UNDERSTANDING FACTORS, POLICIES AND PRACTICES IN A SOUTH BALTIMORE SCHOOL: A CLOSER LOOK AT THE SUSPENSIONS OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN STUDENTS

EDLD Dissertation

Theodosia M. Edwards

University of Maryland Eastern Shore

Education Leadership Program

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Research Advisory Committee
Dr. Derry Stufft (Chair)
Dr. Doug Dewitt (Committee Member)
Dr. Patricia Jamison (Committee Member)
Dr. Ivan Shibley (Committee Member)

Abstract

This qualitative research study examined the suspensions of African-American students at a south Baltimore k-8 school. The research delved into the perceptions of African-American students, school and district administrators to determine what factors, policies and practices influenced the suspension rates among African-American students who were the minority-majority at the school. It also sought to delineate the implications of reducing suspensions among African-American students, and finally provided recommendations from study participants on how to reduce the suspension rates of African-American students.

Eight African-American students in grades 5-8, two school administrators, and two district administrators participated in the study to share their perspectives and recommendations through surveys, interviews and focus groups. Their perspectives, as well as a review of the out of school suspension data from the Maryland State Department of Education for the school and the district from 2011-2016 pointed to several conclusions.

The researcher concluded that while the suspension rates of students increased at the school and for African-American students between 2012-2014, the trend since 2014 has been a continuing decline in the suspension of all students, and in the suspension of African-American students. The researcher also found that factors such as school and community culture, the lack of student interventions and a coherent restorative practices model, among other factors, have all influenced the suspension rates of African-American students. A focus on providing resources through mental and counseling supports, on-going professional development for staff, students, teachers and community members would help all stakeholders to take ownership of student behaviors, and would help to increase the outcomes of African-American students, while reducing the need for out of school suspensions.

Table of Contents

Chapter 5- DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS and CONCLUSIONS

List of Tables

Chapter 1

Introduction to the study

We've seen time and again that school districts with high out-of-school suspension rates

also tend to have lower-than average graduation rates. We've seen that severe discipline

policies often increase the numbers of suspensions and expulsions without effectively

making schools safer or creating better learning environments. And we've seen that the

impacts of exclusionary policies are not felt equally in every segment of the population –

with students of color and those with disabilities often receiving different and more

severe punishments than their peers. (Holder, 2014, p. 1)

Introduction

It is 8:45 a.m., and already Destiny who is an African-American female student is on her

way to the assistant principal's office to discuss a discipline referral that a teacher submitted the

day before. According to the teacher's referral, Destiny refused to put her cell phone away, and

when the teacher told her that she would be calling home, Destiny cursed at the teacher in front

of the class, walked out of the room, slammed the door so hard that the glass on the door broke.

Destiny is well-known by the assistant principal because Destiny is referred to his office at least

every other week. The seventh-grade student always tries to convince the assistant principal that

she had done nothing wrong. As Mr. Lamar the assistant principal listens to Destiny share her

side of the story, he begins to turn the pages on the student code of conduct handbook. Mr.

Lamar tells Destiny that a call will be placed home to her parents, and that Destiny will receive a

three-day suspension for the infraction because Destiny engaged in a classroom disruption during

the school day and destroyed school property. As Destiny prepares to take her paperwork home

and receive a street pass to use on the bus home, Destiny says to Mr. Lamar: "I don't care

anyway, I'm going home to go hang out with my peeps." Destiny leaves Mr. Lamar's office and takes the bus home, where she will begin to serve a three-day suspension for a classroom disruption.

Background of the Problem

Every day in schools around the country, including schools in Baltimore City, students like Destiny receive out of school suspensions for various infractions. While schools in the district address various student misbehaviors daily, which usually do not result in suspensions, there are however, many others that result in out of school suspensions. In an attempt to develop more proactive, intervention reflective practices, and corrective actions, it is imperative to assess current school policies, practices and factors, and how they intersect with the high rates of suspensions, especially amongst African-American students. According to a study authored by Losen, Hodson and Keith (2015) of the Center for Civil Rights Remedies at UCLA, American students lost almost 18 million days of instruction in the 2011-2012 school year, due to the alarming rates of suspension across the country. In Baltimore alone, schools are faced with a myriad of student infractions: from hall walking, to fighting, gang activity, weapons, drugs, bullying and many others. As a result, many school leaders and teachers have called for more severe disciplinary responses and consequences to these student misbehaviors. On the other hand, there are stakeholders who have indicted the district's disciplinary policy as too harsh because of the high rates of suspensions. These stakeholders have called for other alternatives to suspensions. A 2011 study out of Texas suggested that six in ten students were suspended or expelled at least once between the 7th and 12th grades (Fabelo et al., 2011). Of these six in ten, 31 percent of them received out of school suspensions that averaged at least two days. Fabelo et al. (2011) noted that fifteen percent of the million public secondary school students they followed in

the study were suspended or expelled eleven times or more. They further indicated that half of these students were involved with the juvenile system. The findings indicate that of the fifteen percent who were suspended, only three percent of them were suspended for disciplinary actions that are state law mandated. The suspensions were done mainly at the discretion of school officials. The study concluded that repeated suspensions and expulsions predict poor academic outcomes. Only thirty percent of students disciplined eleven times or more were able to graduate from high school during the study period (Fabelo et al., 2011). With such dismal predictions of the future success of students who receive out of school suspensions, one has to take a systematic and an in-depth look as to the reasons for the increase in suspension rates in the Baltimore City School System, and at a South Baltimore Elementary/Middle School between 2013 -2016. In November 2016, a news article by reporter Erica Green of the Baltimore Sun revealed that suspension rates were on the increase. The newspaper quoted the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Baltimore City Public Schools System (BCPSS), Dr. Sonya Santelises who suggested at the time that the district was investigating what led to the increase under her predecessor (Green, 2016).

Statement of the Problem

A number of research studies suggest that there are significant lifelong consequences that result from school suspensions. Increased suspension rates can lead to an increase in the potential for a student to drop out of school. (Flannery, 2015; Lee, Cornell, Gregory, & Fan, 2011). Students who are suspended from school are more likely to be incarcerated during their lifetime (Fabelo et al., 2011; Flannery, 2015; Losen & Gillespie, 2012). In Baltimore, the city is already dealing with a significant dropout rate (13.2 percent), and students who are repeatedly suspended from school will most likely join the ranks of students who have dropped out

(Baltimore City Schools Office of Achievement and Accountability, 2016). These trends suggest an interrelation with other developments that are ongoing in the district and the wider city. In order to take a deeper look into the reasons for the high suspension rates of students from Baltimore City Schools through the lenses of students at this K-8 school, in a very high crime area, it is necessary to take a look first at who gets suspended. Though Baltimore is a minority-majority city, as indicated by Fabelo et al. (2011), particular subgroups of students are more impacted by out of school suspensions. There are higher rates of suspensions for boys, African Americans and students with disabilities. According to the Baltimore City Schools (2017), 64.7 percent of students are identified as coming from low-income households (based on eligibility for programs including Medicaid, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance- City Schools provides free breakfast and lunch to all students and no longer collects applications for free and reduced-price meals). This means that over two-thirds of students in the city come from a disadvantaged socio-economic background. Fabelo et al., (2011) showed through their studies that African American students were 31 percent more likely to be suspended than their White and Latino peers. The intersection between race, gender, socio-economic levels and learning ability and the high suspension rates amongst groups in Baltimore creates an urgency that requires a full study of the suspension rates, as well as the factors and policies that are enabling this to perversely and negatively impact achievement rates for students at this K-8 school. Students in Baltimore already lag significantly on achievement as compared to their peers in other local education agencies; and stakeholders and observers, we have to ask why the most vulnerable and disadvantaged continue to receive out of school suspensions? There are several economic, academic and societal costs for schools, communities and for the country, when students continue to receive out of school suspensions.

Significance of the Study

In the wake of the 2015 protests and riots that followed the death of Freddie Gray, a City of Baltimore man who died while in police custody, the plight of young people in Baltimore City received tremendous media attention. Several stories were shared in the media about the state of Baltimore, including the state of its schools and its youth. Whenever young people are being discussed in the context of public education in Baltimore City, two issues that always come up include the achievement gap and the suspension rates. In November 2016, a news article by the Baltimore Sun pointed out that suspension rates were on the increase. The Chief Executive Officer of the Baltimore City Public Schools System (BCPSS), Dr. Sonya Santelises suggested at the time that the district was investigating what led to the increase under her predecessor (Green, 2016). One of the topics that almost every educator in Baltimore currently can agree upon is the consensus that more and more students are increasingly displaying behaviors that are not conducive to learning or the learning environment. As a result of disruptions in schools, and anti-social behaviors, they are excluded from their peers and from school. Baltimore school administrators and teachers have expressed through their union representatives that although students' misbehaviors and infractions have increased, school administrators are reluctant to suspend students (O'Brien, 2013; Tooten, 2016). This is not supported by the existing data, which suggested that suspensions had increased between 2013-2016. This contradicts the narrative that some Baltimore school administrators and teachers had expressed through their union representatives that while students' misbehaviors have increased, school administrators were reluctant to suspend students (O'Brien, 2013; Tooten 2016). Behavior management problems continue to rank as one of the top concerns amongst teachers and administrators.

(O'Brien, 2013; Tooten, 2016). Over the past eight years under the Obama administration, school suspensions have been one of the issues at the top of its agenda for education and as a matter of civil rights. In a struggling city like Baltimore, the quality of education that students receive is paramount to their achievement. It is imperative for researchers and the district to look at the factors, policies and practices that are affecting the increase in suspension rates. Suspension rates are one piece of data to look at when evaluating schools, because suspensions have an impact not only in the short-term, but also lifelong consequences on the lives of students. Suspensions from schools tend to be the initial triggers for children and adults who become involved in the justice system. In order to improve the social, economic, safety and educational outcomes of Baltimoreans, there has to be an extensive look at the role that out of school suspensions play in extending the cycle of crime and poverty. While this study focused on identifying the factors for the high suspension rates, it was the goal of the researcher to also identify solutions to reduce the high suspension rates in the district. The recommendations that are included at the end of this research were presented to the school and district leadership.

Purpose of the Study

No published study has been undertaken recently to look at the rising rates of out of school suspensions in Baltimore, including at this South Baltimore school. Many of the previous studies have looked at how Baltimore was able to reduce its suspension rates between years 2007-2013, under the leadership of Dr. Andres Alonso; however, since these studies are previous to 2013, they have not provided stakeholders answers as to why recent suspension rates have increased across the district. As a result, educators, researchers, observers and other stakeholders in and outside of the district have been left with an incomplete picture of the factors that are influencing suspensions. The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify the factors

6

influencing the suspension rates amongst students in a South Baltimore school. The study

encompassed research on the factors, policies, and practices in the school and across the district.

The study included eight African-American students, two school administrators, and two district

officials from the Office of Student Suspensions, who were asked open-ended questions using a

qualitative design that was guided by inquiries into factors, practices and policies. The

recommendations were presented to both the school leaders and district leaders.

Research Questions

The research was to examine the factors, practices and policies in order to understand the

reasons for the increase in suspensions. The existing research suggested that factors such as

race, gender, disability, and economic status may be intersected to suspensions. The purpose of

this study was to answer the following research questions:

1) What are the factors as perceived by African American students, school administrators,
   district officials that are influencing the suspension rates in the South Baltimore school?

2) What are the perceptions of African American students on school policies, practices and
   the high suspension rates in the district, and the out of school suspensions in the South
   Baltimore school?

3) What are the implications of reducing the suspensions rates on African American
   students, school administrators and district officials?

4) What recommendations can be made to reduce the suspension rates of African-American
   students?

Theoretical Framework

Critical race theory (CRT) is a social science theory that was developed by Derrick Bell

that examines how society and culture, intersects with race, law and power. It also explores the

7

notion that White supremacy and racial power are maintained over time, and that the law plays a role in maintaining the status quo. This status quo has an impact throughout society, including how schools are organized and administered, and how students of color are treated in schools. CRT can explain why students of color are more disposed to being suspended from school. There is no difference in the suspension rates amongst students of color who attend predominantly Black inner-city schools, versus students of color who attend predominately White schools (Fabelo et. al., 2011; Losen et al., 2012, 2015; U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, 2014).

CRT helps us explain the fact that in America, almost every action is done and seen through the prism of race. As a result, students as young as those in preschool are being suspended from schools and essentially being criminalized by the predominant White culture. For example, a female Black student will receive a suspension for making a verbal threat such as "I'll get you", while on the other hand, a White student who makes the same threat, may only receive a phone call home or a detention. According to statistics from the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights, in 2014, Black girls were suspended at higher rates (12%) than girls of any other race or ethnicity and most boys. (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, 2014). The most recent survey from the U.S. Department of Education's, Office of Civil Rights (2016) suggested that nationwide,

> Black preschool children are 3.6 times as likely to be suspended as are White preschool students. In kindergarten through the 12th grade, Black students are nearly four times as likely to be suspended as are White students. Black students also are nearly twice as likely to be expelled—removed from school with no services—as are White students. (p. 2)

Research Design

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify the factors, policies and practices that were responsible for the increase in suspensions amongst African-American students at a South Baltimore school. Students, school administrators, and district officials were interviewed and asked open-ended questions using a qualitative design that was guided by inquiries into factors, practices and policies. The research design included the use of a student questionnaire, which was utilized to conduct individual interviews. In addition, individual interviews were held with the two school administrators and two district administrators, who are all African-American. Two focus groups were also held with the students and administrators separately. A review and analysis of district and school-specific suspensions for the years 2013-2017 were also undertaken.

Phenomena to be Studied

This research proposed a study that focused on inquiries on the rising rates of suspensions of African-American student in the BCPSS, and more specifically at a South Baltimore school. The perspectives of African-American students, school and district administrators were sought to research the increase in suspensions of students, and the implication on reducing suspension rates of African-American students on students, school and district administrators.

Participants in the Study

Eight African-American students, two school administrators, and two district officials from the Office of Student Suspension, all African-American, were interviewed and asked open-ended questions on a questionnaire. Individual interviews were conducted with all participants, as well as focus groups were held separately for the students and one for the school and district

administrators respectively. The research utilized a qualitative design that was guided by inquiries into factors, practices and policies.

Data Collection Procedures

Data was collected through various sources: they included a questionnaire which was completed only by the eight student participants; individual interviews of the eight students, two school administrators, and two district administrators were also conducted. In addition, a focus group was held separately for the students and the school and district administrators. In addition to the questionnaire, interviews and focus groups, suspension data from Baltimore City School system, which was provided to the Maryland State Department of Education for years 2013-2017, were reviewed. The intent of the data review was to analyze the overall district suspension rates between years 2013-2017, and the school- Baltimore City School's Office of Achievement and Accountability. Data reviewed from the Maryland State Department of Education reflected the overall district suspension rates between years 2013-2017, and the school-specific suspension rates for students at the South Baltimore school for school years 2013-2017. The data was disaggregated by race. In addition, a review of the district's current policies and procedures on suspensions was undertaken. All collection and use of data, questionnaire, interviews and focus groups utilized within this study were undertaken following the completion of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process to protect the human subjects in the study (Appendix A).

Data Analysis and Interpretations

The data was analyzed based on the information that the participants provided, as well as the data provided by the Maryland State Department of Education, Baltimore City Schools and following the review of literature. The qualitative analysis and interpretations were discussed in themes, by categorizing them according to keywords in context. Key words were identified and

then the literature was searched systematically to find all instances of the words and phrases. They included the following words: suspensions, racism, discrimination, equity, ethnicity, institutionalized racism/discrimination, power, privilege, intersection, intersectionality, social justice and recommendations.

The researcher categorized the data and focused on keywords and key events. The data collected were also triangulated to ensure the validity and reliability of the data and results. To improve the validity and reliability, member-checking was done throughout the individual interviews and with the focus groups. In order to increase the credibility of the responses that study participants provided, the researcher asked the same questions on the individual interviews as well as on the focus group questionnaires. This allowed the researcher to determine if the study participants were consistent in the answers that they provided for the same questions. Triangulation also sought to eliminate bias and increase the truthfulness about the research especially since the theoretical theory focused on the social phenomenon of racism, through the lenses of critical race theory. Creswell and Miller (2000) defined triangulation as: "a validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study" (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 126).

Assumptions

Before the study, the assumption was that because Baltimore City is a minority-majority district, race did not play a big factor in the high suspension rates of African American students. It was assumed that since the two administrators at the school are African-American, then race was not a factor as to why more African Americans were getting suspended from school. The assumption was that all participants were present, honest, and thoughtful in providing accurate data and information during the study.

Limitations of the Study

The study was dependent on the ability of participants (students, administrators, the district official from the Office of Student Suspension), to be familiar with and be aware of the state and trends of suspensions in BCPSS, and at the South Baltimore school. However, participants may have attempted to not admit to the factors that were proposed by the researcher as influencing the suspension rates during the interviews and student- focus groups. Student participants may also not have admitted to the reason for suspensions and whether they may have played a part in terms of their actions before being suspended. Administrators may also not be willing to out rightly state or even recognize any biases they may have as they may feel that admitting to such may mean that they are partly responsible for the increase in suspension rates. The responses were based on answers given to open-ended questions through oral responses.

Delimitations of the Study

This study was limited to one K-8 school in the BCPSS. Even though this school was an African-American majority school, the study was still limited just to this South Baltimore school. As a note, students at this school were residents of neighborhoods primarily on the very impoverished side of Baltimore. Most of these students resided in a neighborhood of Baltimore that struggled with crime, high unemployment, and housing abandonment (Schwartz, 2016). The analysis of data that was obtained and was applied pertained only to the participants in the study. Another delimitation was that the study was limited to the use of CRT to view, discuss and analyze the problem of suspensions.

Definition of Terms

African American: a person of African or Caribbean ancestry who was born and raised in the United States.

BCPSS: Baltimore City Public Schools System.

Black: people of African descent who were born and or raised in or out of the United States.

Individual factors*:* unique characteristics to an individual student (race, disability, gender, economic status).

Minority-majority: a term to describe Baltimore City as jurisdiction with a racial minority majority, as composed to the population make in the country's population.

Out of School Suspension (OSS): removal from the school environment as a punitive consequence.

Restorative practices: a set of tools and strategies that draws on the belief that open, respectful communication helps reduce conflict. If and when conflict does occur, restorative practices encourage students to focus on the harm caused and on ways to repair relationships.

Short-term suspension*:* in BCPSS, it is the removal of a student from school for up to three days, but not more than three days.

Student Code of Conduct: provides rules and regulations to govern student behavior during school, en route to and from school and at school related events. It outlines the attendance policy, appropriate student attire and behavior requirements. It also identifies the actions which interfere with school programs and/ or are prohibited by law.

Student with Disability (SWD): a student who qualifies for special education under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). In Maryland, the disability codes are as follows: (01-Intellectual Disability (formerly known as mental retardation); 02-Hearing Impairment; 03-Deafness; 04-Speech/Language Impairment; 05-Visual

Impairment; 06-Emotional Disturbance; 07-Orthopedic Impairment; 08-Other Health

Impairment; 09-Specific Learning Disability; 10-Multiple Disabilities; 12- Deaf

Blindness; 13 Traumatic Brain Injury; 14-Autism; 15-Developmental Delay)

Zero tolerance policy*: a fixed procedure used by schools and districts to address

undesirable and severe conduct.

Summary

This chapter was organized and presented to lay a foundation for the study. It included

the background to the problem, which is the short and long-term academic, social, economic and

community costs that are associated with the suspensions of African-American students. This

chapter also included a statement of the problem which is the high suspension rates of African

American students at a South Baltimore school. The purpose and significance of the study were

also addressed. The purpose was to undertake research as to the reasons for the increase in

suspensions of African-American students between 2013 and the 2016 school years overall in

Baltimore City Schools. The main significance of this study was not only to identify the causes

of the increase in suspensions, but also to make recommendations to the school and district

leaders on how to reduce suspensions of all students overall, but particularly African-American

students who are the main focus of this study, and because the district is a minority-majority

district. In this chapter, the research questions were also delineated. They sought to determine the

factors for the increase in suspensions, and the implications for African-American students,

school administrators, and district leaders. Additionally, in this chapter, the researcher addressed

how the study and data will be collected, interpreted and discussed. The notes on data analysis

and interpretation included the keywords that will be utilized as part of the thematic data analysis

and interpretation. Finally, the frequently used terms in the study were all defined in order to

provide a context for readers.

CHAPTER 2

Review of Related Literature

"Injustice anywhere threatens justice everywhere" (Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., 1963, p. 1).

Introduction

As a researcher, one is required to undertake a review of literature that covers the full scope of the field (Creswell, 2003, 2013). This literature review provided a theoretical understanding for the research topic and provided readers with an understanding of the research that has already been undertaken. The purpose of this chapter was to describe literature that was relevant to this topic based on previous findings and to further explore this research with previous and current literature. In order to fully review literature related to critical race theory, it was imperative that the search included references prior to 1980. Terms selected for this search included: 1) critical race theory 2) critical race theory and suspensions 3) critical race theory in education 4) suspensions and critical race theory 5) high suspension rates 6) Baltimore City Schools 7) high suspension rates in Baltimore 8) suspensions and bias. Criteria included during the search specifically were that the articles are peer reviewed and provide a full text of the articles. After each search was completed, a total of at least 60 literature articles were identified and printed for use in this review.

In the previous chapter, a foundation was laid for the purpose and significance of the study. It included the background to the problem, a statement of the problem which is the high suspension rates of students in the Baltimore City Schools System, and more specifically the high suspension rates of African-American students in a South Baltimore school and the significance of why it needed to be studied. In order to fully understand the factors behind the increased rates of suspensions in Baltimore of African-American students, and the academic,

economic and social costs involved, one body of theory was used to frame and inform the research. CRT provides a simple argument as to why one minority subgroup continues to receive the highest suspension rates in a minority-majority jurisdiction, even when most the senior leadership of the district are mainly members of this minority subgroup. This includes the district's Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Chief Academic Officer (CAO, Chief of School Support (CSS), Chief Legal Counsel and others.

Race Relations in America

Almost 231 years following the Declaration of Independence, race is still the center of every political, social and economic debate in America. Even after the election of the first Black president in American history, race always creeps up in debates. Race became a central issue before independence was declared in the United States, and continues to today. It is accepted common knowledge that the founding fathers including the country's first president, were slave owners. Even though the Declaration of Independence declared "…that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness…" this did not hold true for the Black residents of the United States who remained non-citizens until years after independence was declared. Even though President Abraham Lincoln issued his Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, slavery did not end until December 6, 1865, when the 13th Amendment to the Constitution was ratified. The United States Census Bureau in a 2015 survey estimated that the Black or African America population in the United States was at 13.3 percent, (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), in 2015, 93 percent of Whites over the age of 25 had a high school diploma, compared to 87.7 percent of Blacks. In addition, 36.2 percent of Whites compared to 22.9 percent had a bachelor's degree (National Center for Education

17

Statistics, 2015). A more recent survey indicated that 75 percent of White Americans do not have Black friends (Cox, Navarro-Rivera, & Jones. 2016).

The point of providing this historical context on race relations was to highlight that even though progress has been made in terms of race relations, the present data on race suggests that we still have a long way to go in order to truly achieve racial integration and harmony. Even with the Civil Rights Act of 1964, racism and discrimination have not ended. The ability to end an ingrained institutionalized and cultural practice such as racism and discrimination takes time and cannot be accomplished through legislation alone. Even with the election of the first Black president in 2008, the 44th President of the United States, Barack Obama's election did not and has not ended racism and discrimination. In fact, one can argue that under his presidency, race relations became much heightened with riots in Fergusson, Baltimore, and in other places. This study did not delve into the reasons for the various race-related developments that took place under President Barack Obama's presidency. As a publication put it: "because he (Barack Obama) was elected the 44th President of the United States, because he was the first person of color,...the media proclaimed that the United States had entered a "postracial" era, leading most people in U.S. society to surmise that racism no longer existed…" (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015, p. 1).

When one reviews the timeline of Blacks in America, one will identify themes that have to do with hundreds of years of slavery, exclusion, hardships and some progress towards equality. There are currently only two known African-American billionaires in the United States of America: they are Oprah Winfrey and Michael Jordan, compared to over 500 White billionaires in the United States (Forbes Online, n. d., n. d. a; Sola & Canal, 2016). This suggests that the legacies of slavery, segregation, racism, and discrimination are still being felt almost 400

years after the first Black slaves were shipped to America. In 1896, in Plessy v. Fergusson, the Supreme Court ruled that states' racial segregation laws for public facilities under the doctrine of separate but equal was constitutional. This doctrine remained in effect until the court's ruling in 1954 in Brown v. Board, when the court opined that state laws which established separate public schools for Black and White students were unconstitutional. This was a major victory towards civil rights and integration (Brown v. Board, 1954; Plessy v. Fergusson, 1896).

