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# Con Respeto y Dignidad: Transforming Educational Experiences For Students of Color by Addressing Disproportionate Discipline Practices

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CON RESPETO Y DIGNIDAD: TRANSFORMING EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES
FOR STUDENTS OF COLOR BY ADDRESSING DISPROPORTIONATE DISCIPLINE
PRACTICES

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ABSTRACT

CON RESPETO Y DIGNIDAD: TRANSFORMING EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES
FOR STUDENTS OF COLOR BY ADDRESSING DISPROPORTIONATE DISCIPLINE
PRACTICES

by Selene Munoz

Discipline practices wield significant influence over the social dynamics within
educational settings and profoundly impact students' ability to attain academic and social
gains crucial for their success.  The racialization of school discipline has been linked to
negative effects on student's academic trajectories and life outcomes.  Consequently, school
administrators can play a crucial role in effecting cultural change within their organizations
to support disciplinary practices that uphold students' educational dignity.  This study looked
at the strategies employed by secondary level administrators to shift their school cultures
aimed at addressing disproportionate disciplinary practices.  Using a mixed methods
approach, this study draws upon surveys and interviews conducted with local school leaders,
coupled with quantitative analysis of publicly available discipline data, to examine their
approaches to school discipline and in negotiating data and policy implementation.  The
findings reveal a spectrum of responses among administrators.  Some express inadequacies in
their preparedness attributed to deficiencies in their leadership programs, particularly
regarding disciplinary matters and resistance encountered in promoting restorative practices.
Conversely, others articulate a commitment to combating institutional racism, challenging
the prevailing status quo, and actively embracing disciplinary approaches aligned with
restorative principles.

# DEDICATION

"Dolor, placer y muerte no son más que el proceso de la existencia.  La lucha revolucionaria

en este proceso es una puerta abierta a la inteligencia."

Frida Kahlo

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mother, Azucena Muñoz, who decided to bring her six kids to this country in search of a better life.  She can now look proudly at her kids and grandkids who have inherited her spirit and continue to make this world a better place in everything they do.  To my father who in his own way has supported me and my pursuit of knowledge.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

Author and journalist Ta-Nehisi Coates penned these words with regard to discipline inside and outside of school,

> I came to see the streets and the schools as arms of the same beast. One enjoyed the official power of the state while the other enjoyed its implicit sanction. But fear and violence were the weaponry of both. Fail in the streets and the crews would catch you slipping and take your body. Fail in the schools and you would be suspended and sent back to those same streets, where they would take your body. And I began to see these two arms in relation—those who failed in the schools justified their destruction in the streets. The society could say, "He should have stayed in school," and then wash its hands of him. (2015, p. 33)

These words from Coates reflect his view of schools and the role they played in the school to prison nexus based on his experiences in Baltimore. Unfortunately, his experiences are those shared by many of our youth in particular, youth of color. My interest in this research is based on my own experiences working in public education as a behavior technician, a special education teacher, and currently as an administrator.

As a newcomer to this country, I benefited from teachers and administrators who took the time to guide me through a new set of rules and expectations along with a new language. I see myself in many of my students as a member of this community and I see how my actions as a school leader will impact these students later on. I have also witnessed the other side of education where students have been pushed out of the school system into the criminal system as a result of exclusionary practices. I have lost students to the violence in the streets and know first hand how difficult these losses are to the families, educators and other students. While working on this project, I was informed about the death of a 15 year old who had been in my school for three years. I worked with him and his family for three years, going through the spectrum of services and interventions.

As a freshman in high school, he lasted a semester before getting expelled and sent to an alternative school. By the Spring semester, he was murdered by another 16 year old kid who had also been one of my students. I wondered what I could have done differently, what supports did I fail to provide these students. Sadly, this has not been my first experience with the loss of a student. My research is based on my desire to find out what transformational leaders are currently doing to disrupt this school to prison nexus as well as why other leaders are not seeing the sense of urgency to change their practices.

**Post-Covid Discipline Challenges**

The post-Covid climate in the educational system has brought discipline to the spotlight once again. After months of being home doing distance learning, students in California have come back to schools lacking skills such as conflict management which has resulted in a spike in aggressive behaviors. Journalistic accounts (Pendharkar, 2022) along with my own school observations and conversations with peers provide anecdotal data yet current literature lacks this research. A critical period of development for these students has been negatively affected by months of isolation, leading to schools grappling with the challenge of addressing increased aggressive behavior resulting from the social isolation experienced during the pandemic. Moreover, The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) has reported that many districts do not have the staff, skills or resources available to effectively respond to discipline challenges without conventional tools like suspensions, especially given staffing issues that have made it difficult for schools to hire enough counselors to serve student's needs (Levin et al., 2020) The American School Counselor Association recommends a student-to-counselor ratio of 250:1, but according to ASCA the national

average is 415:1. Addressing the social-emotional needs of students has made it difficult to ignore the way discipline is being addressed at school sites.

Facing crises such as severe budget limitations, state mandates, and providing education in a safe environment with fewer resources, schools have reverted to certain outdated disciplinary policies, one of which is Zero Tolerance. According to the American Bar Association (ABA, 2014), 'Zero Tolerance' is the phrase that describes America's response to student misbehavior. Originally developed as an approach to drug enforcement (Skiba & Rausch, 2006), the term became widely adopted in schools in the early 1990s as a philosophy or policy that mandates the application of predetermined consequences, most often severe and punitive in nature, that are intended to be applied regardless of the gravity of behavior, mitigating circumstances, or situational context (Skiba, 2008).

Zero tolerance is a one-size-fits-all solution to all the problems that schools confront. It has redefined students as criminals, with unfortunate consequences. In particular, students of color have been disproportionately the victims of zero-tolerance policies. Minority students are removed from the classroom at higher rates than their White counterparts, and the relationship between student and school is weakened across all grades for many minority groups (Skiba et al., 2011). Disciplinary actions can be subjective to teacher and administrator perceptions of students. Students of ethnic or racial minorities are overrepresented relative to their enrollment among the students suspended. They have been reported to receive disciplinary referrals for less serious and more subjective reasons than majority-group students and to be given more serious consequences for infractions (Advancement Project, 2005; Keleher, 2000; Mendez & Knoff, 2003; National Association

of Child Advocates, 1998; Skiba et al., 2002). Numerous other empirical studies (Skiba, 2008; Skiba et al., 2002) suggest that Black students are being unfairly singled out when it comes to prosecuting misbehavior that requires more of a case-by-case evaluation. It is impossible to not look at the implicit and explicit biases that teachers and administrators have when dealing with students.

Implicit bias is defined as the attitude that affects an individual's actions and decisions in an unconscious manner (Staats, 2016). Researchers have found implicit biases in regard to race within classrooms that resulted in educational disparities due to the reinforcement of stereotypes, negative evaluations of behaviors, and negative predictions of academic potential toward minority students (ABA, 2014; McGrady & Reynolds, 2012; Wells et al., 2016). Howard (2017) stated, "when Black and Latino students notice racial bias at school, they are more likely to lose trust in teachers and other authority figures" (p. 1). Students who are constantly being disciplined are then more likely to see themselves as different and not belonging.

Previous research has outlined three main explanations for the enduring racial/ethnic gaps in school discipline: (a) Behavior disparities, suggesting that Black and Latinx students display more anti-social behaviors, aggression, and delinquency compared to White students (Petrilli, 2012); (b) Disparate treatment, indicating that Black and Latinx students face harsher punishments for similar behaviors compared to White students (Okonufua & Eberhardt, 2015; Owens & McLanahan, 2020); and (c) Between-school segregation, whereby Black and Latinx students are more likely to attend schools with majority-minority and

economically disadvantaged populations, which tend to have stricter disciplinary measures compared to schools serving predominantly White Students (Welch & Payne, 2010, 2018).

Research indicates that schools with substantial Black and Latinx student populations tend to employ stricter disciplinary measures, such as zero-tolerance policies, compared to schools with predominantly White student enrollments, regardless of average student behaviors (Welch & Payne, 2010, 2018). Some scholars argue that this pattern reflects efforts by White elites to perpetuate racial and socioeconomic segregation by directing fewer resources to minority schools and even closing institutions vital to minority communities (Ewing, 2018).

This inclination toward punitive social control appears specific to minority-majority schools rather than those serving impoverished or urban students in general. Studies show a positive correlation between the percentage of minority enrollment and disciplinary actions, even when controlling for student delinquency rates, the proportion of students receiving free or reduced-price lunch, and the urban setting of the school (Welch & Payne, 2010, 2018). Other research also demonstrates that higher proportions of Black and, to some extent, Latinx students are associated with increased suspension rates, even after adjusting for student behavior and poverty levels (Anyon et al., 2014).

Regarding explanations for racial/ethnic disciplinary disparities, much research has concentrated on understanding differences in final suspension or expulsion administered by school administrators (Kinsler, 2011; Skiba, Chung, Trachok, et al., 2014). However, focusing solely on these ultimate sanctions overlooks two distinct steps in the disciplinary process; teacher referrals and administrator imposed disciplinary dispositions. This fails to

differentiate between the roles of teachers and administrators and raises concerns about the root causes of differential treatment.

Studies investigating teacher referrals consistently reveal significant Black-White (and to a lesser extent, Latinx-White) disparities (Bradshaw et al., 2010; Skiba et al., 2011). While administrators typically give out suspensions and expulsions, teachers wield considerable influence by witnessing most infractions and initiating referrals to the principal's office (Gregory et al., 2010). According to a report from Skiba, Chung, Trachok et al. (2014), approximately one-third of office referrals result in suspension. Thus, teacher referral decisions may compound racial/ethnic bias in administrator's disciplinary actions because discretionary effects accumulate throughout the infraction processing stages.

When a teacher refers a student to the principal's office, they typically document the incident, shaping a narrative around the student that influences both formal disciplinary decisions by administrators and informal perceptions among other teachers, staff, and parents (Vavrus & Cole, 2002). Even in the absence of a referral, teacher's perceptions of student behavior can impact subsequent teacher decision-making, student reputation, teacher-student relationship, and student self-concept (Weinstein, 2002).

A 2010 report from the Civil Rights Project at UCLA, "Suspended Education: Urban Middle Schools in Crisis" revealed great racial and gender disparities at the middle school level, showing much higher rates than appear when aggregate K-12 data are analyzed (Losen & Skiba, 2010). For example, Figure 1 illustrates Office of Civil Rights (OCR) data from every state and it shows the disparities found for middle school students of color.

**Figure 1**

*National middle school suspension rates in 2006 by race, gender.*
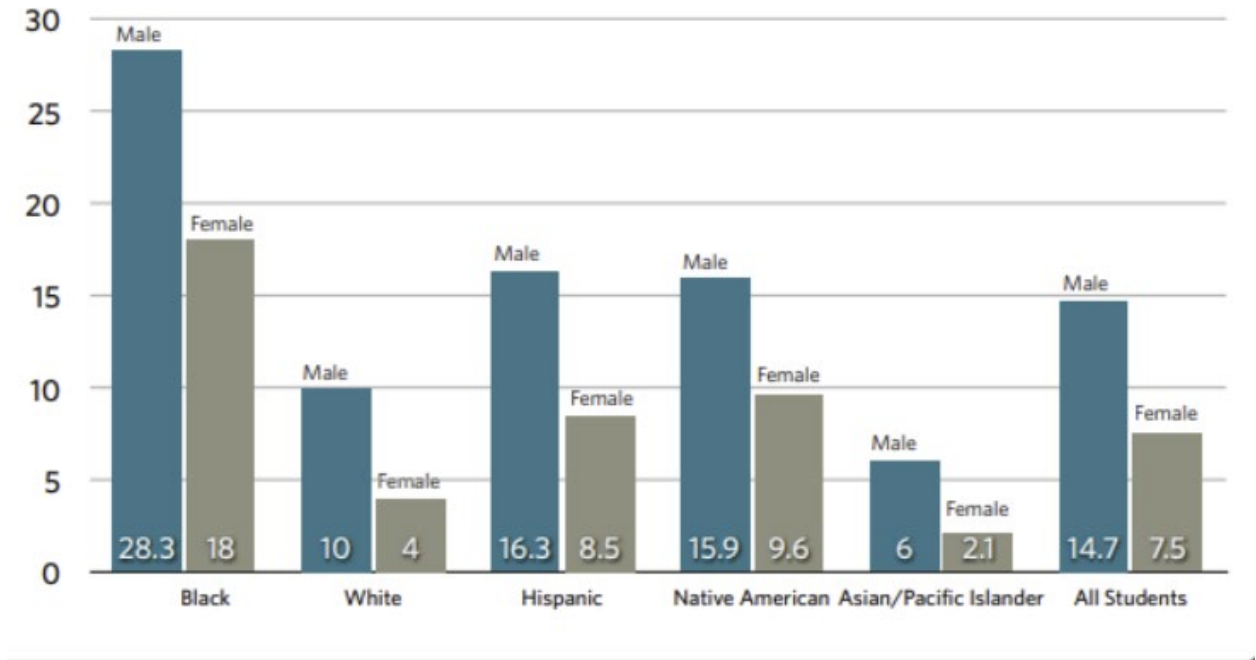


*Note.* This figure demonstrates the disparities in suspension rates at a middle school level. This graph shows both race and gender data.

The aforementioned body of research has shown that middle school students tend to receive more Office Discipline Referrals (ODRs) compared to their counterparts in elementary and high school. Furthermore, within the subset of middle school students who received a referral, Hilberth and Slate (2014) found that Black males were more likely to face exclusionary measures. Losen and Skiba (2010) conducted an analysis of a cross-section of 2006 suspensions across 18 middle schools, compiled by the OCR. Despite the average suspension rate for middle schools being 11.2%, a substantial 46% of all suspensions were associated with Black students, reinforcing earlier research suggesting a higher likelihood for Black males to receive ODRs in middle school leading to exclusions. This trend was further substantiated by Predy et al. (2014), who in their study based on a sample of 401,852

students from 593 public middle schools during the 2009-2010 school year, supported the disproportionate disciplinary outcomes for Black students in middle school settings.

Biases in discipline can lead to students experiencing social issues that can compound the lack of academic success far beyond their time spent in educational institutions. If teachers and administrators are biased, then they may be more likely to make decisions that are unfavorable to Black students, such as deciding that a given misbehavior is worthy of disciplinary action (Riddle & Sinclair, 2019), the severity of disciplinary actions can also be greater for Black Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) students. Researchers have found that teachers who do not understand students' experiences or sociocultural backgrounds are more likely to react to instances of student behavior in discriminatory and/or severe ways. (Baldwin, 2015; Cholewa et al., 2014). Students with higher needs such as foster youth, homeless and students with disabilities, and students of color face far more negative disciplinary actions as compared to their white peers (Skiba, 2008).

A paradigm shift needs to take place to be able to reimagine how discipline is addressed in schools. What drives a change initiative is critical to the success of transformational change implementation in an organization. In 2013, the California Dashboard was introduced as part of the Local Control Funding Formula as a way to provide parents and the public with a better idea of what is happening in our schools and districts. With the introduction of the Dashboard came a new wave of accountability measures. State measures include chronic absenteeism, graduation rate, suspension rate, and academic achievement, which includes performance in English language arts/literacy and mathematics based on standardized tests. These measures for school districts require a cultural shift in school climate and cultural

efforts. Anderson and Ackerman-Anderson (2010) described this type of change as cultural change, which suggests the need for change in both the leader's and staff's behaviors and ways of thinking. This culture change moves stakeholders from the external (environment) to the internal (culture and mindset). The external environment, such as high suspension and expulsion rates, impacts the school community towards the need to shift to an internal change in the school culture and mindset. According to Angelle and Anfara (2006), "Leadership is critical in the shaping of the school culture which will involve changing what people value" (p. 50). Researchers have found that Principal endorsement of zero tolerance was positively associated with suspension rates, holding school-level demographic factors constant. School suspensions were higher in schools where principals endorsed the view that zero-tolerance disciplinary policies helped maintain order in their schools (Heilbrun et al., 2015).

With the implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and the new school accountability measures, in order to be effective, schools need to respond to behavioral problems on an individual basis, analyzing the circumstances and needs in each behavioral situation (C. Bell, 2015). In order to drive this shift in awareness, mindset, and culture, the implementation of practices that are sustainable and support the social-emotional learning of all stakeholders is imperative. One way to implement change in school districts that challenges this mindset of zero-tolerance is by encouraging building caring relationships, a growth mindset, and creating a meaningful connection to the school community, such as restorative practices, which requires focus and repetition (Costello et al., 2009). This type of change needs to be driven deeply into the culture of schools in order to become a part of the schools' DNA (Costello et al., 2009, p. 171). The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and

Emotional Learning (CASEL) has recommended several practices and structures to this effect: morning check-ins with students as an opportunity to identify their emotions; having engaging strategies that use concrete shared expectations ahead of time for collaborative work, and; revisiting expectations regularly to ensure that everyone's needs are being met.

In this vein, the state of California is adapting its educational policy to deprioritize punitive discipline and instead rely on approaches that focus on nurturing a positive learning environment that reduces likelihood of disruptive or dangerous behaviors and that addresses such incidents, when they do happen, with restorative approaches. The current research project will help gauge how prepared administrators in the focal district are for this change in policy.

