

LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

INVESTIGATING EXCLUSIONARY DISCIPLINE:
TEACHERS, DEFICIT THINKING, AND ROOT CAUSE ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to examine school-related predictors of exclusionary discipline practices and racial disproportionality in exclusionary discipline via a mixed-methodology approach involving a quantitative analysis of contextual factors, and a qualitative/quantitative examination of the role of teacher perception in contributing to exclusionary discipline patterns. Relying on publicly available school discipline data, Phase I involved a multiple regression analysis of 200 school districts that were purposefully selected within a state in the midst of school discipline reform to examine the impact of district size, student demographics, teacher demographics, and school funding in predicting the most extreme patterns of exclusionary discipline usage. Phase II involved further analysis into six school districts from the initial analysis, where teachers completed an open-ended questionnaire designed to examine how they think about subjective student behavior, what root causes they attributed to such behavior, and what steps they believed would address such root causes. Questionnaire data were quantified and systematically analyzed through the lenses of deficit thinking theory and school-based root cause analysis through descriptive analyses, ANOVA analyses, and paired samples t-tests.

Results of Phase I indicate that student demographic composition (e.g., percentage of students of color enrollment and percentage of students who receive free or reduced-price lunch enrollment) significantly predicted exclusionary discipline patterns and racial disproportionality in discipline usage. Results of Phase II indicate that the perceptions of teachers are significantly correlated with district-level discipline patterns, providing further support for the idea that school

discipline begins in the classroom. Furthermore, results indicate that deficit thinking likely manifests among teachers throughout all school contexts, regardless of the larger school discipline district data. Finally, results also indicate that teacher perception may be more alterable than previously believed, and highlight the importance of shifting the historical narrative of how student misbehavior is conceptualized in schools. Implications for educational reform efforts, teacher professional development, root cause analysis, and opportunities for multicultural school-based consultation are provided.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background

School discipline refers to the rules and strategies applied in school settings to manage student behavior, as well as the practices used to encourage self-discipline (American Institutes for Research, 2019). According to Bear (2010), there are two distinct aims for school discipline. The first aim involves creating and maintaining a safe, orderly, and positive learning environment, which may require the use of discipline to correct misbehavior. The second aim specifically involves the teaching and development of self-discipline among students. While the first aim typically involves the goal of an immediate end to misbehavior, the second typically involves the goal of sustaining long term outcomes such as developing autonomy. However, both aims are equally important in correcting misbehavior and preventing future occurrences of behavior problems (Bear, 2010).

School discipline exists upon a continuum, with entirely exclusionary actions on one end and entirely proactive actions on the other end. However, research suggests that exclusionary techniques are the most commonly employed approach to student misbehavior in schools (Losen, Hodson, Keith, Morrison, & Belway, 2015; Morgan, Salomon, Plotkin, & Cohen, 2014; Spaulding et al., 2010). Exclusionary school discipline is defined as any type of school disciplinary action that removes or excludes a student from his or her usual education setting (Green, Maynard, & Stegenga, 2017; Koon, 2013; Losen et al., 2015; Mediratta & Rausch,

2016). Suspension and expulsion are the most common forms of exclusionary school discipline and are also the most commonly employed discipline responses in schools (Baker, 2019). In fact, nearly 3.5 million public school students received an out-of-school suspension at least once during the 2011-2012 academic year (U.S. Department of Education, 2014), more than one student for every public teacher in America (Losen et al., 2015). Studies also suggest that at least one third of all students are likely to experience an out-of-school suspension or expulsion at some point during their schooling (Fabelo et al., 2011). Such rates are even higher for Black males, with estimates that nearly 70% of these students will experience at least one suspension or expulsion in their life (Shollenberger, 2015).

Many educators and parents believe that exclusionary discipline practices are the most effective approach to reducing problematic behavior (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008), resulting in a safe and orderly learning environment for students and effectively addressing the first aim of school discipline as reported by Bear (2010). However, such claims have not been supported by the literature (Martinez, 2009; Morgan et al., 2014; Skiba et al., 2006; Spaulding et al., 2010). Rather, exclusionary discipline practices have been tied to higher rates of misbehavior and less satisfactory ratings of school climate by students (Green et al., 2017; Kayama, Haight, Gibson, & Wilson, 2015; Koon, 2013; Way, 2011).

In addition, exclusionary discipline practices do not address the second aim of school discipline, because such consequences do not effectively address the many factors that typically contribute to student misbehavior (Bear, 2010; Green et al., 2017; Leach & Helf, 2016; Morgan et al., 2014). While removing a student from a classroom can be an appropriate response to help de-escalate a conflict, many students are removed from the classroom for relatively minor offenses undeserving of such response that could be better handled within the classroom (Losen,

2011; Morgan et al., 2014). For example, some schools may use harsh punishments for minor, first-time offenses, and in others, repeated minor misbehavior can lead to automatic suspension, expulsion, or even referrals to juvenile court (Gonzalez, 2015; Morgan et al., 2014; U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Thus, because the root causes of such minor behaviors typically go unaddressed, research states that students who are removed from school for misbehavior often return to school displaying the same behavior, if not more intensified (Green et al., 2017; Losen et al., 2015; Skiba et al., 2006).

Because of these limitations, there are long-standing concerns that exclusionary practices are not effective in responding to the behaviors they are intended to change (Sharkey & Fenning, 2012). In fact, exclusionary discipline practices have been consistently tied to lower attendance, higher risk of course failure, a path of disengagement from school (Balfanz, Byrnes, & Fox, 2014), reductions in academic performance, and higher student dropout and delinquency rates (Losen et al., 2015). Many researchers also find that school suspension predicts higher rates of misbehavior, antisocial behavior, and subsequent suspension (Balfanz et al., 2014).

Zero-Tolerance Policies

Systemic and Historical Implications

An examination of the historical underpinnings that have led to such increased reliance on exclusionary discipline practices begins with the passing of the Gun-Free Schools Act. In 1994, the Gun-Free Schools Act was enacted to address a perceived rise in school violence. This law required school districts throughout the country to institute a zero-tolerance policy for students who bring a firearm onto campus (Martinez, 2009). Zero-tolerance policies are defined as policies that mandate predetermined consequences or punishments (typically out-of-school suspension or expulsion) for specified offenses (Curran, 2016; Losen & Martinez, 2013; U.S.

Department of Education, 2014). Further, if school districts did not follow this policy, the law stated that they would lose federal funds mandated by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (United States, 1965). In 1995, the law was modified to include additional forms of student misbehavior such as drugs, alcohol, and fights (Martinez, 2009). By 1999, many school districts had implemented zero-tolerance policies for more subjective offenses such as swearing, insubordination, and disrespect, moving far beyond the original intent of zero-tolerance policies (Martinez, 2009). As such policies were implemented, consequently, the number of out-of-school suspension and expulsion issued to students began to rise throughout the country. Eventually in 2001, the American Bar Association released a statement indicating that zero-tolerance policies should be discontinued in schools (Dea, 2001). However, such practices had already been maintained and enforced for over 20 years in the nation, making it difficult for alternatives to replace them (Martinez, 2009). Nationally, the number of secondary school students who received a suspension or expulsion increased roughly 40% from 1 in 13 during the 1972-1973 academic year to 1 in 9 during the 2009-2010 academic year (Losen & Martinez, 2013). To this day, researchers continue to find that most suspension and expulsion are issued in response to minor violations of school codes of conduct, rather than more serious offenses. For example, one study identified that only 3% of suspension and expulsion utilized within one district were for a behavioral misconduct in which federal or state law require punitive actions for (Fabelo et al., 2011). As such, many educators to this day continue to rely on suspension and expulsion for minor and subjective offenses (Forsyth, Biggar, Forsyth, & Howat, 2015; Skiba et al., 2014; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002; Wallace Jr., Goodkind, Wallace, & Bachman, 2008; Zimmermann, 2018).

Outcomes and Side Effects

Time spent in the classroom and having an opportunity to learn are one of the most consistent predictors of academic achievement (Skiba, Mediratta, & Rausch, 2016). Thus, any form of exclusion from the classroom reduces the opportunity for learning, and ultimately undermines our national goal of educating all children (Ginsburg, Jordan, & Chang, 2014; Green et al., 2017; Morgan et al., 2014; Skiba et al., 2006). Furthermore, the negative short- and long-term consequences of such practices involve academic disengagement, decreased academic achievement, higher grade retention, increased risk of school dropout, increased risk of becoming involved in the school-to-prison pipeline, delayed workforce entry, and risk of future justice system contact (Fabelo et al., 2011; Flynn, Lissy, Alicea, Tazartes, & McKay, 2016; Green et al., 2017; Marchbanks et al., 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

Research indicates that schools and districts with high rates of out-of-school suspension usage may subsequently observe hindered academic achievement for both suspended and non-suspended students (Anyon, Zhang, & Hazel, 2016; Perry & Morris, 2014). One study found that 73% of students who received a suspension in ninth grade failed subsequent academic courses, compared to 36% of non-suspended students failing a course (Balfanz et al., 2014). Eventually, such lost educational opportunity places students at an increased risk for dropout, with research indicating that being suspended one time potentially increases risk of dropout by 20% (Balfanz et al., 2014).

Suspension is also a risk factor for future contact with the justice system, with research indicating that 32% of males suspended for ten or more days by the age of 12 had been confined in a correctional facility by their late twenties (Shollenberger, 2015). Furthermore, suspension is said to nearly triple a student's likelihood of involvement within the juvenile justice system

within the subsequent year, even among youth who did not have a prior history of misbehavior (Monahan, VanDerhei, Bechtold, & Cauffman, 2014). Such data provides clear evidence for a phenomenon called the school-to-prison pipeline, which describes the exclusionary discipline practices which result in school removal and eventual subsequent entry into the juvenile justice or correctional system (Losen & Martinez, 2013; Shapiro, Rodriguez, & Telip, 2014). Thus, the act of receiving a suspension or expulsion are huge risk factors for a host of negative school and life outcomes, and such risk factors are said to persist regardless of socioeconomic status, achievement, or previous behavioral history (Fabelo, 2011; Gregory, Cornell, & Fan, 2011; Losen, 2015; Skiba et al., 2015; Way, 2011; Wright, Morgan, Coyne, Beaver, & Barnes, 2014).

Racial Disparities in School Discipline

Although exclusionary discipline practices are frequently directed toward all students in the nation, students from particular sub-groups are subjected to these incidents at much higher rates than others, causing such negative outcomes to affect them at higher rates as well. More specifically, Black students, students in special education, and male students are significantly more likely to receive an office disciplinary referral and/or out-of-school suspension than their White, general education, and female student counterparts (Butler, Lewis, Moore III, & Scott, 2012; Faer & Omojola, 2015; Losen et al., 2015; Skiba et al., 2011; U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Furthermore, research indicates that students who attend schools where disparities in discipline practices are present are likely to notice such inequitable practices, perceive them as unfair, and feel less connection to a school, regardless if they belong to the disproportionately referred group or not (Anyon et al., 2016; Bellmore, Nishina, You, & Ma, 2012; Debnam, Johnson, Waasdorp, & Bradshaw, 2013).

When zero-tolerance policies were first enacted, it was believed that such policies would

lead to more equitable discipline practices because they were believed to removed subjective influences from disciplinary decisions (Skiba et al., 2006). However, research indicates that zero-tolerance policies actually contribute to disproportionality because of the subjective nature of the behavior schools tend to have “zero-tolerance” for (Curran, 2016; Hoffman, 2014). Thus, the disproportionate discipline of students of color continues to be a concern, with Black students being suspended on average three times more than White students. While Black students comprise 16% of the US public school population, they represent 32-42% of exclusionary discipline sanctions and 27-31% of law enforcement referrals and school-based arrests (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Furthermore, data suggests that during the 2015-16 academic year, Black students lost on average 121 days of instruction due to being excluded from the classroom, while White students lost 43 days of instruction due to exclusion from the classroom (Losen, 2018). Such disparities often begin in preschool, with Black children representing 18% of preschool enrollment, but 48% of Black preschool children receiving at least one suspension. In comparison, White students represent 43% of preschool enrollment and make up 26% of preschool children receiving at least one suspension (U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

These statistics mirror over 40 years of overrepresentation of Black students in the exclusionary school discipline system (Edelman, Beck, & Smith, 2015; Skiba et al., 2002; Wallace et al., 2008). Prior research also indicates that racial disparities remain even after accounting for socioeconomic status, ability status, previous academic achievement, as well as the rates of Black student misbehavior that would warrant higher rates of discipline (Anyon et al., 2014; Bradshaw, Mitchell, O’Brennnan, & Leaf, 2010; Skiba et al., 2002; Skiba et al., 2006; Skiba et al., 2014). Furthermore, racial disproportionality in suspension usage is said to be a strong predictor of similar levels of racial disparity within juvenile court referrals, even after

controlling for factors such as level of delinquent behavior and poverty (Nicholson-Crotty, Birchmeier, & Valentine, 2009).

Disproportionality in school discipline extends to other traditionally marginalized groups of students as well, with research indicating that Hispanic/Latinx students, students with disabilities, and students from LGBTQ backgrounds are more likely to experience exclusionary discipline compared to their White, able-bodied, and heterosexual counterparts (Himmelstein & Bruckner, 2011; Losen, 2018; Losen & Gillespie, 2012; Peguero & Shekarkhar, 2011; U.S. Department of Education, 2014; Whitford & Levine-Donnerstein, 2014).

Meta-Narratives on Exclusionary Discipline and Disparities

Although exclusionary discipline practices and disproportionality have been well documented in the literature, little is known about the factors that contribute to their usage or how to effectively address such overuse. Researchers who have sought to understand the factors that contribute to high exclusionary discipline rates and racial disproportionality have focused on many areas; systemic contributors, school policy contributors, capacity issues, as well as concerns with staff bias (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). However, it is also important to examine the underlying narratives that continue to perpetuate the use of such practices. Mediratta and Rausch (2016) describe the safety and order narrative and cultural deficiency narrative, which explain why such practices continue to be considered “necessary” and “normal” amidst overarching critiques.

Safety and Order Narrative

The safety and order narrative involves the idea that suspension and other forms of punitive and exclusionary discipline are necessary to maintain safety and order in schools (Mediratta & Rausch, 2016; Wright et al., 2014). Proponents of this narrative believe that a trend

of worsening student behavior necessitates the use of exclusionary discipline strategies. However, the literature consistently indicates that the rise in the use of such practices is not tied to a growth in overall disruptive behavior (Curran, 2016) and is rather tied to the overreliance on such practices for more minor student behaviors (Brown & Brown, 2012; Green et al., 2017) such as tardies, dress-code violations, and non-compliance, which can often be better handled through non-exclusionary means (Morgan et al., 2014). For example, according to a study conducted by Yusuf, Irvine, and Bell (2016), in one district, almost half of the students who received a suspension were suspended for “willful defiance or disruption,” a subjective behavior that involves substantial variation in interpretation (Brown & Brown, 2012).

Furthermore, research suggests that although suspension rate is related to inappropriate or challenging student behavior, it is more strongly affected by school factors (Wu, 1980). School characteristics such as principal perspectives, school culture, school spending per pupil, student demographics, and teacher demographics have been consistently tied to overreliance on exclusionary practices in schools (Booth, Marchbanks III, Carmichael, & Fabelo, 2012; Christle, Nelson, & Jolivette, 2004; Mukuria, 2002; Skiba et al., 2014). Proponents of the safety and order narrative also implicitly suggest that students from traditionally marginalized backgrounds are disproportionately more likely to be violent or disrespectful, which supposedly increases the need for removal of such students to protect the learning environment for other students (Mediratta & Rausch, 2016). However, there is no evidence that suggests that students from traditionally marginalized backgrounds engage in higher rates of misbehavior (George, 2015; Girvan, Gion, McIntosh, & Smolkowski, 2017; Skiba et al, 2002; Skiba et al., 2011).

Cultural. Deficiency Narrative

The cultural deficiency narrative implies that exclusionary discipline is a necessary tool for establishing high behavioral expectations among children who may lack such guidance in the home or who suffer from adverse influences in their communities (Mediratta & Rausch, 2016). Thus, this narrative assumes that student misbehavior is a function of deficiencies in the home rather than factors related to the school setting (Ferguson, 2000). The implicit undertones of this narrative insinuate that students from traditionally marginalized backgrounds bring anti-social and inappropriate forms of misbehavior from home and into schools that require tough disciplinary response. Such beliefs have not been substantiated by the school discipline literature. Rather, research indicates that educators' perception of students is a strong driver in how they respond to misbehavior in the classroom (Ferguson, 2000).

Relatedly, the cultural synchrony hypothesis provides a framework that suggests that educational disparities may be associated with a lack of cultural synchrony between Black students and their teachers, who often do not share their same cultural or racial/ethnic background (Irvine, 1990). The cultural synchrony hypothesis asserts that many educators may be unfamiliar with the culture and learning styles of students of color, particularly Black students. Thus, the social and behavioral norms that Black students bring into the school environment that are distinct from White, middle-class culture are often misunderstood and misinterpreted by staff because of the cultural divide (Blake, Gregory, James, & Hasan, 2016).

Research suggests that exposure to same-race teachers is associated with reduced rates of exclusionary discipline for Black students (Lindsay & Hart, 2017). In fact, as a school's faculty and students become less similar in terms of race/ethnicity, the likelihood of discipline increases (Blake et al., 2016). Students of color comprise at least half of the population in the largest 25

cities in the United States, and this rate is expected to continue increasing, with more and more students of color attending public schools throughout the nation in upcoming years (Ladson-Billings, 2005). However, as we continue to experience increasing diversity among school-aged children, the teaching force throughout the nation is becoming less ethnically and culturally diverse, with White teachers comprising about 88% of the nation's teaching force (Ladson-Billings, 2005). This can lead to challenges regarding bias and stereotyping in the classroom due to cultural mismatch between students and teachers (Baker, 2019; Carter, Fine, & Russel, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 2005; Monroe, 2005; Stephens & Townsend, 2015).

Implicit Bias and Deficit Thinking

Research indicates that school personnel perceive and evaluate Black students more negatively compared to White students across both academic and behavior domains regardless of teacher race (Bottiani, Bradshaw, & Mendelson, 2016; Haight, Kayama, & Gibson, 2016; Halberstadt, Castro, Chu, Lozada, & Sims, 2018; Liou, Marsh, & Antrop-Gonzalez, 2017; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004; Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007; Tyler, Boykin, & Walton, 2006; Walker, 2011; Zimmerman, 2018). Thus, implicit bias on the part of educators has recently emerged as an important area of school discipline research. Such implicit prejudices among school staff are often outside of their conscious awareness and may play a role when making decisions regarding student behavior (Glock & Klapproth, 2017; Ispa-Landa, 2018; Staats, 2014). Such covert behaviors often lead to discriminatory outcomes for students who happen to fit the mold of certain identities (Brown & Brown, 2012; Glaser & Knowles, 2008; Glock & Karbach, 2015; Kunesh & Noltemeyer, 2019; Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015). This may lead to educators enabling a self-fulfilling prophecy when students identified as “troublesome” engage in various misbehavior (Edwards, McKinzie Bennett, & Johnson, 2019; Martinez, McMahon, &

Treger, 2016; Mayfield, 2017). This is particularly problematic for Black students, who are often labeled as being “prone to violence”, and/ or “dangerous” (Kahn, Godd, & Glaser, 2016; Kunesh & Noltemeyer, 2019; Reyna, 2000; Staats, 2014). Academically, teachers often perceive Black student performance as lower than that of White students because such stereotypes may affect teacher perception of student competence and ability (Parks & Kennedy, 2007; Walker, 2011), thus leading to lower rates of Black students in honors courses and often higher rates of Black students placed in special education (Francis, 2012; Liou et al., 2017).

Racial bias is also said to result in a school culture that may pathologize Black students and their families, which contributes to problematic cycles of unwarranted discipline usage (Gibson, Wilson, Haight, Kayama, & Marshall, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 2017; Staats, 2016). Teachers who consistently write referrals for students of color may believe that students of color with behavioral concerns are unable to change and/or are deserving of such harsh consequences (Kunesh & Noltemeyer, 2019; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004; Pane, Rocco, Miller, & Salmon, 2014). This deficit-centered explanation fails to acknowledge the many assets of students of color or understand how to proactively support the behavioral needs of students of color (Aldana, 2016; Patton & Jordan, 2017; Weiner, 2006). Furthermore, implicit bias and deficit thinking toward Black students often leads teachers to blame students and their communities rather than adjusting their teaching practices to offer a more inclusive learning environment (Brinkley et al., 2018; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004; Walker, 2011).

Deficit thinking theory (Valencia, 2010) is one theory that explains the phenomenon where implicit bias leads to blame. Deficit thinking theory refers to the labeling of poor and/or minority students and their families as disadvantaged, at-risk, and/or uninvolved (Walker, 2011). It essentially posits that students who fail in school do so because of internal deficits or

deficiencies. Therefore, this theory posits that educators may subconsciously absolve all responsibility in providing sufficient academic and/or behavioral support to historically marginalized groups of students by attributing the problem to internal factors such as poverty and home life. Deficit thinking among educators may manifest in ways that blame students for their behavior and shortcomings, rather than examining the role that school, systemic, and individual teaching factors may play in student performance (Reed, Fenning, Johnson, & Mayworm, 2020). Because such biases are often unintentional and constructed by larger societal institutions, many people may not realize they hold them. Furthermore, those who practice this paradigm may hold that students who are culturally different from the majority have less competence, less intelligence, less capability, and less self-motivation (Aldana, 2006; Baker, 2019; Harry & Klinger, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 2017; Reyna, 2000). Teachers who consciously or subconsciously operate with this mindset may also believe that unless students of color change background characteristics such as their culture, values, or family structures, they have no opportunity to have successful outcomes at school. Thus, the solutions for improvement are deemed beyond the teacher or school system's control and influence (James-Ward, Frey, & Fisher, 2012; Walker, 2011; Willis, 2008), making it essential to further understand the ways in which such biases impact teacher behavior in the classroom (Kahn et al., 2016).

Possible Solutions to Disparities

Research indicates that schools have the power to change their rates of exclusion and, further, that there are effective and promising alternatives to exclusionary discipline that can reduce racial disparity if implemented efficiently (Losen & Smith-Evans Hanes, 2016). Such efforts can exist at both the school level and/or at the classroom level. Furthermore, changes in disciplinary outcomes are more likely to occur by establishing a clear focus on actionable

factors. Because educators cannot change the sociodemographic challenges that students bring with them into school, committing to establishing positive rather than punitive school and classroom environments, engaging in problem solving strategies rather than exclusionary strategies, and consciously increasing cultural responsiveness are said to be important solutions to reducing exclusionary discipline practices and disproportionality (Bal, Afacan, & Cakir, 2018; Lustick, 2017; McCreedy & Soloway, 2010; Skiba et al., 2016). In addition, it is important and possible for educators to challenge deficit explanations of the discipline gap by analyzing how perceptions, attributes, and decisions either contribute to or mitigate behavioral concerns (Brown & Brown, 2012; Deckman, 2017; Mayfield, 2017; Pane et al., 2014; Patton & Jordan, 2017).

Current School Discipline Reform Efforts

Striking a healthy balance between maintaining safety and order in schools along with minimally disruptive school discipline policies remains a challenge for schools throughout the country (Curran, 2019). Increasingly, both federal and state policymakers are taking initiatives to spread knowledge on the harmful effects of exclusionary discipline practices and increase awareness of alternative options. In 2009, the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) expanded the school discipline data that districts are required to report. In 2014, the OCR along with the Department of Justice (DOJ) issued a guidance that outlined the harmful effects of such practices and subsequent disparities and stressed that failure to change harsh policies would constitute a violation of civil rights. Further, in March 2015, the Supportive School Climate Act of 2015 was introduced by congress which continued the support for alternatives to suspension.

Although this important guidance was recently retracted, many states throughout the nation have passed legislation restricting the use of suspension and expulsion (Ritter, 2018). As of 2015, 22 states in the nation as well as the District of Columbia had revised laws to "require or

encourage schools to: limit the use of exclusionary discipline practices; implement supportive discipline strategies; and provide support services such as counseling, dropout prevention, and guidance services for at-risk students” (Steinberg & Lacoë, 2017, p. 44).

