

EDUCATORS' IMPLICIT BIASES AND BLACK STUDENTS' DISCIPLINE:

A QUALITATIVE SINGLE-EMBEDDED CASE STUDY

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EDUCATORS' IMPLICIT BIASES AND BLACK STUDENTS' DISCIPLINE: A  
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## **ABSTRACT**

This qualitative single-embedded case study examines how implicit biases among teachers and principals contribute to the disproportionate discipline of Black students in U.S. K-12 schools. Grounded in Critical Race Theory (CRT), the study investigates the influence of race and systemic inequities on disciplinary practices to identify factors driving these disparities. The research is significant for educators, administrators, and policymakers seeking to foster equity in education. Using thematic analysis, data were collected from 16 teachers and principals within a charter school network. Findings indicate that implicit cultural biases result in disproportionately harsh consequences for Black students. CRT contextualizes these results, highlighting how biases are embedded in broader systems of racial inequality. The study recommends cultural competence training, restorative justice practices, and policy reforms to mitigate these disparities.

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## **DEDICATION**

First and foremost, I give all glory and honor to God. Without Him, this journey would not have been possible. I thank God for keeping me driven in purpose, for giving me the strength and resilience to persevere, and for using me as a vessel to create meaningful and impactful change in the lives of others. Through every challenge, He has guided me, and I am grateful for the wisdom and faith that have sustained me throughout this process.

I dedicate this dissertation to all Black students who have ever faced racial injustices in education. Your experiences, your voices, and your futures matter. May this work serve as a testament to your strength and as a step toward equity, justice, and transformation within the education system. Know that you are worthy, capable, and deserving of every opportunity to succeed. Never allow adversity to silence you, your story, your brilliance, and your existence are powerful. To every Black child who has ever felt unseen, unheard, or mistreated, let this be proof that you are not alone, and your dreams are valid. I stand as an example that education is your power, and change is possible.

Lastly, I dedicate this to my mother, my rock and best friend. You raised me with unwavering love, compassion, and strength, always instilling in me the values of perseverance, kindness, and purpose. Your belief in me never wavered, even when I doubted myself. Thank you for your guidance, sacrifices, and unconditional support, for always being my safe place and my foundation. I am forever grateful for your love, and I pray that this achievement is a reflection of all that you have poured into me. This is for you.

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I am also deeply grateful to the teachers, administrators, and participants who contributed to this study. Their willingness to share their experiences and perspectives has provided a rich foundation for this research.

To my family and friends, thank you for your endless encouragement, love, and understanding. Your unwavering belief in me has been my strength during this journey. Above all, I give thanks to God, whose grace and guidance have sustained me through every challenge and triumph. This dissertation is a testament to faith, perseverance, and purpose.

With gratitude,

Tiara N. Richardson

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

The overrepresentation of marginalized students, particularly students of color, in exclusionary discipline has been a persistent concern, raising important questions about the potential role of implicit bias in disciplinary decision-making (Welsh & Little, 2018). Understanding how implicit bias influences disciplinary actions significantly impacts students' educational experiences and outcomes (Welsh & Little, 2018). The analysis study explored the issue of implicit biases and disproportionate discipline in schools, aiming to understand the problem and its impact on marginalized students. Disproportionate discipline was significant in education due to the far-reaching consequences on students' academic, social, and emotional development.

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the research problem, states the research objectives, and outlines the study's structure. The chapter begins by introducing background information on implicit biases and disproportionate discipline in schools. The following section highlights the significance of implicit bias in education, emphasizing the impact on marginalized students and the need for further research. Chapter 1 also presents the research questions that guide the study, focusing on the relationship between educators' implicit biases and disproportionate disciplinary practices. Additionally, the chapter provides a review of relevant literature on implicit biases and school discipline, incorporating insights from prior research and scholarly sources.

## **Background of the Problem**

Enslaved Black people were severely punished, often by death, for engaging in acts of literacy such as reading or writing, as skills related to literacy were seen as a threat to the control white slaveholders sought to maintain (Muhammad et al., 2020). Literacy among Black people was viewed as a potential tool for resistance and empowerment; therefore, slaveholders enacted harsh penalties against individuals who defied restrictions on education (Kelly, 2021). The prohibition on literacy functioned as part of a broader system of dehumanization designed to strip Black individuals of autonomy and intellectual development (Wilson, 2022). After the formal end of slavery, legacies of educational repression persisted through segregation and the systematic underfunding of Black schools, perpetuating educational inequities that continue to affect Black students (Jones, 2020; Williams, 2021).

Historical inequities continue to influence the educational experiences of Black students, who face systemic barriers rooted in exclusion from education. After gaining freedom from enslavement, Black students were allowed to attend school; however, schooling occurred in inadequate conditions with secondhand books from White schools (Clayton et al., 2019; Muhammad et al., 2019). Inequities and systemic racism embedded in the education system, originating during slavery, segregation, and the Jim Crow period, continue to shape Black students' educational experiences. Wymer et al. (2020) argued that disparities in discipline do not result from Black students exhibiting worse behavior than White students but from racial biases held by teachers. Similarly, Morgan (2021) and Lopez and Slate (2020) highlighted racial bias as a significant factor contributing to disproportionate disciplinary actions against Black students.

Disproportionate discipline remains a persistent issue in the United States education system, where Black students receive suspensions at rates more than three times higher than their White peers (Buckley et al., 2019; Lopez & Slate, 2020; Morgan, 2021; U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Discipline disproportionality refers to the punishment of a racial or ethnic subgroup at a higher rate than the total student population in a school or district (Gopalan, 2019; Lopez & Slate, 2020; Morgan, 2021; U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Black students are suspended and expelled at higher rates than any other racial group and receive harsher consequences than White students for identical behavioral offenses (Lopez & Slate, 2020; Morgan, 2021; Riddle & Sinclair, 2019). Although Black students account for 15.1% of total student enrollment, they represent 38.8% of expulsions with educational services and 33.3% of expulsions without educational services. In contrast, White students comprise 47.3% of total enrollment yet receive significantly fewer expulsions (U.S. Department of Education, 2018).

### **Impact on Education**

Extensive research on the discipline gap between black and white students has indicated that one of the notable causes is the implicit cultural biases of black students by white teachers (Fitzgerald et al., 2019; Morgan, 2021). Teachers' implicit biases may influence the disciplinary consequences for students' behavior, resulting in disproportionate discipline affecting black students at a higher rate than all other races (Lopez & Slate, 2020; Morgan, 2021). When people make quick social judgments about others based on an observable characteristic, such as gender, age, race, or social class, that is considered a bias (Berger, 2020; Rice et al., 2019). Implicit biases are unintentional attitudes and stereotypes that can affect decision-making outside conscious awareness, and

it can be difficult for individuals to know when they have them and how to correct them (Chu & Webb, 2022; Sukhera et al., 2019).

Various studies on implicit biases have contributed to differing teacher reactions to student behavior based on race; Hannigan and Hannigan (2019) gathered data on disciplinary and intervention practices data from sixty school administrators on their disciplinary practices to answer the following questions: “(1) What are school administrators' beliefs around school discipline practices before and three months after the Don't Suspend Me! Alternative Discipline Framework workshop? (2) Was there a shift in the beliefs around school discipline practices before and three months after the Don't Suspend Me! Alternative Discipline Framework workshop? (3) What are the school administrator's perceptions of factors that may support and impede implementing alternative discipline before and three months after the Don't Suspend Me! Alternative Discipline Framework workshop? (Hannigan, 2019).” Hannigan and Hannigan concluded that discipline disproportionality exists in schools nationwide; however, it significantly affects students of color and students with learning disabilities (Hannigan, 2019). Hannigan concluded that administrators' and teachers' overuse of suspensions remains a common practice detrimental to student progression. Multiple studies on Black students and school discipline reveal that excessive suspensions negatively affect academic achievement and increase the likelihood of involvement with the criminal justice system (2019).

### **California Education Reform**

The California Department of Education (CDE) emphasizes the need to replace punitive discipline practices with targeted student support to improve academic success, student engagement, dropout rates, and graduation outcomes (CDE, 2019). Legislative

changes have aimed to reduce the number of students missing instructional time due to exclusionary discipline. One of the most significant policy reforms occurred in 2013, when the state prohibited suspensions for willful defiance in kindergarten through third grade. Data collected by the CDE demonstrated a significant decrease in suspensions for willful defiance following the policy change, leading to the extension of this prohibition to students in grades four through eight under Senate Bill 419 (CDE, 2019). Additional legislative measures include Homework for Students Suspended for Two or More Days, Minimize Suspension for Attendance Issues, Instead of Suspension, Support, and Suspension as a Last Resort (CDE, 2019).

A targeted systemic approach remains essential in advancing equity in education. The challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic have intensified the need for reform, as students and families continue to face unprecedented hardships (Klerk & Palmer, 2021). Factors such as increased stress, changes in social interactions, emotional instability, mental health concerns, attendance issues, and overall disengagement in school further complicate student success (MacKinnon et al., 2022). Disruptions caused by the pandemic have disproportionately affected students of color and other marginalized groups. During moments of significant need, students require support rather than suspensions (CDE, 2019). The CDE continues to develop evidence-based interventions and educational policies designed to foster inclusive learning environments (CDE, 2019).

### **Problem Statement**

Education in the United States in the 21st century continues to face numerous challenges, particularly regarding addressing disciplinary injustices and providing equitable educational opportunities for Black students (Kitchens & Brodnax, 2021;

Morgan, 2021). Discipline disproportionality was blatantly evident in the Jim Crow and Brown v. Board of Education eras, but now it shows up more subtly through implicit biases (Gahungu, 2021; Morgan, 2021). The problem is teachers' and school leaders' implicit biases resulting in disproportionate discipline of Black students, and educators' lack of cultural competencies training contributes to this issue (Bryant & Wilson, 2020; Kitchens & Brodnax, 2021). The impact of implicit bias on disciplinary actions is multi-faceted and deeply ingrained in the educational system (Gahungu, 2021; Morgan, 2021).

#### Updated Problem Statement:

The problem is that teachers' and school leaders' implicit biases result in the disproportionate discipline of Black students (Bryant & Wilson, 2020; Kitchens & Brodnax, 2021). Discipline disproportionality, which was blatant during the Jim Crow era and the period following Brown v. Board of Education, now manifests in subtle ways through implicit biases that influence disciplinary decisions (Gahungu, 2021; Morgan, 2021). Implicit bias remains deeply embedded in the education system, shaping disciplinary outcomes and reinforcing systemic inequities (Gahungu, 2021; Morgan, 2021).

#### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative single-embedded case study was to explore educators' implicit biases in disciplinary decisions and identify strategies to mitigate biased disciplinary practices. Research has demonstrated that implicit biases influence educators' disciplinary decisions, contributing to the disproportionate punishment of Black students (DeCuir-Gunby & Bindra, 2022). Equipping educators with strategies to recognize and

interrupt biased decision-making is essential in addressing discipline disproportionality (Gullo & Beachum, 2020).

### **Population and Sample**

The success of a qualitative research study relies on the careful selection of a population and sample that accurately reflect the context and nuances of the issue under investigation. The population and sample were chosen to capture a broad range of perspectives on implicit bias in school discipline. Participants included a diverse group of teachers and administrators with direct experience in making and implementing disciplinary decisions. Focusing on educators responsible for discipline provided an opportunity to examine the various ways implicit biases influence disciplinary practices, particularly toward Black students. Purposeful sampling ensured demographic diversity by incorporating individuals from various racial and ethnic backgrounds and different levels of teaching experience. Selecting participants with varied backgrounds and professional roles allowed for findings that are rich in detail and representative of a wide range of experiences across the educational spectrum.

### **Population**

The study population included teachers and administrators from a charter school network, offering a comprehensive view of disciplinary practices across multiple educational settings. Participants were selected from five schools within the network: two elementary schools, one middle school, and two high schools. Including both teachers and administrators allowed for an analysis of perspectives from those responsible for implementing and overseeing disciplinary policies. The population represented educators



from various subject areas, ensuring a diverse range of academic contexts and instructional experiences.

### **Sample**

The study included 16 participants, purposefully selected to support in-depth qualitative analysis. The sample comprised eight principals and eight teachers, representing a range of experiences and backgrounds. Sandelowski (1995) emphasized that qualitative sample sizes should be large enough to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation while remaining small enough to allow for detailed, case-oriented analysis. Morse (2000) similarly argued that qualitative research requires fewer participants when data collection yields rich and in-depth insights, which aligns with the methodological approach used in this study. Selecting a balanced number of teachers and administrators ensured that multiple perspectives on disciplinary decision-making were represented, strengthening the credibility of the findings.

Participants received email invitations using addresses obtained from the school's staffing database. The email outlined the study's purpose, emphasized the voluntary nature of participation, and assured confidentiality. Detailed instructions included the study timeline, data collection procedures, and explanations of required surveys. A structured recruitment process ensured participants were fully informed before providing consent, enhancing the quality and reliability of collected data. Selecting a diverse group of teachers and administrators through a strategic sampling approach allowed for a comprehensive examination of implicit bias in school discipline, providing valuable insights into how biases shape disciplinary decisions in educational settings.

### **Significance of the Study**

Examining implicit biases in disciplinary decision-making is critical, as they perpetuate racial disparities in student discipline. While factors contributing to inequitable discipline have been well-documented, this study addresses a significant gap in the literature by focusing on the specific role of implicit bias in shaping these disparities. For scholars, this research adds an essential layer of complexity to the existing literature, particularly in the context of how unconscious attitudes among educators can influence disciplinary outcomes for Black students. It offers new insights into the relationship between bias and disciplinary inequities, filling a critical gap in the understanding of implicit biases within the educational system.

For practitioners, the results of this study are particularly significant. By uncovering how implicit biases may influence disciplinary decisions, the study highlights the need for practical interventions, such as cultural competence training and professional development. These findings underscore the importance of equipping educators with the tools and knowledge necessary to recognize and address their own biases, thus promoting more equitable discipline practices within schools. The research suggests that practitioners can implement restorative justice models and trauma-informed practices as alternatives to punitive measures, fostering an environment focused on student growth and development.

For leaders, the study emphasizes the urgency of reevaluating current disciplinary policies at the institutional and district levels. The findings advocate for a shift from traditional punitive disciplinary models to rehabilitative approaches, which prioritize educational equity and student well-being. School leaders can utilize this research to inform policy reform, encouraging systemic changes that reduce the impact of implicit bias on disciplinary decisions. By adopting equity-driven frameworks, leaders can help create

inclusive school environments that support the success of all students, particularly those from marginalized communities. Ultimately, this study provides leaders with evidence-based strategies to cultivate a more just and supportive educational system.

### **Nature of the Study**

A qualitative single-embedded case study was used to explore the phenomenon of implicit bias among teachers and administrators and its implications on disciplinary decisions within a single charter school organization. The charter school organization, which consists of six schools serving students in grades K-12, served as the single case, while the two embedded groups, teachers and administrators, provided insight into how implicit biases influenced disciplinary outcomes at different levels of decision-making. A qualitative method was chosen for this dissertation because it offers the opportunity to explore perspectives, experiences, and underlying beliefs holistically and in depth (Foster, 2023). Qualitative research aims to reduce bias and error by seeking evidence that challenges initial or emergent research questions and hypotheses, allowing for a more comprehensive exploration of the research topic (Foster, 2023). As Foster (2023) discusses, qualitative methods offer flexibility through methodological pragmatism, enabling researchers to navigate between exploratory and confirmatory phases of research to gain a deeper understanding of complex issues. This approach aligns with the research questions in this study, which sought to examine the factors contributing to disproportionate discipline and the role implicit biases may play in this phenomenon. By focusing on the broader context rather than isolating specific variables, qualitative methods provide a holistic view of how implicit biases manifest in educational settings (Gonzalez et al., 2021;

Grace, 2020). This method, therefore, supports a nuanced investigation of the relationships between educator perceptions and disciplinary outcomes.

A case study design was chosen because it allowed for an in-depth exploration of a specific phenomenon within its real-life context. Case studies provide a detailed and comprehensive analysis of a particular case, enabling the examination of multiple variables and their interplay in shaping the phenomenon (Yazan, 2015). A single-case study was employed because it was conducted within a single charter school organization that operates six schools serving K-12 students. Single-case studies are often conducted with a single case or a small number of participants, allowing for a focused yet detailed exploration of the subject matter (Lobo et al., 2017). These studies provide viable alternatives to large-group studies while maintaining internal validity for assessing relationships between interventions and outcomes within a specific context (Lobo et al., 2017).

A single-embedded method was chosen to examine the perspectives of both teachers and administrators within the charter school organization. The single-embedded method captured the complexities of this issue within a specific educational network, considering the unique factors and dynamics that may have influenced participants' implicit biases and disciplinary practices across multiple school sites (Yazan, 2015). This research approach incorporated multiple data sources, including interviews, questionnaires, and document analysis. The use of multiple data sources provided a comprehensive and thorough exploration of the research problem and helped identify patterns and themes (Yazan, 2015). By embedding the perspectives of both teachers and administrators within the single case of the charter school organization, the study provided a deeper

understanding of how implicit bias operates at different levels within the educational system.

A quantitative method would not have been sufficient, as it may not have captured the complexities and subtleties of teachers' and administrators' perceptions and experiences when interpreting student behaviors (Bristol, 2020). Quantitative research focuses on numerical data and statistical analyses, which may not fully encapsulate the contextual and subjective aspects of implicit biases. Using a quantitative method could have limited the depth and authenticity of the data collected in this study. Ultimately, the qualitative method was the best choice because it allowed for an exploration of participants' thoughts, feelings, and emotions that cannot be quantified or measured (Foster, 2023). Also, qualitative research was better suited for this study because it facilitated a rich exploration of teachers' and administrators' attitudes and beliefs regarding implicit biases, which allowed participants to express their perspectives in their own words, ensuring their experiences and voices were acknowledged (Foster, 2023).

### **Research Questions**

The research questions for this qualitative single-embedded case study are:

R1: How do implicit biases contribute to disciplinary decisions made by teachers and administrators?

R2: What strategies can teachers and administrators incorporate when addressing and mitigating their biased disciplinary practices?

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework guiding this study integrates several key theories that provide a comprehensive lens through which to examine the complex issue of

disproportionate discipline for Black students in educational settings. At the core of this framework is Critical Race Theory (CRT), which offers a foundational perspective on how race and racism are embedded within the structures and policies of the education system. Alongside CRT, the Broken Windows Theory and the Super Predator Theory further illuminate the underlying assumptions and biases that shape disciplinary practices, particularly the harsher treatment of Black students. Together, these theories help to explore how implicit biases and systemic inequities perpetuate racial disparities in school discipline, providing the necessary context for understanding how educators and administrators may contribute to disproportionate outcomes.

### **Critical Race Theory**

Critical Race Theory (CRT) was utilized as the main conceptual framework for this study to explore how race and racism intersect with teachers' perceptions and experiences when interpreting student behaviors. CRT is an ever-growing body of theoretical frameworks that captures the nature and impact of race relations and formations (Kempf, 2020). The origins of CRT began with W. E. B. Du Bois, followed by Garvey, the Nation of Islam, Malcolm X, and the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, all of whom analyzed the sources of racial oppression, institutional, systemic, and individual racial privilege, and punishment (Kempf, 2020). Du Bois contended that stereotypes about race and abilities were used to justify slavery, segregation, and Jim Crow practices, and that race has no biological significance, while our lived reality carries implied advantages and disadvantages (Keenan et al., 2021). CRT argued that race is a social construct with tangible individual, institutional, and systemic repercussions (Lei & Guo, 2022). Education

was a significant focus for CRT, as it was seen as a critical institutional site of racial production and reproduction.

Education was a central focus of Critical Race Theory (CRT), as it was regarded as a crucial institutional site where racial inequalities were both produced and reproduced. Scholars argued that education played a significant role in perpetuating and maintaining systems of racism and oppression, despite efforts to address these issues over time (Kempf, 2020). While progress had been made in addressing certain racial disparities within education, the prevailing racial climate revealed that much work remained to be done to achieve true equity. CRT posited that educational institutions served as systematic environments where structural inequalities persisted for Black students, and these inequalities were deeply embedded in the fabric of schooling (Gullo & Beachum, 2020).

The application of Critical Race Theory (CRT) to the study of education remains particularly significant given the ongoing challenges faced by Black students in educational settings. Despite legal and policy advances, the educational experiences of Black students continue to be marked by disparities in resources, opportunities, and outcomes (Ladson-Billings, 2021). These disparities are not merely the result of individual prejudice but are embedded within the very structures of educational institutions. CRT provides a framework to explain how policies, practices, and norms within schools perpetuate racial inequities, making education a critical site for examining and addressing systemic racism (Sleeter, 2020).

One of the core tenets of CRT is the recognition that racism is not an isolated occurrence resulting from the actions of a few individuals; rather, it is a pervasive and enduring element of the social fabric (Dumas & Ross, 2022). CRT scholars argue that even

if overt racists were removed from society, racism would continue to exist because it is systematically ingrained in laws, social constructs, policies, and biases (Patton, 2021; Sleeter, 2020). The applied perspective emphasizes the importance of addressing not only individual acts of racism but also the broader systems and structures that enable racial inequality to persist. In education, this means critically examining curricula, disciplinary practices, resource allocation, and institutional policies that contribute to the reproduction of racial hierarchies, with a focus on transformative changes to challenge these systems at their core (Ladson-Billings, 2021).

### **Broken Windows Theory**

Broken Windows Theory, traditionally applied to criminology, suggests that visible signs of disorder, such as minor infractions, lead to a breakdown in social norms and an escalation of more serious offenses (Kelling & Wilson, 1982; Ratnayake & Jacobsen, 2020). In the educational context, this theory has been used to justify zero-tolerance policies, where even minor behavioral infractions are met with severe disciplinary actions. The selected approach disproportionately affects Black students, as minor behaviors are often perceived through the lens of implicit racial biases. The application of Broken Windows Theory to school discipline helps explain how educators and administrators may view Black students as more disruptive or threatening, leading to an over-policing of their behaviors.

### **Super Predatory Theory**

Super Predator Theory, which emerged in the 1990s, perpetuated the myth that young Black males were inherently dangerous and likely to engage in violent crime (Dilulio, 1995; Butler & Wilson, 2021). Although this theory has since been discredited,



the legacy persists in the way Black youth, particularly Black males, are perceived in schools. The harmful stereotype of Black students as "super predators" has contributed to their disproportionate discipline. This theory contributes to the conceptual framework by highlighting how societal fears and stereotypes about Black youth influence school discipline, often resulting in punitive measures that further marginalize these students.

Together, these theories provide a robust framework for exploring how implicit biases, systemic racism, and societal perceptions shape disciplinary practices in schools. By examining the intersection of CRT, Broken Windows Theory, and Super Predator Theory, this study aims to uncover the deep-seated assumptions that lead to disproportionate discipline for Black students and offer insights into how these biases can be mitigated.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following working definitions are used throughout the research study:

*Cultural Bias*: the tendency to interpret and judge information, situations, or individuals based on cultural beliefs, values, and norms (Ayikwa, 2022).

*Implicit Bias*: the automatic and unconscious influence that stereotypical associations with specific racial or social groups can have on perceptions, judgments, decision-making, and behavior (Huayllani et al., 2021).

*Discipline Gap*: disparities in disciplinary actions and outcomes between different groups of students, often based on race or ethnicity (Pearman et al., 2019).

*Disproportionate Discipline*: the unequal or unfair distribution of disciplinary actions, such as suspensions or expulsions, among different groups of students, mainly based on their race or ethnicity (Lewis et al., 2017).

*Zero-tolerance policy (ZTP)*: a strict disciplinary approach in which any minor or unintentional infraction is met with severe consequences, such as suspension or expulsion, without considering the individual circumstances or intent behind the behavior (Spiridakis, 2019).

*School-to-prison pipeline (STPP)*: the phenomenon in which students, particularly those from marginalized communities, are funneled from schools into the juvenile justice system or eventually the criminal justice system, often due to harsh disciplinary practices and zero-tolerance policies (Weaver & Swank, 2020).

*Critical Race Theory (CRT)*: theoretical framework that examines the intersections of race, racism, and power with a focus on how racism becomes institutionalized in systems in the United States (Meneses, 2021).

*Restorative Practices*: a shift from punitive disciplinary approaches to repairing harm, building relationships, and promoting accountability and understanding among individuals involved in conflict or wrongdoing (Lodi et al., 2021).

*Trauma-informed discipline*: disciplinary practices that consider the impact of trauma and recognize the possible underlying factors contributing to problematic behavior, emphasizing the root causes and providing support and resources for healing and growth (O'Connor & Samuels, 2021).

### **Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations**

In conducting this study, it is essential to recognize the underlying assumptions, limitations, and delimitations that shape the research design and outcomes. Assumptions are foundational beliefs accepted as true for the study, while limitations refer to potential weaknesses or factors beyond the researcher's control that could influence the results.

Delimitations are the boundaries set by the researcher to narrow the scope and focus of the study. Together, these elements define the study's structure, guiding both the data collection and analysis processes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By identifying these components, the study not only acknowledges the challenges involved in exploring the role of implicit bias in school discipline but also clarifies the parameters within which the findings can be interpreted. The exploration of implicit biases among teachers and administrators, and their impact on disproportionate disciplinary actions, requires a thoughtful consideration of these assumptions, limitations, and delimitations to ensure that the study's conclusions are both meaningful and credible within the educational context (Marshall & Rossman, 2021). Addressing these aspects is essential for enhancing the transparency, rigor, and reliability of the research findings, particularly in a field as complex as educational equity.

### **Assumptions**

The findings operate under several key assumptions that influence the design and the interpretation of the findings. First, it is assumed that teachers and administrators will be willing to explore and acknowledge their own biases in educational practices, which is critical for understanding how implicit biases impact disciplinary decisions (Gullo & Beachum, 2020). Additionally, it is assumed that participants will engage in social and ethnic competency training, recognizing the importance of developing cultural awareness in educational contexts. Finally, the study assumes that participants will respond honestly and openly to interview questions and vignettes, providing reliable data for analysis. These assumptions are necessary to facilitate the research, though they introduce elements of uncertainty as they rely on participant behavior, which cannot be entirely controlled.

