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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

STUDENT, CAREGIVER, AND EDUCATOR PERSPECTIVE OF SCHOOL
DISCIPLINE POLICY AND PRACTICE

A DOCTORAL RESEARCH PROJECT SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION
PROGRAM IN SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY

BY

TAWANN J. JACKSON

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

MAY 2018

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ABSTRACT

African-American students have historically been disproportionately represented in exclusionary discipline practices in our nation's public schools. Regardless of this fact, research has consistently shown that African-American students do not get into more trouble than students of other races, nor do they commit more severe infractions. Previous studies have explored factors such as student behaviors; low academic achievement; and socioeconomic status as reasons for the high rate of suspensions, yet when controlling for these factors race continues to make a difference in the imbalance of exclusionary discipline practices among African American students. "Implicit racial bias" has been associated as a contributing factor to the overrepresentation of African American students in exclusionary discipline. Nevertheless, few studies have directly examined the perception of race in discipline practices from the perspective of students, their caregivers, and the educators involved in the disciplinary process. This study examines race and discipline from the perspectives of ten African-American middle school students and their caregivers, and ten educators from a large Midwest suburban school district. The results of this study provide several conflicting perceptions of the fairness in discipline practices towards African American students in this middle school. The implications of these perceptions are discussed, and suggestions are made for future direction and research.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Despite over 40 years of research citing the overrepresentation of African-American students in exclusionary discipline practices, it is a phenomenon still prevalent in schools today. Research indicates that African-American students are three times more likely than their White counterparts to receive an out-of-school suspension (Rocque, 2010; Shirley & Cornell, 2011; Skiba, Horner, Chung, Rausch, May & Tobin, 2011; Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace & Bachman, 2008), regardless of the infraction. The school discipline sequence typically begins at the classroom level (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010) and tend to be driven by minor infractions and subjective categories of student misconduct such as defiance and disrespectful behavior rather than more objective and serious behaviors such as bringing a weapon to school (Anyon et al., 2014; Gregory & Weinstein, 2008). The Council of State Governments Report studied all the students in the Texas public school system who were in the 7th through 12th grades during the 2000-2002 school years, and found that 77% of African American students were disciplined for minor offenses, compared to 48% of White students who also committed minor offenses (Fabelo, Thompson, Plotkin, Carmichael, Marchbanks & Booth, 2011). Similar studies have also found that African American students do not engage in more serious behaviors than White students, but are punished more harshly (Losen, 2013; Skiba et al., 2011; Wallace et al., 2008).

Statement of the Problem

Among considerations such as socioeconomic status and poor academic achievement, racial bias, and inadequate cultural competence among educators are also suggestions that are consistent throughout the literature as contributors to disproportionate discipline practices with African-American students (Gibson, Wilson, Haight, Kayama, & Marshall, 2014; Haight, Gibson, Kayama, Marshall, & Wilson, 2014; Ruck & Wortley, 2002; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). Caregivers' opinions in three separate qualitative studies found that they viewed educators as: lacking cultural understanding (Gibson & Haight, 2013); lacking cultural sensitivity and empathy for African American youths (Haight et al., 2014); and that the behaviors and attitudes of school staff towards African American students needed to be addressed (Anyon et al., 2014). The persistent relationship between race and school discipline practices is concerning because such exclusionary practices used with African-Americans are linked to: poor academic performance (Gibson et. al., 2014; Gregory & Mosely, 2004; Skiba et al., 2011; Wallace et al., 2008); drop-out rates (Gibson et al, 2014; Gregory, Allen, Mikami, Hafen, & Pianta, 2013; Jordan & Anil, 2009); and involvement in the criminal justice system (Redfield & Nance, 2016; Gibson et al, 2014).

CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

National Data

There is a sizeable body of evidence that African American students are disciplined more often, and more harshly than White students. The Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) has collected data on important education and civil rights issues in our nation's public schools for over fifty years. Formally known as the Elementary and Secondary School Survey, the CRDC provides information for the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights to use in enforcing and monitoring schools' and districts' duty to provide equal educational opportunities to all students (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014). Per Issue Brief No. 1 (2014), the CRDC reported that African American students make up 16% of the student population, yet 32-42% of students suspended or expelled; White students represent a range of 31-40% of students suspended or expelled, and make up 51% of the student population (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014). The disparity has generated many studies exploring if these inequalities are a result of more frequent or serious violations by African American students, teacher discrimination (conscious and/or unconscious), or other factors (Gibson & Haight, 2013; Gregory & Mosely, 2004; Haight et al., 2014; Losen, 2013; Rocque, 2010; Vavrus & Cole, 2002).

Factors Explored

Studies exploring the overrepresentation of African American students in exclusionary discipline have sought to examine such factors as: student behaviors; low academic achievement; and socioeconomic status as reasons for the high rate of suspensions (Anyon, et al., 2014; Gregory et al., 2010; Gregory & Mosely, 2004; Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Mendez, Knoff & Ferron, 2002; Rocque, 2010; Skiba et al, 2002; Skiba et al, 2011). When controlling for socioeconomic status, academic achievement, and student behaviors, several studies found that those demographics are correlational, but not causal of the high suspension rates among African American students (Gregory & Mosely, 2004; Mendez et al., 2002; Skiba et al., 2011; Wallace et al., 2008). Even when the relationship between socioeconomic statuses to disproportionality in school discipline has been explored directly, race continues to make a significant contribution to the imbalance, independent of socioeconomic status (Fabelo et al., 2011; Skiba et al., 2002). A national longitudinal study of over 21, 000 kindergarten children was conducted and when the children reached eighth grade, multivariate logistic regression of suspensions showed that even after controlling for behavior, African American students were 89% more likely to be suspended compared to White students (Wright, Morgan, Coyne, Beaver & Barnes, 2014).

Race Factor

Racial and cultural differences between students and educators are suggested to be the driving force behind racial disparity in school discipline practices (Losen, 2013; Skiba et al., 2011; Wallace et al., 2008). Gregory et al. (2010) noted the “competitive”

and “individualistic” culture of Western Europeans, which direct classroom activities, conflict with the communal values often held in African American culture. It is also suggested that cultural factors within the classroom and school setting influence a teacher’s decision to remove a student from the classroom (Vavrus & Cole, 2002; Wallace et al., 2008); differentially perceiving and misinterpreting African American students’ behavior as dangerous and aggressive. Students of color in a study from a large, urban public school district serving over 50,000 students reported disproportionate discipline practices as conscious and deliberate; contending that teachers apply classroom rules randomly to control students, or remove the students they do not like (Skiba et al., 2002). Such biases likely contribute to the disproportionalities, although studies have shown that African American students do not exhibit behaviors that are more serious or dangerous than White students (Arcia, 2007; Kinsler, 2011; Rocque, 2010; Skiba et al., 2002).

