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RESTORATIVE PRACTICES: ITS IMPACT ON RACIAL  
INEQUITY IN PK-12 SCHOOLS

SHELIA E. BOOZER

186 Pages

This research explores the relationship between Restorative Practices and race, specifically how Black students experience RP when race is not centered. It also explores the ways anti-Blackness influences the implementation of restorative practices and results in further racial inequities and racial oppression through the lens of Critical Race Theory. The central research questions are: In what ways, if any, does RP address racial inequities in PK-12 schools? In what ways do districts implement RP? In what ways, if any, does RP impact institutional racism in school systems? How does RP address the social and emotional issues of historically marginalized students as it relates to education? How have racialized factors impacted the implementation of RP? In what ways, if any, does RP provide support and connectedness in schools for Black students? This case study explores five Black students' and 17 black and white educators' perceptions and experiences with RP and discipline. My findings indicate signals of systemic racism are consistent with the principles of CRT and is also supported by overwhelming qualitative evidence that a potentially effective alternative to exclusionary discipline such as Restorative practices covered in colorblind institutional policies and practices serve to reproduce racial inequalities in school discipline if race and racism are not effectively addressed.

**KEYWORDS:** restorative practice; discipline disparities; racism; race

RESTORATIVE PRACTICES: ITS IMPACT ON RACIAL INEQUITY  
IN PK-12 SCHOOLS

SHELIA E. BOOZER

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Department of Educational Administration and Foundations

ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY

2021

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RESTORATIVE PRACTICES: ITS IMPACT ON RACIAL INEQUITY  
IN PK-12 SCHOOLS

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S.E.B.

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION: SEEKING RESTORATION

### **Introduction of the Study**

Restorative Practices (RP) is an approach that evolved from restorative justice that is now used in the education field to improve interactions between teachers and students (Wachtel, 1999). RP has the potential to reduce the racial discipline gap (Carter, Skiba, Arredondo, & Pollock, 2014) through repairing and building relationships rather than punishing students; however, little is known about the relationship between RP and race, especially from Black students' perspectives and experiences.

Several studies (Braithwaite, Ahmed, Morrison, & Reinhart, 2001; Welch & Payne, 2012) conducted on RP, found that in schools with a higher percentage of Black students, teachers and administrators used more punitive and less reparative approaches to discipline. Further research is needed because school initiatives implemented by white staff and administrators, particularly initiatives that seek to manage student behavior, have a long history of disproportionate and harsh discipline of Black students that push them out of the classroom (Carter, Skiba, Arredondo, & Pollock, 2014; Ferguson, 2000; Noguera, 2008; Skiba, Arredondo, & Rausch, 2014). Furthermore, the literature is absent of studies that use Critical Race Theory to analyze Black students' experiences of restorative approaches and their effects. Without a deeper understanding of the effects on Black students, the purpose of RP may be negated in that it is not actually reducing the disciplinary gap but adding another method through which to criminalize Black students.

The purpose of this case study is to explore the ways anti-Blackness influences the implementation of restorative practices and results in further racial inequities and racial oppression through the lens of Critical Race Theory. The following research questions address

various aspects of discipline disparities and bring to light the ways Restorative Practices affect Black students in K12 schools:

1. In what ways, if any, does RP address racial inequities in PK-12 schools?
2. In what ways do districts implement RP?
3. In what ways, if any, does RP impact institutional racism in school systems?
4. How does RP address the social and emotional issues of historically marginalized students as it relates to education?
5. How have racialized factors impacted the implementation of RP?
6. In what ways, if any, does RP provide support and connectedness in schools for Black students?

This descriptive case study explores the effects of Restorative Practices (RP) on racial inequity in terms of discipline in PK-12 schools by using Critical Race Theory (CRT) purposefully as the lens through which to analyze the data collected. CRT offers critical perspectives on race, and manifestations of race, racism, inequity, and the dynamics of power and privilege in schooling (Gillborn, 2013). The choice to conduct a case study in conjunction with CRT was to collect data in various ways to have a more complex understanding of educators approaches and Black students' experiences as well as to center race in the implementation and effects of RP. Case studies allow for in-depth investigations while gathering data from a variety of sources by using several different methods, such as observations and interviews. Case studies analyze specific issues within the boundaries of a specific environment, situation, or organization (Merriam, 1998).

The location of the school district is in the Midwest. I named the district "Sundown District" because it was an official Sundown town during the early to mid 1900's when my

grandmother was a young lady. Sundown towns are communities that kept Blacks and all other people of color from residing in their towns through various forms of violence, threat of death or actual death (Loewen, 2005). The Sundown District demographics have shifted to include more Black students, but the beliefs, policies, and practices still reflect the sundown mentality.

This case study explores Black students' perceptions and experiences with RP and discipline, through one, one-and-half hour focus group conducted through Zoom with five Black students who have been suspended or expelled from their high schools. The focus group was an opportunity for the students to openly discuss their personal experience with school discipline and the implementation of Restorative Practices from the lens of a Black student. The students openly shared their feelings, insights and next steps on how to make RP work for them and not just their white peers because they believed Black students experienced disparate discipline and RP was not implemented consistently. The case study also consists of 17 interviews conducted through Zoom. Interviewees included 3 Black teachers and 5 white teachers; 5 Black principals and 2 white; 1 Black assistant principal; and 1 Black district-level administrator. I also analyzed disaggregated data on student discipline to potentially reveal discipline patterns that can be masked by larger aggregate data. Sundown District has been cited for the over representation of Black students in exclusionary discipline practices such as suspensions and expulsions. I analyzed the suspension and expulsion data between Black and white students along with the infractions that led to the use of exclusionary discipline.

I analyzed the student and family handbook to see if and how RP was included, its stated purpose, and to discover whether it was being used in practice and part of the culture of the district. Finally, I analyzed the Elements of School Success Survey that is given each year to students in grades 6-12 in Sundown District. The survey system is based on more than 20 years

of research by the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research and is an evidence-based system designed to drive improvement in schools nationwide. It reliably measures changes in a school organization and climate and culture through the eyes of staff, students and families. The Survey provides individualized, actionable reports for each school to improve the educational environment to help ensure student success. For the purpose of this research, I focused on the student areas of the survey that provides data around students' responses to behavioral support provided and their sense of belonging and relationships to staff. These areas all speak to the effectiveness of RP that is mentioned in the student and family handbook.

I originally planned on observing restorative circles as well as interviewing and holding the focus group in person, but due to restrictions imposed by COVID-19 mandates, I had to instead rely on virtual communications and observations. I replaced the observation of restorative circles with viewing a public *Edutopia* (2018) clip on-line of a restorative circle held by Black students in Pearl-Cohn High School located in Nashville, TN. Pearl-Cohn is a 9-12 public high school that has a 90% Black student population with an emphasis on Restorative Practices. The school utilizes a space called the Zone instead of suspensions for students to come together in a collaborative space and discuss what their behaviors were and ways to correct it. I observed this video to get a sense of Black students' responses and interactions to inform my notions of what is possible for Black students in RP. Some specific questions I had were: Can RP actually promote inclusiveness, build relationships, problem solve, and deter exclusionary discipline? I also wanted to build my own background knowledge to assist me in analyzing interview and focus group data. As I observed the interactions between the Black students with each other and between the staff to the students, I noticed students' voices were heard, respected and honored by each other and the staff. It was evident in the video that the purpose and rationale

of restorative conversations in school which is to help guide all participants to healthier interpersonal relationships was occurring.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is significant because little is known about the relationship between Restorative Practices and race, specifically how Black students experience RP when race is not centered. Restorative Practices exist on a continuum of formal and less formal, prevention and intervention approaches such as building community, improving relationships, problem solving to resolve conflict, and holding students accountable with consequences (Stutzman Amstutz & Mullet, 2005; Blood & Thornsbome, 2005; Costello, Wachtel, & Wachtel, 2009). RP invites more voice and more choice in what happens to students in exchange for them to take greater personal responsibility. For example, students are able to say “real things” to one another leading to a shared understanding which is not the same as agreement. This can often occur in a peacemaking circle. It is designed to bring people together in a way that creates trust, honors respect, and fosters intimacy. They also incorporate goodwill, belonging, generosity, mutuality, and reciprocity. The process is never about "changing others," "but instead is an invitation to change oneself and one's relationship with the community” Lyubansky & Barter, 2019, p. 324). While these practices have potential in theory, this practice and other RP practices are adopted as though they are racial equity initiatives, but they are not.

Instituting another intervention that claims to provide equity but does not, is problematic considering that Black students experience suspensions and expulsions from school more than any other racial group of students (Gregory & Mosley, 2004). Furthermore, policy alone will not change the direction of the trend of racial discipline disparity occurring in educational institutions because educators apply harsher disciplinary measures towards Black students

regardless of policy (Dickerson, 2014). These disparities are widespread and persistent regardless of the type of disciplinary action, level of school poverty, or type of public school attended (GAO Report, 2018).