**Statement of the Problem**

Over the past two decades, the demands on school administrators have increased exponentially. Leadership preparation programs have invested time and resources into incorporating frameworks designed to develop socially just leaders. As the notion of social justice within education has been evolving, certain students, particularly those with disabilities, have been railing against persistent inequities within schools (Pazey et al., 2012). A brief review of the literature shows that school administrators go into their field motivated by the idea of disrupting dysfunctional ecologies (Annamma & Morrison, 2018). This motivation fades quickly if they have not received applicable ways from their preparation programs to address equity concerns at the site. Administrators often complete their graduate training with the belief they have been adequately prepared until they are faced with

accusations of inappropriate services or are confronted with a lawsuit and potentially substantial costs for their school district (Burton, 2008; Pazey et al., 2012).

Researchers have found that school administrators often lack the skills to change the culture in their organization. When principals identify racism, they often conceptualize it as teacher-specific or one teacher's problem, not as a prevalent institutional or societal issue that works in and through school policies and practices at all levels (Aveling, 2007). Schools that serve predominantly urban, African American, and Latino children need leadership that not only stresses academic achievement but also does so within the purposeful context of inevitable social change and critical democratic citizenry (Dantley, 2005, p. 652). When administrators are not able to shift the culture in their schools, it leads to more students getting disciplined.

**Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to explore and describe how secondary level administrators change their organizational culture to address disproportionate disciplinary practices and a reliance on punitive discipline. The study relies on surveys, semi-structured interviews with local school leaders, and quantitative analysis of publicly available discipline data to address the following inquiry questions.

**Research Questions**

1. What observable patterns are evident in district discipline data?

2. In what ways, if any, do administrators' personal beliefs and values impact their approach to disciplinary policy in their organization?

3. What are some strategies or initiatives administrators report as useful in changing the culture of their organization to address discipline disproportionality?

**Significance of the Study**

School leaders are the architects of school culture and school environments, which should be culturally relevant and responsive to students' needs (Bazron et al., 2005; Khalifa et al., 2016; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Changes in school climate and culture are ways to prepare teachers and staff to meet the needs of diverse students (Khalifa et al., 2016; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012). School discipline plays a major role in school culture and the climate of schools. Essentially, this study aims to contribute to the research that examines culturally relevant school leaders and the implementation of school discipline policies to support students of color in schools.

**Keywords Defined**

**Critical Race Theory (CRT) -** Focuses on the effects of race and racism while addressing the White dominance in our society in the areas of economics as well as in the legal and educational institutions (Parker & Lynn, 2002).

**Disproportionality -** Overrepresentation of minority students in suspensions and discipline referrals (Cardichon & Darling-Hammond, 2019).

**Exclusionary Discipline -** Removing students from their classroom setting for a specific period of time utilizing in-school suspension (ISS), out-of-school suspension (OSS), or expulsion 12 (Marchbanks et al., 2014, p. 3).

**ISS -** This usually involves removing a student to an alternate location within the school for a specified period of time. This alternate location ISS is often isolated from

the general student body, and the student is expected to sit or study quietly for the duration of the punishment (Theriot & Dupper, 2010).

**OCR -** Subagency of the U.S. Department of Education that is primarily focused on enforcing civil rights laws prohibiting schools from engaging in discrimination based on race, color, national origin, sex, disability, age, or membership in patriotic youth organizations (Cardichon & Darling-Hammond, 2019).

**OSS -** The operant definition for OSS is, "the removal of a student from the school environment for a period not to exceed ten days" (Mendez et al., 2002, p. 259).

**Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) -** A multi-tiered framework for implementing evidence-based practices informed by implementation science (Horner et al., 2017). PBIS is not a packaged program or a single intervention, it is intended to provide students with supports through a continuum (i.e.,tiers) of supports.

**Public Schools -** A school children attend based on residence; this school is supported by the local taxes and controlled by local school boards (Dauber, 2013).

**School Administrators** - According to Şahin (2023) The school administrator functions in the capacity of an organizer, wielding considerable influence over the operational dynamics of the institution. The school administrator is attributed with orchestrating the educational pursuits within the institution. Balyer (2014) emphasized that the roles of school administrators have changed and stated that school administrators are expected to create and implement the educational vision,

employ employees, manage human resources and school-society relations, develop learning communities, evaluate teacher performance and increase student success.

**Suspension Defined -** It is important to review discipline procedures in California to provide context for when students are being removed from the instructional setting. California Education Code 48911.1 defines suspension as prohibiting a student from being on school grounds for a specified period of time unless the school has a "supervised suspension classroom" (Find Law Staff, 2023a). The behaviors that may lead to a suspension can be found in California Education Code sections 48900, 48900.2, 48900.3, 48900.4, and 48900.7, and include: threatening, causing, or attempting to cause physical injury to others; possessing or using tobacco products or illegal substances; and selling or distributing illegal or controlled substances (Find Law Staff, 2023b, 2023c, 2023d, 2023e, 2023f). Section 48903 of the California Education Code states that a student may be suspended for no more than 20 school days in one academic year (Find Law Staff, 2023g). Students with disabilities may be suspended for the same length of time, however, there are several safeguards put in place to ensure that the suspension is appropriate and that the student continues to receive special education services while suspended. Not only are students suspended from the school day, but also, they cannot take part in school activities or events while suspended. There are two primary types of suspensions as outlined by the California Education Code 48910 and 48911 (Find Law Staff, 2023h):

*Suspension by Teacher*: If other means of correction fail, a teacher may suspend a student from the class for the day of the suspension, and the day following. In

elementary schools, 'day' refers to a calendar day while in secondary school it refers to a class period.

*Suspension by Principal*: The school principal or principal's designee may suspend a student for up to 5 consecutive school days. Suspension can be at the first offense, without prior attempts at intervention, if a student's actions cause a danger to persons or property or threaten to disrupt the instructional process.

**Expulsion Defined**

Expulsion refers to removing a student from immediate supervision and control, or the general supervision, of school personnel for an extended time period (Find Law Staff, 2023i). Students are typically suspended while expulsion is being considered. Students can be expelled from their current school and assigned to an alternative school in the district, or they can be expelled from the district. The California Education Code 48525 allows a school district to expel a student for no more than two semesters or one school year (Find Law Staff, 2023j). The process of expulsion takes on many forms; Table 1 provides examples of the types of expulsions that are currently used by school districts:

**Table 1**

*Disciplinary Definitions*

| | |
|---|---|
| Suspended Expulsion | The student is allowed to stay in his or her home school or may be moved to another school within the district and the student is placed on an expulsion contract. The student is removed from the school only if he commits another suspendable offense and then the expulsion order comes into effect. |
| Stipulated Expulsion: | The student/parent(s) agree to the findings of the school and do not dispute the allegations or recommendations of the school. The student and parent sign the expulsion order and the student is placed in a new educational placement. |
| Administrative Panel Expulsion Hearing | The student/parent(s) elect to let an impartial panel of administrators (usually from the same district) hear the case and then the panel makes a recommendation to the school board. |

Once again, students with disabilities are afforded procedural safeguards in order to ensure that suspensions and expulsions are appropriate and that special education services continue. One procedural safeguard outlined by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is the process of manifestation determination. While the objective of this process is commonly known as determining if a student's misbehavior is a result of the student's disability, Katsiyannis and Maag (2001) and others have argued that is impossible to make an accurate manifestation determination because disability categories are socially constructed and socially negotiated.

**Chapter 2: Review of the Literature and Theoretical Framework**

This chapter provides a review of the literature on the relationship between the frequent use of exclusionary discipline practices at the secondary level and the role of school leaders in changing the organizational culture to address these practices. After the review, the proposed theoretical and conceptual frameworks guiding the study- CRT, Change Theory, Dis-Crit Theory, and Transformational Leadership theory- are discussed.

The primary purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between school administrators and their own personal beliefs when changing their organizational culture to address discipline disproportionality. In addition, this study will explore some of the strategies or initiatives that administrators report as useful in changing the culture of their organization. Preventive measures such as restorative practices and the use of PBIS strategies are methods that some school administrators have employed to ensure a safe positive learning environment. In contrast to zero tolerance policies, these methods propose alternatives to applying harsh disciplinary sanctions on those who engage in behaviors that cause harm to the classroom or school community.

**Politics and Discipline**

The concept of zero tolerance emerged from the federal drug and weapons criminal justice policies of the 1980s (Hanson, 2005). Policymakers began applying zero tolerance to educational settings during the late 1980s when several states mandated expulsion for drugs, fighting, and gang-related activity (Skiba & Knesting, 2001). The Gun-Free Schools Act, a zero-tolerance policy, was first implemented in 1994. This policy required a one-year mandatory expulsion for bringing a firearm to or possessing a firearm in school. This policy

also required that offending youths be referred to the Juvenile System for monitoring or reform (Spann, 2018). Failure to adhere to these mandates often resulted in districts not getting their federal funding.

**Disproportionality in Suspension**

Suspension data across the nation shows a wide discrepancy between students of color and white students. Kidsdata (2020) released data on California public schools that showed that 35 students for every 1,000 were suspended in 2019. In California alone, the data on school suspension highlights educational inequities. Data from Losen and Martin (2018) found that in 2016-2017, school children in California lost an estimated 763,690 days of instructional time because of both ISSs and OSSs. The report also found that Black students lost 52 more days per 100 than the 19 per 100 lost by White students (Losen & Martin, 2018).

In addition, data from the Center for Civil Rights Remedies also showed that students with disabilities lose 22 more days of instruction per 100 enrolled than those without disabilities (Losen & Martin, 2018). It is worth noting that students who are Black and have a disability lost 49 more days per 100 than the 20 days per 100 lost by White students with disabilities. There were an estimated 156,484 days of lost instruction that were accounted for under the catchall "disruption or defiance" category.

For students with disabilities, any loss of instructional time can be detrimental. Due to their disability, they require more support and services when they are in school. Because they receive more support in school, these students also lose more when they lose a day of school than their peers without disabilities (Losen & Martinez, 2013). The IDEA has instituted

policies such as the need for a manifestation determination to determine if the student's behavior is a result of their disability to reduce suspension rates for students with disabilities. However, manifestation determinations are not safe from implicit biases either. Katsiyannis and Maag (2001) believe that proper manifestation determinations are impossible due to the social construct of disability categories, the application of a medical model to manifestation determinations, and the political pressure for schools to maintain control and safety while providing FAPE to students with disabilities.

Annamma and Morrison (2018) contend that racism and ableism function as interdependent forms of oppression within the structure of the U.S. educational system. Race and ability are reified in schools through special education labeling, "race-neutral" disciplinary policies that exclude multiplying marginalized youth (Annamma et al., 2020), and the compounding toll of practices and policies that maintain power hierarchies. BIPOC youth with dis/abilities—who are often the recipients of irrelevant, barrier-laden curricula—are more likely to be pathologized under subjective special education labels, such as emotional disturbance (Bal et al., 2019) and learning disability (Shifrer, 2018), and are more likely to experience exclusionary forms of discipline (Welsh & Little, 2018) and segregation from peers (Skiba & Rausch, 2006).

**Financial Costs to Students and Society**

Exclusionary discipline such as suspensions can have a lasting impact on students who will be more likely to lose connection to school and less likely to want to continue attending school if they do not feel welcome. In a national survey of students who dropped out of school, Black students were more likely than students of other racial backgrounds to cite

having been expelled or suspended too often as a reason they dropped out (Jordan et al., 1996). Failure to obtain a high school diploma can have serious economic repercussions for these students who will have a more difficult time getting employment.

Researchers like Rumberger and Losen (2016) have found that there is also a fiscal impact to society from suspensions. Their data showed that in California in 2001-2002 from the almost half million tenth graders that were enrolled, and based on an estimated 18 percent suspension rate, this yielded an estimated 82,726 suspended students (Rumberger & Losen, 2016). The estimated 13 percentage-point increase in dropouts due to suspensions yields an additional 10,754 pushouts (Rumberger & Losen, 2016). The fiscal (taxpayer) impact of each dropout, based on the work of Belfield (2014), is $175,120, while the social impact is $579,820. Multiplying the economic impact per graduate by the number of additional dropouts yields a figure of $1.88 billion in fiscal losses and $6.2 billion in social losses due to suspensions in California.

Under the IDEA (1990), after a child with a disability has been removed from his or her current placement for 10 school days in the same school year, the school system must provide services to the student during any subsequent days of removal, to the extent required under §300.530(d). These services have a financial impact on districts as they are in addition to what was already being provided and budgeted for.

Losen and Martinez (2020) found that being poor often translates into higher suspension rates for each racial group. Moreover, poor families are more likely to be headed by a single parent, thus it is much more likely that a suspended child will be home alone and unsupervised and that the suspension will have negative consequences that impact the entire

family (Losen & Martinez, 2020). Even one day of suspension can add stress to the families of students living in poverty, as working parents may need to lose a day's pay or even their job if they have to stay home with the suspended child. The financial hardships resulting from suspensions can result in a family having to move because they cannot pay the rent; researchers have found a link between high mobility and lower achievement.

**Social Costs**

The lack of stability can also have a negative impact on both mental and physical well-being. Y. A. Payne and Brown (2016) find that the quality of low-and semi-skilled jobs in the US has deteriorated and that Black people with low levels of formal education in inner cities are more likely to be in these "bad jobs". Their research specifically found that low- and semi-skilled jobs in the U.S. worsened over the last four decades in terms of real wages, stability, and benefits. Even more concerning is the fact that studies have found a connection between dropout rates and adult incarceration. When a child is expelled or suspended, that child is more than two times more likely to be arrested within the same month compared to a child who has not been expelled or suspended (Okonofua et al., 2016). OSSs can lead to more unsupervised time for these students which can often lead to more police encounters.

Students who have multiple suspensions are more likely to be transferred to alternative schools which can result in further negative academic impact (Hirschfield, 2018). Following the institutionalization of zero-tolerance policies and high-stakes testing, alternative schools for at-risk youth grew nationally to as many as 20,000 by 2002 (Hirschfield, 2018). The research on the number of alternative schools prior to zero-tolerance policies going into effect is lacking. Researchers have found that while many alternative schools provide a

variety of services, there appears to be more emphasis placed on collaboration with the juvenile justice system and police than on agencies that can help with life after school (Vanderhaar et al., 2014). Hirschfield (2018) argues that interagency partnerships between public school districts and juvenile justice systems also increase the contact minors have with juvenile justice workers such as probation and parole officers.

The punitive nature of placement into disciplinary alternative schools coupled with the strong law enforcement presence in them may construct one possible route through the "school-to-prison" pipeline (Vanderhaar et al., 2014). In addition, alternative school referrals are part of a trend of exclusionary educational practices that can have negative outcomes for students such as racial isolation, punitive focus, intensified social control, inadequate resources, lack of accountability, and an unchallenging curriculum (Vanderhaar et al., 2014). Transferring to alternative schools is yet another way students of color are given the message that they do not fit in and need to be removed. Negatively stereotyped racial and ethnic minority adolescents may therefore enter middle school prepared to attribute unfair treatment to group membership rather than group-irrelevant factors and do so more readily than their white peers (Yeager et al., 2017). This negative perception can impact overall school culture and can make it harder for students of color to want to attend school consistently.

**Biases**

According to many researchers, exclusionary discipline practices contribute to what is now commonly referred to as the school-to-prison pipeline (Skiba, Arredondo, & Williams, 2014). School suspension has been linked to lower achievement, reduced engagement, truancy, risk-taking behaviors, dropping (or being pushed) out, and incarceration (Maag,

2012; Skiba, Arredondo, & Williams, 2014). Maag (2012) and Mansfield et al. (2018), suggest that school administrators continue to use exclusionary practices because the "get tough approach" on crime (and misbehavior at school) has been so ingrained in our society's psyche the past two decades. In addition, "there are certain social and political forces that either positively or negatively impact federal and state funds schools receive and the public's perception of the effectiveness of a given school district" (Maag, 2012, p. 2097). Riddle and Sinclair (2019) have found that there is a relationship between racial bias and disciplinary outcomes. For example, if teachers and administrators are biased, then they may be more likely to make decisions that are unfavorable to Black students, such as deciding that a given misbehavior is worthy of disciplinary action.

Skiba et al. (2002) found that as compared to Whites, Black students were punished more often, more severely, and for more subjective reasons. Y. A. Payne and Brown (2016) describe how among White teachers, who make up the majority of the K-12 teaching force, Black boys' "misbehavior is likely to be interpreted as symptomatic of ominous criminal proclivities" (p. 792). Moreover, there is a negative reinforcement that occurs when a teacher removes a student from the classroom and sends the student to the office,

> Teachers typically find a student's incessant misbehavior to be unpleasant and, consequently, remove the student from the classroom. The teacher's behavior of removing the student from the classroom has been positively reinforced because it terminated the unpleasantness of the student's misbehavior. Therefore, teachers are more likely to continue removing misbehaving students from the classroom in the future. (Maag, 2012, pp. 2096-2097)

This positive reinforcement makes it difficult for adults to change their behavior as they have become accustomed to "the least little infraction resulting in a suspension" (Mansfield et al., 2018).

Students with disabilities represent 11% of the kindergarten through 12th-grade student population, but they are more than twice as likely to be removed from the educational setting. This becomes exponentially true if the student with a disability is also a student of color (Krezmien et al., 2006). The United States Department of Education Civil Rights Data Collection for the 2015-2016 school year indicated that more than 20% of male students of color with disabilities received one or more OSSs as compared to 10% of male white students with disabilities.