The school discipline sequence typically begins at the classroom level (Gregory et al., 2010) and “implicit bias” has been heavily implicated as a contributing factor to the disproportionality in school discipline (Gibson et al., 2014; Gregory et al., 2010; Losen, 2013; Monroe, 2005). In its 2014 Issue Brief, the Kirwan Institute defined “implicit bias” in the context of discipline disproportionality as, “the mental process that causes us to have negative feelings and attitudes about people based on characteristics like race, ethnicity, age and appearance.” Over the course of our lifetime, we are not consciously aware of the negative racial biases we develop unconsciously; therefore, it is imperative that educators become aware of how attitudes and stereotypes affect their understanding,

actions, and decisions made within the educational environment (Rudd, 2014). Since many of the infractions students are disciplined for can be considered subjective, how an educator interprets student behavior can affect how they are disciplined, and to what extent.

Related Studies

In a qualitative study of nineteen school teachers in an urban high school, teachers held a range of theories about reasons for discipline problems and most of those explanations did not account for the racial patterns in discipline. They placed responsibility on the individual student and school forces as the source of the discipline problems (Gregory & Mosely, 2004). This is in stark contrast to the 2014 study of 16 educators in a suburban public school where 69% of teacher participants implicated teachers, staff, and administrators as responsible for events leading to suspension; citing lack of cultural sensitivity and the need to raise educator's cultural awareness to reduce suspensions (Haight et al., 2014). Wallace et al. (2008) sought to specifically investigate the extent of continued racial and ethnic differences in the prevalence and disproportionality in school discipline and found that over a 14-year period, African American students were two to five times more likely to be suspended. One of the first studies to examine trends in school discipline, the findings showed a decrease in discipline rates for most racial groups after 2000; the discipline rates for African American students' did not decline, but continued to increase (Wallace et al., 2008).

Numerous studies have found that racial disparities in discipline outcomes for African American students continue, even after accounting for student behavior and

variables like poverty, disability, previous academic achievement, school and district nuances, and neighborhood context (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Rocque, 2010; Skiba et al., 2002; Wallace et al., 2008). Two key points in the discipline process have been identified in the institutional decision-making process: (1) the differential selection of students of color for office disciplinary referrals; and (2) the differential processing of racial minority student for discipline resolutions, particularly exclusionary sanctions like out of school suspension, law enforcement referrals, and expulsion (Gregory et al., 2010). Further research results suggest both differential selection at that classroom level and differential processing at the administrative level make significant contributions to the disproportionate representation of African American students in school discipline (Anyon et al., 2014; Skiba et al., 2011). Given that many studies have found no differences in behaviors among African American and White students that warrant the overrepresentation of students of color in disciplinary actions, existing research points to cultural bias held by educators influences the subjective assessments of behaviors that penalize African American youth (Wright et al., 2014). Since teachers are mostly responsible for initiating the discipline process, it is important to understand what impacts their decision about which students are punished and how discipline problems are addressed. When students perceive teachers as competent, caring, and respectful, classroom behavior improves and the students' positive feelings are associated with perceptions of fair discipline and legitimate authority (Way, 2011). Schools can generate alienation and resistance from students who do not fit school norms (Morris, 2005);

therefore, it is important to note that how an individual perceives his or her environment can significantly influence how one responds to that environment.

Although we know these inequalities exist, few studies have addressed the perceptions of these disparities from those involved in exclusionary school discipline, as they relate directly to racial bias (Skiba et al., 2002). Youth who are disciplined in school are at greater risk than other students to experience a host of academic and psychosocial problems across their lifespan (Ayon et al., 2014); and suspensions increase significantly from the elementary to the middle school level (Mendez & Knoff, 2003). The racial gap in suspensions has continued to grow throughout the years, and research suggests that suspensions at the middle school level may have significant long-term repercussions (Losen & Skiba, 2010). A researcher at John Hopkins University studied the educational paths of over four hundred youths incarcerated in the ninth grade and found that the youths most at risk were identifiable by middle school (Losen & Skiba, 2010).

Studies on Perspectives

There are very few studies that explore discipline policy and practices with African-American students from the perspectives of the suspended student, their caregivers, and the educators involved in their suspension. In one such study, when asked directly if race played a role in suspensions of African-American students, 68% of the participants agreed (Gibson et al., 2014). Of those participants, 55% were students, 75% caregivers, and 79% were educators. The group cited bias towards African-American students, and inadequate cultural competence among educators in responding to the events and behaviors surrounding suspensions (Gibson et al., 2014), as reasons for the

disparities. Students in this study recounted incidents of similar misbehavior by African-American and White students that were handled differently, felt that many educators regarded African-American students as dishonest, and claimed African-American students are targeted for disciplinary infractions (Gibson et al., 2014). Caregivers of the African-American students in the study agree with the students' contentions about educators, and argued that educators use what they perceive as problem behaviors to exclude African-American children from the educational environment. Many educators in the Gibson, et al. study agreed with students and caregivers, attributing educators' lack of cultural competence as a factor in the elevated suspension rates among African-American students.

In another study, student and educator perspectives were not explored; however, oral narratives from caregivers of suspended African-American students were used to understand how they interpreted and experienced their child's suspension (Gibson & Haight, 2013). Thirty female caregivers of 34 suspended students were found to: value school success; recognized their child's misbehavior; supported appropriate consequences; and viewed suspensions as morally problematic (Gibson & Haight, 2013). The caregiver narratives revealed how they considered school suspension policies as undermining the racial socialization of their children because it conflicted with how they prepare their children to deal with injustices. Some caregivers explicitly mentioned educators' lack of cultural understanding when dealing with African-American children.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to explore middle school student, caregiver, and educator perspectives of the school's discipline policy and practices to gain an understanding of how perception impacts behaviors and outcomes in the educational environment. The aim is to understand the viewpoints of those directly involved in student suspensions and use this information to inform professional development, as well as, professional practice.

Research Questions

My primary research questions are:

1. To what extent do African-American middle-school students who have been suspended perceive racial bias as impacting the events that led to the suspension?
2. To what extent do caregivers of African-American middle school students who have been suspended perceive racial bias as impacting the events that led to their child's suspensions?
3. To what extent do educators of African-American middle-school students who have been involved in the student's suspension perceive racial bias as impacting the events that led to the suspension?
4. To what extent do African-American middle-school students who have been suspended perceive the school discipline policies as fair to African-American students?

5. To what extent do caregivers of African-American middle-school students who have been suspended perceive the school discipline policies as fair to African-American students?
6. To what extent do educators of African-American middle-school students who have been involved in the student's suspension perceive the school discipline policies as fair to African-American students?
7. To what extent do caregivers of African-American middle-school students who have been suspended perceive the educator's involved in the suspension as culturally competent?
8. To what extent do educators of African-American middle-school students who have been involved in the student's suspension perceive themselves as culturally competent?