Since the early 1970s, the era of Civil Rights and Desegregation, the gap between Black students and white students in suspensions has increased (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Skiba, 2000). In the Children's Defense Fund (1975) report, Reyes (2006) describes a historical "unequal playing field." The report cites student suspensions by race across 2,862 school districts for the 1972-73 school year in both elementary and secondary schools. The findings show that Black students were twice as likely as white students to be suspended at least once. Almost fifty years after the Children's Defense Fund report (2020), we see the same discrepancies in school discipline implementation although Black students are a smaller percentage of the school population. The Children's Defense Fund report (2020) shows Black youth represented 54 percent of youth prosecuted in adult criminal court but only 15 percent of the total youth population, and that Black youth are nine times more likely than white youth to receive an adult prison sentence. More than 30 years of research has consistently demonstrated the over-representation of Black youth in the exclusionary discipline consequences of suspension and expulsion (Children's Defense Fund, 1975; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002).

The rise of zero-tolerance policies in the mid-1990s changed how school officials react to the "misbehavior" of students. Zero-tolerance policies encouraged the use of oppressive, punitive disciplinary actions for the slightest infractions (Leonardo & Boas, 2013). Zero-tolerance, according to (Collins, 1986), relates to applying laws or penalties to even minor infringements of code to reinforce its overall importance. Brown (2013) and Losen and Martinez (2013) point out

some of the more vulnerable and marginalized students within schools have been subjected to the effects of zero-tolerance policies. Zero-tolerance policies, coupled with anti-Blackness and cultural deficit theory, have caused further disparity in school discipline. Zero-tolerance is an approach utilized to exclude students from their learning environment that is simple to implement and understand because it draws from racist assumptions and deficit ideas.

Zero-tolerance stems from a two-decade-old study by two white, conservative social scientists. From this study, the social scientists proposed the "broken windows" theory that maintains if people are allowed to break windows with impunity, not only do more minor crimes lead to more serious ones, but the "disordered" appearance of the neighborhood perpetrates criminal disorder (Wilson & Kelling, 1982). When applied to students in an educational setting, this means that students must be punished swiftly and harshly to deter further "criminal" behavior by all students with little to no examination of the role of the institution.

The American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Taskforce (2008) and Skiba (2000) state that zero-tolerance has not proven effective in preventing misbehavior for any students. Reyes (2006) explains that "Zero-tolerance is contrary to the best educational practices. Zero-tolerance policies set equal expectations on an already unequal playing field, reject the developmental needs of children, deny educational opportunities by contributing to dropouts, produce poor achievement, and criminalize student behavior" (p. 8). The unequal playing field is in part due to the common falsehood that exists among white educators that Black students are disproportionately represented in the discipline data because they commit the majority of the behavior infractions when this is in fact not the case (Skiba, 2000). Black students are disciplined more frequently than white students by white educators based on the stereotypical belief that Black students have cultural deficiencies that exist at home (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001).

Valencia (1997) posits that deficit thinking is a form of oppression. That is, "the cruel and unjust use of authority and power to keep a group of people in their place" (p. 3). The history of deficit thinking in education, according to Valencia (1997), is filled with examples of how Black students are kept in their place by macro- and micro-level educational policies and practices fueled by racism. Instead of school administrators dealing with misconduct on a case-by-case basis, many school districts moved to enforce zero-tolerance policies that limit discretion in individual cases, including law enforcement personnel, and mandate the removal of students from school (Kupchik, 2010). Students would benefit from administrators considering the circumstances of the event, the specific students involved, and the repercussions for the school environment's overall safety. Findings indicate that zero-tolerance policies fail to make schools safer through swift punishment (Skiba, 2000). The standard assurance that zero-tolerance practices that immediately suspend a student who violates a school rule create a more conducive learning environment is not proven (Skiba, Arredondo & Williams, 2014). Zero-tolerance policies also fail to improve consistent discipline practices across racial student groups. Hoffman (2012) examined the effects of zero-tolerance policy before and after implementation and its contribution to the racial discipline disparity using data from the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES). The NCES showed suspension percentage for a Black student increased 12% compared to a slight decline of 2% in the rate for a white student (Dickerson, 2014p. 71). Discipline disparity has led to schools looking for reform efforts to combat suspensions, dropouts, and a run-in with law enforcement. Research shows the ongoing disproportionality in the enforcement of zero-tolerance discipline policies (Davis, 2017; Fenning & Rose, 2007).

## **Pipeline**

The “school-to-prison pipeline” refers to the policies and practices that push our nation’s schoolchildren, especially our Black children, out of classrooms and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems (Brownstein, 2009). The American Civil Liberties Union, ACLU (2008) explained that many under-resourced schools become pipeline gateways by placing increased reliance on police rather than teachers and administrators with maintaining discipline. Growing numbers of districts employ school resource officers to patrol school hallways, often with little or no training in working with youth. As a result, children are far more likely to be subject to school-based arrests, the majority of which are for non-violent offenses, like disruptive behavior, than they were a generation ago. The rise in school-based arrests, the quickest route from the classroom to the jailhouse, most directly exemplifies the criminalization of Black schoolchildren. The pipeline reflects the prioritization of incarceration over education for Black students by the U.S. Government (Cole, 2020). From 1987-2007, funding for incarceration more than doubled while funding for higher education rose by just 21 percent (PBS, 2001). The distribution of federal funding for School Resource Officers (SRO) led to an increase in the rates of school-related arrests, and a national study showed that students who experience school punishment before the age of 15, are associated with contact with the criminal justice system (Ramey, 2015). Rather than preventing crime, the presence of SROs has been linked with increased arrests for non-criminal, youthful behavior, commonly known as the school-to- prison pipeline (Owens, 2016). Evidence shows that the school-to-prison pipeline captures and affects Black students in a way that mirrors the over-representation of Blacks in America's prisons and jails (Cole, 2019).

Research also shows that the Black students who experience discipline that removes them from the classroom are more likely to repeat a grade, drop out of school, and become involved in

the juvenile justice system and result in decreased earning potential and added costs to society, such as incarceration and lost tax revenue (GAO Report, 2018). When students are experiencing removal from school environments disproportionately, even for a short time, research shows the underachievement that can occur, leading to increased chances of those individuals not graduating on time or merely dropping out altogether (Brownstein, 2009). Identifying solutions school administrators can utilize to address the gaps zero-tolerance policies have caused the right thing to do for the students, the school environment, and the communities directly impacted by the policy application's disproportionalities. In a report issued in early 2014, the U.S. Department of Education offered three guiding principles for schools to consider in developing local approaches to ensure safe and successful school environments.

### **Recreating Racial Inequity through Criminalization**

News headlines and videos posted worldwide that reinforce the Civil Rights Data Collection (2020), found in the 2017-2018 school year that Black K-12 students were 3.8 times more likely to be suspended from school and receive harsher discipline than white students. An example of this violence occurred when a Black high school student in South Carolina refused to put away her cell phone and was thrown from her desk by a school resource officer (Aartun & Yan, 2015). Another example of violence and school-induced trauma through criminalization occurred when school officials in Virginia had a Black middle schoolboy arrested for allegedly stealing a free carton of milk (Wise, 2016). Additional violence and trauma happened in Illinois when white police officers tased two Black male high-school students for speaking up for themselves while already handcuffed. When the Black male principal stated it was to never happen in his school again, the principal was reprimanded like a child by one of the police officers for his response to the mistreatment and the abuses the white police officers (2018).

Schools mirror greater society including anti-Blackness in the form of an all-time-high rates of incarceration rates of Black people which mirrors disproportionate number of expulsions and suspensions of Blacks children in schools (NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, 2018; Alexander, 2010). Further, school violence reflects the grand scale in which sanctioned violence against Black people experience daily with the threat of frequent, brutal killings by white police officers. At the same time, America captures it all through media (i.e., 12-year-old Tamir Rice, 15-year-old Jordan Edwards of Texas, and 16-year-old Laquan McDonald of Chicago, IL). Today, Black children are having a difficult time finding a place to call their own. Schools are still not providing Black students with the support they need to be safe on any level, let alone accomplish successfully their reason for being in school which is to learn. Adding to white narrative of justifying murder, Black students are then blamed with statements like “they should have stayed in school” (Coates, 2015, p. 33) as if this is a reason or justification for murder.