The Civil Rights Movement and Education

Author Van Delinder (2016), noted that "the 1940's brought dramatic changes to American society…America's new world dominance after World War II encouraged those in segregated settings to develop their own revolution of raising expectation towards the cultural value of equality…" (p. 99). People of all color have worked and continue to work to remove barriers for people of color and others. However, even in the absence of palpable governmental structural institutional barriers that explicitly restricted Black people and other minorities, the legacies of them still remain (Crowe & Ceresola, 2014; DeFina & Hannon, 2011; O'Connell, 2012; Thompson-Miller, Picca, & Feagin, 2014).

The Equality of Educational Opportunity Report (EEOR) a civil-rights era federal survey commonly known as the Coleman Report, which was commissioned under the 1964 Civil Rights Act, was undertaken to study the state of school inequality across the United States. According to Rivkin (2017), the research sought to answer the following questions: "1) How extensive is racial segregation within U.S. schools? 2) How adversely does segregation affect educational opportunities for Black students?" (p. 26). Coleman et al., (1966), found that race and poverty were two of the biggest predicative indicators of student achievement. They noted that the economic status of the parents, and the lack of integration at the time, were two of the most

19

important factors that affected the achievement of Black students (Coleman et al., 1966). In the last four decades, Congress has enacted a number of civil rights statutes which all came from the efforts of the civil rights movement. It included Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, and national origin (Civil Rights Act, 1964). The efforts of the civil rights movement have certainly helped to bring about profound changes in educational opportunities for all students, and in particular for Black students who can attend their local schools without racial barriers. However, even with the profound changes that have been achieved since 1964, in 2017, the two main factors which Coleman et.al (1966) cited continue to be two of the factors that have been referenced by education observers for the continued achievement gap. Rivkin (2017) suggested that "many White families left city schools for nearby all-White suburban districts when integration plans were put forward" (p. 28). In the 1970s, a case was brought to the United States Supreme Court, which addressed de facto segregation, a phenomenon found in Baltimore city today, with nearly 90% of Black students (Baltimore City Schools Office of Achievement and Accountability, 2017). The Supreme Court in Milliken v. Bradley (1974) found that de facto segregation, made by individual decisions by people to move to their residence of choice does not violate the 11th Amendment which affirms equal protection. As a result of the personal decisions made by individuals as to where they want to live, and the resulting de facto segregation of communities and schools, schools in minority-majority communities such as Baltimore City Schools remain segregated.

In education, schools around the country continue to grapple with the huge achievement gap that exists between Whites and Blacks. Moreover, there is a huge disparity among city schools which are mainly minority populated schools and suburban schools, which though mixed in many areas, continue to be overwhelmingly White. According to Bohrnstedt, Kitmitto, Ogut,

Sherman and Chan (2015), of the National Assessment of Education Progress, "Black students are, on average, in schools that are 48 percent Black, whereas White students are, on average, in schools that are 9 percent Black" (p. 6). The report also found that "Schools in the highest Black student density category are mostly in cities...." (Bohrnstedt, Kitmitto, Ogut, Sherman & Chan, 2015, p. 10) The gains from the civil rights movement before and after Brown v. Board (1954) continues to evolve and impact the state of public education. Currently, due to the huge achievement gap between White and Black students, supporters of public education refer to it as the civil rights issue of our time.

The Achievement Gap Between White and Black Students

Even with the gains that have been made since the civil rights movement, and the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, there is still an achievement gap that exists between Black and White students (Colgren & Sappington, 2015; Suh, Malchow, & Suh, 2014). In Baltimore, even though progress continues, the achievement gap between the district's White and Black students is significant as suggested by results of the High School Assessments (HSA), and the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC). According to Jones (2016), PARCC results from the 2015-2016 school year, showed that 38% of White 7th grade students met or exceeded the math standards, while only 8% of Black 7th grade students met or exceeded the standards. In reading, "…. while we led 52 percent of white 3rd-grade students to meet or exceed English standards, we only led 23 percent of their 3rd-grade African-American counterparts to meet or exceed Maryland English standards" (Jones, 2016, p. 1).

According to Bell (2016), on the Programme for International Students Assessment (PISA), the test that is used to compare the skills and knowledge of 15-year old students around the world, "in the first PISA study in 2000, the U.S. placed 15th in reading, and 19th in math, 14th in science"

(p.8). In 2012, American students ranked "24th in reading, 36th in math and 28th in science" (Bell, 2016, p.8). While this assessment looks at education on a national level, in state educational rankings, Baltimore ranks worse than any other district in the state (Bedrick, 2015; Maryland State Department of Education, 2016a; 2016b; n. d. a).

<p style="text-align:center">Student Achievement in Baltimore City</p>

As of May 2017, 21 of the 24 schools that the Maryland State Department of Education has designated as Priority Schools are in Baltimore City (Maryland State Department of Education, 2016a, 2016b). According to the Maryland State Department of Education (2016a), during the 2015-2016 school year, Maryland identified Title I schools to allow for "specialized attention …. to focus on closing the achievement gaps…" (p. 1). These schools are the lowest performing Title I schools and or had graduation rates below 67%. (Maryland State Department of Education, 2016a). Assessment data from the Maryland State Department of Education, 2016 indicated that of the percentage 12th grade students who passed the High School Assessments (HSA), 85.5% of Whites passed all tests or by the combined score option, while only 60.5% of African-Americans in the 12th grade did so (Maryland State Department of Education, n. d. a, p. 1).

The subject specific data suggested the following achievement gaps between Black and White students on the High School Assessments (HSA): in algebra, 84.2% of White students in the 12th grade passed the exam, while 59.2% of Blacks passed it. In Biology, 62.7% of Black students in the 12th grade passed, while 84.7% of White students passed it. The scores in English and Government mirror the same trend (Maryland State Department of Education, n. d. a, p. 1).

Compared to Montgomery County, one of the most affluent counties in the country, 93.5% of Whites and 88.9% of Black students passed their High School Assessments (Maryland

State Department of Education, n.d.c, p1). In Prince George's County, the most populous and one of the most affluent counties in the country, 75% of African-American students in the 12th grade passed all of their High School Assessments, compared to greater than 95% of White students (Maryland State Department of Education, n. d. c, p. 1; n. d. d, p. 1).

A review of the SAT achievement data for one of the secondary schools within the Baltimore City Public School System, found that the composite mean of its students on the SAT were as follows: 972 in 2014, 955 in 2015 and 927 in 2016 (Maryland State Department of Education, n. d. e, p.1). On the High School Assessments (HSA), only 48.3% of students (all races) passed the tests. When the data was desegregated, it suggested the following achievement rates by race: 41.1% of African-Americans in the 12th grade passed all tests or by the combined score option, compared to 55.6% of Hispanic and 69.9% of White students. On the 11th grade assessments, 36.2% of students passed the test, or by the combined score option; 33.7% of African-American students, compared to 47.4% of Hispanic students, and 27.3% of White students respectively (Maryland State Department of Education, n. d. b, p.1).

A review of the Maryland State Department of Education data for an elementary-middle school in an area with high poverty rates indicates the following on standardizes state assessments. On the Maryland State Assessment for Science Grade 5, only 6.3% of students scored advanced or proficient in 2016. In 2014, 13.6% of students scored advanced or proficient. On the English PARCC no, or fewer than 10 students in Grade 3 scored Level 5 (exceeded expectations) during the 2016-2017 school year. (Maryland State Department of Education, n. d. f, p. 1).

Race Relations in Baltimore Before and After Freddie Gray

The riots in 2015 which followed the death of Freddie Gray were not the first race-related riots in Baltimore City. Currently, Baltimore is one of the most segregated cities in America. According to a 2015 article on race relations in the city, two Baltimore-based reporters noted the following: "Baltimore is a city that has not escaped the legacy of very restricted apartheid-type legacies" (George & Puente, 2015, p. 3). These apartheid-related policies refer from the 1910s through 1950s when home ownership was restricted to African-Americans in certain neighborhoods in the city. Presently, when one tours neighborhoods in Roland Park and Mt. Washington, which are mainly White and affluent areas, and a comparison is done to neighborhoods such as Latrobe Homes and Cherry Hill, one can see the stark contrast of two Baltimore's. According to Crain (1968), with the Brown V. Board ruling in 1954, the desegregation of schools in Baltimore created very overcrowded schools. Due to the overcrowding, schools became zoned schools. This meant that students had to live in a neighborhood in order for them to attend a school. This created a status quo, because White children lived in affluent neighborhoods and attended better schools, while African-America students lived in more disadvantaged neighborhoods and attended the lower performing schools in their neighborhoods. This reality from the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s continues until this day.

The Desegregation of Schools in Baltimore

According to Raymond Wolters (2012), "Due to White flight, racial enrollments in Baltimore went from 63% White and 37% Black in 1954 to 80% Black 30 years later. Some schools became almost all Black, while others remained mostly White" (p. 235). "On Brown's fiftieth anniversary in 2004, the public student body in Baltimore, Maryland was 89% Black" (Katz, 2012, p. 858). Baltimore City was one of the first school systems in the country to enact

legal racial segregation. Almost 65 years after the overturn of legal segregation, Baltimore remained a highly segregated district especially among the neighborhood elementary and middle schools. According to a study by Orfield and Ee of the UCLA Civil Rights Project (2009), found:

> There has been some gradual and modest progress in reducing segregation. The overall share of African American and Latino students who attended intensely segregated schools (90-100% nonwhite schools) and apartheid schools (99-100% nonwhite schools) decreased between 1992 and 2013 but remained very high. (p. 12)

The authors described apartheid schools as schools with less than one percent of White students. (Orfield & Ee, 2017). As a minority-majority district, many of the schools in Baltimore, including the school featured in this study, all have less than one percent of Whites (Baltimore City Schools, 2017). Orfield and Ee (2017) also found that:

> Racially and socioeconomically isolated schools are strongly related to an array of factors that limit educational opportunities and outcomes. In our racially and economically stratified society, nonwhite schools are normally doubly segregated by both race/ethnicity and poverty, and such schools are highly likely to be weaker in the factors most related to educational success and to have the weakest peer groups and classroom competition for students. The factors include less experienced and less qualified teachers, high levels of teacher turnover, less educated peer groups, more untreated serious health problems…
> (p. 16)

The first school in Baltimore that was desegregated was Polytechnic High School in 1952. "By focusing on the "separate but equal" provision of the Fourteenth Amendment, the coalition followed the model that Thurgood Marshall and the NAACP had employed throughout the 1930s and '40s to integrate the University of Maryland's various graduate programs

25

(Maryland Historical Society Library, 2014, p. 1). Thurgood Marshall who grew up in Baltimore and attended the Frederick Douglass High School, a then segregated school for Blacks, became one of the vocal voices for the desegregation of Baltimore Schools (Perlstein, 2004, p. 292).

Currently in Baltimore, students in elementary schools are confined to their neighborhood schools. By the time they get to middle and high school where they can use a choice process to apply for their school of choice, the achievement gap has already widened and as such, many Black and students from other minority backgrounds do not get the opportunity to attend the higher performing high schools in the city. This practice may be one of the reasons as to why the achievement gap in the city continues to widen between Black and White students.

School Discipline Approaches

There are several approaches to discipline. Some are punitive, while the new alternative approaches tend to be more focused on restoration. In March 2017, Fox News and other news outlets reported that a school near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, suspended over 500 students for "accumulating too many absences" (Fox News, 2017). This news was accepted with mixed reactions, with some people applauding the move, while others pointed to it as an example of school officials suspending students for non-violent infractions.

Research around the use of school discipline has identified some of the most frequent infractions that students get disciplined for in schools. (Gion, McIntosh, & Horner, 2014; Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; McIntosh, Frank, & Spaulding, 2010). These studies suggested that more and more students were being disciplined for infractions such as disrespect, disobedience, loudness and aggression, hall walking, and other non-violent infractions. New research shows that Black girls are most likely to receive disciplinary referrals for defiance and fighting (Blake, Butler, Lewis, & Darensbourg, 2011; Cooper, 2015a; Morris, 2016; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, &

Peterson, 2002; Skiba, Peterson, & Williams, 1997). The economic and social costs that are associated with the use of suspensions will be addressed later. In addition to Black girls being one of the highest suspended demographic in schools, studies have shown that students with disabilities are also another demographic of students with one of the highest suspension rates (Dickinson & Miller, 2006; Lee, Cornell, Gregory, & Fan, 2011; Rausch & Skiba, 2006; Skiba & Sprague, 2008). In Baltimore, students with disabilities make up 14.8% of students (Baltimore City Schools, 2017, p.1). Some schools have large percentage of their students who make up this demographic. Some of the schools with high percentages of students with disabilities include Booker T. Washington with 34.1% (Baltimore City Schools, n. d. c, p. 1); Stadium with 21% (Baltimore City Schools, n. d. a, p.1); Renaissance with 28% (Baltimore City Schools, n. d. b, p. 1); while the school featured in this study has a population of students with disabilities at 16.7% respectively Baltimore City Schools, n. d. d, p .1). Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 [IDEA], students with disabilities are given due-process rights than their non-disabled peers. IDEA allows school leaders to discipline students with disabilities in the same manner as their non-disabled peers, as long as their Individual Education Plans (IEPs), and in some cases, their Behavior Intervention Plans (BIPs) are implemented. Schools must also follow the disciplinary requirements of IDEA when students are suspended from school. They are to provide special education services as indicated in the IEP (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004). Students with disabilities within the Baltimore City Public School System are entitled to receive a manifestation determination meeting when their overall suspensions within the year exceeds more than ten days. The meeting is to determine whether the student's behavior was as a direct result of the student's disability. Additionally, students with disabilities

within the Baltimore City Public School System are entitled to attend an Alternative Education

Setting (AES) if and when an out of school suspension exceeds 10 days and goes up to 45 days.

New Approaches to Discipline

In the recent past, schools are now moving on to new disciplinary approaches that focus

less on punishment and more on restoration. These include the use of positive behavior

approaches such as Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS), which is mainly utilized in

elementary and middle schools, including schools in Baltimore. Many of the high schools are

now moving towards the use of justice/practices, as well as a focus on the whole child through

the provision of a continuum of services, including mental, physical wellness, as social services

for students within their school buildings and in the community. There is increasing research to

suggest that restorative practices are an effective intervention for decreasing disciplinary

infractions and out of school suspensions (Martin, 2015; Mirsky, 2007; Rundell, 2007; Wilson,

2014).

According to Mirsky (2007),

> …Instead of zero tolerance and authoritarian punishment, restorative practices place
>
> responsibility on the students, using a collaborative response to wrongdoing. Students are
>
> encouraged to both give and ask for support and are responsible for helping to address
>
> behavior in other students. This fosters a strong sense of community as well as a strong
>
> sense of safety… (p. 6)

In addition to the use of restorative practices, researchers have found that schools with

sustainable Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS) models are reporting a decrease in

the use of referrals, as well as out of school suspensions, and increase a culture of success

(Ashley, 2016; McRae, 2016; Mergler, Vargas & Caldwell, 2014).

Finally, "since current disciplinary measures used to combat student misbehavior are at odds with the goal of nurturing noncognitive skills" (García & Weiss, 2016, p. 10), there is a renewed focus on the whole child and efforts to provide more opportunities for professional development. More districts and schools are focusing on finding alternative ways to reduce disciplinary referrals and the use of out of school suspensions (García & Weiss, 2016; Yoder, 2015). Yoder (2015) described the whole child approach as an "integrative approach that includes…school climate and alternative suspensions, and also aims to prevent other problems (e.g. drugs and alcohol use, pregnancy and violence)" (p. 8).

Suspensions of African-American Students

Frequently, people inside and outside of education say that out of school suspensions reflects to the lack of personal responsibility of students. While not negating the importance of personal responsibility, a look at the other factors that may be influencing the suspension rates of African-American students must be undertaken. As the suspensions of students become a critical part of the debate on educational opportunities, access, equity and student achievement, researchers are beginning to create recommendations on how to improve opportunities for them in order to increase their outcomes. Critical Race Theory (CRT) provides a theoretical framework with which to view the increased suspensions of African-American students in South Baltimore, and with which to come up with recommendations on reducing suspensions. One cannot say with authority that suspensions boil down to personal responsibility alone without giving credit to the experiences and perceptions of these students and even their parents, some of whom have experienced racism and discrimination in the legal sector, in employment, school and other areas of their lives. Unlike African-American students, the research suggests that White students were at the lowest risk for suspensions (Noltemeyer, Ward, & McLoughlin, 2015;

Petras, Masyn, Buckley, Ialongo, & Kellam, 2011; Shirley & Cornell, 2012; Skiba, 2014; Skiba et al., 1997; Vincent, Sprague, & Tobin, 2012; Wright, Morgan, Coyne, Beaver, & Barnes, 2014). The findings in these studies suggested that there continued to be a systematic bias against African-American students, and that school suspensions significantly and disproportionately affect African-American students. The rest of this chapter attempts to inquire further on how race could be a factor in high suspension rates of African-American students in South Baltimore.

How Schools got to Zero Tolerance Policies

Some educators view zero tolerance policies as a way to treat all offenders equally by reinforcing expectations and consistently enforcing the discipline code, while others view it as a policy that does not take into consideration the needs of students. However, before reviewing the issue of zero tolerance and its impact on out of school suspensions, as well as the quality of education that students, particularly minority students receive overall, the researcher will briefly review how schools ended with zero tolerance policies.

According to Skiba and Knesting (2001) zero tolerance is a discipline approach intended to send the message that certain behaviors (drugs, weapons) will not be tolerated, and that there will be severe sanctions for violating those expectations. A number of researchers have attributed zero tolerance policies to after the passage of the Gun-Free School Act of 1994 (Black, 2004; DeMitchell & Hambacher, 2016; Simson, 2013; Skiba, 2014; Skiba & Knesting, 2001; Skiba et.al., 2011; Skiba & Peterson, 1999). One study that reviewed the attitudes of principals in 306 high schools in Virginia towards zero tolerance, found that their attitudes of are "associated with both the level of suspensions and racial disparity" in high school suspensions. (Heilbrun, Cornell, & Lovegrove, 2015, p. 489) According to Heilbrun, Cornell, and Lovegrove (2015), states

receiving federal funding were required under the 1994 Gun-Free Schools Act to expel students

for bringing firearms to school. Many states and districts have expanded this to include gangs,

alcohol and drugs (Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2011). Organizations such as

the National Education Association, the American Association of School Administrators, the

National School Boards Association, and the American Academy of Pediatrics all supported the

1994 Gun-Free School Zone Act (Gun-Free School Zone Act, 1994).

The Impact of Zero Tolerance Policies

Several studies have indicated that students who were suspended from school have higher

chances of not being able to graduate from school (Fabelo et al., 2011; Flannery, 2015; Lee et al.,

2011; Losen et al., 2012, 2015). Students may feel disengaged to the point of dropping out of

school. In many instances, students who are suspended from school begin to struggle due to the

academic gaps that are created when they are not in school (Biehl, Celeste, McFarland, Lier, &

Wheeler, 2012; Wald & Losen, 2003). According to a 2009 study of schools in Colorado,

dropouts were approximately two to three times more likely to have been suspended than the

students who graduated (Fabelo et al., 2011; Mac Iver, Balfanz, & Byrnes, 2009). Research has

also established a link between zero tolerance and the increase in out of school suspensions for

students. While these zero tolerance policies were initially adapted to deter gun and gang crimes

from schools, the result was that they were used indiscriminately, and they disproportionally

affected more African-American students than any other subgroup (Black, 2004; Simson, 2013;

Skiba, 2014). Skiba and Peterson (1999) described zero tolerance discipline policies at schools as

a strategy that "…have begun to turn our schools into supplemental law enforcement agencies,

but they have demonstrated little return despite a decade of hype" (p. 10). In Baltimore City,

following the protests that followed the death in police custody of Freddie Gray, one of the

principals of one of its largest high schools, who later was appointed as the Chief of Schools

Support, purportedly sent a scathing email to the district's Ombudsman. The Baltimore Sun

reported that the district official accused the district of using a "soft code of conduct" and

implied that it was responsible for the role that city school students from some of the high

schools played in the riots during the Freddie Gray protests and riots. The official was quoted as

saying that: "…There is a sense of lawlessness in many schools now because principals have

been trained to turn the other cheek and accept any type of crime in our schools…what am I

going to do … is return to zero-tolerance enforcement of my expectations for appropriate

behaviors" (Green, 2015, p. 2). The district essentially returned to zero tolerance between 2015

and the 2016 school year. This will be expounded on later in the subsequent chapters. According

DeMitchell and Hambacher (2016), "after two decades, there is little evidence that demonstrates

zero tolerance policies as an effective approach to making our classrooms, schools and students

safer" (DeMitchell &Hambacher, 2016, p. 3).

Cost of Out-of-School Suspensions

Various studies have identified the many costs of out of school suspensions. Some of

these studies suggested that the following harms can be incurred by both students and schools

when out of school suspensions are used in disproportionate numbers (Balfanz, Byrnes, & Fox,

2015; Fabelo et al., 2011; Flannery, 2015; Lee et al., 2011; Losen et al., 2012, 2015; Simson,

2013). These authors all highlighted the many costs of out of school suspensions. It is not just a

matter of keeping students away from school; out of school suspensions impede learning,

because students are home and are missing instruction. According to a study by the United States

Department of Education (2014), "Students who are suspended or expelled from school may be

unsupervised during daytime hours and cannot benefit from great teaching, positive peer interactions, and adult mentorship offered in class and in school" (p. ii). In most cases, students who have at least one of out of school suspension, continue to receive repeat suspensions. That suggests that out of school suspensions or zero tolerance policies do not deter students from bad behavior. What out of school suspensions essentially create is a lack of trust between the adults and students which can create additional conflict. Anyone who has been in education will tell you about the importance of building trusting relationships with students and supporting their physical and social-emotional wellness. The research presented by these authors also suggested that out of school suspensions criminalizes our youth, thus increasing the school to prison pipeline. This school to prison pipeline not only criminalizes our youth, but also results in economic costs to the community. When students from Baltimore are suspended from school and end up getting caught up in the criminal justice system, the system ends up providing taxpayer dollars to support these youths either in the juvenile justice or adult criminal justice systems. The following researchers (Crockett & Losen, 2017; Rausch & Skiba, 2005; Rumberger & Losen, 2016) have found that when these youths grow up and become perpetually unemployed or underemployed, it creates a strain on the social safety net system, because of the reliance on social services. It also means that these potential taxpayers are discouraged from being able to contribute to society as responsible citizens. Rumberger and Losen (2016) found that out of school suspensions cost the United States "$11B in fiscal impact, and $35.7B in social impact" (p. 19). The grand total economic cost of out of school suspensions amongst 10th graders alone was estimated around $35.7 billion. If suspension rates for 10th graders alone were cut in half: reduced from "16 percent to 8 percent, the country may save up to "$17.87 billion in fiscal and social costs (Rumberger & Losen, 2016, p. 19). In another study of the cost of school

suspensions in California, Belfield (2014a), identified an "…empirical link between the economic burden of dropping out of high school and the effects of suspension practices across California" (p. 4). In a parallel study of the cost of suspensions in Florida, Belfield (2014b), found that schools and districts would

> … reduce their high school suspension rates, which would have an indirect effect on the
>
> dropout rate. For example, if the suspension rate fell by five percentage points (from 27%
>
> to 22%), the number of high school dropouts would fall by 600. This would avert social
>
> losses of $285 million and fiscal losses of $91 million. (p. 2)

While no available research disaggregates the costs of out of school suspensions between students in the general education setting, and those with disabilities, Rumberger and Losen (2016) found that the costs to taxpayers for out of school suspensions is up to $35 billion in lost wages, lost taxes increased crime, higher welfare, and poorer health.

Overview of Suspension data in Maryland and Baltimore City

The public has been able to view snippets of everyday occurrences at high schools in urban schools through videos posted by students on different social media platforms. One video that was widely viewed came from Spring Valley High School in Columbia, S.C. The video showed a White school safety officer flipping a desk to the floor with an African American girl seated in it (Aarthun & Yan, 2015). This video caused outrage amongst many in the Black community. Following the killings of young African-Americans such as Trayvon Martin, Mike Brown, Freddie Gray and others, there has been more of a focus on the plight of young African-American students, and a renewed push to provide interventions to keep them out of the school to prison pipeline, which often starts with out-of-school suspensions. Simson (2013) noted that the increase in the use of out of school suspensions started in the 1970s after the abolishment of

34

corporal punishment in many states. By the late 1980s and early 1990s, schools shifted towards

the use of out of school suspensions (Simson, 2013). For many schools in America currently,

especially urban districts such as Baltimore City School, the data suggested this upward trend.

