

ABSTRACT

Leondus Farrow, Jr., EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF DISCIPLINE PRACTICES ON SUSPENSION RATES OF BLACK STUDENTS: AN EQUITABLE AND RESTORATIVE JOURNEY IN A GRADES 3-5 INNER-CITY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL (Under the direction of Dr. Dan Novey). Department of Educational Leadership, May 2022.

Regardless of the school community or type of school in the United States, Black students are disproportionately excluded from school at a higher rate than any other student group. These discipline practices are a matter of race that negatively impact educational outcomes for Black students and have a direct correlation with their involvement in the criminal justice system. It is essential to focus on alternative exclusionary discipline practices, such as relationship building between adults and students. The purpose of this mixed method action research study was to analyze the implementation of Restorative Practices as an alternative to exclusionary discipline and determine its impact on staff's and students' perceptions of school discipline and student disciplinary outcomes. This study was grounded in the theoretical frameworks of Critical Race Theory (CRT) introduced by a collection of activists and scholars who challenged the legal system as it related to race in the 1960s and slowly worked its way into the field of education to understand the impact of race on educational outcomes for Black students. Conducted in a low-performing Grades 3-5 elementary school with a predominantly Black staff, the study looked at the impact of the implementation of Restorative Practices on teachers' and students' discipline perceptions and school discipline outcomes.

Findings from this study indicate that when staff intentionally build positive relationships with students and create a sense of community and belonging, incidents of students' misbehavior decrease. Restorative Practices is a strategy that can be effective when used to build relationships between staff and students and students and students. However, this study provides recommendations to assist administrators and teachers in establishing school environments and

cultures that are safe spaces for staff and students, which uses equitable discipline practices to decrease the discipline disparities for Black students.

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BLACK STUDENTS: AN EQUITABLE AND RESTORATIVE JOURNEY IN A GRADES 3-5
INNER-CITY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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by

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INNER-CITY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother, to my daughters, to my first born and deceased son, and to my deceased biological father. To my virtuous mother, Hilda Louise Beckwith, who made every sacrifice to ensure that I had the opportunities that she never had, I hope I made you proud, and I hope that you see your sacrifices were not in vain. To my beautiful and intelligent daughters, Kiara, Isla, Nia, and Ramiyah, I hope that you are proud of me, and I hope that you know my sacrifices are all to create better lives for each of you. I have impacted the lives of many children and have been a hero to a few, but I have only ever wanted to be Superman to each of you. To my only son, Dequacius Tarron Farrow, I regret that I never had the opportunity to watch you grow into a man. I have lived vicariously through students wondering what life may have been for you. You would have been a 27 years-old man today, and I know you would have exceeded every expectation I had for you. Thank you for the beautiful seven months that you graced your mother and me with your presence. You were a beautiful baby boy, and I know that you have watched over our family during these last 27 years. And I hope you are proud of this accomplishment. And to my father, Leondus Farrow, Sr., you always stood proud when you saw me walk in a room...although I rarely heard you speak words of admonishment for me, I know you had a sense of pride for your namesake. I have tried to be a good man and to wear your name with honor and pride. I hope that I am the man you secretly dreamed of being.

I know that all things work together for good and that my God has plans to prosper me and not harm me.

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I do not consider myself a religious person, but I am a spiritual individual who believes in the power of prayer and my reliance on God in the name of Yeshua. God is my source of strength, and I enter every day knowing that I am the benefactor of his amazing grace and brand new mercies. His Holy Spirit has been my comforter and my peace during this process and in the times when I questioned “my why.” I pray that my father continues to bless me and build on this cornerstone of success to continue my growth spiritually, professionally, and as a person.

This feeling of completion is surreal, and even today, it is hard not to give mental indulgence to the “Imposter Syndrome.” My success in this endeavor is attributed to a strong supportive family, friends group, and professional peers. They were consistently what I needed, when I needed it, even when I was unsure of what I needed. Their cumulative support provided me with the assistance that I needed to persist through this educational endeavor. Two of the three years that I was a part of this program were predicated on enduring an unprecedented pandemic, which added another level of stress to an already difficult program.

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Leland Gibbs provided the structures of a father figure in the absence of my father and instilled in me the importance providing for and protecting your family. My Aunt Janice who has been one of my biggest cheerleaders throughout my life...she always reminds me how proud of me she is. My beautiful sisters, Cynthia, Santasha, Clarissa, and Lovinnia, have been my inspiration to be successful, so that I might be a role model for them. My double first cousin, Otis Lee Shaw, Jr., has been my brother, my confidant, my friend, and my role model. I have looked up to you my entire life, and you probably have been clueless concerning my true admiration for you. My dear friend, Dr. Lionel Kato, has been an integral part of my professional career. Our careers have very much mirrored one another, and he has been a tremendous source of support and laughter throughout the years. My step-father, Linwood Beckwith, is my hero. He saved my family and my mother by showing us a true representation of love in the flesh...thank you Pops for loving us. To my incredibly large extended family, thank you for whatever role you may have played in my life...big or small, I am thankful for you. To my in-laws, Johnny, Ms. Bernice, and Oatmeal, who have accepted me into their family and supported me in my growth and development. Thank you for your unwavering support of me and for always believing in me. I hope I have made each of you proud.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Schools in the United States have deployed various research strategies designed to positively impact school discipline. However, Black students continue to receive disproportionate punitive discipline measures as a means of correcting non-violent behaviors. The U.S. Department of Education reported data from the 2013-2014 school year that Black students represented approximately 15.5% of all students in U.S. schools but were responsible for 39% of all suspensions and expulsions (Nowicki, 2018). The nation's discipline data tells a compelling story that regardless of the type of public school, level of school poverty, and type of disciplinary action, Black students are systematically disproportionately disciplined and excluded from school (Nowicki, 2018). If Black students represent approximately 15.5% of all students in U.S. schools but are responsible for 39% of all suspensions and expulsions, then the data could lead people to assume that Black students have a predisposition to struggle with self-discipline in school settings (Nowicki, 2018).

In 2013-14, North Carolina (NC) schools, long and short-term suspension data of Black students were consistent with the Nation's school discipline report during the same year. Black students, who comprised 22.5% of NC schools' student population, were disproportionately represented as 57% of all short-term and 55% of all long-term suspensions (Owens et al., 2015). During the 2018-19 school year, NC schools reported Black students as receiving the highest numbers of in-school suspensions (109, 143), short-term suspensions (109, 882), long-term suspensions (332), and expulsions (15) (: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, n.d.). Although Black students were approximately 25% of NC student population in 2018-19, they were disproportionately represented in more than 50% of all expulsions, in-school, short-term, and long-term suspensions (: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, n.d.).

Zero-tolerance school discipline policies are also a contributing factor that has a direct correlation to the overrepresentation of Black students in school discipline data (Nowicki, 2018). Nationally, inequities in the administration of discipline towards Black students and zero-tolerance discipline policies show a strong correlation between Black students' contact with law enforcement and the judicial system. This relationship has become known as the School-to-Prison Pipeline (Nowicki, 2018). Zero-tolerance policies often require court referrals for infractions, which empower School Resource Officers to refer Black and Brown students directly to the legal system rather than using Restorative Practices to correct misbehavior (Brown et al., 2020). In the 1980s and subsequent decades, there was a shift in the education and juvenile systems to focus on stricter punishments for holding youth accountable. The political climate during this time frame helped to perpetuate stereotypes about students of color (SOC) as "super predators," and the increasing concerns about juvenile crimes led to a fear of our youth, which became increasingly noticeable within school discipline practices (Cornell, 2017; Merlo & Benekos, 2016; Simmons, 2017). Perhaps these educational institutions issue consequences for nonviolent offenses that do not serve the interests of student learning or development related to the initial misconduct, leading instead to events that at times culminate in Black students' incarceration. These discipline measures increase the chances of contact with the judicial system for some Black students (Skiba, 2014). Skiba (2014) cites that Black students have a higher correlation of incidents of exclusionary discipline consequences that remove them from the educational setting at disproportionate rates.

The research about discipline practices in U.S. schools and the negative impact on Black students has been brought to the forefront as an issue of race, which has also been identified as a public health crisis (González et al., 2019). It shows that this issue is directly related to race,

racism, and discipline practices. In order to combat the stark disparity in disciplinary practices between Black students and their White peers, it is essential to consider alternative discipline practices that reduce school discipline disparities for Black students.

Background of Focus of Practice

The focus of practice sought to analyze the implementation of Restorative Practices as an alternative to exclusionary discipline and determine its impact on staff's and students' perceptions of school discipline and student disciplinary outcomes. This action research study took place at A. Merge Public Schools district. A. Merge Public Schools district (all names of institutions, counties, and cities in this document are pseudonyms) served a population of about 14,800 students from Northern County and a portion of Eastern County—two counties adjacent to the city of Slocum in eastern North Carolina. The racial breakdown of the school district was as follows: American Indian/Native American 0.5%, Asian 0.9%, Black/African American 52%, Hispanic 12.9%, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders 0.07%, Two or More 3.4%, White 30.1%. Northern and Eastern Counties are both economically disadvantaged areas. This region was embattled with food insecurity, which means many children lack access to a sufficient and reliable quantity of affordable and nutritious food. Approximately 76% of the district's students received free, or reduced-cost school meals (breakfast and lunch) based on applications parents submit and have approved through the United States Department of Agriculture's National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program. The district also participated in the Community Eligibility Program (CEP), which improved access to healthy and nutritious meals for students in high-poverty areas. Out of the 29 schools that make up the A. Merge Public Schools district, 17 were eligible for the CEP, where all students at each school eat breakfast and lunch at no cost.

A. Merge Public Schools consisted of four traditional high schools, two Cooperative Innovative High Schools, one alternative high/middle school, six middle schools, sixteen elementary schools, two Alternative Learning programs, and one Alternative to Suspension program. The North Carolina State Accountability Model, intended to measure student proficiency and growth, guides the development of an academic proficiency score and an academic growth score published as a numeric score with an accompanying letter ranging from “A” to “F.” Academic growth counts as 20% and academic proficiency counts as 80% of the numeric grade. Based on the academic growth rating, schools either “Did Not Meet,” “Met Expected Growth,” or “Exceeded Growth.” Schools which are awarded a letter grade of a “D” or “F” and do not “Exceed Growth” are designated as Low Performing. If a school district has more than half of its schools designated as Low Performing, the entire school district’s designation is as a Low Performing School District (: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, n.d.). Unfortunately, A. Merge Public Schools has been designated as a Low Performing School District for the fifth consecutive year. The seemingly chronic low-performance status of the A. Merge Public School system may have a correlation to the fragile communities within the inner-city limits that experience high crime and murder rates. High rates of gang activity, illicit drug dealing, in addition to suffering a lack of access to quality physical and mental health services, and high rates of incarceration of parents and caregivers, homelessness, and displacement are systemic community issues that affect the pursuit of a free and public education (Data USA, 2018; NC Department of Commerce, 2018). All of the schools within the city limits of Slocum were designated as Low Performing, except for the alternative school. A. Merge Public Schools operated 15 schools that resided within Northern County. Four of the schools that are within northern County are designated as “Low Performing.” There was a stark difference between the

educational outcomes of the schools within the city limits of Slocum and those within Northern County.

As shown in Table 1 and Figure 1, in 2018-2019, Black students were the lowest-performing subgroup in the district, making up the largest percentage of Exceptional Children (63%), and are responsible for the largest percentages of discipline referrals (73% Black), in-school suspensions, short-term suspensions, long-term suspensions, and alternative placements (75% Black).

When comparing Figures 2 and 3, which provide data about the core tested subjects, the percentage of non-proficient students is as follows: Math (60.4%), ELA-Reading (69.4%), Science (44.2%), Math I (88%), Biology (59.7%), and English II (56.1%) (see Figure 20). Although African American students made up the most significant demographic population of students (52% Black), their percentages in Figure 4 are disproportionate to other racial subgroups within the district. Examining these data points together revealed a strong connection between the discipline strategies used with Black students, the number of days excluded from the learning environment, and their performance on state assessments.

Context of the Study

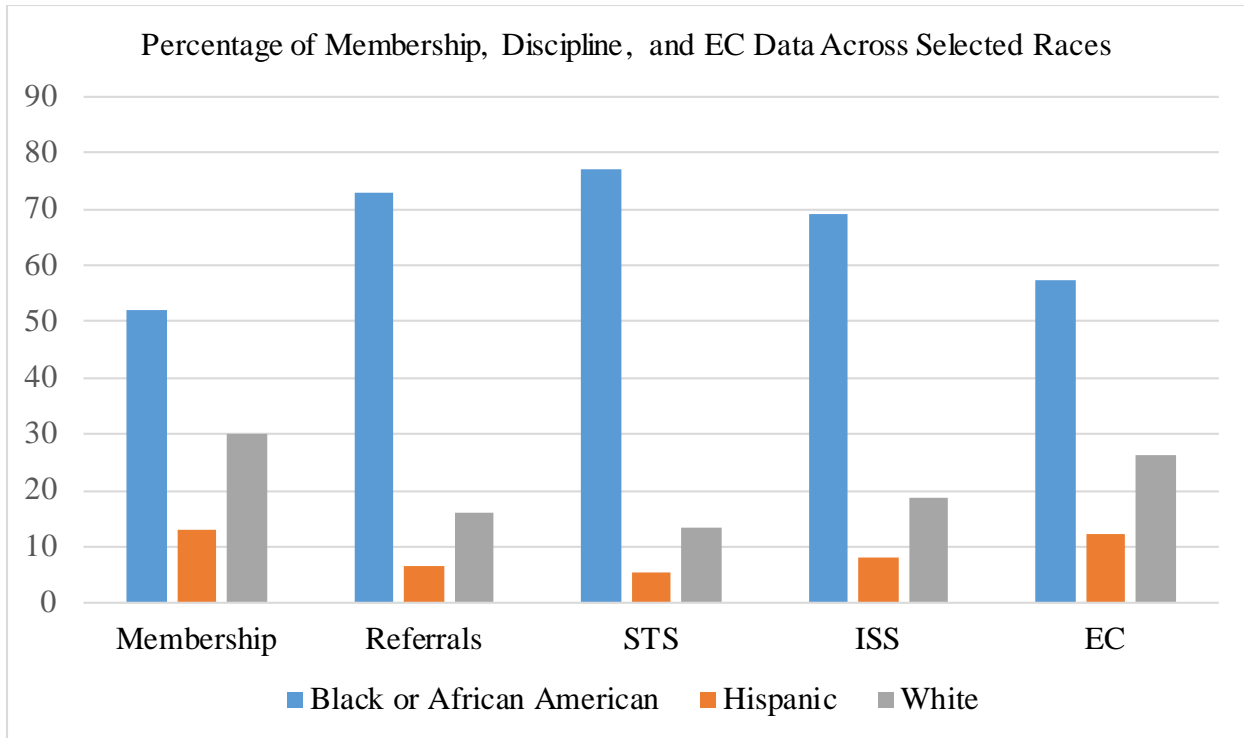
The focus of practice sought to analyze the implementation of restorative practices as an alternative to exclusionary discipline and determine its impact on staff's and students' perceptions of school discipline and student discipline outcomes. This study was conducted at one of the persistently low-performing schools in the A. Merge Public Schools district within the State of North Carolina. L.C. Elementary School was a Grade 3-5 elementary school that served a high-poverty, at-risk school community. The school demographics were predominantly Black

Table 1

District Membership and Discipline Data 2018-2019

Race	Membership	Referrals	Frequency (percentage)				EC	SWDs with OSS
			STS	LTS/365	ISS			
American Indian/Alaskan Native	76 (0.5)	89 (0.7)	23 (0.6)	0 (0)	19 (0.5)	14 (0.6)	4 (0.9)	
Asian	133 (0.9)	23 (0.2)	3 (0.08)	0 (0)	6 (0.2)	3 (0.1)	0 (0)	
Black or African American	7,706 (52.1)	9,178 (72.8)	2,889 (77.2)	7 (88.0)	2,724 (69.0)	1,361 (57.3)	322 (75.8)	
Hispanic	1,912 (13.0)	813 (6.5)	201 (5.4)	1 (13.0)	324 (8.2)	294 (12.4)	26 (6.1)	
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	11 (0.07)	10 (0.08)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	3 (0.1)	0 (0)	
Two or more	500 (3.4)	469 (3.7)	123 (3.3)	0 (0)	140 (3.5)	77 (3.2)	11 (2.6)	
White	4,454 (30.1)	2,028 (16.1)	503 (13.4)	0 (0)	740 (18.7)	623 (26.2)	62 (14.6)	
Total	14,792	12,610	3,742	8	3,953	2,375	425	

Note. STS = short-term suspension; LTS/365 = long-term suspension (“365” represent students suspended for 365 calendar days); ISS = in-school suspension; EC = exceptional education, SWD = students with disabilities.



Note. STS = short-term suspension; ISS = in-school suspension; EC = exceptional education.

Figure 1. District demographic data for selected races 2018-2019.

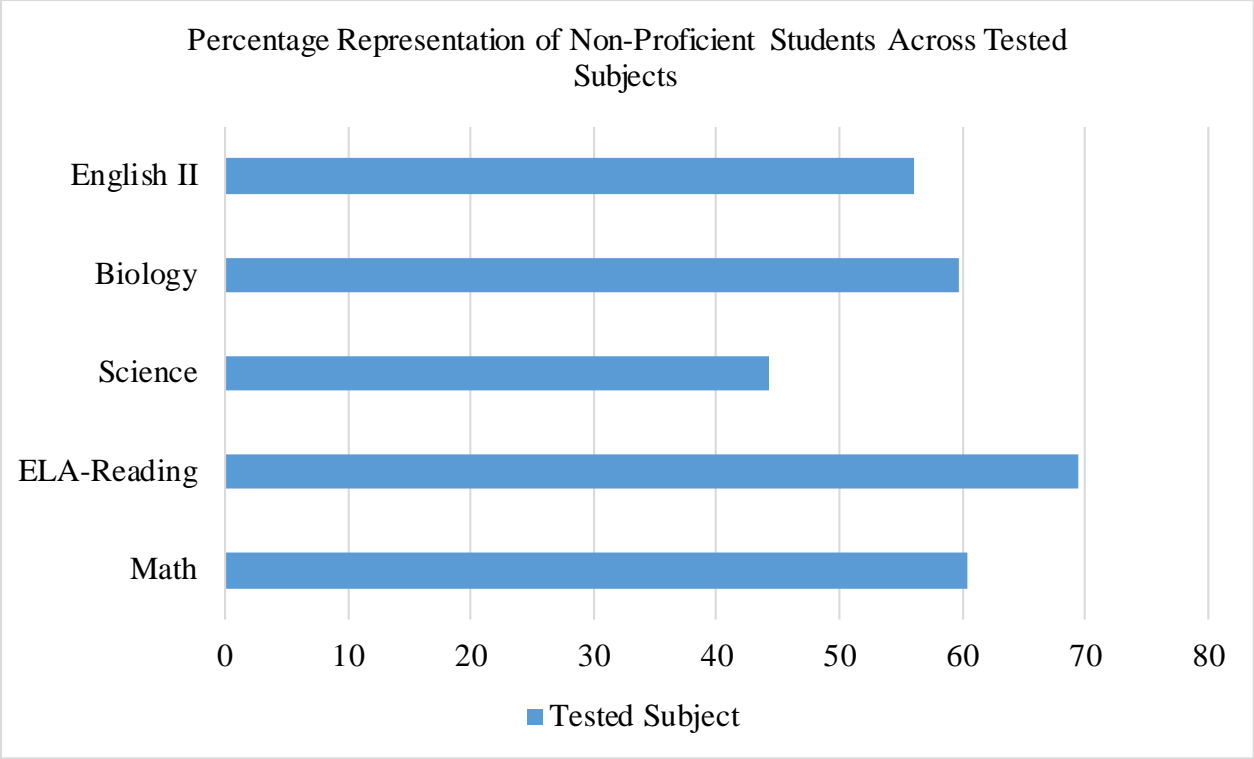


Figure 2. District non-proficient students by state tests 2018-2019.

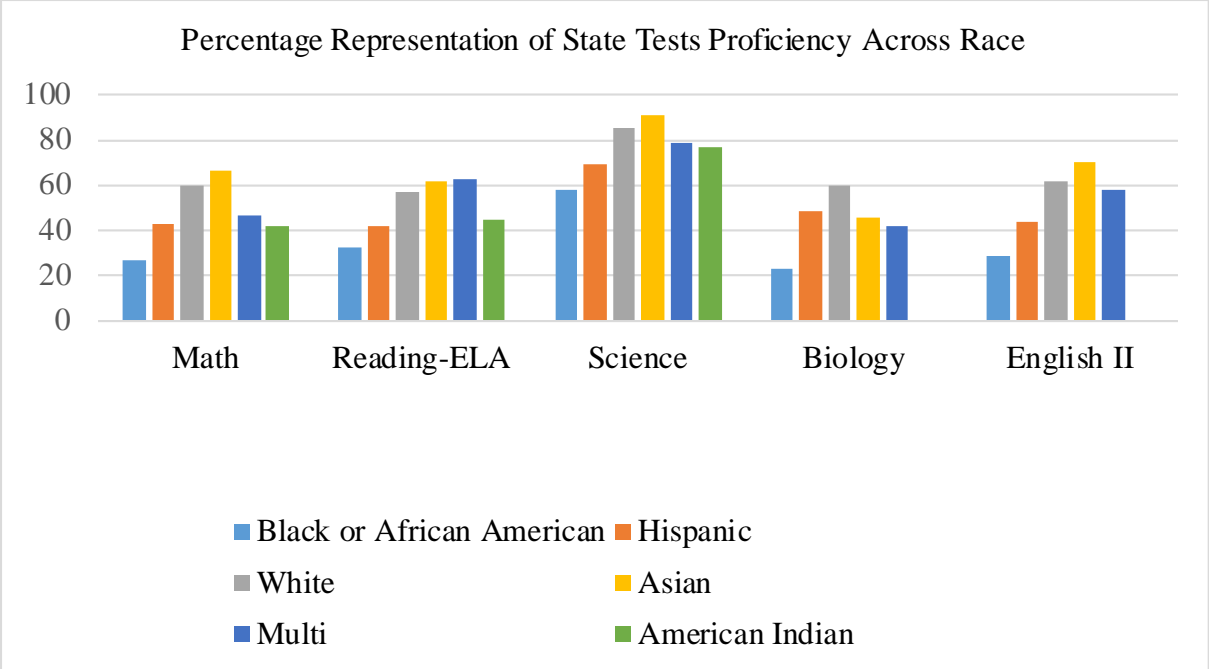


Figure 3. District percent proficient on state tests by race 2018-2019.

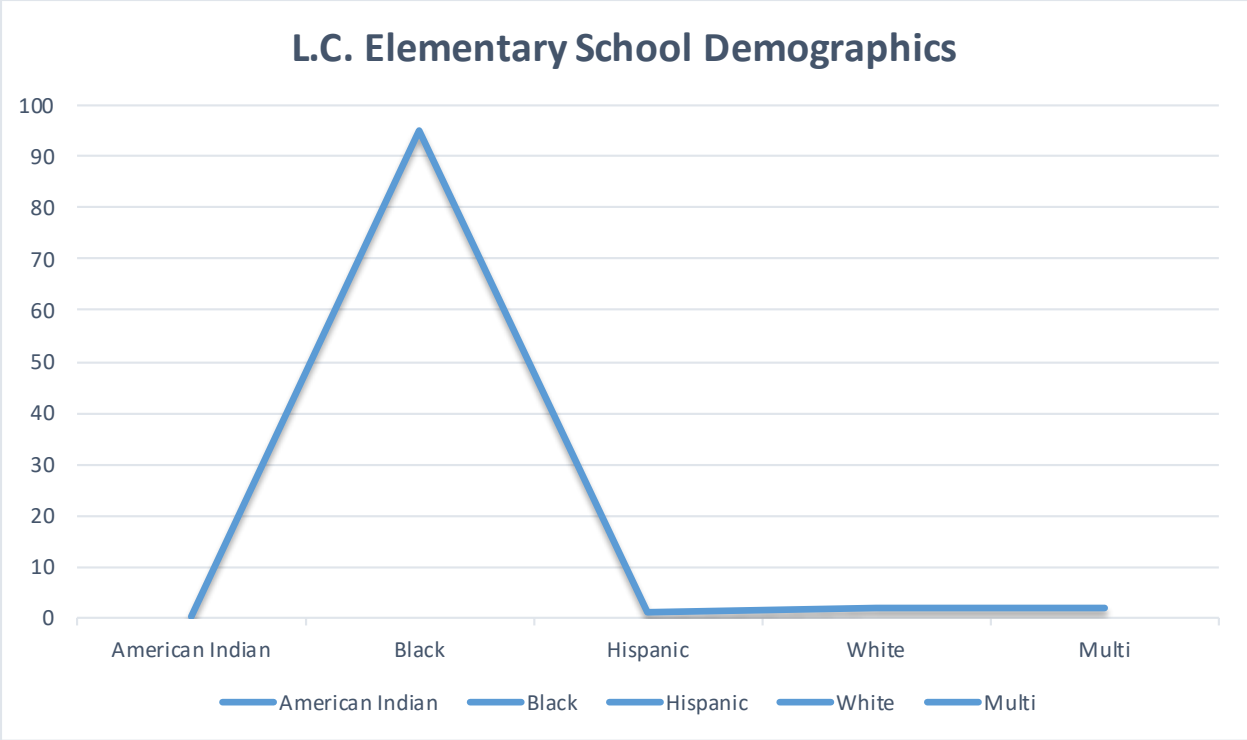


Figure 4. School demographic by race 2018-2019.

with 95.09% Black, 1.87% Multi-Racial, 1.87% White, 0.93% Hispanic, and 0.23% American Indian.

The school was located in a community with a high crime rate, and the communities that it served had some of the highest crime rates within the city. The school has been through three major transitions in the past eight years, with the last one being during the 2018-19 school year. In the 2013-14 school year, the school experienced a separation between the Pre-School campus and its K-5 campus. The Pre-K campus became an entirely different school. It became a Pre-K-2 school with its school number. The K-5 campus became the 3-5 campus that was now known as L.C. Elementary School. The following school year, the school received approximately 150 students from the lowest-performing elementary school in the district, which was being closed because of structural instability. In the 2018-19 school year, the school experienced receiving approximately 80 additional students from the lowest-performing elementary school in the district. The school these 80 students had attended was changed from a Pre-K-5 school to a Pre-K-2 early literacy learning center with wraparound services. These were significant transitions that impacted the school leadership, instructional confidence, and school culture. The school has a history of low performance and “Low Performing” designation for the past 15 years except for the 2014-15 school year.

L.C. Elementary School was a Title I school with a designation of Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI). Schools qualifying under Title I, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary School Act (currently known as the Every Student Succeeds Act) received additional federal funding to serve high numbers or high percentages of low-income families. CSI means the school qualified for membership in the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction’s Innovative District Zone because it was in the bottom 5% of Title I schools in the state. The

school had established progress goals for reading and math in Grades 3-5 for the following designations of students: all, Black, economically disadvantaged, and students with disabilities. At L.C. Elementary School, approximately 85% of the student population qualified for free/reduced school meals. As mentioned previously, the school also qualified for the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) program, which provided free breakfast and lunch to all the students. It was located in a community that had a high crime rate, and the communities that it served had some of the highest crime rates within the city. Historically, it has been hard to staff with experienced, highly qualified teachers; 30% or higher of the teaching staff were beginning teachers. The 2019-20 school year was the principal's 8th year at the school, and the school has Met Expected Growth (for four years), Exceeded Growth (one year), and Not Met Growth (one year), even though it has been designated a "Low Performing School" for the past five years. There were 428 students enrolled in the school during the 2018-19 school year. The student attendance rate was approximately 91%, and the certified staff attendance rate was roughly around 90%. The student population is transient, and there were 1,358 discipline referrals, 532 incidents of out-of-school suspensions, and 251 incidents of in-school suspensions during the 2018-19 school year.

Black students were the lowest-performing subgroup in the district, making up the most significant percentage of Exceptional Children (63%), and were responsible for the most significant percentages of discipline referrals (73% Black), in-school suspensions, short-term suspensions, long-term suspensions, and alternative placements (75% Black).

It is important to note that L.C. Elementary School has two K-2 schools that are its "sister schools," and these were given the same letter grade and performance designation each year as L.C. Elementary School. L.C. Elementary School, on two separate occasions over the past eight

years, had absorbed students of the two lowest-performing elementary schools within A. Merge Public Schools district. In one instance, one of the schools closed due to the age and safety concerns of the building structure. In the other instance, the school transformed from a Pre-K–5 elementary school to a Pre-K-2 elementary school with many wraparound services to focus on early literacy and mental health supports.

COVID-19 forced schools in this district to close in March 2020 and begin the 2020-2021 school year in remote learning. L.C. Elementary school had not operated as normal during the 2019-2020 and the 2020-2021 school years. The 3rd-grade students in this school returned to in-person learning on October 19, 2020, and 4th- and 5th-grade students returned on November 2, 2020. Approximately 50% of the students at this school had chosen to participate in virtual/remote learning during the 2021 school year.

Statement of Focus of Practice

The Focus of Practice sought to analyze the implementation of Restorative Practices professional development as an alternative to exclusionary discipline to determine its impact on staff and students' perception of school discipline and school discipline outcomes before and after implementation. I looked more in-depth at the impact of discipline outcomes for Black students who received 10 or more referrals from the 2018-2019 school year. I also analyzed the discipline data to examine what or if any patterns exist.

School discipline has prompted many emotional conversations and has been a call to arms for educators, the United States Department of Education, Civil Rights groups, parents, and community leaders, to name a few, throughout the United States. The equity issues associated with school discipline have a long and controversial history persuaded by race and socio-economic factors (Lieber et al., 2015). In reviewing the district's discipline data, Blacks made up

52% of the student population but were the recipients of almost 73% of all discipline referrals. At the same time, their other racial counterparts' percentages were lower than or on par with their demographic make-up. A more in-depth analysis of the data revealed that Black males received almost 50% of the total school discipline. Black males who were identified as Exceptional Children in the school district were disproportionately excluded from school as compared to Black males identified as Exceptional Children in the state of North Carolina during the 2017-18 school year. Exceptional Children is a designation for students who qualify to receive specialized instruction based on the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. For students to be identified under IDEA for Exceptional Children's services, the students must have a documented educational, intellectual, or behavioral disability that substantially impacts their ability to access the standard curriculum (: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, n.d.). In North Carolina, a short-term suspension is defined as 1-10 consecutive school days; a long-term suspension is a suspension given for longer than 10 consecutive school days (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, n.d.). A. Merge Public Schools was no longer disproportionate as it relates to Black EC male disciplinary exclusion from school, as compared to the state at the end of the 2018-19 school year. A. Merge Public Schools Exceptional Children Department established internal processes that focused on the discipline of Exceptional Children students. These new processes included training provided for Exceptional Children teachers and building-level administrators to analyze EC discipline data and to find alternative means to addressing student behavior before resulting in exclusionary methods.

