THE IMPACT OF DISCIPLINE POLICIES ON STUDENTS OF COLOR
AND THE INEQUITIES OF SUSPENSIONS AND EXPULSIONS

by

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Abstract

Nationally students of color, particularly African American males, receive suspensions and expulsions from school at a greater rate than their peers. Many of the youth drop out of school, become involved in the juvenile justice system, and become an economic burden to their families, school districts, and society.

The purpose of this study is to review the continuing existence of problems with disparate disproportionality in the discipline process in the educational system. Exclusionary discipline policies in education will be examined. While it is important to look at the history of this problem from all perspectives, it is most important to look at it from a grounded research perspective. The questions to guide this research include do administrators’ perceptions of disciplinary procedures influence the disciplinary rates of students of colors, particularly African American males; do current disciplinary processes result in a disparate impact on students of color; and do administrators perceive and utilize progressive disciplinary procedures across the continuum of inappropriate behaviors?

Data were gathered from the examination of official records, surveys completed by school administrators, and interviews conducted with selected administrators. Based on the data gathered, it was revealed that school discipline policies contributed to the problems of disparate disciplinary practices. Many administrators called for new practices, such as restorative justice, and the overall revision of the process by which students are expelled or suspended from school. When the issues of disparate disciplinary
practices are addressed, African American males as well as all students of color, will be able to fully access and benefit from the core curriculum, school dropout rates will decrease, and society will benefit from a more educated workforce. Greater focus on the use of non-punitive forms of discipline is recommended as a tool to help better address student behavior.
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THE IMPACT OF DISCIPLINE POLICIES ON STUDENTS OF COLOR
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I dedicate my dissertation work to my grandmother, Margaret Morris, who has been more than amazing while raising me to be the man I am. From age five, when you took me in, you showed me love like a son and instilled in me confidence, discipline, and humility. You have been the source of consistency in my life, you were the direction I needed, and the light that stayed on during dark times. Without you, I never would have taken the challenge to do this work and earn this degree. I am truly blessed and thankful for having you in my life to provide me with some stability when everything else was chaotic. You showed me what hard work looked like and the peace that comes with knowing you worked for what you have.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the United States many African American male students have become disenfranchised from the educational process (Howard, 2008). Research shows there is an overrepresentation of ethnic minority students, particularly African American males, receiving exclusionary discipline consequences, such as suspensions and expulsions (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). As a result of the use of exclusionary practices, the students have developed unfavorable attitudes towards school, demonstrate escape reactions (arriving to school late, finding ways to escape and leave early), and aggression toward peers, adults, and property (Reyes, 2006).

Over time, the use of suspensions and expulsions can negatively affect both an individual student and society, costing the person negative capital and costing society money (Skiba et al., 2002). Many of the youth, who add to the dropout rates of the district, become involved in the juvenile justice system. In California, an African American who starts school in 2006 has a better chance of ending up in the penal system or being incarcerated than being in college 12 years later (Howard, 2008). In a longitudinal study on suspensions by Raffaele Mendez and Knoff (2003) they suggested suspensions correlated significantly with a host of negative outcomes, including students’ poor academic achievement, grade retention, delinquency, dropping out, disaffection and alienation, and drug use (Raffaele Mendez & Knoff, 2003). In their study, Raffaele Mendez and Knoff (2003) followed a cohort of students from second grade through twelfth grade to determine which students graduated. The researchers used suspensions as the determining factor for students that fail to reach the goal of graduating. The
researchers found that by sixth grade it was apparent which students were going to graduate based on suspensions and days out of school. Raffaele Mendez and Knoff (2003) were able to track students, interview them, and interact with the staff at the schools the students attended during the 10-year investigation.

The purpose of this study was to analyze administrators’ perception of discipline policies and the way that those perceptions affect the education of students of color. Skiba and Peterson (2000) found that current disciplinary practices are not providing the expected outcomes for California’s diverse student population, and the efficacy of disciplinary procedures vary depending on a number of factors, such as student demographics, parent or guardian socio-demographics, parental involvement in the school, and community relationships. These factors make it difficult to find consistently successful discipline policies within urban school districts (Skiba & Peterson, 2000). It is quite common to find that disciplinary procedures may work well with one school, but may not work for another school within the same school district.

**Theoretical Framework**

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is the framework that was used to conceptualize the research. CRT was developed in relation to dealing with racism that was imbedded in the legal system and policies that targeted people of color (Hiraldho, 2015). Because this research explores the relationship between educational policies relating to behavior and consequences and the effects these policies have on students of color, CRT is appropriate. When dealing with issues of racism, it is important to draw upon previous literature that can guide the conversation. CRT allows researchers to analyze the role of race and racism in creating disparities between dominant and marginalized groups (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).
Known researchers have documented the issue of racial disproportionality in exclusionary discipline in K-12 schools and its effects on minority groups (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Noguera, 2001; Skiba et al., 2002). The way policies, such as zero tolerance, impact students of color serves to keep certain groups marginalized and disenfranchised from the mainstream (Giroux, 2003). Racism connected with poverty sheds light on a large section of students that fall under the umbrella of disproportionately disciplined (Fenning & Rose, 2007). Ladson-Billings and Tate (2006) pointed to Hurricane Katrina as an example of how racism and poverty directly affect policy. Ladson-Billings argued that, “The shock of Katrina left many Americans to fend for themselves in an administration that claims to leave no child behind” (p. 2). Large numbers of poor and African American citizens were left behind. The failure to rescue the people of Hurricane Katrina is the same type of failure failing to rescue students of color from educational discipline policy (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006). It is the theory of the researcher that policies like zero tolerance are intended to divide and marginalize. Thurgood Marshall noted that racism was blatant, intentional, and its existence generally undisputed (Brown, 2004).

Ladson-Billings (1995) suggested that today’s educators are not prepared for the challenges presented by the diversity of students in schools. Ladson-Billings (1995) argued that teaching could better match the home and community cultures of students of color who previously did not have academic success. More initiatives have been aimed to recruit teachers of color, but little attention has been paid to articulating a research-based rationale for increasing the diversity in the ranks of teachers. Villegas and Irvine (2009) stated that over half of the country adopted policies aimed to recruit teachers of color. Teachers of color can serve as role models for all students. They have the potential to improve academic outcomes and school experiences for students of color. Villegas
and Irvine (2010) found that exposing students to racially and ethnically like teachers
increases the chances of success for students of color (Villegas & Irvine, 2010).

Lastly, law and educational research influence policy and has characterized
people of color as inferior for decades (Tate, 2013). Today, policy is created without
much thought to who will suffer from the policy. Equity concerns are given lip service
(Marshall, 2004). The students that suffer from these policies are more likely to fail
according to Marshall. Howard (2008) stated the widespread failure has a direct
 correlation with the quality of life they face after an unsuccessful school experience.
According to Howard (2008) in 2004, 768,400 African American men were enrolled
in college across the United States compared to the approximately 924,000 African
American men who were in jails and prisons. The way school discipline policy is created
is problematic because changes in one area can have ramifications in another area (Su
Pinnell, 1985). It is important to realize this fact before implementing change.

**Background**

Research has shown that discipline rates are higher among African American
and Latino students, particularly males, in many California school districts (Skiba
et al., 2011). Given that the discipline rates among minority students have remained
consistently high (Skiba et al., 2011), it is suggested that alternatives to traditional
disciplinary practices be explored.

The problem of students of color, particularly African American males, being
suspended or expelled at a disproportional rate to that of their peers is well documented
and discussed by both educators and the public. The past three decades of scientific
and behavior research on school discipline have chronicled the disproportionate
representation in school discipline of students of color, particularly African American
males (Butler, Lewis, Moore III, & Scott, 2012). The early research only focused on African Americans and Caucasians. In 1975, the Children’s Defense Fund of the Washington Research Project conducted one of the first studies analyzing the effectiveness of school suspensions. This is one of the first reports that documented the overrepresentation of students of color in school suspensions (Edelman, Beck, & Smith, 1975). During the 1980s, Thornton and Trent (1988) discussed how early desegregation of schools and the integration of African American students into public schools led to cultural conflicts between the African American students and the Caucasian teachers. As a result, there was a disproportionate number of African American students suspended when compared to Caucasian students (Thornton & Trent, 1988). Forty years later research still shows that the trend is holding true, but at a higher rate than the 1975 report. The list of researchers writing on the overrepresentation of students of color regarding discipline matters is vast and easy to distinguish (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Noguera, 2003; Skiba et al., 2011). Most of the current research on school discipline focuses on the proliferation of “zero tolerance” policies that make suspension and expulsion mandatory consequences for violations of certain school rules (Brown, 2007). In an article written by Ellen Boylan (2002), she listed case studies of disciplinary practices where zero tolerance policies required suspensions or expulsions of students for minor incidents, such as a 12-year-old being suspended and recommended for expulsion for bringing a table knife to school to dissect an onion as part of a demonstration for his science project. He was expelled for violating the school’s zero tolerance policy for bringing a weapon to school. In another incident, a student was recommended for expulsion after he left a bread knife in his pickup truck after helping his father bring his grandmother’s linens, books, and kitchen items to a charity thrift shop. In Arkansas, an 8-year-old boy was suspended for three days because he pointed a chicken tender at his teacher and said, “pow, pow, pow.” These are examples of incidents that would not have led to suspension or expulsion
prior to the implementation of zero tolerance, but because of zero tolerance policies a suspension or recommendation of expulsion was mandatory (Boylan, 2002).

Because of the recent research (Noguera, 2003) connecting school disciplinary practices and lack of education attainment, the term School-to-Prison Pipeline has been coined. Christle, Jolivette, and Nelson (2005) have linked academic failure to exclusionary discipline practices. In their research, they found that school-level characteristics could help minimize the risk of youth delinquency. They identified that school-based policies and practices may exacerbate or mitigate the risk for court involvement among youth (Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2005). The School-to-Prison Pipeline refers to policies, practices, and conditions that facilitate both the criminalization of behaviors in educational environments and the process by which students are incarcerated as young adults (Morris, 2012). In a report by Darensbourg, Perez, and Blake (2010), they argued that students’ educational paths are altered by situation variables. These situations include experiencing harsher punishments when being disciplined, being taught by unprepared teachers, and feeling a detachment from school. According to their study, the combination of these factors have been purported to contribute to the overrepresentation of students of color, particularly African American males, in prison (Darensbourg, Perez, & Blake, 2010). Nancy Heitzeg (2009) also researched the connection between education and the School-to-Prison Pipeline and concluded that current policies have increased the risk of students being suspended, expelled and/or arrested at school. She also stated that the School-to-Prison Pipeline is a socio-political problem that is increasing due to the fear and punitive nature of school officials (Heitzeg, 2009). According to Morris (2012), when decisions are made about why and where policy is needed, there are certain ideas, racial stereotypes, and norms that influence the decision making. Morris (2012) argued that in schools where the population is predominately African American or Latino, educators and administrators perceive
a “racial threat,” (p. 6) which has been shown to affect their reaction to problematic students and there is a higher likelihood that punitive exclusionary discipline is practiced.

Welch and Payne (2012) suggested that because crime and punishment are so closely linked to race, tests of the racial threat effect are examined where there are higher numbers of African Americans and Latinos. The researchers found that the proportion of crime that is perceived to be committed by African Americans and the perception that African Americans are violence prone are consequential for the degree to which the public supports punitive crime policies. Thus, there is relatively strong support for the racial threat effect explanation for punitive control even when alternative measures are used (Welch & Payne, 2012).

Nationally, African Americans represent about 16% of the student population, but account for about 33% of the out of school suspensions and 34% of expulsions (U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, 2014). Scholars have suggested that the surge and growth in inequity relating to students’ removal from school is due, in part, to the emergence and popularity of zero tolerance policies. Zero tolerance was a term that became popular in the early 1980s during the war on drugs and quickly became a popular term used in schools to combat student misbehavior (Mongan & Walker, 2012). Reyes (2006) argued that teachers and administrators are entrusted with the ability to interpret student behavior, but zero tolerance removes school discipline from the hands of school personnel that historically mediated student disputes (Reyes 2006). Dunbar and Villarruel (2002) also argued that school leaders have trouble understanding, interpreting, and implementing zero tolerance policies because a high number of African American and Latino students are negatively affected by them (Dunbar & Villarruel, 2002).

The Antioch Unified School District (AUSD) discipline data is in direct correlation to the national trends. This was brought to light in 2009 when the school district reached an out of court settlement in response to the American Civil Liberty
Union (ACLU) allegations that the school district had been unfairly disciplining African American and Latino students (ACLU of Northern California, 2010). Records showed that African American students were suspended four times more often than Caucasian students in the 2006-2007 school year. In that same year, Latino students were suspended twice as often as Caucasians (ACLU of Northern California, 2010). As a result of this lawsuit, the school district reviewed and modified its discipline policies and created processes that standardized approaches towards discipline. One of the main changes was to move away from using exclusionary strategies, primarily zero tolerance strategies, utilizing suspension and expulsion as the punishment, which often denied students due process. Due process was denied by administrators issuing punishments without fully investigating the incidents and only relying on the claims from one side. The AUSD policies changed from a zero tolerance response to behavior to implementing the use of other discipline consequences through a progressive discipline response, which increases the severity of the consequence with repetition. The new discipline consequences implemented were restorative practices, in-house suspension, campus beautification, and Saturday school (AUSD, 2010). However, since then, the data demonstrated that disproportionality continues to take place. From 2009 to 2012, there were 9,715 suspensions issued for students of color compared to 1,688 suspensions for Caucasian students (California Department of Education, 2011).

AUSD reviewed its zero tolerance policy and stated some infractions would not be allowed, such as possession of weapons, drugs, and serious threat or assault in the school environment, thus placing them into Category III-Severe Infractions (Brown & Shabazz, 2012). The goal for the school district was to ensure safe school climates conducive to learning without removing students from their learning opportunity. AUSD is working to improve a sense of school community and belongingness as well as positive interactions among all students by giving them their due process when
investigating student misbehavior. However, most of the suspensions in AUSD were due to defiance and disturbances, which are not Category III-Severe Infractions. Examples of Category III – Severe Infractions are weapons, possession of drugs for sale, and physical altercations (i.e., fights or assaults).

Administrators today are given few, if any, tools to deal with the continuum of behavior problems that students demonstrate in school (Skiba & Peterson, 2000). Resources are few and knowledge of the issues inner city students face is lacking (Moss, 2010). These factors, in combination with a teaching force that is predominantly Caucasian and female (in most school districts), increase the possibility of cultural mismatch or racial stereotyping as a contributing factor in disproportionate suspensions and expulsions and cannot be discounted (Skiba et al., 2011). Skiba et al. (2011) hypothesized a number of reasons for the high discipline rates, including race, ethnicity, poverty, differential rates of appropriate or disruptive behaviors in school settings, and cultural mismatch or racial stereotyping as legitimate reasons for the overrepresentation of students of color in disciplinary hearings. Townsend (2000) claimed that Caucasian teachers were unfamiliar with interactional patterns of students of color and that these patterns are misinterpreted by Caucasian teachers (Townsend, 2000). In addition, with the heightened anxiety over school safety and the advent of zero tolerance regulations, the possibility of unethical and unfair practices for students from poor and minority groups increases considerably. In their research, Cartledge, Tillman, and Talbert Johnson (2001) identified studies that illustrate how zero tolerance led to unfair disciplinary actions for students. In one district, only about 20% of the 158 students expelled warranted an expulsion under zero tolerance policy. In another study, comparing two urban schools, they found that only 50% of all disciplinary actions and 20% of all suspensions violated written school policies. Their research suggests that “get tough” policies, such as zero tolerance, serve to further disenfranchise the most needy segments of the school
population. They question the schools’ shortcomings relative to cultural understanding, ethical treatment, and effective behavioral management procedures (Cartledge, Tillman, & Johnson, 2001). Administrators are at a loss regarding what to try next with students who are constantly in the office for behavior issues. Currently, the only available tool that seems to be a serious consequence is the exclusion of students from schools. Brown (2007) stated although it is necessary to sometimes remove students from school, schools need to develop strategies that advance, rather than hinder, a student’s socio-emotional development. She felt it was detrimental for students to fall behind in their work and that an alternative must be put in place to keep them connected to the processes of school. Although research is growing in the field of school discipline, little attention is given to the results these experiences have on the many students who continue to be cast out of “mainstream” schools, particularly in the U.S. context (Brown, 2007).