Schools today are more frequently using punitive discipline practices to control student behavior. However, data shows that there is greater effectiveness of using community building techniques on compliance based upon restorative justice principles found in criminal justice (Payne & Welch, 2015). Triplett, Allen, & Lewis (2014) examined the demographic characteristics of school shootings from 1990-2011. Lewis, Butler, Bonner, Fred, and Joubert (2010) contend that the passage of the 1994 Gun-Free Schools Act helped with the implementation of zero-tolerance policies in schools as a method for sanctioning students for illegal activity and nonviolent offenses including truancy and drug use. The examination revealed that through the mechanism of zero-tolerance, a nation of urban Black students has continued receiving punishment for the actions of predominantly white, suburban/rural shooters. Like other indicators of inequities in education, racial disproportionality in discipline,

suspensions, and expulsions did not just come on the scene. Racial discipline disparities are a consequence of U.S. history, of the biases and stereotypes created by that history, and of all the still active divisions in lived experiences between socially constructed groups called races (Carter et al. 2014). Racism is normal, not aberrant in American society (Delgado, 1995). Because it is so entangled in the fabric of our social order, it appears both healthy and natural to people of our culture. Bell's work, (1992), discusses how racism is a permanent fixture of American life. Within this vein, recent bipartisan legislation, sponsored bills, and reform proposals such as Every Student Succeed Act and SB100 have led to the implementation of non-exclusionary discipline practices and approaches (Committee for Children, 2018).

In some cases, schools offer Black students coping mechanisms, such as modifying mindsets, grittiness, and adjusting their emotions through trauma-informed practices. Rather than correcting in school conditions like discriminatory policy or racially tinged tracking practices that exacerbate racism's traumas. Gorski (2019) points out. "What good is grit against curricular erasure or inequitable school policy?" (p. 59). Our best strategy for minimizing the impact of racism is to eliminate racism (Gorski, 2019). Rudd, (2014), as quoted by Gorski (2019) states: We cannot allow racism-infused misperceptions of Black culture to justify our failure to create racially just schools. Often, we interpret racial disparities in which students are suspended or expelled, for example, not as the result of racial bias, as research shows it primarily to be, but as a cultural defect in communities of color (p. 58). Instead, institutional policies make failed attempts to solve the discipline disparities by adjusting the behaviors, mindsets, or emotions of Black students instead of addressing and adjusting the racial biases of educators or the schools' inequitable practices that lead Black students from school to prison.

## Theoretical Framework

In this study, I use Critical Race Theory (CRT) as the framework to analyze the respondents' and the researcher's narratives. Critical race theory is being used as the theoretical framework as a lens to show the way race underpins policies and the way programs deal with or address race in practices that claim to negate biases used to inform disciplinary procedures. DeCuir and Dixson (2004) note that given the insidious and often subtle way in which race and racism operate, education researchers must explore the role of race when examining the educational experiences of Black students (p. 26). The rationale for using CRT brings in the significance of experiences of members of the African diaspora and other minorities who pursue an education in the United States. Solorzano & Yosso (2009) quote Solorzano & Solorzano, (1995), and Valencia & Solorzano, (1997):

"Critical race methodology in education challenges traditional research paradigms, texts, and theories used to explain the experiences of people of color. It exposes deficit-informed research and methods that silence and distort the experiences of people of color and instead focuses on their racialized, gendered, and classified experiences as sources of strength" (p.133).

CRT is a scholarly and political movement rooted in the law. It was conceived and born in the mid-1970s to respond to the failure of Critical Legal Studies (CLS) to address the effects of race and racism in the U.S legal system (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Legal scholars such as Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, and Richard Delgado are seen as founding fathers as their work helped develop and shape CRT while having fundamental concepts shared, critical race theorists define them differently. Together the theoretical perspectives of Fay (1987) and Ladson-Billings (2001) provide a functional definition of CRT. In their view, CRT raises essential questions about the

control and production of knowledge about people and communities of color to empower them to transcend their constraints by race, class, and gender. CRT examines the “contemporary legal thought and doctrine from the viewpoint of the law’s role in the construction and maintenance of social domination and subordination” (Crenshaw, Gotunda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995, p. xi). West (1995) cites Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, and Thomas (1995) and note that CRT is an intellectual movement that is both particular to the postmodern and conservative times and part of a long tradition of human resistance and liberation (p. xii). CRT is a movement that highlights a creative and tension-ridden fusion of theoretical self-reflection, formal innovation, radical politics, existential evaluation, reconstructive experimentation, and vocational anguish (West, 1995). Although CRT’s origins are rooted in the law (Crenshaw, 1995), its influences in other areas and disciplines include education (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Litner, 2004). Its theoretical, practical, and analytical characteristics are notable in education as an emerging framework (Duncan, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lynn, Yosso, Solorzano, & Parker, 2002; Solorzano, 1997).

The foundation of CRT, built on advocacy and change, makes it a crucial lens to view racial and discipline disparities in education as it relates to the implementation of restorative practices as an alternative to exclusionary discipline. CRT scholars state that race and racism both ideologically ingrained in the political and legal structures of society. Racism has a complex political, social, and historical context ripe with meaning and often takes place within an institutionalized setting. Solorzano (1997) defines CRT as “a framework or set of basic perspectives, methods, and pedagogy that seeks to identify, analyze and transform those structural and cultural aspects of society. Racism maintains the subordination and marginalization of People of Color” (p. 6). The CRT movement is a large group of activists

and scholars interested in studying and transforming the relationship between race, racism, and power. The focus is based upon the same issues found in the civil rights discourse but includes a broader context such as history, economics and questions the foundation of the liberal order and a pure democracy (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 3).

To this end, CRT focusing on the effects of race-related issues, while addressing the hegemonic system of White supremacy on the meritocratic system (Crenshaw, 1995; Cook, 1995; Dalton, 1995; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Matsuda, 1995). It challenges normative societal ideologies and standards by using the literal narratives of people of color to challenge the existing social construction of race legitimately. At its core, CRT involves explicitly and focuses on the five central tenants. First, CRT recognizes the centrality, permanence, and intersectionality of race and racism (Bell, 1992; Lawrence, 1995). It challenges the dominant ideology regarding the extent of racial power (Harris, 1995). Finally, it is committed to social justice (Bell, 1980). Research is done within the social plain (that is, racialized) that does not allow for quiet discussions. Fourthly, it produces knowledge through the use of (counter) narratives or (counter) stories (Matsuda, 1995). Crenshaw et al., (1995) state that CRT regrets the prevailing viewpoint of neutrality or objectivity in developing counter-narratives. Lastly, CRT makes use of interdisciplinary methodologies (Crenshaw 1988; Solorzano & Villalpando, 1998). This study serves as a catalyst for change and CRT is the springboard from which to analyze the researcher and respondents' narratives. This study's focus is not to create or perpetuate binaries surrounding racial discourse; instead, the use of critical race framework is to inform and shape the discussion.

In this chapter, I framed the problem and its components which include a history of harsh discipline of Black students that pushes them out of schools and into prisons through policies

that support this. I also explained the potential RP holds but that it is problematic to not understand the ways RP is affecting our Black students. In chapter 2, I contextualize the Black student experience in the history of Black education in the US. This discussion grounds and justifies my use of Critical Race Theory as the theoretical framework including the ways anti-Blackness have shaped school reform. In chapter 3, I provide an extensive discussion of the ideological impetus of restorative justice from which restorative practices emerged, and the circumstances in which schools embraced these approaches. In chapter 4, I discuss the case study, my positionality, data collection, discussion of the site, and participants and data analysis method. In chapter 5, I present findings in accordance with the research questions. In chapter 6, I provide a summary of the findings and recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER II: THE HISTORY OF BLACK STUDENT EXPERIENCE IN THE U.S.

### **Liberation through Education**

*“He who controls images controls minds, and he who controls minds has little or nothing to fear from bodies. This is the reason Black people are not educated or miseducated in America... The system could not exist if it did not multiply discrimination... It is no accident that there is a blackout on the Black man’s contribution to American history... An educator in a system of oppression is either a revolutionary or an oppressor... The question of education for Black people in America is a question of life and death. It is a political question, a question of power... Struggle is a form of education, perhaps the highest form” (Lerone Bennett, p. 1).*

I begin this chapter with this quote because it captures how intricately Black liberation ties to education and how the use of education oppresses Black people. I provide histories on the grounds of the importance of learning. Education has always been at the heart of Black liberation—the struggle against blocks of legally embedded anti-Blackness. The quest for freedom through education is in direct contrast to dominating narratives in society, such as cultural deficit theory (Persell, 1981) and deficit thinking (Valencia, 2012) that centers and blames problems resulting from anti-Black racism on the Black community. To fully reveal the struggle, I address and explain the various means through which education is a tool to oppress Black people. These methods of oppression include monumental court rulings, the ideology of anti-Blackness in society and education, the school-to-prison pipeline, and surveillance and policing.

### **Education as a means to freedom**

Davis (2019) discussed that from the time of slavery to the present, Black people had treasured education as liberatory, so much so that Black people who were enslaved broke the law

to learn to read and write. White slave owners, predictably, fought any efforts at liberation as demonstrated in the following occurrence: Frederick Douglass' slave master forbade his wife, upon discovering she was teaching young Frederick to read, stating, "If you teach him how to read, there will be no keeping him. It would forever unfit him to be a slave." (Douglass, 2005. p. 15). Douglass overheard this conversation and realized that education was the pathway from slavery to freedom. It was the most important thing he and other slaves could do to free themselves.