Administrators at the school district level were not provided with a crosswalk that merges the North Carolina Discipline Policy Reporting Manual, the local board of education policies, and consequences for specific incidents that are developmentally appropriate, nor does the

district provide accompanying professional development to administrators for implementation of a Code of Conduct. Research supported the use of alternatives to suspension methods that focus on problem-solving practices that include the voices of all stakeholders and uses a framework for providing support and interventions, such as Restorative Practices (Fronius et al., 2016; Lieber et al., 2015; Losen & Skiba, 2016). Restorative strategies include informal and formal Restorative conferencing, proactive circles, conflict resolution circles, and the use of affective statements (Fronius et al., 2015; Fronius et al., 2016). Definitions of infractions were inconsistently used throughout the school; therefore, disciplinary consequences were inconsistently administered for the same infractions. Administrators and teachers had not had professional development on equitable and restorative discipline strategies to help build systematic discipline practices.

Nationally, this concern was not a new issue; it has been studied and argued ad nauseam, some common practices have been adopted, and the layers of “factors that impact effective measures for school discipline are complex and multifaceted” (Lieber et al., 2015, p. 15). Without addressing the overuse of exclusionary discipline practices through the equity lens, the school continued to support, knowingly or not, an institutional system that disenfranchises children of color (COC) and poverty within the very educational system that should be a tool for empowerment. L.C. Elementary staff and administration received training on Restorative Practices to help address the inequities in discipline data. This training also shaped the discussion on alternatives to exclusionary strategies, how to restore students after suspension, and how to help students grow and manage their behaviors. Gathering baseline data about staff and student perceptions about discipline, providing professional development, and implementing Restorative Practices as an alternative to exclusionary practices, and then gathering additional data about

staff and student perceptions and analysis of discipline data was the focus of practice for this research.

Focus of Practice Guiding Questions

The following questions will guide the study:

1. Following the implementation of Restorative Practices, how have school staff (teacher and school-level administrators) perceptions of discipline changed?
2. How have students' perception of discipline changed since the implementation of Restorative Practices by school staff?
3. How have student disciplinary outcomes changed since the implementation of Restorative Practices by school staff?

The first question intended to observe any changes that may have occurred concerning teachers' and administrators' beliefs about school discipline after the implementation of Restorative Practices professional development facilitated by a restorative practices coach. The second question sought to determine any changes that may have occurred concerning students' beliefs about school discipline after the implementation of Restorative Practices. I wanted to know how students perceived the school environment and adult interaction related to student discipline issues. The third question analyzed student discipline data to determine if there had been a change in student discipline outcomes after the implementation of Restorative Practices. I wanted to understand if discipline data outcome improvements were genuinely based on embedded practices.

Overview of Inquiry

The purpose of this mixed methods action research study was to uncover the impact of the implementation of Restorative Practices on teacher discipline perceptions, student discipline

perceptions, and student discipline outcomes in a grades 3-5 inner-city elementary school. I collected qualitative and quantitative data simultaneously and analyzed the results independently while combining the results to interpret the findings. I used the following qualitative instruments to determine how the staff's perception of school discipline changed over time: teacher surveys and focus groups and principal and assistant principal interviews. I also used surveys as a qualitative instrument to determine how students' perceptions about school discipline changed over time. All qualitative instruments were administered to the selected individuals before and after the implementation of Restorative Practices professional development. I used the following quantitative data sets before and after implementation of Restorative Practices to determine the impact on discipline outcomes: school and student discipline data and school and student attendance data. This allowed me to use the perspectives found in the qualitative data and compare them to the results of the quantitative data at the completion of my research.

My research study engaged a homogenous sampling of students who meet the criteria of having a 20 or more discipline referrals from the previous school year. Students were randomly selected from the first twenty Black students on the list who met the criteria. The demographic information for these students varied; however, they were all from 5th grade. Student surveys were the instrument used to gather student feedback during the inquiry process. Included in this group were students that were predominantly from low socioeconomic households. Based on the school demographics, less than one percent of the students were not Black. So my student sample did not include a racially diverse grouping.

My inquiry engaged six teachers who provided me with their informed consent as willing participants. The teachers also were currently teaching or had previously taught one or more of the twenty students. Although I intended to work only with teachers who had taught or were

currently teaching some of the students, all of the teachers may not be attuned to the existing culture at L.C. Elementary School because they may be new hires. In the event that a teacher was a new hire, it should not impact my inquiry because the teacher had some knowledge of the school culture. It was important to the integrity of the study only to involve adults that participated in the discipline of the student. It was imperative that they compared and contrasted student behaviors and responses to interventions both before and during the implementation of the Restorative Practices. Six selected teacher participants who were former or current teachers of the selected student participants were asked to respond to the surveys. School administrators participated in semi-structured interviews to give their point-of-view during the inquiry process.

In considering this, saturation became a concern. However, saturation was reached when gathering new data would not reveal any new or fresh insight (Charmaz, 2006). Because all of the adults involved in the study were directly linked to the student sample, it was highly unlikely that collecting data from other staff just to increase the number of responses would add new and fresh perspectives regarding discipline, specifically discipline outcomes with these students.

Inquiry Partners

Several collaborative inquiry partners were involved during the study to assist with implementing Restorative Practices data collection and analysis. My role in this process was to assist the principal in scheduling the timeline for professional development, securing the professional development services, monitoring the implementation, identifying participants for the research, and collecting and analyzing data. The collaborative inquiry partners were familiar with me as a colleague, subordinate, supervisor, and senior cabinet staff. The current principal and assistant principal of the school, the former principal of the school, other designated members of the faculty and staff, a trauma-sensitive schools consultant, other principals within

the school district, district-level personnel, and the superintendent served as collaborative inquiry partners. My role in the district provided access to the school's personnel, district resources, and district and school data.

The principal and assistant principal participated in the interview protocol. They played a crucial role in ensuring that fidelity of participation by faculty and staff in the Restorative Practices professional development process and the use of strategies learned during the pieces of training. They also collaborated with the trauma-sensitive schools' consultant to organize the professional development, its implementation, and the monitoring of the use of the strategies. The former principal provided the background and historical context of the school to assist me in school-level data analysis. Six selected teachers participated in the study by completing surveys and being involved in focus group interviews. Other faculty and staff joined in Restorative Practices professional development and implementation, responded to surveys, and participated in focus groups.

Students and parents served a critical role in the study. Twenty selected students participated in the survey process. I effectively conveyed to parents the purpose of the study, the survey process, their child's right to anonymity, and what will be done with the information collected from the surveys. Parents were also asked to provide me with written permission for their child to participate in the study.

Other principals within the district who have an interest in Restorative Practices served as thought partners during the research process. District-level personnel provided access to pertinent data and resources. The superintendent supported the study by providing guidance, being a critical partner, and giving permission for me to collect new data and access existing district data.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Race Theory (CRT) grew out of law school researchers looking through a racial lens at legal practices, which systematically negatively impacted Blacks and people of color (POC) (Bell, 1995; Delgado & Stefanic, 2017). Educators have applied it in educational research, although CRT did not have its origins in education (Dixon & Anderson, 2018; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) apply CRT to education, developing the idea that School inequity is based on three propositions: (1) Race continues to be a significant factor in determining inequity in the United States, (2) U.S. society is based on property rights, and (3) The intersection of race and property creates an analytic tool through which we can understand social inequities and, consequently, school inequity (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). CRT is a theory that problematizes the impact of race on school discipline. CRT asserts that Blacks have been devalued throughout history in favor of Whites, and U.S. schools operate under the same premise. Still, its clear relevance to education over the years has provided a theoretical framework for social justice activists to push for more equitable outcomes regarding discipline disparities for Black students (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017). Discipline disparities compound with a lack of educational opportunities in a pernicious system aligned to systematic practices of inequality that disproportionately affect Black students (Olsrud, 2019). Racial bias on the part of educators is a significant factor in the discipline disparity for Black students, which has helped create a long history of an unjust and unequal system of Whiteness in U. S. schools (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017; Olsrud, 2019).

The constructs identified in Critical Race Theory (CRT) provide a lens through which this study will examine school discipline structures. This theory encourages scholarly activists to seek to understand the connection between race, racism, power, and institutions (Delgado &

Stefanic, 2017). There are six unofficial tenets of CRT. These tenets include ordinariness, convergence, social construction, differential racialization, and race origin. From these tenets, CRT advances the premise that racism exists with such a stronghold because our society was built on principles of racism (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017). For example, whether blue-collar or elite, White people have little incentive to acknowledge racism because it has not negatively impacted their interests, such as access to jobs, education, or a desired lifestyle. Many Americans are not conscious that race and races are social and political constructs and not linked to biological or genetic traits but designed to give one group an inherent birthright over others (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017). The ideas encompassed in CRT have transitioned into education and allowed for the branching off into many areas where race and racism have transformed and manipulated educational structures. One such area in education is student discipline practices. Recent studies show the nation's school discipline data suggests that regardless of the type of public school or kind of disciplinary action taken, the disparities for Black students in the United States are pervasive (Arrendondo et al., 2017; Nowicki, 2018; Olsrud, 2019).

There is a natural inclination to ask about the school culture, school conditions, school practices, environmental conditions, and societal norms that allow this condition to persist at such alarming rates in our modern school settings. However, the foundation of this research study proposed that the systematic devaluation of Blacks in favor of educational opportunities for Whites is aligned to a system of inequality that often excludes Blacks (Olsrud, 2019). Teachers, school building administrators, and district personnel receive training from preparation programs that uphold the idea that the current educational system, which consists of racist structures, must be upheld. Only by maintaining these systems is a school successful, regardless

of the negative impacts it may have on minority or socially oppressed student groups (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017; Olsrud, 2019).

This inquiry sought to identify and influence change in the structural biases in school disciplinary practices as identified in CRT. The urgency to address the many layers connected to school discipline is a school leadership issue linked to teaching and learning, implicit bias related to race, and the lack of substantial professional development centered on research-based practices for intervention and prevention. Addressing inequitable discipline practices that enable such disparities in discipline for Black students should include a framework that outlines Prevention, Intervention, and Prevention/Intervention as its major principles (Gregory et al., 2017). In this study, I used Restorative Practices as the tool for addressing discipline disparities for Black students.

Definition of Key Terms

This section lists operational definitions for terms that are not common but are used in this study:

Code of Conduct – a system created within a school district to manage student behaviors by clearly defining offenses/behaviors and their consequences, which are aligned to tiers of seriousness, standards of equity, child development, and board of education policies. District-level personnel, school administrators, school faculty and staff, parents, and students should clearly know the expectations and the outcomes when the expectations are not met (Frazier et al., 2015).

Critical Race Theory (CRT) – the movement started in the 1960s with a collection of activists and scholars who wanted to transform law as it related to race, racism, and power. Not like traditional Civil Rights methods of discourse, it focuses on liberal order. It has a heavy

footing in education to understand the impact of race and racism on systems, procedures, and institutions of education (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017).

In-School Suspension (ISS) – An alternative to the suspension method that allows a **student** to remain in a structured educational setting on the school’s campus or at another designated location (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, n.d.).

Low Performing School - Schools that receive a school performance grade of D or F and a school growth score of “met expected growth” or “not met expected growth” (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, n.d.).

Out-of-School Suspension (OSS) – The removal of a student from all school activities for a temporary period of time as a disciplinary consequence (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, n.d.).

Restorative Practices – it is an innovative approach to school discipline, which makes the discipline consequence secondary to focusing on nurturing, building, and repairing relationships that have been broken or non-existent because of real or perceived discipline behaviors (Hopkins, 2003).

School-to-Prison Pipeline – it is the connection between school punitive discipline practices and zero-tolerance discipline policies and their informal link to Black and Minority students' contact with the criminal justice system that stems from school discipline practices (Wilson, 2014).

Zero-tolerance School Discipline Policies – became popular in 1994 under President Clinton’s “Gun-Free School Act.” These are school discipline policies or procedures that give a mandatory short-term or long-term suspension or expulsion from school for committing an act such as fighting or bringing a gun to school. The policies were initially established to deter

violent behaviors committed at school but were soon used to address classroom distractions that negatively affected Black and minority students (Skiba, 2014).

Assumptions

One assumption made regarding this study was that neither administrators nor staff members had received training on other equitable ways to handle student discipline. It was assumed that because they continuously engaged in the same patterns of discipline, they had no other viable strategies to use. It was also assumed that any changes made by school administrators and teachers to disciplinary strategies were the results of the implementation of Restorative Practices and not the change in the school's leadership (new principal) during the 2020-2021 school year.

Another assumption of my study was that the implementation of Restorative Practices professional development would produce a decrease in exclusionary consequences and classroom behavior. A decrease in discipline referrals and suspension rates does not necessarily equal a positive change in student behavior. The behavior change could be staff awareness because of the implementation of Restorative Practice professional development. This awareness could create a sense of staff tolerance as it relates to student behaviors that have not traditionally been the school's discipline culture. Ideally, the implementation of Restorative Practices does not only change the way school personnel address student behaviors but also gives students the necessary skills to be able to function successfully in the school setting.

There was also the assumption that the Restorative Practices strategies would be implemented with fidelity. The study did not take into account implicit bias and assumed that Restorative Practices would be implemented without bias. During my study, there was not a process to control for the fidelity of the implementation of the program; rather, there were

periodic check-ins with the administrators to provide coaching and guidance from the Restorative Practices consultant.

Another assumption was that the integrity of the discipline data had been reported accurately, including all discipline referrals written. My study did not control for how many or what discipline referrals have been entered into the discipline maintenance system. My research looked at the discipline data presented in the official discipline report for the school.

Scope and Delimitations

My inquiry engaged only six teachers who had previously taught the identified students during the 2018-2019 school year or were currently teaching them during the 2020-2021 school year. I also involved the principal and assistant principal during the research process. The principal had previously served as an assistant principal at the school for two years before becoming the principal of L.C. Elementary school's sister school, which served grades K-2. He was there for one school year (2019-2020) before becoming principal at L.C. Elementary during the 2020-2021 school year. The assistant principal for the 2020-21 school year was currently in her second year serving as an assistant principal at L.C. Elementary school. This being the principal's first year did not limit his experience with the school because of his prior experience serving as assistant principal. The current assistant principal had at least one year of working with and knowing the students. Their respective time serving at the school did not limit their knowledge of how discipline impacts the school. All faculty members participating in the study had to give informed consent.

The students in the study would have been third graders during the 2018-19 school year, which is the baseline year for the data in this study. Twenty students were selected for the study through a random selection process. They met the criteria of having ten discipline referrals

during that school year, and at least one of those referrals would have included the student receiving an exclusionary discipline consequence. The list of students was generated, listing only student ID numbers. The random selection of students was made by reviewing each student's data and selecting the first twenty students who have the following characteristics: identified as black, have at least ten discipline referrals, and have at least one discipline referral that resulted in an exclusionary discipline consequence. The 2020-21 school year data was only collected during the spring semester. All students and their parents had to sign consent to be included in the study. The study was delimited by analyzing student and teacher perceptions about student behavior and discipline before and after the implementation of restorative practices.

I chose to design this study specifically to analyze the impact of restorative practices on student and teacher perceptions but also to analyze the impact of restorative practices on disciplinary outcomes for black students. The school was specifically chosen because of its location and the community factors of high rates of poverty, drug use, and violence. These factors impact the students in this school as adverse childhood experiences, which exacerbate the disciplinary issues for students in the school.

Limitations

The school setting of the study was not atypical of the inner-city elementary schools that I had encountered as a veteran educator in the state of NC. What was atypical was the volume and severity of behaviors and the number of exclusions from school. L.C. Elementary School served students from high poverty and crime areas, who were some of the most fragile and vulnerable populations within the school district. The students came to school with many external issues that impeded their learning at school. Many of the discipline matters that students encounter at school are related to those same external factors (Mallett, 2017).

The school setting had several factors that contributed to the limitations of the study. The school only had grades 3-5, which limited the population's age range. The principal at the school was different from the principal who had led the school the previous eight years and was serving in their first year at the school. The principal had an opportunity to serve as the assistant principal at L.C. Elementary School for two school years prior to the implementation of this study. The assistant principal was serving in the second year of leadership at the school. The school serves a predominantly Black student and family population and predominantly Black teaching faculty and school staff. The teacher population of this school setting was also a mostly inexperienced teaching staff with Beginning and Lateral Entry teachers. This school population was not very diverse with regard to the experience level or racial diversity of the school staff.

Given the community this school served and the free and reduced lunch status of the school, we knew that a large percentage of the student population lived in low-income housing and met the federal definition of impoverished. The common term used to refer to these adverse childhood experiences is ACEs. Adverse childhood experiences include childhood emotional, physical, or sexual abuse and household dysfunction. The original ACE categories are verbal abuse, physical abuse, contact sexual abuse, a battered mother, household substance abuse, household mental illness, incarcerated household members, and parental separation or divorce (Brown et al., 2009). The expanded list considers the definitions of poverty, racism, discrimination, community violence, and substandard housing, along with many others (Finkelhor et al., 2013). This study only focused on the impact of discipline data from the implementation of Restorative Practice; it did not observe data from other factors like early childhood trauma and mental health disorders.

Students impacted by ACEs can experience trauma and constant toxic stress that can have a difficult time managing strong emotions. Children that do not have the skills to manage these emotions and regulate their bodies often remain in a state of dysregulation, which can significantly impact their behaviors in the classroom (Burke et al., 2011). When triggered, these children have difficulty controlling their responses and actions due to the chemicals flooding their nervous system. This usually results in the flight, fight, or freeze response (Burke et al., 2011). Burke et al. (2011) found that learning and behavior problems increased as exposure to adverse experiences increased for students. Lower school engagement, retention, absenteeism, and behavior challenges are all factors that are likely to occur with a high incidence of ACEs.

Significance of Inquiry

Administrators' and teachers' beliefs about students—who they are, their social status, gender, race, culture, and background influence how they discipline students (Olsrud, 2019). Although most of the staff at this site are Black, they still operated the school under a system of Whiteness that does not see Black children as vulnerable or valued through an educational lens. The inequality of educational opportunities that excludes Black students works through a system that uses exclusionary discipline practices to regulate student behavior. (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017; Olsrud, 2019; Skiba, 2014).

Aware that this was an issue, it was necessary to support educators in unpacking the reality of the system. It was equally essential that educators were given the opportunity to delve into their own biases and mindsets in a safe and gracious setting. Only after this took place could the staff begin implementing Restorative Practices to identify the patterns and needs of the repeat offenders. This study sought to uncover the impact of using alternatives to suspension strategies on teacher discipline perceptions, student discipline perceptions, and student discipline

outcomes. As a result, this FoP may empower administrators and teachers with more effective strategies to keep Black students in the classroom where they can learn and not be suspended.

Advancing Equity and Social Justice

L.C. Elementary School was located in eastern North Carolina and served children and families from several marginalized communities in two counties. L.C. Elementary School's challenges, although unique in some ways, still represent a segment of United States schools that serve a student population who are educationally fragile due to social traumas. The educators who committed their profession to this work do so knowing that resources are few for schools and communities that do not represent the mainstream middle class and upper-class of American society. The profile that represents many Low Performing schools includes significant instructional gaps for Black and other Minority students, high Black and Minority populations, high poverty populations, scarce community resources, a negative school perception because of school location and whom the school serves, a high rate of discipline incidents, and high rates of staff turnover (Leeson et al., 2018).

Educators who work in challenging school environments can be teaching at a disadvantage, considering that a larger percentage of students at schools like L.C. Elementary are living with more than one Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). This means that daily educators have the burden of mitigating behaviors that stem from outside environmental influences but negatively impact the classroom and school environments. Educators have little if any power or influence over these external factors. Training teachers on Adverse Childhood Experiences coupled with Restorative Practices could potentially give educators another set of skills to combat outside influences that impede learning within the classroom and school (González, 2015). According to a study conducted from 1995 to 1997 by the Centers for Disease

Control (CDC) and Kaiser Permanente, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) were linked to negative health and well-being outcomes for young people (Centers for Disease Control [CDC], n.d.).

Additionally, the study found that ACEs exist across all populations, but some populations are more vulnerable to ACEs because of economic, social, and educational contexts. Recent studies have explored the specific trauma children experience due to racism and applied a culturally informed aspect to ACEs (Bernard et al., 2020). The implementation of Restorative Practices addresses ACEs and reduces exclusionary discipline (Breedlove et al., 2020). Educators in the school and classroom should focus on building relationships while using their circle of influence to master outside behaviors before they become matters of crisis.

For school leaders to effectively address the systemic disparities that exist within many Low Performing Schools, they must understand that this is a paradigm shift that moves beyond the standard path of teaching and learning. It would be advantageous for all schools to invest in training like Restorative Practices. It could close a communication and relationship gap between Low Performing school staff and their students (Fronius et al., 2016; Losen & Skiba, 2016). I believe that such programs can empower teachers and administrators to make a difference and ascend past expectations by taking a proactive posture in addressing a school's culture related to school discipline. Administrators, teachers, and students within a school must work collaboratively to build a school culture with embedded systematic practices that provide an alternative to exclusionary discipline practices to more in incredibly fragile school environments like L.C. Elementary (Fronius et al., 2015; Fronius et al., 2016; Kane et al., 2007). Attempting to advance this study through a lens of equity and social justice in schools that serve fragile communities, I believe as a veteran educator that the scope must encompass addressing the

outside influences that students bring to school, ACEs that hinder their learning, investing in Professional Development that is researched-based, and creating a collaborative school culture that fiercely address any discipline disparities within the school.

Advances in Practice

Being trained in Restorative Practices gave teachers and administrators a tool to be proactive in addressing student needs and inhibiting excessive behavior infractions. It allowed the adults and students to work toward building relationships and community norms that move away from exclusionary discipline practices to more robust methods to develop students as individuals and good citizens in the learning environment (Fronius et al., 2016).

This was crucial when addressing discipline with students from backgrounds where the “norms” may differ from those found in the traditional school setting. Teachers and administrators operating in schools without training in Restorative Practices have no choice but to rely on exclusionary measures that continue to increase the achievement gap for the students impacted- in this case and in similar school settings, the students impacted the most are Black (González, 2015; Losen & Skiba, 2016).

This research can serve as a guide for persistently low- performing schools that have significant academic gaps and exclusionary numbers of Black students. The use of Restorative Practices can help build a community with shared norms, expectations, and standards for all that are understood and upheld by the students and the adults in the building. Implementing this way of thinking can help students work on personal growth in the area of behavior and conduct while allowing them to remain in the learning environment to receive the academic support that they need (Fronius et al., 2016; Kane et al., 2007; Morris & Perry, 2016).

Summary

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to evaluate the level of impact implementing Restorative Practices had on staff and student perceptions and discipline outcomes in a grades 3-5 inner-city elementary school. The goal was to effectively address the social justice concern of the disproportionate discipline of Black students through equitable and Restorative Practices. This study was looked at through the lens of CRT. This theory encourages scholarly activists to seek to understand the connection between race, racism, and power and how it transforms (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017). Addressing inequitable discipline practices that enable such disparities in discipline for Black students should include a framework that outlines Prevention, Intervention, and Prevention/Intervention as its major principles (Gregory et al., 2017). Regardless of the type of public school, level of school poverty, and type of disciplinary action, Black students are systematically disciplined and excluded from school at a higher rate than their White counterparts (Nowicki, 2018).

The school setting served a predominantly Black student and family population and mostly Black teaching faculty and school staff. The research limitation did not offer a diverse racial or teacher experience perspective about discipline within the school setting. The research also did not observe data from other factors like early childhood trauma and mental health disorders, as the study focuses on the impact of discipline data from the implementation of Restorative Practice. Aware that this is an issue, educators must address the inequality of educational opportunities that excludes Black students working through a system that uses exclusionary discipline practices to regulate student behavior (Olsrud, 2019). It is necessary to support educators while allowing them to delve into their own biases and mindsets in a safe environment that will give them strategies to serve Black children better.

In Chapter 2, I will present literature that supports the use of Restorative Practices as an intervention against exclusionary discipline. I will also assess literature that outlines a connection between the inequalities in school discipline for Black students and racism in U.S. schools. My review of literature will present a clear pattern that exists in the poor educational outcomes for Black students that begins with the disparities in school discipline.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this review of the existent literature is to examine the factors related to school disciplinary practices and their impact on Black students, as grounded in research. U.S. schools have failed to address the inequalities that in a systematic way, deny educational opportunities to many SOC (Olsrud, 2019). Basic civil rights are being denied in a country with a constitution that promises equal opportunity for all. Inequalities and racial discrimination that operate seamlessly within our education system have created large gaps in disparities for Black students in particular (Olsrud, 2019). Police shootings and vigilante killings of unarmed Blacks are a humbling reminder that the racial divide existing in this country is present within many of our institutions. As we have seen a pattern arise that can have deadly consequences for Black people, it is also symbolic of the educational suffocation of Black students through exclusionary discipline practices (Arrendondo et al., 2017).

Throughout this literature review, I will address the major headings of Critical Race Theory (CRT), Implicit Bias, Impact of Disproportionate Discipline, Prevention/Intervention, and Restorative Justice. The first section is CRT, which gives an overview of CRT and its beginning in the legal field. There is also a focus on the six tenets of CRT, how the movement transitioned into education, and how CRT is used to analyze Implicit Bias in school discipline, Microaggression, Institutional Racism, and White Privilege. In the second major heading, Implicit Bias, there is a review of the science behind this theory. This section also makes the connection between Implicit Bias and Microaggression and how they work together, giving life to stereotypes that impact how schools discipline Black students (Arrendondo et al., 2017; Staats, 2016). The next section, Impact of Disproportionate Discipline, takes a dive into U.S. schools' discipline data, the impact of exclusionary discipline practices, academic

outcomes, and the School to Prison Pipeline theory. Prevention/Intervention section considers the need for positive school discipline practices and research-proven strategies that may drive positive discipline outcomes. This section also considers the role that CRT can play in providing Black students with the necessary tools to mitigate racism when it appears in the educational setting (Lustick, 2017). The last major heading, Restorative Justice, brings an understanding to the movement and how it began outside of the US and was created as a means of combatting the increase of criminal offenders (Kane et al., 2007). This section also sheds light on how the same practices used in a legal aspect transitioned into the education system to address the crisis caused by exclusionary discipline practices (Fronius et al., 2016).

Theoretical Framework: Critical Race Theory

There has been a long controversial history about race in this country and how race impacts outcomes for individuals/groups. School discipline and the outcomes for Black students can be viewed through an overarching lens of CRT. Some of the other factors that align with the theory of CRT are Implicit Bias, Microaggression, Institutional Racism, and White Privilege. These factors play a critical role as it relates to the disproportionate suspension of Black students. In the journal report *Race and Power in the American Education System*, Olsrud (2019) gives a shattering reality of the status of Black people in this country. Olsrud (2019) states that Blacks have been systemically devalued throughout history in favor of Whites as it relates to educational opportunities. These disparities in educational opportunities are directly aligned to a system of inequality that often excludes Blacks, and this same system reveals itself in school discipline.

As I examined school discipline through CRT, it became clear that implicit bias plays such a role in school discipline disparities that researchers have emphasized the importance of changing school culture by improving adult-student relationships within schools (Anyon et al.,

2018; Gregory et al., 2014; Losen et al., 2014; United States Department of Education, 2014). Teacher professional development programs that focus on teachers improving relationships with SOC yield positive results in a reduction of the racial discipline gaps (Anyon et al., 2018; Gregory et al., 2015). When taking this perspective into consideration, schools should consider professional development geared toward improving staff members' relationships with SOC (Anyon et al., 2018; Gregory et al., 2014; Morgan et al., 2014; United States Department of Education, 2014). CRT supports the aforementioned beliefs as it espouses the thought that the educational system within the United States has developed and cemented the values and cultural identity of the White majority in its institutions of education. Educational Institutions are not just a common ground for subject matter learning but also a place where students learn and adults uphold the social ideologies that support inequality (Anyon, 1980; Anyon et al., 2018; Apple, 2012). Consequently, students and adults of all races become conditioned by these practices to recognize the White majority as the standard of human achievement. Subsequently, schools then become the educational ponds of social lessons and White conformity, which are sustained by practices that are colorblind policies on premise alone (Anyon et al., 2018).

In CRT, Delgado and Stefanic (2017) give an in-depth look at the theory and how race impacts every facet of our society. CRT is not framed like many of the traditional Civil Rights Movements; it questions the foundation of our liberal order – not limited to just the equality theory and legal reasoning but others as well. The movement began in the 1970s by a conglomerate of legal activists and scholars who were focusing on issues in the law. They believed that the growth made during the 1960s Civil Rights Movement was somehow taking steps backward because more subtle forms of racism were becoming stronger (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017).

Delgado and Stefania (2017) describes six tenets of CRT. The first feature is ordinariness. This simply means that racism has such a stronghold in this country because it is not acknowledged as a significant issue. The reason racism exists in such a lethal manner is that our society was built on principles of racism. The second feature is interest convergence (Anderson et al., 2019). The authors claim that racism grows the interests of the material wealth of the White elite and the physical labor of the White blue-collar. These two groups make up a large part of our society, and they have little incentive to acknowledge racism because it has not impacted their interests. The third feature is “social construction”; this feature explains that race and races are social and political constructs and not linked to biological or genetic traits. The fourth feature is differential racialization. This tenet examines how the dominant society racializes different minority groups at different times based on the shifting markets. The shifting markets could be labor needs or fads in fashion for example. The fifth feature is that each race has its own origin and ever-evolving history. No one person or group of people has a unitary state of identity. The final feature is a unique voice of color. This feature theorizes that POC are “uniquely positioned to share their stories and experiences about race and racism” because their experiences with the dominant culture make them competent experts on the matter (Delgado & Stefania, 2017, p. 8). CRT does not just focus on race and racism as a movement, but it also examines homosexuality, feminism, education, and religion.