Since 1975, when the Children Defense Fund conducted the first research on students of color, administrators have been searching for ways to combat the ever-growing pattern of disproportionate suspensions and expulsions in schools in the United States. Questions about the equity of school discipline policies and the unintended consequences these policies have on students are ongoing. Cartledge et al. (2001) argued that exclusion from school may negatively affect behavior and often results in grade retentions, dropping out of school, academic failure, and recidivism. In addition, they found that inconsistencies could decrease the effectiveness of discipline policies, cause students to feel they are arbitrary and unfair, and make teachers feel their efforts are undermined (Cartledge et al., 2001). The reality is that it has been a known fact for years that disciplinary practices in schools bear a striking similarity to the strategies used to punish adults in society, and nothing has been done to systematically change the practice of excluding students from school (Noguera, 2003). Fenning and Rose (2007) discussed
the punitive nature of discipline in schools and suggest that instead of focusing on the factors internal to the student, the focus needs to be on the contribution of school factors. The use of behavior consequences that remove students from school, such as out of school suspension and expulsion, deprive students of the opportunity to learn, potentially weaken the school bond, and could be viewed as risky interventions. Skiba et al. (2011) argued that exclusionary discipline practices affect the education environment and the ability of students to bond within that environment. Therefore, administrators need to be careful when issuing discipline because students may get detached from the educational process (Skiba et al., 2011). To reverse this trend, administrators are in need of alternative practices to combat the social issues that accompany students to school. In Mukuria’s (2002) research, he stated that the socioeconomic issues that accompany students to school need to be looked at and the communities in which students come from need to be investigated to better understand the issues that students bring to school (Mukuria, 2002).

Skiba, Knesting, and Bush (2002) question the efficacy of exclusion as a method for dealing with issues of behaviors. They contend that exclusion in of itself offers students no help in addressing the behavior, thus some researchers advocate for the curtailing of exclusion in favor of other strategies that stress prevention, early response, and the development of behavior and academic support for students at risk for disciplinary action. Because our society punishes students who are perceived as behavior problems, there is a widely held belief in the value of punishment for children’s behavior (Skiba, Knesting, & Bush, 2002). Instead of correcting problem behaviors, overuse of punishment leads to the students’ development of unfavorable attitudes towards school, escape reactions (arriving to school late, finding ways to escape and leave early), aggression toward things as well as people, which eventually results in violence. Aydin’s (2011) research analyzed the overuse of punishment and sought to interpret the reactions
of students after receiving punishments from school administrators. In talking to students, one of the questions of interest was if the students felt the punishment fit the violation (Aydin, 2011). Students agreed that suspension was only a vacation away from working and that overall suspensions do not work. Students thought that other means of correction needed to be applied. Alternatives to exclusion may give educators an opportunity to teach and correct student behaviors that disrupt the learning environment so the acts are not repeated.

Legislative acts, like No Child Left Behind 2001 (NCLB), transformed the way schools are evaluated and led to changes in the way administrators viewed students with behavior issues (Fenning & Rose, 2007). Under NCLB, schools were expected to rapidly raise student test scores and were threatened with severe sanctions (loss of funding, school closure, etc.) for failure to produce the targeted results. Research suggests that the achievement expectations may have heightened pressures for administrators to remove children from classrooms who did not fit the norm of the general population (Fenning & Rose, 2007). In many studies conducted on discipline in grade school, African American males ranked higher in suspension and expulsion than any other group of students (Fenning & Rose, 2007). Fenning and Rose (2007) discussed the pressing social justice issue of exclusionary discipline practices on students of color and suggest that the focus shift to use the data to create proactive school discipline policies that will benefit all. Losen and Skiba (2010) discussed the urban middle school crisis involving African American male students. They found that when comparing all ethnicities (African American, Caucasian, Latino, Native American, and Asian/Pacific Islander), African American students ranked higher nationally in suspensions from 1973-2006 (Losen & Skiba, 2010). The research of Gregory, Skiba, and Noguera (2010) showed that students of color ranked as most likely to receive discipline, but African American students ranked higher than Latinos or Native Americans in disciplinary infractions in school. In
this study, they linked the discipline that students received in schools directly to their achievement in schools. The researchers stated that racial and ethnic patterns in school sanctions directly impacted disproportionate discipline and attributed to the lagging achievement of these same students.

### Problem Statement

Racial disparities in suspensions and expulsions are well documented (Skiba & Rausch, 2006). In fact, researchers have been documenting this inequity for over three decades (Losen, 2011). However, the focus has remained on the outcome rather than the policy that continued a trend of negative outcomes for students of color. The problems of overrepresentation of students of color in the area of school discipline is popular and revealing in that gives us insight about the salience of culture, particularly race, in schools and society. Few scholars have explored the culturally based constructs related to school discipline (Monroe, 2005a). This paper will attempt to look at student discipline from the perspective of the administrator, how they view discipline, and the effects it has on students of color, particularly African American male students. It will also look at the issues of how students fit into the educational process and how they view cultural mismatch and if it is in direct conflict with school policy. One of the issues researchers have found to be problematic is the use of language and the way policy is interpreted (Mukuria, 2002).

### Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to address the continued existence of racial disproportionality in exclusionary discipline, examine how administrators perceive
discipline policies, and the affects these practices have on individual students. The issues that are inherent to the use of exclusion practices in school discipline have become more complex since the initial studies in 1975 (Losen & Skiba, 2010). Factors that now affect school discipline are socioeconomic status, the achievement gap, ethnicity, special education, and gender. Due to the imposition of zero tolerance policies, the risk of being disciplined has increased for specific populations, particularly African American and Latino students, and their academic success does not mirror that of their peers (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Skiba et al., 2002). First, this research will make an attempt to illustrate the disproportionality in school disciplinary practices and how these practices play a significant role in the creation of disparity between students, particularly African American males. Second, this study hopes to show how the cultural backgrounds, as well as the socioeconomic status of administrators, influence the interpretation and implementation of school discipline policies and the resulting connection to the phenomenon of suspension and expulsion disparities.

Racial bias in the practice of school discipline is also part of the broader discourse concerning the continuing presence of institutional racism or structural inequity in education (Skiba et al., 2002). The term cultural mismatch is used in this paper to refer to teachers and administrators who lack cultural understanding or who do not use culturally responsive pedagogy in their work with students of color. The continued hiring of predominantly Caucasian, middle class personnel, who often lack cultural understanding to work in schools with students of color perpetuates and reinforces a system that maintains the status quo and has created the “School-to-Prison Pipeline” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986).

This study is designed, in hopes, of demonstrating the need to forego the use of exclusionary discipline practices in favor of alternative practices in addressing unsatisfactory behavior and create safe schools in the Antioch Unified School District.
Research Questions

This study will be guided by the following questions

1. What are school administrators’ perceptions of disciplinary practices to address student misbehavior?

2. How do current disciplinary processes result in disparate impact on students of color?

3. How do alternatives practices offer administrators valuable tools for addressing disciplinary issues and school safety?

Summary

Finally, this study was conducted to look at the impact suspension and expulsion policies have on students of color and to look at the unintended consequences of zero tolerance policies. Suspensions and expulsions are viewed as a needed tool to curb school behavior and to keep schools safe, but the information known is that both suspensions and expulsions negatively impact certain groups or individuals (Noguera, 2003). This research was designed to bring more awareness to an issue that has been researched since 1975 by the Children’s Defense Fund. A great deal of research has been done on suspensions and expulsions and the negative impact it has on students, but this research takes a different angle by asking the administrators the questions and allowing them to share their feelings on suspension and expulsion policies. This problem not only impacts students’ academic performances, but also impacts communities because the student is unsupervised for the period of the suspension (Morrison, Anthony, Storino, & Dillon, 2001). The one area that is consistently misread or overlooked when dealing with the research of the overrepresentation of students of color is the area of cultural
synchronization or cultural relevant pedagogy (Villegas, 1988). Cultural synchronization is taking the lessons learned at home and applying them to the school setting so that students have some understanding of what is expected out of them (Villegas & Irvine, 2010). The theory that this is a necessary and a sufficient condition that needs to happen in the classroom in order for classroom-based learning to take place and for teachers to be able to perform their job responsibilities speaks to the amount of action that needs to take place systematically (Monroe, 2005b).
Chapter 2 will review the literature that informed this research study. The primary focus of the study was on how students of color are impacted by two phenomena: discipline policies with zero tolerance language and the phenomenon of cultural mismatch between the educators and students of color, particularly African American students. To flesh out these issues, additional topics were reviewed including disciplinary practices used in California schools, the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy, the student behaviors that are addressed by exclusionary consequences, and the racial disproportionality that persists in the imposition of those consequences. The relationship between the introduction of zero tolerance policies and the recently identified School-to-Prison Pipeline is also discussed. Finally, the promise of change inherent in alternative programs, such as restorative justice and other positive behavior interventions, is reviewed and recommended as policies that can drive change for the future.

Disciplinary Practices

School disciplinary practices vary by school site and by district (Sugai & Horner, 2002). California public school leaders are responsible for establishing and maintaining safe and secure learning environments in their schools so that learning can take place. The California State Board of Education Policy #01-02 covering subject matter on School Safety, Discipline, and Attendance states
All students enrolled in public schools in California have the right to safe schools. The State Board believes that students cannot benefit fully from an educational program unless they attend school regularly in an environment that is free from physical and psychological harm. The State Board also believes that the leadership in providing safe schools, establishing behavior standards, and improving student attendance must come primarily from local education agency (LEA) boards, superintendents and their staff, and site-level administrators. (California Department of Education, 2011, p. 1)

This State policy puts the responsibility for the creation of an effective school discipline policy on the shoulders of school officials. Because discipline policies are created by each school or school district independently, there is not cohesion between the policies of schools across the district, which creates a problem for administrators enforcing discipline policies when the consistency is not transparent.

The Contra Costa County School Board has adopted a policy that mirrors that of the State. According to the California education code every school district and county will establish school codes that are in accordance with the state uniform codes (Education code section 35290).

It is the belief of Contra Costa County Board of Education that all students have the right to be educated in a positive learning environment free from disruptions. (cf. 5131.1 – Bus Conduct)

It is the responsibility of the County Superintendent of Schools or designee to ensure that each school site develops standards of conduct and discipline consistent with County Board policies and administrative Regulations. (BP 5131(a) – Conduct)
At all times, the safety of students and staff and the maintenance of an orderly school environment shall be priorities in determining appropriate discipline. Staff shall enforce disciplinary rules fairly, consistently, and without discrimination. (BP 5144(a) - Discipline)

The County aligns policy with that of the State, which also contains language that has to be put into the student handbooks and given to students and parents so they have complete understanding of the California school code. One of the most controversial terms in the California Education Code is the term *willful defiance* (Terriquez, Chlala, & Sacha, 2013). According to the American Civil Liberties Union, students of color are more likely to be suspended or punished for violations that fall under the vague behavioral codes than under any other codes in the state handbook (ACLU of Northern California, 2010). In fact, the ACLU encourages district officials to define *willful* defiance. Under the term willful defiance, 53% of the suspensions administered in the 2011-2012 school year in California were for willful defiance (Terriquez et al., 2013). The term loosely refers to any kind of perceived insubordination or misbehavior by a student. The term does not have a standardized formal definition and can be interpreted any number of ways based on what the person writing the referral sees at the time of the infraction (Fleischer, 2012). Students that were deemed not fit or disruptive have generally been suspended or expelled from school (Fenning & Rose 2007). Most of the studies done on student exclusion have focused on the number of students that fall into the category of overrepresentation and how certain policies, like zero tolerance, help magnify this problem (Skiba et al., 2002). Administrators are the ones suspending students in the schools and research shows that principals play a major role in contributing to the behavioral performance of the students in the school (Mukuria, 2002). Schools that find the right chemistry seem to have less discipline issues, while the ones...
that have issues like cultural synchronization, have more behavior issues with students of color (Monroe & Obidah, 2004). Cultural synchronization is the unique cultural orientation that stems from personal traditions for certain ethnic groups, like distinctive language patterns, styles of dress, and forms of nonverbal communication. Monroe and Obidah (2004) suggested that educators and policy makers take a more in-depth look at the relationship that governs a diverse classroom. Research shows that when the teachers align their practice with the students’ cultures, the students have more overall success in school. In a study conducted by Richards, Brown, and Forde (2007) they concluded teachers must employ theoretically sound and culturally responsive pedagogy. The researchers go on to say that all students, no matter the background, should be welcomed and supported so that they are provided the best opportunity to learn (Richards, Brown, & Forde, 2007).

**Discipline Models**

Maag (2012) asserted that there were two categories in which discipline programs fell - obedience models and responsibility models. In his research, Maag identified that both models included exclusionary components as consequences for misbehavior, but he questions the efficacy of obedience model programs that use exclusionary practices as a first line strategy to deal with student behavioral issues. These types of programs rely heavily on rules and consequences to control student behavior and are designed to give the teacher control. Some examples of obedience-focused programs include Think Time and Behavior Intervention Support Team. In these programs, the foundations are the rules and the consequences that students are assigned when they break school rules (Maag, 2012).
An example of the obedience model of discipline is what is demonstrated in the movie *Lean On Me* (Schiffer & Avildsen, 1989). That biographical film depicts the efforts of Joe Clark, a principal in an East Coast urban high school, made to enforce discipline and create a safe learning environment for students in the school. His methods were focused on strict adherence to rules and harsh consequences when students did not adhere to the program. Students were suspended and ultimately expelled from school due to a wide variety of infractions that may not have seemed to warrant such a severe consequence. While this program was initially seen as successful in creating a safe school environment, like all obedience models, it did not teach students the skills needed to make responsible choices outside of the highly structured environment of that school.

Responsibility models are the alternative to the obedience models and focus on teaching students to make independent, responsible choices (Maag, 2012). The responsibility model is designed to deemphasize students engaging in blind obedience to rules due to fear and teacher coercion, and instead use techniques, such as negotiation, discussion, participation in group mediations, and the development of contacts to promote responsibility and build character while also building communication skills and the students’ understanding the rights of others. Lewis, Colvin, and Sugai (2000) asserted that when teachers did not use the responsibility model, they failed to increase their use of more productive techniques, such as discussion, community building, and learning opportunities. The responsibility model rewards students for making positive choices and acting as responsible citizens both in school and beyond (Lewis, Colvin, & Sugai, 2000). Some examples of responsibility models are Restorative Justice and Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports. These programs take a three-tiered approach to behavior management. The first tier involves teaching students appropriate behaviors and rewarding them. The second tier provides an alternative response that can be applied to groups of students who need an alternative to encourage them to behave appropriately.
The third and final tier focuses on the students who exhibit the most challenging behaviors and involve developing an individualized approach for intervention (Maag, 2012). Maag reviewed data from a variety of studies to determine the efficacy of various school-wide disciplinary programs. In the end, he concluded that disciplinary problems in school cannot be solved by basing disciplinary policies on obedience models. Instead, positive approaches must be taken to effectively teach students the positive behaviors we expect of them.

**Behaviors Addressed by Exclusion Consequences**

The California Education Code lists a wide range of behaviors that can result in suspension or expulsion from school (see Appendix A). Some of these are very specific, but others are more general. In 2010, the ACLU published *Discipline in California Schools: Legal Requirements and Positive School Environments*, a guide for California designed to guide schools in the creation of safe and welcoming school environments that effectively implement rules and behavior policies while also reducing the use of school exclusion as a consequence. When creating such a policy, the ACLU had to look at the many factors that create an unsafe and dangerous environment, including discrimination, harassment, and bullying based on race, ethnicity, national origin, and gender. While looking into some of the issues that influenced the creation of discipline policies in schools, the ACLU sought to understand the problems and give recommendations for dealing with these issues, as well as make suggestions for the creation and implementation of more effective discipline policies. The ACLU identified the flaws in current school discipline policies that have lead to increased suspensions and expulsions over the years and gave a great deal of feedback to counter the problem and even improve the way data is collected.
While the California Education Code details the behaviors for which school officials may impose suspension or expulsion, it is important to note that the choice to suspend or expel is always at the discretion of the school administrator who is handling the situation. This section of the Education Code was amended by Assembly Bill (AB) 86 effective March 17, 2014 to reaffirm that the move to expel a student is discretionary. AB 86 states

a pupil shall not be suspended from school or recommended for expulsion, unless the superintendent or the principal of the school in which the pupil is enrolled determines that the pupil has committed an act as defined pursuant to any of subdivisions (a) to (w), inclusive. (see Appendix A)

The freedom administrators have in assigning discipline can be to the benefit or detriment of any student. For example, if a student engages in a fight, the administrator can consider extenuating circumstances that mitigate the consequences, which may benefit the student. However, it can be a detriment to a student when cultural mismatch prevents an administrator from viewing and understanding the student’s perspective and background when deciding the severity of the infraction or the consequence to be imposed (Cross, 2003). Villegas and Irvine (2010) suggested that over the past two decades, the short supply of educators of color in elementary and secondary schools have drawn the attention of policy makers. The researchers go on to claim that widening cultural chasm needed to be addressed. Villegas and Irvine cited educators of color serve as role models for all students, and educators of color have the potential to improve academic outcomes and school experience for students. Ultimately this could reduce the potential for students being disruptive and excluded for simple problems that could be addressed in the classroom (Villegas & Irvine, 2010). An example of this could be a situation where a teacher sends a student out of class for being disruptive or defiant when
shouting out answers in class. This behavior may be culturally appropriate in the student’s home, and an understanding of that difference could lead to an alternative consequence or become an opportunity for education with the student and teacher. Unfortunately, research shows that all too often it becomes another suspension that separates the student from his class and causes him to fall behind academically (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Monroe, 2005a; Skiba et al., 2002). Administrators are expected to look at all the circumstances that surround a student and then act accordingly (Aydin, 2011). Therefore, as school leaders, administrators have the responsibility to independently decide the best course of action to be taken in any situation that arises. However, to do this well, administrators must have an open mind and consider many factors beyond their own opinions and biases.