To further demonstrate the critical desire for education and freedom, universal free public schooling was created post-slavery by the Black community (Anderson, 1988). The determination and commitment to universal education, held by Black folks, was captured in the words of W.E.B. DuBois (2019), calling out the fact it was a whole race trying to go to school while reminding that too few were young and none too old, to attempt to learn. In 1879, Harriet Beecher Stowe said, "Blacks rushed not to the grog shop but the schoolroom. Ironically, in that day, Black folks cried out for spelling books as bread and pleaded for teachers as a necessity to life" (Anderson, 1988. p. 5). Today, some educators claim Black does not want an education; however, this is an example of deficit thinking (Valencia, 2012). Blacks emerged from slavery with a strong belief in education as a means of racial transformation, as described by Douglass and Anderson.

White people, however, maintained total oppression of Black people through legal means usurping efforts towards education and liberation. Black political and civil subordination became part of the law. Blacks existed in a social system that denied them citizenship, the right to vote, and the right to design their educational system to improve their labor power. Blacks once again were trapped by state statutes and social customs in an economy that thrived mightily on

coercive control and allocation of labor until the late 1960s (Roos, 2020). Even though Blacks were formally free when American education systems transformed into a so-called well-respected standardized and critical social institution, the school for Blacks took a different path mired in inequity.

### **Afterlife of Slavery**

In this section, I further contextualize the historical implications that shaped and fed the ways to use education as a weapon of oppression. Dabydeen (2013) discussed that abolitionists in the mid-1700s argued for the necessity to end slavery at the 1830 National Debate on Race. Although the abolitionists began to fight to end slavery, they hoped to "civilize" and Christianize the Black slaves while maintaining racial order. Hall (2013) argues that the hierarchy of racial order was based upon social and cultural norms. The abolitionists believed that the former slaves would all be equal even with these vast contradictions in place one day in the future. Daniels (2013) explains that on this quest for Imperialism, the white settlers' hatred of the blacks, that already inhabited the lands for hundreds of years, grew as the new claim emerged that dark, non-cultured and Godless races could not be civilized and should instead be exterminated. This quest was the beginning of the "Black War." We have not ended racial caste in America; we have merely redesigned it (Alexander, 2011).

The 13th amendment abolished slavery in the U.S., and racism did not end. As written, the 14th amendment granted citizenship rights to anyone born in America, and therefore, no laws would disregard those rights. In *Plessy v. Ferguson*, white America viewed the 14th amendment so that segregation was not considered unequal (Hull-Hoffer, 2012). The court ruled that the 14th amendment should not interpret that Black and white people would share public places although they were considered equal before the law. *Plessy v. Ferguson* allowed separate but equal, and

from that ruling, segregation was birthed into law (Luxenberg, 2019). Out of legal segregation came the Jim Crow laws, hidden yet prevalent in American society today. Jim Crow's primary goal was to keep Blacks in a place of subordination by enforcing Blacks and whites into separate spaces with no interactions with one another. Resources allocated to Blacks were subpar to those of whites and, in some cases, nonexistent. The lasting impact of the Jim Crow laws can be felt and seen in society today. Neighborhoods and thus schools are still as segregated today as they were in the 1960s before busing (NAACP, 2018).

*Brown v. Board of Education* ended state-mandated racial segregation of public schools and became the catalyst to fight racism in the United States. *Brown v. the Board of Education* is among the most significant judicial turning points in the history of the U.S. (Rothstein, 2014). The ruling dismantled the legal basis for racial segregation in schools and other public facilities (Knappman, 1994). Racial segregation, challenged by the 14th amendment to the U.S. Constitution, was instrumental in human rights policies, both foreign and domestic (Crenshaw, 1988), leading *Brown v. Board of Education* to extended beyond children and education. Although the Supreme court decision legally achieved school desegregation, segregation was still in existence with the practice of redlining under the guise of the New Deal (Rothstein, 2017). This legal government-sanctioned segregation fueled the civil rights movement. The *Brown* decision inspired, and galvanized human rights struggles across the country and around the world. *Brown v. Board of Education* clarified that there was no way to make segregation equal as it stated Blacks were inferior. The landmark ruling constitutionally sanctioned laws barring Blacks from sharing the same buses, schools, and other public facilities as whites known as Jim Crow laws and established the separate but equal doctrine that would stand for the next sixty years (Rothstein, 2014). Derrick Bell (1980) posits, "*Brown* transformed Blacks from

beggars pleading for decent treatment to citizens demanding equal treatment under the law as their constitutionally recognized right" (p.1). Blacks and the civil rights movement gained momentum and today still march for equality and abolishing oppression and systemic racism. Fifty years after the historic case in which it ended state-mandated racial segregation of public schools, most black children attend public schools that are both racially isolated and grossly underfunded. The influence of the civil rights movements on Black people's willingness to engage in civil disobedience led to a backlash of out-of-school suspensions and expulsions

### **Policing and Surveillance**

Schools have long operated as racialized confinement sites for Black students. The use of exclusionary discipline policies in American schools has become increasingly prevalent over the last thirty years. Several exclusionary disciplinary mechanisms include referrals, suspensions, expulsions, and arrests. According to the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) (2018), a path leads from the schoolhouse to the jailhouse. This path is the school-to-prison pipeline (Alexander, 2010). While all students are subject to surveillance, Black students are more likely to be monitored and punished by school authorities. As a part of the American political, economic and social culture, institutions like prisons and schools are authorized to discipline and punish students. The choice of punishment is used specifically for Black students to reproduce and execute structural norms, which in part are white supremacist, heteronormative, cis-gendered, and patriarchal (Wun, 2017). Understanding American penal systems as a means by which bodies are enclosed and deprived of freedom, Sojoyner (2013) explains that schools have a long history of confining Black bodies beyond creating the current prison system. While all students are vulnerable to school discipline, Black students, in particular, feel and are targeted but attempt to resist this treatment.

Drawing from this, Sojoyner (2013) contends that American schools have historically reproduced policies and practices of prisons that perpetually subject Black students to surveillance and violence. Discipline data of Black students' highlight how being at school is like living under confinement: always watched, criminalized, and punished (Wun, 2015). These forms of policing and surveillance are thereby normalized (Meiners, 2010). School discipline researchers have reported the disproportionate rates of overrepresented Black youth in school discipline data. Hartman's (1997) theory of the "afterlife of slavery" and how Black people are positioned as captives highlight how school discipline policies help to construct the conditions of captivity for Black youth. According to Dillon (2012), the afterlife of slavery is characterized by: The emptiness left by slavery's regime of unimaginable violence and terror, the nothingness left by the deaths of 60 million or more. Even as slavery's afterlife is crushing, visible and pervasive, it also looks like dust floating in the air. In other words, slavery's mark on the now manifests as the prison, as poverty, as policing technologies; it emerges in insurance ledgers and in the organization of urban space (p. 121).

School discipline policies, which are integral to U.S. policing technologies, create conditions of captivity for Black youth. According to Wun (2015), as captives, Black students are perpetually watched but are simultaneously denied access to their humanity, including rights and privileges over their lives and bodies. They are under constant surveillance.

Hartman (1997) argues that our current period is affected by a long history of anti-Blackness in which Black bodies are structurally and perpetually subject to premature death and ongoing captivity. Black bodies, she continues, are denied access to self-defense, privacy, or autonomy. She also wrote the following over twenty years ago and nothing has changed:

“Black lives are still imperiled and devalued by a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago. This afterlife of slavery skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration and impoverishment”

(p. 6).

Americans can find further evidence of this quote through the high rates of police brutality and assault against Black students and the Black community. Wun (2015) points out that through slavery and its afterlife, Black lives are constructed as captive, confined, and subject to the whims of the master's fantasies. The continuation of slavery and its afterlife is built in the foundation of the controlling and punitive discipline policies to address "disobedience" and "defiance" that funnel Black students into the prison system.

## CHAPTER III: REVIEW OF LITERATURE: RESTORING AND RE-CENTERING RACE

As noted in Chapter One, the purpose of this case study is to explore how Black student populations are affected by discipline disparities and Restorative Practices impact on racial inequities in pk-12 schools. In this chapter, I provide an extensive discussion of the ideological impetus of restorative justice from which restorative practices emerged, and the circumstances in which schools embraced these approaches. A search of relevant articles, books, and reports forms the foundation of this literature review. The phenomenon of restoring and re-centering race in black education categorizes the reviewed literature into four general areas: discussing the history and impact of race and schooling in the United States, discipline disparities of Black students, history of diversity-driven alternative discipline school reforms, and Restorative Practices. This categorization allows for the literature to be examined and reviewed within a structured context. Critical Race Theory (CRT) will serve as the underlying theoretical and analytical framework.