CHAPTER III

METHOD

Demographics

This study took place in a large, suburban public school district that consists of two high schools, four middle schools, and 12 elementary schools. Additionally, the district provides early childhood, alternative, and transition programs. According to the 2015-2016 State Report Card, there were 1,154 full-time teachers employed in the district, 20% of which were male, and 80% were female. They were ethnically identified as 84% White, 5% African-American, 9% Hispanic, 1% Asian, 0.3% American Indian, 0.7% two or more races, 0.1% Pacific Islander, and 0.1% Not Reported. The student population of the district was 26% White, 20% African-American, 43% Hispanic, 7% Asian, 0.2% American Indian, 4% two or more races, and 0.3% Pacific Islander. Students with disabilities comprised 16% of the student population, 2% were categorized as homeless, and 14% were English language learners.

Participants

The participants for this study were students, their caregivers, and educators from one middle-school in this district. This 6th-8th grade middle-school provides educational services for 1,114 of the 17,020 students enrolled in the district. The majority of students at this middle school are categorized as Hispanic (41%), while African-American and White students each comprise 23% of the student population. Asian students represented

8% of this middle-school population, while 0.2% of the students are described as American Indian, 4% two or more races, and 0.9% Pacific Islanders. Students identified as low income accounted for 60% of the population, while 13% are identified as having disabilities, 1% was homeless, and 12% were English language learners. Discipline data was obtained from the district's database that housed disciplinary referrals.

Context

The individuals identified for this study included all 6th through 8th grade African-American students who were suspended during the 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 school years. Their caregivers and the educators involved in the suspension of the student were also a part of the study. "Caregivers" were defined as any adult who was primarily responsible for the care, safety and well-being of the suspended student. The "educator" was defined as the teacher, dean, counselor, and/or administrator involved in the disciplinary referral that resulted in the suspension of the student. Disciplinary data used in this study was obtained from the district's Data and Assessment system, where disciplinary contacts were recorded.

Instrumentation

Three surveys were constructed by the researcher and titled *Student Perspective of Discipline Practices*; *Caregiver Perspective of Discipline Practices*; and *Educator Perspective of Discipline Practices*. The surveys included a Likert scale ranging from zero to four, with four representing total agreement with the statement. The student survey consisted of twelve questions inquiring about the student's: knowledge about the discipline policy; understanding of the discipline policy; number of suspensions; events

leading to the referral; and if they thought race played a role in their referral. The caregiver survey consisted of fourteen questions inquiring about their perception of fairness of the school's discipline policy and practice towards African-American students, and if they perceived their student's suspension a result of racial bias on the part of the educator. The educator survey consisted of fifteen questions inquiring about: their understanding of the school's discipline policy; their implementation of the school's discipline policy; the extent of their cultural awareness and competence; and if they think race played a role in student disciplinary referrals and exclusionary disciplines practices. Demographic information was included in all participant surveys. There was no identifiable information on the survey and all responses were confidential.

Procedures

Disciplinary data obtained from the district database was reviewed to identify African-American students referred for disciplinary action during the 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 school years. There were initially 25 students and their caregivers identified from the 2015-2016 school year. Twenty-five recruitment letters and consent forms were sent to the home address of these students with information about the study, its risks and limitations, and the request for the student's and caregiver's participation in the study. Upon the return of the signed consent from the student and caregiver, a survey was mailed to the home for the student and caregiver to complete and return. One response was received from a student and caregiver pair. After three additional mailed reminders with requests to participate in the study, along with the promise of a chance to be entered into a drawing to receive a small incentive, one additional response was received from a

student and caregiver pair. This produced an 8% response rate; consequently, the study was expanded to include suspension data of African-American students from the 2016-2017 school year to obtain additional participants.

There were 28 students identified from the new data, seven of whom were students and caregivers previously contacted from the 2015-2016 data, which left a total of 21 new possible participants. The contact procedure that was used for the previous school year's recruitment was duplicated with this group, barring one difference; the students and caregivers from this sample set were contacted by telephone after no response to the study was received after 14 days.

No response was received from any student or caregiver after 14 days, which resulted in the researcher contacting the possible participants via telephone to request their participation in the study. From the 21 identified students and caregivers for the 2016-2017 school year: one student was listed as homeless; therefore, no address was available in the district database for contact; two of the mailed invitations were returned as undeliverable by the U.S. Postal Service; one caregiver no longer had the student in her custody; three phone numbers of the caregivers were disconnected; two caregivers declined to participate; and one caregiver stated that they would mail their completed survey, which was never received. From the 11 remaining caregivers called, three were not reached, resulting in 8 student and caregiver pairs that eventually participated in the study. During the phone call to the caregiver, the purpose of the study was reiterated and they were asked if they wanted to participate. Each caregiver gave verbal consent to answer the survey questions via telephone and each student gave their verbal assent.

Every survey item was read to the caregiver, verbatim, and their responses recorded on a survey form; the same process was completed with each student participant.

There were nine educators identified and invited to participate in the study from the 2015-2016 school year. They each were contacted via email, which included information regarding the study, the consent, and a link to the survey. When the educators accessed the link and completed the survey this served as their consent to participate in the study. Fifty-six percent of the educators contacted from the 2015-2016 school year responded to the survey. The 2016-2017 school year data identified ten new educator referrers and yielded a response rate of 50%. Overall, there were ten identified educators who participated in the study, producing an overall educator response rate of 53%.

There were not enough participants in the study for a statistical analysis; therefore, a descriptive analysis was used to compare participant responses. An assignment of participant ID's such as S1, C1, S2, C2, etc. was used for the student and caregiver pairs to link their survey responses, which allowed for the comparison of their replies. The educators were not matched to the suspended student and caregiver pair, as there were some educators who responded to the survey and their identified student and caregiver pair did not participate, and vice versa. The educators' overall responses were compared to the student and caregiver responses to the survey items.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Responding Participants

A total of 10 students, 10 caregivers, and 10 educators participated in the study. All of the caregivers were female; 60% of the students were male, 40% were female; 50% of educators were male and 50% were female. When suspended, 30% of the students were in the sixth grade; 30% were in the seventh grade; and 40% were eighth graders at the time of their suspension. From the group of identified students, 80% of them received only one suspension during the sampled school years; 20% of the students received two suspensions during those school years. Every caregiver and student were African-American; 80% of educators classified themselves as White; 10% Hispanic; and 10% marked "Other", identifying both Hispanic and White heritage. Seven to nine years of teaching/service was documented by 30% of the educators on the educator survey. The majority (70%) indicated more than ten years of teaching and servicing students. There were 30% of responders who specified teaching the seventh grade; 10% teaching the eighth grade; and 60% of the educators surveyed expressed teaching multiple grade levels (see Table 1).