**Disproportionality and Exclusion**

Students of color are most likely to be disciplined in schools (Fenning & Rose, 2007). African American youth in particular are two to three times more likely to be suspended or expelled for school infractions when compared with Caucasian youth (Skiba et al., 2002). When schools suspend or expel for misbehavior, they miss the opportunity to educate the students about alternative behaviors that are more socially acceptable and instead create a situation where the student has neither learned the social skills needed nor the material that is covered in the classroom during the period of exclusion (Irby, 2009). There is also a profile that follows the student that is suspended or expelled. These student fit the low-socioeconomic status qualification, while also falling in the class of the students whose fathers did not have full time jobs (Skiba et al., 2002). Gender disproportionality and disproportionality by minority status is also well documented by Skiba et al. (2002).
There is strong evidence showing that preventing or treating delinquency and school failure is more cost effective than doing nothing or paying the welfare and prison costs incurred by undereducated and alienated youth (Skiba & Rausch, 2006). The term “School-to-Prison Pipeline” has emerged to describe when the juvenile justice system becomes involved in disciplinary matters for infractions that were once handled by schools (Wald & Losen, 2003). Studies performed by the Secret Service, FBI, and researchers have found that student profiles constructed to identify students who may cause an unsafe environment with the intent to promote school safety are unreliable (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force (APA), 2008). An American Psychological Association task force team conducted research and determined the efficacy of zero tolerance and found that the zero tolerance movement is not appropriate because it is in conflict with what is known to be true about adolescent development. The profiles developed by law enforcement after the school shootings of the late 1990s tend to over-identify students from minority populations as potentially violent offenders despite the fact that no minority students were involved in those crimes (APA, 2008).

The current policies that govern public education have become focused on ranking and sorting students rather than actually educating students. One of the original definitions of discipline was, “to educate” (Discipline, n.d.), yet policies, like zero tolerance, which determine how school administrators should handle student behaviors, focus only on punishment. This way of addressing student behavior in schools has predominantly affected students of color, particularly African American males, in the United States. Statistics demonstrate that students of color are disproportionately
disciplined. They also show that high school dropouts are overwhelmingly African American and male, as are the populations in our state and federal prisons (Laura, 2011).

Zero tolerance in schools is any policy that calls for the removal of a student for any offense deemed to be dangerous to that student or anyone in the school. Practices include suspensions, expulsions, alternative educational settings, and dropping students from public schools. Zero tolerance did not originate in educational settings but with law enforcement and was first used by law enforcement agencies as a means of implementing automatic punishment for infractions of a stated rule, with the intention of eliminating undesirable conduct. Since the inception of this concept into educational discipline policy, the term has been used to criminalize students who act out in schools (Hirschfield, 2008). Educational policies and law enforcement policies are in complete contradiction to one another. Educational policies focus on the academic education of children with teaching at the center of importance in the decision making. On the other hand, law enforcement policies are created to govern a society that should know how to make rational decisions. Yet the use of zero tolerance policy is widespread among our nation’s schools (Cartledge et al., 2001).

Zero tolerance discipline policies were adopted as a result of more stringent adult crime policy. Initially, zero tolerance policies focused on alcohol, drugs, and violence to make schools safer. Over time, schools have expanded the use of zero tolerance policies to also include a wide range of misbehavior, including the 48900 educational school codes. This expansion allows for discipline to be based on how the education code is interpreted. The expanded use of zero tolerance policies has led to an increase in student exclusion from school (Fabelo et al., 2011). Instead of a place where teaching and learning occur, school is another place where students of color have to fight just to be treated equal to their Caucasian counterparts. A study conducted by Rosenbloom and Way (2004) discovered that, although subtle, there were still moments that students
of color experienced racism in school. More than 30 years of research has consistently demonstrated the overrepresentation of youth of color, particularly African American males, in exclusion discipline consequences of suspension and expulsions (Fenning & Rose, 2007). Researchers continue to add to the findings of exclusionary practices. Fenning and Rose (2007) make a direct link between the connection of school policy and the path that leads to prison.

Virtually all public schools in the United States are mandated, by federal law, to use a zero tolerance policy for certain acts such as possession and use of drugs, weapons, and the use of violence (Gregory & Cornell, 2009). Zero tolerance policies were created to outline what was not acceptable for any reason in our public schools as far as safety is concerned. Yet, available research suggests that policies that rely mainly on suspending and expelling students do not remedy student misbehavior (Holloway, 2002). The impact of these practices is widely discussed by researchers in the field of student behavior. In Race, Gender, and the School to Prison Pipeline, Morris (2012) explained that the findings of other investigations revealed a strong correlation between youth contact with the justice system and failing to complete school. A lot of the focus can be directed to the classroom; the more a teacher can get a student to engage in the lesson, the more the chances for student misbehavior and suspension go down (Losen, 2011).

Recent school safety priorities have shifted from keeping schools free of weapons and drugs to punishing behaviors that pose the threat of violence from a law enforcement perspective (Browne, 2003). Current evidence strongly suggests that the philosophy and practice of zero tolerance school discipline has failed as an educational intervention, yet the approach remains popular among administrators, educators, and political leaders (Reyes, 2006). Russell Skiba and Reece Peterson (2000) linked the usage of zero tolerance to the perception that school violence is becoming more and more common and
that school officials and stakeholders need to get tough on students that commit these crimes against the student population while on campus.

Skinner (1953) stated that the idea of stopping future misbehavior is central to a philosophy of zero tolerance and the impact of consequence on future behavior is the defining characteristic of effective punishment. The key assumption of a zero tolerance policy is removing students that are disruptive and defiant, which is the leading reason for suspensions in most districts like Antioch Unified School District, will result in a safer climate for others (New York City School-Justice Partnership Task Force, 2013). This assumption is misrepresented because facts show that it has the opposite effect (DeCaltaldo & Lang, 2011). There is evidence that zero tolerance has contributed to the increase of school discipline rates. Schools with higher rates of school suspension and expulsion have less satisfactory ratings of school climate. Rather than reducing the likelihood of disruption, school suspension creates higher rates of misbehavior and suspension among those students being suspended (Bowditch, 1993).

The American Psychological Association (APA, 2008), as part of its mission to advance health, education, and human welfare, commissioned the Zero Tolerance Task Force to examine the policies within the schools and review all data and evidence regarding exclusionary discipline on students of color and with disabilities. The task force also looked at child development and the relationships between education and the juvenile justice system, students, families, and communities. This task force made recommendations for reforming zero tolerance policies and implementing alternatives in practice, policy, and change. School exclusion policies enact harsh punishments for any violation of school rules, without exceptions and without any consideration for mitigating circumstances. When these policies are enforced, there is little room to determine what may have led to the infraction. The idea that students must be expected to be absolutely obedient and compliant with all school rules is harsh because there are no explanations or
exceptions allowed (Gregory & Cornell, 2009). Since 1975, researchers have been trying
to figure out why this trend continues to be the status quo, but an even more pertinent
question is why has anything not been done to change this phenomenon?

Neill (1976) opines zero tolerance policy as a factor in exclusion of students
nationwide. Neill takes her research one step further and discusses the monetary effects
that the “push-out” phenomenon has on youth who do not complete their education and
the cost that society accrues due to welfare and social services. Much research has been
performed to determine the relationship between high dropout rates and socioeconomic
statuses in urban areas. Findings show that less than two-thirds of students graduate
from communities with “high levels of racial and socioeconomic segregation” (Orfield
& Lee, 2005, p. 5). This theory was reiterated in 2013 by Acosta and Martin (2013)
when they stated, “communities that are relatively homogenous in terms of race and low
socioeconomic level are less likely to produce high school graduates” (p. 15).

Little research exists that analyzes the longitudinal effects that zero tolerance
policies have had on students of color. Data shows disproportional discipline is being
given to students of color, especially African Americans (Tajalli & Garba, 2014). In the
study conducted by Tajalli and Garba (2014), they found that because more discipline
was given to students of color that alternative methods needed to be explored to reduce
the disproportional level of referrals given to these students. They are being suspended
and expelled at a higher rate than other groups, ultimately causing higher dropout rates
within those subgroups. This consistent pattern is having a severe negative impact on
their chances of graduating high school.
Cultural Mismatch

When looking at current disciplinary practices, Tyson (2003) stated we have to acknowledge that schools are structured according to the cultural norms and standards of mainstream Caucasian middle class society, and ask if students of color can ever prosper in that system. To date, the current disciplinary practices have not been worked to create universal equity for all students regardless of socioeconomic background. For all students to succeed, these cultural mismatches must be addressed systematically throughout all schools (Villegas, 1988).

California’s schools are predominantly staffed with educators that are from middle class Caucasian backgrounds (California Department of Education, 2011). The student population in California schools is becoming more diverse each year resulting in a high potential for cultural mismatch. McCarthy (1991) reviewed the research related to inequity in schools and proposed that the issue is complex due to the combination of race, class, and gender. He also found that in some schools there is a mismatch between the curriculum and students’ interests and values. Consequently, students resist the curriculum because they find it does not represent them or their culture. Based on this research review, McCarthy (1991) found that different race-class-gender groups have different experiences in schools, engage in competition with each other, and receive different rewards and punishments that affect their futures.

For years, researchers have argued about the comparative educational opportunities available to children of different races. Some went as far to say citizenship and education were unconnected. Moss (2010) discussed the link between race, citizenship, and educational opportunity in her book, *Schooling Citizens: The Struggle for African American Education in Antebellum America*. Moss concluded that with all the reforms that have taken place, it is still a struggle for students of color to have
the same experiences and opportunities as their Caucasian peers. The overwhelmingly disproportionate representation of students of color in the juvenile justice system, as well as their last place ranking on many measures of educational performance and attainment, have become so common place that it has caused many to view the future for these young people as hopeless and impossible to salvage (Garibaldi, 1992).

Some researchers would contend that there are not ethics in education. Cartledge et al. (2001) described ethics as a caring attitude towards others and stated that perhaps the greatest ethical challenge confronting the teaching profession is the fair application of disciplinary measures for diverse student populations. Cartledge et al. (2001) conducted research that questioned the ethical side of student discipline. In the end, they concluded that teachers are not prepared for the ethical issues that arise in the classrooms. They state, “perhaps the greatest ethical challenge confronting the teaching profession is the fair application of disciplinary measures” (p. 9). These researchers argued that the heightened anxiety over school safety and the advent of zero tolerance regulations have created an environment in which there is a higher possibility to practice unethical and unfair practices for students that come from certain populations (Cartledge et al., 2001).

Today, in just about any urban school district, you can find an alarming number of students who feel disconnected from society, frustrated by the educational system, and more than willing to give up and drop out (Beachum, 2010). For students of color, this situation is all too common within the urban school districts. A person might wonder how the hope for a better life and the hope of becoming a contributing democratic citizen got to such a low level? The answer is complex and filled with a confusing mixture of history, policy, and practices (Beachum, 2010).

For the past three decades, much of the discussion about school reform has focused on racial inequality and how students of color, particularly African American males, have failed to achieve (Orfield & Lee, 2005). For years, students of color,
especially African American students, have had to fight against a system designed to sort and rank students to take a particular place in society culturally. Students of color are routinely labeled “at risk of failing”, unsalvageable, or heading towards the School-to-Prison Pipeline path (Laura, 2011).

Researchers for years have concluded that education and students of color in urban school districts present a problem. This problem can be labeled as cultural mismatch or lack of cultural synchronization (Monroe, 2005b). Cultural mismatch leads to discrepancies in education and socio-economic outcomes for certain groups in society (Monroe, 2005b). Before schools were desegregated, African American youth were educated in schools taught by African American teachers. These teachers understood the backgrounds and culture of their students and prepared them to succeed despite racism and oppression. Beachum (2010) explained that the struggle faced by students of color, particularly African American males, was the result of the structural change of education that was the result of school desegregation; African American students joined schools with predominantly Caucasian teachers who did not understand them. In the years following the decision of Brown vs. Board of Education, students of color, particularly African Americans, have continued to struggle both in the areas of academic achievement and with school discipline that is disproportionally harsh (Lewis, Bulter, Bonner, & Joubert, 2010). Beachum (2010) also stated, “the fight for liberation seemed to lessen with the elimination of segregated all-black schools, and the change of attitudes of students regarding the value of education” (p. 3). In summary, the cultural mismatch between teachers and students alienates students of color from schools and reduces their perception of the value of education.

One of the problems that staff and students have is the misinterpretation of language (Villegas, 1988). Villegas contends that although students and teachers may use the same language, interpretation of expectations is not always clear when the two
parties come from different backgrounds. Villegas also mentions the lack of multicultural education that educators come equipped with from their education programs and states teacher education programs must go beyond the acceptance of differences and help teachers analyze the sociopolitical system that give raise to the difference (Villegas, 1988). This leads into questions of ethics and values in education, which also is well documented in research.

McCray, Alston, and Beachum (2006) studied the culture of education from the perspective of values and ethics in relation to shifting curriculum that focuses multicultural education in public schools. McCray et al. (2006) argued that school principals create the climate of a school and may unconsciously make unethical decisions when they do not embrace multicultural education. Instead, those principals create a school climate that does not value all students and fails to promote the respect and trust needed to motivate all students (McCray, Alston, & Beachum, 2006). In this study, McCray and his colleagues surveyed school principals to determine the ways in which their perceptions of the value of multicultural education influenced the school climate and promoted diversity. They found that there is a correlation between perception and social climate of that school which was rooted in the principal’s beliefs about the community’s level of education and the socioeconomic status of the students who make up the student body. These perceptions were influenced by prior experiences the principals had as teachers as well as the differences between that community and their current school. Other researchers supported these findings. Dee (2005) found that race does matter when it comes to students of color and learning. They are more likely to trust and respect someone with whom they share a salient characteristic, making learning come more easily. The same can be said for discipline. When a student shares a salient connection with a teacher or administrator, the likelihood of the student acting out in defiance drops dramatically (Dee, 2005).
School-to-Prison Pipeline

The School-to-Prison Pipeline is a metaphor that attempts to capture the path in which students of color, particularly African American males, take on their way to entering the criminal justice system (Noguera, 2003). The focus of schools has changed; more focus is on controlling student behavior rather than educating them. The fear that educators have of certain students feeds the theory that schools criminalize students. The national trend of criminalizing rather than educating children in school is referred to more specifically as the School-to-Prison Pipeline (Children Defense Fund – Ohio).

Noguera (2003) claimed that a school’s function is to sort, socialize, and maintain social control. In sorting students, schools place students on trajectories that influence their adult life, economic standing, and occupation they will assume. The socializing aspect serves to teach children values and norms that are critical to civil society and social order. Lastly, in regards to social control, Noguera (2003) claimed schools act as a surrogate parent, exercising considerable authority over students and many of their basic civil rights. Within this level of sorting certain students are able to navigate the system and adjust to the rules and procedures that govern the system. In every system, there is a group that controls the way in which the system is going to operate. This group usually creates policies for its members and procedures its members favor. Institutional racism occurs when these institutional policies and procedures operate to facilitate access to members of the dominant subculture whilst effectively and unjustifiably denying access to members of other ethnic or cultural groups (Jones, 1985). Practices like this cause the School-to-Prison Pipeline policies the students of color cannot overcome due to many researched reasons. A shift in attention is needed to focus on school factors (e.g., school-wide discipline policies and practice) (Fenning & Rose, 2007). These are the policies that feed students to the juvenile justice system (Skiba & Peterson, 2003). The focus has been
on students of color in schools. Morris (2012) claimed that African American and Latino students were perceived as a racial threat in predominantly large African American and Latino schools.