### **Black Education**

#### **Race and Racism**

No one in civilized society likes the term or wants the label of racist. However, the case may be, racism persists. It is real and tenacious (Memmi, 2000). Bonilla- Silva (2012) says that few whites in the United States claim to be racist except for overtly announced white supremacist organizations. The failure to understand racism is a structure, not an event, (Kauanui, 2016) gives way to Colorblindness ideology. It is not uncommon to hear white people state; they do not see any color, just people. Bonilla-Silva (2001) calls this new form of racism Colorblindness grounded in the belief that race does not matter. Colorblindness is an ideology

that reproduces racial inequality and permits racism to be covert and blurry, allowing white people not to sound racist (Bonilla-Silva, 2015).

The explicit language and practice of racism have given way to a discourse of Colorblindness. Some white people assert that people of color, especially Blacks, are responsible for whatever race problems or barriers they have in this country. According to Bonilla-Silva, 2006, Colorblind ideology grounds itself in abstract liberalism, one of four frames of Colorblindness. In this frame, white people believe Black people experience no issues or barriers other than themselves in gaining equal access to education, housing, and employment. Therefore, no special programs or supports such as Affirmative Action are required. The history of slavery and oppression are conveniently ignored and overlooked. This white supremacist mentality supports the narrative that Black folks need to let go of the past, work hard, and complain less about racial discrimination as if that is the answer to a better life in America for Black people. "This claim requires ignoring the multiple institutional and state-sponsored practices behind segregation and being unconcerned about these practices' negative consequences for minorities" (Bonilla-Silva, 2006. p. 28). CRT asserts that the law operates and ensures the maintenance of white privilege and challenges the dominant ideology of white privilege because race and racism are at the center of social injustice (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Tatum (2017) reaffirms that racism is still alive and is part of the American fabric as baseball and apple pie. Quite simply, race matters.

### **Impact of Racism**

If one is paying attention and watching and listening, the legacy of racism is brutal to see, and all are affected by it. The impact of the brutal murder of George Floyd at the hands of the Minnesota police officer will leave a bloodstain on the American fabric. It is evident in watching

the media coverage of murders involving Blacks, such as the Trayvon Martin shooting. The Ferguson, MO debacle in the case against the Ferguson police trial for the killing of Michael Brown. Social media covered the Charleston church massacre of a Black congregation that took the lives of nine people. The Sandra Bland case, Walter Scott trial, and Eric Garner choked to death by police. The shooting death of 12-year-old Tamir Rice as he was playing with a toy gun. The death of Freddie Gray after he was in custody and the numerous school resource officers caught on video using extreme violence and force in the guise of discipline towards unarmed black students, male and female. Some people still insist that racism is a thing of the past.

The issue with seeing and understanding racism lies within folks not being able to agree on the definition of racism. Bonilla-Silva (2014) states that whites and people of color cannot agree on racial matters because they conceive racism differently. For whites, racism is prejudice. For most Blacks and people of color, racism is systemic or institutionalized. Olua (2018) states, Racism is a prejudice against someone based upon race when systems of power reinforce those prejudices. When we reduce racism down to prejudice based upon race, we inaccurately reduce issues of race in America to a battle for the hearts and minds of individual racists instead of seeing racists, racist behaviors, and racial oppression as part of a larger system (p. 27).

The design of the educational system is to protect white supremacist structures such as thinking, believing, and behaving under the control of white people. The policies and practices centered around whiteness disadvantage Blacks and other students of color. Schools were built and designed under a lens of biases and stereotypes created by a history that legitimizes white-centered education. Laws governing schools were passed to further advance the white-centered education system.

The passing of Compulsory education laws across America began in 1852. Its goal to teach poor immigrant students to be good workers by learning how to be obedient and civilized according to white standards (Bandiera, Mohnen, Rasul, & Viarengo, 2018). Before compulsory education laws, school attendance was strictly voluntary until the increase of immigrants into America. Society bought this notion of race to the point that we have socially funded race across all of society in the U.S. Social Funding of race has played a significant role in schooling in curriculum, instruction, and classroom management. Despite much scholarly and public discussion, educators and policymakers struggle to undo long-held assumptions about race and how it functions. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) look at race from the perspective of a public commodity that the society "funds" to make it seem natural and intractable. Race fully funded by society is not to describe a financial investment, but rather the total investment of society in the social construct of race. America's present cultural model, or system of whiteness, relies so heavily on race as a sense-making category in everything done. Before people think about their racial identification in American society, culture sends explicit and implicit messages about race Ladson-Billings, (1997). Even though scientists refute any biological claims to race being a natural existence, society continues to fund race in economics, political, social, and cultural realms. Thereby allowing racist, oppressive, and white hegemonic ideals to permeate the culture of America. These racist beliefs, directly and indirectly, impact our schools and the Black students who attend them.

Today, even though Black children have access to free PK-12 public education, there are characteristics of schools that fund race in ways that solidifies race and the social responses to it (Ladson-Billings, 2017). Schools and political parties have recruited, created, and used language that never includes the word race or anything that remotely resembles the word race, but that

language signals that race is the center of the issue. The explicit race language may have removed, but because we have so profoundly funded race in our society and our schools, educators can talk about it without talking about it. For example, educators use school desegregation, forced bussing, neighborhood schools, social engineering, school choice, and vouchers to mask the severe problem that race and racism represent in society. Schools promote a curriculum of violence that implies that Black people are not worthy of respect or value. Educators reinforce the media depiction linking Blacks to violence. When education systems do not discuss the attacks or brutal killings of unarmed Blacks there is a confirmation to all students that Black voices are not heard nor essential in the metanarrative narrative of Black lives in America. When Black students' views are featured, they are marginalized and promote whiteness, thereby signaling to all students that it is perfectly natural to fear Black students (Cridland-Hughes, 2015). The idealistic collective effort that resulted in *Brown v. The Board of Education's* decision did not foresee the unethical, political or immoral impact on America's beliefs on social injustice in academics and school knowledge about black history and culture (King, 2006).

The curriculum reflects white supremacist ideologies embedded within schools and how schools operate. When calling out the curriculum for endorsing racism, (Apple, 1990), it is not uncommon for some white people to refuse to acknowledge the beliefs and attitudes that justify societal oppression and inequity that manifests in deficit thinking about Black people. They become defensive and deflect their sense of discomfort by explaining away their experiences of white privilege (King, 1991). King (1997) further explains that only white people have the choice to go through a transformative shift in their worldview. This shift helps them recognize they can easily see the disadvantage of others without seeing the advantage of their own lives

because they are blind to their privilege. After all, although it is not named culture, there is a socialization of white culture (National Association of School Psychologists, 2016). This socialization is taught and accepted in school as the dominant culture to compare all other cultures. Therefore, as King (1991) believes, teachers must provide an alternative context of meaning within which students can critically analyze the social purpose of schooling. Students need authentic and transformative emotional growth experiences in school that allows for self-reflection. Students also need to understand the history of schools and the role schools play in inequities.

### **White Supremacy and White Teachers**

According to Banks (2004), the statistics show that by the year 2050, public schools will be primarily of students of color, yet a majority of White women teachers will teach these students. This cause for alarm is because it means the implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy is at risk of extinction or the very least challenged (Gay, 2000; T. Howard, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Critical race theorists would say those white teachers have had little to no experience with other racialized people, and may use stereotypes to guide their interactions and perceptions. Schools will continue to be a battleground promoting whitewashed curriculum valuing only whites and their version of history (Cridland-Hughes & King, 2015).

"Just as every army is composed of different tactical positions in order to secure or conquer a territory, so does whiteness consist of its foot soldiers, officers, and generals who perform different functions but whose allegiance to whiteness is not the question. Concerning white women, although they may not call the shots, they often pull the trigger" (Leonardo & Boas 2013, p. 315).

Research is showing that as the number of Black students increases in our classrooms, so does the number of white women teachers leading those classrooms (Feistritzer, 2011). Understanding white people's roles in whiteness maintenance better helps educators, policymakers, and Black people understand how the educational arena is an ongoing racial battleground. The chosen curriculum tacitly kills the human soul of the Black male child while simultaneously teaching violence from the curriculum taught (Leonardo & Boas, 2013). Cridland-Hughes and King (2015) state that schools welcome and embrace a curriculum of violence. If the instructional practices do not deviate from the traditional curriculum, teachers and administrators endorse teaching violence. When educators stick only to a white Eurocentric patriarchal curriculum, it demonstrates their agreement to continue to march in the white racial army. They uphold the racial legacy of white supremacy and perpetuate the attack on the psychological and spiritual deaths of Black learners. However, such psychological and spiritual deaths are not new (Dumas, 2016). During segregated Black schooling, Blacks were among those who were victims of the white racial army. Presently, the violent attacks continue in that Black students and other students of color attend schools that fail to meet their academic and social needs, which would enable them to contribute positively to this "democratic" society (Boutte, 2015). The violence continuing to traumatize students also extends to whose culture is valued in schools.