An assessment of school discipline in Maryland between 2009-2012 by Porowski,

O'Conner, and Passa (2014) found that while the percentage of Maryland students receiving out

of school suspensions or expulsions dropped in 2009 through 2012, they found that Black

students had higher rates of out of school suspensions and expulsions. According to data from a

variety of sources, (Baltimore City Council, 2007; Duncan, 2014; Green, 2016; Webber-Ndour,

2013), around 2003 and 2004, the out of school suspensions of students in Baltimore soared to

26,324 suspensions. During the 2015-2016 school year, the out of school suspensions for the

82,354 student district, hovered around 8443. During the 2014-2015 school year, the district

handed 6760 out of school suspensions to students. Even though these numbers are historically

lower compared to when suspensions rose to 26,324 during the 2003-2004 school year, out of

school suspensions continued to be high, and it affected primarily African-American students

(Baltimore City Council, 2007; Baltimore City Schools, 2013; Duncan, 2014; Green, 2016;

Webber-Ndour, 2013).

According to the Open Society Institute Baltimore (2011), a George Soros funded non-

profit in Baltimore, during the 2009-2010 school year, African-American students accounted for

61.2% of suspensions in the state, even though they made up 37.9% of the population. In

Baltimore City Schools alone, African–Americans who at the time comprised of 87.8% of the

total population, received 95.3% of the out of school suspensions (Open Society Institute, 2011).

Researchers including Simson (2013) found that following the passing of the Gun-Free Schools

Acts of 1994, which "inscribed harsh policies into federal law…most alarmingly, minority

youth, and especially African-American youth, are disproportionately disciplined under this punitive regime and suffer most harshly from its consequences" (p. 509). Even though Baltimore City Schools is a minority-majority district, and the leadership team at the South Baltimore school featured in the study was led by an African-American female, it was easy to recognize how federal and state laws impacted minority students on a daily basis. For example, school disciplinary policies are guided in Maryland by the Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR). Historically, the bureaucrats and politicians who formulate such regulations tend to be White males, who rarely interact with minorities.

Overview of Critical Race Theory

CRT is a social science that examines how society and culture, intersects with race, law and power. "As a theoretical framework, critical race theory examines the "unequal and unjust distribution of power and resources along political, economic, racial, and gendered lines" (Taylor et al., 2009, p. 1). The works of Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman have been attributed to the start of CRT in the 1980s (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004; Delgado, 1989; Hiraldo, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1998). It is traditionally viewed by political philosophers and commentators as a "left wing" philosophy because it emerged from critical legal studies (CLS), which challenged the established legal scholarship of the 1970s and 1980s, which was centered on the notion that the legal system was rational, objective and neutral. Bell and Freeman challenged these assumptions because they essentially served the White elites. In the late 1980's another scholar, Richard Delgado joined Bell and Freeman to become the founders (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Their theory delves into the notion that White supremacy and racial power are maintained over time, and that the law plays a role in maintaining the status quo. This status quo has an impact throughout society, including how schools are organized and administered, and how students of

color are treated in schools. CRT explains why students of color are more disposed to being suspended from school. According to the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, "…Black students are suspended and expelled at a rate three times greater than White students. On average, 5% of White students are suspended, compared to 16% of Black students…" This same report notes that there is a "…disproportionate suspension of girls of color: while boys receive more than two out of three suspensions, Black girls are suspended at higher rates (12%) than girls of any other race or ethnicity and most boys..." (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, 2014, p. 1). Monique Morris (2016), an author of a study on the suspension of Black girls and the co-founder of the National Black Women's Justice Institute made the following findings:

> educational institutions as "structures of dominance" that can either reinforce negative outcomes and ghettoize opportunity or actively disrupt conditions that render black girls vulnerable to criminalization. Black girls are 16 percent of girls in schools, but 42 percent of girls receiving corporal punishment, 42 percent of girls expelled with or without educational services, 45 percent of girls with at least one out-of-school suspension, 31 percent of girls referred to law enforcement, and 34 percent of girls arrested on campus.
>
> (p. 1)

She also found in her research that "Black girls describe being labeled and suspended for being "disruptive" or "defiant" if they ask questions or otherwise engage in activities that adults consider affronts to their authority." (Morris, 2016, p. 1).

Other researchers have also corroborated this trend (Fabelo et. al., 2011; Losen et. al., 2012, 2015, Simson, 2013). As CRT continues to evolve, more and more advocates are beginning to look at fixtures of education such as funding, school climate, pedagogy, curriculum

and instruction and, more through the prism of CRT (Bartlett & Brayboy, 2005; Bell, 1980; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 1998, 2013; Ledesma & Calderon, 2015; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Ledesma and Calderon (2015) confirmed that the "pioneering work of Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) and Solórzano (1998)" introduced the study of CRT into K12 education (p. 206).

There are several scholars who have advocated for the use of CRT from the justice system to education, and have championed its commitment to use social justice to eliminate racism and discrimination (Parker, 2015). Ledesma and Calderon (2015) concluded that CRT in education stands on "firmer footing because it offers practical tools for education practitioners" (p. 207). On the other hand, there are critics of CRT, including Harvard professor, jurist and economist, Judge Richard Posner who dismissed CRT theorists as the "lunatic core of radical legal egalitarianism" (Crenshaw, 2011, p. 131). Posner (1997) also described critical race theorists, as people "who speak for a sliver of the Black intelligentsia and a few university radicals; they do not speak for, or to, an oppressed class of Americans" (p. 97). In addition to Judge Posner, the other leading critics of critical race theory are Darder and Torres (2004). According to Ledesma and Calderon (2015) both social scientists are against the central role of race in CRT because they believe that race has been "… elevated to a theoretical construct, despite the fact that the concept of race itself has remained under-theorized" (Darder & Torres, 2004, p. 99; Ledesma & Calderon, 2015, p. 207) Though CRT has been utilized in law and the social sciences for years, it is now only emerging in the field of education. Several critical race theorists have indicated that it has not yet realized its full scope and potential (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004; Hiraldo, 2010; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, 1998; Ledesma & Calderon, 2015).

The Tenets of Critical Race Theory

CRT suggests the following concepts and ideology: the first tenet is the centrality of race and racism in American society. It declares that racism is a permanent element of American society. According to a number of critical race theorists, racism is endemic and a permanent fixture of the experiences of people of color (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2013; Lynn & Adams, 2002). One of the leading critical race theorists, Gloria Ladson-Billings (1998) described racism as "…so engrained in U.S. society that it seems natural and is often unrecognizable or invisible to most individuals" (p. 7) challenge to dominant ideology. It challenges the notions of neutrality, objectivity, colorblindness and merit in society. In fact, it views colorblindness as one of the reasons for the continued subordination of people of color.

The second tenant of CRT is the centrality of experiential knowledge: it asserts that the experiences and knowledge of people of color is appropriate, legitimate and an essential part to understanding racial inequality. This is a big focus within CRT. Storytelling which enables victims of racism to tell their counter-stories is seen as "a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 32). Even though CRT was developed in the 1970s and took off in the 1980, in the current social media age, more and more victims have been able to use social media platforms to tell their stories, and to rewrite the narrative of racism through counter-stories. It has even been considered as a factor when discussing the increase in racism, or whether social media platforms provide a vehicle for people of color to share their stories, which used to be untold, and hence promoted the perception that race and racism were no longer issues that needed to be discussed during the public policy discourse.

The third tenet is interdisciplinary perspective. CRT challenges the analysis of racism only as history, and instead wants it to be viewed and analyzed in a contemporary and historical context. Interest convergence which is the fourth tenet was presented by the founder of CRT- Derrick Bell. He stated that "interest convergence is grounded on the premise that people of color's interest in achieving racial equality advances only when those interests "converge with the interests of those in power (typically White, heterosexual, Christian, able-bodied males…") (Bell, 1980; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015, p. 9). The fifth and final tenet is the commitment to social justice: a framework that is committed to a social justice agenda to eliminate discrimination. The commitment to social justice is the goal of critical race theorists. Critical race theorists and advocates are committed to the establishment of a just society within the U.S. There is a huge focus on the justice and education systems, even though other sectors are just as important (Bartlett & Brayboy, 2005; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Hiraldo, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1998). For the rest of the study, suspensions of African-American students at the South Baltimore School will be viewed through the lenses of tenets 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 of CRT. CRT helps to explain the fact that in America, almost every action is viewed through the prism of race.

The Centrality of Racism in American Society as it Intersects to Suspensions

Several researchers have found that race is one component that fuels the suspension of African-American students (Kinsler, 2011; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Simson, 2013; Vincent et al., 2012). These researchers all suggested that race continues to be a significant factor in determining inequality in the United States. Race also continues to be a significant factor in determining out of school suspensions and other punitive actions against minority students, especially African-American students. According to Ladson-Billings (1998), Toni Morrison, the

poet laureate and a leading voice on civil rights noted that "race is always present in every social configuring in our lives" (p. 9). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) provided further context as to how race was a factor in the United States:

The first proposition-that race continues to be a significant factor in determining inequality in the United States is easily documented in the statistical and demographic data. Hacker's look at educational and life chances such as high school dropout rates and incarceration rates, echoes earlier statistics. (p. 48)

The intersection of critical race theory and on the suspension of African-American students is predicated on the notion that in American history, including the history of Baltimore, race has played a central role in policies, governance, and in the daily affairs of ordinary citizens. One of the central themes of CRT is the fact that there is a bond between law and racial power (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

CRT argues that though punitive school discipline does not explicitly target African-American students, but due to the centrality that race plays in America, policies such as zero tolerance on gang, guns and other zero-tolerance infractions "serve as a tool that perpetuates, reenacts and polices the boundaries of deeply engrained American racial hierarchies" (Simson, 2013, p. 514) In Baltimore, some of the zero tolerance rules that exist as part of the student code of conduct come directly from the Code of Maryland Regulations commonly called COMAR. Since COMAR is written by the majoritarian White male-dominated political and civil bureaucracy, one could make a connection on how race is a factor in suspensions.

When CRT is utilized to review the predominant curriculum that students are taught, one can see how easy it is for minority students to feel disengaged with the curriculum, because real-world applications do not apply to them and or because the curriculum is culturally irrelevant to

them. Some of these students end up receiving disciplinary referrals and ultimately end up receiving out of school suspensions because they feel bored, do not feel a connection to the curriculum, and may get out of their seats and become disruptive in class. "Critical race theory sees school curricula as a culturally specific artifact designed to maintain a White supremacist "master script" …. (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 18). This master script according to Ladson-Billings meant "stories of African-Americans are muted and erased when they challenge dominant culture authority and power…" (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 18). Take for example, when minority students in Baltimore who may have never been to Europe, have no understanding or interest in what may be referred to as an obsolete language (Elizabethan English), but are required to study Shakespeare, whom they feel no connection to. The only logical conclusion for this is that the White dominant culture even controls curriculum and instruction for all students, including African-American and other students of color. In the same vein, CRT can explain the role of race and racism in instruction and assessment. According to Ladson-Billings, (1998), "CRT suggests that current instructional strategies presume that African-American students are deficient" (p. 19). When the assumption is made that a one-size fits all teaching skills is good for all students, without the regard for racial and cultural experiences, then one needs to look further into whether the lack of higher expectations also impacts the rising rates amongst African-American students in Southeast Baltimore and beyond. Researchers should take a look into whether or not the lack of high expectations and the assumption of criminality that is associated with minorities also help to fuel the increase in suspensions.

The Centrality of Experiential Knowledge

One of the key tenets of CRT is its storytelling component. For students of color, the opportunity to provide their stories is key. At a recent Baltimore City Schools Public Board meeting, the attorney for an African-American transgender student who was suspended following a fight that emanated from an alleged bullying incident from other students, was able to share her client's story. The opportunity to tell one's story helps to provide the validation platform of the experiential knowledge of racism and discrimination that many African-American students have experienced. When the topic of disproportional suspensions amongst African-American students is discussed, stakeholders need to seek the input of these students so that they can share their stories. Ladson-Billings highlights the importance of storytelling because "…it underscores an important point within the critical race theoretical paradigm i.e. race still matters" (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 8). Studies have found that African-American students receive suspensions not only for zero-tolerance infractions, but also for trivial acts such as insubordination, disrespect and others (Open Society Institute Baltimore, 2011; Simson, 2013). In Baltimore for example, prior to the revisions done on the student code of conduct, an analysis conducted by the Open Society Institute (2011) found that many of the out of school suspensions that were given during the 2009-2010 school year were for non-violent offenses. The foundation also found that in the state of Maryland, 41.8% of suspensions were for such non-violent offenses, while in Baltimore, 23% of suspensions were related to these offenses. (Open Society Institute Baltimore, 2011, p. 2) If the students who are caught up in such suspensions share their stories, it is safe to assume that they would provide a different story from what the disciplinary referrals stated. It does not mean that the students lied, or the administrators lied, however, one has to explore whether cultural, environmental and generational differences

play a role in how such offenses are perceived by the adults, and how students view such offenses. Research suggests that African-Americans and other minorities continue to experience racism (George, 2013; Ponds, 2013; Tabron, 2016; Vincent, Tobin, Hawken, & Frank, 2012; Wormeli, 2016). CRT views storytelling as a context for understanding and interpreting racism. "…It brings additional power to the legal discourses of racial justice." Hence, it is imperative to give people of color the opportunity to speak "with experiential knowledge about the fact that our society is deeply structured by racism" (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 13). Finally, CRT theorists believe that storytelling helps to heal the pain of people of color who have experienced racism (Delgado, 1989; Ladson-Billings, 1998). In South Africa, a country that has been celebrated for its integration following the collapse of apartheid, people who suffered under apartheid were provided the opportunity to share their stories with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In Sierra Leone, my country of birth, following its brutal civil war, members of the public were able to share their experiences to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which was modeled on South Africa's. The opportunity for students to share their stories will be one key recommendation which will be explored in the subsequent chapters.

The Interdisciplinary Perspective of Racism in Education

Some CRT theorists and researchers have also found that the public education system's racist beginnings, going back to Plessey v. Fergusson and Brown v. Board of Education, continue to have impacts that reverberates in today's schools (Asmar, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Rosales, 2016; Simson, 2013). While many observers today may say that racism is less pervasive compared to before the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, many studies have shown that African-Americans still feel that racism is just as prevalent as their ancestors

experienced (Chaney & Robertson, 2013; Cooper, 2015; Grosfoguel, Oso, & Christou, 2015; Pew Research Center, 2016; Shelby, 2014).

Also, Baltimore finds itself within the unique state, Maryland, a state that straddled between north and south during slavery and segregation. Since the U.S. Constitution does not explicitly outline education, this has been relegated to states and localities.

Finally, in order to deconstruct the past and present interdisciplinary perspective of critical race theory, then, one has to take an in-depth look at school funding. School funding is one of those issues that have both historical and current implications. According to Ladson-Billings, (1998), "perhaps, no area of schooling underscores inequality and racism better than school funding. CRT argues that inequality in school funding is a function of institutional and structural racism" (p. 20). In 2017, we should look no further than the huge fiscal deficit in Baltimore City Schools. The district currently has a $130 million budget shortfall, the biggest in its history (Prudente & Green, 2017; Santelises, 2017). While Baltimore school officials contend that the deficit is due to an unfair funding formula that fails to take into consideration the small property tax base in the city, compared to other cities and LEAs in the state, the governor accused district officials of waste and not being able to account for millions of dollars (Shen, 2017; Wenger, 2017). CRT helps advocates and theorists to justify their assertions that since the state funds schools through a neutral color-blind standpoint, then districts with large groups of minorities or minority-majority counties will be underfunded because full consideration is not given to other factors i.e. do these districts have the same taxpayer base as other mixed or White majority jurisdictions to support their schools (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

In March 2017, the Maryland Governor, Larry Hogan, suggested that in order to receive additional funding, Baltimore City Schools must submit to a financial control board which would

oversee the financial affairs of the district. (Shen, 2017; Wenger, 2017) The fact is that the state already controls the police, and also transportation in the city, leaves observers to come to their own conclusion about the centrality of race even in current day America. The inequality in school funding creates several implications for district policymakers, students, teachers and all primary stakeholders in the debate.

One Southeast Baltimore school alone lost almost $1.3 million in its initial proposed 2017-2018 school budget that the district offered. This was due to cuts made by the district in its per pupil funding formula, and based on lower enrollment at the school and across the district. There are implications for such a huge budget deficit for schools in Baltimore. It will impact the services and programs that are offered to primarily students from low-income households; it will also affect culture and climate and has the propensity to increase suspensions because the building may lack the staff and programs that contribute to promoting safe school climate and culture.

<div align="center">**Literature on Social Justice**</div>

In a joint letter between The United States Department of Education and the United States Department of Justice (2014), guidance was provided to educators on school discipline that must meet federal laws against discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin. During the Obama administration, school discipline and policy were linked inextricably as matters that involve civil rights and social justice (Duncan 2014; Holder, 2014). More and more education advocates against out of school suspensions have described suspensions as a social justice issue (Heitzeg, 2009; Losen, 2011a, 2011b; Martin, 2015). Social justice is described as "the conditions in society in which all members have the same basic rights, security, opportunities, obligations, social benefits, and the way in which human rights are manifested in

the everyday lives of people at every level of society" (Ingram & Walters, 2007, p. 27). With the

significant past and present role of racism and discrimination in the United States, CRT theorists

(Bell, 1980; Ingram, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), have

emphasized the need for social justice, but have questioned the notion of whether or not the

dominant White culture would be inclined to support social justice. In K-12 education, the tenets

of social justice impacts students, teachers, and even communities. This includes indicators from

curriculum and pedagogy, to the climate and culture of schools.

Byrd (2014) describes social justice is "a moral obligation that reflects the highest

standards by which individuals within organizations should be treated" (p. 520). According to

Alfred and Chlup (2010), social justice required that society confront and expose the

demonstrations of racism, discrimination, bias, prejudice, and other forms of injustice against

historically subjected groups. In order to promote social justice, Byrd (2014) suggested the use

of social justice advocacy, which "refers to organizing efforts by individuals or groups to bring

about change within systems that sustain oppressive conditions" (p. 521).

<div align="center">

The Commitment to Social Justice

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As of February, 2017, the unemployment rate in Baltimore stood at 5.7%, compared to

2.7% in Howard County, and 3.2% in Anne Arundel County (neighboring counties of Baltimore

City) (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017) The percentage of people in the population aged 25

and above without a high school diploma, stood at 24.7%, compared to 12.6% statewide in 2007

(Job Opportunities Task Force, 2008). With these higher numbers in Baltimore City, the

probability of a student becoming disengaged and joining the ranks of being a high school

dropout, may increase following an out of school suspension. As a result, the possibility of these

youths facing the persistent issue of underemployment and unemployment is a realistic

possibility. It is therefore imperative for social justice to be one of the cornerstones, if society wants to change the narrative of racism, inequality and inequity (Belfield & Levin, 2007; Rumberger & Losen, 2016). As stated by Ladson-Billings (1998)

> It is because of the meaning and value imputed to Whiteness that CRT becomes an important intellectual and social tool for deconstruction, reconstruction, and construction: deconstruction of oppressive structures and discourses, reconstruction of human agency, and construction of equitable and socially just relations of power. (p. 9)

The fact that most people can agree that the U.S. still has a race problem, is one step that society can utilize to begin to address some of the problems. When numerous studies suggest that students of color are suspended at disproportionate rates (Black, 2004; Noltemeyer et al., 2015; Petras et. al., 2011; Shirley & Cornell, 2012; Skiba, 2014; Skiba et al., 1997; Vincent et al., 2012; Wright et al., 2014)., it is incumbent on policymakers and school leaders, to find solutions to correct the problem. Numerous CRT theorists and advocates have and continue to call for radical changes to eliminate racism and promote social justice (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Solórzano &Yosso, 2002). As opined by some CRT theorists, Chapman, (2007), Ladson Billings, (2001), Parker & Stovall, (2004), and Sleeter (2016), CRT in K-12 validated that teaching and teacher bias were crucial to student learning. This can be easily confirmed by many students of color, who can share their stories which would highlight that the bias of teachers played a role in the teaching and learning they experienced (Chapman, 2007; Ladson Billings, 2001; Parker & Stovall, 2004; Sleeter, 2016). Simson (2013) suggested that there was a "cultural mismatch" between students and teachers. This mismatch resulted in more racial stereotyping whether conscientiously or unconsciously by teachers and or administrators. This helps to put into perspective why a school district that is a minority-majority district with minority school

leaders, end up suspending more African-American students, just as White administrators in White majority schools and districts do. If studies have revealed such, then it is safe to assume that as humans, the bias of school administrators who typically handle suspensions of students are also crucial to student learning, their experiences in school, and also their outcomes.

CRT Recommendations to Address Suspensions

Critical race theory provides a framework with which to address some of its tenets that intersects with suspensions. The following recommendations are suggested for policymakers and school leaders. The first recommendation was: in order to address institutional bias, schools must be aware through reflection and reflective practices by their staff that while African-Americans may not be targeted as a group, due to racism past and present, they have been the most victimized by school suspension policies especially since the 1980s (Simson, 2013). School leaders must make themselves aware of the biases of public school policies (discipline, fiscal, teaching and learning, curriculum) and more; schools should take the step to offer students restorative methods and keep out of school suspensions as a last resort.

The second recommendation is taker a deeper look at the current "cultural mismatch" (Simson, 2013) between teachers and minority students. Schools of education around the country must make an attempt to diversify their teacher preparation programs not just by the courses and practica that are offered, but also the pool of students they recruit to attend these programs. School districts and schools must also make an effort to recruit qualified candidates from diverse backgrounds. A United States Department of Education survey in 2016 suggested that 80% of student teachers are White, even though White students are less than half of students who attend public schools (U. S. Department of Education, 2016). The majority of students in the Baltimore City Schools System are African-American students who make up 80.6% of the population

49

(Baltimore City Schools, 2017). The South Baltimore K-8 school in this study reported its African-American population during the 2016-2017 school year at 95.3%, while the Hispanic student population was at 1.9%; essentially, the school is a minority-majority school (Baltimore City Schools, 2016). While most lay observers would say that the race of teachers play no role in how they can facilitate the achievement of their students of all races, these CRT theorists, Alemán, (2013), Bartlett and Brayboy, (2005), DeCuir and Dixson, (2004), Delgado and Stefancic, (2017), Ladson-Billings, (1995), (1998), (2013), Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), Ledesma and Calderon, (2015), Lynn and Adams, (2002), McCoy and Rodricks, (2015), Perez Huber (2011), Solórzano (1998), Solórzano and Yosso, (2002), and Tate, (1997) all argued differently. They contended that the public school system was built and functioned on racism and segregation before and after the landmark Brown v. Board (1954) ruling in a variety of ways: from school funding, to human resources, to curriculum and pedagogy, school climate and suspensions, and other various educational opportunities.

Therefore, importance should be paid to who teaches African-American students. It was only after the Brown V. Board ruling in 1954 that public school systems began to make an effort to integrate their schools. Currently, some researchers are beginning to look at the connections and differences that African-American educators make in the lives and in the achievement of African-American students. A 2015 study from the think tank –The Brookings Institute found that a "…student-teacher racial mismatch affects teachers' expectations for students'. ...educational attainment is consistent with existing evidence that indicates student-teacher racial mismatch directly affects student achievement" (Gershenson, 2015; Gershenson, Holt, & Papageorge, 2016; Sleeter, 2016). This mismatch that affects achievement also affects student experiences and outcomes. If teachers do not have high expectations, it is easy to understand

how that can affect the number of referrals that African-American students receive compared to their White peers, and the number of suspensions that these referrals trigger for African-American students, compared to their White peers.   In addition, if the current literature and practices around teaching, learning, and assessments, hold true on how they historically are focused on the White middle class instead of being able to reflect on the racial make-up of the country and of students in public schools, then students and teachers will be able to better understand each other's needs and how to best facilitate teaching and learning, which may help to reduce suspension rates. Finally, CRT researchers and theorists, and other educational equity advocates have called for opportunities for professional development around topics such as teaching and learning, assessments, discipline, racism and discrimination for both new and veteran teachers and administrators. They (Blaisdell, 2005; Kozlowski, 2014; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lynn & Parker, 2006; Picower, 2001; Sleeter, 2016; Ullucci & Battey, 2011) suggested that training and professional development would help to shift the growing trend of out of school suspensions. Mensah (2016), called for safe spaces to be created in teacher and leadership preparation programs so that discussions can take place about race and racism and their effect on the K-12 education system. (Mensah, 2016). This is very imperative especially with the numbers reflected around teacher diversity in public schools. According to a report by the U.S. Department of Education Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development (2016):

> Both quantitative and qualitative studies find that teachers of color can improve the school experiences of all students; further, teachers of color contribute to improved academic outcomes while serving as strong role models for students. One report suggests that, compared with their peers, teachers of color are more likely to:

(1) have higher expectations of students of color (as measured by higher numbers

of referrals to gifted programs);

 (2) confront issues of racism; and

(3) serve as advocates and cultural brokers; and (4) develop more trusting

relationships with students, particularly those with whom they share a cultural

background. (p. 2)

The third recommendation is based on the CRT tenet on the commitment to social justice. Giving students the platform to share their stories of racism, discrimination and bias against them should be prioritized by schools and districts. This outlet will help student feel as if they are being heard, and will help policymakers to make changes that not only protect students and staff, but policies that will provide safe spaces for all students to learn and thrive. The commitment to social justice will also help to begin to correct the legacies of slaver, racism, discrimination and the rippling effects that they continue to have across the public school system, including in the Baltimore City Schools system.