The Antioch Unified School District, located in northern California, uses a practice called progressive discipline. Progressive discipline consists of a systematic way of issuing consequences to students that continue to exhibit behavior problems in school. Progressive discipline is based on the same principles as the obedience model, using punishment as a way to deter behavior (Skiba & Peterson, 2000). In a population where some individuals punish antisocial behavior, it pays to be pro-social selectively with the punishers. In a population where some individuals behave pro-socially only when threatened with punishment, it pays to punish anti-sociality (Cushman, 2013). Schools are not only becoming more like prisons, but they are also using exclusionary punishments, such as expulsion, suspension, and in school suspension to banish students from the classroom the same way that broader society banishes criminals by incarcerating them (Welch & Payne, 2012).

**Restorative Justice**

Suspensions and expulsions are widely researched often giving way to the overrepresentation of students of color being suspended at higher rates and expelled with harsher consequences than their peers (Skiba et al., 2002). Often the cause of the problem is explored in depth, but little to no notice is ever given to remedies that might address the problem (Skiba et al., 2002). One of the fastest moving efforts to curtail suspension and expulsion problems is restorative justice. Restorative justice has emerged as one of the most of effective policies for keeping youth in school and out of the School-to-Prison Pipeline (Schiff, 2013). Restorative practices go against
the norm of punishing students for their discipline behaviors. In more common terms, restorative justice constitutes an innovative approach to both repair the harm done and repair relationships, but more importantly reducing the need to dispense punishment (Hopkins, 2002). Today in schools, students act out and punishment is issued without ever knowing the root cause of the problem to begin with. Too often schools react to behaviors of such children while failing to respond to their unmet needs or the factor responsible for problematic behavior (Noguera, 2003). Administrators in schools like to believe that all students are mature enough to be responsible and can act in a responsible manner, the current disciplinary tactics do not teach. The purpose of discipline policies in schools today is to punish students (Aydin, 2011). Aydin (2011) makes a case why punishment is not always the best approach when disciplining a child. Aydin explains that there are many factors that must be taken into account when issuing punishment, like age, personality traits, and circumstances. The punishment needs to fit the crime if any understanding is to come from the punishment. In the same article, C.M. Charles states punishment never corrects the behavior of a child; hence punishment must absolutely be not used to control misbehavior (Aydin, 2011). This leads back to restorative justice and why the research regarding this approach is so positive. Restorative justice is being increasingly used as a strategy to combat the overuse of school disciplinary referrals, suspension, and expulsions that lead to the juvenile justice system (Schiff, 2013). Schiff’s research explains why and how restorative justice policies can and should be used to combat the damaging effects of zero tolerance to help keep students in school and out of the juvenile justice system. Restorative practices show far greater promise than current strategies and promotes structure, support, and helps keep them engaged in the schooling process (Schiff, 2013).

There are alternatives to the zero tolerance practices administrators use for disciplining students. Restorative justice is a different kind of discipline that requires
training and takes time for all parties to become familiar to it. The end result of a restorative justice type practice is restoring the damage that has been done and also helping students understand the damage that has been done while being accountable for problems created by their actions (Latimer, Dowden, & Muise, 2005). Restorative practices are based on a philosophy of reparation, holding youth accountable for their actions directly to the person or communities they have harmed, and including all stakeholders in the decision making and agreement processes about what happened and what must be done to repair the harm (Schiff, 2013).

Educational discipline policy can be described as a pathway to the criminal justice system that punishes a student for the problems they created, especially when students are not held accountable for understanding the repercussions of what they did. Restorative justice is a process whereby all parties with a stake in a particular offense come together to resolve collectively how to deal with the aftermath of the offense and its implications for the future (Latimer et al., 2005). In fact, scholars find the policies schools have adopted since the 1990s, including campus police, metal detectors, drug sweeps, and surveillance cameras, as a signal shift from discretionary student disciplinary framework to a crime control paradigm (Hirschfield & Celinska, 2011). This way of doing things is an exact copy of our criminal justice system that works in a top down fashion. Why would anyone think that this model of doing things would work for education? Hardly ever, when issuing consequences for an offense committed at a school, does the accused have an opportunity to take a leading role or have a voice in resolving the problem. Discipline is about teaching, and zero tolerance does not allow for any significant teaching moments when consequences and punishments are applied. *The Effectiveness of Restorative Justice Practices: A Meta-Analysis* (Latimer et al., 2005) is an article that examined restorative justice practices and made a case for why techniques like these were more effective than the conventional way of doing things. The researchers used
criminal behavior as the basis of their analysis. For example, one of the studies looked at programs that used restorative justice and its role in reducing offender recidivism. The results revealed that the programs yielded reductions in re-offending. Another study showed the victim’s satisfaction rate was higher when a restorative justice program was utilized (Latimer et al., 2005). Proponents of restorative justice claim that the process is beneficial to victims and offenders by emphasizing recovery of the victim through reparation, vindication, and healing and by encouraging recompense by the offender through habilitation (Van Ness & Strong, 2013). There are steps that need to be applied when implementing restorative justice techniques. The first is a non-adversarial and dialogue-based decision-making process that allows the affected victims to discuss the harm done to them. The second part is an agreement that all stakeholders find necessary to repair the damage done to the persons or community.

Summary

There are two problems at the center of the academic achievement for students of color. These problems are discipline policies with zero tolerance language and cultural mismatches between students and teachers that lead to misunderstandings and ultimately disciplinary problems in schools. Student behavior success is closely linked with their ability to decode implicit teacher expectations and cues (Monroe, 2005a). It is documented that Caucasian teachers often interpret culturally based behavior, such as talking loud and overlapping speech, as rude or offensive conduct (Monroe, 2005a). Problems like these lead to students being excluded from school. Zero tolerance policies that allow for exclusion because of actions like this should be reviewed and if possible changed. This long continued trend is referred to as the push-out factor and has started another phenomenon called the School-to-Prison Pipeline.
The lack of transparency and disconnect between schools, teachers, parents, and students of color is due to policies, like zero tolerance. Research shows that the zero tolerance approach conflicts with the developmental needs of adolescents (Gregory & Cornell, 2009). This conflict has caused great numbers of African American students to fail academically. In fact, this rift between schools and students of color contributes to the academic failures, disproportionate rates of suspension and expulsion, and the overrepresentation of African American students, in particular, in special education programs and their underrepresentation in gifted programs (Day-Vines & Day-Hairston, 2005).

There are remedies to the push-out problem that face our nation’s schools. The first suggested remedy would be to eliminate policies that seek to exclude students from school. This practice is counterproductive to the whole purpose of education and does nothing but marginalize students that are already faced with the task of competing in an arena that was never designed with them in mind. Policies like restorative justice would be a good ideal because this practice replicates the community process of dealing with misunderstandings while at the same time holding people accountable for their actions. Restorative justice brings students together to resolve conflicts instead of using punitive measures and leaving the issues unresolved.
CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHOD

The purpose of this study was to analyze whether administrators’ perceptions of disciplinary policies and procedures influenced the discipline rates of students of color in schools. A specific focus was placed on examining how administrators perceived and utilized progressive disciplinary procedures across a continuum of inappropriate behaviors. The goal was to examine how administrators determined how the behavior should be addressed and whether the method of addressing the behavior called for punitive or restorative types of intervention.

This study examined how administrators perceived or conceptualized school discipline policies in relation to students of color, particularly African American males, and how the administrators’ perceptions and use of disciplinary interventions served to keep students of color marginalized. In addition to the examination of official district records, a 23-question online survey was created using Survey Monkey software to study these issues. All district administrators were invited to voluntarily participate in the study (see Appendix B and Appendix C). Thirty-three administrators chose to take part in the survey. Of the 33 administrators who completed the survey, 10 administrators volunteered for face-to-face interviews. The 10 interviewees consisted of different levels of educational experience and represented various ethnic backgrounds.
The research questions that framed this study addressed current shortfalls identified through the literature review. This researcher used the grounded theory research approach to gather data using a survey and in-depth structured interviews with AUSD administrators. The use of the grounded theory approach allowed the researcher to develop theory without having any preconceived notions about the outcome. This theory allowed the researcher to gather the data, analyze the data, and let the data determine the answers to the questions asked. Data was gathered from three sources AUSD official discipline records from the 2009-2012 academic years, a survey completed by AUSD administrators, and face-to-face interviews with AUSD administrators. The AUSD official discipline records were used to determine base rate data for suspensions and expulsions. The survey used Likert scale, multiple choice, and open-ended questions to determine the administrators’ perceptions of school discipline policy and if the policy impacted students of color in a disparate way. The administrators’ answers to these questions determined their level of like or dislike of discipline policies. The interviews were designed to capture some of the administrators’ thoughts about how effective or ineffective discipline practices are in the schools. Interviews were only given to administrators that wanted to further the research process.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following questions

1. What are school administrators’ perceptions of disciplinary practices to address student misbehavior?
2. How do current disciplinary processes result in disparate impact on students of color?

3. How do alternatives, such as restorative justice practices, offer administrators valuable tools for addressing disciplinary issues and school safety?

Target Population

The target population was administrators employed with Antioch Unified School District. Permission was granted from the District Office allowing use of the District’s email for the purpose of administering the survey. Online survey software, Survey Monkey, was used for its efficiency, cost effectiveness, and accessibility. All 68 schools and district level administrators from AUSD were invited to participate in the online survey. Male and female administrators from various backgrounds and ethnicities took part in this study. Participants were not compensated for their participation; however each participant will have access and benefit from the final report.

The survey took approximately 30 minutes to complete. The interview phase of this study included 10 administrators who volunteered for face-to-face interviews. The participants reflected the demographics of the administrators throughout the district, which created diversity in gender, ethnicity, years of experience, and administrative positions of the interviewees. The administrators interviewed represented schools that had high discipline data and a high disproportion of suspension and expulsion between student groups.
Prior to being interviewed or completing the online survey, each participant was required to sign the informed consent form. By signing the informed consent form, the participant acknowledged receipt of information pertaining to the study’s purpose, benefits, and any anticipated risk (see Appendix B). To ensure confidentiality, all participants were given a disclaimer explaining their confidentiality was protected and that all names, school names, or other identifiers that may jeopardize the integrity of the individual would not be used in the study. Additionally, to retain confidentiality, a code known only to the researcher and housed in a secure location in the researcher’s home office, was assigned to each participant.

All information gathered in this research study was stored in the researcher’s office where only the researcher has access to the items and was kept on a password protected personal laptop computer. The digital recording device was secured in a locked cabinet.

**Setting**

The Antioch Unified School District is located in east Contra Costa County in a city of more than 100,000 residents. There are 13 elementary schools, four middle schools, two comprehensive high schools, three specialized high schools, two alternative high schools, and one K-8 school. There are 1803 employees and approximately 950 are teachers (AUSD, 2014). In the 2011-2012 academic year, 81.2% of the teachers were Caucasian, 7.9% were Latino/Hispanic, 5% were African American, and 3.8% were Asian/Pacific Islander (Ed-Data, 2014). The district serves over 19,000 K-12 students in which 34.3% are Latino/Hispanic, 22.3% are African American, 24.5% are Caucasian,
and 11.3% are Asian/Pacific Islander. AUSD reports that 51.7% of their students receive free and reduced lunch and 18.3% are English Language Learners (AUSD, 2014).

Instrumentation

This study utilized the qualitative grounded theory research approach to gather data to answer the three research questions. The online survey was designed to answer questions regarding the administrators’ perceptions of school discipline. Following the survey, administrators were asked if they wanted to participate in the interview process. Ten administrators, all district employees in the AUSD at the time of the research, volunteered to participate in one on one interviews. Eleven unstructured questions were designed to get administrators’ perceptions of disciplinary practices and their opinions on how discipline impacted students.

Phase 1: Data Analysis Procedures

The official records for the 2009-2012 academic years of Antioch Unified School District were examined to identify any trends regarding discipline within the district and to provide a foundation for which infractions occurred most frequently and the interventions utilized district wide. This information was compared to the survey and interview responses collected from administrators to better contextualize the perceptions of administrators regarding the types of violations taking place at their schools.

Phase 2: Survey

The survey was designed to gather information for three broad questions.
• What are school administrators’ perceptions of disciplinary practices to address student misbehavior?

• How do current disciplinary processes result in disparate impact on students of color?

• How do alternatives, such as restorative justice practices, offer administrators valuable tools for addressing disciplinary issues and school safety?

An online survey was designed to examine school administrators’ perceptions of disciplinary practices and best practices to address student misbehavior. The survey questions were divided into three sections. Section one consisted of 12 Likert scale questions that focused on administrators’ perceptions of school discipline practices. These questions were adapted from other researchers and made to fit the research being conducted.

The second section consisted of eight multiple-choice questions. These questions focused on what administrators thought were the best practices to use when administering discipline to a student. The third section of the survey consisting of three open-ended questions, asked participants about common characteristics of students who are suspended repeatedly, restorative justice approaches, and suggestions that could positively impact student behavior (see Appendix D). The survey concluded with an optional question that asked for the participants’ demographics. The survey was designed to get the perceptions of what administrators thought of discipline.

Phase 3: Interview Procedures

The face-to-face interviews, consisting of 11 unstructured questions were used to explore the beliefs of 10 administrators regarding how disciplinary processes impact students of color. All interviews were recorded using a digital recorder. Field notes were
taken to catch any nuances that might assist in the analysis and/or interpretation of the administrator’s responses. After all interviews were concluded, all data was sent to a transcriber for the interviews to be coded and transcribed. The researcher analyzed the transcribed interviews to identify trends in the administrators’ responses.

To accommodate the schedules of administrators, one-hour appointments were scheduled at their convenience. There were certain parameters that were set for the interviews. The first parameter was that anyone that was being interviewed had to have completed the survey section of the research. The second parameter was administrators could back out of the interview at any time, and if they did not want their interview information in the research, they could decline prior to it being coded and written into the paper. A date was given to the administrators so they would know when to best contact the researcher to pull their information from the research. All interviews took place at the administrators’ locations of choice.

Limitations of Study

Fewer administrators volunteered for the face-to-face interviews than the researcher anticipated. Administrators interviewed may be hesitant to discuss their work-related responsibilities for fear of retaliation. In addition, administrators’ perceptions may be difficult to measure or determine as a result of the environment and their hesitation of discussing their work-related responsibilities. Another concern is how the respondents interpret the survey questions can influence the validity of the answers. The researcher made a staunch effort to maintain any personal biases out of the research and allow the data to speak for itself.
Chapter 3, the research methodology, included a detailed discussion of the study research design, target population, data collection instrument, coding, and data analysis. All the information to complete a thorough research study was presented in this chapter. In Chapter 4, the researcher will provide the findings and a detailed analysis of the information collected.
In this chapter, the results of the data collected from the research are presented and explained. The study was designed to examine administrators’ perceptions of suspensions and expulsions as well as to examine how their discipline practices impacted students of color, particularly African American males. Three main goals drove the data collection process. The first goal was to understand the base rate of suspensions and expulsions in Antioch Unified School District (AUSD) from 2009 - 20012. The second goal was to examine how administrators perceive or conceptualize school discipline policy in relation to students of color, particularly African American males. The third goal of the study was to determine how current administrators’ perceptions and the utilization of discipline intervention serve to keep students of color, particularly African American male students, marginalized and institutionalized. Data sources for this study consisted of

1. Official records containing the 2009-2012 suspension and expulsion records from AUSD,
2. Surveys of AUSD administrators, and
3. Interviews of a subset of AUSD administrators.

Base Rate Data

Base rate data was collected from Antioch Unified School District containing all suspension and expulsion records between the 2009 to 2012 school years. The
information included the gender, ethnicity, and reasons for the referral leading to suspension or expulsion. This data was then broken down to determine trends in suspensions and expulsions over a three-year period. The data revealed six main discipline categories that led to suspensions, which included controlled substance, defiance, physical aggression, weapons, truancy, and theft/stolen property. Over the three-year span, physical aggression and defiance were the leading reasons for suspension at 38% and 49% respectively. Suspensions for defiance were highest during the 2009-2010 school year when there were 2,594 suspensions, which was 62% of that year’s suspensions (see Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2009-2010</th>
<th>2010-2011</th>
<th>2011-2012</th>
<th>2009-2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlled Substance</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defiance</td>
<td>2594</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>1639</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Aggression</td>
<td>1290</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>1442</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weapon</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Truancy</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theft/Stolen Property</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTALS</td>
<td>4204</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>3688</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: 2009 – 2012 Suspensions by Category

There were a total of 5,617 suspensions for defiance from 2009-2012, which accounted for almost half of the 11,401 suspensions during that three-year period. African American students accounted for 6,479 of these total suspensions, while Latino students accounted for 2,732 of the total suspensions and Caucasians students accounted for 1,688 suspensions, and other students received 504 suspensions. These high suspension rates led to a significant number of school days missed and exclusion from learning.