## **Limitations**

Despite efforts to ensure a robust research design, several limitations may affect the reliability and validity of the study. Bias is inherent in all research designs and can arise at any stage of the process, influencing the study's outcomes (Patino & Ferreira, 2020). In this study, participant bias presents a significant limitation, particularly because implicit biases and personal perspectives on sensitive topics may not always be openly acknowledged. Participants may shape their responses to align with what they perceive to be the desired outcomes, potentially compromising the study's internal and external validity (Tadesse, 2021). Additionally, the sample size and the specific educational settings from which participants are drawn may limit the generalizability of the findings. However, measures such as ensuring participant anonymity, implementing strict confidentiality protocols, and creating a non-judgmental environment were used to mitigate these limitations (Cameron et al., 2021).

## **Delimitations**

In this study, the scope was delimited by focusing on teachers and administrators directly involved in disciplinary decision-making within a charter school network. While this provides a clear and relevant population for addressing the research questions, it also limits the broader applicability of the findings to other educational settings. To minimize the effects of selection bias, the study employed a rigorous recruitment process, clearly defined inclusion criteria, and efforts to validate the representativeness of the sample by comparing participant characteristics with the broader population (Ellard-Gray et al., 2021). These delimitations ensure the study remains focused on the primary objectives while maintaining a level of depth and precision in the analysis.

## **Chapter Summary**

Based on the sources mentioned earlier, disproportionate discipline practices significantly impacted Black students' educational outcomes and trajectories. The findings of this study highlighted the role of implicit bias in contributing to this alarming disparity and the subsequent reinforcement of the school-to-prison pipeline. Educators need to be culturally aware and take concrete actions to ensure student equity. By recognizing and actively challenging their biases, educators could create a more inclusive and supportive learning environment that promotes positive behavior and reduces the need for exclusionary discipline. Moreover, schools needed to implement evidence-based interventions, such as restorative justice and trauma-informed practices, to address the root causes of student misbehavior and foster a sense of belonging and support.

Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive historical overview of disproportionate discipline in education, tracing the evolution of racial disparities from early educational systems to present-day practices. It examines how deeply rooted societal factors, such as segregation and structural racism, have shaped the educational landscape and contributed to the marginalization of Black students and other students of color. Starting with the denial of education to enslaved individuals and moving through the Jim Crow era to modern-day schooling, the chapter highlights how racial disparities in discipline persist despite various legal and policy reforms.

The role of systemic racism in influencing the development of disciplinary policies, such as Zero-Tolerance Policies, is a central focus, as these have disproportionately impacted students of color. It also explores implicit bias in educational settings, emphasizing how these unconscious attitudes perpetuate disparities in discipline.

Furthermore, the chapter critically analyzes legal and educational reforms like *Brown v. Board of Education* and contemporary approaches such as restorative justice and trauma-informed practices, examining their successes and limitations in addressing these disparities. Special attention is given to the intersection of race, socioeconomic status, and disability, recognizing that students who fall into multiple marginalized categories face heightened risks of disproportionate discipline.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

The study addresses a literature review comprised of six sections that explored the historical background of racism in the United States and the challenges of addressing implicit bias in educational settings. It detailed how race, privilege, and class issues created systemic educational inequalities that perpetuated disparities in Black students' academic outcomes (Phillips & Gichiru, 2021). Section one outlined the historical background of education in the United States, while section two explored Black people's access to public education. Section three examined policies enacted to rectify racial inequities. Section four explained how the zero-tolerance policy contributed to the disproportionate discipline of Black students.

Section five discussed the school-to-prison pipeline (STPP) phenomenon, where disciplinary practices and punitive measures in schools contributed to the criminalization of Black students. Section six discussed efforts and interventions to address implicit bias in educational settings and promote equity and inclusion for all students. The following databases were used to systematically compile research evidence for this study: ProQuest, SAGE, ERIC, and EBSCOHost. The following search terms were used on internet platforms: Zero-tolerance policy, Brown vs. Board of Education, Jim Crow, No Child Left Behind Act, IDEA Act, school-to-prison pipeline, disproportionate discipline, implicit bias, teachers' implicit bias. The culmination of the resources and literature was used in Chapter 2: Literature Review.

## **Title Searches and Documentation**

The internet was used to research information on the impact of implicit bias on school disciplinary actions. The following online databases were used to systematically compile research evidence for this study: ProQuest, SAGE, ERIC, and EBSCOHost. The following search terms were used: Zero-tolerance policy, Brown v. Board of Education, Jim Crow, No Child Left Behind Act, IDEA Act, school-to-prison pipeline, disproportionate discipline, implicit bias, and teachers' implicit bias.

## **Historical Content**

The historical education of Black students in the United States has been shaped by systemic exclusion, legal segregation, and persistent disparities in disciplinary practices. Understanding these historical developments is crucial for recognizing the origins of current inequities in education. This section examines key events and policies that have contributed to these disparities, including the denial of education during slavery, segregation under Jim Crow laws, and the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. Additionally, the impact of zero-tolerance policies and the school-to-prison pipeline will be analyzed to illustrate how disciplinary measures disproportionately affect Black students. Finally, efforts to advance educational equity, such as policy reforms and restorative justice practices, will be explored.

## **History of Black Education in the United States**

Racism was manifested throughout politics, economics, religion, and social structures, and education was no exception. Joe R. Feagin posited that racial oppression was vigorously enforced and systematically embedded into U.S. culture to protect white power and privilege (2006). The theory of systemic racism was reflected in two central



anti-Black practices: the unjust gain in political and economic power by whites and the ideologies and attitudes that perpetuated the belief in white superiority to justify the system (Feagin, 2006).

Feagin argued that racist America focused primarily on white-Black oppression because it was paradigmatic for other forms of oppression in America (2006). When Africans were brought to America, they were stripped of their identities, cultures, languages, and beliefs and were forced into slavery. While enslaved, education was denied to Black people to further subjugate and control them (Johnson, 2020); racism had been deeply ingrained in the American education system since its inception. From the birth of America, laws were created to maintain a system of hierarchy and racial division between whites and non-whites. Notably, enslaved people were forbidden from learning to read and write, as education was seen as a threat to the institution of slavery and the power dynamics it upheld.

Additionally, laws were created and enforced to ensure that enslaved people could not access any form of education or gain knowledge that could potentially challenge the system of slavery (The Mighty Experiment: Free Labor versus Slavery in British Emancipation, 2002). Black people's submission and conformity to laws, spiritual beliefs, and language were encouraged by whites who believed that to be the American patriotic way. For example, the Act of 1740 in South Carolina made it illegal for enslaved Black people to gather in groups or learn to write (May, 2007).

### **Black People's Access to Public Education**

After the Civil War in 1960 and President Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, Blacks fought tirelessly for their rights guaranteed by the Reconstruction

Amendments. Amendments 13, 14, and 15 to the United States Constitution were intended to grant freedom, equal protection under the law, and voting rights to African Americans. (Stewart, 2004). These amendments established the principles of birthright citizenship and equal justice under the law (Hahn et al., 2018).

The road to desegregation in the United States was long and arduous, but it stands as a testament to the persistence and resilience of the African-American community in their fight for equal access and refusing to settle for "separate but equal." On May 18, 1896, the Supreme Court ruled in the landmark case *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which upheld the constitutionality of segregation laws under the "separate but equal" doctrine. (Whitley, 2022). This ruling declared that racial segregation was constitutional and did not violate the Blacks' rights. *Plessy v. Ferguson* forced Black students to attend inferior and segregated schools that lacked the resources, funding, and quality education provided to their white counterparts. In Black schools, the curriculum was often outdated, the teachers were underqualified and underpaid, and the facilities were in poor condition (Nguyen & Hoang, 2022). This critical decision provided the framework for Jim Crow laws and state Black Codes that perpetuated racial segregation in all areas of life, including education.

Black people across the country employed direct action tactics such as protests, boycotts, and civil disobedience in their fight against racial segregation. (Whitley, 2022) Led by Charles Hamilton, also known as the "Man Who Killed Jim Crow" and a member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), a legal strategy was used to challenge racial segregation in schools (Nugroho & Aryani, 2021; Whitley, 2022). The NAACP constructed *Brown* from a series of lawsuits, including *Briggs v. Elliott*, *Davis v. County School Board of Prince Edward County*, and *Gebhart v.*

Belton. Black families and organizations worked together to file these lawsuits and bring attention to the inequality and injustice of segregated education, and in 1954, the Supreme Court finally issued the ruling in the landmark case *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*. The Supreme Court declared that racial segregation in public schools was unconstitutional and violated the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment (Alvarez, 2018).

Within months following the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, African-American students began to enroll in formerly all-white schools across the country. NAACP leaders across the country met to mobilize efforts to support families who needed financial and legal assistance to navigate the integration process. They demanded that school districts comply with the Supreme Court's ruling (Grooms, 2016). The integration process was met with significant resistance and violence in many white communities, as white supremacist groups and individuals sought to maintain racial segregation and uphold the principles of Jim Crow (Nugroho & Aryani, 2021). The desegregation of schools and the blacks gaining voting rights marked a reign of terror from white supremacist groups, who used intimidation and violence toward Black individuals and communities.

In July of 1954 in Mississippi, the White Citizens' Council (WCC) was formed in response to the *Brown* decision, explicitly opposing school integration and maintaining racial segregation in Southern states (Halberstam, 1956). The WCC formed chapters throughout the South, providing an organized framework for White people to rally to protest against pro-segregation. These resistance efforts included boycotting integrated schools, threatening violence against African-American students and their families, and engaging in acts of domestic terrorism (Vaden, 2014). Despite the resistance and violence

faced by African American students and their families during the integration process, their determination to secure equal rights and access to education persevered.

### **Education Policies Created for Equality**

In 1964, the Civil Rights Act was passed, which specifically addressed school segregation and stated that federally funded schools could not discriminate based on race. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act prohibited segregation in public schools and gave the federal government authority to enforce desegregation orders (Grooms, 2016). The Civil Rights Act allowed the Justice Department to file lawsuits against school districts that continued to practice segregation, and the Department of Education could withhold federal funding from non-compliant schools (Grooms, 2016).

Additionally, a year later, in 1965, Congress passed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) to provide federal funding to schools in low-income areas established as Title 1 campuses. A campus or district could receive Title 1 funding if it had a high percentage of students from low-income families, intending to address educational disparities and promote equal opportunities for all students, regardless of their socioeconomic background. The United States Department of Education (2001) declared Title I funding “is to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at minimum, proficiency on challenging state academic achievement standards and state academic assessments” (Title I, Sec.1001).

Following President Johnson's signing of the Civil Rights Act and the implementation of Title VI, the Education of All Handicapped Children Act was passed in 1975. This act mandated that public schools provide free and appropriate education to disabled students (Education for All Handicapped Children Act (1975 - S. 6), n.d). To

further the commitment to equal access to education, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was passed in 1975. IDEA was enacted to ensure that students with disabilities receive the necessary accommodations and support services to fully participate in their education and access equal opportunities for learning (About IDEA - Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, n.d). Aimed to restructure the ESEA, President George W. Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act into law in 2001. The NCLB Act required states to develop standards-based accountability systems and implement annual testing in reading and math for students in grades 3-8 (Renaud, 2013). The NCLB Act provided Title 1 schools with more funding and strongly emphasized closing the achievement gap while holding schools accountable for student outcomes. (Piazza, 2017; Renaud, 2013).

### **Zero Tolerance Policy**

The Civil Rights Era marked a significant turning point in public education funding, with the implementation of federal policies such as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and the No Child Left Behind Act. However, school discipline in the aftermath of desegregation remains a critical topic of concern. Black students are still plagued by systemic and institutionalized racism and biases within the education system, leading to disproportionately high disciplinary action and exclusionary practices.

The enactment of the Zero Tolerance Policy (ZTP) in schools, particularly after the Columbine High School shooting in 1999, further exacerbated the issue of discriminatory and punitive disciplinary practices; Black students were the large majority (Daly et al., 2016). Zero tolerance policies were initially created in the early 1980s as a drug control legislation implemented by several states that penalized drug dealers and users with stiff criminal sentences after a string of school shootings in the 1990s. Gradually, these policies

were extended to schools in 1994 with the passing of the Gun-Free Schools Act (GFSA), signed by President Bill Clinton (103rd Congress, 1994; Daly et al., 2016).

The GFSA mandated that schools receiving federal funding have a zero-tolerance policy for weapons on school grounds; in some cases, weapons included objects such as scissors, nail clippers, or even toy guns (Skiba & Peterson, 2000). Some districts went beyond weapons and expanded the scope of the ZTP to include bans on drugs, alcohol, truancy, disruption, disrespect, or defiance (Brown, 2021; Skiba & Peterson, 2000). Additionally, schools were required to develop law enforcement referral policies to ensure all incidents were reported to the appropriate authorities (103rd Congress, 1994). Education is not a "one size fits all" approach, and school policies and practices must consider all student behavior and outcomes fairly and equitably.

Since the initial implementation, ZTP has undergone many changes and modifications, but the fundamental issues surrounding the impact on minority students remain prevalent. The ZTP created an unfair discipline model where Black students were disproportionately targeted and penalized for subjective and minor infractions, perpetuating the school-to-prison pipeline (Skiba & Peterson, 2000). Studies show that the ZTP did not make schools safer; however, it indirectly created additional barriers and challenges, such as increased dropout rates and involvement in the criminal justice system for special education and marginalized students (Skiba & Peterson, 2000; Morris, 2005).

The American Psychological Association explained that when poor student behavior stems from poor judgment and decision-making, that is typical of adolescents' neurological immaturity and development (APA, 2008). Students suspended, expelled, or incarcerated under ZTP were often denied educational opportunities due to the federal

legislation's failure to mandate alternative education (Kana'iaupuni & Gans, 2005). Students removed from school typically fall behind and are more likely to drop out.

The federal funding incentives made it easier for schools to suspend or expel students for minor and non-threatening behavior, which caused schools to rely on punitive measures rather than addressing the underlying issues and providing appropriate support for students (Skiba & Peterson, 2000). Under the ZTP, research shows that race and socioeconomic status were the most significant factors in determining if a student would be suspended or expelled despite the severity of their behavior (Skiba & Peterson, 2000; Morris, 2005). Black students were the most dispositionally affected by ZTP, experiencing higher suspension and expulsion rates than White students (Skiba & Peterson, 2000; Morris, 2005). With the increased number of black students suspended, expelled, or sent to the criminal justice system due to zero-tolerance policies, scholars have termed this phenomenon the school-to-prison pipeline (STPP) (Kana'iaupuni & Gans, 2005).

### **School-to-Prison Pipeline (STPP)**

Empirical studies have consistently shown a clear and troubling link between ZTP exclusionary disciplinary practices and students' involvement in the criminal justice system (Barraza, 2021). Studies indicated that students who were suspended from school were more likely to engage in delinquent behavior, be arrested, and ultimately become involved in the juvenile justice system than those who were not, even after controlling other variables that could increase arrest rates (Wolf & Kupchik, 2017; Mowen & Brent, 2016). The STPP refers to the process by which students are pushed out of school through punitive disciplinary measures and into the criminal justice system. (Gosztyla et al., 2021; Barraza, 2021).

Exclusionary discipline practices correlate with academic underachievement and an increased likelihood of dropout (Balfanz et al., 2015; Skiba & Peterson, 2000). Research indicates that students who fail to graduate from high school are more likely to become involved in the criminal justice system; as a youth or adult (Butler, 2022), they are more likely to experience unemployment, poverty, and other adverse life outcomes (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2014; Klingele & Rowe, 2018).

The disproportionate treatment of Black students and punitive disciplinary practices have been well-documented in the literature. In the 2018-2019 school year, the last Black students had a 9 percent suspension rate compared to 4 percent for students overall in California. The rate increases significantly for black middle school boys. In contrast, one out of five were suspended at least once compared to 13 percent of Black middle school girls and 7 percent of middle school children overall, according to a study conducted by the UCLA Center for Civil Rights Remedies (Wood et al., 2020; Workman & Wake, 2000).

In the same year in California, Black students accounted for 30 percent of suspensions and expulsions despite only representing 6.5 percent of the total student population (Wood et al., 2020; Losen & Martinez, 2013; Ramsay & Jordan, 2020). The state expulsion rate for all students was .08%, totaling 5,236; however, the expulsion rate for Black students was .19%, 2.4 times higher than the state's average (Wood et al., 2020). The 2019-2020 exclusions rates in California revealed that out of the 3,263 expulsions, black students accounted for 5.3% of enrollments; however, they accounted for 12.9% of the expulsions (Wood et al., 2020).



When these findings are considered alongside the broader context of the school-to-prison pipeline, a concerning pattern emerges and becomes even more evident that a concerning pattern emerges and becomes even more evident that the pipeline is not simply a single point of transition from schools to prisons but rather a multi-level system that perpetuates inequality and injustice.

A multitude of research has studied Black males' elevated risk of experiencing exclusionary discipline sanctions (Gregory, 1995; Lewis et al., 2009; McFadden & Marsh, 1992; Skiba et al., 2013), and understandably so given the disproportionate rates at which they are suspended and expelled compared to any other race and gender. However, it is essential to broaden the scope of research and consider how this pipeline impacts Black females.

Research tends to limit the attention to black girls' disciplinary sanctions and focuses primarily on the experiences of Black boys within the school discipline system (Epstein & Blake, 2007; Morris, 2005). Epstein and Blake argue that this hyper-focus on the experiences of Black boys within the school-to-prison pipeline neglects the unique and intersectional experiences of Black girls within the education system. Black males' more significant risk of receiving exclusionary discipline practices does not preclude Black females from experiencing inequitable discipline practices. Blake et al. conducted a study that examined referrals and sanctions data from school records collected in an urban school district in the Midwest to determine if Black girls' discipline disproportionately differs from White and Hispanic females.

Disproportionality with the Relative Risk Ratio (RRR) estimates the degree of overrepresentation or underrepresentation of the target group for receiving discipline

sanctions (Blake et al., 2011). The study findings concluded that Black girls were more likely to receive discipline referrals, suspensions, and expulsions than their White and Hispanic peers (Blake et al., 2011). In addition to this study, it should be noted that Black females experience more exclusionary disciplinary practices than white males (Raffaele-Mendez & Knoff, 2003). According to Raffaele-Mendez and Knoff, black females fall just below Black males regarding disciplinary rates.

Research indicates that various factors contribute to the STPP, such as inadequate school resources. Failing schools with overcrowding, unqualified teachers, poor special education services, and insufficient funding fail to meet students' educational needs (Wood et al., 2020; Workman & Wake, 2000). Students from these schools tend to disengage and drop out. Punitive disciplinary policies and negative school cultures also contribute to the STPP. The ZTP, which imposes strict disciplinary measures, disproportionately affects marginalized and minority students. Suspension rates have increased dramatically recently, from 1.7 million in 1974 to 3.1 million in 2000, and have been most dramatic for children of color (Advancement Project, 2005).

A study by Muniz on the relationship between schools and prisons explicitly focuses on four subthemes relevant to the 'School-to-Prison Pipeline': exclusionary discipline policies in schools, school-police partnerships, the expansion of surveillance technologies, and disproportionality (2021). Muniz posits that the discipline disproportionally stems from a societal fear sparked in the 1990s by the idea of 'super-predators' - a term coined for purportedly violent and lawless juveniles (Muñiz, 2021). Christopher Mallett analyzed the STPP and the shift from rehabilitative to punitive paradigms in schools and juvenile courts that disproportionately impact vulnerable

populations (2016). Mallett found that policies such as zero tolerance and increased police presence in schools have substantially increased arrests and referrals to juvenile courts, most often for non-serious offenses (2016). He posits that the ZTP does not improve school or community safety but harms long-term student outcomes (Mallett, 2016).

### **Teacher Identity and Discipline**

The interaction between teachers and students is intricately shaped by the teachers' self-identity, personality, and social positioning within society. These factors collectively influence how educators perceive their students, interpret behaviors, and ultimately make decisions in the classroom (Bardach et al., 2022; Vachon, 2022). A deeper understanding of one's identity is crucial for teachers, especially when working with diverse student populations.

In an inquiry-based self-study conducted by Porcher (2021), 23 teacher candidates engaged in reflective practices using the Photovoice platform, which enabled them to capture and analyze their perceptions through visual storytelling. The chosen method allowed them to confront and critically assess their internalized views about the students and communities they served, which were predominantly of color. Porcher (2021) stated that by engaging in this reflective process, participants were able to identify and challenge the deficit perspectives they unknowingly held. This self-awareness is essential, as it forms the foundation for more equitable and culturally responsive teaching practices.

Sealey-Ruiz (2013) emphasizes the dangers of neglecting this self-exploration. When teachers do not take the time to unpack and understand their self-identities, they risk perpetuating biases and stereotypes that can cause considerable harm to African American students and their communities. This harm is not merely academic; it extends to the

students' social and emotional well-being, affecting their sense of belonging and identity within the educational system. Teachers who are unaware of their biases may unconsciously impose lower expectations, misinterpret behaviors, or enforce disciplinary actions that disproportionately affect students of color. Therefore, the process of self-reflection and identity exploration is not just a personal journey for teachers but a critical professional responsibility that directly impacts the educational outcomes and life experiences of their students. Engaging in this process can lead to more inclusive, understanding, and supportive classroom environments where all students can thrive.

### **Current Content**

The current educational landscape for Black students in the United States reflects both progress and persistent challenges. The section will discuss the following critical issues: the ongoing disparities in school funding and access to quality educational resources, the role of implicit bias in shaping disciplinary actions, and the disproportionate application of exclusionary discipline policies. Additionally, it will examine the impact of school climate and teacher expectations on student success, the intersection of race and socioeconomic status in educational outcomes, and efforts to implement culturally responsive teaching practices. The discussion will also explore policy reforms, such as restorative justice initiatives and legislative changes, aimed at reducing disciplinary disparities and promoting educational equity for Black students.

### **Teachers' and Administrators' Implicit Bias and the Discipline Gap**

Educators' implicit bias negatively impacts Black students more than their white peers, which creates disproportionate discipline practices. Implicit biases refer to unconscious attitudes or stereotypes individuals hold about specific social groups, which

can influence their thoughts, behaviors, and decision-making processes. These biases are often formed through repeated exposure or limited experiences with certain groups, leading to generalized associations (Allen, 2018). For example, individuals who regularly see images of African American criminal offenders in the media, but not white offenders, may develop an implicit bias linking African Americans with criminal behavior.

Implicit biases can also stem from the influence of family and social groups and mass media representations (Fitzgerald et al., 2019). Implicit biases are defined as biases that individuals are unaware of and do not consciously control (Fitzgerald et al., 2019). The term implicit bias is derived from psychology and has gained increased attention in recent years due to the impact on various domains of society (Rudman, 2019; Project et al.; Greenwald & Krieger, 2006). Implicit stereotypes differ from implicit bias in that stereotypes are thoughts or beliefs about specific social groups, whereas implicit biases involve automatic associations and evaluations of those groups (FitzGerald et al., 2019). It is essential to note that the difference between the two phenomena is that implicit biases are more specific and involve the activation of stereotypes unconsciously.

In the United States, implicit biases related to race have been well-documented, with studies consistently showing a preference for white individuals and negative associations with Black individuals (Sabin et al., 2022; Devine et al., 2012; Greenwald & Krieger, 2006). White typically carries a positive connotation, while black often carries negative associations; for example, white is worn at weddings, and black is worn at funerals. Devos summarized the factors affecting the development of implicit attitudes under three categories: (1) Socialization and experiences, (2) cultural evaluations, and (3) self-related attitude objects (2008). The effects of past and present experiences on implicit

attitudes are categorized as socialization and experiences. A study showing negative first experiences with smoking cigarettes and the implicit attitude toward smoking is evidence of how early experiences can shape implicit biases (Rudman et al., 2001.) Similarly, Rudman et al. found that individuals who had negative experiences with African Americans in childhood were more likely to exhibit implicit attitudes towards African Americans.

Implicit bias in education has received considerable attention for the detrimental effects on marginalized student populations, particularly racial and ethnic minorities and female students (FitzGerald et al., 2019). The most prominent theories posit that the leading factors contributing to the African American discipline gap are implicit bias from teachers and systemic racial stereotypes (Gregory et al., 2010; Bradshaw et al., 2010). These biases manifest in various forms and set the stage for Black students to have differential and unequal disciplinary experiences compared to their white peers (Downey & Pribesh, 2004).

The African American discipline gap has been a subject of extensive research, with studies consistently highlighting disparities in disciplinary outcomes between African American students and their white peers (FitzGerald et al., 2019; Monroe, 2005; Sparks, 2019). Quantitative studies reveal that Black students are five times more likely to be suspended than their white peers due to teachers' implicit bias and lack of cultural competence (Shabazian, 2020; Skiba & Peterson, 2011). Qualitative research simultaneously revealed that teachers held implicit biases that influenced their decision-making regarding disciplinary actions against Black students, even when students of other races engage in the same behaviors. (Gregory et al., 2016; Skiba & Peterson, 2000). Additionally, further research discovered that even for subjectively defined behavioral

offenses, Black students received harsher consequences than their peers (Skiba et al., 2000).

Researchers have conducted studies where they controlled factors such as academic achievement, teacher behavior, academic achievement, and discipline gaps that still exist between Black and white students (Gregory et al., 2010; Bradshaw et al., 2010; Wallace et al., 2008). A study conducted in the rural southeastern United States explored the issue of disproportionate discipline for Black students compared to white students in five schools (Workman & Wake, 2019). The study's findings indicated that Black students were disciplined significantly more than their white counterparts, and disciplinary imbalance can be attributed to a cultural mismatch between teachers and students, and student trauma and mental health issues. The findings emphasized the need for development and efforts to minimize implicit bias, mainly through cultivating diversity in the teaching staff and implementing culturally responsive and trauma-informed discipline practices (Workman & Wake, 2019).

Cultural competencies between educators and students are crucial in addressing the issue of implicit bias and disproportionate discipline. Teachers' and administrators' lack of cultural competence can contribute to a misunderstanding of Black students' behaviors and lead to disciplinary actions that may have been avoided with more awareness and understanding of their cultures (Workman & Wake, 2019). Through interviews and observations, Olivia Marcucci sought to understand anti-blackness in rehabilitative and punitive school discipline (Marcucci, 2019). Marcucci examines how implicit bias among educators can manifest in disciplinary actions that disproportionately target Black students. She argues that addressing this issue requires a multifaceted approach encompassing

individual awareness and systemic change (Marcucci, 2019). One of the key findings in Marcucci's study is the impact of implicit bias on educators' perceptions of Black students' behavior. She notes that teachers may interpret the same behavior differently based on the student's race, leading to more severe disciplinary actions for Black students (Marcucci, 2019).