**Alternative Approaches to Suspensions**

Skiba (2002) states "there is little or no evidence showing that suspension improves student behavior or contributes to overall school safety" (p. 338). In fact, "according to the Committee on School Health of the American Academy of Pediatrics (2003), students who are suspended often are least likely to have supervision at home, are from single-parent families, and are those most in need of professional help" (as cited in Christle et al., 2004, p. 510). According to Skiba (2008) "evidence suggests that suspension is ineffective for those students for whom it is used most often considering 40% of school suspensions are given to repeat offenders" (p. 49). Rumberg and Losen (2016) found that there are fiscal benefits to reducing suspension rates. Their research along with others also found that there are effective alternatives to suspending students from school.

**School-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS)**

According to Kervick et al. (2019) SWPBIS has been touted as an effective Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework for improving school climate, improving student behavior, and increasing academic instructional time. SWPBIS is premised on a three-tiered

model (Sugai & Horner, 2002). At the universal level, schoolwide expectations are taught to all students across all learning contexts, and common rewards are given for meeting those expectations. At the targeted level, more focused support and teaching are provided to students needing additional instruction and feedback. At the intensive level, highly individualized approaches and plans are developed to identify how to meet the social/emotional and behavioral needs of students (Sugai & Horner, 2002).

SWPBIS has promise for reducing discipline disproportionality, but it is unlikely to be as effective as it can be or to eliminate disproportionality completely when it doesn't address structural factors, explicit bias, and implicit biases (McIntosh et al., 2014). Although PBIS has been proven to be successful, the lack of resources such as sufficient counseling staff is widely recognized as a major obstacle to successfully implementing PBIS (Hirschfield, 2018). In addition, within PBIS, school administrators select and identify all cultural practices and behavioral expectations to be reinforced in school. Administrators also select behaviors to coincide with the broader culture of the school, which may or may not necessarily represent the culture of the student body (Wilson, 2015). The major shift with restorative practices is that students also take ownership of the community and ensure that norms and well-being are sustained.

**Restorative Practices**

Restorative practices began as restorative justice and originated in the criminal justice system in the 1970s as a method of repairing the harm caused by offenders to the victims (McCold & Wachtel, 2003). Restorative justice offered an alternative way of thinking aimed at improving damage from wrongdoing through principles and philosophies based on

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information, truth-telling, empowerment, and restitution or vindication (Zehr, 2002). Restorative practice (RP) is a behavior management method that aims to help students develop conflict resolution and aggression management skills (Short et al., 2018). RP has its origins in restorative justice and conceptualizes wrongdoing as an infringement on other people and their relationships within the community rather than an infringement on the school institution (Short et al., 2018).

In an educational context, RP aims to educate students about their behavior to help them fully understand its impact and actively choose steps to make it better (McCluskey et al., 2008). To make the restorative process more effective, teachers and other school staff members collaborate and use a common language while speaking to students in need of behavioral support. This common language provides a positive interaction that enhances the overall classroom and school climate in scope (Kaveney & Drewery, 2011).

Early research on the initial impact of introducing RP in schools suggests that it can impact positively on the school environment, on student learning and behavior, and was valued by students for the opportunity it gave them to be heard (McCluskey et al., 2008). Research indicates that while the literature on outcome evaluation is limited, RP appears to have benefits with respect to discipline, school attendance, academic attainment, and organizational culture (Short et al., 2018). RP allows for the development of a culture that cares and allows practitioners to establish authentic relationships (McCluskey et al., 2008); all members of a school community are guided to a more dignified standard of conduct.

Unlike exclusionary disciplinary practices that have shown little success in modifying behavior, the notion of RP is predicated on the theory that positive behavioral changes are

more likely to occur in a context where those in authority do things with students (Mansfield et al., 2018). The RP framework aligns well with other MTSS frameworks, such as SWPBIS, and the use of SEL curricula. These frameworks and approaches can result in a school culture that is committed to building relationships, attending to the social-emotional well-being of all students, building community, and cultivating a more equitable and positive school climate (Kervick et al., 2019). Special consideration must be given to ensure that tools being used within RP are accessible and ethical for students with disabilities and that the tools are infused with critical anti-ableism and antiracism consciousness and strategies in order for RP to be an effective tool to address discipline disparities, (Kervick et al., 2019).

**Restorative and Transformative Justice**

Restorative and transformative justice approaches offer promising strategies for addressing discipline disproportionality in schools. According to Mia Mingus (2022), Transformative Justice (TJ) "works to connect incidences of violence to the conditions that create and perpetuate them" (para. 7). The adoption of a restorative philosophy requires a fundamental shift in mindset within most educational institutions. It requires a reevaluation of our beliefs surrounding discipline, its purpose and its implementation. Original educational frameworks rely heavily on a system of rewards and punishments to shape behavior and interactions. Essentially, we are ingrained in a paradigm that centers on punishment, which restricts our capacity to explore alternative approaches to addressing wrongdoing or conflicts.

When we look at the overall question of what motivates a behavior, and does punishment merely foster passive compliance with norms? Often, punishment serves as the default

reaction to misconduct, with the absence of punishment equated to inaction. Restorative justice offers a shift in this paradigm, urging leaders to scrutinize the underlying intentions behind our disciplinary practices and to redefine our perceptions of how behavior evolves and transforms.

Restorative justice places a significant emphasis in shifting school culture to a more just and equitable learning environment. Achieving this goal requires a collective shift in the mindset within the entire school community towards fostering relations approaches (Morrison et al., 2005). It aims to cultivate stronger connections, foster community cohesion, and deepen mutual understanding by cultivating a nurturing school climate where students, teachers, administrators, staff, parents/guardians are valued for what they bring to the school setting. In their research, Evans and Lester (2013) argue, that RJ is about social engagement. Defining zero tolerance as a type of regulatory formalism that rests on a one-size-fits-all approach, they stated that RJ instead promotes engagement and collaboration among individuals at the local level for the purpose of repairing the harm, resolving conflict, and reconciling relationships.

Within a restorative justice framework, we are able to see both reactive and proactive purposes addressing harm or discord within relationships while also nurturing the inherent value of each individual within these relational dynamics.  Restorative practices such as community-building circles, restorative conferencing and restorative questioning are important ways in which RJ begins to shift the culture in a school. These approaches, when consistently applied on a broad scale, not only contribute to the establishment of a fair and

inclusive learning environment but also hold the potential to enrich social bonds to facilitate the repair and transformation of conflicts (Evans & Vaandering, 2022).

**Middle School Discipline**

Middle school acts as a preparatory period for later academic success in high school and even college (The Meadows Center for Preventing Educational Risk, 2017). It is also during this academic time span that rules, expectations, and school discipline become more stringent. This time is also pivotal for a student's social, emotional, and academic development. A student's academic performance during this period can potentially make a lasting impression on their high school, college, and post-college endeavors (Balfanz, 2009; The Meadows Center for Preventing Educational Risk, 2017).

On average, middle school students, when compared to their peers in elementary and high school, receive more referrals to the office for misbehavior (Girvan et al., 2017; Losen & Martinez, 2013). During their study of middle schools and discipline in a large, urban Midwestern public school district, Skiba et al. (1997) found that the schools in their sample (n=11,001 students) referred 40% of their students, and the majority of those ODRs received were due to their student's inability to show respect or obedience to their teachers. Anti-authoritative social stances by middle school students are not a new concept as these students are still learning to adjust to new peer social groups and peer influences, and this forces middle school students at times to exert measures of resistance towards teachers (Pennington, 2009). Problematic behaviors for elementary school students are traditionally directed at peers, however, Spaulding et al. (2010) found that middle school students are more likely to have their problematic behaviors involve adults rather than peers. Despite the fact that these

behaviors can be attributed to an appropriate development for adolescents, Skiba et al. (1997) suggest that the consequences linked to students' actions may represent a school personnel's inability to effectively redirect or contend with these issues in the classroom.

For many BIPOC students, instead of being allowed to fully maximize their academic potential throughout middle school, they are forced to endure the inequitable enforcement of code of conduct policies based on teachers' different styles of classroom management. A segment of research concerning the topic of school discipline and classroom management has focused on improving the student-to-teacher relationship (Gregory & Ripski, 2008; Gregory et al., 2016; Pence, 2011). Traditional teacher programs prioritized classroom management by focusing on controlling students through rules, order, domination, and fear (Baumrind, 1978), however updated research in teacher education programs has shifted to use more student-centered approaches that rely on trust and relationship building (Gregory et al., 2016; Sabol & Pianta, 2012). Concepts such as culturally responsive classroom management (Brown, 2010; Durden et al., 2015), PBIS, and restorative practices have begun to reframe how teachers provide instructional content, all while affirming students in a manner that promotes collaboration during behavior redirection (Bazemore & Schiff, 2010).

Despite these efforts to shift the way discipline practices are enacted, findings suggest that even in schools whose racial composition is comprised of mostly BIPOC students, harsher discipline practices are enacted (A. A. Payne & Welch, 2013; Welch et al., 2011). These findings suggest that the promotion of school discipline inequities extends far beyond the teacher-to-student relationship and into the student-to-school administrator relationship.

**School Administrators**

The historical role of a school administrator has been maintaining order and ensuring the safety of the building (Sarason et al., 1990). The expectation has been focused on the administrator's ability to manage the school and keep it stable. Historically, traditional leadership preparation programs focused on preparing campus principals to be managers of the campus (Pannell et al., 2016). Smith and Andrews (1989) wrote that traditional leaders were those leaders who performed the following roles: "building managers, administrators, politicians, change agents, boundary spanners, and instructional leaders" (p. 9). Until recently, little attention has been paid to the preparation process and how schools of educational administration have designed their preparation programs (Gutmore, 2015).

While administrators focus on supporting teachers and improving curriculum, they also spend most of their time interpreting school policies, investigating student misconduct, and recommending interventions based on their own discretion (Berlin, 2009). However, there is a lack of research on how administrators approach their responsibilities as disciplinarians, including their effective dispositions, conflict management styles, and interpersonal communication. Even experienced administrators may feel underprepared to handle the daily responsibilities of managing conflict between students and teachers (Oleszewski et al., 2012).

Educational leaders in the 21st century are now required to create culturally cohesive environments that support all students (Karakose, 2008). To do this, school leaders are expected to have the skills needed to work with teachers, parents, and the larger community to be able to develop structures that benefit all students. We now know that what is beneficial to all students is not only having a culturally relevant curriculum and an orderly campus, but

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we also need actively and overtly anti-racist, anti-ableist, and generally anti-oppressive stances and structures. These expectations have continued to evolve after COVID-19 but leadership programs have yet to catch up to these new demands.

**Student Support**

As already mentioned, educators have a say so on whether to write an ODR, potentially leading to suspension, under the assumption that these measures can act as deterrants for recurring behaviors. However, as highlighted by Losen et al. (2012), students often face multiple suspensions within a school year, challenging the efficacy of punishment as a deterrant. Instead scholars like Losen et al. advocate for more in-school behavioral support, highlighting the importance of access to diverse educational opportunities and wrap-around services as alternatives to exclusionary discipline. By neglecting the provision of support as viable alternatives, schools perpetuate a narrative suggesting that Black male students are more disruptive or prone to offenses, despite a lack of evidence supporting each claim (Anyon et al., 2014; Losen et al., 2015). To address this issue and reduce discipline gamps, there is a call for an increased emphasis on implementing positive behavioral supports and interventions (Skiba & Losen, 2016).

Researchers argue that effective reduction of discipline gaps is dependent upon the implementation of school wide norms, supported by all stakeholders and reinforced through programming that fosters positive interactions among students (Skiba & Losen, 2016). The study's findings underscore the effectiveness of schools in mitigating discipline gaps when they focus on enhancing student's perceptions of teacher's expectations, underscoring the importance of consistent implementation of school-wide structures across classrooms.

**School and Classroom Climate**

The U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) acknowledge the detrimental effects of exclusionary discipline on student outcomes and responded by implementing various initiatives designed to enhance school discipline practices. The primary focus of these efforts was the improvement of school climate through the reform of discipline policies. Initiated in 2014, the USDOE's School Climate Transformation Grant was established to allocate resources to State Educational Agencies. The grant aimed to support the development, enhancement, or expansion of multi-tiered behavioral frameworks, such as PBIS. These frameworks underscored the significance of fostering a positive school climate to ameliorate school discipline outcomes (USDOE, Press Office, 2014, September 23).

**School Climate**

School climate, as defined by the National School Climate Center in 2007, encompasses the quality and character of school life, reflecting norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures. The intricate interplay of these elements gives rise to what is commonly referred to as school culture or school climate. The day-to-day interactions among students, staff, and the community establish the rhythm of a school building. Research indicates that in schools with a positive climate, characterized by encouraging relationships, students are more likely to adhere to rules and expectations (Wang & Degol, 2016). Recognized as a key indicator, school climate has long been associated with student emotional and behavioral outcomes (Maxwell et al., 2017). The 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) highlights the importance of measuring "school climate and safety" as a nonacademic indicator of school quality or

student success (ESSA;USDOE, 2015). In California, most schools track their climate and culture by looking at suspension rates.

Researchers have linked negative school climate to increased rates of disciplinary actions (Daly et al., 2014). This correlation is likely influenced by student's perceptions of school policies and disciplinary structures, which can strain their relationships with adults. Conversely, studies have shown that Black students who perceive their school climate as characterized by care, attentiveness, and trust are less likely to face exclusionary disciplinary actions (Maxwell et al., 2017) This supports the idea that a positive school climate not only affects suspension rates but also mitigates the impact of such consequences.

The findings from a study conducted by Hung et al. (2015) noted that school climate can indeed have a significant impact on the student experience, recognizing that students within the same school may experience it uniquely. The research highlights that middle school students are particularly vulnerable to facing school difficulties due to developmental inappropriateness in organizational structures and social supports. These difficulties, as argued by researchers, translate into undesirable student behaviors, ultimately leading to an increase in adverse disciplinary actions.

**Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework that shaped this study combines CRT, Dis-Crit Theory, Change Theory, Educational Dignity Theory, and Transformational leadership. These theories were appropriate because they could be applied as the foundation to determine the success of secondary level administrators in changing their organization's culture. The

culture of the school affects both teacher and student performance and highlights the importance of it when providing students with an appropriate education.

**Critical Race Theory**

Central to any discussion or analysis regarding disproportionate discipline practices and policies is CRT. Scholar Derrick Bell initially brought forth this theoretical framework to address racial inequities and disparities that existed in every part of the U.S. legal system. In critiquing critical legal theory, D. Bell and other scholars (Crenshaw, 1988; Delgado & Stefancic, 2023) asserted that when examining these disparities, it is futile to critique the actions of individuals concerning race and racism in isolation; rather scholars suggested that the correct analysis should focus on the structural systems themselves, and how each system weaponizes race against marginalized groups.

The essence of this critical analysis about race and racism was captured and transitioned into the field of education by scholars seeking to challenge and redefine the power that race and racism held in education and examine how individual components within education (e.g., teacher preparation, school curriculum, instruction, assessment, desegregation, school funding, etc.) continue to preserve inequities (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 1999; Solorzano & Bernal, 2001). According to Yosso et al. (2001), CRT of education has at least five themes that form its basic perspectives, research methods, and pedagogy. These five themes are: the centrality and intersectionality of race and racism; the challenge to the dominant ideology; the commitment to social justice; the centrality of experiential knowledge, and; the interdisciplinary perspective. The themes can be explained as follows:

1. In the U.S., race and racism are endemic to everyday life because each item resides in every conceivable U.S. structure (D. Bell, 1988, 1992).

2. The current structure of race has created a caste-like society that inheritably promotes the dominance of Whiteness (i.e., white privilege and white supremacy) in the U.S. It is these structures that prioritize Whiteness while oppressing and marginalizing groups of color. These structures cannot be pronounced as neutral systems. The promotion of falsehoods such as liberalism and meritocracy gives credence that individual effort always results in success, without examining the systemic inequities of institutional racism. This ignores the multitude of systems that only promote progressive rights for individuals of color, solely based on the convergence of interests for Whites (D. Bell, 1988).

3. Far too often, the singular propagandized narratives of Whites are viewed as truth, which silences people of color. Counter-narratives and the experiential knowledge that individuals of color have are central to preserving an inclusive history, and it challenges the color blindness within the U.S. that seeks to mask the effects of race and racism (Ladson Billings, 1999).

4. Attempts to expose and counteract racism cannot be done solely by one group. Rather, it requires an interdisciplinary perspective, which analyzes how race influences a wide array of aspects in the U.S. (e.g., gender, sexual identity, age, class, etc.). Limiting the impact of race on the lives of individuals requires multiple disciplines to converge and undermine the traditional ahistorical approach to understanding race and racism (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2014).

5. Eliminating race as a tool for marginalization and oppression requires that advocates and scholars utilize a social justice framework. From this perspective, the goal is to remove every form of oppression that exists, regardless of who is being oppressed (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001).

Ladson-Billings (2010) presented CRT as an explanation of the purpose of education, the effects on an individual receiving education in school, and how schools transform students into individuals with respect to the goals of society. This means that "the theories, methods, and the appropriate sociological questions are used to better understand the relationship between educational institutions and society, both at the micro and macro levels" (Fägerlind & Saha, 2016, p. 300). Walker (2014) summarized CRT in education as a challenge to racial stereotypes with the premise that the ingrained racism in schools must be uncovered. The process of removing hidden systemic and customary ways in which racism works in schools starts with discussion and works toward understanding various views and perspectives (Sleeter, 2011). The understanding of others and removal of race as a factor in discipline decisions requires a CRT perspective from teachers and administrators.

