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Administrators' Perceptions of the Impact of Restorative Practices on Discipline Referrals and Suspension Rates in a Rural Elementary School

Gregory W. Brown

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Administrators' Perceptions of the Impact of Restorative Practices on Discipline
Referrals and Suspension Rates in a Rural Elementary School

by
Gregory W. Brown

An Applied Dissertation Submitted to the
Abraham S. Fischler College of Education
and School of Criminal Justice in Partial
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Approval Page

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Statement of Original Work

I declare the following:

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Gregory W. Brown

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April 6, 2023

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First and foremost I have to thank my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Through Him I live, move and have my very being. What I am to become I owe to His Love.

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To my Dad. I miss you. I did it just like I promised.

To my Mom. Hallelujah! I hope you are proud.

To Dr. Joseph Gillard. Thank you for not letting me rest until I got back in the saddle. I appreciate you brother.

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Abstract

Administrators' Perceptions of the Impact of Restorative Practices on Discipline Referrals and Suspension Rates in a Rural Elementary School. Gregory W. Brown, 2023: Applied Dissertation, Nova Southeastern University, Abraham S. Fischler College of Education and School of Criminal Justice. Keywords: discipline, discipline problems, behavior problems, zero-tolerance policy

The problem addressed in the study involved excessive out-of-school suspensions, which have been a major concern for public school educators for decades. The purpose of the study explored the perceptions of participants regarding the effects of implementing restorative practices on suspension rates at a rural elementary school.

The qualitative phenomenology study used a purposive sample of 10 educators who interacted with students suspended for violating the school's code of conduct. Six kindergarten through Grade 5 teachers, two Grades 3–5 grade-level chairpersons, the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support coordinator, and one administrator participated in the study.

Utilizing case study approaches, this qualitative study developed interview questions to allow participants to express their opinions on numerous areas of the faculty and administration's classroom knowledge. The researcher was able to acquire information regarding the district, school, teachers, and administrators' ways to enforcing discipline policies for children from underrepresented groups through the interviews.

The participants of this study believed that restorative techniques combined with Positive Behavior Supports were effective in diverting pupils' negative actions. In addition, the survey revealed that participants considered that zero tolerance disciplinary methods did not result in an overall change in behavior but were nevertheless necessary in particular cases.

Future research should examine the efficacy of continual training to improve restorative practice implementation and maintainability and ensure that all staff members understand its goals.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

The problem to be addressed in the study involved excessive out-of-school suspensions (OSS), which have been a major concern for educators for decades. The amount of time students spend away from the classroom due to zero-tolerance discipline policies represents an ongoing dilemma in many school systems. During the 2017-2018 school year in Georgia, approximately 106,986 students received OSS for at least 1 day. Students from racial or ethnic minority groups were suspended at a rate of 3:1. Of the 105,148 students of color enrolled, 55,911 were suspended from school for at least 1 day. These numbers were also elevated for students in special education programs. Of the 129,328 students of color with disabilities enrolled, 10,660 were suspended from school for at least 1 day. Zero-tolerance discipline policies are the norm in many U.S. school districts (Gage et al., 2018, 2019).

The Research Problem

Based on district discipline data and school College and Career Ready Performance Index data, the elementary school in this study had a disproportionate suspension rate of African American male and female students when compared to the district's other elementary schools. Prior to the pandemic, there was a 33% increase in the numbers of students receiving OSS over the previous 3 years (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2020). The problem to be addressed in the study involves the disproportionate numbers of African American male and female students in kindergarten to Grade 5 who have received OSS compared to the White and Hispanic male and female groups in the elementary school involved in this study. Discipline breached against African American males frequently result in suspensions that lead to excessively missed classroom

instruction. As a result, students often consider abandoning their studies. According to the state department of education's discipline data archive (Ransome, 2021) between 2017 and 2021, 70.7% of the overall suspensions in the county of the target school were given to African American students.

Students who identify as African American constitute 57.5% of the student population in the county, and 61.1% who were expelled from the school under investigation were of African American descent. African American students are subjected to a higher number of referrals for disciplinary actions and more severe repercussions than students of other races (Wright et al., 2020). According to Loomis et al. (2022), African American students are three times more likely than their White counterparts to be suspended or expelled from school. For offenses such as tardiness, resistance, rudeness, and loitering, teachers often apply stricter disciplinary measures to African American males (Loomis et al., 2022). Some of the variables contributing to the high rates of discipline referrals among African American students include experiences with negative peer pressure, unstable homes, poor self-confidence, poor self-esteem, no family participation, and low opinions of education (Morgan, 2018; Schiff, 2018). African American students with disabilities along with other disadvantages are more likely than students without any disabilities to be reprimanded or expelled (Hawkins, 2020; Morgan, 2018).

Background and Justification

The issue of student punishment has received much attention lately, and one concern is that not all children are treated fairly (Diamond & Lewis, 2019). To this end, school districts are looking into if race, gender, or the presence of a student disability that influenced disciplinary methods are anomalies or indications of a systemic issue in policy

and procedure (Dutil, 2020). In the past, views toward discipline were dominated by the notion of punishment, and this was reflected in harsh punishments that were justified on moral grounds. More recently, it has become fashionable to compromise in matters of discipline, being compassionate while being tough, and to place rehabilitation above retribution. National discipline data (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2018) have shown African American students from low-income backgrounds were much more likely than students of other ethnicities to be suspended. According to Bryant and Wilson (2020), African American male students from low-income families were more likely to receive OSS referrals than students from other racial or ethnic groups. Hence, exploring the patterns of school discipline patterns can help to identify and later address the disproportionality issue to show respect for the unique needs of all students (Bryant & Wilson, 2020).

For more than 10 years, state and school district personnel have responded to study findings indicating that OSS is not compatible with the objectives of educational equity and accomplishment (Augustine et al., 2018). Efforts by state legislators and local boards of education to change disciplinary policies via statutory and regulatory mandates and restrictions have been fruitful. Discipline policy, on the other hand, is still in the early stages of development. Preliminary research indicates that policy implementation must be given more attention than it now receives and that educational inequity must be addressed (Basile, 2021). If states desire to achieve fair and effective school discipline, it is possible that policies oriented simply at reducing suspensions will prove insufficient to achieve this goal. School culture, process, and practice must all be examined in more depth to address inequities (Harper, 2020).

As a result of the widespread use of suspensions, as well as the inequities in their

application, specifically for nonviolent acts, a tremendous amount of pressure has been placed on schools to change those policies (Augustine et al., 2018). When schools are under institutional pressure to respond to policy shifts, as is the case in this era of rising school accountability, evidence exists to show that schools might be more sensitive to shifts in policy (Harper, 2020). School systems are unsure whether changes in policy have impacted the likelihood of students being suspended outside of school and, if they have, whether these changes have affected racial disparities in suspensions. However, some school districts have revised their OSS policies (Joseph et al., 2020).

Deficiencies in the Evidence

Restorative techniques are being utilized in schools nationally to eliminate exclusionary punishments and enhance school environments by developing a school community that promotes relationships (Anyon et al., 2018; Augustine et al., 2018; Gregory et al., 2018; Song et al., 2020). Recent research has been examining the application and efficacy of restorative practices as a substitute for punitive punishment measures (Anyon et al., 2018; Augustine et al., 2018; Song et al., 2020). Although most of the research has concentrated on implementation in middle and secondary schools, few studies have been found to examine the effectiveness of restorative practice policies if implemented in an elementary school (Hollands et al., 2022; Weaver & Swank, 2020).

Audience

The target population for the study involves the children at a rural primary school as well as the entire student body at the school. This study will be beneficial to both the school from which the information for this study was collected and the administration that will oversee disciplinary measures at any school with similar disciplinary disparities.

Setting of the Study

The study was conducted at a rural elementary school located in the southeastern United States. Approximately 650 students attend the school, along with 85 staff members, two assistant principals, and one principal. The demographics of the schools are as follows: 82% of the population is African American, 15% is Hispanic, 5% is White, and 2% is Native American/Pacific Islander.

Researcher's Role

The researcher is employed as the assistant principal at the target school to be used for this research. As assistant principal, the researcher is in charge of all discipline for students in kindergarten through Grade 5 as well as being the administrator who supports the school-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) model.

Purpose of the Study

The study was designed to examine the extent, if any, of the positive effects of a zero-tolerance discipline model as opposed to the restorative practices model in a rural elementary setting. As the school is transitioning from zero tolerance to restorative practices, lowering suspension rates and discipline referrals is paramount to the school's overall success. The purpose of the study was to investigate the perceptions of participants about the effects of implementing restorative practices on suspension rates at a rural elementary school.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Many public middle and high schools provide outstanding educational opportunities for students. Those who have benefited from such educational opportunities are likely to have attended a school where suspensions and expulsions were considered last-resort tactics. The best instructors probably instilled good behavior in their students and only seldom used OSSs to discipline problematic students (Milner et al., 2019). Most educators agree that more effective strategies for dealing with disruptive behavior in the classroom are needed (Herman et al., 2020). An increasing body of evidence demonstrates that numerous pragmatic techniques are more effective than school suspensions in settings where adult monitoring is not guaranteed. The American Pediatrics Association modified its policy statement, requesting that physicians adopt more aggressive steps to deter out-of-school punishments and expulsions. A higher rate of OSS referrals and expulsions does not make students or teachers more equipped to adhere to school norms (Davis, 2019).

Identifying Discipline Problems

According to Dalton (2021), disruptive behavior is a popular term that can be used to represent a number of recognized mental health conditions. These documented conditions include oppositional defiant behavioral issues, conduct problems, and antisocial student behavior. The objective of Dalton's qualitative study, which utilized the Delphi method, was to evaluate the factors contributing to negative student behavior in an urban middle school, as well as to explore the ability of administrators and teachers to find alternatives to OSS and expulsion. The results of the study suggested that administrators and teachers were able to identify various categories of disruptive

behaviors exhibited by students in school and that school personnel may benefit from staff development training to help them differentiate between the various types and levels of disruptive behaviors in school (Dalton, 2021).

Camacho and Krezmien (2020) stated public education in the United States has long been viewed as a national icon and a symbol of the country's goals and rights. It is believed that, through public education, all Americans will have an equal chance and expectation of success in pursuing their own future. In the past century, the United States has struggled to attain its goal of equal opportunity via education, primarily by correcting the mistakes of prior generations. Researchers in the field have been examining the subject for many years. The increased use of OSS as a form of punishment, which is not confined to significant infractions, has become increasingly evident. Concurrently, both the use of such sanctions and their discriminatory application to minority students have increased (Camacho & Krezmien, 2019, 2020).

The research of James et al. (2019) indicated that administrators of public schools in the nation have the authority and obligation to suspend students as well as employees to protect the safety of those involved, the capacity of pupils to learn, and the ability of teachers to instruct. The gentlest forms of discipline are employed in schools to ensure that students comprehend and comply with all of the policies and procedures that are in place. Those students who are made to endure the strictest forms of disciplinary action in schools will be barred from returning to their regular classrooms or campuses. When a student is expelled from school, the administrators frequently believe that the expulsion will prompt the student to consider the reasons for the expulsion, hence reducing the likelihood of the student being expelled a second time (James et al., 2019; Noltemeyer et al., 2019).

The problem for school administrators and teachers is how to apply conduct expectations to different student groups, especially African American pupils. All students must adhere to the rules and regulations created by school officials and teachers (Carter-Andrews & Gutwein, 2020). Multiple suspensions within a single academic year are not inconceivable if specific theories behind school discipline, particularly behaviorism and social learning theory, are sound (Barrett et al., 2021). Even when policies aimed at reducing suspension are successful in aggregate, unequal suspension persists (Trinidad, 2021).

Disparity in Discipline

Wymer et al. explained that children from racial and ethnic minority groups are subjected to disproportionately high rates of both hard and soft methods of exclusionary disciplinary techniques. African American students who have White teachers were much more likely to receive harsher discipline than their White counterparts with the same teachers, according to a study by Wymer et al. that investigated numerous disciplinary strategies employed in preschool classrooms. Carlo and Padilla-Walker (2020) found that White adults were more inclined than their African American counterparts to attribute the misbehavior of African American students to gang activity and other arbitrary or subjective causes. Teachers and other adults in schools are susceptible to unconscious bias, which heightens the stakes for students who fall victim to unfavorable assumptions. It is more likely that a negative interaction will develop between the instructor and a student about whom the instructor has a preconceived notion of improper conduct. Because unpleasant interactions with teachers can be a predictor of more severe behavior problems and disciplinary exclusion, those students are more likely to have poor outcomes in adulthood. It is the context in which the students find themselves that poses

the threat and not the students themselves (Zinsser et al., 2022). One related example may be found in the larger community, and that is the disproportionate risk of individuals of color being shot by police (Mattingly et al., 2022).

According to Morgan (2021), although students from racial and ethnic minority groups in general are reported to have a greater incidence of suspensions, the rate at which African American children experience this type of discipline is much higher than average. In 2013-2014, the proportion of African American pupils issued OSS referrals was about double that of Hispanic students, the next largest racial group. According to the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (2018), African American students in kindergarten through Grade 12 experience the likelihood of being suspended outside of school that is 3.8 times greater than that of White students.

Ericson (2021) found that African American students, particularly African American males, are reprimanded more frequently and more harshly than their White counterparts. The study addressed the excessive numbers of African American students who received OSS referrals. Bayever (2021) noted students are regularly suspended from school for infractions such as mobile phone use and displays of affection, as well as disruptive behavior and speaking back to teachers, according to research. Although the random and overzealous use of zero-tolerance policies, which gained popularity following the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, can be largely blamed for rising rates of suspension, the racial and ethnic disparity in discipline is the product of many more complex factors (Skiba et al., 2022). Contrary to the popular misconception that African American students misbehave more than White students, evidence indicates that African American students behave similarly to their White peers in the classroom (Millender-Grubb, 2021); however, they face harsher penalties for identical behavior,

particularly when the action necessitates a subjective determination of whether it constitutes misconduct.

The heavy presence of police in inner city schools with high numbers of students of color represents another factor that contributes to African American students being reprimanded disproportionately (Milner et al., 2019). Students in inner city schools are subject to stricter regulations than those in rural or suburban settings. These regulations include wearing uniforms and carrying identification cards at all times (Milner et al., 2019). Metal detectors, closed-circuit television, and armed security guards are commonplace in many schools, and many also have police officers on duty. While this method might keep the peace, it also raises the possibility of students clashing with security personnel over insignificant issues like refusing to present identification or changing out of attire that is against the school's dress code (Hirschfield, 2018). Furthermore, pupils suffer because it becomes more challenging to cultivate an environment that is inviting and supportive of healthy child development in such a setting. Increased police presence may make students feel safer, but it also has the ability to make them feel unsafe and hence push them away from school. One study found that schools implementing more security measures had lower numbers of negative student outcomes and that the added measures had a negligible impact on students' grades (Milner et al., 2019).

Inequity in school discipline was studied by Santiago-Rosario and McIntosh (2021), and the researchers found that exclusionary discipline (such as OSS and expulsion) disproportionately affects students of color as well as students with disabilities. Despite widespread efforts to address the problem, evidence of improved fairness in school punishment has been hard to come by. Disproportionality is a major

issue for students of color who have disabilities. According to the Office of Civil Rights between 2011 and 2019 (Losen & Martinez, 2020), the suspension rates of students with disabilities were second highest, after those of African American students. The risk multiplier is significant when these elements are combined. For instance, the suspension rate for White pupils was 4.8%, whereas it was 9.2% for White males with disabilities and 26.8% for African American males with disabilities. Almost 20% of high school African American male students with disabilities are suspended each year.

In states that practice physical punishment, African American students experience a much higher risk of corporal punishment than their White counterparts. In more than half of Alabama and Mississippi school districts, African American students are at least 51% more likely to be corporally disciplined than White students, and in one fifth of both districts, African American students are nearly 500% more likely than White students to be corporally disciplined (Font & Gershoff, 2020). According to Font and Gershoff (2020), African American students receive more forms of school punishment and are punished more severely for the same infractions than White children. Discriminatory student discipline is discrimination and a violation of students' human rights (Skiba et al., 2022). Coercion can negatively impact students' mental development and may eradicate student opportunities (Font & Gershoff, 2020).