Understanding the impact of implicit bias on school discipline is essential for addressing racial disparities and promoting equity in education. Implicit biases may not be intentional, but they can have significant consequences for marginalized students. Breese et al.'s comprehensive study aimed to explore preservice educators' awareness of individual, structural, and systemic racism about implicit bias (2023). The study examines implicit biases among pre-service educators in a professional development context. The researchers deemed racism permanent and normal based on the implicit biases in respondents' perceptions.

Due to the persistent nature of the discipline gap, it is crucial to investigate other factors, such as racial bias in disciplinary processes, procedures, and policies, that may contribute to this disparity. In a study on student suspensions by Losen et al., findings suggested no difference in student behaviors despite race or sex; the main drivers of disproportionate discipline are school policies, practices, and leadership (2015). Research demonstrates that school leadership characteristics are more likely to contribute to disciplinary disproportionality than a student's race or background (Skiba et al., 2012). This evidence suggests that district leaders have the capacity and power to eliminate excessive disciplinary exclusion and begin to close the discipline gap.

### **Teachers and Administrators' Implicit Bias and Black Male Students**



Research on the discipline experiences of Black male students has highlighted significant disparities in their treatment compared to their peers of other racial and gender groups (Bates, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2011; Bell, 2015; Little & Tolbert, 2018). In the US, research indicates that Black male students face a greater risk of receiving exclusionary discipline practices, such as referrals and sanctions, than any other race or gender (Morgan, 2021). In public schools, Black students average about 23% of the population; however, they account for 27% of students referred to law enforcement and 31 % of students arrested (Office of Civil Rights, 2020).

Over the past decade, there has been a growing body of research from the Office of Civil Rights, and the data suggest that Black Male students consistently represented 8% of the school population but accounted for approximately 23% of expulsions and 25% of suspensions, approximately three times their enrollment numbers. (Losen & Martinez, 2014; Office of Civil Rights, 2020; Beneke, 2020; Basile & Black, 2022). Additionally, discipline data also revealed that Black males significantly outnumber White students in both suspensions and referrals, where on average, 4.6% of White students are suspended compared to an alarming 16.8% of Black male students (Luttrell, 2017; Office of Civil Rights, 2020; Basile & Black, 2022).

Implicit bias coupled with micro-aggressive behavior has been identified as a contributing factor to these disparities, with teachers and administrators more likely to perceive Black male students as inherently disruptive or threatening (Little & Tolbert, 2018; Craigg, 2020; Morgan, 2021). For decades, Skiba and Losen (2016) critically examined school districts' "get-tough" mentality, which failed to address student behaviors fairly and equitably. Researchers have noted that zero-tolerance policies, which established

mandatory minimum punishments for designated offenses, have a history of discriminating against Black males and employ the concept of “order maintenance,” which can be traced back to the Broken Window Theory, which claims that disorderly or minor infractions can lead to more serious offenses if left unchecked (Skiba & Peterson, 1999; Skiba & Losen, 2010; Hill & Nettle, 2014; Skiba & Losen, 2016; Boyd & Clampet-Lundquist, 2019; Lodi et al., 2021; Gencfurk & Cimpian, 2022).

The Broken Window Theory discovered by James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling, suggests that visible signs of disorder, such as broken windows, contribute to an environment of social disorder and incivility, which in turn leads to an increase in crime and antisocial behavior (Pearce & Kristjansson, 2019; Ratnayake, 2016; Wilson & Kelling, 1982). This theory was initially applied to urban policing strategies but has since been extended to school discipline practices, where it is believed that cracking down on minor infractions (Ratnayake, 2016; Pearce & Kristjansson, 2019).

Following the discovery of the Broken Windows theory and the implementation of the ZTP came the emergence of the "super-predator" phenomenon. In 1996, Dr. John Dilulio (1996) noted the emergence of the "super-predator" phenomenon, which perpetuated negative stereotypes about Black males and led to harsher discipline practices targeting this group. (Caton, 2012; Kang-Brown, 2013; Issue & Journal, 2018; Wallace, 2020). He hypothesized that the characterization of young black males as dangerous and irredeemable criminals contributed to the implementation of harsh disciplinary measures in schools, therefore making it easier to justify harsh disciplinary practices against them (Caton, 2012; Kang-Brown, 2013; Young et al., 2018; Issue & Journal, 2018; Wallace, 2020; Grace, 2020).

The unfounded super-predator phenomenon currently impacts the disproportionate discipline of Black males, especially when teachers fear their behaviors and perceive them as a threat based on stereotypes (Butler-Barnes & Inniss-Thompson, 2020). Extensive literary research suggests that White female teachers are more likely than any other race or gender to feel fear or threatened by black male students, contributing to the perpetuation of implicit biases in their discipline (Issue & Journal, 2018; Morgan, 2021).

### **Teachers and Administrators' Implicit Bias and Black Female Students**

With great understanding, Black males have garnered the most scholarly attention due to their elevated risk of exclusionary discipline sanctions (Gilliam et al., 2016; Grace, 2020). School discipline and intervention research have focused on Black males due to their risk for underachievement and the potential impact of exclusionary discipline practices on their academic success and overall well-being. However, it is crucial to acknowledge and address Black female students' discipline experiences. Evidence suggests that Black girls face a disproportionate number of disciplinary actions compared to their white counterparts, and the reasons for discipline referrals vastly differ from white female students (Blake et al., 2010).

There has been a notable lack of emphasis on Black females in the academic discussions surrounding school discipline, especially compared to Black males (Blake et al., 2010; Hassan & Carter, 2020). Studies examining the disciplinary experiences of Black females have often centered on comparing them to Black males, with Black girls typically receiving minimal attention beyond being included in descriptive statistics (Blake et al., 2010). Rather than shedding light on the unique challenges faced by Black girls in disciplinary settings, the literature tends to use their experiences to underscore the

disparities experienced by Black males (Blake et al., 2010). The underrepresentation of Black girls' discipline experiences may stem from the belief that girls, in general, are less likely to exhibit behavioral issues due to their higher academic performance (Ross & Jackson, 1991). Additionally, gendered racial bias, which favors Black boys in discipline referrals and sanctions, could contribute to this oversight. However, the fact that Black males are more prone to receiving exclusionary disciplinary actions does not negate the possibility of Black females also facing inequitable discipline practices.

Disproportionate disciplinary actions appear to be a prevalent issue affecting Black girls from elementary school through high school, and compared to Hispanic and White girls, Black girls are more likely to face suspensions from school (Raffaele Mendez et al., 2002). Studies investigating individual risk factors associated with discipline referrals and sanctions indicate that physical aggression significantly predicts school removal and disciplinary actions for both girls and boys (Clark et al., 2003; González & Epstein, 2022). However, other research suggests that girls are often disciplined for less severe behavioral infractions (Clark et al., 2003; Raffaele Mendez and Knoff, 2003; Skiba et al., 2002). Costenbader and Markson (1998) observed that while most suspended students cited physical aggression as the primary reason for their suspension, female students were more likely to report minor behavioral infractions such as gum chewing, failure to comply with previous discipline sanctions, and defiance as the reasons for their suspension. Raffaele Mendez and Knoff (2003) reported that out of the 15 most common infractions resulting in suspensions, Black girls were disproportionately referred for defiance, disruptive behavior, disrespect, profanity, and fighting relative to their representation in the school district.

The notion that Black girls are more likely to face disciplinary actions for subjective and minor behavioral infractions underscores the potential existence of implicit bias among teachers and administrators (González & Epstein, 2022; Turner, 2019). This bias may lead to differential treatment based on race and gender, with Black girls disproportionately penalized for behaviors that might be overlooked or handled less severely than their peers. Moreover, implicit biases may influence educators' expectations and interpretations of behavior, affecting how they perceive and respond to Black girls' actions (Blake et al., 2010; González & Epstein, 2022; Turner, 2019). For instance, a Black girl's assertiveness or self-expression may be misinterpreted as defiance or aggression, resulting in disciplinary consequences that stifle her autonomy and confidence (Hassan & Carter, 2020; Blake et al., 2010).

The intersectionality of race and gender adds layers of complexity to the disciplinary experiences of Black girls (Turner, 2019). Not only do they contend with racial biases that disproportionately target Black students, but they also face gendered stereotypes and expectations that influence how they are perceived and treated within the school environment (Blake et al., 2010; González & Epstein, 2022; Turner, 2019). These combined biases can lead to heightened scrutiny, harsher consequences, and limited opportunities for understanding and support for Black female students (Blake et al., 2010; Turner, 2019).

### **Teachers and Administrators' Implicit Bias and Black Special Education Students**

Disproportionate discipline among Black students in special education is a multifaceted issue deeply rooted in systemic inequities and intersecting factors of race, disability, and socioeconomic status (Annamma et al., 2014; Cruz et al., 2021; Fisher et

al., 2021). While the overrepresentation of Black students in special education has long been documented, the disparities in disciplinary actions taken against these students further exacerbate their marginalization within the education system (Fergus et al., 2015; Harry & Losen, 2015; Losen & Martinez, 2015; Skiba et al., 2017). Research consistently reveals stark disparities in disciplinary outcomes for Black students in special education compared to their peers. These disparities manifest in higher rates of suspensions, expulsions, and other punitive measures, even when controlling for factors such as socioeconomic status and disability severity (Harry & Losen, 2015; Losen & Martinez, 2015; Togut, 2011; Ware et al., 2016). The observed phenomenon underscores the systemic bias inherent in disciplinary practices and highlights the urgent need to address the root causes driving these disparities.

One key contributing factor to disproportionate discipline is the pervasive implicit biases and stereotypes among educators and administrators (Cruz et al., 2021; Skiba et al., 2017). These biases can influence perceptions of Black students with disabilities, leading to harsher disciplinary responses for behavior that may be perceived as threatening or disruptive (Cruz et al., 2021; Skiba et al., 2017). Stereotypes portraying Black individuals as aggressive, defiant, or less capable can result in Black students with disabilities being disproportionately targeted for disciplinary action, perpetuating harmful stereotypes and reinforcing systemic inequalities (Cruz et al., 2021; Skiba et al., 2017).

Black students with disabilities often face compounded challenges stemming from both racial discrimination and disability-related biases. They may encounter inadequate support and resources, including limited access to mental health services, behavioral interventions, and culturally responsive support systems, exacerbating behavioral

challenges and increasing the likelihood of disciplinary actions (Annamma et al., 2014; Cruz et al., 2021; Togot, 2011) Fergus et al., examined trends in school discipline disparities in Maryland, focusing on racial and gender disparities, as well as disparities among students with disabilities (2015). The research team found that Black students with disabilities were significantly more likely to receive disciplinary actions compared to their White peers with disabilities, highlighting the intersectional nature of these disparities and the need for an intersectional approach to addressing them.

Skiba et al. explored the role of implicit bias and structural racism in driving racial disparities in school discipline, including among students with disabilities, in their study titled "Racial Disproportionality in School Discipline: Implicit Bias, Structural Racism, and Resistance (2017). " They underscore the importance of recognizing and addressing implicit biases among educators and school administrators to mitigate the disproportionate disciplinary actions faced by Black students with disabilities.

Losen et al. explored the relationship between special education status and racial disparities in school discipline, particularly how students with disabilities, especially Black students, are disproportionately affected by disciplinary actions (2015). Losen et al. discovered that there was a clear association between special education status and racial disparities in school discipline, with Black students with disabilities experiencing higher rates of disciplinary actions compared to their White peers with disabilities (2015). In 2015, Harry and Losen explored the intersection of race, disability, and discipline within the context of the school-to-prison pipeline in their report "The School-to-Prison Pipeline: The Intersection of Students of Color with Disabilities," highlighting how students of color with

disabilities, including Black students, are disproportionately pushed out of school and into the juvenile justice system due to harsh disciplinary practices (Harry & Losen, 2015).

The consequences of disproportionate discipline extend far beyond the immediate disciplinary measures imposed on students. Black students in special education who experience frequent suspensions or expulsions are at heightened risk of academic disengagement, decreased academic achievement, increased likelihood of dropout, and involvement in the juvenile justice system (Togot, 2011). These punitive measures not only disrupt the educational trajectory of these students but also perpetuate cycles of inequality and limit their opportunities for future success (Cruz et al., 2021; Togot, 2011).

### **Black Student Discipline after COVID-19**

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing disparities in school discipline, particularly for Black students. As schools transitioned to virtual learning during the pandemic and subsequently returned to in-person instruction, Black students have continued to face disproportionate disciplinary actions compared to their White peers. Post-pandemic discipline trends reveal that Black students are still subject to harsher penalties for similar behaviors. These trends can be attributed to increased stress, trauma, and mental health challenges that have disproportionately impacted marginalized communities during the pandemic (Anyon et al., 2021).

The return to in-person schooling after COVID-19 led to an increase in disciplinary actions against students of color, particularly Black students, who already faced significant disparities in disciplinary practices (Stark & Noel, 2021). Teachers and administrators, many of whom struggled with their post-pandemic stress, often failed to account for the heightened emotional and psychological challenges faced by Black students during this



period. As a result, behaviors that may have been symptomatic of pandemic-related trauma were often met with punitive rather than supportive responses (U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2021).

Moreover, the continuation of zero-tolerance policies in many school districts further compounded the problem. These policies, which enforce strict consequences for rule violations, disproportionately impact Black students and contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline (Gonzalez et al., 2021). The challenges brought on by the pandemic, such as family financial instability, loss of loved ones, and disruptions to daily routines, have intensified the already existing vulnerabilities of Black students within the educational system.

### **Black Student Discipline during the Black Lives Matter Era**

The rise of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement has brought national attention to issues of systemic racism and police brutality, prompting widespread calls for reform in many areas, including education. The BLM movement, which gained renewed momentum following the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and many others, has highlighted the ways in which Black individuals, including students, are disproportionately impacted by systems of control and punishment. This focus has extended to school disciplinary practices, where Black students have long been subject to harsher disciplinary actions than their White counterparts.

During the Black Lives Matter era, there has been increasing scrutiny of how school discipline policies reflect broader societal patterns of racial injustice. The movement has sparked critical discussions about the over-policing of Black students in schools and the ways in which disciplinary measures mirror the racial disparities seen in the criminal justice

system. Research has shown that Black students are more likely to be referred to law enforcement for school-related incidents, contributing to the school-to-prison pipeline (Skiba et al., 2014). The heightened awareness brought on by the BLM movement has amplified calls to dismantle these punitive systems and replace them with more equitable approaches.

The Black Lives Matter era has also emphasized the need to re-evaluate zero-tolerance policies, which disproportionately affect Black students. These policies, which often involve automatic, severe punishments for certain infractions, have been criticized for reinforcing racial disparities and contributing to the criminalization of Black youth (Wun, 2016). Advocates of the BLM movement argue that these policies perpetuate systemic racism by disproportionately targeting Black students and pushing them out of the educational system and into the criminal justice system.

In response to these issues, educators and activists have increasingly called for the adoption of restorative justice practices in schools as an alternative to punitive discipline. Restorative justice emphasizes reconciliation, healing, and community-building over punishment, making it a potential solution for addressing the racial disparities in school discipline (Gregory & Evans, 2020). Schools that have adopted restorative practices have seen reductions in disciplinary referrals and improved outcomes for students of color, particularly Black students.

The Black Lives Matter era has also encouraged educators to reflect on their own biases and the ways in which these biases may influence their disciplinary decisions. The movement has pushed for greater accountability and transparency in how discipline is

administered in schools, with many districts re-examining their policies to ensure that they are not contributing to racial inequities.

While the BLM movement has led to increased awareness and some policy changes, significant challenges remain. Many schools continue to rely on punitive measures that disproportionately impact Black students, and efforts to implement restorative justice practices are often met with resistance due to a lack of resources and training. Nevertheless, the Black Lives Matter era has sparked a critical conversation about the need for systemic change in how Black students are disciplined in schools, and it continues to serve as a driving force for ongoing reforms in educational equity.

### **Conceptual Framework Literature**

Understanding the disproportionate discipline of Black students requires a comprehensive theoretical lens that examines both individual biases and systemic inequities. The section explores key theories that inform the study, including Critical Race Theory (CRT), the Broken Windows Theory, and the Super Predator Theory. CRT provides a framework for analyzing how race and racism are embedded within educational policies and disciplinary practices. The Broken Windows Theory explains how minor infractions in school settings often lead to harsher disciplinary measures, disproportionately affecting Black students. Additionally, the Super Predator Theory highlights how racialized perceptions of Black youth contribute to implicit bias in disciplinary decisions. By integrating these theories, the study aims to provide a deeper understanding of how implicit biases influence discipline disparities and what strategies can be employed to mitigate these effects.

### **Critical Race Theory**

The concept of race was believed to have been developed by François Bernier in 1684 when he published a comprehensive classification of humans in a French journal. Bernier used the four global quarters to divide humans into racial categories geographically: Europeans, Far Easterners, Negroes (blacks), and Lapps (Loring, 2005; Lopez, 2004). Following Bernier's work, Carl Linnaeus expanded racial grouping in his 1735 treatise, *Systema Naturae*. Linnaeus associated certain personality traits, skills, and abilities with each racial category, creating a perceived "scientific" foundation for the idea that race was the primary determinant of human traits and capacities (Loring, 2005; Lopez, 2004). Josiah Nott used these racial categories to argue for the inherent superiority of whites in his book *Types of Mankind* in the mid-19th century (Udah, 2017). Race became a critical issue that shaped early scientific research, but progressive scholars, many racial or ethnic minorities began scrutinizing the knowledge production processes and the implications for non-European races (Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010). These scholars argued that European researchers could not perceive the insidious influence of racism in their work. Since the 20th century, new perspectives emerged to critically examine the influences of racism on both the research process and outcomes (Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010).

Dr. Derrick Bell developed Critical Race Theory (CRT) in the 1970s and early 1980s, born from the realization that racism was a fundamental part of American society, and traditional legal frameworks were not adequately addressing racial inequalities (Bercuci, 2020; Pulla et al., 2022). Bell sought to challenge the dominant narratives of colorblindness and meritocracy by highlighting how structural racism operated in various aspects of society, including the legal system, education, and employment (Soelistyarini et

al., 2020). Dr. Bell, along with legal scholars, lawyers, and activists, believed that America's infrastructure was designed for white elites, and they would only support racial progress if it benefited their interests (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Critical race theorists posited that racism had at least four dimensions: (1) it took on individual and institutional forms; (2) it had a cumulative impact on both individuals and groups; (3) it had micro and macro components; and (4) it had conscious and unconscious elements (Lee, 2016; Davis, 1989; Lawrence, 1987).

In CRT research conducted by Ladson-Billings and Tate, they theorized race and used it as an analytic tool for understanding school inequity. The researchers based their study on three central propositions: (1) Race continued to be a significant factor in determining inequity in the United States; (2) U.S. society was based on property rights; (3) The intersection of race and property created an analytic tool through which social and school inequity could be understood (1995). Ladson-Billings and Tate argued that institutional and structural racism were the primary drivers of Black poverty rates and low school performance (1995). CRT suggested that one of the prime concerns of white people was maintaining control over Black people and that this was embedded in their culture (Smith et al., 2022; Carothers, 2018). While there were varying perspectives on the intentions and motivations of white individuals in maintaining control over Black people, CRT highlighted the role of power and privilege in perpetuating race-based inequalities (Gerrard et al., 2021).

Dr. Bell agreed with Dr. Rockich-Winston, a research physician and critical race theorist, that "racism is woven into the fabric of the United States." In a research study on Black physicians, Dr. Rockich-Winston's findings indicated that Black physicians were

aware of the country's racial contract, which excluded them from the social contracts governing all physicians. CRT could mitigate the exclusion of Black physicians who experienced barriers in their professional development and advancement, including limited access to resources and opportunities for career growth (Rockich-Winston et al., 2022). In a study on diversity in pharmacy education, Dr. Rockich-Winston posited that CRT could provide critical insights into how diversity could be integrated into research, the curriculum, and co-curricular experiences (Bush et al., 2018). Dr. Rockich-Winston suggested adopting CRT as one of the primary organizational capabilities of the Learning, Diversity, and Research [LDR] model (Bush et al., 2018).

CRT helped shed light on why racial disproportionality in education existed and examined how school disciplinary policies perpetuated the system of racial hierarchy embedded within American society (Lancaster et al., 2019). CRT sought to liberate, empower, and promote justice by addressing issues of race and race relations in various contexts, including education (Gorny-Wegrzyn & Perry, 2021). CRT aligned with the study's problem and purpose because it provided a framework to examine bias and disproportionality in disciplinary practices and challenged existing power dynamics (Hanna et al., 2021). CRT delved into teacher instructional practices, identifying overt and subtle practices of inequality that perpetuated unequal treatment and contributed to the maintenance of systemic racism (Maake et al., 2021).

For decades, there had been a clear and pervasive pattern of disproportionate discipline for Black students, which could no longer be considered an accident or coincidence (Crenshaw et al., 1995). The racial hierarchy in America deemed whiteness as superior and dominant and blackness as lacking worth and inferior; this concept influenced

how teachers and administrators punitively disciplined Black students (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Kennedy, 1989). There was a subconscious fear that after three hundred years of racial oppression and exploitation, an uprising and reversal of power could occur (Carmichael & Hamilton, 1967). CRT explained that when a Black student triggered that fear, school leaders weaponized it, resulting in punitive and discriminatory disciplinary actions (Crawford & Burns, 2022; Carothers, 2018). School leaders making disciplinary decisions often assigned racial categories to students, whether consciously or unconsciously, with Black and white being the most prevalent (Morgan, 2021). In determining the appropriate disciplinary action, various racial criteria might have been considered depending on the nature of the incident; however, race, implicit bias, and stereotypes were highly influential in the chosen behavioral sanction (Anderson & Ritter, 2017).

### **Super Predator Theory**

The Super Predator Theory emerged in the 1990s, fueled by widespread media attention and political rhetoric that painted young Black males, particularly teenagers, as inherently dangerous and prone to violent crime. Introduced by political scientist John Dilulio, this theory suggested that a new generation of "super predators"—youths, especially Black males, devoid of morals—would wreak havoc on American society (Dilulio, 1995). This racialized narrative led to increased public fear and the adoption of harsh policies targeting young Black men. Despite being discredited over time, the Super Predator Theory had lasting impacts on the perception and treatment of Black youth, particularly in schools.

Research shows that the legacy of the Super Predator Theory continues to shape disciplinary practices in education. For instance, Skiba et al. (2011) demonstrated how Black students, particularly males, are disproportionately punished for subjective offenses, such as defiance or disrespect, compared to their White peers. This racialized punishment aligns with the remnants of the Super Predator narrative, which frames Black students as inherently more threatening or problematic. This perception, often exacerbated by implicit biases, leads to harsher disciplinary actions against Black students, contributing to the disproportionate rates of suspension, expulsion, and referrals to law enforcement (Morgan, 2021).

The Zero Tolerance policies that emerged in the 1990s were largely influenced by the Super Predator myth. Initially designed to address issues of safety, Zero Tolerance became a rigid disciplinary approach that criminalized even minor infractions in schools. Research by Morris (2021) highlights how Zero Tolerance disproportionately affects students of color, particularly Black students, who are often subject to harsher punishments for the same infractions as their peers. The criminalization of Black youth in schools not only reflects the Super Predator mindset but also fuels the school-to-prison pipeline, which funnels students from classrooms into the criminal justice system (Lopez & Slate, 2020).

While exploring disproportionate discipline, the Super Predator Theory provides historical context for understanding why Black students continue to face harsher penalties. The theory's influence can be seen in the development of Zero Tolerance policies and the broader pattern of viewing Black students as more dangerous or disruptive than their peers. The analysis highlights the role of implicit bias in reinforcing these stereotypes, which



perpetuate the disproportionate discipline Black students experience (Gullo & Beachum, 2020).

### **The Broken Windows Theory**

The Broken Windows Theory, introduced by criminologists George L. Kelling and James Q. Wilson in 1982, posits that visible signs of disorder, such as minor infractions or social incivilities, can lead to a breakdown of community norms and eventually escalate to more serious crimes (Kelling & Wilson, 1982). This theory suggests that maintaining order in public spaces through the strict enforcement of laws, even for minor infractions, prevents more serious crimes from taking place. Though originally applied to urban policing strategies, this theory soon influenced public policy and was eventually adapted into educational settings during the 1990s, leading to the rise of Zero Tolerance policies in schools. These policies applied the same rigid, punitive approaches to student behavior, contributing to the criminalization of minor infractions in educational contexts (Ratnayake & Jacobsen, 2020).

In the context of school discipline, the Broken Windows Theory frames student misbehavior, no matter how minor, as a precursor to more severe issues (Still, 2023). This led to the implementation of punitive measures for infractions that were often minor and subjective, such as talking back to teachers or violating dress codes (Still, 2023). Black students, in particular, were disproportionately targeted by such policies, facing harsher disciplinary consequences for the same infractions as their White peers (Skiba et al., 2011). Research by Ratnayake and Jacobsen (2020) found that schools implementing policies grounded in the Broken Windows approach were more likely to punish students of color severely for minor misconduct, perpetuating racial disparities in discipline. Additionally,

Morris (2021) demonstrated that Black students were more likely to be disciplined for subjective offenses, such as defiance or disrespect, which are often judged through the lens of implicit bias.

The influence of the Broken Windows Theory on the rise of Zero Tolerance policies cannot be overlooked. Zero Tolerance policies, which mandated strict punishment for any violation of school rules, aligned with the principles of the Broken Windows Theory, where maintaining order was prioritized over addressing the root causes of behavior (Still, 2023). As a result, minor infractions like tardiness or disruptive behavior were treated as major violations, leading to disproportionate suspensions and expulsions for Black students (Skiba et al., 2011; Gullo & Beachum, 2020; Still, 2023). The focus on punitive measures rather than restorative interventions created an environment where Black students were more likely to be removed from school settings and funneled into the criminal justice system (Lopez & Slate, 2020).

Numerous studies have highlighted the connection between the Broken Windows Theory, Zero Tolerance policies, and the school-to-prison pipeline. For example, Monroe (2020) found that schools with strict disciplinary policies tended to criminalize student behavior, particularly among students of color, contributing to their involvement in the justice system at a young age. Furthermore, Wilson (2021) examined how schools that adopted a Broken Windows approach failed to address the underlying causes of student misbehavior, such as poverty, trauma, or lack of resources, leading to further marginalization of Black students. The rigid enforcement of discipline, often underpinned by racial biases, exacerbates the disparities already present in educational systems (Cameron et al., 2021).