Table 1

Percentages of Responding Participants' Demographics

| | Student (n = 10) | Caregiver (n = 10) | Educator (n = 10) |
|----------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| Gender | | | |
| Male | 60% | n/a | 50% |
| Female | 40% | 100% | 50% |
| Suspension Grade | | | |
| 6 th | 30% | n/a | n/a |
| 7 th | 30% | n/a | n/a |
| 8 th | 40% | n/a | n/a |
| Number of Suspensions | | | |
| 1 | 80% | n/a | n/a |
| 2 | 20% | n/a | n/a |
| Identified Race | | | |
| African-American | 100% | 100% | n/a |
| White | n/a | n/a | 80% |
| Hispanic | n/a | n/a | 10% |
| Other (Hispanic & White) | n/a | n/a | 10% |
| Years of Teaching/Service | | | |
| 7-9 Years | n/a | n/a | 30% |
| 10 or More Years | n/a | n/a | 70% |
| Current Grades Served | | | |
| 7 th | n/a | n/a | 30% |
| 8 th | n/a | n/a | 10% |
| Multiple | n/a | n/a | 60% |

Perspectives on Awareness and Understanding of the School's Discipline Policy

The identified students, caregivers, and educators were surveyed on their awareness and understanding of the school's discipline policy. Fifty percent of the students totally agreed they are aware of the discipline policy and 40% somewhat agreed;

60% of the caregivers totally agreed, 20% somewhat agreed; and all of the educators confirmed they are aware of the school's discipline policy. Total disagreement was found among 10% of the student surveyed and 20% of the caregivers somewhat disagreed. Understanding of the school's discipline policy showed similar results, with 60% of the students in total agreement and 20% somewhat agreeing to understanding; 50% of the caregivers totally agreed, 20% somewhat agreed; and the educators were in 100% agreement that they understand the school's discipline policy. The student survey showed 10% did not know and 10% totally disagreed to understanding the discipline policy; 20% of the caregivers somewhat disagreed and 10% totally disagreed.

When they were queried about having knowledge of the removal of the "zero tolerance" policy, 70% of educators totally agreed that they were aware the 'zero tolerance' was removed from the school's discipline policy; 20% somewhat agreed; and 30% of the caregivers had knowledge of its removal. There were 60% of the caregivers who totally disagreed with knowing and 10% who stated that they did not know; and 10% of the educators disagreed somewhat to knowing about the removal of the 'zero tolerance' from the school discipline policy (see Table 2)

Table 2

Percentage of Participant's Perspectives on Awareness and Understanding of the School's Discipline Policy

| | Student (n = 10) | Caregiver (n = 10) | Educator (n = 10) |
|---|---------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| Aware of the Policy | | | |
| Totally Agree | 50% | 60% | 70% |
| Somewhat Agree | 40% | 20% | 30% |
| Somewhat Disagree | 0% | 20% | 0% |
| Totally Disagree | 10% | 0% | 0% |
| Understands the Policy | | | |
| Totally Agree | 60% | 50% | 50% |
| Somewhat Agree | 20% | 20% | 50% |
| Somewhat Disagree | 0% | 20% | 0% |
| Totally Disagree | 10% | 10% | 0% |
| Don't Know | 10% | 0% | 0% |
| Aware of "Zero Tolerance" policy removal | | | |
| Totally Agree | n/a | 30% | 70% |
| Somewhat Agree | n/a | 0% | 20% |
| Somewhat Disagree | n/a | 0% | 10% |
| Totally Disagree | n/a | 60% | 0% |
| Don't Know | n/a | 10% | 0% |

Perspectives of Fairness in Discipline towards African American Students

The participants were asked to what extent they perceived the school discipline policy to be fair towards African-American students? When compared to students of other races, 20% of the surveyed students totally agreed that the policy is fair; 40% somewhat agreed to its fairness; 10% somewhat disagreed; and 30% of the student responders totally disagreed that the discipline policy is fair towards African-American students. During the phone inquiry with many of the student participants, when they were

asked this question the response was often, “oh, no,” “absolutely not,” or a very strong emphasis on the word “totally” when they responded that they totally disagreed that the discipline policy is fair to African-American students.

On the caregiver survey, 40% of the caregivers somewhat agreed that the school’s discipline policy is fair towards African-American students; 30% somewhat disagreed; 10% totally disagreed; and 20% of the caregivers did not know if the discipline policy is fair towards African-American students. During the phone interview, one of the caregivers expressed her disappointment in how her daughter’s suspension was handled at the middle school. She stated that her daughter is now a freshman in the district’s high school, and when answering the question regarding the fairness of the discipline policy, the caregiver emphatically stated, “No, the discipline is *not* fair to African-American students.” She further commented, “The same thing is going on at the high school right now; they want to discipline the kids instead of listening to their cries for help.”

The educators were asked about their perception of the fairness of the school’s discipline policy on the educator survey and 60% of them totally agreed that the policy is fair towards African-American students; 20% of the educators agreed somewhat; 10% somewhat disagreed; and 10% of the educators acknowledged that they did not know if the policy is fair. Overall, all three participant groups agreed more than they disagreed that the school’s discipline policy is fair towards African-American students.

Disciplined more Often, Harsher, or the same?

Though the survey findings indicated an overall agreement to the *fairness* of the school’s discipline policy, when the students and caregivers were asked if they believed

African-American students were disciplined more *often* than students of other races, they overwhelmingly agreed that they *were* disciplined more often. Sixty percent of the students totally disagreed that African-American students are *not* disciplined more often (10% somewhat disagreed; 10% did not know) and 50% of the caregivers disagreed that they were *not* disciplined more often (40% did not know).

When inquiring on their perspective of African-American students being disciplined *harsher* than students of other races, the students (60%) and caregivers (60%) equally agreed that African-American students *are* disciplined harsher. The educators were not asked about the frequency of discipline, but when asked about the *harshness* of the discipline, there was a stark contrast in their responses to the question. The educators were on the same accord in agreement that African-American students are *not* disciplined harsher than students of other races (70% totally agreed; 10% somewhat agreed). There were no caregivers who thought the discipline was *not* harsher and 30% of the students perceived the discipline as *not* harsher than what students of other races receive. More caregivers (40%) than students (10%) and educators (10%) declared they did not know if discipline is harsher for African-American students.

Half of the students surveyed had some semblance of agreement that African-American students are disciplined the *same* as students of other races (30% totally agreed; 20% somewhat agreed). They equally disagreed (10% somewhat disagreed; 30% totally disagreed) or did not know (10%) if they were disciplined the same. The caregivers responded to the same question and more of them disagreed (20% somewhat disagreed; 30% totally disagreed) that African-American students were disciplined the

same as students of other races, than they agreed (10%); 40% of the caregivers admitted they did not know if discipline were the same for all races. Similarly to their thought that discipline was *not* harsher towards African-American students, the majority of the educators believed discipline is carried out the same for students of all races (70% totally agreed; 20% somewhat agreed). Ten percent of the caregivers confessed they did not know if students from all races are disciplined equally.