The persistence of race as a distinctive indicator in education and educational outcomes serves as a constant reminder that any and all efforts to correct any disparities must continue to; (a) situate how race affects systems and individuals, and; (b) explore how multiple systems interact to influence an individual's attainment because of their race. These five themes lead us to a goal to develop a pedagogy, curriculum, and research agenda that accounts for the role of racism and race. By using these themes we can begin to identify, analyze, and transform the use of racial stereotypes and deficit-based theories in education,

which help maintain the subordination of students of color (Yosso et al., 2001). This theoretical framework will serve as a lens to understand if the tenets of interdisciplinary approaches, experiential knowledge, and the removal of color/race blindness are being utilized in administrators' discipline practices.

**Dis-Crit Theory**

Disability/CRT considers the intersection of race and ability when looking at anti-discrimination practices in the educational setting. Dis/Crit is based on seven tenets that aim to create new knowledge established in intersectional commitments, strive to understand how interlocking oppressions of racism and ableism work together, and challenge the boundaries of intersectionality (Annamma et al., 2018). The tenets on which Dis/Crit is established are:

> Tenet 1: DisCrit focuses on ways that the forces of racism and ableism circulate interdependently, often in neutralized and invisible ways, to uphold notions of normalcy.

> Tenet 2: DisCrit values multidimensional identities and troubles singular notions of identity such as race or dis/ability or class or gender or sexuality, and so on.

> Tenet 3: DisCrit emphasizes the social constructions of race and ability and yet recognizes the material and psychological impacts of being labeled as race or dis/abled, which sets one outside of the Western cultural norms.

> Tenet 4: DisCrit privileges voices of marginalized populations, traditionally not acknowledged within research.

> Tenet 5: DisCrit considers legal and historical aspects of dis/ability and race and how both have been used separately and together to deny the rights of some citizens.

Tenet 6: DisCrit recognizes Whiteness and ability as property and that gains for

people labeled with dis/abilities have largely been made as the result of interest

convergence of White, middle-class citizens.

Tenet 7: DisCrit requires activism and supports all forms of resistance (Connor et al.,

2016)

For the purpose of this study, the framework of Dis/ability CRT will identify the current

educational system as a series of dysfunctional education ecologies (Annamma & Morrison,

2018). These ecologies are maintained through implicit bias, and the Dis/Crit Theoretical

Framework in education is used to research and hypothesize ways in which race, racism,

dis/ability, and ableism are built on the interaction, procedures, narratives, institutions, and

policies of education (Annamma et al., 2013). DisCrit Theory recognizes subgroups of

individuals are inherently at a disadvantage based on institutional structures. This theory

provides a lens to open lines of inquiry for dismantling complex systems of oppression in

education (Crenshaw, 1988). These tenets acknowledge that race and ability are constructs

that have psychological and economic impacts on identified individuals. Ladson-Billings

(1999) argued that there is no place where education can be a bystander when education

ecologies are already dysfunctional for multiply-marginalized BIPOC students.

Racism and ableism are built into school structures and policies, which produces unequal

opportunities for students. BIPOC students with and without disabilities increasingly

encounter more exclusionary discipline practices at the secondary level. Secondary school

administrators are critical in the role of challenging the dominant narratives about race and

ability and facilitating equity-oriented changes (DeMatthews, 2020). In order to facilitate

systemic change, school administrators have to address the legacy of mistrust between minority communities and school systems, especially where certain communities have been viewed through a deficit model rather than an asset-based lens (Harry & Kingler, 2005).

As an administrator, I make calls for disciplinary actions and while this is powerful it is also very subjective. My personal experience as a special education teacher provides me with a lens that others do not seem to have. I look at the student's behavior as a way to communicate a need or a want. My immediate decision is not suspension or removal from the instructional setting but seeking a way to modify their negative behavior. This decision to not always remove a student is not always accepted by others, which leads to me having to explain my decision to counter deficit perspectives. Deficit perspectives locate the blame for low performance in students, families, and communities of color, reinforcing the idea that students of color cannot achieve at the same levels or in the same ways as their white peers (Harry & Klinger, 2005). In the same way, the medical model of dis/ability identifies disability as an intrinsic characteristic that demands diagnosis and remediation and relegates students to different and lesser expectations (Annamma et al., 2018).

**Change Theory**

John Kotter's eight steps to change theory is one of several change theories utilized by organizations to introduce changes (Gray, 2002). Kotter and Cohen (2012), in their book, *The Heart of Change*, presents a persuasive eight-step process that prosperous organizations have employed to implement organizational change. The process begins with creating a sense of urgency, building a guiding coalition, getting the vision right, and effectively communicating it. The next steps include empowering actions, creating and celebrating short term wins, and

refusing to give up (Gray, 2002). Very little research currently exists in the area of using the full eight step framework of Kotter's change of theory in an educational setting. Site administrators are responsible for determining the vision and focus of the organization (Hughes et al., 2009).

The need for change is a relevant factor in the educational system. Disproportionate disciplinary practices continue to negatively impact students of color. My experience in education has shown me that change is hard for teachers. Hollins (2006) explains the "culture of practice that most teachers started out with included beliefs and practices that operated against improving teaching" (p. 50). This study allowed me to see what transformational leaders have done to be able to be effective when changing school culture. Kotter (1995) portrayed the ideal leader as, "never letting up until you get the vision of what you wanted…and then securing it and institutionalizing it enough so it sinks into the culture so the winds of tradition do not blow it back where it started" (as cited in Newcomb, 2008, p. 6). There is a lack of literature about administrators being able to create this change. The post-pandemic education setting has made it clear that what we viewed as normal does not exist anymore. After attending conferences and several of my own district leadership meetings, it is clear that change in these times is very difficult but it is essential in order to address the inequalities in our educational system.

**Transformational Leadership**

Originally introduced by Burns (1978), Transformational Leadership has been demonstrated to bring radical changes in the work environment by addressing follower needs for development and achievement (Conger, 1999). Transformational leaders have been

depicted in the literature as visionary, empowering, social, passionate, and innovative (Hackman & Johnson, 2004). In its ideal form, it creates valuable and positive change in the followers with the end goal of developing followers into leaders. Transformational leadership enhances the motivation, morale, and performance of followers through a variety of mechanisms. These include: connecting the follower's sense of identity and self to the mission and the collective identity of the organization; being a role model for followers that inspires them; challenging followers to take greater ownership of their work, and; understanding the strengths and weaknesses of followers, so the leader can align followers with tasks that optimize their performance (Bass, 1998).

The concept of transformational leadership has four dimensions through the 4i concept: (a) idealized influence, which involves behavior that inspires respect and confidence; (b) inspirational motivation, which involves behavior that motivates and inspires others; (c) intellectual stimulation, which involves a leader who comes up with new ideas and solutions; and (d) individualized consideration, which involves listening and paying attention to the people they lead. According to Robbins (2015), transformational leaders are those who inspire their followers to change their lives and work towards a greater purpose and vision. This is achieved by increasing their awareness, enthusiasm, and motivation to achieve organizational goals. According to Bass and Avolio (2000), transformative leaders have three characteristics: they increase followers' awareness of the importance of processes and efforts; motivate followers to prioritize group interests over individual interests; and shift their needs beyond material things to a higher level such as self-esteem and actualization. In the context of this study, transformational leadership will be utilized as a theoretical framework to

examine how school administrators have effectively transformed the culture of their schools to promote equity and inclusivity for all students. This study seeks to identify strategies utilized by these administrators to overcome institutional barriers that disproportionately impact the academic achievement of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) students.

**Educational Dignity**

Linguistic and interactive actions that can be mapped and studied generate both meaningful participation and educational dignity. Thus, both active involvement in learning (meaningful participation) and the sense of worth and respect that comes from education (educational dignity) can be influenced by specific ways of communicating and interacting with others. These communication and interactional patterns can be identified, recorded, and studied to better understand how they contribute to creating a positive learning environment and promoting educational dignity. Espinoza and Vossoughi (2014) have emphasized the historical and collective dimensions of this concept by: (a) arguing that dignity can be derived from productive participation in learning as well as resistance to the inaccessibility of opportunities to learn; (b) conceptualizing learning as 'rights-generative activity,' and; (c) asserting that dignity requires a fundamental respect for the intellectual and political self-determination of all peoples and a commitment to fostering the conditions that support this potential to bloom.

**Summary**

Students of color in the United States are subject to disciplinary action at rates much higher than their white counterparts. These disciplinary actions put students at higher risk for

negative life outcomes, including involvement in the criminal justice system (Riddle & Sinclair, 2019). Some challenges to consistently implementing RP over a longer period included staff, student and policy factors. School culture is a key factor in addressing disproportionate disciplinary practices. School leaders are instrumental in changing school culture but they are oftentimes not equipped to do so. The theoretical frameworks that I am using for this research will provide a lens for looking at transformative leaders and how they are able to effectively change their school culture in a way that improves educational opportunities for students of color.

CRT provides a useful framework for understanding the school-to-prison Nexxus and its impact on marginalized communities. CRT highlights the role that implicit bias and stereotyping play in the Nexxus. Teachers and even administrators may view BIPOC students as threatening or dangerous, leading to disproportionate disciplinary action and harsher punishment. This bias can manifest in many ways, including through the overuse of zero tolerance policies, which mandate harsh punishments for even minor infractions. Through my research, I want to be able to see how transformative leaders counter such policies and practices.

**Chapter 3: Research Methodology**

This chapter describes the methodology utilized in this study. The goal was to collect the administrator's perceptions and experiences with discipline. As the research indicated in the Literature Review, zero-tolerance policies have a negative impact on students and their achievement.

This study considered the following three questions:

1. What observable patterns are evident in district discipline data?

2. In what ways do administrators' personal beliefs and values impact their approach to disciplinary policy in their organization?

3. What are some **strategies or initiatives** administrators report as useful in changing their organization's culture to address discipline disproportionality?

**Nature and Appropriateness of the Methodology**

This study's chosen methodology was a mixed-methods descriptive approach. The decision to use this method was based on the nature of the research questions and the researcher's interest in obtaining more detailed and holistic data. Creswell et al. (2003) states, "A mixed methods design is useful to capture the best of both quantitative and qualitative approaches" (p. 22). Initially, the researcher was inclined towards a quantitative approach but decided to adopt a mixed-method approach after considering the limitations of quantitative studies, as highlighted by Weiss (1994), who suggests that quantitative studies may not provide complete reports due to their standardized precision.

In their 2007 study, Gall et al., pointed out that combining quantitative and qualitative research methods can augment data quality and spur further investigation in future studies (p.

32). They also cautioned that the intricate nature of educational organizations necessitates using qualitative approaches to gather information about the individuals involved in educational programming (p.33). For this study, it is essential to understand the reported leadership behavior and school climate and gain a deeper understanding of the experiences that align with the data.

According to Creswell et al. (2003), there are two types of educational research: quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative research involves the researcher selecting a specific topic to study, posing narrow questions, gathering numeric data from participants or data sets, and analyzing the data using statistical methods in an objective and unbiased manner. On the other hand, qualitative research relies on participants' perspectives, asking broad questions and collecting largely textual data. The data is then analyzed to identify themes and patterns in a subjective and biased manner. The *Journal of Mixed Methods Research* (JMMR) offered a definition of mixed methods research as part of its first call for papers (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017): "Mixed methods research is defined as research in which the investigator collects and analyzes data, integrates the findings, and draws inferences using both qualitative and quantitative approaches or methods in a single study or a program of inquiry" (Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007, p. 4).

Despite various scholars providing definitions over time (Johnson et al., 2007), ongoing debates persist regarding the definition of mixed methods both within and beyond the mixed methods community (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). In an effort to underscore the study's intent rather than prioritizing a specific approach, Creswell and Plano Clark (2017) elucidate

the fundamental characteristics of mixed methods research. These characteristics outline that the researcher,

> (a) Collects and analyzes both qualitative and quantitative data rigorously in response to research questions and hypotheses, (b) Integrates the two forms of data and their results, (c) Organizes these procedures into specific research designs that provide the logic and procedures for conducting the study, and (d) Frames these procedures within theory and philosophy. (p. 4)

**Types of Mixed Methods Designs**

Creswell and Plano Clark (2017) present three fundamental mixed methods designs that serve as a framework for researchers in crafting their own studies. These designs encompass convergent design, explanatory sequential design, and exploratory design (for comprehensive descriptions, refer to Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017, pp. 65-66). For the purpose of my study, a convergent parallel mixed methods design was employed. According to Creswell (2011), in a convergent parallel design, the researcher employs concurrent timing to execute both qualitative and quantitative strands of the research process. Although these two strands are given equal priority, they remain independent throughout the analysis, and the results are integrated during the interpretation phase.

In Phase 1 of this study, a survey was employed to gather quantitative survey data. This data was part of a survey that was sent out to all secondary-level administrators at VUSD.

According to Creswell (2003), a mixed methods approach can be advantageous in situations where researchers survey a large number of individuals and follow up with a few of them to obtain their specific voices on the topic. Collecting close-ended quantitative and open-ended qualitative data helped me better understand the research problem. Hence, the benefits and appropriateness of selecting a mixed methods approach were discussed to justify

its selection for this study. I used quantitative data and qualitative data in a two-phase study in which I merged, integrated, and analyzed these two types of data. Using a mixed methods approach to the research helped me to understand my research problem better and to answer my questions better.

Employing a mixed methods approach addresses the limitations of relying solely on quantitative or qualitative methodologies. While quantitative research may be perceived as lacking consideration for the contextual settings of individuals, qualitative research may be criticized for its limited participant pool and highly situated data. The integration of both approaches in mixed methods research capitalized on the strengths of each, mitigating the shortcomings identified in the singular use of either method (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017, p. 12).

**Social Context and Setting**

This study took place within the Valparaiso School District (VUSD), which serves approximately 18,000 students in preschool through grade 12. The district includes 18 elementary schools, 2 K-8 schools, six middle schools, three comprehensive high schools, two alternative high schools, two charter schools, and one virtual academy. The student body at the schools served by Valparaiso Unified School District is 13.4% White, 0.4% Black, 1.3% Asian or Asian/Pacific Islander, 83.6% Hispanic/Latino, 0.2% American Indian or Alaska Native, and 0.1% Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander. In addition, 1.1% of students are of two or more races, and 0% have not specified their race or ethnicity. Also, 49% of students are female, and 51% are male. At Valparaiso Unified School District

schools, 52.0% of students are eligible to participate in the federal free and reduced-price meal program, and 46.2% are English language learners.

VUSD covers a large geographic area that encompasses parts of two different counties. Like many districts throughout the state of California, the cost of living has impacted the district's ability to retain staff as well as student enrollment. In addition, administrator burnout from the Covid pandemic has impacted the district's focus and stability. While a core group of site and central office administrators have remained in the district for many years, there has also been a high turnover rate of administrators.

**Project Design**

This mixed methods study examines patterns in quantitative district discipline data and administrators' survey and interview responses about personal beliefs and values regarding their approach to discipline policies as well as strategies that have been effective in changing their organization. To achieve this, a Critical Race Transformative Mixed Methods design was used (Garcia & Mayorga, 2018, p. 246). Although the sampling for the qualitative phase was generated from the quantitative data, this remained a convergent design because one set of data did not inform the questions asked of the other set. Utilizing a critical race framework in this analysis, it is essential to consider whether an investigator incorporated or neglected to address white supremacy in their research design (Garcia & Mayorga, 2018, p. 246; see Figure 2 CRTCMM Design).

**Figure 2**

*Convergent critical race transformative mixed methods design.*
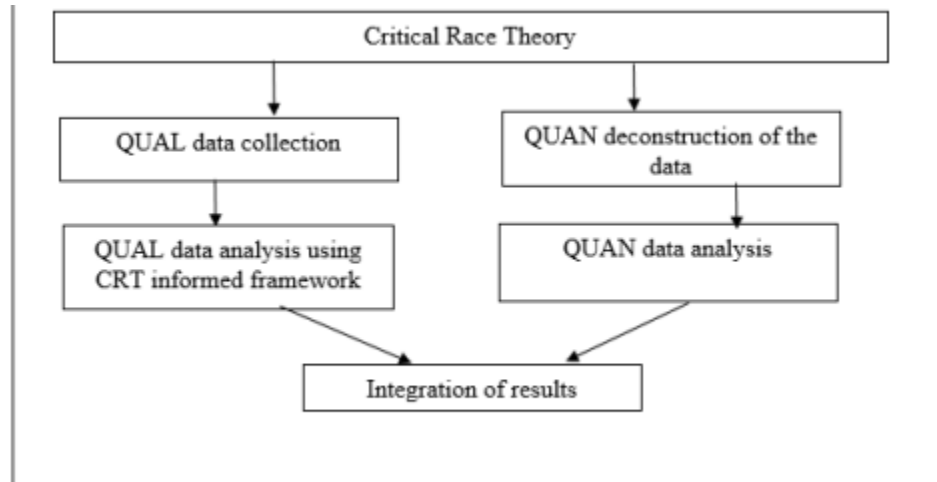


Note. This figure illustrates how a convergent design has two distinct methods and data collection processes, both qualitative and quantitative, with the merging or integration of the two occurring in the results as a means of validation.

This study employed a critical race transformative convergent parallel mixed methods design to evaluate the research questions. The procedural steps in this design align with Creswell's (2014) recommendations for a convergent design, with the notable distinction that the initial step involves deconstructing the dataset. This involves critical race researchers identifying and articulating the limitations of the dataset to challenge and de-normalize white supremacy (Garcia & Mayorga, 2018). For instance, researchers may scrutinize the practice of collapsing diverse racial categories into simplified binary distinctions, such as "white" and "non-white." This oversimplification can mask the nuanced experiences and disparities among racial and ethnic groups. After exploring questions, categories, and sampling methods, the researchers conducts the analysis.