Schools suspended more African American students and children with disabilities 2015-2016, when around 2.7 million pupils in kindergarten to Grade 12 received one or more OSS referrals (Harper et al., 2019). Higher percentages of African American students (8%) were expelled than White students (3.8%), White children (2.9%), or Hispanic students (2.9%). The suspension rates for students with disabilities were double those of students without impairments: 8.5% versus 4.1% (Harper et al., 2019). In the

2015-2016 school year, American Indian and Alaska Native students had a suspension rate 10 times higher than that of White pupils (Whitford et al., 2019).

Wright (2017) performed a qualitative study to examine the tactics used in the classroom by middle school instructors to address disruptive behaviors that put African American male students at risk of receiving more suspensions than their peers. According to Wright's research, OSS may be used to dissuade African American male students from engaging in disruptive behavior in the future. Wright's study concluded that African American male students face higher rates of school suspension as a result of their disruptive behavior in the classroom. Because of the negative impact of a high suspension rate on the overall school performance of African American male students, the dilemma has resulted in a significant achievement gap between this population and their classmates. Schools will utilize disciplinary measures such as expulsion, severe reprimands, and OSS referrals to handle a student's disruptive behavior both within and outside of the classroom setting. However, some studies suggest that the situation with OSS has not improved and that it does not prevent children from engaging in actions that are disruptive (Peguero et al., 2021; Riddle & Sinclair, 2019; Wright, 2017).

Wood et al.'s (2020) qualitative study was designed to better understand teachers' opinions on classroom strategies for minimizing disruptive student behaviors that result in high suspension rates for African American male students. Based on instructors' opinions, this research strategy was utilized to establish hypotheses regarding disruptive behaviors that put African American male students at danger of receiving OSS (Wood et al., 2020). The design yielded three valuable pieces of information for addressing the issue of OSS among African American male students moving forward: (a) a deeper understanding of the topic, (b) a narrative description based on the data collected, and (c)

an appreciation of how the data presented itself in each school setting in relation to the problem (Wood et al., 2020).

Effects of Disproportionate Discipline on Learning

Even though education professionals may attempt to curtail the usage of disciplinary practices (e.g., OSS referrals and expulsions), teachers represent the most critical component of providing positive experiences for students in their classrooms and mitigating the deleterious effects of exclusionary discipline. Preschool teachers welcome students into their classrooms at a vital stage of development, thus setting the tone for other school experiences (Ward-Seidel et al., 2022). Teachers, more than anyone else, understand the critical nature of their profession in preparing students to succeed in school and in life outside their classrooms, and they frequently make extraordinary time and effort to ensure their pupils attain their maximum potential.

Preservice teachers need to be given the tools required to work effectively with children from all backgrounds if they are to be an integral part of an effective teacher support system, but many instructors who work in metropolitan areas with large minority student populations lack the knowledge, beliefs, and behaviors essential to effectively educate the children (Goldhaber, 2019). Goldhaber (2019) cited a survey of 14 public universities in the southeastern United States that offer teacher education programs, finding that just four of them mandated that students attend at least 20% of their courses with a specific multicultural component. Researchers have noted many middle class White educators lacked confidence in their capacity to create lessons that were sensitive to students' cultural backgrounds (Goldhaber, 2019; Moore et al., 2021). Furthermore, a lack of training acquired during their teacher preparation programs was cited as one of the reasons preservice instructors struggle to teach effectively in diverse classrooms

(Moore et al., 2021).

Darling-Hammond, Flook, et al. (2020) conducted a study to evaluate whether specific factors (e.g., socioeconomic background, ethnic group, or gender) influenced a student's risk of obtaining an OSS referral and being suspended. The purpose of this study was to determine whether groups identified previously as being more susceptible to receiving school discipline referrals and suspensions were similarly vulnerable in the school under study. The research established that favorable environmental factors promote the development of strong communities and relationships. These include relationships that create (a) emotional connections, (b) safety, and (c) a feeling of belonging, as well as effective instructional practices that promote competence, self-directed learning, and motivation. These strategies incorporate specific instruction and ongoing assessment to promote understanding of concepts, consider the prior knowledge and experiences of students, and provide challenge and support for engaging in learning tasks (Darling-Hammond, Flook et al., 2020; Gotwals & Cisterna, 2022).

Dalton (2021) indicated that school staff should consider other options to OSS referrals, such as effective in-school suspension programs, integration of PBIS or social-emotional learning into the disciplinary process, implementation of response-to-intervention approaches in the classroom, or use of restorative practices to resolve conflicts and behavioral problems. Instead of using in-school suspension as a punitive measure to address student behavioral concerns, school divisions should consider employing in-school suspension programs to provide behavioral, emotional, and social supports to students during the school day (Dalton, 2021).

In addition, the data suggest that social-emotional learning promotes the development of the abilities, habits, and attitudes required for academic success,

productive behavior, and efficacy, which include interpersonal skills and the ability to foster resilience and productive action (Immordino-Yang et al., 2019; Schonert-Reichl, 2019). According to Schonert-Reichl (2019), support systems foster healthy development, address the needs of students, and minimize obstacles to learning. These include multitiered systems of academic supports designed to provide individualized resources in and out of the classroom to address negative behavior and prevent developmental detours (e.g., those caused by adversity and trauma). According to Smith et al. (2022), programs that enhance behavioral competencies focus on the ability to solve problems. Attainment of these skills means that adolescents with problematic behaviors will more likely engage in improved school-related and life-course outcomes.

According to Wymer et al. (2020), continually withdrawing a student from learning activities can also create negative teacher-child interaction cycles, thus undermining the otherwise positive relationships. This represents a problem because healthy teacher-student interactions are crucial to the learning experiences of children. A warm, supporting, and sympathetic teacher-child relationship is vital for a child to develop the complete spectrum of intellectual, behavioral, emotional, and social abilities necessary for school success: academic, behavioral, emotional, and social skills.

Banking Time (Williford & Pianta, 2020), an intervention meant to support instructors in creating close positive connections with students who are the focus of the intervention, is one method that is supported by research. It has been demonstrated that the behavior and academic performance of preschoolers improved throughout the school year when they participated in Banking Time (Williford & Pianta, 2020). In a randomized controlled trial, Williford and Pianta (2020) explored the effect of the Banking Time intervention on children's externalizing behaviors. Four hundred seventy

preschoolers between 3 to 4 years old and 183 educators took part in the activity.

According to the findings of the study, when children are not fulfilling the expectations set for them in the classroom, it is critical to investigate the reasons behind the children's behavior.

Effects of Bias on Learning

One possible reason for the high numbers of minority students being suspended at higher rates than their counterparts involve the preconceived biases of those charged to educate them. Harper (2020) stated implicit bias explains "expectancy effects" (p. 43), in which teachers have lower expectations of African American students, resulting in achievement discrepancies. Furthermore, there is compelling evidence linking implicit bias and disproportionate disciplinary procedures against African American students (Riddle & Sinclair, 2019). Implicit biases, according to Wymer et al. (2020), are universally held unconscious attitudes, beliefs, and prejudices toward individuals based on ethnicity, gender, disability status, or membership in other social groups. In contrast to explicit prejudices (meaning the person is aware of them), implicit biases are often not intentional and may actually be diametrically opposed to the explicit biases of an individual. All people develop unconscious prejudices at a young age because of direct and indirect cultural signals. Implicit biases have an effect on behaviors and choices, even if people are unaware that they have these prejudices and even if they are not ideas that they would intentionally convey to another person. It is impossible to study the history or contemporary society of the United States without becoming aware of the pervasive presence of pro-White and anti-African American emotions.

Toldson and Daniels (2022) compiled a considerable body of research on education reform indicating that teachers treat children differently according on their race

and that this unequal treatment can have a deleterious influence on kids' ability to learn. Also, social psychologists have found evidence that individuals exhibit what are known as implicit racial biases (i.e., unconscious attitudes, beliefs, and preconceptions), which may be one of the contributing factors behind disproportionate discipline rates (Wymer et al., 2020). Research has shown correlations among various acts of prejudice and measurements of implicit bias when the information is compiled across geographic locations (Costa et al., 2022; Payne et al., 2017; Pit-ten Cate & Glock, 2019). Therefore, education researchers have begun quantifying teachers' racial prejudices to better understand how they affect children. Despite the fact that these studies are limited in number, modest in scope, and are primarily conducted outside of the United States, researchers believe that this will help them better understand how racial prejudices affect children (Tropp & Rucinski, 2022).

As is the case with the vast majority of Americans (Cvencek et al., 2021), teachers tend to exhibit more favorable opinions toward their White students and to display more unfavorable sentiments against their students who are not White. There are some notable exceptions; for instance, a study on the impact of race matching on the exclusion of students from schools found that teachers of color treat students of color more fairly (Jean-Marie & Tran, 2022). On average, teachers may unknowingly perceive and view African American children's behavior in a way that results in increased discipline.

Some researchers have indicated that racial inequalities in school discipline may be caused, at least in part, by the effects of racial biases on the disciplinary decisions made by teachers, staff, and administrators (McIntosh et al., 2018; Riddle & Sinclair, 2019). In addition, research has shown that, in order to eradicate these disruptive

behaviors and reduce the risk of excessive suspension, the evaluation of disciplinary reform should include the implementation of new strategies aimed at enhancing school safety and the instructional learning environment (Sugai & Horner, 2020).

In a study conducted by Nelson (2020), preschool teachers were required to examine classroom footage of students engaging in problematic conduct; in the process, they spent more time monitoring African American children than White children and more time monitoring African American boys specifically. As a direct result of their unconscious prejudices, teachers have a tendency to expect to encounter more inappropriate actions from young African American children, keep a closer eye on certain children, and be more inclined to consider the behavior of those children to be troublesome (Bryan, 2020). People need to develop alternate techniques, as exclusionary discipline is not only harmful, but is also applied unequally to certain groups of children. These techniques should be able to be applied equally, enhance children's learning opportunities, promote positive teacher-child relationships, and enable children to learn to better control their behavior without the severe consequences that are associated with exclusionary techniques.

Children who have difficulty meeting the demands of the classroom and who are frequently seen as disruptive are perceived to be less likely to have a positive relationship with their teachers (Markkanen et al., 2020). These children are also perceived as being more difficult to work with, and in the absence of a connection between the two parties, a cycle of negativity that gets progressively worse over time might develop between the teacher and the student. Research has indicated a correlation exists between having a negative relationship with a teacher of a different race than the child's own and lower levels of academic achievement in young children (Kunemund et al., 2020). Teachers can

build more positive relationships with the struggling students in order to stop negative interaction cycles, provide children who need the most help with a warm and supportive relationship, and prevent negative interaction cycles from occurring.

Effects of Zero-Tolerance Policies

Research on zero-tolerance practices is limited because schools might not document their usage of zero-tolerance practices in formal policy, even though it is ingrained throughout the school staff's ideology and principles (Curran et al., 2019; Huang & Cornell, 2021; Pearman et al., 2019). Virginia, like many other states, has strict rules regulating firearms and illegal substances (Huang & Cornell, 2021). The zero-tolerance mentality reflected in some educators' reflexive use of OSS and expulsion as a standard penalty for student misbehavior is not adequately captured by these laws. Middle schools have a history of problems because of the common decline in student motivation and the rise in student misbehavior that occurs during this time (Glock & Kleen, 2019).

At a time when middle school students are developing their identities and where racial and ethnic inequalities are at their most obvious, zero-tolerance policies are cause for significant concern (Curran et al., 2019). The suspension rate in Virginia's three middle school grades (7 to 8) was greater than that of the state's six elementary grades (kindergarten to 5) and four high school grades (9 to 12; Huang & Cornell, 2021). Disciplinary issues among middle school students have been identified by a number of studies as a major factor in determining whether or not a student will graduate high school (Barbadoro, 2017; Buehler, 2017; Losen & Martinez, 2020).

Positive student behavior is aligned with school social regulations, but negative behavioral activities against peers and teachers, such as demonstrating animosity and

dishonesty, violate the school's overall goal of a safe learning environment (Shek et al., 2019). When students experience disruptive behavior difficulties during their formative years, they are more likely to continue to exhibit disruptive behavior issues throughout their school years and into adulthood because disruptive behavior issues tend to have a generational effect (Dalton, 2021; Goyer et al., 2019). If school administrators fail to address concerns regarding disruptive conduct in the early stages of childhood, or fail to take the appropriate corrective measures, negative effects may arise later. The association that disruptive behavior in children has with negative consequences, such as fewer interactions between parents and children, dropping out of school, and criminal behavior, can be damaging to the development of those children. By the time a child reaches the age of 4, disruptive behavior may already be a substantial component of the child's overall behavioral characteristics (Goyer et al., 2019).

According to Bryant and Wilson (2020), issues regarding African American students include inferior academic achievement, a greater likelihood of dropout, and an accelerated road to juvenile offenses. Within the context of an urban public school, Robinson (2022) investigated the complex relationships that exist among student behavior, peer status, ethnic origin, and gender in relation to disciplinary judgments made by the school. Research conducted over the past 20 years indicates that students of African descent, followed by students of Latino and Native American descent, receive discipline referrals more frequently than students from other ethnic groups, despite that the factors contributing to the unequal representation of African American students in disciplinary procedures are multifaceted and diverse (Fitri et al., 2021).

Morgan (2021) argued that it is crucial to eradicate the punitive approach to discipline that many schools utilize, as excessive numbers of African American pupils are

already subjugated to exclusionary discipline, which parallels the disproportionate numbers of African American men incarcerated in America. Even though adolescents from other racial and ethnic minority groups receive higher proportions of suspensions than their White counterparts, the rate at which African American children receive this type of punishment is significantly higher than the average. Morgan's research indicated that the high incarceration rates that African American people face are a significant issue that must be addressed effectively. According to Morgan's research on school discipline, the negative attitudes of urban school leaders have contributed to this issue.

Throughout most of the 19th and 20th centuries, American schools prioritized academic and learning requirements in preparation for postsecondary vocational occupations (Noyola, 2020). Juvenile courts were established at the end of the 19th century, and the first eight decades involved rehabilitating youth offenders, truants, and other wayward youth (Noyola, 2020). According to Jones (2019), this separation of responsibilities and duties between schools and the juvenile justice system has evolved over the past three decades in tandem with similar advancements in punitive policies. This led to policy adjustments away from rehabilitation and toward a tough-on-crime approach in juvenile courts, as well as away from education and toward increasing school discipline, often in response to extreme incidents of school violence. The school-to-prison pipeline was the result of these concurrent and interrelated transformations (Welch et al., 2022). Criminalizing both regular teenage developmental activities and low-level misdemeanors, such as truancy and disobedience, has resulted in the suspension and expulsion of large numbers of pupils from overworked and underfunded schools (Montelongo, 2020; Schiff, 2018).

According to Mai et al. (2019), zero-tolerance policies typically result in students

being punished for nonviolent, first-time offenses, and these students are more likely to have their punishment escalated, which could result in their suspension or expulsion from school (Huang & Cornell, 2021; Hughes et al., 2021). Even though many suspensions are for noncompliance or minor breaches of school discipline procedures, adolescents who are suspended frequently from school have an increased likelihood of being associated with the juvenile court system (Chase, 2021; Erickson & Pearson, 2022). Increased utilization of zero-tolerance policies and substantial increases in the number of school police (i.e., safety resource officers) have led to an exponential rise in arrests and referrals to juvenile courts (Spence, 2020). Spence (2020) indicated that racism is widespread in policy, practice, and the school environment, whether implicit or explicit, and that students of color, with and without disabilities, are disproportionately suspended.