Summary

There is a general consensus form the literature that even though progress has been made over the past 63 years, there are still issues that need to be discussed and addressed transparently in regards to racism, discrimination, bias, and its impacts on various spheres of society, including its impact on K-12 education. In a city like Baltimore, with its minority-majority, the issue of racism and discrimination in its relations to student achievement and suspensions of students intersects with issues such as economics, class, gender, age, and disability status. The literature suggests that while Baltimore was one of the first cities to integrate its schools, it remains one of

the most segregated cities today in America, and one of the cities with the most segregated schools, which in turn has a negative impact on student achievement.

The second piece of literature reviewed was the issue of out of school suspensions. The various searches suggest that Black students are suspended in disproportionate numbers, followed by Black female students, and students with disabilities. The literature also suggested that with the increase in use of zero tolerance policies, suspension rates continue to increase because states and schools continue to extrapolate other offenses as zero tolerance, including drugs and gangs, issues that were not initially included on the 1994 Gun-Free School Zone Act, where zero tolerance policies originated from. The literature overall suggests that zero tolerance has not worked, and has only resulted in more suspensions and expulsions.

Finally, this chapter reviewed literature pertaining to CRT, and the role of CRT in the increase in suspensions of African-American students. Overall, CRT provides a rationale about the increase in suspensions of African-American students. In the context of equity and social justice, policies and practices must be reviewed in order to ensure that African-American students are not being disenfranchised and being pushed out of schools. In order for progress to be made in race relations in America, everyone must be willing to evaluate attitudes, stereotypes and biases. Only then will we be able to promote fairness and equality for all, including for all school-aged children. While there are some valid criticisms of CRT, especially its heavy focus on race, it would be disingenuous of anyone to state that race has not been the central focal point of interactions for Black and other minorities in America. While other factors such as economics, poverty levels, personal responsibility, parental involvement and others play a key role, the literature presented suggested that due to the legacies of slavery and racism, and the experiences of minorities, the intersection between racism and power in America cannot be denied. However,

the issue of school suspension cannot only be looked at through the lenses of racial and other disparities. Rivkin (2017) recommended that research should be undertaken to look at "teacher quality, school leadership, class size and other factors in school quality that is likely to be more important than research on race-specific policies…" (p. 35).

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

A suspension can be life altering. It is the number-one predictor – more than poverty – of whether children will drop out of school, and walk down a road that includes greater likelihood of unemployment, reliance on social-welfare programs, and imprisonment. (Flannery, 2015, p. 42)

Introduction

This research utilized a qualitative study of eight African-American students from a South Baltimore school, in order to examine the factors, policies and practices which influenced suspensions in the school, and also for the overall increased suspensions in the Baltimore City School System between 2012-2016 (BCPSS). It used CRT as a theoretical framework to examine the factors, policies and practices. According to Creswell (2003), "…Qualitative procedures rely on text and image data, have unique steps in data analysis, and draw on diverse strategies of inquiry" (p. 179). By using three data collection designs, a questionnaire, individual interviews, and a student focus group, this study was able to explore why more African-American students are suspended in Baltimore, and particularly at the South Baltimore school. The study encompassed not only the interviews of the eight African-American students, but also interviews of two administrators who work at the school, and two district officials who work to support climate and culture, and to enforce the student code of conduct, including suspension policies. Using the tenets of CRT, the study examined race as a factor in out of school suspension policies and practices. Specifically, the study examined how the history of racism, institutional bias, race neutrality and colorblindness in the school, the district and the community have contributed to the increased suspensions of African-American students at the South

Baltimore school. By examining the stories and perceptions of students, as well as the administrators whose practices enforce the policies, the researcher was able to identify the factors for the increase in the suspensions of these students, and also to make recommendations to decrease the number of suspensions. According to Losen and Gillespie, (2012) during the 2009-2010 school year, over three million students were suspended from United States public schools (Losen et al., 2012). Several studies have shown that the suspension of students can produce several negative life-long impacts and consequences, including increasing the probability of the student to dropout from school, and to be involved with the juvenile justice system, and the adult criminal system (Fabelo et al., 2011; Flannery, 2015; Losen et al., 2012;).

The Use of Qualitative Methods to Study CRT

Due to the high academic, social, economic and other equity-related costs that are associated with suspensions from school, it is critical theory to better understand the factors, policies and practices that promote suspension rates of African-American students. Understanding why African-American students who made up 62.4% of the school's student body, but accounted for almost 97.8% of the out of school suspensions, was critical in order to understand how the practices and policies that were built on the premise of racial superiority of Whites, segregation in the public school systems, institutional bias, race-neutrality and colorblindness have continued to impact students negatively, and how it impacted their achievement levels, and their communities (U.S. Department of Education Civil Rights Data Collection, 2013).

Since CRT focuses on how race intersects with gender, class, sexuality and language, as well as instructional and structural factors that affect the lives of minorities on a daily basis, some CRT theorists have concluded that the traditional methodologies to study research,

including research focused on the use of race, are both "embedded in multiple layers of imperial and colonial practices…" They advocate that grounded theory within a CRT framework has the ability to directly challenge previous scholarship that they feel "distorts and erased the experiences of students of color…" (Malagon, Huber, & Velez, 2009, p. 253-254). If the traditional scientific methodology of research obscures the full experiences and stories of students who have been victims of racism and discrimination, including institutionalized racism and discriminations, then it is imperative that those students' voices and perspectives be heard. It is also paramount to present and analyze the data on suspensions to determine how race factors into the suspension rates of African-American students in the South Baltimore city school. The interviews and focus groups focused on the experiences of eight African-American students and their experiences in the Southeast Baltimore city high school. In addition, the individual interviews of school and district administrators and the focus group with them concentrated on systemic and school suspension policies and practices. The categorizations were as follows: individual factors of students, school and district factors, and community factors. The overall purpose of the data analysis was to make sense about the data from the Baltimore City Public Schools System (BCPSS) on suspensions, from 2013-2017, and also to synthesize information from the questionnaire, individual interviews and focus groups. The qualitative data was evaluated by taking the questions and the participant responses to explain the factors, policies and practices that have resulted in the increase of suspensions for all students at the South Baltimore school. The factors, policies, and practices along with the responses of all participants were synthesized through the theoretical framework of CRT.

Purpose of the Study

No published study has been undertaken recently to look at the recent rising rates of out of school suspensions in Baltimore, including at this South Baltimore school. Many of the previous studies have looked at how Baltimore was able to reduce its suspension rates between years 2007-2013, under the leadership of Dr. Andres Alonso; however, since these studies are previous to 2013, they have not provided stakeholders answers as to why recent suspension rates have increased across the district. As a result, educators, researchers, observers and other stakeholders in and outside of the district have been left with an incomplete picture of the factors that are influencing suspensions. The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify the factors influencing the suspension rates amongst students in a South Baltimore school. The study encompassed research on the factors, policies, and practices in the school and across the district. The study included eight African-American students, two school administrators, and two district officials from the Office of Student Suspensions (one recently retired as of February 2018), who were asked open-ended questions using a qualitative design that were guided by inquiries into factors, practices and policies. The recommendations were presented to both the school leaders and district leaders.

Individual, School, District and Community Factors

The individual, school and community factors focused on various data points that encompass the profile of students: i.e. prior referrals, prior suspensions, socio-economic status, and stories that the students have to share from their perspective. School factors will include the years of experience of the teachers and school administrators which may impact how they handle classroom and school incidents, the district's practices and policies, and the socio-economic status of the communities that they reside in. These individual factors all intersect with all of the

tenets of CRT. There is no doubt that suspensions negatively impact educational and social

outcomes for students and continues to support inequalities in educational outcomes, which

affect other outcomes such as community stability, personal and community economic outcomes.

Therefore, in order to identify the factors, policies and practices for the increase in suspensions at

this Baltimore school, a comprehensive look must be given to indicators that intersect with

suspensions.

The Researcher's Role

According to Creswell (2003), since qualitative research is interpretive research that

involves the researcher to be involved in a "sustained and intensive research experience with

participants…", there are a "range of strategic, ethical, and personal issues" that are inherently

introduced into it (Creswell, 2003, p. 184). As a sixth year employee of the Baltimore City

Schools and as a fourth year assistant principal at a Southeast Baltimore, high school, the

researcher's role is a hybrid of both emic from within the social group and etic, from the

perspective of the observer. Emic in the sense that the issue of out of school suspension is a task

the researcher has to undertake on a monthly basis, if not on a biweekly basis, by virtue of the

researcher's position as an administrator at a school. The researcher also considers her etic role

because as a Black person, not considered as an African-American, because she was born and

raised outside of the U.S. which means that there may not be a full understanding of the scope of

racism that her students, their parents, grandparents and other generations before them have

experienced and continue to in many instances. That unique position has led to the researcher's

interest in researching the increasing rates of suspension. Additionally, because the researcher

views disproportionate suspensions of African-Americans as a social justice issue, the researcher

felt compelled to undertake such a research and to make recommendations to both colleagues

and the senior leadership of the district. Ultimately, the researcher's goal was to contribute to the increase in meaningful student achievement, and to ensure that every child has access to a quality education and to meaningful learning and social experiences in their educational pursuits. As part of the researcher's research work, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) training was undertaken, and an application was submitted to the University of Maryland Eastern Shore, through the Principal Investigator (Institutional Review Board, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2016).

All interviews and the group focus activities were held at the South Baltimore School and at the Baltimore City Schools headquarters at North Ave, in order to provide participants with easy access and because they were familiar with and felt comfortable in these surroundings.

Consent forms were provided to all participants. The consent forms included information regarding the purpose of the study, procedures, risks and benefits, confidentiality, freedom to withdraw and the contact of the Principal Investigator. All participants were informed routinely that they were under no obligation to participate and could withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty. Students ages 10-15 were provided with an assent script which informed them also of their rights and that they were under no obligation to participate in the study. In addition to the consent forms that were presented to the participants, the eight students who participated in the study were advised of the purpose of the purpose of the study, procedures, risks and benefits, confidentiality, freedom to withdraw and the contact of the Principal Investigator. The assent script is in addition to the consent form that all parents were required to sign for their children to participate in the study.

Study Participants

This researcher reached out to a K-8 school that is located in South Baltimore. The researcher

also obtained the various out of school suspensions reports from the Maryland State Department

of Education. Since the study focused on African-American students, which is a minority-

majority district, the participants in the study are all African-American. The eight students

included five females and 3 males. The students were enrolled in grades 5-8. Three of the

participants had received suspensions within the past year or two. One of the eight students was

identified as a student with a disability. The four adult participants in the study included the two

African-American administrators (principal and assistant principal) of the school. Both

administrators have been together as an administrative team at the school for the past five years.

The other two administrators were district officials. One of the district officials had spent 44.5

years within the Baltimore City Schools System. Until February 1st of 2018, this official was the

head of the district Office of Student Suspensions. The other official had spent 24 years as a

district employee. She was appointed as the interim director of the Office of Suspensions on

February 13th 2017, following the retirement of her predecessor. All participants signed a consent

form to participate in the study, and participated within the guidance of the Institutional Review

Board (IRB).

Participants were invited to participate via email solicitation and a flyer at the school.

Participants were not compensated for their participation. The administrators will have the

opportunity to see the final report of the study. The student questionnaire took approximately 30

minutes to complete. The individual face-to-face student interviews took approximately 10

minutes to complete, while the student focus group was approximately 25 minutes long. For the

administrative participants, the face-to face interviews each took approximately 20-25 minutes,

while the focus group lasted between 30-40 minutes. All surveys, interviews and focus groups were conducted and completed at the school in South Baltimore.

Setting

The Baltimore City Schools is a public school system in the state of Maryland. It is the fourth largest Local Education Agency (LEA) in Maryland. As of November 2017, Baltimore City Schools has 80,592 students enrolled in the district. The district had a total of 177 schools, including 75 elementary/middle schools. 80.1% of the district's population is African-American, while 10.4% are Hispanic/Latino; and 8.7% White. According to the district's website, its budget is $1.31 billion (Baltimore City Public Schools, 2017, p1.).

The South Baltimore school where this study was undertaken currently had an enrollment of 317 students during the 2017-2018 school year. 95.3% of students enrolled identified as African-American, compared to 1.9% who identified as Hispanic. 90.1% of the students are low-income and are eligible for Free and Reduced-Priced Meals (FARMS); while 28.3% of the population is identified as Students with Disabilities (SWDs) (Baltimore City Public Schools, 2017, p.2).

Data Collection

Data was obtained from publicly available information on the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) website (Maryland State Department of Education, 2018). The data provided information on school suspensions in Maryland by county and school. This information was disaggregated by the numbers of suspensions and expulsions, as well as the offenses for the suspensions. Additional data on the characteristics of the school were obtained from the Maryland State Report Card and the Baltimore City Schools Office of Accountability and Achievement (Maryland State Department of Education, 2018; Baltimore City Schools Office of Accountability and Achievement, 2018). The data included school enrollment,

attendance rate, percent of classes taught by highly qualified teachers, percent of students with disabilities, assessment data on the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers *(PARCC),* numbers of students who received free and reduced lunches. The data review of out of school suspensions and expulsions was conducted by this researcher. The data review included data for the school district, as well as school specific data for the South Baltimore school. In the Baltimore City Schools System, out of school suspensions can range from one day and up to 45 days. Suspensions that are three days or less are referred to as short term suspensions, while suspensions that are four to ten days long are referred to as long-term suspensions. Suspensions that are 11-45 days long are referred to as a proposed extended suspension, while suspensions that are over 45 days are referred to as expulsions.

The second set of data was collected through students' surveys which were administered as a questionnaire to eight students from the South Baltimore school. The students were in grades 5-8. In addition to the student questionnaires, all eight students were interviewed individually, and participated in a focus group. The discussions in the focus group was recorded and transcribed. In addition to the student survey and questionnaires, the administrative group which included the two African-American school administrators, and the two African-American district administrators from the Office of Suspensions. These administrators participated in individual interviews as well as in a focus group.

Textual Notes

Throughout the findings, in order to increase transparency, the researcher utilized italics when the words were directly quoted from the study participants. The responses to questions on the student questionnaires (Appendix 1), student interviews (Appendix 2), student focus group (Appendix 3), and the administrator interviews and focus group (Appendix 4).

Data Accuracy

The data on out of school suspensions from the Maryland State Department of Education was found in the archives section of the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) website (Maryland State Department of Education, 2012 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017). The data reported on the number of suspensions and expulsions by school and major offense category for the years 2012-2017. Out of school suspensions refers to the removal of students from the school setting. The Baltimore City Schools Office of Suspensions confirmed with this researcher that all suspension data was reported by the district to the Maryland State Department of Education in October of each reporting year (Maryland State Department of Education, 2018; Baltimore City Schools Office of Student Suspensions, 2018). The data from the participants are recorded accurately as provided. The assumption was that all participants were present, honest, and thoughtful in providing accurate data and information during the study.

Data Collection Procedures

Data was collected through various sources: they included a questionnaire which was completed only by the eight African-American students, individual interviews of the students, two school administrators, and two district administrators, as well as two focus groups-one for students and another for the school and district administrators.   The reasons for pursuing these types of data collection methods were as follows:

Questionnaire

In order to triangulate the data, the first data collection was the use of a questionnaire which was sent out to the eight African-American student participants in the study. The use of a questionnaire is convenient and an inexpensive way of gathering information. It was chosen because it helps to reduce the interviewer bias. The respondent can complete the survey on their

own, without the feel of pressure from anyone.   Overall, the questionnaire will be used to gather facts about the feelings, beliefs and experiences of African-American students, with the freedom to express themselves without any influence from the interviewer or other participants. The questionnaire will also reduce any internal or external threats to validity and reliability (Creswell, 2003).

The survey questionnaire was deigned to gather information from students on the following questions:

1) What are the factors as perceived by African American students that are influencing the suspension rates in the South Baltimore school?

2) What are the perceptions of African American students on school policies, practices and the high suspension rates in the district, and the out of school suspensions in the South Baltimore school?

3) What are the implications of reducing the suspensions rates on African American students and the school.

4) What recommendations can be made to reduce the suspension rates of African-American students?

A paper questionnaire (Appendix 1) with 31 multiple choice questions was designed and administered to students. The purpose of this questionnaire was to solicit the opinions and perceptions of students on teaching, learning, school safety, and on suspension policies and practices.

Interviews

The face-to-face interviews consisted of 15 questions for students (Appendix 2) and 14 questions for the school and district administrators (Appendix 4), in order to explore the opinions and perceptions both groups. In addition to the recordings, field notes were taken. The researcher analyzed the interviews to identify trends in the responses of the students and the administrators. In order to accommodate the schedules of all participants, the interviews were interviewed at their convenience. All interviews took place at the South Baltimore school.

The one-on-one interviews were useful because they yielded historical information about the students, and their experiences, which promotes storytelling; one of the tenets of CRT. It also allowed for the control of questioning. On the other hand, some of the reasons why this data collection type was useful were also responsible for some limitations. For example, the researcher's presence during the one-on-one interviews with the students, school and district administrators may have encouraged participants to filter their responses. Qualitative methods, such as interviews, are believed to provide a deeper understanding of social phenomena in the study. According to Creswell, interviews are more useful because it helps participants provide historical information, which was very relevant to the experiential knowledge that they provided for the study (Creswell, 2003).

Focus Groups

Like individual interviews, the single–one-way focus group with the eight African-American students as the primary participants, and another with the school and district-level administrators fostered an interactive information gathering between participants and researcher as well as between the participants. The focus group questions were administered to the student (Appendix 3) and administrator (Appendix 4) participants respectively, on separate days. The

purpose of the focus group was to identify the perceptions of both groups on the suspension rates of the district and the South Baltimore School. Triangulation of the data was also done to eliminate bias and increase the truthfulness about the research especially since the theoretical theory focused on the social phenomenon of racism, through the lenses of critical race theory.

It allowed the participants to discuss their opinions, share ideas, and brainstorm on recommendations to the school and district leadership. The final benefit of the focus group was that participants were able to build upon their answers. In the same vein, some limitations were created by the use of a focus group. The main limitation was the fact that students may not have expressed their honest opinions within the groups due to a variety of reasons, including the fact that they may have felt that others in the group opposed their ideas.

A field test of the questionnaire for students was administered to high school students at a different school. Revisions were made based on the feedback from the field test.

Review of District and School Data

District and school data were collected the data through various sources. Suspension numbers from 2013-2016 were collected from public information provided by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE). The data review encompassed the district's overall suspension rates between years 2012-2017, specific suspensions for the South Baltimore school for between years 2013-2017, and also disaggregated by race. In addition to the data from City Schools, interviews of the eight African-American students were conducted individually. Additionally, the focus groups, with the interview of the two school administrators and two district administrators were utilized.

Some of these students had received prior suspensions while at the school, while others had never been suspended. All students were in grades 5-8. The questionnaires were provided to

students and they were asked to complete the questionnaires (appendix 1) on their own, at their leisure. The interviews (appendix 2) were held for an average of thirty minutes individually at the school. The student focus group (appendix 3) was held for an hour at the school after school hours, while the focus group with the administrators was also held at the school for an hour after school hours. Each student signed an assent script, in addition to the consent forms signed by their parents. In addition to the student participants, the two administrators at the school (one principal and one assistant principal) and two district officials were interviewed individually to get their perspectives on the increase in suspensions of African-American students (appendix 4). All participants were also interviewed so they could provide their input on recommendations which will be presented to the school and the district in order to reduce suspensions for all student subgroups. Finally, data was requested from the Baltimore City Schools Office of Achievement and Accountability for the school in South Baltimore, in order to review the disaggregated data on out of school suspensions from 2013 to 2017, however, the data was not provided. Instead, the data on suspensions were extracted from the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE website).

Review of the District's Student Code of Conduct and Suspension Policies

This researcher also conducted a review of the district's current student code of conduct and the policies that addressed suspensions within the code of conduct. Additionally, the researcher incorporated within the surveys, interviews and focus groups, questions to review with the study participants. Some of the questions focused on the district's current student code of conduct, as well as the policies contained in it to address suspensions.

Data Analysis and Interpretations

The data was analyzed based on the information that the participants provided, as well as the data provided by the Maryland State Department of Education and the review of literature.

The suspension records for the 2012-2017 years of the Baltimore City Public Schools were examined to identify any trends on suspensions. In addition to the trends, an analysis was conducted to determine whether suspension rates increased decreased during 2013-2017 school years. This information was compared to the questionnaire and interview responses collected from the student and administrator participants to contextualize the perceptions of both groups, and to identify recommendation on how to reduce suspensions.

The qualitative analysis and interpretations were discussed in themes, by categorizing them according to keywords in context. The researcher identified the key words and the literature and responses were searched systematically to find all instances of the words and phrases. They included the following words: suspensions, racism, discrimination, equity, ethnicity, institutionalized racism/discrimination, power, privilege, intersection, intersectionality, social justice and recommendations.

The data was categorized and focused on keywords and key events. The data collected were also triangulated in order to ensure the validity and reliability of the data and results. In order to improve the validity and reliability, member-checking was done throughout the individual interviews and the during the student focus group. In order to increase the credibility of the responses that study participants provided, the researcher asked the same questions on the individual interviews as well as on the focus group questionnaires. This allowed the researcher to determine if the study participants were consistent in the answers that they provided for the same questions. Triangulation also sought to eliminate bias and increase the truthfulness about the

69

research especially since the theoretical framework focused on the social phenomenon of racism, through the lenses of critical race theory. Creswell and Miller (2000) defined triangulation as: "a validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study" (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 126).

As stated by Creswell (2003) "Qualitative research is fundamentally interpretive. This means that the researcher makes an interpretation of the data…includes developing a description of an individual or setting, analyzing data for themes or categories, and finally making an interpretation or drawing conclusions about its meaning…" (Creswell, 2003, p. 182). The data was analyzed based on the information that the participants provided, as well the data provided published by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE). The data also discussed the assumptions, limitations and delimitations. The qualitative analysis and interpretations utilized Grounded Theory to generate categories of information in themes; the data analysis focused on keywords and key events which were connected to the specific tenets of CRT that are addressed in the study. Grounded theory was developed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in order to form theory from realistic everyday experiences (Creswell, 2003, p. 191; Locke & Boyle, 2016; Malagon et. al., 2009; Ruppel & Mey, 2015). The reason for using grounded theory is because it allowed the researcher to use an approach that was grounded in the use of data. Malagon, Huber and Velez, three critical race theorists, described the use of grounded theory as a methodology to research CRT as: "… a systematic, yet flexible approach to the development if theories grounded in data rather than deducing testable hypotheses from existing theories" (Malagon et. al., 2009, p. 261).

Assumptions

Before the study, the assumption was that because Baltimore City is a minority-majority district, race did not play a big factor in the high suspension rates of African American students. It was assumed that since both of the administrators at the school are African-American, then race was not a factor as to why more African Americans were getting suspended from school. The assumption was that all participants were present, honest, and thoughtful in providing accurate data and information during the study.