This study used qualitative methods that incorporated frameworks "that validate experiential knowledge, amplify the voices behind the numbers, and dismantle white supremacy by acknowledging and honoring those voices" (Garcia & Mayorga, 2018, p. 248).

In the qualitative dimensions of this study, administrators provided narratives about their experiences related to student discipline. The research design that I employed in this phase was a qualitative case study. Qualitative case studies provide in-depth descriptions of a bounded system. A bounded system has clear boundaries of what is to be studied (LeCompte, 1994). Site administrators bound this study at the secondary level. I recognize that I am not including elementary administrators. I am seeking to understand and gain insight into secondary-level leaders who have changed their school culture to address discipline disproportionality.

Through semi-structured interviews and document reviews, I analyzed and interpreted the data I collected. This approach was well suited to qualitative case study research.

**The Researcher's Role**

My passion for understanding school discipline, was sparked over a decade ago in my role as a special education teacher. I had students in my caseload who were often suspended without regard to their disability. I also had students arrested in school due to a fight during lunch. I wanted to understand more clearly what can be done to prevent students from being excluded from school. My goal as a researcher was to collect, analyze, and interpret data.

I chose a mixed methods study to interview administrators, access their thought processes and experiences implementing disciplinary policies, and quantitatively generalize the information from the qualitative stage to a larger population. I have a diverse educational

background that may differ from a researcher who has never worked in an academic setting. Through this study, I hoped to learn from the administrator's thought processes and experiences as they considered all stakeholders of their respective schools.

**Data Sources**

*Qualitative Participants and Settings*

This study's primary data source comes from interviewing secondary level administrators at VUSD. I decided to focus on secondary-level administrators because data shows that the number of suspensions increases in Middle school. Middle school administrators will likely spend more time intervening in social and emotional challenges that middle-level students face.

The survey was sent to all 24 administrators at the secondary level regardless of their years of experience. I believed that collecting data from administrators with different levels of experience would result in richer findings.

**Phase 1**

As mentioned, this study proceeded in three phases. During Phase 1 of this mixed methods study, I designed and administered a survey and then analyzed data from survey responses. First, a pilot survey was developed, and a current school leader was invited to do a think-aloud reading of the survey items to ensure that they were interpreted as I had hoped. The feedback from this school leader and colleagues was incorporated to refine the survey and improve its validity and reliability (See Appendix A). To further ensure that the survey was reliable, valid, and suitable for this project, I also had colleagues review the items to ensure they aligned with my research questions. Participants were invited to take the revised

survey on Google Forms, which included questions about the type of administrator they saw themselves as. The survey also asked administrators to use five-point Likert scales to assess their agreement with questions related to student discipline, restorative practices, and their approach to change and resistance to change. The continuum for the Likert scale included the following levels: 1=strongly agree; 2=agree; 3=neither agree or disagree; 4=disagree; and 5=strongly disagree. The responses to open-ended questions were analyzed for themes. The primary purpose of the survey was to identify leaders who saw themselves as transformational leaders who were changing their school culture to address discipline disproportionality.

Demographic and district data on gender, racial/ethnic group, school enrollment, and years as an administrator was collected when participants completed the survey. The demographic data was used to further analyze the administrator's responses. To maintain anonymity, identifiable information such as name or school affiliation was not collected. Demographic information in participant profiles was not provided to prevent risk of indirect identification.

The analysis of these survey responses drove the sampling strategy for Phase 2, the qualitative portion of the study. The original intent was to choose people whose survey responses indicated transformative orientations; however, the data was not conclusive, so those who expressed a willingness to be interviewed were part of phase 2. Interview questions reflected themes that emerged within survey responses and from themes noted in the literature review.

**Phase 2**

I conducted interviews to "present the lives and gain perspectives of those being studied as faithfully as possible" (Esterberg, 2002, p. 13). As an "insider" in the organization, it was easier for me to develop and maintain rapport with participants quickly. Since I am already immersed in the field setting, I have a comprehensive understanding of the context of the field. Developing an empathetic relationship is a critical factor in gathering qualitative data that is honest, open, and reflective, and the survey's primary purpose for interviewees.

In this study, administrators provided narratives about their experiences related to student discipline. The research design that I employed in Phase 2 was a qualitative case study. Qualitative case studies provide in-depth descriptions of a bounded system. A bounded system has clear boundaries of what is to be studied (LeCompte, 1994). This study is bounded by site administrators at the secondary level within the Valparaiso School District. I recognize that I am not including elementary administrators. I am seeking to understand and gain insight into secondary-level leaders who have changed their school culture to address discipline disproportionality because secondary schools often have larger student populations, more diverse curricular offerings, and a greater number of extracurricular activities compared to elementary schools. Addressing discipline disproportionality in secondary schools may require more complex strategies and approaches tailored to the specific needs of older students and the structure of secondary education.

Scanlan (2020) argues that an in-depth interview style can be free flowing when required, allowing deep exploration of the respondent's comments to gain greater understanding of matters of particular interest. Additionally, in-depth interview is an effective qualitative

method for getting people to talk about their personal feelings, opinions, and experiences (Milena et al., 2008). In-depth interviews were chosen over semi-structured interviews because they enabled administrators to provide detailed narrative and examples, offering rich qualitative data that capture the complexity of their experiences with discipline. In-depth interviews allowed for flexibility discussing dimension of school policies, community dynamics, teacher-student interventions.

Finally, district discipline data was analyzed to examine the quantitative findings. The selected participants of the interview portion of this study were provided pseudonyms to protect their identities. In addition to providing confidentiality to the participants' identities, the participants' current institution, and previously employed institutions were masked. If the participants referenced specific individuals in their stories, the individuals' identities were also protected.

I opted to recruit and select from site administrators at the secondary level. I sent an email introducing my research and research questions as well as a link for the Google form with the survey to 24 secondary-level administrators currently at VUSD. It was the goal to have administrators from both middle school and high school represented. The intent was to have a wide demographic variety of school administrators to see if the results could be generalized to the larger population.

The method that I used for the second part of the study consisted of in-depth interviews. Interviews were a valuable way to collect participant data, especially when viewed through CRT. Of the 24 administrators who received the survey, 14 completed the survey. While initially, the intent was to choose transformational leaders for the interviews, this was not

easy to determine from that data, and as a result, I opted to interview the seven administrators who agreed to be interviewed. Of the administrators interviewed, five identified as females, and two identified as males. The years of experience as an administrator for those interviewed ranged from six months to 15 years. Enrollment ranged from 50 to 2,600 students in their schools. Lastly, four administrators identified as White and three as Hispanic.

**Phase 3**

This phase consisted of looking at the qualitative data that was collected as well as the patterns found in the quantitative data to gain a holistic understanding of the disciplinary practices in secondary schools. By triangulating these data sources, I aimed to identify patterns, trends, and discrepancies in disciplinary approaches and outcomes, as well as how school leaders dealt with conflict.

**Setting and Instruments**

To make sure that participants felt comfortable being interviewed, I presented them with options of doing the interview in person or using a video telecommunication application. Participants were encouraged to identify a date and time outside of their working hours so that the participants had an opportunity to decompress from their work responsibilities and participate in the interview option that was conducive to their technological needs and physical space for reflection.

In addition to utilizing a video telecommunications application that could record visual and auditory responses from participants, the interviews were sent to a third party for

appropriate transcription. The transcription component of the recording application allowed for ease of coding, consistent language, and reflective statements from participants.

As the researcher, I conducted interviews with participants using a set of questions outlined in Appendix B for further details. Opting for the in-depth interview approach, I chose this method to structure questions beforehand. These questions were informed by existing research studies, elements of my theoretical framework, and a thorough review of the literature. This method also allowed me, as the researcher, to ask follow-up questions during the interview based on the request for a participant to expand on their responses or the need to gain clarity on a participant's verbal or nonverbal responses (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2016). I asked questions that were derived from my review of literature. When utilizing a semistructured interview approach, a researcher has an ethical responsibility to inform participants that follow-up questions could be incorporated into the interview (Husband, 2020). Semi-structured interviews were used because they are flexible when it comes to small-scale research, such as interviewing a small sample size of administrators (Drever, 1995).

Questions were prepared in advance with a prepared protocol that was used to maintain consistency across all the interviews (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 127). The questions (Appendix B) were used to elicit details on the specifics of an administrator's experience with discipline at their site and the particulars about their training. These types of questions can be characterized as specific grand tour questions as they enable participants to share detailed insights into their everyday experiences (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 132). While all questions were incorporated into the interview process, the sequence and wording were contingent on

the interviewee's responses to the preceding questions. Each administrator provided insights into a distinctive experience, a crucial aspect for subsequent data analysis.

In this research study, the data analysis involved a thorough examination and evaluation of the administrator's responses to the interview questions. Following qualitative data analysis principles, the preferred process included transcribing interview text and creating verbatim (word-for-word) transcriptions of the data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017, p. 212). This researcher found it more effective to use a third-party transcription service to ensure accuracy. Creswell and Plano Clark (2017) further recommend the identification of valuable quotes or codes during the qualitative phase to aid in the development of the quantitative instrument (p.193).

**Coding and Analysis of Qualitative Interviews**

Codes and themes were developed while reviewing the interview transcripts or recordings. A code in qualitative inquiry is a word or phrase with a summative attribute of language-based or visual data and can consist of interview transcripts (Saldaña, 2015, p.3). The codes can be developed into themes to help answer the research questions during the analysis phase or utilize previous literature (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017, p. 213). Coding is the process of grouping evidence and labeling the ideas so that they reflect the broader perspectives of the participants in the interview (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017, p. 214). The process of coding is iterative. There is no defined format in which analysis occurs as the researcher moves back and forth through the data (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 150). Using codes can help organize the data collected during the interview phase. Table 2 shows the codes that

came from the initial coding analysis. Defining the codes helped to retrieve and review specific codes during the analysis process.

**Table 2**

*Qualitative Codes and Definitions*

| Code | Definition |
| --- | --- |
| Training and Professional Development | Capturing strategies involving training programs or PD opportunities for staff. |
| Communication | Codes reflecting how administrator values impact their communication styles during challenging periods. |
| Resilience Strategies | Codes capturing strategies administrators employ to navigate setbacks considering their personal beliefs. |
| Cultural Competence | Reflecting initiatives/strategies focused on promoting cultural competence within the organization. |
| Community Engagement | Related to efforts in engaging with the community to address disciplinary practices. |
| Resource Allocation | Strategies involving the allocation of resources to support students. |
| Data Monitoring and Analysis | Strategies capturing the consistent monitoring and analysis of discipline data |
| Restorative Practices | Related to the implementation of restorative practices as a disciplinary approach |
| Policy Flexibility | Administrators willingness to adapt policies based on ongoing evaluation and feedback |
| Policy Implementation | Related to the implementation of specific policies or procedures addressing discipline. |
| Personal Beliefs | Reflecting the influence of administrators personal beliefs on their approach to setback in policy change. |
| Value Alignment | Codes indicating instances where administrator's values align with or proposed changes. |
| Ethical Consideration | Codes related to administrators ethical considerations influencing their responses to setbacks. |

Saldaña (2015) suggests employing pre-coding, preliminary jottings, and noting quotes that stand out while reviewing the data. According to Saldaña, as one engages in the coding and re-coding process, it is important to contemplate the research questions and document

emergent patterns or themes. These identified patterns or themes may influence the trajectory of the study.

In the first round of coding, I applied Charmaz's (2006) recommendations to be continually critical of the data, trying to name processes, actions, tacit assumptions, and implicit meanings. I coded segments of data with short phases, staying close to the data and using words such as "restorative" or "discipline" to describe actions. I also used words such as "prepared" to describe training. As I conducted initial coding, I also utilized the constant comparative method described by Charmaz (2006, 2014) as developing themes, patterns, or categories that cut across the data.

After reading and rereading participant interview transcripts, I began to identify patterns which I highlighted. Using open coding, I explored the transcripts and assigned descriptive codes to the identified data units. These codes were intended to represent the basic idea of the data unit. Using Dedoose software, I created nodes to represent each category after grouping together units similar to my initial line-by-line coding.

After this step, I looked for connections between the codes, consolidating those with similar meanings and attributing a provisional theme to the grouped codes. In the final step of the data analysis, I organized the codes by the research question that they addressed. At this point, each tree code was named and identified as a category. The categories that emerged from the training data reflect the most common and well supported views of the participants.

There were three main themes that emerged as major focus areas after re-reading the transcripts, listening to the interviews, and coding: *school culture, negotiating data, and policy and ethical decision-making.* The codes for school culture include communication,

community engagement, cultural competence, resource allocation, training and professional

development, and resilience strategies. The codes for negotiating data and policy are data

monitoring and analysis, policy implementation, policy flexibility and training, and PD.

Lastly, the codes for Ethical decision-making are personal beliefs, ethical obligations, value

alignment, and resource allocation. Figure 3 provides a visual representation of the way

codes were organized to come up with the main themes from the qualitative data. The

following paragraphs discuss the major themes and codes that were derived from the

interview transcripts.

**Figure 3**

*Main themes from interviews.*
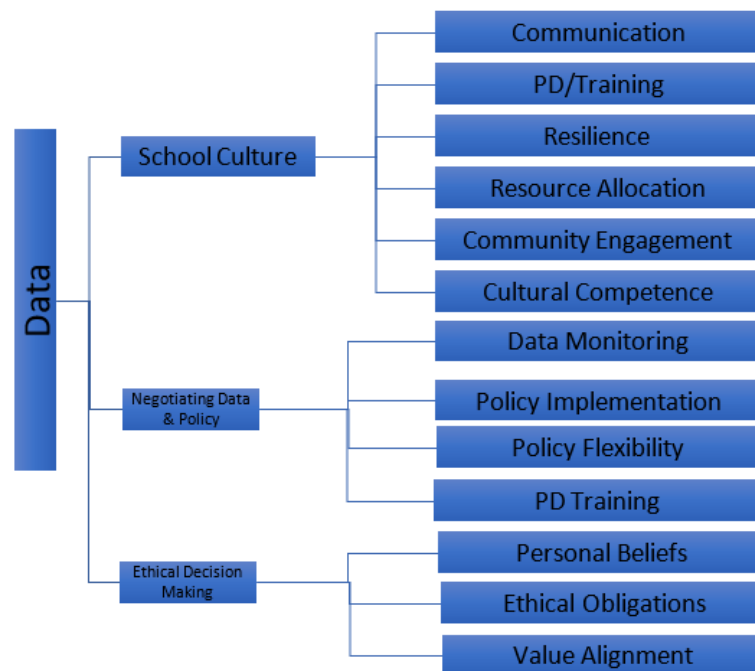


**Quantitative Data**

While conducting the analysis in the qualitative phase, the researcher also collected

quantitative data. Data collection was carried out by the district and occurred during the fall

semester of the 2023-2024 school year. School administrators entered data into the district

reporting system, (Synergy) which was compiled into a report. The report includes data for

all secondary schools in the district. School-level variables relating to school characteristics,

school type and level, and discipline decisions were used for this study.

This dataset exhibits minimal missing data, as it solely encompasses variables obtained

through mandatory fields in the district's student information system. However, certain cases

lacked data on the reporting of suspensions by race, a matter discussed later in Chapter 4.

There might be mistakes of bias from the person reporting the data, but this hasn't been

looked into in this district. Still, other studies suggest that data from student information

systems are, for the most part, reliable for estimating student behavior and disciplinary

outcomes (Irvin et al., 2004). This quantitative data from the SIS also includes qualitative

event tags for incidents. As part of the analysis of this data, I looked for any

disproportionality regarding gender, race, and disability. In addition, I looked for

relationships between certain behaviors and punishments to evaluate consistency across the

district.

**Ethical Considerations**

Prior to collecting data, I obtained permission from the San Jose State University

Institutional Review Board (IRB) to pursue data collection. Participants of this study were

selected on an entirely voluntary basis. The administrators who agreed to be participants

were guaranteed complete anonymity and confidentiality on the survey unless they opted in

to being contacted for the interview; their individual identities and the identities of their

schools were never compromised. Personal identifiers, such as names and specific school

names, were either anonymized or pseudonyms were used to safeguard the privacy of participants. Additionally, any potentially identifying information was carefully removed or altered in the reporting findings. Strict adherence to ethical guidelines was maintained throughout the research process to uphold the confidentiality of participants and their affiliated educational institutions. The level of risk for the participants in this study was minimal. There was a risk of discomfort if a participant did not enjoy filling out surveys or the topics of the survey questions. Participants filling out the survey may have had negative or emotional experiences regarding discipline that may have impacted how they filled out the survey.

**Conclusion**

This chapter describes the methodology that makes up the study's convergent parallel mixed methods design. This study explored administrators' experiences with discipline policies. This chapter also explained the data sources, data collection process, and data analysis used for the study in its quantitative and qualitative phases. Finally, ethical considerations were discussed. The next two chapters outline the qualitative interviews and the stories told by the participating administrators (Chapter 4), and then the results of this study and its implications (Chapter 5).

# Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter presents a review of the findings of the interviews and surveys in the qualitative stage and the findings from the quantitative analysis of district discipline referral data. As a reminder to the reader, the purpose of this study was to explore and describe how secondary level administrators change their organizational culture to address disproportionate disciplinary practices. The study relied on surveys, semi-structured interviews with local school leaders, and quantitative analysis of publicly available discipline data to address the following inquiry questions:

1. What observable patterns are evident in district discipline data?

2. In what ways do administrators' personal beliefs and values impact their approach to disciplinary policy in their organization?