Although CRT began its movement in law, education is one of the fields it has transcended with an intense focus on understanding the issues around school discipline (Delgado & Stefania, 2017). The notion that racism is ordinary or a natural state of being because our country was built on white supremacy beliefs leads to the premise that education in this country was never intended to be a system of equality for Blacks, and school discipline is one of the

major factors in this system of inequality. In the report, *Race and Power in the American Education System*, Olsrud cited Cook's staggering statistics on school discipline and the disparities for Black students in U.S. schools. While Black students make up 16% of the student population, they are responsible for 32% of in-school suspensions, 42% of multiple out-of-school suspensions, and 34% of expulsions (Cook, 2015). The numbers are sobering and indicate that schools in the US still operate in many ways as they were intended to function: a system of whiteness and systemic discrimination against SOC, particularly Black students (Olsrud, 2019). There are many reasons that factor in this saga, but implicit bias is one of the major players (Staats, 2016).

Texas Public Schools conducted a study that focused on students of Color who received disciplinary actions after the implementation of a zero-tolerance discipline policy (Sullivan et al., 2010). This study was conducted during the course of the 1999-2000 and 2002-2003 school years. The study used specific tenets of CRT to reveal trends across race/ethnicity, gender, and school-level suspension and expulsion data, along with a modified critical policy analysis were also used in combination with the tenets of CRT (Sullivan et al., 2010). Sullivan et al. (2010) note that the following student demographics represent the total number of elementary, middle, and high school students of color within Texas' public schools who were suspended or expelled out of school during the noted academic years:

- 1999-2000 school year - 13,407
- 2002-2003 school year - 14,921

The 1999-2000 school year was chosen in this study because it represented the first five years of implementation of Zero-Tolerance policies in Texas' public schools, and it was also the first year of all uniformly compiled discipline data (Sullivan et al., 2010). The 2002-2003 school year was

chosen because it posted the highest numbers of expulsion rates over a six-year data set (Sullivan et al., 2010).

The results of the study concluded that there were disproportionate patterns that demonstrated a significant overrepresentation of Black students as compared to the majority and other minority student groups (Sullivan et al., 2010). As shown in Figure 5, Black students represented 14.3% in the 1999-2000 school year and 14.4% in the 2002-2003 school year of Texas's enrollment (Sullivan et al., 2010; Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2005). Black students who made up less than one-fifth of the enrollment in Texas' schools received more than one-third of all out-of-school suspensions and expulsions. The data from this study highlighted that Black students received 53.6% of out-of-school suspensions, 64.3% of expulsions (1999-2000 school year), 53.9% of the out-of-school suspensions, and 65.1% of the expulsions (2002-2003 school year) (Sullivan et al., 2010).

During the zero-tolerance discipline policy years, Texas found that SOC received harsher discipline consequences for less severe and subjective offenses for referrals that could be labeled as defiance of authority or disrespect. Texas concluded that there was a disproportionate representation in school discipline that targeted students of color, but more specifically, Black students and Black males. The numbers and percentages of office referrals, out-of-school suspensions, and expulsions give credence to systemic bias that works through institutional racism using administrative procedures and institutional policies (Lynn & Parker, 2006; Sullivan et al., 2010). The zero-tolerance discipline policy studied in Texas schools, revealed that you cannot address the issues of discipline without first addressing the implicit bias that influences the behavior of those who are administering disciplinary consequences (Staats, 2016; Sullivan et al., 2010).

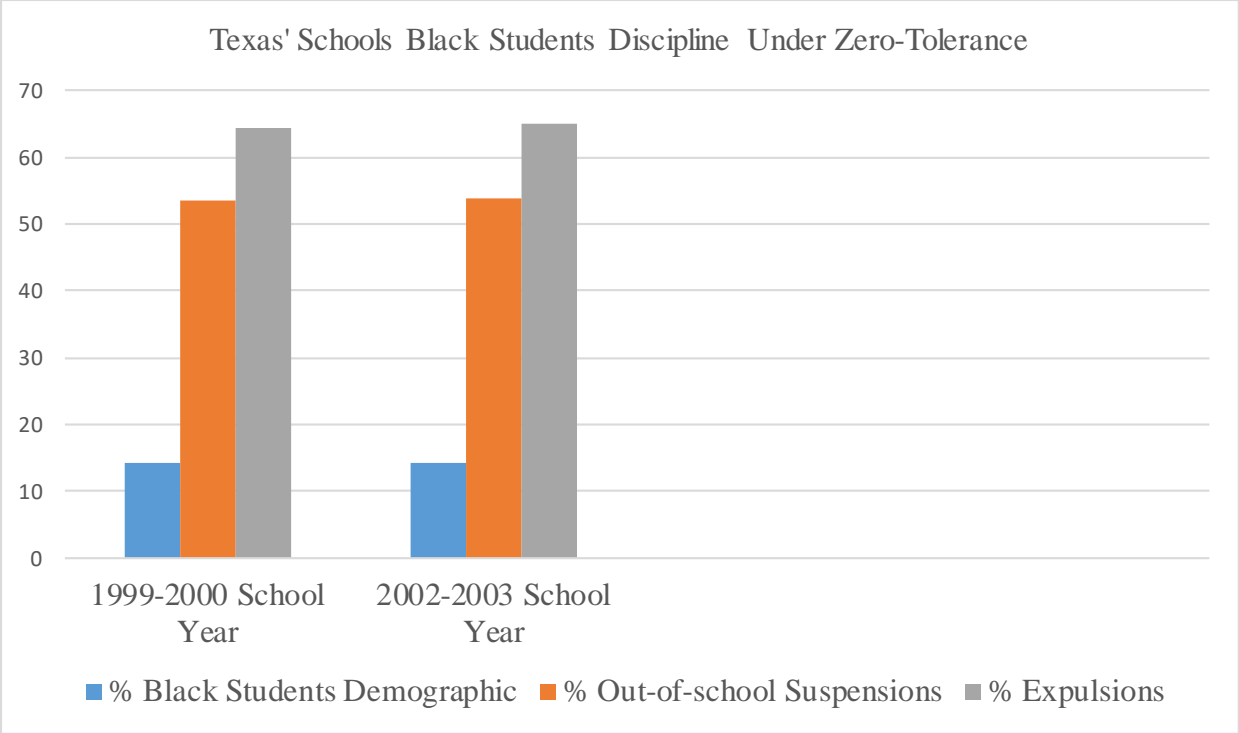


Figure 5. Black students' demographics and exclusionary consequences.

Implicit Bias

Simply stated, implicit bias is the beliefs, attitudes, stereotypes, and experiences that affect our understanding, actions, and decision-making through an unconscious manner that our conscious being is not aware exists (Staats, 2016). Many well-intended educators do not even know that implicit bias is at play. This pervasive ignorance causes many educators to participate in systematic discipline procedures that show their implicit (unconscious) intentions rather than their explicit (conscious) intentions (Staats, 2016). There are two cognitive functions at work within our brain, and these functions are referenced as System 1 and System 2 (Kahneman, 2011). System 1 is responsible for things that happen outside of our conscious awareness; we just automatically do it because it is a rote experience, such as you know to be aware of fire or stopping at a stop sign when driving a car. System 2 is for more critical and cerebral thinking. Kahneman (2011) describes it as covering the acts within conscious processing, such as completing a math problem or an employment application. These two systems function as a unit to help us survive in our environments. According to psychologists, our brains are capable of processing 11 million pieces of information per second. We have learned that System 1 is responsible for most of the information processed. The other factor to consider about System 1 is that its cognitive processing helps us recognize that many mental associations that affect our perceptions and actions are functioning implicitly – outside of our consciousness (Kahneman, 2011).

According to Staats (2016), research indicates several conditions in which individuals (educators) are very likely to access their System 1 associations. These conditions are ambiguous information, time constraints, and instances when cognitive control is compromised. Teachers are faced with these conditions in some form or manner every day, which would indicate that

implicit bias affects their decision-making and actions when it relates to discipline (Staats, 2016). Subjective discipline infractions such as disruptive, disrespectful, disorderly, and insubordinate are the main culprits for student discipline, but there is no standardized measure for assessing such infractions. Staats noted in her writings that one study showed that Black students were more likely to be disciplined for subjective infractions like disrespect.

In contrast, White students were more likely to be disciplined for objective infractions like smoking. Another factor is the correlation between Black male students and the stereotypes associated with violence, threat, and aggressiveness. These implicit (unconscious) attitudes or beliefs can impact disciplinary decisions (Staats, 2016). Staats (2016) references the researcher Carla Monroe's thoughts on how implicit bias affects teachers' decision-making about discipline for Black male students. She believes that negative stereotypes of Black males may implicitly guide teachers' beliefs that Black males need a stronger hand than their counterparts do and will be unlikely to respond to non-punitive measures. A study by Stanford University focused on discipline disparities even when Black and white students behaved in the same manner. In the study, different teachers received identical discipline referrals, but fictitious stereotypical Black and White names were given to the students. The students with stereotypical Black names were more likely to receive a harsher punishment between the first and second discipline referrals (Staats, 2016). All educators need to know that implicit bias exists and not be ashamed because we all have it. However, once educators know that it exists and understand how it works, they can take steps toward becoming consciously aware of some of their unconscious associations (Staats, 2016).

We should also consider that implicit bias also may disguise itself in the form of microaggressions and become another factor in how Black students are perceived and negatively

impact discipline practices. Microaggressions are daily interactions with the dominant culture that are brief and intended to give subtle reminders about negative racial stereotypes automatically and unconsciously (Arrendondo et al., 2017). In school settings, microaggressions are often acts that communicate Black students, and SOC are less intelligent and dangerous. These acts of microaggression become another reminder to Black students that the playing field is not level and causes them to question their right to belong in school settings (Arrendondo et al., 2017).

For teachers to successfully educate students, in particular Black students, White teachers must acknowledge and challenge their own racial identity and the “White Privilege” that is their birthright. White educators must own and name the racist institutional structures that have an impact on how we educate Black students (Andrews, 2019). The People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond defines race as:

A specious classification of human beings, created by Europeans (Whites), to assign human worth and social status using himself or White as the model for humanity and the height of human achievement, for the purpose of establishing and maintaining privilege and power (Andrews, 2019, p. 8).

Despite the fact that American schools have become vastly more diverse, White Middle-Class females still are responsible for a majority of the teaching force. Schools are more segregated by race, with COC mostly attending schools with high minority populations and White students attending schools that are 70% or greater than White. If you consider the perspective of race as defined by the People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond, it gives clear indicators for the disparity in school discipline of Black students, and it suggests White educators must be a voice at the table to address this epidemic (Arrendondo et al., 2017).

In summary, White educators' experiences, beliefs, and associations have a direct impact on how they perceive and discipline Black students. Constructs of White Privilege are fostered within racist education institutions that have created a systematic practice of disproportionate discipline for Black students with punitive measures such as high rates of suspension and expulsion. Often these behaviors are conveyed through automatic, unconscious methods of implicit bias and microaggressions (Andrews, 2019; Arrendondo et al., 2017). It becomes difficult for a Middle-Class White female teacher to empathize with Minority students when their implicit biases warn them of danger, violence, and the need to maintain the privilege and power of students who look like them. To adequately address this issue, we have to explicitly give it a name by removing the premise of color blindness and systematically addressing the issue of discipline disparities based on race (Arrendondo et al., 2017; Staats, 2016).

Impact of Disproportionate Discipline

While there has been research about discipline practices in U.S. schools and the implementation of research-based strategies throughout some U.S. schools to impact school discipline positively, Black students remain the highest percentage of recipients of disproportionate punitive discipline practices. Black students represented approximately 15.5% of all students in U.S. schools and were responsible for 39% of all suspensions and expulsions; the rate of overrepresentation for Black students was approximately 23% (Nowicki, 2018). The data in this report suggests there are three groups who are overrepresented in school discipline: Blacks (23.2%), Boys (18.3%), and students with disabilities (13.2%). Black students are the common denominator who make up the highest percentages of overrepresentation across the three categories. A salient fact of the nation's discipline data insists that regardless of the type of

public school, level of school poverty, and type of disciplinary action, the disparities were pervasive and systemic (Nowicki, 2018).

Zero tolerance school discipline policies have also been a factor in the discipline disparities of Black students. Zero-tolerance policies were initially instituted to address violent behaviors but have aided in the discipline disparities of Black students. These policies have frequently been used to address school infractions such as fighting and classroom disruptions (Mallett, 2017). During the 2016-17 school year, one study found that 48% of all suspensions and expulsions were for non-violent infractions (Cole et al., 2018).

Mallett (2017) suggests that it is logical to understand that some Black students, who share common experiences related to school discipline and the juvenile justice system, are likely to have associated risk factors within their families, peer groups, neighborhoods, and schools. The sum of these experiences for Black students means they have a high probability of experiencing problems at home, in the community, at school, and involvement with law enforcement; civil and children's rights activists call this the school-to-prison pipeline (Mallett, 2017). The school-to-prison pipeline is the informal link between zero-tolerance punitive exclusionary school discipline methods and the criminal justice system, which negatively impacts COC primarily, in particular Black students (Mallett, 2017; Wilson, 2014). Nationally, Black children represent 32% of those arrested, 42% of the children detained, and 52% of whose cases are waived to criminal courts (NAACP, 2019).

A study conducted in Texas indicated 3% of the suspensions and expulsions were mandated by state law; 97% of these exclusions were at the sole discretion of educators. Although race had no significance in the seriousness of the infractions, Black students were more likely to receive a suspension or expulsion for the same infraction that their peers committed

(Wilson, 2014). School discipline for the last 20 plus years has led us down a path where Black students are excluded at an alarming rate for school and community incidents that may make them susceptible to contact with law enforcement (Skiba, 2014). The unintended consequences of zero-tolerance discipline practices have been the devastating impact of the school-to-prison pipeline for Black Students. These consequences are a probable result of implicit bias since the majority of discipline infraction consequences are at the sole discretion of educators (Mallett, 2017; Skiba, 2014; Staats, 2016; Wilson, 2014).

Academic Outcomes of Exclusionary Discipline

Research shows that there is a degree of a connection between suspensions and achievement, but it does not convey how much of an effect school exclusion has on academic performance (McLoughlin et al., 2015). Also, the literature is limited on the variables within the research, such as but not limited to the list that follows: in-school versus out-of-school suspensions, no data at the Pre-K level, very little data at the elementary level, race, gender, and length of the suspension. However, studies have shown a positive correlation between school exclusion practices and poor student outcomes; the gaps in the literature and research make it difficult to claim that school exclusion alone is the culprit (Anderson et al., 2019). A study in Arkansas analyzed 10 years of student demographics, achievement, and discipline data from all of its K-12 public schools and determined that exclusionary practices had more of a negative impact on academic outcomes than less exclusionary practices. As a result, school systems throughout the country are implementing practices to limit the number of out-of-school suspensions by implementing an alternative to suspension programs such as in-school suspensions (Anderson et al., 2019). The literature warns that there is a strong possibility that the

relationship between school exclusions and achievement is more correlational than causal (Anderson et al., 2019; McLoughlin et al., 2015).

Scholars have researched the cause of the racial achievement gaps for many years but have not been able to identify concretely the vehicle which causes the gap. Research that follows the effect of suspensions on achievement over a long period and with a large, diverse group had been non-existent until the Kentucky School Discipline Study in 2014 (Morris & Perry, 2016). Morris and Perry (2016) conducted the first comprehensive study that analyzed the connection between the impacts of school exclusion on racial differences in student outcomes. The study is unique because it was direct observation of the achievement gap to determine to what extent school discipline affected the gap. Inequitable exclusionary discipline practices have racialized discipline consequences and contributed to the racial achievement gap. A more concentrated authentic focus to address the “racial punishment gap” would assist in sustainable progress in the racial achievement gap (Morris & Perry, 2016).

Prevention/Intervention

Intervention strategies that positively impact improving school discipline address three critical components of school climate and discipline: relationship building through restorative practices, social-emotional learning strategies, and structural interventions such as Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (Losen & Skiba, 2016). Schools should also consider addressing Codes of Conduct as this is a crucial step in ensuring alignment to the aforementioned three critical components. Reforming Codes of Conduct at the district and school levels is necessary to equitably impact discipline practices (Bradshaw et al., 2013). Bradshaw et al. (2013) also notes it is imperative that all appropriate school personnel receive professional

development so that the implementation of a revised Code of Conduct produces the intended consequences.

Schools that have a single-minded focus on strengthening teacher-student relationships and increasing student engagement can have a positive impact on discipline strategies and disparities (Allen et al., 2015). Denver Public Schools that implemented restorative justice and suspension rates were reduced by approximately 7.2% for Black students, who recorded the largest reduction percentage of all racial groups (González, 2015). There were two notable facts for Black students recorded as improvement during the period of restorative justice implementation: an increase in achievement scores and the Black/White disparity gap reduced by approximately 4 percentage points. Restorative justice provides schools with an alternative means to exclusionary, zero tolerance, and punitive discipline practices.

Throughout this nation, schools have traditionally used discipline strategies that are punitive and consist of exclusionary methods, which has ultimately resulted in inequitable discipline practices against Black students (Hannigan & Hannigan, 2019). Some of the nation's schools have evolved to use an alternative approach to traditional methods of school discipline. Hannigan and Hannigan (2019) note their study in the State of California that sought to understand school administrators' beliefs about school discipline, identify factors that may impede or support an alternative model, and evaluate whether the workshop/training helped shift administrators' beliefs around school discipline. This study focused on the implementation of an alternative discipline framework through a workshop/training titled "Don't Suspend Me!" In the study, 52 administrators from across California participated in this eight-hour workshop/training and three months of program implementation (Hannigan & Hannigan, 2019). The eight-hour training involved administrators in learning how to understand the "Don't Suspend Me"

discipline framework. Participants were taught to use the framework for addressing discipline actions with a three-pronged consequence, including a restorative, reflective, and instructional component. The intent of discipline consequences was to be meaningful to the behavioral development of the student and not just a punitive reaction to a disruptive cause (Hannigan & Hannigan, 2019). Evaluation of the program determined the following nine recommendations for school administrators:

1. Participation in Alternative Discipline workshop/training and ongoing training.
2. School administrators have to believe in the work in order to get support and buy-in from teachers.
3. School administrators should intently consider providing training to teachers and staff around alternative discipline measures so that they adequately understand why these measures are important and how these measures impact student outcomes.
4. Ensuring the implementation of an Alternative Discipline Model to fidelity is critically important to get the desired outcomes of positive impact on student behavior.
5. District and school-level Codes of Conduct should be aligned with language that includes discipline practices for Alternative Discipline methods.
6. Educating the School Board of Education and community, including parents and students, is critical to the success of effective implementation.
7. Allow teachers and stakeholders an opportunity to provide feedback on the development and implementation of the process.
8. Develop a strong tiered system of support to help with intervention, prevention, and remediation of students needing behavioral support.

9. Ensure progress monitoring by analyzing school-wide behavior data to create SMART goals.

Administrators are the driving force coupled with the training made available to institute such an Alternative Discipline model. There has to be a paradigm shift and an overhaul in the Code of Conduct in order to educate and shift from traditional methods of exclusionary practices (Hannigan & Hannigan, 2019; Losen & Skiba, 2016).

Culturally Responsive Education

Current literature about utilizing positive school discipline practices alone shows some promise as a means to reduce discipline disparities for black students, but more research is needed (Welsh & Little, 2018). Also noted in the literature are schools that utilize positive practices continue to show racial disproportionality with harsher consequences for Black students than White students (Lustick, 2017). A universally held assumption about positive school discipline is that the approach should not address behavior alone but address the student as a developing person (Kane et al., 2007). An approach to effective school discipline can never merely be a punitive measure or just creating positive school discipline measures, but it must be about educating the whole child and addressing the reality of racism that is woven into the fabric of our nation's schools. The pedagogical strategy is to shift disciplinary practices for Black students from an impediment to an instrument in education (Kane et al., 2007). Discipline outcomes for Black students may improve when educators focus on teaching students the skills of social-emotional learning, which involves how to foster positive relationships with teachers, peers, and others; self-discipline; and problem-solving and managing conflict.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) have been associated with lower assets of social-emotional regulation and resiliency, which is also associated with more serious behavioral

problems (Ray et al., 2020). Direct instruction in social/emotional competencies can lead to a decrease in behavioral issues for students (Whitcomb, 2009). Through social-emotional learning, protective factors can be increased, leading to a reduction in behavioral issues for students (Duncan et al., 2019).

Lustick (2017) expresses the thought that culturally responsive, culturally relevant, and multicultural education are three terms that are as interchangeable as they are different. She chose to refer to the term “culturally responsive education.” In the work of culturally responsive education, schools must ensure that teachers commit to helping Black students understand the role of racism in education while having high standards for learning (Ladson-Billings, 1996).

How schools approach discipline is a major factor in culturally responsive education. Consider a classroom disturbance by a student and applying culturally responsive strategies to the discipline matter. Lustick (2017) suggests giving the teacher and the student the opportunity to share their perspective of the situation before determining discipline consequences. This creates an opportunity to remediate and teach students the desired behavior you wish to see based on principles of restorative justice. Restorative justice and Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports model believe that discipline is an opportunity to teach by helping students understand what they did wrong and understand the reasons for appropriate consequences (Fallon et al., 2012). This type of approach to discipline calls for a positive school culture that facilitates positive relationships between students and teachers. Fallon et al. (2012) developed a “Three Tiered Support Logic” approach to positive discipline that addresses most minor school-wide offenses to more severe and problematic behaviors. Lustick (2017) describes the three-tiered system in the following way:

- Tier 1 includes the lowest level strategies for all students. These strategies should establish behavioral expectations and foster positive relationships between teachers and students.
- Tier 2 or Moderate Intervention includes strategies that focus on relationships and school environment that needs to be restored after minor conflict. These strategies include student to student and student to teacher remediation that is facilitated by a competent non-biased adult.
- Tier 3 or Intensive Intervention includes the strategies to address long-term critical work with students who exhibit major conflict or display chronic behavior issues.

Tiers 2 and 3 create a necessary opportunity to address behaviors that are traditionally resolved through exclusionary methods. Tier 2, coupled with culturally responsive and anti-racist strategies, is critical in the effort to reduce discipline disparities for Black students.

If systemic change is going to be launched, counterproductive practices must be replaced with effective disciplinary alternatives (Losen & Skiba, 2016). Schools and school districts must fully support educators with resources and training. It is critical to have structures in place that provide sufficient time for professional development to train and coach teachers in the implementation of models such as restorative practices. Administrators must support and champion teachers throughout this process. Losen and Skiba (2016) note that school data should be transparent concerning all violations, including those resulting in arrests or referrals to law enforcement. The data should be publicly reported and disaggregated, including complete information about racial disparities. Schools and school districts have a wealth of community agencies to form alliances to help support teachers, such as mental health organizations, juvenile justice, social service agencies, and the business community. Collaborating together helps

develop a more sustained effort toward effective and equitable school discipline for Black students, increasing their time in school and creating a safe learning environment for all students (Losen & Skiba, 2016).

Restorative Justice

Restorative Justice became a movement that addressed the increase of adult, youth, and juvenile offenders being imprisoned (Kane et al., 2007). Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the USA, Europe, and the UK have had a major interest in and have implemented Restorative Justice principles. Restorative Justice has a different structure depending on the country, state, and region due to how that particular place interprets the principles (Miers, 2001). Legal structures particular to an area will also impact the implementation of Restorative Justice. The United Nations defines Restorative Justice in the following manner:

A problem-solving approach to crime that focuses on restoration or repairing the harm done by the crime and criminal to the extent possible and involves the victim(s), offender(s), and the community in an active relationship with statutory agencies in developing a resolution. The modes for delivering restorative justice include, but are not limited to, restitution of property, restitution to the victim by the offender, reparations, and truth commissions (United Nations, 2003, p. 28).

Although Restorative Justice's initial existence was a means to divert adult and juvenile offenders from the courts and penal systems, and as a program for those already convicted offenders who were a part of the justice system, it has made what seems to be a natural transition into the educational system (Fronius et al., 2016). There is a common belief that Restorative Justice in school settings began in Australia due to an assault at a school-sanctioned event, and it

sparked Queensland High School to implement its first school-based Restorative Justice conference in 1994 (Blood, 2005).

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation funded the WestEd Justice & Research Prevention Center to conduct exhaustive research through a national lens on the impact of Restorative Justice in U.S. schools (Fronius et al., 2016). Restorative Justice Programs within school settings are usually composed of various programs that focus on a non-punitive approach to determining discipline consequences for a wide range of conflicts. Effective Restorative Justice Programs involve a whole-school approach, with sustained training for staff and students in the principles of the program (Fronius et al., 2016). Restorative Justice in the school setting has been difficult to define or place it an exact science, just as it was in the criminal justice system. The National Centre for Restorative Approaches in Youth Settings defines Restorative Justice in the following way:

Restorative Justice is an innovative approach to offending and inappropriate behavior which puts repairing harm done to relationships and people over and above the need for assigning blame and dispensing punishment. A restorative approach in a school shifts the emphasis from managing behavior to focusing on the building, nurturing, and repairing of relationships (Hopkins, 2003, p. 3).

The overuse of exclusionary discipline increasingly became a concern for the juvenile justice system and education, so the two systems found common ground to begin deploying methods of Restorative Justice Programs in schools (Schiff, 2013). Students were increasingly having contact with law enforcement due to conflict incidents within schools that were another focal point for the two systems. Fronius et al. (2016) note that aside from their attempts to define

Restorative Justice, researchers have identified the following four reasons why schools are embracing Restorative Justice practices:

1. Zero-tolerance policies
2. Discipline disparity for Black and Brown students
3. School-to-Prison- Pipeline
4. Low academic achievement and poor graduation rates

Schools' and school districts' main objective is to keep students in schools and combat the traditional methods of exclusionary practices and referral to police for minor offenses.

Restorative Justice addresses the root causes of behavior issues while focusing on repairing relationships between students and teachers and students and their peers. This practice supports schools to provide equitable measures for holding students accountable for inappropriate behavior (Fronius et al., 2016).

California is one of several states where schools have adopted various Restorative Justice Programs that involve informal restorative dialogue techniques between teachers and students. Another strategy used is formal restorative conferencing that involves students, staff, and others from within the school community (Fronius et al., 2016). Restorative circles have been noted by experts in various interviews as the most common Restorative Justice practice (Fronius et al., 2015). Fronius et al. (2016) identified specific Restorative Justice Program components with notable practices that are intended to achieve the goals of restorative justice. The following practices were identified:

- Restorative Circles — facilitated meetings that allow students, teachers, and others to collaborate for problem-solving, resolving disciplinary issues, receiving academic support, and discussing difficult topics, such as racial tensions.

- Restorative conferencing — a facilitated meeting between offender and victim (may also include teachers and parents) to discuss the situation and work towards a solution.
- Providing peace rooms — “safe spaces” or areas within a school where restorative circles and conferences can be held.
- Restorative questioning — open-ended questions with the purpose to help individuals discuss an incident and reach a solution.
- Active listening — a technique that requires the listener to restate or paraphrase what another person said in his/her own words.

The implementation of Restorative Justice in schools has noted signs of success in improved relationships and behavior in schools, has empowered students, and allowed for the adoption of alternatives to traditional punitive and exclusionary methods such as suspension and expulsion (Fronius et al., 2015). Fronius et al. (2015) note the challenge for implementing Restorative Justice is sustainability, specifically as it relates to school or district leadership. If a school leader leaves a school and he or she believes in the practices of Restorative Justice, the implementation of Restorative Justice Practices under a new leader will most likely end. Other major challenges are the length of time to implement the practices; competing priorities in schools; the initial phase of getting buy-in from teachers, students, and parents; and insufficient capital for implementation (Fronius et al., 2015).

Summary

The research that I have completed in this chapter has drawn, at times a dismal picture but ultimately an optimistic view of the possibilities for U.S. school discipline in the future. The Nation’s schools operate in the manner in which they were fashioned to function--a system that

favors the White majority with an intentional or unintentional systemic oppression of Black students (Olsrud, 2019). Removing the premise of a color-blind educational system through systematically addressing the issue of racism in U.S. schools is essential in the efforts to improve the disproportionate discipline of Black students (Anyon et al. 2018).

CRT states that the disparities in school discipline and educational outcomes for Black students are the product of a system of inequality that often excludes Blacks based on principles of racism (Olsrud, 2019). These same principles of racism are connected to ignorance and stereotypes, which allows many educators to participate in discipline practices that show their unconscious intentions rather than their conscious intention and implicit bias (Staats, 2016). Implicit bias touches every facet of school discipline because, more often than not, the sole discretion of discipline consequences is decided by educators (Staats, 2016). Inequitable discipline practices have routinely racialized discipline consequences, which in return creates a racial achievement gap. In order to address the achievement gap, we must first address the “racial punishment gap” (Morris & Perry, 2016). The consequences of zero-tolerance discipline practices coupled with the exclusion of Black students from the school at an alarming rate help give life to the School-to-Prison-Pipeline and the connection between school discipline and the criminal courts (Fronius et al., 2016).

Effective prevention and intervention strategies that seek to improve discipline outcomes for Black students address components of school climate and discipline (Losen & Skiba, 2016). School discipline practices that have shown to be effective do not focus on punitive measures or positive school discipline measures alone. Rather, the strategy is the holistic education of students while addressing the racism that is a major factor in our nation’s schools (Kane et al., 2007). The priority of U.S. schools is to keep students in schools and combat exclusionary

discipline practices and the involvement of police for minor offenses. Restorative Justice provides equitable means for holding students accountable for inappropriate behavior that addresses the root causes of behavior issues while focusing on positive relationships between students, their peers, and their teachers (Fronius et al., 2016).