Limitations

The study was dependent on the ability of participants (students, administrators, district official), to be familiar with and be aware of the state and trends of suspensions in BCPSS, and at the South Baltimore school. The fact is that during the interviews and student-focus groups, participants may have attempted to not admit to the factors that were proposed by the researcher as influencing the suspension rates. Student participants may also not have admitted to the reason for suspensions and whether they may have played a part in terms of their actions before being suspended. Administrators may also not be willing to out rightly state any biases they may have as they may feel that admitting to such may mean that they are partly responsible for the increase in suspension rates. The responses were based on answers given to open-ended questions through oral responses.

Delimitations

This study was limited to one K-8 school in the BCPSS. Even though this school was an African-American majority school, the study was still limited just to the South Baltimore school. As a note, students at this school were residents of neighborhoods primarily on the very impoverished side of Baltimore. These students mostly resided in a neighborhood of Baltimore

that struggled with crime, high unemployment, and housing abandonment (Schwartz, 2016). The analysis of data that was obtained and was applied pertained only to the participants in the study. Another delimitation was that the study was limited to the use of CRT to view, discuss and analyze the problem of suspensions.

Definition of Terms

African-American: a person of African or Caribbean ancestry who was born and raised in the United States.

BCPSS: Baltimore City Public Schools System.

Black: people of African descent who were born and or raised in or out of the United States.

Individual factors*:* unique characteristics to an individual student (race, disability, gender, economic status).

Minority-majority: a term to describe Baltimore City as jurisdiction with a racial minority majority, as composed to the population make in the country's population.

Out of School Suspension (OSS): removal from the school environment as a punitive consequence.

Restorative practices: a set of tools and strategies that draws on the belief that open, respectful communication helps reduce conflict. If and when conflict does occur, restorative practices encourage students to focus on the harm caused and on ways to repair relationships.

Short-term suspension*:* in BCPSS, it is the removal of a student from school for up to three days, but not more than three days.

Student Code of Conduct: provides rules and regulations to govern student behavior during school, en route to and from school and at school related events. It outlines the attendance policy, appropriate student attire and behavior requirements. It also identifies the actions which interfere with school programs and/ or are prohibited by law.

Student with Disability (SWD): a student who qualifies for special education under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). In Maryland, the disability codes are as follows: (01-Intellectual Disability (formerly known as mental retardation); 02-Hearing Impairment; 03-Deafness; 04-Speech/Language Impairment; 05-Visual Impairment; 06-Emotional Disturbance; 07-Orthopedic Impairment; 08-Other Health Impairment; 09-Specific Learning Disability; 10-Multiple Disabilities; 12- Deaf Blindness; 13 Traumatic Brain Injury; 14-Autism; 15-Developmental Delay)

Zero tolerance policy*: a fixed procedure used by schools and districts to address undesirable and severe conduct.

Summary

This chapter explained the methodology utilized to conduct the study. It also addressed biases, limitations, delimitations, and the role of the researcher. In addition to the role of the researcher, this chapter discussed the data collection procedures utilized, which included the use of questionnaires, interviews and focus groups. A qualitative methodology that incorporated the use of grounded theory and keywords for thematic coding were used to analyze and interpret the data collected. Grounded theory within a CRT framework was utilized to directly challenge previous scholarship and provide an outlet for study participants to freely express themselves. In addition to the questionnaire, interviews and focus group, data from the Baltimore City Schools on district-wide and school-specific suspensions were analyzed in order to study the practices

and policies that may be responsible for the increase in suspension of African-American students. The interviews and data analysis also allowed this researcher to categorize all data in one of the following categories: individual, school, district or community factors. In chapter three, the researcher the theoretical theory of CRT was reviewed, briefly. Next, the specific methods such as participant selection, data collection and analysis, ethical considerations, and issues of trust, and member-checking were explained. Also addressed in this chapter is the summary of the three research questions, and the methodology to explain the findings, the conclusions, discussions, and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 4

Research Findings

"All of the students in all of our schools deserve all that a high-quality education makes possible—talents that are discovered, doors that open, and lives that change."

Dr. Sonja Brookins Santelises, CEO, Baltimore City Public Schools (City Schools' Blueprint for Success, 2017, p.2).

Findings

In this chapter, the results of the data collected from the research are presented and explained. The study was designed to gain an understanding of the factors, policies, and practices that are related to suspensions of African-American students at a Baltimore City school. There were four goals that guided the data collection process. The first goal was to identify and analyze out-of-school suspension rates and trends in the Baltimore City Public School System (BCPSS) and the South Baltimore K-8 school from 2012-2016. The second goal was to examine the perceptions of African-American students and school and district administrators on the factors that are influencing the suspension rates. The third goal was to identify the implication of reducing suspensions rates on African-American students, who are the minority majority at the school of study and in the Baltimore City Schools system. The fourth goal was to suggest recommendations on how to reduce the suspension rates of African-American students.

Data sources for this study consisted of:

1. A review of the Baltimore City Schools student code of conduct;

2. Official records containing the 2011-2016 out-of-school suspension and expulsion records from the Baltimore City Schools System, including that of the K-8 school in the study;

3. Survey of students in grades 5-8 at the South Baltimore school;

4. Individual interviews of students and school and district administrators, and;

5. Separate focus groups of students and school and district administrators.

Data Collection

As outlined in Chapter 3, the researcher utilized grounded theory to generate categories of information in themes. Grounded theory was developed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss to form theory from realistic everyday experiences (Creswell, 2003, p. 191; Locke & Boyle, 2016; Malagon et. al., 2009; Ruppel & Mey, 2015). In addition, Malagon, Huber, and Velez, three critical race theorists, described the use of grounded theory as a methodology to research CRT as: "… a systematic, yet flexible approach to the development of theories grounded in data rather than deducing testable hypotheses from existing theories" (Malagon et. al., 2009, p. 261). The primary sources of data included eight interviews with: students in grades 5-8 at the South Baltimore school and two of the school's administrators, who were African-American, and the recently retired former head of the Office of Suspensions and the current Interim Director of the Office of School Suspensions in Baltimore who were also African-American. There were also two focus groups (a student group and administrator group). In addition, a review of data was conducted of the suspension data between 2011 and 2017. As discussed in the previous chapter, methodologically, the researcher upheld a commitment to present the authentic perspectives of all study participants regarding the perceptions of study participants on district and school policies, practices, and the suspension rates in the district; as well as at the South Baltimore school.

Data was obtained from publicly available information on the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) website (Maryland State Department of Education, 2018).

The data provided information on school suspensions in Maryland by city and school. This information was disaggregated by the numbers of out-of-school suspensions and expulsions, as well as the offenses for the suspensions. Additional data on the characteristics of the school were obtained from the Maryland State Report Card and the Baltimore City Schools Office of Accountability and Achievement (Baltimore City Schools Office of Accountability and Achievement, 2018; Maryland State Department of Education, 2018). The data included school enrollment, attendance rate, percent of classes taught by highly qualified teachers, percent of students with disabilities, assessment data on the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers *(*PARCC*),* and the number of students who received free and reduced lunches. The data review of out-of-school suspensions and expulsions was conducted by this researcher. The data review included data for the school district, as well as school specific data for the South Baltimore school. In the Baltimore City Schools System, out-of-school suspensions can range from one day to 45 days. Suspensions that are three days or less are referred to as short term suspensions, while suspensions that are four to 10 days long are referred to as long-term suspensions. Suspensions that are 11-45 days long are known as proposed extended suspensions, while suspensions that are over 45 days are referred to as expulsions.

The second set of data was collected through students' surveys, which were administered as a questionnaire to eight students from the South Baltimore school. The students were in grades 5-8. In addition to the student questionnaires, all eight students were interviewed individually and participated in a focus group. The discussions in the focus group was recorded and transcribed. In addition to the student survey and questionnaires, the administrative group included the two African-American school administrators and the two African-American district

administrators from the Office of Suspensions, participated in individual interviews and in a focus group.

Questionnaire, Individual Interviews, and Focus Groups

The questionnaire portion of the research was seven pages in length with 31 questions. Data collected from the questions were automatically tallied for further analysis. The questionnaire consisted of 31 multiple choice and open-ended questions. Demographic questions were asked at the beginning of the questionnaire and individual interview (see Appendix A and Appendix B). The student interviews consisted of 12 questions (see Appendix B), while the student focus group consisted of 12 questions (see Appendix C). Finally, the individual administrator interview and focus group consisted of 14 questions (see Appendix D). The questions in the questionnaire, interviews, and focus groups addressed behaviors and referrals at the school, teaching and learning, the school behavior framework, experiences with the suspension process, opinions on the student code of conduct, school police, guns in schools, and finally, an opportunity for students to provide their input as to why students received suspensions and what actions the district and school could take to reduce suspensions. A total of eight students, all of whom were African-American (three males and five females), participated in the survey. The participants represented grade levels 5th-8th grades. Four students were in the 5th grade, while one of them was in the 7th grade. Three were 8th grade students. Four African-American administrators, one male and three females, participated in the interviews and focus group. The participants were a former Director of the Office of Student Suspension, the Interim Director of the Office of Student Suspension, the school principal, and the school assistant principal. Their years of experience were 45, 24, 21, and 24 years respectively.

Throughout the findings, the researcher utilized italics when the words were directly quoted from the study participants in order to increase transparency. This was done for the responses to questions on the student questionnaires (see Appendix A), student interviews (see Appendix B), student focus group (see Appendix C), and the administrator interviews and focus group (see Appendix D).

Themes

Data collected from the Maryland State Department of Education's suspension data and published data from the Baltimore City School's Office of Achievement and Accountability, the questionnaire, the interviews, and the focus groups, resulted in the identification of three themes related to the school. They were:

- school and community culture,

- student interventions and restorative practices, and

- professional development and resources.

As part of the triangulation of the data, this researcher conducted a review of the student code of conduct and reviewed school and district PARCC data and the interim benchmark iReady assessments. These sources of data provided the three themes which will be discussed in this chapter.

Theme I: School and Community Culture

One of the themes that came up repeatedly had to do with the culture of the school and the community. According to Fullan (2007), school culture can be defined as the "guiding beliefs and values evident in the way a school operates." School culture can be used to encompass all the attitudes, expected behaviors, and values that impact how the school operates. The school

being studied, had (at the time of this study) an emerging culture. However, to fully understand the emerging culture of the school, a review of data pertinent to the district and school was performed in order to fully understand the context of the culture of this school and its community, which came up as a theme during the review and analysis of the data. The review of the district level profile helped to establish and set the stage, providing a perspective regarding the impact of the systemic policies and practices on the suspension of African-American students.

District profile. The findings about the district profile were as follows: Baltimore City was, at the time of this study, the fourth largest local education agency in Maryland, with current enrollment at 80,592. Its population made up 9.80% of student enrollment in the state's public school system, and accounted for 8.3% of all students who are suspended in the state. As of the 2017-2018 school year, Baltimore City Public Schools had 80,292 students enrolled; of whom 42,864 students were in pre-k-grade 5, 16,964 students were in grades 6 to 8, and 20,764 students were in grades 9-12. Also, in 2017-2018, the district reported that there were 49 elementary schools, 75 elementary/middle schools (K-8), 7 middle schools, 14 middle and high schools, and 24 high schools. The district managed 177 schools in total. The demographics of students enrolled in the 2017-2018 school year were as follows: 80.1% African-American; 10.4 % Hispanic/Latino; and, 8.7% White. The district's operating budget for the year was $1.31 billion (Baltimore City Schools, 2017).

School profile. In order to understand the context of the findings that emanated from the data collection process, a review of the school's profile was also conducted. The unnamed school was a K-8 elementary middle school which served approximately 352 students in pre-kindergarten through eighth grade. The school was in a community in the South of Baltimore,

Maryland. The principal and assistant principal had been at the school for five years. Prior to her appointment as principal for the 2013-2014 school year, the current principal served as an assistant principal for more than five years at various district schools. The assistant principal, who handled all disciplinary issues, including suspensions, had been at the school for more than five years. Her parents were leaders in the community for over 40 years. The school had 23 teachers during the 2017-2018 school year. Of them, 17.4% had tenure at Baltimore Schools for 10 years and up, while 30.4% had a tenure of between six to 10 years; 30.4% of the teachers at the school had a tenure at Baltimore City Schools of between three and five years, while 21.7% of its teachers had zero to two years of tenure at Baltimore City Schools.

Over the years, enrollment had steadily declined at the school. In 2015, the school reported its enrollment at 342. In 2016, enrollment increased to 352, and then steadily declined from 321 in 2017, to 317 in 2018. During the 2017-2018 school year, the school reported that 95.3% of students identified as African-American, while 1.9% identified as Hispanic/Latino. The percentage of students identified as students with disabilities was 28.3%, while 71.7% of students were identified as non-students with disabilities. On the socio-economic status of students at the school, 90.1% of students were identified as low income and eligible for Free and Reduced-Priced Meals (FARMs) in 2015, while in 2016, 92.6% of students were identified as low income and eligible for FARMS.

Daily attendance at the school continued to decrease, and the students at risk of chronic absence continued to increase. In 2015, the school boasted a 90.1% attendance rate; however, in 2016 that dropped to 89.8%, and in 2017 there was a further decrease to 88.1%. On the other hand, students at risk of chronic absence (20 days absent or more) increased each year. In 2015,

26.2% of students were chronically absent; in 2016, this number increased to 29.8%; and in

2017, this number increased by more than 10% to 40% of students who were chronically absent.

School culture. Now that a background of the district and specific school data has been

provided on school profile, climate surveys, and on student academic and achievement data, the

focus will be shifted to the triangulation of findings related to school culture. Though student

participants were all African-Americans (the intentional make-up of the study participants by the

researcher) the students all acknowledged that most the students enrolled at the school were

African-American. This data was also supported by the school's enrollment profile which

indicated that 95.3% of students were African-American, while 1.9% identified as

Hispanic/Latino. During the data-gathering activities, students also noted that because Black

students were in the majority, they received more suspensions. They did not believe that Black

students were being specifically targeted for suspensions. On the annual school survey, the

following survey topics were reported in school years, 2015, 2016, and 2017. On the Physical

Security Index, which "…measured the extent to which students and staff feel safe in a school

building, parents feel that their child is safe and students fighting and bringing weapons to school

is not a problem" (Baltimore City Schools, 2018). Students and staff reported the following

respectively: in 2015 63.9%, 61.0%, and 58.7% of students, staff, and parents reported that they

felt physically safe at this K-8 school. The survey also measured the Respectful Relationships

Index. This measured the extent to which students and staff reported that there were respectful

relationships among students and between students and staff at their school. This index found

that theses respectful relationships continued to increase; from 33.3% in 2015, to 34.7% in 2016,

and to 41.9% in 2017. Finally, the School Connectedness Index "measured the extent to which

students and staff felt that they belonged at the school, that parents felt welcome, that staff and

parents worked closely to meet students' needs, and that the administration was responsive to parent and staff concerns" (Baltimore City Schools, 2018). The following were reported for school years 2015-2017: 75.6%, 68.2%, and 81.7%, respectively, agree with that statement.

School and classroom expectations. The American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force (2006) found that schools with higher rates of school suspensions had lower academic quality, paid less attention to school climate, and received lower ratings on school surveys. During the discussions on school and classroom expectations, five out of eight student respondents (62.5%) shared that they met school behavior expectations; however, they had challenges meeting classroom expectations. Two out of eight (25%) of the students believed that while they met school behavior expectations for the most part, they sometimes had challenges meeting some of the school expectations. One out of eight (12.5%) of students believed that he/she had met school and classroom expectations, but also had challenges meeting some school expectations. These findings corroborated the school's suspension numbers between 2011-2017, which suggested that over two thirds of the students who were suspended in those years were suspended for infractions related to fighting or attacking others, and/or, for classroom disruption and disrespect to staff. These findings suggested that even though the administrative staff publicized their school and behavior frameworks (Garrett & Locke, personal communication, February 15, 2018), the school faced continuing difficulties with students adapting to the frameworks. As part of the discussion on the teaching, learning, and behavior culture at the school, the study participants (mainly the students) discussed how their attitudes and behavior choices impacted the out-of-school suspensions numbers of the school. During the questionnaire and interview portions of the data collection, three out of eight student participants (37.5%) responded that they felt that their behavior choices affected their learning, and the

behavior choices of others affected their learning. When asked to explain, one female student in the 8th grade shared the following: *"If they* (referring to other students) *do something wrong, the teacher will stop"* (Monica, 8th Grade, personal communication, February 14, 2018). A female 5th grade student noted the following: *"If I'm being bad, then others will start"* (Kyelle, 5th Grade, personal communication, February 14, 2018). Finally, Bolder described the impact of the behavior of others on his learning, attitude, and choices: *"When they get loud, I get mad at them"* (Bolder, 5th Grade, personal communication, February 14, 2018).

The school's principal in the focus group shared that the school continued to implement a school-wide behavior framework which was posted in all classrooms because she wanted students to be familiar with the frameworks and wanted teachers to have daily conversations with the students about their school's behavior plan (Locke, 2018, personal communication, February 14, 2018). The two district administrators shared that part of the reason for the high suspension rates at a few of the schools was due to the lack of the implementation of a behavior framework across the school. The interim director noted the following when referring to students: *"You don't do what you don't know"* (Hines, 2018, personal communication, February 15, 2018). In an effort to reduce the suspension rates and the increasing climate and culture issues at the school, the district established a 'culture and climate task force' that was charged with creating recommendations to the chief executive officer, on the implementation on a district-wide climate and culture plan. As part of this plan, all schools were to have a school-wide behavior plan; a school-wide behavior framework that all school-based stakeholders were familiar with.

Academics and achievement. As part of the findings, the researcher reviewed the academics and achievement of the school in order to identify a more holistic trend on findings related to the culture of the school. Most of the students agreed that they did not feel engaged in

the classroom by their teachers. When discussing the culture of teaching and learning at the school, several students mentioned that they felt unengaged in classes. When asked what actions the school should take to promote learning, at least two students suggested the following: *"Get more teachers"* (Kyelle-5th Grade; Aa'niya, 8th Grade, personal communication, February 14, 2018). A 7th grade male student suggested the following in response to a question of how the staff could promote learning at the school: *"Get better teachers"* (Tyrone, 7th Grade, personal communication, February 14, 2018). Another student suggested the use of manipulatives in order to have engaging lessons. Some of her suggestions included the provision of "*manipulatives, aids like guitars, dance classes, etc."* (Deasia, 5th Grade, personal communication, February 14, 2018). Based on some of the comments by the students on the teaching and learning culture at the school, the achievement data from the school was validated, as the test scores suggested that there was a significant academic deficit among the students at the school. Since 86.4% of the students in grade 3-5 only scored on Levels 1 and 2 on the PARCC (below expectations and approaching expectations) for ELA, as did 75% for Levels 1 and 2 in math, it pointed to a lack of student engagement and/or a culture of achievement at the school.

PARCC. In a review of the school's PARCC scores, the researcher found that the assessment which was administered in both math and English language arts to grades 3-8 students at the school resulted in the following achievement scores: in math, 30.7% of students met expectations (Level 1); 44.3% partially met expectations (Level 2); 20.5% approached expectations (Level 3); 4.5% met expectations (Level 4); and, no students exceeded expectations (Level 5). In English language arts, 59.1% of students did not meet expectations (Level 1); 27.3% partially met expectations (Level 2); 11.4% approached expectations (Level 3); 2.3% met expectations (Level 4); and, no students exceeded expectations (Level 5). These results

suggested that while students at the school were performing below levels for math and ELA,

students were performing even lower on the ELA PARCC, when compared to the math results.

Table 1: *2017-School's Grades 3-5 PARCC Results*

Results	Level 1 Not met expectations	Level 2 Partially met expectations	Level 3 Approached expectations	Level 4 Met expectations	Level 5 Exceeded expectations
Math	30.7%	44.3%	20.5%	4.5%	0%
English	59.1%	27.3%	11.4%	2.3%	0%

Baltimore City Public School's Office of Achievement and Accountability, 2017

For the students in grades 6-8 (middle school students), according to the results in math,

44.4% of students met expectations (Level 1); 45.8% partially met expectations (Level 2); 8.3%

approached expectations (Level 3); 1.4% met expectations (Level 4); and no students exceeded

expectations (Level 5). In English language arts, 57.5% of students did not meet expectations

(Level 1); 30.1% partially met expectations (Level 2); 12.3% approached expectations (Level 3);

0% met expectations (Level 4); and no students exceeded expectations (Level 5). Like their

elementary school peers, the results suggested that while students at the school were performing

below levels for math and ELA, students were performing even lower on the ELA PARCC when

compared to the math results. The scores from the school on student performance and

achievement suggested that the school needed extensive help to increase the student achievement

rates on the PARCC.

Table 2: *2017-School's Grades 6-8 PARCC Results*

Results	Level 1 Not met expectations	Level 2 Partially met expectations	Level 3 Approached expectations	Level 4 Met expectations	Level 5 Exceeded expectations
Math	44.4%	45.8%	8.3%	1.4%	0%
English	57.5%	30.1%	12.3%	0%	0%

Baltimore City Public School's Office of Achievement and Accountability, 2017

School iReady Benchmark Assessments. Similar to the PARCC assessments, the school utilized the iReady assessments for math and English language arts as a benchmark to measure student growth. The test was aligned to the Common Core (Curriculum Associates, n. d.). Also similar to the PARCC, the achievement levels were identified from levels 1-5. The results of these assessments during the 2016-2017 school year found that of the 88 students in grades 3-5 who took the ELA assessment, 59.1% of students met expectations (Level 1); 27.3% partially met expectations (Level 2); 11.4% approached expectations (Level 3); 2.3% met expectations (Level 4); and, no students exceeded expectations (Level 5). In math, of the 88 students who were assessed, 30.7% of students did not meet expectations (Level 1); 44.3% partially met expectations (Level 2); 20.5% approached expectations (Level 3); 4.5% met expectations (Level 4); and, no students exceeded expectations (Level 5).

For the students in grades 6-8, on the ELA assessment, of the 73 students who took the assessment, 57.5% of students did not meet expectations (Level 1); 30.1% partially met expectations (Level 2); 12.3% approached expectations (Level 3); no students met expectations (Level 4); and, no students exceeded expectations (Level 5). In math, of the 72 students who were assessed, 44.4% of students did not meet expectations (Level 1); 45.8% partially met expectations (Level 2); 8.3% approached expectations (Level 3); 1.4% met expectations (Level 4); and no student exceeded expectations (Level 5).

The analysis of the results on both the PARCC and the iReady suggested that not only were students not meeting expectations in both subjects, the middle school students performed poorly when compared to students in grades 3-5.

Table 3*: 2016-2017-Grades 3-8 iReady benchmark assessment results PARCC results*

Results	# of Test takers	Level 1 Not met expectations	Level 2 Partially met expectations	Level 3 Approached expectations	Level 4 Met expectations	Level 5 Exceeded expectations
ELA 3-5	88	59.1 %	27.3%	11.4%	2.3%	0%
ELA 6-8	73	57.5%	30.1%	12.3%	0%	0%
math 3-5	88	30.7%	44.3%	20.5%	4.5%	0%
math 6-8	72	44.4%	45.8%	8.3%	1.4%	0%

Baltimore City Public School's Office of Achievement and Accountability, 2017

School safety. The school administrators described the school as a safe environment for all students and staff. However, when the researcher conducted a review of the school's Physical Security Index, from 2015-2017, which "…measured the extent to which students and staff feel safe in a school building, parents feel that their child is safe and students fighting and bringing weapons to school is not a problem" (Baltimore City Schools, 2018), students and staff reported the following respectively: in 2015, 63.9% of students, 61% of staff, and 58.7% of parents reported that they felt physically safe at this K-8 school. The data suggested that the students, parents, and staff felt less physical safety each year from 63.9% in 2015 to 58.7% in 2017 (Baltimore City Schools, 2018). When students were asked about whether they felt physically or emotionally safe at school, all but two of the students responded that they did not feel safe at school.

The role of school police. During the interviews, administration of the questionnaire to students, and in the focus groups, 100% of the study participants expressed their support for school police to be assigned to their school and to all district schools. The administrator respondents, however, emphasized that even though having school police officers at the school

was necessary for safety reasons, the goal of the police officers was to build relationships with the students, parents, and community. One respondent said: *"The role of the school police officers is to support the school's administration, not to run the school. Their goal should be to build relationships with the students and staff"* (Garnett, 2018, personal communication, February 15, 2018). It must be noted however, that that while the school had a school police officer who was assigned to the school until the 2014-2015 school year, the school no longer had a school police officer assigned. The district only assigned school police officers to a handful of high schools in the district, at the time of this study.