Amount of Trouble?

The student participants were asked if they supposed African-American students get into more trouble than students of other races. More of them agreed (60% totally; 10% somewhat) than disagreed to this declaration. The remaining respondents did not agree that African-American students get into more trouble than students of other races (10% somewhat agreed; 10% totally disagreed). The educator responses revealed that they held opposing opinions to the students' point of view, believing African-American students misbehave the same amount as students of other races. The caregivers were not asked to reply to this query (see Table 3).

Table 3

Percentage of Participants' Perspectives of the School's Discipline Policy towards African-American Students When Compared to Other Races

| | Student (n = 10) | Caregiver (n = 10) | Educator (n = 10) |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| Fair | | | |
| Totally Agree | 20% | 0% | 60% |
| Somewhat Agree | 40% | 40% | 20% |
| Somewhat Disagree | 10% | 30% | 10% |
| Totally Disagree | 30% | 10% | 0% |
| Don't Know | 0% | 20% | 10% |
| Not disciplined more often | | | |
| Totally Agree | 0% | 10% | n/a |
| Somewhat Agree | 20% | 0% | n/a |
| Somewhat Disagree | 10% | 0% | n/a |
| Totally Disagree | 60% | 50% | n/a |
| Don't Know | 10% | 40% | n/a |
| Not disciplined more harsher | | | |
| Totally Agree | 20% | 0% | 70% |
| Somewhat Agree | 10% | 0% | 10% |
| Somewhat Disagree | 0% | 30% | 10% |
| Totally Disagree | 60% | 30% | 0% |
| Don't Know | 10% | 40% | 10% |
| Disciplined the same | | | |
| Totally Agree | 30% | 0% | 70% |
| Somewhat Agree | 20% | 10% | 20% |
| Somewhat Disagree | 10% | 20% | 0% |
| Totally Disagree | 30% | 30% | 0% |
| Don't Know | 10% | 40% | 10% |
| Gets in more trouble | | | |
| Totally Agree | 60% | n/a | n/a |
| Somewhat Agree | 10% | n/a | n/a |
| Somewhat Disagree | 10% | n/a | n/a |
| Totally Disagree | 10% | n/a | n/a |
| Don't Know | 10% | n/a | n/a |
| Misbehaves the same amount | | | |
| Totally Agree | n/a | n/a | 50% |
| Somewhat Agree | n/a | n/a | 40% |
| Totally Disagree | n/a | n/a | 10% |

Types of Discipline Infractions

Through the district discipline data report, ten different infractions were identified as reasons for the suspensions of African-American students during the two school years considered. Those infractions included: defiance/disrespect; violence without physical injury; abusive language/gestures; disruption; forgery/theft; technology violation; failure to attend class; harassment/bullying; gross disobedience; and “other”. On the educator survey, they were asked to identify the most common reason they suspend students, which resulted in 50% of the educators recognizing “disrespect” as the most common reason they discipline students. Twenty percent of the educators identified “disrupting class”, and 30% classified “Other” as the most common reason. The reasons acknowledged in the category marked “other” involved behaviors consistent with: danger to others; unsafe participation; and insubordination. According to the discipline data reviewed for the two school years, the students who actually participated in the study committed three out of the ten recorded offenses. The district’s discipline data specified that 70% of the student participants were suspended for ‘violence without physical injury. Forgery/theft contributed to 20% of the infractions, and harassment/ bullying represented 10% of the suspension reasons for the school years examined (see Table 4).

Table 4

Percentage of Disciplinary Infractions

| | Student (n = 10) | Educator (n=10) |
|---|---------------------|--------------------|
| Educators most common infraction (overall) | | |
| Disrespect | n/a | 50% |
| Disrupting class | n/a | 20% |
| Other (danger to others; unsafe participation; and insubordination) | n/a | 30% |
| Participating students' infractions | | |
| Violence w/o physical injury | 70% | n/a |
| Forgery/theft | 20% | n/a |
| Harassment/bullying | 10% | n/a |

Participant Perspectives on the Role of Race

The survey contributors were asked to rate the extent they perceived racial bias as a factor impacting the events that led to the student's suspension. The results from the student and caregiver surveys showed a general consensus among both groups that race did *not* play a role in the student's suspension. The student survey results arrived at 70% of them reporting total agreement that race did *not* play a role and 10% of them were somewhat in agreement. This position was greater than the 20% of students who sensed race *was* a contributing factor to their suspension. Likewise, the caregivers' survey findings also discounted race as a factor in their student's suspension, with 50% of them totally agreeing race was *not* a factor, and 10% in somewhat agreement. There were some caregivers who disagreed, or did not know if race played a role in their student's suspension (10% somewhat disagreed; 10% totally disagreed; 20% did not know).

Though the educators were not asked this specific question directly, their survey responses regarding the fairness of the school discipline policy towards African-American students; how many of them agreed that African-American students are *not* disciplined harsher than students of other races; and that African-American students are disciplined the *same* as students of other races, is suggestive that the educators do *not* identify race as a factor in their discipline practices (see Table 5).

Table 5

Percentage of Participants' Perspectives on the Role of Race in Exclusionary Discipline Practices

| | Student (n = 10) | Caregiver (n = 10) |
|-------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| No Role | | |
| Totally Agree | 70% | 50% |
| Somewhat Agree | 10% | 10% |
| Somewhat Disagree | 0% | 10% |
| Totally Disagree | 20% | 10% |
| Don't Know | 0% | 20% |

Participant Perspectives of the Classroom/Educational Environment

Seventy percent of the identified students for this study stated that they totally agree to understanding teacher expectations within the classroom; 20% of them somewhat agreed and 10% totally disagreed to understanding the classroom expectations. The survey results indicated students totally (80%) and somewhat (20%) agreed that they understand the consequences for breaking classroom rules. When asked if they perceived teachers to treat African-American students the same as students of other races, 50% of the students totally disagreed and 20% somewhat disagreed. There were 20% of the

students that totally agreed African-American students are treated the same as students of other races, and 10% who somewhat agreed to this statement.