The Broken Windows Theory helps explain how schools' preoccupation with maintaining order and control has contributed to the over-punishment of Black students for relatively minor infractions. This theory not only justifies the punitive approaches taken by Zero Tolerance policies but also reinforces the perception of Black students as more disruptive and in need of harsh discipline. By examining the historical roots of this theory and the lasting impact on educational practices, this research underscores the importance of dismantling punitive policies and adopting restorative, culturally responsive approaches that focus on equity and understanding the socio-emotional needs of students (Gullo & Beachum, 2020; Still, 2023).

### **Methodology Literature**

Research studies on implicit biases and disproportionate discipline in schools rely on qualitative methodologies such as interviews, surveys, and observations. These studies have provided valuable insight into the pervasive and detrimental impact of racial bias on educational practices and outcomes. As scholars have increasingly recognized the importance of minimizing bias, they have begun analyzing the complexities of race and racism in education, and the relevance and applicability to disciplinary practices have become even more evident (Bell & Puckett, 2023; Crenshaw et al., 1995).

Crenshaw et al. interviewed teachers in a qualitative study to understand their perspectives on discipline and implicit bias. They found that implicit biases and stereotypes play a significant role in determining disciplinary actions, with Black students facing harsher punishments compared to their white peers (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Crenshaw et al., 2015). Similarly, Bell and Puckett conducted a qualitative study to explore the experiences of Black parents navigating the disciplinary system in schools. The researchers

found that Black parents often faced barriers and challenges in advocating for their children, with disciplinary practices reflecting systemic racism and perpetuating inequitable outcomes for Black students (2023).

Numerous studies have utilized various methodologies to investigate the inequitable discipline phenomenon and shed light on the underlying factors contributing to it. One notable study by Gregory and Fergus utilized a qualitative case study and a quantitative mixed-methods approach to explore the experiences of Black students who received disciplinary actions. The researchers conducted interviews, surveys, and observations of disciplinary practices in school settings and, throughout their data analysis, found that Black students faced higher rates of disciplinary actions compared to their White counterparts and experienced subjective judgments and biased treatment from teachers and administrators (Gregory & Fergus, 2017; Skiba et al., 2022).

Skiba et al. involved interviews and focus groups with Black and White students and teachers to explore their perspectives on disciplinary disparities (Skiba et al., 2013). The study found that Black students and teachers perceived differential treatment in disciplinary practice. Black students felt targeted and unfairly disciplined, and teachers acknowledged their potential biases but also expressed a need for more support and resources to address disciplinary issues effectively (Skiba et al., 2013).

Furthermore, researchers have also utilized observational methods to examine the role of racial bias in disciplinary actions; Okonofua and Eberhardt used a combination of field experiments and mock scenarios to investigate the impact of implicit bias on teachers' disciplinary decisions (2015). The researchers found that when presented with identical infractions committed by a Black student versus a White student, teachers were more likely

to view the behavior as more severe and were more likely to recommend harsher disciplinary actions for the Black student (Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015). These qualitative studies collectively suggest that racial biases exist within the disciplinary practices of schools, leading to disproportionate punitive actions against Black students compared to their White counterparts (Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015).

### **Research Design Literature**

The research design for this study employed a qualitative single-embedded case study method utilizing vignettes to focus on the discussion and interpretation of teachers' and administrators' perceptions and disciplinary decision-making processes. Case study vignettes were fictional scenarios or stories that presented specific situations for participants to consider and respond to (Jeffries & Maeder, 2006). They simulated real-life situations and allowed researchers to explore participants' thoughts, emotions, and decision-making processes in a controlled setting (Jeffries & Maeder, 2006).

The use of dramatic scenarios in this qualitative single-embedded case study aligned with similar methodologies in previous research within educational settings. These past studies provided extensive evidence on the cognitive, emotional, and social processes associated with racial disparities in disciplinary actions, making it a relevant and reliable research tradition to build upon. A case study by Starcke and Porter explored racial disparities in postsecondary disciplinary actions using vignettes to examine administrators' recommendations for marijuana violations (2019). The vignettes only differed in the students' names, which were purposely selected to suggest a particular racial identity. The study results indicated no pattern of racial biases between Black and White students (Starcke & Porter, 2019). Okonofua and Eberhardt utilized vignettes to investigate the role

of implicit racial bias in teachers' disciplinary decisions and how a single Black student might have received multiple suspensions and been labeled a "troublemaker" for minor infractions, while a White student received more lenient discipline for similar behavior (2014).

Given the persistent disparities in disciplinary actions based on race, utilizing vignettes in the research design for this study provided a valuable method for exploring teachers' and administrators' perceptions, behaviors, and decision-making processes. This could ultimately aid in developing more equitable and effective intervention strategies to address these disparities and support all students' well-rounded academic and social-emotional learning, fostering a more inclusive and just educational environment.

## **Conclusions**

Extensive bodies of research consistently indicated the presence of a significant discipline gap between Black students and their White peers. Despite efforts to control for various factors such as academic achievement and teacher behavior, Black students were more likely to face suspension and expulsion compared to their counterparts. The discipline gap persisted, with implicit racial bias, cultural competence, and subjective disciplinary practices playing a role in these disparities. To address this issue, the research design for this study employed a qualitative single-embedded case study, drawing on data to provide a comprehensive understanding of the implicit biases contributing to the disproportionality. The qualitative single-embedded case study method enabled an in-depth exploration of teachers' and administrators' experiences, shedding light on the nuanced dynamics within school disciplinary systems.

## **Chapter Summary**

Chapter 2 provided an in-depth exploration of the discipline gap between Black and White students in the U.S. educational system, focusing on the racial disparities in school disciplinary practices. The chapter reviewed a wide body of literature that consistently demonstrated how Black students were disproportionately subjected to harsher disciplinary actions compared to their White peers for similar behaviors. This disparity was closely linked to both explicit and implicit racial biases that influenced educators' decision-making processes. The chapter highlighted how these biases, often unconscious, were ingrained within broader institutional practices, exacerbating the discipline gap.

The research also emphasized how subjective interpretations of student behavior contributed to these racial disparities, with educators' perceptions often shaped by cultural differences and stereotypes. Furthermore, institutional policies such as zero-tolerance measures were identified as contributing factors that disproportionately impacted Black students, leading to higher rates of suspensions, expulsions, and interactions with the juvenile justice system.

Chapter 2 also introduced the rationale for using a qualitative single-embedded case study to explore the experiences of teachers and administrators and uncover the implicit biases that perpetuated these disparities. The chosen methodology allowed for a nuanced understanding of the complex factors at play, moving beyond quantitative data to examine the deeper dynamics influencing disciplinary decisions. In the next chapter, Chapter 3, the focus will shift to outlining the research design and methodology used in this study. It will detail the rationale for selecting a qualitative single-embedded case study approach, describe the participant selection process, and explain the data collection methods, including vignettes, questionnaires, and final surveys. Additionally, Chapter 3 will discuss

the thematic analysis used to identify patterns and themes related to implicit bias in disciplinary actions, ultimately contributing to strategies for addressing and reducing the discipline gap in schools.



## **Chapter 3**

### **Research Methodology**

The study addresses a qualitative single-embedded case study that explored implicit biases in the disciplinary decisions made by teachers and administrators and sought to identify strategies that could support them in addressing and mitigating these biases. Chapter 3 outlines the rationale for selecting a single-embedded case study approach to effectively meet the research objectives. The chapter provides a detailed overview of the research design, including the criteria for participant selection and the recruitment process used to engage teachers and administrators in the study.

Additionally, Chapter 3 describes the research setting and the data collection methods, such as the use of vignettes, questionnaires, and final surveys, to gather comprehensive and contextualized information about participants' disciplinary practices and their experiences with implicit bias. The chapter will further elaborate on the data analysis process, detailing the steps taken to interpret the collected data through thematic analysis. Strategies such as detailed documentation of the research process and reflexive journaling were employed to ensure the reliability and validity of the study. Detailed documentation helped to maintain transparency in the research methods. Ethical considerations were also addressed in the chapter, ensuring that all necessary measures were taken to protect participants' rights, maintain confidentiality, and adhere to ethical research standards. Chapter 3 lays the foundation for the study's in-depth exploration of implicit bias in educational disciplinary practices, setting the stage for the presentation and analysis of findings in subsequent chapters.

## **Research Methods and Appropriateness**

The research methodology and design for this study were carefully selected to ensure alignment with the study's objectives, which explore implicit biases in disciplinary decision-making and disproportionate discipline of Black students. A qualitative approach was deemed most appropriate due to the ability to capture rich, nuanced data on participants' experiences, beliefs, and perspectives. A single-embedded case study design was chosen to provide an in-depth exploration of these issues within the specific context of a school, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of multiple variables and their interactions.

## **Research Method**

A qualitative single-embedded case study was carefully selected for this research due to the alignment with the study's purpose and objectives. Compared to other qualitative research designs, such as narrative or phenomenological methods, the case study design was chosen because it focuses on exploring the structure of individuals' experiences and delves deeply into uncovering the essence of their encounters with disciplinary disparities. While narrative and phenomenological approaches are valuable, they might not have captured the subtle nuances and underlying meanings as comprehensively as the case study approach.

A qualitative method was selected because it offered the opportunity to explore perspectives, experiences, and underlying beliefs in a holistic and nuanced way (Gonzalez et al., 2021). The selected approach provided several benefits: (1) A deeper understanding of lived experiences and perspectives (Gonzalez et al., 2021); (2) Exploration of contextual factors, such as cultural mismatches between teachers and students, student trauma, and

mental health issues; (3) Uncovering the underlying mechanisms and processes driving decision-making (Gonzalez et al., 2021; Grace, 2020); (4) Flexibility and adaptability in data collection. The qualitative method helped understand the entire context surrounding the phenomenon rather than focusing solely on specific variables (Gonzalez et al., 2021). The chosen method aligned with the research questions, as it sought to understand the complex factors contributing to disproportionate discipline and how implicit biases played a role in this issue (Grace, 2020).

A quantitative method would not have been sufficient, as it may not have captured the complexities and subtleties of teachers' and administrators' perceptions and experiences when interpreting student behaviors (Bristol, 2020). Quantitative research focuses on numerical data and statistical analyses, which may not have reflected the nuanced and contextual aspects of teachers' implicit biases and their impact on disproportionate discipline. Using a quantitative method might have limited the depth, richness, and authenticity of the data collected in this study. Ultimately, the qualitative method was the best choice because it allowed for an exploration of participants' feelings and emotions, which could not be quantified or measured (DeMarrais & Tisdale, 2002). It also enabled participants to express their perspectives in their own words, ensuring their voices were heard and acknowledged.

### **Design Appropriateness**

A case study design was chosen because it allowed for an in-depth exploration of a specific phenomenon within a real-life context. Case studies provided a detailed and comprehensive analysis of a particular case, enabling the examination of multiple variables and their interactions in shaping the phenomenon (Yazan, 2015). A single-case study was

selected because the research took place at one school site. Single-case studies are often conducted with a single case or a small number of participants involved in one study (Lobo et al., 2017). Single-case studies offered a viable alternative to large-group studies without compromising internal validity for assessing causal relationships between interventions and outcomes in a specific context (Lobo et al., 2017).

The single-embedded case study design was deployed because the study subjects were teachers and administrators. This design captured the complexities of the issue within a specific school site, considering the unique factors and dynamics that influenced the participants' implicit biases and discipline practices (Yazan, 2015). This design incorporated multiple data sources, such as interviews, questionnaires, and document analysis, providing a comprehensive exploration of the research problem and helping to identify patterns and themes (Yazan, 2015).

Other research designs were considered, but they would not have adequately captured key components of the study. For example, phenomenology would not have been ideal, as it focuses on exploring individual lived experiences and subjective meanings attributed to specific past events (Williams, 2021). While phenomenology provides valuable insights, it may not capture the broader systemic factors and contextual influences shaping participants' decisions (Williams, 2021). A case study methodology was more appropriate for understanding the complex social phenomena of implicit biases and disproportionate discipline, allowing for a comprehensive examination of multiple variables and dynamics in a specific school context (Alam, 2021). Phenomenology might not have provided the depth and detail needed to fully explore the intricate factors contributing to participants' disciplinary choices (Williams, 2021).

Although capturing participants' stories was important, a narrative study would not have been suitable for this research. Narrative studies focus on individual personal experiences and may not provide the necessary scope to analyze the systemic factors and contextual influences contributing to biases and disciplinary practices (Eick, 2012; McAlpine, 2016). To fully understand implicit biases and disproportionate discipline, a narrative study would not have provided the broader perspective needed to examine societal and structural influences on these phenomena (Eick, 2012; Sondag, 2020). Furthermore, a narrative study would not have allowed for the in-depth exploration of multiple participants' perspectives and experiences, which was crucial for understanding the complexities of the issue (Sondag, 2020).

### **Research Questions**

The research questions for this qualitative single-embedded case study are:

R1: How do implicit biases contribute to disciplinary decisions made by teachers and administrators?

R2: What strategies can teachers and administrators incorporate when addressing and mitigating their biased disciplinary practices?

### **Population and Sample**

The selection of an appropriate population and sample size is essential for understanding the dynamics of implicit bias in school disciplinary practices. The findings focuses on teachers and administrators who were specifically chosen due to their direct involvement in making and enforcing disciplinary decisions. The aim was to capture a range of experiences and perspectives by selecting participants from a diverse population

within a charter school network. The following sections provide a detailed explanation of the population and sample size considerations for this research.

### **Population**

The population for this study consisted of teachers and administrators from a charter school network, which included two elementary schools, one middle school, and two high schools. Teachers and administrators were selected because they hold key roles in determining student discipline, making their perspectives critical to the exploration of implicit biases in disciplinary decision-making. Diversity among participants, including racial/ethnic backgrounds and years of teaching experience, was prioritized to ensure that the study captured a comprehensive view of how different factors influence discipline within educational settings.

### **Sample**

The sample consisted of 16 participants: 8 teachers and 8 administrators. Purposeful sampling was employed to ensure demographic diversity and a balance between teaching and administrative roles. The selected approach allowed for a deeper exploration of how different educational professionals, with varied backgrounds, perceive and implement disciplinary actions. Sandelowski (1995) emphasized that qualitative research should have a sample size large enough to capture rich, detailed data, yet small enough to allow for in-depth analysis. Morse (2000) also noted that fewer participants are needed when data from each individual is particularly rich and informative, as was the case in this study. This sample size provided the breadth and depth needed to explore the complexities of disproportionate discipline in educational contexts.

Consent forms for participation in the study were distributed to participants via email and were returned through the same medium. The process was designed to ensure that all participants clearly understood the study's purpose and role within it before agreeing to participate. The video meeting with participants followed a structured agenda to facilitate clear communication and address any concerns. The meeting began with a warm welcome and an expression of gratitude to the participants for their involvement in the study. A brief recap of the research's purpose and goals was provided to ensure all participants aligned with the study's objectives. Following the introduction, a comprehensive overview of the study was presented. This included detailed information about the study's objectives, methodology, and expected outcomes. The discussion also covered the types of data that would be collected, such as surveys, interviews, or focus groups, providing participants with a clear understanding of their participation.

Confidentiality measures were then emphasized to reassure participants that their responses would be anonymized and kept strictly confidential. The procedures for safeguarding their privacy, including data encryption and secure storage protocols, were explained to ensure that participants felt comfortable with how their information would be handled. Participants' rights were reviewed, focusing on their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences. It was also made clear that their decision to participate would not impact their employment or relationship with the school district, thereby ensuring that their participation was entirely voluntary. The meeting also included a Q&A session, inviting participants to ask questions, express concerns, or seek clarification about the study. This session was crucial in ensuring all participants felt fully informed and comfortable with the study's procedures before proceeding.

Finally, the next steps in the research process were outlined. This included a discussion of the timeline for data collection, any additional materials or resources that would be provided to participants, and how they could contact the researcher for further assistance or support if needed. This thorough approach aimed to provide participants with all the necessary information to participate confidently and securely in the study.

### **Vignettes, Demographic Surveys, and End of Study Interview Questions**

Once the informed consent form was signed, participants were immediately emailed a link to the Demographic Questionnaire Survey tailored to their specific group. The demographic questionnaire was designed with two versions, Version A and Version B, applicable to both teachers and principals. Four teachers received Version A, and the other four received Version B. Similarly, for principals, four received Version A, and the remaining four received Version B. Although the questions on the Demographic Questionnaire were the same for both groups, the distinction between the versions allowed for more targeted data collection.

At the end of each Demographic Questionnaire, participants were directed via a link to the Case Study Vignette, which also differed between teachers and principals. Like the questionnaires, the Case Study Vignettes were divided into Version A and Version B, with four teachers and four principals receiving each version. For example, the Teacher Demographic Questionnaire Version B included a link to the Teacher Case Study Vignette Version B, while the Principal Demographic Questionnaire Version A led to the Principal Case Study Vignette Version A. These vignettes were the only part of the survey with differing questions based on the assigned version. After completing each Case Study Vignette, participants were provided with a link to the Final Interview questions, which



were uniform across both groups. This ensured consistency in the final data collection phase.

### **Credibility and Transferability**

Ensuring credibility and transferability is crucial to the rigor and validity of this study, which explores implicit biases in disciplinary practices. Credibility pertains to the accuracy and trustworthiness of the data collected from teachers and administrators, ensuring that the findings genuinely reflect their experiences with student discipline. Transferability focuses on whether these findings can be applied to other educational contexts.

#### **Credibility**

Credibility in this study was reinforced through multiple strategies designed to ensure the trustworthiness of the data. In addition to prolonged engagement with the participants, peer debriefing was utilized. Peer debriefing involved discussing the data and findings with colleagues who were not directly involved in the study, which provided an external check on the research process and helped to identify any potential biases or inconsistencies. The chosen method, along with data triangulation, ensured a more robust and accurate interpretation of the data. To address reliability, the research procedures and data analysis methods were meticulously documented and clearly outlined to facilitate replication and ensure the consistency and dependability of the study's findings.

#### **Transferability**

In this study, transferability is achieved by providing a detailed description of the research setting, participant selection criteria, and data collection processes. By offering thick, rich descriptions of the participants' experiences and the educational environments

in which they work, readers can determine the applicability of the findings to their contexts. While the study focuses on a specific charter school network, the themes and patterns that emerge may be relevant to other K-12 educational institutions grappling with issues of implicit bias and disciplinary disparities. Additionally, comparisons to existing literature further support the study's transferability by linking the findings to broader discussions on race, discipline, and educational equity. By documenting the methodology with transparency, the study allows future researchers and practitioners to assess its relevance and apply its insights to similar educational settings.

### **Data Collection**

Data for this study were collected using a combination of vignettes, demographic questionnaires, and open-ended interview questions. Initially, semi-structured interviews were planned to follow the completion of the demographic questionnaires and vignettes. However, after consulting with the Institutional Review Board (IRB), it was determined that maintaining participant anonymity and confidentiality would be better suited to ensure the integrity of the research process and the workplace environment. Given the small sample size and the fact that participants were drawn from the researcher's workplace, it was imperative to protect their identities and create a safe space for honest reflection. As a result, open-ended interview questions were administered anonymously instead of semi-structured interviews.

The vignettes allowed participants to elaborate on their perspectives and decision-making processes when faced with disciplinary scenarios involving students of different racial identities. These responses provided valuable qualitative data on how implicit biases influence disciplinary decisions. The demographic questionnaire gathered essential

background information about participants, including their age, years of teaching experience, and racial/ethnic identity. This information was analyzed to provide a descriptive overview of the participants and explore potential patterns in their responses.

The open-ended interview questions encouraged participants to reflect deeply on their disciplinary practices, implicit biases, and experiences in the educational field. This qualitative approach allowed participants to explain their disciplinary choices in detail and delve into their experiences with implicit bias. Once responses were collected, the data were compiled and organized in a Google Drive folder for analysis.

Thematic analysis was used to examine the qualitative data, identifying recurring themes and patterns in the participants' narratives. Responses were coded to uncover significant insights regarding participants' perceptions of bias and their decision-making processes. The demographic data from the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics to contextualize the participants' backgrounds and their disciplinary choices. This holistic approach to data collection and analysis provided a comprehensive understanding of how implicit biases shape disciplinary decisions and highlighted strategies for mitigating such biases in educational settings.

### **Thematic Analysis**

A thematic analysis was conducted to gain a comprehensive understanding of the data collected from interviews and focus groups. The analysis involved reviewing transcriptions and identifying patterns, themes, and commonalities across the participants' narratives. These themes were analyzed and interpreted to answer the research questions and provide insights into teachers' and administrators' perceptions and biases related to disciplinary practices. The analysis went beyond summarizing the data, aiming to interpret

and make sense of it by identifying important patterns that could inform recommendations for improving disciplinary practices (Peel, 2021).

The thematic analysis also considered how the identified themes were influenced by factors such as age, years of teaching experience, and racial/ethnic identity, exploring intersections and variations in the themes based on these factors (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Peel, 2021). Additionally, the context in which the data were collected, such as school demographics and disciplinary policies, was examined to provide a deeper understanding of the factors influencing disciplinary practices and their potential impact on student outcomes. The thematic analysis was guided by principles of rigor and trustworthiness, including member checking and peer debriefing, to validate the findings and ensure an accurate representation of participants' perspectives (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Peel, 2021). The findings from this analysis contributed to the existing body of research on disciplinary practices and teacher biases, shedding light on the underlying factors contributing to disparities in student disciplinary outcomes.

### **Chapter Summary**

Chapter 3 outlined the research design and methodology used to investigate the implicit biases of teachers and administrators in disciplinary decisions. The study employed a qualitative single-embedded case study method, utilizing a combination of vignettes, questionnaires, and interviews to collect data from the participants. The vignettes presented hypothetical scenarios that allowed teachers and administrators to make disciplinary decisions, while the follow-up interviews provided an opportunity for participants to reflect on their initial responses and explore any new insights or changes in perspective that emerged throughout the study. This design enabled an in-depth

examination of how implicit biases might have influenced disciplinary choices, offering a nuanced understanding of the participants' decision-making processes.

Chapter 3 also addressed the study's limitations and proposed future research directions. It highlighted the need for additional qualitative interviews and fieldwork, the collection of demographic data, and the importance of considering intersectional factors such as race, gender, and disability in future studies. Additionally, the potential for unconscious biases in participant selection was discussed, emphasizing the importance of being mindful of these influences in both the current research and future investigations. To ensure the reliability and validity of the data, rigorous methodologies such as member checking and peer debriefing were employed.

The chapter concluded with a discussion of the thematic analysis approach used to analyze the collected data. The selected approach focused on identifying recurring patterns and extracting significant insights related to implicit biases in disciplinary decisions. The thematic analysis provided a structured way to interpret the complex data and draw meaningful conclusions from the participants' experiences and responses. As we transition into Chapter 4, the focus shifts to analyzing and presenting the study's findings. Chapter 4 will delve deeper into the themes that emerged from the data, exploring how the participants' implicit biases influenced their disciplinary decisions and highlighting the broader implications for educational practices and policies.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Analysis and Results**

The purpose of this study is to explore how implicit biases in teachers and administrators contribute to disproportionate disciplinary actions against Black students. By examining these biases, the study aims to uncover the underlying factors influencing disciplinary decisions and provide insights into strategies for mitigating biased practices. The research objectives focus on understanding the relationship between implicit biases and disciplinary disparities while identifying practical interventions to foster more equitable disciplinary approaches in schools.

The study addresses the chapter presents the analysis of the data collected from participants and details the results of the study. The chapter begins by outlining the data analysis process, including how interviews, surveys, and observations were used to gather information from teachers and administrators. Following the description of the analysis, the chapter provides the findings of the study, organized by themes that emerged from the data. These themes reflect key areas related to implicit bias, disciplinary practices, and the impact on Black students. The chapter concludes with a summary of the results, which will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

### **Research Questions**

How do implicit biases contribute to disciplinary decisions made by teachers and administrators?

What strategies can teachers and administrators incorporate when addressing and mitigating their biased disciplinary practices?

## **Data Collection**

Participants for this study were carefully selected based on predefined criteria established for teachers and administrators within the Real Journey Academies community. For teachers, the inclusion criteria required a valid teaching credential and at least two years of credentialed teaching experience. For administrators, a minimum of two years of administrative experience was required. These criteria ensured that participants had sufficient professional experience and qualifications relevant to the study. Collaboration took place with the Human Resources department to identify potential participants and provide access to the internal staffing database containing essential contact information, including email addresses, for all eligible teachers and administrators.

The recruitment process was initiated by emailing the 77 eligible teachers and 19 administrators. These emails served as the primary method for inviting participants to the study. Each email provided detailed information about the study, including the purpose, eligibility criteria, and the requirements for participation. Additionally, the emails emphasized that participation was available on a first-come, first-served basis, ensuring that those who met the criteria and were interested in the study had the opportunity to participate.

## **Thematic Analysis**

A thematic analysis was conducted to gain a comprehensive understanding of the data collected from interviews and focus groups. The analysis involved reviewing transcriptions and identifying patterns, themes, and commonalities across the participants' narratives. These themes were analyzed and interpreted to answer the research questions and provide insights into teachers' and administrators' perceptions and biases related to

disciplinary practices. The analysis went beyond summarizing the data, aiming to interpret and make sense of it by identifying important patterns that could inform recommendations for improving disciplinary practices (Peel, 2021).

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### **Demographics**

The study participants were described by reporting relevant demographic information such as gender, age range, ethnicity, region, occupation, and years of experience. To maintain confidentiality, age was collected and reported in ranges such as 20 to 30, 30 to 40, and so forth. The demographic information was presented using a combination of text and tables. However, each demographic variable was reported individually without linking it to a specific participant. For instance, no information was provided that would allow the reader to identify that a particular participant was an Asian



female teacher in her 30s living in the Northwest region, as this could compromise confidentiality.

The participants in this study comprised a diverse group of educators, each bringing a unique set of experiences, perspectives, and backgrounds to the research. The demographic data collected from the participants included age, race, and years of experience in education. These factors were crucial in understanding the varied viewpoints and professional insights that contributed to the study's exploration of implicit biases in disciplinary practices.

### **Age Distribution**

The participants' age distribution spanned a wide range, reflecting a mix of early-career, mid-career, and veteran educators. No participants were under the age of 25, indicating that the study did not include individuals new to the profession or recently graduated from teacher preparation programs. The largest groups of participants were aged 35-44 and 45-54, with six participants in each category. This suggested that a significant portion of the participants were likely in the mid-stages of their careers, possessing considerable experience in education. Three participants fell into the 25-34 age range, representing early-career educators who had already accumulated some teaching experience. Only one participant was aged 55-64, showing a smaller representation of educators approaching the later stages of their careers. There were no participants aged 65 or older.