As of 2016, Baltimore City Schools police were no longer allowed to carry guns into schools, following a series of high profile school police brutality cases, and following the finding that in Maryland it was illegal for police to carry guns into schools (Green, 2016). While all of the students expressed that they felt safe at the school, they all also supported the presence of police officers to provide a reassurance of safety. *"So we will feel safe"* (Tyrone, 7th Grade; Mario, 5th Grade; Deasia, 5th Grade, personal communication, February 14, 2018). Another concurred with: *"If someone intrudes the school, the school police would protect us, or if a fight breaks out they can break it up"* (Karess, 8th Grade, personal communication, February 15, 2018).

On the question of whether school police officers should be allowed to carry guns into the school and other schools, all four of the school and district administrators agreed, six students also agreed, while two students opposed allowing the carrying of guns by school police into the school and other school buildings. Those in support of guns did so because they felt that providing guns to the police provided an added layer of security; while those who opposed did so on the basis of safety and felt that guns around students was not in the best interest of all.

89

Running in the hallways and fighting. Research regarding the use of school discipline

has identified some of the most frequent infractions that students are disciplined for in schools.

(Gion, McIntosh & Horner, 2014; Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; McIntosh, Frank, & Spaulding,

2010). Studies suggested that more and more students were being disciplined for infractions such

as disrespect, disobedience, loudness, and aggression, hall-walking, and other non-violent

infractions. One subject the students repeated on multiple occasions was their perception that

students ran the halls. The school administrators, on the other hand, did not believe that students

ran in the hallways. However, based on the disaggregation of the out-of-school suspension

numbers by infractions, almost a third of students who received suspensions did so for

disrespect. Since schools were not allowed to suspend students for hall-walking, between 2011

and 2014 when schools were allowed to suspend students for the infraction of disrespect, many

schools justified suspending students for hall- walking as disrespect. The review of the

suspension data, and the opinions shared by students suggested that fighting is a big cultural

issue at the school. While the district's code of conduct did not support it, practices among

school administrators allowed for students to receive out-of- school suspensions for infractions

such as skipping classes and hall-walking. In 2014, schools were no longer allowed to suspend

students for infractions such as hall-walking, skipping classes, or not being in uniform.

According to Monahan, VanDerhei, Bechtold, and Cauffman (2014), students received out-of-

school suspensions for offenses such as hall-walking based on the adoption of zero tolerance

policies that targeted other infractions such as guns and gangs. The authors found that due to the

vigilance of administrators to prevent gangs and other zero tolerance behaviors, administrators

began to suspend for relatively minor incidents like skipping classes. These cyclical behaviors

and infractions had a domino effect that resulted in the higher suspension rates at the school, and

at other schools in the district. In addition to the hall-walking or "running halls" as was described

by a number of the students, fighting was the second most infraction responsible for student

suspensions.

Table 4: *Number of suspensions and expulsions for the South Baltimore K-8, for school years 2012-2017*

Description of data	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017
All	30	67	41	30	28
Male	18	45	28	24	25
Female	12	22	13	6	3
Black or African-American	29	63	40	28	26
Students with disabilities	5	19	21	14	10
Percentage of Black or African-American students	96.6%	94%	97.5%	93.3%	92.85%
Suspensions increase or decrease from previous year	+66.6%	+123.3%	-38.8%	-36.6%	-6.66%
Suspensions change for Black and African-American students	+61%	+117.24%	-57.49%	-42.85	-7.14%

Data reported by the Maryland State Department of Education

The data analysis found that suspensions decreased significantly during 2011-2012, and

while the district's suspension rates decreased significantly during 2012-2013, the South

Baltimore K-8 school saw a 66% increase in the suspensions of students. There was a 61%

increase in the suspensions of African-American students. During the 2013-2014 school year,

there was an increase of suspensions of 123.3% from the previous year. In the previous year,

only 30 students were suspended, while in 2013-2014, 67 students were suspended. During the

2014-2015 school year, there began a reduction trend of suspensions. In the 2015-2016 school

year, while district suspensions increased by 24%, the school's suspension rates decreased by

36%. There was a similar reduction trend in the 2016-2017 school year with a reduction in

suspensions of 6.6% from the previous year.

The data analysis found that the increase and decrease in suspensions of African-American students mirrored that of the percentage changes in the overall suspension of students. For example, during 2011-2012, since there was an increase in the suspension rates at the school, there was a correlation to the suspensions of African-Americans. The school saw a 61% increase in the suspensions of African-American students. In 2013-2014, when the now principal was then a first-year principal at the school, the school saw an increase of 117.24% among African-American students. In 2014, the suspension of African-American students was reduced by 38.8%, a reduction of 36.6% in 2015-2017, and a 6.6% in reduction of suspensions in 2016-2017.

The analysis of the data, from the Maryland State Department of Education, found that most of the students who received suspensions (including African-American students) were suspended for the following behavior infractions: attack, threats, and fighting; while disrespect/insubordination/disruption came a distant second. For example, the data suggested that during the 2012-2013 school year, out of the 30 students who were suspended, 19 of them were suspended for attack/threats or fighting. Of the 29 African-American students who were suspended that year, 18 of them were suspended for attack/threats or fighting. In 2013-2014, the year with the highest suspension rates, and the first year of the current principal, out of the 67 suspensions, 48 of them were for attack, threats, or fighting. Of the 48 students suspended, 47 of those suspended were African-American students who were suspended for attacks, threats, or fighting. In the 2014-2015 school year, of the 40 African American students who were suspended, 21 of the suspensions were for attack, threats, or fighting, while 16 of them were for disrespect, insubordination, or disruption. In the 2015-2016 school year, of the 28 African-American students who received suspensions, 22 were for attack, threats, and fighting. Finally, in

92

the 2016-2017 school year, of the 26 African-American students who received suspensions, 18 students were suspended for attacks, threats, and fighting, while the rest were suspended for disrespect or disruption. As a note, during the 2015-2016 school year, schools were no longer permitted to suspend students for insubordination. The suspension numbers indicated that more boys, especially African-American boys, were suspended in greater numbers for all infractions. Two of the study participants shared that they had received out-of-school suspensions in the current school year for fighting, while others had expressed that they had been suspended for fighting or knew a friend who had received a suspension.

In the 2017-2018 school year, the school was focused on the implementation of Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS), despite the stress of limited resources, in order to celebrate students and encourage students to make better behavior decisions. PBIS models are reporting a decrease in the use of referrals, as well as out-of-school suspensions, and they increase a culture of success (Ashley, 2016; McRae, 2016; Mergler, Vargas, & Caldwell, 2014).

Community culture. Several studies have found that school level factors were associated with an increased risk of suspension. These include school enrollment, attendance, mobility, the numbers of teachers who were highly qualified, the percent of students receiving free and reduced priced meals, the percent of special education students, Title I status, and other data points. Vincent, Sprague, and Tobin (2012) found that students in special education were more likely to be suspended, while Petras et al., (2011), found that the socio-economic status of students affected the suspension rates at schools. Students who attended schools with students from a lower socio-economic status were more likely to be suspended. Sullivan, Klingbeil, and Van Norman (2013), in their study of the socio-demographics and characteristics of students at risk of suspension, found that students who were living in poverty were likely to be suspended.

Hemphill, Plenty, Herrenkohl, Toumbourou, and Catalano (2014), found that students who were living in families that received welfare had a greater risk of being suspended from school. Data from the school's profile suggested that in 2015, 90.1% of students were identified as low income and eligible for (FARMs), while in 2016, 92.6% of students were identified as low income and eligible for FARMS. The poverty rates of students at the school mirror that of this very economically depressed community in South Baltimore. The data supports the findings that economics is one of the factors affecting student suspensions (Hemphill, Plenty, Herrenkohl, Toumbourou, & Catalano, 2014; Sullivan, Klingbeil, & Van Norman, 2013). When the suspension numbers were compared to more affluent schools in the district, the findings by these authors were supported with the increased numbers of suspensions in the less affluent schools when compared to schools in the more affluent areas of Baltimore, such as Roland Park and Mount Washington.

The community and school that was part of this study was in a South Baltimore neighborhood that struggled with crime, housing abandonment, and unemployment. The average home price in this neighborhood was $38,517, (Live Baltimore, n.d.) compared to Maryland's average home price of $273,500 (Zillow, n.d.). The current real estate vacancy rate was 27.1% in 2018, which is higher than that of 92.5% of all neighborhoods in the United States (Neighborhood Scouts, 2018). The community had a yearly income that was lower than 83.4% of all U.S. neighborhoods; while 57.2% of the children in the community lived below the federal poverty line. This was higher than in 94.3% of communities in the United States (Neighborhood Scouts, 2018). When crime data for the southern part of Baltimore in 2017 was reviewed, it showed that as of 3/19/18 there were 3 gun related homicides, down 53% from the same period in 2017; 99 robberies, down 28% for the same period in 2017, 7 larcenies, down 43% from the

94

same time last year, and 29 aggravated assaults, which showed no change from the same time period last year. (Baltimore Police Department, 2018)

When talking about the class and the socio-economic status of the parents of students at the school, one student stated during the individual interview that if the parents of students *"...didn't do good, the students won't do good"* (Karess, 8th Grade, personal communication, February 14, 2018). These perceptions were prevalent among the students and other stakeholders who were more involved in the school community. One African-American student explained that she felt African-American students received more suspensions *"...because they are the main ones who get in trouble"* (Bolder, 5th Grade, personal communication, February 14, 2018). Students also shared that many of their parents did not come to the school to meet the teachers. One of the students shared that her parent had been to the school 4-9 times so far this current school year because *"my brother is always in trouble"* (Kyelle, 5th Grade, personal communication, February 15, 2018). The only other student who had an engaged parent was Bolder, whose mother served as the school's official parent liaison. Because of her job description, she was at the school at least four times a week. The assistant principal at the school shared that the school was engaged in an effort to engage parental participation. This had been a focus of the school's administrative team not just in an effort to support family and community engagement, but to support student behaviors. The administrators met with a team of parents at the school on Mondays to discuss initiatives and to utilize them as ambassadors to reach out to other parents and families in the community.

Collectively the questionnaire, interviews, focus groups, and the data provided by the Maryland State Department of Education on suspensions, as well as the data provided by the Baltimore City Schools Office of Accountability and Achievement led to the belief that the

school and community culture overwhelmingly impacted the behaviors among students at the school, which then in turn impacted the suspension rates at the school. The students especially in their answers led the researcher to identify school and community culture as a theme on the suspensions of students at the school. The theme encompassed issues related to teaching, learning, and social and community constraints within the school and community.

Theme II: Student Interventions and Restorative Practices

During the administration of the questionnaire to students, the interviews and focus groups, as well as in the review of the student code of conduct, this researcher found trends that pointed to student interventions and restorative practices as another theme. The school and the district in their Whole Child initiative were focused on plans to provide student interventions so that out-of-school suspensions would be the last option to address student behavior infractions. In a review of the 2017-2018 student code of conduct, the researcher found that it was focused on approaching discipline more proactively with student interventions and support and the incorporation of restorative practices. It should be noted that the theme of student interventions and restorative practices came up during the interviews and focus group with the school and district administrators, while on the other hand, the students who discussed interventions and restorative practices, approached them as actions they would like to see in their school's approach to reducing student behavior infractions, and ultimately out-of-school suspensions.

Student code of conduct. The first data point that generated the keywords that later became a theme was the 2017-2018 student code of conduct. The student code of conduct was referred to as Board Policy JKA in Baltimore. The code of conduct was driven by the Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR). The Office of Student Suspension was primarily responsible for providing guidance to schools on the implementation of the code of conduct. The goal of the

district's disciplinary responses was to "…focus on promoting positive relationships, intervention strategies, and the use of suspensions and expulsions only as disciplinary measures of last resort…" (Baltimore City Schools 2017-2018, Student Code of Code of Conduct, 2018, p. 2). The district participants, in their articulation of the code of conduct, highlighted that it focused on providing students with interventions to correct behaviors and focused on addressing behaviors, with the end goal of building and promoting positive relationships rather than on punitive responses. The disciplinary responses ranged from Level 1 to Level 5. The interventions for students included the following actions: contact parent, verbal corrections, reminders and redirection, seat change, student and/or parent conference, daily progress sheet, and restorative practices. In the Level 2 disciplinary responses, student interventions include the provision of conflict resolution, mindfulness practices by trained staff, referral to a student support team, referral to afterschool programs. The only level of disciplinary response where student interventions were not necessarily emphasized was for zero tolerance offenses such as weapons, firearms, and explosives. However, to make the determination to provide disciplinary responses for students who were engaged in Level 5 infractions, it required approval of the Office of Student Suspensions. Level 5 disciplinary infractions included long-term or extended suspension, and even permanent expulsion in some cases. During the discussion of the student code of conduct, the majority of the student participants shared that they were not in favor of making changes to the current code of conduct, because they felt the policy focused on providing interventions and restoration, rather than on punishment. The only student who supported the updating of the code of conduct to more stringent disciplinary responses stated that she felt that the current code was too permissive. She declared: *"A lot of the kids don't follow the current rules, it should be stricter. The kids need it"* (Kyelle, 5th Grade, personal communication,

97

February 15, 2018). In the focus group, the school leader articulated that while she was generally in support of the focus on providing more student interventions and support, she lamented the governor's recent signing of the law which prohibited the suspension of students in K-2, except for a handful of issues (2017, HB0425). Since 2007, Baltimore City Schools continued to communicate expectations to all schools that the focus should be on improving processes for student interventions and support, with the utilization of a myriad of strategies. However, the district's code of conduct was one document where the policy of support by the district was underscored.

Student interventions. Another keyword which became a theme that came up during the interviews and focus groups was the lack of use of interventions by the administrators. Student interventions were used to describe responses that the administrators could utilize to correct behaviors and tackle the need for out-of-school suspensions. During a review of the suspension data for the overall district and the school, one of the findings was that the majority of students, including the majority of African-American (over 60%) who received suspensions, were suspended for these two categories of behavior infractions: attack/threats/fighting, and disrespect/insubordination/disruption. For example, the data suggested that during the 2012-2013 school year, out of the 8,653 suspensions, 8,134 were Black or African-American students. Of these suspensions, 4,572 were for attack/threats/fighting, while 2,440 were suspended for disrespect/insubordination/disruption. The analysis found that during the 2012-2013 school year, 7,012 African-American students received out-of-school suspensions and expulsions for fighting, threats, attack, insubordination, and disrespect, out of 8,653 suspensions. This represented 81% of the overall number of suspensions for the school year.

The same trends were found for the school suspension data: 2012-2013 school year, out of the 30 students who were suspended, 19 of them were suspended for attack/threats or fighting. Of the 29 African-American students who were suspended that year, 18 of them were suspended for attack/threats or fighting. In 2013-2014, the year with the highest suspension rates, and the first year of the current principal, out of the 67 suspensions, 48 of them were for attack, threats, or fighting. Of the 48 students, 47 of those suspended were African-American students for attacks, threats, or fighting. In the 2014-2015 school year, of the 40 African-American students who were suspended, 21 of them were for attack, threats, or fighting, while 16 of them were suspended for disrespect, insubordination, or disruption. In the 2015-2016 school year, of the 28 African-American students who received suspensions, 22 were for attack, threats, and fighting. Finally, in 2016-2017 school year, of the 26 African-American students who received suspensions, students were suspended for attack, threats, and fighting, while the rest were suspended for disrespect or disruption. While the school had as Student Support Team (SST) led by the assistant principal, the school administrators did not share their SST process with the researcher. The school also utilized Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS) as a student intervention and a reward system to reduce behavior infractions and celebrate the small behavior wins that many the students make each day by making the right choices.

Restorative practices. Another keyword that came up throughout the student code of conduct review and in the collection of data with the student questionnaire, individual interviews, and focus groups was the concept of restorative practices. Baltimore City Schools, in its 2017 School Blueprint for Success plan, prioritized student wholeness as one of the three key areas to help students reach success. The other two were literacy and staff leadership (Baltimore City Schools Blueprint, 2017). The focus on student wholeness was built on the premise that

99

students are unique, with "talents, challenges, and social, emotional, and physical lives."

(Baltimore City Schools Blueprint, 2017, p.1). The goal was to provide support for students by

building partnerships, emotional, social, and mental supports, and create structures to listen to

student voices. A huge focus of the wholeness initiative was to adopt restorative practices. The

school district had adopted restorative practices as its disciplinary response for almost all levels

of student behavior infractions. While the school had been formally identified as a restorative

practice school, the school thus far had not adopted restorative practices as its official model

during the 2017-2018 school year. The school leaders were working to adopt restorative practice

as the school's specific disciplinary model during the 2018-2019 school year. Research

suggested that restorative practices can be an effective intervention for decreasing disciplinary

infractions and out-of-school suspensions (Martin, 2015; Mirsky, 2007; Rundell, 2007; Wilson,

2014).

According to Mirsky (2007),

> …Instead of zero tolerance and authoritarian punishment, restorative practices place
>
> responsibility on the students, using a collaborative response to wrongdoing. Students are
>
> encouraged to both give and ask for support and are responsible for helping to address
>
> behavior in other students. This fosters a strong sense of community as well as a strong
>
> sense of safety. (p. 6)

Yoder (2015) described the whole child approach as an "integrative approach that

includes…school climate and alternative suspensions, and also aims to prevent other problems

(e.g. drugs and alcohol use, pregnancy and violence)" (p. 8).

All the administrators understood the concept of restorative practices. The two district

officials who took part in the study were part of the team that was spearheading the district's new

focus to becoming a restorative practices district. The current interim director was the first person who mentioned the use of restorative practices, which provided an outlet for *"student voices and for repairing harm"* (Hines, personal communication February 15, 2018). When asked for a description of what a restorative district would look like, the newly retired Director of the Office of Student Suspensions mentioned that, "*It is at the beginning stage of being a restorative district. However, even with restorative practices, for example, if a student is injured, then a suspension should be given. The victim should feel safe*" (Garnett, personal communication, February 15, 2018). Even though the school administrators touted that the school would be a full-time restorative practices school next year, they were unable to articulate the hallmarks of restorative practices. The principal during the focus group also noted that the school had been selected as one of the district's Student Wholeness/SEL Intensive Sites, a new program that would focus on intensively supporting schools with climate and other disciplinary concerns.

During the individual interviews and focus groups, students shared their preference for alternatives, such as restorative practices. On question 21 of the student questionnaire, seven out of eight students (87.5%) supported the use of alternatives, such as restorative practices, to out-of-school suspensions. One student perspective was that students were already missing school, while another shared that because students were dealing with mental and other social issues, they needed an opportunity to receive counseling, rather than out-of-school suspensions: *"They are missing school if they are suspended"* (Tyrone, 7th Grade, personal communication, February 15, 2018). Another student stated that, *"Some people have problems and maybe they need to talk it out"* (Aainiya, 5th Grade personal communication, February 15, 2018). During the interviews and focus group, the researcher found that students did want their school to hold students

accountable for their behaviors and actions; however, they wanted students to have the opportunity to receive other alternatives to out-of-school suspensions.

Overall, the student intervention and restorative practices theme surfaced from the triangulation of data. This included the data on out-of-school suspension, which spoke to the numbers of suspensions that students received for incidents that may have been responded to through other means such as interventions and restorative practices. It also emanated from the review of the 2017-2018 student code of conduct which was heavily focused on building positive relationships and providing restorative practices. It also came from the individual interviews and focus group with all administrators, and during the questionnaire and focus group activities with the student participants. Some keywords that created the theme on student interventions and restorative practices were: interventions, student support, SST, IEP, IEP process, building relationships, restoration, restorative, whole child, learn from mistakes, and circles.

Theme III: Professional development and resources.

The final theme from the review of data and data collections was professional development and resources. The phrases professional development and workforce training came up at least 30 times during the interviews and the focus group with the administrators. The word resources came up a number of times during the collection of data with students and the administrators.

Professional development. While CRT researchers and theorists and other educational equity advocates have called for opportunities for professional development around topics such as teaching and learning and assessments, the administration of discipline has also been an area where CRT education advocates have asked for increased professional development for school staff. They (Blaisdell, 2005; Kozlowski, 2014; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lynn & Parker,

2006; Picower, 2001; Sleeter, 2016; Ullucci & Battey, 2011) suggested that training and professional development would help to shift the growing trend of out-of-school suspensions. Mensah (2016) called for safe spaces to be created in teacher and leadership preparation programs so that discussions could take place about race and racism and their effect on the K-12 education system. During the focus group, there was a consensus among the administrator group that as part of utilizing restorative practices and student interventions the district should offer intensive professional development to administrators and staff members on how to adequately implement restorative practices, to help repair wrongs and to help reduce the suspension rates. One of the study participants, who served for 13 years in the capacity of coordinator and then Director of the Office of Suspensions, noted that it was difficult to find the opportunity to provide principals and administrators professional development on the implementation of the student code of conduct, as well as on strategies to reduce suspensions (Garnett, personal communication, February 15, 2018). The new acting interim director noted that because *"adults get easily triggered,"* the need for workforce development on implementation strategies for de-escalation and restorative practices was needed (Hines, personal communication, February 15, 2018).

Resources. Since CRT is a social science that examines multiple facets of how society and culture, intersects with race, law, and power, resources are a focus of the theoretical framework. Taylor et al. (2009) raised the issue of "unequal and unjust distribution of power and resources along political, economic, racial, and gendered lines" (Taylor et al., 2009, p. 1). These CRT theorists: Alemán, (2013), Bartlett and Brayboy, (2005), DeCuir and Dixson, (2004), Delgado and Stefancic, (2017), Ladson-Billings, (1995, 1998, 2013), Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), Ledesma and Calderon, (2015), Lynn and Adams, (2002), McCoy and Rodricks, (2015),

Perez Huber (2011), Solórzano (1998), Solórzano and Yosso, (2002), and Tate, (1997) all

contended that since the public school system was built and functioned on racism and

segregation before and after the landmark Brown v. Board (1954) ruling, decisions that affect

public schools are impacted by school funding, human resources, curriculum and pedagogy,

school climate, suspensions, and other various educational opportunities. The school's principal

gave an example of her school's upcoming (2018-2019) budget, stating that she had to decide to

reduce the music teacher from fulltime to .4 because she did not have enough resources to keep

music fulltime. While some may see cutting music from fulltime to .4 as non-consequential on

student achievement and behaviors, the response that a student provided suggested that the

students believed resources such as music made a difference. One of the students during the

focus group recommended that in order to engage students in their classes and keep them away

from making poor choices, they needed to have opportunities, such as: "*dance, music,[and]*

music aids (such as guitars) to keep students engaged" (Deasia, 5th Grade, personal

communication, February 14, 2018). A number of students during the interviews also mentioned

that to address some of the behavior issues (such as the hall-walking and students running the

hallways), the school needed "*more counselors, social workers and school psychologists*"

(Mario 5th Grade; Karess, 8th Grade, personal communication, February 15, 2018). Even the

administrators noted the need to have more clinicians in place to adequately respond to the

trauma of students and to support the district's whole child initiative. However, these additional

needed resources as described by the students and school administrators would require additional

resources to the school. The researcher learned that as part of this school's effort to build

student wholeness, they had developed a partnership with community organizations such as

M&T Bank and Under Armour. The school recently opened a newly renovated media center at the school (Locke & Spence, personal communication, February 15, 2018).

Summary

In Chapter 4, the researcher reported all information that was gathered to conduct the research. The researcher utilized the review of the student code of conduct to provide a perspective regarding the rationale behind Baltimore City School's student code of conduct and how the disciplinary responses contextualized the suspension numbers for the South Baltimore school and the overall systemic suspension numbers. The suspension data for the district and the schools was taken from the Maryland State Department of Education as reported by the Baltimore City Public Schools on out-of-school suspensions and expulsions. There were 12 study participants in total. Eight students signed up to participate in the study. In addition to the eight students, two school administrators and two district administrators (one recently retired in February of 2018), all participated in the study. All study participants were African-American.

In the review of the 2017-2018 Baltimore City student code of conduct, the researcher found that the current code of conduct, when compared to the one used in 2012-2013, was more focused on restorative practices and correcting behaviors than on being punitive. The researcher also found that the student code of conduct provided various disciplinary responses to student behavior infractions. During the review of the student code of conduct, the researcher also found that because the student code of conduct provided discretion to administrators on how they ranked disciplinary infractions, (levels one-five), administrators frequently escalated issues to level three, and often went to suspensions as the first option in level three.