The majority of the caregivers who participated in the study agreed that they have regular communication with their student's teachers (40% totally agreed; 40% somewhat agreed) and are contacted immediately if their student is disruptive in the classroom (80% totally agreed; 10% somewhat agreed). There were 20% of the caregivers surveyed who totally disagreed to having regular contact with their student's teacher and 10% totally disagreed to immediate contact following a disruption from their student. Most of the caregivers (20% totally agreed; 50% somewhat agreed) perceived that their student trusted their teacher; 30% of them did not detect trust (10% somewhat disagreed; 20% totally disagreed). There were more caregivers who totally disagreed that their student was allowed to have input in the discipline decision process (60%) than there were that agreed their student had input (10% totally agreed; 30% somewhat agreed). Overall, 80% of the caregivers totally agreed, and 20% somewhat agreed, that all races and cultures are welcomed at their student's school (see Table 6).

Table 6

Percentage of Participants' Perspectives of the Classroom/Educational Environment

| | Student (n=10) | Caregiver (n=10) |
|---|-------------------|---------------------|
| Understand classroom expectations. | | |
| Totally Agree | 70% | n/a |
| Somewhat Agree | 20% | n/a |
| Totally Disagree | 10% | n/a |
| Understand the consequences of breaking classroom rules. | | |
| Totally Agree | 80% | n/a |
| Somewhat Agree | 20% | n/a |
| African-American students treated the same as students of other races | | |
| Totally Agree | 20% | n/a |
| Somewhat Agree | 10% | n/a |
| Somewhat Disagree | 20% | n/a |
| Totally Disagree | 50% | n/a |
| Regular communication with teachers. | | |
| Totally Agree | n/a | 40% |
| Somewhat Agree | n/a | 40% |
| Somewhat Disagree | n/a | 10% |
| Totally Disagree | n/a | 10% |
| Immediate communication of student disruption. | | |
| Totally Agree | n/a | 80% |
| Somewhat Agree | n/a | 10% |
| Totally Disagree | n/a | 10% |
| Student trusts teachers | | |
| Totally Agree | n/a | 20% |
| Somewhat Agree | n/a | 50% |
| Somewhat Disagree | n/a | 10% |
| Totally Disagree | n/a | 20% |
| Student has input in the discipline process | | |
| Totally Agree | n/a | 10% |
| Somewhat Agree | n/a | 30% |
| Totally Disagree | n/a | 60% |
| All races and cultures are accepted. | | |
| Totally Agree | n/a | 80% |
| Somewhat Agree | n/a | 20% |

Participant Perspectives on Educator Responsiveness

The caregivers were asked if they perceived the school's educators to be culturally competent professionals and 30% of them totally agreed and 30% somewhat agreed that they are culturally competent. Ten percent of the surveyed caregivers totally disagreed that the school's educators are culturally competent and 30% of them asserted that they did not know. Educators were also surveyed to gain their perspective of their level of cultural competence and they mostly responded in the affirmative; 50% totally agreed they were culturally competent and 40% of them somewhat agreed. There were 10% of the educators who acknowledged they did not know if they were culturally competent.

When questioned about their cultural awareness, every educator had some level of agreement that they were culturally aware; 70% totally agreed and 30% somewhat agreed that they were culturally aware. Ninety percent of them totally agreed that they discipline African-American students fairly and 10% recognized that they did not know if they exhibited fair discipline practices with African-American students. Unlike the educators' opinion concerning their discipline practices, 70% of caregivers surveyed did not believe teachers discipline students fairly (20% somewhat disagreed; 50% totally disagreed). There were 30% of the caregivers who agreed that teachers are fair in their discipline habits towards African-American students (see Table 7).

Table 7

Percentage of Participants' Perspective of Educators' Responsiveness

| | Student (n = 10) | Caregiver (n = 10) | Educator (n=10) |
|--|---------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|
| Culturally Competent | | | |
| Totally Agree | n/a | 30% | 50% |
| Somewhat Agree | n/a | 30% | 40% |
| Totally Disagree | n/a | 10% | 0% |
| Don't Know | n/a | 30% | 10% |
| Culturally Aware | | | |
| Totally Agree | n/a | n/a | 70% |
| Somewhat Agree | n/a | n/a | 30% |
| I discipline African American students fairly | | | |
| Totally Agree | n/a | n/a | 90% |
| Don't Know | n/a | n/a | 10% |
| Teachers discipline fairly | | | |
| Totally Agree | 10% | n/a | n/a |
| Somewhat Agree | 20% | n/a | n/a |
| Somewhat Disagree | 20% | n/a | n/a |
| Totally Disagree | 50% | n/a | n/a |

Participant Perspectives on Educator Preparedness

There was a division among the educators' perspectives regarding their preparedness to work with students of other races (see Table 8). Half of them affirmed that the school district provided training to prepare them to work with students of other races (20% totally agreed; 30% somewhat agreed), and the other half disagreed to district trainings to support working with students of other races (40% somewhat disagreed; 10% totally disagreed). These educators also disagreed (40% somewhat disagreed; 20% totally disagreed) that they routinely discuss barriers to working with students of other

racers. There were 40% of the educators surveyed who professed to somewhat having routine discussions about racial barriers. In regards to their understanding that their beliefs and values may differ from the students they work with, the survey results indicated 90% of the educators totally agreed that they were aware of their cultural differences. There were 10% of the educators who admitted that they somewhat disagreed that they understood the differences between themselves and the students they serve.

Table 8

Percentage of Educators' Perceived Preparedness to Work with Students of Other Races

| | Educator (n = 10) |
|---|----------------------|
| <hr/> | |
| District trains staff | |
| Totally Agree | 20% |
| Somewhat Agree | 30% |
| Somewhat Disagree | 40% |
| Totally Disagree | 10% |
| <hr/> | |
| Routine discussions about racial barriers | |
| Somewhat Agree | 40% |
| Somewhat Disagree | 40% |
| Totally Disagree | 20% |
| <hr/> | |
| Understands their values/beliefs differ from students of other races. | |
| Totally Agree | 90% |
| Somewhat Disagree | 10% |
| <hr/> | |

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the role race plays in exclusionary disciplinary practices from the perspectives of African-American students who were suspended, their caregivers, and the educators involved in the discipline process that led to the suspension. The relevance of this information is significant, as numerous studies have consistently shown that it is the African-American student who disproportionately suffers these fates, especially African-American males (Monroe, 2005; Skiba, et al., 2011). Empirical data has linked exclusionary discipline practices to further disengagement from the educational environment, poor academic performance, increased dropout rates, and worse yet, an almost guaranteed spot on the school-to-prison pipeline (Gibson, et al., 2014; Gregory & Mosely, 2004; Gregory, et al., 2013; Jordan & Anil, 2009; Redfield & Nance, 2016; Skiba, et al., 2011; Wallace, et al., 2008). Gaining the perspectives of suspended students, their caregivers, and educators' on the discipline practices within their school could potentially be the impetus needed to ignite school conversations regarding race, racial barriers, cultural competence and awareness, and how to change the unequal discipline methods that have plagued students of color for more than five decades.