3. What are some strategies or initiatives administrators report as useful in changing their organization's culture to address discipline disproportionality?

## Research Question 1: What observable patterns are evident in district discipline data?

As previously noted, existing data from the district's student informational system (SIS) was used to address the first research question. A comprehensive dataset encompassing ten secondary schools in VUSD, characterized by student enrollments ranging from 50 to 2600, was collected and subjected to analysis. An identified pattern in the analysis indicated challenges in discerning racial disparities within schools exhibiting homogeneity in racial composition. The inherent difficulty in identifying such disparities in racially homogenous schools posed a hindrance to drawing statistically significant conclusions regarding the existence of racial disparities in discipline outcomes. VUSD contains 34 schools where the

student body is 13.2% White, 0.3% Black, 1.3% Asian or Asian/Pacific Islander, 83.7%

Hispanic/Latino, 0.2% American Indian or Alaska Native, and 0.1% Native Hawaiian or

other Pacific Islander. Table 3 presents the total number of ODRS issued during the 2023-

2024 school year fall semester and the total number of students enrolled.

**Table 3**

*Schoolwide Student Count and Disciplinary Records: Comparative Analysis*

| School | School Year | Total Number of Incidents | Total Enrollment |
|---|---|---|---|
| School 1 | 23-24 | 141 | 1276 |
| School 2 | 23-24 | 73 | 572 |
| School 3 | 23-24 | 18 | 546 |
| School 4 | 23-24 | 2 | 83 |
| School 5 | 23-24 | 32 | 552 |
| School 6 | 23-24 | 117 | 283 |
| School 7 | 23-24 | 115 | 396 |
| School 8 | 23-24 | 141 | 1360 |
| School 9 | 23-24 | 317 | 606 |
| School 10 | 23-24 | 79 | 2167 |

However, the examination of the dataset unveiled substantial variability in the manner

and content of discipline data reporting across schools. Table 4 delineates the nature of

disciplinary actions administered, juxtaposed with the gender of the respective students. The

breakdown by gender reveals a disparity in disciplinary incidents, with males exhibiting a

higher frequency of reported incidents than females. Another revelation from this data

analysis is the disparity between the aggregate count of disciplinary dispositions and the overall count of incidents. This revelation is significant because it indicates variations in the approach to behavior management and disciplinary strategies across schools. This disparity could be attributed to differences in school policies, administrative philosophies, or the overall climate of each school. Two plausible explanations were discerned for this discrepancy. First, certain schools recorded multiple dispositions for a singular student or incident. For instance, a student subjected to suspension could concurrently be identified as undergoing alternative disciplinary measures if administrative records documented additional interventions, such as parent meetings or counseling sessions. This discrepancy manifested as an inherent inconsistency prevalent among the analyzed schools.

**Table 4**

*Distribution of Disciplinary Measures Across Schools: Out of School Suspension, In-School Suspensions, Alternative Corrections Methods and Expulsions*

| School | Female | Male | Nonbinary | Out of School Suspension | In School Suspension | Other Means | Expulsion |
|--------|--------|------|-----------|--------------------------|----------------------|-------------|-----------|
| School 1 | 10 | 106 | 1 | 23 | 16 | 65 | 0 |
| School 2 | 28 | 33 | 0 | 41 | 3 | 17 | 0 |
| School 3 | 6 | 5 | 0 | 8 | 0 | 3 | 0 |
| School 4 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| School 5 | 8 | 20 | 0 | 27 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| School 6 | 17 | 50 | 0 | 33 | 10 | 25 | 0 |
| School 7 | 44 | 123 | 1 | 37 | 19 | 113 | 0 |
| School 8 | 32 | 72 | 0 | 78 | 0 | 25 | 1 |
| School 9 | 105 | 291 | 0 | 31 | 41 | 245 | 0 |
| School 10 | 15 | 33 | 0 | 39 | 4 | 5 | 0 |

It is unknown what other factors might have influenced administrators in terms of what incidents they chose to log in or what factors impacted their choice of intervention or disciplinary disposition. Furthermore, a discernible spectrum was observed in the disciplinary measures implemented for identical transgressions. For example, School 8 recorded instances of Educational Code 48900 (t), (caused, attempted to cause, or threatened to cause physical injury to another person) with an OSS as the corresponding disciplinary disposition, whereas School 9 documented incidents involving the same Educational Code violation, albeit opting for an in-house suspension as the disciplinary action. Notably, School 8 reported violations of defiance under Educational Code 48900 (k) and administered suspensions, notwithstanding the stipulation in the Education Code that defiance does not constitute grounds for suspension. The review of the data showed no patterns of disproportionality by race because of the racially homogenous student body, but there seems to be a pattern by looking at gender data.

Furthermore, the data also reflects a pattern of irregular decision-making across schools regarding disciplinary actions. Some schools administer multiple interventions for single infractions, whereas others do 1:1, and some schools punish certain behaviors more stringently than other schools do. This quantitative data showed inconsistencies in the tagging of students with disabilities. The SIS system used by the district relies on the accuracy of data merging from a different system used by the district for students with disabilities. If there is an error on the second system, the SIS system used for discipline does not tag the student as having an IEP. It is then left to site administration to check for accuracy on their end for documentation purposes.

An additional dataset that was analyzed was the survey that was disseminated among administrators overseeing secondary education within the district. The dataset offers a discerning perspective on the disparities observed in discipline documentation practices. Fourteen responses were received, and there was even a split between high school administrators and middle school administrators. The response rate of 70% (14 out of 20) from secondary-level administrators within the district, while falling short of achieving statistical significance, nonetheless constitutes a substantial representation, facilitating generalization regarding the perceptions and perspectives of this cohort. 42.9% of the administrators who responded had been associated with their current school for less than a year. 28.6% had been in their school for more than ten years, and 21.4% of the respondents had been in their current school between one-three years.

Some of the findings from this data contradict each other. Figure 4 reflects the responses to the statement, *As a leader I generally consider changes to be a negative thing.* 50% of the respondents disagreed with the statement, and 42.9% strongly disagreed. However, figure 5 reflects that 35.8% of administrators who responded to the survey agreed with the following statement: *If I were to be informed that there's going to be a significant change in the way things are done at work, I would probably stress out.*

**Figure 4**

*As a leader I generally consider changes to be a negative thing.*

As a leader  I generally consider changes to be a negative thing (RQ 2)
14 responses



- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

50%

7.1%

42.9%
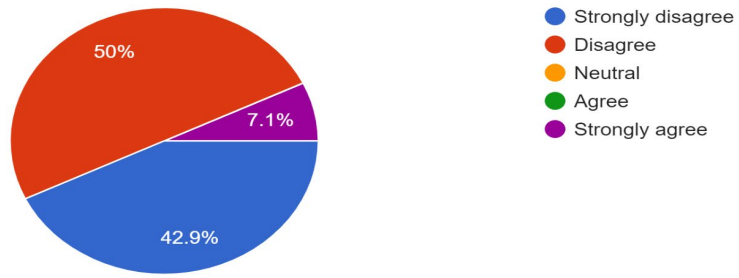
**Figure 5**

*If I were to be informed that there's going to be a significant change regarding the way things are done at work, I would probably feel stressed out.*

If I were to be informed that there's going to be a significant change regarding the way things are done at work, I would probably feel stressed out.
14 responses



- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

21.4%

14.3%

7.1%

57.1%

69
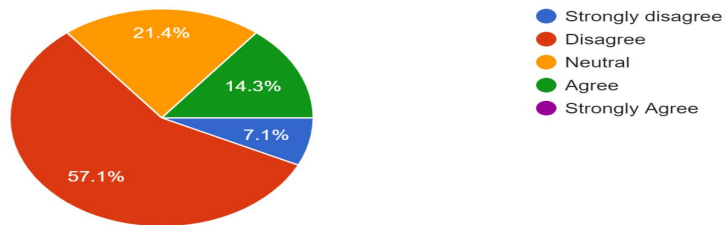
**Figure 6**

*I show that I am a firm believer in "if it ain't broken, don't fix it."*

I show that I am a firm believer in "if it ain't broken, don't fix it"

14 responses



Legend:
- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

57.1% — 14.3% — 28.6%
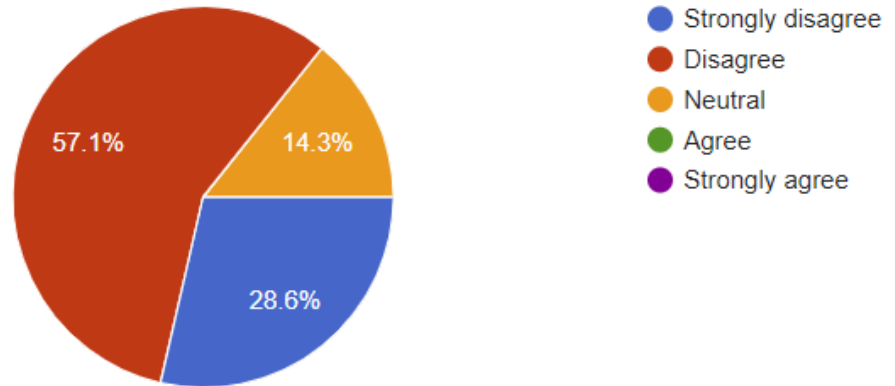
**Figure 7**

*I think that my organization has a culture that is open to change.*

I think that my organization has a culture that is open to change

14 responses



Legend:
- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

50% — 14.3% — 21.4% — 14.3%
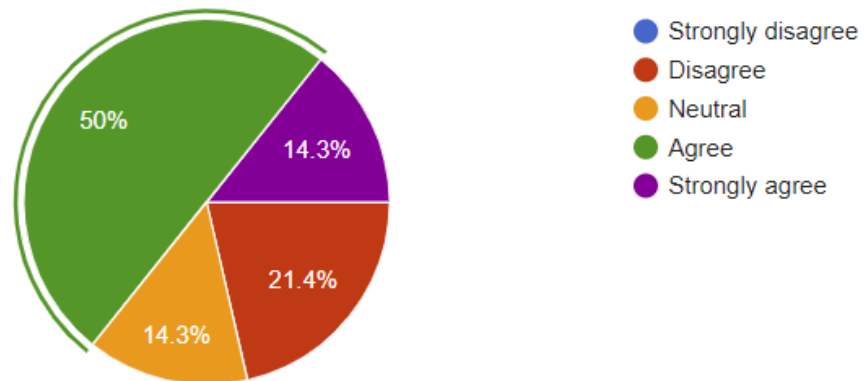
**Figure 8**

*I have participated in a restorative practice training.*

I have participated in a restorative practice training

14 responses



- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

42.9%
21.4%
7.1%
21.4%
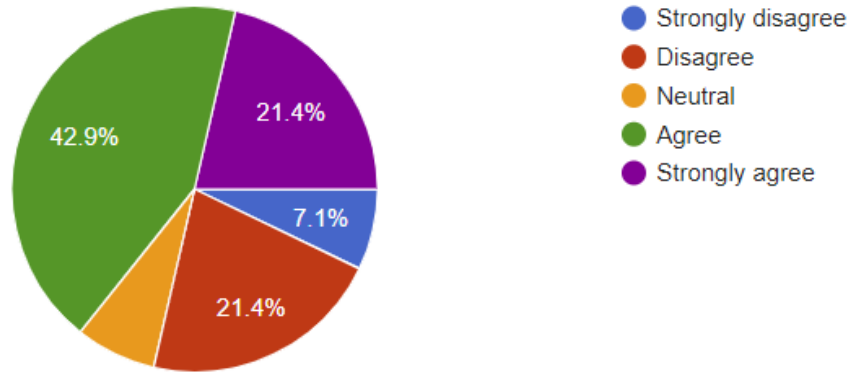
**Figure 9**

*I am familiar with restorative practices.*

I am familiar with restorative practices

14 responses



- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

64.3%
21.4%
14.3%
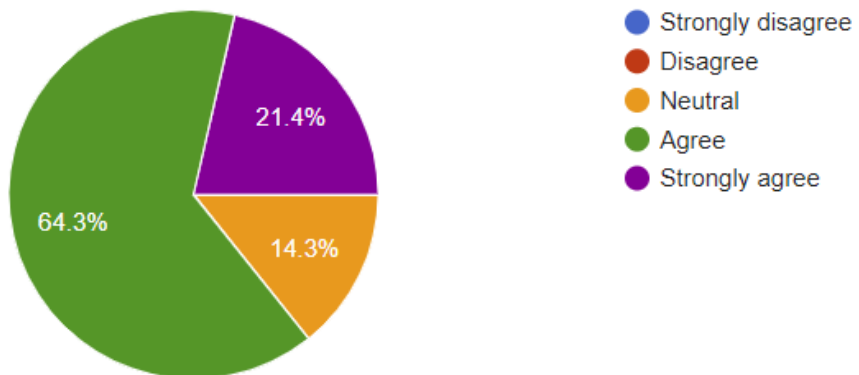
The items presented in the figures above suggest that administrators in this district are receptive to change, however, they do not clarify their inclination towards the specific changes advocated for, nor do they address their readiness to adapt to changes imposed upon them, contrasting their proactive leadership in effecting change.

Furthermore, Figure 9 focuses explicitly on administrators' familiarity with restorative practices. Although a significant portion of the surveyed administrators indicated familiarity with restorative practices, there was a notable disparity between their professed awareness and the actual implementation of such practices within their organization. This was more evident during the interview portion of this study, and more information will be provided below. Despite their acknowledgment of the concept and their being provided with training on restorative practices, many administrators appeared to encounter obstacles hindering the integration of restorative practices into their administrative frameworks. This disparity suggests a potential gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application.

**Research Question 2: To What Extent do Administrators' Personal Beliefs and Values Influence their Approach to Organizational Disciplinary Policy?**

As previously reported, the study examined interviews with seven practicing administrators. This section includes qualitative participant demographics, a summary of the interview procedure, and an analysis of the qualitative data. Furthermore, themes and subthemes from the qualitative data analysis are discussed. The major themes include *school culture, negotiating data and policy,* and *ethical decision-making*. The codes for school culture include *communication*, *community engagement*, *cultural competence*, *resource allocation*, *training and professional development*, and *resiliency strategies*. The codes for negotiating data and policy are *data monitoring and analysis, policy implementation, policy*

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*flexibility and training, and PD. Lastly, the codes for ethical decision-making are personal*

*beliefs, ethical obligations, value alignment, and resource allocation.*

**Qualitative Participant Demographics**

In the qualitative portion, the researcher interviewed seven administrators ranging from

assistant principals to principals. Administrators interviewed represented schools with an

enrollment of 50 to 2,600 students. Of the administrators interviewed, five identified as

females, and two identified as males. The years of experience as an administrator for those

interviewed ranged from six months to 15 years.  Lastly, four administrators identified as

White and three as Hispanic.

**Interviews**

***Theme 1: School Culture***

A theme that consistently came out of the interview process and the check of accuracy

was the theme of school culture, specifically regarding disciplinary practices.  School

climate, as defined by the National School Climate Center in 2007, encompasses the quality

and character of school life, reflecting norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships,

teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures. The intricate interplay of these

elements gives rise to what is commonly referred to as school culture or school climate.

According to Angelle and Anfara (2006), "Leadership is critical in the shaping of the school

culture, which will involve changing what people value" (p. 50). When administrators were

asked about their disciplinary practices, a common response was the lack of training and

preparation. This deficiency can be seen in administrators' ability to manage conflict among

staff, students, and parents. Additionally, administrators who lack adequate training in their

field may struggle to design and implement meaningful professional development (PD) programs such as restorative practices. Implementing restorative practices in discipline can foster collaboration and trust within the school community, while punitive approaches often result in a more isolating and hostile culture. By not feeling prepared, administrators themselves perpetuate this negative cycle by providing weak PD and maintaining a status quo culture. Administrator 2 stated, "With us as administrators, you get a PD and then you get another PD, and then you get another PD, but then nothing happens the rest of the year. And you're like, "Well, I'm going to do ... I like this one, and I like this one, but where's the follow-up." Administrator 2 shared, "I can't remember anything that I learned in that class right now other than the research and reasoning behind it. The philosophy". This feeling was shared by most of the administrators who were interviewed. All the administrators listed one class during their leadership program for dealing with human resources and student discipline as the only source of training for their job. Administrator 6 expanded on this, "It was tied into human resources. So there was a course where they focused on human resources, and then they touched on, it was very brief where they go over discipline, staff discipline, that kind of categories."

Similar sentiments about learning on the job were shared by all administrators who were interviewed.  Administrator 3 shared that she had to rely on her previous experience to be able to address discipline.

> Just in general, there should be more training, I feel, and more support when it comes to... They didn't train me to be a detective. But when you're dealing with discipline, you become a detective, in a way. They should have given me that class specifically, how to be able to... And I mean, I think through the practice obviously, but just, I think there should be more of that, explicitly, on how to investigate and how to. More clarity on that, I think would be helpful. And I think for me, having the counseling

background really helps me, I think when it comes to being able to investigate and work with students. And I think that helped me significantly in the work that I do now, for sure.

Similarly, Administrator 5 shared, " I probably got more from the business world that I was in, because owning a business you have to deal with employees and stuff like that. So reading difficult conversations, different…How to work with people management, that kind of thing.I got more from my business end of my life than my educational leadership".

