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Which Student Characteristics Correlate with Discipline Referrals? A Case Study of a Diverse, High-Poverty Rural School District in the South

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this dissertation first and foremost to my mother, Polly Bryant. Thank you for always showing me that regardless of life's many ups and downs you just keep on working. This lesson was invaluable in keeping me focused and determined to complete this work.

I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to my husband, Blake Monson, who fixed many dinners and missed many outings while I sat working on my laptop. I dedicate this also to my most beautiful daughter, Polly Jo Monson, whose courage and talents are a constant inspiration to me as I watch her pursue her own dreams. And, I dedicate this to my son, Blake Monson, II, his loving and lovely wife, Melissa Monson, my most exceptional grandson, Blake Monson III and his soon to be brother Benton; watching them grow as a family gives me constant joy.

Finally, I dedicate this dissertation to my best friend, Brenda Benton. Thank you for being my friend all these years and for believing in me and my abilities to complete this work. I could have never completed this journey without your ever present faith in me.

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During the course of my educational journey, starting in high school, I have been taught and mentored by exceptional educators. Though there influence on my life varies,

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the correlates of discipline referrals in a diverse, high-poverty rural school district. The framework is based upon the Diamond (2004) study which, like this research, was built on the notion that socioeconomic inequality is a major factor for disproportionality in student discipline. This study identified the assets and deficits of the sample population and analyzed them in relationship to the referrals accrued. This study was conducted in a small, rural, southern school district. Of the population, approximately 78% are on free and reduced lunch and is made up of Caucasian students, 53%, and African-American students, 44%. Data for this research study were derived from student discipline reports, records, and test scores. The data gathered from student records included age, grade, sex, ethnicity, free and reduced status, and single-parent home. Present reading levels reflected the most recent test data. The sample population included 199 students. Descriptive statistics were used to determine if certain student characteristics were common among student disciplinary infractions. Calculations showed a correlation with discipline referrals for four student characteristics: students on free and reduced lunch, male students, African-American students, and students reading below grade level, reading levels being the strongest. Findings in this study found that socioeconomic status and ethnicity are major factors in student discipline. Because 94% of the African-Americans in the study were also on free and reduced lunch the analysis could not determine which variable correlated more strongly to discipline referrals.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Students to earn a high school diploma as a first step in becoming a productive adult. As critical as this step is there are still many young people of all ethnicities that do not graduate from high school. The path to dropping out begins as early as elementary school. Students who experience academic problems, who are involved in ongoing discipline issues, and who are often suspended out of school are the students most likely to drop out of school. The students that experience these problems most frequently are African-American males.

Much research dedicated to this phenomenon suggests that African American students are disproportionately suspended compared to white students (Applied Research Center, 2000; Blackshear, 2008; Bock et al. 1998; Borrazzo, 1997; Cameron, 2006; Clark, 2002; Dehlinger, 2008; Gray, 2000; Hinojosa, 2007; Johnson et al. 2001; Mcfadden et al., 1992; Morgan, 1991; Skiba et al. 2002; Vanderharr, 2003; Wallace et al., 2008). Suspensions lead to an increased number of days missed from class, which in turn, could be expected to result in decreased academic achievement. Because of the negative academic impact this pattern has on students, it is important to understand why minority students appear to be more severely disciplined than majority students. Three central theories, Critical Race Theory, Cultural Reproduction Theory, and Social

Reproduction Theory, have been offered to explain disproportionality in student discipline. From these theories, four comprehensive and sometimes intersecting models have been advanced to explain why certain groups of students receive more discipline referrals than other groups of students: racism; socioeconomic inequality; cultural differences, and school cultures. This study was constructed form the work by Diamond (2004) that suggests that socioeconomic inequality is the root cause of disproportionality in student referrals. Diamond (2004) correlated student characteristics that teachers perceived as assets and deficits, which were rooted in socioeconomic inequality, to determine if students from low socioeconomic backgrounds (deficits) were more likely to accrue discipline referrals than students from high socioeconomic backgrounds (assets).

Using this socioeconomic framework, the purpose of this study was to examine the correlates of discipline referrals in a diverse, high-poverty rural school district. Student deficits were free and reduced lunch, living in one-parent households, and reading below grade level. Student assets were full-pay lunch, living in two-parent households, and reading on or above grade level. Descriptive analysis was used to provide a snapshot of the assets and/or deficits of the students in the sample population then compared to the number of referrals these students had acquired over a specific amount of time.

The population chosen for this study was drawn from a small rural southern school district. The school district is made up of approximately 4000 students, averaging 53% Caucasian students, 44% African-American students, and 3% Hispanic. The poverty rates for the district is high, about 78% of all students are on free and reduced lunch.

Agriculture is the primary industry in the area and many students are second and third generation residents of the area.

This study is significant because it attempts to distinguish the students that accrue discipline referrals which lead to student suspension and/or expulsion from school. Armed with this information school leaders could facilitate meaningful conversations with teachers about why certain students are most likely to experience academic difficulties, to receive disciplinary referrals, to be suspended out of school, to be expelled, and to drop out of school. Additionally, teachers and administrators could identify and implement interventions to keep these students successfully in school. Further, this information could inform state and federal policy makers as they work to assist the families of these children.

Historical Overview

Over the past two centuries, public education in the United States has undergone numerous changes. One constant that has not changed is the overarching mission of schooling, to educate young people. Educators know that a precondition for educating students is good classroom management. Drawing on a study by Wang, Haertal, and Walberg (1993), Marzano and Marzano (2003) concluded that classroom management is critical to student learning. Some of the changes in public education that have occurred over the years have had a direct impact on classroom management and student discipline. For this study three of the major changes that have impacted this are discussed, student disciplinary practices, the desegregation of schools, and the “No Child Left Behind” legislation.

The first wooden schoolhouse, established at St. Augustine, Florida, in 1716, and now open to tourists, has on display the "dunce hat" used to discipline students over 400 hundred years ago. As a school administrator I was intrigued by this landmark and visited the school on three different occasions. During my twenty-eight year career I have not witnessed the use of "Dunce Hats" to discipline students. I have observed and used other recommended techniques to discipline students including isolation, copying sentences, suspension, and corporal punishment. Corporal punishment was considered by the Christian population, based on their interpretation (misinterpretation) of Proverbs 13:24 (New King James Version), "spare the rod, spoil the child," as key to effectively disciplining children. But, due to an outcry by many organizations, including The American Psychological Association, the National Association for State Departments of Education, the American Medical Association, the National Education Association, The American Bar Association, and the American Academy of Pediatrics, the use of corporal punishment in schools declined (Greydanus et al., 2003). Today only 19 states allow the practice, and of these, only the southern "Bible Belt" states, still extensively practice corporal punishment (Bath, 2012). Given this decline in the use of corporal punishment, schools had to find other means to deal with noncompliant and/or disruptive students.

A second critical change in public education occurred beginning in 1954 when the Supreme Court in *Brown v. Board of Education* ruled that segregating students in public schools based on race violates the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment and, therefore, is unconstitutional (Goldsmith, 1997). Though many states were very slow to comply with this ruling it did ultimately result in the de-segregation of public schools.

Schools in South Carolina did not comply until 1970. I was a ninth grade student in South Carolina and well remember the first time I shared classroom space with African-American students. This dramatically changed the face of public education. For the first time, students from very different cultures and life experiences were now being educated in the same classrooms and being taught by teachers with little understanding of many of the children sitting in their classrooms. This challenged teachers not only to learn to connect with and and to teach students from different backgrounds, but also to discipline students who have been raised in a culture and with experiences very different from those lived by the typical middle-class, white, female teacher.

In 2001, a third major change in public education occurred with the enactment of the "No Child Left Behind" legislation (NCLB, 2008). This legislation made all public schools accountable for the education of all students regardless of their ability levels. Up until about 1990, the many students who left school before earning a high school diploma were able to earn a living wage in the manufacturing industries that flourished across the United States. But, as the economy has moved from a predominantly manufacturing to a technology and service industry, the ability of students without a high school diploma to get a job that offers a living wage has decreased. Today's economy demands that all students earn at least a high school diploma. The federal government through the "No Child Left Behind" legislation demands that public schools keep all students in school until they earn a high school diploma or suffer state and/or federal sanctions.

The net result of both the change in the economy and the expectations for schools to educate all students is that students who, in the past, may have dropped out of school, stay. Statistics from the National Center for Educational Statistics (2005) indicate that,

"The proportion of all 16-24 year olds who were drop-outs declined between 1998 (12%) and 2004 (10%). A decrease in the drop-out rate is encouraging, but the longer students remain in school the greater the opportunity for discipline issues to increase. "The overall suspension rate in 2007 was not measurably different from that in 1999, but differences were found for Black males. A greater percentage of Black males had been suspended in 2007 than in 1999 (57 vs. 41 percent) (National Center for Educational Statistics).

The face and workings of public education have changed since these actions. Many of these changes have been positive - the decline in the acceptance and use of corporal punishment, the de-segregation of schools based on race, the need for all students to stay in school, and the pressure on schools to graduate all students. Students are much less likely to be physically punished for inappropriate behavior, all students have access to a quality education regardless of the color of their skin, and educators have been told that they must educate all students, not just the ones that look like them or who are compliant and easy to teach. One negative result, however, has been the high numbers of students' suspended out-of-school for noncompliant and/or disruptive behavior. In addition, numerous studies have shown that these disciplinary policies have put students on the track of dropping out and, in many instances, to incarceration. Even more disturbing is a Department of Education study conducted from 2009 to 2010 that found African-American students were 3.5 times more likely to be suspended than white students (The Civil Rights Data Collection 2009-2010 Report).

Root Causes

Student are regularly suspended out of school for disciplinary infractions, it appears that a disproportionate number of these are minority students. Much research has

been dedicated to understanding if and why this occurs in schools. Three overarching theories have been posited to explain this phenomenon, Critical Race Theory, Cultural Reproduction Theory, and Social Reproduction Theory. Stated simply, Critical Race Theory describes race as a social construct used and maintained by the majority to dominate the minority (Delgador and Stefancie, 2002; Skiba, 2006). Cultural Reproduction theory argues that the public school system plays a critical role in reproducing the status quo in an effort to perpetuate the majority culture (Bowles & Gintis, 1977; Kupchik et al., 2007; Nolan, 2007; Skiba et al., 2006). Closely aligned to Cultural Reproduction Theory is Social Reproduction Theory. Collins (2009) argues that schools do not support equal opportunity but promote cultural, economic and linguistic inequalities. From this view he sees schools as institutions that perpetuate Social Reproduction Theory,

Borrowing from these theories, research designed to understand the root causes of why some students receive disproportionately more referrals than other students can be grouped into four broad and sometimes overlapping categories: racism; socioeconomic inequality; cultural differences; and school cultures.

The first explanation, racism, ignites much debate and emotion. Multiple studies cite racism as a root cause (Applied Research Center, 2000; Blackshear, 2008; Bock et al., 1998; Borrazzo, 1997; Cameron, 2006; Clark, 2002; Dehlinger, 2008; Gray, 2000; Hinojosa, 2007; Johnson et al., 2001; McFadden et al., 1992; Morgan, 1991; Skiba et al., 2002; Vanderharr, 2003; Wallace et al., 2008). Other studies suggest that disproportionality is not a function of race but a result of socioeconomic inequality (Christle et al., 2004; Diamond, 2004; Nolan et al., 2007; Skiba et al., 2006). Howarth

(2008) concluded similarly that socioeconomic status appears to be a better predictor of out-of- school suspension. A clash of cultures is a third often cited explanation (Borrazzo, 1997; Clark, 2002; Monroe, 2005, 2006; Williams, 2007; Wu, 1980; Nichols, 1999; Skiba et al., 2006). Most germane to this review is Beswick's (1990) definition for institutional and cultural prejudices which he describes as, "more subtle {than racism} because they are imbedded in unexamined assumptions and established procedures" (p.2). And, studies by Wu (1980) and Skiba et al. (2008) suggest high out-of-school suspension numbers are not a function of race but a function of the school a student attends. In contrast, studies by Kinsler (2007) and Nichols (1992) dispute the notion that disproportionality is a product of racial bias or socioeconomic inequality; instead they suggest that any discrepancy is a function of inconsistent data reporting systems.

Regardless of the causes, the preponderance of studies concludes that African American students are suspended out-of-school disproportionately when compared to Caucasian students. But while the data could be explained by different theoretical interpretations, the quantitative data are insufficient to settle definitively on one interpretation or another. Qualitative studies, on the grounds that they are attentive to the racial and social class dynamics of an integrated public school, can shed light on the processes that produce the outcomes and thus better enable us to judge which theoretical explanation for disparities is more prevalent among school personnel.

Though the majority of the studies conducted on student discipline are based on quantitative data derived from discipline reports, there are also qualitative studies, and mixed, qualitative and quantitative studies that directly or tangentially address these issues. These topics include academic achievement of African American students,

African American overrepresentation in special education, the effectiveness of In-School-Suspension, the effectiveness of disciplinary policies and procedures, the role of school/administrative leadership, and school boards and racism.

Several researchers, Nichols (1999), Green (2006), Children's Defense Fund (1975), Arriza (2003), and Blackshear (2008) conducted mixed-methods research, data and survey quantitative analysis coupled with interviews of students, teachers, administrators, and/or community members to investigate issues related to school discipline. Nichols (1999) reviewed discipline data reports generated from five schools and conducted interview sessions with the administration disciplinary teams. This study investigated discipline reporting systems and the ability of teachers to manage classroom discipline. The researcher found inconsistencies in data reporting systems and concluded that white middle class teachers were ineffective in managing discipline issues among African American students.