The disproportionately high rate at which students of color receive disciplinary actions is indicative of the gravity of the situation. The U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (2018) reported that, in 2015-2016, African American males accounted for only 8% of pupils enrolled but 25% of those suspended. Previous research has shown that African American students in preschool are 3.6 times more likely to be suspended than their White counterparts (Latham et al., 2021). Similar challenges are experienced by other pupils of color. Disproportionate numbers of Hispanic and African American students in New York City schools have been suspended or expelled during the past several decades (Shapiro, 2019). However, this has a disproportionate impact on the African American student population. The lenient stance many school districts take toward punishment is reflected in the disproportionate number of suspensions and expulsions that children of color face.

Students who engage in behavior judged objectionable are typically excluded

from school rather than given the chance to learn from their mistakes (Milner et al., 2019). Traditional approaches to managing student behavior in schools have focused on exclusionary practices to change the behavior of disobedient kids. At first, schools adopted zero-tolerance policies in response to harmful student conduct. For instance, if students were caught with firearms at school, they would be expelled for at least a year under the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994. However, these regulations have been widened to cover even the most trivial of infractions (Jones et al., 2018). In certain places today, concerns such as swearing and dress code infractions are met with zero-tolerance measures (Milner et al., 2019).

The need for teacher support in implementing disciplinary strategies for students of color has been associated with the rise in use of zero-tolerance policies (Skiba et al., 2022). While students have recently faced an increase in numbers of OSS referrals and expulsions, teachers lack the support required to mitigate those high rates of punishment. Even when educators became aware of the critical role of cultural and socioeconomic factors in learning, this knowledge has been frequently ignored when confronted with demands such as test preparation. This trend has resulted in many school employees relying on traditional White middle class values when interacting with students of color, oblivious to the ways in which schools marginalize these students (Milner et al., 2019).

Mallett (2019) explained the school-to-prison pipeline is a relatively new concern, as there have not always been punitive procedures in schools and juvenile courts. When school administrators suspend or expel pupils, severe consequences may result, including a decline in academic achievement and a high dropout rate. Hopkins (2021) indicated that African American students are 3.6% more likely to be suspended from school than their White counterparts. Texas had 5,536,631 students enrolled in its schools during the 2017-

2018 school year, and 206,861 of those students were suspended. Hispanic students received the highest numbers of OSS referrals: 107,839 students. African American students had the second largest number of OSS referrals at 64,759, and White students had the fewest at 34,263 (Texas Education Agency, 2020).

The unequal treatment of all students often begins in preschool, as evidenced by national statistics indicating that African American students are 3.6 times more likely to be suspended from school than their White counterparts (Homer & Fisher, 2020). Additionally, the literature supports the fact that excessive suspensions of African American children are connected with high rates of dropout and poor school performance (Aronowitz et al., 2021). Morgan (2021) explained that, once students are subjected to exclusionary discipline, the likelihood of graduation from high school decreases and continues to decline with each subsequent suspension or expulsion. Jackson (2021) stated that 55% of African American pupils in Southern states are suspended. Smith et al. (2022), Harper (2020), and Heidelberg et al. (2022) stressed that African American males with disabilities had the highest suspension and expulsion rates of any racial or gender grouping.

Similar to the criminal justice system, Homer and Fisher (2020) discovered that race was associated with punishment but not reparative consideration of discipline. In addition, Payne and Welch (2017) found schools with higher numbers of African American students were less likely to implement such procedures in response to student conduct that resulted in discriminatory repercussions. Comparable to the findings of Homer and Fisher, Jarvis and Okonofua (2020) discovered that African American pupils typically suffer harsher sanctions for misbehavior, which can be attributable primarily to the assumptions of adult authority figures. These results demonstrate the importance of

schools addressing issues of inequality and inequity. Using a standard qualitative study technique, Gomez et al. (2021) examined school discipline and its punitive and exclusionary punishments that have negative impacts on kids and are applied unequally to minority students and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

Spence (2020) that trauma-informed care should be centered on race and given through collaboration among professionals. Moreover, Amemyia et al. (2020) indicated that poverty status and varying rates of misbehavior do not properly explain punishment disparities among African American students. As a result of racial marginalization in society and school, students of color are more likely to become enmeshed in disciplinary proceedings. In order to bridge the gap between disciplines, the researchers contend that racial bias and a lack of training on issues occurring in childhood can lead instructors to misinterpret the behaviors of African American and Brown students as delinquent rather than a call for assistance (Amemiya et al., 2020).

Schools use critical race theory as a social justice framework to illustrate how color-blind policies and practices from the past continue to affect the racialized educational achievements of students of color (Daftary, 2020). In response, researchers (Ferman, 2021; Spence, 2020) have presented a race-centered, trauma-informed interdisciplinary framework for assessing disproportionate disciplinary actions in relation to racist injustices, bias, policy, and practice. Students of color are more likely to face disciplinary actions because of these biases, and they are forced to deal with injustices and because they are discriminated against in both society and school (Spence, 2020). Ferman (2021) suggested that trauma-informed therapy should be attentive to race and administered through interprofessional teamwork. Ferman also advocated for combining a trauma-informed framework centered on race with multitiered behavioral therapy, a

recommended set of layered techniques for adolescents who have suffered trauma.

According to Joseph et al. (2020), schools are employing multitiered treatments and trauma-informed care techniques to address excessive and racially disparate school suspensions. There is now legal precedent for requiring schools to use restorative methods as well as trauma-informed care (Herrenkohl et al., 2019). In addition to socioemotional and academic support, equity-oriented and anti-racist interventions are required to address racial bias and unfairness in disciplinary discrepancies. Herrenkohl et al. (2019) suggested that interventions should prioritize the social and historical implications of racism in student discipline, as well as the connection between trauma exposure and expression in students of color. Without this, schools and judicial institutions will continue to promote trauma-informed care approaches aimed at eradicating racialized and urban trauma (Alvarez, 2020). According to Zaragoza (2022), the inability of schools to deliver culturally responsive practices may lead to the excessive overrepresentation of minority adolescents in suspension. As such, practitioners need trauma-informed frameworks that recognize students' strengths and consider race and the manifestations of racial bias into account when making policy and practice decisions.

Many students who have been disciplined do not pose a substantial danger to other students or to the safety of the schools they attend (Dizon et al., 2022). In the existing paradigm of punishment, mitigating circumstances are not always considered throughout an investigation or when calculating a penalty. Education studies have indicated that misbehaving students who are subject to discretionary zero-tolerance policies perform well academically and that the suggested policies may cause the child or adolescent to become alienated from school (Knippa, 2019). When a student is

preoccupied or absent from school, which represent important risk factors, poor peer selection and, in some situations, delinquent behavior increase considerably (Skiba et al., 2022).

Enforcing Student Codes of Conduct

Students of color face the brunt of prevalent implicit racial biases and school discipline choices. The research of Mahlangu (2019) was inspired by abuses of students' human rights in schools, most notably an occurrence that transpired at a high school in 2016, in which African American girls protested the school's code of conduct regarding hairstyles. Schools can regulate student conduct to maintain discipline, and proponents of school uniforms claim that uniforms can reduce dress-related issues by promoting an environment conducive to teaching and learning, allowing for self-expression, enhancing school safety and security, and fostering school solidarity and pride (Mahlangu, 2017). Opponents of school uniforms say that uniform policies can violate the human rights of kids in schools (Mahlangu, 2017).

Although both sides of the debate have pros and cons, the fundamental reason schools implement school uniforms is to reduce negative behavior and improve student conduct. The problem of impartiality has been obscured by the tendency of researchers and judges to describe the discussion largely in terms of school autonomy versus the child's best interests, as well as by the widespread emphasis of courts on school autonomy (Mahlangu, 2017). Both have severely misjudged a shared social interest in the integrity and fairness of the criminal justice system. Using a qualitative methodology, the implementation of the school uniform policy and violations of students' human rights in schools was explored (Mahlangu, 2017).

According to Atrey (2021), schools that exploit poor students with the intent of

causing them harm or injustice should justifiably be considered in violation of human rights. Schools are expected to practice human rights based on the assumption that all pupils have human rights, regardless of race, origin, color, disability, sex, pregnancy, or language. Schools should prevent prevailing beliefs of group dominance; however, determining where the problem of human rights begins and ends is one of the greatest challenges instructors encounter when drafting school policy (Atrey, 2021). Student codes of conduct outline both permitted and prohibited student behaviors, as established by the school administration. Frequently, they are the result of state laws, district policies, and administrative choices. Students are rarely involved in their growth, although parents and parent groups are frequently involved (Curran et al., 2019). Infrequent or minor violations of the code of conduct include cell phone and other technology use, tardiness, dress code violations, inappropriate language, and school disturbances. In addition, the code of conduct may involve minor or significant violations that can constitute felonies, such as assault, tardiness, drug use, fighting, and possession of a firearm. Typically, the code communicates to students and families in writing the disciplinary actions that will be taken against them for specific transgressions (Curran et al., 2019).

Most policies focus on reprimanding children for infractions, misbehaviors, or other related issues; however, they give little to no consideration to the learning environment at schools or the roles that students, teachers, and staff play in fostering an environment that is both healthy and safe for students (Green et al., 2019). According to Green et al. (2019) rules that are firm, clear, and consistent, as well as punishments that address misbehavior and rule violations, punishments that are equitable, punishments that are proportionate to the importance of the rule, and the effective communication of these rules to students, are all essential components of an effective code of conduct for a school

district. Effective student conduct policies include the following elements: (a) a process for establishing and reinforcing positive student behaviors and expectations, (b) a description of helpful student strategies, (c) clear communication of the relationship between student misbehavior and type of misconduct, (d) a gradual range of interventions prior to suspension or expulsion for minor offenses, and (e) the reserving of expulsion for serious offenses (Green et al., 2019).

It is essential that a student code of conduct be centered on student rehabilitation, provide graduated responses rather than an immediate discipline measure to assist school administrators in making appropriate decisions, and exclude OSS referrals for minor misbehaviors, disruptions, or attendance issues. Providing graduated responses rather than an automatic discipline measure to assist school administrators in making the appropriate decision is essential. It is unfortunate that minor violations and disruptions account for the great majority of students being suspended from school (Rafa, 2019).

Restorative Techniques

Recently, increased interest has been shown in the school-based restorative justice framework as a disciplinary strategy that prioritizes the reparation of harm and reconciliation for students involved in conflict (Darling-Hammond, Fronius, et al., 2020). Increasingly, nonexclusive approaches are being evaluated as measures to reduce racial-ethnic gaps in disciplinary and academic achievement, notably between Black and Latino students and their White peers (Christiani, 2021). In a study conducted by Moreno (2021), participants were able to convey their impressions about the implementation procedure as a result of their personal involvement because of face-to-face interactions. If there is a campus-wide culture that values relationships and works to heal broken ones, restorative discipline can be an effective strategy for minimizing harmful student conduct

(Moreno, 2021). If restorative discipline is to be employed to minimize suspension rates, campus administrators must allot time during circle time for the implementation of these techniques (Taylor & Bailey, 2022). Similarly, educators must adopt the concept of what restorative practices may offer in terms of fostering positive relationships with their pupils. In addition, children must develop the capacity to deal with miscommunications that do not necessarily end in contempt for teachers, themselves, or their peers.

Other elements contributing to the discipline issue include prejudiced school staff, absence of teacher preparation and support, and the impact of institutional discrimination inherent in the U.S. educational system (Picower, 2021). One strategy that politicians may consider involves implementing successful restorative justice initiatives. Although comprehensive research on restorative justice programs is in its infancy, available research indicates that, when these programs are conducted in accordance with the recommendations of leading scholars, beneficial effects are probable (Green & Bazelon, 2019). By approving well-designed restorative justice programs, American school officials can ease an issue that has become unmanageable in the 21st century.

Restorative techniques are increasingly being implemented in schools, and evidence exists to show that using a restorative approach may assist in closing the racial discipline gap, despite the fact that most studies have been conducted on students who were older in age (Ward-Seidel et al., 2022). Because exclusionary discipline is both harmful and unequally applied to specific groups of students, educational professionals must find better strategies that can maximize children's learning opportunities, promote positive teacher-child relationships, and assist students in learning to better control their behavior without the serious consequences associated with exclusionary policies (Shapiro, 2019).

In 2021, the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance performed a study on changes in exclusionary and non-exclusionary discipline in kindergarten to Grade 5, as well as on the reform of Oregon's state policy (Ferrell & Crosby-Cooper, 2022). Oregon is among the states modifying school discipline policies, shifting from a zero-tolerance approach to one that promotes classroom attendance. The policy reform in Oregon occurred in reaction to mounting concerns regarding the use of exclusionary discipline, in which students were removed from classroom instruction for minor behavioral issues. In 2013, the state of Oregon passed a law requiring districts to adopt school discipline policies that prioritize preventing and lowering unwarranted suspensions and expulsions. The study by the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance specifically examined exclusionary and non-exclusionary punishment measures in schools voluntarily using Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports from 2011-2012 to 2017-2018 (Ferrell & Crosby-Cooper, 2022). The data included the three school years preceding the 2015 school discipline policy revision and the three school years following its implementation (2011-2012 to 2014-2015).

According to a study conducted by Westlake et al. (2022), students in kindergarten to Grade 5 who are subjected to exclusionary discipline are more likely to encounter chronic absenteeism, academic failure, and disciplinary challenges over the course of their academic careers. They face an increased chance of juvenile misbehavior, substance abuse, and school failure. Lower classroom order, a feeling of safety, and academic progress are reported by pupils in primary schools with a higher proportion of exclusionary discipline compared to those in schools that use PBIS. In addition, research has found that suspending pupils for small infractions has little bearing on their academic performance compared to students who are not disciplined in this way. The importance of

school discipline is highlighted by the research (Westlake et al., 2022). The study's authors did acknowledge, however, that more investigation into the link between exclusionary discipline and adverse student outcomes is warranted.

Discipline Policy Reform

In our classrooms, challenging behavior and how it is viewed, perpetuated, and managed is a systemic issue. Despite these deficiencies, educators frequently resort to methods of punishment and external control. In-class suspensions and OSS referrals, which have negative effects at school and in the community, mirror marginalization and systemic racism (Mittleman, 2018). The COVID-19 pandemic and racism together have heightened concerns that racial inequities in school punishment and its consequences may expand if schools unequally suspend students of color for absence, trauma-related behaviors, and breaches in measures of health safety (Belsha, 2020). Although many states and school districts have decreased the use of suspensions, exclusionary policy remains a go-to option (Harper et al., 2019). The Civil Rights Data Collection (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2018) and local studies have shown the harmful consequences of exclusion, such as increased risk for low achievement, dropout, and arrest (Anderson et al., 2019; Mittleman, 2018; Noltemeyer et al., 2019; Owens & McLanahan, 2020).

According to Gray (2021), there was a noticeable discrepancy between what teacher education programs emphasized and what transpired in the participants' student teaching classrooms. All participants' field sites employed the same school-wide behavior management strategy called PBIS during their student teaching practicum. The PBIS model establishes and enforces uniform, baseline expectations throughout the school and classes, frequently through a sequence of incentive systems for acceptable conduct and

increasing interventions for unacceptable behavior (Johnson & Bornstein, 2021). The PBIS approach is a proactive strategy that entails problem-solving techniques, evidence-based procedures, and progress monitoring (Majeika et al., 2020). Additionally, the PBIS model has been advocated as a curriculum to combat bullying (Johnson & Bornstein, 2021) and to develop social skills (Zoder-Martell et al., 2022). The overarching purpose of PBIS is to increase “the efficacy, efficiency, and equity of schools and other agencies” (Johnson & Bornstein, 2021, p. 81), as well as to improve students’ social, emotional, and academic performance (Johnson & Bornstein, 2021).