In Chapter 3, I will present the methodology of my action research design that aims to learn what impact the implementation of Restorative Practices will have on discipline outcomes for Black students. I will use a convergent approach for analyzing qualitative and quantitative data that focuses on a representative sample of participants. Quantitative data sources will consist of school level and individual students' discipline and attendance reports. Qualitative data sources will consist of student surveys, teacher surveys, and staff interviews. All data sources will be comparatively analyzed to determine the impact the intervention had on discipline outcomes for the selected students after the implementation of Restorative Practices.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS OF INQUIRY

My Focus of Practice sought to analyze the implementation of Restorative Practices as an alternative to exclusionary discipline to determine its impact on staff and students' perceptions of school discipline and student discipline outcomes at L.C. Elementary School. This study examined the impact on discipline outcomes for Black students who received 10 or more referrals from the 2018-2019 school year. Also identified are patterns that may have existed in the student discipline outcome data pre- and post-Restorative Practices implementation. As substantiated already in district data, Black students are the lowest-performing subgroup in the district, make up the largest percentage of Exceptional Children (63%), Black students recorded the largest percentages of (a) discipline referrals (73% Black), (b) in-school suspensions, (c) short-term suspensions, (d) long-term suspensions, and (e) alternative placements (75% Black). These data points magnify the educational issues of Black students and how exclusionary discipline practices are linked to the educational outcomes for Black students in this school.

Analysis of the extent to which Restorative Practices professional development for administrators and teachers changed teachers' and students' beliefs about school discipline and its influence on student discipline outcomes was the foundation of this study. This chapter will outline the design rationale, inquiry procedures, and the specific components related to each to ensure the integrity, feasibility, and relevance of the study.

Focus of Practice Guiding Questions

The purpose of this action research mixed methods study is to evaluate the level of impact implementing Restorative Practices had on staff and student perceptions and discipline outcomes in a grades 3-5 inner-city elementary school. As such, the following study questions will be examined:

1. Following implementation of Restorative Practices, how have school staff (teacher and school-level administrators) perceptions of discipline changed?
2. How have students' perception of discipline changed since the implementation of Restorative Practices by school staff?
3. How have student disciplinary outcomes changed since the implementation of Restorative Practices by school staff?

Research Question One

The question will seek to understand how the administrators' and teachers' perception of discipline have changed from before Restorative Practices professional development to after the implementation of Restorative Practices. Interviews and surveys, and focus groups were used respectively to garner perception data from these two groups.

Research Question Two

This question was addressed through responses from an open-ended survey of 20 students who have received 10 or more discipline referrals during the 2018-19 school year. Students' perception of how the school culture views and manages student behaviors within the school setting before and after implementation of Restorative Practices was gathered and analyzed.

Research Question Three

This question was addressed by comparing student discipline outcomes to outcomes from previous school years. Student and staff attendance data was also examined during these time frames. The impact of COVID-19 altered what portion of discipline and attendance data was examined because of the Remote Learning process that was in effect within the school district. With students at home and not in school during Remote Learning, there were fewer discipline referrals, and attendance was not a valid data point.

Answers to the three questions helped me discover if the use of restorative practices, instead of previously relying on exclusionary discipline practices, changed perceptions of discipline at the school level. The study data also sought to uncover any changes that occurred with respect to staff and student perceptions and student discipline outcomes after the implementation of Restorative Practices. This chapter will outline the methodology that I used to conduct this study, including the sampling procedures and the details regarding the instrumentation to be utilized. Finally, details on data collection and processing will be discussed, along with the ethical considerations and threats to validity that are inherent in the implementation of the study.

Inquiry Design and Rationale

To understand the impact of providing teachers and administrators with professional development for Restorative Practices, I have determined that a mixed method action research was most appropriate. The site for this study is a grades 3-5 elementary school (L.C. Elementary School) that serves a high poverty and minority school community has high incidents of exclusionary discipline practices and is a persistently low-performing school.

The action research process was used to conduct this study. Action research is a planned, systematic approach to improving practice in an educational setting. Its process is cyclical and requires continual reflection, inquiry, and action taken by stakeholders (Mertler, 2019). A critical part of action research is that it focuses specifically on the characteristics of the population with whom the change must occur. Action research is most critical for this study because it removes the gap between researcher and practitioner. In action research, the practitioner in the field uses qualitative and or quantitative data to implement a change or changes in interactive cycles. This study will utilize three cycles. Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA) will provide the structure for these

cycles. PDSA cycles provide a process for testing change that can lead to larger improvements. In PDSA, Plan refers to developing the strategy to test change; Do is the implementation and data collection phase of the cycle; Study is to analyze the data; and Act is to determine the next steps (Langley et al., 2009)

The implementation of Restorative Practices had either a negative, a positive, or no impact on how school personnel address student behaviors and how students use strategies learned to navigate conflict within the classroom. This study sought to uncover the impact of the implementation of Restorative Practices on teacher discipline perceptions, student discipline perceptions, and student discipline outcomes. If the school does not adopt an equitable systematic plan to address its own data, which is indicative of the long and controversial history of the negative connection between race and school discipline, it will continue to perpetuate a system that disenfranchises COC within the very educational system that should be a tool for empowerment (Frazier et al., 2015).

I used a research design that is a mixed-method, convergent parallel design, action research study, which focuses on the improvement of school practices that are influenced by the critical self-examination of the school practitioners (Mertler, 2019, p. 125). By using convergent parallel design, I collected data simultaneously and analyzed the results independently from instruments that measure qualitative and quantitative data throughout the study while combining the results to interpret the findings. I used the following qualitative instruments for my mixed-method action research to determine how staff and students' perceptions change over time: surveys, focus groups, and interviews. Also, as part of this research study, I collected and analyzed data using the following quantitative data sets before and after the implementation of Restorative Practices to determine the impact on discipline outcomes: discipline data, student

attendance data, and teacher attendance data. The use of convergence allowed both quantitative and qualitative research to be applied during the research process concurrently. I used the perspectives found in the qualitative data and compared them to the results of the quantitative data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 217; Mertler, 2019, p. 168).

Context of the Study

The focus of this study took place within the school district of A. Merge Public Schools at L.C. Elementary school. A. Merge Public Schools served a population of approximately 14,800 students. The school district serves a student population that is almost 70% minority, with nearly 30% of the student population being White. The school district represented a fragile school community, with approximately 76% of the district's students receiving free or reduced-cost school meals (breakfast and lunch).

The particular site for this study is a grades 3-5 elementary school that had high incidents of exclusionary discipline practices. L.C. Elementary School was one of the persistently low-performing schools in the district and the state that serves a high poverty, fragile school community. The school demographics were reported as Black (95.09%), American Indian (0.23%), Hispanic (0.93%), Multi (1.87%), and White (1.87%). It is located in a community with a high crime rate, and the neighborhoods that it serves, have some of the highest crime rates within the city (NC Department of Commerce, 2018). Historically, it has been hard to staff with experienced, highly qualified teachers; 30% or higher of the teaching staff were beginning teachers. The 2018-2019 school year was the principal's eighth year at the school, and during the most recent years when growth has been measured, the school had Met Expected Growth (4 years), Exceeded Growth (1 year), and Not Met Growth (1 year). There were 428 students enrolled in the school during the 2018-19 school year. The student population was transient, and

there were 1,358 discipline referrals, 532 incidents of out-of-school suspensions, and 251 incidents of in-school suspensions during the 2018-19 school year.

In comparison to similar schools in the district, L.C. Elementary School had a unique make-up of students and teachers, which contributed to many of its struggles. There are two other grades 3-5 elementary schools which had a more diverse student population of students and staff than L.C. Elementary School. Because of hiding the real names of the school district and the schools, I will refer to one of the 3-5 grade elementary schools as I. B. Track Elementary. Historically, I. B. Track Elementary has not been hard to staff with experienced, highly qualified teachers; 15% or less of the teaching staff were beginning teachers. The 2018-2019 school year was the principal's first full year at I. B. Track Elementary School as the principal was assigned to the school in November of the 2017-2018 school year. During the most recent years, when growth has been measured, the school had Met Expected Growth (3 years), Exceeded Growth (0 years), and Not Met Growth (2 years), including the 2018-19 school year. There were 571 students (65% Black) enrolled in the school during the 2018-19 school year. As compared to L.C. Elementary School, I. B. Track Elementary School had pockets of students who were transient and were domiciled in low socio-economic communities within the student population. Both schools were designated as "Low Performing" by the state of North Carolina. In the 2018-2019 school year, L.C. Elementary had a school letter grade of an "F," and I. B. Track Elementary had a letter grade of a "D." The school had 259 discipline referrals, 102 incidents of out-of-school suspensions, and 94 incidents of in-school suspensions during the 2018-19 school year. See Figure 6, which compares the two schools' discipline data for the 2018-2019 school year.

My Focus of Practice sought to analyze the implementation of Restorative Practices as an alternative to exclusionary discipline to determine its impact on school discipline measures. I also collected and analyzed staff and students' perception data and school discipline data, and other school data (attendance and years of teaching experience for staff involved in the study) to determine if any patterns existed in the interpretation of the data.

Inquiry Partners

Several collaborative inquiry partners were involved during the study to assist in the data gathering and the data analysis process. The collaborative inquiry partners were familiar with me as a colleague, supervisor, senior cabinet staff, and subordinate. The current principal and assistant principal of the school, the former principal of the school, other designated members of the faculty and staff, a Restorative Practices coach, district-level personnel, and the superintendent served as collaborative inquiry partners. My role in the district provided access to the school's personnel, district resources, and district and school data.

The principal and assistant principal participated in the interview protocol and played a crucial role in ensuring the fidelity of participation by faculty and staff in the Restorative Practices professional development process and the use of strategies learned during the training. They collaborated with the trauma-sensitive schools' consultant to organize the professional development, its implementation, and the monitoring of the use of the strategies.

The former principal provided the background and historical context of the school to assist me in school-level data analysis. Six selected teachers participated in the study by completing surveys and being involved in focus group interviews. Other faculty and staff participated in Restorative Practices professional development and implementation.

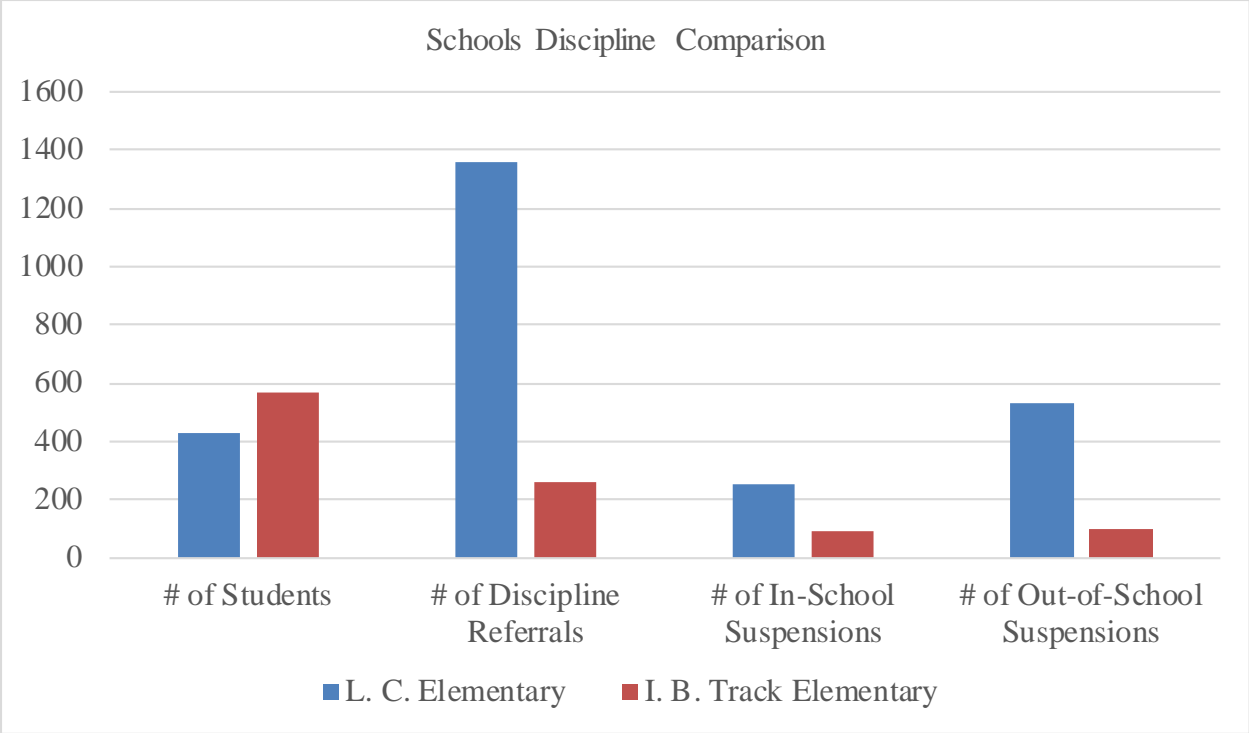


Figure 6. Schools discipline comparison.

Students and parents served a critical role in the study. Twenty selected students participated in the survey process. I effectively conveyed to parents the purpose of the study, the survey process, their child's right to anonymity, and what will be done with the information collected from the surveys. Parents also had to provide me with written permission for their children to participate in the study.

Other principals within the district who had an interest in Restorative Practices served as thought partners during the research process. District-level personnel provided access to pertinent data and resources. The superintendent supported the study by providing guidance, being a critical partner, and giving permission for me to collect new data and access existing district data.

The school site for this study is a low-performing elementary school in a low-performing district in eastern North Carolina. L.C. Elementary School served approximately 400 students in grades 3rd -5th. Although the school had continued to attain academic growth markers, the students continued to struggle with mastery of reading and math standards. This, coupled with the enormous amount of discipline referrals, had created a cyclical pattern for the staff and students. In an attempt to disrupt this cycle, reduce the use of exclusionary discipline practices, and increase time in the classroom, restorative practices were implemented in the learning environment. All staff was trained on the use of restorative practices; however, for the study, only selected grade teachers provided data via surveys and focus groups as to the effectiveness and impact of the restorative practices intervention. These teachers were the previous and current teachers of the students included in the study. The students for the study were a random sampling of twenty 4th and 5th graders that had ten or more discipline referrals from the previous year.

Ethical Considerations

Before beginning the study cycles, several steps were completed. As required by East Carolina University, I completed the training modules for the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) Certification. Following the completion of this training, I submitted the proposed study for approval by the dissertation committee. Once formally approved by the committee, a written request to conduct the study was sent to the school district superintendent, as well as the building principal detailing the scope of the study, requirements of participants, and the data to be collected. Finally, I sought Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval.

When IRB approval was obtained, I began the study by selecting its participants. Each participant chosen, both staff and student, received a letter outlining the study and requesting their participation. This part of the process was very important because I hold a leadership position within the district in which this study is taking place. It was necessary to ensure this letter of informed consent would explain to the participant what would be required of them if they participated, how long they would be involved, and any compensation or incentive for participation. It was equally important to emphasize that this was voluntary, and the participant will not be penalized for choosing to participate or not. The consent form was signed by the participant and /or legal guardian before any data was collected from that person. Participants were able to choose to opt-out of the study at any time. However, every accommodation was made to ensure that the study participants remained comfortable with all of the processes used throughout study. The electronic surveys conducted were anonymous and stored in Qualtrics. Using Qualtrics kept the collected data confidential. The focus group and interview data were collected by the scholarly practitioner and transcribed using the NVivo software. Participants

were given pseudonyms to keep their responses confidential. Also, every effort was made to work with the participants during a time frame that was convenient for their schedule.

The data collected was only shared with the participants, school administration, and district administration if requested in writing. The data contained pseudonyms and excluded any other identifying information. Specified in the informed consent was a statement that data derived from this study should not be used to penalize or promote any employee. Instead, I hoped that this data would be requested to help coach teachers and administrators and design strategies to support students in similar schools who struggle with repeat behaviors.

Inquiry Procedures

Purposeful sampling was used for this study. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), this method of sampling involves the intentional selection of participants based on the practitioner's judgment of their potential to provide information to address the study topic. The students were selected based on the principles of purposeful sampling. Specifically, homogenous sampling was used to identify the 20 students to participate. Homogeneous sampling seeks to identify individuals that "possess a similar trait or characteristic" (Mertler, 2019, p. 168). In this case, the student sampling consisted of students that received ten or more discipline referrals in the previous year. A report of students meeting these criteria was created. From there, names were removed from the report. The report was then sorted in numerical order by student identification numbers. The first 20 students listed were selected for participation. These students completed surveys before and after the strategy implementation. Their before- and after-discipline data were studied to determine the impact of restorative practices. Based on current discipline data, and the judgments of the school administration and me, these students provided

deeper insight into discipline practices at the school. They also stood to experience the most change as a result of the implementation of restorative practices.

Teachers for the study population were selected based on the individuals' involvement with the selected students' discipline. I worked closely with the administration to identify the adults in the building to complete the survey. The students' previous or current teachers were asked to respond to the surveys. The responses of this group assisted me in forming a robust and more accurate picture of the beliefs about discipline that exists at the school. Since the students selected for the study dictated the adults included, it was not yet known the total number of adults that would be involved in the study. In considering this, saturation became a concern. However, saturation is reached when gathering new data will not reveal any new or fresh insight (Charmaz, 2006). Because all of the adults involved in the study were directly linked to the student sample, it was highly unlikely that collecting data from other staff just to increase the number of responses would add new and fresh perspectives regarding discipline, specifically discipline outcomes with these students.

I used the following Action Research Cycles to analyze the data and address or make changes to processes and procedures as needed. Figure 7 outlines the three Phases and the cycles of PDSA within each phase.

Phase I

Plan - Student study participants were selected beginning with the selection of the 20 students chosen from a list of students with 10 or more referrals during the 2018-2019 school year. I selected six teachers from a list of teachers who have taught the 20 selected students in the past or who were currently teaching them during the 2020-2021 school year. The principal and assistant principal were also a part of the staff participants in this study. The discipline data



Figure 7. Graphic overview of phases & PDSA cycles.

generated in this phase was the school discipline data disaggregated by race and gender as well as the twenty students' discipline data as a cohort. The discipline data focused on referrals, in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, and long-term suspensions (spring 2018-2019 school year). I also collected teacher and student attendance data school-wide and as teacher and student cohorts for those who are participants in the study (spring 2018-2019 school year). I used the spring of 2018-19 as my baseline data because of the interruption of face-to-face learning for schools in NC during March of 2020 (2019-2020 school year). This interruption of face-to-face learning also transitioned to the fall 2020-2021 school year. The comparison data sets were collected from the spring 2018-19 and spring 2020-2021 school years. I retained the data for comparison to the data gathered at the end of the study. Following the selection of the students, the teacher participants were selected.

Do - All selected student participants were given the initial round of the student discipline perception survey. Teacher participants were given the initial round of the teacher discipline perception survey as well as a discipline perception focus interview. The principal and assistant principal received the initial round of individual discipline perception interviews.

Study - I analyzed the data received from all surveys, interviews, discipline data, and attendance data to discover themes and patterns in the responses.

Act - I worked with the Restorative Practice consultant and principal to design a Restorative Practice training that addressed some of the patterns or concerns uncovered in the collected data. All staff participated in the Restorative Practices training.

Description of Participants and Recruitment Strategies

Initially, participants were selected based on school-level data. The selection process began with identifying 20 Black 5th grade students who had 10 or more discipline referrals in the

spring of the 2018-19 school year. Of those 10 or more discipline referrals, at least one must have resulted in an exclusionary discipline outcome (suspension from 1-10 days). Once the students were identified, then the selection of the staff members began. I planned to identify six staff members who taught the students previously or were currently teaching them. I did not choose teacher participants based on whether or not they had previously or currently submitted discipline referrals for the students. If six previous or current teachers for the selected 20 students were not identified due to the high teacher turnover of the school, then a teacher with at least one year experience teaching at the school was selected to complete the teacher sample. Only the current administration was selected for the study. The current principal was new to the school but served as Assistant Principal at the school when the current 5th graders were in 3rd grade. The current Assistant Principal had served at the school for one year previous to this study.

Race and gender data were be analyzed as part of the study, but only the sample of students was selected with race as a considering factor. Gender was not a factor in selection for the student sample.

Once identified, participants were recruited to the study through individual meetings. I met with each selected student's parent(s)/guardian(s) individually to explain the study, the data to be collected and the process for collecting the data, how student privacy was maintained, potential risks and benefits of the study, and that the participants may elect at any time to discontinue participating in the study. Parents were asked to sign a consent form that details all the information that I shared in the meeting giving their permission for their child to participate in the study.

A similar process was used for teachers and administrators selected to participate. Individual meetings were held to explain the particulars of the study, and the participants were asked to sign a consent form that outlined the information shared.

Instrumentation

Initially, the selected 20 students and the selected six teachers, the survey population, were given the Student Discipline Perception Survey and Teacher Discipline Perception Survey (an anonymous open-ended survey). The staff survey gauged teachers' efficacy in their classroom roles of managing behaviors. The student survey gauged students' perception of how the school culture viewed and managed student behaviors within the school setting. The study population were given the surveys to complete again before the conclusion of the study.

I worked collaboratively with a professional trained in Restorative Practices and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) to create a Student Discipline Perception Survey with 10 multiple choice questions (see Appendix B), a Teacher Discipline Perception Survey with 10 multiple choice questions (see Appendix C), teacher focus group questions with six open-ended questions (see Appendix D), and administrator interview protocol with eight open-ended questions (see Appendix E).

I used semi-structured interviews questions to garner the perceptions of the principal and assistant principal, which gave me, the researcher, an opportunity to follow up with additional questions if necessary (Mertler, 2019, pp. 172-175). The semi-structured interviews were completed separately for the principal and the assistant principal. The six teachers also participated in a focus group to gain a deeper insight of their perception of school discipline. In the semi-structured interview and focus group process, questions were predetermined, but participants and I also had the agency to ask follow-up questions. I interviewed the principal and

the assistant principal and conducted the teacher focus group at the beginning and end of the study to measure changes in perceptions throughout the process.

I proposed that anonymous open-ended surveys be provided to teachers and students. The six teachers selected were based on the 20 student participants. The student and the teacher surveys had different questions but the same number of questions. I used a different set of questions for the student and teacher surveys than the ones used in the semi-structured interviews for the principal and assistant principal. The surveys were conducted at the beginning and after the process to determine the changes in perceptions throughout the study. My role was to ensure the removal of bias and create a safe environment that was conducive for the participants to speak honestly without influence from others and fear of retribution. Table 2 identifies specifically which study question each instrument or data source will help to answer.

Baseline Data Collection

I began the baseline data collection process by identifying 20 Black 5th-grade students who had 10 or more discipline referrals in the spring of the 2018-19 school year that resulted in an in-school suspension or out-of-school suspension from 1-10 days. The 20 students and the school's attendance data and discipline data from the spring of the 2018-19 school year were also collected. I identified six teachers who had previously or were currently teaching the aforementioned 20 students. The staff attendance data from the spring of the 2018-19 school year was acquired.

Perception data were gathered for all selected student and staff participants during Phase I of the research process. The qualitative data consisted of student surveys, teacher surveys, a teacher focus group, and administrator interviews. Survey and interview questions were multiple choice and open-ended, and the interview and focus group questions were semi-structured.

Table 2

Study Questions and Instruments/Data Sources Used to Gather Data Sets

Study Questions	Stakeholders	Instruments/Data Sources	When
<i>Study Question 1:</i> Following implementation of Restorative Practices, how have school staff (teacher and school-level administrators) perceptions of discipline changed?	Teachers School Level Administrators	Teacher Discipline Perception Surveys -10 multiple-choice questions Focus Groups - 6 open-ended questions Individual interviews for Principal and Assistant Principal - 8 open-ended questions	December 2020 – 1 st Week in January 2021 will be the time to gather initial data from Teacher Discipline Perception Survey, teacher focus group, and administrator interviews. First week in June 2021, I will complete another round of data gathering from all stakeholders using the same previously identified data collection tools.
<i>Study Question 2:</i> How have students' perception of discipline changed since the implementation of Restorative Practices by school staff?	Students	Student Discipline Perception Surveys-10 multiple-choice questions	December 2020 – 1 st Week in January 2021 will be the time to gather initial data from Student Discipline Perception Survey. First week in June 2021, I will complete another round of data gathering from all stakeholders using the same previously identified data collection tool.
<i>Study Question 3:</i> How have student disciplinary outcomes changed since the implementation of Restorative Practices by school staff?	Faculty and Students	School discipline data, selected students discipline data, school attendance data, selected students attendance data, and staff attendance data	December 2020 – 1 st Week in January 2021 will be the time to gather initial school discipline and selected student discipline data and staff, selected students, and school attendance data (spring 2018-2019 school year). First week in June 2021, I will complete another round of data gathering using the same previously identified data sources from spring 2020-2021 school year.

The survey data was collected in Qualtrics, while the interview data was transcribed through NVivo.

The qualitative and quantitative data were collected between the first week of December and no later than the second week of January. This timeline provided me the opportunity to implement the Restorative Practice professional development after the data analysis process that allowed for an approximate 14-16 week study.

Data Analysis

Survey data was collected electronically using Qualtrics. The variable data was already assigned a value so that it was ready for the statistical analysis process. I used Microsoft Excel to disaggregate survey data as well as quantitative data sources, such as discipline and attendance data, to identify patterns and trends. A designated person was present to record the participant responses during the focus group sessions through the use of a recording device and a transcription of the participants' responses. A recording device also recorded the responses during the interview sessions. Once each session was completed, the recordings were transcribed using NVivo. This is where the data was stored and used for preliminary coding.

Summary of Phase I

Phase 1 involved the selection and recruitment of participants for the study, the development and deployment of the interview and survey questions, and preliminary planning for Phase 2. The length of time anticipated to complete Phase 1 was approximately 10 weeks. Phase 1 established the baseline data for perceptions and beliefs at L.C. Elementary School related to school discipline practices. In preparation for Phase 2, I met with the administration and the Restorative Practice consultant to review the baseline data and finalize plans for launching the Restorative Practices professional development.

Phase II

Phase II included implementation of the Restorative Practices professional development and strategic coaching for the fidelity of implementation. This phase of the study connected to research question one: Following the implementation of the intervention, how has the staff's perception of discipline at L.C. Elementary School changed? In order to determine if there was any change in staff's perception following the implementation of Restorative Practices, it was essential to making sure that staff was provided coaching throughout the implementation to address questions they may have had. The Restorative Practices Consultant provided coaching for staff periodically throughout Phase 2. Implementation fidelity was determined through meetings with myself, the Restorative Practices Consultant, and the administrative team of L.C. Elementary School. The Restorative Practices Consultant adjusted coaching intervals as needed based on these meetings and what the administrative team was seeing in implementation.

Plan - I worked with the school administration to create a plan to roll out the implementation of Restorative Practices in the school.

Do - Teachers began using aspects of Restorative Practices in the classroom, including circles and informal conferencing. Teachers and administrators began using conferencing as a way to generate Restorative Practices aligned with alternatives to in-school suspension and out-of-school suspensions. I collaborated with the Restorative Practices Consultant, providing the professional development and coaching, and also with the school administration to ensure that Restorative Practices were in place, implemented with fidelity, and progressing during this approximately sixteen-week study.

Study - I continued to look for themes and patterns in responses from administrators and the Restorative Practices Consultant regarding the implementation of Restorative Practices.

Act - I worked with the Restorative Practices Consultant to ensure that teachers and administrators were provided continued coaching and support as needed to ensure consistent and equitable implementation.

Inquiry Approach/Intervention

Implementing Restorative Practices, specifically circles and conferences, was the proposed intervention that was expected to cause changes in staff, student, and administrators' perceptions about school discipline and also decrease exclusionary discipline practices that disengage students from the educational setting. After receiving professional development on Restorative Practices from the Restorative Practices Consultant, school administrators began conducting restorative conferences with students as part of the disciplinary action and also when they returned to school if a suspension was absolutely necessary. Teachers began to conduct restorative circles to reconcile classroom-level behavioral issues as well as interpersonal conflicts students experience in the classroom that could potentially lead to classroom disruption.

The proposed design of this intervention cycle was based on the needs of faculty as determined by data analysis from discipline perception surveys, interviews with administrators, focus groups with teachers, and as aligned with the structure of Restorative Practices professional development. This part of the plan was subject to change based on the analysis of data and specific needs of the staff of L.C. Elementary School as Restorative Practices were implemented.

Summary of Phase II

During Phase II, the intervention phase of my research was implemented by providing Restorative Practice professional development and coaching to the staff of L.C. Elementary School. In this phase, I worked with the Restorative Practices Consultant and the administration

of the school to periodically review implementation data. From those reviews, we determined if staff and administrators needed additional coaching or if the planned coaching intervals needed to be adjusted. We also determined if the initial implementation with a focus on circles and conferences would need to be augmented to include additional Restorative Practices elements. Focus groups were conducted to gather implementation data for these purposes. This phase completed the intervention cycle and prepared for Phase III, which was an analysis of the data conclusions of the research.

Phase III

In Phase III, I gathered the final data and conducted the final analysis to draw study conclusions. The final data collected was post-study interviews with administration, post-study surveys of teachers and students, and an analysis of trends and patterns that emerged during the implementation phase of the study (Phase II). Phase III connected to the research question: How have student discipline outcomes changed? Phase III is also connected to the two other research questions because it is a culmination of the study: How have staff and student perceptions of discipline changed? I merged quantitative and qualitative data collected. The quantitative data collected was discipline data school-wide from the spring of the 18-19 school year and discipline data for the 20 students identified for the study for the 18-19 school year and the spring of the 20-21 school year. Additionally, attendance data for teachers, the school, and the selected students were analyzed. The qualitative data collected were the perception surveys data (staff and students for both pre- and post-implementation), the teacher focus group data, and the individual interviews of the principal and assistant principal before and after the implementation of the intervention. All data sets were then analyzed for trends and patterns and to determine what

change had occurred in beliefs about school discipline and discipline outcomes in the school before and after implementation of the intervention.

Plan - I compared the quantitative data and qualitative data collected before and after the implementation of the Restorative Practices professional development and interpreted the findings. A plan for the collection of additional data, if needed, was made at this point in the study.

Do - The final round of surveys and interviews were conducted with teachers, administrators, and students. Teachers and students received the teacher discipline perception survey and the student discipline perception survey, respectively. The six teachers also participated in the discipline perception focus group interview. The principal and assistant principal participated in individual discipline perception interviews. The current discipline data for the 20 students were gathered for comparative analysis. I gathered data from the spring of the 2020-21 school year: discipline data for the school, discipline data for the selected students, attendance data for the staff, the 20 selected students, and the school attendance data. Data was reviewed for saturation.