Blackshear (2008) reviewed data from discipline reports, surveys, and classroom observations in an effort to determine why African American males have a high rate of discipline referrals and to make recommendations about methods and practices to reduce these numbers. Blackshear concluded that teachers were inclined to hold negative judgments of African American students, and referrals were a result of negative student-teacher interactions. It was noted that when teachers were able to keep students engaged in learning, discipline problems decreased; students with less academic abilities encountered more discipline issues.

The findings suggested that racism does play a role in the disproportionate number referrals written for African American students. The study by Arriza (2003)

supported these findings, concluding that referrals are the result of defiance and disruption rooted in cultural, racist, and linguistic conflicts between teachers and students.

Other researchers conducted qualitative studies, interviews, case studies, and ethnographies to better understand issues related to school discipline. Studies by Lane (2006), Hyland (2003), Dotzert (1998), and Emihovich (1982) suggest that racism is a factor in student discipline. Studies by Nolan (2007) and Christle (2004) concluded that the effects of poverty play a major factor in student discipline. Williams (2007) conducted a study on teachers' ideology concerning classroom management and on how they can enhance African American academic achievement, concluding that teachers need much training on how to work with African American students. A study by Besaw (2006) had similar findings, concluding that schools need to figure out a better way to discipline students.

Barrazzo (2002) gained access to primary source documents, teacher-written referrals. In this quantitative study, referrals were coded for teacher and student demographics and incident data to assess different teacher conflict resolution styles. Results suggested that a teacher's cultural values, beliefs, and perceptions greatly influenced his conflict style selections and their views of discipline and student achievement. A review of the data revealed that African American males experience a higher number of referrals which resulted in out-of-school-suspension when compared to the entire population. Though much research has been done to support the assertion that disproportionality in discipline exists when comparing African American numbers to

Caucasian numbers and explanations for this have been explored, very little information has been gathered from and about the source of referrals, the classroom teacher.

Green (2006) after surveying teachers about discipline policies and interviewing focus groups of administrators, concluded that they all, teachers and administrators, agreed that the discipline policies were effective in controlling behavior and that violence was not a serious problem. Clearly, there appears to be a disconnection between discipline data reports and teachers and administrators' perception that current discipline practices are effective. The purpose of this study was to examine the correlates of discipline referrals in a diverse, high-poverty rural school district.

Theoretical Framework

Socioeconomic inequality is the framework for this quantitative study. This framework was most influenced by Diamond (2004). The results of the Diamond (2004) study suggested that teachers consciously and unconsciously assign asset and deficit "points" to students. Students from high socioeconomic backgrounds earn assets and those from low socioeconomic backgrounds earn deficits. Students who appear to have more assets than deficits by teachers are expected to learn at high levels and behave well. Students who appear to have more deficits than assets are not expected to learn at high levels and are not expected to behave. Further, Diamond (2004) concluded that, "the current of belief and practice tends toward lower expectations followed by a decreased sense of responsibility for students" (p. 76). The Diamond work, like this research, was designed from a socioeconomic framework.

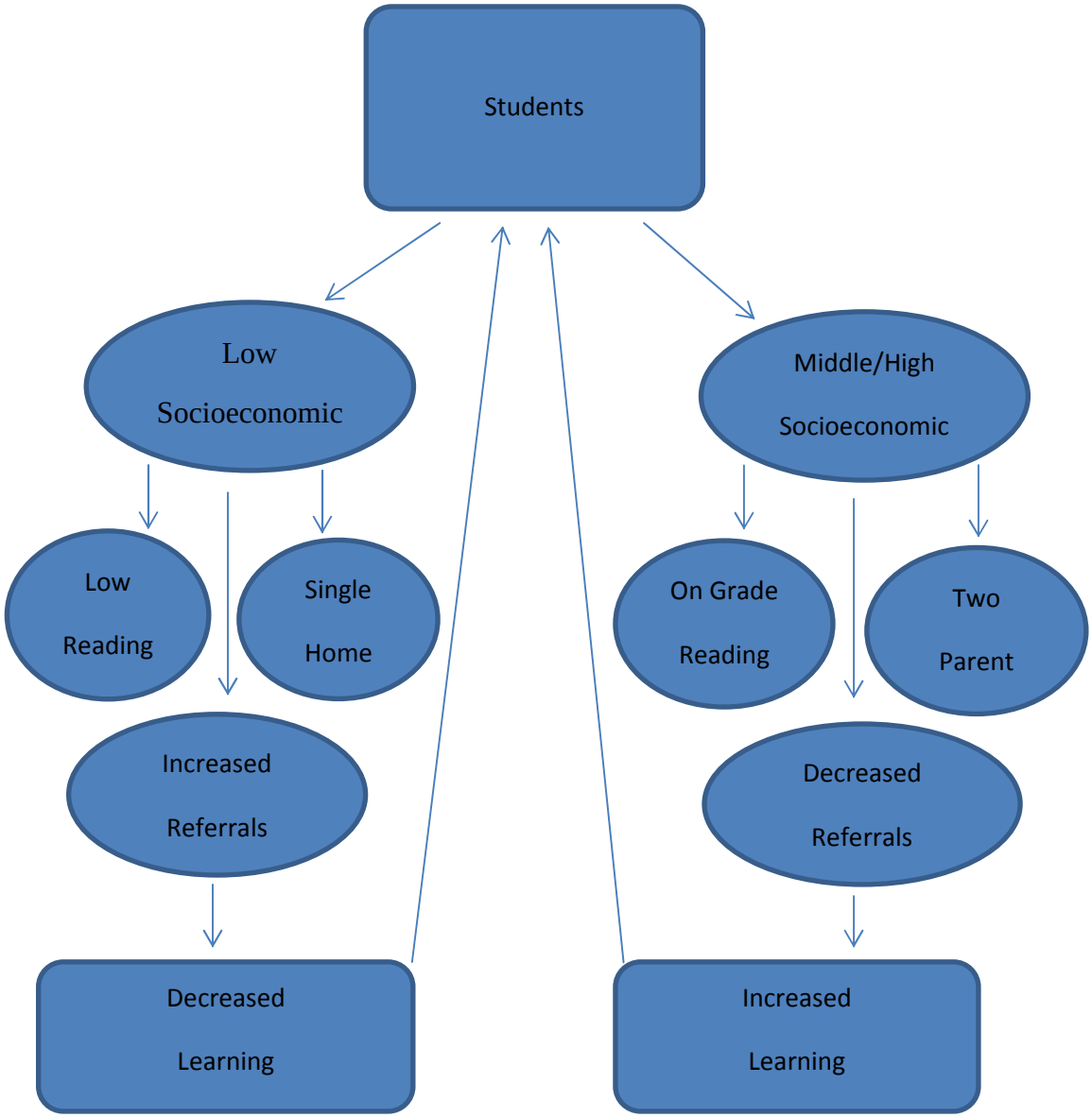
For this study, deficits are defined as: free and reduced lunch status; single-parent home; and reading below grade level. Assets are: full lunch; two-parent home; and

reading on or above grade level. Gender and ethnicity are neutral and referrals are the dependent variable. Simply stated, the researcher believes that the socioeconomic status (SES) of a student is directly related to the number of referrals a student receives. The higher the SES the fewer number of referrals a student is likely to receive; the lower the SES the greater the number of referrals a student is likely to receive. Increased referrals correlate to time out of class which can decrease student learning. The November, 2012, National Center for Education Statistics report, *Improving the Measurement of Socioeconomic Status for the National Assessment of Educational Progress* defines SES as "one's access to financial, social, cultural and human capital resources. Traditionally a students' SES has included as components, parental education attainment, parental occupational status, and household of family income, with appropriate adjustment for household or family composition." (p. 4)

The Socioeconomic Theoretical Framework is represented on the next page, Diagram 1.1. The framework suggests that students on full-pay lunch are more likely to be from two-parent homes and read on grade level. In turn these students are less likely to receive referrals for discipline infractions that lead to decreased time out of class and higher levels of learning. Students on free and reduced lunch are more likely to be from single-parent homes and read below grade level. These students are more likely to receive referrals for discipline infractions that lead to increased time out of class and lower levels of learning.

Diagram 1.1: Theoretical Framework

Socioeconomic Status – Student Referrals – Student Learning



The Theoretical Framework in Diagram 1.1 illustrates the Socioeconomic Theory that low economic statues students are at increased risk for referrals which can lead to decreased learning. High or middle socioeconomic students are at decreased risk for referral which leads to increased learning.

The belief that socioeconomic status is directly related to success in school is well supported by researchers (Baharundin et al., 1998; Bowers, 2013; Eamon, 2005; Majoribanks, 1996; McDill et al., 1989; McLeod, 1998; McNeal, 2001; Smith et al., 1997). Bowers (2013) examined relevant research to determine if changing social policy can help close the achievement gap. In this quantitative study he determined that many social conditions and environmental factors impact student learning but even more so for poor, minority students. He found a strong correlation between SES and reading levels and suggested that researchers and educators focus on the achievement gap among classes not races. McDill et al. (1989) concurred with these conclusions. He added that the conditions associated with students living in poverty include problems such as repeating a grade, requiring special education, out-of-school suspensions and dropping out of school.

Based on the belief that socioeconomic status is a key indicator of student academic performance and the supporting research cited above the following independent variables were chosen for this study: ethnicity, free and reduced lunch status, present reading level, grade in school, age, and, single-parent home. The dependent variable was number of referrals. The variables were chosen based on the collective works of other researchers highlighting student factors that influence student learning, socioeconomic status – free and reduced lunch, parents in the home – single parent home, grade in school to measure against reading level, and referrals – loss of time in class (Christle et al., 2004; Diamond, 2004; Nolan et al., 2007; Skiba et al., 2006). This study does not attempt to address cause and effect, just patterns. Recognizing any patterns among deficits, assets

and referrals could be used to help distinguish students most at risk to accrue discipline referrals and be suspended out of school.

Research Question

The research question was designed to distinguish which students are most at risk to accrue discipline referrals, based on identified deficits and assets.

1. What student characteristics, classified as assets and deficits, correlate with disciplinary referrals?

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The first step in understanding why disproportionality in school discipline appears to exist is to review the literature addressing school discipline and related issues. The literature review will examine the following: the legal rulings governing school integration, research indicating disproportionality in school suspensions and expulsions, research addressing the root causes of disproportionality – socioeconomic inequalities, data reporting systems, school norms, teacher and/or administrator bias, legal rulings governing claims of racism, root causes of teacher and/or administrator bias, racism, inequitable school practice, clash of cultures; and suggested solutions.

In 1954 the Supreme Court, in *Brown v. Board of Education* overturned the 1896 separate but equal doctrine established in *Plessy v. Ferguson.* The *Brown* case called for equal protection; this has been interpreted to mean nondiscrimination on the basis of race in school policies and practices. This ruling alone did not result in school integration. It was with the passing of Title VI, Section 601, of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, that the courts began forced school integration (Goldsmith, 1997).

Disproportionality and Race

Since that time much research has been generated suggesting that African Americans males are disproportionately suspended and expelled when compared to white males (Applied Research Center, 2000; Blackshear, 2008; Bock et al. 1998; Borrazzo, 1997; Cameron, 2006; Clark, 2002; Dehlinger, 2008; Gray, 2000; Hinojosa, 2007; Johnson et al. 2001; Mcfadden et al., 1992; Morgan, 1991; Skiba et al. 2002; Vanderharr, 2003; Wallace et al., 2008). A study by Gray (2000) found that "Blacks were 3 times as likely to be suspended as all other students combined" (p. 49). Wallace et al. (2008) reported similar findings arguing that the disproportionality in the number of African American students compared to white students highlights the system's hostility to court order integration.

In contrast research conducted by Dehlinger (2008) on the Texas public school system suggests that discipline bias against African Americans is not a function of imposed integration. This Texas study found that African American males are disproportionality suspended and expelled when compared to white males in schools and systems regardless of unitary status (court-ordered de-segregation). Dehlinger (2008) found that African American students are disproportionality suspended and expelled in schools in unitary status, in schools released from unitary status, and in schools who have never been in unitary status. Howarth (2008) referred to this phenomenon as "second generation segregation argued that regardless of integration when African-American students are suspended and/or expelled out of school disproportionately compared to Caucasian students the result is school segregation. The concern that school systems have

internally segregated is not new. In 1982, Emihovich wrote, “De-segregation succeeds because of ‘resegregation’ in schools” (p.17).

This phenomenon is further evidenced in segregated curriculum tracks and classrooms. My experience in both high schools and middle schools attest to how school systems have resegregated schools. Classroom segregation occurs in schools that place students into either remedial, college preparatory or honors-tracked curriculums. Criteria for placement into a specific track are based on some combination of school grades, norm-referenced and/or criterion referenced tests, and teacher recommendations. The long-term effect of this is that there is often a disproportionately low number of African American students enrolled in the honors and Advanced Placement classes compared to a disproportionate high number of African American students enrolled in practical and remedial classes.

Disproportionality and Special Education

As alarming as this is, the numbers of African American students placed in Special Education classrooms is of even more concern. Studies of Special Education populations find that African American students are significantly overrepresented in the population of Special Education students (Clark, 2002; Emihovich, 1982; Schott, 2005; Skiba et al., 1997). A more recent study by Skiba and Poloni (2006) mirrored these findings. This study found that African American students with disabilities are significantly overrepresented in general education classroom placements (inclusion) and in separate classroom settings (resource and self-contained). “Further, in almost all disability categories, African American students were more likely than their peers with

the same disability to be served in more restrictive settings" (p.419). Similar results were found in studies by Skiba (2006) and Gray (2006). Though the focus of this study is not disproportional minority representation in Special Education programs or in Honors-level classes, it is clearly an area in need of research and resolution.

Disproportionality and Socioeconomic Status

As cited above, since court ordered integration, the preponderance of school discipline studies suggest that African American students are disproportionally suspended and expelled when compared to white students. This clearly implies racial bias. Racial bias is assumed to be the reason for disproportionality because low socioeconomic populations are often high minority populations. There are studies that suggest disproportionality is not a function of race but a result of socioeconomic inequality (Christle et al., 2004; Diamond, 2004; Emihovich, 1982; Nolan et al., 2007; Skiba et al., 2006; Tenebaum et al., 2007). Public schools are funded by state and federal dollars. The system is designed so that each school has the resources needed to provide equal educational opportunities for all students. However, because schools have access to local monies, per pupil funding is higher, in some cases much higher, for schools located in high income areas.

In addition to the monetary advantage these schools have, they also serve a better educated parent and community population resulting in even more inequalities across school systems. A study by Christie et al. (2004) highlights the effect socioeconomic status can have in schools. The study concluded that when teaching students from high socioeconomic backgrounds, teachers held high expectations for students, challenged

them, and used positive reinforcement in the classroom to control behavior. When teaching students from low socioeconomic communities, teachers held low expectations for student learning and behavior, were inconsistent, and were more punitive in dealing with behavior.

Diamond (2004) supported the Christie findings couching his findings in terms of assets and deficits. The results of this study suggested that teachers consciously and unconsciously assign asset and deficit "points" to students based on a variety of criteria. Students from high socioeconomic backgrounds earn assets, and those from low socioeconomic backgrounds earn deficits. Students who appear to have more assets than deficits by teachers are expected to learn at high levels and behave well. Students who appear to have more deficits than assets are not expected to learn at high levels and are not expected to behave.

Findings by Howarth (2008) investigating student discipline agreed that socioeconomic status matters. He concluded that socioeconomic status appeared to be a better predictor of out-of-school suspension student ethnicity. Vanderharr (2003) posits "…those accumulating the majority of power are often the dominant group. …those with fewer resources …may be considered subordinate or oppressed. Thus, economic inequality is an important factor shaping the interactions of people within educational institutions. Economic inequality is linked with racial inequality" (p.7). Other studies reject this argument concluding that regardless of economic inequalities, African Americans are still are suspended and expelled at disproportionate levels and punished more harshly for less severe infractions when compared to white students (Johnson et al., 2001; Wallace et al., 2008; Warren, 2007).

Disproportionality and Data Reporting

Studies by Kinsler (2007) and Nichols (1992) dispute the notion that disproportionality is a product of racial bias or socioeconomic inequality; instead they suggest that any discrepancy is a function of inconsistent data reporting systems. An example of how suspension numbers may be inflated is as follows. Two students, one white, and one African American, are involved in a verbal altercation. Both are suspended pending a parent conference. The parent of the white student comes in the next morning, and a conference is held; the student is readmitted to class. The parent of the African-American student comes to the school two days later, a parent conference is held, and the student is readmitted to class. The infraction recorded on the discipline record for both students is verbal confrontation, but the consequence recorded for the white student is 1 day out-of-school suspension but three days of out-of-school suspension for the African American student.

Another possible inconsistency can be found in how the data are recorded. It is not unusual for one referral to contain multiple infractions such as cutting class, disrespect, and defiance. The official infraction recorded is often left to the discretion of the person imputing the data; this person may be the administrator in charge of discipline or, more than likely, the person is a clerk. Only one infraction per referral is imputed into the discipline data base, again, at the discretion of the person recording the data. This results in inconsistent reporting and the appearance that students are being disciplined differently for the same infraction.

Additionally, consequences imposed for an infraction are based on not only the most recent infraction but also on the number and severity of previous infractions. Again,

if discipline data are only superficially examined, it may appear that some students are disciplined more severely for the same infraction than other students. Findings by Kinsler (2007) underscore the problems with discipline reporting. In this study, the data collected found that for the majority of infraction categories, black students are significantly more likely to receive out-of-school suspension and for a longer period of time than white students who commit similar transgressions. This suggests racial bias, but the author contends the statistics do not account for previous referrals and differences in the disciplinary policies across schools (p. 50). Additional studies are needed to determine if inconsistent reporting is wide spread and to what degree discipline numbers may be inflated.

Disproportionality and Culture

Still other studies suggest high out-of-school suspension numbers are a function of the school a student attends (Skiba et al., 2008; Wu, 1980). Their research hypothesizes that the use of out-of-school suspension is not necessary to school discipline but a choice administrators use to control students and increase achievement. While their findings did support the assertion that the use of suspensions is related to the school a student attends, the findings did not support the assertion that high suspensions results in increased student achievement.

On the other hand, Skiba (2008) concluded that schools that suspend a high number of students have difficulty maintaining a positive school climate and tend to have low test scores. A related study conducted by Kinsler (2007) agreed that suspension numbers are a function of the school a student attends and that suspension is used to control student behavior, **"**…disparities in punishment result from varying disciplinary

levels across schools and not pernicious bias by principals at individual schools" (p. 54). But Kinsler (2007) disagreed on the effect suspension has on student achievement. He concluded, "Students who get out-of-school suspension tend to repeat and decrease achievement, but if it increases the achievement for peers a principal may increase overall achievement by longer out-of-school suspension" (p.59). Unlike the Skiba (2008), and Wu (1980) studies the Kinsler (2007), study considered the effect disruptive students have on the ability of their peers to learn. "Principals are eager to boost achievement; one tool used is discipline" (p. 57).

If school systems do use out-of-school suspension to improve student behavior and/or to improve student achievement, then research into its effectiveness is necessary. The majority of research about the effectiveness of out-of-school suspension suggests that it does not deter negative behavior; in fact it can do real harm (Bock et al., 1998; Howard, 2006; Johnson et al. 2001; Mcfadden et al., 1992; Skiba et al., 2008; Studley, 2002; Warren, 2007; Wu, 1980). Collectively, the studies determined that out-of-school suspension did not deter students from future negative behaviors. "…such exclusions (out-of-school suspension) can have a negative effect on students with backgrounds similar to those of the teachers, but it can be extremely detrimental of African-Americans…" (Studley, 2002, p. 97).

Out-of-school suspension recidivism numbers reported in the McFadden, 1992 study affirm that this form of discipline does not change student behavior. The study reported that only 31% of all students suspended were not repeat offenders, 75% were suspended up to 5 more times, and 25% were suspended up to 15 additional times. Additionally, these studies found days missed from school due to forced absences are

detrimental to student learning. Warren (2007) studied reading and math achievement and determined that suspension negatively affected student achievement.

Finally, these studies concluded that not only is out-of-school suspension not effective but it can lead to worse student behavior. The Johnson (2001) study found that student suspension can lead to expulsion, failure to graduate and, of more concern, juvenile detention. Many of these studies list a plethora of negatives attributed to out-of – school suspension - loss of self-respect, interaction with other "bad" kids, missed school work, peer stigma, and an increased likelihood of worsening problems. In sum, it appears that out-of-school suspension does not change student behavior. The studies cited in this section investigated the effect of out-of-school suspension may have on students who break school rules.

Other studies investigate the effect out-of-school suspension may have in improving the learning environment for the students who behave and their teachers. "It is the ghetto kids who destroy the classroom. They don't have the right to do it (*disrupt instruction*). Get rid of them and you will get a better school," Mr. Young (Arriaza, 2003, p. 90). This statement reflects well sentiments shared by many teachers and administrators. Students who disrupt class disrupt their learning and the learning of everyone in the class. Teachers write referrals because they want the "troublemakers" out of their classrooms. Administrators suspend these students to get "troublemakers" out of their schools (Arriaza, 2003; Wu, 1980). These teachers and administrators believe that removing these students improves the learning environment for the other kids in the school. Research conducted by Kinsler (2007) concluded that, "…schools are careful to respect the rights of disruptive students to the detriment of the well-being of other

students; peer misbehavior is costly from an achievement standpoint" (p. 139). Collectively, the studies in the literature review agreed that, regardless of the reason or effect, African American students appear to be disproportionately suspended and expelled when compared to white students.

The Kinsler (2007) study was the only study found that contradicted this finding. This study, conducted by three Duke University graduate level economists, investigated how North Carolina public school instruction is transformed into student knowledge and how this affects future student productivity. Based on their research, they concluded that African American students receive out-of-school-suspension at the same rate as white students within a particular school. "Once differences in disciplinary policies across schools are controlled for, out-of-school-suspension lengths for Blacks and Whites converge and are no longer significantly different" (p.54). They found no bias in student discipline regardless of race or socioeconomic status. Further, "Claims of racial bias are inaccurate, and there are significant achievement benefits associated with strict discipline" (p. 50).

The Kinsler (2007) study notwithstanding, the majority of research in the area of school discipline suggests that African American students are suspended and/or expelled disproportionally compared to white students. But, while much of the research agrees that disproportionality exists, there is no consensus on the root cause of this phenomenon. Morgan wrote in a 1991 study, **"**For reasons yet to be determined, Black pupils in general and Black males in particular are more often involved in school disciplinary processes than their White peers. This inequality has been documented for the past twenty-five years. Reasons for this inequality, culture gap, self-fulfilling prophecy, lower

expectations by teachers both Black and White, unequal resources, and inexperienced teachers, status and values of teachers incongruent with African-Americans" (p. 14).

Legal Rulings

To understand why documented inequality, regardless of its stem, still appears to flourish, it is important to study the legal rulings that govern accusations of inequality. A Legal Memorandum prepared by Goldsmith, 1997, outlines the court rulings cited to measure claims of racism. In *Hawkins v. Coleman, 376 F. Supp. 1330; N.D. Tex. 1974*, "racism" was cited as the chief cause of the disproportionate number of black students being suspended. Until 1976, the courts could base their decisions on statistical evidence alone to determine the existence of racism. "The mere demonstration of a racially disproportionate impact or effect of a school policy shifted the burden to the school district to show there is a legitimate or non-racial reason for the disproportionality" (p. 4).

But, in 1976 a Supreme Court ruling was handed down that completely changed the face of how cases of racism were determined. In *Washington v. Davis, 426 U.S. 299,* the court held that disproportionate impact alone does not demonstrate discrimination. The court determined that, "a discriminatory purpose or intent must also be proven in order to support a finding of a constitutional violation of equal protection. The court said that disproportionate impact was not irrelevant but that it was not the sole touchstone of invidious discrimination either" (p. 4). One year later in *Village of Arlington Heights v. Metropolitan Housing Development Corporation, 429 U.S. 252 (1977),* "the Supreme Court defined further the kinds of evidence necessary to establish discriminatory intent or purpose, degree of disproportionate impact, historical background of the challenged

decision, specific antecedent events, departures from normal procedures, and contemporary statements of decision makers" (p.4).

Collectively, these rulings profoundly affect the ability of a group to prove racial discrimination because disproportionate numbers alone no longer suffice, intent must be established. In response Johnson (2001) writes**,** "when racism is measured only by intent, rather than impact, policies such as standardized testing are seen as race-neutral" (p. 11).

Disproportionality and Schools

Intentional or not, much research suggest that teacher and/or administrator bias is the reason for the disproportional number of minority students suspended and expelled compared to white students (Applied Research Center, 2000; Cameron, 2006; Children's Defense Fund, 1975; Hall, 2006; Moule, 2009; Nichols, 1999; Wu, 1980). Cameron (2006) expressed this well, "Sadly, school disciplinary practices appear to be vehicles for the expression of racial and class based biases held by teachers and school administrators. It is in these ways school discipline may have its most iatrogenic impact on those students who are most vulnerable" (p. 223).

A student's journey to out-of-school suspension and expulsion begins with referrals. The vast majority of referrals are written by classroom teachers, and often 10% of teachers write 75% of all referrals. To understand why it appears that African American students are disproportionately disciplined compared to white students, these teachers need to be investigated to determine if their decision to write a referral is a function of racism (Nichols, 1999). Racism is defined as a developed set of attitudes that

include antagonism based on the supposed superiority of one group or on the supposed inferiority of another group, premised solely on skin color or race (Beswick, 1990).

This generation of educators was, for the most part, educated in an integrated K-12 public school system and entered the profession knowing that they are expected to educate all students. When a white teacher accuses an African American student of an infraction and writes a referral, the charge of racism by either the student and/or parent is not uncommon. Teacher reaction to this accusation is almost always intense. A study by Skiba (2006) found several recurring reactions to the accusation of racism by teachers: anger at the differences in students and parents, anger at the cultural mismatch of kids and school, frustration about inadequate schools, denial, claiming they are "color-blind", and an unwillingness to talk about the issue.

Additionally, the study found that African-American teachers were more willing to talk about race. Most teachers denied any racial bias, stating that any differences are economic, not racial. Similar findings were found in a study by Dotzert (1997), "Teachers are uncomfortable talking about racial behavior…; I have yet to find a white person who does not think that they are under attack when they are confronted with a race issue" (p.87). One explanation for why teachers are unable to discuss race is because it is framed as racist or not with no middle ground (Trepaegni, 2001).

Regardless of teacher denial that racism does not play a role in the decision to write a referral, research suggests otherwise. Wu (1980) determined that, "the subjective judgments and attitudes of the teachers throughout appear to be highly relevant to out-of-school suspension…teacher judgments, attitudes, or perceptions also determines whether

students are suspended out-of-school'' (p. 28). He concluded that "…racial bias plays a role in out-of-school suspension" (p. 44).

This same study asked if African American students were better off when taught by African American teachers. The results found no significant difference in how African American students were treated regardless of the race of the teacher. Given this, researchers have tried to determine whether teachers are aware of their bias but deny it or if they are unaware of their bias. In the mid-1990s, a test, the Implicit Association Test, was developed to measure unconscious bias. The test, developed by Anthony Greenwald and Maharin Banaji, was created because people
often do not speak their minds, and they suspected that people do not always know their own mind. The test can be accessed at www.tolerance.org/hidenbias/tutorials/04.htlm (Greenwald, McGhe-Wise, and Schwartz, 1998). Years of data gathered from individuals taking this test support findings in a study conducted by Moule (2009). He found that, "although many white Americans consider themselves unbiased when unconscious stereotypes are measured some 90% implicitly link blacks with negative traits (evil, failure)" (p. 324). Whether teacher and/or administrator bias is conscious or unconscious, it still has the same negative impact on African American students.

Infractions cited on student referrals offer support for the notion that teacher bias affect how they interact with African American students (Johnson, 2001; Monroe, "Bad Boys" 2005; Schott, 2005; Schwartz, 2001; Skiba. et al., 2002; Studley, 2002; Wallace et al., 2008). The Studley (2002) study conducted in San Diego schools identified the top reasons for referrals: 1. disrespect and overlapping speech, 2. fighting and play fighting, 3. conduct and humor, and, 4. disobedience. The second most common reasons for out-

of- school-suspension were defiance and disrespect, both subjective in nature. “Referrals for such offenses most likely depend highly on individual teachers’ levels of tolerance and understanding of the academic and developmental needs of the students they teach” (Studley, 2002 p. 106).

An example of how teachers interpret or misinterpret African American behaviors is found in the Wallace (2008) study. This study concluded that discrimination by teachers and administrators is evidenced in the way they respond to African American behaviors. Student tardiness to class is a chronic problem in schools regardless of grade level. In this study, which examined individual student referrals, a student was cited for a “physical and verbal threat” directed at a teacher in response to a teacher reprimand for being tardy to class. This is a serious infraction and could, and most likely would if upheld, result in removal to an alternative program or expulsion. But a closer look into the incident revealed that when the teacher reprimanded the African American student for being late to class, the student responded, “Man, I was just fix’n to bounce on you.” The teacher interpreted this language as threatening.

Similar findings were reported by Skiba in 1997, 2002, and again in 2008. The 1997 study found that the preponderance of referrals was for issues of non-compliance, disrespect, disobedience, and improper conduct. There was also little consistent relationship between the seriousness of infractions and severity of consequences. The Skiba (2002) study found that the infractions recorded most frequently for white students were smoking, leaving class without permission, obscene language, and vandalism. The infractions recorded most frequently for African American students were disrespect, excessive noise, threat, and loitering. The referrals recorded for African American

students were clearly more subjective in nature than those recorded for white students. He concluded, “The primary source of disciplinary disproportionality; rather, school suspension seemed to function to ‘pass along’ the racial discrepancies originating at the level of the referral to the office” (p.334).

A third study by Skiba (2008) concluded that African American students were suspended for less severe but more subjective infractions. This study by Skiba agrees that teacher and/or administrator bias results in discipline disproportionality but frames the issue as inequitable school practices.

In schools, like all political institutions, the rules and regulations governing the members of an organization are developed by the dominate culture. The dominant culture in K-12 public schools in the United States is white middle class. Whether at the district or school level discipline policies are both developed and enforced by the white middle class majority. Much research has been dedicated to the investigation of the application of school discipline practices (Besaw, 2006; Blackshear, 2008; Cameron, 2006; Gray, 2000; Green, 2006; Johnson, et al., 2001; Kinsler, 2007; Kupchik et al., 2007; McFadden et al., 1992; Skiba et al., 1997; Skiba et al., 2008; Wallace et al., 2008). Though many school systems enacted some form of zero-tolerance and/or “three strikes you’re out” policies after the 9/11 terrorists attack that mandated specific consequences for specific infractions the vast majority of consequences are still left to the discretion of a school or district administrator. Very much like criminal court judges, administrators know that the individuals who commit infractions all have different histories and experiences and that the circumstances surrounding each infraction are unique. Given this, administrators do not want their “hands tied” by mandated consequences per infraction. It is this subjective

flexibility in assigning punishments that leaves room for real discrimination in assigning punishment or, at least, the appearance of discrimination.

Of the studies dedicated to school discipline policies, several suggest that there is an inequitable application of school discipline when comparing African American students and white students (McFadden et al., 1992; Skiba et al., 1997; Skiba et al., 2008; Wallace et al., 2008). Though the exact percentages vary in each study, they all agreed that given the percentage of referrals earned by African American students, a disproportionately high number of students were suspended-out-of-school and a disproportionately low number received in-school-suspension and/or detention. In schools where corporal punishment is still practiced the most common reason for its use was defiance and bothering others. Though more white students than African American students were cited for these offenses, more African American students were administered corporal punishment. When teachers were asked their impression of the application school policies, they stated that while the rules governing suspension and expulsion were clear, they agreed students were not treated fairly and this can cause confusion among the students (Gray, 2000; Green, 2006). When Kupchick (2007) interviewed students, he found that African American students perceived discipline policies as inconsistent as and less fair than white students.

Again, the only significant study found that disputed the findings that discipline policies are unequally applied was the aforementioned Kinsler study. That study found that, “Once I control for varying policies across schools the difference in discipline for Black and White students is significantly reduced. In some cases it actually appears as if White students are punished more severely. The vast majority of aggregated racial gap in

discipline stems from cross school variations in discipline policies" (Kinsler, 2007, p. 108). Teacher racism and administrator bias as reflected in school discipline practices are suggested explanations for the disproportional suspension and expulsion rates of African American students in the K-12 public education system.

A clash of cultures is a third often cited explanation (Borrazzo, 1997; Clark, 2002; Monroe, 2005, 2006; Williams, 2007; Wu, 1980; Nichols, 1999; Skiba et al., 2006; Tenenbaum et al., 2007; Vanderharr, 2007). Beswick (1990) defines culture as the ideas, customs, and art of a people's living present. He writes, "Culture is not static but rather a dynamic context for social life that all people have a right to shape" (p. 5). He distinguishes culture form ethnicity, defining ethnicity as historically pertaining to generational heritage and history. Most germane to this review is Beswick's definition for institutional and cultural prejudices which he describes as, "More subtle (*than racism*) because they are imbedded in unexamined assumptions and established procedures" (p.2).

The majority of teachers and administrators in public education are white, middle-class Americans. They make decisions, interact with students and interpret experiences from a cultural framework based on white, middle class America. "People with power determine the values and norms of school based on their culture and drive out other cultures. …adults force their culture on the young" (Vanderharr, 2003 p.7). Interviews conducted by Borrazzo (1997), "… revealed that the teachers' cultural values, beliefs, and perceptions greatly influence their conflict style selection as they influence their views of discipline and student achievement" (p. 210). When dealing with students

from a similar background, this can be an asset, but when dealing with students from a different cultural framework, this can be a problem.

Studies by Hinojosa (2007), Wu (1980), and Nichols (1999), conclude that the root cause of disproportionality in school discipline is conflicting cultures. “Schools are middle-class institutions with middle class people teaching and administering them. It is the different cultural orientation of the largely low socioeconomic minority students in conflict with the middle class orientation of the school that explains their higher out-of-school suspension rate, not racial bias” (Wu, 1990, p. 4). Clark (2002) underscored the argument that students not from the cultural norm in the school have less ability to succeed in school evidenced by increased discipline problems and placement in Special Education. Monroe (2006) agrees that it is culture misunderstanding that impacts high minority suspensions. He describes white middle class culture as characterized by lack of affect, constraint, deference to authority, turn-taking, and linear conversations contrasted to the African American culture characterized by overlapping, animated, emotional talk, and physical expression. He concludes, “Schools are populated by White middle-class teachers who expect White cultural norms of behavior; this leads to misinterpretation of African American behavior” (Monroe, 2006, p. 163).

Similar findings were reported in a study by Tenenbaum, et al. (2007). This study found that teachers hold higher expectations, provide more positive reinforcement, and write fewer referrals for students from European American backgrounds than for students from Latino and African American backgrounds. Hyland (2005) contends that teachers would not knowingly hurt kids, but do so unconsciously not understanding their underlying attitudes. Not understanding the cultural differences of the students a teacher

teaches may be unconscious but it can cause much harm (Arriaza, 2003; Clark, 2002; Monroe, 2006, Skiba et al., 2006).

When teachers misunderstand and interpret a student comment or action as disrespectful or threatening and then react by writing a referral that results in a disciplinary action, students react strongly. Young people have a strong sense of right and wrong and justice and injustice. Most do not have the maturity to understand the concept of mismatched cultures and are unable to successfully master school. Arriaza (2003) concluded, "Teachers… interpret such behavior (*African American*) in ways that only lead to a clash with students own cultural positions. Students, on the other hand, tend to play with the expectations and power dynamics in ways that only exacerbate the negative impact on their capacity to build social capital" (p.92).

Skiba et al. (2002) explains, white teachers and students see racial disparity in discipline as unconscious. African American sees this as conscious and deliberate – applying rules to exclude. that (1996) adds, "African American see differences in communication styles and lack of respect by teachers and are 'pushed to the edge'; they are encouraged to be hostile" (p.175). Resistance Theory provides some insight into student reaction to a hostile system. "Student conflict and violence can be understood within a theory of resistance, not as a form of rebellion against prescribed norms, but because such 'power-moves' between students are not unrelated relations of power between students and institutional and state agents [school personnel and law enforcement]" (Nolan, 2007, p. 13). Further, he suggests more serious results, "Findings revealed that students found creative, albeit sometimes destructive, ways to preserve valued identities and contest policies. And, findings suggest that the school has assumed

a key role in the management of an educationally and economically marginalized group – poor and working class urban youth of color" (p. 334).

Theoretical Concepts

The notion of management of the poor and working class brings to the table the very serious claims that schools play a role in Cultural Reproduction tied to the concept of White Privilege and Critical Race Theory tied to the concept of White Racism. It is argued that the public school system plays a critical role in reproducing the status quo in an effort to perpetuate the majority culture (Bowles & Gintis, 1977; Kupchik et al., 2007; Nolan, 2007; Skiba et al., 2006). "Schools are shaped by the needs of the capitalist marketplace. School reproduces existing classes and status inequalities in society." This is significant to schools because "African American students are stereotyped as more violent or more in need of control than White kids and this shapes school practices and student perception" (Kupchik et al., 2007, p. 57).

Imbedded in the Theory of Cultural Reproduction is the concept of White Privilege. Members of the dominant culture are, for the most part, unaware to the privilege this affords them (Dotzert, 1997; Johnson et al., 2001; Monroe, 2005; Hyland, 2005). The 2001 study by Johnson summed up well the impact White Privilege has on schools. The study points out that White Privilege is prevalent in teaching materials, in assumptions made by teachers, in norm-referenced test that are gauged against the dominant race and that there is "little analysis of how white privilege creates an unequal context that advantages White, while denying Children of Color" (p.6). The Dotzert (1997) study researched evidences of racism in an all-white school board and concluded

that the board members were completely unaware of how their whiteness benefits them. Further, one board member stated that there was not a race problem in the schools because they had no African American students in the schools. The unspoken suggestion is that the presence of African America children in the schools that creates racism. The effect of White Privilege was examined in a three year, ethnographic study conducted by Hyland (2005). The author observed four teachers and documented their interactions with the minority students they taught. The study amplified the disconnect between what has been identified as good practices for teaching students of color and how the four teachers in the study understand themselves as good teachers.

The first teacher, Pam, was referred to as the "helper" because she saw teaching as her way to help the poor black kids and their families. After successfully helping the mother of one of her African-American students recover a stereo she had pawned, Pam stated, "She was so grateful to me because she knew that I had helped her. I mean I was tough on her though, I wasn't just going to give her something. That's not what these people need" (p. 440).

The second teacher, Sylvia, was Latino but because of the death of her parents at an early age, she was adopted by a white family. She wanted her African-American students to use her assimilation to whiteness as a role model. She felt that she could be a role model for students of color so they could choose to be white as she had. She stated, "I am feeling guilty now because I don't feel like I am disadvantaged and technically I am Hispanic, but I don't see myself that way. Maybe that could be good for our students too – to stop seeing themselves as minorities" (p. 443). More disturbing, she referred to

herself as “lucky” to have been raised by white parents. Her parents had died when she was a baby.

The third teacher was Carmen who believed she understood the minority cultures she taught and was, therefore, able to become a part of them. When asked about instruction, she explained that she prefers to do creative, hands-on activities, but African American students cannot handle these activities. Ironically, when questioned, she stated that she sees the curriculum as race neutral and seemed to be unaware of White Privilege. The fourth teacher, Miaze, was described as the most radical of the teachers studied and openly challenged others who showed racism but did not see any need to connect with the African American community of the children she taught. The author concluded “… these four teachers perpetuated ‘whiteness’ and this is embedded in their teaching. All teachers fell short of what they need to be good teachers of African American students. All appeared good but still permitted belief and practices that sustained racism in the school” (p. 55). Collectively, these teachers acted in a way that they, based on their words, did not believe to be racist. Looking at their actions through a lens of “White Privilege” it is difficult not to see their actions as racists. This reinforces the need to provide research that helps educators see that regardless of intent their actions are hurting students.

While scholars debate whether White Privilege imbedded in Cultural Reproduction Theory is for the majority conscious or unconscious, there is less doubt that White Racism imbedded in Critical Race Theory is a construct held knowingly by some members of the majority. Critical Race Theory describes race as a social construct used and maintained by the majority (Delgador & Stefancie, 2002; Skiba, 2006).

Hyland (2005) describes racism as, “A historically and socially assigned category, socially constructed as a result of history, politics, and economics” (p. 431). Further, he describes white racism as “Bigger than bigotry, it is supported by discourse, ideology, the legal system and everyday practice. Whites are advantaged, all other groups are disadvantaged, it is about power, and they create hegemonic ideology and discursive norms that position them as superior. Racism relies on institutional power and the mask of normal to the subordinate the African-American subgroup. Whiteness is supported by racism the racism preserves Whiteness“(p. 432). He concludes that Whiteness creates an in group and by definition a subordinate group. The result is that the most wretched white member of the in group has a higher status than the best members of the out group; their only claim to fame is their Whiteness.

Regardless of reasons, innocuous or insidious, the preponderance of research suggests that African-American students are disproportionately suspended and expelled compared to white students. Given this, questions asked by Skiba (2002) must be addressed, “Why do discipline inequalities continue despite of 25 years of consistent documentation? *(and*) Will there ever be enough data to prove discrimination exists and what will it take to make educators and policymakers say it must stop” (p. 338)? Reasonably the first step to stop discrimination is for educators to admit that racial bias exists (Skiba, 2006). Once a real conversation begins then educators can begin to explore real solutions including understanding the importance of any difference in teaching students not subjects, providing for teacher’s cross-cultural training, implementing an engaging, inclusive curriculum, acknowledging and understanding the “hidden” curriculum students experience in schools, making school meaningful for all students,

eliminating teacher apathy, and educating educators to the privilege their whiteness affords them, and the damage done to minority students (Monroe, 2005; Stevick, 2000, 2003, 2007;Williams, 2007; Wu, 1980).

Collectively, the literature review strongly suggests that the education systems and educator actions contribute greatly to the disproportionate number of minority students suspended out of school. If this is the case then clearly the root causes of this, whether they be grounded in Critical Race Theory or Cultural Reproduction Theory or Social Reproduction Theory, must be brought to light, addressed, and changes must happen.

This study was most influenced by the socioeconomic inequality issues explored in the Diamond (2004) study. As a researcher that has worked in worked in the public education system for the past thirty years I have witnessed actions by school leaders and teachers that have strong undertones of racism. I understand that racism exists to a degree in all persons. I have seen little overt racism exhibited by public school leaders and teachers and what I have seen has decreased over the years. Regardless, the numbers show that minority students, most especially, African-American males are suspended from school and do drop-out of school disproportionately more than white students.

The Diamond (2004) study, based on socioeconomic inequality, enforced my professional belief that the "great divide" in education is based on economics. In his study he used concrete information, specific deficits and assets based on students' economic status to uncover which students were most likely to be suspended out-of – school. Young et al. (1997) concluded that a student's socioeconomic status is a key

factor in success in school, students living in high socioeconomic households are more likely to be successful in school, students living in low socioeconomic households are less likely to be successful in school.

This study was built on a socioeconomic framework to provide a picture of the deficits and assets of the students in the sample population they had accrued over a period of time. Specific student factors included were, free and reduced lunch status, single parent home, reading level, grade in school, and the number of referrals accrued by the student. This study will add to the literature by either supporting the notion that socioeconomic inequality is key to student success in school or it will suggest the need for other explanations for student failure in school be explored.

If the results support the findings by other researchers (Baharundin et al., 1998; Bowers, 2013; Eamon, 2005; Majoribanks, 1996; McDill et al., 1989; McLoyd, 1998; McNeal, 2001; Smith et al., 1997) that have found that socioeconomic status is a key factor is a student's success in school then more informed conversations among educators can begin to address these issues. Further, these findings lend support to the notion that to fix these problems discussions must go beyond the school house door. Discussions about student learning must broaden to include social policy. School systems and educators have little control over students' home environment. If low socioeconomic status, generational and situational poverty, is a key factor in decreased student learning then this must be addressed at the local, state, and federal policy level.

Chapter 3

Methods

This chapter describes the methods and procedures used in this study. Included in this chapter is a description of the research design, population and sample, sampling procedures, instrumentation, data collection procedures, data analysis, and limitations. The purpose of this study was to examine the correlates of discipline referrals in a diverse, high-poverty rural school district. Much research has been generated suggesting that African Americans males are disproportionately suspended and expelled when compared to white males. To make public education work for all students, it is critical to uncover the reasons that so many students, especially African American students, are suspended. This study posits that identifying student deficits and assets could be used to help target students most likely to be suspended out of school. Identifying these students will help inform teachers and school leaders of the students most likely to be removed from school.

The following research question guided this study.

1. Do the data suggest patterns among the assets or deficits of students in the general education population referred to the office for disciplinary infractions?

Research Design

Quantitative methods, specifically, Descriptive Statistics were used in this study. This method was chosen because it deals in numbers, logic, and objectivity, and can be generalized to predict future results (Moore, 2010, p. 25). Descriptive statistics were incorporated as a means of describing and summarizing the data selected for this study (Fink, 2009, pp. 78-79). Calculations were run for mean, median and for measures of central tendency and dispersion. Both categorical and ordinal variables were included in the study. The categorical variables were, sex: male/female, ethnicity: African American/white/Hispanic, number of parents in household: 1/2, Free and Reduced status: yes/no, and infractions: yes/no. The ordinal variables were, age: 4 years to 19 years, grade: K4 through senior, Reading Equivalent: Pre-K through 12+, subjective referrals: 0 through n, and objective referrals: 0 through n. Discipline records covering a specific period of time of August 19, 2013, through January 21, 2014, for each school were reviewed.

These variables were selected based on the study's theoretical framework, socioeconomic inequality. This framework suggests that disproportionality in student discipline is a function of a student's socioeconomic status. Also tied to socioeconomic status is the number of parents in the household and academic progress. Given this, the variables, free and reduced lunch and number of parents in the household were chosen to provide information about a student's socioeconomic status. The assumption being that student on free and reduced lunch and living with one parent are more likely to live below the poverty line. The variables, age, grade, and reading level were chosen to provide academic information. The assumption being that students who are in the grade

appropriate to their age and are reading on or above grade level are academically proficient. The source for all of the data, with the exception of reading level, was retrieved from Power School. Power School is the name of the software used by the state to record and track student data. Reading level data were obtained from the Measure of Academic Progress Test (MAP), which is produced by the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) to determine academic progress for k-12 students. This test is administered annually in the district.

The mean of total infractions, the mean of subjective referrals, and the mean of objective referrals was calculated. The mean was also calculated for age of student, grade level, and reading level. The standard deviation was also calculated for these same variables to provide information about variability (Fink, 2009, pp. 80-82). Proportions were calculated for sex, ethnicity, free and reduced lunch, and single-parent home. These proportions are ratios comparing the number of students selected per group to the total population. Mean and median was also calculated for age, grade, reading level, and infractions as a means of comparison for the measures of center (Fink, 2009, pp. 79-81). This design was chosen because it provided a framework for systematically and accurately organizing the observed data.

Population and Sampling

The site chosen for this study was Blake County School District where I have served as a middle school principal. Conducting research in a site where I have worked is referred to as backyard research (Glesne, 2011). I selected this site because it allowed me access to the data needed for the study. Weiss (1994, pp.24-29) argued that there are

situations in which "convenience sampling is the only feasible way to proceed, for example, in attempting to learn about a group that is difficult to gain access to…" (Maxwell, 2005, p.89).

The most recent statistics for Blake County School District show that this district is representative of the many districts highlighted in the research where the data show that African American students are disproportionality suspended out-of-school compared to Caucasian students. Blake County School District is located in rural South Carolina with a poverty rate of 78% and serves grades K-12 students. The total population of Blake County School District is approximately 4000 students, 43.7% African American, 53% Caucasian and 3.3% other. Of the African American population, 48.4% are male and 51.6% are female; of the Caucasian population 49.2% are male and 50.8% are female. The students are housed in one K4-2 primary school, one 3-5 elementary school, one 6-8 middle school, one 9-12 high school, a career center, and an alternative school. Many of the students are from second and third generation families that also attended the school.

Teachers generate all student grades and the majority of all referrals. Grade distribution for the first semester shows that of the total A's earned, 68.0% were earned by Caucasian students and 28.7% by African American students. The percentage of F's earned by Caucasian students was 40.6% and for African American students 57.1%.

Discipline data show a different balance. The numbers are high for African-American students; 54.8% have been suspended for at least one day. The data are low for Caucasian students with only 42.4%. Data recorded for students referred for subjective reasons such as "disrespect" are 59.8% African American students and 41.8% for

Caucasian students. Collectively, the statistics for African American students attending Blake County School District as compared to Caucasian students are disproportional.

Table 3.1: Total Population by Ethnicity, Gender, Grades, Out-of School Suspensions, Subjective Referrals

Ethnicity	Total Population	Total Male	Total Female	Total "A's"	Total "F's"	Total Out-of-School Suspensions	Total Subjective Referrals
African-American	43.7%	48.4%	51.6%	28.7%	57.1%	54.8%	59.8%
White	53%	49.2%	50.8%	68.0%	40.6%	42.4%	41.8%

Of the total population there are approximately 5% more white students than African-American students, there is little percentage difference between the total number of African-American males and females and white males and females. There is a large difference in grades. African-American students earn approximately 17% more "F's" than do white students; inversely white students earn approximately more 40% "A's" than total African-American students. White students receive about 10% fewer out-of-school suspensions than African-American students and approximately 20% fewer subjective referrals.

Sampling Procedures

The population sampled in this study included all full time students enrolled in the school district, just under 4000 students. The population range was Pre-kindergarten through seniors in high school. Student state identification numbers were collected for each student enrolled in each of the four schools, primary, elementary, middle, and high.

Records were not collected from the career center because students only attend on a part-time basis. Their student records are housed at the high school. Nor were they collected from the Alternative Program because students are only assigned there on a short term basis and their student records remains with the home school. Fifty student identification numbers were randomly selected using a simple random selection generator for each of the four schools, primary, elementary, middle, and high. After the 200 identification numbers were selected, the identification numbers and names were deleted.

Data Collection and Organization

The first step in the data collection process was to secure permission to conduct the research at Blake County School District. Before collecting the data permission was secured from the District Superintendent to access student data. A letter was submitted outlining purpose and parameters of the study for approval. The superintendent granted approval and gave the researcher access to all student records in Power School and to all student MAP records. After permission was granted, the study proposal was submitted to the University of South Carolina Institutional Review Board for approval. The study was approved.

Data on each of the samples were collected from PowerSchool and MAP reading scores. The data were recorded on an Excel spreadsheet and coded for the following data: sex/ethnicity, grade/age, free and reduced status, household numbers, number of parents in the household, and reading level. Free and reduced status and one-parent household status were coded as deficits (1). Data coded as assets (2) were full-pay status and two-parent household. The data coded as deficits were free and reduced status and single-

parent homes. Student sex was recorded as F (female) and M (male). Ethnicity was recorded as W (White), B (African-American), and H (Hispanic). Age was recorded numerically, ages four through eighteen. Grade levels were recorded as Pre-K, four-year-old kindergarten, K, five-year-old kindergarten, and, first grade through twelfth grade. Infractions accrued from reading levels were recorded as 0 – 13 based on grade. Pre-K was recorded "N/A" because they are considered non-readers and no data were available. Zero was used for any reading level below 1st grade, and thirteen was used for reading levels above 12th grade. The number of referrals were counted and recorded as total number of subjective referrals and total number of total referrals. Total referrals were concrete, needing very little, if any, teacher discretion. These included, but were not limited to, tardy to school/class, cutting class, profanity, dress code violation, electronic devise violation, off-limits, ID violation, fighting, weapon violation, and possession of a controlled substance. Subjective referrals were open to interpretation. The referral was written based on student behaviors as interpreted by a teacher or administrator. These behaviors included, but were not limited to, disrespect, rude, classroom disruption, bus infractions, failure to obey, horseplay, and failure to follow directions.

Data Analysis

The data were collected from PowerSchool and MAP and entered into Excel for Windows. The sample included 200 students in the general education setting out of a population of 4000 students. One student from the general education sample was removed because required demographic information was not available, leaving a general education sample population of 199. From these samples, the data analysis procedures were chosen to determine if certain student characteristics were common among students

who received disciplinary infractions. Measures of centers and proportions provided the researcher with an initial perspective of characteristics most likely to be prevalent among students that accrue disciplinary referrals. Specific data analysis procedures were used to address the research question.

Research Question

What student characteristics, classified as assets and deficits, correlate with disciplinary referrals?

Descriptive statistics were used to answer the first research question. The statistics compiled were the mean and median. These measures were calculated using Microsoft Excel for Windows. Measures of spread, standard deviation, were also calculated using the same program. Lastly, Excel was used to solve the proportions for the categorical. Categorical variables were gender, ethnicity, free and reduced status and single-parent home. The measures of center and spread were calculated for quantitative variables, age, grade, reading level, and number of total infractions, subjective infractions, and objective infractions. All descriptive statistics were calculated for the three demographic groups, African American, Caucasian, and Hispanic. These statistics were also calculated for gender, male, and female.

Descriptive statistics were also used to determine if there was any pattern among students with identified deficits referred to the office for disciplinary infractions compared to students with identified assets. The statistics compiled were the mean and median. These measures were calculated using Microsoft Excel for Windows. Measures of spread, standard deviation, were also calculated using the same program. For these

analysis assets, two-parent households, full-pay lunch status, and students on or above grade level data were grouped to determine mean, median, and standard deviation for all infractions. Deficits, one-parent households, free and reduced lunch status, and below grade level reading data were grouped to determine mean, median, and standard deviation for all infractions.

Limitations

The issues investigated in this study were complex. This study was limited by the selection of data coded and analyzed. In every instance when a teacher made a decision to write a disciplinary referral for a student that resulted in a consequence that may or may not have removed him or her from school, there was almost an infinite number of factors that could have led to that action. This study looked at only a limited number of student assets and deficits and their potential connection to disciplinary referrals that may or may not have led to suspensions and expulsions and, in turn, to potential academic problems. Further, there was no attempt to uncover or to differentiate teachers' or administrator's assets or deficits. Additionally, this study was specific to a small, southern, rural school district and, therefore, the results are not easily applicable to different populations.

Chapter 4

Analysis of the Data

The purpose of this study was to examine the correlates of discipline referrals in a diverse, high-poverty rural school district. Descriptive statistics were incorporated as a means of organizing the data for analysis. The following analyses were calculated. The mean and standard deviation was calculated for ethnicity and gender. The mean and standard deviation was calculated by ethnicity for age of student, grade level, and reading level. Calculations were then performed for the mean of total infractions and then the proportions total infractions, subjective infractions and objective infractions by ethnicity. Proportions were also calculated for total infractions, subjective infractions, and objective infractions by ethnicity and gender. For number in household mean, median, and, proportions were calculated for total infractions, total subjective infractions, and total objective infractions. Proportions, mean, median, and standard deviations were calculated free lunch, reduced lunch, and for full pay students. Proportions for lunch status were then calculated for total, subjective, and objective infractions. Proportions mean, median, and standard deviations were calculated for students reading on or above grade level and for students reading below grade level. Proportions for reading levels were then calculated for total, subjective, and objective infractions. Finally, assets, full pay lunch, two-parent households, and on or above grade level data were calculated for mean,

median, and standard deviation for total infractions. And, deficits, free and reduced lunch status, one-parent household, and reading below grade level data were calculated for mean, median, and standard deviation for total infractions. This quantitative design was chosen because it provided a framework for systematically and accurately organizing the data as observed by the researcher.

Research Question

The purpose of this study was to examine the correlates of discipline referrals in a diverse, high-poverty rural school district. To determine these correlates, the research investigated:

Do the data suggest patterns among the assets or deficits of students who are referred to the office for disciplinary infractions?

Description of Population

Participants for this study were K-12 students from a small rural district located in the midlands of South Carolina. Permission was granted from the district superintendent to access the records of 200, from a population of 3,864 students, random- selected students from the 4K-12 general education population. Of the total number of students, 199 randomly selected from the general population, 103 were males, ninety-six were female, ten were Hispanic, eighty-eighty were African American, and 101 were Caucasian.

Table 4.1: Sample by Ethnicity and Gender

Total Sample – 199	Caucasian	African-American	Hispanic
Male	56	41	6
Female	45	47	4

The sample population was relatively evenly divided by gender; 96 females and 103 males. By ethnicity 81 students in the sample were African Americans and 101 were white. The sample included 10 Hispanic students.

The school district serves residents of a small, rural community with a population of approximately 9,412; it covers an area of around 11,000 miles. The population of the district has a positive growth trend as new homes and mobile home parks have been constructed. Unfortunately, there has not been a similar rise in income. The average individual income is $15,057. The percent of individual's living below poverty is 21.4; the percent of families with children living below the poverty level is 27.3. The community is composed of three small towns. Kids Count data show that 22% of children in South Carolina live in poverty, yet 27.3% students in the district attendance area live in poverty. A percentage of 77.8 of the students in the attendance area are eligible for free and reduced lunch.

The unemployment rate in the attendance area is six-percentage points higher than the national average, According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the unemployment rate among the working population is 16.6%. Of the 21,209 children under the age of eighteen living in the district, 6,115 are living in a one-parent household where the parent

is unemployed or a two-parent household where neither parent is employed. Based on current census information, 28.5% of all adults twenty-five and older did not graduate from high school, and only 16.3% have a four- year or higher degree. The high school graduation rate for comparative districts is 78.6%; for this attendance area, the graduation rate is 78% (South Carolina Department of Education, District Report Card, 2013). Higher graduation rates impact the community by providing more people ready to enter the work-force and by providing students more opportunities to read; to be prepared for higher-education or work is one goal for all schools. The drop-out rate for the district is 2.5%.

A significant number of the students in the district attendance area are behind two or more reading levels and are being reared in one-parent, semi-illiterate homes. The following statistics underscore the challenges these students face. Overall, 46% of all students scored Not Met on the standardized PASS reading assessment. Kids Count data show that 65% of the students' mothers are single; of that number 72% are working mothers, and 26% of those have not completed twelfth grade.

Statistical Analysis of the Research Question

Research Question

Do the data suggest patterns among the assets or deficits of students in the general education population that are referred to the office for disciplinary infractions?

Descriptive statistics were used to answer the research question. The statistics are presented in Tables 4.1 through Table 4.14. The statistics compiled were the mean, median, proportion, and, standard deviations were calculated. Descriptive statistics were

calculated for the three demographic groups, African American, white, and Hispanic. These statistics were also calculated for both sexes, male and female.

Table 4.2: Sample Mean, Standard Deviation, and Median by Ethnicity and Gender

	Mean Age	Std. Dev. of Age	Median Age
Black Female (47)	10.9	3.7	11
White Female (45)	11.5	4.4	13
Hispanic Female (4)	10.5	5.2	11
Black Male (41)	11.4	4.3	12
White Male (56)	11.6	4.5	12.5
Hispanic Male (6)	9.7	5.2	9

The mean and median age of African American and Hispanic students in the sample was lower than the mean and median age of white students. The mean and median age of African American and Hispanic males and females in the study was slightly lower than for white males and females in the sample.

Table 4.3: Measures of Center and Spread for Infractions by Gender and Ethnicity

Sex/Ethnicity	Mean Number of Infractions	Mean Number of Subjective	Mean Number of Objective	Standard Deviation of Number of Infractions	Median Number of Infractions
Male (103)l	3.03	2.14	0.90	5.55	0
Female (96)	1.75	1.14	0.61	4.29	0
Black (88)	2.95	2.20	075	5.31	0
White (101)	2.01	1.23	0.79	4.93	0
Hispanic(10)	1.70	1.10	0.60	2.16	0.5

The standard deviation for each of the subgroups, male, female, African American, white, and Hispanic was relatively small. This suggests that though only 199 students were included in the sample, the calculations should hold true for larger samples

of students. There was not a large range of infraction values. The median of infraction values were equal for all subgroups except those for Hispanics. This suggests that in all likelihood the bulk of students who were sampled for each subgroup received no referrals. For Hispanics, the median is 0.5, which suggests the two numbers in the middle of the data set were 0 and 1 and averaged to 0.5. Again, this data suggests that the bulk of students in this subgroup received no referrals. Overall, there were more than twice as many subjective referrals written for all subgroups than objective referrals. On average, males received more referrals than females, and African-American students received more referrals than white or Hispanic.

Table 4.4: Proportion of Students with Total, Subjective, Objective Infractions by Ethnicity and Gender

	Proportion of Students with Infractions	Proportion of Students with Subjective Infractions	Proportion of Students with Objective Infractions
Black (88)	0.41	0.36	0.34
White (101)	0.25	0.21	0.24
Hispanic (10)	0.50	0.40	0.30
Black Female (47)	0.36	0.32	0.30
White Female (45)	0.16	0.13	0.13
Hispanic Female (4)	0.50	0.50	0.25
Black Male (41)	0.46	0.39	0.36
White Male (56)	0.32	0.25	0.32
Hispanic Male (6)	0.50	0.33	0.33

Overall all African American students, male and female, received more total referrals, subjective referrals, and objective referrals compared to all white students, male

and female. 41% of African American students in the sample compared to 25% of all white students. African American males received a little over twice as many total referrals as white males. African American females earned over twice as many referrals as white males. For both sample groups, African American and white males earned more total referrals than did African American and white females. The Hispanic subgroup is very small, ten total students; for this subgroup sample half of the students earned referrals.

Table 4.5: Table of Proportions for Subjective and Objective Referrals, Free Lunch and One-Parent Households by Sex and Ethnicity

Sex/Ethnicity	Proportion of Subjective	Proportion of Objective	Proportion of Free Lunch	Proportion of 1 Parent Households
Male	.67	.61	.70	.49
Female	.33	.38	.82	.47
Black	.75	.25	.94	.68
White	.61	.39	.57	.29
Hispanic	.65	.35	1.0	.60

Calculations presented in Table 4.4 show that males received more, almost twice as many subjective and objective referrals than females in the sample. African American students received more subjective referrals than either white or Hispanic students. White students received the fewest subjective referrals, proportionally, while all female students received close to half of the subjective referrals compared to all other subgroups. Overall, females received fewer total referrals compared to male students. African American students received the fewest number of objective referrals. African-American students received, three-to-one, more subjective referrals than objective referrals. The percentage of free and reduced students was high for both African American students and Hispanic students; these subgroups represented proportionately the highest number of free and

reduced students. The highest was for African-American students, .94, and Hispanic students, 1.0. Though the data for the Hispanic population was high, it must be noted that the overall population of Hispanics in the sample was very small consisting of only ten students. Of the sample, African-American students, more than any other subgroup live in single-parent households was 0.68%. White students in the sample represented the fewest percent of students living in single-parent homes, 0.29%.

Table 4.6: Summary of Mean, Standard Deviation and Median Total of Infractions by Number in Household

Number of Parents in Household	Mean of Total Infractions	Std. Dev. of Total Infractions	Median of Total Infractions
Household Size = 2 (106)	1.94	4.74	0
Household Size = 1 (91)	3.23	5.30	0

Students in the sample that live in two-parent homes received fewer mean referrals than students in the sample living in one parent homes. There was not a large range of infraction values.

Table 4.7: Proportions of Students with Infractions by Number in Household

Number of Parents in Household	Proportion of Students with Infractions	Proportion of Students with Subjective Infractions	Proportion of Students with Objective Infractions
Students with Household Size = 2 (106)	0.24	0.20	0.21
Student with Household Size = 1 (91)	0.44	0.37	0.36

Student in the sample that live in single-parent households are almost twice as likely to receive total referrals, subjective referrals, and objective referrals as are students

in the sample living in two-parent households. Two students were excluded one was a foster child and the other had missing data.

Table 4.8: Summary of Mean, Standard Deviation and Median Infractions by Number in Household

Number Parents in Household	Mean of Objective Infraction	Mean of Subjective Infraction	Std. Dev. of Objective Infraction	Std. Dev. of Subjective Infraction	Median of Objective Infraction	Median of Subjective Infraction
Household Size = 2 (106)	0.68	1.26	1.81	3.67	0	0
Household Size = 1 (91)	0.96	2.27	1.58	4.22	0	0

On average students in the sample that live in single-parent households received about one-third more objective referrals and about twice as many subjective referrals as students in the sample that live in two-parent homes. There was not a large range in infraction values for objective or subjective referrals.

Table 4.9: Mean, Standard Deviation, and Median for Total, Subjective, and Objective Infractions

Students Free, Reduced, and Paid Lunch	Mean of Total Infractions	Std. Dev. of Total Infractions	Median of Total Infractions
Free (137)	2.92	5.50	0
Reduced (14)	3.93	4.70	2
Paid (48)	0.96	2.95	0

Students in the sample on reduced lunch received, on average more referrals than did students on free lunch or full-pay lunch. Students in the sample on full-paid lunch received, on average, the fewest total referrals.

Table 4.10: Percent of Students with Total Infractions, Subjective Infractions, and Subjective by Lunch Status

Students Free, Reduced, and Paid Lunch	Proportion of Students with Infractions	Proportion of Students with Subjective Infractions	Proportion of Students with Objective Infractions
Free (137)	0.37	0.31	0.30
Reduced (14)	0.57	0.43	0.57
Paid (48)	0.15	0.13	0.15

This table shows that students in the sample on reduced lunch status received proportionately more total, subjective, and objective referrals than did students on free lunch or full-pay lunch. Students in the sample on full-paid lunch received proportionately the fewest total, subjective, and objective referrals.

Table 4.11: Mean, Standard Deviation, and Median of Objective and Subjective Infractions by Lunch Status

Students Free, Reduced, and Paid Lunch	Mean of Objective Infractions	Mean of Subjective Infractions	Std. Dev. of Objective Infractions	Std. Dev. of Subjective Infractions	Median of Objective Infractions	Median of Subjective Infractions
Free (137)	0.85	2.07	1.75	4.38	0	0
Reduced (14)	1.36	2.57	1.65	3.74	1	0
Paid (48)	0.52	0.44	1.56	1.93	0	0

This table shows that students in the sample on reduced lunch status received, on average more objective and subjective referrals than did students on free lunch or full-pay lunch. Students in the sample on full-paid lunch received the fewest total objective and subjective referrals.

Table 4.12: Mean, Standard Deviation, Median, and Proportions of Students with Total, Subjective, and Objective Infractions by Reading Level

Reading Levels at, above, and below grade level	Mean of Total Infractions	Std. Dev. Of Total Infractions	Median of Total Infractions	Proportion of Students with Infractions	Proportion of Students with Subjective Infractions	Proportion of Students with Objective Infractions
Students reading at or above grade level (74)	0.80	1.96	0	0.19	0.14	0.18
Students reading below grade level (106)	4.17	6.22	0	0.49	0.42	0.41

This table shows that overall students in the sample who are reading below grade level receive, on average received four times more referrals than students who are on or above grade level. By category students who are reading below grade level are twice as likely to earn overall referrals, three times as likely to receive subjective referrals and twice as likely to receive objective referrals. Nineteen students were excluded from the data set because reading data were not available.

Table 4.13: Mean, Standard Deviation and Median of Objective and Subjective Infractions by Reading Level

Reading Levels	Mean of Objective Infraction	Mean of Subjective Infraction	Std. Dev. of Objective Infraction	Std. Dev. of Subjective Infraction	Median of Objective Infraction	Median of Subjective Infraction
Students reading at or above grade level (74)	0.41	0.39	1.06	1.23	0	0
Students reading below grade level (106)	1.23	2.94	2.07	4.99	0	0

This table shows that students in the sample who are not reading on grade level are twice as likely to earn objective referrals and six times more likely to receive subjective referrals than are students in the sample on or above grade level.

Table 4.14: Table of Measures of Center for Quantitative Variables

Sex Ethnicity	Mean Age	Mean Reading Level	Mean Grade	Median Age	Median Reading Level	Median Grade	Std. Dev .Age	Std. Dev. Read Level	Std. Dev. Gr
Male	11.3	4.6	5.8	12	3	6	4.4	4.4	3.9
Female	11.2	5.1	5.7	12	5	6.5	4.1	4.3	3.8
Black	11.1	4.1	5.5	11	3	6	3.9	3.9	3.6
White	11.5	5.7	6.0	12	5	7	4.5	4.7	4.0
Hispanic	10	2.8	5.0	12	2	4.5	4.9	3.3	4.3

Calculations presented in this table show that the mean age, reading level, and grade level by variables. Overall all ethnicities are, on average, on target with grade and age. When sorted by gender all samples are performing below grade level in reading, females are about one half year below grade level, males about one year below grade level. When sorted by ethnicity the African-American subgroup is about two years below grading in reading, the white subgroup is only slightly below grade level. The Hispanic sample, only representing ten students, is significantly below grade level, over three years; this could be attributed to the language barrier. Calculations for the median age, grade, and reading level showed similar results. By ethnicity the subgroup with the highest median reading level and the highest median grade level was white. The weakest median level for reading and for grade level was Hispanic closely followed by African Americans. Standard deviation calculations for age, reading level, and grade were relatively small for all subgroups, male, female, African-American, white, and Hispanic.

Descriptive statistics were also used to determine if there was any pattern among students with identified deficits referred to the office for disciplinary infractions compared to students with identified assets.

Table 4.15: Students with All Assets and Deficits by Ethnicity

Students with all Assets and All Deficits	Ethnicity	Mean of Total Infractions	Std. Dev. of Total Infractions	Median of Total Infractions
Students with 2 parent household, pay lunch, and read at or above grade level (28)	White – 28 Black – 0 Hispanic - 0	0	0	0
Students with 1 parent household, free or reduced lunch, and read below grade level (65)	White – 14 Black – 48 Hispanic - 3	3.46	5.74	0

In the sample twenty-eight students live in two-parent homes, are on full-pay lunch status and read on or above grade level; none of these students received any referrals. Sixty-five students in the sample live in a single-parent household, are on free or reduced lunch and read below grade level; the average number of infractions received is 3.46.

Conclusion

The findings in this chapter provided a detailed analysis of the data included in this study. Procedures used in this analysis were descriptive statistics. The purpose of this study was to examine the correlates of discipline referrals in a diverse, high-poverty rural school district. Data were analyzed for ethnicity, African-American, white, and Hispanic and for gender, male and females for each ethnicity. The assets and deficit used in the analysis were, free and reduced lunch, full-paid lunch, single-parent home, two-parent home, and below grade level reading and on or above grade level reading. Due to the small number of Hispanic students in the sample population, ten, broader generalizations about this subgroup were not possible. Of the sample population two students were omitted from number-in-household calculations because one was in foster care and the other had no information. Nineteen students were also omitted from calculations for reading levels because no information was available.

Chapter Five includes a summary of the research findings, the patterns and themes represented by the findings, recommendations for implementation of professional conversations and practices to address the findings, and recommendations for further study.

Chapter 5

Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Chapter Five is organized into four sections. First, the research conducted to determine the student characteristics that correlate with discipline referrals is summarized. Second, conclusions are drawn from the data and discussed. Third, recommendations for actions that school leaders and teachers might take to address some of the concerns discussed in the conclusions are explored. And fourth, the researcher posits recommendations for future research.

Summary of Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the correlates of discipline referrals in a diverse, high-poverty rural school district. As detailed in Chapter Two, much research has been generated suggesting that African Americans males are disproportionately suspended and expelled when compared to white males. To make public education work for all students, it is critical to uncover the reasons that so many students, especially African American students, are written up for disciplinary infractions. Scholars have cited four broad explanations for this phenomenon: racism; socioeconomic inequality; cultural differences, and school cultures. The genesis for this study was based on the work by Diamond (2004). This study was based on a socioeconomic conceptual framework suggesting that teachers consciously and unconsciously assign asset and

deficit “points” to students based on their socioeconomic status. Students from high socioeconomic backgrounds earn assets, and those from low socioeconomic backgrounds are regarded as deficient. Students who are perceived by their teachers to have more assets than deficits by teachers are expected to learn at high levels and to behave well. Students who appear to have more deficits than assets are not expected to learn at high levels and are not expected to behave.

This study suggests that the stipulated deficits and assets could be used to help identify and assist students with characteristics that make them most at risk to accrue discipline referrals, be suspended from school, and experience academic problems. Identifying these students could help inform teachers and school leaders of the students most at risk of being removed from and/or drop-out of school. Using the quantitative analysis outlined in Chapter Three, the researcher in Chapter Four analyzed data on 199 regular education K-12 students. Descriptive statistics were used to determine if any variables, such as gender, ethnicity, single-parent home, age, grade, or reading level, appeared to be a factor in the number of total infractions, subjective infractions, and, or objective infractions a student accrues over a semester from classroom.

Overall, the calculations showed that for all total infractions and for subjective infractions the following variables were correlated with the likelihood of students accruing discipline referrals: free and reduced lunch status, number of parents in the household and reading level. Reading level, most specifically, students reading below grade level, was the variable with the strongest correlation for students who had accrued a number of referrals. Student ethnicity, combined with one or more of the other variables, also correlated to students that accrued referrals.

Conclusions from Data

The literature review highlighted numerous studies that showed that African American male students were disproportionately suspended from school compared to white students. Various theories were posited to explain this phenomenon - racism, differences in student and teacher culture, differences in school cultures, and socioeconomic inequalities. Before conducting this study the researcher, having worked in secondary schools for the last twenty-eight years, believed that African-American male students were more likely to receive referrals from teachers, especially subjective referrals, than any other student demographic. Analysis of the data showed a correlation among stipulated student assets and deficits and teacher referrals. The majority of 199 students in the sample population accrued no referrals during the time period covered in the study. Of the students who did receive referrals, specific variables were analyzed singularly and collectively: gender, ethnicity, age, free and reduced lunch status, number of parents in the household, and reading levels. Results calculated by gender were clear. Male students received twice as many referrals as females. The statistics for age showed that most students were on grade level compared to their age. This calculation is important because the student's actual age, compared to the grade level shows if they are overage for the grade level. If they are overage then it most often means they have been retained. For this sample population it appeared they were on grade level.

Statistics calculated by ethnicity provided more interesting information. The ethnic populations in the study were Caucasian, African-American, and Hispanic. There were too few Hispanics in the sample population to draw meaningful conclusions. The vast majority of the students in the study were either Caucasian or African-American. Analysis showed that the African-American students accrued more referrals than did Caucasian students, 41% of African-American students and 25% of Caucasian students. African-American males accrued more total referrals, more subjective referrals, and more objective referrals than any other subgroup. This suggests a correlation between ethnicity, African-American, and referrals. This is of interest because subjective referrals are most often written for infractions that are based on adult interpretation of student behaviors, such as “disrespect”, and objective referrals are concrete, such as “tardy to class”. This lends support to the theory that racism is a factor in understanding why African-American males receive a disproportionate number of referrals compared to Caucasian students.

Statistics calculated by free and reduced lunch status also provided useful information. Students on free and reduced lunch received more referrals than full-pay students. Interestingly, the students on reduced lunch received more referrals than students on either free lunch or full pay lunch. Students on reduced lunch received almost four times as many referrals as did full pay students. Students on free lunch received almost three times as many referrals as did full pay students. These numbers show that there is a strong correlation among free and reduced lunch status and referrals.

Calculations for number of parents in household showed that students living in one-parent homes received almost twice as many referrals as did student s living in two-

parent homes. Students in one-parent households received one-third more objective referrals and twice as many subjective referrals as did students in two-parent households. These statistics show that there is a correlation among number in household and referrals. Statistics for free and reduced lunch status combined with number of parents in the household and number of accrued referrals support the theory that socioeconomic status is an underlying cause of student referrals. These variables coupled with ethnicity, specifically, African American, shows a strong correlation to the total number of referrals as well as the total number of subjective referrals a student will accrue for disciplinary infractions. These data supports the findings in the current literature that African American students are more likely to receive referrals than white students.

Specific to this study, it must be noted that the percentage of African-Americans on free and reduced lunch was 94%, and 68% live in one-parent households, compared to 57% of all Caucasians on free and reduced lunch, and 29% living in one-parent households. Because the percentage of African-American students on free and reduced lunch it is difficult to discern if ethnicity or free and reduced status more strongly correlates to the number of referrals a student accrued. More sophisticated analysis is needed to better determine if a student's race or socioeconomic status is more strongly correlated to the number of referrals a student accrues.

Statistics calculated for student reading levels was most interesting. First, African-American students in this district were, on average, two-years below reading level, Caucasian students were, on average, only slightly below reading level. Overall, females were one-half year below grade level, and males one year below reading level. When compared to the number of referrals students accrued, students reading below

grade level received on average four times as many referrals as did students reading on or above grade level. Students reading below grade level received three times as many subjective and two times as many objective referral as did students reading on or above grade level. These data suggest that reading level is more strongly correlated to discipline referral than either ethnicity or socioeconomic status. What cannot be determined in this student is the direction of the correlation. Do students receive referrals because they read below grade level or do they read below grade level because they receive referrals and miss time out of class? A student with low reading ability will struggle academically if the reading deficit is not addressed. This is significant because the longer a student remains in school the less likely, certainly by middle and high school, they will be given instruction on "how to read".

Further analysis was done to determine if patterns suggest that students with stipulated deficits are more likely to be referred to the office for disciplinary infractions compared to students with identified assets. To address this point, twenty-eight students from the sample that had all identified assets--that is, they live in two-parent households, are on full-pay lunch, and are reading on or above grade level--and all sixty-five students from the sample that had all identified deficits—namely, they live in single-parent households, are on free or reduced lunch, and are reading below grade level—were grouped and analyzed for total number of infractions. The twenty-eight students from the sample that had all identified assets earned zero referrals and were all white students. The sixty-five students from the sample that had all identified deficits earned, on average, three referrals, and were from all ethnic subgroups, white, African-American, and Hispanic. The African-American subgroup made up the majority, forty-eight students, of

the students in this subgroup. These findings identified that the stipulated assets and deficits that are strongly linked to socioeconomic issues were prevalent among the students receiving discipline referrals. From this sample, it is difficult to draw conclusions about the specific role ethnicity plays as a possible deficit in influencing which student characteristics are most at risk to accrue discipline referrals, in part because none of the African-American students in the sample had all three assets measured: full-pay lunch; two-parent households and reading on or above grade level.

These findings can be interpreted as supporting the theory that socioeconomic differences result in students' accruing infractions, and, in turn, suspensions out-of –school, given the fact that the three stipulated deficits for students--on free and reduced lunch, living in single-parent households, and reading below grade level—appear among students in this subgroup of all ethnicities, African-American, white, and Hispanic. But, it must be noted that students reading below grade level accrued, on average, the most objective and subjective referrals. This fact could also be explained using a Socioeconomic Framework, because students living in poverty are not as likely to be exposed to a variety of written texts, compared to students from middle or high socioeconomic households.

Recommendations for School Leaders

When the researcher first began to examine the documented disproportionality in student discipline, most notably between white students and African-American students, the intention was to uncover the root causes of this phenomenon. The review of the literature discussed in Chapter Two highlighted many studies based on different

theoretical assumptions - racism, differences in student and teacher culture, the culture of the school, socioeconomic differences--or as some researchers assert, the premise that there are no real differences, just differences in reporting systems and/or faulty statistical analysis.

This generation of educators was, for the most part, educated in an integrated K-12 public school system and entered the profession knowing that they are expected to educate all students. Given this, when there is a suggestion that some subgroups of students are being disciplined more often and more severely than other groups of students, teachers become very defensive. This is especially true in schools staffed by predominantly white middle-class teachers, and the perception is that African American students are being disciplined more often and more harshly than white students. When a white teacher accuses an African American student of an infraction and writes a referral, the charge of racism by either the student and/or parent is not uncommon. Teacher reaction to this accusation is almost always intense. Skiba (2006) cited several recurring reactions by teachers to the suggestion that they are racist: anger at the differences in students and parents, anger at the cultural mismatch of kids and school, frustration about inadequate schools, denial, claiming they are “color-blind”, and an unwillingness to talk about the issue. Most teachers denied any racial bias, stating that any differences are economic, not racial. Dotzert (1997) reported, “Teachers are uncomfortable talking about racial behavior…I have yet to find a white person who does not think that they are under attack when they are confronted with a race issue” (p.87). A study by Wu (1980) asked if African American students were better off when taught by African American teachers. The results found no significant difference in how African American students were

treated regardless of the race of the teacher. Given this, researchers have tried to determine whether teachers are aware of their bias but deny it or are unaware of their bias.

The researcher, after reading and digesting the layers of complexities in trying to determine the root cause of disproportionality in student discipline especially when comparing African American student discipline to white student discipline and considering the experts that have conducted multiple studies and many years researching this issue, concluded that determining root causes was beyond the scope of this work. Instead, the researcher based on work by Diamond (2004) decided to address this issue by identifying the characteristics, couched as assets and deficits, of the students most likely to receive referrals. Armed with this information, teachers could begin to discuss which students are receiving referrals, what common characteristics they share, and, ideally, begin to uncover root causes through safe, peer-based conversations.

The purpose of this study was to examine the correlates of discipline referrals in a diverse, high-poverty rural high school. To understand why certain subgroups of students receive more referrals than other subgroups is important because referrals lead to suspensions that lead to an increased number of days missed from class, which in turn, result in decreased academic achievement. This study found that a key indicator that a student will accrue referrals is below reading levels and the socioeconomic status of the student as measured by free and reduced lunch status and single-parent households. These findings supported earlier studies that suggested that suggest disproportionality in student discipline is a result of socioeconomic inequality (Christie et al., 2004; Diamond, 2004; Emihovich, 1982; Howarth 2008; Nolan et al., 2007; Skiba et al., 2006; Tenebaum

et al., 2007; Vanderharr 2003). The study by Christie et al. (2004) highlights the effect socioeconomic status can have in schools. The study concluded that when teaching students from high socioeconomic backgrounds, teachers held high expectations for students, challenged them, and used positive reinforcement in the classroom to control behavior. When teaching students from low socioeconomic communities, teachers held low expectations for student learning and behavior, were inconsistent, and were more punitive in dealing with behavior.

Teacher expectations as noted in Christie et al. (2004) study sync's well into the notion of "self-fulfilling prophecy" as discussed by Stevick & Levinson (2003). In this paper Ray Rist (1973) suggests that students from the lower classes have low expectations for themselves based on family and cultural issues. And, when teachers either consciously or unconsciously convey low expectations for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, the student then acts or reacts to the teacher based on the treatment he or she receives on the basis of these unequal expectations. The result of this process is that the student's conduct and performance fulfills the prophecy of their failure in school. Johnson (2001) found that student suspension can lead to expulsion, failure to graduate, and of more concern, juvenile detention. Many of these studies list a plethora of negatives attributed to out-of-school suspension - loss of self-respect, interaction with other "bad" kids, missed school work, peer stigma, and an increased likely-hood of worsening problems.

A second key finding concerned the kinds of referrals, objective versus subjective, students received. This study found that males, especially African American males were more likely to receive subjective referrals than total referrals. This finding

supported the Skiba (2002) study that found the infractions recorded most frequently for white students were smoking, leaving class without permission, obscene language, and vandalism. The infractions recorded most frequently for African American students were disrespect, excessive noise, threat, and loitering. The referrals recorded for African American students were clearly more subjective in nature than those recorded for white students. He concluded, "The primary source of disciplinary disproportionality; rather, school suspension seemed to function to 'pass along' the racial discrepancies originating at the level of the referral to the office" (p.334).

This study, by identifying the stipulated deficits and assets that were correlated with students receiving referrals or being suspended from and/or expelled from school, found that students on free and reduced lunch were more at risk to accrue total referrals, and African American males were most at risk to accrue subjective referrals over a semester. Using this information, school leaders could facilitate meaningful conversations with teachers about why certain students are most likely to receive disciplinary referrals, be suspended out of school, expelled, and experience academic problems. And, school leaders and teachers could begin exploring and understanding how they may exacerbate the phenomenon of the "self-fulfilling prophecy" so many low income students experience.

Though there was a correlation among students living in poverty and referrals in this study it must be noted that there were students on free and reduced lunch and living in one-parent homes that did not accrue referrals. Educators must be careful to not assume that children living in poverty are ill-equipped to be successful in school. Yet, educators must become knowledgeable about possible effects of living in poverty.

Among the most damaging effects of poverty is the lack of positive experiences many students from underprivileged homes experience from birth to age four when, hopefully, they are eligible to attend school. This includes exposure to the written text and opportunities to play using age-appropriate toys and occasions to engage in experiences outside the home including, but not limited to, a public library, the zoo, a museum, the beach, organized play dates, a trip to the mountains, restaurants (other than fast food), the arts, Disney World, travel, and state and national parks. Poverty is also associated with other harmful effects for children that affect their ability to learn - an unhealthy diet, overexposure to television and to inappropriate television, lack of regular medical attention, unregulated, poor day care, and an unstable home environment. Given this knowledge and the findings in this study that low socioeconomic status is a key indicator among other indicators, such as gender, age, and reading level, primary school administrators and teachers could dialogue about how the school can create experiences and opportunities to fill the gap for these students. Personnel from public school district offices, the Department of Social Services, faith-based organizations, and the medical professions could begin conversations about how to support these students from cradle to their first entry in public school. From that point on, teachers and administrators could identify and implement interventions that would increase the likelihood that these students will be successful in school.

Through these conversations, educators can begin to explore real solutions including understanding the importance of any difference in teaching students not subjects, providing for teacher's cross-cultural training, implementing an engaging, inclusive curriculum, acknowledging and understanding the "hidden" curriculum students

experience in schools, making school meaningful for all students, eliminating teacher apathy, and educating educators to the privilege their whiteness affords them, and the damage done to minority students (Monroe, 2005; Stevick, 2000, 2007; Stevick & Levinson, 2003; Williams, 2007; Wu, 1980).

Recommendations for Further Research

As discussed in Chapter Three, this study is specific to K-12 students attending school in a high poverty, small, rural, southern district. Therefore, the results are only applicable to this population. Regardless, this study can be used as a springboard for further research. The first part of this study analyzed student characteristics, deficits and assets, from the K-12 general population. While collecting data for the randomly-selected students from the general population, the researcher learned that, though discipline issues involving middle and high school students were systematically documented on referrals, this was not the case for primary and elementary students. Written referrals are not typically part of the culture at those lower grade levels. Though there were some referrals written for students at this level, the researcher learned that the few instances of misbehavior documented on referrals did not reflect the actual number of discipline infractions students accrued. Younger students, rather than receiving referrals, were often sent to “time-out”, lost demerit points, were excluded from recess, or, if these measures did not work, a parent or guardian was called in for assistance. It was only in more extreme cases, if a student had committed a criminal act, or if the behaviors were so extreme that the district hearing officer had to be called, that referrals were written to provide documentation. Given this, future studies that examine the relationship between

numbers of referrals accrued, and student deficits and assets might give more useful information if they are limited to the middle school and high school population.

A second area for future study could examine the findings in this study that student ethnicity was dominant in determining the number of referrals a student will accrue. This is important because other studies clearly reject the argument that regardless of economic inequalities, African American students are still suspended and expelled at disproportionate levels and punished more harshly for less severe infractions when compared to white students (Johnson et al., 2001; Wallace et al., 2008; Warren, 2007). As was noted earlier in this chapter, one explanation for why ethnicity proved to be statistically insignificant may be that of the African American students in the general population, 94% were also on free and reduced lunch. So 94% of the individuals in the African American sample were included in the sample of students on free and reduced lunch. Also, African American students had a low average reading level, so the remaining information on this group could have been contained within this reading level variable. This high percentage may have masked the impact ethnicity had on numbers of referrals. For the population in this study, perhaps more sophisticated statistical analysis might have provided different information on the significance of ethnicity compared to free and reduced lunch status. A future study that targets a more balanced general education population in terms of percentage of minorities and minorities on free and reduced lunch may provide better information on the significance of ethnicity versus free and reduced status and student referrals.

Based on the results of this study, a third area of study that would be of interest would be one addressing student referrals and student reading levels. For this study,

below-grade-level status was considered a deficit. The reading level of the student was identified for students that did and did not receive discipline referrals. The question this raised for this researcher was, “What comes first, excessive referrals or below-grade-level reading levels?” This study suggests that excessive referrals are often accrued by students with below-grade-level reading levels. Future studies that investigate this relationship would be very useful.

Lastly, research to fully address the issues inherent in this study needs to include the human factor that can only be gleamed through conversation. This study, like the majority of the studies conducted on student discipline, was based on quantitative data - discipline reports, student demographic information, and student reading levels. Qualitative and mixed-methods studies that are attentive to the racial and social class dynamics of an integrated public school can shed light on the processes that lead to student referrals. The methods and findings of this study can be used to frame a more comprehensive study by including qualitative methods that include face-to-face dialogue with teachers, administrators, and students. This kind of study could better enable educators to judge which theoretical explanation for disparities is more prevalent among school personnel.

In conclusion, fundamental changes on how students experience school, changes involving the interactions among students, teachers and school administrators, student learning, classroom activities, and assessment practices, as well as changes in professional development, must be the focus of change in schools if meaningful progress is to be made in how students, all students, experience school. Education is a people-

business; the human factor, therefore, must be central to any attempts to change how students are treated in school and enhance student learning.

The change process is clearly a people issue, and it is those people in the classroom, the teachers, who must become leaders and creators of meaningful student experiences and who must be given information and opportunities for professional and personal growth. Teachers' expertise and experience can be invaluable as in planning and in implementing needed change. Teachers must become more than simply recipients of professional development but also developers and leaders. For too long, many well-meaning administrators and professionals have ignored the contributions that classroom teachers can make to their own professional growth, as well as to that of their peers. Teachers need to be acknowledged as professionals who can and will take responsibility, given opportunity and information, for restructuring their classrooms to meet the needs of the students they teach. Policy-makers and teachers must become partners in change. They must learn to work hand-in-hand in all aspects of change if the ultimate goal, to improve student experiences in school and to enhance learning for all students, is to be realized. Gary Negin (1993), a classroom teacher, expressed it well:

"All teachers ask is that others respect our contributions. Recognize that there is much that can be learned from the work of practice and treat us like professionals who can help determine when and where it is appropriate to apply research recommendations. Help us refine what we teach…Provide the facilities and resources that are needed to do the job. And sit with us…as fellow survivors on Friday afternoon and help us finish the wine. After all, a wine is a terrible thing to waste" (p. 33).

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Appendix A

Letter of Request

Carver-Edisto Middle School

P. O. Box 65
Cordova, SC 29039
(803) 534-3554

"Where Cougars Care"

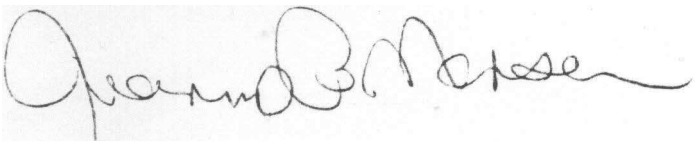
3-13-2014

Dear Ms. Turner,

I am in the graduate program at the University of South Carolina. For my dissertation I am looking at possible relationships between student demographics, reading levels and behavior. Information on 200 students, randomly selected, will be compiled to determine relationships and compared to students placed at STAR.

To ensure confidentiality all student names will be deleted and replaced with a number starting with number 1, then number 2, 3 and etc. Ms. Smith has agreed, if approved, to supply the reading levels from MAP information.

Thank you for your help in this matter.



Jeannie Monson, Principal

Appendix B

Letter of Consent

ORANGEBURG CONSOLIDATED SCHOOL DISTRICT 4

March 14, 2014

Mrs. Jeannie Monson
124 Oakbluff Road
Summerville, South Carolina 29485

Dear Mrs. Monson:

This letter is in response to your request to conduct research using ex-post facto data for students in Orangeburg Consolidated School District Four. Your letter indicates that, in fulfillment of your dissertation requirements at the University of South Carolina, you will investigate the relationship between student demographics, reading levels and behavior. You have indicated that 200 students will be used in the population study, randomly selected, and compared to students who have been placed in the STAR Program.

Any data or information used in this study must adhere to all FERPA requirements and redacted to maintain full confidentiality. The district expects that any results or conclusions be shared with the superintendent.

Orangeburg Consolidated School District Four supports the efforts you are proposing and will provide the information requested. If I can be of further assistance, please contact me at 803-534-8081 or by email at turnerb@orangeburg 4.com.