Consistent with nationwide efforts, the state in which the current study takes place has implemented statewide discipline legislation that requires greater transparency in district reporting of total incidences of out-of-school suspension, expulsion, and disciplinary transfers to alternative settings (Fenning & Johnson, 2016). One important component of the act is the compilation and public report of all discipline data disaggregated by race and ethnicity, gender, age, grade level, limited English proficiency, incident type, and discipline duration. This statewide legislation also requires the top 20% of school districts throughout the state with the highest rates of suspension/expulsion and highest rates of racial/ethnic disproportionality to be publicly identified and required to create a corrective action plan with strategies for addressing the identified discipline issues.

The second accompanying piece of the statewide legislation requires school districts to limit the unnecessary use of exclusionary discipline and to determine the extent to which “appropriate and available” alternatives to exclusionary discipline can be used. Other provisions require school faculty to determine suspension days on a case-by-case basis based on whether the students’ continued presence in school would pose a continued threat to school operations, thus prohibiting the use of zero-tolerance policies. Furthermore, this legislation recommends opportunities to provide faculty with professional development on effective classroom management strategies in order to aid in aligning practice with these mandates (Moreno & Scaletta, 2018). See Fenning and Johnson (2016) for a more detailed summary of the state discipline legislation.

However, even with such reforms, punitive practices and disproportionality remain prevalent in American public schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). For example, the state in which the current study was conducted has observed slight decreases in the overall use of exclusionary disciplinary practices but an overall increase in racial disproportionality (Reed & Fenning, 2019). Historically, the schools often targeted by such policies (schools with high proportions of students of color and schools that frequently use exclusionary discipline) are often the schools that fail to comply with discipline reform legislation, even three years after policy change (Anderson, 2018). According to Anderson, this is said to be the case because of: (a) insufficient communication to schools regarding the purpose of the policy change or suggested alternatives to suspension; (b) a lack of accountability for adherence to the new guidelines; and (c) a lack of capacity or resources for compliance. Many researchers believe that policy change is only a necessary first step in addressing the issue. In order to make a systemic impact in the reduction of suspension use along with their disparate impact on children of color, the process must also involve changing the everyday practices in principals' offices and classrooms (Koon, 2013). Without attending to the norms and politics that sustain the use of exclusionary discipline practices and disparities at the school level, prolonged change is unlikely (Wiley et al., 2018). In addition, without a clear understanding of the factors contributing to exclusionary discipline practices, policy-change alone may be ineffective in leading to desired outcomes or may even perpetuate old patterns of exclusion (Deschenes, Cuban, & Tyack, 2001). Therefore, it is suggested that in order for policy to affect change at the school level, policy makers must improve communication and local-buy in, develop and implement accountability systems, and improve resource-capacity for schools to successfully comply (Anderson, 2018).

Recent policy implementation literature stresses the multilayered nature of policy

implementation and encourages a mutual process negotiated between those making policy and those implementing policy to effectively target the contextual structures surrounding implementation (Datnow & Parks, 2009). For example, practices at the classroom level are embedded within the school, district, state, and federal context (McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993), and these contexts must shape implementation decisions made by policymakers and individuals implementing policy (Datnow & Parks, 2009). However, according to a New Teacher Center survey of more than one million teachers, only 32% of teachers in high-poverty schools and 37% in low-poverty schools felt they had input in school discipline procedures (Ingersoll, May, & Collins, 2017; Sprick & Knight, 2018).

Theoretical Framework

Equity-Minded School Change Framework

Equity-minded school change was originally developed and applied to the implementation of academic de-tracking reforms in schools throughout the nation (Oakes, 1992; Oakes, Welner, Yonezawa, & Allen, 2005). Recently, this framework has been applied more broadly to various systemic education reform efforts, such as school discipline reform (Wiley et al., 2018). This framework implies that there are three important dimensions of effective and comprehensive education reform that must be addressed when striving for systemic education reform: technical, normative, and political dimensions.

Technical dimensions. Technical dimensions involve the structures, strategies, and knowledge associated with the educational issue. Structures refer to the arrangements of people, time, space and materials. Strategies may involve curricular and pedagogical approaches, and knowledge involves exposure to specialized professional development and training (Oakes, 1992). In regard to school discipline, necessary technical dimensions for effective school

discipline reform include professional development, relationship-building, and discretionary spending. The intentional use of time factors into all of these aspects. Setting aside the time for professional development and training provides staff with the structural and intellectual support necessary to undertake new approaches to behavior management. Positive relationships between the entire school community must also be cultivated. Thus, the time and structure must be allocated to effectively establish deeper connections between staff members and also between staff and students. Finally, the strategic use of site-based budgeting to support school discipline reform efforts is integral. For example, hiring additional support service providers and/or restorative practice coordinators may be necessary to support the robust implementation of school discipline reform efforts (Wiley et al., 2018).

Normative dimensions. Normative dimensions involve the beliefs, attitudes, and values held by the key-stakeholders and decision makers of the educational issue (Oakes, 1992). In regard to school discipline, necessary normative dimensions involve educators possessing a set of beliefs toward discipline which involve prevention rather than punishment, the importance of relationships, adult-responsibility for conflict, the human capacity for growth, and beliefs about the importance of understanding and addressing racism (Wiley et al., 2018). More specifically, a school culture that reflects a preventive and proactive orientation to minimizing conflict is essential. Further, educators must truly believe that exclusionary discipline practices are ineffective in addressing the root cause of misbehavior and instead strive to adopt a commitment to problem solving. The student-teacher relationship is also an integral aspect that must be a priority for all educators, as well as an understanding of the role that educators play in both creating and resolving conflict. The latter specifically involves an awareness of the ways in which staff behavior may exacerbate or minimize discipline issues. Treating mistakes as

opportunities to problem solve and learn new skills is also an important approach as well, which should be implemented among both students and school staff. Finally, rather than placing blame on students and families, educators must recognize the larger structural and racialized inequities at play within the school and within their own practices (Wiley et al., 2018).

Political dimensions. Political dimensions involve the power and resource stratification in schools. For example, if an educational practice is linked to racial and economic stratification, reforms seeking change may anticipate pushback from those benefiting from the current arrangement. Further, changes that aim to advance the interests of traditionally underserved groups can threaten the interests of the more powerful groups, causing barriers to implementation (Oakes, 1992). Thus, in education settings it is important to be aware of the power dynamics and rely on a leader who is willing to use such power proactively. In regard to school discipline, necessary political dimensions for effective school discipline reform include reinforcing expectations among staff and personnel decisions (Wiley et al., 2018). More specifically, school leaders must be willing to use their power to reinforce expectations for handling conflict in the classroom. For example, administrators must be willing to hold teachers accountable to expected protocols and proactively guide teachers through missteps. Further, administrators must use their power to hire and retain staff based on alignment to such values, further reiterating the importance of the school cultural values (Wiley et al., 2018).

Altogether, these three dimensions reveal a comprehensive and integrated approach to school discipline and form the basis of both implementing and sustaining school discipline reform. Further, this framework illuminates the interrelationship of all factors, suggesting that a one-dimensional approach may overlook or leave out key elements. The current national and state level approach to school discipline reform efforts only slightly responds to one of these

three important areas, the technical dimension. While policy change is an important step in the right direction that requires new strategies for addressing behavior as well as professional development opportunities, policy makers and educators may not see the change expected if the underlying normative and political dimensions are not assessed and addressed as well.

According to Dam, Jannsen, and van Driel (2018), successful educational reform requires behavioral change from the stakeholders affected. In order for this to occur, teachers and staff must possess the requisite knowledge and skills, form strong positive intentions to perform the new behavior, and have a supporting environment for change. Current approaches to educational reform are aimed at the development of knowledge and skills and focus less on supportive environments and intentions to change (Dam et al., 2018). Thus, an understanding of teacher beliefs, teacher mindset, and teacher interpretation of school discipline and student misbehavior is an important area of examination that is currently lacking in the school discipline reform literature.

Teacher Factors in Implementation

While school discipline reform efforts have flooded the nation in response to the overreliance on exclusionary practices, the act of assessing teacher mindset and skillset toward classroom behavior management and student behavior continues to be missing from the equation (Anderson, 2018; Dam et al., 2018; Sprick & Knight 2018; Tyre & Feuerborn, 2017).

Furthermore, many teachers are opposed to alternatives to suspension and other positive behavior strategies because of limited training, a lack of understanding of the purpose of such strategies, and overall philosophical disagreements of the utility of the changes (Tyre & Feuerborn, 2017). This is an extremely important barrier to school discipline reform efforts throughout the country because of the lack of buy-in, support, and input from one of the key

stakeholders affected by such changes.

According to Yusuf et al. (2016), teachers rarely have time to think about how routine decisions may affect larger trends of disproportionate suspension. However, when given the space to be involved in such conversations, teachers are open to examining their role in this issue. This study points to the importance of involving all stakeholders in decision-making and specifically points to the need for more intensive efforts to engage teachers in conversation regarding the problem, deep reflection into the causes of the problem, and possible solutions to the problem (Yusuf et al., 2016).

Teachers in the midst of district-wide discipline reform often express concern regarding a lack of teacher collaboration in developing the plan for behavior management at school (Gregory et al., 2016; Moreno & Scaletta, 2018; Sprick & Knight, 2018). The importance of gaining teacher buy-in when engaging in systemic school reform of any nature is heavily substantiated in the literature (Rainbolt, Sutton Fowler, & Cumings Mansfield, 2019; Rollenhagen, Goodman, & Barnes, 2017). Teachers also indicate feelings of underappreciation for their daily struggle to respond efficiently to the behavioral needs of students and often face criticism in the decisions they make, pointing to the increased importance of understanding their perception and providing consistent training based on their needs (Rainbolt et al., 2019).

Teacher Perception of Behavior

Because teachers play such a key role in the decision-making process of responding to student misbehavior in schools, it's important to understand how they think about student behavior and how such thought processes may impact the larger school culture and practices. Teachers are often looked to as the experts on their students' behavioral performance due to the amount of time spent with them and their teaching expertise, thus pointing to the importance of

ensuring unbiased frameworks for assessing such performance. One proactive approach that teachers take part in involves determining and addressing the underlying function of student misbehavior through a process called functional behavior assessment (FBA). In fact, amendments were introduced to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1997, which specifically require the use of FBAs when addressing behavioral concerns among students (Drasgow, Yell, Bradley, & Shriner, 1999). Typically, FBAs involve identification of the antecedent, behavior, and consequence of a student's misbehavior and the creation of a behavior intervention plan (BIP) to support the student. Unfortunately, research indicates that the majority of FBAs conducted occur with students in special education, rather than students in general education (Anderson, Rodriguez, & Campbell, 2015), leading to a lack of inquiry into the causes of misbehavior for the majority of students.

Furthermore, the FBA process does not allow staff members to critique or analyze processes and practices at the contextual or systemic levels that could be contributing to the misbehavior and rather focuses on student level deficits (Loman & Borgmeier, 2010). In fact, the current approach to functional behavior assessments may unintentionally encourage deficit interpretations of behavior. According to Allday (2018), a functional thinking approach to understanding student behavior involves thinking about the following: (a) why a student is engaging in the behavior, (b) what deficit is related to the behavior, and (c) how to match the behavior's function and related deficit with an appropriate intervention. This framework and other formal assessment frameworks oftentimes unintentionally place blame within the individual student.

Data used to identify the antecedent, behavior, and consequence depend on formal classroom observations generally conducted by school-based mental health professionals along

with anecdotal input from teachers. This process consequently does not address how teacher beliefs about the causes of student problem behavior may influence decision making related to behavior management or the overall role that perception plays in determining the function of student behavior. Thus, teacher decisions about how to respond to misbehavior may depend on what they view as the cause of problem behavior and whether teachers believe that such problem behaviors can be changed by school-based intervention (Simms, 2014). In the education literature, attribution theory has been the primary method of examining this phenomenon in schools.

Attributional models. Attributional models suggest that how an individual responds to an event is influenced to a large degree by the causes an individual attributes to that event (Simms, 2014). Weiner's Theory of Motivation identifies three causal dimensions of behavior (Weiner, 1976). First, *locus of control* refers to the location of the cause or whether the cause of the behavior is internal or external to the individual. For example, a teachers' response to a student failing a test may depend on whether the teacher believes the student failed because they did not try hard enough (internal locus of control) or that they failed because the test was too difficult (external locus of control). Second, *stability* refers to the likelihood that the cause of a behavior, situation, or event would or could change. Causal attributions that are related to an individual's disposition may be perceived as a stable cause, while causal attributions related to environmental factors may be perceived as unstable causes. For example, a teacher may attribute a child's challenging behavior to a disability (stable cause) as opposed to a change in the normal classroom routine (unstable cause). The third causal dimension is *controllability*, referring to whether the cause attributed to an occurrence is perceived to be within the individual's control or not. A fourth causal dimension was later identified that is closely related to *controllability*. *Blame*

and intentionality indicates that causal attributions involve the act of either placing blame or drawing conclusions about responsibility (Weiner, 1993). For example, when something is attributed to a lack of effort, controllable causality may be assumed, and the individual is deemed responsible for an occurrence. On the other hand, when a failure is attributed to a lack of ability, uncontrollable causality may be assumed, thus leading to the individual not being perceived as responsible and the person making judgment being more likely to express sympathy rather than punishment (Simms, 2014)

Nemer, Sutherland, Chow, and Kunemund (2019) provide a clear example of how these decisions may play out in schools to lead to disparities in discipline referrals and subsequent disparities in exclusionary practices. The example involves a student consistently shouting out the answers in class without raising their hand. If the teacher attributes the behavior to attention seeking, it is likely that they will be frustrated and reprimand the student. However, if the teacher attributes the behavior to excitement for the topic, the teacher may be more sympathetic and positively remind the student of the classroom rules (Nemer et al., 2019). There are many factors that come into play when understanding why the same behavior from different students may be attributed to a different cause and thus leading to a harsher consequence. For example, the categorization of a student as Black or African American compared to White has been heavily supported by the literature as a possible contributor to negative and/or deficit interpretations of the causes of student misbehavior (Kunesh & Noltemeyer, 2019; Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015). Unfortunately, such factors are often not considered by teachers when determining how to address student behavior, thus leading to the need for school-based approaches to identify the causes of student behavior from objective means. While relatively new to the education literature, root cause analysis may be one possible approach to aide in identifying the attribution

of student behavior while mitigating the impact of biases and deficit thinking.

Root cause analysis. A root cause is defined as “the deepest underlying cause, or causes, of positive or negative symptoms within any process that, if dissolved, would result in elimination, or substantial reduction, of the symptom” (Preuss, 2003, p. 2). A root cause analysis is defined as “an effective tool used both reactively, to investigate an adverse event that has already occurred, and proactively to analyze and improve processes and systems before they break down” (p. 1). A root cause analysis is most effective when the goal is to discover the causes for success or eliminate the causes of a red-flag issue. Furthermore, this generative process allows stakeholders to redirect the level of discussion and focus on deeper underlying issues that often go ignored or unresolved. In schools, root cause analyses can be used at the systemic level to identify the factors contributing to a schoolwide problem or at the classroom level to identify the factors contributing to a student level concern. However, regardless of the level a root cause analysis is implemented within (systems level vs. classroom level), it is a system-focused, rather than people-focused process. It is not employed to place blame, but rather to determine the components of a system that need to be improved (Preuss, 2003).

There are six major hypothesis categories that exist when examining problems within schools. Research indicates that all potential elements of causation within the school can be assigned to one of these areas (Preuss, 2003): (a) student demographics, (b) curriculum, (c) instruction, (d) school system processes, (e) organizational culture, and (f) external factors. Ideally, the root cause analysis process allows for the identification of hypotheses within multiple or all levels thus leading to the generation of multiple school-based interventions to address the root cause. Student demographics hypotheses involve the identification of characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, language spoken, disabilities, academic history, and participation rates as root

causes of student misbehavior in schools. Curriculum hypotheses involve the identification of curriculum alignment and/or curriculum balance as possible root causes of student misbehavior in schools. Hypotheses in the instruction category involve the identification of teacher training and skills, classroom management, and/or student groupings as possible root causes of student misbehavior in schools. Hypotheses in the system processes category involve the identification of factors such as academic and discipline policies, leadership style, and staffing as root causes of student misbehavior in schools. Organizational culture hypotheses involve factors such as school culture, student/teacher relationships, and school values and beliefs as root causes of student misbehavior in schools. Finally, the external factors category involves hypotheses such as student home life, neighborhood safety, and exposure to violence as root causes of student misbehavior in schools (Preuss, 2003).

Hypotheses that fall within the curriculum, instruction, school system processes, or organizational culture categories (Preuss, 2003) are deemed putative malleable root causes, or root causes that examine the role that school factors play in contributing to and/or causing the problem behavior, and are capable of being changed via school-based intervention (Cook et al. 2018). Conversely, hypotheses that fall within the student demographics or external factors categories (Preuss, 2003) are deemed deficit-centered in nature, or root causes that blame students and families for their behavior and/or shortcomings, and are generally not capable of being changed via school-based intervention (Saldana, 2009). Hypotheses in this category are deemed deficit-centered due to the fact that school personnel often have little control over these factors and can lead to the belief that nothing can be done in school to change these variables (Saldana, 2009).

Causes of behavior in schools are often attributed to deficit factors (Brinkley et al., 2018;

McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004; Preuss, 2003; Walker, 2011) due to the historical and societal underpinnings that contribute to how we conceptualize misbehavior and the narratives that have led us here (e.g., safety and order narrative, cultural deficiency narrative) (Mediratta & Rausch, 2016). Therefore, school staff often have little training or understanding of the other factors that may be at play or how to address such contextual factors. However, only examining factors at the deficit level dismisses school staff of their responsibility in analyzing more malleable factors that could be contributing to the behaviors. Based on previous literature regarding school staff perceptions of students of color as well as the cultural synchrony hypothesis (Blake et al., 2016; Irvine, 1990; Monroe & Obidah, 2004; Redding, 2019), it is hypothesized that teachers may be more likely to assign deficit-centered root causes when attempting to understand the underlying root causes of subjective student misbehavior, thus contributing to high exclusionary discipline rates and disproportionality.

Current Study Rationale and Purpose

Rationale

While there is literature on exclusionary practices, disproportionality within such practices, and the negative outcomes associated within such practices, significant gaps in the literature remain, particularly in our understanding of the reasons for such disparities as well as how they can be effectively addressed (Skiba et al. 2016). An important first step in answering this question involves analysis into the contextual factors that may systemically play a large role in how discipline manifests in schools, such as school spending per pupil, student demographics, and teacher demographics (Booth et al., 2012; Christle et al., 2004; Mukuria, 2002; Skiba et al., 2014). Further research is also needed to understand how school-based practitioners respond to state, district, and school disciplinary policy change as well as the extent to which implicit bias

among teachers may hinder this response (Skiba et al., 2016).

As we move forward in understanding how to effectively address the overreliance on exclusionary discipline practices and disproportionality in school discipline, it is important to analyze the discriminatory social practices that occur at both the systemic level and interpersonal level that may be contributing to the problem. Research indicates that it is important and possible for educators to challenge deficit explanations of the discipline gap by analyzing how perceptions, attributes, and decisions either contribute to or mitigate behavioral concerns (Pane et al., 2014). Thus, this dissertation study sought to dive deeper into the complexities of systemic racism, structural inequality, teacher capacity, and teacher mindset in order to continue identifying realistic ways to address this problem.

Research indicates that there are many systemic factors that are often correlated with high exclusionary discipline usage and racial disproportionality in discipline practices. In order to understand the relationship between these many factors (student demographics, teacher demographics, school funding), this study sought to examine the role each factor plays in predicting both exclusionary discipline practices and racial disproportionality outcomes throughout school districts in one state. In addition, despite the role that teachers play in addressing student misbehavior, few studies have sought to understand how teachers think about student misbehavior, how teachers perceive the root cause of student misbehavior, and how such perceptions relate to districtwide exclusionary discipline patterns. In sum, the researcher sought to compare and contrast the systemic and teacher level variables among and within school districts with lower exclusionary discipline rates and school districts with higher exclusionary discipline rates.

Purpose

The overarching purpose of the current study was to understand the factors that contribute to continued exclusionary discipline usage and racial disproportionality within a state in the midst of school discipline reform. This study specifically targeted the often overlooked normative and political dimensions of the equity-minded school change framework within a state currently undergoing discipline reform efforts. More specifically, the researcher hoped to gain an understanding of the variables not typically acknowledged or assessed by large-scale policy reform, such as predetermined school level variables and teacher beliefs and attitudes.

Based on the literature, the researcher hypothesized that there were larger contextual factors that play a role in exclusionary discipline patterns throughout school districts. Thus, this study sought to analyze the often predetermined and systemically derived variables that lead to certain schools engaging in higher rates of exclusionary discipline usage and/or disproportionality in discipline usage. Such variables include student racial demographics, student socioeconomic demographics, teacher demographics, and funding opportunities.

The researcher also hypothesized that another possible cause of high exclusion rates and disproportionality was teacher perception of student misbehavior. The literature has briefly documented the ways in which implicit bias and deficit thinking manifests when making decisions regarding student behavior in the classroom, thus, the researcher hypothesized that one possible root cause or contributing factor to both racial disproportionality and high exclusionary discipline usage is teacher perception of the root of student misbehavior. The use of deficit-centered ideologies have been tied to inequitable treatment of students, while more malleable considerations have been deemed a proactive approach to handling misbehavior. Thus, this study sought to compare and contrast the perception of teachers who work in districts with various

discipline patterns in order to understand if such perception was related to the differing discipline patterns.

By asking teachers to reflect on real-world student misbehavior occurring in their classrooms and assign root causes to such misbehavior, the researcher hoped to gain a greater understanding of the factors often considered by teachers when responding to misbehavior. In addition, the term “root cause” is relatively new to the education literature and was thought to present teachers with a new way of thinking about student misbehavior. The hypothesis that drove this aspect of the study was that teachers working in districts with the highest rates of racial disproportionality in suspension usage and/or highest rates of exclusionary discipline patterns relative to other districts in the state would be more likely to identify punitive or harsh response strategies when presented with subjective student misbehavior in a vignette and also more likely to attribute deficit-centered root causes when asked about the root of said misbehavior. Contrastingly, teachers working in school districts with no racial disproportionality and/or low rates of exclusionary discipline were hypothesized to identify proactive or mild response strategies when presented with subjective student misbehavior in a vignette and more likely to attribute malleable root causes when asked about the root of said misbehavior.

Finally, while the literature consistently documents the relationship between attributions of student misbehavior based on perception and subsequent response to student misbehavior, the researcher was also interested in examining if teacher responses to subjective student misbehavior would stay the same or change after being asked to consider the root cause of the behavior. This was important because of the long-standing critique that exclusionary discipline practices fail to address the factors that contribute to student behavior (Bear, 2010). Thus, if discrepancies existed between the originally identified response strategy and subsequently

identified response to the root cause of misbehavior, the researcher believed this would signify the disconnect between the practices teachers believe would be effective in addressing the root of behavior and the actual practices they're implementing at first glance. The researcher hypothesized that teachers who work in districts with low exclusionary discipline rates and/or no disproportionality may be more likely to identify the same strategies regardless of wording. Thus, not only was this study intended to identify possible system components that require improvement, but it also sought to identify possible system components that are successful in some districts in an attempt to replicate such success in districts that are facing problems.

Research Questions

The following four research questions were developed to guide this dissertation study:

- 1) Do the predictor variables of student demographic composition, teacher demographic composition, and district funding predict districtwide exclusionary discipline patterns?
- 2) Is there a significant relationship between teacher perception of how to respond to subjective student misbehavior and districtwide exclusionary discipline patterns?
- 3) Is there a significant relationship between teacher perception of the root cause of subjective student misbehavior and districtwide exclusionary discipline patterns?
- 4) Is there a significant difference in teacher response to subjective student misbehavior when immediately asked to address the behavior compared to when specifically asked to respond to the root cause of the behavior?

CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

Behavioral Misconduct and Discipline Practices in Schools

While research indicates that keeping students in the classroom and minimizing their referrals to the office for misconduct reduces the possibility of students receiving suspension (Gregory et al., 2016), office disciplinary referrals (ODRs) remain one of the most common teacher responses to disruptive student misbehavior (Spaulding et al., 2010). In fact, in classrooms with higher rates of misbehavior, teachers are more likely to use coercive discipline practices rather than relationship-based discipline, even though relationship-based discipline has been proven to minimize disruption to student learning and increase student responsibility (Lewis, 2001).

Alter, Walker, and Landers (2013) conducted a comprehensive review of the literature where nine categories of challenging behaviors in schools were identified. Off-task behavior was the most prevalent and challenging behavior reported, followed by verbal disruption. Such information is somewhat consistent with Glock (2016) who found that destruction, aggression, and talking out of turn were reported as the most disruptive behaviors by teachers (Glock, 2016). Furthermore, isolation/no social interaction was the least prevalent and least problematic behavior identified by teachers. This indicates that teachers may be likely to overlook students who are “internalizers” (Alter et al., 2013) and rather focus their efforts on more “disruptive” yet often subjective misbehavior. Research further suggests that teachers issue the most ODRs

overall for missed class and misconduct/defiance, however high referring teachers are more likely to refer Black and Latinx students compared to White students (Blake et al., 2016). In fact, Black students are three times as likely to receive an ODR than White students (Morris & Perry, 2017). Such referrals tend to occur for less serious, but more subjective offenses such as disruptive behavior, dress code violations, disobedience, and aggressive behavior.

According to Spaulding et al. (2010), upon referral to administrators, the most common consequence in middle and high schools were detentions, in-school suspensions, and out-of-school suspensions. In the elementary grades, such responses were also common with the addition of student conferences, loss of privilege, time in office, and parent contact. This indicates that upon receiving a discipline referral to the office, an exclusionary action is highly likely to follow. A comprehensive study conducted throughout 730 schools indicated that the most common behavioral misconduct that led to an in-school suspension or out of school suspension was coded as defiance/disruption/other (Skiba et al., 2015). Similarly, a study by Skiba et al. (2011) found that administrators identified insubordination and defiance, behaviors that are arguably characterized as subjective offenses requiring judgment by adults, as the most common behaviors resulting in out-of-school suspension (Skiba et al., 2011). However, research indicates that teachers and administrators often vary in their understanding and interpretation of what “defiant” behavior is defined as (Fenning & Jenkins, 2019).

Spaulding et al. (2010) reported patterns of ODRs and subsequent administrative decisions among a nationwide dataset of racially and socioeconomically diverse schools. ODRs were most likely to be generated from the classroom among all school levels, with fighting and defiance most documented among elementary schoolers; defiance, disruption, and fighting by middle schoolers; and tardiness, defiance, and truancy for high schoolers. Furthermore, student

race, gender, previous disciplinary history, and teachers' postsecondary expectations for students have been said to predict teacher referrals (Bryan, Day-Vines, Griffin, & Moore-Thomas, 2012). More specifically, research indicates that Black students, students with prior at-risk behaviors or disciplinary infractions, and students whom teachers had lower expectations for are more likely to receive an ODR (Bryan et al., 2012; Girvan et al., 2017; Horner, Fireman, & Wang, 2010; Martinez et al., 2016; Skiba, Shure, & Williams, 2012; Wright et al., 2014).

While some might argue that Black students are more likely to engage in misbehavior, which leads to subsequent disproportionate referral and suspension data, the literature has consistently disproved this theory. For example, Girvan et al. (2017) reported that disproportionality in subjective ODRs explained the vast majority of variance in total disproportionality (Girvan et al., 2017). In fact, the largest discipline gaps between Black and White students occurs for the subjective behaviors of "defiance," "disrespect," and "uncooperative behavior" (Fabelo et al., 2011; Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Losen, Martinez, & Okelola, 2014), the same behaviors that are more likely to lead to suspension or expulsion by administrators (Skiba et al., 2015). Furthermore, discipline data consistently show either no difference in more serious behaviors (e.g., truancy, theft, substance abuse) or that White students were actually more likely to be cited for a more serious violation (Morris & Perry, 2017). This indicates that implicit bias in teacher decision making, not racial differences in student behaviors, are likely one of the largest contributors to disproportionality in discipline usage. Thus, disparities in discipline are said to begin at the classroom level and may also be related to differences in classroom management styles (Skiba et al., 2016).

Predictors of Exclusionary Discipline

Systemic Variables

Student demographic composition. The correlation between demographics of students and suspension rates have long been documented in the literature. In general, the literature indicates that schools with higher overall student enrollment are more likely to suspend students (Gilliam & Shaha, 2006; Skiba et al. 2012). Furthermore, Martinez et al. (2016) found that the racial/ethnic minority concentration within schools were positively associated with ODRs for physically aggressive behavior. Christle, Jolivet, and Nelson (2005) further indicated that the percentage of Caucasian students within a school significantly predicted the likelihood that a school will have lower suspension rates. Additional research has continuously supported this phenomenon (Anyon et al., 2014; Arcia, 2007; Hannon, DeFina, & Bruch, 2013; Krezmien, Leone, & Achilles, 2006; Martinez et al., 2016; Payne & Welch, 2010; Skiba et al., 2011; Skiba et al., 2014; Skiba et al., 2015).

Relatedly, Mendez, Knoff, and Ferron (2002) identified that high percentages of Black student enrollment within a school, as well as high enrollment of students who receive free or reduced-price lunch were strongly correlated with overall high suspension rates. Such a phenomenon has been documented by other researchers as well (Christle et al., 2004; Mendez et al., 2002; Nicholson-Crotty et al., 2009; Skiba et al., 2014). However, according to the literature, although poverty influences the rate of suspension and expulsion, race remains a significant predictor of over-representation in suspension and often remains significant even after controlling for individual and school level poverty, pointing to its increased weight (Blake et al., 2016; Skiba et al., 2016). Furthermore, while Black students in poverty are more likely to be suspended than poor White students, middle- and upper-class Black students are also more likely

to be suspended than their White counterparts of similar socioeconomic status (Skiba et al., 2016).

School districts with higher proportions of students of color enrolled are also less likely to implement proactive/restorative practices to address behavioral concerns and tend to rely on punitive approaches instead (Payne & Welch, 2015). Thus, the variability in consequences assigned to students based on race appears to be tied to the school context and setting in which students of color are more likely to be enrolled. Using a national random sample, Welch and Payne (2012) found that the school-level racial composition also affects the likelihood that zero tolerance policies will be present at the district level, with the presence of zero tolerance policies associated with higher minority student racial composition. Evidence further suggests that the presence of zero tolerance policies contributes to racial discipline gaps (Curran, 2016; Hoffman, 2014). Districts serving high proportions of minority students are more likely to have mandatory expulsion policies for certain offenses (Curran, 2019), indicating that variations in the use of mandatory expulsion policies could be a contributor to racial discipline gaps (Welch & Payne, 2012).

While there is literature supporting the idea that student racial demographics impact discipline patterns, some literature indicates conflicting suggestions. For example, one study identified that schools with predominantly African American student populations yielded similar suspension patterns to schools with predominantly White student populations (Wallace et al., 2008). Another study yielded that among a diverse statewide sample of schools that school size, urbanicity, and percentage of students living in poverty did not contribute to disproportionality in suspension usage, also conflicting with overarching literature (Gregory et al., 2011). However, in this study the proportion of Black students in the school remained an important correlate of

suspension rates that was associated with overall high exclusionary discipline practices and disproportionality (Gregory et al., 2011).

Teacher demographic composition. Although the demographic composition of students is important, they are not the only contextual factors that must be considered when predicting school discipline patterns (Christle et al., 2005). Teacher demographics such as teacher racial composition and percentage of novice teachers have also been identified as possible contributors to excessive exclusionary discipline usage and disproportionality (Hirsch, Lloyd, & Kennedy, 2019). Assignment to a same-race teacher has been associated with more favorable teacher ratings of student academic and behavior performance (Downey & Pribesh, 2004; Gershenson, Hart, Lindsay, & Papageorge, 2017; Lindsay & Hart, 2017). There is further evidence that Black students score higher on achievement tests when assigned to a Black teacher (Redding, 2019). Support for such a phenomenon contributing to discipline patterns has also been strong, with research indicating that all students benefit from attending schools where faculty racial demographics mirror the student body (Blake et al., 2016).

Schools with a more diverse and representative teaching force have been found to exhibit lower rates of racial disparity in school discipline practices (McLoughlin & Noltemeyer, 2010). Lindsay and Hart (2017) studied this phenomenon throughout schools in North Carolina and found consistent evidence that assignment to same-race teachers is associated with reduced rates of exclusionary discipline for Black students and such relationship held true in elementary, middle, and high schools. Similarly, Wright (2015) found that African-American students with more African-American teachers were suspended less often, suggesting that the underrepresentation of African-American teachers may be an important contributor to disparities.

Furthermore, Baker (2012) suggests that teacher experience is also a strong predictor of

suspension rates for defiance, with a higher composition of novice teachers being associated with higher suspension rates for subjective defiant behavior. Morrison et al. (2000) also support this theory, finding that less teacher experience may contribute to higher suspension rates. In general, preservice teachers and novice teachers report not feeling well prepared to respond to student misbehavior (Glock, 2016; O'Neill & Stephenson, 2012). Unfortunately, research consistently indicates that early career teachers, teachers who hold little experience, and teachers who are often not fully certified tend to work in schools with larger percentages of students of color and larger percentages of students of low socioeconomic status (Fuller, Carpenter, & Fuller, 2008; Valencia, 2010). For example, an Education Trust study found that teachers lacking a college degree taught core academic classes more frequently in high poverty schools and high minority race schools (Jerald, 2002).

Early career teachers also report the need for additional training and support in the area of classroom behavior management. Teachers report that although these needs are often addressed through their employing schools and through informal conversations with colleagues and mentors, additional support is needed to strengthen their ability to manage student behavior in the classroom (Spencer, Harrop, Thomas, & Cain, 2017). Furthermore, while state teacher evaluation rubrics often include the assessment of proactive classroom management strategies, specific evidence-based practices that could help teachers improve their classroom management skills are often not included in this process (Gilmour, Majeika, Sheaffer, & Wehby, 2019). Research indicates that teachers with limited training or experience with effective behavior management may be more likely to rely on exclusionary practices (Booth et al., 2012; Glock & Kleen, 2019).

However, conflicting literature has been documented regarding teacher demographic

contribution as well. For example, Christle et al. (2005) found that average years of teaching experience was not associated with suspension rates throughout a sample of 40 schools. Further research has identified that the race/ethnicity of the teacher and teacher years of experience were not significant predictors of efficacy, the use of behavior management strategies, or culturally responsive teaching (Larson, Pas, Bradshaw, Rosenberg, & Day-Vines, 2018).

District contextual factors. Additional contextual and systemic factors may also predict discipline patterns in schools and district. A study conducted by Skiba et al. (2014) found that school characteristics such as principal perspective on discipline were stronger predictors of racial discipline disparities than student or teacher demographics, suggesting that a focus on altering school factors may be a more effective solution. Further, a study conducted by Mukuria (2002) identified that principals of schools with the lowest suspension rates had high expectations for all students and supported a structured environment with a school-wide discipline program that combined input from students, teachers, and administrators, while such principal characteristics were not present in high suspending schools.

Differences in discipline may also be reinforced by structural disparities, which have been said to affect both exclusionary discipline rates and racial disproportionality. Research indicates that majority Black enrolled middle and high schools are more likely to have school-based security staff while majority White enrolled middle and high schools are rather more likely to have a surplus of mental health providers (Finn & Servoss, 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2014). In general, schools with the highest suspension rates and with the largest racial discipline gaps tend to be those perceived by students as low in structure and support, indicating the important role school climate may play (Gregory et al., 2011).

Further research finds that schools with higher student-teacher ratios have more ODRs or

suspensions, suggesting that schools with higher student-teacher ratios may create impersonal school settings that lead to overreliance on exclusionary means to restore and maintain order upon observance of subjective misbehavior (Martinez et al., 2016; Perry, Holland, Darling-Kuria, & Nativ, 2011). Lack of resources, high workloads, and limited teacher capacity may also be contributing factors (Welsh & Swain, 2020). Teachers in one study emphasized the many macro system-level constraints on their ability to implement more proactive discipline practices. Such barriers involved inadequate school resources and funding and heavy staff workloads that impede their abilities to efficiently focus on student behavior and develop meaningful relationships with students and families (Haight, Gibson, Kayama, Marshall, & Wilson, 2014). Relatedly, research suggests that the amount of spending per pupil at the district level may also be positively associated with high suspension rates (Christle et al., 2015) and negatively associated with student of color enrollment (Carey, 2004), although extensive literature in this area is somewhat limited.

Teacher Variables

Teacher perception, bias, and deficit thinking. Because teachers are one of the most frequently encountered role models outside of a youth's immediate and extended family (Bernard, 1995), the behaviors and characteristics of teachers can have a large impact on student outcomes within the school setting (Deng, Trainin, Rudasill, Kalutskaya, & Wessels, 2017; Gansen, 2019; Hafen, Ruzek, Gregory, Allen, & Mikami, 2015; Haight et al., 2016; Larson et al., 2018; Mitchell, Hirn, & Lewis, 2017; Owens et al., 2018; Pane et al., 2014). Disparities in school suspension and expulsion often begin with differential rates of office referrals from teachers for misbehavior occurring within the classroom (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008). Race continues to be a large factor in teacher perception of children's social/behavioral skills (Downey & Pribesh,

2014; Francis, 2012; Irizarry, 2015; McGrady & Reynolds, 2013; Yates & Marcelo, 2014), as teachers have been found to rate students from minority backgrounds as more disruptive than their majority peers (Chang & Demyan, 2007). Furthermore, majority student misbehavior is often attributed as being “normal” while minority student misbehavior is seen as “pathological” (Ferguson, 2001).

Research has frequently documented that teachers often attribute a lack of academic success by their students of color to inherent or endogenous student deficits (Donnell, 2010; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004). McKenzie and Scheurich identified that teachers believed students of color had deficits because of the students’ upbringing and arose from the students’ parents having deficits and so on and so forth. Many teachers also equated a lack of student motivation with having parents who don’t value education. Moreover, many teachers who participated in the study believed that students are expected to come to school already motivated to learn, and that it is not their responsibility to motivate students in this way. Numerous studies have documented low academic expectations held by teachers when working with students of color and the resulting negative effects such teacher beliefs have on student academic success, achievement, and feelings of belonging (Aldana, 2016; Anyon et al., 2016; Dray & Wisneski, 2011; Kayama et al., 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2017; Liou et al., 2017). Furthermore, those who engage in such deficit thinking may regard student failure as a result of poor student and/or family choices, thus contributing to the belief that children of color and their families are responsible for the failure of schools (Donnell, 2010).

McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) found that a deficit-centered perception of students of color is also prevalent when teachers address behavior problems in schools. The foundation of misbehavior for students of color was frequently attributed to the home, where in the teachers’

view, many students did not learn how to behave appropriately. Students were characterized as “delinquent,” “pathetic,” and/or “gangsters.” Teachers in this study consistently appeared to hold a belief that children of color walk into preschool with built-in deficits that are either impossible or not in the teachers’ job duties to overcome. Often, disparate rates in suspensions among youth of color are also attributed to unengaged parents and the home life of students (Wadhwa, 2010).

Such overt or covert forms of bias can also affect whether the observed behaviors of different groups of students are perceived as differentially problematic or not (Losen & Smith-Evans Hanes, 2016). In one study, emotions in Black faces were less accurately recognized than emotions in White faces by teachers, with Black faces more likely to be incorrectly perceived as angry compared to White faces, and Black boys’ misbehaviors perceived as more hostile than White boys (Halberstadt et al., 2018). This suggests that the emotion-related behaviors of Black students are less understood than the emotion-related behaviors of their White counterparts.

Cultural beliefs of teachers also play a large role in if student behavior is deemed “problematic” or not. Tyler et al. (2006) presented teachers with hypothetical student behavior scenarios where students were depicted to behave in ways that are consistent with particular cultural themes and then asked teachers to indicate whether the depicted student would have high levels of classroom motivation and achievement in their own classrooms. Teachers rated the motivation and achievement of students displaying competitive and individualistic classroom behaviors as much higher than students displaying communal or vervistic behaviors, indicating that European/mainstream classroom behaviors are perceived as more favorable among teachers than Afrocultural behaviors (Tyler et al., 2006). This indicates that teacher perceptions of optimal classroom motivation and achievement are linked to student behaviors that are consistent with mainstream cultural ethos. Furthermore, this indicates that classrooms are not culturally neutral

environments, which may lead to teachers fostering different expectations and opportunities for success when a student's cultural orientation does not match the mainstream.

Teachers' experiences and automatic unconscious associations can also shape their interpretation of situations that merit discipline and situations that don't (Staats, 2016). Research indicates that students of color are disproportionately referred for subjective offenses compared to their White counterparts (Skiba et al., 2011). Subjective infractions typically allow for more biased decision making, which is said to be a potential contributor to the racial disproportionality often documented in schools (McIntosh, Girvan, Horner, & Smolkowski, 2014). This is said to be the case because ambiguous situations typically provide educators with the grounds to justify biased decision making on nonracial grounds (George, 2015). For example, in one study, among the following infractions: disobedience, violence, substance abuse, vandalism, theft, truancy, safety, and miscellaneous, Black students were the only students who exceeded the criteria for infractions having subjective definitions. All other groups of students exceeded the population proportion criteria for infractions with objective definitions (Forsyth et al., 2015).

Oftentimes, vignettes are used by educational researchers when studying this topic in attempts to simulate real-life teacher—student interactions. In one study, pre-service teachers who read a vignette about a Black student were more likely to believe that the student would likely misbehave in the future compared to those who read a vignette about White students. These results indicate that teachers may believe that a Black male student who is ambiguously (or subjectively) defiant is more likely to misbehave again compared to a White male student, even if these students behaved in identical ways. These findings are in line with an attributional model of stereotypes which suggests that stereotypes affect people's attributions about the stability of another individual's behavior (Kunesh & Noltemeyer, 2019). People naturally have a

lower sense of efficacy for changing an individual's behaviors when they perceive such behaviors as stable or innate to the individual (Reyna & Weiner, 2001). Furthermore, undesirable behaviors that are perceived as controllable can elicit anger from teachers and lead to higher frequencies of disciplinary referrals.

While research identifying a direct correlation between implicit bias and racial disparities in school discipline practices is limited, researchers have begun to explore its' impact (Bradshaw et al., 2010; Gregory, Allen, Mikami, Hafen, & Pianta, 2015). Most notably, Okonofua and Eberhardt (2015) found that upon presenting teachers with simulated scenarios of behavioral incidents, they may be more likely to recommend a suspension in cases associated with an African American sounding name rather than a White sounding name. Research also indicates that teachers expect students from racial minority backgrounds to display more stereotypically negative behavior (Pigott & Cowen, 2000). For example, when expecting challenging behaviors, Gilliam, Maupin, Reyes, Accavitti, & Shic (2016) found that teachers gazed at Black children more than White children. In another study, teachers were more likely to escalate the disciplinary response to the second infraction when the student was perceived to be Black as opposed to White. This suggests that Black student misbehavior may be more likely to be perceived as a pattern or innate to the individual student when compared to White students who engage in the same misbehavior twice (Staats, 2016). Even when male ethnic minority students showed the same behavior as other students, they are more likely to be judged less favorably and punished (Kokkinos, Panayiotou, & Davazaglou, 2004).

What teachers believe, what they know, and what they are able to do strongly guide their teaching practices (Atilas, Gresham, & Washburn, 2017). For example, Christle et al. (2005) found that schools with personnel that held negative beliefs regarding expectations for student

success, negative perceptions of school climate, and negative perceptions of family involvement, were more likely to have low academic achievement, high suspension rates, and high dropout rates. Research indicates that students are socially and academically more successful if they perceive their classrooms as fair and just environments (Sanches, Gouveia-Peraira, & Carugati, 2011). However, positive student-teacher relationships are more likely to be experienced by White students rather than students of color (Gregory & Ripsky, 2008). Cultural synchrony theory implies that the cultural missteps and miscommunications between racially/ethnically diverse students and their teachers who often do not share the same background likely activates teachers' negative stereotypes about diverse students leading to these negative relationships (Irvine, 1990). For example, one study found that providing family background information resulted in lower behavior severity ratings when the teacher and child race matched but resulted in increased behavior severity when the race did not match (Gilliam et al., 2016). Further, when White teachers did not have access to family background information, they were more likely to hold preschoolers to a lower behavioral standard, where Black teachers held Black preschoolers to a higher standard. This indicates that White teachers may expect Black children to engage in problematic behavior and therefore don't consider it unusual to see such an occurrence. The lower expectations that arise from such mismatch can have detrimental consequences over time, as research indicates that teacher expectations of students have been shown to correlate with disparities in practice (Clark & Zygmunt, 2014). Furthermore, in time, students of color may pick up on such subtle differences in treatment, which in turn may inspire repeated misbehavior and continued disengagement from school (Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015).

Teacher attribution and response literature. Teacher attribution literature indicates that teacher ideas about the cause of student misbehavior in turn affect the attitudes they adopt toward

their students and their eventual decisions to help them overcome such difficulties (Poulou & Norwich, 2002). Furthermore, the extent to which they believe they are capable of truly influencing student performance impacts their persistence in working with them (Kulinna, 2007). Twardawski, Hilbig, and Thielmann (2019) found that when the cause of student misbehavior was perceived as controllable rather than uncontrollable, teachers were more likely to utilize harsher punishment strategies. Relatedly, in one study, when teachers were provided with cognitive skill deficit information, they were less likely to believe the student had control over their misbehavior and therefore perceived the behavior as unintentional (Crandall-Hart & DiPerna, 2017). Teachers often indicate significantly more positive emotional responses when perceiving that students have less control over their misbehavior (Crandall-Hart & DiPerna, 2017).

Teachers often ascribe student's challenging behavior in schools to the home environment, with serious problems first attributed to student variables, second to family/home factors, and lastly to teaching variables (Medway, 1979). This indicates that perceived causes of student problem behavior can negatively impact teachers' willingness to provide appropriate support for students due to the belief that students are beyond helping (Andreou & Rapti, 2010; Mavropoulou & Padelidu, 2002). Furthermore, teacher's perception that school factors don't play a role in the emergence of behavior problems may indicate that they feel powerless in the classroom (Mavropoulou & Padelidu, 2002). Such information is consistent with the findings of Johansen et al. (2011), in which school behavioral problems were perceived to be caused by external factors such as parenting, and these behaviors were perceived as controllable by the students and uncontrollable by the teachers. Furthermore, teachers reported a belief that positive behavioral interventions did not work and also reported receiving minimal formal training in

behavior management (Johansen et al., 2011).

Using vignettes to assess teacher practices. Literature examining how teachers respond to and think about misbehavior most often involve presenting participants with a vignette describing a student engaging in a specific behavior and then asking teachers how they would respond to the described scenario. For example, Simms (2014) administered the Teacher's Attributions for Student's Behavior Measure (TASBM) to a sample of teachers. The TASBM has two sections with section A presenting teachers with six brief scenarios of students engaging in problem behavior. Teachers were asked to imagine a student they have taught engaging in the problem behavior described to more efficiently simulate the real-life actions of teachers. After reading each scenario, participants were asked to read four causal statements and indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the statement on a 6-point likert scale (disagree strongly to agree strongly). The causal statements allowed participants to rate the extent to which the described behavior was "blame-deserving and intentional" (item 1: the student intended to behave this way on purpose, item 4: the student should be blamed for this behavior), the extent to which the behavior was "stable and not likely to change" (item 3: the reason why the student behaved this way is unlikely to change), and the extent to which the cause of the behavior was "internal to the student" (item 1: the student's behavior is due to something about the student, e.g. that's just the way they are). Results from section A of this study indicated that teachers may be more likely to blame the student for their problem behavior and perceive the behavior as intentionally displayed by the student rather than attributing the cause of the behavior to stable factors (Simms, 2014).