### **Discipline Disparities of Black Students**

The white racial army's tactics are also evident in the disparities prevalent in exclusionary discipline practices such as out-of-school suspensions. Many public schools use suspensions as a form of punishment under the guise of school discipline with Black students to address behaviors by removing Black students from school for as many as ten days for behaviors such as non-

compliance and fighting, as a normalized response to students labeled with challenging behaviors (Hemphill, Plenty, Herrenkohl, Toumbourour, & Catalano, 2013; Losen 2011). Black students do not commit more serious offenses than their white peers. However, Black students experience greater exclusionary discipline, leading to the role race and racism play in school discipline (Gibson, Wilson, Haight, Kayama, & Marshall, 2014). Black students receive out-of-school suspensions at a rate of 1.8 times that of a white student, with Black boys being 3.5 times more likely to be suspended (Carter, Fine, & Russell, 2014; Finn & Servoss, 2013). Discipline disparities for Black students directly correlate racism in America's history with slavery and Jim Crow (Carter, Skiba, Arredondo, & Pollock, 2014). History is filled with unjustified hate towards Blacks and shaped Americans' perception with a false and negative narrative of who is safe and dangerous, leading to the overuse of exclusionary discipline of Black students. Exclusionary discipline such as suspensions correlates to the school to prison pipeline. The school-to-prison pipeline centers on schools' policies and practices to remove students from the school in response to discipline infractions that have a strong probability of leading students into the juvenile system (Council on Crime and Justice, 2008). It is not difficult to conclude that school discipline is not disciplining; it is punishment through power and control.

Foucault's (1982) theories of power, discipline, and punishment emphasize school discipline in the educational pipeline as a tool of containment that supports school-to-prison pipelines for Black students. Drawing upon Foucault's tenets of power, discipline, and punishment theory, Dancy (2014), discusses the perception of Black children in their educational journey from pre-K through high school that scripts them out of childhood humanity. Adults that script Black students out of childhood cannot view them as children. Instead, they are referred to as sinister, intentionally defiant, thereby stripping Black children of any innocence people

perceive in children (Ferguson, 2000). Ferguson also argues that the displacement of their careless behavior in Black children by images of adult acts of theft gives power to who is dangerous narrative. Regarding natural and usual naughtiness in white children becomes inherent viciousness and insubordination that must be under control in Black children, thus validating strong discipline policies in schools.

Schools kill the individuality of students by teaching them to respond in rote and unoriginal ways. Education is a form of disciplinary power enforcing and maintaining social order (Foucault, 1980). Hierarchical observations, normalizing judgment, and examination, according to Foucault (1980), all serve to control, monitor and classify individuals. Schools utilize hierarchical observations such as surveillance; normalizing judgments, the standards used to sanction and police the body around behavior, speech, time, and sexuality; and the examination tool to assess whether subjects deviate from the norm and then document the judgment. Deviation from the norm is subject to punishment or discipline. They are rewarding those with the ability to stay within the rule. Foucault (1980) found the examination to be the most crucial instrument of disciplinary power because it combines hierarchical observation with normalizing judgment in schools. These norms fuel the need to develop more and more discipline power and policies under the guise of safe and orderly learning environments.

### **Criminalization**

James Ford (2016) says this discipline disparity is not new. He surmises that since the 1970s, coinciding with the advent of widespread desegregation efforts, the racial gap in suspensions has been trending upward. This trend led to adopting zero-tolerance initiatives that demand heavy-handed approaches to the slightest disciplinary infractions. PK-12 public schools across the nation hire and staff School Resource officers, SROs, as an intervention and response

to the increase in student disciplinary infractions caused by adopting zero-tolerance policies and practices in schools (Kim & Geronimo, 2009). These policies impact Black students around minor infractions, including lateness and dress code violations with suspensions, expulsions, and arrests, instead of the customary trip to the principal's office (ACLU, 2013). There is a prevailing belief that Black students are disciplined more because of cultural deficiencies at home and a lack of respect for authority. This belief is an authoritarian discipline mindset fixed in a slavery ownership mentality of orders obeyed without explanation.

Michael Foucault (1997) argues that schools choose confinement of select groups to control or isolate socially undesirable. The overuse of in-school suspension (ISS) rooms is an example of confinement in American schools. ISS is a form of punishment (Losen, 2011) with students sitting in a room isolated not interacting with the other students doing homework with no counseling. When looking at disaggregated discipline data in Sundown District, 67% of the 31% student population receiving an in-house suspension for minor infractions were Black. Research shows a difference between the culture of schools, dominated by white teachers and the homes of Black students (Noguera, 2008; Solomon, 1992). Those in charge of creating and implementing policies in schools weaponize the system of oppression and create an environment that views Black students as pathological or criminal.

Pathologizing is mental health terminology that does not celebrate nor honor differences but treats differences as deficits that lead to discriminatory practices and policies (Horowitz & Wakefield, 2007; Shields, 2004). The result is the criminalization of youth, specifically Black youth (Denby & Curtis, 2013). Rios (2011) describes the criminalization of Black students as a process by which adults view the cultural and behavioral differences of Black students as criminally deviant. According to Rios, Black students are routinely monitored, threatened,

policed, labeled, and punished, particularly by the police and educators, as part of a youth control complex that criminalizes everyday youth behaviors. Kupchik (2010) argues that teachers view Black students as more aggressive. This perception leads to the contemporary forms of school discipline such as zero-tolerance policies, surveillance cameras, security guards, and uniformed police.

### **Zero-Tolerance**

The development of disciplinary policies and codes of conduct that generally are distributed to students, parents, and teachers came about after the signing of the No Child Left behind Act of 2001 (Fenning, Pulaski, Gomez, Morello, Maciel, Maroney, Schmidt, Dahlvig, McArdle, Morello, Wilson, Horwitz, & Maltese, 2012). These policies and Codes of Conduct describe the responsibilities of all students and the specific consequences of students' misbehaviors. While school districts may vary in their particular disciplinary procedures, most have zero-tolerance policies that list predetermined outcomes (Klein, 2014). Gibson, Wilson, Haight, Kayama, & Marshall (2014) and the American Academy of Pediatrics (2013) criticize this zero-tolerance policy as a one-punishment fits all approach. This approach may be suitable or justifiable for severe offenses such as bringing guns to school. Gibson et al. (2014) further posit that severe consequences, including suspensions, are imposed on students for relatively minor school behaviors such as disrespect.

Zero-tolerance policies lead to increased student surveillance through metal detectors, locker searches, and school resource officers in urban schools. Consequently, despite the need for schools to institute safety measures for protection against school mass shootings, Black students are disproportionately affected by zero-tolerance policies as compared with their white peers. Black children are suspended two to three times higher and, similarly, overrepresented in

office referrals, expulsions, and corporal punishment (Skiba, 2014). The safety measures allowed under zero-tolerance policies used by schools criminalize students of color. A challenge for educators is equitably safeguarding forms of discipline that are justifiable with practices and policies that are academically, socially, and emotionally punitive to Black children (National Association of School Psychologists, 2018). Ultimately, schools have become environments where there is little to no tolerance for what deems unacceptable forms of behavior in the classroom. The use of zero-tolerance policies in schools extends beyond the original intent of keeping school weapons and drug-free (Cornell & Mayer, 2010). Including school exclusion for student behaviors that previously would have received lesser consequences, such as mimicking a gun with one's fingers (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008). With zero-tolerance, exclusionary practices have become a first consequence instead of a last resort measure (Maag, 2012).

Some school districts are looking towards restorative justice practices and turning away from zero-tolerance policies because zero-tolerance policies, which criminalize many minor and highly subjective behaviors, have not demonstrated effectiveness in reducing undesired behavior. Unfortunately, movement away from zero-tolerance policies is not predominantly the case, and these policies serve as an introduction to the criminal justice system disproportionately affecting students of color.

### **Response to Zero-Tolerance**

The zero-tolerance policy was a promising strategy for violence and was the only option for maintaining safe school climates conducive to learning (American Psychology Association, 2008). However, in recent years, numerous research studies and several government panels have critically examined violence prevention strategies. In Illinois, a Senate Bill presented in response

to the necessity of an alternative to zero-tolerance disciplinary actions. The American Psychology Association (2008) found zero-tolerance policies to be controversial and posed some degree of risk (e.g., lost educational opportunity for those removed from school).

Recommendations and alternate strategies included bullying prevention, threat assessment, and restorative justice.