Three of the administrators interviewed reported attending professional development on their own and reported this training as being beneficial for not only being able to deal with students but also when dealing with adults. Administrator 1 shared that during her leadership program there was little preparation for managing conflict. "I would say that there was a, you're going to manage conflict, here read these things and know that this is going to come up, but not directly addressing it. And I want to say just this last week, I went to something that was like, here's how you're going to manage conflict. So I'm like, Hey, this is actually really helpful. But no, in my course, my administrative course didn't really call it out as much as I needed".

The lack of training also impacted specifically how administrators chose to respond to a behavioral incident and this in turn impacted the overall culture of their school. When asked about what factors impacted the consequences issued for specific violations, Administrator 7 stated:

> You didn't go through any scenarios of like, okay, let's say a student comes in with a pack of cigarettes. How do you code that? Okay, I guess that's tobacco possession. And then what can you do? I've since had to find curriculum for them so that they can learn about tobacco use during their in-school suspension. And now we have a substance use, a tobacco counselor on campus once a week that they can talk to and

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those are the consequences for having it. But when I started, it was just like, I don't
know, do you, you figure it out, dude. And I was like, okay, well I guess I will.

Reevaluating their discipline practices for educators can be difficult when they are expected

to deal with multiple things at once and they have to determine their priorities as well as how

to allocate their resources.

For administrators who self reported as having a good understanding of restorative

practices, resource allocation was an area of growth. When talking about supports and

interventions for students, Administrator 3 stated, "Interventions and stuff like that, but what

happens when those interventions are not working. What else is out there? So I think figuring

that out is also challenging. If a student doesn't want counseling, the student doesn't want

this, doesn't want that, but these are all things we have, and none of them are working". This

sentiment was echoed by other administrators.

The lack of training regarding cultural competence, discipline and managing conflict

impacted the way administrators communicated with students, staff and families. This in turn

impacted school climate. The lack of training can inadvertently perpetuate a status quo

climate within schools, particularly when coupled with the enforcement of draconian rules.

Terrell et al. (2018) outlined an approach to culturally proficient leadership and self-

discovery that helps school leaders explore and learn how and from whom they developed

their assumption, values, and beliefs about people culturally different from them; learn from

people who are culturally different from them; develop an intentional from for culturally

proficient leadership practice; learn how to model appropriate responses to various people;

and address issues of inequity. Administrator 2 felt he was proactive with discipline:

I want to be very proactive is it helps me when I have a meeting with a parent and they say, "Why are you not allowing my daughter to wear this shirt?" Well, here's the contract you signed. Every day I remind them, and yet your daughter chooses to, or son, it could be a boy, to dress inappropriately. Their phone. Why'd you take their phone away? Well, every morning I ask students to put their phone away. You signed this phone contract that we have. Here's your signature and so the more proactive you are, when it comes time to meeting with parents regarding discipline issue, it's rare that they will argue the point. And it's the same with fighting, vaping, doing bad stuff.

Without an understanding of cultural competence, administrators may resort to rigid, one-size-fits-all disciplinary measures that fail to account for the diverse backgrounds and circumstances of students. This can create an atmosphere of fear and mistrust among students, staff, and families, where compliance is prioritized over understanding and growth. Additionally, the punitive nature of these rules can contribute to a cycle of conflict and alienation, as students can feel unjustly punished and disengaged from the school community.

*Theme 2: Negotiating Data and Policy*

Analysis of the interviews revealed that administrators were constantly negotiating data points and how they implemented policies. State policy and district policy are consistently negotiated and impact the training and professional development that administrators attend and what they choose to provide to their staff. Administrators who had participated in their own professional development for restorative practices were more likely to be more flexible with their policy implementation. When asked about data and policy implementation Administrator 4 stated:

When I'm starting to notice certain trends or certain behaviors coming up, I'm much more interested in us all coming together and saying, "Okay, we're noticing something. What do we need to do? What do we need to revisit? What do we need to tweak? What kind of thoughts and ideas?" So I do spend a lot of my day working on

reemphasizing or retraining those Tier 1 supports and looking at how are those multi-tiered supports working? Because honestly, the more you do that then the less triage you hope to be doing, but we don't really have control over what goes on in kids' homes.

Administrators who reported seeking out their own professional development were more likely to start implementing restorative practices at their site. Administrator 1 reported, "Since I've done that restorative practice piece, I actually have implemented restorative conferences with the staff member and the student. And I've just piloted that last year. I haven't really implemented it this year, but I do plan to do that with a student here soon". Similarly, Administrator 5 shared, "We are in our second year of a restorative justice cohort through RJED, and so we're in our second year of that. And then we just recently went to the Transformational Discipline Workshop, but we've been working a lot with that here".

On the contrary, administrators who reported a lack of training were less likely to implement restorative practices for different reasons, including their lack of confidence in the topic. Administrator 2 noted, "If there's something going on at your school that you want to do, have the experts come in and then just say that's all we're going to do this year." Administrator 4 also reflected on how restorative practices were an area of growth, "that's an area that I want to learn more about… It's an area that I know I need growth, and I want to learn more because I'd like for it to be really a backbone of what we do and how we function". Administrator 7 self reported as being more restorative as a teacher but changing his philosophy as an administrator. When asked about these responses to discipline in particular, he noted:

> I don't think that's something that I would think that I'd be doing is citing kids for having some substance that were like that. But I do see the value in it now. And same with suspension, similar, I do see a reason why you would need students not to be at

school. Oh, you told a teacher that you called a teacher a snitch and said that he's going to have it coming to him. I have to figure out what's going on here. You can't come to school tomorrow.

Administrator 7 has been on the job for half a year, with previous experience teaching in an alternative school. As a current administrator in a comprehensive school, he provides a glimpse into the admin world, where he has to negotiate data and policy implementation. As a teacher, his philosophy was to "never sent a student to the office. I had no idea what happened when you sent a kid to the office. All I heard was that didn't really have an effect". Now, as an administrator with a self-report of little training, his approach to discipline has shifted towards one that sees the value in punitive responses. This approach only serves to create a status quo culture rather than a transformative culture that embraces restorative practices. As a teacher, he might have felt confident in dealing with behavioral incidents at his own pace and with his own ideologies. However, as an administrator, he consistently has to answer to teachers wanting to make sure that students get 'punished' for their behaviors. Additionally, educational code 49079 directs administrators to inform the teacher of each pupil who has engaged in or is reasonably suspected to have engaged in certain unlawful acts.

### Theme 3: Ethical Decision Making

Analysis of the interviews provided a lens into the way that administrators play a pivotal role in the theme of ethical decision-making. Their decision-making process is complex and influenced by an interplay between their personal beliefs, ethical obligations, and policies. There is an overlap between this theme and the theme of negotiating data. Administrators must navigate the tension between their individual value systems and the ethical principles

guiding their professional responsibilities. Moreover, in addressing discipline, administrators often rely on their own personal beliefs when making decisions about resource allocation.

For some of the administrators who were interviewed, they expressed staying rooted in their student-centered approaches even after becoming administrators. When asked about the type of leader she was and how she wanted to impact her site, Administrator 1 responded with, "I aim to be a transformational leader…ultimately to support the students and then implement practices that are going to transform the school away from the systems that are perpetuating inequities." Administrator 1 elaborated on her practices and her own personal beliefs throughout her interview. When asked if her philosophy on discipline had changed from being a teacher and now as an administrator, she noted:

> I actually feel affirmed, but I feel affirmed and I want more. And then I want to figure out how to do more for kids. And that's where I'm comfortable with conflict because I can see that our practices, past practices are punitive, exclusionary, and they've created disproportionate access for kids. And that's where I think my passion comes out. And so it's easy for me to have those difficult conversations. I think as a teacher, I just thought that everybody was doing that. And as an administrator I can see very clearly that many people aren't.

Similarly, Administrator 3 added, "I think allowing and creating spaces where students can express how they're feeling and what they think about the ways that things are being done in education. Administrator 4 elaborated on her own background and belief system and how they impacted the way she dealt with students.

> Giving them the respect where they could respond, giving them the time to share what's happening being compassionate. I also don't hold anything, like, it happened. It's a mistake…we're moving on, so the next time I see them, I greet them just with the same smile. Welcome, so excited to see you that kind of thing, so definitely wanting to have more influence across the campus and seeing where maybe we could do better or maybe we can grow as the foundation.

These administrator's perspectives reflect a broader trend toward a more empathetic and holistic approach to education, prioritizing student well-being, equity, and community engagement. Their commitment to fostering inclusivity, empathy, and growth within their school communities highlights the potential for meaningful change and improvement in their organizations. Their perspective on their role as administrators clearly demonstrates a dedication to challenging inequities and promoting student empowerment.

**Research Question 3: What are Some Strategies or Initiatives Administrators Report as Useful in Changing the Culture of their Organization to Address Discipline Disproportionality?**

Through the coding process of the analysis of the interviews, communication was a pattern that was found as a strategy for those administrators who wanted to change their school culture and begin using restorative practices. Administrators understood the importance of communicating clearly with their staff and being consistent regarding their approaches. Administrator 1 described a recent situation in which she was doing a classroom walkthrough and noticed a student doing the work for another student. Rather than getting the students in trouble, she figured out the problem's root. Her response to this situation and how she approached the teachers provided a lens through which we can see how administrators try to change the culture in their schools.

> I appreciate you helping, but you're actually taking away their opportunity to learn and hey you, you're not allowing yourself to try and fail. It's important that you at least attempt and then learn how to ask for help. I emailed the teacher and took all the papers over to our access center and said, hey, can you get a math intern to pull this kid in during sixth period? It's a class that he's successful in. He identified that, and I'll email the teacher and CC you all on it asking for an extension.

This administrator also recognized that her current school culture was not always open to restorative practices and that she would face some pushback from teachers.

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> The teacher kind of gave me a response of oh well, this kid doesn't ever want help in class , says that he's fine. He can do it at home. And my response was, I think he actually probably is embarrassed to talk to or admit it in front of his peers that he can't access the language of the assignment. And then he is going home and attempting to access it without any support. I'm hoping this teacher will give this kid a week extension. Adn the teacher's usually pretty strict and tough.

Additionally, administrators who were implementing restorative practices at their sites recognized the need for coaching staff to be more receptive to restorative practices. Administrator 5 shared, "The teacher is the most challenging person to support. The reason that it's challenging to support the teacher and actually did this with a staff member already, now that I am thinking about it, is they need coaching on I statements. They need to know how to say, I felt disrespected. I felt hurt by the behavior in the class". This coaching approach provided clarity and fostered open and respectful dialogues within the framework of restorative practices.

This strategy allowed for an alignment in the organization where administrators and teachers could be on the same page regarding the goals and expectations associated with restorative practices. This alignment fosters a cohesive approach within the school community and supports a positive school climate.

**Discussion**

The current study sought to explore and describe how secondary level administrators changed their organizational culture to address disproportionate disciplinary practices. There were significant differences in the way discipline was documented across the district, the codes used for such incidents, and the interventions chosen by administrators. Additionally, results showed that it was challenging to show discipline disproportionality due to most schools having an ethno-racially homogenous demographic.

This study was not able to find discipline disproportionality based on race since the district's demographic is mostly Latinx. CRT offers a lens through which we can analyze how systemic racism influences various aspects of society, including education. Anderson (2018) found that schools that had high levels of suspension as well as those serving greater proportions of racial minority students were less likely to comply with the state ban than those that used exclusionary discipline less frequently or served a whiter student body.

Additionally, inconsistency in data input posed a significant obstacle, hindering efforts to discern patterns of disproportionality for students with disabilities. This issue is particularly pertinent when viewed through the lens of DisCrit theory, which emphasizes the intersectionality of disability and race in educational settings. Without accurate data reflecting the experiences of students with disabilities, it becomes exceedingly difficult to develop interventions that effectively mitigate the disparities they face.

The quantitative data showed that despite the lack of evidence showing that suspensions improve student behavior or contribute to overall school safety (Skiba et al., 2002), most administrators opted for OSSs and ISSs as a disciplinary consequence. The findings did not show racial disproportionality, but they do show problematic patterns such as the high variability in discipline policy at the school level and heavy disproportionality of discipline toward male students. The fact that the majority of these administrators had been at their site less than three years speaks to the high level of turnover and the overall culture in the district. Still, it provides a lens into the fact that these administrators are continuing with high levels of punitive disciplinary approaches.

Furthermore, the majority of participants agreed that they did not receive enough training in their leadership programs. Additionally, participants asserted that they had been learning on the job as they went. The findings also indicated that the district had offered professional development to administrators regarding restorative practices but this did not always result in having administrators implement restorative practices at their site. This finding aligned with question number two of this research which looked at ways in which administrator's personal beliefs and values impacted their approach to disciplinary policies. Out of the seven administrators interviewed, only three discussed having tough conversations with their staff to be able to support students. The remainder of the administrators maintained a status quo culture where students did not see much benefit.

In their study, McIntosh et al. (2014), argued that SWPBIS has promise for reducing discipline disproportionality. Still, it is unlikely to be as effective as it can be or to eliminate disproportionality completely when it doesn't address structural factors, explicit bias, and implicit bias. Administrators who participated in this study mentioned the tendency to interpret student's behavior in a way that confirmed pre-existing beliefs or expectations.

This was not just an administrator tendency; teachers also tended to provide students with labels based on previous interactions. Research has demonstrated that teachers tend to issue a disproportionate number of ODRs to students of color for subjective behaviors such as defiance, disruption, and disrespect, which involve subjective interpretation and require value judgments regarding what is acceptable or not (Girvan et al., 2017). The quantitative data from school discipline records showed that students were suspended for defiance even when the Education Code does not allow for that. Overall, administrators shared a willingness to

accept change but had a hard time leading conversations with their staff and providing a rationale for moving on to restorative practices.

A shared finding from the survey responses and the interview transcripts was the notion of school culture and district culture and the overall impact on being able to make positive changes. Skiba et al. (2011) argued that "access to educational achievement requires the support needed to be socially successful in school. This involves not simply ensuring that problem behavior is addressed equitably, but investing in building school cultures where appropriate behavior is clearly defined, actively taught, and consistently acknowledged" (p. 104). Out of the seven administrators interviewed, only three discussed having tough conversations with their staff to be able to support students. The remainder of administrators maintained a status quo culture where students did not see much benefit.

Of the administrators that took part in this study, a larger percentage had been associated with their current school for less than three years. In their study, Curran and Finch, (2021) found that changing organizational norms and building capacity to adapt practice to new policy can take time. These administrators have not had enough time to move their school culture to a more positive place. Their lack of training in their leadership programs impacted the way they decided to transform their culture.

Despite this, some of the administrators interviewed shared that they viewed coaching and mentoring their staff as a way to change the culture in their organization. These administrators acknowledged that when having conversations with their teachers, there might be pushback but being prepared with their responses was a way to counteract this pushback. Bastable et al. (2021) suggested that educators can feel personally attacked or unfairly

burdened with addressing what could be perceived as systemic or societal issues. Therefore, it may be important to have strategies to counteract defensiveness and respond to deficit-based thinking" (p. 229). Shields (2021), in discussing the tenets of transformational leadership, put it this way:

> Getting inside the apparatuses of power, working within existing systems to effect change, is not easy. As one changes the status quo to eliminate inequities, to redistribute power, and promote global awareness, some will feel the loss of their "advantage" and often push back. It is for that reason we return to the requirement in the first tenet that transformative leaders must know what grounds and guides them in order to take a courageous stance to confront inequity. (p. 125)

Personal beliefs and core values were found to be very important to administrators who sought their own professional development to change the culture in their organizations. They felt confident in the need to address inequities and wanted to make sure they were better prepared to articulate the need for change. They were also guided by their core values when deciding what conversations to have and professional development for their staff.

Administrators face a delicate balancing act in ensuring the safety of individual students while also maintaining the collective safety of the school community. On one hand, they must address the unique needs and vulnerabilities of each student, considering factors such as personal safety concerns, mental health challenges, and individualized supports. On the other hand, administrators must also implement policies and procedures that promote the overall safety and well-being of all students, staff, and visitors within their schools. Achieving this balance requires administrators to navigate complex dynamics in their organizations. Learning how to maximize both individual and collective safety demands a nuanced understanding of risk assessment, crisis management, and proactive intervention strategies.

Adequate training for administrators plays a crucial role in supporting the complex task of balancing individual student safety with the collective safety of the school community.

**Limitations**

There are some significant limitations that should be considered when considering this study's findings. First, this study draws from a single district, limiting the findings' generalizability. Future research might gather similar data from additional schools in nearby counties with similar demographics. The researcher acknowledges that the small sample size of participants in the qualitative portion of this study was lower than expected and greatly limited the generalizability of the results.

The quantitative portion of the study was done during the fall semester of the 2023-2024 school year. The researcher acknowledges that a semester might not be sufficient time to gather comprehensive data on school discipline practices. This small sample size of data is a limitation of the study as certain disciplinary patterns may be overrepresented or underrepresented within the limited time frame. In addition, external factors, such as changes in school policies, leadership, or community dynamics, can influence disciplinary practices. One semester may not capture the full impact of these factors on school discipline.

Furthermore, qualitative event tags from the SIS were not analyzed for this study due to time constraints. This data could have provided more context in regards to administrators' decision to issue OSS versus ISS or the other way around for a particular incident. These qualitative incident tags could have provided nuanced information that could uncover underlying themes, motivations, or systemic issues contributing to disciplinary incidents, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of the problem. Analysis of these

qualitative elements might have provided a clearer picture of the differences in quantity of incident logs or severity of punishment.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

Future research could be enhanced by adding observational data from staff meetings to provide a more comprehensive look at the way administrators shift the culture in their organization when addressing discipline disproportionality. Looking at staff meeting agendas and minutes to be able to understand the negotiation process for policy implementation. Questions that are more structured around discipline could also be added to better understand how administrators respond to behavioral incidents and the types of interventions they are putting in place.