Between 2009 and 2012, African American students, who make up 23% of AUSD’s total student population, accounted for 57% of the suspensions in the district. Latinos, who are the largest ethnic group in the district, accounted for 24% of the
suspensions. In comparison, Caucasian students represent 23% of the district’s total student population and comprise 15% of the total suspensions during this period. African American students more than double the suspension rates of the Latino and Caucasian students even though they represent 23% of the total student population (see Table 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>2009-2010</th>
<th>2010-2011</th>
<th>2011-2012</th>
<th>2009-2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Male %</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Male %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>53% 33%</td>
<td>57% 37%</td>
<td>61% 40%</td>
<td>57% 44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>26% 19%</td>
<td>24% 19%</td>
<td>22% 16%</td>
<td>24% 21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>15% 12%</td>
<td>15% 11%</td>
<td>15% 11%</td>
<td>15% 13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>6% 4%</td>
<td>4% 2%</td>
<td>3% 2%</td>
<td>4% 4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>100% 69%</td>
<td>100% 70%</td>
<td>100% 69%</td>
<td>100% 81%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Total Number of Suspensions by Race & Ethnicity 2009-2012

Suspensions represent days out of school, missed opportunities for learning, and denied participation in the education process. During this three-year period, a total of 27,523 school days were missed because of suspension. In the 2009-2010 school year, suspensions equated to a total of 9,636 missed school days. In the 2010-2011 school year, suspensions led to 9,145 days of school being missed, with most of the suspensions being for defiance. During the 2011-2012 school year, suspensions caused students to miss 8,742 school days. Unlike the other two years, physical aggression was the cause for a majority of the suspensions in 2011-2012.

African American students missed over half of the total days of suspension. African American students accounted for 15,619 total days suspended from school from 2009 to 2012 school years, which was 57% of the total suspension days during this period. In comparison, Latinos accounted for 24% of the total days of suspension, while Caucasian students represented 14% of the missed school days because of suspension. Latinos accounted for 6,622.5 total days missed and Caucasian and others accounted for 3,850.5 and 1,431 respectfully.
Gender was also compared and male students were suspended at a higher rate than female students. Males comprised 81% of the suspensions during this period. The higher rate of suspensions for African American males remained consistent to the total African American student suspension rate when compared to their Latino and Caucasian counterparts. The suspension trends for males were comparable of the total population suspension numbers as African American males represented 44%, Latinos 21%, and Caucasians 13% of the suspensions (see Figure 1).

![Chart 2: 2009-12 Suspensions by Race, Ethnicity & Gender](image)

*Figure 1: 2009-2012 suspensions by race, ethnicity, and gender.*

Of the 11,401 suspensions during this span, there were 5,722 unique students, which indicates that some students were suspended multiple times. There were 3,044 individual African American students, which equaled 53% of these students. As with the
total suspensions, males also had a much higher representation in this area and made up 67% of the unique student suspensions.

During this three-year period, there were 519 expulsions. The majority of the expulsions were for physical aggression, which comprised 57% of all expulsions. Weapons, controlled substance, defiance, and theft/possession of stolen property were the other reason for expulsion (see Figure 2).

![Chart 2: Expulsions by Category 2009-2012](image)

**Figure 2**: Expulsions by category from 2009-2012.

Similarly to the suspension data, African American students accounted for 63% of the expulsions in the district between 2009 and 2012. Latinos accounted for 22% of the expulsions. In comparison, Caucasian students represent 13% of the expulsions during this period. Just like with the number of suspensions, African American students more than double the expulsion rates of the Latino and Caucasian students even though they are not the majority.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Population %</th>
<th>Suspension %</th>
<th>Expulsion %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Percentage Comparison of Population to Suspension & Expulsion Rates 2009-2012

For expulsions, African American males accounted for 44% of expulsions, while male Latinos accounted for 18% and Caucasians for 10% of expulsions as is shown in Figure 3. African American male expulsions almost doubled the number of Latino and Caucasian expulsions combined and were greater than the total of all groups.

Figure 3: Expulsions by race, ethnicity, and gender from 2009-2012.

Between the years of 2009-2012, African American students made up 23% of the school district’s population, but accounted for over half of the suspensions and
almost two-thirds of the expulsions issued during this three-year period. Latino students made up 37% of the Antioch Unified School District’s population and had a suspension rate of 24% and an expulsion rate of 22% over this time. Meanwhile, the Caucasian student population was equal to the African Americans students in the district, and their suspension rate was 15% and their expulsion rate was 13% during that same time period.

**Survey Response Data**

The survey portion of the research was conducted using Survey Monkey, an online software application. Data collected from the questions was automatically tallied for further analysis. The survey consisted of 23 questions 12 Likert scale questions, 8 multiple-choice, and 3 open-ended questions. There was an optional demographics question at the end of the survey (see Appendix D). The questions examined administrators’ perceptions of current discipline policies effectiveness in modifying student behavior. Administrators were asked to respond to challenging behaviors that students display at school. Questions included identifying common characteristics of students and administrators’ perceptions on equity of discipline policies, resources, and strategies used to promote acceptable behavior and conduct to prevent behavior problems.

A total of 33 administrators participated in the survey. Five opted not to answer the demographics portion of the survey, and of those who did, some did not answer every demographics question. There were 14 females and 13 males. The racial/ethnic breakdown of the participants included three African Americans, 15 Caucasians, three biracial, five Latinos, and one Native American. The participants represented a variety of placements in AUSD, five at the district level, eight high school administrators, six middle school administrators, and eight elementary administrators. They ranged from 1-35 years of employment in Antioch Unified School District and 1-28 years working in
administration. Their time in education ranged from 6-37 years of experience. The age range of the participants was from 27-68 years old.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity/Race</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>African American</th>
<th>Caucasian</th>
<th>Latinos</th>
<th>Native American</th>
<th>Biracial</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>27-68</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Administration Level</th>
<th>Elementary</th>
<th>Middle School</th>
<th>High School</th>
<th>District</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># of Years in AUSD</th>
<th>1-35</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># of Years in Administration</th>
<th>1-28</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># of Years in education</th>
<th>6-37</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

*Table 4: Demographics of Survey Participants*
Perceptions from the Survey

Fifty percent of the administrators believed current school discipline policies made the school safer, yet almost 85% of the administrators felt that elementary and high school students should be disciplined differently. Over 51% of the administrators disagreed or strongly disagreed that suspension and expulsion are good discipline policies.

On questions one, four, and six regarding the effectiveness of discipline, administrators agreed that school discipline programs were ineffective. For question four, 75% of school administrators agreed or strongly agreed school discipline programs had not had an effect on students who were sent to the office frequently. On question 10, almost 60% of the administrators surveyed believed students who display behavior problems are sent to the office for the principal or vice principal to handle the issue. Fifty-three percent of the administrators believed the response to student behavior is reactive instead of proactive on question five.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. In meetings about students with behavioral challenges, discussions focus primarily on behaviors rather than on causes and unsolved problems.</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9.1% (3)</td>
<td>18.2% (6)</td>
<td>27.3% (9)</td>
<td>36.4% (12)</td>
<td>9.1% (3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2. In responding to challenging behaviors, the school relies heavily on a policy-based system: a list of behaviors students should not exhibit and a process for how administrators should respond to those behaviors if they are exhibited.</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.0% (0)</td>
<td>9.4% (3)</td>
<td>15.6% (5)</td>
<td>46.9% (15)</td>
<td>28.1% (9)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3. Students of color are treated the same in comparison to white students.</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12.1% (4)</td>
<td>21.2% (7)</td>
<td>24.2% (8)</td>
<td>9.1% (3)</td>
<td>33.3% (11)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. There are many "frequent flyers" in the school: students whose behavior has not improved despite frequent exposure to our school discipline program.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.3% (2)</td>
<td>6.3% (2)</td>
<td>12.5% (4)</td>
<td>28.1% (9)</td>
<td>46.9% (15)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Our school's response to students with continuing challenging behavior is primarily immediate and reactive rather than planned and proactive.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1% (1)</td>
<td>31.3% (10)</td>
<td>12.5% (4)</td>
<td>37.5% (12)</td>
<td>15.6% (5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.0% (0)</td>
<td>18.8% (6)</td>
<td>31.3% (10)</td>
<td>21.9% (7)</td>
<td>28.1% (9)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7. Expulsion is a good discipline policy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>27.3% (9)</td>
<td>24.2% (8)</td>
<td>21.2% (7)</td>
<td>27.3% (9)</td>
<td>0.0% (0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8. Suspension is a good discipline policy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21.2% (7)</td>
<td>30.3% (10)</td>
<td>15.2% (5)</td>
<td>27.3% (9)</td>
<td>6.1% (2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9. Elementary and high school students should be disciplined the same.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>57.6% (19)</td>
<td>27.3% (9)</td>
<td>6.1% (2)</td>
<td>6.1% (2)</td>
<td>3.0% (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

10. In my school, classroom teachers frequently send students to someone outside of the classroom - for example, the principal or assistant principal - to deal with behavior problems.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.3% (2)</td>
<td>21.9% (7)</td>
<td>15.6% (5)</td>
<td>40.6% (13)</td>
<td>15.6% (5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12. My school relies very heavily on adult-imposed consequences, such as detentions, suspensions and other punishments, in responding to challenging behavior.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.0% (0)</td>
<td>6.3% (2)</td>
<td>12.5% (4)</td>
<td>40.6% (13)</td>
<td>40.6% (13)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Responses for Likert Scale Questions

Effectiveness

Based on responses to question 12, 81% of the administrators agreed or strongly agreed that their schools rely on adult imposed consequences. These include detentions, campus beautification, in school suspension, out of school suspension, expulsion,
and restorative justice. Thirty-six percent of the administrators felt detention was an effective method to improve student behavior. Forty-three percent believed campus beautification was an effective means to correct behavior. Forty-one percent felt in school suspension was an effective way to correct student behavior. Forty-three percent of the administrators believed suspension was an ineffective tool to correct behavior and 40% also felt expulsion was an ineffective tool for correcting behavior. Sixty-eight percent of the administrators polled felt restorative justice was an effective way to correct student behavior.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Extremely Ineffective</th>
<th>Ineffective</th>
<th>Neither Effective nor Ineffective</th>
<th>Effective</th>
<th>Extremely Effective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Detention</td>
<td>6.1% (2)</td>
<td>21.2% (7)</td>
<td>36.4% (12)</td>
<td>36.4% (12)</td>
<td>0.0% (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus Beautification</td>
<td>3.1% (1)</td>
<td>15.6% (5)</td>
<td>37.5% (12)</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.1% (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-school Suspension</td>
<td>6.3% (2)</td>
<td>28.1% (9)</td>
<td>25.0% (8)</td>
<td>34.4% (11)</td>
<td>6.3% (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of School Suspension</td>
<td>15.2% (5)</td>
<td>27.3% (9)</td>
<td>21.2% (7)</td>
<td>33.3% (11)</td>
<td>3.0% (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expulsion</td>
<td>9.1% (3)</td>
<td><strong>30.3% (10)</strong></td>
<td>27.3% (9)</td>
<td><strong>30.3% (10)</strong></td>
<td>3.0% (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restorative Justice</td>
<td>0.0% (0)</td>
<td>3.1% (1)</td>
<td>28.1% (9)</td>
<td><strong>50.0% (16)</strong></td>
<td>18.8% (6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: Effectiveness of Discipline Methods to Improve Behavior

Administrators differed on the technique preferred for addressing specific behaviors. In addressing behaviors, such as chewing gum, 53% of the administrators would suggest campus beautification to discipline the student. A majority of the administrators felt detention was the appropriate discipline technique for using cell phones/electronics, classroom disruption, profanity, and cutting class. Fighting, use of drugs, alcohol or tobacco, and the possession of drugs are infractions for which administrators suggested that suspension was the appropriate discipline. Although a majority felt suspension was appropriate for those incidents, 33% believed restorative
justice was an appropriate response to fighting and using drugs, alcohol, or tobacco. Seventy-one percent responded that possession of weapons or explosives warranted expulsion. Restorative justice was the preferred choice among administrators when dealing with defiance, tardiness, not bringing materials to class, and bullying. Using restorative justice techniques was the second option to all behaviors except possession of drugs and possession of weapons or explosives.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Detention</th>
<th>Campus Beautification</th>
<th>Suspension</th>
<th>Restorative Justice</th>
<th>Expulsion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chewing gum</td>
<td>16.7% (5)</td>
<td>53.3% (16)</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>30.0% (9)</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not bringing materials to class</td>
<td>38.5% (10)</td>
<td>7.7% (2)</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>53.8% (14)</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using a cell phone or electronics in class</td>
<td>56.7% (17)</td>
<td>10.0% (3)</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>33.3% (10)</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom disruptions</td>
<td>63.3% (19)</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3.3% (1)</td>
<td>33.3% (10)</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tardy to class</td>
<td>46.4% (13)</td>
<td>3.6% (1)</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>50% (14)</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defiance</td>
<td>40.6% (13)</td>
<td>3.1% (1)</td>
<td>12.5% (4)</td>
<td>43.8% (14)</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using profanity</td>
<td>46.7% (14)</td>
<td>6.7% (2)</td>
<td>10.0% (3)</td>
<td>36.7% (11)</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under the influence of drugs, alcohol or tobacco</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>56.7% (17)</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>10.0% (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possession of drugs</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>71.9% (23)</td>
<td>12.5% (4)</td>
<td>15.6% (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possession of weapons or explosives</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>21.9% (7)</td>
<td>6.3% (2)</td>
<td>71.9% (23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cutting class</td>
<td>53.3% (16)</td>
<td>13.3% (4)</td>
<td>3.3% (1)</td>
<td>30.0% (9)</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying</td>
<td>15.6% (5)</td>
<td>3.1% (1)</td>
<td>21.9% (7)</td>
<td>56.3% (18)</td>
<td>3.1% (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7: Suggested Discipline Techniques for Inappropriate Behavior
Data collected from the survey and interview transcriptions resulted in the emergence of four themes of culture, tools and resources, interventions, and restorative justice.

**Culture**

The cultural theme was inclusive of any mention of ethnicity, race, gender, socioeconomic demographics, or anything that sounded like discrimination towards a group. Findings under the cultural theme were many.

When discussing teachers’ perceptions of African American students in comparison to Caucasian students and the rate of African American students being kicked out, one administrator had this to say:

> Because this is not a staff who gives two craps about children. They really, really, really just like kicking them out. And there are very few white kids that get kicked out. A lot of brown kids, a lot of black kids who get kicked out. For a little nothing. (G. Watson, personal communication, January 22, 2013)

The administrator continued with discussing the reasons students of color are kicked out of class. The reasons varied, but students in Antioch are kicked out for a variety of reasons including refusing to take gloves off in class, as the following excerpt illustrates:

> Like I got a referral because the kid wouldn’t take his gloves off. It was before they turned the heat on and it was 50 degrees outside. It’s frikking cold. If he’s doing his work why did you kick him out? You kicked him out because he’s 6 foot
5 and African American. Let’s be real about it. Because if a white kid wouldn’t take their gloves off, eh, okay. I guarantee it. And basically my school sickens me. I have a pit in my stomach every day I have to go there because I can’t just fire half the staff. Because they should not be allowed to be around children. (A. Scott, personal communication, January 18, 2013)

A Caucasian male administrator was asked as a follow up question, “Do you think the demographic difference between Caucasian teachers and students of color matters when it comes to a level of understanding?” In other words, is there a communication breakdown between students of color and Caucasian teachers?

Well, I think that our teachers are aware that they service non-white kids more than any other kids. But yet, I don’t think that in the same speed that the demographics have changed, I don’t think their instructional practices have changed in the same proportion. So simple things that go unnoticed sometimes, there are teachers who will ask rhetorical questions to a predominantly African American class, and African American students, for whatever reason, cultural or whatever, don’t do well with rhetorical questions. If they hear a question and they’re not told this is the policy and procedure on how to answer a question that’s asked in that manner then they will talk out. And the volume and the number of outbursts in that sense usually enrages white teachers, and causes to why can’t you just behave? Again, another rhetorical question, which is answered, and you create this whole hostile exchange where each side feels disrespected. I think that has a lot to do with it. The rhetorical question is just one example of that. (T. Person, personal communication, January 9, 2013)

Although cultural differences are apparent in the responses given, most felt it was something that could be overcome given enough time and training. One Caucasian
middle school principal explained her family’s reaction to her teaching at one of the predominantly African American schools

When people found out I was going, it was like, oh my gosh! I got told be aware of the kids, the moms are ghetto, the kids are ghetto, and I always thought to myself, how? The kids come from Carmen [name], Jack London, and Grant. I used to be the principal at Grant. I know the kids who I sent to Black Diamond from Grant. Ghetto is not how I would have chosen to describe them or their parents. (G. Watson, personal communication, January 22, 2013)

One African American male principal was blunt about how he perceived the cultural gap between students and staff

It’s calling a spade a spade. You have a disproportionate amount of African American, Hispanic, Latino students, students from families that are lower income, free and reduced lunch, and on this side you have a lot of WHITE teachers, older, middle class, upper middle class backgrounds. So in and of itself maybe that’s not a problem, but operationally, the reality is, that grouping has a lens. This grouping has a lens. There’s a friction that’s going to take place there as we’re dealing with the educational experience of those kids. (B. Johnson, personal communication, January 16, 2013)

As we continued the conversation, he shared these thoughts about culture, the role he thinks it plays in the dynamics of school, and how adults view students of color. He stated that as long as you have different people from different backgrounds coming together, there are going to be misunderstandings.