In a review of the suspension data from the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), the researcher found that African-American students received the most suspensions by

virtue of them being the minority-majority in the district. The suspension data correlated to the

enrollment data of African-American students at the school. Additionally, in the review of data,

the researcher found that suspensions of African-American students and overall suspensions

increased at the school from the 2011-2012 to the 2012-2013 school year. The suspension rate

increased by 66.6%, while the suspension rate for African-African students also increased by

61% from the 2011-2012 to the 2012-2013 school year. The study also found that suspensions

increased by 123.3% from 2012-2013 to the 2013-2014 school year, and by 117.2% for African-

American students during the 2013-2014 school year. This was the first year of the current

administration at the school, and it followed a tumultuous two to three years when the school

was being managed by a Managing Assistant Principal (interim principal). However, the study

also found that since the 2013-2014 school year, suspension rates at the school, and suspension

rates for African-Americans had decreased incrementally over the years. One trend the

researcher found was that when overall suspensions increased at the school, the suspensions of

African-Americans also showed an increase. Conversely, when overall suspensions decreased,

there was a decline in the suspensions of African-American students. The school suspension rate

suggested a significant reduction in suspension from an increase of 117.2% in 2013-2014, to a

reduction by 57.49% in 2014-2015. In addition to the suspension rates, the researcher found that

out-of-school suspensions were given as disciplinary responses mainly for the following two

categories of infractions: fights/attack and disrespect/disruption.

In the review of the district suspension data, the researcher also found trends similar to

that of the school. When the overall suspension rates increased or decreased, there was a direct

correlation to the increase or decrease in the suspension numbers of African-American students.

A review of the district data also found that suspensions decreased incrementally each year, but

then increased significantly during the 2015-2016 school year. In 2015-2016, the overall suspension rate of the district rose by 24.8% and by 23.4% for African-American students across the district.

In addition to the review of the student code of conduct, an analysis of the district and school's suspension data from 2011-2017, the researcher triangulated the data with the utilization of a student questionnaire, individual interviews of students and administrators, and two focus groups. The three sources of data provided the opportunity to member check, and it reiterated the consistency at which the study participants shared their perspectives about the role of race, class, and other demographic identifiers in the suspension of students. Data from the questionnaire suggested that students all knew at least one person who had received an out-of-school suspension from the school. Two out of the eight student participants had been suspended for fights during the 2017-2018 school year. Students also consistently raised the issue of lack of engagement in their classrooms and the lack of a behavior management system in the hallway as reasons why suspensions resulted, when they provided answers in the questionnaire, individual interviews, and focus groups. Students expressed what their perceptions were regarding the reasons for the suspensions at the school. Some of them shared that part of the reason why students got involved in fights or classroom disruptions was due to the lack of engagement in class and the roaming of the halls by some students, which in turn created the need for out-of-school suspensions. Students also shared that parental engagement with the teachers at the school was key to reducing behavior infractions and, thus, out-of-school suspensions.

During the individual interviews of the administrators and in the focus group, the researcher found that based on perceptions articulated throughout, they felt as if racism and classism were not factors in the suspension numbers of the school or the district, even though

they acknowledged that it was a problem in other districts. However, two of the district officials opined that the disproportional suspension of African-American students and students with disabilities may be a cause for concern at certain schools within the district, but not at this South Baltimore school. The researcher found that the school utilized Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS), and was at the beginning stages of adopting restorative practices, a new focus of the district, as part of its strategic plan. During the individual interviews and the administrator focus group, there emerged three consistent themes of school and community culture, student interventions and restorative practices, and professional development and resources. The district administrators shared that many schools did not implement the continuum of disciplinary responses and instead went straight to the out-of-school suspensions choice under level 3. Additional key findings included the following:

- Students shared that they needed more counselors, social workers, and psychologists to support them;

- Administrators opined that resources were needed to provide meaningful experiences to students; and

- Teachers, administrators, parents, and students needed to receive training and work together to support the student code of conduct and improve student behaviors.

All participants shared that the utilization of restorative practices as a school and a district would be imperative to building relationships between students and between staff and students. This would also serve as an alternative to suspensions, and thereby help to disconnect the entrenched school-to-prison pipeline.

The researcher created themes based on the findings. Theme 1 focused on school and community culture. Under school school and community culture, there were subthemes which

108

included the school culture, which encompassed details of the school and district' profiles; school and classroom expectations; academics and achievement, which included school data on the PARCC, iReady benchmark assessments; school safety; the role of school police; and, student perceptions of their peers who they believed ran the hallways and fought.

Theme II focused on student interventions and restorative practices. Under the subthemes for Theme II, the researcher looked at the district's current student code of conduct, as well as the district and school's efforts and policies on student interventions and restorative practices.

Finally, Theme III was professional development and resources. The researcher looked at the current professional development and training and resources, as well as those that would be needed for the future to reduce suspensions of African-American students.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations

"Studies have suggested a correlation between exclusionary discipline policies and practices and an array of serious educational, economic, and social problems" (U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Justice, Dear Colleague Letter on the Nondiscriminatory Administration of School Discipline, 2014, p.1)

Discussion and Conclusions

Summary of the Study

An assessment by Porowski, O'Conner, and Passa (2014) of school discipline in Maryland between 2009 and 2012 found that while the percentage of Maryland students receiving out-of-school suspensions or expulsions dropped, Black students had higher rates of out-of-school suspensions and expulsions. Research investigating the use of school discipline identified some of the most frequent student infractions (Gion, McIntosh, & Horner, 2014; Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; McIntosh, Frank, & Spaulding, 2010). These studies suggested that more and more students were being disciplined for non-violent infractions such as disrespect, disobedience, loudness and aggression, and hall walking. Years of research also suggested that out-of-school suspensions did not lead to increased positive student behaviors (Skiba, 2014). If anything, it pushed students into the world of truancy, dropping out, and the criminal justice system, while also increasing the risk of students becoming citizens who are dependent upon social and other government assistance, because they lacked the education and skills to hold employment.

 The suspension of African-American students at a South Baltimore k-8 school was not a one-size-fits-all issue that produced one answer or could be undertaken through just one prism. This was confirmed by the opinions and perceptions shared by the African-American students and

school and district administrators who took part in the questionnaire, interviews, and focus group

which were part of this research study. In addition to the opinions shared in these activities, a

review and analysis of the school and district's out-of-school suspensions between 2012-2017

was undertaken to find answers to the research questions.

This qualitative study examined the factors, policies, and practices that influenced the out-of-

school suspension rates at the South Baltimore school which was the focus of this study. It was

designed to highlight the voices of African-American students and professionals regarding their

perceptions of out-of-school suspensions, and include their recommendations on how

suspensions could be reduced for African-American students, who comprise 95.3% of the

population of the school.

The viewpoints of the participants, the data on suspensions, and the literature on school

suspensions, as well as the theoretical framework of critical race theory, shaped the findings in

this research. The researcher utilized data triangulation through the collection of student

questionnaires, interviews of students and administrators, and focus groups discussions with both

the students and the administrators. The results of this study may help not just the school

leaders, but also district leaders and other educational leaders and policymakers in their quest to

increase achievement for all students; particularly African-American students in the City of

Baltimore, who, at the time of this study, consistently ranked below the achievement levels of

other students in the state. It may also support school leaders and policymakers as they focus on

reducing the disproportionate suspensions of African-American students and address the social

and economic issues that result from the out-of-school suspensions and impact society.

Ultimately, this study may help the school administrators at this school to create and implement

processes to increase student engagement, provide robust student interventions, and utilize

alternatives to suspensions, which may help to provide incremental gains in overall student learning and increase positive behaviors.

Further exploration may show that this research lends itself to helping other subgroups affected by disproportional suspensions: Black girls and students with disabilities. Emerging research is beginning to show that Black girls are most likely to receive disciplinary referrals for defiance and fighting (Blake, Butler, Lewis, & Darensbourg, 2011; Cooper, 2015a; Morris, 2016; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002; Skiba, Peterson, & Williams, 1997). In addition, studies have shown that students with disabilities are another demographic of students with high suspension rates (Dickinson & Miller, 2006; Lee, Cornell, Gregory, & Fan, 2011; Rausch & Skiba, 2006; Skiba & Sprague, 2008). This chapter is a review of the results brought to the forefront based on the theoretical framework and the themes identified in Chapter 4.

The following research questions guided this study:

Research Question 1: What are the factors as perceived by African-American students, school administrators, and district officials that are influencing the suspension rates in the South Baltimore school?

Research Question 2: What are the perceptions of African-American students, school administrators, and district officials regarding district and school policies, practices, and the high suspension rates in the district, and the out-of-school suspensions in the South Baltimore school that was the focus of this study?

Research Question 3: What are the implications of reducing the suspensions rates on African-American students, school administrators, and district officials?

Research Question 4: What recommendations can be made to reduce the suspension rates of African-American students?

Discussion for Research Question 1: What are the factors as perceived by African -American students, school administrators, district officials that are influencing the suspension rates in the South Baltimore school?

The objective of the first research question was to identify the perceptions of African-American students, school administrators and district official on the factors influencing the suspension rates in the South Baltimore school.

Suspensions for fights, attacks, threats and classroom disruptions/disrespect. Based on the suspension data of the school from 2011-2017, the main infractions for suspensions were student fights, threats/attacks and classroom disruptions, and disrespect to staff. The review of data for the school showed that during 2012-2016 there were at least 3900 systemic suspensions for these infractions. During the 2012-2013 school year, 4572 students were suspended for these infractions, while in 2013-2014, 4317 students were suspended. In 2014-2015, 3929 students were suspended, while in 2015-2016-5020 students were suspended systemically for fights/attacks/threats. For the South Baltimore school, their suspension data from 2012-2016 for fights/attacks/threats were 29 for 2012-2013, 63 in 2013-2014, 40 in 2014-2015, 28 in 2015-2016. During the student focus group, one of the students shared that one factor as to why students received out of school suspensions was due to "…*fighting and violence*…" (Mario, 5th Grade, personal communication, February 14, 2018). Two other students (Mario, 5th Grade and Karess, 8th Grade) also shared that fighting was a major factor for the suspensions of African-American students at the school. These two students also shared that they had received at least one out of school suspension during the 2017-2018 school year. They both also received the out of school suspension for fighting. Karess shared that *"…a lot of people get into fights and threaten others…"* (Karess, 8th Grade, personal communication, February 14, 2018). Tyrone

another student shared that the reason why he wanted school police at the school every day was because of fights at the school. He said: *"kids be fighting"* (Tyrone, 7th Grade, personal communication, February 14, 2018). In addition to the fights and threats, data reviewed showed similar numbers and trends for infractions related to disrespect and disruption. In addition to the suspension data, findings from the data collected during the interviews, questionnaire, and focus groups also found that the factors which influenced suspensions rates encompassed school and community related issues. Two of the male student participants shared that they routinely heard gunshots in their neighborhoods. These students referred to violence in their neighborhood as a daily fact of life.

No behavior framework enforcement and lack of resources. First, students reported that the lack of an enforced school and behavior framework allowed for students to run the hallways and thereby get into altercation with others and with staff members. These infractions led to disciplinary responses that usually result in out-of-school suspensions. On the survey, only one out of eight students (12.5%) shared that he met school and classroom expectations. The remaining students shared that they either met school, or classroom expectations, but not both (Appendix 1, question 3). The principal shared during a focus group that the school's behavior framework was *"posted in the classrooms and in the school hallways…"* (Ms. Locke, personal communication, February 15, 2018). However, several students shared that the behavior framework was not consistently enforced. A student complained when asked about her behavior choices and the behavior choices of others: *"kids are running the halls, they are out of control, they throw dictionaries, desks…"* (Bolder, 5th Grade, personal communication, February 14, 2018). Another student noted the following in a personal interview: *"if one person is running*

114

around, everyone runs around and do not get work done" (Kyelle, 5ᵗʰ Grade, February 14, 2018).

Second, the students and administrators also shared that the lack of resources was a factor for the suspension numbers. Students, who needed mental counseling and support as they reeled from trauma and other mental issues, did not get adequate support because of the lack of resources, especially in this high-need South Baltimore community, where unemployment, the lack of adequate housing, and crime were all issues. A student Deasia explained that she needed resources such as *"manipulatives for math, guitars, dance and music classes"* to promote learning and keep students engaged and away from student behavior infractions (Deasia, 5ᵗʰ Grade, February 14, 2018). On the student surveys 100% of the students called for the hiring of more counselors, social workers and school psychologists to help students. (Appendix 1, question 29). The administrators also during a group activity, advocated for more resources. The school principal noted that prior to her participation in the focus group, she was mulling over her budget and had to make the decision to reduce the music teacher from *"fulltime to .4"* because she did not have enough resources to keep music fulltime (Locke, 2018, personal communication, February 15, 2018). The former head of the district's Office of Student Suspensions advocated the following position: *"...put in the resources into schools to put in interventions..."* (Garnett, 2018, personal communication, February 15, 2018). The current interim director of the district's suspension office said: *resources are needed to fund various initiatives..."* (Hines, 2018, personal communication, February 15, 2018). The school's principal advocated that while there was an *"emphasis on literacy and math, if climate is not focused on, students cannot learn. Given this population and climate in the community, climate is a priority versus literacy or math..."* (Locke, 2018, personal communication, February 15, 2018).

First year principal. The data suggested that suspensions increased at the school

during the 2013-2014 school year. The third factor responsible for the suspension rates at the

school, and especially an increase in the suspensions of African-American students during the

2013-2014 school year, was that this was the current administrative team's first year at the

school. In addition, it was the principal's first year as a school principal. The principal took over

from a managing assistant principal (interim) who had been at the school for the previous two to

three years. The new administrative team had to begin to address the climate and culture that

they found. The first-year principal utilized the policy, which included out-of-school suspensions

as a disciplinary response, in order to salvage what was left of the school's climate and culture.

This factor and practice led to an increase in suspensions in school 2013-2014. However, as the

new team gained experience and learned about the school and community, suspensions had been

on the decline at the school since 2014.

Crime in Baltimore and community issues. While there was an increase district-wide in

the out-of-school suspension rates during the 2015-2016 school year, there was a decline in the

suspension numbers for students at the South Baltimore school. This was the same year that the

Baltimore riots took place following the death of Freddie Gray while in police custody. During

the focus groups, a number of the administrators raised the point that there may have been a

slight increase in the suspension rates of students systemically due to the rising crime rates in the

community that were related to the riots. As crime increased in the community, it created a

spillover effect in the schools. As one of the study participants put it: "*Some of these students are

crying out for help*" (Hines, personal communication, February 15, 2018). A review of the crime

statistics for Southern part of Baltimore, which encompasses this school and it's community,

found the following: 3 gun related homicides, down 53% from the same period in 2017; 99

robberies, down 28% for the same period in 2017, 7 larceny, down 43% from the same time last year, and 29 aggravated assaults with no change from the same time period last year (Baltimore Police Department, 2018).

Over the years, as crime in Baltimore has increased, so have the media reports of teachers and principals being assaulted (Kubler, 2013; Tooten, 2017). Coleman et al., (1966) found that race and poverty were two of the biggest predicative indicators of student achievement. The school level and external factors that contribute to increased student misbehaviors, which include but are not limited to gun violence, poverty levels, increased crime rates, unemployment, and sub-standard housing, all may impact how students perform academically and socially in school. Critical race theory assumes that race is a factor in all spheres of life within the United States. While the school in this study did not outright suspend students based on race, and there wasn't any evidence that suspensions in the district were based on race, CRT theorists would suggest that the policymakers needed to take a look at the allocation of resources, which is a major external factor in the suspension rates of African-American students at the school. The lack of resources impacts funding of curriculum and instruction, staffing, programs, school climate, and school culture, all of which impact the behaviors and achievement levels of the African-American minority-majority at the school and district level (Bartlett & Brayboy, 2005; Bell, 1980; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 1998, 2013; Ledesma & Calderon, 2015; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

Overall, the factors perceived by students, school, and district administrators to influence the suspension rates in the South Baltimore school mirrored the themes found in Chapter 4. The factors encompassed not only school and community individual factors, but also issues of resources and experience of the school's leadership.

117

Research Question 2: What are the perceptions of African-American students, school administrators, and district officials regarding district and school policies, practices, and the high suspension rates in the district, and the out-of-school suspensions in the South Baltimore school?

Restorative practices and student support. The second research question focused on the perceptions of African-American students, school administrators, and district officials regarding school and district policies. Over the years, Baltimore City Public Schools has attempted to focus on positive disciplinary responses rather than negative disciplinary responses, such as out-of-school suspensions. The student code of conduct highlights positive disciplinary responses for almost all behavior infractions. As the district moves to become a restorative practices district, it is expected that more schools will begin to adopt individual school-wide policies with district guidance, to support restorative practices. The school's principal shared her optimism that since the school had been selected as a *"restorative practices intensive site* (Student Wholeness/SEL Intensive Site), *it would provide staff with a climate piece that will go deeper"* (Locke, personal communication, February 15, 2018). The school in the study attempted to follow the district's guidance on policies; however, because administrator discretion was a choice, even though policies were defined, administrators still had the discretion to skip various disciplinary responses that would allow for students to remain in school. It was within their discretion to skip from a level one response to a level three response, such as an out-of-school suspension. Since there is increasing research to suggest that restorative practices are an effective intervention for decreasing disciplinary infractions and out-of-school suspensions (Martin, 2015; Mirsky, 2007; Rundell, 2007; Wilson, 2014), this school focused on utilizing restorative practices by moving forward to support student behaviors and to reduce its suspension numbers. CRT focuses on

118

social justice as a means to correct the centrality of race in all spheres of society in the United States.

Several of the authors and advocates of CRT, including Parker (2015), have advocated for the use of social justice means such as restorative practices, to eliminate the negative impact of policies on African-Americans and other minorities. Ledesma and Calderon (2015) concluded that the use of CRT in education could help provide "… practical tools for education practitioners" (p. 207). As educators begin to focus on incorporating positive behavior responses, student suspension rates may decline, because it is only when schools begin to focus on building relationships, providing the resources to meaningfully support student achievement and growth, that students will embrace expected behaviors, rather than look for attention or cry out through various misbehaviors. The district needs to do a better job of providing professional development to teachers, staff, and students, so that every stakeholder understands their role and responsibilities as a means to take ownership and focus on achievement, rather than on punitive measures for students who do not live up to the expected behaviors. On the student surveys five out of eight student respondents (62.5%) chose for students to get the opportunity to participate in restorative practices, or other alternatives to suspensions (Appendix 1, question 22).

Administrator discretion. When the Maryland State Department of Education began to require school districts to record and report all disciplinary issues, including the number of suspensions, Baltimore City Schools began to utilize the Student Management System (SMS) database to record all disciplinary responses. Prior to that, schools chose to record certain disciplinary responses, which showed lower behavior infractions by students and, as a result, lower suspension rates. Schools did this since the chief executive who enforced this policy at the time, Dr. Alonso, began to tie principal evaluations to school culture and climate; and a school's

suspension numbers were included in the information reviewed. The principal, at the school in the study, was at that time a fifth-year principal who was cognizant of the impact that the suspension numbers had on her evaluation, and so she made attempts to support disciplinary alternatives in an effort to reduce suspensions.

Between 2011-2017, some of the spikes in the number of suspensions may have been due to a district-wide reiteration of policies which required schools to record all suspensions. One administrator noted that *"administrators skip over levels 1, 2 and go straight to levels 3 and 4 which often begin with suspensions. Administrators either don't read, or do not fully understand the whole menu of consequences"* (Garnett, 2018, personal communication, February 15, 2018). In the 2013-2014 school year, the first year for the new administrative team at the school in the study, there may have made a more concerted effort to record all suspensions. It is possible that the data supplied by the Maryland State Department of Education may not necessarily tell the whole story about school and climate, or about the numbers of out-of-school suspensions that are given at each school, on a yearly basis. Schools are still able to use their own discretion regarding the recording of behavior infractions and student suspensions.

Administrator discretion requires ongoing professional development. Question 2 asked about the perceptions of African-American students, school administrators, and district officials regarding the practices and the high suspension rates in the South Baltimore school. The research found that even though there was a 66% increase in suspensions in 2012-2013 and a 123% increase in suspensions in 2013-2014, the school overall did not have a high suspension rate; nor did the district. The district did see a spike in its overall suspension numbers and the number of African-American student being suspended in the 2015-2016 school year, during the Freddie Gray riots, when the district also had a new executive at the helm. The study participants

expressed that training and professional development aimed at deescalating behaviors was needed for teachers and administrators, not only for there to be a decline in suspensions, but also to create opportunities for students to increase their achievement outcomes. Some of the students expressed that as a school, they felt that some of the disciplinary practices were unfair.

Overall, the study participants agreed that policies were in place to reduce suspensions, and that resources and actions were needed to ensure that the policies were implemented with fidelity, which would then in turn increase student achievement and thereby reduce the numbers of suspensions on a yearly basis. Additionally, study participants expressed that ongoing professional development was required for all stakeholders (students, parents, teachers, administrators, community members) in order to understand what the behavior expectations were, what the student code of conduct entailed, and what role each stakeholder had in ensuring that students were held accountable for behavior choices. They expressed a need to maximize resources to provide an optimal environmental for students to learn and increase their outcomes. More importantly, they expressed belief that if the policies were implemented and practiced with fidelity, the school would be able to better support students as they dealt with issues that were external to the school, such as the poverty level, gun crime, and violence within the community. CRT researchers and theorists and other educational equity advocates have called for opportunities for professional development around topics such as teaching and learning, assessments, discipline, racism, and discrimination for both teachers and administrators. They (Blaisdell, 2005; Kozlowski, 2014; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lynn & Parker, 2006; Picower, 2001; Sleeter, 2016; Ullucci & Battey, 2011) have suggested that training and professional development would help to shift the growing trend of out-of-school suspensions.

Research Question 3: What are the implications of reducing the suspensions rates on African American students, school administrators, and district officials?

The third research question which guided the study asked for the implications of reducing the suspensions rates on African-American students, school administrators, and district officials.

Academic implications. All the study participants agreed that while students should receive appropriate disciplinary responses for behavior infractions, including the use of out-of-school suspensions, efforts must be made to utilize out-of-school suspensions only when necessary; such as situations in which a victim is injured or a weapon is involved. All participants also agreed that because students are dealing with daily real-life crises, opportunities must be provided for students to correct their misbehaviors or errors, instead of going directly to out-of-school suspensions, which then create a myriad of instructional and social deficits.

The implications for reducing suspensions, as shared by the study participants, would be multiple. First, students would remain safe at school. Second, they would have the opportunity to learn from teachers who are instructional leaders, thus improving achievement and increasing student outcomes. The achievement scores on the PARCC assessments and the iReady assessment for this school showed achievement levels that correspond with Levels 1 and 2 (below expectations; approaching expectations), which means that there were significant achievement deficits among the student body. If effort was made to enhance instruction, engage students, and provide resources to meet their instructional needs, then the school might experience less behavior infractions and be able to devote attention to improving the achievement rates among students.

The third implication arising from reduced numbers of suspensions would be that as more students were engaged in school activities, there would be less opportunities for fights,

classroom disruptions, hall walking, and a general lack in engagement. Lastly, the dropout rate of students at the study school would decrease, and as a result more students would be able to transition to high school where they could be adequately prepared for college and/or a career.

Economic implications. Another implication mentioned by study participants was the potential that student involvement in the school reduce the number of students in the 'school-to- prison pipeline;' and this would have the potential to reduce the numbers of African-Americans in the prison system. More importantly, however, would be the ability for this South Baltimore community, and Baltimore in general, to share in the harvesting of the human resources that were being produced. These are not only school implications, but also wider societal implications. With reduced out-of-school suspensions ultimately leading to employment, students would not need to depend on welfare and other social services. They would have the education and job skills to compete in the job market and improve their outcomes; becoming responsible citizens. Rumberger and Losen (2016) found that out-of-school suspensions cost the United States "$11B in fiscal impact, and $35.7B in social impact" (p. 19). The grand total economic cost of out-of-school suspensions among 10th graders alone was estimated at $35.7 billion. If suspension rates for 10th graders alone were cut in half: reduced from "16% to 8%, the country may save up to "$17.87 billion in fiscal and social costs (Rumberger & Losen, 2016, p. 19). Rumberger and Losen (2016) also found that the costs to taxpayers for out-of-school suspensions was reflected in $35 billion in lost wages, lost taxes, increased crime, higher welfare, and poorer health (Rumberger & Losen, 2016). In Baltimore, the percentage of people in the population aged 25 and above without a high school diploma, stood at 24.7%, compared to 12.6% statewide in 2007 (Job Opportunities Task Force, 2008). The possibility of a student

becoming disengaged and joining the ranks of being a high school dropout may decrease as a result of a decrease in out-of-school suspension.