The Illinois Senate Bill 100 and Alternatives to Exclusionary Discipline law, sponsored by Illinois State Senator Kimberly Lightford and State Representative Will Davis (Wilkie, 2015), requires schools to exhaust and document all other means of intervention and eliminating the automatic zero-tolerance response of expelling students or suspending them for more than three days. The Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights (2015) reports Illinois as a leader in the nation with wide disparities between suspended black students and their white peers. The report also reported that Chicago Public Schools, during the 2012-13 school year, issued suspensions for 32 of every 100 black students, compared to just five of every 100 white students (2015). Senate Bill 100 became law in September of 2016, launching a closer look at restorative practices in Illinois schools.

Although it seems logical to remove disruptive students from schools automatically makes school environments a better and safe place for the remaining students. However, exclusionary punishment will not improve the penalized student's school behavior or those who observe that punishment; the available evidence consistently contradicts these beliefs. Zero-tolerance has not proven to change school climate or improve school safety because suspensions and expulsions are not an effective means of changing school behavior. They intensify Black overrepresentation in school punishments (Dickerson, 2014). The change in the relationship between education and juvenile justice, zero tolerance shifted the intended function of discipline

from inexpensive actions in school settings to the highly costly processes of arrest and incarceration. In so doing, zero-tolerance policies created unintended consequences for Black students, Black families, and Black communities in particular. These consequences led to the need for further discipline and classroom policy reforms.

In summary, this section highlights the role and impact of race and racism in education and the schooling of Blacks. Discipline disparities and zero-tolerance policies are pathways to continuing a system of oppression resulting in pathologizing Black students as criminals. In the next section, there will be a discussion of the history of education reform on the response to schools becoming more Black. At the same time, the teaching staff grew increasingly white, using exclusionary discipline and the impact of both on Black students. The reform models include the framework centered on a one-size-fits-all approach of Multi-Tiered System of Supports, Positive Behavior Intervention System, Social and Emotional Supports, and Restorative Practices.

### **History of Diversity Driven School Reform**

Education reform has a rich history in American schools. Historically, confidence in education has created one of the most comprehensive public education systems in the world (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). The authors further argued that public opinion about success and failure in education reflects the general confidence in American institutions. History tells us that the overall public opinion of school was highly positive from the 1940s to the 1950s. However, as the faces of the students that had access to free public education began to change, confidence in school began to decline steadily, and opinions of public education continued to decline year after year.

Public-school enrollment in the US has undergone a dramatic racial transition since the late 1960s. Historically, in American schools across the country, the demographic has been 80% white students and 15% of Black students, and 5% other (Orfield & Lee, 2007). As a result of these numbers, most classes in schools are from the white supremacist perspective. The present demographic includes 49.5% of white, a decrease from 58% in 2004. 16% of Black students and the fastest-growing group is the Latino population, which now makes up 25%, and the remaining 9% comprised of other minoritized groups such as Asian, American Indian, Alaskan Native, or two or more races (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2017). The shift in school demographics and school desegregation has led to school reform efforts across the nation. The lack of preparation on the part of school districts, teacher preparation programs, and effective leadership of these dramatic changes that America's schools are in distress and failing millions of students of color. America's schools, not designed for students of color, specifically Blacks. Racism was at the nation's peak at the establishment of desegregation mandates.

As schools became increasingly standardized during the 1970s, state departments and policy leaders, such as the US Bureau of Education, controlled everything from policy to quality of buildings, curriculum, school terms, and teacher qualifications (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Consequently, minoritized groups, students with disabilities, and children living in poverty were left behind. However, in the eyes of white America, schools were making steady progress toward success. The 1983 commission's report, *A Nation at Risk*, found K-12 public schools inadequate throughout the country. Educational foundations viewed as mediocrity threatened the nation's youth (Iorio, 2011, p. 19). Furthermore, the laws that passed during this time required higher standards and expectations for all levels of students. Consequently, the notion of "progress" and

"regress" in education became subject to opinion and, arguably, politically charged (Iorio, 2011; Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

School desegregation brought on a whole new set of issues that the Supreme Court had not considered, including racial reform. Segregation tainted the US reputation abroad, and the limited opportunities for blacks that resulted from it meant fewer human resources available to defend the nation and extend its interests. Critical Race Theory scholars state white interests around desegregation converged with Black interests for three political reasons. Firstly, *Brown vs. The Board of Education* not only overturned *Plessy vs. Ferguson*, but it had a broader political impact that white America does not teach. *Brown vs. The Board of Education* also helped bring about America's credibility due to the damage segregation brought upon the United States and its principle that all men are created equal. White America was concerned with looking ethical and portraying equity to outsiders rather than living ethically and equitably at home. Second, *Brown* overturned *Plessy v. Ferguson*. It also provided a much-needed reassurance to the American Black soldiers that the false idea of equality and freedom that America portrayed during WWII might be accurate. This false narrative was nothing more than a ploy to motivate the Black soldiers to keep fighting for a country and its ideals that would never be the Black soldier or his family's reality. Finally, whites in the Deep South realized that segregation was a barrier to becoming industrialized and self-interest profit-makers (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

As with the abolition of slavery, whites understood that the desegregation of schools was the moral thing to do. However, unfortunately, it was not enough to bring about the much-needed racial reform. The outcry of the poor whites around this landmark decision was loud because they were afraid of the decision by Chief Justice Taney in the *Dred Scott* case that Blacks had no

rights that whites were required to respect was being undone (Ladson-Billings, 2009). They were concerned with who would be of lower status than them since they were losing their right to use and enjoy their privilege to exclude. History shows, Blacks were now transforming from property to citizens. An impactful quote by Ralph Ellison (1953/1995) states:

The white American seeks to resolve the dilemma arising between his democratic beliefs and certain anti-democratic practices, between his acceptance of the sacred democratic belief that all men are created equal and his treatment of every tenth man as though he were not ... Perhaps the object of the stereotype is not so much to crush the Negro as to console the white man (pp. 28, 41).

Lensmire (2011) states, racial stereotypes enable white people to continue believing in democracy, even as they betray it. Therefore, white people need stereotypes of people of color to relieve the strain of participating in and benefiting from a society that disregards a flawed founding principle that all people are created equal. The same democracy is referenced and utilized when it benefits social power, such as American schooling. The American school system operates under controlling practices and policies brought about by outside pressures whereby teachers and administrators treat our students of color as if they own them.

American history illustrates that the implementation of educational policies is dependent mainly upon the power structures of the external environment, such as federal and state agencies. Notably, PK-12 institutions will implement procedures for the sole purpose of maintaining legitimacy with the external environment (Powell & DeMaggio, 1991). Hanson (2001) argued that legitimacy is the ultimate driving force behind schools conforming to standards, rules, expectations, and external pressures from the environment. Three leading scholars in institutional theory stated that schools' organization is not to accomplish instructional goals but to maintain a

legitimate status of a school. In order to reach accreditation status, schools must conform to professionally specified, legally mandated structural rules. When anything threatens schools' legal status, panic evokes (Meyer, Scott & Deal, 1992).

Spending time and energy to improve public schools' academic and instructional aspects would eliminate the need to fight to maintain legal status. School systems face pressure from stakeholders to adopt certain structures and follow specific procedures to be considered legitimate. Obtaining and maintaining legitimacy is a complex issue due to the diverse characteristics of the different stakeholders whose demands they try to meet at the expense of meeting every student's needs that enter the school doors (Feito, González, & González, 2019). Organizations, such as schools, selectively adopt externally defined goals and processes to establish legitimization in the eyes of society by trying to gain societal confidence doing what the major stakeholders on the outside expect them to do. Through this legitimization, schools justify a claim on societal resources and protect themselves against attacks on their policies, practices, and procedures. When educational organizations can argue that they are doing what the state requires, what the best research indicates, what the professional societies expect, what the courts require, and so on, there are rewards for their conformity (Hanson, 2001).

### **Intersection of Race and Property Rights**

Although in 1954, the Supreme Court's decision in the *Brown v. Board* case to end state-mandated school segregation of public schools, American schools remain segregated, and most Black children still attend public schools that are both racially divided and inferior (Bell, 1980; Ladson-Billings, 2009). Following slavery and subjugation (Harris, 1995), whiteness became a racialized privilege. A status in which white racial identity provided the basis for allocating private and public societal benefits. Property of whiteness was ratified and legitimated in law as

a type of status property. Even with the overturning of legal segregation, whiteness as property continues to serve as a barrier to effective change as racial classification operates to protect entrenched power. The concept of whiteness as property continues with today's perceptions of racial identity and the law's misperception of group identity. Race and property rights intersect CRT scholars discuss America as a nation designed and developed on property rights (Bell, 1987; Harris, 1993). Ladson-Billings (2009) makes the connection to property issues. She points out that history tells us that only white males were property owners, and only property owners could be citizens. With the prerequisite to ownership connecting to citizenship, only those who owned the country could make decisions about it. It is the foundation of property rights that makes the civil rights legislation ineffective and slow-moving. Blacks represented a conundrum to the system because not only did they not have any civil rights because they were not white and owned no property, but they construct as property to be owned by others. Through their actions and sense of entitlement, whites know they possess a property that Blacks do not—possessing these rights grants aspects of citizenship not available to others. Harris (1993) states:

“Property functions as whiteness, ... rights of disposition, rights to use and enjoyment reputation and status property, and the absolute rights to exclude; make the American dream of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” a more likely and attainable reality for Whites as citizens. This reality also is more likely to engender feelings of loyalty and commitment to a nation that works in the interests of Whites. Conversely, Blacks, aware that they will never possess this ultimate property, are less sanguine about U.S. citizenship” (p. 1731).