So think those are two points where culture makes a big, big deal in terms of how discipline plays out, and what discipline even means. Because you know, for
some people, for some cultures, the importance of dialogue in communication and talking openly and getting in a circle and talking about stuff, that is part of certain people’s culture to be able to talk stuff out. But in other cultures it’s like you’re supposed to sit there and shut up, and that’s their cultural framework. So what do you do if those two cultures rub up against each other? Then you put a power differential into that cultural friction. One person has a power differential. So now the person with the power differential might ascribe pathology to a person’s behavior, which is really a natural expression of the cultural perspective and boom, you’ve got defiance. You’ve got a kid sent out of class. You’ve got six times the kid’s sent out of the class before you can establish within the organization culture that something is wrong and I’ve got to engage that, and there you have some of our discipline problems that we see playing out here. (B. Johnson, personal communication, January 16, 2013)

Finally, a female African American principal shared her view about the cultural perception of young African American males and what she felt needs to be done to change the perception

I feel it alarming that it’s still African Americans, after 400 years, it’s still African Americans, and how we are aggressive and defiant and this and that and the other, and that there hasn’t been any intervention or any major, major reform effort to show us how we’re supposed to change. But then I say, “We’re not supposed to change.” The structure needs to change. We’re always asked to tone it down, sit down, be down, be quiet, pull your pants up, whatever it is, it’s—and the structure is not changing to try to accommodate or to try to see who we are as a people. (C. Blake, personal communication, January 15, 2013)
The second theme that emerged was the mentioning of tools or resources used or not available to administrators in the district. When looking at the data, administrators kept mentioning the lack of professional development, staffing issues, and communication between staff and families as being problematic. The findings under the tools and resources theme consist of the following.

Antioch Unified School District collaborates with a variety of non-profit agencies to improve student behavior and academic performance. One of the Caucasian principals noted this during the interview session when he was asked about tools and resources that the district uses.

> So through agencies that come and look for gang prevention, making good choices, working with different sub-groups, African Americans, Hispanics, and helping them to see past their issues and problems to the point that we need to be successful in school and give them the support they need to be successful. (F. Carter, personal communication, January 11, 2013)

Collaboration has been implemented throughout the district but is not used as an intervention strategy for behaviors. A Caucasian high school principal highlighted how collaboration can be used for intervention as well as monitoring student academic progress and mentioned that it is important that information regarding students and their behavior is shared amongst the staff.

> …we have a lot of grade level collaboration so the teachers that share a grade level of students talk a lot about what students they’re worried about and how to intervene, and share what works for them and what’s going on. (D. Green, personal communication, January 14, 2013)
Many schools use conflict mediation as an intervention tool, but who oversees the mediation varies by campus depending on resources and funding. When discussing the problem of resources, one administrator mentioned that because there are not enough adults on campus to deal with minor elementary issues, she used students as mediators for student conflicts. “I do have conflict managers on my campus that I utilize, and they have been doing a very good job of working with kids and talking to kids about the varying issues that are coming up” (F. Carter, personal communication, January 11, 2013).

Alternatively at the high school level, this principal explained how school staff oversaw the mediations

…usually when two kids get into a fight per se, they go and have conflict mediation. Usually in the past it’s been with 10, with [name], or with one of us they’ll do a conflict mediation. [name] has been really good about if we have female type stuff, sitting down with that; I’ve done it a few times. If a kid has a drug type of thing that leads them to be suspended, then they come back and do drug counseling with Mac usually. Defiance and profanity, I don’t think we really have any real systematic follow-up on that. What I have done personally, my personal response, when kids have been suspended for cussing out an adult, I make them write a letter, you know, saying—and I say, you know what, if you write a letter and it’s sincere, it’s legit, I’ll break your suspension down like a day. I’ll go two instead of three, because if you cuss out an adult it’s three. (C. Blake, personal communication, January 15, 2013)

Some school sites use outside agencies to help with their conflict mediation as this middle school administrator described, “We just try to make sure we get a pass out for them and get them to conflict management, which is with our Reach counseling,
thankfully. At least we have one of those” (H. Ubande, personal communication, January 23, 2013)

When continuing the conversation, the elementary school principal noted that different schools are allocated different resources depending on the socioeconomic status of their students. So if a school receives federal Title One funding, it is allocated more money than a school that does not receive this additional funding. “And we got the parents into a parenting class. That helped too, but we had things available to us at AMS that we don’t have financially available to us here because we don’t have Title 1 one money” (G. Watson, personal communication, January 22, 2013).

Another principal, a White female at the middle school, which the elementary school previously mentioned feeds into, shared about her limited resources, including not having a counselor on campus and how the kids can learn social skills that a counselor can provide. She also noted how things like this take time to develop and is not learned overnight.

For some of our students I think a follow-up would be great. Whether it’s with a counselor for multiple sessions for a couple weeks in a row, touching base with them, was the suspension because they were fighting? If so, we need to give them some tools on how to interact with other kids that a counselor could give, or this is a child whose doing a lot of FUs to their teacher, and if so, what other avenues we can pursue about helping the student learn appropriate times for certain language. Seeing the difference between what’s accepted at home, as home language, and what’s accepted at school, for school language. That’s not something that’s going to come right away. That’s going to take some time to develop. So follow-up would be fabulous, and in small groups or one-on-one counseling. (E. Jones, personal communication, January 10, 2013)
The lack of resources was repeatedly stated, but this African American vice principal noted there is not a systematic procedure to respond to various behavior issues. The information that is captured is not always used correctly to help administrators correct behaviors. He goes on to state that the district does not use information appropriately, and that the district does not know the person, meaning the student. He believes that if students were tracked in a more holistic fashion, the district would have a better grasp on why kids behave the way they do and administrators would have a better chance of correcting the behavior because they have more information on the student.

So to be formalized and systematized if a kid gets in a fight you have a conflict mediation, the results of that mediation is documented in here, and it’s tracked and it’s followed up on it. Same thing with the drugs. Same thing with the profanity. These things need to be systematically done, documented, and followed up on. And we don’t capture enough information on kids from the effective domain to create holistic kind of big data like pictures of kids so we can understand how a kid, again, as a person—as a person—moves through the educational journey. Not just a collection of suspensions, not just a collection of Ds and F’s, not just a collection of truancy. That’s a person. That’s a human being with aspirations, dreams—or CRUSHED aspirations and dreams, that if we can capture that data and develop a better picture along with our responses to disciplinary infractions, because frankly, if we capture the right kind of information on kids and create better profiles through these processes of follow-up when the kid comes back, we could get a better sense of what works. (I. Stanly, personal communication, January 25, 2013)
The third theme was the lack of or use of interventions at the disposal of the administrators. Interventions can be anything the administrator can use as a strategy to help correct behavior and combat the problem of suspensions or expulsions. The administrators mentioned detentions, alternative placement, on campus suspension, and other methods that could be used as a deterrent to suspensions or expulsions in the interviews. The principals shared a great deal that contributed to the findings under the intervention theme.

Follow up intervention was one of main issues identified when putting the questions together to ask the administrators. When speaking to one of the Caucasian male principals at the middle school, he discussed the importance of following up with students after suspension, expulsion, or minor consequences to show the students that the school supports them and for there to be a reflection. The following is how he described the need for follow up and why it is important to recognize if a student is trying to change his behavior.

I think it has a huge impact on kids who get expelled and come back. You take the time to not just meet with them once, but to have a review process where they’re able to demonstrate to you the changes that they’re trying to make and you’re able to provide support for that too. When the student is labeled as a discipline problem, it’s three, four, five times as hard to be successful. And I think that that’s the role that administrators have to show that support where the message isn’t to the student, it’s to the school, and to say we’re supporting these kids that are coming back. So I think follow-up is important for not just suspension, but for expulsions and even for sometimes minor consequences. That’s why the reflection
piece would be important for us to put in place. If you’re going to have a kid write a reflection that means somebody’s got to review the reflection with the student, right? That means you’re kind of making that process happen. (T. Person, personal communication, January 9, 2013)

Of all the administrators interviewed, the one administrator to indicate that he conducts follow up meetings with the students was a Caucasian high school male administrator. He explained that the reason for his follow ups are to make sure that students are ready to return to school after a suspension so that they do not put themselves in a situation similar to the one that got them suspended.

…if I suspend a student for three or more days like for a fight or drugs, things like that, I do want to meet with them before they go back, especially if it was a fight situation, just to make sure that things are calmed down, that things are resolved, or do we need to do some conflict mediation, you know, how are they going to deal with it when they go back out there and somebody’s taunting them about what they got into the fight the first time, so I think it is important on those situations when it’s something severe. That you are touching base with them before they go back out, to say how are you going to—what have you learned, how are you going to cope with this, you know, it’s a fresh start today. (F. Carter, personal communication, January 11, 2013)

Another administrator at a middle school explained that the school site tries to have their sixth graders work out their issues in conflict management but it is not always successful. The administrator’s reasoning is that it had more to do with the age of the students and their lack of impulse control than the failure of the intervention
I would say most of our suspensions come from sixth grade. They’re just little and squirrely and they don’t get to keep to their hands to themselves, you don’t get to fight things out, you get to come to conflict management and work it out. But they’re not—they’re 10 and 11, they don’t have that impulse control. (E. Jones, personal communication, January 10, 2013)

Several of the administrators agreed that there should be a follow up after suspensions. They had a number of suggestions of what should be done to follow up with students after suspensions. They shared a variety of ideas on what interventions should target after suspensions. One of the African American high school administrators shared that the school does not have an intervention model in place, but explained that one is needed to help kids control their tempers.

So I don’t know what kind of intervention there needs to be. I do think that there should be some kind of follow-up something that the kids go through to have them reflect on what they did and what behavior needs to change, and how do you go about? Some kids, I have a lot of kids, they have real short fuses, they will fly off the handle. So how do you work with them to get them to keep themselves calm? (C. Blake, personal communication, January 15, 2013)

Another African American administrator emphasized the importance of treating the students as a person and using a holistic approach instead of just looking at the suspension data, truancy, and D and F grades. He explained how using this approach could improve the system and figure out what works.

…we don’t capture enough information on kids from the effective domain to create holistic kind of big data like pictures of kids so we can understand how a kid, again, as a person—as a person—moves through the educational journey.
Not just a collection of suspensions, not just a collection of Ds and F’s, not just a collection of truancy. That’s a person. That’s a human being with aspirations, dreams—or CRUSHED aspirations and dreams, that if we can capture that data and develop a better picture along with our responses to disciplinary infractions, because frankly, if we capture the right kind of information on kids and create better profiles through these processes of follow-up when the kid comes back, we could get a better sense of what works. (B. Johnson, personal communication, January 16, 2013)

A Latino elementary school administrator emphasized the importance of having mediation in a neutral setting after a fight, so that the parties involved can come to an agreement and sign a contract based on what is agreed. This procedure allows for the students to take responsibility for their actions, as the administrator explained:

I think if you suspended a couple of kids for fighting, I think there absolutely has to be follow-up because those kids need to have a neutral situation, a neutral setting in which they can talk it out. They have to, and they have to come to an agreement. And they have to come to some understanding with each other. I’ve gone so far as to have kids sign a contract with me. Not a no-contact contract, that’s part of it, but I have them sign a contract on what they agree, how they will treat each other… kids will come right up to me and say he’s not following the contract. And I’ll say okay, come with me and I’ll bring the child with me, we’ll get the contract out and we’ll find the kid. Here’s the contract, is there a part of this that you would like to change? That’s how I start it. They go no, and I say okay, but you’re not following the contract, which means that you are now putting yourself in the position of receiving consequences. Is that what you want? Because this is what we agreed to. Is this something you don’t want to agree
to? When you start putting it back on the kid, the kid suddenly finds themselves going, well, no, I want to agree with the contract. So what do you think you need to do right now? And 9 times out of 10 the kid will go I’m sorry I broke the contract, and that’s the end of it. But that’s middle school, that’s high school, I’ve had that work in that regard. But elementary it works REAL well. (A. Scott, personal communication, January 15, 2013)

One of the African American high school administrators shared that he believed it would be good to have teachers and parents more involved in the discipline process. He had several suggestions on how to include teachers and parents in the discipline process, including having teachers read anonymous referrals to see the different disciplinary infractions students are given referrals for in hopes that this would have an impact on how they discipline students or infractions they write referrals for.

So my recommendation would be that teachers get a chance to work in the office and sort through the referrals. Have them work a day in the office and read anonymous referrals and just honestly, do blank referrals. Don’t look at the name, they’ll be surprised. They’ll be surprised to see just how petty these things are. And I’ve said that before. Have teachers work a day, teachers take turns doing discipline, a dean a day kind of thing. And you will see a change in the way discipline is done. I also like what we were talking about just now, the idea of follow-up, having teachers involved in the process of discipline and deciding to discipline and parents. I know that’s too far out, but parents would be a big part of that discipline. It would be good to have parents too. (I. Stanly, personal communication, January 25, 2013)
Restorative Justice

The last and final theme was restorative justice. Of the four themes that surfaced, restorative justice was probably the most talked about, but least known. Restorative justice is the theory of justice that emphasizes repairing the harm caused by criminal behavior. The restorative justice theme emerged from the survey responses and included any mention of the word restorative justice, relationship building, trust, teaching students about mistakes, and helping them learn from those mistakes. Most of the administrators had very vague knowledge of the term restorative justice, but all seemed to agree that it was a strategy that should be used when disciplining students with behavior problems.

The first administrator interviewed was very knowledgeable of the workings of restorative justice and knew the intended outcomes of using the techniques. Understanding that restorative justice is more about learning and creating better citizens, this administrator stated

Restorative justice is something that I would definitely like to employ when possible. I like the students to understand that you know, you made a mistake, you’re human and to err is human, now where do we go from that point? Where do we go once you served your consequence? I don’t want you to just fall back into the same routine. I want you to adjust something that went wrong in the process with that last incident. So the whole object is to create a more mature, functional, capable citizen that understands that there are other options and other ways to solve problems other than the way they chose initially. (B. Johnson, personal communication, January 16, 2013)

There were also administrators that had no idea what restorative justice meant, or what it involved, but the ideal of it was appealing when explained in detail. This
administrator stated that she has no idea what restorative just was, but goes on to explain without knowing she would be using procedures involving restorative justice techniques

I want to say no, but I have to tell you that when you hear the story behind some actions, depending on what it is, like it said, you know, there are times we can negotiate, instead of suspending a kid with tobacco, with the smoking cigarettes, you can send them to Reach. You can do restorative things. So when I hear things about them from their background in such instances, I might work out an on-campus suspension instead of an off-campus suspension. So, in that sense yes. But in the other way, as far as if it’s severe, it doesn’t matter. (T. Person, personal communication, January 9, 2013)

A Caucasian administrator at a high school acknowledged using restorative techniques but knew that if he was the only one using these processes, it was not enough. This administrator knew that using restorative justice practices would have to be a district level mandate and that the price of teaching teachers and all staff the techniques of restorative justice practices would be costly and time consuming because not all staff knew the value of it.

Just that I wish there were more funds available to do more restorative type discipline things. We try to do that here. Up until this year, when we had our counselor doing discipline, I think it was really good because we had that counseling component where, and I know Mr. Weber’s trying to follow similar things that she did, but he doesn’t really have that counseling background or that kind of affect with kids, you know what I mean? He’s more military, he’s from the military, he has his own style, but he is doing the activities where he has the kids reflect. (F. Carter, personal communication, January 11, 2013)
This African American male administrator, who was very informed about restorative justice practices, compared the current policy to restorative justice and actually said he felt let down by the system because punitive discipline does not work. This administrator proposed taking a broader point of view when looking at student behavior and viewing the total student instead of just looking at the behavior.