Because the PBIS model is implemented from the top down, with teachers and administrators determining what constitutes acceptable social and behavioral standards, it may not adequately address the many cultural and individual requirements of its student body (Ferrell & Crosby-Cooper, 2022). According to the National Center for Education Statistics, most school administrators and teachers are White, middle class people who may not realize how their own backgrounds color their views of students’ needs. For this reason, educators are more likely to establish behavioral standards that are not in line with the requirements of their students. It is also unclear if these extrinsic motivation systems increase or lessen students’ intrinsic drive; yet, helping and caring for others, both of which are intrinsically motivated, are strongly correlated with prosocial conduct (Amemiya et al., 2020). An alternative to public behavior control and incentive programs is to utilize class time to build relationships with pupils (Amemiya et al., 2020). The quality of education can improve with a more relational approach to managing the classroom; however, the use of external punishment systems and behavioral compliance goals, such as those advocated by PBIS, might hinder relationship formation and lead to an us-versus-them atmosphere in the classroom (González et al., 2019).

The most influential argument against incentive-based behavior management systems was made by Gray (2021). In his ethnographic research conducted on a kindergarten class over the course of a year, Gray discussed the finding that students associated good behavior with high intelligence. In the eyes of educators, being intelligent meant conforming to norms, producing submissive students, and acting in ways that experts predicted. Therefore, it appears that public and incentive-based approaches to managing behavior have several flaws. A number of patterns emerged as a result of the data analysis. Eleven of the 16 participants utilized the restorative practices components of Affective Statements and Circles. Affective remarks were used to resolve daily classroom disputes, and participants reported positive results.

Gregory and Evans (2020) discovered that, although strong evidence exists to show that restorative practices can minimize racial disparities in exclusionary discipline, the positive results of these programs are often diluted by five common types of inadequate implementation strategies: (a) approaches that are top down and do not adhere to restorative practices principles, (b) approaches that use only one restorative practice, (c) approaches that are colorblind, (d) approaches that lack sufficient support, and (e) short-term, under-resourced projects. Values of restorative practices are at odds with top-down initiatives that are commanded to produce rapid change. Districts often authorize changes without addressing the readiness or willingness of institutions to adopt new programs, despite the fact that policy changes are often ineffective unless they are established simultaneously. This course of action could provoke resistance and reluctance to comply.

A restorative practices program is less likely to be successful if it is constrained to specific approaches, much like those of a top-down program (Gregory & Evans, 2020).

The problem with this approach is that it might lead to incompatibility between initiatives if vital parts of restorative practices are ignored. Inadequate representation from a key stakeholder group is a common problem in efforts with a narrow focus. A holistic perspective, on the other hand, takes into account the interdependencies between programs and a wide range of participants (Gregory & Evans, 2020). Methods that focus too narrowly include those that prioritize hiring more restorative practices facilitators and police officers or those that prioritize student engagement over the importance of school staff. A color-blind outlook, as was previously mentioned, is harmful. Sadly, restorative practices are often applied without taking into account the bias and abuse of power that members of ethnic minorities often experience. Rather than reducing inequality, this strategy could help to maintain it. Regarding unsupported strategies, efforts are doomed to failure if educators do not receive sufficient training, feedback, and coaching. Last but not least, research on short-term and under-resourced programs has shown that, without sufficient funding and long-term dedication, schools can lose the benefits of a program over time (Gregory & Evans, 2020).

Restorative practices are being adopted by school districts around the United States as part of a tiered approach to addressing student misconduct (Maximoff & Taylor, 2022) in order to create schools where students feel safe to learn and where strong relationships can flourish. Part of the rationale for implementing restorative practices in U.S. schools involves the data showing that pupils of color and students with disabilities continue to experience disproportionate rates of exclusionary discipline (Leos-Martinez, 2020). Multitiered support systems, including the school-wide PBIS model, have been implemented recently to better respond to students' social and emotional needs (Kervick et al., 2019; Sugai & Horner, 2020). Many educational institutions today employ social-

emotional learning programs as a proactive means of instructing students in social skills (Darling-Hammond, Flook, et al., 2020). Unfortunately, despite these best efforts, kids who identify as members of marginalized groups continue to be at greater risk of facing severe discipline than their peers. Therefore, in order to more effectively combat exclusionary discipline inequity in their student populations, several schools have begun incorporating restorative practices into their existing initiatives to promote student conduct.

In many cases, initiatives aimed at improving school discipline are not coordinated with initiatives aimed at reducing educational disparities. Students who are academically challenged but have access to supportive learning environments are less inclined to engage in disruptive behavior (Griffiths et al., 2019). Use of punitive and reactive disciplinary strategies reduces students' motivation to work hard in the classroom (Nasir, 2020). Poor learning environments and heightened militarization of safety measures affect disproportionately large numbers of pupils of color (Wirtz, 2021). In addition to relational learning, social-emotional learning, and behavioral supports, educators and schools should take cues from the science of learning and development (Darling-Hammond, Flook, et al., 2020), which argues that students need productive instructional strategies such as collaborative inquiry-based activities that build on students' prior knowledge and develop their ability to collaborate with others (Farrington, 2020). This ensures that all students, regardless of their socioeconomic standing, family situation, or level of ability, have access to a learning environment and the resources to achieve their goals.

Academic, social-emotional, behavioral, and restorative supports and interventions for students from underrepresented groups have advanced (Nisle & Anyon,

2022). Relative to other branches of sociology, the use of restorative practices is on the rise because of the emphasis on helping individuals foster positive relationships with others in their immediate social networks, including friends, family, and classmates. With Native American rituals as its genesis restorative justice has been used effectively in recent years to repair strained connections within law enforcement (Gregory et al., 2021). Proactive social and emotional support is where restorative practice really shines in kindergarten to Grade 12 classrooms.

Across the nation, especially in large urban epicenters, school administrators are implementing projects that involve restorative practices (Fronius et al., 2019). The widespread use of restorative practices is part of a larger movement to reduce the use of disciplinary practices such as OSS and boost social-emotional learning in schools. Relational psychology is based on a set of values and methods for promoting positive community involvement, which are primarily relational and nonpunitive (Ward-Seidel et al., 2022). In addition, restorative practice incorporates a wide variety of activities, such as restorative conferences and community-building circles, to heal the harm caused by disagreements (O'Connell, 2020). New studies have shown that restorative practices can help students become more connected to their school, reduce the use of punitive measures, and even out racial disparities in suspension rates (Darling-Hammond et al., Fronius, et al., 2020; Gregory & Evans, 2020). Many school leaders may feel compelled to conduct programs focused on restoration, rehabilitation, and community building in the wake of the 2020 global health crisis in an effort to mend students' frayed or severed ties to school.

To this end, it will be highly critical for students to experience equitable disciplinary treatment, even though they may come from low-income and disadvantaged

communities and lack proper access to remote schooling and social-emotional therapy or counseling throughout the crisis due to the absence of high-speed Internet or digital equipment (Holpuch, 2020). Additionally, the recent nationwide mobilization against police brutality and anti-African American racism signals a resurgent civil rights movement that will likely bolster efforts to eliminate racial inequities in school discipline and disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline. Despite the widespread use of restorative practices, data have indicated that implementation is difficult and that teachers require additional training and support (Dorcemus, 2018; Schlesinger & Schmits-Earley, 2020). Moreover, administrators may be unaware of the comprehensive scope of restorative practice projects (Gregory & Evans, 2020).

Kamrath (2019) investigated alternative methods for high school students with disciplinary issues. The author found that, although suspensions and expulsions are frequently used as disciplinary measures, substantial concerns have been raised about their effectiveness. Similarly, Williams (2020) concluded that these typical sanctions are unlikely to alter the students' inappropriate behavior, nor are they viewed as a significant deterrent to other students. Instead of that, these repercussions hindered the academic progress of suspended or expelled students and increased the risk that the student would drop out of school (Epperley, 2021). Several suggested alternatives to traditional suspensions and expulsions include restitution, counseling, community service, coordinated behavior plans, PBIS, and alternative programming or alternative schools (Mowen et al., 2020).

Whenever disciplinary data and other factors that contribute to students dropping out of high school are included (e.g., poor socioeconomic status, special education placements, prior retentions, and attendance), urban schools have a higher proportion of

students at risk of not graduating (Trinidad, 2021; Welsh, 2022). Children on the verge of dropping out frequently require brief or sustained academic or social interventions in order to succeed in school. According to Welsh (2022), supporting the needs of children alienated from the traditional educational system is becoming increasingly crucial as teachers face an increasing number of pupils for whom the status quo schooling is ineffective. Alternative schools may provide students a second chance to get a high school diploma (Welsh, 2022).

There are many various types of alternative schools, including those where students voluntarily enroll, those where they are sent for disciplinary reasons, and those that serve as a last chance for at-risk pupils (Kamrath, 2019). All of these characteristics can exist inside a single institution, with the type of school being determined by the student body. Classes at alternative schools may take place during the regular school day, in the evenings, or on the weekends, and they may be a part of an existing high school, a separate public school, or a hybrid model of the three. Smaller student bodies, smaller class sizes, enhanced trust between students and staff, creative and flexible teaching practices, and a condensed curriculum that typically includes work-related experiences are all hallmarks of alternative schools of varying sizes and layouts (Kamrath, 2019; Welsh, 2022).

In an examination of studies on alternative schools, Dubovicki and Topolovčan (2020) cited a qualitative study that was descriptive in that it sought to learn more about the participants' living experiences in order to explain the complexities and uniqueness of both the individuals and the program. Interviews with students were conducted in both the program context and, when necessary, in their homes. During the preliminary phase of interviews, the researchers formulated certain questions based on research in the field

of alternative education. In the second phase, participants were asked free-form questions on their participation in the program and its effects on their lives. In addition, the researchers were able to double check the accuracy of the respondents' initial comments thanks to the use of two-stage interviews. Similar to the approach used in the study conducted by Dubovicki and Topolovčan, the study aims to assess the positive benefits, if any, of a zero-tolerance disciplinary paradigm versus a restorative practices model in a rural elementary school context.

Research Questions

The following research questions have been established to guide this applied dissertation:

1. How do the teachers perceive the effectiveness of restorative practices protocols as opposed to the zero-tolerance discipline protocols in the reduction of student suspensions?
2. What effect do the administrators and teachers perceive that restorative practices have had on the disciplinary data at the school?

Chapter 3: Methodology

Qualitative Research Approach

The purpose of the qualitative study was to examine the perceptions of participants about the impact of implementing restorative practices on suspension rates at a rural elementary school.

Phenomenological research is a type of qualitative research that aims to comprehend and characterize the universal core of a phenomenon (Umanilo, 2019). In order to comprehend the motivations behind the myriad of qualitative research methods and the significance they hold, researchers in the field of phenomenology want to acquire a more in depth understanding of the way people's consciousness is organized in relation to the environments in which they live. Phenomenology is a research approach that can be characterized by the following four qualities: descriptiveness, reduction, essence, and intentionality. Phenomenology is a branch of academic study that focuses on the description of phenomena rather than their explanation. This includes any recently discovered phenomena, such as human feelings, ideas, and deeds, and also includes the phenomenon itself. The practice of phenomenology entails describing something by referring to the thing itself. Given that the goal is to investigate events as they take place, it is pointless to speculate (Umanilo, 2019).

This research methodology is significant in that it indicates the presence of factors and their implications in various contexts of cases. In contrast to survey research, phenomenological research methodology makes it simpler to provide detailed comments on the situations of individuals who do not lend themselves to uncomplicated generalization (Williams, 2021). In addition, the researcher conducted this kind of study to demonstrate empathy and build a solid level of rapport with the participants to obtain a

profound understanding of the experiences they share.

Participants

The participants for this qualitative phenomenological study were chosen purposefully to guarantee that only pertinent and useful information is shared (Vasileiou et al., 2018). To achieve an in-depth comprehension of the topic of interest, the research should have some level of credibility. To achieve this level of credibility, the researcher conducted interviews with a sufficient number of participants to obtain a useful perspective on the subject matter but not with so many participants that they lose track of the central idea of the subject matter. An appropriate sample size is one that accurately represents the subject of study and addresses the research topic being investigated (Vasileiou et al., 2018). A very large sample size runs the danger of having repeating data, so the objective of qualitative research should be to achieve saturation. (Vasileiou et al., 2018). To this end, the researcher proposes a sample size of 10 participants.

The goal was to get 10 of the individuals who are invited to participate: six teachers of kindergarten through Grade 5, two grade-level chairpersons for Grades 3 to 5, the PBIS coordinator, and one administrator. Participants were chosen based on their experiences at the school. Teachers must have been at the school for a minimum of 1 school year, must have created a classroom discipline plan, must either have written a referral or served on the school's PBIS team, and must agree to be interviewed. The leadership personnel being interviewed must have been a part of the initial restorative practices implementation in an administrative or teaching capacity. The qualitative phenomenological study employed a purposive sample because the participants are educators with direct experience working with students at the school being researched who were suspended for violating the school's code of conduct.

Data-Collection Instruments

Perception is seen as the primary source of data in phenomenology, rather than explanations or analyses of the phenomena being researched because perception is revealed through descriptions of experienced, subjective, firsthand knowledge (Greening, 2019). As a result, persons who have dealt with problematic behaviors prior to and throughout the adoption of restorative practices will be requested to participate in interviews in order to collect information about their experiences. According to Parameswaran et al. (2020), interviews are effective tools for obtaining targeted data because they allow the researcher to focus directly on the topic of the study. In addition, participants are given the opportunity to offer their unique insights, meanings, attitudes, and opinions via interviews (Billups, 2019; Parameswaran et al., 2020). When conducting interviews, the researcher must ensure that the questions do not transfer prejudice to the participants or lend support to it (Yin et al., 2020). In addition, the population to be questioned must be large enough to provide the collection of sufficient and comprehensive data, as well as the ability to overcome errors caused by poor recall or reflexivity (Yin et al., 2020).

The researcher structured open-ended interview questions to provide the participants with room to comment on their thoughts on many aspects of the faculties and administration's expertise in the classroom. The interviews provided the researcher a chance to obtain information about the approaches of the district, school, teachers, and administrators to enforcing discipline policies for children from minority subgroups. The questions were structured around a central topic, with optional follow-ups designed to elicit more specific details or in-depth anecdotes from the respondent (Turner & Hagstrom-Schmidt, 2022). The interview protocol consisted of 10 questions (see

Appendix) pertaining to the participant's position, restorative practices training, years spent at the school being researched, experience dealing with students who have been assigned OSS, and whether they had received restorative practices training prior to participating. The researcher vetted the questions he intends to use by discussing the process of introducing restorative practices with multiple administrators within the school system. In addition, the researcher reviewed each question and its purpose to ensure that the interviewees would be able to (a) provide information about restorative practices based on their perceptions, (b) add depth and breadth to each question if they so desired, and (c) provide information based on their experiences void of any leading or bias.

Procedures

The data-collection approach for the study were semistructured interviews to collect data pertinent to understanding the historical content and culture of school. The purpose of the data collection was to ascertain teachers and administrators' perceptions regarding the effect of suspension rates at a rural elementary school. The research was conducted in a rural elementary school in Georgia that has seen an increase in the number of students in kindergarten through fifth grade receiving out-of-school suspensions. This qualitative phenomenological study followed the guidelines established by the Nova Southeastern University Institutional Review Board (IRB) to guarantee that the ethical protection of research subjects is not jeopardized. Consent for interviews was acquired in accordance with the requirements of the university's IRB.

According to the university's IRB, researchers must obtain the informed consent of prospective individuals prior to involving participants in research of human beings. Consent based on informed consent is a continuous educational process between the researcher and prospective participant, allowing the researcher and participant to share

knowledge and ask questions. In the majority of instances, federal regulations mandate informed consent and documentation of the procedure. In particular situations, the federal regulations permit a waiver of informed consent paperwork or of the procedure. The data collection process commenced once the university's IRB committee has determined that the qualitative phenomenological study is suitably prepared in accordance with the university's definition of academic discourse and is free of risk factors that could harm participants.

Between 45 and 60 minutes was allotted for each individual interview. Zoom was utilized for every interview. The researcher took notes during the interviews and then listen back to the recordings to verify that his notes are complete and accurate. There was a primary question that gets at the center of the qualitative phenomenological research and then a secondary question that gives the respondent a chance to elaborate on the first answer by drawing on more personal or in depth experiences (Lukacik et al., 2022). All interviewees were required to sign a consent form before the researcher may interview them. Audio recordings of the interviews were made and transcribed.

Participants were given the opportunity to elaborate on their responses and express more personal or in-depth insights on the topic at hand using a combination of instruction inquiry and follow-up inquiry (Howard et al., 2019). The researcher made sure to obtain everyone's permission, both in writing and verbally, before beginning the interviews. Zoom was to conduct the interviews, and the transcripts were typed afterward. There were no predetermined answers, and the interview was fluid enough to accommodate any new questions that may arise from the interviewee's responses (McGrath et al., 2019).

Interviews were coded to uncover common themes and patterns revealed by data

analysis (Lukacik et al., 2022). One of the researcher's responsibilities in this qualitative phenomenological qualitative phenomenological study was to serve as the interviewer, demonstrating a capacity to be sincere, open, and honest while displaying a general interest in what the interviewee will say by accurately and appropriately reflecting their experience (McGrath et al., 2019). By functioning as the interviewer, findings included the type of detailed descriptions required for this type of qualitative phenomenological study.

Data Analysis

The collection of data concentrated on the perceptions and experiences of educators and administrators on the implementation of restorative discipline techniques. Additionally, data was used to determine whether teachers believe that restorative practice guidelines are effective at reducing suspensions. For the purposes of organizing, the researcher designated each of the participants with a pseudonym. The subsequent stage incorporates manually transcribing each of the interviews, which were conducted over Zoom. Afterward, the researcher conducted a thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns in the responses. The researcher then transcribed all of the answers from the interviews before diving into the analysis. A computerized verbatim transcription system was used in the qualitative phenomenological research. The transcription was cleaner and simpler to read after the removal of unnecessary words and grammatical errors. To begin the theme content analysis, the researcher identified the dominant emotions expressed in the data and then eliminate any possible biases. Next, the researcher established recurrent themes and conduct an organic search of the materials to identify recurrent patterns present in the entire data set. Data analysis was used to code interviews and reveal overarching themes and trends (Mayring, 2019).

The qualitative phenomenology research approach explores the subjective experiences and viewpoints of individuals towards a particular subject. Qualitative phenomenology research provides a complete and deep insight of personal views, attitudes, and beliefs around a certain topic. This methodology enables researchers to examine the depth and diversity of human experiences and to get a greater knowledge of the topic under investigation. (Sundler et al., 2019).

In addition, qualitative phenomenological research is adaptive and fluid, allowing researchers to modify their study topics and methodologies based on the collected data. This method permits a more organic and dynamic examination of the topic under investigation. This sort of research focuses primarily on the experiences and points of view of the participants. This method acknowledges the significance of the voices and ideals of participants and attempts to comprehend their personal experiences. (Williams, 2021).

According to Gaete (2019), qualitative phenomenological study is an effective method for examining subjective experiences and viewpoints, and it can lead to a deeper comprehension of the phenomenon under investigation.

Ethnographic data analysis is dependent on a variant of theme analysis, called modified, because it incorporates both the conventional theme analysis (described above) and modified thematic approaches (applied to artifacts, observational notes, and other non-interview data) that have already been discussed (Wutich & Brewis, 2019).

Ethnographers create unique approaches for analyzing data, such as images and historical documents, in order to spot trends and reoccurring themes. Finally, the data from all available sources must be combined according to the themes in order to provide a coherent picture of the culture as a whole (Wutich & Brewis, 2019). The approach

involving ethnographic data, which are collected across cultures, was not the best choice for this study because the researcher relied solely on the first interview to get information, and did not keep any field notes.

Thematic analysis is a qualitative data analysis technique that consists of a collection of texts, such as an interview or transcripts. The researcher extensively studies the data to identify common themes: recurring subjects, concepts, and significant patterns. There are numerous ways to conduct thematic analysis, but the most popular method involves six steps: familiarization, coding, topic generation, theme review, theme definition and naming, and report writing. Even though Braun and Clarke (2021) originally created this method for psychological study, theme analysis is a versatile tool that may be used in other types of research. Thematic analysis is an effective research method for determining people's perspectives, opinions, knowledge, experiences, and values from qualitative data, such as interview transcripts, social media profiles, or survey replies. Interviews will be coded to identify topics and similarities exposed through the data analysis (Mayring, 2019).

Utilizing theme analysis methodologies has very distinct advantages and disadvantages. Thematic analysis enables researchers to produce new insights and concepts based on data. One advantage of theme analysis is that it is an accessible method for novice researchers who are just learning how to examine qualitative data. On the contrary, because thematic analysis is such a flexible method, numerous ways exist to interpret the meaning of a data set. It might be intimidating to determine which statistics to spotlight and which to ignore. Furthermore, because thematic analysis focuses on identifying patterns throughout interviews, singularly occurring occurrences can be neglected. In addition, the absence of current theoretical frameworks limits the

interpretive capacity of thematic analysis.

Beyond the descriptive and interpretative objectives of many other qualitative models, the objective of grounded theory is to develop a theory. It requires explanation as opposed to just depiction and employs a method of data analysis based on constant comparison that begins as soon as the researcher collects data. Each data gathering event, such as an interview, is immediately examined, and subsequent data collection events can be changed to seek further information on developing topics. In other words, analysis occurs at each step of data collection and not just afterward. The core of the grounded theory analysis is coding, which is similar to coding in theme analysis but more rigorous. Because it would be necessary to use interviews, observation, and artifacts to create and support the theoretical objective, the grounded theory is not the most appropriate method of analysis for this study.

Ethical Considerations

Participants were invited, by the researcher, to participate by meeting with the researcher to discuss the study and consented to participate by agreeing to attend a planned interview in which the objective of the qualitative phenomenological study and the manner in which the data obtained will be stored and secured will be explained. This included (a) the purpose of the research, (b) an explanation of the approximate length of time expected for the interview, (c) a guarantee of the confidentiality of the information obtained, and (d) the roles and responsibilities of both the interviewer and the participant. The digital request also included the following information: During the digital email invitation process, a time limit of 7 calendar days was offered to ensure that participants do not feel obligated to join immediately after receiving their invitation.

Through the use of pseudonyms, the researcher concealed the identity of

participants by obscuring their names and other identifiable characteristics. The names of the participants were kept confidential because only their responses were recorded, and no reference was made to the participants' actual names or other identifying information. Because the findings could be influenced in some way by any type of bias, regardless of whether it was direct or indirect, the researcher will maintain objectivity by avoiding conversations that are not pertinent to the topic at hand. In addition to this, the researcher managed his efforts to maintain his status as a researcher rather than a supervisor or coworker.

Trustworthiness

A time restriction of 7 days will be established as part of the digital email invitation procedure to ensure that participants do not feel obligated to participate immediately after receiving their invitation. Only the responses of the participants were recorded, and no reference was made to the participants' actual names or any other identifying information. Therefore, the names of the participants remained confidential. To guarantee that the interview notes are accurate, significant consideration was given to each interview item. To guarantee that the interview notes are correct, the researcher collected information during the course of the interview and then review the recording of the interview. The use of the recorded Zoom interview made it possible to revisit any interview sections and provided answers to any questions that may have been raised.

Potential Research Bias

As an administrator at the school undergoing examination, the researcher has dealt with multiple students who have been suspended for violating the school's code of conduct. Additionally, he has served as the administrator responsible for developing school-wide discipline guidelines. Furthermore, the researcher is responsible for the

adoption of restorative practices in the building and has been asked to assist the district in bringing restorative practices to the district in lieu of rigidly enforcing the district code of conduct as the sole disciplinary mechanism. It is essential for the researcher to preserve as much neutrality as possible when interviewing educators discussing restorative practices. Any bias, whether explicit or implicit, has the potential to distort the findings in an unreliable direction. The researcher kept his objectivity by limiting his participation in conversations that deviate from topic. During the entire process of data collecting, analysis, and participant questioning, the researcher kept an unbiased perspective.

Limitations

With such a small sample size, if a participant opts out of participating, it may be difficult to find a new participant who meets the qualifications necessary to be a part of the query. Although interviewers can provide support and exhibit sympathy via nonverbal facial expression and tone of voice over a video chat, physical presence is often required to comfort the participant if the study focuses on a complicated issue. Along with videoconferencing may impede the capacity to examine the participant's environment, which frequently gives valuable contextual data for detecting information from the interview during the data processing phase. Furthermore, the researcher was unable to observe the full spectrum of body language and nonverbal communication because the participant's image is often presented from the waist up.

Similarly, to limiting the scope of data obtained, the use of videoconferencing may underrepresent people who lack access to the technology or are uncomfortable with its use. In addition, participants may experience technical or Internet connection issues that influence the clarity of their voice and image, as well as the quality of the interview and audio-recorded file. Depending on the severity of the broadband service, interviewers

and participants may be preoccupied with resolving the issue rather than the interview's intended objective.

Additionally, it was essential to make the questions straightforward and to exercise caution when selecting wording to ensure there is no introduction of bias. As a result of the researcher's familiarity with the faculty and the process of restorative practices used in the school, there was a possibility that the researcher would be less likely to ask leading questions, which are questions that are designed to elicit responses from participants that support a particular assumption.

Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of the study was to investigate the perceptions of participants about the effects of implementing restorative practices on suspension rates at a rural elementary school. As the school is transitioning from zero tolerance to restorative practices, lowering suspension rates and discipline referrals is paramount to the school's overall success.

The participants for this qualitative phenomenological study were chosen purposefully to guarantee that only pertinent and useful information is shared (Vasileiou et al., 2018). Only persons who have dealt with problematic behaviors prior to and throughout the adoption of restorative practices were invited to participate in interviews to collect information about their experiences. According to Parameswaran et al. (2020), interviews are effective tools for obtaining targeted data because they allow the researcher to focus directly on the topic of the study. In addition, participants are given the opportunity to offer their unique insights, meanings, attitudes, and opinions via interviews (Billups, 2019; Parameswaran et al., 2020).

The researcher structured open-ended interview questions to provide the participants with room to comment on their thoughts on many aspects of the faculties and administrations expertise in the classroom. The interviews provided the researcher a chance to obtain information about the approaches of the district, school, teachers, and administrators to enforcing discipline policies for children from underrepresented groups. The questions were structured around a central topic, with optional follow-ups designed to elicit more specific details or in-depth anecdotes from the participant (Turner & Hagstrom-Schmidt, 2022). The interview protocol consisted of 10 questions (see

Appendix) pertaining to the participant's position, restorative practices training, years spent at the school being researched, experience dealing with students who have been assigned OSS, and whether they had received restorative practices training prior to participating.

Salanterä and Zumstein-Shaha (2019) emphasized the importance of understanding the perceptions of stakeholders through interviews, focus groups, questionnaires, and self-assessment tools. The survey for this study contained open-ended questions to allow the primary investigator to gain an in-depth understanding of what each participant had experienced about a zero-tolerance policies and restorative practices. Responses were then coded to capture the main ideas espoused by the participants.

The interview questions, whose responses are below were driven by the following two research questions:

1. How do the teachers perceive the effectiveness of restorative practices protocols as opposed to the zero-tolerance discipline protocols in the reduction of student suspensions?

2. What effect do the administrators and teachers perceive that restorative practices have had on the disciplinary data at the school?

Interview Questions 1, 4, 6, 7, and 9 answered Research Question 1, while Interview Questions 2, 3, 5, 8, and 10 answered Research Question 2.

Results for Interview Question 1

Interview Question 1 asked, what disciplinary practices are supported by the district or administration to assist in adhering to the district code of conduct. All 10 participants believed that the district initiative to have PBIS in every school was a support to the district code of conduct.

Emerging Theme: PBIS

The code, “PBIS,” emerged from reoccurring statements found during the analysis of the individual interviews. The code first appeared in the participants’ responses to being asked what disciplinary practices are supported by the district or administration to assist in adhering to the district code of conduct during the individual interviews.

Participant 7 stated.

PBIS emphasizes the importance of consistent consequences for both positive and negative behavior. PBIS is easily supported by the schools code of conduct and is easily able to support fair disciplinary practices.

Two of the 10 participants responded by describing how school staff were more accountable and more consistent in acknowledging positive student behavior since the implementation of PBIS. The code reappeared when six of the 10 participants engaged in a discussion about how implementing PBIS in their schools improved the way that staff responded to positive student behavior.

Participant 4 stated

My elementary school adheres to the PBIS model for promoting schoolwide appropriate behavior. With our school mascot being a lion, we encourage students to exhibit R.O.A.R.S. behavior – Responsible, Optimistic, Accountable, Respectful, and Safe.

Participant 6 stated,

At my school, there are several disciplinary practices in place to assist the district’s code of conduct. For example, we use preventative discipline to ensure that certain behaviors are avoided. We do this by providing innovative and

effective instruction for students to stay engaged. When students are learning productively and engaged, most times, students are well behaved. We also incorporate restorative practices in our school. This has allowed students to build rapport with teachers and administration in our building.

Emerging Theme: Appropriate Behavior

Seven of the 10 participants mentioned students need to understand what appropriate classroom behavior meant in their classroom/in a classroom. The administrators mentioned the assemblies conducted during the first ten days of school as the catalyst for students understanding what was required of them in class.

Participant 6 stated:

At my school, there are several disciplinary practices in place to assist the district's code of conduct. For example, we use preventative discipline to ensure that certain behaviors are avoided. We do this by providing innovative and effective instruction for students to stay engaged. When students are learning productively and engaged, most times, students are well behaved. We also incorporate restorative practices in our school. This has allowed students to build rapport with teachers and administration in our building.

Emerging Theme: District/School Support

All the participants made mention of the need for more support either at the district(administrators) or school (teachers) levels. They all mentioned that they want to see more presence in the classroom/school as a show of support in dealing with the adverse behaviors in the building. It is also important to mention that the overall sentiment of all the interviews is that behaviors have escalated since COVID and a need for support is due to the increased social needs of the students.

Participant 1 stated,

Teachers are frustrated and overwhelmed with the lack of district emphasis and support from the district level. Our administration needs more support with alternatives to suspension and other behavior modifications.

Participant 4 stated, “Our district is only reactive. They only say something when something has happened. They need to be more forward thinking about the discipline we have to endure as teachers.”

Results for Interview Question 2

Interview Question 2 asked how have teachers and administrators been trained to deal with adverse behavior? How do the administrators ensure that teachers have effectively taught the behavior expectations to students. Nine of the ten (90%) of the participants believed that the district has not done an adequate job of providing training focused on behavior. Three of the participants attended conferences and professional developments outside of the district that have been beneficial, but each felt that what they learned did not fully align with the district’s current discipline protocols. Seven of the participants mentioned that they focus on teaching their personal classroom expectations and less on the districts code of conduct even though they are aligned.

Emerging Theme: Lack of Ongoing Training

All the participants made mention of the need for ongoing support and training for teachers and administration in dealing with student behavior and the rise of aggressive behaviors in the district. They all mentioned that since returning to full time in person school post COVID, the adverse behaviors in the school/district has spiked.

Participant 9 said, “Without the training we don’t get to learn about different strategies or best practices, but we have an ongoing responsibility to limit the behaviors in our classrooms.

All did mention that they have received positive behavior support training from the district as is the yearly practice, but the professional development did not address the behavior issues they have seen in the past 2 years.

Participant 3 stated, “We need more than just PBIS training to manage the behaviors in our classrooms!”

Emerging Theme: Social Emotional Issues

All the participants mentioned that students have shown that there is a high need to address social and emotional deficiencies. Elementary school students have experienced a range of social and emotional issues that have impacted their academic performance, behavior, and overall well-being. Four of the participants mentioned that they have referred students for counseling support due to their behaviors, but they have also had to refer those same students for breaking classroom and school rules as well.