African-American males comprised the majority of the disciplined students who participated in this study, which is consistent with much of the literature on school

discipline that reports African-American males as the primary recipient of out-of-school suspensions (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Skiba, et al., 2002). Also consistent with what we see in most educational institutions, students of color make up the majority of the population, yet the educators who serve them are predominately White (Arcia, 2007; Neal, McCray, Webb-Johnson & Bridgest, 2003; Skiba, et al., 2011). The educators who contributed to this study were 80% white compared to 100% African-American student and caregiver participants.

Responses from most of the participants in each surveyed group indicated awareness and understanding of the school's discipline policy; however, there were a few students and caregivers who either did not understand the policy, or had no awareness or understanding of the policy. In addition, a crucial change involving the removal of the 'zero tolerance' policy was completely known among the educators, but largely unknown by the caregivers of the suspended students. Lack of procedural knowledge of school, state, and/or federal policies could potentially place caregivers at a disadvantage when communicating with educators and advocating for their students. Senate bill 100 eliminates the use of discipline policies that require suspension or expulsion in response to certain student behaviors (Illinois General Assembly, 2015), and being armed with this information could assist caregivers in ensuring restorative steps were made in addressing discipline issues prior to the use of exclusionary practices. There were 10% of the educators who disagreed to being aware of the removal of the policy, which further suggests a breakdown in communication within the educational environment. One might

ask, “If there is not awareness and understanding of policies among *all* stakeholders within an educational institution, how can there be equality among *any* of its practices?”

In this study, there was more agreement among students than their caregivers to the fairness of the discipline policy towards African American students in their school. This is interesting given the fact that these same students and caregivers reported African American students being disciplined more *often* and *harsher* than students of other races. Students contradict their perceptions further by more than half of them disagreeing that teachers discipline fairly. More educators concurred with the perception of fairness in the discipline policy than disagreed. This included not providing harsher discipline to African American students and disciplining all students equally, which conflicts with literature on the subject of discipline and African American students. An overwhelming amount of data has been collected and analyzed throughout the years that support the notion that African American students *are* disciplined more often, harsher, and disproportionate to students of other races (Losen, 2013; Skiba, et al., 2011; Wallace, et al., 2008). The CRDC has also collected data on education and civil rights issues for more than 50 years, providing evidence of this idea of more often and harsher punishment of African-American students (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014). In addition to being inconsistent with current literature, there is also a distinct discrepancy between the perceptions of the educators in this school, and the students and caregivers they serve. This disconnect could be attributed to: educators’ denial of implicit bias; educators’ not knowing what they do not know; students’ lack of knowledge and/or understanding of “unspoken” rules and expectations within the educational environment;

and caregivers' previous unpleasant experiences with the school system which causes them to steer clear of school involvement.

Studies have found that subjective categories of student misconduct such as defiance and disrespectful behavior have been the leading cause for suspensions among African American students (Anyon et al., 2014; Skiba et al., 2008). Though the educators in this study named "disrespect" as the most common reason for suspending students, this reason was not in the top three of the offenses committed by the students who were identified and participated in the study. Among the additional 36 students who were invited to participate in this study, merely three of those students were suspended for "defiance/disrespect." The discipline data reviewed for this study indicated "violence without physical injury" as the most common reason for suspension among the survey participants. Previous research emphasizes *subjective* reasons behind most suspensions of African American students; however, this school's data supports incidents directly related to *objective* behaviors as the major reason for the suspensions of the students identified for this study. The reason for this discrepancy is unclear, but perhaps the educators in this study automatically attribute student's misbehavior to "disrespect", and have not realized the *actual* reason they suspend students. This inconsistency could also suggest the necessity for relevant educators to meet, analyze, and discuss discipline data in order to determine behavior trends, and better serve the needs of the students.

When controlling for other factors such as academics, socioeconomic status, and student behaviors as reasons for the high rate of suspensions among African-American people, studies have documented race as the significant contributor to the imbalance,

independent of those elements (Fabelo et al., 2011; Skiba et al., 2002). Previous studies have mentioned racial and cultural differences between students and educators as the driving force behind racial disparities in school discipline practices (Losen, 2013; Skiba et al., 2011; Wallace et al., 2008); and in several other studies, when asked directly most participants affirmed that race plays a role in school discipline (Gibson et al., 2014). These findings are in complete opposition to the perceptions of most of the students and caregivers who completed the survey; over half did not perceive race as an influence in their suspension. These outcomes lead to further investigative questions for students and caregivers: If they do not sense race as a factor in their suspension, they do not perceive the discipline policy to be fair towards African American students, and they do not detect equal treatment towards African American students when compared to students of other races, then what *do* they perceive as the reason for these inequalities?

The students in this survey mostly reported understanding the classroom expectations and consequences of not following through with those expectations. According to the caregiver survey responses, there seems to be good communication between home, and school and parents believe their student trusts their teachers. Caregiver's perception of trusting teachers conflicts with students feeling unequal treatment from their teachers. These contradictions pose additional questions concerning not only the participants' understanding of the survey statements, but the connection between caregivers insight on how their students experience their educational environment. Despite these inconsistencies, caregivers were still able to respond positively to feeling all races and cultures are welcome at their child's school.

The educators who participated in this study considered themselves culturally competent and aware, and mostly professed to their fairness in the discipline of African American students. More than half of the caregivers' survey agreed to the educators' perception of cultural competence and awareness, though there was not total agreement that teachers discipline fairly from neither the caregivers nor students. Although individually, educators consider themselves culturally competent, there is division among educator responses regarding the level of support from the school district. Although they report having an understanding of the difference in their value system from the students they serve, most of the educator respondents denied receiving training from the district that prepares them to work with students of other races. The issue of race seems to continue as a taboo subject, evidenced by the educators also denying participating in routine discussions surrounding racial barriers. Since the first step in the disciplinary process usually begins in the classroom, teachers would especially benefit from continuing professional development on topics pertaining to race and working with diverse students. Studies have pointed to the importance of educators being aware of how attitude and stereotypes affect their understanding, actions, and decisions made within the educational environment (Rudd, 2014).

Limitations

The main limitation of this study is the sample size, which did not produce enough data to be statistically analyzed or information that could be generalized to other settings, thus threatening the study's external validity. Enrollment for the study was more difficult than expected and the data was obtained from one middle school in a large

Midwest suburban school district, which limits perspectives from other geographical areas. The participants were African-American students and caregivers, limiting the perspective of the school's discipline policy from other racial groups. Uncontrollable external factors such as participants' understanding of the question or their attentiveness during the reading of the question could have impacted the way they responded to the survey items. Since the responses were based on personal perspectives and the questions were not open-ended, there was no way for the researcher to ensure complete comprehension of the survey questions. Lastly, the research instrument was designed by the researcher and not widely tested among various racial groups.