So, I think what we need to do is perhaps think about discipline a different way. I think if we develop a more holistic view of the student as a person that would help contribute to us dealing with discipline differently. I think that if we incentivized the organization’s response to discipline differently that would make a difference, right? But there’s a challenge in how you do that. Because we could say, discipline is somehow part of accountability. The amount of discipline and suspensions, let’s say that it was somehow formally a part of our accountability model. I guarantee you suspensions would go down, but it wouldn’t necessarily address the problem. Because that action is removed from the genesis of a lot of the discipline issues that a school deals with. (B. Johnson, personal communication, January 16, 2013)

Restorative justice is a relatively new practice in the field of education that was popular with people that practiced law. Restorative justice is the new educational buzzword that is gaining steam because it provides students with education to prevent repeat offenses and offers a remedy that does not require students to be excluded from school. Of all the administrators interviewed only two had a real background on the practice of restorative justice. All of them had heard the word, but none of them put the theory into practice at their school. Antioch Unified School District uses the term in the student discipline matrix, but none of the teachers or administrators were ever trained or given any type of professional development on how to us it.
Summary

In Chapter 4, this researcher reported on all the information that was gathered to conduct this research. The base rate data was taken from the district database that tracks and stores data of all students that have been suspended or expelled. All school district administrators were invited to participate in an online survey and the results were summarized in Chapter 4. The last part was the structured in-depth interviews that were conducted with the 10 administrators that agreed to provide additional data for the research.

The base rate data collected from the district included student suspension and expulsion records that detailed the reason the student was being suspended/expelled, number of days the student was to be suspended/expelled, and other information, such as student ethnicity and gender. The school district data revealed that African Americans and Latinos were being suspended and expelled in numbers disproportionate to the representation in the student body.

Thirty-three AUSD administrators choose to complete the online survey. The survey results revealed the range of difference in the way administrators perceive the purpose of student disciplinary practices. Some administrators believed discipline should be punitive, while others felt discipline was a tool for teaching. The difference in these beliefs had an impact on the choices that were made regarding imposing a suspension or choosing an alternative means of correction. The survey also revealed a disconnect between administrators’ perceptions of the efficacy of suspensions and the reality that suspensions and expulsions do not change behaviors.

Ten administrators volunteered to be interviewed anonymously and spoke openly about their perceptions of disciplinary practices within the district. The interviews revealed that there was a lack of consistency in the way that discipline was assigned when
comparing administrators at the same site as well as when compared between schools across the district. Four themes surfaced from the interviews with the administrators, these included culture, tools and resources, interventions, and restorative justice.

All of the administrators were asked to address issues of culture and the impact it has on disciplinary practices in their interviews. While some of the administrators were convinced that cultural differences had no effect on their disciplinary practices, others spoke openly about the disproportional numbers of African American and Latino students who were suspended and expelled. A key point in the discussion of culture was the fact that Antioch Unified has predominantly Caucasian middle class teachers working with a diverse student body that includes a significant number of students who come from lower income homes.

Across the board, all of the administrators interviewed felt that there was a lack of tools and resources available in the district. Suspension was the only option that was available for dealing with serious issues like violence, drugs, and defiance that leads to aggression towards staff. They felt that if provided additional resources they would have used suspension less often.

When the administrators spoke about interventions, they focused on two types, meetings with students following a suspension and conflict mediation between students. While there was general agreement that a meeting with students following a suspension was a good idea to ensure a positive transition back into school, few administrators conducted these meetings. The use of conflict mediation to address and resolve student conflicts was rarely used, but when given the chance showed success in preventing ongoing conflicts.

Restorative justice is the alternative to suspension that was named most often by the administrators interviewed as it has received the most press in recent years. Unfortunately, none of the administrators had received any formal training in these
practices nor had the district provided them with materials or other resources that could be used to implement an effective restorative justice program. In the end, while administrators held great hope for the promise of restorative justice as an alternative to suspension, most did not know anything about the theory and practice, and were unable to implement it in their schools.
DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine how administrators perceive or conceptualize school discipline policy in relation to students of color and how administrators’ perceptions and utilization of discipline interventions serve to keep students of color, particularly African American male students, marginalized and institutionalized. The researcher reviewed Antioch Unified School District’s discipline data and the school district’s discipline policies. A survey consisting of 23 questions was created on Survey Monkey to query district administrators. The purpose of the survey was to obtain aggregated confidential information of administrators’ perceptions and utilization of school intervention procedures. An e-mail introducing the research topic, purpose, and procedure was sent to all administrators in the district, along with an invitation to participate in the study and the link to the online survey. Thirty-three administrators completed the survey and 10 administrators volunteered to participate in a structured in-depth interview. The location and starting time was at the administrator’s discretion. The purpose of the face-to-face interview was to gather data on how administrators perceive or conceptualize the school discipline policy. The data was immediately transcribed, numbered, coded, analyzed, and stored.

This research study adds to literature on disciplinary processes in public schools, informs policy makers of inequities students of color experience in schools, and provides policy makers with recommendations that help create more equitable school policy that fit all students no matter their color or their social economic status. Students of color are
the beneficiaries of this study. Students of color should be given the same rites of passage as their peers. They have the right to graduate high school and become productive, contributing citizens in the democratic process all are promised as a citizen of the United States of America.

Interpretation of Findings

The three questions that guided this study were

1. What are school administrators’ perceptions of disciplinary practices to address student misbehavior?
2. How do current disciplinary processes result in disparate impact on students of color?
3. How do alternatives practices offer administrators valuable tools for addressing disciplinary issues and school safety?

Each question will be answered in this section, and any additional information that was discovered during the process will be added.

Perception of Practices

The objective of the first research question was to identify administrators’ perceptions of disciplinary practices to address student behavior. The baseline data created a guide for determining trends in the way administrators figured out how to discipline students for infractions committed during school. Findings from data collected during interviews and surveys revealed that administrators want to move away from punishment and punitive tools to behavior education and other innovative practices that address the diverse needs of students. In particular, the administrators interviewed voiced
the belief that appropriate intervention tools could both improve students’ behavior and teach them to make better choices in the future. The data also revealed administrators would like the freedom to take into consideration student demographics, backgrounds, and other factors in the students’ personal lives when decisions are made to exclude students through suspension or expulsion. The research showed that administrators would benefit from training in culturally relevant pedagogy to prevent misunderstandings based on cultural differences and increase their competency in working with diverse student populations. Surprisingly, when the subject of cultural relevancy was mentioned to the administrators interviewed, few were able to define or present their perception of the term. Gloria Ladson-Billings (2000) has written that

> culturally relevant pedagogy rests on three criteria or propositions (a) students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they can challenge the status quo of current social order. (p. 3)

When asked if they felt these needs were being reinforced throughout the district, all responded, “No.” One of the more contentious issues to surface in response to the first research question of administrator’s perception of the discipline policy was their response referencing the section of the California Education Code that addresses fighting at school. Specifically, they took issue with the fact that any student involved in a fight must be suspended, regardless of whether or not the student is innocent. The California Education Code instructs administrators to suspend both students, even if the administrator has facts to determine that one of the students is solely responsible for the fight. This method of discipline punishes the victim, leaving little room for due process, a right to which all students are entitled.
One of the most controversial problems identified is the interpretation of Education Code 48900(k). This code states that any student can be suspended for “disrupting school activities” or “willful defiance of school authorities”. These phrases are largely left undefined and can be interpreted a number of different ways by any principal or school administrator when disciplining a student. When the administrators interviewed were asked to interpret 48900(k), the offenses cited as suspendable offenses ranged from chewing gum in class to using profanity directed at another student or school personnel. In fact, in 2012, 42% of all the suspensions in California were attributed to behaviors listed in Education Code 48900(k). Since the start of this research, lawmakers have since become aware that the vagueness of this code has led to an open interpretation that was problematic, and in 2013 passed Assembly Bill 2242 (AB 2242), which was designed to make school districts codify what “willful defiance” looks like and specify what exactly is meant by “disrupting school activities.” Until AB 2242, Education Code 48900(k) gave school administrators the freedom to suspend students at will for any number of reasons. When Antioch Unified School District suspension data from 2009 to 2012 was disaggregated, there were an extremely high number of students suspended under 48900(k) for acts as simple as refusing to take off a hat or refusing to move from one seat to another compared to the number of students suspended under mandatory zero tolerance offenses, such as weapons or drug. To remedy this, teachers now participate in professional development focused on how to write referrals and which details should be noted in the referrals when students are excluded from class.

**Disparate Impact**

The objective of the second research question was to analyze if the current discipline processes resulted in disparate impacts on students of color. The data collected
confirms that students of color continue to be the most affected in the application of current disciplinary practices despite the desire of individual school administrators to effect change through alternate methods of discipline. Data collected identified time constraint, lack of consistency, and classroom management as the main reasons current discipline policy resulted in disparate impacts on students of color. Time constraint was a pressing issue that the interviewed administrators felt limited their efficacy when working with students to address behavior. When asked about time, seven out of ten administrators felt a majority of their time was spent dealing with immediate disciplinary issues and not enough time was spent on corrective responses to behaviors. One administrator went so far as to say, “every incident is a time for learning and correcting,” and further stated, “we’re in the business of teaching and that’s what discipline should be all about” (B. Johnson, personal communication, January 16, 2013). Administrators have many competing demands on their time, like supervising student activities, evaluating teacher performance, and investigating and disciplining student behavior infractions.

With the hectic pace of each workday, it is often difficult to find time to handle all of the issues from the current day. Without support from supervisors and policy makers, it is difficult for administrators to justify bringing a student into the office after a suspension or expulsion to follow up on an issue that is considered resolved by the assigned discipline. One of the needs that was mentioned by administrators is more student follow up when discipline has been assigned. When asked in the interview if they followed up with students upon return from a suspension, most administrators responded that they did not meet with students because of the lack of time in their schedules due to all the suspensions they handed down. With that being said, most administrators believed that follow up meetings with suspended students could create better relationships when dealing with other offenses in the future, if they had time.
Lack of consistency was also a major theme that recurred when the question of the discipline process was asked. Administrators admitted that there was not a formal process for follow up after a student returned from suspension but believed that this would be a major tool for creating relationships and healing students were harmed by aggressive student behavior. Currently, some students talk with an administrator after a suspension and others do not see an administrator again until the next offense. One administrator even went on to say he does mediation in the hallways during passing period as he sees individual students.

**Alternatives**

The last theme that arose from the administrators was poor classroom management on the part of teachers and sending students out of class for reasons that were not deemed toxic or worthy of a referral. Administrators are busy, but when students are sent to the office because they are defiant, administrators start to believe teachers are sending students out because they cannot control that particular student or they simply need a break from that student. One administrator said her teachers are under the impression that it is not their job to discipline students and when the time calls for discipline it is the principal’s job to handle students that behave inappropriately during class. Administrators also spoke of teachers needing to teach rules and procedures to govern the behavior of students in their classrooms, so that students learn and are aware of the classroom expectations and appropriate behavior. In some classrooms, rules are posted on walls for everyone to see, and in others, the rules that govern student behavior and conduct are not visible.

The objective of the third research question was to explore alternatives, such as restorative justice and positive behavior intervention systems, to see if they are
valuable tools for addressing student discipline. Both of these student behavior tools have yielded some positive feedback in the academic community when it has come to students with behavior problems. In the data collected, most administrators felt that when a student is suspended, the policy should be amended to include a follow up with mediation or another restorative justice practice. While the data revealed that most of the administrators interviewed would support alternative methods, they did not think it was practical or possible to implement the educational piece in every case, because of time constraints or other logistics and lack of resources. Data shows administrators are not in favor of zero tolerance policies because they do not want to be mandated to suspend or expel students unless it is due to an extreme or severe infraction. In recent years, restorative justice and the application of these principles in schools has become one of the most talked about ways of combining discipline and student learning. Unfortunately, the phrase “restorative justice theory” was unfamiliar to five out of ten administrators interviewed. However, it was commonly known by the administrators who took the online survey. When restorative justice practice, ideals, and theory were explained to the administrators who were interviewed, six of ten agreed that it would be a good program to incorporate into the practice of student discipline. Examples of the type of restorative justice practices they agreed would work are community building, victim reparation, and reentry counseling. Administrators who completed the survey also felt that restorative justice practices should be standard procedure when discipline is needed. All of the administrators who were interviewed thought that the current practice of assigning discipline is archaic and focuses on punishing students for infractions rather than educating students and supporting learning that would address the behavior.

The findings as presented in Chapter 4 reinforce previous research that there is a disproportionate rate of suspensions and expulsions for students of color. It also illustrates the need to change current discipline policies. The current system is flawed
and if unchanged students of color will continue to be suspended and expelled at a disproportionate rate.

**Limitations of the Study**

Administrators were understandably reluctant to go on record with their feelings towards school discipline; they expressed concerns that if they were to talk freely, there was a risk that some of their words might come back to hurt them. When scheduling interviews, some administrators insisted on a specific site, so that no one would know that they were part of the study and to ensure that no one would overhear them talking about student discipline. When administrators did finally engage in conversations about student discipline, all appeared to feel comfortable, and they eventually discussed their concerns about enforcing the discipline policies that are in place.

**Recommendations for Action**

The data indicated that review and examination of California Education Code 48900 might be needed. This code needs to be clearly defined so that sections, like (K), do not allow for individual interpretation of the behavior for discipline. If this section of the education code was clearly defined, and limited the number of suspendable offenses, not only would fewer students be suspended or expelled, but also schools would begin educating students to correct behavior. Then they are less likely to commit correctable offenses.

Another recommendation would be the use of more informative measures to correct behaviors. The two most popular methods of correction are restorative justice and positive behavior intervention and support. The leading reason for recommending both
of these practices is both practices have been used and researched and are considered to be among the best practices according to research. Restorative justice is a community building process that aims to repair or heal relationships between the victim and the offender. This process brings two parties together to discuss the problem and find a solution. Positive behavior intervention support is a proactive and data driven response to discipline. This approach calls for setting clear behavior expectations and rewarding positive and appropriate behavior.

A common theme that arose in the conversations with the administrators interviewed was the need to hold teachers accountable for the student referrals they write and finding ways to ensure that they are not sending students out of class for reasons that are petty or insignificant. Training in culturally responsive pedagogy can help reduce these types of referrals by helping teachers be more responsive to student needs and build understanding for the cultural differences that often are viewed as disruptions in the classroom. In addition, the implementation of restorative justice practices can provide teachers and students a method to resolve conflicts and address the behaviors that are seen as disrespectful and defiant.

**Implications**

This research is intended to contribute to positive social change. This change can be seen when more equitable laws replace ambiguous laws that govern student behavior. Laws should be clearly written and not left to individual interpretation.

Students at every school should have the right to choose between traditional or alternative discipline. After being informed of the two forms of discipline, students should be allowed to choose which form will be used to address their behavior. Traditional discipline would include things like Saturday school, detention, and school
beautification, but is not limited to those specific forms of discipline. Alternative
discipline would include methods like restorative justice circles, conflict mediations,
and student peer court, in which students would be judged by a group of their peers in
a formal court setting run by students. This would give students a realistic and lifelike
experience of what it actually feels like to be tried by a court of your peers. Allowing
students to choose how to be disciplined might make them more accountable for
their actions.

Early studies indicate restorative justice holds significant promise, however,
proponents in the field identify that theoretical and evidence based research is falling
behind practice (Vaandering, 2010). One of the significant studies was the Hopkins
(2002) research that explained how restorative justice breaks from the old paradigm
and takes into account the aspect of teaching and learning, while building community at
the same time. Braithwaite (2002) also makes the argument that restorative practices is
necessary in schools, but cautions the implementation. Like Hopkins (2002), Braithwaite
(2002) thinks restorative justice gives citizens a voice and it works from the bottom
up allowing the victim and the aggressor justice. This is one of the reasons restorative
justice should become an option in all matter of student discipline in schools. Secondly,
the whole of idea of western rules-based justice in education is in direct conflict with
the ideology of education. The longstanding conflict with the educational system is
clear in that western-based ideas about issues that affect the community are to be dealt
with. Western justice is seen as something that is served, retributive justice, which gives
authority and responsibility to those appointed to positions that oversee that fair and
equal punishment will be handed out (Brenton & Lehman, 2001). This idea conflicts
with education because there is no moment for the parties involved to reflect and learn
which is what education is all about. Education also involves community input in
matters that directly affect the educational learning process. Western justice does not
take into consideration the role of the community and the influence the whole has over the individual. Lastly and most important, when the researcher was first introduced to teaching he was told to read two books and then understand the significance of these books. These two books were John Dewey’s *How We Think* (1916) and Paulo Freire’s (2005) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Dorothy Vaandering (2010) made reference to both of these great educators and considered things that every teacher should have been taught during their teacher training. Vaandering mentions the longterm impact of engaging students with rule-based justice for schools. Policies that rely solely on suspending and expelling students do not remedy student misbehavior (Holloway, 2002).