Section B of the TASBM asked participants to indicate the extent to which they thought that a given behavior management strategy would be effective in addressing the behavior

problems of the student referenced in the scenario on a six-point likert scale (very ineffective to very effective). The interventions presented to teachers were categorized as supportive interventions (clarify behavioral expectations, teach social-emotional strategies, recognize the student when they engage in positive behavior, identify factors that may be maintaining the behavior, determine if the student needs to be evaluated for a disability, or make changes to classroom routines or instruction) or unsupportive interventions (ask the student's parents to address the behavior, send the student to the office, take away a preferred activity, recommend the student for suspension, send the student away from the group, or verbally reprimand the student). Results from section B indicated that teacher mean ratings on the supportive scale was slightly higher than mean scores on the unsupportive scale, indicating that teachers may be more inclined to use supportive strategies with students rather than unsupportive strategies.

Similarly, Kulinna (2007) used the Behavior Attribution Survey with physical education teachers. Teachers were presented with three descriptions of misbehaving children (mild misbehavior, moderate misbehavior, severe misbehavior) and asked how often they used 27 different behavior management strategies that were compiled from the behavior management literature. Next, teachers in the study were asked to indicate the extent to which they believed the described behaviors were related to out-of-school factors (e.g., parenting skills, drugs, gangs), student factors (e.g., personality, motivation, social, physical skills) teacher factors (e.g., curriculum, methods, caring, class management), or school factors (e.g., class size, services for students, overall school management).

Results from Kulinna (2007) found that the Behavior Attribution Survey produced reliable and valid scores and the researchers indicated that the measurement was a psychometrically sound instrument to use. Final factor loadings revealed the eight different

behavior response categories of: remove/refer, positive action, behavior modification, punishment, experts, peers, keep busy, or threaten. The most frequently used strategy across all behavioral scenarios was “have a direct discussion with the student.” Overall, results suggest that teachers reported using more positive than punitive strategies. For the mild and moderate scenarios, the teachers’ top five strategies stayed the same (direct discussion, provide student with positive praise, draw attention to positive models, consult with other teachers, distract student with positive behavior). However, in the severe behavior scenario (rough play, punching, bullying), teachers reported different responses such as contact parents or time-out as their most common strategies.

Results from Kulinna (2007) also indicated that physical education teachers most commonly attributed student misbehavior to home and student factors rather than teacher or school factors. Notably, the authors indicated that teacher responses to misbehavior were generally not clear matches with their attributions. For instance, although teachers believed that home factors were one of the most primary influences on student behavior, contacting parents was not a common response strategy. The researchers further indicate that, “additional research is needed to explore why teachers use certain strategies and how those strategies are related to their beliefs about teaching, students, and parents” (p. 28).

Gibbs and Gardiner (2008) conducted an exploratory factor analysis on a questionnaire created by Miller and Chandler (2005) that also asked teachers to identify the attributions of student misbehavior. The original questionnaire had 28 items where teachers were asked to rate various causes of misbehavior on a four-item scale from very important to not important at all. A four-factor analysis of the items yielded four somewhat distinct categories: teacher rewards and punishments, adult behavior, curriculum demands on children, and child’s personality.

Interesting results were yielded with all participating teachers recognizing and acknowledging the role that their own behavior as teachers played in influencing student behavior. This indicates that some teachers may recognize that behavior problems do not emanate from the individual child and are willing to explore their own impact. However, it is important to note that the authors indicated that they cannot claim the study to have elicited teachers' own explanations for the causes of misbehavior because the questionnaire was close-ended, pointing to the need for open-ended examinations of teacher causes of misbehavior.

In a much earlier study, Mavropoulou and Padelia (2002) also examined causal attributions of teachers for behavior problems and identified that teachers specifically reported family problems, parental attitude, learning difficulties, and self-esteem as the biggest contributors to behavior problems. Furthermore, consistent with the literature in this area, teachers were more likely to reject school-related factors that may have contributed to the problem (e.g., number of students in class, lack of classroom rules, school demands, teacher attitude). The researchers were also interested in the impact of teaching experience and found that teachers with more experience were more likely to disagree that school factors may have caused behavior problems compared to teachers with less teaching experience. The authors noted that the nature of these attributions do not allow for much intervention on behalf of the teachers and indicated that while educators should be aware of and concerned about the family's influence on behavior problems at school, blame should not be placed on the parents. However, overall results indicated that teacher's causal attributions of student misbehavior can be used to predict their preference for using unsupportive interventions. More specifically, if the teacher felt as if the student should be blamed for the behavior and that the behavior was done intentionally, teachers were more likely to indicate unsupportive intervention preferences.

Supportive school-based interventions to address problem behavior can involve the identification of the conditions that prompt and reinforce problem behavior, teaching and reinforcing new skills to increase appropriate behavior, and modifying the classroom environment by clarifying expectations and establishing structure (Epstein et al., 2008; Simms, 2014). However, if teacher responses to misbehavior are based on perceived causes of the behavior, this implies that the same misbehavior may be handled differently depending on the students' home life, background, or identity (Glock, 2016). For example, Glock found that intervention strategies depended on student gender and ethnicity, with male and ethnic minority students receiving harsher interventions due to the stereotyped attributions assumed. Preservice teachers have also consistently been researched to apply harsher strategies in response to ethnic minority misbehavior when presented with a vignette that indicated whether the student was an ethnic minority or ethnic majority student (Glock & Klapproth, 2017).

Mavropoulou and Padelia (2002) notes that teachers need to be provided with a comprehensive framework for understanding behavior problems that emphasizes an ecological approach. This approach should integrate school, family, and biological factors when examining causes of behavior to ensure an effective action plan. Staats (2016) further suggests that educators should take enough time to fully process a situation before making a decision regarding student misbehavior. However, research indicates that vulnerable decision points in the classroom often inhibit such processing. Vulnerable decision points are contextual events that may increase the likelihood of implicit bias affecting discipline decision making and may explain the lack of attributions matching consequences in schools (Smolkowski, Girvan, McIntosh, Nese, & Horner, 2016). The strongest research support for vulnerable decision points involve situations in which the behavior is inherently subjective (when staff have to make a judgment call

regarding whether the behavior is a violation). Thus, it's often difficult for teachers to comprehensively examine the causes of such misbehavior in a classroom with limited time for decision making in this manner (Staats, 2016).

Altering Malleable Factors to Reduce School Discipline

School-Level Characteristics

While public schools are not responsible for the host of social ills that threaten the healthy social development of children, research suggests that they can exacerbate or ameliorate the vulnerability of children to negative outcomes (Christle et al., 2005). Positive school-level characteristics such as supportive leadership, dedicated and collegial staff, proactive schoolwide behavior management, and effective academic instruction can help minimize the risks for youth delinquency (Christle et al., 2005).

Furthermore, a school climate and culture where teachers feel supported in their efforts through meaningful dialogue and professional development opportunities may reduce the need for discipline referrals in the first place (Fenning & Jenkins, 2019). Teachers with more favorable perceptions of the environment tend to have lower initial ratings of concentration problems, disruptive behavior, and internalizing symptoms, and higher ratings of perceived prosocial behaviors and family involvement (Pas & Bradshaw, 2014). Research indicates that feelings of safety and security within a school rely on two conditions: (1) an orderly, predictable environment where school staff provide consistent, reliable supervision and discipline; and (2) a school climate where students feel connected to the school and supported by their teachers and other school staff (Catalano, Haggerty, Oesterle, Fleming, & Hawkins, 2004). Thus, when whole school buildings adopt proactive approaches, the school culture is positively impacted (Cook et al., 2018; Payne & Welch, 2018; Waldron & McLesky, 2010).

Teacher professional development. Although discipline disparities have been historically viewed as inevitable and/or unchangeable, research suggests that educators can disrupt such practices and replace them with strategies and programs that foster a healthy school climate for all students (Gregory et al., 2016). If teachers do not design their classrooms in ways that effectively manage student behavior, high-level learning is less likely to occur (Flynn et al., 2016). Furthermore, when teachers feel more confident in behavior management, they are more likely to implement specific strategies in the classroom and feel more comfortable proactively addressing challenging behavior (Butler & Monda-Amaya, 2016), pointing to the importance of ensuring that preservice teachers are equipped with efficient preparation on managing challenging behavior in class. Thus, when teachers are equipped with a toolbox of strategies to support students who exhibit challenging behaviors, those students are more likely to have improved outcomes (Flynn et al., 2016). Unfortunately, only 19% of elementary and 23.4% of secondary participants rated themselves between a level of 3 (confident) and 5 (expert) in managing challenging behavior.

Research indicates that teacher professional development on alternatives to suspension have been associated with reductions in suspension (Flynn et al., 2016; Hashim, Strunk, & Dhaliwal, 2018; Hirsch et al., 2019). Okonofua, Paunesku, and Walton (2016) studied the effects of an intervention aimed toward fostering empathy among teachers to understand its' impact on exclusionary discipline. The intervention involved teachers reading an article on the many reasons why students may misbehave in class and how positive relationships with others may foster social emotional growth. The material discouraged the labeling of misbehaving students as trouble-makers and instead encouraged teachers to understand and value student experiences that can lead to misbehavior. Teachers participated in a follow-up empathic-mindset intervention

throughout the school year as well. Outcomes of the program indicated that students whose teacher received the intervention were half as likely to be suspended over the school year as compared to students in control groups whose teachers did not receive the training. Further, the reduction in suspension was largest for Black and Latinx students. This study indicates that encouraging teachers to view discipline as an opportunity to facilitate mutual understand and better relationships can empower teachers to do so, which can effectively lead to less reliance on punitive practices (Okonofua et al., 2016). Teachers with higher self-efficacy are more willing to try out innovative strategies to meet the needs of their diverse students and persist longer (Deng et al., 2017; Ross & Bruce, 2007), while teachers with lower self-efficacy are more likely to blame students for their lack of success (Deng et al., 2017; Podell & Sodak, 1993), pointing to the important role that appropriate professional development plays in teacher perception.

When teachers effectively learn how to setup the classroom to meet the behavioral and social-emotional needs of their students, a reduction in discipline referrals often follows (Hafen et al., 2015). Thus, utilization of a universal school-wide approach to misbehavior and school discipline is highly effective in maintaining a positive school culture and reducing unnecessary reliance on exclusionary discipline. Structured decision-making in the classroom is one potentially powerful strategy that schools can use to establish more consistency in response to misbehavior within the classroom. Yusuf et al. (2016) conducted a study involving the implementation of a professional development session where teachers participated in conversation regarding their school's approach to school discipline, the behaviors they personally perceived as infractions, their responses to such infractions, and their reasons for referring students to school administrators. The professional development ended with an activity where teachers collaboratively constructed a response grid outlining various minor and major student

misbehavior and a universal approach to responding to such behaviors. In the finalized matrix, there were guidelines for both minor and major behaviors as well as outlines for if the minor or major behavior was a first-time offense, repeated offense, constant offense, or chronic offense. Such an activity allowed for teachers to outline agreed upon objective criteria for responding to student misbehavior at various levels that may have the potential to limit individual discretion in the process. While a follow-up study has yet to be conducted to assess the effect that such a tool has on reducing reliance on suspensions and disproportionality, the researchers indicated that with high levels of buy-in from teachers, such grids have the potential to do so (Yusuf et al., 2016). However, because teacher professional development opportunities are generally instructional and broad in nature (Mitchell et al., 2017; Spencer et al., 2017), they often indirectly relate to individual behavioral concerns teachers are facing.

Reframing Teacher Perception

Teachers who worked in schools with overall positive student outcomes tend to have high expectations for all students (Christle et al., 2005). Relatedly, Williams (2015) examined differences in the disposition of high referring teachers and low referring teachers and identified that high referring teachers held substantially greater deficit views of Black students and their families while low referring teachers held high behavioral expectations for all students, regardless of race. Furthermore, low referring teachers demonstrated a sensitivity to each student's uniqueness but also maintained high expectations for all students. This indicates that teachers who take the time to understand the causes of individual student behavior while also maintaining the same expectations for all students may have better behavioral outcomes from students in class and rely less on referrals for managing behavior. Thus, in order to effectively adopt a new approach to school discipline in schools where such high expectations are not

present, a fundamental shift in thinking among stakeholders must occur (Bazemore & Schiff, 2010; Gregory, Bell, & Pollock, 2014).

Fortunately, the literature suggests that it is possible to address the perceptions, mindsets, and belief systems of teachers to challenge deficit explanations for behavior (Brinkley et al., 2018; Hafen et al., 2015; Monroe, 2009). For example, Hirsch et al. (2019) identified that providing teachers with professional development support decreased teachers' perceptions of target students' risk of antisocial behavior over time, suggesting that it is possible to alter teacher perception of student misbehavior. Thus, school personnel who receive instruction and implementation support in implicit bias, classroom consultation, and approaches geared toward teachers can begin to shift their mindset, thinking, and perspective from a punitive to a student-centered mindset (Fenning & Jenkins, 2019). The Professional Development Series (PDS) is one example of a training curriculum that encourages teachers to address their assumptions, beliefs, and practices and minimize deficit explanations for student performance (Parker, 2017). Results of its implementation in one school indicated that teachers reframed their way of thinking through professional development, that resisting deficit-based explanations of students depends on the quality of school leadership, and finally, if we wish for students to possess resiliency, educators must first believe that all are capable of it (Parker, 2017).

Additional literature suggests that providing information about stereotypical biases and increasing knowledge about the strengths of minority students can also be effective in reducing stereotyping (Stephan, 2004; Stephan & Stephan, 2005). Weiner (2006) shares a professional development approach used with teachers and educators at a graduate program that focuses on uncovering, contextualizing, and challenging tacit assumptions about student weaknesses. The approach is based on a reframing process, first described by Molnar and Lindquist (1989), which

involves four steps: (a) describe the problem behavior in neutral, observable terms; (b) identify positive characteristics or contributions the individual makes; (c) create a new, positive perspective on the individual—a frame that can be articulated in a short sentence; and (d) state the new frame to the student and act on it and do not refer back to the previous frame. An example of this strategy was provided in the case of a Kindergarten student who was very hyperactive in class. While the teacher initially believed that the student should be referred and evaluated for ADHD, the reframing strategy allowed the teacher to view the student as having a lot of energy, which made her special. Thus, rather than referring the student, she had a heart to heart with her and they collaboratively identified a plan that would allow the student to release that energy in appropriate and agreed upon ways in the classroom.

While there is a plethora of research identifying strategies that have been evidenced to reduce reliance on exclusionary discipline, there is not as much research specifically focused on practices that effectively address disproportionality and implicit bias (Hashim et al., 2018). In order to address implicit bias, professional development that specifically addresses inequity and racism must occur (Carter, Skiba, Arredondo, & Pollock, 2017). Prevention through bias-free classrooms and respectful school environments involves creating opportunities for staff to reflect critically on how stereotyping and implicit bias can affect students, communicating trust and respect throughout the school, and increasing awareness about how the structure and history of racism impacts students at school. Further, teachers can be aware of snap judgments about student misbehavior by asking themselves if they have considered the whole context when responding to misbehavior (McIntosh et al., 2014).

My Teaching Partner is one example of a program that focuses on effectively attuning to individual student needs to reduce the impact of implicit bias (Gregory et al., 2016). Teachers

trained in My Teaching Partner Secondary (MTP-S) ultimately had no significant disparities in discipline referrals between Black students and their classmates, compared to teachers in the control condition, where racial discipline gaps remained (Gregory et al., 2016). Results also indicated that teacher responsiveness to students' social and emotional needs improved through the program and was also related to the lower likelihood of Black student referral. These results indicate that teachers who participate in this type of coaching experience may learn to view their Black students in a more positive manner and ultimately defy unconsciously held negative racial stereotypes of them as less capable or prone to aggression. Hafen et al. (2015) also found that participating teachers in MTP-S were just as likely to report high projections for students with disruptive behavior as for those with no history of disruptive behavior, which was reportedly not the case for control group participants. Thus, this process ultimately involves a level of intentionality that alters the process of forming and adapting perceptions about students, and research indicates that it is possible for educators to do so.

Summary of Literature and Current Study's Contribution

The impact of structural and contextual factors such as student demographic composition, teacher demographic composition, and district contextual variables on exclusionary discipline practices requires further investigation due to overall inconsistent findings in the literature (Baker, 2012; Carey, 2004; Christle et al., 2005; Gilliam & Shahar, 2006; Larson et al., 2018; Martinez et al., 2016; Mukuria, 2002; Skiba et al. 2012; Wallace et al., 2008). While the literature indicates that these systemic variables tend to have a large impact on student behavioral performance and discipline patterns, the direction of this impact is largely unknown. Furthermore, there is limited research examining if such factors remain significant during the process of large-scale school discipline reform aimed at reducing exclusionary discipline reliance statewide.

In addition, with the plethora of literature identifying the important role that teachers play in either contributing to or preventing exclusionary discipline practices and disproportionality, many researchers have sought to understand the ways in which the latter can be encouraged. While there is literature identifying that teacher perception of and response to student misbehavior plays a role in individual student disciplinary outcomes, there is limited literature specifically examining how such patterns in teacher perception may contribute to exclusionary discipline practices at the district level. Furthermore, it is unclear if such teacher beliefs may impact a school district's disciplinary response to large scale discipline reform aimed at reducing exclusionary discipline reliance statewide. Glock and Karbach (2015) suggest that future research should relate implicit attitudes among school staff to actual behavior in schools, thus the current study sought to examine how teacher perceptions and attributions of student misbehavior relate to actual district discipline data.

Finally, while attribution literature indicates that teachers most often identify student and family factors as the underlying causes of student misbehavior at school, research indicates that teacher responses to misbehavior rarely addresses such perceptions (Kulinna, 2007; Simms, 2014; Twardawski et al., 2019). Therefore, further literature is needed to examine the ways in which teachers respond to the attributions they tend to assign to student misbehavior. Thus, this study sought to examine such attributions from a root cause analysis perspective to examine the deficit and putative malleable attributions assigned to behavior and the subsequent strategies to address such attributions that followed throughout school districts with varying exclusionary discipline patterns in a state undergoing large scale discipline reform. In sum, the researcher aimed to take a comprehensive approach in examining the systemic and individual-level factors described in the literature as contributors to exclusionary discipline patterns.

CHAPTER THREE

METHOD

Research Design

A mixed methodology framework (Creamer, 2018; Creswell, 2017) was selected for this study in order to gain a holistic understanding of the factors that contribute to exclusionary school discipline patterns at both the state level and school/district level in two phases. Phase I involved the use of publicly available school discipline data from the state education agency. The dataset consisted of school discipline data from all school districts in the state from the 2017-2018 academic year. Phase I builds on previous theory and research which suggests that various institutional and school level variables may predict exclusionary discipline patterns. Thus, the purpose of Phase I was to examine the impact of this phenomenon within one state in the throes of school discipline reform.

Phase II of the current study involved a linking sampling strategy (Creamer, 2018), such that participants who taught grades K-12 in six school districts throughout the state were selected based on predetermined inclusionary criteria directly from the quantitative discipline dataset from Phase I. Phase II builds upon previous theory and research at the interpersonal level to examine the relationship between teacher perception and discipline practices and also investigates how teachers respond to the root cause analysis framework. The purpose of Phase II of this study was to identify if and how teacher perceptions regarding initial responses to subjective student misbehavior, perceived root causes of such misbehavior, and perceptions of

how to address said root cause were correlated with districtwide exclusionary discipline practices and racial disproportionality in school discipline. Data from both Phase I and Phase II were used concurrently to holistically examine the factors at various levels that contribute to exclusionary discipline usage and racial disproportionality in school discipline.

Discipline Rates, Risk Indices, and Risk Ratios

In order to monitor and compare the rates of exclusionary discipline usage throughout districts, an exclusionary discipline rate must be calculated. To calculate an exclusionary discipline rate, the total number of suspensions and expulsions received by each individual student within a school or district must be divided by the total student enrollment within said school or district (Illinois State Board of Education Center for Safe and Health Climate, 2019). This way, discipline rates between various districts can be compared, regardless of population size. Districts with high discipline rates indicate increased exclusionary discipline usage and districts with low discipline rates indicate low levels of districtwide exclusionary discipline.

In order to monitor disproportionality of disciplinary practices, risk indices and risk ratios must be identified. A risk index is the proportion of a group that is at risk for a specific outcome (Boneshefski & Runge, 2014). Risk indices can, therefore, be used to determine the proportion of a subgroup of students who have received specific disciplinary outcomes (e.g., office discipline referrals, suspensions, expulsions, etc.). To calculate a risk index, the total number of students from a specified subgroup who have received a disciplinary outcome within a school or district is divided by the total number of students from that subgroup enrolled in the school or district. The calculated number is then multiplied by 100 to determine the percentage of students from the subgroup who have received a disciplinary outcome.

For example, if there are 75 African American students enrolled in a school and 37 of

those students have received at least one suspension, the risk index would be .49 (37/75). This would mean that 49% of African American students within the school have received at least one suspension. Risk indices are difficult to interpret without a comparison group. Thus, identifying the percentage of White students who have received a suspension within the same school is necessary in order to truly conceptualize disproportionality (Osher, Poirier, Jarjoura, Brown, & Kendziora, 2015). Once risk indices have been created for two different subgroups of students, a risk ratio can be calculated.

Risk ratios are defined as the relative risk of a target group compared to a comparison group (Boneshefski & Runge, 2014). A risk ratio can be used to determine whether a particular student characteristic or demographic is a risk factor in receiving a discipline outcome. After creating risk indices for all subgroups of students, comparison of the risk indices can occur. This involves dividing the risk index for the target group (e.g., risk index for African American students receiving a suspension) by the risk index for the comparison group (e.g., risk index for White students receiving a suspension). A risk ratio of 1.0 indicates that the two groups are exactly proportional. A risk ratio of above 1.0 indicates overrepresentation of the target group. A risk ratio of lower than 1.0 indicates underrepresentation of the target group.

For example, if the risk index for African American students receiving a suspension is .49 and the risk index for White students receiving a suspension is .27, the risk ratio of African American students receiving a suspension compared to White students receiving a suspension would be 1.7 (.49/.27). This indicates overrepresentation, in that African American students appear to be 1.7 times as likely as White students to receive a suspension.

Procedures

Phase I

Variables. Phase I involved analysis of school discipline data from 200 school districts throughout the state. Participating school districts were selected based on extreme values in the publicly available school discipline data from the 2017-2018 academic year (Illinois State Board of Education, 2018), such that the top 50 school districts with the highest exclusionary discipline rates, the bottom 50 school districts with the lowest exclusionary discipline rates, the top 50 school districts with the highest racial disproportionality risk ratios, and 50 school districts with risk ratios that range from 0.85 to 1.09 (indicating little to no racial disproportionality) were purposefully selected to be included in the analysis. Such extreme values were intentionally selected to examine if there are unique contextual factors within districts at such opposite ends of the discipline practices spectrum that may contribute to such practices. The publicly available data (Illinois State Board of Education, 2018; Illinois State Board of Education, 2019) that were relied upon for Phase I of this dissertation study involve the following information from each included school district:

enrollment totals for all students

enrollment totals for White students

enrollment totals for students of color

total number of students who received one or more suspension/expulsion

total number of White students who received one or more suspension/expulsion

total number of students of color who received one or more suspension/expulsion

districtwide exclusionary discipline rates

districtwide risk ratios for student of color discipline compared to White student

discipline

percent of students who receive free/reduced price lunch

pupil/teacher ratio

percent of White teachers

percent of teachers of color

percent of novice teachers

instructional spending per pupil

operational spending per pupil

Outcome and predictor variables. The continuous outcome variables for this study were racial disproportionality risk ratios and exclusionary discipline rates. The continuous predictor variables of interest were total student enrollment, percent students of color, percent students who receive free or reduced-price lunch, pupil/teacher ratio, percent teachers of color, percent novice teachers, instructional spending per pupil, and operational spending per pupil. Definitions of all outcome and predictor variables as reported by the state education agency (Illinois State Board of Education, 2019) can be viewed in Appendix A.

Data analysis plan. Phase I of the study allowed the researcher to examine school level predictors of exclusionary discipline practices among the most extreme examples throughout one state in the process of implementing large scale school discipline reform. Multiple regression was used to aid in understanding the impact of such contextual variables on discipline rates and disproportionality risk ratios. Multiple regression was selected as an appropriate analysis technique because it allowed the researcher to examine the extent to which various independent variables predict one dependent variable (Field, 2013). Thus, two separate analyses were run to examine the impact of such variables on the two different outcome variables.

Phase II

Participant identification and recruitment procedures. Participants were purposefully selected to ensure a representative sample from each of the discipline groups. A linking strategy (Creamer, 2018) was utilized to select participants for Phase II, such that school districts from Phase I were contacted to determine interest in voluntarily participating in a more in-depth qualitative data collection effort. The goal of this process was to identify two school districts from each of the four groups of district discipline patterns (high racial disproportionality, no racial disproportionality, high exclusion rates, low exclusion rates). The researcher contacted superintendents and school building administrators via an emailed standardized recruitment script (please see Appendix B) that outlined the purpose of the study and expressed interest in working with the teachers within their respective school district and school buildings.

Recruitment procedures involved a continuous process that began with contacting school districts with the most extreme discipline patterns (e.g., the highest disproportionality, the lowest exclusionary discipline rates, etc.). In instances where districts declined participation, the researcher moved on to the next “extreme” case within the respective discipline pattern group.

Ultimately, the researcher was unable to fulfill the goal of two participating school districts from each discipline category (equaling a total of eight participating districts) and instead recruited a total of six participating districts, with at least one school district representing each of the predetermined discipline categories. Five out of the six participating districts had multiple school buildings, thus the researcher also attempted to reach all school buildings to gain a representative sample of teachers. However, due to constraints beyond the researcher’s control, not all school buildings were reached (14 school buildings reached out of 19 total buildings).

Please reference Table 1 for a representation of district contextual factors and district discipline

data from each of the six participating school districts as reported by the state education agency (Illinois State Board of Education, 2018; Illinois State Board of Education, 2019).

Upon receiving approval to work with each respective school district, the researcher collaborated with district and building administrators to identify a time to travel to the participating schools to administer an open-ended questionnaire to teachers (described below under measures/instrumentation). Various administration formats were offered to participating schools with the most commonly used method involving the researcher administering the questionnaire at the beginning or end of a predetermined staff meeting. In these instances, the researcher briefly explained the purpose of the project to teachers and asked for voluntary teachers to participate. While the researcher also announced that all participating teachers would be entered into a districtwide Visa gift card random drawing, voluntary participation was also stressed.

Final sample. Out of a potential participant pool of 908 teachers who work in the six participating school districts, 300 teachers volunteered to participate and comprised the final sample. The majority of participants worked in high racial disproportionality districts (n=149). Participants working in low exclusionary discipline districts comprised the next largest group of participants (n=80). The remaining participants were from districts with high exclusionary discipline rates (n=59) and districts with no racial disproportionality (n=12). The majority of final sample participants self-identified as White (n=264) and female (n=245). Please reference Tables 2 and 3 for a representation of the participant sample and demographics compared to the participant population.

Table 1. District Contextual Factors and Discipline Data

	Total Student Enrollment	Total Discipline	Discipline Rate	% Students of Color	Discipline Students of Color	% White Students	Discipline White Students	Racial Disp. Rate	% Free Reduced Lunch	Operational Spending (\$)	Pupil/Teacher Ratio
High Disproportionality											
District 1	2021	71	3.51	0.71	70	0.29	1	28.88	0.36	12189	15
District 4	2018	85	4.21	0.75	81	0.15	4	7.0	0.29	12812	15
No Disproportionality											
District 2	1819	233	12.81	0.57	135	0.43	98	1.04	0.51	17886	20
High Exclusion											
District 5	3435	287	8.36	0.91	284	0.09	3	8.78	0.97	16251	21
Low Exclusion											
District 3	3003	14	0.47	0.29	5	0.71	9	1.33	0.17	12777	17
District 6	1364	11	0.81	0.03	--	0.97	--	--	0.17	8976	22

The majority of final sample participants taught at the primary level (n=174), with participants who taught at the secondary level comprising the next largest group (n=71) and participants who taught at the intermediate level comprising the remainder of participants (n=55). The majority of participants reported a teaching career of 10+ years (n=187). Please reference Appendices C and D for a comprehensive representation of demographics and teaching characteristics among participants.

Table 2. Participant Sample vs. Participant Population

	Sample		Population	
	n	%	n	%
High Disproportionality	149	49.7	307	33.8
District 1	96	32.0	155	17.1
School 1	37	12.3		
School 2	31	10.3		
School 3	28	9.3		
District 4	53	17.7	152	16.7
School 1	33	11.0		
School 2	9	3.0		
School 3	11	3.7		
Low Disproportionality	12	4.0	107	11.8
District 2	12	4.0	107	11.8
School 1	12	4.0		
High Exclusion	59	19.7	199	21.9
District 5	59	19.7	199	21.9
School 1	59	19.7		
Low Exclusion	80	26.7	295	32.5
District 3	60	20.0	223	24.6
School 1	20	6.7		
School 2	4	1.3		
School 3	8	2.7		
School 4	8	2.7		
School 5	20	6.7		
District 6	20	6.7	72	7.9
School 1	20	6.7		
Total	300	100.0	908	100.0

Table 3. Sample Demographics vs. Population Demographics

	Gender				Race/Ethnicity					
	Sample %		Population %		Sample %			Population %		
	Male	Female	Male	Female	White	Black	Other	White	Black	Other
High Disproportionality										
District 1	14.6	85.4	14.0	86.0	87.5	6.3	6.2	87.0	7.0	6.0
District 4	11.3	88.7	15.0	85.0	86.8	3.8	8.7	87.0	4.0	9.0
No Disproportionality										
District 2	50.0	50.0	52.0	48.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	85.0	0.0	15.0
High Exclusion										
District 5	33.9	66.1	15.0	85.0	76.3	13.6	10.1	79.0	15.0	6.0
Low Exclusion										
District 3	11.7	88.3	15.0	85.0	95.0	2.0	3.0	92.0	0.4	7.6
District 6	10.0	90.0	22.0	88.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	98.0	0.0	2.0
Total %	18.3	81.7	22.2	77.8	88.0	5.1	7.9	88.0	4.4	7.6

Measures/Instrumentation

Open-Ended Vignette

Teacher participants were asked to complete an open-ended questionnaire where they read a brief vignette about a student engaging in “disruptive” behavior. The vignette was purposefully vague in order to encourage teachers to create their own subjective understanding of what disruptive behavior looks like in their respective classrooms (Brown & Brown, 2012). The vignette required teachers to imagine a current student in their classrooms who engaged in “disruptive” behavior when answering the questions that followed to more efficiently simulate the real-life actions of teachers (Simms, 2014). The questionnaire consisted of four open-ended questions designed to understand how they would respond to the imagined student’s disruptive behavior, what they believed the root cause of the student’s disruptive behavior was, how they would respond to the root cause of the student’s behavior, and any additional information they would want to know about the student to inform their decision making. Employing a free

association paradigm where participants freely identify their responses is said to increase the likelihood of a response being aligned with actual practice (Reich & Goldman 2005), as compared to forced response paradigms where participants are confined to predetermined categories (Glock & Kleen, 2019). The questionnaire also involved seven demographic questions where participants indicated what district they work in, what school within the district they work in, grades and subjects taught, how long they have been teaching, their race/ethnicity, and their preferred gender. The open-ended vignette and items that followed can be viewed below in Figure 1 and the entire questionnaire including demographic items can be viewed in Appendix E.

Please think about a student in your class right now who engages in disruptive and/or negative behavior. With this student in mind, please answer the following questions:

1. How do you typically respond to this student's behavior in class?
 2. *Root cause: "The deepest underlying cause, or causes, of a behavioral misconduct that, if dissolved, would result in elimination, or substantial reduction, of the behavioral misconduct" (Preuss, 2003).* Based on this definition, what do you think a possible root cause of this student's behavioral concerns could be? (e.g., what could be some potential reasons why this student may be engaging in this behavior)
 3. Based on the root cause identified above, what steps would you take to address the root of the problem?
 4. What additional information would be important to know in informing your decision about how to move forward?
-

Figure 1. Open-Ended Vignette

Data Analysis

Coding Process

Questionnaire responses were first inputted verbatim into a spreadsheet and coded by participant and district number. Next, the frequency of written responses were categorized and

totalled by item, relying on the school discipline and root cause analysis literature. Participant responses to the first questionnaire item were categorized via a response to misbehavior continuum created by the researcher based on multiple studies that systematically identified the most common teacher responses to classroom behavior (Glock, 2017; Keller, 2014; Kulinna, 2007; Martin, Linfoot, & Stephenson, 1999; Ozben, 2010; Simms, 2014). This framework was created to capture the span of various approaches teachers most frequently use when responding to student behavior in the classroom as defined by the literature. Creation of the continuum occurred by systematically reviewing previous work on this topic and compiling the most frequently identified strategies teachers have reported using in prior studies. Next, strategies were ordered from most “mild” to most “harsh” relying on the work of Keller (2014) and referenced by Glock (2017). The final response continuum ultimately involved categorization of teacher responses into the 22 different categories presented in Table 4, ranging from mild/proactive strategies to harsh/punitive strategies.

Upon creation of the response continuum, the researcher coded all participant responses to the first item on the questionnaire into one of the 22 strategies. In instances where participants reported more than one strategy, all strategies mentioned were coded under that participant’s number. A mild/proactive and harsh/punitive strategy percentage was also calculated for each participant by first identifying how many strategies fell at or above the midpoint strategy of “consulting with staff or a school-based mental health professional.” Such strategies were categorized as mild/proactive strategies and strategies that fell beneath this item on the continuum were categorized as “harsh/punitive.” Next, the total number of mild/proactive strategies each participant identified was divided by the total number of identified strategies with the same calculation occurring for the harsh/punitive strategies. For example, if a participant

reported four strategies and two were mild/proactive, the participant was coded with a 50% proactive/mild, 50% punitive/harsh response to the first item. Coding of the third questionnaire item involved a process that was identical to the first item, with strategies being categorized via the response to misbehavior continuum and consequent mild/proactive and harsh/punitive percentages.

Table 4. Response to Misbehavior Continuum

Mild/Proactive	Improve school processes Establish positive relationships Change classroom practices Ignore behavior Nonverbal reaction Positive reinforcement/attention or BIP Provide additional skill instruction Encourage coping strategy Reminder of rules/redirection Identify root cause and address One on one conversation
Moderate	Consult with school staff/SMH Verbal reaction/warning Call/involve parents Detention School conference In class consequence Refer for special education evaluation In school suspension Send to principal/ODR Out of school suspension
Most Harsh/Punitive	Expulsion

(Adapted from Glock, 2017; Keller, 2014; Kulinna, 2007; Martin et al., 1999; Ozben, 2010; Simms, 2014).

The second questionnaire item responses were coded via a similar process relying on the school discipline, root cause analysis, and attribution literature (Cook et al., 2018; Kulinna, 2007; Preuss, 2003; Valencia, 2010). All participant responses to this item were categorized via the six categories of root cause within schools as outlined by Preuss (2003): (1) student demographics;

(2) curriculum; (3) instruction; (4) system processes; (5) organizational culture; and (6) external factors. The factor loadings from the Behavior Attribution survey analyzed by Kulinna (2007) were also relied upon when coding strategies into the hypothesis categories. Next, relying on the definitions of deficit thinking (Valencia, 2010) and putative malleable (Cook et al., 2018), root causes were then categorized into the broad categories of deficit-centered root cause or putative malleable root cause. By definition, root causes that fell within the student demographics or external factor categories were deemed deficit-centered root causes and root causes that fell within the curriculum, instruction, system processes, or organizational culture categories were deemed putative malleable root causes. A graphic that depicts this coding process along with definitions and examples of each root cause category can be viewed below in Figure 2.

Analysis

Upon categorization of the first three questionnaire items, descriptive statistics were run in SPSS to provide quantification of participant response patterns within and throughout district discipline categories. Next, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) was run in SPSS to compare the mean percentage of mild/proactive and harsh/punitive strategies reported in response to item one compared to the mean percentage of mild/proactive and harsh/punitive strategies reported in response to item three. This analysis was conducted to examine if there was a quantifiable difference in the types of strategies participants offered both before and after considering the root cause of the imagined student's behavior (Field, 2013). Finally, a paired samples t-test was run in SPSS to examine if and how each individual teacher's response differed when responding to the first questionnaire item compared to the third questionnaire item. This analysis was conducted to further examine differences in teacher reported strategies both before and after considering the root cause of the student's behavior (Field, 2013). Finally, all data were examined to identify

differences in response patterns by district and district discipline category through an analysis of descriptive statistics and by independently running all analyses described above by district. The results from the analyses described are presented below by research question.

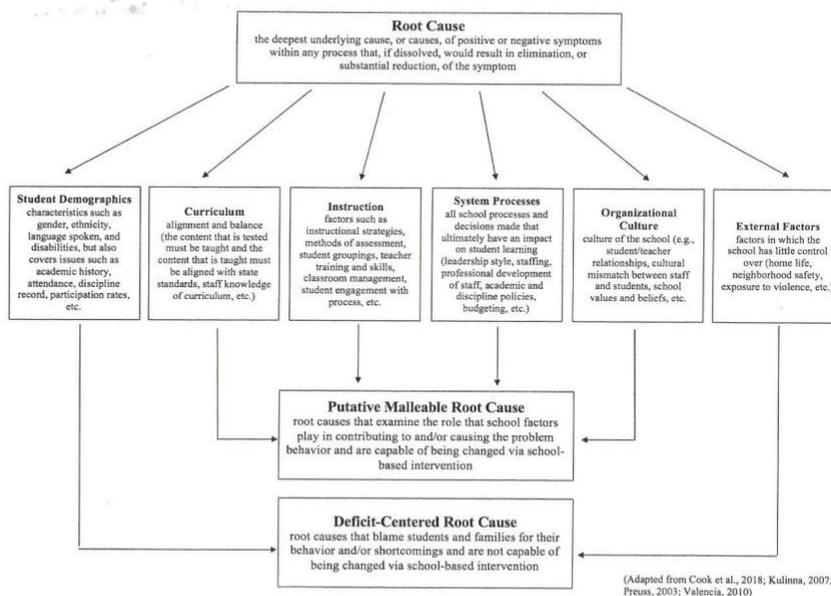


Figure 2. Meta Root Cause Analysis Framework

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Part I

RQ1. Do the predictor variables of student demographic composition, teacher demographic composition, and district funding predict districtwide exclusionary discipline patterns?

The researcher hypothesized that there would be many contextual school-level factors that contributed to or predicted patterns in exclusionary discipline practices and/or racial disproportionality throughout the participating school districts. Before running the regression, correlations between all variables and predictors were run to identify if any variables were strongly correlated with each other. Results indicated that disproportionality rate and percent student of color enrollment were significantly correlated at the 0.05 level ($r=.187$). Further, discipline rate was significantly correlated with the following variables at the 0.01 level: percent student of color enrollment ($r=.416$), percent free reduced lunch enrollment ($p=.562$), percent teachers of color ($r=.342$), and percent novice teachers ($r=.271$). Operational spending per pupil was significantly correlated with discipline rate at the 0.05 level ($r=.192$). In addition, total student enrollment and number of schools were significantly correlated ($r=.906$) and operational spending and instructional spending were significantly correlated ($r=.938$) at the 0.01 level. Due to the high correlations and common variance in the latter, number of schools and instructional spending per pupil were excluded from the regression model. This removal also reduced redundancies in the data.

The final regression model for the discipline rate variable included the predictor variables of percent free or reduced-price lunch and operational spending per pupil, such that for every one percentage increase in free reduced price lunch, the discipline rate increases by 30.27% when operational spending was held constant. Furthermore, for every dollar increase in operational spending per pupil, the discipline rate increased by .001% when free reduced-price lunch was held constant. Ultimately, results indicate that the predictor that significantly explained the most variance for exclusionary discipline practices throughout schools in this study was percent free or reduced-price lunch student enrollment, as this variable explained approximately 38% of the variance for the discipline rate model. Please see Table 5 for the regression models run to arrive at the final model.

The final regression model for the disproportionality variable only included the predictor variable of percent students of color, such that for every one percentage increase in percent student of color enrollment, the disproportionality rate increased by 2.225%. Ultimately, the only predictor that significantly explained any variance for racial disproportionality in exclusionary discipline practices was percent student of color enrollment and this variable explained approximately 4% of the variance for the racial disproportionality model. Please see Table 6 for the regression model summary for disproportionality rate.

Table 5. Regression Results: Discipline Rate (standard deviations from the mean)

	A	B	C	D	E
Constant	-3.854 (1.652)	-4.466 (1.679)	-3.950 (1.650)	-3.989 (1.754)	-15.413 (3.122)
%Free/reduced	28.568** (3.191)	24.589** (3.909)	26.049** (3.619)	28.181 (3.601)	30.027** (3.062)
%SOC		5.796 (3.326)			
%TOC			10.269 (7.636)		
%NOV				5.877 (25.131)*	
OP SPEND					.001** (.000)
R-squared	0.315	0.327	0.322	0.316	0.381
Adjusted R-squared	0.311	0.319	0.314	0.308	0.374
No. Observations	176				

*Indicates significance at the 95% level

**Indicates significance at the 99% level

Table 6. Final Regression Model Disproportionality Rate

Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Sig. F Change
1	.187 ^a	.035	.029	3.34060	.015

a. Predictors: (Constant), Percent Student of Color Enrollment

b. Dependent Variable: Disproportionality Rate

Part II

RQ2) Is there a significant relationship between teacher perception of how to respond to subjective student misbehavior and districtwide exclusionary discipline patterns?

The researcher hypothesized that there would be significant differences in the strategies teachers offered to respond to the student misbehavior in the vignette (Item 1 on the questionnaire, presented in Figure 1) based on the larger district-level school discipline patterns. Overall, throughout all participants, the majority of strategies identified in response to Item 1 were proactive/mild in nature (n=546), comprising 70% of the strategies mentioned, with the remainder falling in the punitive/harsh category (n=234). This pattern held true at the district level for all participating districts, with more than 50% of reported strategies falling in the proactive/mild category across all district respondents. The most frequently reported strategy overall was student redirection (n=165), comprising 21% of the strategies reported, followed by 1:1 student conversation (n=114), comprising 15% of the strategies reported. Please reference Table 7 for a representation of all Item 1 responses by district.

The researcher's hypothesis was ultimately supported, as the two districts with the highest percentage of harsh/punitive responses were from teachers who work in a high disproportionality district (District 1: 42.5% of responses were punitive) and teachers who work in a high exclusion district (District 5: 35.2% of responses were punitive). The two districts that reported the lowest percentages of harsh/punitive responses were from teachers who work in the two low exclusion districts (District 3: 15.9% of responses were punitive; District 6: 21.6% of responses were punitive).

In order to determine if these differences were statistically significant, the test of homogeneity of variances was first run to test for the assumption of homogeneity. Results from

this analysis yielded that the assumption of homogeneity was not met for this sample ($p < .001$). Thus, rather than running an ANOVA, a nonparametric analysis that is parallel to an ANOVA was run. Ultimately, the Kruskal-Wallis analysis yielded that there was a statistically significant difference in the mean percentage of mild strategies reported in response to Item 1 by district ($p < .001$).

Overall, teachers from all districts were more likely to report proactive strategies, however teachers who worked in districts where disproportionality and/or high exclusionary discipline usage was present in the discipline data were more likely to identify punitive response strategies to the student misbehavior presented in the vignette as compared to teachers who worked in districts with low exclusionary discipline rates.

RQ3) Is there a significant relationship between teacher perception of the root cause of subjective student misbehavior and districtwide exclusionary discipline patterns?

The researcher hypothesized that there would be differences in what teachers believed to be the root cause of subjective student misbehavior based upon the larger district-level school discipline patterns. This hypothesis was not directly supported by the data. Overall, the majority of root causes identified, regardless of the district, were deficit-centered in nature ($n=381$), with 86% of all participant responses falling in this category. The district that reported the lowest percentage of deficit-responses was District 1, a high disproportionality district (82% of responses were deficit-based), followed by District 3, a low exclusion district (83% of responses were deficit-based). Within each district, most root causes fell within the student demographics hypothesis category ($n=237$) followed by the external causes hypothesis category ($n=144$). Notably, no root causes identified fell within the organizational culture or curriculum level domains. Overall, the larger district discipline data patterns did not impact the root causes

Table 7. Response to Item 1 by District

	Proactive/Mild										Punitive/Harsh						
	Pos. Relation	Class Practice	Ignore	Non-verbal	Pos. Reinforce	Coping Strat.	Redirect	Root Cause	1:1 convo	Consult SMH	Verbal Warn	Call Parents	Detention	School Conf.	Class Cons.	ISS	ODR
High RD	2 (0.5)	7 (1.8)	17 (4.3)	27 (6.9)	45 (11.4)	15 (3.8)	80 (20.3)	8 (2.0)	52 (13.2)	2 (0.5)	40 (10.2)	19 (4.8)	9 (2.3)	4 (1.0)	34 (8.6)	5 (1.3)	28 (7.1)
District 1	1 (0.4)	3 (1.2)	12 (4.7)	19 (7.5)	24 (9.4)	7 (2.8)	48 (18.9)	3 (1.2)	27 (10.6)	2 (0.8)	34 (13.4)	14 (5.5)	9 (3.5)	3 (1.2)	18 (7.1)	4 (1.6)	26 (10.2)
District 4	1 (0.7)	4 (2.9)	5 (3.6)	8 (5.7)	21 (15.0)	8 (5.7)	32 (22.9)	5 (3.6)	25 (17.9)	0 (0.0)	6 (4.3)	5 (3.6)	0 (0.0)	1 (0.7)	16 (11.4)	1 (0.7)	2 (1.4)
No RD	1 (3.0)	1 (3.0)	1 (3.0)	2 (6.0)	3 (9.0)	1 (3.0)	7 (21.2)	1 (3.0)	7 (21.2)	1 (3.0)	1 (3.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (3.0)	0 (0.0)	3 (9.0)	0 (0.0)	3 (9.0)
District 2	1 (3.0)	1 (3.0)	1 (3.0)	2 (6.0)	3 (9.0)	1 (3.0)	7 (21.2)	1 (3.0)	7 (21.2)	1 (3.0)	1 (3.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (3.0)	0 (0.0)	3 (9.0)	0 (0.0)	3 (9.0)
High Exclusion	6 (4.1)	1 (0.7)	7 (4.8)	8 (5.5)	8 (5.5)	1 (0.7)	28 (19.3)	7 (4.8)	28 (19.3)	0 (0.0)	8 (5.5)	13 (0.9)	2 (1.4)	0 (0.0)	21 (14.5)	0 (0.0)	7 (4.8)
District 5	6 (4.1)	1 (0.7)	7 (4.8)	8 (5.5)	8 (5.5)	1 (0.7)	28 (19.3)	7 (4.8)	28 (19.3)	0 (0.0)	8 (5.5)	13 (0.9)	2 (1.4)	0 (0.0)	21 (14.5)	0 (0.0)	7 (4.8)
Low Exclusion	6 (2.9)	6 (2.9)	9 (4.3)	16 (7.7)	30 (14.4)	14 (6.7)	50 (24.0)	11 (5.3)	27 (13.0)	3 (1.4)	8 (3.8)	10 (4.8)	0 (0.0)	1 (0.5)	10 (4.8)	1 (0.5)	6 (2.9)
District 3	5 (3.2)	6 (3.8)	8 (5.1)	13 (8.3)	22 (14.0)	12 (7.6)	36 (22.9)	8 (5.1)	22 (14.0)	0 (0.0)	7 (4.5)	8 (5.1)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	5 (3.2)	1 (0.6)	4 (2.5)
District 6	1 (2.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (2.0)	3 (5.9)	8 (15.7)	2 (3.9)	14 (27.4)	3 (5.9)	5 (9.8)	3 (5.9)	1 (2.0)	2 (3.9)	0 (0.0)	1 (2.0)	5 (9.8)	0 (0.0)	2 (3.9)
Total n (%)	15 (1.9)	15 (1.9)	34 (6.8)	53 (6.8)	86 (11.0)	31 (4.0)	165 (21.2)	27 (3.5)	114 (14.6)	6 (1.2)	57 (7.3)	42 (5.4)	12 (1.5)	5 (0.6)	68 (8.7)	6 (0.8)	44 (5.6)

teachers attributed to the student behavior in the vignette. Rather, the majority of participants indicated deficit-centered root causes, regardless of district. Please reference Table 8 for a breakdown of root causes by district and hypothesis category and Table 9 for specific examples of participant responses under each category.