Study - I prepared all data for the final analysis. Themes and patterns were identified by using Qualtrics for survey data; NVivo was used for transcription of interviews; and Microsoft Excel was used to disaggregate qualitative and quantitative data sources. Early data were compared to that collected throughout to inform changes in perceptions and discipline outcomes. Spring 2020-21 data were compared with the discipline data and attendance data that were already analyzed at the beginning of the research from the spring of the 2018-19 school year. Also analyzed were the student discipline perception surveys, the staff discipline perception surveys, the teacher focus group responses, and the interview responses with the principal and

assistant principal after implementation. The post data was then compared with the same data sets collected prior to the implementation of the intervention.

Act - After analysis of the data before and after implementation, I shared my data and insights with the school administrative team to share with the School Improvement Team to be used for school improvement planning purposes for the following school year. In particular, the school's focus on discipline practices to ensure or limit students' exclusion from school was important for the school's planning for continued school improvement. The findings of my research were also presented for consideration for approval by my dissertation committee. Other stakeholders that received an analysis of the data are the executive administrators of the school district and the school board.

Analysis of Approach

Several comparisons of quantitative and qualitative data occurred to document actual or perceived changes in students, teachers, administrators, and practices at L.C. Elementary School. Baseline qualitative data was collected from the spring of 2018-19, consisting of student discipline data school-wide, the selected students' discipline data, school-wide staff attendance data, school-wide student attendance data, and the selected students' attendance data. This data was compared to the same data sets collected from the spring of the 2020-21 school year. I expected to see a difference in the data that would indicate positive outcomes from the implementation of the intervention, which would be a decrease in student discipline data, an increase in student attendance data, and an increase in teacher attendance data. I expected analysis of the qualitative data to indicate a change in student, teacher, and administrator perceptions of school discipline and the strategies and approach towards school discipline. The qualitative data was a comparison of pre-implementation survey responses from students and

teachers about their perceptions of discipline with their post-implementation survey responses. Teacher focus groups were also conducted before and after implementation to collect additional data regarding the perception of school discipline. Interviews with the principal and assistant principal were also conducted prior to and after the implementation of Restorative Practices to determine changes in perception of school discipline. Collectively, the perception data from surveys, focus groups, and interviews was analyzed to determine the correlation to the quantitative data for interpretation of changes in school discipline.

The potential impact of this research was an augmentation of discipline practices that will reduce exclusionary discipline outcomes and provide a roadmap for school leadership to effect positive changes in discipline practices. The results from the analysis of the discipline perception data and the discipline outcome data provided evidence of the impact of Restorative Practices on educational and school leadership practices.

Data insights were shared at the school level with the administration and School Improvement Team for school improvement planning purposes. My research findings were also shared with the executive administrators of the school district and the school board for consideration of potential implementation at other schools for improvements in discipline outcomes for students. The process of conducting this research impacted my leadership learning profoundly. Reflecting on the disproportion of exclusionary discipline for black students caused me to question what other detrimental effects exclusionary discipline has and what other disparities it leads to for Black students. As educators, our mission is to educate students. Educating them about behavior and equipping them with the skills needed to self-regulate emotions and build interpersonal relationships to resolve conflicts may improve discipline outcomes. I wonder what other outcomes will extend to, including possibly an increase in

academic performance outcomes for Black students. My research has also caused me to reflect on my 11 years as a high school principal and the large number of students that were suspended under my leadership. I wonder if a change in discipline practices would have moved the school further in academic achievement. The school's discipline referrals did not decline, even though there was academic growth, and I now believe it was because I did not have a framework like Restorative Practices in place. Having such a framework to equip my staff with the skills needed to build relationships, de-escalate intense classroom moments, and provide restorative means for students that were not punitive and exclusionary, may have aided in engaging students more academically for increased academic proficiency. My title gave me the position to lead, but conducting research to solve a problem of practice gave me the evidence to lead with authenticity. Throughout this research process, I have also leaned on inquiry partners as thinking partners, from developing a plan of action to researching analysis of the data. I have also relied on the goodwill of educators who are invested in improving outcomes for students. This experience has made me consider that not only does it take a village to raise a child, but it also takes a village to solve a problem of practice. Throughout this journey, I have also been very mindful of ethical practices to ensure that all participants' privacy was protected and that the inquiry results were valid and reliable, and built on sound research practices. I met with advisors and inquiry partners to receive feedback throughout the process, who has also served as accountability partners for ethical considerations.

Summary of Phase III

Phase III is the culmination of my research. Phase I involved developing the design of the study, the selection and recruitment of study participants, and the collection of initial data prior to implementing the intervention. Phase II involved implementing the intervention of Restorative

Practices and collecting additional qualitative data. Phase III brought in the baseline pre-intervention qualitative and quantitative data in an analysis with post-intervention data to generate a conclusion on the impact of implementing Restorative Practices on perceptions and outcomes of student data. In Phase III, the convergence of qualitative and quantitative data was analyzed, and potential future implications for the research were addressed. Phase III also provided a reflection on the entire study and opportunities to share the data with additional stakeholders.

Inquiry Design Rigor

In this section, I discuss the rigor of my inquiry design by addressing the credibility of my action research and the standard of its usefulness in assisting L.C. Elementary in addressing issues of chronic exclusionary discipline practices of Black students (Mertler, 2019, p. 144). I also describe my efforts to ensure that my bias is controlled for or eliminated so that the outcomes are genuine and not reflective of my beliefs (Mertler, 2019, p. 144; Stringer, 2007).

In my action research plan, I have created three phases that my study cycled through using the Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle in each phase. Implementing PDSA in each phase allowed for greater credibility of the information learned in each cycle. During my research process, the selected 20 students provided perception data twice via a ten-question multiple-choice survey; the selected six teachers provided perception data on four different occasions (twice through surveys and twice through focus groups), and the two administrators provided perception data twice by participating in two individual semi-structured interviews that consisted of eight open-ended questions. The staff participants engaged in member checking at the end of the research process to review the findings of the study. This provided the school with an

opportunity to assess the reliability of the findings based on their beliefs while also creating an opportunity to use the data for school improvement planning purposes.

Being a seasoned educator with 24 years of experience, and 19 of those years as a school and district level administrator, gave me credibility as an educator, but my lack of experience as a researcher may cause participants of the study to question my dependability as a researcher (Mertler, 2019, p. 145). The Restorative Practice consultant was also an experienced educator and had previously facilitated an action research process. My inquiry partners were also seasoned educators who have conducted published research. These partners assisted me in gaining the confidence of the participants in the study.

Delimitations, Limitations, and Assumptions

A delimitation in my study was due to the impact of COVID-19. School closures and remote learning decreased my quantitative discipline data pool. It also forced me to use the spring semester of the 2018-2019 school year as my baseline year. This created an entire year and a half gap between my comparison discipline data year and the spring of 2020-2021, which was when I conducted the study. The student participants would have been 3rd graders during the baseline year and were 5th graders during the comparison school year.

The six selected teachers had previously taught the 20 identified students during the 2018-2019 school year or were currently teaching them during the 2020-2021 school year. All of the teachers selected as participants had a past or present teaching connection with the student participants but may not have been knowledgeable of the existing culture at L.C. Elementary School because they may have been new hires to the school. I also involved the principal and assistant principal during the research process. The 2020-2021 school year was the principal's first year as the principal, but the principal had previously served as the assistant principal at the

school for two years. The assistant principal was currently in her second year serving as an assistant principal at L.C. Elementary school. The principal and assistant principal's respective time serving at the school did not limit their knowledge of how discipline impacts the school. Saturation was a point of concern because all of the adults involved in the study were linked to the student participants. Collecting data from other staff to increase a larger percentage of staff participants would not have provided a much different perspective of school discipline perception than what was provided by the six teacher participants. All staff participants had to sign consent to be a part of this study.

The 2018-2019 school year was the baseline year for data in this study, in which the 20 students would have been third graders and were currently fifth graders during the 2020-2021 school year. The same 20 students were selected for the study through a random selection process. The list of students was generated, listing only student ID numbers. Then the random selection was done by reviewing each student's data and selecting the first 20 students who had the following characteristics: identified as black, had at least ten discipline referrals, and had at least one discipline referral that resulted in an exclusionary discipline consequence. Data collection from the 2020-21 school year was only collected during the spring semester. All students and their parents had to sign consent to be included in the study.

I designed this study specifically to analyze the impact of restorative practices on student and teacher perceptions and also to analyze the impact of restorative practices on disciplinary outcomes for black students. The analysis of student and teacher perceptions about student behavior and discipline before and after the implementation of restorative practices was a delimitation of this study. The location of the school and the community factors of high rates of poverty, drug use, and violence were instrumental factors in choosing L.C. Elementary as the

study site. These factors present as behaviors in the school with the students as adverse childhood experiences, which exacerbated the disciplinary issues for students in the school.

The sheer severity of behaviors and the number of exclusions from L.C. Elementary School were atypical based on my experiences as a veteran educator and were a limitation in this study. The school served a fragile student population from high poverty and crime areas, who were some of the most vulnerable populations within the school district. The students came to school with many external issues that impeded their learning at school because many of the discipline issues that students experienced at school were related to those same external factors present in their communities (Mallett, 2017). These external factors were a limitation in my study as well, but my research did not observe data from other factors like early childhood trauma and mental health disorders. Observation of the community this school served and the free and reduced lunch status of the school, we knew that the majority of the student population lived in low-income housing and were impoverished. The common term used to refer to these external factors is Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) (Brown et al., 2009). ACEs include childhood emotional, physical, or sexual abuse and household dysfunction, along with an expanded list that includes the definition of poverty, racism, discrimination, community violence, and substandard housing, along with many others (Brown et al., 2009; Finkelhor et al., 2013). Students who were impacted by ACEs can experience trauma and/or constant toxic stress that leads to an increase in learning and behavior problems for these students (Burke et al., 2011). My research was taking more of a global approach to addressing the social-emotional factors present within student behavior and only focused on the impact of discipline outcomes and discipline perceptions from the implementation of Restorative Practices.

The school's predominantly Black student population and mostly Black staff, inexperienced teaching staff, and a limited student population age range (grades 3-5) were also limitations within the study. The school did not offer a diverse racial or teacher experience perspective about discipline within the school setting. The number of students involved as participants for the student perception of school discipline was less than 5% and may also be another level of limitation during the research process.

The school setting had several other factors that contributed to the limitations of the study. The school only had grades 3-5, which limited the students' population age range. The principal at the school was different from the principal who had led the school for the previous eight years, and the principal was serving in his first year at the school. The assistant principal was serving in the second year of leadership and served for one school year (2019-2020 school year) with the previous principal. The school serves a predominantly Black student population, teaching faculty, and school staff. The teacher population of this school setting was also a mostly inexperienced teaching staff with Beginning and Lateral Entry teachers. The school population was not very diverse with regard to student racial population and the experience level or racial diversity of the school staff.

An assumption in this study was that staff members had not received training on other equitable ways to handle student discipline. Administrators and teachers continuously engaged in the same patterns of discipline, which led me to assume that they had no other viable strategies to use. An assumption to consider was that any changes made by school administrators and teachers to disciplinary practices were the results of the implementation of Restorative Practices and not the change in the school's principal during the 2020-2021 school year.

There was also an assumption that the integrity of the discipline data was accurate; this included all discipline incidents being reported and reported accurately. My study did not control for the number of discipline referrals nor the content of the referrals that were entered into the discipline maintenance system. Instead, it analyzed the discipline data of the official discipline report for the school.

Another assumption of my research was that the Restorative Practices professional development would have a positive impact on exclusionary consequences and classroom behavior. This was a natural inclination, but a decrease in discipline referrals and suspension rates does not necessarily equal a positive change in student behavior. The change in behavior could merely be associated with staff awareness because of the Restorative Practice professional development. This awareness could create a sense of staff tolerance as it relates to student behaviors that have not been the normal practice within the school setting. The goal was to not only change the way school personnel addressed student behaviors but also to give students the necessary skills to be able to behave and function successfully in the school setting. There was also the assumption to consider that the Restorative Practices program would be implemented with fidelity. During the research process, there was no method for measuring oversight of the implementation of the program. Instead, there were periodic check-ins with the administrators to provide coaching and guidance from the Restorative Practices consultant.

Role of the Scholarly Practitioner

The site for this study was at a school in the district where I, the scholarly practitioner, served as an assistant superintendent. For this reason, I used a consultant to help provide the training for restorative practices. This was done to ensure that the teachers and administrators involved were able to take ownership of the new strategies and implement them in a way that

was organic to their school culture. The scholarly practitioner realizes that if they participated in more than the data collection and analysis, the staff might have perceived the intervention strategies as more of a directive. If staff viewed this as a directive with judgment from senior district staff, they might not have felt the freedom to do what is best for students.

The scholarly practitioner was responsible for conducting the surveys, focus groups, and interviews. Efforts were made in the design of the instruments to ensure that both positive and negative feedback and insight were encouraged. This helped in removing any bias that the practitioner may have had when analyzing the data.

Summary

This study aimed to learn what impact the implementation of Restorative Practices had on discipline outcomes for Black students. Using a convergent approach to analyzing qualitative and quantitative data with a representative sample of participants, conclusions were drawn from the data collected. The conclusions were not finite but may lead to additional questions that future research will address. This action research design was a replicable model that could be implemented at other schools with larger, more diverse samples to learn more about Restorative Practices' impact on stakeholders' perceptions of school discipline and discipline outcomes.

I used the following qualitative tools:

1. Teacher Discipline Perception Survey
2. Teacher Discipline Perception Focus Group
3. Student Discipline Perception Survey
4. Principal Discipline Perception Interview
5. Assistant Principal Perception Interview

I also used quantitative data sources during the research process. These data sources consisted of school level and individual students' discipline and attendance reports. Staff attendance reports were also another quantitative data source in this process. These data sources were comparatively analyzed for pre-intervention findings and post-intervention results to determine what, if any, impact the intervention had on discipline outcomes for the selected students.

The findings of this study are presented following in Chapter 4. In this chapter, I will describe the process of conducting the research, including any obstacles encountered during the research process as well as adjustments that were made through the research process.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The purpose of this study is to examine the implementation of Restorative Practices as an alternative to exclusionary discipline to determine its impact on staff and students' perceptions of school discipline and student discipline outcomes at L.C. Elementary School. Additionally, by comparing the whole school and identified students' attendance and discipline data of the spring 2018-2019 baseline school semester to the data of the spring 2020-2021 semester, my study examined if there is a noticeable impact where the school discipline outcomes mirror the perceptions about school discipline. The professional development plan at L.C. Elementary School focused on an overview of Restorative Practices, informal conferencing, affirmative statements, student voice in natural consequences, and circles. Since the focus of the professional development was restorative versus punitive practices, a comparison of the data sets from before and after the professional development may reveal an increase in positive perceptions about school discipline, an increase in school practices that focus on relationships, and an improvement in school discipline outcomes. If my data analysis reveals a higher level of satisfaction in the perceptions of school discipline and an improvement in school discipline outcomes, then my hypothesis that Restorative Practices is a contributing factor to changing staff and students' perception of school discipline and improving school discipline outcomes could be considered as an influence, but not a conclusive fact. This intervention with a more sustained professional development plan could have a considerable impact at L.C. Elementary School. Additionally, my findings may result in staff engaging in dialogue that considers their role as a protagonist in student discipline and what structure should be in place to create a school culture that removes punitive discipline measures and adds restoring students through relationships, teaching behaviors, and changing adult language.

Research Questions

The research questions were as follows:

1. Following implementation of Restorative Practices, how have school staff (teacher and school-level administrators) perceptions of discipline changed?
2. How have students' perceptions of discipline changed since the implementation of Restorative Practices by school staff?
3. How have student disciplinary outcomes changed since the implementation of Restorative Practices by school staff?

Demographics

Six teachers, the principal and assistant principal, and 15 students at L.C. Elementary School volunteered to participate in this study, which was focused on staff and students' perception of school discipline before and after the implementation of Restorative Practices. Five of the teachers were outside of the range of a beginning teacher, and one teacher was a beginning teacher. An individual with a beginning teacher's status in NC is significant because it signifies one who has less than three years of teaching experience. Teacher participants were certified in a variety of licensure areas, and all teachers had previously taught or were currently teaching one or more of the students who participated in the study. Four of the teachers were Black females, one was a White female, and one was a Black male. The principal is a Black male with 25 years in education. He had three years of experience as an assistant principal and was serving in his second year as a principal. The assistant principal is a Black female with 13 years in education. She was serving in her fifth year as an assistant principal.

The 15 student participants identified as Black in PowerSchool, the student information database for the district, but one of the 15 students identified as Two or More Races on the

survey. This discrepancy was rectified by considering the input in the survey as a mistake. It was thoroughly explained to all parents and students that the study was focusing on Black students. None of the 15 families stated that their child did not identify as Black during the informational sessions of the recruitment phase. Eight of the students were females, and seven of the students were males. All of the students were in the 5th grade. The participants of the study were a representation of the total makeup of the staff and students at the L.C. Elementary School. In Table 3, the content area, years of experience, race, and gender are provided for each of the staff study participants.

Data Collection

Data collection for my study began during the spring semester of the 2020-2021 school year after I had previously enlisted the support and approval of the principal to use L. C. Elementary School as the site of the study. In January 2021, during a face-to-face meeting with the Principal of L. C. Elementary School, I shared the information about my study, as well as information about the individual who would be providing the Restorative Practices professional development for L.C. Elementary. This individual was an ACEs/Early Childhood Trauma and Restorative Practices trainer with the North Carolina Public School Forum's NC Resilience & Learning Project.

Data for the study was collected in Phase I of PDSA Cycle 1 and Phase III of PDSA Cycle 3. In Phase I of PDSA Cycle 1, the following data was gathered before the implementation of Restorative Practices:

- Teacher Discipline Perception Surveys were administered to the teacher participants in April 2021.

Table 3

Staff Who Volunteered to Participate in Study on Restorative Practices

Staff ID #	Grade Level/Content Area	Years of Experience	Race	Gender
Teacher 01	4 th Grade Core Content	30	B	M
Teacher 02	4 th Grade Core Content	4	B	F
Teacher 03	4 th Grade Core Content	4	B	F
Teacher 04	3 rd Grade Core Content	5	B	F
Teacher 05	3 rd Grade Core Content	9	W	F
Teacher 06	5 th Grade Math	3	B	F
Admin 1	School Level Administrator	25	B	M
Admin 2	School Level Administrator	13	B	F

- Student Discipline Perception surveys were administered to student participants in April 2021.
- Individual discipline perception interviews were conducted with the principal and assistant principal in April 2021.
- A teacher discipline perception focus group was conducted with the teacher participants in April 2021.
- School attendance/discipline data and student participant attendance/discipline data from the spring of the 2018-19 school year.

In Phase III of PDSA Cycle 3, the following data was collected after the implementation of Restorative Practices:

- Teacher Discipline Perception Surveys were administered a second time to the teacher participants in May 2021.
- Student Discipline Perception surveys were administered to student participants a second time in May 2021.
- Individual discipline perception interviews were conducted a second time with the principal in June 2021 and the assistant principal in September 2021.
- A teacher discipline perception focus group was conducted a second time with the teacher participants in May 2021.
- School attendance/discipline data and student participant attendance/discipline data from the spring of the 2020-21 school year.

At the beginning of March 2021, I shared the entire timeline for my study with both the principal and the professional development trainer, followed by revisions to that timeline in Mid-March 2021. During a faculty meeting in March, I asked the principal of L.C. Elementary School

to explain that the intent of my study was to determine what impact the implementation of Restorative Practices professional development as an alternative to exclusionary discipline has on staff and students' perception of school discipline and school discipline outcomes after implementation. The purpose of having the principal speak with their staff concerning the study was to provide the staff with knowledge of the upcoming Restorative Practices training. This strategy also allowed the principal to present as the person in charge of the process instead of the scholarly practitioner, whose role in the district could be perceived as one of power and negatively impact the study.

Impact of COVID-19

On January 4, 2021, the staff at L.C. Elementary School returned to school to work in person, but students did not return to in-person learning. It is important to note that A. Merge Public Schools district ended the 2019-2020 school year in remote learning and began the 2020-2021 school year in remote learning. In the middle of October 2020, Exceptional Children, Pre-Kindergarten, and Kindergarten students started attending in-person learning on A/B days for those students whose parents wanted them to return to in-person learning. Towards the end of October 2020, 1st-3rd-grade students returned to in-person learning for those students whose parents had submitted the proper requests. In the second week in November 2020, 4th-5th grade students returned to in-person learning for those students whose parents submitted requests. Middle and high school students did not report to school for in-person learning the entire first semester; the educational setting was entirely virtual/remote learning. High school students did have to report for in-person testing for state exams only (End-of-Course tests, ACT, and WorkKeys).

The COVID-19 rate of infection was increasing at such an alarming rate that A. Merge Public Schools BOE voted to go back to full remote learning for the last full week of instruction in December for elementary and middle schools. This information is important to consider because L.C. Elementary School is a 3rd through 5th-grade school. The A/B schedule of in-person learning was only applicable to approximately 50% percent of the student body for approximately six to seven weeks during the first semester. The A. Merge Public Schools voted during a “special called” December 2020 BOE meeting for all grade levels to return to in-person learning for those families who would request to do so on January 11, 2021. During the January BOE meeting, the Board voted to stay in virtual/remote learning until April 12, 2021, when students would return to an A/B schedule of in-person learning for families who chose that option. There were disgruntled teachers, parents, administrators, and community members who believed that April was too long of a period to be virtual and there should be a shorter time frame to consider returning to in-person learning. The A. Merge Public Schools BOE voted during their February 2021 meeting to bring students back to an A/B schedule of in-person learning on March 1, 2021, as an option for parents. Several schools in the district had over 80% of their students participating in in-person learning, but the majority of the schools hovered around a 50% participation rate of their student body.

COVID-19’s impact on the school system began in March 2020 and continued throughout the 2020-2021 school year. Students were removed from in-person learning and were shepherded into virtual/remote learning for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year. There was a tiered process for Exceptional Children and elementary students to begin in-person instruction for those who chose it as an option approximately six to seven weeks into the start of the 2020-2021 school year, which began with virtual/remote learning for all students. Challenges

were immediately identified by the school district, and measures were put in place to overcome the heavy burden of providing students and teachers with laptops and internet access. Teachers also were immediately thrust into a new method of teaching that was unfamiliar and not mastered in many ways, which caused professional stress on top of the personal stress of dealing with the pandemic. Nearing the end of the 2019-2020 school year in May of 2020, the North Carolina State Board of Education passed SPLN-006, Remote Instruction Plans in Response to COVID-19 Crisis. The statutory reference for this State Plan is Senate Bill 704 (SL 2020-3). The State Board of Education made it mandatory that each public school unit submit a Remote Instruction Plan. The State Board of Education defined remote learning as “Remote Learning is learning that takes place outside the traditional school setting using various media and formats, such as but not limited to: video conference, telephone conference, print material, online material, or learning management systems (LMS)” (North Carolina State Board of Education, 2020). A. Merge Public Schools District spent the months of June and July building their Remote Instruction Plan, as it had to be submitted to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction on July 20, 2020.

The immediate task was to ensure that all students and instructional/instructional support staff had access to laptops and the internet. Fortunately, A. Merge Public Schools District was a one-to-one school district for high schools, middle schools, and 3rd through 5th grades when the pandemic forced the state of North Carolina to close all schools. Being a one-to-one school district gave A. Merge Public Schools District an advantage because the district only had to find laptop funding for Prek-2nd grade. The most difficult problem to solve was internet access for students and families, and staff who either did not have internet or did not have internet access because of the lack of infrastructure where they lived. The state and federal governments

provided funding for laptops and hotspots for internet access. Local businesses and agencies also provided resources for internet access for students and their families.

Additionally, there were differentiated professional development sessions designed for each content area teacher that also included various applications of technology tools. The majority of the training presented by district leaders for A. Merge Public Schools addressed how to create rigorous, relevant, and engaging lessons while facilitating instruction using online platforms. The impact of COVID-19 presented a challenge to the study because students at L.C. Elementary School spent the majority of the school year in remote/virtual learning and only attended in-person learning for approximately fourteen weeks of the total thirty-six weeks in the 2020-2021 school year.

I recognized during the fall semester of the 2020-2021 school year that COVID-19 would impact the qualitative and quantitative points of my research due to social distancing and remote/virtual learning. The pandemic caused a major disruption of the normal school day for staff and students. The continuation of my study was contingent on having students back in school for in-person learning for a sustained period of time during the spring semester of the 2020-2021 school year. Therefore, I had to adjust my timelines before beginning administrator interviews, teacher surveys and focus groups, and student surveys prior to Restorative Practice professional development. Students came back to school at the beginning of March 2021, for in-person learning. This caused me to determine that staff and students needed an adjustment period together as they transitioned back to in-person learning before I began implementing my study. In evaluating the impact of COVID-19 at L.C. Elementary School, the disruption of the pandemic to the normal school day, the insecurities of staff about their families and their own personal safety, students and their families concerned about their personal health, and students

attending in-person learning based on an A/B week schedule forced me to operate a study that had been created for a normal school face-to-face environment, which had been transformed into a hybrid of a remote/virtual and in-person learning experience for staff and students.

Participant Recruitment

To conduct the study, I recruited teachers who had either taught the identified students in 3rd or 4th grades or were currently teaching the identified students as 5th graders. A specific number of years with teaching experience was not a requirement of the study because this study was not controlling for teacher experience. There were eight teachers who met the qualifications of the study, but six teacher participants were the number set by the scholarly practitioner in the planning stages of the study. I specifically selected two of the teachers because one was a male and the other one was White. I randomly selected four more teachers of the remaining six by choosing the next concurrent four on the list. Because of COVID-19, I met with all participant staff members virtually and shared the Staff Script for Research Participation (see Appendix J) along with the Adult Informed Consent document (see Appendix H). It was explained that participating in the study would be strictly voluntary and would not have any link to or impact on their employment status. For any staff member who may have had questions about the study at a later time, my email address and cell phone number were shared as a point of contact.

The two administrators and the six teachers received and reviewed the information, and all agreed to be participants in the study and signed the Adult Informed Consent document (see Appendix H). I sent emails to the teachers and administrators to re-emphasize that the study was voluntary and would not have any bearing on their job at the elementary school. Staff members were provided a copy of their signed Adult Informed Consent document (see Appendix H).

Students were also participants in my study, which involved a different recruitment strategy. The process began with disaggregating L.C. Elementary School discipline data from the 2018-2019 school year, searching for 3rd-grade Black students with at least five office discipline referrals and at least one day of assignment to in-school suspension (ISS) or out-of-school suspension (OSS). There were 30 students who met this criterion and were still in attendance at L.C. Elementary School. I solicited the assistance of the individual who had served as principal at L.C. Elementary for eight years to help me recruit twenty of the thirty students. This individual played an important role because she had institutional knowledge and healthy, trusting relationships with many students and their families. For three days near the end of March 2021, we visited students' homes to share information with parents and students concerning my research at L.C. Elementary and why we were recruiting their students. I allowed the former principal of L.C. Elementary school to introduce us and to read the IRB Student Script for Research Participation (see Appendix I). I used this strategy because of her positive relationships with the families she had since she had served as the students' principal during their 3rd- and 4th-grade years. Parents from the L.C. Elementary School were very protective of their children, and a few of them would not allow their children's participation because they did not trust that their students were not being labeled discipline problems and that the research was not a way of tracking their students for some later inequitable reason. Those concerns were not arbitrary feelings that those parents possessed. According to CRT, racial bias exists in U.S. schools and is a significant factor in the discipline disparity for Black students, which has helped create an educational institution system that is unjust and unequal (Delgado & Stefaniec, 2017; Olsrud, 2019). Fifteen of the 30 parents agreed for their students to participate. It was explained that participating in the study would be strictly voluntary and would not have any link to or impact on

the students' discipline or educational status. For any parent or student who may have had questions about the study at a later time, I shared my email address and cell phone number as a point of contact. Parents and students who agreed to participate in the study signed the IRB Parental Consent Form (see Appendix G) and the IRB Minor Assent Form (see Appendix F) on the day we visited their homes. Several of the students and their parents, for various reasons, signed the appropriate forms the following week. I was unable to attain my goal of twenty students, but I am confident that without the presence and assistance of the former principal of L.C. Elementary there would have been fewer than 15 parents to agree to their students' participation in the research.

Professional Development Plan

In the late fall of the 2020-2021 school year, the principal of L.C. Elementary School, the Restorative Practices trainer, and I agreed to conduct the initial Restorative Practices professional development during the first week of March. In February of 2021, we decided that initial training would consist of an overview of Restorative Practices with a focus on new mindsets and affirmative statements. We decided this approach would not overwhelm the staff since we were only allotted two hours for the professional development. These were also concepts that could be learned in shorter professional development training time and concepts that could be applied in the classroom immediately. I was unable to meet the initial date of training during the first week in March because my recruitment of staff and students' timeline was delayed due to COVID-19. The new date established for the initial professional development training was the middle of April 2021. The principal explained that he was only able to give two hours because of the strain that COVID-19 had already placed on his staff. I reminded the principal of the critical importance of communicating with the staff about the implementation of

Restorative Practices as a school initiative and that the ownership of this initiative takes place at the school level. We also discussed the importance of assisting staff in understanding the plans for Restorative Practice as a future tool to equitably assist in the disciplining of students at L.C. Elementary School.

Two days before the initial professional development date, the principal, assistant principal, the trainer, and I communicated to ensure that all school logistics, technology resources, and training materials were accessible and functional. I created a Zoom meeting titled, *Restorative Practices 101*, and the time of the professional development was from 2:30 pm to 4:30 pm. The goals for the two-hour professional development were:

- to explore foundations for the current mindset when dealing with student conduct,
- to challenge the current mindset to make room for Restorative possibilities, and
- to unpack the basic components of Restorative Practices.

At the completion of the two-hour training, the professional development trainer provided L.C. Elementary School staff with a link to a Jamboard to provide feedback for the training. Based on the feedback from the teachers on the Jamboard, the trainer shared with the principal, assistant principal, and me that we should consider writing a script for teachers to use to introduce circles to students and create norms and agreements. One of the major concerns from the staff was if students did not understand that it is was a safe space, this alone would prevent the training from being effective. The trainer shared the following resources to assist the staff in their Restorative Practices endeavors until the next professional development date scheduled two weeks later:

- Community building questions to use when facilitating a classroom circle
- A reference for staff to consult what circles are/are not
- Words to consider when building an affective vocabulary

- Using stems to build high-quality affective statements and language

The principal assigned a faculty member who was a clinical school social worker with Restorative Practice training to be the school contact to assist the school administration in conveying the information and resources shared by the trainer to the staff to ensure that the school had a systematic plan for beginning their journey.