### Conclusion

The disproportionate rate of suspension and expulsion of African American and Latino students in comparison to their representation in the student body is a fact that has been widely known to education professionals for some time and has been a topic of scrutiny in the media and by politicians in recent years. What is alarming is the amount of time that has lapsed and the limited resources put into correcting this enormous educational equity flaw. African American students are twice as likely to receive exclusionary discipline as their other race counterparts. Despite national awareness of this problem, the efficacy of alternatives to suspension and expulsion, that may be more effective in changing student behavior over time, have not been widely researched or implemented. Through research and interviews for this study, administrators expressed concern and frustration with the lack of support and resources available to implement new discipline methods that are more responsive to student needs. The administrators are aware that suspension and expulsion are outdated and ineffective methods for discipline. When excluded from school, students fall behind in their classes. Over time, the loss of
learning accumulates for students with repeated suspensions and expulsions and increases the dropout rate for these students. The lifelong effect of the learning loss is lower rates of education, lower average pay, and increased risk of living at or below the poverty line.

The current emphasis in education is to teach students using evidence based methods that demonstrate efficacy; the disciplinary practices schools use should be based on the same theory. While exclusion from class seems a natural consequence for behaviors that are characterized as disruptive, the research demonstrates that student behavior is not likely to change when these disciplinary practices are assigned repeatedly without addressing the root cause of the behavior. When speaking with administrators, most had ideas about what it would take to create a discipline system that would be more equitable between ethnicities, but most, if not all, felt that change would be slow and probably would not come during their tenure as administrators.

Not every law or policy put into place is equitable or justifiable. What is even more disturbing is that when those laws are put into place and they start to affect a certain population or ethnic group, they need to be reviewed and revised so that specific individuals do not fall under the umbrella of that targeted population. Educators are very aware of the lack of equity in school practices. When school practices start to reflect criminal practices, it is time those in charge of making change are held accountable.

The research conducted is expected to act as a change agent, one who fights for equity among all races. A change agent can be a person that ensures subgroups are not overlooked or given less because of their lack of knowledge about the situation. In the education profession, it is important that administrators model behavior that can be looked upon as justified and righteous in the eye of the less fortunate because they expect educators to fight for them in situations that affect them directly or indirectly.

The problem of suspensions and expulsions among students of color is a problem that really needs to be dissected and analyzed by professionals that know how the
educational system works. It is not fair that language like “Zero Tolerance” has found a way into the educational system, leaving thousands of students to feel the effect of no due process, where patience is supposed to be taught. The education system is plagued by inequalities, suspensions, and expulsions, and students of color do not have to be one of them.
REFERENCES


Schiff, M. (2013). *Dignity, disparity and desistance: Effective restorative justice strategies to plug the school to prison pipeline*. Boca Raton, FL: Florida Atlantic University, School of Criminology and Criminal Justice.


48900. A pupil shall not be suspended from school or recommended for expulsion, unless the superintendent of the school district or the principal of the school in which the pupil is enrolled determines that the pupil has committed an act as defined pursuant to any of subdivisions (a) to (r), inclusive:

(a) (1) Caused, attempted to cause, or threatened to cause physical injury to another person.

   (2) Willfully used force or violence upon the person of another, except in self-defense.

(b) Possessed, sold, or otherwise furnished a firearm, knife, explosive, or other dangerous object, unless, in the case of possession of an object of this type, the pupil had obtained written permission to possess the item from a certificated school employee, which is concurred in by the principal or the designee of the principal.

(c) Unlawfully possessed, used, sold, or otherwise furnished, or been under the influence of, a controlled substance listed in Chapter 2 (commencing with Section 11053) of Division 10 of the Health and Safety Code, an alcoholic beverage, or an intoxicant of any kind.

(d) Unlawfully offered, arranged, or negotiated to sell a controlled substance listed in Chapter 2 (commencing with Section 11053) of Division 10 of the Health and Safety Code, an alcoholic beverage, or an intoxicant of any kind, and either sold, delivered, or otherwise furnished to a person another liquid, substance, or material
and represented the liquid, substance, or material as a controlled substance, alcoholic beverage, or intoxicant.

(e) Committed or attempted to commit robbery or extortion.

(f) Caused or attempted to cause damage to school property or private property.

(g) Stole or attempted to steal school property or private property.

(h) Possessed or used tobacco, or products containing tobacco or nicotine products, including, but not limited to, cigarettes, cigars, miniature cigars, clove cigarettes, smokeless tobacco, snuff, chew packets, and betel. However, this section does not prohibit use or possession by a pupil of his or her own prescription products.

(i) Committed an obscene act or engaged in habitual profanity or vulgarity.

(j) Unlawfully possessed or unlawfully offered, arranged, or negotiated to sell drug paraphernalia, as defined in Section 11014.5 of the Health and Safety Code.

(k) Disrupted school activities or otherwise willfully defied the valid authority of supervisors, teachers, administrators, school officials, or other school personnel engaged in the performance of their duties.

(l) Knowingly received stolen school property or private property.

(m) Possessed an imitation firearm. As used in this section, “imitation firearm” means a replica of a firearm that is so substantially similar in physical properties to an existing firearm as to lead a reasonable person to conclude that the replica is a firearm.

(n) Committed or attempted to commit a sexual assault as defined in Section 261, 266c, 286, 288, 288a, or 289 of the Penal Code or committed a sexual battery as defined in Section 243.4 of the Penal Code.

(o) Harassed, threatened, or intimidated a pupil who is a complaining witness or a witness in a school disciplinary proceeding for purposes of either preventing that pupil from being a witness or retaliating against that pupil for being a witness, or both.
(p) Unlawfully offered, arranged to sell, negotiated to sell, or sold the prescription drug Soma.

(q) Engaged in, or attempted to engage in, hazing. For purposes of this subdivision, “hazing” means a method of initiation or preinitiation into a pupil organization or body, whether or not the organization or body is officially recognized by an educational institution, which is likely to cause serious bodily injury or personal degradation or disgrace resulting in physical or mental harm to a former, current, or prospective pupil. For purposes of this subdivision, “hazing” does not include athletic events or school-sanctioned events.

(r) Engaged in an act of bullying. For purposes of this subdivision, the following terms have the following meanings:

(1) “Bullying” means any severe or pervasive physical or verbal act or conduct, including communications made in writing or by means of an electronic act, and including one or more acts committed by a pupil or group of pupils as defined in Section 48900.2, 48900.3, or 48900.4, directed toward one or more pupils that has or can be reasonably predicted to have the effect of one or more of the following:

(A) Placing a reasonable pupil or pupils in fear of harm to that pupil’s or those pupils’ person or property.

(B) Causing a reasonable pupil to experience a substantially detrimental effect on his or her physical or mental health.

(C) Causing a reasonable pupil to experience substantial interference with his or her academic performance.

(D) Causing a reasonable pupil to experience substantial interference with his or her ability to participate in or benefit from the services, activities, or privileges provided by a school.
(2) (A) “Electronic act” means the creation and transmission originated on or off the school site, by means of an electronic device, including, but not limited to, a telephone, wireless telephone, or other wireless communication device, computer, or pager, of a communication, including, but not limited to, any of the following:

(i) A message, text, sound, or image.

(ii) A post on a social network Internet Web site, including, but not limited to:

(I) Posting to or creating a burn page. “Burn page” means an Internet Web site created for the purpose of having one or more of the effects listed in paragraph (1).

(II) Creating a credible impersonation of another actual pupil for the purpose of having one or more of the effects listed in paragraph (1). “Credible impersonation” means to knowingly and without consent impersonate a pupil for the purpose of bullying the pupil and such that another pupil would reasonably believe, or has reasonably believed, that the pupil was or is the pupil who was impersonated.

(III) Creating a false profile for the purpose of having one or more of the effects listed in paragraph (1). “False profile” means a profile of a fictitious pupil or a profile using the likeness or attributes of an actual pupil other than the pupil who created the false profile.

(B) Notwithstanding paragraph (1) and subparagraph (A), an electronic act shall not constitute pervasive conduct solely on the basis that it has been transmitted on the Internet or is currently posted on the Internet.

(3) “Reasonable pupil” means a pupil, including, but not limited to, an exceptional needs pupil, who exercises average care, skill, and judgment in conduct for a person of his or her age, or for a person of his or her age with his or her exceptional needs.

(s) A pupil shall not be suspended or expelled for any of the acts enumerated in this section unless the act is related to a school activity or school attendance occurring
within a school under the jurisdiction of the superintendent of the school district or principal or occurring within any other school district. A pupil may be suspended or expelled for acts that are enumerated in this section and related to a school activity or school attendance that occur at any time, including, but not limited to, any of the following:

(1) While on school grounds.

(2) While going to or coming from school.

(3) During the lunch period whether on or off the campus.

(4) During, or while going to or coming from, a school-sponsored activity.

(t) A pupil who aids or abets, as defined in Section 31 of the Penal Code, the infliction or attempted infliction of physical injury to another person may be subject to suspension, but not expulsion, pursuant to this section, except that a pupil who has been adjudged by a juvenile court to have committed, as an aider and abettor, a crime of physical violence in which the victim suffered great bodily injury or serious bodily injury shall be subject to discipline pursuant to subdivision (a).

(u) As used in this section, “school property” includes, but is not limited to, electronic files and databases.

(v) For a pupil subject to discipline under this section, a superintendent of the school district or principal may use his or her discretion to provide alternatives to suspension or expulsion that are age appropriate and designed to address and correct the pupil’s specific misbehavior as specified in Section 48900.5.

(w) It is the intent of the Legislature that alternatives to suspension or expulsion be imposed against a pupil who is truant, tardy, or otherwise absent from school activities.
Dear Colleagues,

As an administrator and doctoral student in the Department of Education Leadership at California State University East Bay, I am working with our district to gain a better understanding of the various issues which administrators face in our day-to-day management of student discipline in our schools. While the issue of discipline has been addressed from many viewpoints, the ultimate goal of this study is to inform the Antioch Unified School District of the impact that our current discipline policy, procedures have on our practices.

You are being invited to participate in this project. Participants will be asked to complete an online survey. Participation is completely voluntary and participants as well as their responses will be protected and remain confidential. However, the benefits of this study will assist in developing policies, procedures, and practices that will contribute to a reduction in disciplinary issues in our schools. While there is no anticipated risk of harm, participants will have the option to discontinue the survey at any time. This survey will take approximately 30 minutes to complete. Each participant will have access to the final report upon completion.

If you would like to receive additional information regarding this study, please feel free to contact me at Markellmccain@antioch.k12.ca.us.
Your time, expertise, and commitment to our Antioch students is highly appreciated. If you would like to participate in this study, please access the survey from the link provided.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Markell McCain
Dear Colleagues,

I am an administrator in the Antioch Unified School District as well as a graduate student in the Department of Education Leadership at California State University East Bay. As a school administrator in this school district, you are being invited to participate in my research focusing on discipline in our schools. Public school leaders are responsible for establishing and maintaining “safe and secure” learning environments in their schools. The emphasis of this research serves to better understand the relationship between theory and practice as it related to school discipline.

Participants will be asked to complete an online survey which will take approximately 30 minutes to complete. Participation is completely voluntary and all responses will remain confidential. There are no risks to the participants and each participant will receive access to the final report upon completion.

If you would like to receive additional information regarding this study, please feel free to contact me at Markellmccain@antioch.k12.ca.us or my advisor, Dr. Silvina Ituarte at silvina.ituarte@csueastbay.edu.

Your time, expertise, and commitment to our Antioch students is highly appreciated. If you would like to participate in this important research, please access the survey from the link provided. https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/antiochadminsurvey

Thank you for your time and consideration,
111

Appendix D

ADMINISTRATOR SURVEY


1. **In meetings about students with behavioral challenges, discussions focus primarily on behaviors rather than on causes and unsolved problems.**
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Neither Agree or Disagree
   - Agree
   - Strongly Agree

2. **In responding to challenging behaviors, the school relies heavily on a policy-based system: a list of behaviors students should not exhibit and a process for how administrators should respond to those behaviors if they are exhibited.**
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Neither Agree or Disagree
   - Agree
   - Strongly Agree
3. Students of color are treated the same in comparison to white students.
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Neither Agree or Disagree
   - Agree
   - Strongly Agree

4. There are many “frequent flyers” in the school: students whose behavior has not improved despite frequent exposure to our school discipline program.
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Neither Agree or Disagree
   - Agree
   - Strongly Agree

5. Our school’s response to students with continuing challenging behavior is primarily immediate and reactive rather than planned and proactive.
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Neither Agree or Disagree
   - Agree
   - Strongly Agree
6. **Disciplinary policies make the school safer.**
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Neither Agree or Disagree
   - Agree
   - Strongly Agree

7. **Expulsion is a good discipline policy.**
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Neither Agree or Disagree
   - Agree
   - Strongly Agree

8. **Suspension is a good discipline policy.**
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Neither Agree or Disagree
   - Agree
   - Strongly Agree

9. **Elementary and high school students should be disciplined the same.**
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Neither Agree or Disagree
   - Agree
   - Strongly Agree
10. In my school, classroom teachers frequently send students to someone outside of the classroom - for example, the principal or assistant principal - to deal with behavior problems.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

11. In terms of behavioral improvement, how effective are the following methods of discipline?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Extremely Ineffective</th>
<th>Ineffective</th>
<th>Neither Effective nor Ineffective</th>
<th>Effective</th>
<th>Extremely Effective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Detention</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus Beautification</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-school Suspension</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of School Suspension</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expulsion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restorative Justice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12. My school relies very heavily on adult-imposed consequences, such as detentions, suspensions and other punishments, in responding to challenging behavior.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree
13. Which of the following disciplinary techniques would you suggest for the following behavior?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Detention</th>
<th>Campus Beautification</th>
<th>Suspension</th>
<th>Restorative Justice</th>
<th>Expulsion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chewing gum</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not bringing materials to class</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using a cell phone or electronics in class</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom disruptions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tardy to class</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defiance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using profanity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fighting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under the influence of drugs, alcohol or tobacco</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Possession of drugs</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Possession of weapons or explosives</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cutting class</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

14. How are acceptable behaviors and conduct communicated to students (both formally and informally)? (Check all that apply.)

- School assemblies
- Student handbooks
- Letters to Parents
- Other: ____________________________________________
15. **How is the length of suspension decided? (Check all that apply.)**
   - Disciplinary Code
   - The number of times I’ve seen the student
   - Impact on other students
   - Teacher Anger
   - Severity of the act

16. **How is the decision made to suspend a child out of school? (Check all that apply)**
   - Based on education code/discipline policies
   - Severity of the act
   - Number of repeat offenses
   - Teacher recommendation

17. **What is the academic level of students who have been suspended repeatedly from your school?**
   - Far below grade level
   - Below grade level
   - Basic
   - Proficient
   - Advanced

18. **What resources are available at your school to prevent student behavior problems? (Check all that apply)**
   - Staff Training
   - Outreach to external agencies
   - Counseling
   - Mentoring
19. **How familiar are you with restorative justice practices in a school setting?**
   - Very familiar
   - Familiar
   - Somewhat familiar
   - A little familiar
   - Not familiar at all

20. **Can Restorative Justice be useful in the school disciplinary process?**
   - Yes
   - Not sure

21. **Describe the common characteristics of students who have been suspended repeatedly from your school.**

22. **What types of Restorative Justice approaches do you use?**

23. **What suggestions do you have that will have a positive impact on student behavior?**

24. **Demographics (Optional)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School level:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of years in the district:</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of year in administration:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of years in education:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix E

INTERVIEW QUESTION

The Impact of Discipline Policies on African American Males and the Inequalities of Suspension and Expulsion

Interview Questions

1. What are your school’s greatest strengths?

2. What are your school’s major disciplinary challenges?

3. Do you believe discipline is a basis for punishment or an opportunity for intervention and learning? Explain.

4. Does your current discipline policy and procedures accomplish this? Explain What do you feel is your role in the discipline and educational process?

5. What is the purpose of suspensions?

6. What is the purpose of expulsions?

7. Does a student’s demographics and background influence your decisions on discipline? If so, how?

8. When students return from suspension, do you notice a change in behavior?

9. Do you follow up or have follow up procedures for students who return from suspensions?
10. Do you think there should be follow up after suspensions? If so, what?

11. Do you have any other thoughts or suggestions you would like to make regarding the discipline process?

Participant Code:

Gender:

Ethnicity:

Age:

School level:

Number of years in the district:

Number of years in administration:

Number of years in education: