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In Pursuit of Equity: Does the Implementation of Culturally Responsive Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports Have an Effect on the Racial Suspension Gap?

Abstract

The purpose of this quantitative, archival study was to explore the relationship between culturally responsive positive behavioral interventions and supports (CRPBIS) and the racial suspension gap of two cohorts of eighth-grade students in an urban school district located in New York State. The participants in this study were seventh and eighth-grade students from three middle schools who received a suspension(s) during the 2014–2015, 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 school years. The treatment group consisted of students who received CRPBIS and the control group consisted of students who had not receive the intervention. For Cohort 1, the difference in suspension rates between the treatment and control groups was insignificant when the students were in seventh grade. However, when students finished the eighth grade, the treatment group had significantly lower suspension rates than the control group. The data also reveal that Pan African students who were exposed to CRPBIS received less suspensions compared to the Pan African students who were not exposed to the CRPBIS. The results of this study show that CRPBIS decreases suspension rates of Pan African students as well as closes the racial suspension gap. Studies have also shown that middle school suspensions can have an adverse effect on high school success; therefore, a longitudinal study on the impact of CRPBIS involving eighth-grade students, as they progress through high school, is suggested for future research. Because this study only included three middle schools, future research is suggested for stakeholders to include an entire urban district in a longitudinal study.

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In Pursuit of Equity: Does the Implementation of Culturally Responsive Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports Have an Effect on the Racial Suspension Gap?

By

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Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Ed.D. in Executive Leadership

Supervised by

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St. John Fisher College

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Dedication

“With God, all things are possible to them that believe.” Matthew 19:26. Thanks be to God because without Him, this would not have been possible. I thank him for giving me the strength and guidance to get through the process of completing my dissertation. I would like to dedicate this work to my mother, Trudella Walker. Although, I lost her when I was a child, she instilled in me that education was the great equalizer. To my foster parents, Pastors Lorenzo and Margaret Martinez, your unwavering support has been critical to my success! Thank you for pushing me, supporting me, and loving me throughout this journey. This degree is as much yours as it is mine. To my mentors Elder Roos and Regent Judith Johnson your love has allowed me to progress to this level.

To my family, siblings, friends, colleagues, professors, Cohort “Great” 8, and mentors—there are no words other than, “it takes a village.” Each of you played such an important role in this process, and I am forever grateful for your contributions.

I am so incredibly blessed to welcome a plethora of new doctors to the field and am forever thankful to know that I have all of you in my corner. My friends and colleagues, your humor throughout this process has reminded me that life keeps moving forward, and you need to be able to take time to enjoy it. To my team, Dr. EdD, thank you for helping me “trust the process,” even when it seemed like a never-ending journey.

I would like to thank Dr. Janice Kelly and Dr. Gilbert Louis for helping me to grow as a leader. To my chair, Dr. Robert Siebert, thank you for guiding me through this

process and pushing me out of my comfort zone. There are not enough words to describe what your support has meant over these past few years. Thank you for your guidance and for helping me navigate through this voyage. I would like to also thank my committee member, Dr. Sandye Johnson, for your feedback and support.

Biographical Sketch

Alexandria Connally is currently an assistant principal at Yonkers Middle High School. In addition, Alexandria is also the scheduler for Regent Judith Johnson and the Assistant to the New York State Board of Regent's Chancellor, Dr. Betty Rosa.

Ms. Connally attended Iona College from 2000 to 2004 and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts/Sciences degree in 2004. She attended Mercy College from 2004 to 2006 and graduated with a Master of Arts/Sciences degree in 2006. Ms. Connally received a second degree in School Administration and Leadership in 2007 from Mercy College.

She enrolled at St. John Fisher College in the spring of 2018 and began doctoral studies in the Ed.D. Program in Executive Leadership. Alexandria pursued her research on the impact of culturally responsive positive behavioral interventions and supports on the racial discipline gap under the direction of Dr. Robert Siebert and Dr. Sandye Johnson and received the Ed.D. degree in 2018.

Abstract

The purpose of this quantitative, archival study was to explore the relationship between culturally responsive positive behavioral interventions and supports (CRPBIS) and the racial suspension gap of two cohorts of eighth-grade students in an urban school district located in New York State. The participants in this study were seventh and eighth-grade students from three middle schools who received a suspension(s) during the 2014–2015 , 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 school years. The treatment group consisted of students who received CRPBIS and the control group consisted of students who had not receive the intervention. For Cohort 1, the difference in suspension rates between the treatment and control groups was insignificant when the students were in seventh grade. However, when students finished the eighth grade, the treatment group had significantly lower suspension rates than the control group. The data also reveal that Pan African students who were exposed to CRPBIS received less suspensions compared to the Pan African students who were not exposed to the CRPBIS. The results of this study show that CRPBIS decreases suspension rates of Pan African students as well as closes the racial suspension gap.

Studies have also shown that middle school suspensions can have an adverse effect on high school success; therefore, a longitudinal study on the impact of CRPBIS involving eight-grade students, as they progress through high school, is suggested for future research. Because this study only included three middle schools, future research is suggested for stakeholders to include an entire urban district in a longitudinal study.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In the landmark case, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* (1954), the Supreme Court ruled that segregated schooling was unconstitutional. Findings from the well-known Clark and Clark (1947) doll study played a significant role in the outcome of the case. Drs. Kenneth and Mamie Clark, 14 years before *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), conducted a doll study to measure the self-esteem and racial identity of Pan African children ranging from 3 to 7 years of age. (The term *Pan African* (n.d.) relates to all people of African birth or descent.)

The study children were asked to identify each doll by race and then choose their preference among the dolls. Overwhelmingly, Pan African children chose the White doll and not the doll most clearly associated with their own racial identity. The study demonstrated that as a result of segregation, prejudice, and discrimination, Pan African children felt inferior to White children. In addition, the Clark and Clark (1947) study indicated that Pan African children suffer from poor self-esteem and lack positive racial identity. Pan African racial identity cements two structures: (a) the promotion of positive identification as a Pan African person in America, and (b) understanding the social and historical context of race relations in the United States (Zirkel & Johnson, 2016). The *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision changed policies on school segregation in the United States (Fergus, 2016).

After the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) ruling, school districts throughout the United States began the process of desegregation (Fergus, 2016). However, Kucsera

and Orfield (2014) revealed that 50 years after the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling, New York's public schools were among the most segregated schools in the country. According to Fergus (2016), school districts' inability to achieve racial integration was due to a complex interplay of political, economic, social, and racial dynamics, which were mostly beyond the purview and control of the local school districts. However, segregation in the form of "exclusionary practices" (Miller, 2014, p. 1) was carried out by educators every day when schools practiced disciplinary protocols, specifically out-of-school suspensions (Fenning & Rose, 2007). Miller (2014) stated, "Out-of-school suspension and expulsions are termed exclusionary practices because students are barred from school during their punishment" (p. 1). Dalton (2009) defined a suspension as students' removal from their assigned classroom and school campus. These exclusionary practices, as a form of segregation, were very much within the purview and control of local school districts. This form of segregation was the subject of this current study. Fenning and Rose (2007) suggested that suspensions and other exclusionary practices are modern-day segregation. According to Skiba, Shure, and Williams (2011b), there was a consistent trend of disproportionate rates of suspensions among Pan African students in the United States.

Sixteen years after *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), consistent data collection on the racial discipline gap (disparities in suspensions rates) began (Skiba & Losen, 2016; Whitford & Emerson, 2018). Since the 1970s, suspension rates have more than doubled for all subgroups. However, suspension rates have more than tripled for Pan African students (Skiba, 2013). Undeterred by these findings, the distribution of exclusionary practices disproportionately impacts Pan African students and continues to increase

(Noltemeyer & Mcloughlin, 2010). Former United States Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, identified disparities in discipline as the fundamental civil rights issue of the 21st century. According to Bryant (2013), “The undeniable truth is that the everyday educational experience for too many students of color violates the principle of equity at the heart of the American promise” (p. 1).

According to the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC, 2014), there were almost 50 million students enrolled in public schools in the United States during the 2013-2014 school year. In the same year, more than 2.5 million suspensions were issued to students enrolled in public schools in the United States. Table 1.1 presents enrollment in public schools within the United States by race and ethnicity during the 2013-2014 school year.

Table 1.1

National Estimated Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity During the 2013-2014 School Year

Race/Ethnicity	Percentage Enrolled	Percentage Suspended
Native	1.1	1.4
Asian	4.8	1.0
Latino	24.8	21.4
Pan African	15.5	40.3
White	50.4	32.6

Note. According the CRDC (2014), Pan African students make up 15.5% of the student population, nationally, but they receive suspensions at the rate of 40.3%.

Suspension rates of public schools in New York State (New York State Education Department [NYSED], 2014) are consistent with the national data, showing significant disproportionality in the suspension of Pan African students. In New York State, Pan

African students were suspended at a rate of more than twice the percentage they represent in the total population (NYSED, 2014). Nationally, and on the state level, almost every other racial and ethnic subgroup was suspended at a rate that was lower than their total population (CRDC, 2014; NYSED, 2014). Public schools in New York State during the 2013-2014 school year served almost 3 million students. During the 2013-2014 school year, 94,887 students (4% of the total population enrolled) received suspensions (NYSED, 2014). Table 1.2 presents enrollment in public schools within New York State by race and ethnicity during the 2013-2014 school year.

Table 1.2

State Estimated Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity During the 2013-2014 School Year

Race/Ethnicity	Percentage Enrolled	Percentage Suspended
Native	.6	.7
Asian	8.6	1.3
Latino	24.5	17.7
Pan African	18.9	39.9
White	46.7	38.4

Note. This data shows that Pan African students receive suspensions at a rate that is more than twice the percent they represent in the total student population (NYSED, 2014).

Suspensions and expulsions led to a host of adverse academic and social outcomes (Gage, Grasley-Boy, George, Childs, & Kincaid, 2018; Losen et al., 2015). School suspension increases the probability that students will fall behind academically, and it increases the probability of school failure (Losen et al., 2015; Noltemeyer & McLoughlin, 2010; Whitford & Emerson, 2018). Bryant (2013) expanded on this idea by explaining the correlation between a student’s attendance and his or her academic

success. Suspensions disconnect students from the school environment, and students can become disengaged and disinterested in school (Skiba, 2013). Unfortunately, these symptoms can lead to an increase in the dropout rate, particularly for Pan African students, given that they are suspended at a disproportionate rate (Bryant, 2013). Other negative impacts of suspension of Pan African students include: (a) a decrease in graduation rates (Noltemeyer & McLoughlin, 2010; Skiba, 2013), (b) high unemployment rates (Sweeten, Bushway, & Paternoster, 2009), (c) early engagement with the juvenile justice system (Losen et al., 2015), and (d) school failure (Losen & Skiba, 2010; Losen & Whitaker, 2017).

According to the researchers, the problems of suspensions and disproportionality have been exacerbated by the movement for zero tolerance disciplinary policies (Losen & Skiba, 2010; Mozley, 2016). Zero tolerance is defined as an automatic suspension with little consideration for circumstances and context when students violate specific portions of the code of conduct (Jackson, 2014). Zero tolerance was the response of policymakers to broad societal concerns about school safety and violence disruption (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Losen & Skiba, 2010). Studies suggest that zero tolerance policies created a culture of disproportionate disciplining (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force [APA Zero Tolerance Task Force], 2008; Reyes, 2006; Skiba, 2013). According to Brown (2015), the racial subgroup most affected by zero-tolerance policies has been Pan African students.

According to Vincent, Spragus, Pavel, Tobin, and Gau (2015) in the United States, there has been a significant increase in suspension rates when students move from elementary school to middle school. Many studies emphasized the correlation between

suspensions at the middle school level particularly in eighth grade and high school graduation (Arcia, 2007; Endsley, 2014; Hilberth & Slate, 2014; Losen & Skiba, 2010; Whitford & Emerson, 2018). Since 1973, there has been a steady increase in the racial discipline gap among middle school students with the broadest gap affecting Pan African students (Losen & Martinez, 2013; Whitford & Emerson, 2018). This current study focused on the suspension rates of eighth-grade students.

The National Education Longitudinal Survey of 1988 (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], n.d.) explained that eighth-grade teachers in urban school districts spent more time disciplining students than in suburban and rural districts. In urban districts, 25% of eighth-grade teachers spent a minimum of 1 hour disciplining students, compared to 13% of teachers in rural districts and 16% of teachers in suburban districts (Byun, Meece, & Irvin, 2012; Finn, Fish, & Scott, 2008). The increase in suspensions at the middle school level can result from a difference in organizational structures, the effects of adolescence, and from the many negative effects of various cultural and racial dynamics (Vincent et al., 2015).

Addressing the problem. The U.S. Department of Education (USDOE, 2008) issued a report that focused a national spotlight on racial disproportionality and the application of school discipline codes (Gregory et al., 2016; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002; Skiba et al., 2011b). This report led to the creation of programs and methods designed to decrease the use of exclusionary discipline practices and the disparities in suspension (Cohen, 2013). One of the most frequently used interventions is positive behavioral intervention and supports (PBIS), a program recognized nationally and internationally as a valid model for decreasing unacceptable behavior in schools

(Vincent & Tobin, 2011). The implementation of PBIS has led to a decrease in suspension rates for all subgroups including Pan African students. However, even after the implementation of PBIS, Pan African students continue to be suspended at a disproportionate rate (Bal, 2015; Gage et al., 2018; Sugai, 2011; Whitford & Emerson, 2018). In an effort to address this disproportionality after the implementation of PBIS, *culturally responsive* PBIS (CRPBIS) was introduced and implemented in school systems across the nation (Bal, 2015). Bal (2016) stated that

Culturally Responsive Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (CRPBIS) is an educational initiative grounded in local to global justice theory with the ultimate goal of educational systems change Various types of data collection . . . from local schools are working with members of their communities to identify tensions within school, pose new solutions, and test their effectiveness. (p. 2)

CRPBIS is predicated on the belief that every student should have equal access to educational opportunities. Access and opportunity within the CRPBIS framework can lead to academic success because the framework acknowledges the contributions, existence, and values of Pan Africans (Banks & Obiakor, 2015; Noltemeyer & Mcloughlin, 2010). CRPBIS integrates diversity and curriculum into the school environment by including cultural celebrations, traditions, heroes/heroines, history, and other aspects to which the student population belongs (Bal, 2016). Banks and Obiakor (2015) defined CRPBIS as (a) cultural knowledge and awareness, (b) validation and establishing cultural validity, (c) emphasizing cultural equality, (d) meaningful partnerships, and (e) communication with all stakeholders. Moreover, CRPBIS infuses the lived experiences of Pan African students into the curriculum and school culture.

Using a unique approach, CRPBIS engages Pan African students in the educational process through the integration of a broad repertoire of learning experiences (Banks & Obiakor, 2015). Providing instruction in this cultural and historical context, CRPBIS minimizes classroom disruptions while increasing academic success (Hershfeldt et al., 2009). CRPBIS includes learning through academic instruction that is rich and diverse. The CRPBIS model also uses assessments that are free from prejudice and bias (Swain-Bradway, Loman, & Vincent, 2014).

According to Cramer and Bennett (2015), one key to developing the CRPBIS framework began with educators having a clear understanding of institutional racism and implicit and explicit bias. Institutional racism and bias in the American school system creates inadequate scholarly opportunities for Pan African students (Cramer & Bennett, 2015). Furthermore, Cramer and Bennett (2015) revealed that “Research findings have shown that teacher’s beliefs about their students influence students’ performance” (p. 19). It was essential for educators to understand the role that bias played and the differences between teachers’ and students’ experiences, values, expectations, and beliefs (Noltemeyer & Mcloughlin, 2010). According to Banks and Obiakor (2015), acceptable classroom behavior is defined by the values and beliefs of the educator. CRPBIS suggests that teachers develop knowledge of students’ families and environments to effectively modify the behavior of Pan African students (Banks & Obiakor, 2015; Cramer & Bennett, 2015; Swain-Bradway et al., 2014).

Problem Statement

Statistics and much research make it clear that suspension rates for Pan African students, when compared to suspension rates of students of other races and ethnicities, are disproportionately high (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Losen & Martinez, 2013; Losen & Skiba, 2010; Skiba & Losen, 2016). Adopting the zero-tolerance discipline policies made the problem worse (Quinlan, 2016; Skiba, 2013). Ideally, schools rely on alternative interventions before suspending students. Unfortunately for Pan African students, suspension tends to be designated as a first resort (Skiba & Losen, 2016). Research by Gregory et al. (2010) maintains that Pan African students are inclined to receive suspensions for subjective offenses such as disruption, insubordination, defiance, disrespect, and excessive noise. In contrast, White students chiefly receive suspensions for objective, observable offenses such as smoking, vandalism, and cutting class (Gage et al., 2018; Whitford & Emerson, 2018).

Historically, the marginalization of Pan African students in schools has been the result of the disparities in student suspension by racial and ethnic subgroups (Bal, 2015; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Whitford & Emerson, 2018). As a result of bias from educators, Pan African students have been disproportionately represented among all racial subgroups regarding out-of-school suspensions (Swain-Bradway et al., 2014). Gregory et al. (2010) indicated that teachers gave reprimands and punitive consequences to Pan African students even when students of other races participated in the same undesirable behaviors. Additionally, White students are referred for suspension less frequently for the same behaviors exhibited by Pan African students (Balderas, 2015; Losen & Skiba, 2010; Skiba, 2013).

CRPBIS have been developed and implemented to address the seemingly intractable problems associated with the racial discipline gap in schools. Does this program work? In particular, does it work at the eighth-grade level—a level at which suspensions of Pan African students can be a predictor of school failure and low graduation rates (Endsley, 2014)? There has been limited research on the impact of CRPBIS on the racial discipline gap. A comprehensive assessment of this critical issue is necessary to improve school culture (Whitford & Emerson, 2018).

Theoretical Rationale

Critical race theory (CRT) was the theoretical rationale for this study. Through CRT, one can delve into bias and bigotry within social institutions by surpassing the deficiencies of the faculty, families, or students (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006). CRT allowed this researcher to study discriminatory policies as a stand-alone entity excluding the flaws of educators and students. Policy changes and responsive cultural systems can be instituted in school systems by the use of CRT to challenge institutional racism, discrimination, and bias in school systems (Payne, 2010). Thus, this theoretical framework was imperative to this study.

CRT is an approach borrowed from legal studies rooted in human rights and equality (Price, 2010). Activists use CRT to make the connection between race, racism, and power by giving a voice to marginalized people (Ford & Hirhihenback, 2010). A significant factor in the racialization of school discipline was the cross collaboration of the social systems including families, community supports, and politics (Bal, 2015). Exploring the culture and lived experiences of Pan African students engages Pan African students and through the use of CRT, and instruction is designed to improve outcomes

(Abrams & Moio, 2009). The application of CRT in education aims to expose the unfairness that Pan African students face in schools every day. In addition, CRT can be used as a tool to focus the delivery of relevant instruction and culturally relevant assessments, which are vital components of CRPBIS (Bal, 2015; Closson, 2010).

CRT was chosen as the framework of this current study because it challenges the dominant culture and uncovers the infiltration of the dominant culture into the Pan African experience. CRT reveals the everyday existence of discrimination in America (Taylor, 1998). Disparities in suspension data suggest that the behavior of Pan African students has more to do with perception than fact (Payne, 2010). Exploring the misconceptions from a social equity aspect may explain the anomaly of disproportionality in the racial discipline gap. CRT was used to dissect the profound interpretation of disparities in suspensions (McDonald, 2003).

Secondly, CRT was chosen as the framework for this current study because it explains that racism is a tool used to preserve White privilege while maintaining disadvantages for Pan Africans (McDonald, 2003; Taylor, 1998). The foundation of CRT explains that racism is universal and embedded into social systems (Tyson, 2012). According to Oatts (2003), being victimized by racism, discrimination, and bias are typical experiences for minority groups in the United States. CRT is designed to empower minority groups by giving a voice to marginalized people. Narratives constitute a significant component of CRT, and it is the basis for comprehending the stories of minority groups (Smith, 2015).

This researcher used CRT to give a voice to a marginalized group, Pan African students. The goal of this current study was to compare the suspension rates of Pan

African students to the suspension rates of other races and ethnicities. This current study framed CRT to support the notion that the use of exclusionary discipline policies, along with zero tolerance policies, segregates Pan African students from the public school system. Moreover, the study explored the relationship between CRPBIS and the disparities in the racial discipline gap as it relates to Pan African students.

Critical race theory and the educational experience. In the field of education, CRT can be a tool in assisting teachers to serve a diverse population of students (Abrams & Moio, 2009). This theoretical framework was used as the lens through which to examine the data and policies in schools and districts. Additionally, CRT was used to investigate, interpret, and establish a positive relationship between race, racism, and influence (McDonald, 2003). Furthermore, CRT was an apparatus to expose the power of implicit bias in a school setting (Abrams & Moio, 2009).

In previous studies, researchers have used CRT to analyze the educational experiences of Pan African students (Smith, 2015). Through the use of cultural competence, CRT reveals inequities in power and entitlements (Abrams & Moio, 2009). Scholars, such as Derrick Bell, who advocated for CRT, argued that the Pan African experience was not accepted in the educational field because the White experience was considered to be the norm (Payne, 2010). It is important to note that CRT laid the groundwork to understanding that institutional racism is so profoundly indiscernible and infused in the educational system that it is difficult to separate one from the other (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Bonilla-Silvas (2001) expanded on the work of Ladson-Billings (1998) by placing institutional racism in the center and exploring the racist genesis of the public educational system (Smith, 2015). Another advantage of CRT is that it can assist

educators in understanding the past traumas and racial conflicts of Pan African students (Jackson, 2014). The consequence of the connection between institutional racism and the education system has led to discriminatory practices and the maltreatment of Pan African students. According to Losen and Martinez (2013), the Gun-Free School Act of 1994 widened the racial discipline gap by 11%.

Critical race theory and disproportionality of suspension rates by race.

Intellectuals in the field of education have used CRT to explore the bias Pan African students faced in schools and the role that race plays in education (Belcher, 2012). CRT is the framework that researchers have used to expose and disavow discriminatory practices against Pan African students such as exclusionary practices (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Jackson, 2014; Payne, 2010). The implementation of CRPBIS has been used as a means of giving a voice to a marginalized group of people (Bal, 2015; Fenning & Rose, 2007). According to Losen and Skiba (2010), too often, Pan African students are required to adopt the social norms of White people. Pan African students who refuse to adopt the social norms of Whites may receive consequences, or they may be seen as defiant (Losen & Skiba, 2010). The challenge for some Pan African students comes with receiving the consequences for refusing to conform to the White experience (Fergus, 2016).

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact CRPBIS has on closing the racial suspension gap. CRPBIS uses restorative practices as opposed to zero-tolerance methods of discipline (Skiba, 2013). There is a gap in the literature regarding the use and effectiveness of CRPBIS as a means of decreasing the racial suspension gap of eighth-

grade students. Studies on CRPBIS overwhelmingly have addressed academic achievement and school climate. Most studies have focused on self-efficacy of students, parent engagement, and the culturally responsive teaching practices after the implementation of CRPBIS (Bal, Thorius, & Kozleski, 2012; Miley, 2010; Tyson, 2012). This study used a quantitative, archival approach to examine the impact of CRPBIS (the independent variable) on the suspension rates of eighth-grade students by race, ethnicity, gender, and cohort (the dependent variables).

This researcher examined data on eighth-grade student suspension rates by race. A comparative study was conducted on three middle schools in the same district with similar demographics. Two of the schools did not implement CRPBIS, and one school implemented CRPBIS. The suspension rates of eighth-grade students from each school covering two cohorts (2015-2016 and 2016-2017) were analyzed.

Research Questions

The following research questions were designed to measure the impact of CRPBIS:

1. Were eighth-grade Pan African students suspended at a disproportionate rate compared to Asian, Latino, and White students between the 2015 and 2017 school years in an urban school district?
2. Is there a statistically significant difference in the suspension rates of eighth-grade Pan African students compared to Asian, Latino, and White students who attended a school that implemented CRPBIS and the schools that did not implement CRPBIS?

3. Does the implementation of CRPBIS narrow the racial suspension gap of Pan African students compared to Asian, Latino, and White students when they transition from the seventh grade to the eighth grade?

Potential Significance of the Study

The results of this study are significant for school districts instituting a school-wide behavioral system with the goal of closing the racial discipline gap and ensuring that every student is receiving a quality education (Bal et al., 2012). Studies have shown the effectiveness of the use of PBIS on overall school discipline, however, very few schools have implemented a CRPBIS model. According to Skiba, O’Keefe, and Fallon (2012), “The question whether any universal, school-wide intervention can successfully reduce racial and ethnic disproportionality remains unanswered” (p. 18). Further, Gregory et al. (2010) questioned if “there is yet no empirical research testing [of] a specific intervention for reducing the discipline gap” (p. 65). This study answered these questions, hence, making this study significant to district leaders, school administrators, policymakers, and teachers.

Definitions of Terms

Black/Pan African – interchangeable terms in which students in this category are decedents from Africa (Smith, 2015).

Critical Race Theory – explicitly focuses on societal inquiries originating from race and racism (Jackson, 2014).

CRPBIS – a culturally responsive, three-tiered intervention program designed to encourage compliance with school behavior. CRPBIS is seen through the creation of a

positive school environment by analyzing practices, processes, and data outcomes to develop a positive school culture (Bal, 2015).

Disproportionality – over- or underrepresentation of a specific subgroup. For the purpose of this study, disproportionality refers to the overrepresentation of suspensions of Pan African students (Losen & Martinez, 2013).

Exclusionary Discipline – the use of punitive methods to exclude students from classroom instruction and school activities (Cohen, 2013).

Gun-Free Schools Zone Act – a modification to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA). Enacted in October 1994, the Gun-Free Schools Act demanded consequences for any student who brought a firearm into a school (as defined by federal law Section 921 of Title 18 of the U.S. code).

Implicit Bias – an automatic, unconscious stereotyping and judgment of an individual or group (Xie, 2015).

Institutional Racism – complex structures and processes that function to maintain racial inequality mostly independent of the prejudice or tolerance of individuals (Aveling, 2007)

Office Discipline Referrals – students removed from classes and referred to the administrative/discipline staff for assistance with the discipline issues (Jackson, 2014)

Suspension – when a student is prohibited from classroom instruction and school activities for a specific period (Miller, 2014).

Suspension Rates – the comparison of the number of students (or those in a subgroup) who have received suspensions and the number of students (or those in a subgroup) who have enrolled in any school or district (Losen & Skiba, 2010).

Zero Tolerance – school discipline policies that react to even minor disruptions in the social order with a strong force to send a message that specific behavior will not be tolerated (Skiba, 2013).

Chapter Summary

This introductory chapter examined the disparities in suspension rates. This current study focuses on the disciplinary practices that led to disproportionate outcomes. Using archival data, this researcher compared the suspension rates of eighth-grade Pan African students to students of other ethnicities and races. Chapter 1 serves as an overview of the study through explaining the background, purpose, approach, problem, significance, and vocabulary of the study. The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the impact that CRPBIS has on the racial suspension gap and creating an environment of culturally responsive discipline practices including culturally responsive pedagogy and a school-wide behavioral model (Bal, 2016; Monroe, 2005). With the onset of behavioral management approaches that have resulted in an overwhelming divide in this country's controversy on school discipline, a response is desperately needed (Losen & Skiba, 2010). Research on zero-tolerance policies have indicated that the intended results of eliminating undesirable behavior has not been successful (Hudson, 2011; McAndrews, 2001). Miller (2014) stated:

A central problem of zero tolerance policies is that they fail to consider the circumstances of the event and a student's intentions. Because the circumstances and intentions of the student vary from cases to case, for some punishments may end up being too harsh. (p. 3)

CRPBIS was designed to inform teachers regarding the effects and dangers of the power that is driven by institutional racism and implicit and explicit bias, which can lead to disproportionate disciplining.

Chapter 2 provides the rationale for investigating the research questions and establishing the structure for the review of the related literature. Chapter 3 outlines the research design, methodology, and analysis. Chapter 4 presents a detailed analysis of the results and findings, and Chapter 5 includes a discussion of the findings, implications, and recommendations for future research and practice.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Purpose

Chapter 2 reviews the literature on the history of unfair practices in school suspensions and culturally responsive school-wide behavioral systems. This study examined the relationship between *culturally responsive* PBIS (CRPBIS) and the racial discipline gap. The racial discipline gap is defined as the rate that Pan African students are suspended compared to students of other races and ethnicities (Losen & Martinez, 2013). CRPBIS is a school-wide response to behavior that uses culture and history to reinforce learning. CRPBIS connects PBIS and culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) into one framework (Bal et al., 2012). It is built upon a platform established by PBIS, which is an evidenced-based framework that is accepted by the educational community as a useful tool for managing undesirable behavior in schools (Losen & Gillespie, 2012; Sugai & Horner, 2002). CRP is grounded in cultural competency and creating a culturally diverse school environment (Gay, 2002, 2010). There is limited research on the impact of CRPBIS, which combines CRP and PBIS on the racial discipline gap, specifically as it affects eighth-grade students in an urban setting (Luttrull, 2014). The purpose of this quantitative study is to add to the body of research and broaden our understanding of the effectiveness of suspensions rate of Pan African eighth-grade students relative to their peers.

Introduction

Diversity in schools in the United States is no longer the exception, but it is now the norm (Flores, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2011; Sugai, Fallon, & O’Keefe, 2012). According to the USDOE (2007), students of color (including Pan African students) were outpacing White students in population (Flores, 2010). Schools in the United States are challenged with meeting the needs of the ever-increasing number of Pan African students (Ladson-Billing; 2006a, Luttrull; 2014). As a result, studies indicate the need for culturally responsive education and discipline practices in school systems to meet the needs of the diverse population that schools are encountering (Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2006b; Rothstein-Fisch & Trumbull, 2008).

In 2008, the U.S. Department of Education issued a report on the effects of exclusionary practices, including suspension, on the racial discipline gap (Gregory et al., 2016). The overrepresentation of Pan African students in suspension and expulsion data has been consistently documented in the 21st century (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Losen & Skiba, 2010; Whitford & Emerson, 2018). In 2010, Pan African students accounted for 17% of the school population in the United States. However, Pan African students represented 32% of the student suspensions (Endsley, 2014). According to Skiba (2013), suspension rates have more than doubled for all subgroups since the 1970s. However, suspension rates have more than tripled for Pan African students. Skiba et al. (2014) explained that schools and districts that use exclusionary practices run the risk of suspending Pan African students at a disproportionate rate.

Studies have shown that exclusionary practices affect academic success and students’ perception of the school environment (Bridges, 2012; Skiba & Losen, 2016).

Pan African students have expressed concerns over teacher reprimands and punitive consequences that are perceived as overwhelmingly given to Pan African students. Another major concern of the McCadden (1998) and Monroe (2016) studies was the harsher consequences given to Pan African students compared to students of other races and ethnicities for the same behavior. Skiba and Peterson (2000) and Welch and Payne's (2010) research further revealed that Pan African students receive harsher punishments than their peers, often for subjectively defined offenses. Inequities in school discipline are most pronounced among Pan African males (Monroe, 2005; Vincent & Tobin, 2011; Whitford & Emerson, 2018).

History of Exclusionary Practices

Borrowing from the legal field, critical race theory in education is rooted in the notion of human rights (Crenshaw, Gotanda, & Peller, 1995). According to Fergus (2016), during the Civil Rights Movement, the landmark legal decision by the United States Supreme Court, *Brown v. the Board of Education* (1954), changed race relations in schools. One of the most critical pieces of evidence, in this case, was the Clark and Clark (1947) experiment, which indicates that as a result of school segregation, Pan African students suffer from a lack of self-concept (Fergus, 2016). The ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* found that it was not possible for all aspects of schooling to be equal if students receive education in separate facilities (Fergus, 2016). The separate but equal policy was, in fact, very unequal, but since that time, with the full implementation of remedies to force integration, schools in America are now even more segregated by race (Kucsera & Orfield, 2014).

Brown v. the Board of Education (1954) ruled that segregated schools were unconstitutional because separate could not be equal. Unfortunately, research of today's schools have concluded that exclusionary practices are modern-day forms of segregation (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Skiba & Losen, 2016). Zero-tolerance policies, which are congruent with the Gun Free Schools Act, have made the situation worse and challenge the notion of equity in the public school system. Ironically, federal desegregation laws, such as the Gun-Free Schools Act, were the catalyst for the over suspension of Pan Africans students (Gregory et al., 2016).

Civil rights groups became concerned about the disparities in suspension rates for Pan African students during the 1970s (Skiba & Losen, 2016). In the 1970s and 1980s, the increase in civil lawsuits brought against school districts for discriminatory practices imposed on Pan Africans students received national attention (Skiba & Losen, 2016). As a result, there was an increase in the research on the use of exclusionary practices. In one study, which was funded by the Children's Defense Fund (CDF, 1975), showed that Pan African students were disproportionately suspended. The results indicated that out of the 2,862 school districts that participated, 67.9% suspended Pan African students at a higher rate than their White counterparts (CDF, 1975). Additionally, the findings suggest that Pan African students were suspended for longer periods of times than their White counterparts.

In another national study, Losen and Martinez (2013) examined data from 26,000 U.S. middle and high schools in the United States. Findings suggest approximately 2 million students served suspensions during the 2009-2010 school year. The researchers questioned the rate at which the Pan African students received suspensions. An analysis

of the high school data revealed an increase in suspension rates by race from 1970 through 2010. It is of note that the suspensions increased by 12% for Pan African students while the increase for White students was 1.1%. The results, therefore, indicate there was an 11% increase for Pan African students compared to White students from 1970 through the 2010 school year (Losen & Martinez, 2013).

School suspensions. In America, the average number of days that constitutes a school year is 180 (Rowland, 2014). In New York State, principals, superintendent, or their designees are the only parties allowed to issue suspensions, and suspensions are given often in response to violations of the code of conduct (Greflund, McIntosh, Mercer, & May, 2014). Miller (2014) stated that “Out-of-school suspensions and expulsions are also termed exclusionary practices because students are barred from school during the course of their punishment” (p. 1). There has been an alarming concern over the use of suspension and other exclusion practices (Skiba & Losen, 2016).

Skiba and Losen (2016) conducted a study to explore the status of school discipline and exclusionary practices. The study used data from the 2011-2012 school year. The data shows that the suspension of students during the school year was 3.5 million. In that same year, the number of students who were suspended was higher than the number of school teachers employed in the United States. In addition, Losen and Skiba (2010) found, in their earlier research, that 3.3 million students enrolled in public schools in the United States received multiple suspensions during the 2006 school year.

Nationally, Pan African students received suspensions at a disproportionate level over students of other ethnicities and races (Quinlan, 2016). According to Fergus (2016),

Pan African students received more exclusionary consequences, which led to disproportionate suspension rates, than any other racial or ethnic subgroup.

Disproportionality. Research by Gregory et al. (2010) found that Pan African students were inclined to be suspended for subjective offenses such as disruption, insubordination, defiance, and disrespect. However, White students were chiefly suspended for more objective, observable offenses such as smoking, vandalism, and cutting class. Moreover, White students were referred for suspension less frequently for the same behavior that was exhibited by Pan American students (Gregory et al., 2010).

Although suspension rates were higher for Pan African students, there was no evidence that Pan African students misbehaved more than students of other races (Gregory et al., 2016). Losen and Skiba (2010) conducted a study of 9,220 middle schools in 18 urban school districts from 2002 through 2006. The study showed that suspension rates increased in 12 of the districts, remained steady in two districts, and decreased in four districts. This study included over a million students from 35 school districts. The researchers used data from the Elementary and Secondary Education Office of Civil Rights Data Collection (Losen & Skiba, 2010). The study indicates that sixth-grade students who received suspensions were more likely to receive additional suspensions by eighth grade. Furthermore, the data suggest that more suspensions were given to Pan African students for nonviolent and less-disruptive behavior (Losen & Skiba, 2010). Of the middle schools that were surveyed, the average suspension rate was 11.2%, and the study exposed racial disproportionality in the out-of-school suspension rate. Pan African students were the subgroup that received the highest number of suspensions: males at 28.3% and females at 18%. According to Losen and Skiba (2010),

the data indicate a 26.2% difference in the suspension rates of Pan African males (the most suspended population) and Asian females (the least suspended population).

Another study that examined disproportionality was conducted by Skiba et al. (2002), and it focused on middle-school students in a large, urban, Midwestern public school district that served 50,000 students. Pan African students represented 56% of the district's population, with 65% of the school's population receiving a free or reduced-fee lunch. The study revealed that Pan African students were disproportionality represented in all disciplinary categories including office referral, suspensions, and expulsions (Skiba et al., 2002). However, there was an underrepresentation of White students in all discipline categories. Furthermore, the research found disparities in consequences distributed to students of different races and ethnicities (Skiba et al., 2002).

It is important to note that the racial suspension gap was much higher among students who received the most serious disciplinary consequences—expulsion. Although there was significant disproportionality when considering race, there was no significant difference when considering socioeconomic status. The findings also indicate a correlation between the distribution of office-referral discipline and school suspensions, which speaks to the importance of understanding the role that implicit bias and institutional racism play in schools (Skiba et al., 2011).

Another study that researched disproportionality and exclusionary practices focused on the behavioral continuum that pointed out a range of undesirable behaviors by students and their antecedents. Finn et al. (2008) utilized data from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NCES, n.d.). The participants were a representative sample of students in eighth grade through high school, and they were

students who dropped out of high school (24,599) students. There were 1,817 public schools in the study and 240 private schools. Results indicate that “Multiple misbehaviors often occur in the same individuals and that early forms of misbehavior can persist over time and affect the educational accomplishments in the latest years” (Finn et al., 2008, p. 271). The findings suggest that 43.3% of students who cut class were seven times as likely to be removed from class for disruptive behavior. The researchers argued that teachers need tools to counter undesirable behavior (Finn et al., 2008).

Rocque (2010) conducted a study that focused on office discipline referrals (ODRs) during the 2004-2005 school year. The study explored the impact of a student’s race on ODRs while controlling for student behavior. The essential question asked about the distribution of ODRs based on race. An additional question investigated the statistical difference in ODRs by race, which was correlated to age, socioeconomic status, gender, and GPA status. Ultimately, the researcher sought to examine if race was a factor in the distribution of ODRs. The participants included 28,634 elementary school students, in 44 elementary schools in Virginia. Of the student participants, 43% were White, 26% were Latino, and 20% were Pan African. Also, 52% of the population was male. The data was not cross-pollinated between schools or districts. Controlling for behavior, the data showed disproportionality in ODRs for Pan African students. Evidence revealed that 14% of ODRs were given to Pan African students; while 5% of ODRs were given to White students. ODRs were given to 6% of the Latino students. When correlated to students with similar socioeconomic status and similar GPA scores, Pan African students were most likely to receive ODRs (2.47%). Rocque (2010) suggested that teacher bias may have played a role in the distribution of ODRs. The

study makes compelling arguments that labeling students may have an impact on the rate those ODRs were distributed (Rocque, 2010).

Rocque's (2010) research differed from the literature because the study controlled for behavior while other literature examined all behavior in relation to ODRs. A limitation of the study was that 2% of the population ($n = 503$) was excluded from the study because the students were over 11-years old. An additional limitation was data availability, as the demographic data was not available. As in much of the literature on this topic, Pan African students received ODRs at a disproportionate rate.

Using discipline records as a primary data source, Skiba et al. (2014) designed a stratified linear-model method that examined student characteristics, school response to behavior, and racial disparities in discipline. The participants included Pan African and White students who received suspensions while enrolled in public and charter schools in a Midwestern state during the 2007-2008 school year. The total number of suspensions and expulsions were 323,104, involving 126,310 students in 1,720 schools. Additionally, disciplinary practices surveys were administered to 1,875 principals to evaluate their attitudes toward school discipline. A total of 1,068 surveys were used in the study. Findings demonstrated that harsher offenses resulted in stricter consequences. Defiance and disruption were the most common infractions, and they resulted in 60.3% of all in-school suspensions. Physical aggression ranked in the lower spectrum of the incidents reported. However, 71.6% of students who were accused of aggression received an out-of-school suspension. The incident that was reported the least was the use or possession of a weapon, which resulted in the highest rate of expulsion (15.2%). Pan African students represented 23.7% of the suspensions and expulsions, but they represented just

12% of the state's student population (Skiba et al., 2014). Use of a multilevel model speaks to the rarity of the study conducted by Skiba et al. (2014).

Gastic (2016) conducted a study in 2007 involving approximately 4,000 Massachusetts public school students enrolled in Grades 9 to 12 who had been disciplined for physical fights at school. The researcher noted the disproportionality of the rates of Pan African and Latino students. Gastic explored the difference in school data in addition to the self-reports of Pan African and Latino students. The racial breakdown of the students in the study was (a) White (57.5%), (b) Latino (21.1%), and (c) Pan African (17.4%). Nearly all of the students cited for fighting received an out-of-school suspension (94.9%). Students that did not receive an out-of-school suspension received one of the following consequences: (a) in-school suspension (4.6%), (b) permanent expulsion (0.2%), (c) removal by an impartial hearing officer (0.1%), or (d) removal by school personnel to an alternative school (0.2%) (Gastic, 2016).

A summary of the Gastic (2016) data shows that 1.2% of all students in Grades 9 through 12 received consequences for fighting. The breakdown by race for the students that were suspended for fighting was (a) 2.6% of the Pan African students, (b) 2.2% of the Latino students, and (c) 1.0% of the White students. Results suggest that when surveyed, 2.52% of the Pan African students and 2.14% of the Latino students said that they were disproportionately suspended compared to White students for fighting (Gastic, 2016). One limitation of the study was that it only focused on one type of incident (fighting). One unique feature of this study was that it reviewed state data along with student self-perceptions of disproportionality of suspensions in Massachusetts (Gastic, 2016).

Middle school suspension. A 2-year comparative study on the suspension rates of elementary and middle school students demonstrated that suspension rates dramatically increase when students move from elementary school to middle school (Arcia, 2007). The study was conducted during the 2002-2003 school year. The study compared suspension rates of students who attended K-8 schools to students who attended traditional middle schools (Grades 6-8) in Miami-Dade County Public Schools. The results determined the in-school suspension rates: 1.6% of elementary students received in-school suspension while 16.9% of students in middle school received in-school suspension. The sample of the study was sixth-grade students who were housed in general education classroom. All participants transitioned with their cohort to the next grade ($N = 26,137$). One crucial factor in this study was that the majority of teachers in the Miami-Dade County public schools during the 2002-2003 school year were female (87%). The following show the racial composition of the teachers: (a) 44% were Latino, (b) 28% were Pan African, and (c) 26% were White. The findings concluded that students attending middle schools received suspensions at a higher rate than students who attended K-8 schools. The students attending middle schools were suspended for approximately 6.8 days. In contrast, students attending K-8 schools received suspensions, on average, 4.6 days. Additionally, the suspension rate of sixth-grade students attending middle schools was 21.1%. However, the suspension rate of students attending K-8 schools was 8.7% (Arcia, 2007).

According to Losen and Skiba (2010), middle school is when Pan African males are suspended more than any other subgroup. Endsley (2014) studied the suspension rates of 19 Pan African male students who attended an alternative middle school that used

a nongraded curriculum, compared to Pan African male students, who attended a traditional school with a graded curriculum. Of the two schools participating in the study, one school was located in Ohio, and the other school was located in Virginia. Each of the schools followed different state educational laws, and therefore, this could be perceived as a problem with the study. The rate at which the Pan African males received suspensions from the traditional middle school was 2.53 times higher than the overall student population. However, the rate at which Pan African males received suspended from a nongraded alternative middle school was 5.46 times higher than the overall student population. Results show that the Pan African male students who attended the nongraded, alternative middle school were suspended at a higher rate compared to the Pan African male students who attended the traditional middle school (Endsley, 2014). Research by Endsley (2014) was distinct as it was a comparative study between an alternative middle school and a traditional middle school.

Another study that focused on middle school students analyzed the statistical difference in the assignment of disciplinary consequences for students by race in middle schools in Texas. The study conducted by Hilberth and Slate (2014) explored and questioned the rate that Pan African and White students were assigned to in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, and disciplinary alternative education programs (DAEP) during the 2008-2009 school year. Data were drawn from the state database, PEIMS. The population of the study included students in the sixth grade (172,551), seventh grade (173,671), and eighth grade (175,730). The Pan African students in the sixth grade represented 14.1% of the school population. However, those students received 32.1% of the in-school suspensions, 19.4% of the out-of-school suspensions,

and 4.1% of the Pan African students in the sixth grade were referred to DEAP. In contrast, the sixth-grade White students who represented 34.7% of the school population, received 14.2% of the in-school suspensions, 3.7% of the out-of-school suspensions, and 1.1% of the White students in the sixth grade were referred to DEAP. The Pan African students in the seventh grade represented 14.2% of the school population, but they received 35.9% of the in-school suspensions, 22.6% of the out-of-school suspensions, and 5.9% of the seventh-grade Pan African students were referred to DAEP. By comparison, the White students in the seventh grade, who represented 35.2% of the school population, received 16.2% of in-school suspensions, 4.8% of out-of-school suspensions, and 1.8% of White students in the seventh grade were referred to DAEP. The Pan African students in the eighth grade represented 14.4% of the school population. However, the Pan African students received 36.4% of the in-school suspensions, 23.2% of the out-of-school suspensions, and 7.0% of Pan African eighth-grade students were referred to DAEP. By comparison, the White students, who represented 35.3% of the school population, received 17.5% of the in-school suspensions, 5.4% of out-of-school suspensions, and 2.6% of White eighth-grade students were referred to DAEP programs. The results indicate that the Pan African students were assigned disciplinary consequences at a disproportionate rate compared to the White students (Hilberth & Slate, 2014). The researchers suggested that future research could examine the distribution of disciplinary consequences among several races and ethnicities.

Discipline Codes

The Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 mandated that states develop legislation that supported *zero tolerance* in schools. The Act required that any student caught with a

firearm on school property would receive a 1-year school expulsion (Skiba, 2013). The consequences for districts who fail to create these laws are a possible loss of federal funding (Losen & Skiba, 2010). Zero-tolerance policies allowed school leaders to demonstrate to the public that they were taking strong actions to ensure safety and discipline in schools (Jackson, 2014; McAndrews, 2001). This philosophy and practice of zero tolerance led to an increase in rates of suspension and expulsions (Skiba & Rausch, 2006). In addition, Payne & Welch (2015) posited that zero tolerance has raised serious questions about both the effectiveness and fairness of such strategies particularly its impact on Pan African students. Research shows that the disproportionality in the racial suspension gap is linked to zero tolerance policies (Quinlan, 2016).

Some school leaders began to use zero-tolerance policies as a primary remedy for undesirable behavior, believing that a constant, firm application of zero tolerance was required (Skiba & Peterson, 2000). While the philosophy and practice of zero tolerance have led to the increase in the use of suspension and expulsion (Skiba et al., 2011; Skiba & Rausch, 2006), these policies have raised serious questions about both the effectiveness and fairness of such strategies (Payne & Welch, 2015).

Despite nearly two decades of the implementation of zero-tolerance discipline policies and their application to mundane and nonviolent misbehavior, there is no evidence that frequent reliance on removing misbehaving students improves school safety or student behavior (APA Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008). “Because suspended students miss instructional time, frequent use of out-of-school suspension also reduces students’ opportunity to learn” (Losen & Skiba, 2010, p. 2). Furthermore, research has

shown that the disproportionality in the racial suspension gap has been linked to zero-tolerance policies (Quinlan, 2016; Skiba & Losen, 2016).

Zero tolerance. In 1994, Congress enacted a law referred to as the Gun-Free Schools Act. This law mandated states to develop legislation to support the notion of zero tolerance in schools. The consequences of failing to create these laws could include the loss of federal funding for schools (Losen & Skiba, 2010). Zero-tolerance policies provided school leaders with a strong justification for strict disciplinary consequences that ensured safety and order in schools (McAndrews, 2001). However, over time researchers were discovering connections between zero tolerance and student failure (Heilbrun, Cornell, & Lovegrove, 2015). Overall, the philosophy and practice of zero tolerance led to increases in the use of suspension and expulsion, which raised serious questions about both the effectiveness and fairness of such exclusionary strategies (Payne & Welch, 2015; Skiba & Rausch, 2006).

The first mention of the term zero tolerance appeared when discussing the consequences for sailors who used drugs in a Navy shipyard in Norfolk, VA. Soon after the incident, the former First Lady, Nancy Reagan, used the term at a press conference with the Secretary of the Navy to address the incident with the sailors. By 1986, President Ronald Reagan proposed a zero-tolerance policy to address safety issues in schools. However, Congress did not cooperate, and the law was not passed during the Reagan presidency. By 1994, under President William Clinton, Congress would pass the Gun-Free School Act, which brought a transition of the term zero-tolerance policies to the education system (Skiba, 2013).

Zero tolerance is framed after an adult system that depends on punitive consequences. Schools that embraced the zero-tolerance philosophy believed that punishment was an appropriate response to a violation against a school or individuals in a school system (Cole, 2013). The belief behind the punishment-fitting-the-crime approach was that behavior will change. According to Costello, Wachtel, and Wachtel (2009), punishment does not develop empathy. Punishment does not change behavior because the punishment is an external force. Students who internalized the effects of their behavior were more likely to change their undesirable behavior. Punishment is not a learning experience that build relationships.

Challenged by external factors, public schools in urban centers face racism, crime, and poverty, which strike at the very core of the education system (Cole, 2013; Howard, 2008). The rights of students, especially Pan African students, have been eclipsed by policies that flow from school safety. Discipline under this punitive system does not allow for interpretation, context, circumstance, and the many variables inherent in culturally and racially diverse settings (Fergus, 2016; Reyes, 2006). Zero tolerance relies on punitive approaches rather than a restorative discipline that actually changes behavior (Cole, 2013).

Zero-tolerance policies have been the primary contributor to the racialization of discipline (Gregory et al., 2010). A study conducted by Gregory and Weinstein (2008) that assessed the discipline gap of Pan Africans students focused on one behavior—defiance in classrooms. Gregory and Weinstein (2008) concentrated on the proportion of Pan Africans students who received ODRs from one or more teachers. In addition, the researchers duplicated the first part of the study while measuring multilevel modeling

with a subsample of 30 Pan Africans students. The location of the study was a high school in a mid-sized city in the United States. The study sample size was 2,882 students. The research was conducted during the 2002-2003 school year, and the demographics of the student population was (a) Pan African, 30%; (b) White, 37%; (c) Asian, 12%; (d) Latino, 11%; and (e) Mixed Race, 1%. It is important to note that each student in this study attended approximately six classes a day with as many as six different teachers. Although Pan African students represented 30% of the total school population, 67% of all defiant ODRs were assigned to Pan African students. White students represented 37% of the total school population, but they accounted for 5% of defiant ODRs. Out of 250 Pan African students who received ODRs from teachers, 185 discipline referrals came from two teachers. The results of this study show a disproportionate pattern of referrals. The phenomenological nature of the distribution of defiant ODRs to Pan African students for defiance is evidenced by the range of ODRs across classrooms; meaning, the Pan African students received ODRs for defiance at a disproportionate rate (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008).

Results of the Gregory and Weinstein (2008) study also indicate that the students complied more with teachers who showed that they cared for the students and for high academic standards. A concern that students expressed was the lack of a universal understanding of discipline codes and consequences. Students complained that they received different consequences for the same behavior with different faculty members. Gregory and Weinstein (2008) suggested that future longitudinally designed studies should investigate the notion of educator bias and student perception.

Hoffman (2014) measured the outcomes of the implementation of zero-tolerance policies that related to the percentage of suspensions and the loss of instructional days for secondary students in a mid-sized urban school district. The population included more than 24,000 students who received suspensions. The racial breakdown of the district was (a) 50% White, (b) 24% Pan African, (c) 15% Hispanic, and (d) 10% Asian. The study examined the effects of the implementation of changes to the zero-tolerance policies by comparing the suspension rates of Pan African and White students and the number of days out of school as a result of those suspensions. Hoffman (2014) used data from the 2005-2006 through 2008-2009 school years to gauge the impact of the implementation of the zero-tolerance policies.

The Hoffman (2014) results suggest that the zero-tolerance policies broadened the number of exclusionary consequences and the number of days of classroom instruction students lost. Before the policy change, 2.2% of Pan African secondary students received expulsions. After the policy change expulsions increased to 4.5%. The data concluded that suspensions more than doubled for the Pan African students. However, the expulsion rate of the White students increased from .03% before the zero policy change to .05% after the policy change. It is important to note that the White students' experienced only a .02% increase in suspension rates. The number of days that White students received suspensions increased from .10% before the zero policy change to .11% after the policy change (Hoffman, 2014). The sample size was from one urban school district, and the study depended on publicly available data that needed to be disaggregated to the school level. This study was unique as it included the number of lost instructional days for students in a particular racial group.

Triplett, Allen, and Lewis (2014) explored the correlation between gun violence in schools and the creation of zero-tolerance policies. The study focused on national public school shootings, from 1990 through 2011, to determine if gun violence was a valid reason to enact zero-tolerance policies. The researchers utilized CRT and racial threat theory (RTT) to examine the disproportionality between the dominant group and minority groups. The researchers questioned if there were more school shootings in urban districts or suburban districts between 1990 and 1999. Additionally, the study investigated the correlation between the over suspension of Pan African students and school gun violence (Triplett et al., 2014).

The Triplett et al. (2014) sample included two different datasets. The first set of data analyzed 191 school shootings between 1979 and 2011. The second set of data analyzed 116 school shootings that occurred between 1990 and 2011. The results indicate that school shootings between 1990 and 2011 were significantly higher in suburban districts (72 incidents) than in urban districts (44 incidents). Proponents of zero tolerance argued that such measures were needed to address gang violence in the 1990s in urban districts. This study answered the concerns of the advocates of zero tolerance who suggested there was a correlation between gang violence in urban areas and the dramatic increase in school shootings (Triplett et al., 2014).

Against this backdrop, Triplett et al. (2014) provided evidence that the majority of school shootings occurred in suburban districts. This data suggested the need to examine school discipline through implicit bias and institutional racism (Triplett et al., 2014). Studies on gun violence were often related to the effects of zero-tolerance and exclusionary practices. The study conducted by Triplett et al. (2014) differed from the

literature because it analyzed the location of the school shootings. Although the study examined the location of the school shootings by identifying if the shooting took place in urban or suburban districts, it would have benefitted the study to disclose the geographic location of each shooting. Furthermore, the study questioned the validity of the effectiveness of zero tolerance and its relationship with the racial discipline gap (Triplett et al., 2014).

Alternatives to Traditional Discipline Codes

After the USDOE report on the increase of school suspensions, schools and districts began to look for alternatives to suspensions (Bryant, 2013). PBIS, CRPBIS, and restorative practices are three alternative to suspensions that have been researched. PBIS is a schoolwide behavioral system that uses three levels of interventions (Tobin & Vincent, 2011). PBIS was effective in decreasing suspensions, however, it was not an effective tool in closing the racial discipline gap (Banks and Obiakor, 2015). As a result of the failure to close the racial discipline gap, CRPBIS was developed. This model added a culturally responsive framework to the PBIS framework (Bal & Obiakor, 2015). Both models align with restorative practices, which is an inclusive structure to undesirable behavior (Payne & Welch, 2015).

PBIS. PBIS is an evidence-based method that uses a proactive approach to school discipline as an intervention to exclusionary practices. Proponents of PBIS suggest that the model is proactive, and the positive aspect of the model builds relationships and compliments the teaching-learning process (Miley, 2010).

Dehlinger (2008) argued that the first step to closing the racial discipline gap is to understand there is disproportionality in suspensions, and for the staff to commit to a

system that gives equal opportunities to all students. According to Skiba and Losen (2016), suspensions and expulsions will decrease, especially for Pan African students, if the interventions are rooted in relationships. The philosophy behind PBIS is a set of school-wide norms, created in a collaborative setting, that highlights positive behaviors and celebrates the smallest level of compliance through the strengthening of relationships and building community (Skiba & Losen, 2016).

Green (2009) conducted a study in a suburban, Midwestern school district that set out to measure if PBIS could decrease discipline problems. Participants included 2,500 students who were enrolled in Grades Pre-K-8. The district introduced PBIS to address issues of undesirable behavior. The goal was to move schools from punitive consequences to a prevention model that gave students exemplars of positive behavior. The district went through a 2-year planning process with a team consisting of social workers, teachers, administrators, district level staff, and the technology department personnel before the plan was rolled out to schools. In the first year of implementation of PBIS, the district experienced a significant decrease in discipline referrals. Before the implementation of PBIS, the discipline referral rate was 44%. After the implementation of PBIS, the referral rate was 21%. Educators surveyed after the implementation of PBIS indicated that the positive results were due to the universal language. Results also indicate other factors that led to success were a unified approach, a positive school climate, and a standardized referral form (Green, 2009). Another study that examined the effectiveness of PBIS used school-wide information systems and the National Center for Education Statistics and Effective Behavioral Support Survey, which examined the racial discipline gap (Hawkins, 2018).

Tobin and Vincent (2011) analyzed the effects of PBIS on the racial discipline gap. Their study examined disparities in exclusionary practices of the Pan African students during the 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 school years. Participants involved 46 schools (19 elementary schools, 17 middle schools, six high schools, and four alternative secondary schools) throughout the United States. There were approximately 32,690 students who participated in the study. Of the total sample, 9,248 students were Pan African, 19,688 students were White, and 3,758 were identified as Other. Tobin and Vincent (2011) consolidated the dataset to investigate the effects of PBIS on the disparities in suspension rates of Pan African students compared to their White counterparts. The results indicate that before the implementation of PBIS, the average relative rate index (RRI) for Pan African students who received consequences of exclusionary practices was 3.11 ($SD = 2.21$). Evidence implied that Pan African students were approximately three times more likely to be suspended or expelled than their White counterparts. However, after the implementation of PBIS, the average RRI for the Pan African students who received consequences of exclusionary practices was 1.60 ($SD = 3.17$). The results concluded that the suspension of the Pan African students decreased after the implementation of PBIS (Tobin & Vincent, 2011). Although PBIS decreased the RRI for the Pan African students, there was no evidence that there was a decrease in the racial discipline gap. The study conducted by Tobin and Vincent (2011) differed from other national studies because their data included the evaluation of 46 schools that implemented PBIS (Tobin & Vincent, 2011).

Nocera, Whitbread, and Nocera (2014) conducted a study that explored the impact of PBIS on the school improvement process. Roosevelt Middle School was

identified as a school in need of improvement. As a result, the school was instructed to develop an improvement plan. Participants included two school administrators, four teachers, and 75 students from the seventh and eighth grades of Roosevelt Middle School during the 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 school years. The researchers questioned the effectiveness of professional development activities, the effects of policy changes, and the influence of PBIS on ODRs. The findings concluded, after 3 years of the implementation of PBIS, there was a 36% decrease in ODRs. Although referral rates declined for Pan African students, there were still disparities when compared to White students. Additionally, academic gains showed a 25% increase in reading scores and an 11% increase in math scores from 2007-2010. By 2010, Roosevelt Middle School had made enough improvements to be unclassified as a school in need of improvement (Nocera et al., 2014).

Bal (2016) showed evidence that PBIS was an effective tool in decreasing the suspension rates of Pan African students. However, PBIS has not closed the suspension gap between Pan African students and students of other races (Bal, 2016). Both culturally responsive teaching and CRP have been effective in closing the achievement gap between Pan African students and students of other races and ethnicities (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

CRPBIS. Levenson, Smith, McIntosh, Rose, & Pinkelman (2016) expanded on the work of Banks and Obiakor (2015) to explain the five foundational principles of CRPBIS. Levenson et al. (2016) suggested the first principle as the identity of cultural knowledge and awareness. Educators must understand how their cultural may impact the classroom environment (Banks & Obiakor, 2015). It is important that students see their

lives, histories, cultures, and languages incorporated into classroom instruction (Banks & Obiakor, 2015; Vincent et al., 2015). Additionally, educators must identify and validate the culture of the students, the families, and the communities they engage (Bal, Schrader, Afacan, & Mawene, 2016; Gay, 2002; Vincent et al., 2015). The validation of cultures can be done through creating a culturally diverse curriculum and give a voice to all stakeholders (Banks & Obiakor, 2015).

Levenson et al. (2016) recommended the second principle of CRPBIS is the use of voice to emphasize culturally equity. By giving voice to parents, they become partners in education (Vincent et al., 2015). Communicating with community members, political entities, and stakeholders to actively engage and assess Tier I is imperative. The teachers' voices are also important, and they should have ownership implementation and responsibility for sustaining the fidelity of the model. Additionally, teachers are the leaders of explicitly instructing students on appropriate school behavior (Levenson et al., 2016).

The third principle that Levenson et al. (2016) determined that a key factor in the CRPBIS model, and that is to create a supportive environment that emphasizes valuing the community and developing meaningful partnerships (Vincent et al., 2015). Cultural responsiveness should be at the top of the list when planning celebrations and using recognition systems. In order for behavioral systems and reward plans to be meaningful and authentic, teacher teams must include families and communities in the creation of implementation (Levenson et al., 2016).

According to Levenson et al. (2016) the fourth principle of CRPBIS is understanding situational approaches. Fidelity of the model includes effective

communication with students and stakeholders of color, and expectations must reflect the cultural values of the community (Vincent et al., 2015). Policies and procedures must have legitimate purpose within the setting. Expectations cannot be based on tradition or the status quo. Students must be taught through explicit instruction about expected school behavior (Bal, 2016). The foundation of discipline should be teaching social skills instead of defaulting to zero-tolerance policies (Bal, 2015; Banks & Obiakor, 2015). For example, the use of storytelling may explain why a behavior is not acceptable in school (Levenson et al., 2016).

The final foundational principle of CRPBIS that Levenson et al. (2016) suggested using data to ensure equity. This encourages schools to respond to behavior using an ethical framework. Teams should examine all tiers of the school-wide system specific to equity. School should develop consistent assessments, engaging a multitude of stakeholders including not-for-profit organizations, parents, politicians, local businesses, teachers and community centers. These assessments should focus on equity and drive the model so that it is making benchmarks and reaching the targeted goals (Banks & Obiakor, 2015).

Ladson-Billings (1995) defined CRP as the academic success, the cultural competency, and the critical consciousness of students. The researcher's qualitative study aimed to understand the indicators of CRP that brought success to students. The results indicate a correlation between the academic success of Pan African students and positive self-esteem. The participants included eight teachers who were considered successful with Pan African students. The study took place from 1992-1994 in Wisconsin. The teachers were chosen based on the recommendations of parents and

administrators. Indicators that defined success included a low number of students referred to the office as a result of discipline issues, a high score on standardized tests, and high attendance of the students that were enrolled in the teacher's class (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

The findings explained that the teachers who participated in this study had some understanding and taught students to code switch. Code switching is the ability to move seamlessly between two languages (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Moreover, the teacher did not see the students who exhibited high amounts of energy as a deficit. The teachers in the study used students with high energy as a vehicle to develop purpose in the students. Cultural consciousness was used to teach students to stand up to injustices and to develop the power of active citizenship. The Ladson-Billings (1995) study has been the baseline for many studies involving CRP. However, one limitation of the study was the lack of common practices of the teachers. As a result, no framework was established as an effective way to engage Pan African students. Ladson-Billings (1995) concluded that the teachers' successes were based on the fundamental doctrine of how teachers thought of themselves in relation to the students in their classes. The fluidity of the teacher-student relationships and a focus on a restorative model, instead of a deficit model, was imperative to the success of the Pan African students (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

According to Sugai et al.(2012), schools that lack a cultural response to teaching, lack of CRP, and lack of a cultural response to behavior risk disproportionality in discipline. Sugai et al. (2012) designed a study to evaluate the cultural relevance of the existing PBIS programs. The study used action research to evaluate the program. According to Sugai et al. (2012), action research is crucial to the success of the

implementation of cultural responsive programs. The importance of including Pan African students and their families in curriculum and pedagogy was based on the fundamental components of community, that is, language, socioeconomic status, and family structures (Sugai et al., 2012). The report developed by Sugai et al. (2012) used the foundational principles of PBIS. However, the shift from PBIS to CRPBIS included culturally responsive indicators. First, culture was defined, then there was a focus on problem behaviors. Next, there was a targeted response to discipline. Finally, there was a reflection on the strategy used, employing a cultural context. The results indicate that PBIS uses clear expectations, teaches expectations, and is a well-designed system for reinforcing positive behavior. Nevertheless, PBIS did not close the racial discipline gap for the Pan African students. Sugai et al. (2012) suggested that PBIS would be effective for Pan African students if the framework included a school environment that reflected the values of the local culture, including honoring historical figures and incorporating culturally relevant literature. It is important to note that Sugai et al. (2012) insisted that to close the racial discipline gap effectively, the model must evaluate cultural responsiveness. In addition, Sugai et al. (2012) suggested that the evaluation of any cultural competency data should be desegregated by racial subgroups (Sugai et al., 2012).

According to Bal (2016), the majority of PBIS research has been conducted in suburban schools district that do not have a diverse population of students. In these institutions, the culture, language, and values were similar among a large part of the faculty and students. CRPBIS holds the same ideology as PBIS (Bal, 2016). However, Vincent and Tobin (2011) argued that CRPBIS is more effective in serving all students—especially Pan African students. Cramer and Bennett (2015) suggested designing a

curriculum that represents the population of the students' increased academic success for Pan African students. Implementation of a diverse curriculum and positive reinforcement would develop purpose and a positive self-image in students (Cramer & Bennett, 2015). Studies indicate that when a school creates a diverse planning committee and a timeline, PBIS becomes a more useful tool (Green, 2009).

Banks and Obiakor (2015) conducted a study on how a school addressed the behaviors of Pan African students. Eastwood School (pseudonym) is located in a large metropolitan area. The problem identified in the study was the disproportionate number of Pan African students who were the recipients of exclusionary practices. The study examined the effects of PBIS on the suspension rates of the Pan African students at the Eastwood School. Essential questions were developed and posed, to 60 staff members, to explore the effects of CRPBIS upon cultural knowledge, self-awareness, and cultural relevance. Results show that the classrooms were not culturally neutral.

Overwhelmingly, Pan African students were given consequences for subjective offenses. However, White students were given consequences for objective offenses. The survey also revealed a strong need for the school administration to promote an agenda that would build cultural competency. Suggestions for next steps included cultural competency professional development, involvement of families in the revision of the code of conduct, and remodeling PBIS Tier 1 to bridge gaps between home and school (Banks & Obiakor, 2015).

Gregory et al. stated that "The most substantial discipline gap between Pan African and White students occur for reasons related to defiance, disrespect and uncooperative behavior" (p. 174). Building on the preponderance of their research

findings, Gregory et al. (2016) showed the overrepresentation of Pan African students who were subjected to exclusionary practices. Like many researchers before them, Gregory et al. (2016) found that the most substantial discipline gap between Pan African and White students occurred in the category of subjective discipline infractions of the discipline code such as defiance, disrespect, and unacceptable school behavior. The research was conducted over 2 years in five middle and high schools located in Virginia. Student enrollment in the schools studied ranged from 1,200 to 1,900. Racial-ethnic minority groups represented 71% of the student enrollment in the district. Of the participants in the study, 52% were female, 58% were Pan African, 31% were White, 9% were Latino, and 2% were Asian. Moreover, 13% of the students received free or reduced-fee lunches. Of the 97 teachers who participated in the PBIS training, 86% of completed the 2-year study. The findings showed that the teachers who participated in the training had 24% fewer discipline referrals of Pan African students than the group who did not participate in the training. The researchers concluded that the teachers needed tools to counter undesirable behaviors in the students, and the teachers needed to use exclusionary practices as a last resort (Gregory et al., 2016).

Restorative practices. CRPBIS moves discipline from the punitive approach of zero tolerance to a restorative approach (Bal, 2016). An essential factor to closing the racial discipline gap is for school districts to commit to a system that gives equal opportunities to all students (Dehlinger, 2008). According to Skiba and Losen (2016), suspensions and expulsions will decrease, especially for Pan African students, if the people responsible for discipline have a relationship with the students. Restorative

practice is a system that schools can use to strengthen relationships and build community (Payne & Welch, 2015; Skiba & Losen, 2016).

Some schools have replaced zero-tolerance policies with restorative practices (Skiba, 2013). Denver public schools saw a 47% decrease in suspensions after the implementation of restorative practices. The most significant subgroup affected by the decrease in suspension rates in the Denver Public Schools were Pan African students (Losen & Skiba, 2010).

Theoretical frameworks. CRT has helped this researcher understand the Pan African student experience in schools that served students from Pre-K through 12th grade. A study was conducted in the United States by Howard (2008) who used the principles of CRT to explain and understand the manner in which the *system* reacts to Pan African male students. The researcher explored stereotypes and microaggressions using a race-based epistemological approach. The sample size for Howard's qualitative study consisted of 10 Pan African males. The study was conducted in five high schools located in a large metropolitan area on the west coast of the United States during the 2005-2006 school year. The research questions focused on the underachievement of Pan African males, and it sought possible interventions that could enrich the academic experiences of Pan African males. The researcher used CRT's counter storytelling as a method to examine the lived experiences of the Pan African male students. Results indicate that all participants experienced the effects of negative stereotypes in their educational experience. Also, the participants discussed experiences in which educators had shown microaggressions. Not many studies have tried to understand the Pan African student

experience in their learning environment, and even fewer studies have used CRT as a philosophical platform (Howard, 2008).

RTT was birthed out of CRT, and it was also used to explain the experiences of Pan African students in schools. According to Welch and Payne (2010), RTT is the belief that when the number of Pan African students increased in a school, there was a heightened need for control—as a response to the anticipation of increased misbehavior. Welch and Payne (2010) conducted their study by assessing RTT and social control. Using data from the National Study of Delinquent Prevention in Schools, the researchers included participants from 294 public schools. The study included private and Catholic schools; however, the researchers decided not to include those schools in the data because the perception of disciplinary actions differed in the nonpublic schools.

The Welch and Payne (2010) research included principal, teacher, and student questionnaires. The study posed the following research questions (a) does the racial composite of students have an influence on discipline in schools, and (b) do poor students decrease the prevalence of delinquent behavior and drug use? The findings indicate that a school that increased its proportion of Pan African students increased the number of harsher consequences it distributed. Also, evidence showed a decrease in the use of restorative forms of discipline and a decrease in milder forms of disciplinary interventions such as oral reprimands or community service (Welch & Payne, 2010).

In addition, the foundation of RTT is the notion that Pan African students (solely as a result of being Pan African) bring a threat to a school that forces school leaders to put measurements into place that examine policies and practices related to discipline. The unique aspect of the Welch and Payne (2010) study was the use of RTT to measure

social control. One limitation of the study was that it did not explore if Pan African students received harsher consequences than White students within a school or district (Welch & Payne, 2010).

Teacher training in cultural competency rooted in classroom management is a tool that may address issues of disparities in the classroom (Gregory et al., 2010; Skiba et al., 2002). According to Skiba et al. (2002; 2011), teachers feel that classroom management is the area that teachers are least prepared for when entering the classroom. According to Miley (2010), Public Agenda 805 surveyed educators, and 77% indicated that behavioral problems in the classroom negatively affected the teaching-learning process. Miley (2010) explained that 17% of teachers stated that the loss of instructional time could be as high as 4 hours a week, while 19% expressed between 3 to 4 hours of lost classroom time (Miley, 2010). Trends in disciplinary disproportionality can be linked to the mistrust between educators and students, which can be the result of a lack of cultural sensitivity, implicit bias, and racial tension (Gregory et al., 2016).

Kunesh and Noltemeyer (2015) explored disciplinary disproportionality, stereotypes, and pre-service teacher expectations about Pan African male behavior. The study looked at four areas: (a) attributes of racial bias, (b) the acknowledgments of stereotypes, (c) implicit bias, and (d) societal norms that encourage Americans to cover racial bias. Participants included undergraduate students who majored in education while being enrolled in a public university in the Midwest. All participants worked in an urban school as student teachers. Many of the participants identified as being White (90%) and being a woman (76%). Kunesh and Noltemeyer looked at the difference between interpretations of the students' behavior based on the students' races, and how the

teachers' beliefs affected their response to student behavior based on the students' races. The results suggested that the teachers showed implicit bias and explicit bias toward Pan African students at higher rates than they did toward the White students. The findings also concluded that the teachers believed that the Pan African students would repeat negative behavior more often than the White students—even if both races of students displayed an identical initial behavior. Ergo, implicit bias and stereotypes increased the likelihood of disproportionality in Pan African student discipline referrals (Kunesh & Noltemeyer, 2015).

The research conducted by Kunesh and Noltemeyer (2015) aligned with other studies in the field as it measured implicit bias and stereotypes among individuals who were preparing to enter into the field of education. One limitation of this study was that the participants were college students who spent a limited amount of time in urban schools districts. The researchers suggested that a change in geographic location may have given the participants a different perspective. Kunesh and Noltemeyer (2015) recommended future research could replicate the study with the same participants on the anniversary of the participants' teaching career.

There are two kinds of bias that educators have to confront (Fergus, 2016). The first is implicit bias, which is bias that individuals may not be aware of and, therefore, they are not seen by an individual. Implicit bias is based on exposure. It is an unforeseen bias that works at the unconscious level. In contrast, explicit bias works on the conscious level. Unlike implicit bias, individuals are aware that explicit bias exists (Boyson, 2010). Addressing bias is a multistep process. First, educators must recognize that they have a

bias. Then, educators must work on rehabilitating themselves. Replacing bias is imperative because bias can lead to disparities in discipline referrals (Fergus, 2016).

The Gregory et al. (2010) study findings concluded that as a result of bias, teachers' punitive consequences were given to Pan African students at a higher rate—even when students of other races participated in the same undesirable behaviors. Skiba and Losen (2016) argued that teacher bias can lead to disparities in suspension rates.

Chapter Summary

Studies have shown a correlation between suspension rates, low academic performance, and lower scores on standardized tests (Arcia, 2007; Gregory et al., 2016; Losen & Skiba, 2010). Studies have also found that there is a relationship between academic instruction and school success, highlighting the concern over disproportionate disciplining (Losen & Skiba, 2010; Miley, 2010).

Arcia (2007) stated that “Students who received the highest number of days of suspensions had lower achievement levels than students who receive fewer or no suspensions” (p. 457). As a result of suspensions, students have missed instructional time, and frequent use of out-of-school suspensions have also reduced students' opportunity to learn (Losen & Skiba, 2010). According to Gregory et al. (2016) increasing time in classroom instruction and decreasing suspensions can modify the trajectory of student failure. Students who lose instructional time are subject to lower academic performance, which could lead to an increased dropout rate.

Research regarding the suspension rates of Pan Africans, who are being suspended at higher rates than other students, are linked to ideas such as the school-to-prison pipeline. Zero-tolerance policies have increased exclusionary discipline

consequences and increased entrance into prison (Fergus, 2016; Quinlan, 2016). According to Payne and Welch (2010), creating an intervention process, such as CRPBIS, prior to suspension, will decrease suspension rates of Pan African students while allowing the students to develop social skills. Interventions include conferences, empowerment programs, community-school connections, and teacher training before defaulting to suspensions. This current study examined the effects of CRPBIS on the racial discipline gap.

Miley (2010) opined that behavior is a manner of one's beliefs and expectations. It is crucial for educators and creators of educational policy to understand the culture and the experiences of Pan African students in order to eliminate the misinterpretation of unacceptable behavior (Miley, 2010). "Social behavior of at-risk Pan African students are cultural influences, therefore, it is critical that CRPBIS and multicultural perspectives be infused to increase school success and life choices both academically, and socially, for students" (Miley, 2010, p. 17). Very few school systems implement CRPBIS, and this lack of implementation may be a major reason for the disparities in disciplinary consequences called the racial discipline gap (Swain-Bradway et al., 2014).

Quinlan (2016) stated "For some 20 years, numerous policymakers responded to concerns about school safety and disruption with a 'get tough' philosophy relying upon zero-tolerance policies and frequent out-of-school suspensions and expulsions" (Skiba & Losen, 2016, p. 4). Since 1973, coinciding with these get tough initiatives, there has been a remarkable increase in the racial discipline gap. The largest disparities in suspension rates have been between Pan African students and their White counterparts (Quinlan, 2016). According to Fergus (2016), disproportionality in the racial suspension gap is

driven by failed approaches to behavioral management, zero-tolerance policies, implicit bias, lower expectations for Pan African students, and stereotypes of Pan African students.

Chapter 3: Research Design Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the research design and methodology used in this study. The participants consisted of middle school students from an urban school district located in New York State. Data analyses were conducted mainly using the chi-square test of independence. This study relied on ex post facto data. The researcher used a casual comparative design and investigated the relationship between the independent and dependent variables on a set of archival data. Causal-comparative research attempts to determine the cause or consequences of differences that already exist between or among groups of individuals. In this design, the participants were not randomly assigned to groups (Creswell, 2017).

School suspensions have disastrous consequences for all students, but especially for Pan African students, which is due to institutional racism and educator bias (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Losen & Skiba, 2010; Tyson, 2012). As a result of institutional racism and bias, Pan African students are suspended at a disproportionate rate when compared to Asian, Latino, and White students. In addition, stereotypes and implicit bias can develop negative implications about individuals from different ethnic backgrounds (Xie, 2015). According to Xie (2015), the majority of North Americans show a negative bias toward Pan African students and a positive bias toward White students. When discussing implicit bias, it is important to note that 85% of teachers in the United States are White (Fergus, 2016). This study opens the possibility to the understanding that teacher bias

can affect student learning (Xie, 2015). It is important to understand that teachers were the major distributors of the ODRs that lead to school suspensions (Skiba et al, 2011a).

During the 2011-2012 school years, approximately 3.5 million students were suspended from public schools in the United States, resulting in 18 million days of lost instruction (Losen et al., 2015). Loss of instruction is toxic to the global focus on developing a path to graduation (Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2013). Of the 3.5 million students suspended, a highly disproportionate rate of suspensions (23.2%) were assigned to Pan African students who made up 7.8% of the population of the public school students.

A study conducted by Losen and Skiba (2010) on middle schools located in 18 major cities throughout the United States looked at suspension rates during the 2005-2006 school year. The study showed disproportionality in the suspension rates of Pan African students when compared to Asian, Latino, and White students (Losen & Skiba, 2010). According to Swain-Bradway et al. (2014), CRPBIS were designed to deconstruct institutional racism and bias by constructing a concerted scholarly climate and activities that would clarify norms of social behavior in Pan African students therefore reducing suspension rates (Banks & Obiakor, 2015). Equipping teachers with culturally responsive classroom management strategies, developing school-wide norms, and clarifying expectations may be steps in the right direction in closing the racial suspension gap (Monroe, 2005; Vincent et al., 2015).

One of the most popular behavioral modification tools adopted by schools is PBIS, which is a multitiered model that uses preventive strategies to counter undesirable behavior (Vincent & Tobin, 2011). Although, schools that have utilized PBIS saw a

decrease in the suspension rates of Pan African students, it has not significantly decreased the gap between the rates of suspension between Pan African students and Asian, Latino, and White students (Bal et al., 2012). While many behavioral interventions have been implemented in public schools, there has been limited research to support any intervention that decreases the disproportionality in the racial discipline gap. This researcher examined the effects of CRPBIS (independent variable) on suspension rates (dependent variable).

Research Questions

The results of this study will encourage policymakers, school district leaders, and school building administrators to seek culturally relevant interventions with the goal of closing the racial suspension gap. The following research questions guided the study:

1. Were eighth-grade Pan African students suspended at a disproportionate rate compared to Asian, Latino, and White students between the 2015 and 2017 school years in an urban school district?
2. Is there a statistically significant difference in the suspension rates of eighth-grade Pan African students compared to Asian, Latino, and White students who attended a school that implemented CRPBIS and the schools that did not implement CRPBIS?
3. Does the implementation of CRPBIS narrow the racial suspension gap of Pan African students compared to Asian, Latino, and White students when they transition from the seventh grade to the eighth grade?

Research Context

The data consisted of suspension rates desegregated by race and ethnicity that determined the effectiveness of CRPBIS on the racial suspension gap. The test results analyzed two cohorts of students who were in the seventh and eighth grades during the 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 school years. The retrospective data was retrieved from eSchool Plus, which is a district-wide database system. The data collected included suspension rates by race and the percentage rates by cohort. Data collection began in March 2018, and it was completed in June 2018. The data collected was completed by an employee of the data department within the district of the schools that were studied.

This study was conducted in an urban school district located in the Northeastern United States. At the time of the study, the district consisted of almost 40 schools that provided educational services to more than 25,000 students (NYSED, 2016). The teaching staff members in this district were required to have a state-certified license. The district had been identified as a high-needs district with almost 80% of the students eligible for a free and reduced-fee lunch (NYSED, 2016). Table 3.1 presents the overall enrollment in the district studied by race and ethnicity during the 2015-2016 school year.

Table 3.1

Participating District's Estimated Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity	Number Enrolled	Percentage Enrolled
Native	91	0.3
Asian	1,552	5.4
Latino	16,214	56.1
Pan African	6,146	21.3
White	4,894	16.9
Multiracial	18	0.1

The district suspension rates increased 14% from 2009 through 2013. According to the Office of Civil Rights Data Collection Survey for the year 2013, 6.3% of the total population of the students received suspensions (CRDC, 2014). Although Pan African students represented 20.8% of the district’s population, the suspension rate for that subgroup was 44%. Pan African students were the only racial subgroup in this district that received suspensions at a significantly disproportionate rate (CRDC, 2014).

The district middle schools that participated in this study provided educational services to 1,063 students during the 2015-2016 school year. During the 2016-2017 school year, 1,087 students received educational services. Table 3.2 presents the enrollment of the students represented in the schools that were studied by race and ethnicity during the 2015-2016 school year. Table 3.3 presents the enrollment of students represented in the schools being studied by race and ethnicity during the 2016 – 2017.

Table 3.2

Participating Schools Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity Representing the 2015-2016 School Year

Race/Ethnicity	Number Enrolled	Percentage Enrolled
Native	4	0.0
Asian	102	4.3
Latino	1,196	49.0
Pan African	678	25.3
White	645	20.3
Multiracial	30	1.0

Table 3.3

Participating Schools Enrollment by Race/ Ethnicity representing the 2016-2017.

Race/ Ethnicity	Number Enrolled	Percentage Enrolled
Native	4	0.0
Asian	114	6.7
Latino	1,268	51.3
Pan African	558	23.3
White	627	18.7
Multiracial	30	1.0

Research Participants

Three middle schools were identified for participation in this study. All the middle schools were in the same district. In order to protect the identity of the school, each school received a pseudonym. The schools involved in this study are identified as Rockport Middle School, Trudy Academy of Leadership, and King Academy. There were two groups of students participating in this study. Group A consisted of students who had received the CRPBIS intervention, and Group B consisted of students who did not receive the CRPBIS intervention. The participants in this study were seventh- and eighth-grade middle school students who received a suspension(s) anytime during the 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 school years and who attended the same school in both the seventh and eighth grades. The students who were held over in the seventh or eighth grade did not participate in this study.

Archival data was collected on the participating schools, which included suspension rates by race, ethnicity, gender, age, school enrollment, and cohort. Consents

were obtained from the school district to access, use, and analyze data. However, individual consents from students were not necessary because the data was archival. In order to protect the anonymity of students, the data was coded. Identification numbers were assigned to participants, and due to the retrospective nature of this study, the researcher did not have any interactions with the participants. The data is being kept in a password-protected file on the researcher's computer, and it will be destroyed 3 years after publication of this work.

Instruments Used in Data Collection

The archival data was collected from the USDOE Office of Civil Rights Data Collection Discipline Reports, and the eSchoolPlus database. The eSchoolPlus database is a software program that permits schools to monitor reports. This system is shared with schools and personnel throughout the district. This system also generates suspension letters, transcripts, report cards, attendance reports, failure records, and grade-point averages.

Data collection included students' grades, suspension rates by race and ethnicity, and demographics from the schools studied. The four data categories for the school report cards are profile data, assessment data, accountability data, and outcomes (CRDC, 2014). The USDOE Office of Civil Rights collects data from public schools throughout the nation. The data includes, but is not limited to, school enrollment, state assessments, courses offered, discipline records, and school financial records. The district provided data in three different sets: (a) student identification numbers, (b) number of suspensions, and (c) student demographics (age, birthday, gender).

Research variables. The dependent variable (DV) is the outcome variable whose value was determined by other factors or phenomenon. For the purpose of this study, one dependent variable, suspension rate, was identified. The suspension rate was measured dichotomously, that is, students who had no suspensions within a given school year would receive a score of zero (0) in this category. Therefore, the DV in this study should be considered a nominal variable.

The independent variables (IVs) measure factors or phenomenon that contribute to the change of the dependent variable. For the purpose of this study, the independent variables are the demographic variables of the students. The demographic variables consisted of students' gender, race, year of attendance, and school of origin (i.e., the treatment group vs. the control group). Therefore, all of the IVs in this study should also be considered nominal variables.

Data analysis. Descriptive analysis of the categorical study variables, using cross tabulation, enabled the identification and measurement of the occurrences among one or more of the data sets such as race, ethnicity, grade level, age, and gender (Huck, 2012). The descriptive analysis used in this study was the chi-square. The chi-square analysis is a parametric assessment as the level of measurement (Vogt & Johnson, 2011). Descriptive statistics are reported to capture the characteristics of the participants as well as the variables of interest. Frequencies and percentages are reported for nominal variables such as gender, race, and suspension rate. Given that both the independent and dependent variables were categorical, the chi-square test of independence was utilized to analyze whether significant differences existed between the groups of variables for Research Question 1 (RQ1), and Research Question 2 (RQ2). Cramer's V is reported as

an indication of the magnitude of such differences. For Research Question 3 (RQ3), McNemar's test was utilized because suspension rates were obtained twice (i.e., once for seventh grade and once for eighth grade) on the same group of students, which made it a repeated measure. All the analyses were conducted using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, Version 19.0). The goal of this study was to determine whether a relationship exists between CRPBIS and the suspension rates of Pan African, Asian, Latino, and White students and the impact of the intervention on the racial suspension gap.

Summary

School suspensions have severe consequences for all students, but especially for Pan African students, which is due to institutional racism and educator bias (Fenning & Rose, 2007). As a result, there is a disproportionate rate of Pan African student suspensions when compared to Latino, Asian, and White students. School districts have utilized different tools to address behavior in the hopes of decreasing or eradicating student suspensions and reducing the racial suspension gap. It is important to note that even when suspension rates are decreased across all racial and ethnic groups, there still exists a racial suspension gap.

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of the implementation of CRPBIS on middle school students to reduce suspensions and close the racial suspension gap. Students who received CRPBIS were compared with students who did not receive those supports. Archival data was collected and analyzed across the ethnic groups to answer the research questions.

The significance of this study is to examine a tool that school districts can use to reduce the racial suspension gap (Bal et al., 2012). In addition, this study explains how institutional racism and implicit bias impacts the racial discipline gap. Policymakers can utilize this study to explore the importance of culturally relevant pedagogy and disciplinary practices in urban school districts. Studies have shown the effectiveness of the use of PBIS on overall school discipline. However, few schools have implemented the impact of CRPBIS on the racial suspension gap. CRPBIS was chosen by this researcher because it was grounded in culturally responsive education and pedagogy. This study explored cultural responsiveness as an effective intervention in reducing the racial discipline gap.

Chapter 4: Results

Chapter 4 presents the findings in accordance with the research design described in Chapter 3. The results were analyzed in an effort to answer the research questions, which are restated in this chapter. An analysis of all data is presented in the data analysis and findings section of this chapter. This chapter concludes with a summary of the results, and it sets the stage for a thorough discussion of the findings in Chapter 5.

The researcher for this retrospective quasi-experimental research gathered data from three schools located in an urban school district. All the schools in the study were middle schools housing students in the seventh and eighth grades. Each school was given a pseudonym (Rockport School, King Middle School, and Trudy Leadership Academy). The students who attended the Rockport School served as the treatment group because they received the intervention. Students who attended King Middle School and Trudy Leadership Academy served as the control group because they did not receive the intervention.

The overarching goal of this study was to examine the influence of race on students' suspension rates and whether the implementation of CRPBIS reduces those suspension rates. Specifically, the study first examined whether Pan African students had a higher suspension rate when compared to other racial groups. Secondly, the study disaggregated the data by race and explored the difference, if any, of suspension rates between the schools that implemented CRPBIS and the schools that did not implement such intervention strategy. Finally, the study investigated whether the implementation of

CRPBIS in the seventh grade decreases the suspension rate when the same group of students enter eighth grade.

The data revealed 195 incidents, over 3 years, that led to suspensions. Some students were involved in multiple incidents, which led to multiple suspensions; therefore, the total number of students suspended was less than 195. The study sought to answer three research questions. The statistical design that was utilized is explained later in this chapter.

Research Questions

The following research questions were designed to measure the impact of CRPBIS:

1. Were eighth-grade Pan African students suspended at a disproportionate rate compared to Asian, Latino, and White students between the 2015 and 2017 school years in an urban school district?
2. Is there a statistically significant difference in the suspension rates of eighth-grade Pan African students compared to Asian, Latino, and White students who attended a school that implemented CRPBIS and the schools that did not implement CRPBIS?
3. Does the implementation of CRPBIS narrow the racial suspension gap of Pan African students compared to Asian, Latino, and White students when they transition from the seventh grade to the eighth grade?

Data Analysis and Findings

The SPSS was applied to analyze archival data, and it provided summary values where applicable (George & Mallery, 2003). Inferential statistics were used to draw

conclusions from the data. Suspension rates by ethnicity and race across group types (treatment and control) were analyzed. Additionally, the racial suspension gaps of students in the control group were similarly quantified. Demographic data was prepared using frequency statistics. Lastly, for each hypothesis, a nonparametric test was utilized.

In order to ensure that the variables of interest met appropriate statistical assumptions, data hygiene and data screening were applied. Therefore, the experiment followed analytic strategies that were aligned in such a way that the variables were first assessed for missing data. Students who did not complete the seventh and eighth grades consecutively in the same school were excluded from the sample. For example, if a student attended Rockport Middle School in the seventh grade and then transferred to King Academy in the eighth grade, that student was removed from the data set as a requirement for eligibility was attending the same school in both the seventh and eighth grades.

As previously mentioned, archival data was collected from the USDOE Office of Civil Rights Data Collection Discipline Reports, and the eSchoolPlus database. Students from three urban middle schools from the same district located in the Northeast region of the United States were included in this study. The treatment group included one school that implemented CRPBIS, and the control group included the remaining two schools that did not implement CRPBIS. The participants included all of the students who entered eighth grade in school years 2015-2016 and 2016-2017. Data regarding the number of suspensions each student received during their seventh and eighth grades were collected.

Descriptive statistics for the suspension data. Among the 541 participants, 220 were affiliated with the school that implemented CRPBIS, and 321 were affiliated with

schools that did not implement CRPBIS. Table 4.1 summarizes the demographic characteristics of the participants of Cohort 1, in the treatment group, as well as the control group, respectively. Within the treatment group, 118 (53.6%) students were male and 102 were female (46.4%). Over half of those students were identified as Latino (55%), followed by Pan African (23.2%), White (14.5%), and Asian (7.3%). Within the control group, 151 (47%) students were male and 170 were female (53%). Again, about half of those students were identified as Latino (47.7%), followed by Pan African (25.9%), White (21.5%), and Asian (5%). Overall, the two groups did not differ significantly in terms of gender distribution $\chi^2(1) = 2.272, p = .132$, nor did they differ significantly regarding distribution of race $\chi^2(3) = 6.297, p = .098$. Table 4.1 displays the demographic characteristics of participants for Cohort 1.

Table 4.1.

Demographic Characteristics of Participants of Cohort 1

	Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Treatment Group N = 321	Gender	Male	118	53.6
		Female	102	46.4
	Race	White	32	14.5
		Pan African	51	23.2
		Asian	16	7.3
Control Group N = 220	Gender	Latino	121	55.0
		Male	151	47.0
	Race	Female	170	53.0
		White	69	21.5
		Pan African	83	25.9
		Asian	16	5.0
		Latino	153	47.7

For Cohort 2, among the 508 participants, 273 were affiliated with the school that implemented CRPBIS, and 235 were affiliated with schools that did not implement

CRPBIS. Table 4.2 summarizes the demographic characteristics of the participants in the treatment group, as well as the control group, respectively. Within the treatment group, 138 (50.5%) students were male and 135 were female (49.5%). This Group ($N = 273$) consisted of 49.5% Latino students, 29.7% Pan African students, 15% White students, and 5.9% Asian students. Within the control group, 112 (47.7%) students were male and 123 were female (52.3%). This group was composed of 48.9% Latino students, 23.4% Pan African students, 23% White students, and 4.7% Asian students. Overall, the two groups, again, did not differ significantly in terms of gender distribution $\chi^2(1) = .422, p = .516$, nor did they differ significantly regarding distribution of race $\chi^2(3) = 6.469, p = .091$. Table 4.2 displays the demographic characteristics of the participants for Cohort 2.

Table 4.2

Demographic Characteristics of Participants for Cohort 2

	Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Treatment Group $N = 273$	Gender	Male	138	50.5
		Female	135	49.5
	Race	White	41	15
		Pan African	81	29.7
		Asian	16	5.9
Control Group $N = 235$	Gender	Latino	135	49.5
		Male	112	47.7
	Race	Female	123	52.3
		White	54	23.0
		Pan African	55	23.4
		Asian	11	4.7
		Latino	115	48.9

It is important to note that for Cohorts 1 and 2, the suspension type in both the treatment and control groups varied, with the majority of the suspensions being for

disruptive behavior ($n = 128$, 65.6%). Furthermore, the largest student ethnic population within both groups was Pan African ($n = 83$, 42.6%) and Latino ($n = 103$, 52.8%).

Chi-square test of independence. The chi-square test is a nonparametric test used to compare differences of distributions on interval, ratio, or nominal scales between two or more groups. This is achieved by examining the discrepancy between the observed frequency distribution and the expected frequency distribution of the variable of interest. Unlike parametric statistics, such as the t test, the chi-square test “is sensitive to any kind of difference between two distributions – central tendency, variability, or shape” (Diekhoff, 1996, p. 157). Therefore, no statistical assumptions about the aforementioned parameters of the data needed to be met in order for the test to be used appropriately. Moreover, chi-square is a statistical test for categorical data. In this study, chi-square was used as a test of independence. The test analyzed if there was a “statistical difference between the observed (actual) frequencies and the expected (or hypothesized, given the null hypothesis) frequencies of variables presented in the cross-tabulation table” (Vogt & Johnson, 2011, p. 61). However, due to the nature of the chi-square test, it is commonly accepted that when the expected frequency is small (typically less than 5), the Fisher’s exact test is used instead (Diekhoff, 1996; McDonald, 2009). The Fisher exact test explains the relationship between two nominal variables when the data is too small to have confidence in the chi-square test (Vogt & Johnson, 2011).

While chi-square test can be used to examine if the significant difference of distributions exists between two or more groups, the Cramer’s V statistic is typically used to evaluate the magnitude of such difference. Cramer’s V allows for meaningful comparisons of chi-square values from tables with different sample sizes (Vogt &

Johnson, 2011). Therefore, for the purpose of this study, the Cramer's V was reported when a significant difference was identified by the chi-square test.

McNemar's test. The chi-square test is used to compare nominal data between different groups, but it is inappropriate to utilize a chi-square test when dealing with repeated measures or a set of paired data (e.g., pretest scores vs. posttest scores). Instead, the McNemar's test is recommended as an alternative by researchers (Adedokun & Burgess, 2011). A McNemar's test was used for the data that were dependent and related (Vogt & Johnson, 2011). Therefore, for the purpose of this study, RQ1 and RQ2 are addressed by the chi-square test, whereas RQ3 is addressed by McNemar's test. In RQ3, this researcher was specifically looking at the suspension rates of students in the seventh grade (pretest) and students in the eighth grade (posttest). Fisher's exact test was used when small expected frequencies occurred in the chi-square test. The Cramer's V statistics are reported for significant findings in the chi-square test

RQ 1 findings. Were eighth-grade Pan African students suspended at a disproportionate rate compared to Asian, Latino, and White students between the 2015 and 2017 school years in an urban school district?

The chi-square test examined the suspension rates of students among different racial groups. Table 4.3 presents the suspension rates of students in Cohort 1 across different races and ethnicities for both the treatment and control group. **Figure 4.1 represents the suspension rates organized by race and ethnicity for Cohort 1, treatment group.** Within the treatment group, altogether, 14 students in the seventh grade were suspended (6.4%; $N = 220$). Of those, eight students (15.7%) were Pan African ($N = 51$), and six students (5%) were Latino ($N = 121$). No White or Asian students in the

treatment group were suspended during the seventh grade; such a difference in suspension rates was statistically significant ($P = .02$, Fisher's exact test). Within the treatment group, altogether, six students in the eighth grade were suspended (2.7%; $N = 220$). Regarding the eighth-grade students in the treatment group, three Pan African students (5.9%, $N = 51$) received suspension, followed by two Latino students (1.7%, $N = 121$), one White student (3.1%, $N = 32$), and no Asian students. Such difference in suspension rates was not statistically significant ($p = .411$, Fisher's exact test).

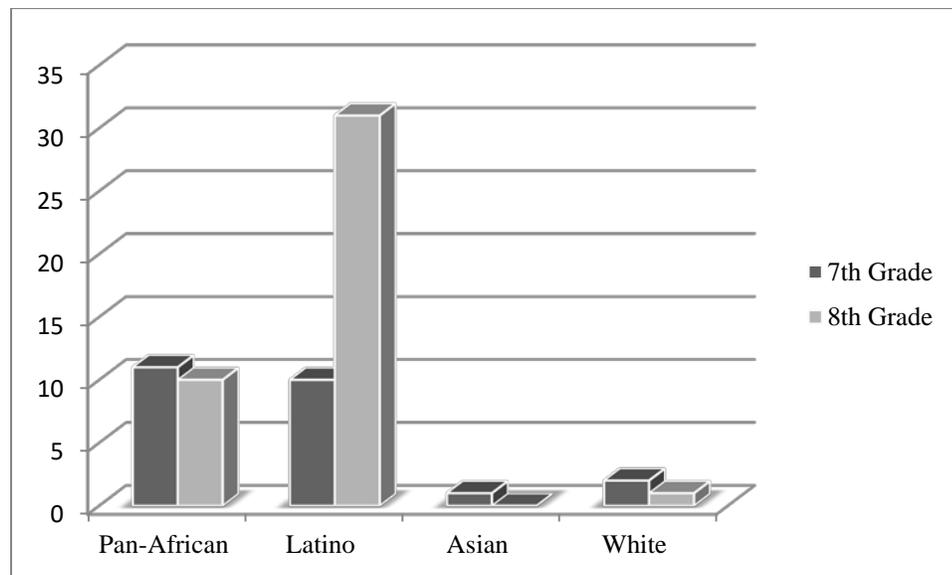


Figure 4.1. Number of suspensions distributed to seventh- and eighth-grade students in the treatment group of Cohort 1 across all races and ethnicities (Pan African, Latino, Asian, and White).

Figure 4.2 represents the suspension rates organized by race and ethnicity for Cohort 1, control group. Regarding the control group, altogether, 19 students in the seventh grade were suspended (5.9%; $N = 321$). Of those, 11 students (13.3%) were Pan African ($N = 83$), and eight students (5.2%) were Latino ($N = 153$). Again, no White or Asian students in the control group received suspensions during the seventh grade. Such

difference in suspension rates is statistically significant ($P = .004$, Fisher's exact test). By the time of the completion of their eighth grade for students in the control group, 24 students were suspended (7.5%; $N = 321$). There were still 11 Pan African students (13.3%, $N = 83$) who received suspensions, followed by 10 Latino students (6.5%, $N = 153$), two Asian students (12.5%, $N = 16$), and one White student (1.4%, $N = 69$). Such difference in suspension rates is statistically significant ($p = .025$, Fisher's exact test).

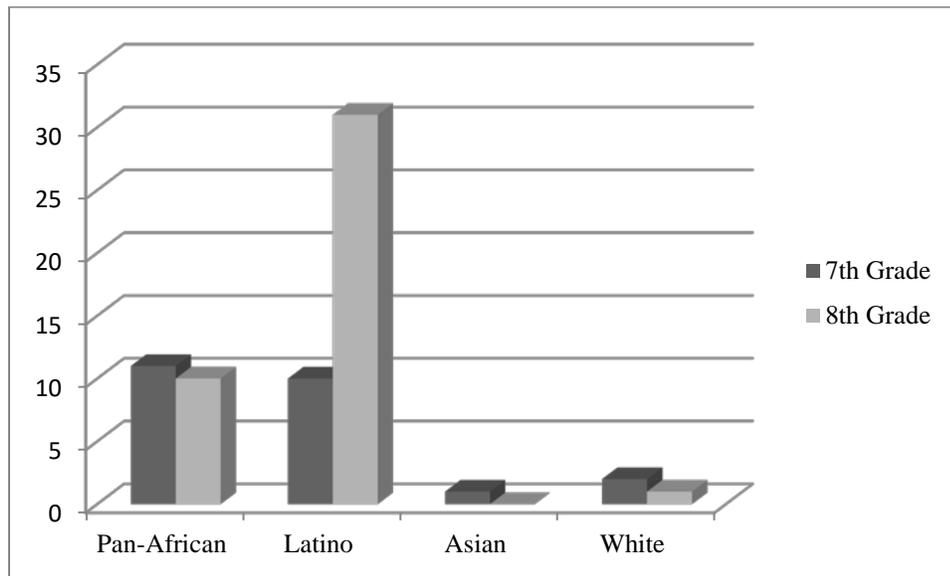


Figure 4.2. Number of suspensions distributed to seventh- and eighth-grade students in the control group of Cohort 1 across all races and ethnicities (Pan African, Latino, Asian, and White).

In sum, the suspension rate of the seventh-grade students in both the treatment and control group differed significantly across all the racial groups in that Pan African students received more suspensions than students from other racial groups. When those students entered eighth grade, a significant difference continued in the control group, but there was no longer a significant difference in the treatment group. This suggests that treatment had a possible effect on suspension rates for the treatment group, which will be

discussed in detail later in this chapter. Table 4.3 displays the suspension rate distribution of eighth-grade students by race in Cohort 1.

Table 4.3

Suspension Distribution of Cohort 1 by Race

	Race	Seventh Grade		Eighth Grade	
		Suspension Rates (%)	Number of Suspensions	Suspension Rates (%)	Number of Suspension
Treatment Group N = 220	Pan African	15.7	8	5.9	3
	Latino	5.0	6	1.7	2
	Asian	0.0	0	0.0	0
	White	0.0	0	3.1	1
	Total	20.7	14	10.7	6
Control Group N = 321	Pan African	13.3	11	13.3	11
	Latino	5.2	8	6.5	10
	Asian	0.0	0	12.5	2
	White	0.0	0	1.4	1
	Total	18.5	19	33.7	24

For Cohort 2, Table 4.4 presents the suspension rates of students across different races and ethnicities in Cohort 2 for both the treatment and control groups. **Figure 4.3 represents the suspension rates organized by race and ethnicity for Cohort 2, treatment group.** Within treatment Group 5, students were suspended in the seventh grade ($N = 273$). Of those students, three were Latino students (2.2%, $N = 135$), and two were White students (4.9%, $N = 41$). None of the Pan African or Asian students were suspended in this year. The difference in suspension rates across all the racial groups was therefore not statistically significant ($p = .223$, Fisher's exact test). By the time the students in the treatment group completed the eighth grade ($N = 273$), only one Latino student (0.7%; $N = 135$) received a suspension. Therefore, there was no difference in suspension rates across students of different races in the treatment group. Overall, the suspension rates of

the different racial groups in the treatment group did not differ significantly. In fact, very few students in this group received suspensions during their seventh and eighth grades.

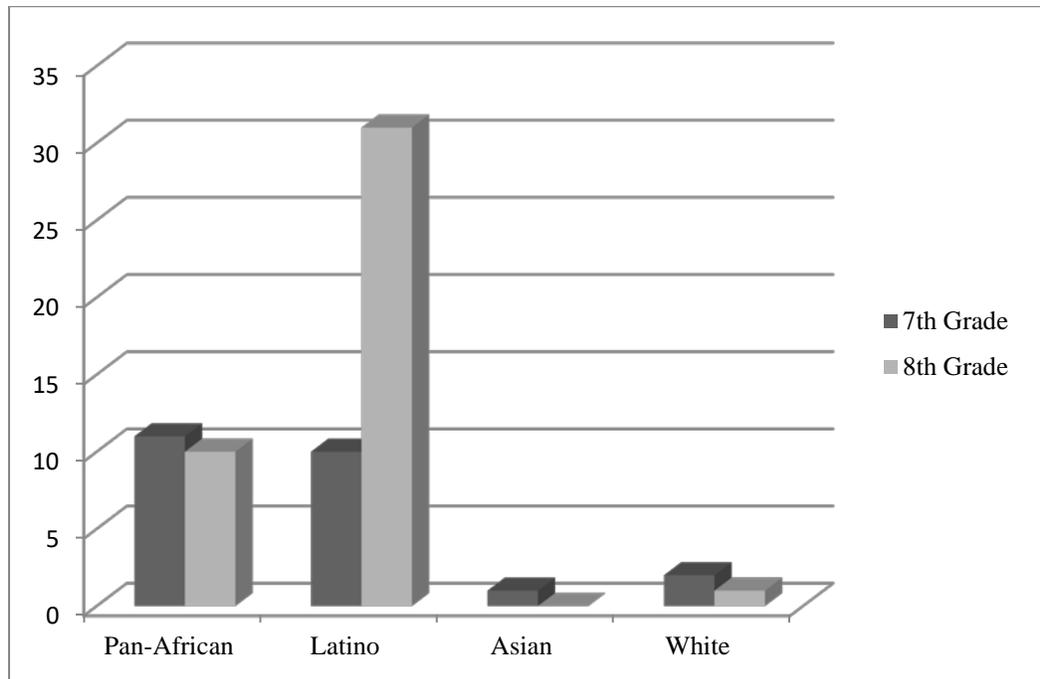


Figure 4.3. Number of suspensions distributed to seventh- and eighth-grade students in the treatment group of Cohort 2 across all races and ethnicities (Pan African, Latino, Asian, and White).

Figure 4.4 represents the suspension rates organized by race and ethnicity for Cohort 2, control group. Regarding the control group, altogether, 24 students in the seventh grade ($N = 235$) were suspended. Of those, 11 students were Pan African (20%; $N = 55$), 10 students were Latino (8.7%; $N = 115$), two students were White (3.7%; $N = 54$), and one student was Asian (9.1%; $N = 11$). The difference in suspension rates across all the racial groups was statistically significant ($P = .037$, Fisher's exact test). By the time the students in this group completed their eighth grade, 42 students were suspended (17.8; $N = 235$). It is important to note that no Asian or White students received

suspensions, but 10 Pan African students (18.2%; $N = 55$) and 31 Latino students (27%: $N = 115$) received suspensions.

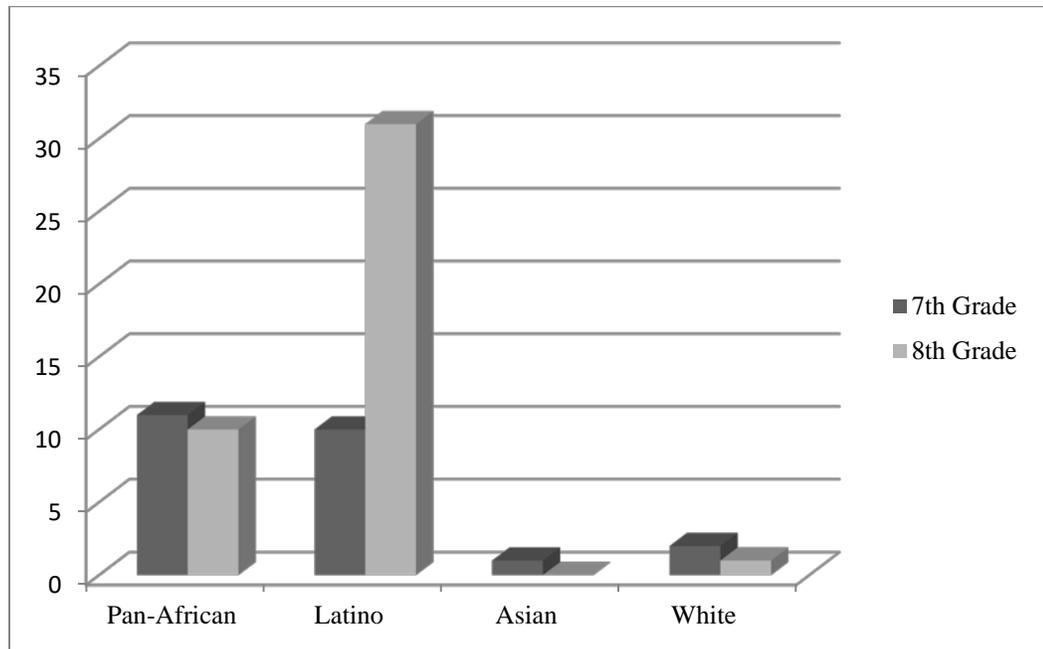


Figure 4.4. Number of suspensions distributed to seventh- and eighth-grade students in the control group of Cohort 2 across all races and ethnicities (Pan African, Latino, Asian, and White).

Such difference in suspension rates was, again, statistically significant ($p < .001$, Fisher's exact test). Therefore, the suspension rates of different racial groups in the control group were significantly different for both the seventh and eighth grades.

Table 4.4 displays the suspension rate distribution of eighth-grade students by race in Cohort 2.

Table 4.4

Suspension Distribution of Cohort 2 by Race

	Race	Seventh Grade		Eighth Grade	
		Suspension Rates (%)	Number of Suspensions	Suspension Rates (%)	Race
Treatment Group N = 272	Pan African	0.0	0	0.0	0
	Latino	2.2	3	0.7	1
	Asian	0.0	0	0.0	0
	White	4.9	2	0.0	0
	Total	7.1	5	0.7	1
Control Group N = 235	Pan African	20.0	11	18.2	10
	Latino	8.7	10	27.0	31
	Asian	9.1	1	0.0	0
	White	3.7	2	0.0	1
	Total	41.5	24	45.2	42

RQ 2 findings. Is there a statistically significant difference in the suspension rates of eighth-grade Pan African students compared to Asian, Latino, and White students who attended a school that implemented CRPBIS and the schools that did not implement CRPBIS?

The second research question investigated the difference in suspension rates between the treatment and the control group of students. As previously mentioned in Cohort 1, 14 students (6.4%, $N = 220$) in the treatment group received suspensions during their seventh grade, compared to 19 students (5.9%, $N = 321$) in the control group. The difference in suspension rates was not statistically significant $\chi^2(1) = .832, p = .856$. However, during their eighth-grade year, six students (2.7%, $N = 220$) in the treatment group received suspensions, and 24 students (7.5%, $N = 321$) in the control group received suspension. Such a difference was statistically significant $\chi^2(1) = 5.622, p = .021$, but the magnitude of difference was considered weak (Cramer's $V = .102$).

For Cohort 2, altogether, 24 students (10.2%; $N = 235$) in the control group were suspended during the seventh grade, compared to five students (1.8%; $N = 273$) in the treatment group. However, during their eighth-grade year, one student (0.4; $N = 273$) in the control group received a suspension, and 41 students (17.4%; 235) in the control group were suspended. Therefore, the difference in suspension rates between eighth graders of the treatment and the control groups was statistically significant $\chi^2(1) = 48.58$, $p < .001$, and the magnitude of difference was considered medium (Cramer's $V = .309$). When looking at the Pan African students alone, the suspension rates of eighth-grade Pan African students was lower in the treatment group (2.9%, $N = 102$), compared to the control group (19.3%, $N = 166$). However, such difference was not statistically significant $\chi^2(1) = 1.83$, $p = .176$.

The data demonstrates that Pan African students who were exposed to CRPBIS in both cohorts experienced almost a 10% drop in suspension rates compared to Latino students who experienced a little more than a 5% decrease. However, White students experienced more than a 1% increase in suspension rates. There was no change in the suspension rates of the Asian students from seventh grade to eighth grade. In contrast, the suspension rates of Pan African students in the control group was stagnant in Cohort 1, and it decreased by 1% in Cohort 2, compared to the Latino students who experienced a more than a 22% increase, and an 11.5% increase for the Asian students. Additionally, the White students in the control group increased more than 3% in the suspension rate. Regarding the important question of whether or not interventions, such as CRPBIS, can positively impact the racial suspension gap, this data reveals that such a program can reduce those disturbingly high rates suspension of Pan African students.

RQ 3 findings: Does the implementation of CRPBIS narrow the racial suspension gap of Pan African students compared to Asian, Latino, and White students when they transition from the seventh grade to the eighth grade?

The third question investigated the treatment effect, that is, did the implementation of CRPBIS in the seventh-grade lower students' suspension rates during their eighth grade? Although the overall suspension rate in the treatment group dropped from 6.8% to 2.8% ($N = 220$), such a difference was not statistically significant ($P = .058$). When looking at the Pan African students alone, it was found that the suspension rates dropped from 15.7% to 5.9% ($N = 51$), however, such a difference was, again, not statistically significant ($p = .227$).

As previously mentioned, very few students in the treatment group of Cohort 2 received suspensions during their seventh- and eighth-grade years, making it meaningless to investigate if the treatment effect led to a decrease in the suspension rate.

Summary of Results

The study used a casual comparative research design to examine the impact of race and CRPBIS on suspension rates. The research explored if a gap existed between Pan African students and students of other races. In addition, the study examined the difference in suspension rates among different racial groups, compared to specifically Pan African students. Furthermore, the study examined if at the end of eighth grade, Pan African students who received CRPBIS would have lower suspension rates than the students who did not receive such treatment.

Major findings 1. The major finding determined that there a difference in the suspension rates among Pan African students of different racial groups. For Cohort 1, the

suspension rates of seventh-grade students in both the treatment and control groups differed significantly across all racial groups. The Pan African students in the control group received more suspensions than students from other racial groups, but this was not true about the treatment group. For Cohort 2, while the suspension rates of the different racial groups in the control group was significantly different for both seventh and eighth grades, such difference was not present in the treatment group. In fact, very few students in the treatment group received suspensions during their seventh and eighth grades, making the difference in suspension rates, if anything, insignificant.

Major findings 2. Major finding 2 suggested that there was a difference in the suspension rates between schools(s) that implemented CRPBIS and school(s) that did not implement CRPBIS, specific for Pan African students. For Cohort 1, the difference in suspension rates between the treatment and control groups was insignificant when the students were in seventh grade. However, when students finished the eighth grade, the treatment group had significantly lower suspension rates than the control group. For Cohort 2, because very few students received suspensions in both seventh and eighth grade, the suspension rate of the treatment group was significantly lower than the control group.

Major findings 3. Major findings 3 indicates that the implementation of CRPBIS decreased the suspension rates of Pan African students from the seventh grade to eighth grade. For Cohort 1, although a decrease in suspension rates of all the students in the treatment group was observed, no statistically significant change in the suspension rate was found. The same held true when the researcher only looked at the Pan African students, that is, although there was a decrease in the suspension rates for Pan African

students in the treatment group, such change was not statistically significant. Regarding Cohort 2, given that very few students received suspensions in seventh and eighth grade, RQ3 was not addressed. The findings indicate that the Pan African students in both the treatment and control groups had the highest suspension rates. It is important to note that the suspension rates of the Pan African students in the treatment group were lower than the suspension rates of Pan Africans in the control group.

Banks and Obiakor (2015) suggested that using a culturally responsive disciplinary model would impact the suspension rates of Pan African students. The second question in this study investigated if a difference existed between the suspension rates of eighth-grade students in the treatment group compared to the suspension rates of eighth-grade students in the control group. Specifically, this study examined the rates of suspension of the Pan African students. The results indicate that the suspension rates of the Pan African students in the control group were stagnant. Moreover, the suspension rates of Asian, Latino, and White students in the control group increased. However, suspension rates of the Pan African students in the treatment group decreased more than 9% from seventh to eighth grade, meaning, students who were engaged in the program longer were more successful than those who were in the treatment program for less time. Within the treatment groups, while the suspension rates of Pan African and Latino students decreased, the suspension rates of White students increased.

Losen and Skiba (2010) defined the racial suspension gap as the difference between the suspension rates of Pan African students compared to the suspension rates of other races and ethnicities. In analyzing this gap, researchers have found that Pan African students often are suspended for subjective behaviors (i.e., excessive noise,

disrespect, insubordination, disruptive behaviors) while White students are suspended for objective behaviors (i.e., fighting, smoking, destroying property, smoking). Furthermore, there are less suspension referrals for White students than for Pan African students for identical behaviors (Balderas, 2015; Losen & Skiba, 2010; Skiba, 2013). This study aligns with the research in this area, as more than 65% of suspensions in this study were labeled under a subjective category, specifically, disruptive behavior.

The third research question of this study examined if CRPBIS influenced the racial suspension rates of eighth-grade Pan African students in the treatment group compared to the Asian, Latino, and White students. The results determined that the suspension rates of Pan African students in seventh grade decreased by 12.9% compared to White students, and the suspension rates of Pan African students in the seventh grade decreased by 9.8% compared to the Asian students, and 6.5 compared to the Latino students. Although, there was not a statistically significant decrease in the racial suspension gap, there was a significant decrease in the gap. The results of this study contrast with previous research regarding the intervention in this study, which closed the racial suspension gap of Pan African students and students of other races (Bal, 2015; Gregory et al., 2016; Payne & Welch, 2010; Skiba & Losen, 2016).

This study indicates that CRPBIS is an effective tool in decreasing the racial suspension gap. A decrease in suspension rates not only benefits students, schools, and educators, but it also benefits taxpayers (USDOE, 2018). Students who are suspended from school increase their chances of dropping out of high school (Bryant, 2013). High school dropouts have higher rates of crime and lower unemployment, costing taxpayers

millions of dollars every year (Sweeten et al., 2009; U.S. Department of Labor, 2018).

All of the implications spelled out in Chapter 4 are explained in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Overview

Almost 50 years of research has documented disproportionate suspension rates for Pan African students, and there are disparities in those rates as well (Bal, 2016; CDF, 1975; Fergus, 2016; Gregory et al., 2016; Losen & Whitaker, 2017; Quinlan, 2016; Skiba et al., 2002; Whitford & Emerson, 2018). The purpose of this study was to address the effects of a culturally responsive discipline model, CRPBIS, on these suspension gaps and disparities, specifically as they impact eighth-grade Pan African students, compared to Asian, Latino, and White students. Using retrospective data, this study examined the difference in suspension rates of students who received the CRPBIS intervention (treatment group) and students who did not receive the CRPBIS intervention (control group), while disaggregating the data by race and cohorts. This study was conducted as a result of insufficient research on whether or not CRPBIS reduces the suspension gap.

Introduction

This quasi-experimental, causal-comparative study used ex post facto data to examine if eighth-grade Pan African students in this study were disproportionately suspended. Therefore, it was essential to determine if disparities in suspension rates existed between Pan African students and students of other races in the schools being studied. This study quantified the impact that CRPBIS had on the suspension rates of Pan African students and on closing the racial suspension gap. This study has many

significant antecedents because a large body of evidence was amassed regarding suspensions and the racial discipline gap.

Losen and Martinez (2013) conducted one of the most significant studies on the racial discipline gap. During the 2009-2010 school year, the researchers analyzed suspension data from 26,000 middle and high schools in the United States. The results determined that more than 2 million students were suspended from school that year. A more significant finding concluded that the difference in suspension rates of Pan African and White students increased 11% from 1970 to 2010 (Losen & Martinez, 2013).

Another critical study related to this topic was conducted during the 2014-2015 school year in California. According to Losen and Whitaker (2017), as a result of school suspensions, students lost approximately 840,000 instructional days. It is important to note that as a result of suspensions, 13 school days were lost for every 100 students enrolled in public schools in California.

Moreover, results reveal that Pan African students lost more days as a result of suspension than any other racial subgroup. For every 100 students enrolled, the number of lost instructional days for Pan African students were 43, while the loss of instructional days for White students was 11 (Losen & Whitaker, 2017). Furthermore, studies indicate the disproportionality in suspension rates is the result of discriminatory policies and practices of school systems (Gregory et al., 2016; Losen & Skiba, 2010; Miller, 2014).

Congress legislated the Gun-Free Schools Act in 1994, which pressured districts to enforce zero-tolerance policies (Cole, 2013; Skiba, 2013). According to Mozley (2016), disparities in suspension rates have been exacerbated by the implementation of zero-tolerance policies. More importantly, studies have shown that zero-tolerance

policies have not been effective in decreasing incidents that lead to suspensions (Hudson, 2011; McAndrew, 2001). During his tenure as United States Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, acknowledged that disparities in suspension rates were one of the leading civil rights issues of our times (Bryant, 2013).

The literature on this issue reveals that approximately 3 million students are suspended from school in the United States every year (Bal, 2016; Bal et al., 2016; Losen & Gillespie, 2012, Skiba & Losen, 2016). The consequences of school suspensions are a surge in the dropout rate (Noltemeyer & Mcloughlin, 2010; Skiba, 2013), increased engagement with the juvenile justice system (Losen et al., 2015), inflation in the unemployment rate (Sweeten et al., 2009), and academic failure (Losen & Skiba, 2010; Losen & Whitaker, 2017). Additionally, there are negative financial consequences that the local, state, and federal governments must assume and pass to taxpayers (Patel & Fadaei, 2017).

The correlation between suspension and dropout rates is particularly dangerous for Pan African students due to the high rates of suspension for these students (Bryant, 2013). According to the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018), a high school dropout makes \$200,000 less over his or her lifetime than a high school graduate. Nationally, each new high school graduate awards a net benefit to taxpayers of about \$127,000 over that graduate's lifetime. On average, 1.3 million students drop out of high school every year (USDOE, 2018). Nationally, decreasing the high school dropout rate by 25% (325, 000 new high school graduates) would bring more than a \$41 billion relief to taxpayers throughout the new graduates' lifetimes (Alliance for Excellent Education [AEE], 2011). If public schools in America decreased their dropout rate by

25% for the next 12 years, the public would see the benefit of almost a half-trillion dollars (AEE, 2011).

Studies also show a correlation between high school dropouts and rising unemployment rates (Sweeten et al., 2009). According to the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018), high school dropouts have a higher chance to be unemployed than high school graduates. Students who drop out of high school have a 72% of being unemployed compared to high school graduates (U.S. Department of Labor, 2018). Additionally, high school dropouts have a significantly higher chance of needing public assistance and becoming teenage parents (Garfinkel, Kelly, & Waldfogel, 2005; Lansford et al., 2016). Furthermore, high school graduates tend to live healthier lifestyles and have access to health insurance (Muennig, Franks, Jia, Lubetkin, & Gold, 2005; Quin & Hemphill, 2014).

School suspensions are not only connected to unemployment but also to criminal activity (Losen et al., 2015). It is important to note that school suspensions can lead to engagement with the juvenile justice system. Students who are suspended often lack adult supervision during the time they are removed from school (Losen et al., 2015). In the United States, 75% of crimes are committed by high school dropouts (NCES, 2018). According to Mai and Subramanian (2017), the average cost of housing an inmate in New York State exceeded \$65,000 a year. With more than 50,000 inmates imprisoned in New York State, the total cost can exceed \$3 billion a year. As Pan African students are suspended at a disproportionate rate, they are more likely to be incarcerated (Bal, 2015; Brown, 2015; Gregory et al., 2016; Quinlan, 2016; Reyes, 2006). Pan African youth are twice as likely to be arrested as their White counterparts. This number increases when

examining state and federal data; specifically, Pan African males between 18 and 24 years are seven times more likely to be incarcerated than White males (Rovner, 2014). The statistics above do not include the intellectual and human capital costs that are the consequences of incarceration (Losen et al., 2015).

A study reported by the U.S. Department of Education in 2008 brought disproportionate discipline to the national stage (Gregory et al., 2016; Skiba et al., 2011b). As a result of the report, interventions were developed (Cohen, 2013). PBIS is one of the most widely used models that schools use to manage behavior (Vincent & Tobin, 2011). Most research on PBIS has been in suburban schools with a homogenous population (Bal, 2016). Studies show that PBIS has been effective in decreasing suspension rates for all students. However, disparities in the racial suspension gap continue to exist—even after the implementation of PBIS (Bal, 2015; Sugai, 2011). Bal (2015) indicated that in order to counter disparities in disproportionate disciplining, a culturally responsive model should be infused into the PBIS framework.

Equity and equal educational access for all students is the foundation of CRPBIS (Bal, 2015). If implemented with fidelity, the CRPBIS framework can lead to academic success for Pan African students because the framework acknowledges the contributions, existence, and values of Pan Africans (Banks & Obiakor, 2015; Noltemeyer & Mcloughlin, 2010). According to Bal et al. (2012), there are necessary components that ensure the proper implementation of CRPBIS. Studies have categorized the CRPBIS framework into five components: (a) cultural identity, which includes cultural competency; (b) giving a voice to cultural equity; (c) creating a supportive environment; (d) using a situational approach; and (e) using data to examine equity. CRPBIS takes

these five components and adds them to the PBIS framework (Bal, 2015; Banks & Obiakor, 2015; Levenson et al., 2016; Tobin & Vincent, 2015). Furthermore, CRPBIS can decrease suspension rates for Pan African students and close the racial suspension gap.

The purpose of this quantitative study was to explore the impact of a culturally responsive discipline model on the suspension rates of eighth-grade students. Specifically, the study aimed to understand if CRPBIS decreased suspension rates of Pan African students. In addition, the study sought to explore if CRPBIS reduced the suspension gap when comparing Pan African students to Asian, Latino, and White students. This study used retrospective data of eighth-grade students from two cohorts (Cohort 1, 2015-2016 and Cohort 2, 2016-2017). In order to conduct such an investigation, this researcher utilized a chi-square analysis to better understand the relationship between CRPBIS and the suspension rates of Pan African students.

Implications of Findings

First, this study examined if eighth-grade Pan African students were disproportionately suspended compared to students of other races and ethnicities. National, state, and local data show disproportionalities regarding suspension rates of Pan African students (CRDC, 2014; NYSED, 2014). However, it was important to examine if Pan African students were disproportionately suspended because the focal point of this study examined if the intervention addressed the racial suspension gap. The findings show that the Pan African students were disproportionately suspended. In Cohort 1, the seventh-grade Pan African students in the treatment group were suspended at a statistically significant higher rate than their Asian, Latino, and White counterparts.

However, there was a decline in that trend for the treatment group, which was due to the decrease in suspension rates of Pan African students in the eighth grade. Although, in Cohort 2 of the seventh-grade Pan African students who were disproportionately suspended, it was not at a statistically significant rate. In contrast, in both grades and cohorts of the control group, Pan African students were disproportionately suspended at statistically significant higher rates than their Asian, Latino, and White peers. Moreover, eighth-grade Pan African students in the control group received the second-highest suspension rate.

Second, this study investigated the impact of CRPBIS on suspension rates between students who attended a school that implemented CRPBIS and school(s) that implemented the traditional code of conduct including zero-tolerance policies. This study found that the Pan African students in Cohort 1, who were exposed to CRPBIS, saw a 9.8% decrease in suspension rates from the seventh to the eighth grade. The most significant decrease in suspension rates throughout the study was seen from Cohort 1 of the treatment group, and the suspension rates of the Pan African students in the control group of the same cohort were stagnant (13.3%). In Cohort 2, the Pan African students who were exposed to CRPBIS in the treatment group did not receive any suspensions in the seventh or eighth grades. However, the suspension rates of the Pan African students in the control group experienced only a 1% reduction from the seventh grade (11%) to the eighth grade (10%). The Pan African students in the treatment group had considerably lower rates of suspensions than the Pan African students in the control group when compared to Asian, Latino, and White students.

Studies show a correlation between suspension rates and graduation rates (Losen & Whitaker, 2017); therefore, tracking suspension is vital. Students who are suspended at disproportionate rates have a higher risk of dropping out of school. An additional risk factor in having one racial group disproportionately suspended, especially for Pan African students, is there is a historical trauma that these students experience in relation to the educational system (*Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954; Fergus, 2016).

These findings also align with the Bal (2016) study that explained that in order to decrease the suspension rates of Pan African students, schools must transition from a punitive approach of zero-tolerance policies to more restorative forms of discipline. In addition, providing instruction in a historical and cultural context in which all cultures are valued minimized classroom disruptions while it increased academic success for Pan African students (Hershfeldt et al., 2009; Swain-Bradway et al., 2014). This research established that culturally responsive interventions not only had a positive effect on Pan African students, but the intervention had a positive impact on students of other races and ethnicities.

Last, this study investigated the influence of CRPBIS on the racial suspension gap for students in the eighth grade. Suspension rates increase from elementary school to middle school (Arcia, 2007; Vincent et al., 2015). Research indicates a correlation between suspension rates of eighth-grade students and high school graduation rates (Endsley, 2014; Hilberth & Slate, 2014). This study found that the overall suspension rates in the treatment group dropped from 6.8% to 2.8%. The suspension rates of Pan African students in the treatment group dropped from 15.7% to 5.9%, which is noteworthy, but the drop did not result in a statistically significant finding. As students in

Cohort 1 of the treatment group transitioned from the seventh to the eighth grade, the suspension rates of the Pan African students (5.9%), compared to Latino students (1.7%), Asian students (0%), and White students (3.1%), showed a considerable reduction. In Cohort 2, no Pan African students were suspended in the seventh and eighth grades. The conclusion is that Pan African students who are exposed to CRPBIS have significantly reduced rates of suspension when compared to their Latino, Asian, and White peers. The primary focus of this study was to examine the impact of CRPBIS on the racial suspension gap. The findings from this study show that CRPBIS can significantly decrease the racial suspension gap for Pan African students. Suspended students suffer from lost instruction, but there is also a loss of initiatives that could benefit struggling students (Skiba, 2013). For example, in this study, suspension is defined as a specific period of time when a student is prohibited from classroom instruction and school activities (Miller, 2014). An athlete who is suspended would not be able to play a game. An artist who is suspended would not be able to attend an art show. Imagine a student securing the lead role in the school's play. This student, who may have been practicing for months, might not be able to attend opening night if that student was suspended. It is important to restate that Pan African students are often suspended for objective reasons such as excessive noise, defiance, and disrespect (Gregory et al., 2016).

In Cohort 1 of the treatment group, 11 Pan African students were suspended in the seventh grade, and three Pan African students were suspended in the eighth grade. As stated earlier, in Cohort 2 of the treatment group, no Pan African students were suspended. There is no price tag that a school can put on the value that is added of by having these students present in school. Studies have shown a relationship between

school suspension and high school dropout rates (Bryant, 2013). If the 11 Pan African students, who were suspended from Cohort 1, dropped out of school, it would cost taxpayers more than \$1 million over the lifetime of those students (Noltemeyer & Mcloughlin, 2010; Skiba, 2013; U.S. Department of Labor, 2018). According to Bryant (2013), 75% of crime is committed by high school dropouts. If 75% of the 11 students (8.25) were incarcerated for 5 years, it would cost taxpayers more than a half a million dollars (Losen et al., 2015; NCES, 2018). It should be noted that the almost 10% decline of Pan African students in the treatment group from Cohort 1 to Cohort 2 will likely support future academic success and decreased chances of students dropping out of school.

Implications on the state level. Legislators, policy makers, and educational leaders can benefit from this body of research. Legislators could use this study to eliminate zero-tolerance policies and acknowledge the harm of them as they relate to historically marginalized groups. Additionally, legislators could fund research discipline programs that are more inclusive and that would benefit all students such as CRPBIS. Policymakers should ensure culturally responsive indicators are implemented through a lens of equity and cultural competency. Additionally, policymakers could assist schools in developing culturally relevant indicators within their school improvement plans, funding reports, and policies. State education departments, educational leaders, and teachers can use this research to frame curriculum units in a culturally relevant manner to provide professional development that would support educators in the areas of equity, cultural competency, and restorative practices. Furthermore, the state education

department may want to start with guaranteeing the ELA and math modules are diverse and culturally relevant.

This body of research can be valuable for school districts in executing a culturally responsive behavioral model with the goal of eliminating the racial suspension gap. Closing the racial discipline gap and decreasing suspension rates for Pan African students will increase their chances for improved academic performance, and ultimately, they will lead to a decrease in the high school dropout rates (Noltemeyer, Ward, & Mcloughlin, 2015). As previously mentioned, high school dropouts put a significant long-term burden on taxpayers (Patel & Fadaei, 2017).

Implications for school districts. School administrators, pupil personnel, district-level administrators, data teams, and other educators in school settings can use this research as motivation to begin to understand the suspension data of their student population. Schools and school districts should analyze their suspension data to determine if there are disproportionate patterns of suspensions among racial and ethnic categories of students. Suspension data, disaggregated by race, may give educators opportunities to have essential and courageous conversations (Singleton, 2014), particularly when the school's data show disproportionality in suspension rates of historically marginalized students. Singleton (2014) explained the importance of analyzing data, disaggregating data by race, and reviewing the results for implications as an essential part of school and district conversations. These courageous conversations can lead to implementing interventions that counter disproportionalities.

Schools that begin to disaggregate suspension data by race could track behavior. An online system will allow schools to identify school-wide referral patterns.

Additionally, this system can allow schools to examine time, location, and frequencies trends of incidents. A tracking system would also help schools to identify students and teachers with high occurrences of incidents (Hawkins, 2018). With this new information, schools can take a more positive and proactive approach to discipline. For example, if the data show that there is a high number of incidents in the morning, schools can modify morning transition programs. Furthermore, if a specific teacher has a significant number of referrals, that teacher could be offered additional support. This researcher is optimistic that this study can motivate educators to inspect their school's disciplinary policies and data with a focus on decreasing trends that cause discrepancies in the disciplinary treatment of specific student groups.

Limitations

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of CRPBIS on the racial suspension gap, mainly as it affected eighth-grade students who were enrolled in an urban district. There were four noteworthy limitations to this study. This study was conducted in an urban school district where there are no standalone middle schools. Rockport and King Academy served students from seventh through 12th grades. Trudy Academy served students from Pre-K to 12th grade. In a study conducted by Arcia (2007), students in traditional middle schools (grades 7 and 8) were suspended at higher rates than students who attended a K-8 school model. Moreover, students in the middle school lost more instructional time per suspension (Arcia, 2007). The results of this study may not be generalizable for districts that have stand-alone middle schools or K-8 schools.

Another limitation of this study was sustainability. There was a steady decrease in the suspension rates of Pan African students from Cohort 1 to Cohort 2 and from the

seventh to the eighth grade. The most substantial suspension rate was seen in the seventh-grade students of Cohort 1. This was the second year of implementation of the program. By the second cohort (the third year of implementation), no Pan African students were suspended. Examining a large number of cohorts would show if the decrease in the racial suspension gap was sustainable.

An additional limitation of this study was the inability of the researcher to evaluate the implementation of CRPBIS and how it impacted the data in the study. According to Banks and Obiakor (2015), behavior is defined solely by educators and other adults in a school building. Successful implementation of CRPBIS begins with conversations relative to institutional racism and bias (Cramer & Bennett, 2015). Banks and Obiakor (2015) identified five components of the effective implementation of CRPBIS. The components must include feedback to ensure fidelity. This researcher did not examine if the five components were implemented with fidelity. Other researchers employing qualitative research designs could investigate the manner in which a school culture successfully or unsuccessfully implements the components of CRPBIS and how that implementation correlates to suspension rates.

Lastly, a limitation of this study was the relatively small sample size. The researcher extrapolated trends from a small sample. This study only analyzed the suspension rates of two cohorts, but the study revealed that 195 incidents led to suspensions of the total sample size (representing the total number of students who were suspended), which was 135. This study would have benefitted from a larger sample size.

Recommendations

Considering the large body of historical evidence, along with the results from this study, it is critical to understand that zero-tolerance policies that immediately lead to school suspension, as a first resort, has been harmful to the academic success of historically marginalized groups (Skiba & Losen, 2016). According to Welch and Payne (2012), RTT is the notion that punitive consequences increase as the proportion of Pan African students increase in a school or district. Research by Skiba et al. (2011b) analyzed suspension rates that were disaggregated by race while controlling for socioeconomic factors. Their findings demonstrate that race was the constant contributing variable leading to school suspensions (Skiba et al., 2011a). Conducting an archival, comparative study on school districts that have experienced an increase in their Pan African populations could provide more information on the effects of zero-tolerance policies on the racial discipline gap.

Based on this researcher's investigation, this study was the first of its kind to specifically examine the impact of CRPBIS on the racial suspension gap for eighth-grade students. The design of future studies could expand the knowledge of educational leaders regarding the impact of culturally responsive discipline and its potential to close the racial discipline gap. The results of this study show that CRPBIS not only decreased suspension rates of Pan African students, it also closed the racial suspension gap. A longitudinal study on the impact of CRPBIS involving eight- grade students as they progress through high school is suggested for future research. The literature suggests that middle school suspensions can have an adverse effect on high school success. These consequences are particularly pronounced for Pan African students (Gregory et al., 2016, Losen & Martinez, 2013; Welch & Payne, 2010). Studies have also shown a connection

between suspensions and student dropout rates (Bryant, 2013; Endsley, 2014; Hilberth & Slate, 2014). A longitudinal study of schools that implemented CRPBIS may help to determine if CRPBIS implemented in middle school may have a lasting impact on high school students. Future research may want to include an entire urban district because this study only included three middle schools.

According to Rocque (2010), there is a correlation between ODRs and suspensions. ODRs occur when teachers request assistance with student behavior (Rocque, 2010). Purchasing an incident-tracking system is another recommendation that schools could use to manage discipline referrals. As schools disaggregate suspension data, they should also examine ODRs. A referral tracking system would allow schools to identify the most vulnerable times in the day for high rates of incidents. Additionally, a tracking system can identify staff members who consistently have the highest rates of referrals and who may need extra support. This system would allow data teams to target students who might benefit from additional services (Tobin & Vincent, 2011) by identifying students by tiers (Hawkins, 2018). Although, traditional PBIS would give extra academic and behavioral management supports to the more vulnerable students, CRPBIS involves an additional layer relative to culture (Levenson et al., 2016). For example, under the umbrella of CRPBIS, a student who is struggling with conforming to the school norms may receive a mentor who identifies with the student's racial and ethnic makeup. Also, as a preventive measure, a restorative conference could be held. In addition, an incentive or safety plan could be developed with a student. Schools may also use the information developed from a tracking system to construct programs with a goal of engaging students.

Furthermore, a mixed-methods study could explore student and staff perspectives on suspensions. Qualitative dimensions could examine changes in the culture as CRPBIS is implemented and practiced. Of particular interest could be data gleaned through interviews of staff perspectives on suspensions that were given for subjective behaviors compared to suspensions given for objective behaviors. According to Gregory et al. (2016), Monroe (2005), and Vincent et al. (2015), Pan African students are inclined to be suspended for subjective behaviors while White students are suspended for objective reasons. CRPBIS is designed to counter the effects of implicit bias that may lead to disparities in suspension rates. Given that CRPBIS is designed to reinforce the importance of cultural equity validation, quantitative research could measure stakeholders' assessments of the implementation of the five fundamental components of CRPBIS and whether or not the culture and environment of the school improved in some significant ways (Levenson et al., 2016).

Conclusion

Over several decades, researchers have determined that disproportionate suspension rates exist between Pan African students and students of other races (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Fergus, 2016; Gregory et al., 2016; Losen & Martinez, 2013; Skiba et al., 2011a). A substantial number of studies explain that the racial suspension gap in relation to school discipline is linked to zero-tolerance policies (Jackson, 2014; Mozley, 2016, Quinlan, 2016; Reyes, 2006; Skiba, 2013). Additionally, research suggests that a solution to disproportionate suspensions is a school-wide, culturally responsive discipline program (Bal, 2016; Banks & Obiakor, 2015; Monroe, 2005). CRPBIS were designed to

counter the stubborn and persistent problems connected with the racial discipline gap (Bal et al., 2012).

The findings of this study are consistent with the research by Banks and Obiakor (2015). School administrators needed to build an environment of cultural competency to close the racial suspension gap (Banks & Obiakor, 2015). Schools that develop culturally responsive pedagogy and teaching have benefitted from closing the racial achievement gap (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995). O’Keefe et al. (2011) warned that if schools fail to create a culturally responsive environment, they run the risk of the disproportionate discipline of students—with all of its negative consequences.

Proper implementation of CRPBIS is a useful tool in improving the school environment (Bal, 2015; Banks & Obiakor, 2015; Levenson et al., 2016). Research has indicated that in order for CRPBIS to be useful, there are necessary components that must be incorporated into its implementation. As explained previously in this study, the CRPBIS framework must include five components: (a) identity, (b) voice, (c) supportive environment, (d) situational approaches, and (e) data for equity. Levenson et al. (2016) explained that educators need to be able to identify their own cultural identity and how cultural affects their classroom dynamics. Banks and Obiakor (2015) explained that a cultural voice establishes cultural validity in schools. Creating a supportive environment allows for growth and encourages educators to take the risk (Levenson et al., 2016). Bal (2016) suggested that understanding situational approaches are a necessary tool when communicating with parents and community stakeholders. Situational approach communications begin with having a clear understanding of values, expectations, and beliefs (Cramer & Bennett, 2015).

Although this study did not investigate the implementation of the CRPBIS model, the researcher observed the application of the intervention. The school in the study that implemented the CRPBIS model (Rockport) had some clear differences from the schools that implemented a traditional code of conducts, which included a zero-tolerance approach. Rockport School employed a parent coordinator who served as a bridge between the administrative team and the community. Second, the school developed interventions for all three tiers of the PBIS model. Lastly, the Rockport School intentionally and systematically infused culturally responsive pedagogy into the school environment.

Rockport included many stakeholders in the community throughout the implementation of the model. Parents, students, community center employees, legislators, faculty members, and local business developed school expectations and discussed modifications to the school plans. For instance, the researcher observed a meeting where members of the committee discussed employing a uniform policy. When the meeting concluded, there was a clear consensus that a uniform policy would be a benefit to the students, parents, school, and community. It is important to note that uniforms are a hot-button topic in public school education. However, within 3 weeks of the meeting, students consistently met the 95% goal of school uniform compliance.

During the implementation process, this researcher also observed activities that engaged all tiers of the PBIS model. An example of a Tier 1 intervention is the voice level system. Rockport School used a school-wide voice level system. Voice-level signs were posted in all areas of the school including classrooms, hallways, and common areas. Voice-level signs clarify the volume that students should employ in different parts of the

school. Examples of the effective use of Tier 2 of PBIS was the check-in and check-out program. Students who needed extra support met with a staff member at the beginning and end of the day. Students on Tier 3 needed the most support. So, data teams met weekly to discuss, modify, and update behavioral plans for students on Tier 3.

Standing on the foundation of PBIS, Rockport School also created a culturally responsive environment. Hallways were draped with posters of a diverse group of prominent individuals and quotes. Also, welcome signs at the entrance of the school were in multiple languages. Curriculum development included adding literature from different cultures and multiple languages. Lastly, trips were designed to follow curriculum units with a focus on diversity. For instance, at the beginning of the school year, seventh-grade students read a biography of Cesar Chavez. To reinforce learning, students also visited the El Barrio Museo. These anecdotal observations of Rockport School suggest a context in which the stakeholders were engaged on behalf of the goals of CRPBIS. Such engagement was a likely predictor of the quantitative results measured in this study.

The results of this study indicate that culturally responsive discipline models could narrow the racial suspension gap of eighth-grade Pan African students in an urban district. Middle school (seventh and eighth grade) is a critical time for examining student suspension because there is a correlation between eighth-grade suspension rates and high school dropout rates. Implementing an intervention that decreases the racial suspension gap in middle school may have a positive impact on graduation rates that can benefit students and society as a whole. Furthermore, CRPBIS could be a cost-effective tool for

local, state, and federal municipalities in a time when funding of education is under enormous pressure.

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