The second and last training was scheduled for April 30, 2021. Just like the first training in an attempt to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, the meeting for the staff was virtual. The training was a pre-recorded virtual webinar, and due to unforeseen professional circumstances, neither the trainer nor I was able to participate in the professional development. The school Restorative Practice contact facilitated the training with the assistance of the school administrators. The trainer sent the webinar as a Vimeo link but also provided a YouTube link in the event that the Vimeo did not operate properly. The title of the training was, *Restorative Practices 102*, and the focus was on impromptu and formal conferences. The trainer shared two additional resources to assist with conferencing: Restorative Questions for Informal Conferences/Chats and The Golden Rules of Restorative Practices. The school Restorative Practice contact continued to help lead the work for the remainder of the school year, with a continued focus on new mindsets, affirmative statements, and formal and informal conferencing.

The principal was responsible for providing a professional development sign-in sheet for staff and for sharing the appropriate course offering information with the district's Professional Development Coordinator to ensure the proper tracking of Continuing Education Units (CEU) earned from attending professional development sessions. It was a requirement that all teachers, administrators, and instructional support staff attend all training sessions provided.

Data Analysis for Research Question #1

The first research question that guided this study asked, how have school staff (teacher and school-level administrators) perceptions of discipline changed? To answer this question, six identified teachers participated in pre- and post-focus groups which responded to the same six questions during both interviews (see Appendix D). The identified teachers also completed Teacher Discipline Perception Surveys (see Appendix C) prior to implementation of Restorative Practices and post-implementation. The survey consisted of 10 multiple choice questions ranging from *Strongly Agree* to *Strongly Disagree*. I interviewed the principal and assistant principal individually by asking the same eight questions (see Appendix E) prior to the implementation of the intervention and post-implementation. The focus groups, interviews, and survey questions were designed to capture data about the staff's perception of school discipline at L.C. Elementary School.

Table 4 denotes the first administration of the Teacher Discipline Perception survey and revealed 100% of survey respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed that the only way to decrease disruptive behavior is to suspend students. The majority of survey respondents, 67%, neither agreed nor disagreed that suspensions increase school safety. This neutral stance, combined with the fact that 66.7% of teachers agreed that their school uses alternative to suspension strategies when students participate in disruptive behaviors, may suggest that prior to the intervention, teachers did not see a link between school safety and school responses to disruptive behavior violations. Two-thirds (66.67%) of survey respondents reported that teachers in the school listen to and talk with students when they have a problem. It may be concluded that prior to the intervention, relationships among staff and students were not pervasive enough to lead

Table 4

Teacher Discipline Perception Survey 1st Administration

Question	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Q1. When students act out and are disruptive in my school, they are suspended.	0.00%	16.67%	50.00%	0.00%	33.33%
Q2. The only way to decrease disruptive behavior is to suspend students consistently.	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	20.00%	80.00%
Q3. Suspensions from school increase school safety.	0.00%	16.67%	66.67%	0.00%	16.67%
Q4. It is important for students to mend their relationships after they argue with adults and peers.	66.67%	16.67%	16.67%	0.00%	0.00%
Q5. Having a good relationship with a student is one of the best ways to improve student behavior.	80.00%	20.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Q6. When my students have a problem at my school, teachers listen to them and talk with them.	50.00%	16.67%	16.67%	16.67%	0.00%
Q7. My school has an effective plan for reducing out-of-school and in-school suspensions and discipline referrals.	0.00%	16.67%	50.00%	0.00%	33.33%
Q8. Students in my school are treated fairly in discipline, regardless of their race, gender, religion, disability, etc.	66.67%	33.33%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Q9. My school uses alternative to suspension strategies when students participate in disruptive behaviors.	0.00%	66.67%	33.33%	0.00%	0.00%

Table 4 (continued)

Question	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Q10. Students are provided with information about the school's discipline policies, including Code of Conduct.	33.33%	33.33%	0.00%	0.00%	33.33%

respondents to believe that all students were heard and felt connected to the school, as one-third of teachers reported this type of relationship was not present.

In Table 5, which reports results from the post-intervention administration of the teacher discipline perception survey, there was an increase in the number of teachers who strongly disagreed that their school had an effective plan for reducing out-of-school and in-school suspensions and discipline referrals. As shown in Table 3, 33.33% of teachers strongly disagreed with the statement “My school has an effective plan for reducing out of school and in-school suspensions and discipline referrals” in the first administration of the survey, while 50% strongly disagreed with this statement in the second administration of the survey as shown in Table 8. This represents a slightly different focus from discipline as a tool to ensure structure to a more student-centered guide to teach expectations.

There was a significant increase in the number of teachers disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with the statement, “My school uses alternative to suspension strategies when students participate in disruptive behaviors.” In the first administration of the survey (see Table 4) 0% of teacher respondents selected disagree or strongly disagree with Q9, while Table 5 shows 50% of teachers selected disagree or strongly disagree in the second administration. In the 2nd administration of the survey, 100% of the teacher participants selected strongly agree to Q5; whereas during the first administration, 80% of the teachers chose strongly agree and 20% chose agree. This data point illustrates that all of the teachers believed having good relationships with students is a sure way to help improve student discipline.

Figure 8 denotes two themes that emerged from the teachers' surveys and focus groups and the administrators' interviews. Those themes were “a positive shift in beliefs about school

Table 5

Teacher Discipline Perception Survey 2nd Administration

Question	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Q1. When students act out and are disruptive in my school, they are suspended.	0.00%	25.00%	50.00%	0.00%	25.00%
Q2. The only way to decrease disruptive behavior is to suspend students consistently.	0.00%	0.00%	25.00%	50.00%	25.00%
Q3. Suspensions from school increase school safety.	0.00%	25.00%	75.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Q4. It is important for students to mend their relationships after they argue with adults and peers.	75.00%	25.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Q5. Having a good relationship with a student is one of the best ways to improve student behavior.	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Q6. When my students have a problem at my school, teachers listen to them and talk with them.	50.00%	25.00%	25.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Q7. My school has an effective plan for reducing out-of-school and in-school suspensions and discipline referrals.	0.00%	0.00%	50.00%	0.00%	50.00%
Q8. Students in my school are treated fairly in discipline, regardless of their race, gender, religion, disability, etc.	50.00%	50.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%

Table 5 (continued)

Question	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Q9. My school uses alternative to suspension strategies when students participate in disruptive behaviors.	25.00%	25.00%	0.00%	25.00%	25.00%
Q10. Students are provided with information about the school's discipline policies, including Code of Conduct.	50.00%	0.00%	25.00%	25.00%	0.00%

discipline” and “the role school culture plays on relationships and the school community is impactful.” These two themes were the major concepts of perception change based on responses from the focus groups and interviews prior to and after the implementation of Restorative Practices.

A Positive Shift in Beliefs about Discipline

Prior to the intervention, I discovered that staff were aligned to the thought that school discipline is a needed preventative tool and that school should be an orderly environment. Prior to the intervention, during the interviews and the focus group session, the staff talked approximately ¼ of the time (25.88%) about the state of discipline practices. Administrator 2 stated, “I believe that without some type of discipline, then students will have no expectations about how they’re supposed to behave.” Teacher responses focused almost exclusively on discipline processes in the school. Based on teacher responses, there is a plan that exists, but it is inconsistent; and the matrix provided is not followed by the administration. All four of the responding teachers expressed that they were not trained on the plan, and for that reason, the implementation became cumbersome and overwhelming. For example, one teacher described using a document to “notate how many times a child is disruptive.” Another teacher pointed out things are not done “to fidelity” throughout the school, and an “ineffective plan creates an ineffective outcome.” The interventions present prior to the training on Restorative Practices were described by teacher participants as “inconsistent,” not done with fidelity and a babysitting service. The current support provided was described as passive. These comments accounted for a great deal of the conversation around school discipline. Post-intervention data show that staff’s perceptions about school discipline made a change that focused on discipline as a tool for

Research Questions	Themes
<p>1. Following implementation of Restorative Practices, how have school staff (teacher and school-level administrators) perceptions of discipline changed?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A Positive Shift in Beliefs About Discipline ● The Role School Culture Plays on Relationships and the School Community is Impactful
<p>2. How have students' perceptions of discipline changed since the implementation of Restorative Practices by school staff?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Improved Staff/Student Relationships ● Students' Perceptions About School Discipline are Inconsistent

Figure 8. Themes identified in students' discipline perception survey responses.

redirecting, making more time for academic instruction and a tool for keeping all students safe.

Teacher #5 shared,

I think of suspension as a loss of instruction. So when they're not in the classroom, they're missing class, and those students may already be behind, and a suspension is putting them further behind. It is just going to cause more struggle for them when they do come back into the classroom.

Likewise, the response trend also highlighted this change, with staff talking significantly more about culture after the intervention. Specifically, teachers spoke about building community and a sense of community, as well as the need for support from the administration to implement new discipline strategies. This shift from school discipline representing rules, structure, and a consistent discipline matrix to a concept that represents a structure designed to support student learning and teach students positive behaviors was also noted by staff when speaking about consequences. Prior to the intervention, half of the teachers responded to the question about beliefs about suspension, and each of them had a different opinion about suspending students and whether or not this was an effective option for discipline. Teacher #3 shared that it depends on the student and whether or not the student saw it as a punishment or a reward to go home. The consequence effectiveness was really rooted in how the student felt about school. Teachers # 2, #4, and #6 agreed with this sentiment. Teacher # 2 stated, "I don't think that the suspension itself affects the students at all. I think that if that suspension leads to some type of ramifications at home, then they're more affected by what the parent may say or their caretaker may think."

One new thought that came from Teacher #3 is that in-school suspension was not effective at all because it resembled babysitting. This teacher also brought up the notion that suspending students using the processes at this school often meant more work for the teacher.

When I got a student suspended, I was giving myself more work, having to type up the write-up and to get work together for them. It put more work on me. So it is like to the point do I even want to write them up or do I even want to suspend them?

Prior to the intervention, each of the responding teachers mentioned a desire for an alternative that would keep students in school and learning. “If we had a system where it was very effective to keep them here and learning and not just coming back to the class after a couple hours...”

After training on Restorative Practices, Teacher #2 was definitive in the stance that suspensions are not working.

I don’t think suspensions are positive; it could be that kids want to go home. It could be a reward, and they do not receive punishment at home. It alienates students from the class, and when they come back, they are trying to figure you out to see if it is okay now that they are back. I don’t like it.

Teachers #3 and #5 cite the loss of instruction as one of the reasons that suspensions don’t work. The responses from both of these teachers post-intervention are more student-centered and address student needs than did their previous responses. Teacher #3, who previously discussed suspensions as giving themselves more work, now stated, “And we see how much instruction is lost. Maybe reflect on how we do suspension because school suspension didn’t work. Maybe we can make little changes, so we won’t have to resort to out-of-school suspension.” This represents a different focus from discipline and consequences as a tool to ensure structure to a more student-centered guide to teach expectations and foster the conditions needed for students to effectively engage in learning.

The Role School Culture Plays on Relationships and the School Community is Impactful

Another theme that emerged was the role school culture plays in relationships and the school community. Prior to the intervention, staff responses focused primarily on programs and initiatives at the school but did not give any specific strategies for relationship building with students. Administrator 2 did make specific mention of knowing students' names and something about students and their interests pre- and post-intervention. Teacher 4 also stated the importance of not only building relationships with students but building relationships with the family to foster the whole child pre and post-intervention. Teacher 1 stated,

It helps you manage the room even if you have a difficult student. If you lack a positive relationship with one student but have a solid relationship with the other students, that positive peer pressure will change that difficult student's attitude as well. When you can control the room, you can teach the class.

The teachers unanimously agreed that building positive relationships with students can help decrease disruptive behavior in the classroom.

Post-intervention, the administrators identified strategies for repairing relationships with students, such as changing language with parents and students, the practice of reflecting with students and letting students know how their actions impacted and made others feel, and doing some type of activity with students to get them off of the defensive. Administrator 1 shared, "I have focused more on talking to students about how their behaviors made me feel; this is different than what I have done in the past, and by letting students know how their behaviors have impacted me, the students open up more to me." Administrator 2 explained that when dealing with teachers and students, the administrator assumes the role of mediator to help the student and the teacher see each other's side in what has happened. The administrator states that

by having these types of conversations, all parties get to see situations from different perspectives, which begins to mend the relationships.

Initially, Administrator 1 stated the school was striving to find ways to give parents and students an opportunity to be included in the decision-making process. Administrator 1 declared, “Inclusion is the key and something we are trying to build but have not gotten there yet.”

Administrator 1 identified one of the barriers to trying to build inclusion was the previous negative experiences that students and parents have had with schools. In the interview prior to the intervention, Administrator 2 listed some supports that should be in place. Among them, a second guidance counselor suggested splitting up the grade levels to help build community.

Another support proposed is a strong Parent Teacher Organization (PTO). Administrator 2 replied, “A strong PTO can be a very good bridge between the school and the community.”

Each teacher had a different perception as to how this happens in the school building. Teacher #2 initially stated that building a school community was difficult due to remote learning. This teacher described using playful banter with students and colleagues as a way to “make it through the day.” Post-intervention Administrator 1 identified the language strategy from the intervention and affirmative statements as a focus for helping to overcome the barrier and build relationships with parents and students. Post-intervention Administrator 2 stated that they are still working on building culture in the school, but the school needs support in ensuring that students know that their best interest is the priority. Administrator 2 stated that the administrators in the building are seen as the disciplinarians all the time, and it creates a barrier to building relationships with students. Adding a behavior specialist could be another layer to redirect student behaviors. It is the desire of Administrator 2 for students to help build a culture where students feel like they’re safe, and that should begin with the administrators building a “sense of comfort and security” for

students. A short time period later, post-intervention, teacher #2 shared that most wanted to build the desired community, but the environment was not conducive to doing so. The most interesting part of this post-intervention response is that the teacher asserted that the pandemic is not the reason for this non-conducive environment. The teacher described a previous school-wide approach to doing school, and now teachers just retreat to their own classrooms. Teacher #3 describes a similar assessment of the state of the school environment.

It's an individual walk to build that, but the atmosphere has to be conducive, and I don't think right now the atmosphere is conducive to actually building upon. The administration down to the rest of the staff has to build cohesiveness. But if everyone is still not on the same page, you cannot build what is not in the atmosphere to receive. We kind of have blamed it on the pandemic, but when the staff does not feel like they are a part of something, the students feel like the staff is not a part of them. So when it becomes everyman for himself, you are just trying to survive. When it becomes an everyday thing, that energy gets transferred to the students and we're not ok and they're not ok.

Teachers mentioned school culture approximately 10.49% of the time during the focus group prior to the intervention but discussed school culture approximately 21.13% of the time during the second focus group after implementation of the intervention.

Data Analysis for Research Question #2

The second research question that guided the study asked, how have students' perception of discipline changed since the implementation of Restorative Practices by school staff? The same Student Discipline Perception Survey was used with students prior to implementation of Restorative Practices and post-implementation to gather feedback from students concerning their

perceptions about school discipline at L.C. Elementary School. The survey consisted of 10 multiple choice questions ranging from “Agree” to “Disagree.” The student survey was decreased to three answer options versus five because I believed it to be more developmentally appropriate for students. There were 15 students who participated in the first administration, while only 10 students were participants in the second administration.

Figure 8 illustrates two themes that emerged from the students' surveys. Those themes were “improved staff/student relationships” and “students’ perceptions about school discipline are inconsistent.” In Table 6, as demonstrated, Questions #5, #7, and #9 are virtually unchanged between survey answers taken prior to the implementation of Restorative Practice and after the implementation of Restorative Practice. Questions #1, #2, #3, and #6 average an approximate 25 percentage point decrease in change of “Agree” between survey answers chosen prior to the intervention and after implementation of the intervention. Questions #4, #8, and #10 average an approximate 24 percentage point increase in change of “Agree” between survey answers chosen prior to the implementation of Restorative Practices and after implementation of Restorative Practices. For the two surveys given to student participants at L.C. Elementary, I was surprised by the data results as the student responses clearly showed that students’ perceptions regressed in some areas.

Improved Staff/Student Relationships

As denoted in Table 6, there was a significant decrease in the number of students who reported feeling important or belonging at their school between the first and second administration of the survey. In the first administration of the survey, 92.86% of student respondents agreed with the statement “I feel important at my school like I belong,” compared to 70% of student respondents in the second administration of the survey. Although there was an

approximate 23% decrease, 70% of the targeted students still acknowledged that they felt important at school, which was a significant percentage. The students' responses pertaining to their perception of teachers assisting students with verbal conflict increased between the first survey and the second survey. Between the first and second administration of the survey, there was a 55% increase in Q4, "When students argue at my school, the teachers help them work it out." In Q8, there was an 11 percentage point increase illustrating that students understood discipline expectations and the consequences for breaking the rules. Prior to the intervention, 66.67% of the students chose "Agree" with Q8, while 77.78% of the students chose "Agree" post-intervention.

These data indicate that staff provides students with information concerning discipline expectations and the consequences for breaking the rules. This is an important element in creating fair and equitable discipline practices because this helps create an environment where rules are not made dependent on the individual administering the consequences.

In Table 6, Q10, "At my school, my principal uses other ways to discipline instead of suspending students," student responses in the second survey showed an approximate 7% increase from the pre-intervention survey to the post-intervention survey. This is an indication that post-intervention, the principal was more thoughtful about the discipline consequences that were assigned to students. Students' perception of interactions with the principal, as indicated in both administrations of the surveys, remained the same. All (100%) students chose "Agree" for Q5, "At my school, when a student gets in trouble, the principal talks to them and helps them." Based on student responses, there was positive interaction between the principal and students that was unchanged by the intervention. Maybe the intervention solidified the students' positive

Table 6

Comparison of Student Discipline Perception Survey 1st Administration v. 2nd Administration

	1 st Administration			2 nd Administration		
	Agree	I don't know	Disagree	Agree	I don't know	Disagree
Q1. I feel important at my school, like I belong at my school.	92.86%	7.14%	0.00%	70.00%	20.00%	10.00%
Q2. When I have a problem, my teachers listen to me and I can talk to my teacher.	66.67%	13.33%	20.00%	55.56%	22.22%	22.22%
Q3. When I argue with a classmate, I can talk with them about it afterwards.	53.33%	26.67%	20.00%	20.00%	40.00%	40.00%
Q4. When students argue at my school, the teachers help them work it out.	33.33%	66.67%	0.00%	88.89%	0.00%	11.11%
Q5. At my school, when a student gets in trouble, the principal talks to them and helps them.	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Q6. Students at my school are treated fairly in discipline, regardless of their race, gender, religion or disability.	80.00%	20.00%	0.00%	50.00%	30.00%	20.00%
Q7. Suspension is most often used to discipline students at my school.	42.86%	35.71%	21.43%	40.00%	40.00%	20.00%
Q8. Students at my school understand discipline expectations and the consequences for breaking the rules.	66.67%	20.00%	13.33%	77.78%	11.11%	11.11%

Table 6 (continued)

	1 st Administration			2 nd Administration		
	Agree	I don't know	Disagree	Agree	I don't know	Disagree
Q9. I feel as if I am targeted at my school because of where I live.	40.00%	26.67%	33.33%	40.00%	0.00%	60.00%
Q10. At my school, my principal uses other ways to discipline instead of suspending students.	53.33%	20.00%	26.67%	60.00%	20.00%	20.00%

perception of the principal, but I can say with certainty that the data suggest all students were in agreement concerning the principal as a listener.

Although the data show that students' responses to the surveys showed a positive improvement in staff and student relationships, some of the data points are in direct conflict. For example, in Q6 in the first administration, 80% chose "Agree," and 20% chose "I don't know." During the second administration and the same question, 50% chose "Agree," 30% chose "I don't know," and 20% chose "Disagree." In the first administration of the survey with Q6, none of the students chose "Disagree." I cannot state exactly why 20% of the students chose "Disagree" in the second administration, but it does suggest that there was a slight negative change in students' perception related to the fair treatment of students.

Students' Perceptions about School Discipline Are Inconsistent

The data gathered from the Student Discipline Perception Surveys prior to the implementation of Restorative Practice and after the implementation of Restorative Practice showed that the degree to which students agreed increased in percentages in the second administration, while other questions decreased after the implementation of the intervention. These questions attempted to gauge the conflict resolution between students, students and adults, and students and the school environment. As illustrated in Table 6, in the first administration of the student discipline perception survey, 66.67% of the students agreed with the statement, "When I have a problem, my teachers listen to me, and I can talk to my teacher," compared to 55.56% in the second administration of the survey. In the first administration, Q3 data stated that 53.33% of students agreed to the statement, "When I argue with a classmate, I can talk with them about it afterward," compared to 20% of students agreeing with the statement in the second administration of the survey. Q3 decreased 33% between surveys, and Q2 dropped 11% between

surveys, which indicates that there is a specific need to provide students and staff with conflict resolution training. However, in direct contrast to this data point, Q4 stated, “When students argue at my school, the teachers help them work it out,” increased 55 percentage points between the pre and post-intervention surveys. This indicates that the intervention had a positive impact on teachers' conflict resolution strategies, and maybe the focus should be on providing students with more conflict resolution training.

In response to the statement, “Students at my school are treated fairly in discipline, regardless of their race, gender, religion or disability,” 80% of students agreed during the first administration, with 50% of students agreeing to the statement in the second administration of the survey. As compared to the first administration, where only 20% of the students chose “I don’t know” or “Disagree,” 50% of the students chose “I don’t know” or “Disagree” in the second administration. I spoke about this same data point at the end of the “Improved Staff/Students Relationships” section, where I described the data point as being a slight negative decrease in students' perception of student treatment based on demographic factors. I revisited the data point again in this section because it illustrates that before the administration of the intervention, 80% of the students believed that students were disciplined fairly regardless of demographic factors. I considered what could be the factor(s) that caused a 30% decrease in the second administration and one possible answer is the fact that five fewer students participated in the survey during the second administration. This is a valid analysis to consider for all data points of the Student Discipline Perception Surveys.

Data Analysis of Research Question #3

The third research question that guided the study asked how student disciplinary outcomes changed since the implementation of Restorative Practices by school staff. The

purpose of conducting an analysis of the school's attendance and the targeted students' attendance was to establish if there was a correlation between poor student attendance and students who were chronically disciplined. The student attendance rate for the target group, as depicted in Table 7, increased from 82.75% for the 2018-19 spring semester to 87.4% for the 2020-21 spring semester. While 10 of the 15 students saw an increase in the number of days present in spring semester attendance rates between 2018-19 and 2020-21,

Student 2 and Student 4 saw a 22.59 percentage point and 10.41 percentage point decrease, respectively. Conversely, six students' attendance rates increased by more than 10 percentage points among the target group, with Student 3 experiencing the highest increase from 61.18% in the 2018-19 school year to 85.00% in the 2020-21 school year.

It should be noted that attendance was calculated each semester differently as a result of the impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on in-person instruction during the 2020-21 school year. During the 2018-19 school year, students were counted as present only if they were in the school building for instruction. During the 2020-21 school year, students participated in blended in-person learning and remote learning. Students were considered present if they (1) attended in-person learning, (2) completed daily assignments, and/or (3) engaged in any two-way communication with their teacher (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2020).

While attendance rates increased for the target group, a causal relationship between the intervention and attendance rates is impacted by the changes in attendance processes during the 2020-2021 academic year. Students also were separated into Track A and Track B for attending in-person learning and virtual/remote learning. For example, if Track A was attending in-person learning, then Track B was attending virtual/remote learning. In both Tracks, A and B students only attended school until 12:30 pm on Fridays. When looking at attendance data between the

Table 7

Comparison of Spring Attendance Data 2018-19 v. 2020-21 for Student Target Group

Student	2018-2019 Absences	2020-2021 Absences	2018-2019 Attendance Rate	2020-2021 Attendance Rate
Student 1	9	5	89.41%	90.00%
Student 2	8	32	90.59%	68.00%
Student 3	33	15	61.18%	85.00%
Student 4	9	21	89.41%	79.00%
Student 5	4	3	95.29%	97.00%
Student 6	21	8	75.29%	92.00%
Student 7	24	10	71.76%	90.00%
Student 8	10	19	88.24%	81.00%
Student 9	25	11	70.59%	89.00%
Student 10	16	10	81.18%	90.00%
Student 11	20	11	76.47%	89.00%
Student 12	7	3	91.76%	97.00%
Student 13	11	19	87.06%	81.00%
Student 14	5	14	94.12%	86.00%
Student 15	18	8	78.82%	92.00%
Average	14.67	12.60	82.75%	87.40%

Note. Data represents spring semester only as reported in the PowerSchool student information system. The absence of medically fragile students (reported as 1H absences) is not included in this data.

spring of 2019 and the spring of 2021, we must also consider that the State Board of Education made it mandatory that each public school unit allow families to determine whether or not they would attend school in-person or via virtual/remote learning during the 2020-2021 school year (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2020). The number of in-person instructional days during the spring 2019 semester was 86 days, whereas the number of in-person instructional days during the spring 2021 semester was 27 days for students on Track A and 30 days for students on Track B. The vast difference in the instructional experience for students between the spring 2019 and spring 2021 semesters included not only differences in how attendance was calculated and the number of in-person instructional days, the number of families who chose instructional days, the number of families who chose to participate solely through virtual/remote learning, but also included less measurable differences including, but not limited to, impacts on social development due to social isolation resulting from shutdowns, fear, and anxiety related to the perceived health impacts of COVID-19, learning environment comfort related to face mask requirements, and family context changes due to financial and/or mental health factors related to the pandemic.

The purpose of analyzing school discipline and targeted student discipline data is to determine the change in both discipline samples when comparing the baseline 2018-2019 school year to the 2020-2021 school year after the implementation of Restorative Practices. As demonstrated in Table 8, there was a significant decrease in the number of referrals from the spring 2019 semester to the spring 2021 semester. The average number of referrals per student in the target group was 10.53 in spring 2019 and 0.20 in spring 2021. Again, a causal relationship between the intervention and discipline referrals is impacted by the effect the COVID-19 pandemic had on in-person instruction during the 2020-21 school year. During the

2020-21 school year, students were in a blended in-person and remote learning environment where some behaviors were not observable in a remote learning environment.

During the spring 2019 semester, all 15 students in the target group received discipline referrals ranging in numbers from three to 17. There were three students in the target group who received a discipline referral during the spring 2021 semester, and no student in the group received more than one referral during this time. Student 4 had one referral in 2021, which did not result in an in-school suspension (ISS) nor an out-of-school suspension (OSS), and two out of a total of three referrals resulted in an OSS during spring 2019. Student 10 and Student 12 both had a discipline referral that resulted in an OSS consequence during the spring 2021 semester. Student 10 had a total of 12 discipline referrals during the spring 2019 semester, with four resulting in an ISS consequence and five resulting in an OSS consequence. During the spring 2019 semester, Student 12 had five total discipline referrals, with three resulting in an ISS consequence and one resulting in an OSS consequence. The proportion of discipline referrals resulting in an ISS consequence during the spring 2019 semester was 27.22% on average for the target group compared to 0.00% during the spring 2021 semester. On average, the proportion of target group discipline referrals resulting in an OSS consequence during the spring 2019 semester was 39.24%, as compared to 66.67% of discipline referrals resulting in an OSS consequence for the spring 2021 semester. As indicated in Figure 9, L.C. Elementary School only had seven referrals during the spring of 2021, which were given to four Black females and three Black males, resulting in four OSS consequences. This particular data point highlights that very few discipline referrals were processed at L.C. Elementary during spring 2021, with three of the seven referrals and one of the four OSS being administered to the Targeted Student Group.

Table 8

Comparison of Spring Discipline Data 2018-19 v. 2020-21 for Student Target Group

Student	2018-2019 ISS Incidents	2020-2021 ISS Incidents	2018-2019 OSS Incidents	2020-2021 OSS Incidents	2018-2019 Referrals	2020-2021 Referrals
Student 1	3	0	3	0	8	0
Student 2	2	0	2	0	9	0
Student 3	2	0	9	0	13	0
Student 4	0	0	2	0	3	1
Student 5	3	0	1	0	13	0
Student 6	5	0	9	0	17	0
Student 7	4	0	4	0	10	0
Student 8	2	0	4	0	12	0
Student 9	4	0	7	0	16	0
Student 10	4	0	5	1	12	1
Student 11	4	0	3	0	12	0
Student 12	3	0	1	1	5	1
Student 13	1	0	4	0	6	0
Student 14	1	0	2	0	6	0
Student 15	5	0	6	0	16	0
Average	2.87	0.00	4.13	0.13	10.53	0.20

Note. Data represents spring semester only discipline referrals, in-school suspension (ISS), and out-of-school suspension (OSS) incident responses as reported in the PowerSchool student information system.