### **Racial and Ethnic Diversity**

The study included participants from various racial and ethnic backgrounds, ensuring diverse perspectives in the exploration of disciplinary practices. The largest racial

group among the participants was Black, with seven participants identifying as such. This strong representation of Black educators provided important insights into how racial identity intersected with professional practices and perceptions of discipline. Five participants identified as White, offering a perspective that reflected the demographic majority in many educational settings in the United States. Additionally, four participants identified as Hispanic, contributing further to the racial and ethnic diversity of the group. This mix of racial and ethnic backgrounds enriched the study by ensuring that the findings reflected the experiences and viewpoints of educators from different cultural contexts.

### **Years of Experience in Education**

Participants varied significantly in their years of experience in the education field. This range of experience levels contributed to the depth and breadth of the study's findings, as participants with different levels of tenure brought distinct perspectives to the discussion of implicit bias and disciplinary practices. The group included one participant with 1-3 years of experience, representing those relatively new to the profession but offering fresh insights into current educational practices. Three participants had 4-6 years of experience, reflecting early-career professionals who had gained enough experience to navigate the challenges of teaching and administrative roles but were still in the early stages of their careers.

Two participants had 7-9 years of experience, placing them in the middle of their teaching careers, likely with a solid understanding of educational environments and student behavior management. A significant number of participants, four in total, had 10-15 years of experience, representing educators who had developed a deep understanding of the educational system and had likely encountered a wide range of disciplinary scenarios

throughout their careers. Three participants had 16-20 years of experience, indicating considerable expertise and time in the profession. Finally, three participants had been in education for over 20 years, bringing a wealth of experience and knowledge from their extensive careers.

**Table 1**

**Demographics**

Participant	Race	Age	YOE
Principal 1	Black	35-44	10-15
Principal 2	White	35-44	16-20
Principal 3	Black	25-34	4-6
Principal 4	Hispanic	35-44	10-15
Principal 5	Black	45-54	20+
Principal 6	Hispanic	35-44	1-3
Principal 7	Black	45-54	20+
Principal 8	Hispanic	35-44	7-9
Teacher 1	White	45-54	20 +
Teacher 2	White	45-54	16-20
Teacher 3	Black	25-34	4-6
Teacher 4	White	55-64	16-20
Teacher 5	Black	45-54	4-6
Teacher 6	Hispanic	25-34	7-9
Teacher 7	White	45-54	10-15
Teacher 8	Black	35-44	10-15

## **Data Analysis**

The data analysis section thoroughly examined the educators' responses to the case study vignettes. The study included 16 participants, consisting of 8 teachers and 8 principals. The surveys were randomly distributed among both groups. Four teachers completed Survey A, while the other four completed Survey B. The same random distribution method was applied to the principals, with four principals assigned to Survey A and the remaining four to Survey B. The selected approach ensured an even representation across both versions of the surveys for each group. Both versions of the survey, labeled Survey A and Survey B, presented teachers and principals with five distinct behavioral scenarios that reflected common disciplinary challenges encountered in educational settings. For each scenario, the teachers were asked to select a disciplinary response they felt was most appropriate based on the behavior described.

The range of disciplinary options available to the teachers varied in severity, offering a spectrum of consequences from no disciplinary action to more serious measures, such as suspension. In one particular scenario, expulsion was also presented as a possible consequence, highlighting the potential for severe repercussions depending on the teacher's interpretation of the behavior. This structure was designed to reveal how different teachers responded to similar behavioral issues, providing insight into the factors that influenced their disciplinary decisions.

The Case Study Vignettes were designed to explore potential differences in disciplinary responses based on the perceived race of the student involved in the behavioral scenarios. In Survey A, the vignettes featured common names associated with Black students as the aggressors in the scenarios. For example, in Scenario 1, the student

exhibiting the problematic behavior was named Jayden, often associated with Black males, and the accompanying image depicted a Black student wearing a football uniform. In contrast, Survey B presented the same behavioral scenarios but with common names associated with White students. In Scenario 1 of Survey B, the aggressor's name was changed from Jayden to Brett, a name typically associated with White males, and the accompanying image showed a White student in a football uniform.

The Principal Case Study Vignettes presented the same behavioral scenarios as those given to the teachers, using identical names and pictures for each scenario. The key difference between the two sets of vignettes was the level of authority in the decision-making process. While teachers were asked to suggest disciplinary actions, such as suspension or expulsion, principals were given the actual responsibility of making the final decision to suspend or expel a student. Apart from this distinction in decision-making power, all other elements of the scenarios, including the context, names, and images, remained the same across both the teacher and principal vignettes.

The use of these names and corresponding images was intentional, as they were designed to reinforce the race of the student involved in each disciplinary scenario. The pictures served as visual cues, providing additional context to the names and behaviors described in the vignettes. The selected approach allowed the study to examine whether the students' race influenced the teachers' disciplinary decisions, as the name and image suggested. By comparing the responses across both surveys, the analysis aimed to uncover potential biases in how educators perceived and responded to the same behaviors when they believed the student was of a different racial background. The analysis explored whether certain types of behavior were consistently met with harsher consequences and if

these patterns differed between the two survey versions. Additionally, the section examined how factors such as the severity of the behavior, the context provided in the vignette, and the teachers' experiences and perceptions influenced their disciplinary choices. This in-depth exploration of the vignette responses provided a critical understanding of the underlying dynamics that shaped school disciplinary practices.

**Table 2**

**Teacher Survey: A Demographics**

Race	Age	YOE
White	45-54	20 +
White	45-54	16-20
Black	25-34	4-6
White	55-64	16-20

**Table 3**

**Teacher Survey B Demographics**

<b>Race</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>YOE</b>
Black	45-54	4-6
Hispanic	25-34	7-9
White	45-54	10-15
Black	35-44	10-15

**Table 4**

**Principal A Demographics**

<b>Race</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>YOE</b>
Black	35-44	10-15
White	35-44	16-20
Black	25-34	4-6
Hispanic	35-44	10-15

**Table 5**

**Principal Survey B Demographics**

<b>Race</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>YOE</b>
Black	45-54	20+
Hispanic	35-44	1-3
Black	45-55	20+
Hispanic	35-44	7-9

### **Case Study Vignettes Scenarios**

**Table 6**

#### **Teacher Scenario Question 1**

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**Survey A:** You are giving a test, and Jaden, who is on the football team, is copying answers from Brett. Jaden has commented about needing to pass the test to play in tomorrow's homecoming game. You have a rule against cheating in your class.

What do you do?

**Survey B:** You are giving a test, and Brett, who is on the football team, is copying answers from Jaden. Brett has commented about needing to pass the test to play in tomorrow's homecoming game. You have a rule against cheating in your class.

What do you do?

---

In Scenario 1 of Teacher Survey A, Jaden, the perceived Black student, was depicted as cheating off Brett's test. The teachers' responses to Jaden's behavior varied,



with two of the teachers opting for more severe disciplinary actions. One teacher decided that both Jaden and Brett should receive a zero for cheating, as this was the established policy for such infractions. Another teacher chose a less punitive response, suggesting Jaden be called out for cheating but allowed to make up the test after school. However, two other teachers selected the most punitive option, deciding to give Jaden a zero and recommending him for suspension, emphasizing that cheating was against school rules. The range of responses for Jaden included options from a minimal consequence, such as allowing him to retake the test, to the most severe response of recommending suspension.

In contrast, in Scenario 1 of Teacher Survey B, Brett, the perceived White student, was depicted as cheating off Jaden's test. The responses to Brett's behavior were notably less punitive. Three teachers decided the appropriate response was to give Brett and Jaden a zero for cheating, citing this as the policy for such situations. One teacher chose the least punitive option, calling Brett out for cheating but allowing him to retake the test after school. In this case, no teachers recommended suspension for Brett, even though the behavior was identical to that of Jaden in Survey A.

The comparison between the two surveys reveals a disparity in how disciplinary actions were assigned based on the perceived race of the student. Jaden, the perceived Black student, received harsher consequences, with two teachers recommending suspension, while Brett, the perceived White student, was not subjected to such severe disciplinary measures. This suggests a potential bias in the decision-making process, where the same offense was met with different punishment levels depending on the student's perceived race.

**Table 7**

## Principal Scenario Question 1

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**Survey A:** Jaden, who is on the football team, is copying Brett's answers. The teacher sent Jaden to your office because this is not the first time she has caught him cheating and has commented about needing to pass the test to play in the homecoming game. You have rules against cheating on your campus.

What do you do?

**Survey B:** Brett, who is on the football team, is copying Jaden's answers. The teacher sent Brett to your office because this is not the first time she has caught him cheating and has commented about needing to pass the test to play in the homecoming game. You have rules against cheating on your campus.

What do you do?

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In Scenario 1 of Principal Survey A, Jaden, the perceived Black student, was portrayed as cheating off Brett's test. When faced with this scenario, all four principals unanimously decided that the appropriate response was to "Instruct the teacher to give

Jaden a zero for cheating. That is the school's policy for cheating." This decision aligned with the school's established policy and reflected a consistent approach to addressing academic dishonesty.

Similarly, in Scenario 1 of Principal Survey B, Brett, the perceived White student, was depicted as cheating off Jaden's test. In this scenario, all four principals also chose the same response, deciding to "Instruct the teacher to give Brett a zero for cheating. That is the school's policy for cheating." As with Jaden, the principals adhered to the school's policy and applied the same disciplinary measure.

The comparison between the two surveys reveals that there was no noticeable difference in how the principals handled the situation based on the perceived race of the student. In both cases, the principals applied the school's policy uniformly, ensuring that the same consequence—a zero for cheating—was issued regardless of whether the student was perceived as Black or White. This consistency suggests that, at least in this scenario, the principals demonstrated an impartial approach to discipline, applying the same standard response to academic dishonesty across both racial contexts.

## **Table 8**

### ***Teacher Scenario Question 2***

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**Survey A:** During the passing period, you witness Jamal picking on Seth in the hallway.

Jamal teases him about his clothes, and other kids laugh at Seth.

What do you do?

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**Survey B:** You witness Seth picking on Jamal in the hallway during the passing period.

Seth teases him about his clothes, and other kids laugh at Jamal.

What do you do?

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In Scenario 2 of Survey A, Jamal, the perceived Black student, was depicted as picking on Seth in the hallway by teasing him about his clothes, which caused a group of students to laugh. The teachers' responses to Jamal's behavior varied significantly. One teacher opted for a less punitive response: "Quietly approach the group and tell Jamal to stop teasing Seth. You reassure Seth that he can come to you if he ever feels bullied again." The selected approach emphasized de-escalation and support rather than punishment. Another teacher took a much more severe approach, deciding to "Confront the group of students publicly, especially Jamal, reminding them of the school's zero-tolerance policy for bullying and insisting that they apologize to Seth immediately. You send Jamal to the principal's office with a recommendation for suspension." The remaining two teachers chose a middle-ground response: "Call Jamal's mother, inform her of the incident, and tell her that if it happens again, you will send him to the principal's office." Among the options, the decision to "Quietly approach the group and tell Jamal to stop teasing Seth..." was the least punitive, while recommending suspension was the harshest disciplinary action.

In Scenario 2 of Survey B, Seth, the perceived White student, was portrayed as the one committing the behavioral offense by picking on Jamal. The responses from the teachers in this scenario were generally less punitive than those in Survey A. Two teachers chose the same less severe approach seen in Survey A, opting to "Quietly approach the group and tell Seth to stop teasing Jamal. You reassure Jamal that he can come to you if he

ever feels bullied again." Only one teacher in Survey B selected the more severe option to "Confront the group of students publicly, especially Seth, reminding them of the school's zero-tolerance policy for bullying and insisting that they apologize to Jamal immediately. You send Seth to the principal's office with a recommendation for suspension." The final teacher chose to "Call Seth's mother, inform her of the incident, and tell her that if it happens again, you will send him to the principal's office."

The comparison between the two surveys highlights a disparity in disciplinary actions based on the perceived race of the student involved in the same behavioral offense. Jamal, the perceived Black student, faced harsher consequences, including a recommendation for suspension, while Seth, the perceived White student, received less severe disciplinary responses for the same behavior. This discrepancy suggests a potential bias in the disciplinary decision-making process, where the same actions were treated more severely when committed by a Black student than by a White student.

## **Table 9**

### ***Principal Scenario Question 2***

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**Survey A:** During the passing period, you witness Jamal picking on Alex in the hallway. Jamal teases him about his clothes, and other kids laugh at Alex.

What do you do?

**Survey B:** You witness Alex picking on Jamal in the hallway. Alex teases him about his

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clothes, and other kids laugh at Jamal.

What do you do?

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In Scenario 2 of Principal Survey A, Jamal, the perceived Black student, was depicted as teasing Seth in the hallway about his clothes, leading a group of students to laugh at Seth. All four principals decided that the best consequence for Jamal's behavior was to "Confront the group of students publicly, especially Jamal, reminding them of the school's zero-tolerance policy for bullying and insisting that they apologize to Seth immediately." The selected approach emphasized a public reprimand and reinforcement of the school's anti-bullying policy.

In Scenario 2 of Principal Survey B, Seth, the perceived White student, was portrayed as the aggressor, teasing Jamal in the hallway. The responses from the principals in this scenario were more varied. Two principals chose a less confrontational approach, opting to "Quietly approach the group and tell Seth to stop teasing Jamal. You reassure Jamal that he can come to you if he ever feels bullied again." One principal selected the same response used by all four principals in Survey A, choosing to "Confront the group of students publicly, especially Seth, reminding them of the school's zero-tolerance policy for bullying and insisting that they apologize to Jamal immediately." The remaining principal took a more severe stance, opting to "Issue a 1-day suspension for Seth. Your school has zero tolerance for bullying, and it is your job as the principal to ensure the safety of ALL students."

When comparing the findings between the two surveys, a notable difference emerges in how the principals responded to the same bullying behavior based on the perceived race of the student. In Survey A, where Jamal, the perceived Black student, was the aggressor, all principals opted for a public confrontation and a demand for an apology. However, in Survey B, where Seth, the perceived White student, was the aggressor, the principals' responses were more varied. While one principal chose the same public reprimand approach used in Survey A, two opted for a quieter, more private intervention, and one even escalated the consequence to a 1-day suspension.

These differences suggest a potential inconsistency in how principals handled similar situations based on the perceived race of the student involved. Jamal, the perceived Black student, consistently received a public confrontation, while Seth, the perceived White student, faced a range of responses, from a quiet intervention to a suspension. This variation indicates that, despite the similar nature of the offense, the perceived race of the student may have influenced the disciplinary decisions made by the principals.

## **Table 10**

### ***Teacher Scenario Question 3***

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**Survey A:** During lunch break, you notice Isaiah and Conner walking to the back of the school building. Isaiah is a popular student who hangs with the athletes, and Conner is quiet, reserved, and typically by himself, so, oddly, the two students are together.

As you approach, you see that he has a vape in his hand, and you hear Isaiah say to Conner, "Try it; the first time is crazy. But it gets easier."

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What do you do?

**Survey B:** During lunch break, you notice Isaiah and Conner walking to the back of the school building. Conner is a popular student who hangs with the athletes, and Iasiah is quiet, reserved, and typically by himself, so, oddly, the two students are together.

As you approach, you see that he has a vape in his hand, and you hear Conner say to Isaiah, "Try it; the first time is crazy. But it gets easier."

What do you do?

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In Scenario 3 of Teacher Survey A, Isiah, the perceived Black student, was portrayed as peer-pressuring a White student to try vaping. The teachers' responses to Isiah's behavior showed some variation, though the disciplinary actions were consistent overall. Three teachers opted for the more formal consequence of "Confront the students, emphasizing the dangers of vaping and the consequences of breaking school rules. Inform them that you will report the incident to the school administration for further action." The selected approach involved addressing the behavior while ensuring the incident was escalated to the school administration. One teacher, however, chose a less punitive response, selecting to "Approach the students and remind them of the school's strict no-tolerance policy for vaping on campus. Confiscate the vaping device and give each student a warning." This response focused on immediate intervention but did not involve further administrative action, instead opting for a warning.



In Scenario 3 of Teacher Survey B, Conner, the perceived White student, was depicted as peer-pressuring a Black student to try vaping. In this scenario, all four teachers chose the same course of action: "Confront the students, emphasizing the dangers of vaping and the consequences of breaking school rules. Inform them that you will report the incident to the school administration for further action." This unanimous response indicates that when Conner was the one engaging in the inappropriate behavior, teachers uniformly opted for a more formal consequence that included involving the administration.

When comparing the findings between the two surveys, it is clear that there was no significant difference in how teachers handled the vaping scenario overall. In both cases, the majority of teachers opted for a formal response that involved escalating the situation to the administration. However, the slight difference lies in Survey A, where one teacher chose a less punitive option for Isaiah, the perceived Black student, by handling the matter without administrative involvement and simply issuing a warning. In contrast, all teachers in Survey B took a consistent approach to Conner, the perceived White student, by choosing the more formal consequence of reporting the incident. Although this suggests some variation in responses, the difference was not drastic, and both scenarios generally elicited similar levels of disciplinary action from the teachers.

### **Table 11**

#### *Principal Scenario Question 3*

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**Survey A:** During lunch break, you notice Isaiah and Conner walking to the back of the school building. Isaiah is a popular student who hangs with the athletes, and Conner is quiet, reserved, and typically by himself, so, oddly, the two students are together.

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As you approach, you see that he has a vape in his hand, and you hear Isaiah say to Conner, “Try it; the first time is crazy. But it gets easier.”

What do you do?

**Survey B:** During lunch break, you notice Isaiah and Conner walking to the back of the school building. Conner is a popular student who hangs with the athletes, and Isaiah is quiet, reserved, and typically by himself, so, oddly, the two students are together. As you approach, you see that he has a vape in his hand, and you hear Conner say to Isaiah, “Try it; the first time is crazy. But it gets easier.”

What do you do?

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In Scenario 3, Isiah, the perceived Black student, was depicted as peer-pressuring a White student to try vaping. The principals' responses to Isiah's behavior were unanimous, with all four principals deciding that the appropriate course of action was to "Confront the students, emphasizing the dangers of vaping and the consequences of breaking school rules. Additionally, issue a suspension to both students for breaking the no vaping policy." This consistent response highlighted the principals' strict adherence to the school's anti-vaping policy, resulting in the suspension of both students involved.

In Scenario 3 of Principal Survey B, the situation remained the same, except Conner, the perceived White student, was the one peer-pressuring Isiah to try vaping. In this case, three out of the four principals opted for the same response as in Survey A, choosing to "Confront the students, emphasizing the dangers of vaping and the

consequences of breaking school rules. Additionally, issue a suspension to both students for breaking the no vaping policy." However, one principal deviated from this approach, selecting a less punitive response by deciding to "Approach the students and remind them of the school's strict no-tolerance policy for vaping on campus. Confiscate the vaping device and give each student a warning." This response focused more on educating the students and issuing a warning rather than immediately resorting to suspension.

The comparison between the two surveys shows that while the majority of principals in both scenarios applied the same strict disciplinary measures by issuing suspensions to both students, there was a slight difference in how the situation was handled when Conner, the perceived White student, was the aggressor. In Survey B, one principal chose a less severe consequence, opting to handle the situation with a warning rather than suspension. This difference suggests that while there was overall consistency in enforcing the no-vaping policy, there was a small variation in the disciplinary response based on the perceived race of the student involved, with Conner receiving a more lenient option from one principal compared to the unanimous suspension decision for Isiah in Survey A.

## **Table 12**

### ***Teacher Scenario Question 4***

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**Survey A:** In the middle of a class lecture, a heated argument erupts between two girls, Ka'Maya and Emily, seated at the back of the classroom. Suddenly, Ka'Maya starts physically attacking Emily, pulling her hair and pushing her against a desk while Emily tries to defend herself.

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What do you do?

**Survey B:** In the middle of a class lecture, a heated argument erupts between two girls, Ka'Maya and Emily, seated at the back of the classroom. Suddenly, Emily starts physically attacking Ka'maya, pulling her hair and pushing her against a desk while Ka'maya tries to defend herself.

What do you do?

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In Scenario 4 of Teacher Survey A, Ka'Maya, the perceived Black student, was depicted as the aggressor in a physical altercation with Emily, the perceived White student. The responses from the teachers reflected varying levels of intervention. Three teachers opted to "Rush to separate the girls, pulling Ka'Maya away from Emily and escorting her out of the classroom to prevent further violence. You reassure Emily and instruct her to stay seated while you deal with Ka'Maya." The selected approach focused on quickly de-escalating the situation and managing Ka 'Maya's behavior while ensuring that Emily was reassured and remained safe. One other teacher chose a different approach, selecting to "Call for assistance from other teachers or staff members to help break up the fight and ensure the safety of both students. You then escort Ka'Maya and Emily to the principal's office for further investigation and disciplinary action." This response involved enlisting additional help to manage the altercation and immediately escalating the situation to the school administration for further action.

In Scenario 4 of Teacher Survey B, the roles were reversed, with Emily, the perceived White student, being the aggressor in a physical altercation with Ka'Maya, the perceived Black student. Interestingly, the teachers' responses differed slightly from those in Survey A. Three teachers chose the more collaborative approach, selecting to "Call for assistance from other teachers or staff members to help break up the fight and ensure the safety of both students. You then escort Ka'Maya and Emily to the principal's office for further investigation and disciplinary action." This response mirrored the approach taken by one teacher in Survey A, emphasizing the involvement of additional staff and immediate administrative intervention. One teacher, however, opted for the same response that three teachers in Survey A had chosen, which was to "Rush to separate the girls, pulling Ka'Maya away from Emily and escorting her out of the classroom to prevent further violence. You reassure Emily and instruct her to stay seated while you deal with Ka'Maya."

The comparison between the two surveys shows that while the majority of teachers in both scenarios chose similar approaches, there were subtle differences in how they handled the situation based on the perceived race of the aggressor. In Teacher Survey A, when Ka'Maya, the perceived Black student, was the aggressor, most teachers chose a more immediate and direct intervention by physically separating the students and dealing with Ka'Maya individually. In contrast, in Teacher Survey B, where Emily, the perceived White student, was the aggressor, most teachers preferred to involve additional staff and immediately refer both students to the administration for further investigation and disciplinary action. Although both approaches aimed to ensure student safety and de-escalate the situation, the responses in Teacher Survey B generally involved more collaborative and administrative action compared to the more immediate hands-on

approach taken in Teacher Survey A. This difference suggests a slight variation in handling the situation based on the perceived race of the student involved, though the overall responses were not drastically different between the two surveys.

In Scenario 4 of Principal Survey A, Ka'Maya, the perceived Black student, was depicted as the aggressor in a physical altercation with Emily, the perceived White student. The principals were divided in their responses. Two of them opted for a more punitive approach, choosing to "Issue Ka'Maya a suspension since she hit Emily first and was the more aggressive student." The other two principals, however, preferred a less punitive, more restorative approach, selecting to "Have a restorative circle and allow the girls to talk it out in hopes of finding a solution." The selected approach aimed to resolve the conflict through dialogue and understanding rather than immediate punishment.

### **Table 13**

#### ***Principal Scenario Question 4***

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**Survey A:** One of your teachers notified you that in the middle of a class lecture, a heated argument erupted between two girls, Ka'Maya and Emily, seated at the back of the classroom. Suddenly, Ka'Maya starts physically attacking Emily, pulling her hair and pushing her against a desk while Emily tries to defend herself. Security intervenes, sending both students to the office for administrative support. What do you do?

**Survey B:** One of your teachers notified you that in the middle of a class lecture, a heated argument erupted between two girls, Ka'Maya and Emily, seated at the back of the classroom. Suddenly, Emily starts physically attacking Ka'Maya, pulling her hair and

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pushing her against a desk while Ka'Maya tries to defend herself. Security intervenes, sending both students to the office for administrative support. What do you do?

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In Scenario 4 of Principal Survey B, the roles were reversed, with Emily, the perceived White student, as the aggressor in a physical altercation with Ka'Maya, the perceived Black student. The principals' responses were more varied in this scenario. Two principals decided to "Issue both girls a suspension for fighting," holding both students accountable regardless of who initiated the conflict. One principal chose the restorative approach, opting to "Have a restorative circle and allow the girls to talk it out in hopes of finding a solution." The final principal decided to "Issue Ka'Maya a suspension since she hit Emily first and was the more aggressive student," focusing on Ka'Maya's role in the altercation despite Emily being portrayed as the initial aggressor in this version of the scenario.

The comparison between the two surveys reveals some differences in how the principals handled the same physical altercation, depending on the perceived race of the students involved. In Survey A, where Ka'Maya, the perceived Black student, was the aggressor, the principals were evenly split between issuing a suspension and opting for a restorative approach. In Survey B, where Emily, the perceived White student, was the aggressor, the responses were more mixed: two principals chose to suspend both girls, one favored a restorative circle, and one focused on suspending Ka'Maya despite her not being the initial aggressor.

The study addresses comparison highlights that, while restorative approaches were considered in both scenarios, there was a greater tendency to assign suspensions when

Emily, the perceived White student, was involved, with some principals still focusing on Ka'Maya as the more aggressive student. The least punitive option in this scenario would have been to "Give the girls a warning and allow them to go back to class," while the most punitive would be to issue a suspension without thoroughly investigating the root cause of the conflict. The responses indicate that the perceived race of the students may have influenced the disciplinary decisions, though a range of approaches was present in both scenarios.

#### **Table 14**

##### ***Teacher Scenario Question 5***

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**Survey A:** During lunch break, you witness an argument between two high school boys, Peter and Malakai, near the cafeteria entrance. They're shouting at each other and pushing aggressively, drawing attention from other students. You then hear Malakai call Peter the N-word.

What do you do?

**Survey B:** During lunch break, you witness a physical altercation between two high school boys, Peter and Malakai, near the cafeteria entrance. They're shouting at each other and pushing aggressively, drawing attention from other students. You then hear Peter call Malakai the N-word.

What do you do?

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In Scenario 5 of Survey A, Malakai, the perceived Black student and an alleged gang member, was depicted as the aggressor in a heated argument with Peter, the perceived White student. Although the situation did not escalate to physical violence, Malakai called Peter the N-word, intensifying the conflict. Three teachers chose to "Approach the boys and attempt to separate them, calmly asking them to step back and take a moment to cool down. Once separated, escort them to a quieter area to talk and resolve the conflict peacefully." This response aimed to de-escalate the situation without resorting to severe disciplinary measures. One teacher, however, opted for a more punitive approach, selecting to "Call for assistance from other staff members or security personnel to help intervene and de-escalate the situation. While waiting for backup, keep a safe distance and monitor the situation to ensure the safety of all students involved. Inform the principal of the altercation with a suspension recommendation for Malakai for calling Peter the N-word." This response not only involved additional personnel but also escalated the situation by recommending suspension for Malakai.

In Scenario 5 of Survey B, the situation remained the same, but the roles were reversed. Peter, the perceived White student, was now the aggressor, while Malakai, the perceived Black student, was the target. In this version, three teachers opted for the harsher response of "Call for assistance from other staff members or security personnel to help intervene and de-escalate the situation. While waiting for backup, keep a safe distance and monitor the situation to ensure the safety of all students involved. Inform the principal of the altercation with a suspension recommendation for Peter for calling Malakai the N-word." Only one teacher chose the less severe option, deciding to "Approach the boys and

attempt to separate them, calmly asking them to step back and take a moment to cool down. Once separated, escort them to a quieter area to talk and resolve the conflict peacefully."

In both scenarios, the teachers had a range of options, from the least punitive response, which would have been to "Ignore the situation. You're hesitant to intervene because you're unsure of the cause of the altercation, and you don't want to exacerbate tensions or risk getting involved in a potentially dangerous situation; Malakai is an alleged gang member, and gang members commonly use the N-word," to the most punitive response, which involved calling for assistance and recommending suspension. Interestingly, the comparison between the two surveys shows that while the overall responses were somewhat similar, there was a subtle difference in the distribution of the more punitive option.

In Survey A, when Malakai, the perceived Black student, was the aggressor, only one teacher opted for the most severe disciplinary response, while the majority chose to handle the situation calmly and peacefully. In Survey B, however, when Peter, the perceived White student, was the aggressor, the majority of teachers chose the more severe option of involving additional staff and recommending suspension. This suggests a variation in how teachers responded to the same behavior based on the perceived race of the student, with the perceived White student receiving more consistent punitive responses compared to the perceived Black student.

In Scenario 5 of Principal Survey A, Malakai, the perceived Black student and an alleged gang member, was depicted as the aggressor in a heated argument with Peter, the perceived White student. Although the confrontation did not turn physical, Malakai intensified the conflict by calling Peter the N-word. The principals' responses were

somewhat consistent, with three choosing to "Approach the boys and attempt to separate them, calmly asking them to step back and take a moment to cool down. Once separated, escort them to a quieter area to talk and resolve the conflict peacefully." The selected approach emphasized de-escalation and resolution through conversation. One principal, however, opted for a more cautious approach by choosing to "Call for assistance from other staff members or security personnel to help de-escalate the situation. While waiting for backup, keep the students a safe distance from each other and monitor the situation to ensure the safety of all students involved. Once the situation is de-escalated, call both of their parents and issue them a warning for disruptive behavior." This response involved additional support and issuing warnings to both students.

#### **Table 15**

##### ***Principal Scenario Question 5***

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**Survey A:** During lunch break, you witness an argument between two high school boys, Peter and Malakai, near the cafeteria entrance. They're shouting at each other and pushing aggressively, drawing attention from other students. You then hear Malakai call Peter the N-word. What do you do?

**Survey B:** During lunch break, you witness an argument between two high school boys, Peter and Malakai, near the cafeteria entrance. They're shouting at each other and pushing aggressively, drawing attention from other students. You then hear Peter call Malakai the N-word. What do you do?

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In Scenario 5 of Principal Survey B, the roles were reversed, with Peter, the perceived White student, now the aggressor, and Malakai, the perceived Black student, the target. The principals' responses were more varied in this scenario. Two principals chose the same approach as in Survey A, opting to "Call for assistance from other staff members or security personnel to help de-escalate the situation. While waiting for backup, keep the students a safe distance from each other and monitor the situation to ensure the safety of all students involved. Once the situation is de-escalated, call both of their parents and issue them a warning for disruptive behavior." This response was focused on maintaining safety and issuing warnings to both students. The other two principals took a more punitive stance toward Malakai, opting to "Tell the boys to stop. Since the students did not fight, you tell Peter to walk away so that you can have a private conversation with Malakai. You issue Malakai a suspension for using offensive language; racial slurs will not be tolerated."

The comparison between the two surveys shows differences in how the principals handled the same situation depending on the perceived race of the students. In Survey A, where Malakai, the perceived Black student, most principals opted for a peaceful resolution, focusing on calming the situation without resorting to severe disciplinary action. However, in Survey B, where Peter, the perceived White student, there was a split in the responses. While two principals chose to address the situation with warnings and support, the other two focused on punishing Malakai by issuing a suspension for his use of offensive language. In both scenarios, the principals had options ranging from the least punitive response—"Ignore the situation. You're hesitant to intervene because you're unsure of the cause of the altercation, and you don't want to exacerbate tensions or risk getting involved in a potentially dangerous situation; Malakai is an alleged gang member, and gang

members commonly use the N-word" —to the most punitive response, which involved calling for assistance and recommending suspension. The difference in disciplinary actions between the two surveys suggests that the perceived race of the students may have influenced the principals' decisions, with Peter receiving harsher consequences in Survey B.

## **Results**

The study's results from the teacher and principal scenarios reveal important insights into how disciplinary actions were influenced by factors such as the perceived race of the students and the severity of the behavioral infractions. While there were some similarities in how teachers and principals approached discipline, key differences also emerged, particularly in the consistency of their responses and the impact of potential racial bias.

Among the teachers, there was a notable variability in disciplinary responses across different scenarios. For example, in Scenario 1 of Teacher Survey A, where Jaden, the perceived Black student, was caught cheating off Brett's test, the responses ranged from minimal punitive actions to more severe consequences. One teacher opted to allow Jaden to retake the test after school, a less punitive response focused on giving the student a second chance. However, two other teachers recommended more severe actions, such as giving Jaden a zero on the test and referring him to the principal with a suggestion for suspension. In contrast, in Teacher Survey B, where Brett, the perceived White student, was depicted as cheating off Jaden's test, the responses were generally less punitive. Most teachers chose to give both students a zero without further consequences, reflecting a more neutral disciplinary approach. These discrepancies suggest that the perceived race of the

student influenced the severity of the punishment, with Black students often receiving harsher consequences for similar behaviors.

A similar pattern emerged in Scenario 2, where Jamal, the perceived Black student in Teacher Survey A, was teasing Seth in the hallway. Here, some teachers chose to confront the group quietly and resolve the issue without severe punishment, while others opted to publicly reprimand Jamal and send him to the principal with a recommendation for suspension. In Teacher Survey B, where Seth, the perceived White student, was the aggressor, the responses were again less severe, with some teachers choosing to quietly address the situation and provide reassurances to Jamal, the perceived Black student, rather than imposing harsher disciplinary measures on Seth. These examples illustrate the variability in teachers' responses, particularly when racial perceptions came into play, indicating potential biases in how discipline was administered.

Principals, in contrast, demonstrated more consistency in their responses, often closely adhering to established school policies. For instance, in Scenario 2 of Principal Survey A, where Isiah, the perceived Black student, was pressuring another student to try vaping, all four principals chose to suspend both students involved, citing the school's no-vaping policy. This consistent application of school policy indicates that principals were more likely to enforce uniform consequences for rule violations. However, in Principal Survey B, where Conner, the perceived White student, was the one pressuring Isiah to vape, one principal deviated from the standard response by opting to issue a warning rather than a suspension. Although this shows that most principals followed the same disciplinary protocol, the slight difference suggests that racial perceptions may have influenced some decisions, albeit less frequently than among teachers.

In Scenario 4 of Principal Survey A, where Ka'Maya, the perceived Black student, was involved in a physical altercation with Emily, the perceived White student, principals were split in their responses. Two principals chose to issue Ka'Maya a suspension, reasoning that she was the more aggressive student, while the other two opted for a restorative circle to allow the students to talk through their issues. In the reversed Scenario 4 of Principal Survey B, where Emily was the aggressor, principals again showed a mix of responses. Two principals decided to suspend both girls; one opted for a restorative circle, and one principal chose to suspend Ka'Maya despite her not being the initial aggressor. These examples reflect that while principals tended to be more consistent in their disciplinary actions compared to teachers, racial bias may have still played a role in determining the severity of consequences.

A key similarity between the two groups is that both teachers and principals exhibited a mix of restorative and punitive approaches. In scenarios involving conflicts or behavioral issues, some participants in both groups leaned toward restorative practices, such as mediation and conflict resolution, while others preferred punitive measures like suspension. For example, in both teacher and principal surveys, responses to the vaping scenarios demonstrated a balance between issuing suspensions by school policy and less severe actions like warnings or restorative discussions. However, the degree to which these approaches were applied varied, with principals being more likely to follow a consistent, policy-driven approach, while teachers displayed more individual discretion in their decisions.

The influence of racial bias was a key difference between the two groups. Among teachers, there were more overt disparities in punishment based on the perceived race of

the students. Black students, like Jaden in Scenario 1 or Jamal in Scenario 2, were more likely to receive harsher consequences than their White counterparts, even when the behaviors were similar. Principals, while generally more consistent in their application of discipline, also showed evidence of racial disparities, particularly in cases where Black students were involved in conflicts or rule violations. For example, in Scenario 5 of Principal Survey B, where Peter, the perceived White student, was the aggressor, some principals chose to issue a warning rather than a suspension, while in similar scenarios involving Black students, suspensions were more common.

The thematic analysis of the study's data revealed several key themes regarding disciplinary practices and decision-making processes among teachers and principals. The analysis identified recurring patterns in how discipline was applied, particularly about the tension between restorative and punitive approaches, the role of implicit bias and perceived race in influencing disciplinary decisions, and the consistency of responses based on authority roles. These emerging themes provide valuable insights into the complexities of school discipline, highlighting how implicit biases and institutional policies impact the treatment of students, especially students of color. The four key themes identified in this study are: (1) Implicit Bias and Racial Disparities in Disciplinary Practices, (2) The Influence of Zero-Tolerance Policies on Disciplinary Practices, (3) Restorative vs. Punitive Approaches in Discipline, and (4) Consistency and the Role of Authority in Disciplinary Decisions. Each of these themes reflects the underlying factors that shape disciplinary actions and contribute to disparities in how students are treated within the educational system.



### ***Theme 1: Implicit Bias and Racial Disparities in Disciplinary Practices***

One of the most significant themes to emerge from the study was the impact of implicit bias on disciplinary decisions, particularly in how race influenced the severity of consequences. Teachers and principals frequently demonstrated harsher disciplinary responses toward Black students compared to their White peers, even when the behaviors were identical. In Scenario 1, where both Black and White students were caught cheating, Black students were more frequently recommended for harsher consequences, such as suspension or referral to the principal, while White students often received warnings or opportunities to retake the test. This pattern aligns with the study's findings of implicit bias, where teachers and administrators tended to perceive Black students' behavior as more problematic than that of their White peers. Similarly, in Scenario 2, when students were caught vaping, Black students were more likely to face punitive measures like suspension, whereas White students often received lighter consequences, such as a verbal warning or detention. The study's finding illustrates how perceived race influenced the severity of disciplinary decisions. Additionally, in Scenario 4, involving a physical altercation, Black students were consistently viewed as aggressors and disciplined more harshly, typically receiving recommendations for suspension, while White students were more often subject to restorative measures like mediation or conflict resolution.

### ***Theme 2: The Influence of Zero-Tolerance Policies on Disciplinary Practices***

Zero-tolerance policies mandate strict, predetermined consequences for specific infractions, regardless of the context or individual circumstances. While these policies were originally intended to create safe and orderly school environments, they have been widely

criticized for disproportionately impacting students of color, for example in Scenario 2, where students were caught vaping, zero-tolerance policies were strictly enforced by both teachers and principals, with most participants recommending suspension, regardless of the student's race. However, Black students still faced harsher treatment, including referrals for expulsion, highlighting the interaction between zero-tolerance policies and implicit bias. In Scenario 3, involving bullying, principals adhered to zero-tolerance policies, opting for suspensions or expulsions, particularly for repeat offenses. While the policy dictated these responses, Black students were disproportionately subjected to harsher punishments compared to their White peers, suggesting bias in policy enforcement. Similarly, in Scenario 5, when students disrupted class, Black students were more likely to be removed from class or suspended, while White students received alternative consequences such as in-school detention or verbal warnings, demonstrating racial disparities even within the enforcement of strict policies.

### ***Theme 3: Restorative vs. Punitive Discipline***

The tension between restorative and punitive approaches to discipline is another prominent theme in this study. Restorative practices aim to repair harm and rebuild relationships, whereas punitive approaches focus on punishment, often exacerbating the negative consequences for students of color. In Scenario 1, where students were caught cheating, some teachers opted for restorative approaches, such as allowing students to retake tests or offering support to understand the motivations behind the behavior. However, Black students were less likely to receive restorative measures and were more frequently subjected to punitive consequences, such as suspension. In Scenario 4, involving

physical altercations, restorative practices like mediation were more often used when White students were involved, with an emphasis on conflict resolution and relationship repair. In contrast, Black students in similar situations were more likely to face punitive measures, including suspension. Similarly, in Scenario 6, involving peer conflict, principals occasionally implemented restorative practices such as peer mediation, particularly when White students were involved. In contrast, Black students were more frequently subjected to punitive responses, such as in-school suspension or detention.

#### ***Theme 4: Consistency and the Role of Authority in Disciplinary Decisions***

The level of authority held by educators also influenced the consistency of disciplinary decisions. Principals, who typically hold more authority in school settings, were more likely to adhere to established policies, while teachers often displayed more variability in their responses based on personal discretion. In Scenario 2, involving vaping, principals consistently applied the school's zero-tolerance policy, recommending suspension across the board, regardless of the student's race. Teachers, however, exhibited more variability, with some offering warnings while others strictly enforced the policy, reflecting personal discretion based on student behavior and background. In Scenario 5, where students disrupted class, principals adhered more closely to established procedures, assigning detention or removing the student from class. Teachers, on the other hand, demonstrated a wider range of responses, from verbal reprimands to suspension, depending on their interpretation of the situation. Finally, in Scenario 3, involving bullying, principals generally enforced consistent disciplinary responses based on the severity of the offense, while teachers displayed more variability, with some reporting incidents to administration

and others handling them informally. This inconsistency underscores the greater discretion teachers have in handling disciplinary matters.

The analysis of disciplinary practices among teachers and principals revealed four key themes: implicit bias and racial disparities in disciplinary decisions, the influence of zero-tolerance policies, the tension between restorative and punitive approaches, and the role of authority in ensuring consistency. These themes demonstrate how implicit biases shape perceptions of student behavior, particularly for Black students, leading to disproportionate disciplinary actions. The strict enforcement of zero-tolerance policies further exacerbates these disparities, while the inconsistent application of restorative practices limits opportunities for equitable resolution. Additionally, the level of authority held by educators influences the consistency of discipline, with principals more likely to enforce uniform policies, while teachers exercise greater discretion. Together, these themes underscore the need for addressing implicit biases and reevaluating disciplinary practices to create a more equitable educational environment.

### **Chapter Summary**

Chapter 4 provided an in-depth analysis of the disciplinary responses from both teachers and principals, focusing on their decision-making processes and how these were influenced by factors such as the perceived race of students and the nature of the behavioral infractions. Through this analysis, several key themes emerged, including the tension between restorative and punitive disciplinary approaches, the influence of perceived race on disciplinary outcomes, and the consistency of responses between teachers and principals.

The data revealed that teachers displayed a wide range of responses to the scenarios, with significant variability in how they approached discipline. Some teachers favored restorative practices, emphasizing de-escalation and conflict resolution, while others leaned toward punitive measures such as suspension. This inconsistency in responses highlighted the impact of individual discretion on disciplinary decisions. Furthermore, the perceived race of students appeared to influence the severity of the punishment, with Black students often receiving harsher consequences compared to their White counterparts for similar behaviors. This suggests the presence of racial bias in the disciplinary practices of teachers, which calls for further examination and interventions to promote equity in school discipline.

On the other hand, principals exhibited more consistency in their responses, often adhering closely to established school policies. When faced with behavioral infractions such as vaping or physical altercations, principals were likelier to enforce suspensions in line with school rules. However, similar to teachers, racial disparities in disciplinary actions were evident, with Black students receiving harsher consequences in certain scenarios. Despite this, principals demonstrated a greater willingness to incorporate restorative practices, particularly in conflict resolution situations, which indicates a balance between enforcing policy and promoting alternative approaches to discipline.

The chapter also highlighted the role of authority in shaping disciplinary decisions. While principals, with their higher level of authority, tended to apply school policies more uniformly, teachers, who often made recommendations rather than final decisions, showed more flexibility and variation in their responses. This balance between authority and discretion influenced the overall consistency of disciplinary actions across both groups.

In summary, Chapter 4 revealed that while teachers and principals utilized a combination of restorative and punitive approaches, their decision-making processes were influenced by perceived race and authority levels. The results suggest a need for ongoing professional development to address implicit biases and ensure that disciplinary practices are fair, consistent, and equitable for all students.

As the study transitions to Chapter 5, the focus will shift to a discussion of the implications of these findings, recommendations for practice, and the potential for future research. Chapter 5 will explore how the emergent themes from this study can inform educational policies and practices, particularly in fostering a more equitable approach to school discipline that balances accountability with restorative justice.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

Chapter 5 serves as the culmination of the study, synthesizing the findings and discussing their implications for educational practice and policy. The primary purpose of this study was to explore how disciplinary decisions in schools are influenced by factors such as perceived race and the balance between restorative and punitive approaches. Through analyzing responses from both teachers and principals, the study aimed to uncover patterns in disciplinary practices and highlight areas where equity and consistency in discipline need to be addressed.

The objectives of this study were twofold: first, to analyze how educators approach disciplinary decisions in response to different behavioral situations, and second, to identify the impact of perceived race on disciplinary actions. The findings revealed important themes, including the variability in disciplinary responses, the influence of racial perceptions on punishment severity, and the role of authority in shaping the consistent application of school policies. This chapter will build on those findings by discussing the study's broader implications for educators and school administrators. Additionally, Chapter 5 will present recommendations for improving disciplinary practices in schools, with a focus on promoting fairness, reducing bias, and enhancing the use of restorative practices. Finally, the chapter will explore opportunities for future research to further understand the complexities of school discipline and to continue advancing equity in educational settings.

### **Research Questions/Hypotheses**

The study addressed the following questions:

RQ1: How do implicit biases contribute to disciplinary decisions made by teachers and administrators?

RQ2: What strategies can teachers and administrators incorporate when addressing and mitigating their biased disciplinary practices?

### **Discussion of Findings**

The findings from this study offer a deep exploration into how implicit biases, the zero-tolerance policy, and the school-to-prison pipeline influence disciplinary decisions in educational settings. By comparing teachers' and principals' responses to various behavioral scenarios, this research adds to the growing body of literature examining the disproportionate discipline faced by Black students in schools. The following section discusses the emergent themes, comparing and contrasting the study results with existing research, and revisiting the Critical Race Theory (CRT) framework to explain how this study either supported or refuted the assumptions.

#### **Theme 1: Implicit Bias and Racial Disparities in Disciplinary Practices**

One of the most prominent themes that emerged from the study was the role of implicit bias in shaping disciplinary outcomes. Consistent with previous research, the study found that Black students were more likely to face harsher disciplinary actions than their White counterparts, even when engaging in similar behaviors. This aligns with a vast body of literature that highlights how implicit biases, subtle, often unconscious attitudes, can influence educators' perceptions and lead to disproportionate discipline for Black students (Skiba et al., 2017).



### ***Teacher responses***

For example, in Scenario 1 of both the teacher and principal surveys, Black students who were caught cheating were more likely to receive recommendations for suspension or referrals to the principal's office. In contrast, White students in identical situations were often given warnings or other less severe consequences. One participant reflected, "I realized that in certain cases, I was quicker to refer Black students for detention because I perceived their behavior as more defiant. I only became aware of this after reflecting on my discipline records and seeing a clear pattern." This self-awareness mirrors the findings of Okonofua and Eberhardt (2015), who demonstrated that educators often unconsciously view Black students' behaviors as more problematic than those of their White peers, even when the behaviors are identical.

Another teacher noted that implicit bias plays a role in classroom management strategies, stating, "I sometimes find myself assuming that Black students will be disruptive before they even act out. I catch myself enforcing stricter rules on them compared to White students." This perspective supports research that shows Black students are more likely to be disciplined for subjective infractions like disrespect or excessive noise rather than clear violations of school rules (Gregory et al., 2010). Teachers acknowledged that their expectations and perceptions could shape students' classroom experiences and disciplinary outcomes, leading to an ongoing cycle of bias and disproportionate discipline.

### ***Administrator Responses***

Administrators also recognized the pervasive nature of implicit bias and how it shapes school-wide disciplinary policies. One administrator explained, "I've reviewed

discipline data and noticed that Black students receive harsher consequences, but changing the culture of discipline is difficult because it requires educators to unlearn ingrained biases." This sentiment reflects research findings that school discipline systems often reinforce broader societal biases, making systemic change challenging (Wald & Losen, 2003). Another administrator highlighted the challenges of addressing implicit bias among staff, stating, "Many teachers don't realize they have biases, so when we try to discuss racial disparities in discipline, some feel attacked rather than seeing it as an opportunity for growth."

Participants also discussed the broader consequences of implicit bias, particularly how it contributes to the school-to-prison pipeline. One administrator observed, "Our discipline policies have long-term effects. When Black students are repeatedly suspended, they fall behind academically and disengage from school, increasing their risk of entering the juvenile justice system." This aligns with studies that show harsher school discipline policies disproportionately impact Black students, often leading to negative academic and social outcomes (Losen & Martinez, 2013). Administrators emphasized the importance of implementing bias-reducing initiatives, such as restorative justice practices and cultural competency training, to address these disparities. One administrator noted, "We've started requiring staff to participate in implicit bias training, and while it's a step in the right direction, real change requires ongoing commitment and accountability at every level." This highlights the necessity of institutional support for long-term reforms that promote equity in discipline practices.

The cumulative effects of these harsher disciplinary practices were also evident in the participants' reflections. One administrator remarked, "One suspension can spiral into

more severe consequences. Black students often don't get the benefit of second chances like their White peers." This sentiment aligns with Gregory et al. (2010), who found that Black students are less likely to receive restorative or rehabilitative measures and are instead subjected to punitive disciplinary actions that exacerbate their marginalization.

## **Theme 2: Differential Treatment and Subjectivity in Discipline**

Another key theme that emerged from the study was the differential treatment of Black students compared to their peers, particularly in how disciplinary decisions were made and justified. Participants acknowledged that subjectivity played a significant role in determining disciplinary outcomes, often to the detriment of Black students.

### ***Teacher Responses***

Educators in the study described instances where Black students were more likely to be disciplined for subjective infractions, such as "defiance" or "disrespect," while White students engaging in similar behaviors were given more leniency. One teacher reflected, "When a Black student questions authority, it's often seen as being confrontational. When a White student does it, it's considered curiosity or self-advocacy." This aligns with findings from Gregory, Skiba, and Noguera (2010), who emphasized that subjective disciplinary referrals disproportionately impact Black students, reinforcing racial disparities in school discipline.

### ***Administrator Responses***

Participants also discussed the broader impact of these disparities, particularly in reinforcing negative student-teacher relationships and increasing students' distrust in school disciplinary systems. One administrator observed, "Our Black students don't feel

safe challenging unfair discipline because they know they're more likely to get punished. This affects their confidence and willingness to speak up for themselves." Such perspectives underscore the need for structured, bias-reducing disciplinary policies, such as restorative justice approaches, to ensure fairness and equity in disciplinary practices.

### **Theme 3: Lack of Cultural Competency and Awareness**

The study also revealed that a lack of cultural competency among educators significantly influenced disciplinary outcomes for Black students. Many participants admitted that they had not received adequate training on cultural responsiveness and that this gap affected how they interpreted student behavior. Without a strong foundation in cultural awareness, educators often misinterpret the actions of Black students, leading to disciplinary consequences that reinforce existing inequities. Research has shown that schools with limited cultural competency training often display patterns of discipline that disproportionately impact students of color, as their behaviors are frequently judged against dominant cultural norms (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

#### ***Teacher responses***

One teacher stated, "I grew up in a predominantly White community, so I didn't realize that my expectations for 'appropriate' behavior were based on my cultural norms. What I see as disrespect might just be a different communication style." This reflects the findings of Ladson-Billings (1995), who argued that culturally responsive pedagogy is essential for mitigating bias in classrooms. Many teachers acknowledged that they had not been trained to recognize or appreciate the diverse cultural backgrounds of their students, which influenced their disciplinary decisions.

Several participants noted that misunderstandings related to communication styles, expressions of emotion, and body language often led to harsher disciplinary responses for Black students. One participant shared, "I once disciplined a Black student for 'yelling' at me, but later realized that raising their voice was a normal part of how they communicated frustration. If a White student had done the same, I might have just seen it as venting." This supports the work of Gregory et al. (2010), who found that cultural misunderstandings contribute to disproportionate discipline for students of color. Many Black students come from cultural backgrounds where direct communication, expressive speech, and animated body language are normative, yet these behaviors are often perceived as aggressive or defiant in traditional classroom settings.

Another teacher reflected on their tendency to discipline Black students more frequently for minor infractions. "I had a conversation with a colleague who pointed out that I was writing referrals for things like 'talking too loudly' or 'being disruptive,' but when I looked at who I was disciplining the most, it was disproportionately Black students. It made me realize that I was enforcing rules based on my cultural expectations, not necessarily based on fairness or student intent." Such reflections highlight the need for greater self-awareness and structured training to help educators challenge their biases and create fairer classroom environments.

### ***Administrator responses***

To address this issue, participants emphasized the need for comprehensive cultural competency training. One administrator reflected, "We need mandatory training that goes beyond a single workshop. Educators need ongoing opportunities to reflect on their biases

and learn strategies for more equitable discipline.” Administrators stressed that cultural competency should be an integral part of professional development, rather than an occasional topic.

Another administrator pointed out the challenge of helping educators recognize their biases without creating defensiveness. "When we try to address racial disparities in discipline, some teachers feel personally attacked. They don't realize that this is about system-wide changes, not just individual blame. We need a way to have these conversations productively, so people don't shut down." This highlights the need for structured and ongoing discussions that allow educators to engage with difficult topics constructively. Administrators also noted that a lack of cultural awareness among staff led to a disconnect between students and school policies. "Many of our Black students don't trust the discipline process because they see it as unfair. If students feel like teachers don't understand or respect their backgrounds, they're less likely to respond positively to discipline and more likely to disengage altogether." This disconnect contributes to a cycle where students become increasingly alienated from school, leading to lower academic outcomes and higher dropout rates.

Several administrators shared that schools that had implemented cultural competency training saw improvements in student-teacher relationships and a reduction in disciplinary referrals. "When teachers start seeing cultural differences as strengths rather than disruptions, it changes everything. Students feel more respected, and conflicts can be handled in a way that doesn't immediately escalate into punishment," one administrator explained. These observations align with studies showing that culturally responsive

discipline policies lead to better academic and behavioral outcomes for students of color (Gregory et al., 2010).

#### **Theme 4: The Impact of Restorative Practices on Discipline Outcomes**

The study found that schools implementing restorative justice practices experienced more equitable disciplinary outcomes. Participants who worked in schools using restorative approaches noted a significant reduction in suspensions and a shift in school culture toward conflict resolution rather than punishment.

##### ***Teacher Responses***

One teacher explained, "When we started using restorative circles, we noticed fewer repeat offenses. Instead of just punishing students, we were helping them understand their behavior and make amends." This aligns with research by González (2015), which found that restorative justice practices foster stronger student-teacher relationships and reduce racial disparities in discipline. Many teachers expressed support for restorative approaches but acknowledged challenges in implementation. One teacher noted, "Restorative practices work, but they require time and training. Some teachers resist them because they feel like traditional discipline is faster and easier." This reflects findings from Payne and Welch (2018), who argued that while restorative justice is effective, its success depends on proper training, resources, and administrative support.

##### ***Administrator Responses***

Participants also highlighted the need for buy-in from all school staff to ensure the successful implementation of restorative justice practices. One administrator noted, "If only some teachers are committed to restorative practices while others continue using

punitive discipline, students get mixed messages. We need a school-wide approach." This sentiment underscores the importance of consistency in discipline policies to ensure equitable treatment for all students. Another administrator emphasized the role of leadership in fostering a restorative culture, stating, "If school leaders do not actively model and reinforce restorative practices, teachers will revert to traditional punitive measures. It requires a shift in mindset at all levels." This perspective aligns with research suggesting that administrative support and ongoing training are critical factors in the effectiveness of restorative justice initiatives (Payne & Welch, 2018).

Additionally, administrators reported that some staff members were hesitant to adopt restorative approaches due to concerns about time constraints and classroom management. One administrator explained, "Many teachers feel overwhelmed by academic demands and see restorative justice as an additional burden. Without clear guidelines and structured support, they may default to suspensions and detentions as quicker solutions." Administrators also noted that parental involvement is another key factor in the success of restorative discipline. "We can implement restorative practices in school, but if parents and guardians are not on board, students may struggle to see the value in repairing harm and resolving conflicts constructively," one administrator shared. Schools that have successfully implemented restorative practices have included family engagement strategies, such as parent workshops and community circles, to reinforce the principles both inside and outside the classroom.

### **Triangulation: Comparison and Contrast of Teacher and Administrator Responses across Themes.**



An analysis of Themes 1-4 reveals both similarities and differences in the perspectives of teachers and administrators regarding implicit bias, cultural competency, differential treatment, and restorative justice in disciplinary practices. While both groups acknowledge the presence of disparities in discipline, their viewpoints diverge in terms of responsibility, implementation strategies, and the perceived challenges of addressing these issues.

### ***Similarities in Teacher and Administrator Responses***

Across all four themes, both teachers and administrators recognize that Black students experience disproportionately harsh disciplinary measures compared to their White peers. Participants from both groups acknowledge that implicit bias influences disciplinary decisions, leading to more punitive consequences for Black students even when their behaviors mirror those of White students. They also agree that cultural misunderstandings play a significant role in disciplinary disparities, as educators often misinterpret communication styles, expressions of frustration, and body language through a biased lens.

Additionally, both teachers and administrators support the implementation of restorative justice practices as an alternative to punitive discipline. They believe that a shift away from exclusionary discipline policies could reduce the school-to-prison pipeline and foster a more equitable school environment. However, both groups acknowledge that these changes require institutional commitment, training, and consistency across all staff members.

### ***Differences in Teacher and Administrator Responses***

Despite these shared perspectives, notable differences exist between teachers and administrators regarding accountability and implementation. Teachers, for instance, tend to focus on the classroom-level impact of disciplinary disparities. They often reflect on their own biases and express concerns about how their perceptions of student behavior influence disciplinary actions. Many teachers recognize their implicit biases after reviewing their disciplinary patterns, and they highlight the need for self-awareness and continuous professional development on cultural competency to address these issues.

Administrators, on the other hand, take a systemic perspective, emphasizing the role of school-wide policies and structures in shaping disciplinary outcomes. They focus on the data-driven analysis of discipline trends and express concerns about how to implement long-term institutional changes. Administrators are more likely to discuss the resistance to change among staff members and the difficulties of securing teacher buy-in for new disciplinary approaches, such as restorative justice. They highlight that teachers often feel defensive when discussing racial disparities, making it challenging to create a unified approach to discipline reform.

Additionally, teachers often express frustration with inconsistent enforcement of policies, noting that some colleagues discipline students more harshly than others based on personal biases. In contrast, administrators emphasize the need for structured training programs to ensure that all staff members apply discipline equitably. While teachers focus more on their individual experiences in the classroom, administrators advocate for institutional policies that provide clear guidance on equitable disciplinary practices.

### ***Implications for Policy and Practice***

The differences in teacher and administrator perspectives highlight the need for a collaborative approach to discipline reform. While teachers need support in recognizing and addressing their implicit biases, administrators must create policies that provide consistency and accountability across the school system. Effective solutions will require ongoing professional development, restorative practices, structured cultural competency training, and institutional commitment to restorative justice practices. The findings suggest that successful discipline reform must bridge the gap between classroom-level concerns and administrative policies. Teachers need clear guidance on how to implement restorative justice approaches, while administrators must ensure that policies are effectively communicated and reinforced across all levels of the school community. By fostering open dialogue and collaboration, schools can move toward a more equitable and just disciplinary system that benefits all students, particularly those who have been historically marginalized.

### ***Limitations***

As with any research, certain unforeseen limitations emerged during the course of the study that were beyond the control of the researcher. These limitations impacted the data collection and analysis processes, ultimately influencing the study's results. The following section discusses those unforeseen challenges, distinct from the limitations previously outlined in Chapter 1.

### ***Participant Availability and Engagement***

One significant limitation encountered during the study was participants' fluctuating availability and engagement. Despite initial interest and commitments, some participants faced scheduling conflicts or other responsibilities that affected their participation in the timely completion of surveys. This challenge limited the amount of qualitative data that could be gathered, which, in turn, may have affected the depth of insight that could be drawn from the analysis. While efforts were made to accommodate participants' schedules and encourage full engagement, this limitation remained largely out of the researcher's control.

### ***Technological Barriers***

Another limitation that emerged during the study was the issue of technological barriers. Some participants experienced difficulties accessing or navigating the online surveys and interviews due to technical problems, such as unstable internet connections or unfamiliarity with the software platforms used for data collection. These technological barriers delayed the data collection process, and although technical support was provided to participants, the unforeseen challenges posed by technology remained a limitation.

### ***Limited Generalizability Due to Sample Size***

The study utilized a qualitative single-embedded case study method, which inherently limits the generalizability of the findings. The small sample size, particularly within the context of the specific school district examined, means that the results may not be broadly applicable to other educational settings. This limitation became more evident as the study progressed, and it became clear that the findings, while insightful, may not

capture the full spectrum of experiences across different regions or school environments. The focus on one district provided in-depth insights, but it also constrained the ability to generalize the findings to a wider population.

### **Unanticipated Biases in Responses**

Another limitation that emerged during the study was the potential for unanticipated biases in participants' responses. While the study aimed to explore implicit biases in disciplinary decisions, it became apparent that some participants might have consciously altered their responses to align with what they perceived to be socially acceptable or expected. The identified issue, known as social desirability bias, was an unforeseen challenge in the study and may have affected the authenticity of the data. Despite efforts to create a non-judgmental environment and ensure confidentiality, the presence of bias in self-reported data was a limitation that could not be fully controlled. These challenges underscore the importance of considering such limitations in future research, particularly when addressing complex and sensitive issues like racial disparities in education.

### **Recommendations to Leaders and Practitioners**

The findings of this study highlight significant areas for improvement in school disciplinary practices, particularly in addressing implicit bias and racial disparities. School leaders and practitioners play a crucial role in shaping equitable and inclusive environments that foster positive student outcomes. The following section provides targeted recommendations based on the study's results, aligned with the research questions and emergent themes. These recommendations are designed to mitigate the underlying problems identified in the study and support the development of fairer and more effective disciplinary practices.

### ***Addressing Implicit Bias through Continuous Professional Development***

Result Addressed: Implicit bias plays a significant role in influencing disciplinary decisions, leading to harsher punishments for Black students compared to White students for similar infractions.

Recommendation: School leaders should implement continuous, structured professional development programs focused on implicit bias training for all educators and administrators. These programs should include regular workshops, facilitated discussions, and reflective exercises designed to help educators recognize and address their unconscious biases. The training should be ongoing, rather than a one-time event, and incorporate real-life case studies, role-playing scenarios, and feedback mechanisms to ensure educators are actively engaged in the process of identifying and mitigating bias in their disciplinary decisions. To reinforce this training, schools can also adopt peer observation models, where educators observe each other's disciplinary practices and provide constructive feedback. This peer-to-peer learning can promote accountability and create a culture of continuous improvement in addressing bias.

### ***Implementing Restorative Practices as a School-Wide Initiative***

Result Addressed: There is inconsistency in the application of restorative versus punitive approaches to discipline, with many educators defaulting to punitive measures, especially in cases involving Black students.

Recommendation: School leaders should adopt restorative practices as a core element of their school's disciplinary framework. This requires shifting from a primarily punitive approach to one that prioritizes repairing harm, restoring relationships, and

building a positive school climate. Restorative practices should be integrated into the school's policies, daily routines, and conflict resolution strategies. To implement this, leaders should establish a restorative justice team consisting of trained staff members who can facilitate restorative circles, mediations, and conflict resolution sessions. Regular training should be provided to all staff, and students should be educated on restorative practices so that they become active participants in the process. Additionally, schools can create restorative spaces—designated areas where students can go to de-escalate conflicts or reflect on their actions as part of the restorative process.

### ***Revisiting Zero-Tolerance Policies***

Result Addressed: Zero-tolerance policies contribute to racial disparities in discipline by mandating harsh consequences for minor infractions, disproportionately impacting Black students and feeding into the school-to-prison pipeline.

Recommendation: School leaders should revisit and revise their zero-tolerance policies to allow for more discretion and flexibility in handling disciplinary cases. Instead of rigidly applying severe punishments like suspensions for minor infractions, schools should adopt a more graduated approach that considers the context of the behavior and the individual needs of the student. The selected approach can include tiered interventions, where initial infractions are met with restorative conversations or counseling, and only repeated or severe behaviors lead to more punitive measures. By moving away from a one-size-fits-all approach to discipline, schools can reduce the negative impacts of zero-tolerance policies and ensure that students are not disproportionately funneled into the criminal justice system for minor behaviors. Leaders should work with district

policymakers to revise these policies and ensure that they align with equity goals and restorative principles.

### ***Establishing a Collaborative Decision-Making Model***

Result Addressed: Teachers exhibited variability in their disciplinary decisions, often influenced by personal discretion, while principals tended to follow school policies more consistently.

Recommendation: Schools should establish a collaborative decision-making model for discipline that includes input from teachers, principals, counselors, and other relevant staff members. This model would ensure that disciplinary decisions are not left solely to individual discretion but are instead made through a team-based approach that considers multiple perspectives.

**Table 16**

### ***Themes and Recommendations***

Theme	Recommendation
Implicit bias influences disciplinary decisions.	Implement continuous professional development programs focused on implicit bias training for all educators and administrators. Use peer observation models to reinforce learning and accountability.
Inconsistent application of restorative practices	Adopt restorative practices as a core element of the school's disciplinary framework. Create a restorative justice team and provide regular training for staff and students.



Zero-tolerance policies Revisit and revise zero-tolerance policies to allow for more contribute to racial discretion and flexibility. Adopt a tiered approach to discipline, disparities. emphasizing restorative practices for minor infractions.

Teachers' decisions are Establish a collaborative decision-making model for discipline highly variable. involving teachers, principals, counselors, and other staff. Create a disciplinary review board to ensure consistency and reduce the influence of personal discretion on discipline.

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In practice, this could involve forming a disciplinary review board that meets regularly to discuss cases, review patterns in disciplinary actions, and make collective decisions on how to handle more complex situations. By involving multiple stakeholders in the decision-making process, schools can reduce the potential for bias and ensure that discipline is applied more consistently and fairly across the school community. These recommendations provide a comprehensive approach to addressing the key findings of this study, focusing on reducing implicit bias, promoting restorative practices, revising zero-tolerance policies, enhancing data-driven decision-making, and fostering collaboration in disciplinary decisions. By implementing these recommendations, school leaders and practitioners can create more equitable and just disciplinary systems that better serve all students, particularly those from marginalized communities.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

While this study provided valuable insights into the role of implicit bias, zero-tolerance policies, and restorative practices in shaping school disciplinary decisions, several areas warrant further exploration. Future research can build on these findings to

deepen our understanding of the complexities of school discipline, particularly regarding racial disparities. Below are four specific recommendations for future research, including suggested methodologies that could expand upon the results and themes uncovered in this study.

### *Longitudinal Studies on the Impact of Restorative Practices*

One limitation of this study was the cross-sectional design, which provided a snapshot of disciplinary practices at a specific point in time. Future research could benefit from a longitudinal study that examines the long-term effects of implementing restorative practices in schools. Such a study could track changes in disciplinary outcomes over several years, focusing on whether restorative practices reduce racial disparities in discipline and improve overall school climate. Gregory, Clawson, Davis, and Gerewitz (2016) found that restorative justice practices significantly reduced suspensions and improved teacher-student relationships, suggesting that long-term studies could provide further evidence of these benefits.

A mixed-methods longitudinal study would be well-suited for this type of research. Quantitative data could be collected on disciplinary actions (e.g., suspensions, expulsions) before and after the implementation of restorative practices, while qualitative data could be gathered through interviews and focus groups with students, teachers, and administrators to explore their experiences with the restorative approach. This combination of quantitative and qualitative data would allow researchers to assess both the statistical impact of restorative practices and the lived experiences of those involved (Braithwaite, 2002).

### ***Experimental Studies on Implicit Bias Interventions***

The findings highlighted the significant influence of implicit bias on disciplinary decisions, but it did not test specific interventions designed to reduce these biases. Future research could explore the effectiveness of different implicit bias training programs in changing educators' behavior and reducing racial disparities in discipline. Studies like those by Staats, Capatosto, Wright, and Jackson (2016) suggest that implicit bias training can have a measurable impact on reducing bias, but the long-term effects on behavior remain underexplored.

A randomized controlled trial (RCT) would be an appropriate design for this research. Educators could be randomly assigned to either a control or intervention group receiving implicit bias training. The disciplinary decisions of both groups could be tracked over time to assess whether those who received the training are less likely to exhibit biased behavior in their disciplinary actions. Pre and post-intervention assessments of implicit bias, such as the Implicit Association Test (IAT), could also be used to measure changes in participants' unconscious attitudes (Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998).

### ***Comparative Studies across Different School Districts***

The findings from this study were based on a single embedded case study within a specific school district, which limits the generalizability of the results. Future research could compare disciplinary practices across multiple school districts with varying demographics, policies, and leadership styles to identify common patterns and unique challenges. Losen and Gillespie (2012) have shown that disparities in discipline can vary

widely between districts, suggesting that comparative studies could offer valuable insights into how different contexts shape disciplinary outcomes.

A comparative case study design could be employed to explore differences in disciplinary practices across diverse districts. Data could be collected through interviews with administrators and teachers and through the analysis of disciplinary records. By comparing districts that have implemented different policies (e.g., schools with restorative justice programs versus those with strict zero-tolerance policies), researchers could identify which approaches are most effective in reducing racial disparities and fostering equitable school environments (Skiba, 2014).

### ***Qualitative Research on Student Perspectives***

While this study focused on the perspectives of educators and administrators, future research should explore the experiences and perceptions of students who have been subjected to disciplinary actions. Understanding how students perceive and are affected by different disciplinary practices, especially those from marginalized groups, is crucial for creating more student-centered approaches to discipline. Research by Payne and Welch (2013) has shown that students' perceptions of fairness in school discipline are strongly linked to their sense of belonging and engagement in school.

A phenomenological qualitative study would be ideal for capturing the lived experiences of students who have been disciplined in school. In-depth interviews or focus groups with students from diverse racial and socioeconomic backgrounds could provide insight into how they perceive fairness, bias, and the impact of disciplinary actions on their academic and personal lives. The analysis could also explore students' views on restorative

versus punitive practices and how these approaches affect their sense of belonging and trust in the school system (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012).

Future research should build on the findings of this study by exploring the long-term effects of restorative practices, testing interventions to reduce implicit bias, comparing disciplinary practices across different contexts, and centering students' voices in the conversation. By using a variety of methodologies, future studies can provide a more comprehensive understanding of how to create equitable and effective disciplinary systems in schools. These efforts will be essential in addressing the persistent racial disparities in school discipline and ensuring that all students can thrive in a supportive educational environment.

### **Chapter Summary**

Chapter 5 provided a thorough examination of the study's findings, limitations, recommendations, and potential areas for future research. The chapter began by addressing unforeseen limitations that emerged during the research process, such as participant availability, technological barriers, and potential biases in responses. These limitations, while beyond the control of the researcher, highlighted the complexities of researching sensitive topics like race and discipline. Despite these challenges, the study yielded significant insights into the impact of implicit bias and systemic policies on school disciplinary practices.

As a result of the study, the recommendations emphasize a need for school leaders and practitioners to have continuous professional development to address implicit bias, the implementation of restorative practices as a core disciplinary framework, and the revision of zero-tolerance policies. Additionally, collaborative decision-making models were

recommended to reduce variability in disciplinary decisions and ensure consistency across educational settings. These recommendations align with the emergent themes of the study, which include the tension between restorative and punitive approaches, the pervasive influence of implicit bias, and the consequences of rigid zero-tolerance policies.

The chapter then explored directions for future research, emphasizing the importance of building on the current study's findings. Recommended areas for further investigation include longitudinal studies on the impact of restorative practices, experimental studies on implicit bias interventions, comparative research across different school districts, and qualitative studies centered on student perspectives. These suggestions aim to deepen our understanding of the systemic factors contributing to racial disparities in discipline and to develop more effective, equitable solutions.

Throughout Chapter 5, the study's objectives were revisited, and the primary objectives were to explore how educators approach disciplinary decisions in response to different behavioral scenarios and to identify the impact of perceived race on those decisions. The study confirmed that implicit bias plays a significant role in disciplinary outcomes, with Black students disproportionately receiving harsher punishments. The findings also highlighted the role of zero-tolerance policies in perpetuating racial disparities and the potential of restorative practices to foster more equitable school environments.

In conclusion, this study has contributed to the body of knowledge by providing empirical evidence of the complex relationship between race, discipline, and school policies. It underscores the need for systemic change in how schools approach discipline, particularly in light of ongoing racial inequities in the broader society. The study's findings

align with current social justice movements, such as Black Lives Matter, by calling for a reexamination of policies that disproportionately harm Black students and perpetuate cycles of marginalization.

## **Researcher Reflection**

As I reflect on this research journey, I am struck by how closely the issues explored in this study intersect with the broader social justice movements that are reshaping our world. Conducting this research during a time of heightened awareness of racial injustice, amid the Black Lives Matter movement and widespread protests against police brutality, has given me a deeper understanding of the systemic nature of racism and the far-reaching consequences. The findings, which focused on the racial disparities in school discipline, mirror the broader struggles against racial inequities in the justice system. The same implicit biases and systemic policies that disproportionately impact Black students in schools are reflected in the policing practices that disproportionately target Black communities.

The events of the past few years have made it clear that the fight for racial justice extends beyond any one institution; it is a pervasive issue that touches all aspects of life, from education to law enforcement to the criminal justice system. The deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and so many others at the hands of police have brought the realities of systemic racism to the forefront of national and global conversations. As an educator and researcher, I feel a profound responsibility to ensure that the work I do contributes to dismantling these systems of oppression within the educational context. Schools should be spaces where all students, regardless of race, feel safe, supported, and valued. Yet, the findings of this study remind me that for many Black students, schools can feel like another site of surveillance and punishment, a precursor to the inequities they may face later in life.

Throughout this research process, I have been constantly reminded of the importance of listening to the voices of those who are most impacted by these systems. The



voices of students, particularly Black students, must be at the center of any efforts to reform disciplinary practices. Their experiences and perspectives are critical to understanding how policies play out in real life and how they can be improved. Moving forward, I am committed to advocating for disciplinary practices that not only reduce racial disparities but also actively work to empower marginalized students.

The findings have also deepened my understanding of the importance of restorative practices, not only in schools but across society. Just as we are rethinking how we approach public safety and policing, we must rethink how we approach discipline in schools. Restorative practices offer a pathway to healing and justice that punitive measures cannot. They provide opportunities for students to learn, grow, and repair harm, rather than simply being punished and pushed out of the educational system.

In the end, this research has reinforced my belief that education can be a powerful tool for social change, but only if we are willing to confront the biases and systemic inequalities that exist within it. As we continue to fight for justice in the streets, we must also fight for justice in our schools. I hope that the findings of this study will contribute to that fight, helping to create more equitable, just, and restorative educational environments for all students. This is not just an academic pursuit for me, it is a moral imperative, one that I will carry with me in all of my future work.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Visual: Teacher and Principal Scenario 1**



1. You are giving a test and Jaden who is on the football team, is copying answers from Brett. Jaden has commented about needing to pass the test to play in tomorrow's homecoming game. You have a rule against cheating in your class.

What do you do?



You are giving a test and Brett who is on the football team, is copying answers from Jaden. Brett has commented about needing to pass the test to play in tomorrow's homecoming game. You have a rule against cheating in your class.

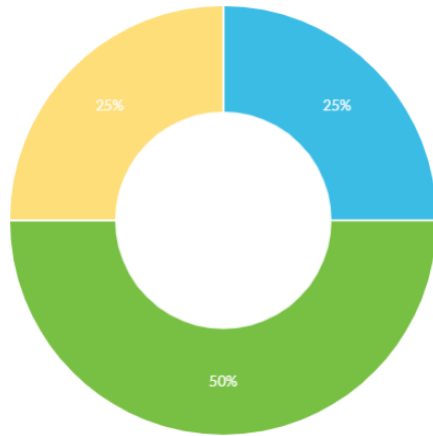
What do you do? \*

## Appendix B

### Scenario 1: Teacher Survey A and Survey B Responses

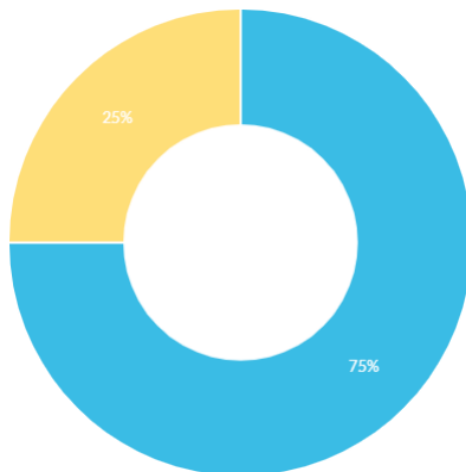


### Survey A Responses:



Choice	Total
Ignore the cheating. Jaden is the football team's star player, and you don't want everyone to be upset with you for benching him.	0
Give Jaden and Brett a zero for cheating. That is your policy for cheating.	1
Give Jaden a zero and send him to the principal's office with a recommendation for suspension since cheating is against school rules	2
Call Jaden out for cheating; however, allow him to make up the test after school.	1

### Survey B Responses:

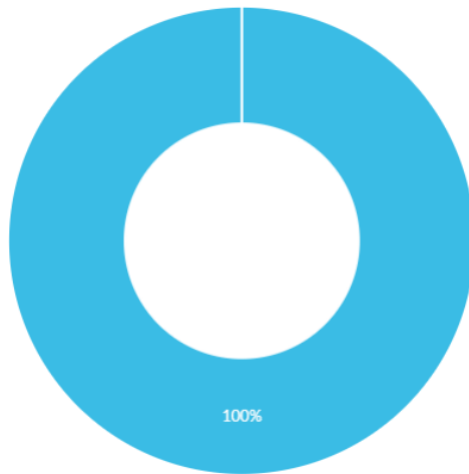


Choice	Total
Ignore the cheating. Brett is the football team's star player, and you don't want everyone to be upset with you for benching him.	0
Give Brett and Jaden a zero for cheating. That is your policy for cheating.	3
Give Brett a zero and send him to the principal's office with a recommendation for suspension since cheating is against school rules.	0
Call Brett out for cheating; however, allow him to make up the test after school.	1

## Appendix C

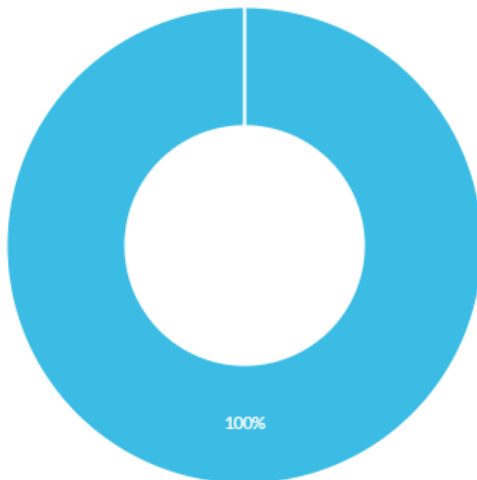
### Scenario 1: Principal Survey A and Survey B Responses

### ***Principal Survey A Responses:***



Choice	÷	Total
Ignore the cheating. This is a big game against the rival school. Jaden is the football team's star player, and you don't want everyone to be upset with you for benching him	0	0
Instruct the teacher to give Jaden a zero for cheating. That is the school's policy for cheating.	4	4
Suspend Jaden for cheating, which is against school rules. It was premeditated, and this is not his first offense.	0	0
You don't want to ruin his chances of being recruited. Give Jaden a warning for cheating; however, allow him to make up the test after school.	0	0

### ***Principal Survey B Responses:***



Choice	÷	Total
Ignore the cheating. This is a big game against the rival school. Brett is the football team's star player, and you don't want everyone to be upset with you for benching him	0	0
Instruct the teacher to give Brett a zero for cheating. That is the school's policy for cheating	4	4
Suspend Brett for cheating, which is against school rules. It was premeditated, and this is not his first offense.	0	0
You don't want to ruin his chances of being recruited. Give Brett a warning for cheating; however, allow him to make up the test after school.	0	0

## **Appendix D**

### **Visual: Teacher and Principal Scenario 2**



2. During the passing period, you witness Jamal picking on Seth in the hallway. Jamal teases him about his clothes, and other kids laugh at Seth.

What do you do?



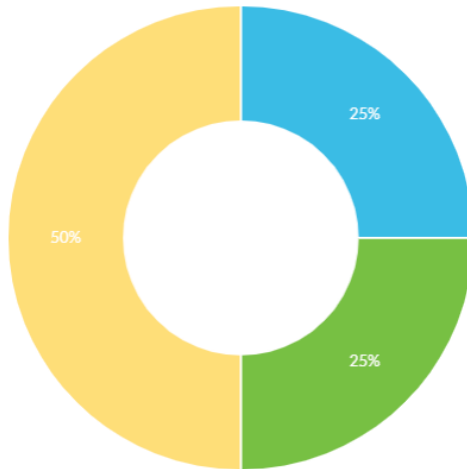
You witness Seth picking on Jamal in the hallway during the passing period. Seth teases him about his clothes, and other kids laugh at Jamal.

What do you do?\*

## Appendix E

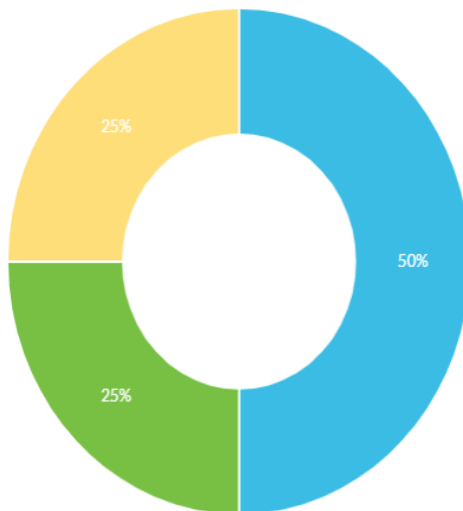
### Scenario 2: Teacher Survey A and Survey B Responses

### Teacher Survey A Responses:



Choice	÷	Total
Ignore the situation. You're hesitant to intervene because you don't want to escalate the situation, or Jamal has a temper and gets upset easily.	0	0
Quietly approach the group and tell Jamal to stop teasing Seth. You reassure Seth that he can come to you if he ever feels bullied again.	1	1
Confront the group of students publicly, especially Jamal, reminding them of the school's zero-tolerance policy for bullying and insisting that they apologize to Seth immediately. You send Jamal to the Principal's office with a recommendation for suspension.	1	1
Call Jamal's mother, inform her of the incident and tell her that if it happens again, you will send him to the principal's office.	2	2

### Teacher Survey B Responses:

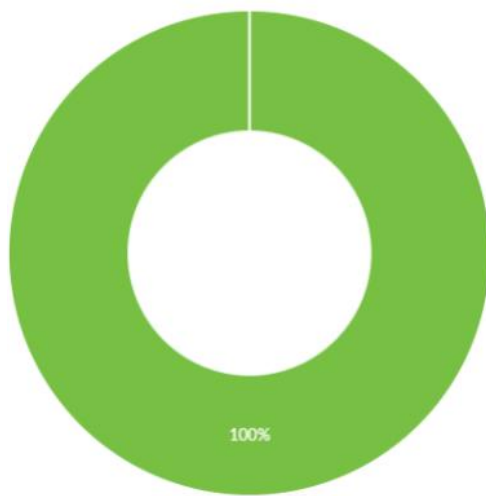


Choice	÷	Total
Ignore the situation. You're hesitant to intervene because you don't want to escalate the situation, or Seth has a temper and gets upset easily.	0	0
Quietly approach the group and tell Seth to stop teasing Jamal. You reassure Jamal that he can come to you if he ever feels bullied again.	2	2
Confront the group of students publicly, especially Seth, reminding them of the school's zero-tolerance policy for bullying and insisting that they apologize to Jamal immediately. You send Seth to the Principal's office with a recommendation for suspension. This isn't the first time he has picked on other students.	1	1
Call Seth's mother, inform her of the incident and tell her that if it happens again, you will send him to the principal's office.	1	1

## Appendix F

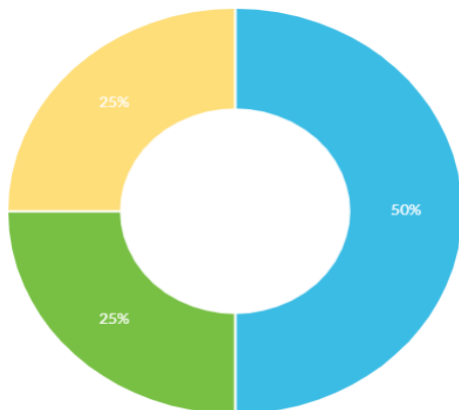
### Scenario 2: Principal Survey A and Survey B Responses

### Principal Survey A Responses:



Choice	Total
Ignore the situation. You're hesitant to intervene because you don't want to escalate the situation, or Jamal has a temper and gets upset easily	0
Quietly approach the group and tell Jamal to stop teasing Seth. You reassure Seth that he can come to you if he ever feels bullied again.	0
Confront the group of students publicly, especially Jamal, reminding them of the school's zero-tolerance policy for bullying and insisting that they apologize to Seth immediately	4
Issue a 1-day Suspension for Jamal. Your school has zero-tolerance for bullying, and it is your job as the principal to ensure the safety of ALL students	0

### Principal Survey B Responses:



Choice	Total
Ignore the situation. You're hesitant to intervene because you don't want to escalate the situation, or Alex has a temper and gets upset easily.	0
Quietly approach the group and tell Alex to stop teasing Jamal. You reassure Jamal that he can come to you if he ever feels bullied again.	2
Confront the group of students publicly, especially Alex, reminding them of the school's zero-tolerance policy for bullying	1
Issue a 1-day Suspension for Alex. Your school has zero-tolerance for bullying, and it is your job as the principal to ensure the safety of ALL students. This is not the first time Alex has made fun of other students.	1

## Appendix G

### Visual: Teacher and Principal Scenario 3



During lunch break, you notice Isalah and Conner walking to the back of the school building. Isalah is a popular student who hangs with the athletes, and Conner is quiet, reserved, and typically by himself, so it is odd that the two students are together. As you approach, you see that he has a vape in his hand, and you hear Isalah say to Conner, "Try it; the first time is crazy. But it gets easier." What do you do? \*

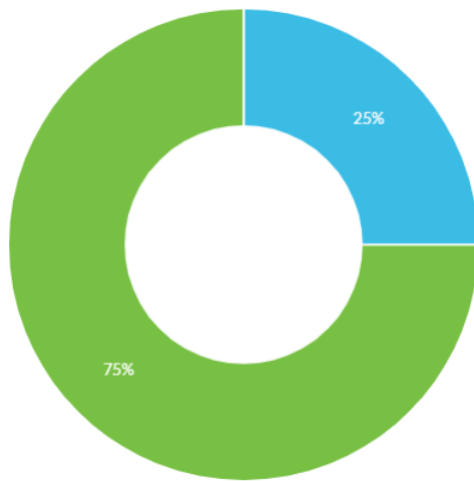


During lunch break, you notice Isalah and Conner walking to the back of the school building. Conner is a popular student who hangs with the athletes, and Isalah is quiet, reserved, and typically by himself, so it is odd that the two students are together. As you approach, you see that he has a vape in his hand, and you hear Conner say to Isalah, "Try it; the first time is crazy. But it gets easier." What do you do? \*

## Appendix H

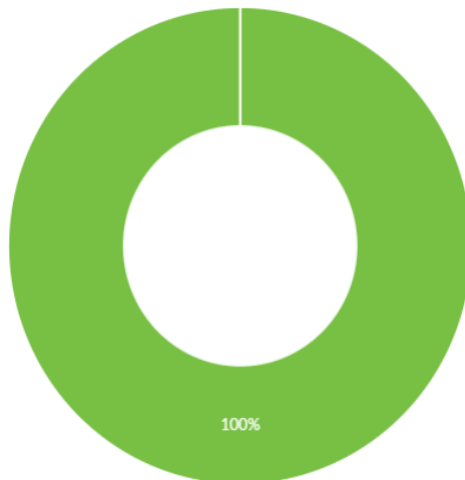
### Scenario 3: Teacher Survey A and Survey B Responses

### Teacher Survey A Responses:



Choice		Total
Ignore the situation. You're concerned about the potential backlash from confronting Isaiah, a popular student, and do not want to risk damaging your relationship with him or facing criticism from other students for "snitching" on him	0	0
Approach the students and remind them of the school's strict no-tolerance policy for vaping on campus. Confiscate the vaping device and give each student a warning	1	1
Confront the students, emphasizing the dangers of vaping and the consequences of breaking school rules. Inform them that you will report the incident to the school administration for further action.	3	3
Send Isaiah to the Principal's office since he was peer-pressuring Isaiah to smoke the vape.	0	0

### Teacher Survey B Responses:

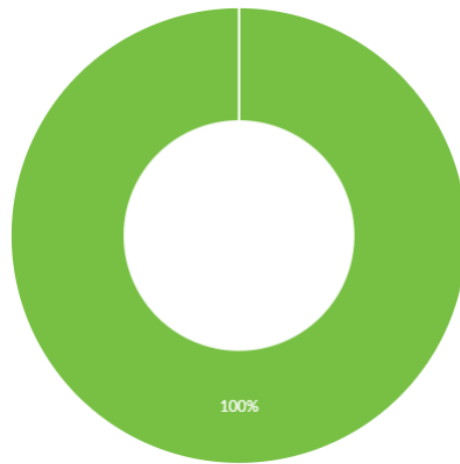


Choice		Total
Ignore the situation. You're concerned about the potential backlash from confronting Conner, a popular student, and do not want to risk damaging your relationship with him or facing criticism from other students for "snitching" on him.	0	0
Approach the students and remind them of the school's strict no-tolerance policy for vaping on campus. Confiscate the vaping device and give each student a warning.	0	0
Confront the students, emphasizing the dangers of vaping and the consequences of breaking school rules. Inform them that you will report the incident to the school administration for further action.	4	4
Send Conner to the Principal's office since he was peer-pressuring Isaiah to smoke the vape.	0	0

## Appendix I

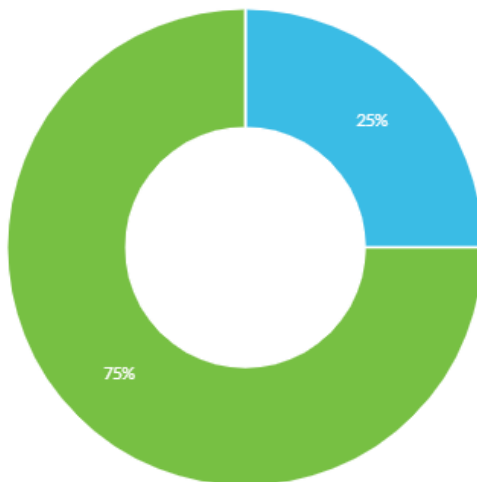
### Scenario 3: Principal Survey A and Survey B Responses

### Principal Survey A Responses:



Choice	÷	Total
Ignore the situation. You're concerned about the potential backlash from confronting Isaiah, a popular student, and do not want to risk damaging your relationship with him or facing criticism from other students for "snitching" on him.	0	0
Approach the students and remind them of the school's strict no-tolerance policy for vaping on campus. Confiscate the vaping device and give each student a warning.	0	0
Confront the students, emphasizing the dangers of vaping and the consequences of breaking school rules. Additionally, issue a suspension to both students for breaking the no vaping policy.	4	4
Issue a suspension to Isaiah for having the vape for peer-pressuring Conner to smoke the vape with him	0	0

### Principal Survey B Responses:



Choice	÷	Total
Ignore the situation. You're concerned about the potential backlash from confronting Conner, a popular student, and do not want to risk damaging your relationship with him or facing criticism from other students for "snitching" on him	0	0
Approach the students and remind them of the school's strict no-tolerance policy for vaping on campus. Confiscate the vaping device and give each student a warning.	1	1
Confront the students, emphasizing the dangers of vaping and the consequences of breaking school rules. Additionally, issue a suspension to both students for breaking the no vaping policy	3	3
Issue a suspension to Conner for having the vape for peer-pressuring Isaiah to smoke the vape with him.	0	0

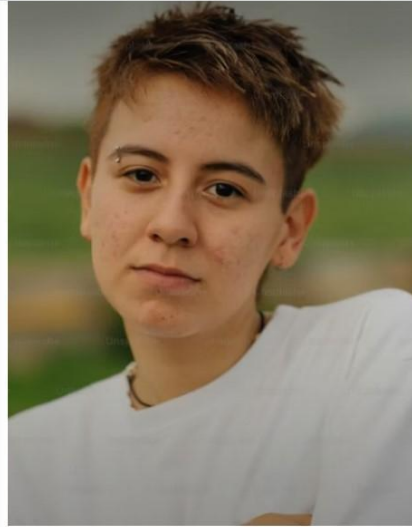
## Appendix J

### Visual: Teacher and Principal Scenario 4





One of your teachers notified you that in the middle of a class lecture, a heated argument erupted between two girls, Ka'Maya and Emily, seated at the back of the classroom. Suddenly, Ka'Maya starts physically attacking Emily, pulling her hair and pushing her against a desk while Emily tries to defend herself. Security intervenes, sending both students to the office for administrative support.

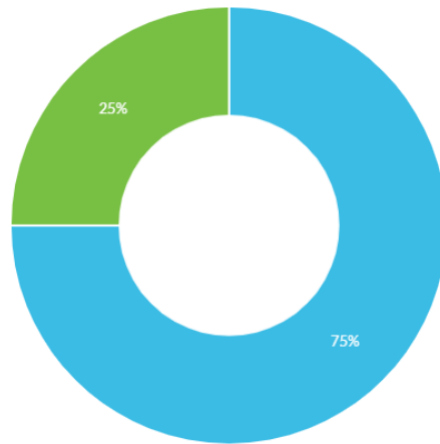


One of your teachers notified you that in the middle of a class lecture, a heated argument erupted between two girls, Ka'Maya and Emily, seated at the back of the classroom. Suddenly, Emily starts physically attacking Ka'Maya, pulling her hair and pushing her against a desk while Ka'Maya tries to defend herself. Security intervenes, sending both students to the office for administrative support. What do you do? \*

## Appendix K

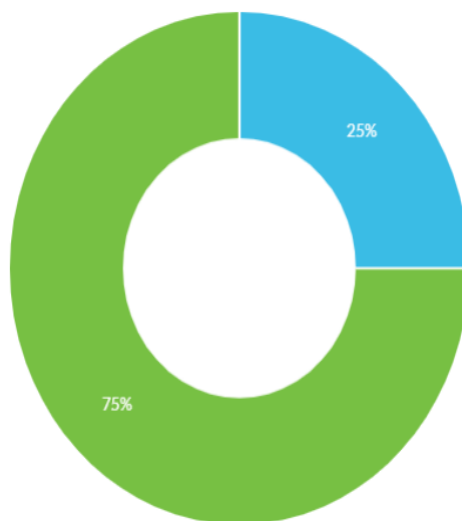
### Scenario 4: Teacher Survey A and Survey B Responses

### Teacher Survey A Responses:



Choice	Total
Freeze, unsure of how to react, and hope the situation resolves itself without your intervention. You feel hesitant to get involved in a physical altercation between students	0
Rush to separate the girls, pulling Ka'Maya away from Emily and escorting her out of the classroom to prevent further violence. You reassure Emily and instruct her to stay seated while you deal with Ka' Maya.	3
Call for assistance from other teachers or staff members to help break up the fight and ensure the safety of both students. You then escort Ka'Maya and Emily to the principal's office for further investigation and disciplinary action.	1
Focus solely on Emily, the victim in this situation, and instruct Ka'Maya to leave the classroom and report to the principal's office immediately for her behavior. You support and assist Emily, ensuring she feels safe and comfortable before continuing with the class.	0

### Teacher Survey B Responses:

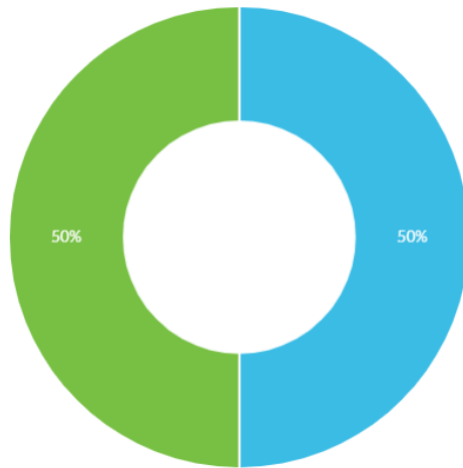


Choice	Total
Freeze, unsure of how to react, and hope the situation resolves itself without your intervention. You feel hesitant to get involved in a physical altercation between students.	0
Rush to separate the girls, pulling Emily away from Ka'maya and escorting her out of the classroom to prevent further violence. You reassure Ka 'Maya and instruct her to stay seated while you deal with Emily.	1
Call for assistance from other teachers or staff members to help break up the fight and ensure the safety of both students. You then escort Ka'Maya and Emily to the principal's office for further investigation and disciplinary action.	3
Focus solely on Ka'maya, the victim in this situation, and instruct Emily to leave the classroom and report to the principal's office immediately for her behavior. You support and assist Ka'Maya, ensuring she feels safe and comfortable before continuing with the class.	0

## Appendix L

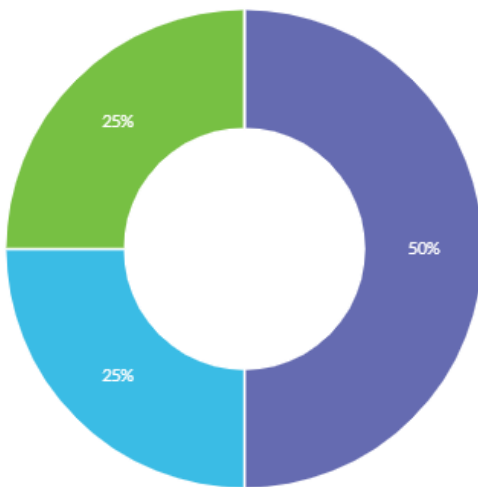
### Scenario 4: Principal Survey A and Survey B Responses

### ***Principal Survey A Responses:***



Choice	÷	Total
Issue both girls a suspension for fighting.		0
Issue Ka'Maya a suspension since she hit Emily first and was the more aggressive student.		2
Have a restorative circle and allow the girls to talk it out in hopes of finding a solution.		2
Once the girls have calmed down, give them a warning and allow them to go back to class		0

### ***Principal Survey B Responses:***



Choice	÷	Total
Issue both girls a suspension for fighting.		2
Issue Emily a suspension since she hit Ka'Maya first and was the more aggressive student.		1
Have a restorative circle and allow the girls to talk it out in hopes of finding a solution.		1
Once the girls have calmed down, give them a warning and allow them to go back to class		0

## **Appendix M**

### **Visual: Teacher and Principal Scenario 5**



During lunch break, you witness an argument between two high school boys, Peter and Malakai, near the cafeteria entrance. They're shouting at each other and pushing aggressively, drawing attention from other students. You then hear Malakai call Peter the N-word. What do you do? \*

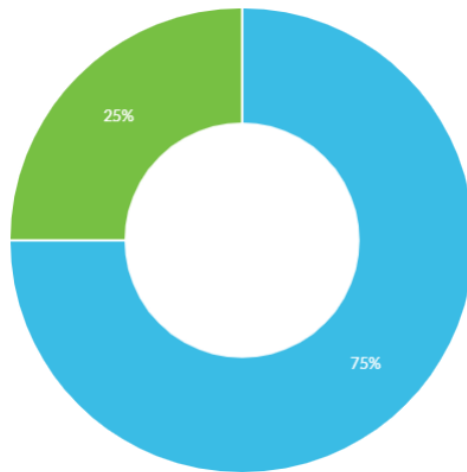


During lunch break, you witness a physical altercation between two high school boys, Peter and Malakai, near the cafeteria entrance. They're shouting at each other and pushing aggressively, drawing attention from other students. You then hear Peter call Malakai the N-word. What do you do? \*

## Appendix N

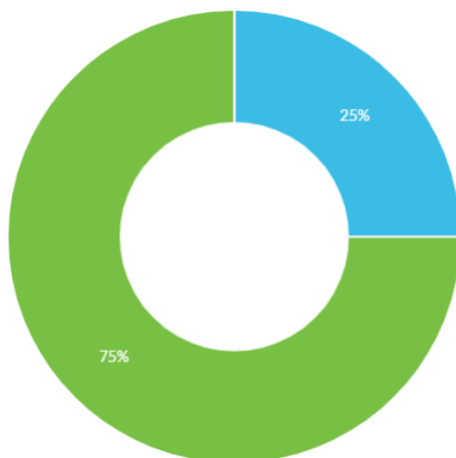
### Scenario 5: Teacher Survey A and Survey B Responses

### Teacher Survey A Response:



- Ignore the situation. You're hesitant to intervene because you're unsure of the cause of the altercation, and you don't want to exacerbate tensions or risk getting involved in a potentially dangerous situation; Malakai is an alleged gang member, and gang members commonly use the N-word. 0
- Approach the boys and attempt to separate them, calmly asking them to step back and take a moment to cool down. Once separated, escort them to a quieter area to talk and resolve the conflict peacefully. 3
- Call for assistance from other staff members or security personnel to help intervene and de-escalate the situation. While waiting for backup, keep a safe distance and monitor the situation to ensure the safety of all students involved. Inform the principal of the altercation with a suspension recommendation for Malakai for calling Peter the N-word. 1
- Tell the boys to stop. Since the students did not fight, you tell Peter to walk away so that you can have a private conversation with Malakai. You inform Malakai that the N-word is offensive and give him a warning. If he uses it again, you will send him to the principal for further disciplinary action. 0

### Teacher Survey B Response:

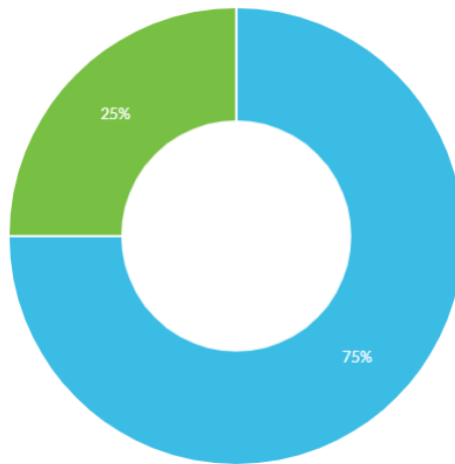


- Ignore the situation. You're hesitant to intervene because you're unsure of the cause of the altercation, and you don't want to exacerbate tensions or risk getting involved in a potentially dangerous situation; Malakai is an alleged gang member 0
- Approach the boys and attempt to separate them, calmly asking them to step back and take a moment to cool down. Once separated, escort them to a quieter area to talk and resolve the conflict peacefully. 1
- Call for assistance from other staff members or security personnel to help intervene and de-escalate the situation. While waiting for backup, keep a safe distance and monitor the situation to ensure the safety of all students involved. Inform the principal of the altercation with a suspension recommendation for Peter for calling Malakai the N-word. 3
- Tell the boys to stop. Since the students did not fight, you tell Malakai to walk away so that you can have a private conversation with Peter. You inform Peter that the N-word is offensive and give him a warning. If he uses it again, you will send him to the principal for further disciplinary action. 0

## Appendix O

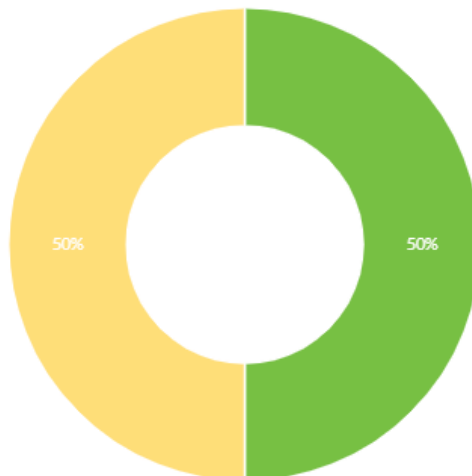
### Scenario 5: Principal Survey A and Survey B Responses

### Principal Survey A Responses:



- Ignore the situation. You're hesitant to intervene because you're unsure of the cause of the altercation, and you don't want to exacerbate tensions or risk getting involved in a potentially dangerous situation; Malakai is an alleged gang member, and gang members commonly use the N-word. 0
- Approach the boys and attempt to separate them, calmly asking them to step back and take a moment to cool down. Once separated, escort them to a quieter area to talk and resolve the conflict peacefully. 3
- Call for assistance from other staff members or security personnel to help you de-escalate the situation. While waiting for backup, keep the students a safe distance from each other and monitor the situation to ensure the safety of all students involved. Once the situation is de-escalated, call both of their parents and issue them a warning for disruptive behavior. 1
- Tell the boys to stop. Since the students did not fight, you tell Peter to walk away so that you can have a private conversation with Malakai. You issue Malakai a suspension for using offensive language; racial slurs will not be tolerated. 0

### Principal Survey B Responses:



Choice		Total
● Ignore the situation. You're hesitant to intervene because you're unsure of the cause of the altercation, and you don't want to exacerbate tensions or risk getting involved in a potentially dangerous situation; Peter is an alleged gang member, and gang members commonly use the N-word.	0	0
● Approach the boys and attempt to separate them, calmly asking them to step back and take a moment to cool down. Once separated, escort them to a quieter area to talk and resolve the conflict peacefully	0	0
● Call for assistance from other staff members or security personnel to help you de-escalate the situation. While waiting for backup, keep the students a safe distance from each other and monitor the situation to ensure the safety of all students involved. Once the situation is de-escalated, call both of their parents and issue them a warning for disruptive behavior.	2	2
● Tell the boys to stop. Since the students did not fight, you tell Malakai to walk away so that you can have a private conversation with Peter. You suspend Peter for using	2	2