Future Directions

This research gave rise to additional questions regarding the recruitment process of caregivers and educators, which should be considered when making a decision on which research design to utilize in forthcoming research. Given the small population of this study, future studies should be conducted with a much larger sample size for more generalizable results. Perspectives from other racial groups could also be valuable in providing additional evidence for the need of professional development and gauging the perceptions from all stakeholders regarding discipline policies and school climate.

Future research might benefit from employing an in-person, narrative approach when specifically examining the role of race in discipline policy and practice. This might ensure richer data, opportunity for clarification of questions and responses, and the ability to observe the body language of the participants, which might influence further

conversation. In addition, future research might explore why it was easier to obtain survey participation from participants via telephone versus the U.S. mail service.

The information gleaned from this study could influence the creation of educator professional development on the subject of race, implicit bias, and other barriers to White educators working with students of other races. The constructed instrument used in this study could be the beginning of future survey instruments that delve into the specific topic of race and school discipline.

APPENDIX A
STUDENT SURVEY

Student Perspective of Discipline Practices

Please circle one answer for each of the following questions that best describe you:

| <u>Grade</u> | <u>Age</u> | <u>Gender</u> | <u>Number of times suspended during 2015-2016/2016-2017 school years</u> |
|--------------------|----------------|---------------|--|
| a) 7 th | a) 12 | a) Male | a) 1 |
| b) 8 th | b) 13 | b) Female | b) 2 |
| | c) 14 or older | | c) 3 or more |

Using the scale below, please answer the questions that best identifies how strongly you agree or disagree with the statement.

I Don't Know = 0 Totally Disagree = 1 Somewhat Disagree = 2 Somewhat Agree = 3 Totally Agree = 4

| | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I am aware of the school's discipline policy. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 2. I understand the school's discipline policy. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 3. I understand my teachers' expectations in the classroom. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 4. I understand the consequences of breaking classroom rules. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 5. Teachers are fair when it comes to discipline. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 6. African-American students get in more trouble than students of other races. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 7. Teachers discipline students from different races equally. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 8. Teachers treat African-American students the same as students of other races. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 9. African-American students are not disciplined more often than students of other races. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 10. African-American students are not disciplined more harshly than students of other races. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 11. When I was suspended, race did not play a role in why I was suspended. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 12. My school's discipline policy is fair to African-American students. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

APPENDIX B
CAREGIVER SURVEY

Caregiver Perspective of Discipline Practices

Please circle one answer for each of the following questions that best describe you:

| <u>Your child's grade</u> | <u>Your child's grade when suspended</u> | <u>Gender</u> | <u>Race</u> |
|---------------------------|--|---------------|--------------------|
| a) 7 th | a) 6 th | a) Male | a) White |
| b) 8 th | b) 7 th | b) Female | b) Black |
| | c) 8 th | | c) Hispanic |
| | | | d) Other (specify) |
| | | | _____ |

Using the scale below, please answer the questions that best identifies how strongly you agree or disagree with the statement.

I Don't Know = 0 Totally Disagree = 1 Somewhat Disagree = 2 Somewhat Agree = 3 Totally Agree = 4

| | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I have regular communication with my child's teachers. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 2. I am contacted immediately if my child is disruptive in the class. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 3. My child trusts his/her teachers. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 4. Individuals from all races and cultures are welcomed in my child's school. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 5. I am aware of the school's discipline policy. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 6. I understand the school's discipline policy. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 7. The school's discipline policy is fair to African-American students. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 8. African-American students are disciplined the same as students of other races. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 9. My child has input into the decisions made during the discipline process. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 10. Racial bias did not play a role in why my child was suspended. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 11. African-American students are not disciplined more often than students of other races. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 12. African-American students are not disciplined more harshly than students of other races. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 13. The educator involved in my student's suspension is culturally competent. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 14. I am aware of the removal of the "zero tolerance" discipline policy. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

APPENDIX C
EDUCATOR SURVEY

Educator Perspective of Discipline Practices

Please circle one answer for each of the following questions that best describe you:

Grade(s)

- a) 7th
- b) 8th
- c) Multiple

Gender

- a) Male
- b) Female

Race

- a) White
 - b) Black
 - c) Hispanic
 - d) Other (specify)
-

Number of Years Teaching Most Common Reason You Discipline Students

- a) 1-3
- b) 4-6
- c) 7-9
- d) 10 or more

- a) Disrespect
 - b) Disrupting the class
 - c) Fighting
 - d) Weapons/Drugs
 - e) Other (specify)
-

What is your role(s) at this school?

- a) Administrator (principal/assistant principal)
 - b) Teacher
 - c) Dean
 - d) Resource Officer
 - e) Paraprofessional
 - f) Other (specify)
-

Using the scale below, please answer the questions that best identify how strongly you agree or disagree with the statement.

I Don't Know = 0 Totally Disagree = 1 Somewhat Disagree = 2 Somewhat Agree = 3 Totally Agree = 4

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I am aware of the school's discipline policy. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 2. I understand the school's discipline policy. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 3. I think African-American students are disciplined fairly. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 4. I think African-American students are disciplined the same as students of other races. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 5. African-American students are not disciplined more harshly than students of other races. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 6. I think African-American students misbehave the same amount as students of other races. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 7. I discipline African-American students fairly. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 8. I consider myself culturally aware. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

| | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 9. I consider myself culturally competent. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 10. I understand that my values and beliefs might be different from students of other races. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 11. The school and/or district has provided me with training to work with students of other races. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 12. Our staff routinely discusses barriers to working with students from different cultures, races, and backgrounds. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 13. I am aware of the removal of the “zero tolerance” discipline policy. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

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VITA

Tawann J. Jackson was born in Bronx, New York, and also raised in South Carolina and Georgia. She attended Atlanta Metropolitan College where she was a representative of the Social Work committee, studied abroad in West Africa, and received the award for Outstanding Public Speaker. Tawann graduated with honors from Atlanta Metropolitan in 1999, with an Associate of Science degree in Social Work.

Tawann transferred to Georgia State University where she completed her studies with honors in 2001, earning a Bachelor of Science Degree in Social Work. She moved to Chicago, Illinois in 2001 and provided eight years of service to children and families with special needs involved in State foster care, before earning an Education Specialist Degree in School Psychology from The Chicago School of Professional Psychology. While at The Chicago School, Tawann was the class president and delivered the commencement speech at her 2009 graduation.

Tawann has worked as a school psychologist for the past nine years in elementary, middle, and high schools. She is presently a school psychologist in the Valley View School District, in Bolingbrook, Illinois, where she provides services to special education students transitioning from high school to post-secondary education and/or employment. In her first year of service at Valley View, Tawann was recognized by her building principal, and the school board, as a pillar of the district community. Tawann is her building liaison for students who are homeless, hospital/home-bound, and

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