Participant 2 said,

I try to refer my behavior students to the counselor before I submit the ODR (Office Discipline Referral). I have a number of students who act out because of what happened at home. It’s not their fault but they have broken school rule so the need a referral. Those babies need help.

One participant mentioned the importance for educators and parents to be aware of social emotional issues and the need to provide support and resources to help students navigate these challenges. This may include counseling, social skills training, behavior interventions, and other interventions to promote social and emotional well-being.

Participant 1 said, “A major part of the fight we have is getting parents on board with getting the kids help outside of school. There are community resources, but the parents don’t use them.”

Emerging Theme: Classroom Expectations

Eight of the ten participants mentioned that they leaned heavily on their personal classroom rules and expectations trumping the district/school rules. The participants said that they felt like their rules insulated their students from the need to look for outward stimulus to be behaviorally successful.

Participant 1 said,

While personal classroom rules and expectations may not necessarily override district/school rules, I feel they provide additional structure and guidance specific to my classroom. Also, personal classroom rules and expectations help to create a positive and productive learning environment that is tailored to the needs of my students.

Participant 3 added,

I set the tone for my students on the first day of school. They know they represent my classroom everywhere in the building. It is imperative that they know and follow my classroom rules. If they follow my rules, they automatically are following the school rules.

It is important to mention that the eight participants are all veteran teachers and have been in the school environments for five years or more.

Results for Interview Question 3

Interview Question 3 asked, what fundamental classroom behavior management skills do you teach for your students to achieve proficiency behaviorally in your

classroom/school? How have the implementation of restorative practices assisted with process? All but two of the ten participants felt that they had a taught the fundamental classroom behavior management skills needed to achieve proficiency behaviorally in their classroom/school. However only two participants believed that the implementation of restorative practices assisted with the process.

Emerging Theme: Veteran Teacher vs. New Teacher

During the interviews there was a theme centered around veteran teacher versus newer teachers. The participants felt that veteran teachers have the advantage of experience when it comes to dealing with challenging behavior in the classroom. They have more experience in recognizing patterns and can quickly identify where the problem is coming from and how to address it.

Participant 4 said,

Veteran teachers typically have more experience in dealing with student discipline issues, which can provide them with a better understanding of what works and what doesn't. They may have developed a repertoire of strategies that they use to manage student behavior, such as positive reinforcement, clear expectations, and consistent consequences.

They also felt veteran teachers also have the advantage of having built relationships with students over the years, which allows them to better understand the students' motivations and how to work with them to find solutions.

Participant 9 stated,

Veteran teachers are more likely to have developed a firm but fair approach to student discipline, while new teachers may be more inclined to be more lenient or permissive. Veteran teachers are more likely to set clear expectations from the

outset and to hold students accountable for their actions, while new teachers may be more likely to give students the benefit of the doubt and to allow more flexibility in the classroom.

Emerging Theme: Time for Restorative Practice

Seven out of the ten participants mentioned not having the time to properly implement the restorative practices tenants in class. They felt teachers do not have enough time in the school day to both teach and address the social emotional issues of their students. Teachers typically have a combination of instructional time and other time such as lunch, recess, and planning periods where they can interact with their students and address their social emotional needs, but that does not give them enough time to fully implement the practices.

They also mentioned the time required to effectively implement restorative practices in classrooms without taking time away from instruction depends on the size of the school and the scope of the program.

Participant 7 mentioned,

It can take anywhere from one to three months to effectively implement restorative practices in a school, depending on the size and resources available.

The school needs to provide time for staff training, developing the program, and introducing restorative practices into the school culture.

Participant 6 said,

During the training we were told that teachers need about 1-2 hours per day and 4-8 hours per week to successfully implement restorative practices. We need time for planning, training, and implementing restorative practices in the classroom.

We don't have that time and we haven't been told how we can make that time in our day to day schedules

Results for Interview Question 4

Interview Question 4 asked, How are resources such as textbooks, technology, and other behavior modification/positive behavioral support material utilized by teachers provided by the district and school? All the participants said that they felt that there was a lack of resources provided to them by the school and district. They all also mentioned that they needed more behavior modification/positive behavioral support material and training and that such training would be beneficial.

Emerging Theme: Lack of Material on Behavior

During several of the interviews the participants mentioned that their school has not provided them with material on behavior modification for several reasons.

One of the issues stated was the importance of behavior modification aspect of classroom management and student discipline, and that teachers require knowledge and skills in this area to effectively manage their classrooms. They stated that if a teacher has not been given the necessary materials or training, they will struggle to manage difficult behaviors in their classroom.

Participant 8 said, "I was hoping to get PD (professional development) that would help me deal with the different behaviors in my class. Aside from the PBIS meetings, we haven't had any."

Others mentioned that a teachers feel unsupported by their school or administration if they have not been provided with the resources, they need to effectively manage student behavior. This has led to feelings of frustration, stress, and burnout, which have negatively impacted their teaching and their students' learning.

Participant 4 said,

I resent when my needs and concerns are not being heard or addressed by my administrators. There is a breakdown in communication and a lack of trust between teachers and administrators. This has caused frustration, stress, and resentment. I am feeling burned out, and my mental health and job satisfaction are at risk.

Lastly, an issue that was mentioned concerning the lack of resources on behavior modification was they did not feel comfortable communicating and advocate for additional materials from their school or district.

Participant 5 stated, “I have asked my administrators about additional materials about behaviors. I have received limited information and I get the feeling that they just want me to figure it out on my own sometimes.”

Emerging Theme: More Professional Development

Five of the participants mentioned the need for more professional development was so they could learn new behavioral modification techniques and methods.

Participant 3 said, “Behavioral best practices are constantly evolving, and teachers need to keep up with the latest teaching methods and technologies to provide their students with the best possible learning environments.

Participant 8 said, “I was hoping to get PD (professional development) that would help me deal with the different behaviors in my class. Aside from the PBIS meetings, we haven’t had any.

Another issue with the lack of PD that was stated was the need to effectively address student needs. Participant 7 stated, “I need professional development to get better

understand and address the needs of my students, especially those with special needs or who come from diverse backgrounds.”

Results for Interview Question 5

Interview Question 5 asked, How are behavior data assessment results utilized at the school to assist in making decisions in deciding consequences? Nine of the ten participants felt as if behavioral data was not shared with teachers adequately. The remaining participant believed the data was available for teachers to view and use and did not wait for the data to be reviewed collectively. The one participant also felt as if it was the responsibility of the teachers to review the data for their prospective classes and the schoolwide data did not directly affect their classroom.

Emerging Theme: Schoolwide Data not Discussed Consistently

The main issue with this theme stemmed from the lack of overall information teachers felt they received. Eight participants stated by sharing school-wide data with stakeholders, administrators can help to build a culture of transparency and accountability. This can help to ensure that everyone involved in the school community is working towards common goals and is invested in the success of the school.

Participant 6 mentioned,

Sharing school-wide data helps administrators and teachers to identify overall areas where the school may need to improve and teachers who need support in classroom management and behavior modification implementation. By allowing teachers to be more involved with analyzing data on student performance, attendance, and other factors, administrators can pinpoint areas of weakness and develop targeted strategies to address them.

Emerging Theme: No In-School Suspension Options

Participants felt by offering a more constructive alternative to out-of-school suspension would be effective in the elementary school setting. One of the sub-themes that emerged was unlike out-of-school suspension, which removes students from the school environment entirely and can lead to negative outcomes such as increased absenteeism and decreased academic performance, ISS allows students to remain in school and continue their academic work. This can help to minimize the negative impact of disciplinary actions on students' academic progress.

Participant 7 mentioned, “Having ISS would provide an opportunity for school staff to intervene with students who are exhibiting problematic behaviors and provide support to help them address any underlying issues.”

Participant 4 stated,

Our kids need discipline, but they also don't need to be out of the building. Many of my students get their most nutritious meal at school and are the safest when they are in school. If we had an ISS, we could still give students the discipline without eliminating the things they need.”

Results for Interview Question 6

Interview Question 6 asked, Do you feel Restorative Practices has helped or hindered your teacher/student relationships as it pertains to classroom discipline? All 10 participants believed that restorative practices have helped in some degree with their relationship with students. Although those degrees ranged from slightly to immense, RP has been a positive influence on the teacher student relationship. All participants also mentioned that they wanted more training as the year progressed as there are several levels restorative practices elevates as mastery of the process by teachers and students occur,

Emerging Theme: Ongoing Training

Participants emphasized four reasons that ongoing professional development for veteran and new teachers was important. Participants felt that restorative practices are not always intuitive and require specific skills and techniques that need to be learned and practiced over time. Ongoing professional development can help teachers to build their skills in these areas, enhancing their effectiveness in implementing restorative practices in the classroom and helping them to achieve positive outcomes for their students.

Participant 9 stated.

Restorative Practices are new to us in education and in our school. Even though we understand restorative practices theoretically, I know I have an issue with the how to implement all of it. I want to do it. I think it could work but implementing something I don't do naturally is a struggle.

Participants also mentioned that restorative practices is a rapidly evolving field, with new research on best practices emerging all the time. Ongoing professional development can help teachers to stay up to date with the latest research techniques, ensuring that they are using the most effective strategies to promote positive relationships and prevent harm in their classrooms.

Participant 3 said, "The more I read and reserached restorative practices, the more I see I don't know. There are so many nuances to implementing this. It's a bit overwhelming."

Participants stated that restorative practices is challenging to implement, particularly for teachers who are new to the approach. Ongoing professional development can provide teachers with the support they need to address implementation challenges and successfully integrate restorative practices into their classrooms.

The participants who were in favor of RP mentioned that wanted restorative practices to “stick around.” They stated that behavior protocols and social emotional best practices, and programs that work in general are most effective when they are implemented consistently over time, and ongoing professional development can help teachers to sustain their efforts. This can include regular training sessions, coaching and mentoring, and other forms of support to help teachers stay motivated and engaged in their use of restorative practices.

Participant 8 mentioned, “We have had so many “programs” come in and out of our district. I don’t want to get married to a process that is going to change next year. I hope RP sticks around. I think it could be a great thing if we do it right.”

Emerging Theme: Time Restraints

Again, having time to implement the restorative practices protocols as a major concern for the participants. They felt that with the pressure of having to teach, state and district testing and other non-negotiables, and the pressure to raise achievement scores prevented them from implementing RP with fidelity.

Participant 5 stated,

We need to create time in our schedules to make this work. We are struggling to get all of the academic standards taught and now we need to make time to get RP of the ground. Sometimes it feels like we are trying to get water from the rock!

Results for Interview Questions 7

Interview Question 7 asked, What Interviewed based professional development modules have been delivered (if any) to decrease negative student behavior? How have they benefited you in decreasing classroom disruptions? Eight of the 10 participants stated that after the initial professional developments on restorative practice, there has

been very little new information or follow-up to ensure the program was being implemented with fidelity. The remain two participants felt that the emailed articles and information where adequate but also admitted they felt this was status quo with programs implemented and were unsure based on the information and attention given to RP if it would last.

Emerging Theme: One and Done Approach

One time per semester may not be enough time for teachers to fully grasp restorative practices concepts and implement them with fidelity.

Participant 1 stated, “Restorative practices are a set of skills and techniques that require ongoing practice and support to master, it is going take time for teachers to fully integrate RP into their classrooms with fidelity. It is going to take some time for this to take hold in our school.”

Participant 2 stated,

Restorative practices involve a complex set of skills that require specific training and ongoing support to fully grasp. A single training session per semester may not provide enough time or depth of learning to fully understand and implement these practices.

Participant 10 mentioned,

New programs are most effective when they are implemented consistently over time and require ongoing support and coaching to help teachers refine their skills and overcome implementation challenges. One-time training sessions do not provide teachers with the level of support they need to sustain their efforts.

Participant 4 said, “To be effective, restorative practices must be implemented with fidelity, meaning that they are implemented consistently and correctly.”

Results for Interview Question 8

Interview Question 8 asked, How has the school prioritized improving schoolwide suspension rates? Seven of 10 participants believed school prioritized improving schoolwide suspension rates, but all participants felt like the school/district response has been placed more on teachers and less on the student's behavior. The participants also stated that administrators heard them most during the PLC process as they had their undivided attention, but the student discipline issues were funneled back to teacher as the main deterrent for the negative behaviors.

Emerging Theme: Professional Learning Communities

Participants emphasized that PLCs allow teachers to collaborate and work together to share their knowledge and experience. This collaboration can help to ensure that pertinent information is shared among colleagues and can lead to a more comprehensive understanding of the topics being discussed. During PLC's teachers could discuss behavior and best practices amongst other topics. They felt this was the time where they could support each other and get feedback on what they have observed in their classrooms.

Participant 1 stated,

I love the fact the district has mandated the PLC time for us. We have time, uninterrupted time to discuss and plan. The more information and training we get on RP the more we can integrate it in our classrooms and school. PLC is the perfect place to make RP work. We still need a lot more training in implementation though.

Emerging heme: PBIS Rewards

The PBIS program was a heavily mentioned part of the schoolwide discipline effort. In particular, the use of PBIS Points were favorable mentioned. There were three main topics that emerged within the PBIS conversation.

Participant 3 stated,

When PBIS points are used consistently and fairly, they help to create a positive culture in the classroom or school. This promotes positive behavior and helps to any prevent negative behavior by creating an environment where positive behavior is rewarded.

Participant 3 also stated,

PBIS points encourage students to monitor their own behavior and take responsibility for their actions. By setting goals for themselves and working towards earning PBIS points, students are encouraged to be proactive in their behavior and take ownership of their actions.

PBIS points can and should be tracked and analyzed to identify trends in behavior and identify areas for improvement. Participant 7 said, “Even though data is not consistently mentioned or discussed, analyzing the data, could make decisions about interventions and supports that can be put in place to further reduce negative behaviors.

Emerging Theme: Administrative Support

Participants were also very supportive of the fact that administrators have been seen making an effort to be more visible and available. Though many of the participants mentioned that more administrative support was needed, they did see and hear from their administration that they would be more visible and assessable.

Participants felt that when negative behavior does occur, when administrators are more visible and involved, they can more readily enforce consequences. According to the

participants this would send a message to students that negative behavior will not be tolerated, and that there are consequences for their actions. When consequences are consistently and fairly enforced, it can help to deter negative behavior in the future.

Participant 8 stated,

To decrease our school's suspension rate, the administration team has utilized The Stop and Think room as an alternative. In Stop and Think, students have the opportunity to address their behavior through a brief lesson on character development (via a paraprofessional). In addition, students still receive access to their classwork. Depending on the infraction, time spent in the Stop and Think room could be an hour, half-day, or full day(s).

Participants also stated that administrators needed to be available to provide support and resources to teachers and staff to help them effectively manage negative behavior. This can include professional development, coaching, and access to mental health resources for students who may be struggling with behavior issues.

Participant 3 stated,

We need admin. to show higher levels of support. The students know when the principal and assistant principal show up that "It just got real". We need them to back us up and sometimes just be a show of presence more often. Them just popping in and out of classrooms and roaming the hallway does a lot for schoolwide discipline, especially in the cafeteria during lunch.

Results for Interview Question 9

Interview Question 9 asked, How does the school's restorative practice protocol and implementation guide reflect the required attention to teach the behavior modification skills required to perform adequately in the school? Eight of the ten

participants stated that they have received the implantation guides and subsequent materials, but those items do not address the overarching needs of the students even when the RP protocols are being followed.

Emerging Theme: Need for Wrap Around Services

Every participant mentioned the needs for wraparound services or some level of therapy a supplement for RP and behavioral modification in the schools. They mentioned when it comes to teachers and maintaining acceptable behavior from students in the classroom, wrap around services can provide several benefits.

Participant 5 stated,

Wraparound services can be particularly important for students who are struggling academically, socially, or emotionally. These services can help address the underlying issues that may be impacting a student's ability to succeed in school. For example, a student who is experiencing mental health issues or trauma may benefit from counseling or therapy services.

Participants felt that wraparound services can identify and address issues early on, before they become more serious. One example stated was if a student is struggling with behavior issues, a wraparound service may provide a counselor or therapist to work with the student to develop coping skills and strategies to improve behavior.

Participant 1 stated, “Early intervention can help prevent problems from becoming more serious, because by addressing issues as soon as they are identified, schools can prevent problems from escalating and becoming more difficult to address.”

Participant 5 stated, “Early intervention can improve academic outcomes by getting early support and resources to students who are struggling academically, schools can help these students catch up and succeed in school.”

Participant 10 mentioned,

Early intervention can promote positive social and emotional development by providing early support and resources to students who are experiencing mental health or behavioral issues, we can help the students develop the skills and strategies they need to succeed both academically and socially.

Also mentioned was the wraparound services involved families and caregivers in the support process, which can help to reinforce positive behavior at home and in the community. They also stated that when families are involved, they can help to reinforce the message that appropriate behavior is important and can help to hold students accountable for their actions.

Participant 6 said, “Family members can provide support for learning by helping with homework, providing access to educational resources, and engaging in conversations about school and learning.”

Participant 3 stated, “When families are involved in a child's education, the child may feel more motivated and invested in their own learning.”

Participant 1 said, “Family involvement can improve communication between home and school, which can help ensure that students are getting the support they need both inside and outside of the classroom.”

Results for Interview Question 10

Interview Question 10 asked, Which discipline practice do you prefer? RP or Zero Tolerance? Why? Eight of the ten participants believed restorative practices is a more effective practice. One of the participants believed Rp and zero tolerance practices were needed, as more violent behaviors are more effectively addressed using zero tolerance discipline practices in their opinion. One participant adamantly was for zero tolerance

practices as in their opinion, the time that restorative practices take to implement should be used for academics and zero tolerance practices allow for that to happen.

Emerging Theme: Fairness and Equity

When asked about preferences between RP and zero tolerance discipline practices despite the choice, fairness, and equity were prevailing themes. The thought that fairness and equity play a critical role in school discipline because they ensure that all students are treated equally and justly, regardless of their background or circumstances was prevalent in several of the participants' interviews. They mentioned that when discipline policies and practices are fair and equitable, they promote a positive school climate and foster a sense of belonging for all students.

Participant 3 said, "Fairness and equity are not considered enough in discipline policies and procedures. When discipline is applied inconsistently, students may feel that they are being unfairly targeted or singled out. This destroys trust in school authorities and create a negative school climate."

Participant 1 stated,

Certain groups of students, such as students of color and students with disabilities, are disproportionately disciplined compared to their peers and that this could be due to implicit biases or systemic discrimination. We need to be aware of the implicit and explicit biases some school leaders and teachers have towards certain groups of students.

They also stated that not all issues should be dealt with the same way and the fairness and equity require differentiated support for students who are struggling with behavior issues.

Participant 9 said, “Rather than simply punishing these students, schools need to provide students with the support and resources they need to address the underlying issues that are causing the behavior like counseling, academic support, and other interventions.”

Participant 2 said,

Restorative practice because it allows students another chance to make good choices. Restorative practice allows teachers to be creative and to think before being reactive. Oftentimes, teachers respond based on how they feel instead of getting to the root of why the student is showing certain behaviors. Restorative practices give teachers the opportunity to “stop and think”. Restorative practices give the students interventions to increase their feeling of security, recognition, and authentic relationships.

Emerging Theme: Education Reform in Disciplinary Practices

Participants specified that Education Reform is a growing need in discipline practices in schools, as traditional disciplinary methods have been shown to be ineffective and harmful to students, particularly students of color and students with disabilities.

Participant 4 said,

Students of color and students with disabilities are disproportionately disciplined compared to their peers, often for minor infractions. could be due to implicit biases or systemic discrimination. By reforming discipline practices, we can address these disparities and ensure that all students are treated fairly and equitably.

Another subtheme that emerged was the amount of negative outcomes for student of color. All but one of the participants stated that traditional disciplinary methods, such as suspension and expulsion, have negative outcomes for students, including decreased academic achievement, increased likelihood of dropping out, and increased likelihood of involvement in the juvenile justice system.

Participant 5 mentioned,

Education reform in discipline practices can help to reduce negative outcomes and promote positive outcomes for all students. Out of school suspensions don't work. They don't address the behaviors. They just remove the problem child for a little while and bring him back without solving the problem.

Also mentioned was the fact that many of the students who exhibit behavior issues have experienced trauma in their lives. Participant 10 stated, "Trauma-informed practices would recognize and provide students with the support and resources they need to address the underlying issues that are causing the behavior. We need to include counseling, academic support, and other interventions that address the root causes of problematic behavior."

The main concern was that education reform in discipline practices is needed to address the disproportionate discipline of students of color and students with disabilities, reduce negative outcomes, promote restorative justice, incorporate trauma-informed practices, and utilize alternative methods to traditional discipline practices. By implementing these reforms, schools can create a positive and inclusive school climate that supports the success of all students.

Participant 10 also said,

From my novice foundational knowledge of Restorative Practice, I prefer this program as opposed to a Zero Tolerance form of behavior management. Black students are disproportionately suspended at higher rates for the same offenses as their white counterparts, who often receive less severe punishment. RP allows schools to create equitable opportunities to address behavior, while simultaneously creating communities of healing and understanding.

Emerging Theme: Zero Tolerance Works

One participant felt that zero tolerance practice worked and are effective. The participant stated that there are advantages of zero tolerance discipline policies which where Clear Consequences. Zero tolerance policies offer clear and consistent consequences for specific behaviors, such as possession of weapons or drugs on school grounds according to the participant.

Participant 4 stated, “Zero tolerance discipline can help to deter students from engaging in such behavior and provide clear expectations for students and staff.. They know if they break a rule there is an immediate consequence for everyone. No exceptions.”

Another positive was School Safety. Zero tolerance policies are often implemented in response to concerns about school safety. Participant 4 stated, “By strictly enforcing consequences for certain behaviors, We are able to prevent incidents that could put students and staff in danger. We cant play and be lax about safety in the times we are in.”

Another reason for zero tolerance policies is that they are a deterrent effect on other students who may be considering engaging in the same behavior. The fear of severe consequences may discourage students from engaging in problematic behavior.

Participant 4 stated,

My students know I am about the business of teaching and learning. When you walk in my classroom, they know I am the teacher and they are the student. Their parents know from Day 1 that I run a tight ship and will not tolerate any student disrupting the learning environment. And if they decide to go left, there is a consequence.

Summary

In this chapter, a description of the qualitative perceptions of the administrators' perceptions of the impact of restorative practices on discipline referrals and suspension rates in a rural elementary school. Throughout the Interview, ethical protocol was used to avoid deception of participants and to ensure confidentiality of the data for integrity of the study. The methodology for data analysis employed semi structured interviews to collect data pertinent to understanding the historical content and culture of school. Chapter Five contains the interpretation of the data, implications for change, and recommendations for application and further study.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

In this section, the researcher discusses the perspectives of participants regarding the impact of integrating restorative practices on suspension rates in a rural primary school. When the school transitions from zero tolerance to restorative practices, it is crucial for the school's overall performance to reduce suspension rates and discipline referrals. As part of the study's overview, the researcher then addresses the ramifications of each theme. Implications follow study limitations.

The researcher makes recommendations to administrators and educators at all levels. In conclusion, the researcher makes suggestions for future research based on the study's findings and limitations.

Overview of the Study

Public schools implement their district's code of conduct as the primary set of rules used to regulate how discipline is administered in the district's numerous schools. This rule is necessitated by the excessively disruptive student conduct that impedes academic achievement. These disruptive actions are increasing at an exponential rate (Samudre et al., 2022).

Minor violations include chatting during class and tardiness, whereas more significant offences include assault against another student or instructor and vandalism (Camacho, & Krezmien, 2020). To establish clear expectations for student behavior and to foster a safe and productive learning environment, school systems have developed codes of conduct. Students are expected to adhere to the rules and regulations outlined in a code of conduct when on school grounds or participating in school-sponsored events.

These standards typically include academic integrity, respect for others, appropriate technology use, and conformity with school policies and procedures. By setting expectations and punishments for improper behavior, schools attempt to foster a positive and respectful learning environment, minimize disruptions to instruction, and protect the safety and well-being of all students and faculty (Eaton, 2021)

The major purpose of these codes of conduct was to prepare students for responsible citizenship by emphasizing the significance of rule-following and courteous, responsible behavior (Weisburst, 2019). In addition, codes of conduct were to serve as a guide for students and parents to understand the expectations and rules for appropriate school behavior.

In the 1980s and 1990s, many schools in the United States began implementing harsher disciplinary policies in response to concerns about rising levels of violence and drug use in schools. Thus, zero tolerance policies in education began to develop as a result of these stricter disciplinary policies. It should be noted that the formulation of these policies was influenced by a number of different causes. (Fergus, 2019).

A key source of concern for public school stakeholders was the increasing political pressure to "go tough" on crime. This mentality permeated schools as well throughout the 1980s and 1990s, when there was a broad movement toward more stringent rules in the criminal justice system. (Levin, 2020). In addition, schools might have implemented zero tolerance policies to shield themselves from potential legal repercussions in the event that students engage in violent behavior.

There was a steady increase in the amount of pressure coming from parents and members of the community to reduce the behavioral problems in schools. (Bell, 2020). A significant number of parents and other community members were worried about the

wellbeing of their children, which led them to advocate for more stringent disciplinary procedures. (Bell, 2020).

The passing of the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 provided a significant boost to efforts to promote behavior standards with zero tolerance. This law stipulated that any student who brought a firearm to school would result in the student's expulsion from the educational institution if the institution received federal support. (Curran, 2019). As a response of these considerations, many educational institutions chose to implement zero tolerance policies, which enforced severe sanctions for a wide variety of activities, such as the use of illegal drugs, engaging in physical conflict, and even violating dress codes. On the other hand, these practices have come under fire for being excessively punitive and having a disproportionate impact on students of color and students with disabilities. (Curran, 2019).

The primary objective of this qualitative phenomenological case study was to investigate the participants' points of view about the influence that the implementation of restorative practices had on the number of students who were suspended from a rural elementary school. The researcher devised ten questions that were aimed at eliciting responses from the participants so as to better understand their perspectives.

Ten rural elementary school teachers and administrators were invited to participate, and all agreed to be interviewed for the research. Each participant was interviewed via Zoom at a predetermined date and time. The duration of each interview was at the participants' discretion. Interviewing at their convenience allowed for minimal or no distractions, enabling each participant to concentrate fully on each question. Providing opportunities for maximum attention enabled the comprehensive and detailed descriptions of the sustainability of zero tolerance behavior policies establishment of

restorative practices, and the implementation and efficacy of restorative practices in the classroom and schoolwide. Each interview lasted between 40 and 60 minutes over the course of four weeks. After completing the interviews, the researcher transcribed the interviews using Zoom, assessed the results, and searched for categories and themes relevant to the primary study questions.

Summary of Findings

The analysis of the data revealed several significant themes, including (a) the implementation of PBIS, (b) significant barriers to the implementation of restorative practices, (c) a lack of time to implement restorative practices in the classrooms, (d) district and school support for inappropriate behavior, and (e) a lack of ongoing training. The examination of the data revealed three underlying themes: (a) the efficiency of PBIS, (b) the time frame, and (c) support.

The study revealed that there were four overarching themes, each of which could be broken down into two categories: (a) professional development (PD), and (b) teacher buy-in. Teachers view professional development (PD) equally as both an aid in facilitating restorative practices and a barrier to implementing restorative practices, particularly when there is a lack of initial and sustained PD. This perception is especially prevalent in situations in which there is a lack of initial and sustained PD. The second category that emerged from the investigation was one that was equally stated, and that was the concept of teacher buy in. The teachers emphasized that in order for any new program, including RP, to be successful, it is essential for all of the teachers and the administration to support its introduction and continued operation. However, instructors also indicated that a lack of buy-in from both teachers and administration is a barrier to the development and maintenance of restorative practices.

In conclusion, the investigation uncovered a total of three supplementary themes. To begin, there was a general agreement that RP was or had the potential to be very effective in minimizing undesirable conduct while simultaneously promoting desirable behavior. Second, all of the participants agreed that restorative practices would be more successful if they were given additional time to both plan and carry out the necessary steps. In conclusion, participants placed a high value on receiving support from administration. They felt that there was a general lack of assistance for behavioral issues in the classroom as well as training in restorative practices by administration, and they believed that further support would help in establishing and maintaining restorative practices across the entire school.

Findings Compared to Literature

Comparing the research findings to the literature pertaining to the various topics addressed by the literature, the findings were diverse. Participants in this study addressed the research questions focusing on these core subjects that were discussed in the literature review.

Identifying Discipline Problems

The data from this study showed participants felt that out-of-school suspensions and expulsions were necessary, but that they should not be the focus of the school or district's punishment plan. Participants reported that a skilled teacher may recognize discipline issues by being vigilant and cognizant of their pupils' actions and attitudes. The participants emphasized the need of observing the relationships between students, identifying patterns of disruptive behavior, and establishing and continuously enforcing clear behavioral expectations. This aligned to Camacho and Krezmien (2020) research which stated that public education has long been considered as a national icon

and a symbol of the country's aims and rights. They also stated that public education, it is expected that all Americans will have an equal opportunity and expectation of success in pursuing their own futures. The United States has labored over the past century to achieve its goal of equal opportunity via education, mostly through correcting the errors of previous generations. The expanding use of out of school suspension as a form of punishment that is not limited to serious offenses has become increasingly apparent. Both the use of such sanctions and their discriminatory application to minority pupils have expanded concurrently (Camacho & Krezmien, 2019, 2020).

Participants reported that a skilled teacher may recognize discipline issues by being vigilant and cognizant of their pupils' actions and attitudes. The participants emphasized the need of observing the relationships between students, identifying patterns of disruptive behavior, and establishing and continuously enforcing clear behavioral expectations. In addition, they noted that teachers must develop strong relationships with their pupils and foster a supportive classroom atmosphere which can assist in preventing discipline issues from ever occurring. James et al. (2019) also determined that administrators of public schools in the United States have the authority and responsibility to suspend students as well as employees in order to preserve the safety of people involved, the ability of students to learn, and the ability of educators to instruct. Schools adopt the least severe types of discipline to ensure that students understand and adhere to all policies and procedures. Students who are subjected to the most severe types of school discipline will be prohibited from returning to their normal classrooms or campus. When a student is expelled from school, administrators often feel that the expulsion will prompt the student to reflect on the reasons for the expulsion, hence minimizing the risk that the student will be expelled a second time (James et al., 2019; Noltemeyer et al., 2019).

Contrary to James and Noltemeyer, some participants felt that out-of-school suspensions and expulsions were necessary, but that they should not be the focus of the school or district's punishment plan. Participants reported that a skilled teacher may recognize discipline issues by being vigilant and cognizant of their pupils' actions and attitudes. The participants emphasized the need of observing the relationships between students, identifying patterns of disruptive behavior, and establishing and continuously enforcing clear behavioral expectations. In addition, they noted that teachers must develop strong relationships with their pupils and foster a supportive classroom atmosphere which can assist in preventing discipline issues from ever occurring. The participants indicated being proactive in identifying and resolving discipline issues is imperative to maintain a safe learning environment.

Disparity in Discipline

Disparity in discipline refers to the unequal treatment of students depending on factors such as their race, gender, financial background, or other personal traits. Wymer et al. indicated that children from racial and ethnic minority groups are subjected to disproportionately high rates of both hard and soft exclusionary disciplinary approaches. African American students with White teachers were significantly more likely to experience harsher discipline than their White counterparts with the same teachers, according to a study by Wymer et al. that examined a variety of disciplinary tactics used in preschool classrooms. White adults had a greater tendency than African American adults to ascribe the misconduct of African American students to gang activities and other arbitrary or subjective causes, according to Carlo and Padilla-Walker (2020).

This was one of the primary problems that was raised by the participants. The evidence that certain groups of students, in particular Black and Latinx students, are

disproportionately targeted for disciplinary action in comparison to their non-minority classmates in the district. They added that they believe these children are more likely than white students to face harsher consequences such as suspension or expulsion for comparable offenses.

Teachers and other adults in schools are subject to unconscious bias, which raises the stakes for students who succumb to negative beliefs. An unpleasant interaction is more likely to occur between an instructor and a student about whom the instructor has a preconceived impression of improper behavior. Due to the fact that unpleasant encounters with teachers can be a predictor of more severe behavior issues and disciplinary exclusion, these children are more likely to have negative adult outcomes. It is the setting in which the kids find themselves, not the students themselves, that provides the threat (Zinsser et al., 2022) The research of the study differed when the issue of how there is not enough uniformity in the application of disciplinary actions. According to the participants, even within the same school or district, there is a large amount of difference in how different pupils are disciplined for offenses that are comparable to one another. They thought that this produced a sense of unfairness and injustice among the students and the community at large, and that it has the potential to damage trust at both the school and district level.

According to Morgan (2021), although students from racial and ethnic minority groups have a higher incidence of suspensions in general, the rate at which African American children experience this type of punishment is significantly greater than the norm. In 2013-2014, the percentage of African American children sent to out of school suspension was approximately double that of Hispanic students, the next-largest racial group. In accordance with U.S. According to the Department of Education's Office for

Civil Rights (2018), African American students in kindergarten through grade 12 are 3.8 times more likely to be suspended outside of school than White students. According to the participants, this disparity has had significant consequences for students, particularly for those students who are already disadvantaged. Furthermore, this disparity contributes to the school-to-prison pipeline, which is a phenomenon in which students who are expelled from school as a result of disciplinary action are more likely to end up in the criminal justice system. The problem of implicit bias was brought up as well. Operating from biases can have an effect on how instructors and administrators perceive student conduct and how they respond to that behavior. The participants expressed their fear that implicit biases could result in the unjust treatment of students, even in situations where the individuals involved had no intention of discriminating against others.

Effects of Zero-Tolerance Policies

Research on zero-tolerance practices is limited since schools may not document their implementation of zero-tolerance methods in formal policy, despite the fact that it is engrained in the teacher's worldview and guiding principles (Curran et al., 2019; Huang & Cornell, 2021; Pearman et al., 2019). The zero-tolerance mentality exhibited in some educators' reflexive use of out-of-school suspension and expulsion as regular punishments for student misconduct is not sufficiently addressed by these statutes. Middle schools have a history of difficulties due to the usual decline in student motivation and the increase in student misbehavior throughout this time (Glock & Kleen, 2019).

Positive student behavior is consistent with school social standards, whereas negative student behavior against classmates and teachers, such as displaying hostility and dishonesty, violates the school's overarching purpose of a secure learning

environment (Shek et al., 2019). When adolescents demonstrate disruptive behavior issues throughout their formative years, they are more likely to continue to do so throughout their school years and into adulthood, because disruptive behavior issues tend to have a generational impact (Dalton, 2021; Goyer et al., 2019). Negative repercussions may occur in the future if school administrators neglect to address issues regarding disruptive behavior in the early stages of life or fail to implement the required corrective measures. The correlation between disruptive behavior in children and negative outcomes, such as less interactions between parents and children, school dropout, and criminal behavior, might be detrimental to the development of these youngsters.

According to Bryant and Wilson (2020), problems associated with Black American students include inferior academic achievement, a higher likelihood of dropping out, and a faster path to juvenile delinquency. Robinson (2022) explored, within the context of an urban public school, the complicated links between student behavior, peer status, ethnicity, and gender in relation to school disciplinary decisions. Students of African descent, followed by students of Latino and Native American descent, receive more discipline referrals than students of other ethnicities, despite the fact that the factors contributing to the disproportionate representation of African American students in disciplinary procedures are complex and varied (Fitri et al., 2021).

This was one of the topics that had the greatest variation in views. Several of the participants held the view that zero tolerance policies should be implemented because they believe that enforcing stringent and consistent punishments for specific offenses can contribute to the maintenance of a secure and well-ordered educational setting. They might also believe that these rules act as a deterrent for kids who might otherwise engage in potentially dangerous or disruptive actions.

On the other extreme, a number of participants are of the opinion that zero-tolerance policies should not be implemented since they are excessively severe and can result in disproportionate consequences for very minor transgressions. They may also feel that zero-tolerance policies do not address the underlying causes of students' misbehavior while these policies may contribute to a school-to-prison pipeline by funneling students into the criminal justice system. This is because zero-tolerance policies have the potential to send students directly into the criminal justice system.

Restorative Techniques

There has been increased interest in the school-based restorative justice framework as a disciplinary strategy that prioritizes the reparation of harm and reconciliation for students involved in conflict (Darling-Hammond, Fronius, et al., 2020). Increasingly, nonexclusive approaches are being evaluated as a means of decreasing racial-ethnic gaps in disciplinary and academic achievement, particularly between Black and Latino students and their White peers (Christiani, 2021). Due to their personal involvement and face-to-face interactions, participants in a study conducted by Moreno (2021) were able to communicate their impressions of the implementation procedure. Restorative discipline can be an effective technique for reducing harmful student conduct if there is a campus-wide culture that values relationships and attempts to repair damaged ones (Moreno, 2021). In order to apply restorative discipline to decrease suspension rates, campus administrators must allocate time during circle time for the application of these strategies (Taylor & Bailey, 2022). Educators still must adopt the concept that restorative practices can develop positive relationships with their students. In addition, students must have the ability to respond appropriately to miscommunications that do not necessarily result in contempt for teachers, themselves, or their peers. The participants reported that

since they began using restorative practices in their classrooms, they have noticed a marked improvement in their students' behavior, as well as a rise in the level of student involvement, and a fortification of their ties with their students. Restorative Practices along with Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS) beneficial and inclusive school culture, make students feel valued and supported according to the participants.

According to a study by Westlake et al. (2022), kindergarten through fifth-grade students who are subjected to disciplinary measures are more likely to experience chronic absenteeism, academic failure, and disciplinary issues throughout their academic careers. They are at a higher risk for juvenile delinquency, substance abuse, and poor academic achievement. Students in primary schools with a larger incidence of exclusionary discipline report less classroom order, a sense of safety, and academic achievement than those in PBIS-based schools. In addition, evidence indicates that suspending students for minor offenses has little impact on their academic performance compared to students who are not disciplined in this manner. Research demonstrates the significance of school discipline (Westlake et al., 2022). The authors of the study did concede, however, that further research into the connection between exclusionary discipline

To the contrary, the participants emphasized that implementing restorative practice techniques requires a major commitment of time and effort, and that it may not be suitable for all schools or situations. In other words, it is a lengthy process that is difficult to accomplish. Some educators have indicated that they are more at comfortable with a traditional approach to disciplinary measures, whereas others may have the opinion that restorative tactics are more beneficial.

Implications of Findings

According to the findings of this study, restorative practices are seen as an effective method for enhancing student conduct. When done with fidelity, restorative practices can provide opportunity to replace bad behaviors and help kids comprehend how their actions influence others. In addition, the results suggested that restorative practices are considered as a beneficial strategy for addressing student conduct. While widespread agreement that restorative practices are beneficial, concerns have been raised about the need for initial and ongoing teacher training as well as ongoing professional development in the area of framework application. According to one of the participants, "it would be good to have continual training and checkpoints throughout the year, to check on the progress of utilizing it and to answer concerns and provide suggestions for modifications that are required to make RP a permanent part of our school."

A secondary finding suggested that regular teacher buy-in between staff and administration would be advantageous during the initial adoption of restorative practices and on an ongoing basis to aid in their facilitation. This was highlighted by a secondary finding indicating that consistent teacher buy-in amongst staff and administration would be advantageous. The data indicated the necessity for preparation time and interaction with peers, administrators, and RP specialists, which leads to the third consideration. Despite the fact that this was not a theme nor a subtheme of the report, it was underlined that the execution should be consistent. It should be implemented initially and blatantly throughout the entire school, and then trickle down to each classroom. Yet, each classroom should reflect the same norms and behavioral models.

The comments of the participants indicate that restorative techniques are widely being seen as a behavioral alternative to fundamental classroom punishment. The purpose

of restorative practices is not to replace the rules and regulations that are in place at the school; rather, they are intended to add preventative opportunity through the social and emotional portions of the school schedule and restorative circles, as well as an opportunity to restore students after they have been removed from in-school suspension or expulsion. Participants in Restorative Circles are given the opportunity to comprehend how their actions impact those around them and to participate in dialogue that teaches the significance of thinking before acting. This is extremely crucial when the circles include both the aggressor and the victim at the same time.

Limitations of the Study

According to Garcia and Yao (2019), a study's limitations include insufficient records, individuals, or locations to which the researcher did not have access. In the course of this study, a systematic sampling strategy was implemented. In the process of deliberate sampling, members of a population are sought out and selected according to their level of expertise on the investigated issue. This allows the researcher to obtain the most from the opinions and insights of the participants. (Tomaszewski, et al, 2020)

The fact that every participant in this study was of African American heritage was the first limitation of this investigation. The researcher did not intend for this to occur, but subjects of non-African American heritage declined to participate in the study. According to Hirose and Creswell (2023), homogeneous sampling entails picking individuals and locations based on their membership in a subgroup with distinguishing characteristics. This limitation was caused by the lack of diversity in the rural research location's population.

The inability to extrapolate the research's findings to all 50 states in the United States is an additional limitation. This project's investigation was conducted in a tiny

rural community in a southern state. It is probable that the results do not apply to other localities within the United States, especially those rural populations. It is conceivable that the socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic composition of this region does not mirror the demographics of other rural elementary schools in the United States (Sheikh & Hoeyer, 2018).

The final limitation has to do with the restricted number of samples. This inquiry adhered to Creswell's (2018) suggestion to select more than ten examples for a single study. According to Creswell (2018) this number should provide sufficient for identifying themes in the data and to do cross-case theme analysis. There is a potential that the phenomenon has achieved saturation due to the small sample size, issues, and concerns with the data (Gentles et al., 2019). However, there are techniques to overcome this limitation. As an illustration, Creswell (2018) states when qualitative researchers provide comprehensive observations of the circumstances or present multiple perspectives on a theme, the results become more realistic and detailed. This method has the potential to enhance the validity of the findings.

Recommendations for Local Practice

The results obtained from this study have offered information that will be extremely helpful for future research, particularly when categorized according to specific themes. For example, the category of ongoing professional development and training was the one that predominated for the topics of establishing and maintaining restorative practices. In the future, research should be carried out to determine the efficacy of an ongoing training protocol, with the goals of enhancing the implementation and maintainability of restorative practices and ensuring that all staff members have an understanding of the objectives that restorative practices aim to achieve.

First, the establishment of a protocol for ongoing training and support will make it possible to maintain program competency and application. This will make it possible to delve deeper into how stakeholders (teachers, staff, and administration) perceive the program, while also making it possible to accommodate any changes that may become necessary in the future. If this approach is shown to be successful, it has the potential to be implemented at additional schools within the district, if not the entire district as a whole.

The scope of future research might also be broadened to include larger school districts in the immediate area that have student numbers, disciplinary problems, social-emotional needs, and demographic levels that are comparable to those in the current study.

Second, the importance of having the buy-in of teachers was emphasized, with the implication that their participation can either help or hinder the successful adoption and ongoing maintenance of restorative practices. It is recommended that in the future study be carried out on successful activities that will encourage teacher buy-in. These activities can include visiting school systems or programs that have already successfully implemented restorative practices, having a staff member or administrator who is an on-staff expert in restorative practices available to direct in school professional developments, providing "on the spot" feedback to teachers who are having issues in implementation, making efforts to implement to effectively implement restorative practices, being able to onboard and give introductory trainings to new staff and having a staff member or administrator who is an on-staff expert in restorative practices available to lead in school professional development.

Conclusions

Many of the challenges encountered by students who live in metropolitan areas are also faced by students who live in rural communities. They have rates of poverty that are comparable to those of urban communities, and they have per capita rates of students who have disabilities that are comparable to those of urban communities. Nonetheless, they have do greater rates of academic deficiencies, homelessness and substance abuse than urban communities do (Butler et al., 2020)

Students who hail from low-income households are more likely to suffer academically than their counterparts who come from more affluent households, according to Glock & Kleen (2019). They could be exposed to more stress, and they might have fewer resources accessible to them, both of which could make it more difficult for them to concentrate on their academics. (Shek & Chai, 2020). It is necessary to take a multidisciplinary approach in order to address the challenges that are faced by students who live in poverty. This approach should also include both educational and non-educational interventions, such as improving the quality of schools and teachers, providing social and emotional support, and addressing the underlying causes of poverty itself.

On the other hand, the number of students exhibiting disruptive behaviors in the classroom is growing at an exponential rate (Shek & Chai, 2020). This has resulted in stakeholders and governments searching for innovative methods to prevent these harmful behaviors in schools as a direct result of the aforementioned. The use of restorative practices in the juvenile justice system has been shown to be an effective form of deterrence, and these techniques can be used to provide support for behavior modification initiatives in educational settings. (Breedlove et al., 2021).

By redefining and teaching consistent behavioral expectations, in addition to providing opportunities for students to understand how their behaviors affect others, restorative practices have the potential to mitigate negative behaviors and replace them with positive behavior patterns. This is accomplished by providing students with opportunities to understand how their behaviors affect others according to Darling-Hammond and Fronius (2022).

Reestablishment of proper behaviors while discouraging undesirable ones has been the focus of restorative practices, which when introduced into classrooms all around the United States, have received widespread support from local school districts as an efficient method.

Nonetheless, in spite of widespread approval, individuals who are at the front of implementation have expressed certain reservations about the use of the system. As a result of this research, the most common perspective that was voiced was that there was an overwhelming need for initial and ongoing training on how to implement restorative practices, as well as the training itself being sustained. Next, greater resources should be allocated to support this initiative as part of the effort to promote restorative practices. In addition, there must be sufficient time allotted for employees to work together with their colleagues and the management on the implementation of these policies, both in their respective classrooms and across the entire school system.

The results of this qualitative case study can be utilized to modify the approach that is currently taken to the adoption of restorative practices that are now being implemented inside the school as well as the overall system that is being studied at the studied school. It was essential to have a fundamental understanding of the participants', who were also key stakeholders, perspectives on the question of whether or not

restorative practices effectively improve student behaviors and socialization skills. The results of this research can be used to develop a comprehensive plan to continue implementing and maintaining restorative practices. This plan can be adjusted to match the specific requirements of each unique school.

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Appendix
Interview Questions

Interview Questions

1. What disciplinary practices are supported by the district or administration to assist in adhering to the district code of conduct? – RQ1
2. How have teachers and administrators been trained to deal with adverse behavior? How do the administrators ensure that teachers have effectively taught the behavior expectations to students? – RQ2
3. What fundamental classroom behavior management skills do you teach in order for your students to achieve proficiency behaviorally in your classroom/school? How have the implementation of restorative practices assisted with process? - RQ2
4. How are resources such as textbooks, technology, and other behavior modification/positive behavioral support material utilized by teachers provided by the district and school? – RQ1
5. How are behavior data assessment results utilized at the school to assist in making decisions in deciding consequences? RQ2
6. Do you feel Restorative Practices has helped or hindered your teacher/student relationships as it pertains to classroom discipline? – RQ1
7. What researched based professional development modules have been delivered (if any) to decrease negative student behavior? How have they benefited you in decreasing classroom disruptions? - RQ1
8. How has the school prioritized improving schoolwide suspension rates? – RQ1
9. How does the school's restorative practice protocol and implementation guide reflect the required attention to teach the behavior modification skills required to perform adequately in the school? – RQ1
10. Which discipline practice do you prefer? RP or Zero Tolerance? Why? – RQ1/2