Additionally, future research should include analysis of qualitative incident tags to be able to understand underlying factors such as socio-economic background, cultural differences, or individual student needs, which could significantly influence disciplinary outcomes.

## Chapter 5: Conclusions and Implications

The primary goal of this research was to understand the disciplinary practices across the district better to see if there were inequities in implementing discipline policies. The data collected looked at who was being disciplined, how, and why they were being disciplined. Additionally, this study sought to identify sites and leaders who nurtured the transformation of school culture and disciplinary practices. Lastly, this study also sought to learn about the values, beliefs, and practices of school leaders, especially those making positive change, regarding school discipline. Due to the relatively uniform student demographics within VUSD and the limited availability of administrators for surveys and interviews, the initial objectives shifted away from delineating specific strategies for school transformation. Instead, emphasis was placed on examining the influence of personal values and beliefs on the approaches undertaken by secondary-level administrators in addressing issues of disproportionality.

This study was based on data collected through the use of a survey presented to all secondary-level administrators, disciplinary data from the student informational system, and qualitative data from interviews. By interviewing seven administrators from the 14 who responded to the survey, the researcher was able to acquire a more significant understanding of how secondary-level administrators attempt to change the culture in their organizations to address discipline disproportionality. The purpose of this chapter is to summarize and discuss the research findings, draw conclusions from the findings, suggest implications, and propose recommendations for future research. This chapter is organized into two segments. The first

section contains a summary and discussion of the findings as well as the implications of the findings and the second section proposes recommendations for practice and for future study.

**Key Findings and Implications**

*District Disciplinary Patterns*

The first goal of this research was to look at discipline patterns across the district. Through an analysis of the quantitative data of the student informational system (SIS), the researcher found that there is a big discrepancy between schools in regard to what is being documented for discipline. Additionally, the data showed that there is a big difference between the disciplinary dispositions issued for similar violations across the district. Overall, this researcher was not able to find race disproportionality because the schools in this district are homogenous in this regard. Furthermore, disproportionality regarding disability was not easy to determine as not every administrator was documenting this in the SIS. This researcher was able to determine gender disproportionality, with male students having multiple incidents logged in as compared to female students.

Utilizing data to identify and understand patterns of disproportionality and inconsistent responses to discipline is crucial for developing targeted and evidence-based interventions. School leaders need access to comprehensive and disaggregated data on disciplinary practices, student demographics, and outcomes to inform their decision-making and monitor the effectiveness of interventions over time. For example, data on disability status of students involved in disciplinary incidents can help identify disparities in the application of disciplinary practices. Some barriers to collecting or sharing disciplinary data may include concerns about student privacy, data security, and the potential misuse of data. Additionally,

there may be resistance from school administrators or staff who fear repercussions or negative perceptions associated with high rates of disciplinary incidents.

To overcome these barriers, it could be helpful for schools to ensure compliance with data privacy laws and regulations to protect student confidentiality and ensure that the district implements robust data security measures to safeguard sensitive information. Providing training and support for administrators and staff on the importance of data collection and analysis for promoting equity and improving outcomes for all students is also valuable. Additionally, the district needs to foster a culture of transparency and accountability by openly sharing disciplinary data with stakeholders, including students, parents, teachers, and community members.

Having inconsistent documentation policies and a wide range of disciplinary responses across the district impacts the district's ability to bring about actual change. The wide range of disciplinary responses across the district can contribute to inequities in how students are disciplined. These gaps in discipline can disproportionately affect certain groups of students, leading to unequal treatment and overall outcomes. Additionally, with reliable data and standardized procedures, it becomes easier to implement meaningful changes that promote equity, fairness, and positive outcomes for all students.

**Administrators' Constrained Sense of Agency**

Another key finding from the data collected suggested that administrators in the district are open to change; however they are not necessarily agents of change in their organization. Their openness to change primarily stems from the directives imposed upon them by the district office. Administrators recognize the importance of aligning with these directives to

ensure compliance. Their receptiveness to change is intrinsically linked to their professional responsibilities and obligations within the broader institutional framework.

This finding highlights the importance of recognizing the limitations and challenges inherent in relying solely on top-down directives from district offices to address issues such as disproportionality or inconsistent discipline practices across schools, especially when principals are not inherently inclined to act as agents of change. When school leaders do not see themselves as change agents, they cannot articulate the need for change in their own organizations, the importance of addressing discipline disproportionality, or the heavy reliance on punitive approaches to discipline.

When school leaders do not recognize their role in driving change, these leaders may lack the motivation, confidence, or sense of responsibility to advocate for transformative initiatives. Consequently, they may fail to effectively communicate the urgency and significance of addressing discipline disparities or outdated practices to their staff, students, and stakeholders. Their reluctance to embrace change and take proactive steps toward rectifying inequities can perpetuate a culture of complacency and inertia within the organization, hindering progress and perpetuating a culture of status quo.

**The Need for Better Administrator Training**

Administrators are not getting the training they need to lead change in their organization in their leadership programs. Administrators get one class that addresses staff and student discipline as part of their admin credential program. A lot of the information in this class is theoretical and does not provide explicit support for dealing with discipline or changing draconian systems. Districts can choose what initiatives they will be investing in, and

oftentimes, restorative practices are not seen as a priority. Those who have initiated change in their organizations to address discipline disproportionality and reliance on punitive discipline have done so after seeking their own professional development. Previous literature on transformative leadership sheds light on the importance of a principal's core beliefs when it comes to designing and implementing successful action plans for change. Shields (2021) argues that to be a transformational leader "it requires knowing oneself, developing insight about organizational inequities, and understanding the wider community" (p. 120).

A lack of training can have a negative impact on the overall school culture by perpetuating inequities within the school environment. This can lead to disparities in academic outcomes, disciplinary actions, and allocation of resources, ultimately fostering a culture of inequality. When school leaders are not equipped to address systemic challenges and promote positive change, it can contribute to low morale among teachers, staff, and students. A lack of direction, vision, and support from leadership can diminish enthusiasm, engagement, and satisfaction within the school community and can lead to staff turnover.

**Recommendations**

*Recommendations for Practice*

Findings showed that school leadership programs need to do a better job in preparing educational leaders, specifically in regard to dealing with conflict and changing their organization. In this study, administrators acknowledged that they were aware of restorative practices, but they did not feel prepared to implement restorative practices based on the training they received in their leadership program. If principals are not adequately prepared to implement these practices, it may perpetuate existing disparities in disciplinary outcomes

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and hinder efforts to create a more equitable and just school environment. The findings of this study have validated some of my current practices as a site administrator, and they have also influenced me to be more purposeful in my vision. To ensure that everything that I do, including professional development, staff meetings, and leadership meetings, is aligned with the vision of social justice and equity for students.

### *Recommendations for Administrator Credential Programs*

Current credential programs need to invest more in providing potential leaders with more than just theoretical frameworks. The preparation of these leaders needs to take into account the complexity of the role of an administrator. Additional training should address discipline with interventions and supports encompassing restorative practices rather than just punitive responses. Having future leaders visit sites that have been doing successful restorative practices is one way for educators to implement what they have learned from theory. In addition, ensuring that there is mentorship available to future leaders as part of the credentialing program would help new administrators feel more supported in their new roles.

### *Recommendations for Districts*

From the interviews done for this study, there is a symbolic reference to fire and water imagery. Their experiences confirm the existence of "sink or swim" and "trial by fire" approaches in school and district induction. Although completely unintentional, these practices can continue to promote an adherence to a status quo culture that emphasizes crisis management and disciplinary functions rather than fostering change and leadership. It is recommended that the district establish an induction plan for new administrators, resembling a comprehensive leadership academy covering various topics including evaluations,

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curriculum, student discipline, MTSS, PBIS, and more. This leadership academy should not be a size fits all approach to all administrators. The role of an assistant principal is different from that of a principal and there are nuances to each role that calls for specific training. District leadership should provide social and emotional scaffolding as needed to new administrators as they navigate their roles.

### *Recommendations for Policy Makers*

As education code continues to change to address replacing discipline with supports, special attention needs to be provided to districts to ensure not only their adherence to the law but also best practices. There should be a gradual change to existing laws so that districts are provided ample time to be able to change their systems and train staff adequately about the upcoming changes. In addition, policy makers should provide action steps to these changes in reform so that districts are able to comprehensively make the appropriate changes. Concrete examples should be provided to districts as to what a MTSS team should look like or what appropriate interventions for discipline, academics, and attendance should look like.

In addition, policy makers need to look at current ed code and attempt to align what teachers are able to issue discipline with what administrators are able to do. For example, current ed code (48910) allows for a teacher to suspend any student from their class, for any acts enumerated in Section 48900, for the day of the suspension and the day following. This misalignment can continue to hinder administrator's vision for restorative practices and continues to create the opportunity for subjective disciplinary practices that only hurt students.

*Recommendations for Future Research*

My recommendation for future scholars is to expand the scope of the study to include other local districts. By expanding the scope of the study to multiple districts, the findings are more likely to be generalizable to a broader population of schools and districts. Furthermore, examining a diverse range of contexts, including districts with varying demographics, geographic locations, and organizational structures, researchers can better understand the commonalities and differences in how leaders address discipline disproportionality across different setting. Including multiple districts increases the richness and diversity of the data collected. Researchers can gather a wider range of perspectives, experiences, and insights from leaders, educators, and stakeholders across different districts, enriching the depth and breadth of the study findings.

Future research should also pursue in depth case studies of leaders who have successfully adopted restorative practices at their school sites to learn about the beliefs and practices that help them with that transition. Part of this in depth study should include observations of staff meetings and dealing with pushback. It should include document analysis of relevant materials such as school policies, memos, training materials, and disciplinary records which can offer a comprehensive understanding of how restorative practices are integrated into the school's framework and day-to-day operations. Furthermore, conducting focus groups with staff members and students can facilitate open discussions about their experiences with restorative practices, allowing for the exploration of different perspectives and the identification of areas for improvement.

As a middle school principal deeply committed to social justice, I recognize the imperative of employing CRT principles to address disparities within our educational system. Understanding that systems and institutions perpetuate racial inequalities, I am dedicated to dismantling these structures and implementing restorative practices that foster equity and inclusion. Through an intersectional lens, I will continue to analyze policies and procedures within my own practice, identifying and challenging instances of disproportionality. By centering the experiences and voices of marginalized students and their communities, I aim to collaboratively develop strategies that affirm their identities and provide equitable opportunities for success. My commitment to social justice compels me to not only acknowledge disparities but actively work towards their eradication, ensuring that every student receives the support and resources they need to thrive academically and personally.

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**Administrator Interview**

Con Respeto y Dignidad: Transforming Educational Experiences for Students of Color by

Addressing Disproportionate Discipline Practices

Selene Munoz

**Interview Protocols**

*Begin every interview with a review of the consent form and with an invitation for participant questions. These question stems are for semi-structured interviewing, meaning that follow up is possible when interviewer deems valuable for probing deeper or seeking clarification/expansion.*

Interview Protocol

The Study is seeking to answer the following research questions:

1. What are some **strategies or initiatives** administrators report as useful in changing the culture of their organization to address discipline disproportionality?

2. In what ways, if any, do administrators' personal beliefs and values impact their responses to setbacks to changing disciplinary policy in their organization?

Warm-Up Questions

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself in terms of what kind of school leader you perceive yourself to be?

**Prior Educational Experience**

2. Tell me about your educational experiences prior to becoming an administrator?

3. Did you complete any college courses on diversity, multiculturalism, or anything that directly dealt with race?

4. Were you offered, or did you complete any courses that dealt with classroom management? If so, what was that experience like?

5. What was your overall experience with teaching?

      a. – What were the characteristics of the schools you served in? (e.g., demographics, suburban, urban, etc)

      b. – What was your philosophy on student discipline?

      c. – What were some factors that influenced your disciplinary philosophy as a teacher?

**Experiences as an administrator**

6. What factors motivated you to pursue a degree in educational leadership?

      a. - How many years did you teach before enrolling in your program?

      b. Are you an assistant principal at the same school you taught at?

7. What was your overall experience like in your educational leadership program?

8. Did your program offer any courses on the administrative perspectives of multiculturalism or diversity?

      a. - What courses were offered that specifically addressed school discipline or managing conflict in the school in your program?

      B. what kind of skills or content did you learn from these classes that help you when dealing with conflict in your organization?

9. Have you engaged in a professional development seminar around student discipline?

10. Can you tell me about some of the benefits or limitations of that PD in terms of supporting your practice?

11. Would you say this PD was beneficial, why or why not?

12. How much of your daily responsibilities revolve around managing student conduct (either proactively, or reactively)?

13. What are (were) some of the biggest challenges you face as an administrator as it relates to student discipline?

    a. In regards to managing student conduct through discipline, has your philosophy changed since becoming an administrator, or during your time as an administrator? If so, how?

14. What factors influence the type of discipline intervention you recommend?

**Interactions with Stakeholders**

15. Is there an experience(s) with a student that helped shape your view of school discipline?

    a. - How did that experience affect you, negatively or positively?

    b. – In what ways did this experience prepare you for handling future disciplinary episodes with students?

16. What strategies do you utilize when interacting with students or their teachers when it comes to student discipline?

17. As an administrator, do interpersonal relationships factor into how you go about communicating with teachers, students, parents, your supervisors, and other support staff?

18. How do you cultivate and nurture those relationships?

Final Questions

19. Is there a question that you wished I would have asked?

20. Is there anything you else you want to share?

## Appendix B

## Survey Questions

The Study is seeking to answer the following research questions:

1. What are some **strategies or initiatives** administrators report as useful in changing the culture of their organization to address discipline disproportionality?

2. In what ways, if any, do administrators' personal beliefs and values impact their responses to setbacks to changing disciplinary policy in their organization?

What title best describes your role within your organization (Demographic Info)

School Site Principal

School Site Assistant Principal

Academic Coordinator

Other (Please specify)

With which grade levels do you work? (Demographic Info)

Middle School

High School

Please select the race/ethnicity to which you identify (Demographic Info)

Black or African American

Hispanic or Latinx

Asian or Asian American

White or Caucasian

Prefer not to Answer

Please select the gender to which you identify (Demographic Info)

Male

Female

Transgender Male

Transgender Female

Non-Binary

Prefer not to answer

Please provide how many years you have been associated with the school. (Demo Info)

<1 year

1-3 years

4-6 years

7-10years

More than 10 years

School enrollment: (Demo info)

- ☐ 0 – 299

- ☐ 300 – 599

- ☐ 600 – 999

- ☐ 1000 – 1499

- ☐ 1500-1999

2000+

School's percentage of students on free and reduced lunch:

☐

0 – 9%

☐  10 – 19%

☐  20 – 39%

☐  40 – 59%

☐  60%+

School's percentage of English Learners: (Demo Info)

☐  0 – 9%

☐  10 – 19%

☐  20 – 39%

☐  40 – 59%

☐  60%+

School's percentage of students receiving Special Education services: (Demo Info)

☐  0 – 4%

☐  5 – 9%

☐  10 – 14%

☐  15 – 19

   20%+

As a leader

I generally consider changes to be a negative thing (RQ 2)

   Strongly agree

   Agree

   Disagree

   Strongly disagree

I'll take a routine day over a day full of unexpected events any time

    Strongly agree

    Agree

    Disagree

    Strongly disagree

If I were to be informed that there's going to be a significant change regarding the way things are done at work, I would probably feel stressed out.

    Strongly agree

    Agree

    Disagree

    Strongly disagree

I re-examine central assumptions underlying our existing practices and systems to question whether they are appropriate

    Strongly agree

    Agree

    Disagree

    Strongly disagree

I wait for things to go wrong before taking action

    Strongly agree

    Agree

    Disagree

    Strongly disagree

I focus attention on irregularities, mistakes, exceptions, and deviations from standards

    Strongly agree

    Agree

    Disagree

    Strongly disagree

I avoid getting involved when contentious issues arise

    Strongly agree

    Agree

    Disagree

    Strongly disagree

I talk about my most important values and beliefs to explain my actions as a school leader

    Strongly agree

    Agree

    Disagree

    Strongly disagree

I seek differing perspectives when solving problems

    Strongly agree

    Agree

    Disagree

    Strongly disagree

I spend time teaching and coaching

    Strongly agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

I show that I am a firm believer in "if it ain't broken, don't fix it"

Strongly agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

Holding conferences, either formal or informal, with a student and their parent/guardian in response to misbehavior is an effective discipline strategy

Strongly agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

I implement trauma-informed practices in my current role at the school

Strongly agree

Somewhat agree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

I am familiar with restorative practices

Strongly agree

Somewhat agree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

I have participated in a restorative practice training

Strongly agree

Somewhat agree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

I think restorative practices are an effective means of addressing cheating violations among secondary level students

Strongly agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

I think that my organization has a culture that is open to change

Strongly agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

I am familiar with initiatives designed to address discipline disproportionality in my organization

Strongly agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

I have received training or professional development on how to implement strategies to address discipline disproportionality

Strongly agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Your feedback is valuable and I would like to learn more about your experiences. If you are interested in sharing more of your thoughts, I invite you to participate in a follow-up interview. Your participation is voluntary and would be greatly appreciated. If you are interested in being contacted for an interview, please provide your contact information below. I will reach out to you to schedule a convenient time for the interview.