Social justice implications. Not only are there economic implications for the reduction in the out-of-school suspension rates, there are also many social justice implications for the reduction in the suspensions of African-American students at the study school and across the district. Locally and nationally, African-American students are suspended from school more than students from other demographics (Noltemeyer, Ward, & McLoughlin, 2015; Petras, Masyn, Buckley, Ialongo, & Kellam, 2011; Shirley & Cornell, 2012; Skiba, 2014; Skiba et al., 1997; Vincent, Sprague, & Tobin, 2012; Wright, Morgan, Coyne, Beaver, & Barnes, 2014). Such a disparity in disciplinary actions raises questions about practices and the impact on the civil rights of these students, as well as wider social justice implications. Various studies have identified the many costs of out-of-school suspensions as well as the harms which can be incurred by both students and schools when out-of-school suspensions are used in disproportionate numbers (Balfanz, Byrnes, & Fox, 2015; Fabelo et al., 2011; Flannery, 2015; Lee et al., 2011; Losen et al., 2012, 2015; Simson, 2013). The research presented by these authors also suggested that out-of-school suspensions criminalize our youth, thus increasing the school-to-prison pipeline. This results in economic and social costs to the students and their communities. The neighborhood of the school is a prime example of what can happen when communities lack adequate resources to prosper and thrive (Schwartz, 2016). It creates cyclical domino effects on several other indicators. When students from Baltimore are suspended from school and get caught-up in the criminal justice system, the system ends up having to provide taxpayer dollars to support these youths either in the juvenile justice or adult criminal justice systems. For these out-of-school suspensions, the perceptions among parents and students is that certain students are targeted for

suspensions. This is also a perception among other opponents of suspensions that school policies are written from the perspective of the White majority, and that they target the poor and minorities. If efforts were made to reduce suspensions with the provision of on-going training, resources and a focus on providing student interventions, while holding students accountable, this perception among some parents, students, and anti-school suspension advocates may be moderated. The focus would then be on important matters such as improving student achievement, improving student engagement, and preparing students adequately for post-secondary education and careers.

Research Question 4: What recommendations can be made to reduce the suspension rates of African-American students?

Recommendations for action. The fourth research question in this study addressed making recommendations to reduce the suspension rates of African-American students. Numerous studies have suggested that students of color are suspended at disproportionate rates (Black, 2004; Noltemeyer et al., 2015; Petras et. al., 2011; Shirley & Cornell, 2012; Skiba, 2014; Skiba et al., 1997; Vincent et al., 2012; Wright et al., 2014); therefore, it is incumbent on policymakers and school leaders to find solutions to correct the problem. To reduce the significant achievement disparities of the students, focus must first be given to the difference in the quality of schools that are attended by African-American students. In Baltimore, this would be a review of systemic disparities, since the district is a minority-majority district. This South Baltimore school that was featured in the study, had for years experienced the appointment of inexperienced school leaders and novice teachers. This was coupled with the challenge of managing resources to meet all the needs of its high-need population. When teachers are unable to effectively manage their classrooms, or engage students, the potential for students to go off-

125

task and get into behavior infractions becomes elevated. To maximize opportunities for positive instructional outcomes and social outcomes of students at the school and across the district, the research participants proposed the following recommendations:

1) Increase the use of positive behavior interventions and supports, not limited to the use of restorative practices and mindfulness practices; all the while holding all students accountable. The school must take into consideration the physical, emotional, and academic status and needs of individual students before a determination is made on the disciplinary response needed to address the various infractions. A school-wide adoption of restorative practices at the school and district level would help to not only give the victims a voice, but also to heal them and to resolve issues without the need for the loss of instructional time for victim and offender. This may also lead to a decrease in the community issues created by the spillover effect of students who have behavioral or instructional issues at school. As mentioned by the interim head of the office of student suspensions, the current Chief Executive Officer was "*making an effort to make the district a restorative practice district."* (Hines, 2018, personal communication, February 15, 2018).

2) The state, city, and district must provide resources to this school and other schools to address support of the mental and physical health and wellbeing of students, parents, and teachers. With the provision of mental supports, students may not choose to fight or attack because of a disagreement. If the suspensions for fighting and attacks were reduced, that would cut the school and district suspension rates by over 50%. Schools must be sensitive to student needs and must incorporate the use of interventions and practices to better support students who are dealing with trauma and the realities of their existence within

126

their community. Consideration must also be given to the cultural experiences of both staff and students. As stated by two of the students, the school needs "*more counselors, social workers and school psychologists*" (Mario 5th Grade; Karess, 8th Grade, personal communication, February 15, 2018). An administrator also shared a similar sentiment: "*...m*ake *certain that there are mental health counselors, psychologists to help support students*" (Hines, 2018, personal communication, February 15, 2018).

3) Train teachers, administrators, students, parents, community members on their roles and responsibilities. Make them aware of the information contained within the student code of conduct. This point was emphasized by all study participants. If all stakeholders understand the expectations, it might then be more likely that they would take ownership of their individual roles. This might have a cyclical impact on the school's climate and culture. The district and the school must train its staff on how to deescalate behaviors. This partnership with family and community would help to increase family and community engagement at the school. Finally, it was suggested that there be effort toward the building and improving of relationships among students, between students and teachers, and between students and administrators. One of the study participants shared that there needed to be a "*mindset change in Baltimore*" (Garnett, 2018, personal communication, February 15, 2018). Another participant, the new acting interim director noted that because "*adults get easily triggered*", the need for workforce development on implementation strategies for de-escalation and restorative practices was needed (Hines, personal communication, February 15, 2018). The participants shared the belief that the provision of professional development and training to all stakeholders would begin this process of a change in the mind shift.

4) All interventions should be implemented prior to suspensions. There should be a whole menu of interventions such as SST, 504 teams, attendance and IEP teams. All intervention and student support teams should be involved prior to a suspension. *"Interventions require the support of all. It will help to build relationships, focuses on the whole child (social and emotional learning)…"* (Garnett, 2018, personal communication, February 15, 2018). Overall, the district officials reiterated that to make out-of-school suspensions the last disciplinary response of last resort, it would require the support of all stakeholders. These interventions should focus on building relationships; providing the emotional and social learning and support for the whole child.

Importance of the study to the discipline

Following the riots in the aftermath of the death of the Baltimore man, Freddie Gray, while in police custody, attention was drawn to Baltimore City's youths and the educational capacity of the district in meeting the needs of its young citizens, while preparing them for the future. Various news reports discussed the state of the schools. This debate included discussion between residents and long-time supporters of the city versus others from the outside who felt as if the state continued to pour money into what they described as a failing city and a failing local education agency (Broadwater & Prudente, 2017; Eversley, 2016). Unfortunately, when both sides engaged in these discussions, a full picture of events at schools, such as the one in this study where over 95% of students are African-American, live in poverty and must deal with crime and other concerns that many children around the state do not have to deal with on a daily basis, was not presented accurately. In contrast, this study included the perceptions of the students, school, and district administrators, providing them a voice to tell their stories, share their victories, articulate their needs, and discuss their future plans on out-of-school suspensions.

It also provided the opportunity for all participants to share and learn what each have been doing in their respective roles as students and administrators to reduce the out-of-school suspension rates of African-American students, the minority-majority at the school and across the district. Finally, the second tenant of CRT is the centrality of experiential knowledge: it asserts that the experiences and knowledge of people of color is appropriate, legitimate, and an essential part to understanding racial inequality. This large focus within CRT enables African-Americans and other minorities to tell their counter-stories. It is also seen as "a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 32).

Critique of Findings

Prior to the review of data, the researcher assumed that the data would show an increased suspension trend between 2012-2016 for the school and across the district. However, the findings did not support a general increase in suspensions each year for the school or the district. Instead, the findings support that while the school saw an increase in suspensions during the 2012-2013 and the 2013-2014 school years, the school since then has seen a decline in the trajectory of its out-of-school suspension rates. While the data showed an increase in the district's suspension numbers during the 2015-2016, other data, including the student code of conduct, the district's new strategic blueprint, and the questionnaire, interviews, and focus groups that the African-American study participants participated in, suggested that the district and school are working to significantly reduce suspensions. There wasn't any evidence that African-American students were targeted for suspension even with the disproportionate numbers. Instead of looking at suspension through the prism of racism, more focus instead should encompass other root causes which lead to the lack of achievement and successful outcomes among students at this school.

Recommendations for Future Practices

The following recommendations for future practice are suggested to reduce the number of school suspensions:

1) Clearly define the student code of conduct to clearly and concisely label what is level one-five. The student code of conduct should no longer vaguely identify infractions under the various levels; but should instead clearly delineate the infractions and identify the specific disciplinary response for each infraction. This would allow the students, teachers, parents, and the administrators at the school to clearly understand the expectations, responsibilities, and consequences that are contained in the student code of conduct without any ambiguities. This would also allow administrators to retain discretion, which would help to differentiate the disciplinary responses that they give to students for student behavior infractions. The range of options would also allow for administrators to not just focus on out of school suspensions as the first disciplinary response, but would encourage administrators to explore restorative practices and other student interventions to address behavior infractions.

2) The second recommendation for action calls on universities, schools, and districts to collaborate as they educate the next generation of administrators and teachers. They must understand how to adequately teach and train educators at all levels to support the instruction and behavior of all students, not just the predominate culture. The pedagogy should evolve to focus on what is culturally relevant and aim toward keeping students engaged in an effort to reduce off-task behaviors and behavior infractions.

3) Schools across the district should keep accurate records of all disciplinary infractions, and all suspensions. This would help teachers and administrators to reflect on their practices as they implement their goal to reduce the potential for African-American students to enter the school-to-prison pipeline.

4) The fourth recommendation is for schools to make an attempt to listen to the voices of their students. This would allow the administrators to hear from students regarding issues such as not feeling engaged in classes or believing that their hallways are run by students.

5) Implement the school's school-wide and classroom behavior frameworks with fidelity. Students and staff must be knowledgeable of both, and the school should provide recognition for the students and staff who implement it consistently.

6) This school and all schools across the district should set time aside to celebrate their efforts as they work toward decreasing student suspensions. Information regarding success in this effort should be communicated to all stakeholders, including community leaders. This celebration of success would help staff to reflect on their practices as they tackle the other root causes of educational inequality and the lack of achievement amongst all student groups.

7)

Recommendations for Future Research

Recommendations for future research include:

- Exploration of the suspension rates after the implementation of a cohesive policy on restorative practices at the school in this study or in another school.

- Explore whether administrator discretion contributes to the suspensions of students.

- Research the root causes of education inequality that impacts the suspensions of African-American and other minority students. These may include how the lack of resources, mingled with mental health issues, family, societal, and community issues, impact the behavior and choices that students make at school, and how the school can effectively respond to behavior infractions by holding students accountable, while addressing some of the root causes of student misbehaviors.

- Research the reasons why the majority of students at the school in this study who receive out-of-school suspensions do so for fights/attacks or for classroom disruption/disrespect.

- Finally, conduct a study on how a school and/or district can reduce suspensions with the implementation of proactive and robust student support programs and processes.

Limitations of the Study

It is imperative to acknowledge the limitations of this study. One limitation to this study was that while the study looked at the district-wide suspension data, specific focus was given to the k-8 South Baltimore school. This school was not representative of all schools in the district. Additionally, administrators were understandably reluctant to acknowledge any biases that they may have had towards students. They were also reluctant to acknowledge deficits between their knowledge of policies versus their practices. Finally, while the study participants were African-American students, it wasn't a full representation of all students even within the African-American student subgroup. Additional subgroups within this group included students with disabilities. These students were not accounted for during the data collection phase with the study participants.

Conclusion

Years of research suggest that out-of-school suspensions do not support increased positive student behaviors (Skiba, 2014). If anything, out-of-school suspensions push students into the world of truancy, the criminal justice system, becoming a dropout; thereby, increasing the risk of students not becoming productive citizens, which then causes them to be dependent on social and other government assistance because they lack the education and skills to hold employment. Despite the years of national and local attention to the issue of disparate suspension policies and practices and the disproportional suspensions of African-American students and students with disabilities, schools and districts are still unable to focus on providing resources to students and staff and to provide the training for all stakeholders to address behavior concerns. As restorative practices are implemented school-wide and across the district, African-American students may remain in school, receiving instructional and behavioral support from adults who are trained instructional leaders or from clinicians who support students with trauma or mental needs. While African-American students are not intentionally targeted, due to more wide and external factors (laws, policies, social issues, and disparities) African-American students are at a greater risk of suspensions, especially for infractions such as a classroom disruption. The problem of suspensions and expulsions among African-American students in Baltimore should be analyzed on a yearly basis and must be addressed with on-going research to improve outcomes for students, the school, the district, and the city. The education system, just like other spheres of our society, is plagued by disparities; therefore, schools, school leaders, and communities can make the commitment to take ownership and do what is within their power to hold students accountable, while maximizing the opportunities for success for each of them, regardless of race or economic level.

Summary

In November 2016, reporter Erica Green of the Baltimore Sun revealed that suspension rates were on the increase. She quoted the Chief Executive Officer of the Baltimore City Public Schools System (BCPSS), Dr. Sonya Santelises, who suggested that the district was investigating what led to the increase under her predecessor (Green, 2016). At the same time, the researcher also became curious and wanted to know what was behind this increase.

The purpose of this study was to examine the factors, practices and policies in a South Baltimore City school and the Baltimore City Public School System, to understand the reasons for the increase in the suspensions of African-American students at the end of the 2015-2016 school year. The study sought the perceptions of African-American students, school administrators, and district officials on the factors that influence the suspension rates in the South Baltimore school which was the primary setting for this study. The study also sought to identify the perceptions of African-American students, school administrators, and district officials regarding district and school policies, practices, and the high suspension rates in the district, as well as the out-of-school suspensions in the South Baltimore school being study. Finally, the study also sought to identify the implications of reducing the suspensions rates on African-American students, the school, and district administrators, and create recommendations to reduce the suspension rates of African-American students.

At the start of the study, the researcher started with the story of "Destiny", an eighth grade student at a school who was suspended for a classroom disruption. Destiny ultimately received a three-day suspension. What was behind Destiny's behavior that day was unfortunately not captured by Mr. Lamar. While Destiny deserved an appropriate behavior response for her inappropriate behavior, Destiny was crying for help that day, and the response of the

134

administrator was to suspend Destiny, which helped to further create a gap in her achievement levels, and helped to fuel her lack of trust towards the school and adults at the school. Had the administrator taken the time to learn about Destiny, he would know that Destiny lost her mother unexpectedly a few years ago. He would have also learned that even though Destiny had four other siblings, she was not in contact with any of them, or with any blood relative. He would have also learned that Destiny lived in a foster home after being thrown out from at least six other foster homes. What Mr. Lamar was also unaware of was that Destiny was looking for love and attention in all the wrong ways and places. What Destiny needed was counseling; a connection to school-based and community based social services to provide counseling for her depression, anxieties, and her feelings of abandonment. Destiny's story was shared in order to provide a context for the baggage that students at this school and numerous schools in Baltimore and across the country carry to school each day.

At the end of the day, adults should shift their mindsets and not just be willing to suspend students when they lash out at their peers through the manifestation of fights, or when they disrespect their teachers or other adults. Students can still receive disciplinary responses that do not always involve out-of-school suspensions. These students have a right to remain in school, and not be pushed towards the school-to-prison pipeline.

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APPENDDICES

Appendix A

IRB Approval

UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND EASTERN SHORE

Institutional Review Board

Hazel Hall, Suite 1062	**VOICE:**	**(410) 651-6262**
Princess Anne, Maryland 21853-1299	**FAX:**	**(410) 651-6736**

Date: March 15, 2017

To: Dr. Derry Stufft, Department of Education Justice
From: Clayton Faubion, Ph.D., Chair, UMES IRB

RE: UMES #2017-004 – "The Increase in Suspensions Amongst African American Students in Baltimore City Schools: Understanding Factors, Policies and Practices in Southeast Baltimore Schools"

I am writing to confirm that UMES Protocol #2017-004 mentioned above has been reviewed and approved by the UMES Institutional Review Board. Your protocol was deemed EXPEDITED and did not require full IRB committee review. Please be advised that any and all information recorded in your study must be kept confidential.

This application has UMES IRB approval until March 14, 2018. As the principal investigator for UMES, you are expected to maintain consistent communication with the UMES IRB (i.e. annual update, changes to protocol). Finally, no changes to the study protocol can be made without prior approval by the UMES IRB.

If there are any questions regarding this study, please contact me at 410-651-6379 or cwfaubion@umes.edu. Thank you.

Appendix 1

Student Questionnaire

1**. What grade are you in?**

○ 5th

○ 6th

○ 7th

○ 8th

2**. What is your gender?**

○ Male

○ Female

3. **As a student, I believe (choose all that applies)**

○ I meet class and school behavior expectations

○ I meet classroom expectations but sometimes challenge school expectations

○ I meet school expectations but challenge classroom expectations

○ I challenge classroom and school expectations

4. **During this school year, I have earned the following number (s) of behavior office referrals:**

○ 0

○ 1-3

○ 4-9

○ 10 or more

5**. If I have earned behavior referrals, for the following reason (s) (choose all that apply)**

1. ○ Tardies

2. ○ Disruptive

3. ○ Disrespect

4. ○ Violating classroom expectations

5. ○ Violating school expectations

6. ○ I have not received a referral

6. **Do you think your behavior choices impact your learning?**

○ Yes

○ No

Explain why?

7. **Do you think your behavior choices impact others' learning?**

○ Yes

○ No

Explain why?

_____

8. Do **you think the choices of other students impact your learning?**

⦿ Yes

○ No

Explain how and why?

_____

9. **In order to do a better job promoting learning, what should school staff do?**

○ Enforce classroom standards

○ Be more consistent with classroom standards

○ Provide more student freedom

○ Other (please specify)

10**. Why do you meet school or classroom expectations?**

○ High standards for myself

○ Expectations are reasonable so I comply

○ I don't want to get in trouble at school

○ I don't want to get in trouble at home

○ I don't want to disappoint my family

○ I don't want to disappoint my teacher

11**. If I am assigned detention, (Multiple answers allowed)**

☐ I know my parents will be contacted

☐ My parents are sometimes contacted

☐ My parents will not be notified

☐ I will serve it and will work to not get another detention

☐ I will serve it, but my behavior will not change

☐ I won't serve the detention

12. If you have earned detentions and have not served them, what are the reasons? (Multiple answers allowed)

☐ I forgot

☐ I did not want to serve

☐ I knew my parents didn't know

☐ I hope to get ISS instead

☐ I hope to get OSS instead

☐ I had a personal conflict and did not talk to administration about it

13. What is the biggest challenge when it comes to student discipline at your school? (Multiple answers allowed)

○ Lack of classroom engagement

○ Work is too difficult

○ Work is too easy

○ Classwork and assignments are not interesting or meaningful to me

○ Unsafe school

14. During this school year, I have earned the following number of out of school suspension days:

○ 0 days

○ 1-3 days

○ 4-9 days

○ 10 or more days

15. During this school year, I have earned the following number(s) of behavior referral(s):

○ 0 times

○ 1-3 times

○ 4-9 times

○ 10 or more times

16. For the past three years (2014-2017) I have received out of school suspensions:

○ 0 times

○ 1-3 times

○ 4-9 times

○ 10 or more times

17. **If you have ever received an out of school suspension, why were you suspended (check all that apply)**

☐ Hall walking.

☐ Fighting.

☐ Threats against staff.

☐ Threats against students

☐ Other (please indicate)

18. **I know someone who has received a short term (3 days or less) or a long-term (4 days o or more) suspension.**

○ Yes

○ No

How many students do you know? ___ Are any of them your friends? _____

19. **Does your school discipline students fairly?**

○ Yes

○ No

Explain _____

20. **Should more students receive out of school suspensions?**

○ Yes

○ No

Why or why not_____

21. **Should there be alternatives to suspensions?**

○ Yes

○ No

Why should there be an alternative?

_____

22. **What alternatives should schools use to out of school suspensions?**

☐ In school suspension

☐ Detention

☐ Restorative practices like mediation, circles

☐ End all suspensions

☐ Do nothing different

23. **Do you believe that suspensions are handed out evenly among all races of students?**

○ Yes

○ No

Please explain why you believe so _____

24. **Which group(s) of students do you believe receive more suspensions?** (Choose all that apply)

☐ All groups of students receive the same frequency of suspensions.

☐ White students

☐ Black students

☐ Hispanic students

☐ Asian students

☐ Students with disabilities

☐ More boys

☐ More girls

25. **Should your school have School Police?**

○ Yes

○ No

Why or why not?

_____

26. **Should School Police be allowed to carry guns into schools?**

○ Yes

○ No

Why or why not?

_____

27. **Should the Student Code of Conduct be updated?**

○ Yes

○ No

Why or why not?

_____

28. **Do you feel as if out of school suspensions have increased since 2013?**

○ Yes

○ No

Why or why not?

_____

29. **What can the school and district do to reduce suspension rates?**

○ Don't allow schools to suspend students.

○ Focus on building relationships with students.

○ Provide more counselors, social workers and school psychologists to help students.

○ Create school-wide behavior expectations.

○ Give students more rewards for behaving right.

○ Don't worry about the suspension numbers; just suspend students who don't follow the rules.

30. **How many times a year do your parent and teachers get in contact with one another?**

○ 0

○ 1-3

○ 4-9

○ 10 or more

31. **Do you think any of the following factors impact how students receive suspensions?**

○ Race

○ Class

○ Economic levels

○ Neighborhood

○ Education level of parents

○ Parental involvement

Appendix 2

Individual student interview questions on discipline

1. What grade are you in?

2. How do your choices impact your learning?

3. How do you think other students' impact your learning?

4. In order to do a better job promoting learning, what should school staff do?

5. Should your school have school police every day? Why?

6. Should school police carry guns in schools? Why or why not?

7. Should the Student Code of Conduct be updated? Why or why not?

8. Do you feel as if out of school suspensions have increased since 2013? Explain why.

9. What can the school and district do to reduce suspension rates? Please explain your idea.

10. How many times a year does your parent and teacher get in contact with one another?

11. Do you think any of the following (race, class, economic levels, neighborhood, education levels of parents, others) factors impact how students receive suspensions? How so?

12. Do you think race is a reason why students get suspended? Explain

13. What top two recommendations would you make to your school administrators in order to reduce suspension rates?

14. What top two recommendations would you make to district administrators in order to reduce suspension rates?

15. Do you think it is possible to excel and achieve after receiving more than one suspension in a year? Why or why not?

Appendix 3

Student focus group activity

1. Do you feel physically safe at the school? Explain .

2. Do you feel emotionally safe at school? Explain.

3. Are students encouraged to say what they think and to freely express themselves? How so?

4. Please share what you believe are some of the biggest reasons why students receive out of school suspensions?

5. Should students not receive suspensions for some infractions? Which infractions should students not be suspended for?

6. Are you concerned about any of the following: gang violence, drugs, bullying? Why or why not?

7. Do you think administrators provide you with due process (to treat everyone the same, with the same requirements) when you receive a teacher write up? Please explain how due process is provided.

8. Why should the district consider revising the student code of conduct?

9. Work with a partner to brainstorm on some ways that the district can reduce suspensions?

10. Do you believe that developments outside of the school have any impact on your safety or achievement? Please explain how and why.

11. Do you feel as if school suspensions have increased (gone up), or decreased (gone down) since 2013? Please share why you feel it has increased or decreased.

12. If you have ever received a suspension, or you know someone who has been suspended, what are some reasons for why they were suspended?

13. If you could make recommendations to the CEO of schools on how to decrease out of school suspensions, what would they be?

Appendix 4

District and school administrators' individual interview and focus group questions

discipline

1. How long have you been at BCPSS?

2. Should your school have school police every day? Why or why not should your school have school police every day?

3. Should school police carry guns in schools? Why or why not should school police carry guns in schools?

4. Should the Student Code of Conduct be updated? Why or why not should the student code of conduct be updated?

5. What types of feedback do you receive from students about suspensions?

6. What types of feedback do you receive from parents about suspensions?

7. Do you feel as if out of school suspensions have increased or decreased since 2013? Please explain your answer.

8. What can the school and district do to reduce suspension rates?

9. What efforts are you making in your role to reduce suspensions?

10. Do you think any of the following (race, class, economic levels, neighborhood, education levels of parents, others) factors impact how students receive suspensions? How so?

11. What are some factors for the high suspension rates amongst African-American students?

12. Can the school/district implement an action plan to reduce their suspension numbers?

13. What do you see as key elements of an action plan that the school/district could implement to reduce the suspension numbers?

14. If you had to deliver a set of recommendation to Dr. Santelises on how to reduce suspensions, what would those recommendations be?