Table 8. Root Causes by District and Hypothesis Category

	Deficit Centered n (%)		Putative Malleable n (%)		Total
	Student Dem.	External Causes	Instruction	School Process	
High Disproportionality	125 (52.7)	76 (32.1)	35 (14.8)	1 (0.4)	237
District 1	77 (48.4)	54 (34.0)	27 (17.0)	1 (0.6)	159
District 4	48 (61.5)	22 (28.0)	8 (10.3)	0 (0.0)	78
No Disproportionality	11 (55.0)	8 (40.0)	1 (5.0)	0 (0.0)	20
District 2	11 (55.0)	8 (40.0)	1 (5.0)	0 (0.0)	20
High Exclusion	39 (49.4)	30 (38.0)	7 (8.9)	3 (3.8)	79
District 5	39 (49.4)	30 (38.0)	7 (8.9)	3 (3.8)	79
Low Exclusion	62 (57.9)	30 (28.0)	14 (15.9)	1 (.09)	107
District 3	47 (57.3)	21 (25.6)	13 (15.9)	1 (1.2)	82
District 6	15 (60.0)	9 (36.0)	1 (4.0)	0 (0.0)	25
Total Root Causes	237 (53.5)	144 (32.5)	57 (12.9)	5 (1.1)	443
	381 (86.0)		62 (14.0)		

Table 9. Examples of Identified Root Causes

Deficit-Centered	Student demographics	“Family background”
	External causes	“Learning disability” “Attention seeking” “Lack of structure at home” “Domestic issues at home” “Home life”
Putative Malleable	Instruction	“Isn’t being challenged enough” “Needs assistance completing work”
	School Processes	“Teacher/school involvement within teams” “We need more social-emotional training for teachers and admin”

RQ4) Is there a significant difference in teacher response to subjective student misbehavior when immediately asked to address the behavior compared to when specifically asked to respond to the root cause of the behavior?

Overall, throughout all participants, the majority of strategies identified in response to Item 3 were proactive/mild in nature (n=448), comprising 78.7% of the strategies mentioned, with the remainder falling in the punitive/harsh category (n=121). This pattern held true at the district level for all participating districts, with more than 50% of strategies reported falling in the proactive/mild category across all district respondents. The most frequently reported strategy overall was to provide positive reinforcement (n=102), comprising 18% of the strategies reported, followed by call/involve parents (n=87), comprising 15% of the strategies reported. Please reference Table 10 for a representation of all Item 3 responses by district. The district with the highest percentage of harsh/punitive responses were from teachers who work in a high disproportionality district (District 1: 26.9% of responses were punitive). The district that reported the lowest percentage of harsh/punitive responses were from teachers who work in the no disproportionality district (District 2: 6.2% of responses were punitive).

In order to determine if these differences were statistically significant, the test of homogeneity of variances was first run to test for the assumption of homogeneity. Results from this analysis yielded that the assumption of homogeneity was not met for this sample ($p < .001$). Thus, rather than running an ANOVA, a nonparametric analysis that is parallel to an ANOVA was run. Ultimately, the Kruskal-Wallis analysis yielded that there was not a statistically significant difference in the mean percentage of mild strategies reported in response to Item 3 by district ($p = .101$). Please reference Table 11 for a representation of the test of homogeneity of

Table 10. Response to Item 3 by District

	Proactive/Mild																Punitive/Harsh		
	School Process	Pos. Relation	Class Practice	Ig no re	Non-verbal	Pos. Reinfor ce	Teach Skills	Coping Strat.	Re-direct	Root Cause	1:1 Convo	Consult SMH	Verbal Warn	Call Parents	Detention	School Conf.	Class Cons.	IEP Refer	ODR
High RD	2 (0.7)	27 (9.9)	19 (7.0)	1 (0.4)	3 (1.1)	56 (20.5)	32 (11.7)	9 (3.3)	7 (2.6)	14 (5.1)	18 (6.6)	20 (7.3)	4 (1.5)	46 (16.8)	2 (0.7)	3 (1.1)	4 (1.5)	1 (0.4)	5 (1.8)
District 1	1 (0.6)	15 (9.0)	9 (5.4)	1 (0.6)	3 (1.8)	29 (17.4)	18 (10.8)	2 (1.2)	5 (3.0)	10 (6.0)	14 (8.4)	15 (9.0)	4 (2.4)	29 (17.4)	2 (1.2)	2 (1.2)	4 (2.4)	1 (0.6)	3 (1.8)
District 4	1 (0.9)	12 (11.3)	10 (9.4)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	27 (25.5)	14 (13.2)	7 (6.6)	2 (1.9)	4 (3.8)	4 (3.8)	5 (4.7)	0 (0.0)	17 (16.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (0.9)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	2 (1.9)
No RD	1 (6.3)	4 (25.0)	1 (6.3)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	2 (12.5)	2 (12.5)	0 (0.0)	2 (12.5)	0 (0.0)	2 (12.5)	1 (6.3)	0 (0.0)	1 (6.3)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
District 2	1 (6.3)	4 (25.0)	1 (6.3)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	2 (12.5)	2 (12.5)	0 (0.0)	2 (12.5)	0 (0.0)	2 (12.5)	1 (6.3)	0 (0.0)	1 (6.3)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
High Exclusion	2 (1.8)	11 (10.0)	13 (11.8)	1 (0.9)	0 (0.0)	14 (12.7)	8 (7.3)	3 (2.7)	4 (3.6)	4 (3.6)	19 (17.3)	13 (11.8)	0 (0.0)	13 (11.8)	0 (0.0)	2 (1.8)	3 (2.7)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
District 5	2 (1.8)	11 (10.0)	13 (11.8)	1 (0.9)	0 (0.0)	14 (12.7)	8 (7.3)	3 (2.7)	4 (3.6)	4 (3.6)	19 (17.3)	13 (11.8)	0 (0.0)	13 (11.8)	0 (0.0)	2 (1.8)	3 (2.7)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Low Exclusion	0 (0.0)	16 (9.4)	20 (11.8)	1 (0.6)	1 (0.6)	30 (17.6)	18 (10.6)	9 (5.3)	3 (1.8)	9 (5.3)	12 (7.1)	14 (8.2)	1 (0.6)	27 (15.9)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3 (1.8)	4 (2.4)	2 (1.2)
District 3	0 (0.0)	15 (11.5)	15 (11.5)	1 (0.8)	1 (0.8)	21 (16.2)	13 (10.0)	9 (6.9)	1 (0.8)	7 (5.4)	9 (6.9)	11 (8.5)	1 (0.8)	20 (15.4)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	2 (1.5)	2 (1.5)	2 (1.5)
District 6	0 (0.0)	1 (2.5)	5 (12.5)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	9 (22.5)	5 (12.5)	0 (0.0)	2 (5.0)	2 (5.0)	3 (7.5)	3 (7.5)	0 (0.0)	7 (17.5)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (2.5)	2 (5.0)	0 (0.0)
Total n (%)	5 (0.9)	58 (10.2)	53 (9.3)	3 (0.5)	4 (0.7)	102 (17.9)	60 (10.5)	21 (3.7)	16 (2.8)	27 (4.7)	51 (9.0)	48 (8.4)	5 (0.9)	87 (15.3)	2 (0.4)	5 (0.9)	10 (1.8)	5 (0.9)	7 (1.2)

variances for both Item 1 and Item 3 along with the results from the nonparametric analyses for both items.

Table 11. Test of Homogeneity and Kruskal-Wallis Analyses

% Mild Strategies (Mean)	Test of Homogeneity		Kruskal-Wallis	
	Levene Statistic	Sig.	H	Sig.
Item 1	6.538	.000	27.007	.000
Item 3	6.882	.000	9.213	.101

Participants were ultimately asked to respond to the same question in Items 1 and 3 (see Figure 1), thus a paired-samples t-test was run to determine if there was a statistically significant mean difference between how each individual participant responded to the first item and how they responded to the third item. From here on out, participant answers to Item 1 will be referred to as the response to misbehavior and participant answers to Item 3 will be referred to as the response to root cause, to clearly differentiate between strategies reported both before and after considering the root cause of the student behavior presented in the vignette.

Results from the paired-samples t-test indicated that the mean difference in participant responses were statistically significantly different across all participant groups. Such results indicated that on average, participants reported 6% more proactive strategies on the response to root cause item compared to the response to misbehavior item ($p=0.16$). The district with the largest increase in proactive responses on the response to root cause item was District 5 (high exclusion district), who increased their proactive response strategies by 19% when responding to the root cause as compared to when responding to the misbehavior, a statistically significant finding ($p=.001$). A statistically significant difference in responses was also identified at the

district level for District 1 (high disproportionality district) with a 16% increase in proactive strategies when responding to the root cause as compared to when responding to the misbehavior ($p=.004$). Surprisingly, both of the low exclusion district proactive responses *decreased* from the response to misbehavior item to the response to root cause item (District 3: 4.9% decrease; District 6: 3.4% decrease). Please see Tables 12 and 13 for the frequency and percent of response to misbehavior item and response to root cause item proactive/mild and punitive/harsh strategies by district and by strategy.

When examining the specific strategies identified to respond to the behavior in the vignette both before considering the root cause and after considering the root cause, a similar finding was revealed. The paired-samples t-test that examined how each individual participant changed in their response pattern from the response to misbehavior item to the response to root cause item indicated 16 response strategies that were significantly different overall. The most significant findings from this analysis revealed that on average the strategy of “reminder of rules/redirect” was mentioned .49 times less on the response to root cause item. Furthermore, on average, the strategy of “provide skill instruction” was mentioned .20 times more on the response to root cause item ($p<.001$) and both strategies of “one-on-one conversation” and “in class consequence” were mentioned .20 times less on the response to root cause item. Finally, the “verbal/reaction/warning” strategy was mentioned .18 times less on the response to root cause item. All of these mean differences were significantly different at the .001 level. Please see Table 14 for a representation of all 16 strategies that were statistically significant from the paired samples t-test along with strategies that were significant at the district level.

Table 12. Proactive/Mild and Punitive/Harsh Strategies: Response to Misbehavior vs. Response to Root Cause

	Item 1: Response to Misbehavior			Item 3: Response to Root Cause			Misbehavior Proactive % - Root Cause Proactive %*
	Proactive/Mild n (%)	Punitive/Harsh n (%)	Total	Proactive/Mild n (%)	Punitive/Harsh n (%)	Total	
High Disproportionality							
District 1	146 (57.5)	108 (42.5)	254	122 (73.1)	45 (26.9)	167	+15.6
District 4	109 (77.9)	31 (22.0)	140	86 (81.1)	20 (18.9)	106	+3.2
No Disproportionality							
District 2	25 (75.8)	8 (24.2)	33	15 (93.8)	1 (6.2)	16	+18.0
High Exclusion							+18.8
District 5	94 (64.8)	51 (35.2)	145	92 (83.6)	18 (16.4)	110	
Low Exclusion							
District 3	132 (84.1)	25 (15.9)	157	103 (79.2)	27 (20.8)	130	-4.9
District 6	40 (78.4)	11 (21.6)	51	30 (75.0)	10 (25.0)	40	-3.4
Total	546 (70.0)	234 (30.0)	780	448 (78.7)	121 (21.3)	569	+8.7

*The final column represents the percentage of response to root cause strategies that were proactive subtracted by the percentage of response to misbehavior strategies that were proactive. Positive numbers indicate an increase in percentage of proactive strategies when responding to the root cause compared to when responding to the misbehavior and negative numbers indicate a decrease.

Table 13. Response Strategies: Response to Misbehavior vs. Response to Root Cause

	Misbehavior Frequency n	Misbehavior Percent %	Root Cause Frequency n	Root Cause Percent %
Proactive/Mild	546	70.0	448	78.7
Address School Processes	0	0.0	5	0.9
Establish Positive Relationship	15	1.9	58	10.2
Change Classroom Practices	15	1.9	53	9.3
Ignore Behavior	34	4.4	3	0.5
Nonverbal Reaction	53	6.8	4	0.7
Positive Reinforcement/Behavior	86	11.0	102	17.9
Provide Additional Skill Instruction	0	0.0	60	10.5
Encourage Coping Strategy	31	4.0	21	3.7
Reminder of Rules/Redirect	165	21.2	16	2.8
Identify Root Cause/Function and One on One Conversation	27	3.5	27	4.7
Consult with School Staff/Send to	114	14.6	51	9.0
	6	.07	48	8.4
Punitive/Harsh	234	30.0	121	21.3
Verbal Reaction/Warning	57	7.3	5	0.9
Call/Involve Parents	42	5.4	87	15.3
Detention	12	1.5	2	0.2
In Class Consequence/Send to School Conference	68	8.7	10	1.8
In School Suspension	5	.06	5	0.9
Refer for Eval/IEP	6	.07	0	0.0
Send to Principal or Dean	0	0.0	5	0.9
	44	5.6	7	1.2
Total	780	100.0	569	100.0

Table 14. Paired Samples T-Test, Item 1 vs. Item 3 Responses and Significant Difference by District

	Mean Difference	Sig. (2-tailed)	High RD		Low RD		High EXC		Low EXC	
			D1	D4	D2	D5	D3	D6		
Mild Responses %	.05859	0.16	.16	--	--	.19	--	--	--	
School Processes	.01701	.025	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	
Establish Positive Relationship	.14626	.000	.15	.21	--	--	.17	--	--	
Change Classroom Practice	.12925	.000	--	--	--	.22	.15	.25		
Ignore Behavior	-.10544	.000	-.12	-.09	--	-.11	-.12	--		
Nonverbal Reaction	-.16667	.000	-.17	-.15	--	-.15	-.20	--		
Reminder of Rules/Redirect	-.49660	.000	-.44	-.57	-.42	-.42	-.58	-.60		
Skill Instruction	.20408	.000	.19	.26	--	.15	.22	.25		
One on One Conversation	-.20408	.000	-.13	-.40	-.42	--	-.22	--		
Consult with School Staff/SMH	.14286	.000	.14	.09	--	.24	.18	--		
Verbal Reaction/Warning	-.17687	.000	-.32	-.11	--	-.15	-.10	--		
Call Parents	.15306	.000	.16	.23	--	--	.20	--		
Detention	-.03401	.001	-.07	--	--	--	--	--		
In Class Consequence	-.19728	.000	-.15	-.30	--	-.33	--	--		
Refer for IEP	.01701	.025	--	--	--	--	--	--		
Send to Principal/ODR	-.12585	.000	-.24	--	--	-.13	--	--		
ISS	-.02041	.014	--	--	--	--	--	--		

^ -- Indicates that this response strategy was not statistically significantly different between items at the district level.

Most notably, analyses at the district level revealed that participants from District 1 (high disproportionality) had 12 statistically significantly different strategies between the response to misbehavior and response to root cause items, while District 2 (no disproportionality) and District 6 (low exclusion) had 2-3 statistically significantly different strategies. In general, results reveal that participants who worked in districts with high exclusionary discipline rates and high disproportionality were more likely to increase in identification of proactive strategies from the response to misbehavior item to the response to root cause item while participants from low disproportionality and low exclusion districts did not have as many significant differences in response strategies between the two items. Finally, while there was no way to measure this outcome, it appears that most of the response to root cause strategies were tied to the identified root cause. Please reference Table 15 for examples of instances where participants changed their response to root cause strategy based on the identified root cause.

Table 15. Response to Misbehavior, Root Cause, and Response to Root Cause by Participant

Response to misbehavior	Identified root cause	Response to root cause
“Ignore what I can. Use a 1, 2, 3 count with behavior that can’t be ignored. Time out or office referral when needed.”	“Lack of attention outside of school, academic issues that are frustrating.”	“Praise and give as much positive attention as possible. Extra support for academics.”
“Redirections, personal talks on the side, detention when warranted, dean referral”	“Doesn’t like reading, cares more about social life, home life.”	“Recommend high interest books that could appeal to his interests after getting to know him.”
“Informal cues, tap on desk/ask if they need help. Send him on a walk and if it continues, discipline referral.”	“Frustration regarding home life or not understanding content.”	“Building a good relationship and trust with the student; reteaching.”
“Proximity/verbal or visual cues.”	“Attention seeking, poor home environment.”	“Relationship building.”
“Redirect/encourage positive behavior and/or ignore negative behavior.”	“Academic challenges/attention seeking.”	“Ensure student gets necessary academic support. Provide opportunities for student to receive positive attention.”
“Ignore or give a warning. Move seat. Redirect. Talk in the hall with him. Contact parent.”	“Dad has almost 0 contact with the school...has declined conferences and ignores most emails.”	“Encourage a mentorship program to give him a strong sense of belonging and love of school. Continue to hold him to high standards because he is very capable.”
“1) Stern warning. 2) Punitive consequences.”	“Boredom, lack of self-control, distractions”	“Limit down time, model appropriate classroom behavior, keep communication open with parents.”
“Redirect, write detentions, documents on the communication log, call home, referral.”	“Attention seeking.”	“Find other ways to give student attention, e.g. classroom jobs.”
“Speak with parent, conference with student and try to build a positive relationship. If all else fails, I follow the school’s policy and write referral and they serve detention.”	“Attention seeking, bored, energetic, placed in the wrong class level, home life is not ideal.”	“Build positive relationships, send to student support services.”

Summary of Results

Overall, the student demographic variables of percent free/reduced price lunch student enrollment and percent student of color enrollment were the strongest predictors of exclusionary discipline patterns in Part I of this study. Part II revealed that when teacher participants were asked how they would respond to a student engaging in disruptive behavior in class, the majority of response strategies mentioned were proactive in nature, however teachers who worked in districts where disproportionality and/or high exclusionary discipline usage was present in the discipline data were more likely to identify punitive response strategies compared to teachers who worked in districts with low exclusionary discipline rates. When teacher participants were asked what they believed to be the root cause of the disruptive behavior presented in the vignette, the majority of responses were deficit-centered in nature, regardless of district discipline patterns. Finally, when teacher participants were asked what steps they would take to respond to the root cause of the student behavior presented in the vignette, the percentage of proactive/mild strategies increased from their initial responses to the misbehavior, however this finding was most significant among teachers who work in districts with high exclusionary discipline rates and high disproportionality at the district level. Implications of all findings from both Part I and Part II are presented next in the discussion.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Summary

The purpose of this dissertation study was to examine school related predictors of exclusionary discipline practices within a state in the midst of large-scale school discipline reform. Overall, results indicate that exclusionary discipline patterns can be predicted by district contextual factors and that the perceptions of teachers do correlate with district-level discipline patterns to an extent. However, the most compelling finding involves the idea that regardless of school factors and district-level discipline patterns, deficit thinking likely manifests throughout all school contexts. While this was an unintended finding of the current study, another compelling finding involves the idea that teacher perceptions may be more alterable than previously thought. See below for a more thorough description of such findings.

Systemic Factors

The first aspect of this study sought to identify school-related predictors of exclusionary discipline practices and identified that the percentage of students who receive free or reduced-price lunch independently explained 38% of the variance among exclusionary discipline usage, such that as the percentage of this demographic variable increased within a school, so did the exclusionary discipline rate. These results are consistent with the findings of Baker (2012) who also found that the percentage of students receiving free or reduced-price lunch was the strongest predictor of suspension/expulsion for defiant student behavior. However, the finding that the

percentage of students who receive free or reduced-price lunch was a stronger predictor than the percentage of students of color has consistently not been the case in previous literature. In past studies, race remains a significant predictor of suspension patterns even after controlling for school level poverty weight (Blake et al., 2016; Skiba et al., 2016).

While racial demographic student composition did not significantly independently predict exclusionary discipline rates, it was a significant predictor of racial disproportionality in exclusionary discipline practices. This suggests that higher student of color enrollment predicts racial overrepresentation in school discipline practices. While this variable did not explain as much of the variance in exclusionary discipline practices as the percent of free or reduced-price lunch demographic variable, it is consistent with prior research on this topic that has documented a similar trend regarding student of color enrollment (Anyon et al., 2014; Arcia, 2007; Hannon et al., 2013; Krezmien et al., 2006; Martinez et al., 2016; Payne & Welch, 2010; Skiba et al., 2011; Skiba et al., 2014; Skiba et al., 2015). Results of the current study found that teacher demographic variables did not independently significantly predict patterns in exclusionary discipline. This finding is also inconsistent with prior research on this topic which identifies that higher racial diversity among teachers is correlated with lower disproportionality for students of color (Lindsay & Hart, 2017; McLoughlin & Noltemeyer, 2010), and that years of teacher experience predicts suspension rates (Baker, 2012; Morrison et al., 2000).

While the results of the current study indicate both consistencies and inconsistencies with prior research in this area, it is also important to acknowledge and critique the limitations of quantitative analyses in fully capturing and measuring the intersectional nature of socially constructed variables such as race and socioeconomic status (Codioli McMaster & Cook, 2019). According to Codioli McMaster and Cook, who recently identified the dearth of quantitative

literature that measures educational inequality from an intersectional perspective, intersectionality refers to the idea that social categories such as gender, race/ethnicity, and social background, are almost always permeated by one another. Codioli McMaster and Cook further indicate that intersectional approaches to investigating educational inequality requires a fundamental shift in thinking about the whole set of characteristics and circumstances that relate to systems of power and discrimination within and beyond education, and argue that education researchers have historically relied on qualitative means to holistically represent such constructs. However, the authors point to the importance of grounding quantitative findings within a similar intersectional framework that acknowledges the intersectionality of the many variables that systematically come together to lead to adverse outcomes for certain groups of students within the education system. For example, the current study found a significant positive relationship between percent student of color enrollment and percent free or reduced-price lunch enrollment, reflecting centuries of systemic segregation and racism (Ladson-Billings, 2017). Intersectional relationships of this nature are almost impossible to fully quantify when examining their contribution to inequitable education practices and it is impossible to examine the impact of one without acknowledging the other (Codioli McMaster & Cook, 2019; Welsh & Swain, 2020).

Such systemic and historical inequities within the education system are also represented in the current study's identification of the negative relationship between percent free or reduced-price lunch enrollment and instructional spending per pupil, as well as the positive relationship between percent free or reduced-price lunch enrollment and percent novice teachers. In addition, the significant relationship between percent student of color enrollment and percent teachers of color in the district further replicates the magnitude of racial segregation in schools that has also extended to an increasingly segregated teaching workforce (Ladson-Billings, 2005). These

examples point to the importance of future research that examines predictors of inequitable practices such as disproportionality in exclusionary discipline from an intersectional lens that allows for the analysis of anti-categorical complexity, intra-categorical complexity, and inter-categorical complexity as defined by Codioli McMaster and Cook (2019). In sum, findings from the first aspect of this study are somewhat consistent with prior research in this area but ultimately continue to provide evidence for the argument that disparities in educational opportunities and outcomes are largely due to a broad range of sociological factors, making it difficult to separate education from sociocultural, sociopolitical, and socioeconomic contexts (Welsh & Swain, 2020).

Teacher Factors

Response to misbehavior. The second aspect of this study aimed to examine the impact of additional factors on exclusionary discipline practices, specifically teacher perceptions of behavior. Results revealed that when teachers were asked how they would respond to subjective student misbehavior, the majority of reported responses throughout all participants were proactive/mild in nature. Furthermore, the act of redirection and engaging in a one-on-one conversation with the student were the two most commonly identified responses. This information is consistent with previous research on this topic (Gregory & Mosely, 2004; Kulinna, 2007). Furthermore, while all participating districts reported more proactive strategies than punitive, there were significant discrepancies throughout districts, with low exclusion districts reporting more proactive strategies than high disproportionality and high exclusion districts. This indicates that the perceptions of teachers regarding how to handle misbehavior in their classrooms is consistent with larger school discipline patterns at the district level.

Root cause of misbehavior. When teachers were asked to identify what they believed to

be the root cause of subjective student misbehavior, the majority of teachers reported root causes that were deficit-centered in nature. This is consistent with previous research on this topic, which indicates that educators often focus on the specific misbehavior or offense when determining the outcome rather than considering the context of the misbehavior and related school and classroom practices in need of attention and resolution to prevent future problem behaviors (Haight et al., 2016). These findings indicate that deficit thinking that blames students for their behavior is pervasive throughout all schools, regardless of the larger school discipline context. These findings are consistent with the deficit-based narratives that have historically shaped how we conceptualize misbehavior in schools, particularly among racial/ethnic minority students (Mediratta & Rausch, 2016) and are also supported by the larger literature in this area. For example, one study found that teachers believed that the personality of the learner was the most important reason behind problem behaviors (Tunaz, 2017).

Interestingly, the current study found that the district that reported the lowest percentage of deficit-centered root causes was a high disproportionality district. However, upon analyzing the participant demographics within this district, the researcher identified that 46% of the participants from this district were special education teachers while no other participating districts had special education teachers in their participant sample. Special education teachers are more likely to have additional training in behavior management, proactive strategies, and growth mindset mentalities (Moreno & Scalatta, 2018) and may be more prone to look to instructional and classroom factors rather than internal student attributes. Thus, while there is no explicit data in the current study to support this interpretation, the researcher speculates that the training and background of the majority of teacher participants from this one district may have contributed to this finding rather than the district discipline data.

While the current study focused on how larger discipline patterns interacted with deficit thinking, prior studies on this topic have focused on how student race may predict deficit thinking among teachers. For example, Gregory and Mosely (2004) found that while teachers identified both deficit and putative malleable factors as contributors to student behavior, in instances where race was discussed, emphasis was increasingly placed on the deficits that low-income Black students bring into schools. A descriptive analysis of the participating districts from the current study show that the percentage of student of color enrollment is tied to the larger discipline patterns (reference Table 1), with high exclusion and high disproportionality districts having higher percentages of student of color enrollment and low exclusion districts having lower percentages of student of color enrollment. Thus, while findings from the current study stress the prevalence of deficit thinking throughout teachers in all districts, higher rates of deficit thinking were identified among teachers who work in districts with high exclusionary discipline and high disproportionality rates, which also happen to be the districts with higher rates of student of color enrollment. Therefore, while the current does not directly support that deficit thinking may be tied to student racial demographics, such a relationship should continue being investigated in future research.

While the deficit thinking attribution literature is pervasive, some researchers have found promising results where teachers have also considered more malleable attributions. In such instances, teachers have generally been observed to perceive a combination of within school and outside of school factors as contributors to student misbehavior (Belt & Belt, 2017; Donnell, 2010; Gregory & Mosely, 2004; Milner & Lomotey, 2013). While conflicting with the current study, these results are promising indicators that teachers are open to considering not only the incident that occurred but also the school characteristics that may provoke the students to engage

in problem behavior (Baker, 2019).

Prior researchers have also focused on teachers who recognize the impact that factors such as poverty may have on students, but rather than attributing student failure to poverty or other characteristics, they make a point to compensate for what the children may be lacking at home. This approach does not blame student success on socioeconomic status, and rather allows teachers to identify what types of things are in their control. Further research also indicates that some teachers implement an asset-based approach to factors typically viewed as deficits (Donnell, 2010). Teachers who adopt this mentality may be less inclined to engage in deficit thought processes and may rather build upon the wealth of diversity in knowledge and experiences that students and families bring into schools (Donnell, 2010; Gadsen & Dixon-Roman, 2016). The diversity in teacher perception of the causes of student misbehavior throughout the literature represents an increased need to ensure that teachers operating from deficit mentalities have access to the same training opportunities that teachers who operate from strengths-based approaches do.

While the current study operated from the root cause analysis framework, it is important to note that teacher participants did not receive any formal training on the various levels of root cause to encourage the identification of putative malleable root causes. This was an important premise of the study because it allowed for an assessment of how teachers currently operate without having access to such knowledge. Due to the plethora of research examining how widespread deficit thinking is in schools, these findings are somewhat unsurprising. However, future research should be aimed at providing teachers with information on root cause analysis, the importance of identifying root causes at all levels, how to systematically identify which root causes are deficit in nature and which are putative malleable, and encouraging self-reflection in

how easy or difficult it is to come up with root causes that can be addressed in the school setting. In fact, Mavropoulou and Padelidu (2002) indicated that teachers need to be provided with a comprehensive framework such as this one that allows them to integrate school and family factors into their examination of the causes of behavior. Therefore, future research should also examine the root causes teachers identify before a comprehensive training on root cause analysis and afterward to examine if they can more readily develop putative malleable root causes after being presented with such information. While completely reframing the deficit view schools traditionally place on student misbehavior will take time, comprehensive professional development opportunities that break down the root cause analysis framework may be a great starting point that encourages teachers to examine other viewpoints.

Response to root cause of misbehavior. The researcher hypothesized there to be differences between teacher initial response to behavior and teacher response to the root cause of behavior. This hypothesis was supported, as participants were more likely to identify proactive responses when responding to the root cause of the behavior compared to the actual misbehavior. Proactive strategies increased the most among teachers who worked in districts with high exclusion patterns and high disproportionality rates. Interestingly, proactive strategies decreased overall among teachers who worked in low exclusionary discipline districts. Because the researcher did not statistically examine why this may have been the case, future research should examine this phenomenon.

The finding that teachers were less likely to report responses such as “ignoring the behavior” and “nonverbal reaction” is an important example of how teachers attempted to link the root cause of misbehavior to their subsequent response to the root cause. Many teachers from the current study reported that a need for attention was the root cause of the misbehavior of the

student in the vignette. Thus, once teachers considered attention as a possible root cause, many reconsidered their initial response of ignoring the misbehavior and instead reported the act of providing the student with positive reinforcement. This indicates that teachers may have realized that ignoring the student behavior does not effectively address the root if the root is believed to be attention. This finding is consistent with the literature which indicates that while ignoring inappropriate behavior can be an effective deterrent for students seeking attention, it is more effective when paired with positive reinforcement for appropriate behavior (Green et al., 2017).

Surprisingly, participants in the current study were more likely to report the act of contacting the student's parents to respond to the root cause of misbehavior. This can be interpreted in multiple ways. Firstly, this response could be an extension of deficit thinking, with teachers feeling as if they are unable to make a difference in the student's behavior in the classroom because the student's parents are the root of the behavior problems (Martin, Bosk, & Bailey, 2018). Thus, after considering the root cause of misbehavior, which were majority deficit in nature, teachers may have decided that the only way to address these deficits would be to go straight to the source. If this was the case, implications are two-fold: teachers need more support in identifying root causes that are not deficit in nature; and teachers need more support in identifying responses to misbehavior that are within their control and that can be implemented within the school environment.

On the other hand, while the act of contacting a student's parents may appear punitive in nature, depending on the approach, it can also be a protective factor. Research indicates that seeking the support of the child's parent can aid in increasing the child's social-emotional skills if a strengths-based approach is utilized (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Green et al., 2017). Strong family-school partnerships are essential in resolving problems at school, especially for

families of color who are often marginalized from these spaces. Often times family-school relationships are facilitated in top-down approaches with educators prescribing activities for caregivers, rather than a collaborative partnership where both parties provide insight. This is extremely important when issues of power and race come into play and often lead to family distrust in the education system and teacher disrespect toward families (Haight et al., 2016).

While the researcher of the current study coded the act of “contacting parents” as a punitive behavior response strategy, the literature is mixed on whether such a strategy should be viewed as punitive or proactive (Adams, Harris, & Suzette Jones, 2016; Cherng, 2016; Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Green et al., 2017; Ishimaru et al., 2016; Smith, 2003), with most of such conflicting views resting in what the intention of teachers are when contacting parents. For example, Smith (2003) found that teachers most often reported the act of contacting a student’s parents to report problems rather than to provide information or collaboratively communicate. Furthermore, research indicates that teachers will either engage in constructive efforts to resolve the problem or “blaming behaviors” when speaking with parents and that this intention is likely rooted in their behavior attributions and perceived self-efficacy for handling classroom problems (Smith, 2003).

While the current study did not specifically assess teacher self-efficacy, research indicates that teachers often feel less self-efficacy when classroom problems are attributed to deficits within the student or home. Because the majority of behavior attributions in the current study were deficit in nature, one could hypothesize that the act of contacting parents was a punitive approach. However, because the current study did not specifically assess for such differentiation, future research should examine the conversations teachers have most frequently when contacting parents about problem behavior, the intention behind such actions, and their perceived self-

efficacy in classroom management. It is also important to note that parents and families from nondominant communities often feel unwelcome and marginalized in their children's schools which could further perpetuate feelings of blame regardless of teacher intent (Ishimaru et al., 2016). According to Cherng (2016), teachers are more likely to contact parents of minority students with academic or behavioral concerns rather than with news of accomplishments. Thus, future research should also examine parents' experiences of collaborating with teachers to understand if they felt blamed or supported (Smith, 2003) and whether they feel agency and in what ways schools can support such agency.

Arguably, one of the most compelling findings from this aspect of the current study is that teachers did not mention the strategy of providing additional skill instruction at all when asked to respond to the misbehavior, but this response pattern comprised approximately 10% of the strategies reported to respond to the root cause. Therefore, teachers recognized that when students engage in misbehavior, it often means that they need additional social emotional or behavioral skill instruction. However, these beliefs are not translated into the strategies being implemented. Research on the way behavior is conceptualized in schools consistently documents this phenomenon, thus representing the continued existence of zero-tolerance mindsets in our schools even though the actual practices are physically nonexistent in most discipline codes of conduct (Camacho & Krezmien, 2020). Contrastingly, while "in school suspension" was mentioned as a possible response strategy for responding to the misbehavior, it was not mentioned at all when teachers were asked to respond to the root cause. Therefore, the ways in which teachers responded to the root cause of behavior may be more in line with how Bear (2010) conceptualizes the intended aims of school discipline, which specifically emphasizes the act of teaching students' self-discipline skills.

These findings are important for several reasons. First and foremost, there has been limited research about how asking questions that specifically mention root cause drivers changes teacher responses. In addition, these results indicate that teachers are capable of changing their perception of an event based on how questions are asked of them. Within minor variations in how questions were posed, more teachers quickly shifted their perspectives to identify proactive means of handling the same instance of student behavior. Most importantly, these findings suggest that how we phrase certain questions can severely change the way teachers think about what is being asked of them. This phenomenon may be an important example of how vulnerable decision points play out in classrooms (Rollenhagen et al., 2017; Smolkowski et al., 2016).

Vulnerable decision points represent a point of interaction between staff and a student that is more vulnerable to the effects of biases due to the staff member needing to quickly make a discipline decision (Rollenhagen et al., 2017; Smolkowski et al., 2016). The current study may have unintentionally created a situation in which the symbolism of vulnerable decision points can be observed. More specifically, the initial response strategies teachers wrote down to respond to the subjective student behavior were more punitive in nature than the strategies the same teachers identified when encouraged to consider the root cause of the student behavior. The key premise of vulnerable decision points within classrooms involve teachers being asked to make a judgment call about a subjective student behavior without having the time to holistically reflect on the potential causes of the behavior, leading to increased reliance on implicit biases.

(Laraway, Snyckerski, Michael, & Poling, 2003; Smolkowski et al., 2016). Thus, the significant difference in responses when teachers were asked to reflect on root cause drivers of behavior provides additional support for the notion of vulnerable decision points. The findings also underscore the importance of encouraging teachers to reflect on the situation rather than make an

immediate decision more susceptible to implicit bias (Smolkowski et al., 2016). Related research supports that when teachers perceive they are “losing control” of the classroom, they more likely make rash decisions, contributing to excessive exclusionary discipline practices (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Maag, 2012). Therefore, it is extremely important for educators to identify, examine, and reflect on vulnerable decision points (Garro, Giordano, Gubi, & Shortway, 2019). The current study provides support for the fact that such a process does not have to be as time-consuming as educators may believe.

Teacher decision making. Research indicates that the act of accurately perceiving, interpreting, and responding to child behavioral cues is necessary to appropriately meet the child’s social and emotional needs (Deng et al., 2017; Hamre, Hatfield, Pianta, & Jamil, 2014). Unfortunately, the results of the current study indicate that teachers across a variety of settings may not be perceiving, interpreting, or responding appropriately to student behavior. These findings underscore the need for increased support in and attention to this area. However, another important implication from the current study is that even though the majority of participants reported root causes that were deficit in nature, participants were still more likely to report positive response strategies after being asked to think about possible root causes of the behavior. This further exemplifies the importance of reconsidering how we ask questions about behavior, elicit teacher input, and support teachers in responding to behavior. Thus, while the implementation of programs that reduce deficit-thinking is necessary to halt student-blame, the act of reframing what it means to respond to misbehavior in schools may also be a great first step that leads to similar outcomes. Such reframing may perhaps impact teachers’ thoughts about preventing and addressing behavior in schools.

While no studies to date have specifically compared teacher perception of responses to

student misbehavior in this way, prior literature has examined the extent to which the attribution of student misbehavior may be related to the subsequent strategies teachers report using with students. Overwhelmingly, the literature in this area indicates that when teachers engage in deficit-based attributions of root causes of student behavior, they are also more likely to implement harsh or punitive strategies to respond to such behaviors (Andreou & Rapti, 2010; Glock, 2016; Johansen et al., 2011; Twardaawski et al., 2019; Wang & Hall, 2018). Other studies indicate that teachers with more experience and/or behavior management training may be more likely to use proactive strategies that are tied to their identified attributions (Glock, 2017; Glock & Kleen, 2019). Therefore, future research should explore these factors when examining teacher attribution for behavior, as well as their subsequent response strategies. The results of the current study highlight the importance of considering teachers in school discipline reform efforts and provide insight into the most optimal ways to collaborate with them at the individual, classroom and system level. Ultimately, the findings from both phases of the current study provide important implications for school discipline reform efforts at both the interpersonal and systemic levels.

Considerations for Educational Reform Efforts

Teacher Level Considerations

At the teacher level, ingrained deficit beliefs may lead teachers to reject educational reform initiatives due to the assumption that student failure cannot be addressed through school practice initiatives (Garcia & Guerra, 2004). Because most education reform initiatives require teachers to change something about their normal routine, it is especially important to ensure that teachers understand why reform efforts are being implemented along with concrete strategies to implement them (Patrick & Joshi, 2019). Oftentimes, even when teachers seem motivated to

further examine their own mindsets, research indicates that they often lack the necessary support to do so (Patrick & Joshi, 2019).

Low staff support and subsequent lack of staff-buy in for alternatives to suspension is a large barrier to the implementation and sustainability of school discipline reform efforts (Simms, 2014). One study of teacher perception of restorative practices found that the majority of teachers perceived them as positively affecting school culture, however 20% of respondents disagreed with such a perception (Rainbolt et al. 2019). Because teachers often struggle to understand the reasoning behind the proposal of such systemic changes, it is important to give teachers a voice and autonomy in the process when engaging in educational reform (Sprick & Knight, 2018). The current study supports the fact that teachers are capable of changing the way they perceive student behavior, thus involving them in this process and increasing their knowledge base on effective strategies may be an important future direction for school discipline reform efforts.

Teacher training and capacity building. The School Discipline Consensus Report emphasizes the importance of equipping teachers with the skills and commitment to build positive relationships with students and teach social emotional skills and conflict resolution (Morgan et al., 2014). However, while many evidence-based practices such as clear expectations and routines, specific feedback, and high rates of opportunities to respond exist in the literature, such practices are often missing from teacher repertoires, pointing to the increased need for professional development and training on classroom behavior management for teachers (Mitchell et al., 2017). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), teachers consistently report that they are unprepared to handle behavior problems in their classrooms, that misbehavior interferes with their teaching, and that they are unaccepting of having students who

exhibit behavior problems in their classrooms (Gilmour et al., 2019). Lack of training and preparedness for student behavior is one of the main reasons why teachers report experiencing burnout and leaving the field (Burke & Nishioka, 2014). Such feelings may be more related to the systemic and historical complications of what it means to respond to student misbehavior in schools. Because zero tolerance policies and deficit ideologies of student behavior have been ingrained in our society for so long, once such strategies were no longer allowed, teachers likely felt the weight of needing to independently redesign their approaches to misbehavior. However, the results of the current study indicate that teachers do know that proactive strategies are more likely to address the root cause of misbehavior than punitive practices. Thus, as a society, a next step will be to build on this knowledge and allow teachers the capacity and resources to actually apply such strategies in schools.

Research indicates that teachers are interested in learning about strategies that encourage positive behavior in the classroom (Martin et al., 1999). Thus, teachers are open to learning about opportunities that strengthen their understanding of classroom behavior management, as long as the presented strategies are acceptable, reasonable, and fair for easy adoption into their classrooms (Cook et al., 2018). While the implementation science literature indicates that trainings are more effective when implemented continuously throughout a period of time (Nilsen, 2015), teachers often report that long or continuous trainings sometimes feel like a waste of time (Seaton, 2018). This finding further stresses the importance of ensuring teachers are involved in larger reform conversations so they can have a voice in indicating what their training needs are and school leaders can ensure that such trainings are practical and considerate of time commitments (Nilsen, 2015).

Changing teacher mindset/encouraging self-reflection. Research indicates that

teachers must examine their deeply held beliefs to identify any possible personal barriers to successful implementation efforts (Patrick & Joshi, 2019). Therefore, professional development tools that encourage teachers to reflect on their own mindsets may be an effective approach that facilitates teacher practice change (Patrick & Joshi, 2019). Areas of professional development most likely to facilitate changes in school practices are implicit bias, empathy training, and classroom consultation (Fenning & Jenkins, 2019). Teachers who have participated in such opportunities have indicated that developing an awareness of one's own practice was one of the most useful aspects of the training, indicating that self-reflection may truly be key to making substantial change (Fergus, 2018; Seaton, 2018).

Reflective practices among school staff that examine the possibility of educator behaviors as antecedents to student misbehavior is a necessary step to continue examining the school-level factors that may contribute to or prevent behaviors at school (Baker, 2019). The current study provides support for this claim and may be an important direction for future training opportunities. Stressing the importance of putative malleable root causes and school-based interventions to address such root causes can serve as an important reframe of the current way in which behavior is approached in school settings. Furthermore, the attribution literature stresses the importance of embracing controllable factors rather than uncontrollable factors when supporting student needs in schools.

Research indicates that in order to facilitate teacher practice change, it is important for them to see the impact that the change could have in order for it to become a prioritized action. For example, research indicates that observing the success of a change in improving student outcomes is likely to shape teachers' own attitudes and beliefs, thus leading to openness for the change (Guskey, 2002). This can be achieved by talking to other professionals who have

experiences with such a change or from being presented with research-based evidence on such outcomes (Forrest, Lowe, Potts, & Poyser, 2019). Thus, it is important for school leaders to incorporate such information into professional learning opportunities and bring in professionals who have experienced success with such practices to ensure that teachers understand why changes are being made and how such changes could positively impact students as well as their own teaching practice. Knowledge of the actual approaches and techniques coupled with evidence of successful implementation and outcomes in everyday practice contexts is crucial to the facilitation of teacher practice change (Forrest et al., 2019).

Engaging in race talk. While research indicates that school teams are often comfortable addressing problem behavior, they tend to be less comfortable engaging in discussions about race and implicit biases, especially in regard to addressing disproportionality in exclusionary discipline (Gregory et al., 2018; Rollenhagen et al., 2017). However, because implicit bias has received increased attention as a mechanism driving disparities in exclusionary practices, school personnel need to invest in practices that target implicit bias and examination of such biases (Garro et al., 2019).

While there is a dearth of literature that specifically examines implicit bias interventions in schools (Garro et al., 2019), emerging research suggests that implicit bias can be recognized within oneself to aid in identifying techniques to overcome such perceptions (Carter et al., 2017; Devine, Forscher, Austin, & Cox, 2012). Social psychology research indicates that targeted efforts to increase self-awareness of implicit biases and education on the nature of implicit biases has been effective in reducing biases, increasing awareness of biases, and increasing concerns about discrimination (Devine et al., 2012; Garro et al., 2019). Social skills such as perspective-taking and individuating have also been found to reduce the effects of implicit bias in non-school

settings and has thus been identified as a possible option for reducing the effect of implicit bias within schools as well (Isapa-Landa, 2018). This information is aligned with results from the current study because such self-reflection skills and strategies are necessary for teachers to feel more connected to the students who are different from them in order to identify root causes of behavior that are more malleable and allow for high expectations for all students.

Alter et al. (2013) further indicates that evaluating how demographic variables impact perceptions of challenging behavior can aide teachers in their awareness of how they might perceive various misbehavior. For example, Gulfer (2020) examined how two online courses on English Learner (EL) students impacted teacher perception of this population of students. Gulfer found support for the fact that providing knowledge on EL student needs and appropriate instructional techniques to support them led to a more positive perception of EL students as well as increased advocacy for EL students. This supports the idea that providing information and instructional techniques for teachers' work with culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students can be an important avenue for increasing teacher knowledge and perception of students who are different from them. Such results combined with results from the current study supports the fact that professional development that specifically focuses on putative-malleable root causes and proactive school-based strategies to address such root causes may provide teachers with the knowledge base and empowerment necessary to feel capable of utilizing such strategies.

School Level Considerations

At the school level, administrative support is key to ensuring staff buy-in for education reform initiatives (Rainbolt et al., 2019; Rollenhagen et al., 2017). Solorzano and Yosso (2002) indicate that in order for school leaders to sufficiently address student discipline, they must first identify, analyze, and transform the structural, cultural, and interpersonal aspects of education

that maintain the marginalization of students of color. One approach to supporting teachers' classroom management relies on the same multitiered support framework that is often implemented to address the academic, behavioral, and social-emotional needs of students. This framework involves the enactment of universal professional development support for all staff members, targeted support for some who need extra guidance, and intensive support for staff who need individualized support (Green et al., 2017; Simonsen et al., 2014). Findings from the current study could be implemented into this process by first ensuring that administrators value proactive discipline strategies and recognize the importance of reducing disproportionality. When administrators have such qualities and beliefs, they may be more open to incorporating professional development opportunities that outline the implications of root cause analysis and the importance of considering putative malleable root causes and proactive school-based intervention strategies.

The literature shows that moving from entrenched punitive practices to proactive approaches is a major system reform effort that will likely take three to five years (Fullan, 2016). Furthermore, implementation dips are common when pursuing such a change in schools, thus it is important for administrators to respond to such dips with reassurance and feedback (Kane et al., 2007). In order for an approach like this to work, it is important for administrators and school leaders to provide teachers with the tools and supports necessary to sustain implementation. Such supports involve access to reference materials, tools for data collection, time for self-monitoring and self-reflection, access to coaches or other supports, funding, and the ability to provide performance feedback.

As Dam et al. (2018) indicates, successful education reform requires that teachers and staff possess the requisite knowledge and skills necessary, form strong positive intentions to

perform the new behavior, and have a supporting environment and administrative team to encourage such a change in behavior. One factor contributing to the research to practice gap in implementation of effective behavior management strategies is teacher perceptions of their role in meeting the needs of students who exhibit problem behaviors (Simms, 2014). Such factors include whether teachers perceive that an intervention may have unplanned or unintended consequences, the extent to which an intervention is fully understood by teachers, and teachers' willingness to let go of ineffective old methods to adopt new ones (Baker-Henningham & Walker 2009; Simms, 2014). Administrators can direct such changes by ensuring that the evidence-base of proactive behavior strategies are understood and accessible by teachers in schools. The implications of the findings at the school and policy and level will be discussed below.

Policy Considerations

The results of the current study, along with the broader educational reform and school discipline reform literature, continue to stress a multi-pronged approach to reform efforts that involve collaboration with stakeholders at all levels, rather than a top-down approach. According to Cook et al. (2018), there is an implementation gap in the field of education that occurs when translating research into practice and one significant barrier to the adoption of effective practices is staff-buy in. Disciplinary practices in schools are often guided by mandates at the federal state level and policies at the district level, which often provide strict and precise guidance on infractions and their associated disciplinary outcomes (Camacho & Krezmien, 2020). However, while many school districts have detailed school codes of conduct that aligned with regulations, Camacho and Krezmien found that the vast majority of discipline codes throughout one state allowed for administrator discretion when assigning consequences, rather than requiring strict reliance to the code, allowing for increased subjectivity on the part of school staff. Thus, the

application of exclusionary discipline to minor offenses may be driven by discretion on the part of school personnel rather than specific mandates in school policy (Fuentes, 2013; Shedd, 2015). This, along with the findings of the current study indicate that not all educational reform efforts are adopted as intended, and school and teacher level considerations must be attended to when enacting policy change.

A Teach Plus study that involved distribution of a survey to K-12 teachers from the state in which the current dissertation study was implemented allowed for policy recommendations within the same vein. Such recommendations included providing mandatory professional development on new legislation and corresponding school discipline protocols, implementing disciplinary protocols informed by restorative justice, ensuring consistent ongoing systemic support and accountability for teachers and school staff, and allocating adequate funding to hold districts accountable for implementation (McCall et al., 2018). Such recommendations are consistent with the equity-minded school change framework (Wiley et al., 2018) that guided the current study and further stresses the importance of comprehensive reform efforts to make a lasting impact.

For example, Wiley et al. (2018) broke down all three dimensions of discipline reform with examples of attending to each dimension. Examples of effectively addressing the technical dimensions of school discipline involve providing appropriate professional learning for program implementation, allocating instructional time for community building, and budgeting effectively. While many school districts have the resources to enact such efforts, many do not and would need to have access to the appropriate support to aid in doing so. Impacting normative dimensions would involve the act of harboring a school culture that values prevention over punishment, understands the evidence-base of suspension ineffectiveness, and values growth

mindsets and equitable practices. This can only occur through intensive, prolonged, and oftentimes uncomfortable professional development efforts. Finally, political dimensions must be addressed at the systemic and district level with policymakers and administrators using their power to impact the equitable distribution of resources.

Implications for School-Based Consultants

Research indicates that teachers having access to school consultation increases the likelihood that all students will receive some degree of academic, behavioral, or social emotional prevention or intervention efforts in the classroom (Conoley, Conoley, & Reese, 2009; Erchul, 2011). Research also indicates that teachers with access to mental health consultation support may be less likely to rely on exclusionary means (Darensbourg, Perez, & Blake, 2010; Gilliam, 2005). For example, school psychologists possess expertise in the main components of MTSS, such as data-based decision making, evidence-based interventions, and systematic problem-solving procedures (Eagle, Dowd-Eagle, Snyder, & Holtzman, 2015). School psychologists also receive training and expertise in consultation that is systems-focused, consultee-focused, and client-focused (Eagle et al., 2015), indicating that they should play a key role in implementing, evaluating, and supporting reform efforts. School consultants can also serve to teach about and reframe low teacher and staff expectations through the implementation of trainings on cultural competency, proactive classroom management strategies, and implicit bias, and by supporting individual teachers through consultation efforts that rely on reframing strategies (Darensbourg et al., 2010; Edwards et al, 2019; Hunter, Dieker, & Whitney, 2016).

School-Level Consultation

Consistent and proactive analysis of school discipline data at the school-wide level is an extremely important practice that can allow for data-based decisions to be made in school

(Darensbourg et al., 2010). Thus, school-based mental health professionals should consistently examine school discipline data to look for patterns among teacher referrals, demographics of students being referred, and referral reasons (Darensbourg et al., 2010; Rollenhagen, et al. 2017). This information can then be used to systematically examine factors within the specific school context that could be contributing to excessive discipline and/or disproportionality among certain subgroups of students (Darensbourg et al., 2010). Furthermore, these data can be used to inform interventions at both the teacher and student level (Sugai, Sprague, Horner, & Walker, 2002). In order to gain buy-in support, consultants must first highlight the data that supports the need for alternatives to exclusionary practices and approaches that target bias in schools. Consultants should also directly convey the benefits of such strategies (Garro et al., 2019). Consultants should heavily rely on data-based decision making to encourage educators and administrators to recognize the impact of positive discipline strategies as an effective behavior management tool (Garro et al., 2019).

Garro et al. (2019) present a multifaceted consultation model aimed at targeting the factors that contribute to disproportionate rates of exclusionary discipline for students of color. The model incorporates systems-level analysis and collaboration, data-based decision making and analysis at multiple levels, and interventions to target implicit bias among educators. Cultural competency training that assists teachers in taking a strengths-based approach to addressing problem behavior in schools can further support this process. An MTSS model can also be implemented within these realms by collecting data at the schoolwide level that assesses teacher comfort with classroom management and cultural competency to identify teachers who may benefit from intensified consultative support (Eagle et al., 2015).

Teacher-Level Consultation

Martin et al. (2018) suggest that because expulsion is an adult behavior and a process that unfolds over time, it allows for intervention from mental health consultants at multiple points throughout the process. Teachers should be offered support and guidance over time and school psychologists possess the necessary training and expertise to provide such support (Forrest et al., 2019). Prevention-oriented approaches that focus on modifications to the environment are extremely important and consultants play a key role in communicating the effectiveness of such changes (Garro et al., 2019).

Consultants can help staff engage in mindfulness strategies that allow educators to attend to their thoughts, feelings, and experiences in the present moment to lead to greater awareness of the automatic assumptions that comprise implicit bias (Garro et al., 2019). It is also important for consultants to explicitly provide instructions to look for root cause drivers that are within the schools control to change rather than factors internal to students or their families as root cause drivers (Fenning & Jenkins, 2019). Findings from the current study highlight how easy it may be to encourage such changes in perception. The fact that a simple modification in the way a question was presented to teachers led to such a dramatic change in how the student was perceived provides support for the fact that incorporating discussions about root causes and the response to root causes can change teacher practice.

Because school consultants such as school psychologists are often trained in psychology, education, counseling, and consultation methodologies, they also possess the requisite knowledge and skills to aid other educators in reframing their biases and provide teachers with strategies that foster belonging among students of color (Brown, 2007; Edwards et al., 2019). One way for school psychologists to use this information is by supporting teachers at the micro

level through behavioral consultation and reframing techniques. In schools, consultants can gather data on teacher values, beliefs, and perceptions related to bias and stereotypes against students of color to help staff understand the link between implicit bias and their own behaviors. Furthermore, consultants can provide data about children that contradicts such stereotypes (Garro et al., 2019).

Researchers are also beginning to examine school-based consultation models aimed toward minimizing implicit biases and stereotyping in the classroom (Martin et al., 2018). For example, multicultural school consultation models can encourage self-reflection and examination of one's own biases (Behring & Ingraham, 1998; Ingraham, 2000). Edwards et al. (2019) developed an approach designed to reduce stereotype threat in classrooms, called the stereotype threat interruption model (STIM). This model involves many of the same strategies in the traditionally recognized problem-solving consultation approach (Newell, 2010), but also incorporates strategies that encourage staff to learn about stereotyping and stereotype threat and how such assumptions can implicitly undermine student performance. This dynamic also requires the consultant to consider biases, privileges, stereotypes, and beliefs about all parties involved in the process in order to engage in dialogue with the consultee that brings such conversations to light (Edwards et al., 2019). One important aspect of STIM that is relevant to the findings of the current study involves the act of reflective teaching, defined as a process that encourages teachers to intentionally analyze their classroom practices to determine their efficacy on student outcomes (Larrivee, 2008). Thus, this process encourages self-reflection without blame to empower teachers to consider modifications to their instructional and behavioral practices in order to support the needs of students. Such a process may effectively allow educators to consider and address putative malleable root causes rather than deficit centered root

causes when supporting student behavior.

Research indicates that school psychologists spend a large majority of their time evaluating students for special education services (Albritton, Chen, Bauer, Johnson, & Matthews, 2019). However, through this process, school psychologists are also presented with an opportunity to address implicit biases through consultation efforts with teachers of the students being evaluated. For example, school psychologists can highlight potential contextual factors that might shape expectations for behavior and, in turn, contribute to unnecessary referrals (Garro et al., 2019). School psychologists are also typically involved in the Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) process when behavioral concerns arise in the classroom, thus providing an additional opportunity for consultation that reframes teacher beliefs. Culturally adaptive or systems approach FBAs (Duran, Bloom, & Samaha, 2013; Moreno, Wong-Lo, & Bullock, 2014), which combine quantitative and qualitative information through functional interviews that capture the beliefs, values, and perceptions of educators may be a more proactive approach (Garro et al., 2019). Thus, one key role for consultants is the implementation of FBAs that highlight the functions of both student AND teacher behavior. A comprehensive approach such as this one will allow teachers and staff to identify causes at the putative malleable level that can be addressed through environmental changes (Garro et al., 2019). Ultimately, the findings of the current study highlight many areas of future direction that have high potential to impact the behavior of students in schools.

Limitations

There are several limitations for the current study. Because this study occurred within one state in the midst of state specific policy reform, generalizability to other geographic areas and states may be limited. Furthermore, results represent analysis from one point in time

approximately three years into the school discipline reform process within one state. Because the education reform literature indicates that significant systems change is not likely to occur until after at least three years of implementation (Fullan, 2016), results may be context and time specific. Because school districts tend to have unique contextual factors that impact the culture of the school, it is also difficult to generalize findings throughout school districts with similar discipline patterns as the ones mentioned. Furthermore, less than 50% percent of school districts throughout the state were included for the multiple regression analysis, and the school districts that were selected were purposeful and represented the most extreme discipline cases. Finally, most teacher level analyses were limited to descriptive statistics and the small sample size of teachers and lack of symmetrical spread throughout district groupings provides another limitation for the current study.

Future Research

While there is an abundance of evidence on the discipline gap, research on the specific factors that contribute to its' existence remains sparse (Baker, 2019). Thus, future research should continue examining teacher perception of student behavior in relation to districtwide exclusionary discipline patterns. As Hafen et al. (2015) indicates, "The formation of teacher perceptions deserves continued research, as they offer additional insight into the process through which students impact the educational setting" (p. 430). Research that provides a context to learn if the evocative impacts of disruptive behavior are limited to personal interactions or if teachers are wired to expect less from students who display behavior problems is also necessary (Hafen et al., 2015).

The current study examined teacher attributions for challenging misbehavior through qualitative means. Further trends in the literature suggests that researchers tend to also rely on

qualitative means or create their own attribution assessments rather than relying on a set of measures commonly used in the field (Nemer et al., 2019). This may be the case because few psychometrically sound measures exist to effectively understand the construct of such attributions and reliably measure such cognitive, unobservable variables (Carter, Williford, & LoCasale-Crouch, 2014; Hussain, 2016). Recently, Feuerborn, Tyre, and Zecevic (2019) replicated the factor structure of the Staff Perceptions of Behavior and Discipline (SPBD) and statistically confirmed the consistency and overall factor structure of the tool. This tool specifically assesses the following factors: teaching and acknowledging expectations; effectiveness and need; systems: resources, supports, and climate; implementation integrity; philosophical views of behavior and discipline; and systems: cohesiveness and openness to change. Thus, this tool may be an effective way for school teams to make data-based decisions that are inclusive and considerate of the needs of all stakeholders tasked with implementation. This tool could also be used to evaluate changes in teacher practice and the subsequent impact on exclusionary discipline patterns. Thus, future research should focus on utilizing this tool and/or similar tools to allow for a standardized method of analyzing this phenomenon and monitoring teacher beliefs.

Education researchers and policymakers should also consider introducing and examining educational policy efforts that attend to the norms of the school building and include the voice of key stakeholders. Trainings aimed toward assessing and addressing teacher mindset toward student behavior, approaches to addressing student behavior, perceptions of exclusionary discipline, and perceptions of alternatives to exclusionary discipline should be further examined. Further research is also needed that examines the relationship between outside and inside of school factors that influence student experiences at school (Milner, Murray, Farinde, &

O'Connor, 2015). Research that operationalizes the assets that students in poverty bring to the classroom is also needed, as scholars have yet to empirically document such information (Welsh & Swain, 2020). Such data would also provide sufficient evidence and support for putative malleable root causes and practices within schools.

Conclusion

The goal of school discipline is to address “school-wide, classroom, and individual student needs through broad prevention, targeted intervention, and development of self-discipline” (Osher, Bear, Sprague, & Doyle, 2010, p. 1). Furthermore, as Skiba, Rausch, and Simmons (2006) state, there are four essential goals of school discipline: “1) to ensure the safety of students and teachers; 2) to create a climate conducive to learning; 3) to teach students skills needed for successful interaction in school and society; and 4) to reduce rates of future misbehavior” (p. 87). However, students, parents, and school staff continue to consider school discipline as a form of punishment, where the student is reprimanded for displaying a certain behavior in an attempt to deter them from repeating the behavior (Christle et al., 2004). For example, during the 2009 academic year, over one in three schools used suspension, expulsion, or other removals from the learning environment as a form of disciplinary action (Robers, Zhang, Morgan, & Musu-Gillette, 2015).

With the many negative outcomes associated with such exclusionary practices (Fabelo et al., 2011; Flynn et al., 2016; Green et al., 2017; Marchbanks et al., 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2014), school discipline reform advocates have continued to support the implementation of proactive approaches to school discipline through policy and school code of conduct revision. However, the school discipline reform literature overwhelmingly states that while reform efforts are generally successful in reducing reliance on out of school suspension,

other exclusionary approaches are generally relied upon instead (e.g., in school suspension, transfers to alternative settings, etc.) (Reed et al., 2020). For example, the current study found that rather than using documented exclusionary practices, participants were likely to report the use of in-class-consequences such as time-out or removal from the activity instead when responding to student misbehavior, thus missing the intended essence of alternatives to suspension. Thus, the results of the current study point to the importance of equipping educators with appropriate tools to effectively respond to such mandates (Moreno & Scaletta, 2018).

The results of this study also shed a light on deficit thinking and how pervasive it may be throughout our education system. Teacher beliefs about children behaviors contribute to peer relations, school adjustment, and academic performance (Deng et al., 2017). Teachers also form expectations about students based on factors such as race/ethnicity, gender, culture, social class, attractiveness, behavior, and educational history (Bae, Holloway, Li, & Bempechat, 2008; Edwards, 2006; Garcia & Chun, 2016). Furthermore, children who display disruptive classroom behaviors that don't conform to teacher expectations are at a greater risk of being underestimated by teachers in their future academic potential (Espinosa & Laffey, 2003). Thus, the values, beliefs, and perceptions that educators bring into the classroom are key to creating equitable systems for students of color and it is imperative that we continue supporting educators in their understanding of this concept. As Martin et al. (2018) states, "expulsion is an adult action, informed by adults' biases, practices, and relationships and situated within an ecological context full of structural constraints" (p. 96). The findings of the current study also support the fact that such perceptions may be more malleable than previously thought, pointing to the emphasis that should be placed on how we discuss behavior in schools and how such a change may consequently impact the way behavior is responded to in schools.

Finally, school discipline reform efforts must involve a multi-pronged approach relying upon institutional and policy efforts in combination with school and district level efforts. School districts that invest time in revising their district policies and code of conducts, involving key stakeholders in discipline reform discussions, using data-based decision making to inform context specific decisions, and implementing professional development opportunities geared toward proactive classroom management approaches, culturally responsive practices, and implicit bias may be better able to effectively support the social-emotional needs of students and begin the process of undoing the years of damage caused by zero tolerance policies and systemic racism (Okilwa & Robert, 2017). However, there is no “one size fits all” approach to supporting school districts in the implementation of school discipline reform, thus it is extremely important to consider each school or district within its’ own unique context, discipline philosophy, leadership structures, professional development opportunities, internal and external resources, and data analytic expertise, that will either facilitate or hinder systems change (Senge, 2012). It is also hoped that the results of the current study point to the impact that small changes in language may have on school staffs’ ability to modify such approaches. Future research and inquiry into this finding is increasingly necessary to identify feasible steps for school districts to enact change.

APPENDIX A
DEFINITIONS OF OUTCOME AND PREDICTOR VARIABLES

Variable	Definition
Racial disproportionality	the overrepresentation of students of color in comparison to the total number of students of color on October 1 st of the school year in which data are collected, with respect to the use of out-of-school suspensions and expulsions, which must be calculated using risk ratios, as the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights uses
Exclusionary discipline	the total number of out-of-school suspensions and expulsions divided by the total district enrollment by the last school day in September for the year in which the data was collected, multiplied by 100
Number of schools in district	total number of individual school buildings within the specified district, as indicated by the state education agency webpage
Total student enrollment	total number of students enrolled in the school district as reported on the last school day in September of the school year
Percent students of color	total number of students who identify as any race/ethnicity other than “White” and are enrolled in the school district as reported on the last school day in September of the school year divided by the total number of students who identify as “White” race/ethnicity and are enrolled in the school district as reported on the last school day in September of the school year, multiplied by 100
Percent students who receive free or reduced-price lunch	percentage of students eligible to receive free or reduced price lunch, that live in substitute care, or whose families receive public aid; students meet the low-income criteria if they receive or live in households that receive public aid from SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) or TANF (Targeted Assistance for Needy Families) are classified as homeless, migrant, runaway, Head Start, or foster children; or live in a household where the household income meets (USDA) guidelines to receive free or reduced-price meals
Pupil/teacher ratio	average number of pupils per teacher calculated using the fall enrollment for the school year divided by the number of full-time equivalent (FTE) teachers in the district
Percent teachers of color	percentage of full-time equivalent (FTE) teachers in the district who identify as any race/ethnicity other than “White” race/ethnicity
Percent novice teachers	number of teachers with two or less years of teaching experience in state or out of state divided by the total number of teachers in an educational entity, multiplied by 100
Instructional spending per pupil	activities dealing with the teaching of students or the interaction between teachers and students; includes only the costs that are directly used for teaching students and facilitating interaction between teachers and students
Operational spending per pupil	all costs for overall operations in the school’s district, including instructional spending, but excluding summer school, adult education, capital expenditures, and long-term debt payments; includes all costs associated with a district’s operating costs over the regular school year, such as transportation, building maintenance, salaries, etc.

Retrieved from <https://www.illinoisreportcard.com>

APPENDIX B
ADMINISTRATOR RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

Dear (insert administrator name),

My name is Kelsie Reed and I am a fourth-year school psychology doctoral student at Loyola University Chicago. I am reaching out because I'm wondering if your school district/building is interested in participating in the data collection phase of my dissertation. My dissertation involves examining patterns of student misbehavior in schools throughout the state in order to understand the effect of racial disproportionality in exclusionary discipline practices. I will be administering a short vignette followed by a series of four open-ended questions to teachers who work in various districts throughout the state to gain information on how the behavioral needs of students are supported in schools, as well as what the perceived drivers of student misbehavior are. The questionnaire should take no longer than 20 minutes to complete. All teachers who participate will have the opportunity to be entered into a **\$250 random drawing!** I will be holding one random drawing for each participating district, therefore one teacher from each participating district is guaranteed to win. It would be ideal for me to physically travel to your school/district at a designated time (i.e., school faculty meeting) to explain my project to your staff and administer the questionnaire to any teachers who wish to participate. If this is not feasible, I would love to work with school administrators to determine the best way to disseminate questionnaires. The questionnaire that will be used for my dissertation can be viewed below.

Questionnaire directions: Please think about a student in your class right now who engages in disruptive and/or negative behavior. With this student in mind, please answer the following questions:

1. *How do you typically respond to this student's behavior in class?*
2. *Root cause: "The deepest underlying cause, or causes, of a behavioral misconduct that, if dissolved, would result in elimination, or substantial reduction, of the behavioral misconduct" (Preuss, 2003). Based on this definition, what do you think a possible root cause of this student's behavioral concerns could be? (e.g., what could be some potential reasons why this student may be engaging in this behavior)*
3. *Based on the root cause identified above, what steps would you take to address the root of the problem?*
4. *What additional information would be important to know in informing your decision about how to move forward?*

There are no direct benefits to you or your staff for participation. However, I anticipate that the information gained from teachers who work in your district will be useful in determining how to better support the behavioral needs of students. Further, I would love to share the results of my study with your district to aid in future discussions regarding student misbehavior. Participation is completely voluntary. You will not be penalized in any way should you decline to volunteer your school district. Teachers will also be given the option to participate. If you agree to participate, your school district and staff members will remain completely anonymous.

If you would like more information regarding the purpose of this study or if you have interest in participating, please feel free to reply to this email or contact me at 517-525-4161. If you have any additional questions about your rights as a research participant, you may call the Loyola University Chicago Compliance Office at 773-508-2471. Thank you.

Sincerely,
Kelsie Reed

APPENDIX C
PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

	Participant Gender			Participant Race/Ethnicity						
	Male	Female	Total	White	Black/African American	Latino/Hispanic	Asian	Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	Two or More Races	Total
High Disproportionality										
District 1	14	82	96	84	6	2	1	0	3	96
District 4	6	47	53	46	2	3	0	0	2	53
No Disproportionality										
District 2	6	6	12	12	0	0	0	0	0	12
High Exclusion										
District 5	20	39	59	45	8	3	2	0	1	59
Low Exclusion										
District 3	7	53	60	57	1	0	0	1	1	60
District 6	2	18	20	20	0	0	0	0	0	20
Total n	55	245	300	264	17	8	3	1	7	300
Total %	18.3	81.7	100	88.0	5.1	2.7	1.0	0.3	2.3	100

APPENDIX D

PARTICIPANTS BY GRADES AND SUBJECTS TAUGHT

	Grades			Subjects							Years Teaching			
	K-5	6-8	9-12	Science	Math	History	English	Multiple	Specials	Special Ed	0-5	5-10	10-20	20+
High Disproportionality														
District 1	0	25	71	0	0	0	0	25	27	44	18	21	30	27
District 4	53	0	0	0	0	0	0	53	0	0	9	13	20	11
No Disproportionality														
District 2	0	12	0	0	0	0	0	0	12	0	1	4	5	2
High Exclusion														
District 5	59	0	0	0	10	9	30	10	0	0	4	16	16	23
Low Exclusion														
District 3	42	18	0	0	0	0	0	48	12	0	4	13	25	18
District 6	20	0	0	12	8	0	0	0	0	0	6	4	4	6
Total n	174	55	71	12	18	9	30	136	51	44	42	71	100	87
Total %	58.0	18.3	23.7	4.0	6.0	3.0	10.0	45.3	17.0	14.7	14.0	23.7	33.3	29.0

APPENDIX E
QUESTIONNAIRE

Demographic Questions:

1. What district do you currently work in?
2. What school do you currently work in?
3. What grade do you currently teach?
 - a) K-2
 - b) 3-5
 - d) 6-8
 - e) 9-10
 - f) 11-12
4. What subject(s) do you currently teach (select all that apply)?
 - a) Science
 - b) Math
 - c) History
 - d) English/Language Arts
 - e) Specials (please specify: _____)
5. How long have you been teaching?
 - a) 0-5 years
 - b) 5-10 years
 - c) 10-20 years
 - d) 20+ years
6. What is your race/ethnicity (select all that apply)?
 - a) White
 - b) Black/African American
 - c) Latino/Hispanic
 - d) Asian
 - e) Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander
 - f) American Indian
 - g) Other (please specify: _____)
7. What is your gender?
 - a) Male
 - b) Female
 - c) Nonconforming

Questionnaire Directions: Please think about a student in your class right now who engages in disruptive and/or negative behavior. With this student in mind, please answer the following questions:

1. How do you typically respond to this student's behavior in class?
2. *Root cause: "The deepest underlying cause, or causes, of a behavioral misconduct that, if dissolved, would result in elimination, or substantial reduction, of the behavioral misconduct" (Preuss, 2003).*
Based on this definition, what do you think a possible root cause of this student's behavioral

concerns could be? (e.g., what could be some potential reasons why this student may be engaging in this behavior)

3. Based on the root cause identified above, what steps would you take to address the root of the problem?
4. What additional information would be important to know in informing your decision about how to move forward?

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VITA

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