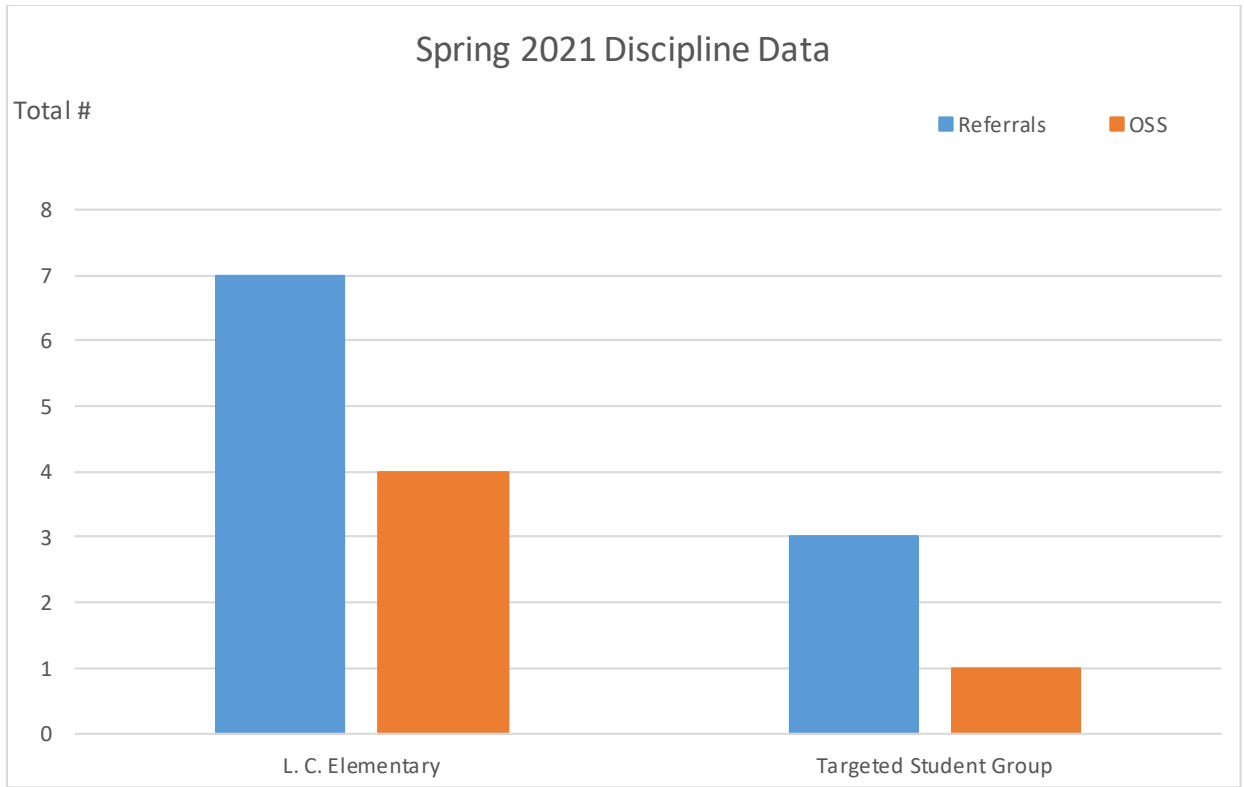


Figure 9. L.C. Elementary School v. targeted student group discipline comparison for Spring 2021.

Summary

My research study was driven by three research questions related to school discipline at L.C. Elementary School, a 3rd through 5th-grade school. My analysis of the data has provided valuable insight into the impact of Restorative Practices on students' and teachers' perspectives of school discipline and discipline outcomes at L.C. Elementary School. In reviewing research questions 1 and 2, my analysis suggested a shift in beliefs about school discipline by staff and improved students/staff relationships. This shift represents a focus on discipline as a guide to a more student-centered approach that fosters a school culture that is safe, conducive to learning, and builds positive relationships between staff and students. One of the strategies identified by CRT researchers for closing school discipline disparities is changing school culture by improving adult-student relationships within schools is seen when analyzing research questions 1 and 2 (Anyon et al., 2018; Gregory et al., 2014; Losen et al., 2014; United States Department of Education, 2014). Based on the survey results from students, the implementation of Restorative Practices provided staff with the necessary tools to effectively use conflict resolution measures to improve discipline outcomes. However, students seemed to be less adept at resolving conflict between one another, and conflict resolution training for students should be considered.

Ultimately school culture impacts staff and student relationships and how well schools are prepared to address the needs of students and adults. Teachers referenced that there was once a school culture that functioned as a system, but now staff is isolated and works in their own silos. Teacher #3 describes it as, "When it becomes an everyday thing that energy gets transferred to the students, and we're not ok, and they're not ok." The implementation of Restorative Practice professional development for staff at L.C. Elementary School as a tool for improving relationships with students yielded positive discipline outcomes for the targeted

student population. Although we can see data points with positive outcomes, it is critical to understand the causal relationship between the implementation of Restorative Practices and discipline outcomes is impacted by the effect the pandemic had on in-person instruction during the 2020-21 school year.

In the following chapter, I will provide my reflections regarding the significant findings from conducting this study based on the literature and data collected. I will share the challenges I faced in implementing this study during a pandemic of historic proportions that has not been witnessed in modern times. I will share some recommendations that could improve the implementation of Restorative Practices in an inner-city 3rd through 5th-grade elementary school setting to achieve equitable discipline outcomes for Black students.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Currently, district and school leaders have begun monitoring school and district-level discipline data as a part of monthly principal meetings to find the gaps and inconsistencies in school disciplinary data. However, once gaps are identified, there is not a systematic process for schools to use that will serve as a mitigation strategy to address the disciplinary gaps. There are initiatives at various schools and professional development available to staff that focus on relationship building, creating equitable discipline practices, and attending to the social-emotional wellbeing of students. Although these initiatives are actively at work in schools and there are resources available to students and adults, there is still a lack of strategies that address the extensive disparity gap in disciplinary outcomes for Black students. This is a problematic issue supported by research that shows the inequality for Black students who are excluded from educational opportunities essentially through a system that uses exclusionary discipline practices to regulate student behavior (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017; Olsrud, 2019; Skiba, 2014).

This is true for Black students attending low-performing schools whose students are majority Black and minority. These low-performing schools are characteristically low wealth, encountering problems that are external, and have a student population that has experienced more than one ACEs as well. Often, these school environments are stressful for staff and students and lack resources and highly qualified staff resulting in discipline disparity outcomes for Black students that are equal to or greater than their majority White school counterparts. Regardless of the school that Black students attend, the research details that many of the discipline matters encountered at school are related to external factors stemming from their homes and communities (Mallett, 2017).

Olsrud (2019) stated that administrators' and teachers' perceptions about students-- their identity, social status, gender, race, culture, and background--influence how students are disciplined. Based on this research, educators could effectively address the systemic discipline disparities and close a communication and relationship gap between low performing school staff and their students by focusing on building relationships, using their circle of influence to levy external behaviors before they become matters of crisis, and creating a paradigm shift that moves beyond the standard path of teaching and learning (Fronius et al., 2016; Losen & Skiba, 2016). In fragile school environments like low performing schools, this must be a collaborative effort between staff and students to create a school culture with embedded systemic practices like Restorative Practices, which encourages the use of alternatives to exclusionary discipline practices (Fronius et al., 2015; Fronius et al., 2016).

The purpose of this study was to analyze the implementation of Restorative Practices professional development as an alternative to exclusionary discipline to determine its impact on staff and students' perception of school discipline and school discipline outcomes before and after implementation. Restorative Practices professional development training was used by the staff as a strategy to build relationships with students and to assist the staff in creating a safe, caring climate for students. This study, conducted in a low-performing elementary school, also looked at the impact on the discipline outcomes for Black students. Black students who had five or more discipline referrals with at least one ISS or OSS were the student target group.

In this chapter, the key findings of the study, as well as an interpretation of the findings, limitations of this study, and recommendations for future studies, will be the focal point. The chapter will close with a conclusion regarding the study and the researcher's reflections on how conducting this study impacted his personal leadership and growth.

Summary of the Findings

The implementation of Restorative Practices as an alternative to exclusionary discipline practices had some positive impacts on staff and students' perceptions about school discipline. The intervention's effects on discipline outcomes were not as easily identifiable because of the obstacles created by COVID-19 and the study site's participation in remote learning for students during the entire school year. The analysis of the data from the study revealed perceptions, opportunities for growth, and areas of success.

Study Question 1 Findings

The first question focused on how have school staff (teacher and school-level administrators) perceptions of discipline changed after the implementation of Restorative Practices? The results revealed that the majority of teacher participants' responses to the survey had little change between the first and second administrations. The majority of teachers did not believe that the only way to decrease behaviors was to suspend students, nor did they believe that suspensions increased school safety. Teachers believed that students were treated fairly regardless of background, that having good relationships with students was an effective strategy for improving student behavior, that there were teachers at school whom students could communicate with when they encountered problems, and that it was important for students to rebuild broken relationships with peers and adults. Teachers did not believe the school had an effective plan for managing discipline or consistently using an alternative to suspension strategies when students participated in disruptive behaviors.

The targeted teacher participants also participated in a focus group, and school administrators participated in individual interviews pre- and post-administration of Restorative

Practices. The results yielded two themes: “A Positive Shift in Beliefs about Discipline” and “The Role School Culture Plays on Relationships and the School Community is Impactful.”

The first theme, “A Positive Shift in Beliefs about Discipline,” revealed a change in discipline from a preventative tool to maintain order to a concept that represents a structure designed (a) to support student learning by making more time for academic instruction, (b) to teach students positive behaviors, and (c) to keep all students safe, after the implementation of Restorative Practices. Teachers did not believe that the suspension itself affected students but rather how the student felt about school determined the impact of the suspension. Teachers believed that ISS and OSS are largely ineffective because they are either provide a babysitting service or a process that alienates students from the classroom, ultimately giving the teachers more work to do. Another identified change with staff was the significant increase in responses that talked more about developing school culture and building a sense of community after the intervention. Specifically, teachers spoke about the need for support from the administration to implement new discipline strategies that were systematically and consistently used throughout the school.

Another theme that emerged when analyzing data to answer study question one was “The Role School Culture Plays on Relationships and the School Community is Impactful.” Prior to the intervention, teacher and administrator responses focused primarily on programs at the school but did not give specific strategies on how to build effective relationships with students. Staff did note prior to the intervention that building positive relationships with students can help decrease disruptive behavior in the classroom. After the implementation of Restorative Practices, the administrators identified strategies for repairing relationships with students, changing language that parents and students use to be more positively reinforcing, reflecting with students

and letting them know how their actions make others feel, and engaging with students in a productive manner to make them less defensive. The administrators also believed that by engaging in reflective dialogue with students and teachers, all parties have an opportunity to see situations from different perspectives, which begins the relationship mending process.

Prior to the implementation of Restorative Practices, administrators stated the school was striving to find ways to give parents and students a voice in the decision-making process and identified previous bad experiences involving schools as a barrier to building family inclusion. Administrators also listed additional support that was needed to be the bridge between the school and the community. These supports referenced a second guidance counselor, a behavior specialist, and the building of a strong Parent Teacher Organization (PTO). Post-intervention administrators believed that they had to create a climate for a “sense of comfort and security” for students. They identified the language strategy and affirmative statements as tools to engage parents and students in overcoming barriers to building positive relationships and that building culture in the school was an ongoing process. Before the implementation of the intervention, teachers’ responses during the focus group mentioned school culture approximately 10.49% of the time, while after the implementation of the intervention, it was noted approximately 21.13% of the time. This is important because teachers felt that the staff worked within silos while a school-wide approach to managing school was no longer feasible and that the pandemic was not the reason for this environment, an environment that was non-conducive for collaboration. One teacher stated, “We kind of have blamed it on the pandemic, but when the staff does not feel like they are a part of something, the students feel like the staff is not a part of them. So when it becomes everyman for himself, you are just trying to survive.”

Study Question 2 Findings

The second question of this study asked, how have students' perception of discipline changed since the implementation of Restorative Practices by school staff? The students in the study participated in the Students Discipline Perception Survey pre- and post-administration of Restorative Practices. The results yielded two themes: Improved Staff/Students Relationships and Students' Perceptions about School Discipline are Inconsistent.

The first theme that emerged was Improved Staff/Students Relationships. Appearing to be contrary to the theme, analysis of the data revealed there was a decrease in the number of students who reported feeling important or belonging at their school between the first and second administration of the survey. Although there was an approximate 23% decrease, 70% of the students still acknowledged that they felt important at school, which is a significant percentage and indicates that the vast majority of the selected students feel this way. After the second administration of the survey, students' perception of teachers assisting students with verbal conflict was more positive, while the data also indicated that there was an 11 percentage point increase illustrating that students understood school discipline expectations and the consequences for not abiding by these expectations.

After the intervention, student responses in the second survey indicated that the principal was more thoughtful about the discipline consequences that were assigned to students. Students' perceptions of interactions with the principal remained at 100% agreement, as indicated in both administrations of the surveys. The positive interaction between the principal and students was unchanged by the intervention, but the intervention solidified the students' positive perception of the principal and their role as a listener. Although the data indicated that students' responses to the surveys showed a positive improvement in staff and student relationships, two data points

indicated a negative change, with 80% of students agreeing during the first administration and 50% agreeing during the second administration, as well as none disagreeing during the first administration, but 20% disagreeing during the second administration. This is a negative change in students' perception related to the fair treatment of students, but it is significant because it makes you question what made those students change their minds after the first intervention.

The data analysis of the second theme, “Students’ Perceptions about School Discipline is Inconsistent.”. The data gathered during both administrations of the survey showed that some of the questions increased in percentage points while other questions decreased in percentage points after the implementation of the intervention. These questions attempted to gauge the targeted students’ perceptions about conflict resolution between students, students and adults, and students and the school environment. After the implementation of the intervention, approximately 45% of the students did not believe they were able to talk with an adult when they had a problem. Approximately 80% of the students did not believe that they were able to talk with their peers after an argument. Another analysis of the survey data showed that approximately 50% of the targeted students believed students were disciplined fairly regardless of demographic factors, which was a 30 percentage point decrease from the first survey. However, in direct contrast to these data points, approximately 90% of the students believed that “When students argue at my school, the teachers help them work it out.” This is an indication that there had been previously a need to provide students and staff with conflict resolution training and the intervention had a positive impact on teachers' conflict resolution strategies.

Study Question 3 Findings

The third question of this study asked, how have student disciplinary outcomes changed since the implementation of Restorative Practices by school staff? Analysis of the student

attendance rate for the target group increased by approximately 4 percentage points between the 2018-19 spring semester and the 2020-21 spring semester. While 10 of the 15 students saw an increase in their attendance rate, 5 of the 15 saw a decrease in their attendance rate, and 3 of the 15 had more than a 20 percentage point increase in their attendance rate from the 2018-19 spring semester to the 2020-21 spring semester.

Analysis of the school's discipline data reveals a significant decrease in the number of referrals from the spring 2019 semester to the spring 2021 semester. The select student group's average number of referrals per student was 10.53 in spring 2019 and 0.20 in spring 2021. During the spring 2019 semester, all students in the target group received discipline referrals ranging in numbers from three to 17, and three students in the target group received one discipline referral each during the spring 2021 semester. The assigned ISS consequences during the spring 2019 semester were 27.22% on average compared to 0.00% during the spring 2021 semester for the target students group. The assigned OSS consequences during the spring 2019 semester were 39.24% on average as compared to 66.67% for the spring 2021 semester for the target students group. The discipline results for L.C. Elementary School during the spring of 2021 yielded seven referrals, which were given to four Black females and three Black males, resulting in four OSS consequences.

It is important to acknowledge that there is a correlation between the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and discipline outcomes that may be stronger or equally as strong as the relationship between the impact of the intervention on discipline outcomes. The COVID-19 pandemic impacted in-person instruction during the 2020-21 school year as students were in a blended in-person and remote learning environment.

Interpretation of the Findings

Losen and Skiba (2016) named three critical components of school climate and discipline to serve as intervention strategies that positively impact improving school discipline. Those strategies are relationship building through restorative practices, social-emotional learning strategies, and structural interventions such as Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports. Race and how it impacts outcomes for Black people have a long controversial history in this country. CRT is the theory in which this study is grounded, states that Implicit Bias, Microaggression, Institutional Racism, and White Privilege are all factors that play a critical role as it relates to the disproportionate suspension of Black students (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017).

Interpretation of Study Question 1 Findings

Beginning with the findings from the first question, the data showed that staff felt the most confident in their beliefs that suspending students from school was not an effective practice to address student behavior. Mallett (2017) urges educators to understand that some Black students, who share common experiences related to school discipline, are more likely to have associated risk factors within their families, peer groups, neighborhoods, and schools. The research tells us that these experiences for Black students subject them to having a higher probability of experiencing problems at home, in the community, at school, and in involvement with law enforcement, which covertly places them in a systematic structure to become a part of the school-to-prison pipeline (Mallett, 2017). This research aligns with the staff's feelings about OSS for their students and gives frightening causality that school, in some instances, is safer than students' own homes and communities. Conversely, the administrators believe there is a systematic discipline plan at the school, but the teachers do not administer the plan consistently, while the teachers believe there is not an effective discipline plan to manage student behaviors.

The administrators and teachers must align their practices to have an effective and systematic discipline plan at the school, beginning with the fair treatment of students regardless of their background. The discipline plan must have elements that focus on building positive relationships between staff and students, how to rebuild broken relationships between peers and adults, and the consistent and standardized use of alternatives to suspension measures. Focusing on strengthening teacher-student relationships and increasing student engagement can have a positive impact on discipline strategies and disparities (Allen et al., 2015).

After the implementation of Restorative Practices, there was a shift in the concept of discipline by staff as a structure designed to support student learning by making more time (a) for academic instruction, (b) to teach students positive behaviors, and (c) to keep all students safe. Teachers had a paradigm shift that understands when OSS is used as a discipline tool alone, it has very little impact on students; rather, it is a student's connection to school and the adults in the building that determined the real impact of suspensions. When staff and students work toward building relationships and setting community norms that include alternatives to suspension measures while focusing on the development of students as individuals with good character, it creates a school and classroom environment that is conducive for learning (Fronius et al., 2016). Ultimately, it is the commitment of administrators, teachers, and students working together collaboratively that develops school culture and builds a sense of community.

Interpretation of Study Question 2 Findings

The analysis and finding of the data from question 2, indicated that there was an overall positive increase in students' perception of discipline at L.C. Elementary School, which is a Low Performing School. Despite the 22.86% percentage point decrease after implementation of the intervention in Q1 of the student surveys, students believed they were important and felt a sense

of belonging at their school. This is incredibly important because students need to feel safe at school, have adults whom they can trust and talk to, and feel like they are part of a positive school community. González (2015) noted that working in challenging school environments often means that a large percentage of the student population is living with more than one Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and that the staff is inundated with the burden of combatting outside environmental influences that become discipline behaviors which negatively impact school environments. After the implementation of Restorative Practices, students believed at a higher percentage rate that their teachers would mediate conflict between students and their peers. In order for teachers to effectively mediate conflict between students, students have to trust the teachers, and there must be a sense of positive relationship between the students and teachers. This research finding also aligns with the data point that the principal was a trusting adult figure whom students could talk to and believe that the principal would listen to their concerns.

Bradshaw et al. (2013) described the importance of reforming Codes of Conduct at the school levels as an equitable necessity and that it was also imperative that school staff receive professional development so that the implementation of a revised Code of Conduct produces the intended consequences. It is important to note that A. Merge Public School District had revised its Code of Conduct, which went into operation during the 2020-2021 school year at L.C. Elementary School. The staff did not have specific professional development concerning the Code of Conduct but did participate in Restorative Practices professional development. After implementation of the intervention, the students' responses illustrate that students better understand discipline expectations and the consequences for breaking the rules. This data point

suggests that the staff invested more in talking about behaviors, consequences, personal responsibility, and building relationships with students.

Between the first and second survey, there was a 30-percentage point decrease indicating that approximately 50% of the selected students believed students were disciplined fairly regardless of demographic factors. Two other data points that after implementation of the intervention showed a positive increase was that 60% of the students believed that the principal used other ways to discipline students than suspensions and that students were not targeted at their school because of where they live. Approximately half or slightly more than half of the students believed that discipline is administered fairly and is not contingent upon demographic factors such as race, religion, gender, or a student's address.

The data were hard to grapple with at points in the analysis phase of the research as they showed there was some inconsistency in students' perceptions about school discipline after the implementation of the intervention. For instance, approximately 50% of students did not believe they were able to talk with an adult when they had a problem, yet 88.89% of students believed the teacher would help them work through an argument with a classmate, while approximately another 80% of the students did not believe they could talk with their classmates after an argument. Elementary-age students are more likely to have the least control of their emotions when conflict arises than middle or high school-age students. These three data points assert that the staff needed to build student capacity with conflict resolution skills but also spend more time creating opportunities for students to share their feelings in safe spaces. Fronius et al. (2016) encouraged the use of informal and formal Restorative conferencing, proactive circles, conflict resolution circles, and the use of affective statements to create a safe space for students to share while also developing their skills for conflict resolution.

Interpretation of Study Question 3 Findings

The analysis and findings of the data from question 3, indicated that discipline and attendance data for the targeted student group and the whole school improved from the spring 2019 school year to the spring 2021 school year. Ten out of the 15 targeted students' attendance rates increased between the baseline spring semester and the spring semester of the research. The target student group's average number of referrals per student decreased by 100% between spring 2019 and spring 2021. Fronius et al. (2016) stated that an effective way for schools to provide equitable measures for holding students accountable for inappropriate behaviors is to address the root causes of behavior issues while focusing on repairing relationships between students and teachers and students and their peers through the implementation of programs like Restorative Justice. Although my research focused on the implementation of Restorative Practices and not Restorative Justice, Restorative Practices is Restorative Justice amended to function within school settings to address disparities in school discipline for Black students.

It is irresponsible to consider any of the data yielded during the research without making connections of how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the discipline outcomes as compared between the 2019 spring semester and the 2021 spring semester. The lack of in-person instruction, the manner in which teachers were required to take attendance during remote learning, and the flexibility for parents to choose remote or in-person learning for students impact the improvement of discipline and attendance outcomes for the targeted students' group and the whole school was inconclusive.

Limitations of the Study

There were several limitations related to this research study. The first involved the hybrid learning structure of remote learning and in-person learning. The research did not account for the

fact that in the first two months of the 2021 spring semester, students would participate only in remote learning due to COVID-19 restrictions implemented by the Board of Education. Once students were able to return to in-person learning, the school was on an A/B week schedule for students alternating between in-person and remote learning. This constant change in instructional delivery and school environment could have an impact on teachers' and students' responses to the surveys, teachers' and administrators' responses to interview questions, and the attendance and discipline outcome data for students. Teachers were given limited opportunities when this study was conducted to deliver face-to-face instruction to targeted students due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The scholarly practitioner attempted to account for this fact by pushing the timeline back for surveys and interviews prior to and after the implementation of the professional development, as well as delaying the timeline for administering the Restorative Practices professional development. In addition to the hybrid learning situation, every moment that the school had for face-to-face learning was crucial and made it difficult to find the right time to survey students and teachers, as well as interview staff. Students, teachers, and administrators were stressed, and the various stressors of the pandemic could have impacted how all targeted participants responded in surveys and interviews. These stressors are due to the anxiety of increasing COVID-19 cases, death rates, and positive cases and quarantines. All while staff is working tirelessly to keep themselves safe so that they are not the conduit of COVID transmission to their families is a heavy burden to carry along with the responsibility of teaching during a pandemic without the proper time for preparation. The scholarly practitioner tried to account for these situations by being understanding, patient, and changing timelines to accommodate the participants and their level of comfort.

Because of social distancing recommendations both by the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services and the district's Board of Education, the interviews and focus groups were not conducted in person. The interviews and focus groups were conducted through the virtual platform Google Meet. This was a less personal and formal way to conduct interview protocols but had quickly become a reality as an alternative to in-person meetings. This format for meeting may have caused more trepidation about the anonymity of their responses due to them being visually and audibly recorded as opposed to an audio recording and transcription notes. Teachers' inability to properly address discipline issues virtually, the small number of students participating in in-person learning, students' ability to be counted present for class but not be physically present, and the school vacillating between the hybrid instructional delivery methods made the absence of a normal classroom setting due to the COVID-19 pandemic a limitation as well. The scholarly practitioner's focus was to control the matters of which he had control to create a safe and unobtrusive space so that all participants were comfortable during the study.

Lastly, other limitations of the study included that there was not an opportunity for comparison between Black students and other groups of students because the school had a predominantly Black student population, that the teaching staff was predominately Black and mostly inexperienced, that the principal and assistant principal were different in the baseline semester than in the research semester, and that there was a limited student population focusing only on 15 students which represented a small fraction of the student body. During the second administration of the student survey, 10 of the 15 students were able to successfully start and complete the survey due to technical difficulties that the other five students experienced. Several attempts were made to remedy the technical glitches, but the scholarly practitioner was unable to

successfully assist the students in completing the survey. This impacted student response outcomes causing percentages to fluctuate either up or down between the pre- and post-intervention surveys. The school does not offer a diverse racial or teacher experience perspective about discipline within the school setting, which does not align perfectly with the basis of CRT when examining school discipline and its disparity gaps on race. The scholarly practitioner's role as a senior-level executive of the Superintendent's cabinet could also be viewed as a limitation. There are close professional and familiar relationships with the school and district level administrators that existed before, throughout, and after the study. The scholarly practitioner was given access to sensitive information that reflected the perceptions of the administrators, teachers, and students. The scholarly practitioner's perceived position of power may have influenced to what extent the participants were fully truthful in their perceptions about school discipline. However, in each administration of a survey and interview protocol, the scholarly practitioner consistently refrained from gestures that indicated the correctness of a response, asked questions for clarity of responses, checked for study participants' understanding of responses, and constantly reiterated that it was a safe environment to share their perception.

Implications of the Findings for Practice

The implications of the data collected motivated the scholarly practitioner to consider the perspectives of staff, students, and parents who are part of a low-performing school community as it relates to addressing the root problem of school discipline when assessing the external factors that play such a major role. The study did not breach the surface of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and how they may impact school discipline, but ACEs are another layer to those external factors that are prevalent but not always seen. The study showed that if specific professional development opportunities such as Restorative Practices are provided to staff over a

sustained period of time with continuous support, the training could help contribute to a more equitable difference in school discipline. The study revealed that building strong relationships between staff and students and students and their peers could have a positive impact on discipline. It is not enough alone to just teach staff mediation and conflict resolution skills, but there should be a consideration to provide coaching and modeling for teachers and staff in implementing the training while also investing in students by providing them the opportunity to learn these same skills.

As echoed by the staff in the study, school environment is another important factor in school discipline outcomes, and the school environment begins with the staff. In a low-performing school, school staff is the most vital resource needed to create a school culture primed for success. School staff is often overlooked, and their ACEs and social-emotional health many times are not considered when determining the root problems of school discipline. A school staff with many members that are functioning under the duress of stress and mental health concerns could create a toxic school climate through their own unresolved emotional well-being, which often presents itself as frustration or work burnout. These moments of frustration can be compounded by the absence of avenues for communication and relationship building to essential parties, which may cause students and staff to not feel a sense of safety or a sense of belonging.

Implications of the Findings for Equity

As previously stated, my study focused on the implementation of Restorative Practices and its impact on staff and students' perceptions about school discipline and on school discipline outcomes for Black students. However, I realized through the study that many Black elementary children who attend schools labeled as low performing with high poverty and high minority rates like students at L.C. Elementary School are often discarded as simply having behavior problems.

Students who attend these schools live in impoverished and high crime rate neighborhoods with minimal access to quality food security, housing, and healthcare options that are breeding grounds for childhood abuse and violence (Mallett, 2017). Faculty and staff who serve in these schools are inundated with the sheer number of discipline incidents and the intensity of behaviors that stem from external factors associated with ACEs (González, 2015). Only within the past 10 years have schools started making the connections between ACEs and school-level behaviors. These incidents of childhood trauma experienced by children show up as discipline issues at school, and while we are busy suspending students from school and misdiagnosing the root causes of the behaviors, schools have become complicit in the perpetuation of institutional racism that adversely affects Black students' quality of life.

This is not just an issue of equity and/or social justice in the organization of my study but potentially exists in the larger society. There should be some consideration of monetary and human resource allocations to schools that serve these populations of students with the sole intent of combating the negative impact of ACEs on Black students' behavior and educational outcomes.

Recommendations for Practice

Based on my data analysis, there are three recommendations I believe will impact student and staff perceptions about school discipline and discipline outcomes for Black students. First, establishing a plan that provides Restorative Practices professional development opportunities over a sustained period of time. The professional development should also offer phases of coaching and support to ensure that the full model is implemented to fidelity. I discovered during my study that the professional development sessions provided did not allow for a sufficient amount of time to train the staff on all parts of Restorative Practices. I consulted with the

Restorative Practices professional development trainer to choose several parts of the training that we believe would yield the most productivity based on the three hours of professional development time allotted. The sustained professional development coupled with the phases of coaching and support will provide staff with adequate time to learn, practice, implement, and reflect while collaborating and sharing knowledge as a team.

Second, the site of the study is currently participating in professional development focused on Resilience, which is needed to help address many of the behavior problems which stem from outside factors associated with students' ACEs. The research site was awarded a grant that provided sustained Resilience training school-wide with coaching and support during the 2021-2022 school year. The district has also used grant funding to have four staff members certified as Resilience trainers to coach and sustain the Resilience professional development that has been started in various schools throughout the district. The Resilience training would blend nicely with the Restorative Practices professional development that has already begun at the site of the study. The objective is to teach staff about early childhood trauma, how to process those experiences, and how to nurture Resilience traits while providing students a safe space to learn the skills of building a sense of community and repairing relationships. These two professional development opportunities used in tandem could be a mitigating factor against school behaviors that are often triggered by external factors.

Third, the district needs to continue its work with creating and implementing a Code of Conduct that has been in use for less than two years, and the first year was COVID-19 year, with students spending most of the year in remote learning. When the district first embarked upon the journey of creating a new Code of Conduct, the intent was to make the document a Student Code of Character, Conduct, and Support. The Code of Conduct has been created, so now the district

should consider investing in the character and support side of the document. This would be an all-encompassing document centered on Restorative Practices principles for reporting students' behaviors and assigning consequences that are age-appropriate and equitable. This Student Code of Character, Conduct, and Support would have detailed roles for district administrators, school administrators, teachers, parents, and students. There should be training on the use of the document for all parties, including students, and follow-up training during the summer and at the beginning of each school year. This ensures that a focus remains on equitable discipline outcomes while providing a common language about discipline infractions, consequences, and how to effectively restore students back into the educational community when relationships have been broken.

Last, teacher preparation programs at colleges and universities should consider embedding Restorative Practices or many of its strategies into a curriculum geared specifically for teachers. If these strategies were coursework completed in a teacher preparation program, the course could possibly equip beginning teachers with an effective tool for building positive relationships with students and managing classroom behaviors and student conflict. District and school-level administrators have often conveyed the need to create a course that focuses specifically on classroom management for teacher preparation programs. This study has allowed me to see the potential effectiveness of such a course based on the strategies of Restorative practices.

Recommendations for Future Study

This study was designed and implemented to see how staff and students' perceptions about school discipline and discipline outcomes would be impacted by the use of Restorative Practices. Specifically, 3rd-5th elementary staff in a low-performing school were trained on

Restorative Practices. Following the initial training, teachers were trained on impromptu and formal conferencing and implemented them in their classrooms as a way to build and repair relationships with students. The research findings were informative and gave insight into how school culture and school staff are critical factors in how the purpose of discipline is perceived and the student outcomes based on those perceptions. This study was implemented approximately one year after the global pandemic began with far-reaching consequences for public schools. After thoroughly analyzing the data, I have determined there are some adjustments that can be recommended for future studies.

I recommend conducting future research that is an identical or similar study post-COVID-19 when schools have settled back into a normal routine of in-person learning without the complications of quarantining during a pandemic. The impact of Restorative Practices on staff and students' perception of school discipline and discipline outcomes could yield different and more compelling results during in-person learning. Discipline and classroom management situations did not present the same magnitude of an issue in the remote learning environment where the teacher was able to control a student's audible and visual levels of participation. Students who were unwilling to participate could easily opt out of learning by not logging into the online platform and choosing to complete and submit work independently. Another possible component that could be added would be recruiting students who were participants from both 4th and 5th grades; this would create an opportunity to gather feedback from a larger representative group of the student body. This strategy would also increase the number of teacher participants from the school. Having a larger representative group of teachers and students from two different grade levels could potentially strengthen the study findings. I would also suggest intentionally controlling for experienced and beginning teachers in the study. This would be another data point

for the researcher to consider as a determining factor in whether or not experience makes a significant difference.

Another future study could explore the concept of the impact of ACEs on school discipline for Black elementary-age students attending predominantly Black low-performing schools and living in marginalized communities. Future research could consider what factors of ACEs are directly correlated to student discipline issues and misinterpreted as “bad” students. A professional development framework like Resilience could possibly consider whether or not a change in school and staff social-emotional practices impact school discipline over a specified time period. And if so, when these school discipline outcomes change, could it be related to a change in teachers' education through the Resilience framework about ACEs and their impact on the brain and student behavior?

Lastly, future research may consider adding a few more qualitative tools in the data-gathering phase if they were to repeat the study or a similar one. Possibly interviewing students and surveying administrators during the study would give another data source to better determine the impact of their perceptions about school discipline before and after the implementation of Restorative Practices. It would be telling to look at the data when all study groups participate in two surveys and two interviews, as these additional qualitative tools may be used to further compare staff and students results that could potentially strengthen the study findings. Additionally, researchers should use pseudonyms for surveys so that they can decipher individual student and staff data to gather a more granular look at the data.

Conclusions

In conclusion, my study showed that staff perceptions about school discipline revealed a paradigm shift about OSS as an ineffective practice when it is used as a discipline tool alone. The

staff believes that OSS has very little impact on students' behaviors; however, it is a student's connection to school and the adults in the building that determines the real impact on students' behavior. The staff's concept of discipline shifted to a structure designed to support student learning by making more time for academic instruction, to teach students positive behaviors, and to keep all students safe. The administrators and teachers must align their beliefs and practices to have a systematic discipline plan that focuses on building positive relationships between staff and students, how to rebuild broken relationships between peers and adults, and the consistent and standardized use of alternatives to suspension measures.

The study also indicated that there was an overall positive increase in students' perception of school discipline. After the implementation of Restorative Practices, students were more likely to believe that their teachers would mediate conflict between students and their peers and that the principal was a trusting adult figure who would listen to their concerns. It was also noted that students had a better understanding of discipline expectations and the consequences for breaking the rules after the implementation of the intervention. As I reflect on the study, I believe that the staff invested more time in talking about behaviors, consequences, personal responsibility, and building relationships with students. However, there are opportunities for growth with the staff to build students' capacity with conflict resolution skills and create opportunities for students to share their feelings in a community that fosters a sense of belonging.

The study showed that the impact of Restorative practices after implementation on school discipline outcomes has a positive effect. Discipline and attendance data for the targeted student group and the whole school improved from the baseline spring 2019 school year to the research spring 2021 school year. Restorative Practices can be an effective tool to address disparities in school discipline for Black students when implemented to fidelity. My conclusions

should be taken in the context that my research was completed during the time of a pandemic. The lack of in-person learning, the State mandated attendance policy during remote learning, and the flexibility for parents to choose remote or in-person learning for students had a causal effect on school discipline and attendance outcomes, and the data should not be considered without acknowledging these facts.

Scholarly Practitioner Reflections on Leadership

Through the implementation of this study, I have grown as a leader and sharpened my insight into school discipline. As I began to gather student and parent signatures, I realized that the parents were extremely protective and cautious about signing any paperwork that was official and had some type of implication for their children. I have spent the majority of my career serving families from marginalized communities, but my current role has weakened my ties to those low-income communities. It was painfully obvious that the parents did not trust me or my intentions. Initially, it was shocking to me that the parents were reluctant or refused to agree to my recruitment of their children, and it took several times for parents to directly deny my recruitment of their child to understand that trust was the major factor guiding their decision. The parents did not trust the school system as an institution, and they did not trust me because I represented the very institution that they did not trust. One of the most productive things I did during this research was recruiting the former principal of the school to serve on my recruitment team. Once I took a back seat and allowed the principal to introduce the study, we were able to get parents to agree to the research because they trusted the principal; the principal was family. My study would have never gotten started if I did not have the principal on my team. It was critical to understand the community I would be researching from the onset and make plans accordingly.

Although theoretically, low-performing schools have the same level of pressure and state accountability measures as schools without the label, there is another level of pressure and mandates facing low-performing schools and districts. The inability to recruit, hire, and retain high-quality staff, the inundation of discipline issues that derive from external issues associated with student ACES, and the communities that the schools are located in add another level of stress not experienced by other schools. We do schools a disservice, and in my opinion, the actions are criminal when you give schools serving these environments the same resources as other schools. The site of my research was fortunate to have a plethora of resources, but quality staff, discipline issues, and school community environment still remained major factors. My role as a district leader cannot merely be one that gives reassuring phrases while being an empathetic listener. I and others of my status must be gatekeepers for equity for those children and communities that are the most fragile and have the least voice. I must be willing to ask the hard questions that make district leadership, BOE members, and me uncomfortable. The processes and procedures of the district should always have figurative pictures of our most fragile students and communities before them so that they remember our decisions have lasting impacts on students and families, and ultimately communities.

Lastly, as a scholarly practitioner, I have learned that although the study site has a predominantly Black student body and staff, they too have been conditioned by the rules and practices to recognize the White majority as the standard for human achievement. These rules and practices have such a stronghold because the behaviors of school staff are the result of unconscious, implicit bias. Studies such as this one can assist in identifying such implicit bias and thus begin counteractions to implicit bias. There is not another institution in this country that preserves the values and cultural identity of the White race more than our public schools, even

when the school has a predominantly Black administration and instructional support staff. Discipline outcomes for Black students at predominantly Black schools with predominantly Black staff are similar to the discipline outcomes for Black students at predominantly White schools with predominantly White staff.

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APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY
University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board
4N-64 Brody Medical Sciences Building · Mail Stop 682
600 Moyer Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834
Office 252-744-2914 · Fax 252-744-2284
rede.ecu.edu/umcirb/

Notification of Initial Approval: Expedited

From: Social/Behavioral IRB

To: [Leonidus Farrow](#)

CC: [Daniel Novey](#)

Date: 3/30/2021

[UMCIRB 21-000367](#)

Re: EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF DISCIPLINE PRACTICES ON SUSPENSION RATES OF BLACK STUDENTS

I am pleased to inform you that your Expedited Application was approved. Approval of the study and any consent form(s) occurred on 3/30/2021. The research study is eligible for review under expedited category # 6, 7. The Chairperson (or designee) deemed this study no more than minimal risk.

As the Principal Investigator you are explicitly responsible for the conduct of all aspects of this study and must adhere to all reporting requirements for the study. Your responsibilities include but are not limited to:

1. Ensuring changes to the approved research (including the UMCIRB approved consent document) are initiated only after UMCIRB review and approval except when necessary to eliminate an apparent immediate hazard to the participant. All changes (e.g. a change in procedure, number of participants, personnel, study locations, new recruitment materials, study instruments, etc.) must be prospectively reviewed and approved by the UMCIRB before they are implemented;
2. Where informed consent has not been waived by the UMCIRB, ensuring that only valid versions of the UMCIRB approved, date-stamped informed consent document(s) are used for obtaining informed consent (consent documents with the IRB approval date stamp are found under the Documents tab in the ePIRATE study workspace);
3. Promptly reporting to the UMCIRB all unanticipated problems involving risks to participants and others;

4. Submission of a final report application to the UMICRB prior to the expected end date provided in the IRB application in order to document human research activity has ended and to provide a timepoint in which to base document retention; and

5. Submission of an amendment to extend the expected end date if the study is not expected to be completed by that date. The amendment should be submitted 30 days prior to the UMCIRB approved expected end date or as soon as the Investigator is aware that the study will not be completed by that date.

The approval includes the following items:

Name	Description
Adult Informed Consent	Consent Forms
IRB_Minor Assent Form LF.doc	Consent Forms
Parental Consent Form(Child Participation)	Consent Forms
Principal and Assistant Principal Interview Questions	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
Script for Recruitment of Staff	Recruitment Documents/Scripts
Script for Recruitment of Sudents	Recruitment Documents/Scripts
Student Survey Questions	Surveys and Questionnaires
Teacher Focus Group Questions	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
Teacher Survey Questions	Surveys and Questionnaires

For research studies where a waiver or alteration of HIPAA Authorization has been approved, the IRB states that each of the waiver criteria in 45 CFR 164.512(i)(1)(i)(A) and (2)(i) through (v) have been met. Additionally, the elements of PHI to be collected as described in items 1 and 2 of the Application for Waiver of Authorization have been determined to be the minimal necessary for the specified research.

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

APPENDIX B: STUDENT SURVEY

Student Discipline Perception Survey

Students will answer each question by rating it in one of the following ways:

1. *Agree*
2. *I don't know*
3. *Disagree*

Please complete the following:

What is your race?

- a. Black
- b. White
- c. Asian
- d. Hispanic
- e. American Indian
- f. Two or More
- g. Other

What is your gender?

- a. Female
- b. Male

Survey Questions

1. I feel important at my school, like I belong at my school.
2. When I have a problem, my teachers listen to me and I can talk to my teacher.
3. When I argue with a classmate, I can talk to them about it afterwards.
4. When students argue at my school, the teachers help them work it out.

5. At my school, when a student gets in trouble, the principal talks to them and helps them.
6. Students in my school are treated fairly in discipline, regardless of their race, gender, religion, or disability.
7. Suspension is most often used to discipline students at my school.
8. Students at my school understand discipline expectations and the consequences for breaking the rules.
9. I feel as if I am targeted by school rules because of where I live.
10. At my school my principal use other ways to discipline instead of suspending students.

APPENDIX C: TEACHER SURVEY

Teacher Perception Discipline Survey

Teachers will answer each question by rating it in one of the following ways:

1. *Strongly Agree*
2. *Agree*
3. *Neutral*
4. *Disagree*
5. *Strongly Disagree*

Please complete the following:

What is your race?

- a. Black
- b. White
- c. Asian
- d. Hispanic
- e. American Indian
- f. Two or More
- g. Other

What is your gender?

- a. Female
- b. Male

Are you a Beginning Teacher (within your first three years of teaching)? Yes or No

Survey Questions

1. When students act-out and are disruptive at my school, they are suspended.
2. The only way to decrease disruptive behavior is to suspend students consistently.
3. Suspensions from school increases school safety.
4. It is important for students to mend their relationships after they argue with adults and peers.
5. Having a good relationship with a student is one of the best ways to improve student behavior.
6. When my students have a problem at my school, teachers listen to them and talk to them.
7. My school has an effective plan for reducing out of school and in-school suspensions and discipline referrals.
8. Students in my school are treated fairly in discipline, regardless of their race, gender, religion, disability, etc.
9. My school uses alternative to suspension strategies when students participate in disruptive behaviors.
10. Students are provided with information about the school's discipline policies, including the Code of Conduct.

APPENDIX D: TEACHER FOCUS GROUP

School Discipline Perception Questions for Teacher Focus Group

<u>Teacher Names:</u> 1. Name 2. Name 3. Name 4. Name 5. Name 6. Name	<u>Pseudonym:</u> 1. Name 2. Name 3. Name 4. Name 5. Name 6. Name
<u>Date:</u> 	<u>Start time:</u> <u>Finish time:</u>

Introduction and Opening Questions

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this focus group today. During this session, I will be asking a series of open ended questions about your perceptions of school discipline at your school. At times it may be necessary for me to ask follow up questions to clarify your responses. Please note, my role is as an interviewer only. I am not here to judge the appropriateness or accuracy of your responses. This is a safe space for you to share your opinions openly. I would ask that we agree now that all responses will remain confidential, and that responses are not shared with others outside of this focus group unless it is a part of the study. This interview will be recorded so that it can be transcribed. As the interviewer, I will focus on facilitating the group. My colleague will be present during the session to control the recording device and take written notes.

At the completion of this focus group, the recording will be transcribed using a transcription service. If you would like to be provided a copy of the interview, please send me an email at llfarrow@ncpschools.net and I will ensure that you receive a copy.

The following questions will be asked in both focus group cycles:

1. What has your school done to create a positive culture for all students at your school?
2. Do you agree/disagree with the statement, “My school has an effective plan for reducing out of school and in-school suspensions and discipline referrals? Why or why not.
3. What do you think about the statement, “When we build student relationships, we will decrease behaviors that disrupt the school environment?”
4. How do you build a sense of community and belonging in your school?
5. How do you think suspending students affects them?
6. How has student fighting and aggression traditionally been managed at your school?

APPENDIX E: PRINCIPAL AND ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW

School Discipline Perception Interview Questions for Principal and Assistant Principal

<u>Administrator Name:</u>	<u>Pseudonym:</u>
<u>Date:</u>	<u>Start time:</u> <u>Finish time:</u>

Introduction and Opening Questions for Administrators

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview today. During the interview, I will be asking a series of open ended questions about your perception of school discipline at your school. Your responses to these questions will remain confidential. They will only be reported using a pseudonym I will assign to you. The interview will be recorded so that it can be transcribed. As the interviewer, I will also be taking my own notes to document your responses.

At the completion of this interview, the recording will be transcribed using a transcription service. If you would like to be provided a copy of the interview, please send me an email at llfarrow@ncpschools.net and I will ensure that you receive a copy.

Opening questions will only be asked during the first interview cycle.

- How many years have you worked in education and with what grade levels?
- How many years have you served as an assistant principal?
- How many years have you served as a principal? (*ask principal only*)

The following questions will be asked in both interview cycles:

1. What are your beliefs about the purpose of school discipline?
2. What intentional strategies do you and your staff use to build relationships with students?

3. What strategies do you and your staff use to repair broken relationships with students?
4. What supports do you think should be in place to build a sense of community and belonging in your school?
5. Do you provide students with information about the school's discipline policies, including the Code of Conduct? Why or why not?
6. Do you think as a school culture, students in your school are treated fairly in discipline, regardless of their background (race, ethnicity, gender, religion, disability, etc.)? Why or Why not?
7. Do you use alternative to suspension strategies when students participate in unacceptable behavior? Why or why not?
8. Do you agree/disagree with the statement, "My school has an effective plan for reducing out of school and in-school suspensions and discipline referrals? Why or why not?

APPENDIX F: MINOR ASSENT FORM



Minor Assent Form

Things You Should Know Before You Agree To Take Part in this Research

IRB Study # _____

Title of Study: EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF DISCIPLINE PRACTICES ON SUSPENSION RATES OF BLACK STUDENTS: AN EQUITABLE AND RESTORATIVE JOURNEY IN A GRADES 3-5 INNER-CITY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Person in charge of study: Leondus Farrow, Jr.

Where they work: Nash County Public Schools Central Office

Study contact phone number: 252-395-0060

Study contact E-mail Address: llfarrow@ncpschools.net

People at ECU study ways to make people's lives better. These studies are called research. This research is trying to find out ways to improve discipline outcomes for Black students at a D. S. Johnson Elementary School.

Your parent(s) needs to give permission for you to be in this research. You do not have to be in this research if you don't want to, even if your parent(s) has already given permission.

You may stop being in the study at any time. If you decide to stop, no one will be angry or upset with you.

Why are you doing this research study?

The reason for doing this research is to analyze the implementation of Restorative Practices as an alternative to exclusionary discipline and determine its impact on students' perceptions of school discipline and student disciplinary outcomes.

Why am I being asked to be in this research study?

We are asking you to take part in this research because we want to know your perception of school discipline at D. S. Johnson Elementary School.

How many people will take part in this study?

If you decide to be in this research, you will be one of up to 20 students taking part in it.

What will happen during this study?

- You will be asked to take part in a survey about discipline at D. S. Johnson Elementary School.
- You will take the same survey that will be given at the beginning of the research and at the end of the research process.

This study will take place at D. S. Johnson Elementary School and will last 4 months.

Who will be told the things we learn about you in this study?

The information gained from the study will be shared with ECU and Nash County Public Schools District. The information collected in this study will be securely kept using a secure digital drive and on a secure flash drive that will be kept in a locked cabinet drawer in my office that only I have a key to. I will keep this information until I successfully defend my research and for a period of 3 years after the research is complete. All audio recorded and written interviews will be destroyed after a successful dissertation defense.

What are the good things that might happen?

Sometimes good things happen to people who take part in research. These are called “benefits.” The benefits to you of being in this study may be helping D. S. Johnson Elementary School improve discipline perception and discipline outcomes for Black students.

What are the bad things that might happen?

Sometimes things we may not like happen to people in research studies. These things may even make them feel bad. These are called “risks.” There are no major risks to your participation in this study, but it is a possibility that discipline perceptions and discipline outcomes do not improve for Black students at D. S. Johnson Elementary School as a result of your participation in the research.

Will you get any money or gifts for being in this research study?

You will not receive any money or gifts for being in this research study.

Who should you ask if you have any questions?

If you have questions about the research, you should ask the people listed on the first page of this form. If you have other questions about your rights while you are in this research study you may call the Institutional Review Board at 252-744-2914.

Do you want to participate? If you have any questions or don't want to participate, please let me know.

Signature of person obtaining assent

Date

APPENDIX G: PARENTAL CONSENT FORM (CHILD PARTICIPANT)



Parental/Legal Guardian Permission to Allow Your Child to Take Part in Research

Information to consider before allowing your child to take part in research that has no more than minimal risk.

Title of Research Study: EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF DISCIPLINE PRACTICES ON SUSPENSION RATES OF BLACK STUDENTS: AN EQUITABLE AND RESTORATIVE JOURNEY IN A GRADES 3-5 INNER-CITY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Principal Investigator: Leondus Farrow, Jr. (Person in Charge of this Study)
Institution, Department or Division: East Carolina University
Address: 1905 Tralee Ct. Winterville, NC 28590

Researchers at East Carolina University (ECU) study issues related to society, health problems, environmental problems, behavior problems and the human condition. To do this, we need the help of volunteers who are willing to take part in research.

Why is my child being invited to take part in this research?

The purpose of this research is to analyze the implementation of Restorative Practices as an alternative to exclusionary discipline and determine its impact on staff's and students' perceptions of school discipline and student disciplinary outcomes. Your child is being invited to take part in this research because your child is a Black student who received at least one disciplinary consequence during the 2018-19 school year that resulted in an in-school or out of school suspension at D. S. Johnson Elementary School. The decision for your child to take part in this research will also depend upon whether your child wants to participate. By doing this research, we hope to learn your child's thoughts and feelings about discipline at D. S. Johnson Elementary School. If you and your child agree for him/her to volunteer for this research, your child will be one of up to 20 students to do so.

Are there reasons my child should not take part in this research?

Your child should not participate in this study if they are unwilling to be honest about their experience in education.

What other choices do I have if my child does not take part in this research?

Your child can choose not to participate.

Where is the research going to take place and how long will it last?

The research will be conducted at D. S. Johnson Elementary School. Students will work with their school administrator on a day and time that is beneficial for the student to take part in the study. Students participating in the study at D. S. Johnson Elementary School will go to the media center during the time for the study. The total amount of time your child will be asked to

volunteer for this study will not exceed two hours over the next year. All research participation will happen during the course of the school day.

What will my child be asked to do?

Your child will be asked to do the following:

- Your child will be asked to take part in a survey about discipline at D. S. Johnson Elementary School.
- Your child will take the same survey that will be given at the beginning of the research and at the end of the research process.

What might I experience if I take part in the research?

We don't know of any risks (the chance of harm) associated with this research. Any risks that may occur with this research are no more than what you would experience in everyday life. We don't know if your child will benefit from taking part in this study. There may not be any personal benefit to your child but the information gained by doing this research may help others in the future.

Will my child be paid for taking part in this research?

We will not be able to pay you or your child for the time you volunteer while being in this study

Will it cost me anything for my child to take part in this research?

It will not cost you any money to be part of the research.

Who will know that I took part in this research and learn personal information about me?

ECU and the people and organizations listed below may know that your child took part in this research and may see information about your child that is normally kept private. With your permission, these people may use your child's private information to do this research:

- The University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) and its staff have responsibility for overseeing your child's welfare during this research and may need to see research records that identify your child.
- People designated by Nash County Public Schools District

If your child is a patient at ECU or Vidant, a copy of this form will be placed in your medical records.

How will you keep the information you collect about my child secure? How long will you keep it?

The information collected in this study will be securely kept using a secure digital drive and on a secure flash drive that will be kept in a locked cabinet drawer in my office that only I have a key to. I will keep this information until I successfully defend my research and for a period of 3 years after the research is complete. All audio recorded and written interviews will be destroyed after a successful dissertation defense.

What if my child decides he/she doesn't want to continue in this research?

Your child can stop at any time after it has already started. There will be no consequences if he/she stops and he/she will not be criticized. Your child will not lose any benefits that he/she would normally receive.

Who should I contact if I have questions?

The people conducting this study will be able to answer any questions concerning this research, now or in the future. You may contact the Principal Investigator at 252-395-0060 between 9:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m.

If you have questions about your child's rights as someone taking part in research, you may call the University and Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) at phone number 252-744-2914 (days, 8:00 am-5:00 pm). If you would like to report a complaint or concern about this research study, you may call the Director of Human Research Protections, at 252-744-2914.

I have decided my child can take part in this research. What should I do now?

The person obtaining informed consent will ask you to read the following and if you agree, you should sign this form:

- I have read (or had read to me) all of the above information.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions about things in this research I did not understand and have received satisfactory answers.
- I know that my child can stop taking part in this study at any time.
- By signing this informed consent form, my child is not giving up any of his/her rights.
- I have been given a copy of this consent document, and it is mine to keep.

Parent's Name (PRINT)	Signature	Date
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Person Obtaining Informed Consent: I have conducted the initial informed consent process. I have orally reviewed the contents of the consent document with the person who has signed above, and answered all of the person's questions about the research.

Person Obtaining Consent (PRINT)	Signature	Date
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APPENDIX H: ADULT INFORMED CONSENT FORM



Adult Informed Consent to Participate in Research
Information to consider before taking part in research
that has no more than minimal risk.

Title of Research Study: EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF DISCIPLINE PRACTICES ON
SUSPENSION RATES OF BLACK STUDENTS: AN EQUITABLE AND RESTORATIVE
JOURNEY IN A GRADES 3-5 INNER-CITY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Principal Investigator: Leondus Farrow, Jr. (Person in Charge of this Study)
Institution, Department or Division: East Carolina University
Address: 1905 Tralee Ct. Winterville, NC 28590
Telephone #: 252-395-0060

Researchers at East Carolina University (ECU) study issues related to society, health problems, environmental problems, behavior problems and the human condition. To do this, we need the help of volunteers who are willing to take part in research.

Why am I being invited to take part in this research?

The purpose of this research is to analyze the implementation of Restorative Practices as an alternative to exclusionary discipline and determine its impact on staff's perceptions of school discipline and student disciplinary outcomes. You are being invited to take part in this research because you work in a position in the school that directly impacts disciplining Black students at D. S. Johnson Elementary School where the research is being conducted. The decision to take part in this research is yours to make. By doing this research, we hope to learn your thoughts and feelings about discipline at D. S. Johnson Elementary School.

If you volunteer to take part in this research, you will be one of about 8 people to do so.

Are there reasons I should not take part in this research?

You should not participate in this study if you are unwilling to be truthful about your experience in education.

What other choices do I have if I do not take part in this research?

You can choose not to participate.

Where is the research going to take place and how long will it last?

The research will be conducted at D. S. Johnson Elementary School. Participants of the study who work at D. S. Johnson Elementary School will need to come to the media center during the times of the study. The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this study is no more than five hours over the next year.

What will I be asked to do?

You will be asked to do the following:

- If you are a teacher at the school, you will be asked to take part in two surveys and two focus group protocols about discipline at D. S. Johnson Elementary School.
- If you are an administrator at the school, you will be asked to take part in two interview protocols about discipline at D. S. Johnson Elementary School.

What might I experience if I take part in the research?

We don't know of any risks (the chance of harm) associated with this research. Any risks that may occur with this research are no more than what you would experience in everyday life. We don't know if you will benefit from taking part in this study. There may not be any personal benefit to you but the information gained by doing this research may help others in the future.

Will I be paid for taking part in this research?

We will not be able to pay you for the time you volunteer while being a participant in this research.

Will it cost me to take part in this research?

It will not cost you any money to be part of the research.

Who will know that I took part in this research and learn personal information about me?

ECU and the people and organizations listed below may know that you took part in this research and may see information about you that is normally kept private. With your permission, these people may use your private information to do this research:

- Any agency of the federal, state, or local government that regulates human research. This includes the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), the North Carolina Department of Health, and the Office for Human Research Protections.
- The University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) and its staff have responsibility for overseeing your welfare during this research and may need to see research records that identify you.
- People designated by Nash County Public Schools.

How will you keep the information you collect about me secure? How long will you keep it?

The information collected in this study will be securely kept using a secure digital drive and on a secure flash drive that will be kept in a locked cabinet drawer in my office that only I have a key to. I will keep this information until I successfully defend my research and for a period of 3 years after the research is complete. All audio recorded and written interviews will be destroyed after a successful dissertation defense.

What if I decide I don't want to continue in this research?

You can stop at any time after it has already started. There will be no consequences if you stop and you will not be criticized. You will not lose any benefits that you normally receive.

If this research involves the collection of identifiable private information:

Your information collected as part of the research, even if identifiers are removed, will not be used or distributed for future studies.

Will I receive anything for the use of my private identifiable information?

If the research conducted on your private identifiable information leads to a commercially valuable product, you will not be eligible for any of the profits either because it will be impossible to identify the information that led to the product.

Is there anything else I should know?

There is nothing else you should know. All information concerning this research has been shared.

Who should I contact if I have questions?

The people conducting this study will be able to answer any questions concerning this research, now or in the future. You may contact the Principal Investigator at 252-395-0060, Monday-Friday between 9:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m.

If you have questions about your rights as someone taking part in research, you may call the University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) at phone number 252-744-2914 (days, 8:00 am-5:00 pm). If you would like to report a complaint or concern about this research study, you may call the Director for Human Research Protections, at 252-744-2914

I have decided I want to take part in this research. What should I do now?

The person obtaining informed consent will ask you to read the following and if you agree, you should sign this form:

- I have read (or had read to me) all of the above information.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions about things in this research I did not understand and have received satisfactory answers.
- I know that I can stop taking part in this study at any time.
- By signing this informed consent form, I am not giving up any of my rights.
- I have been given a copy of this consent document, and it is mine to keep.

Participant's Name (PRINT)

Signature

Date

Person Obtaining Informed Consent: I have conducted the initial informed consent process. I have orally reviewed the contents of the consent document with the person who has signed above, and answered all of the person's questions about the research.

Person Obtaining Consent (PRINT)

Signature

Date

APPENDIX I: STUDENT SCRIPT FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPATION

Student Script

You are being invited to participate in a **research** study titled “*EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF DISCIPLINE PRACTICES ON SUSPENSION RATES OF BLACK STUDENTS: AN EQUITABLE AND RESTORATIVE JOURNEY IN A GRADES 3-5 INNER-CITY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL*” being conducted by Leondus Farrow, Jr., a student at East Carolina University in the Education Leadership department. The reason you are being asked to participate in this research is because as a student at D. S. Johnson Elementary School, we want to know your perception of school discipline. Here are key facts to know about this research:

- The goal is to survey 20 students twice at D. S. Johnson Elementary School during the course of this research.
- The survey will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete each time.
- The information collected will assist us to better understand your thoughts and experiences as a student of D. S. Johnson Elementary School.
- The survey is confidential, so please do not write your name.
- Your participation in the research is **voluntary**. You may choose not to answer any or all questions, and you may stop at any time.

There is **no penalty for not taking part** in this research study. Please call me, Leondus Farrow, Jr. at 252-395-0060 for any research related questions or the University & Medical Center IRB (UMCIRB) at 252-744-2914 for questions about your rights as a research participant.

APPENDIX J: STAFF SCRIPT FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPATION

Staff Script

You are being invited to participate in a **research** study titled “*EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF DISCIPLINE PRACTICES ON SUSPENSION RATES OF BLACK STUDENTS: AN EQUITABLE AND RESTORATIVE JOURNEY IN A GRADES 3-5 INNER-CITY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL*” being conducted by Leondus Farrow, Jr., a student at East Carolina University in the Education Leadership department. The reason you are being asked to participate in this research is because you are a staff member at D. S. Johnson Elementary School, who has a direct impact on the school discipline of Black students. Here is some information that you should know about this research:

- The goal of this research is to collect data that will assist us to better understand your thoughts and experiences regarding discipline practices as a staff member of D. S. Johnson Elementary School.
- 6 selected teachers will participate in surveys and focus group interviews twice during the course of this research.
- School administrators will participate in interviews twice during the course of this research.
- The survey will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete each time.
- Each focus group and interview will take approximately 60 minutes to complete.
- The survey is confidential, so please do not write your name.
- Your participation in the research is **voluntary**. You may choose not to answer any or all questions, and you may stop at any time.

There is **no penalty for not taking part** in this research study. Please call me, Leondus Farrow, Jr. at 252-395-0060 for any research related questions or the University & Medical Center IRB (UMCIRB) at 252-744-2914 for questions about your rights as a research participant.