This function of whiteness makes white privilege so prevalent because it causes many indignities such as being invisible, voiceless, or feeling of having no rights, which students of color face regularly in their classrooms and schools. These daily indignities take a toll on our Black students. When these indignities are skimmed over in the classes that purport to develop students into citizens, it is no wonder students blow off classroom discourse. Ladson-Billings (1995) asks, how are students expected to deconstruct rights in a world of no rights? Instead of looking into why students of color, particularly Black students, are experiencing so many discipline issues in our schools' hegemonic reform after reform designed and implemented to fix our Black children. If our Black children do not conform, there will be sanctions for the schools. Schools are now being monitored and openly rated based on their discipline data.

According to Miner, VI (2008), a critical race theory perspective would suggest that whites' ability, will, and fortitude to negotiate and make difficult decisions in providing more equitable policies and practices in schools specifically. The need to negotiate means they might lose aspects of their lives that are important to them, including their power, privilege, social status, etymological status, and their need to replicate the same benefits to their children and future generations. This loss would genuinely cause turmoil because their property of whiteness may depreciate (Harris, 1993; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). There is indeed a tension in the idea that schools, through their organization, structure, and curriculum, both formal and hidden, maintain hegemony by instituting students to the interest of the dominant group. Then students are encouraged and instructed, both explicitly and implicitly, to make those interests their own (Jay, 2003). This idea relates to curriculum representing a form of intellectual property secured to real property or available resources in schools (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). The

intellectual property argument suggests that those with access to the better property are entitled to and experience better schools (Lynch, 2006).

### **Stereotype Threat**

According to the US Government Accountability Office, GAO (2018), who gets disciplined and why is complex. Studies reviewed suggest that implicit bias, stereotypes, or unconscious associations about people on the part of the teachers and staff may cause judgment of students' behaviors differently based upon the students' race and sex. These same teachers and staff have the discretion to make case-by-case decisions about discipline and the form of punishment in response to student behavior, such as disobedience, defiance, and classroom disruption. The GAO (2018) reports show that these decisions can result in certain groups of students disciplined more harshly than others. Further, the studies found the types of offenses that Black children receiving punishment for based upon school officials' interpretation of the behavior. For example, studies find Black girls are disproportionately disciplined for biased understandings of actions, such as disobedience and disruptive behavior (Hines & Andrews, 2017). One study, in particular, used eye-tracking technology to show that, among other things, teachers gaze longer at Black boys than other children in the classroom when looking for challenging behavior based on video clips (GAO, 2018). A stereotype threat (Steele, 2009) is a situational threat or a threat in the air that affects the members of any racial group about whom the negative stereotype exists. Not just in the area of academia but also in social and emotional areas displayed in behavior. Beginning with Freud in psychology and Cooley and Mead in sociology, through long exposures to negative stereotypes about one's self and their group, these members of the prejudiced against groups will often internalize the negative stereotypes, and the resulting sense of inadequacy and inferiority becomes a part of their personality (Steele, 2009;

Brill, 1938). To be fair and transparent, to experience stereotype threat, one does not have to believe the stereotype nor believe that it is veritable to oneself. James M. Jones (1997), a well-known Black social psychologist describes his thinking; when he goes to the ATM and a woman is making a transaction, he thinks about whether she will fear he may rob her. Although he has no such intention, he concerns putting her at ease. He concludes, maybe he cannot, and maybe she has no such expectation. Nevertheless, it goes through his mind.

Jones felt a stereotype threat in this situation, much like many Black students in our schools, even though he did not believe that the stereotype characterized him. However, this does not make it any less of a life-shaping force. Jones felt a stereotype threat in this situation, much like many Black students in our schools, even though he did not believe that the stereotype characterized him. However, this does not make it any less of a life-shaping force. These are the narratives and conversations needed to address the discipline disparities and racism prevalent in our nation's schools to bring about racial reform. Edward Taylor (2009) surmises that this will not happen because whites live in a stereotype threat-free world they do not understand. Their exposure to people of color can trigger powerful emotions that range from denial to anger to defensiveness and sadness. The reality is that skin color profoundly affects the treatment of people, and it shapes the teaching of people to think and feel about American society and causes a division. This reality of this teaching is so prevalent that the decision to generalize from this division is valid (Patricia Williams, 1991). Generally, most CRT scholars challenge the experiences of whites as the standard (Calmore, 1995). Most critical race theorists believe the majority's mindset is the significant barrier to racial reform (Delgado, 1994). Racial reform is buried deeply in the educational reform policies and legislation. For example, Dudziak (1988) examined the political context in which Brown was argued and found evidence that the

desegregation ruling likely motivated by foreign policy concerns, not what was morally correct for Blacks. The US was concerned with upholding an image as a model of democracy. The US Justice Department filed an amicus brief asserting that desegregation was in the national interest when there was no end to segregation in US education (Taylor, 2009). Discrimination and discipline disparity and the protection of civil rights in our nation's schools is still a significant concern.

### **Forced Discipline Reform**

The Education's Office for Civil Rights and Justice's Civil Rights is responsible for enforcing several civil rights laws. These laws protect students from discrimination based on predetermined characteristics such as race, color, national origin, sex, and religion in public schools (Civil Rights Data Collection, 2013-14). As part of their responsibilities, both agencies investigate the response to possible discrimination complaints or reports. The Education Office may withhold federal funds from schools if the school is determined to violate the civil rights laws. There have been two major recently enacted laws related to school discipline: Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and the Child Care and Development Block Grant Act of 2014 (CCDBG). ESSA, enacted in December 2015, allows Title I program requirements to permit states' accountability systems to use multiple indicators of success. The measures include school climate and safety. ESSA policy amended the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESSA, 2016). It authorizes the Student Support and Academic Enrichment Program in which school districts may also use grant funding to design and implement a locally tailored plan to reduce exclusionary discipline practices in elementary and secondary schools. Schools may also allow the use of funding to expand access to school-based mental health services and counseling.

The Child Care and Development Block Grant, CCDBG Act of 2014 permits states to use specified funds to support child-care workers' training and professional development.

Professional activities such as behavior management strategies and training promote positive social and emotional development and reduce challenging school behaviors, including reducing expulsions of young children for those school behaviors. Nowhere in these two laws is the need to eradicate racism in our schools to address the discipline disparities mentioned or alluded to in school reform efforts. Data exposes Black students, boys, and students with disabilities are disproportionately disciplined in PK-12 public schools, according to the analysis of Education's most recent CRDC data. This pattern of disproportionate discipline persisted regardless of the type of disciplinary action. Across each disciplinary action, Black students, boys, and students with disabilities experienced excessive levels of discipline. Black students were particularly overrepresented among students suspended from school, received corporal punishment, or had a school-related arrest. For example, Black students represented 15.5 percent of all public-school students and accounted for 39 percent of students suspended from school, an overrepresentation of about 23 percentage points (GAO, 2018). Differences in the discipline were unusually significant between Black and white students. There were approximately 17.4 million more white students than Black students attending K-12 public schools in 2013-14, nearly 176,000 more Black students than white students suspended from school that school year. These alarming statistics on discipline disparities and schools sanctioned that alternative discipline models and reforms are prevalent.

School discipline policies based on a zero-tolerance framework have not reduced suspensions or expulsions as initially intended (National Association of School Psychologists, 2018). These policies have resulted in more students excluded from the classroom due to reactive

disciplinary action (Skiba, 2014). According to Bernstein (2014), these policies increase the educational achievement gap and negatively impact students of color. Schools are asking what they can do to prevent exclusionary disciplinary actions such as suspensions and expulsions?

### **Alternative Discipline Reform Models Used**

Evidence that exclusionary discipline is harmful and that students face persistent discipline disparities by gender and race spurred a wave of reforms (GAO, 2018). These reforms range from federal, state, and local levels to decrease the use of out-of-school suspensions (GAO, 2018). Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) establishes the federal government's approach to discipline. ESSA seeks to curtail the overuse of exclusionary practices that removes students from the classroom. Schools must now show evidence by collecting data on their school discipline reform policies (Gregory & Edwards, 2017). ESSA outlines five strategies for doing so:

1. State agencies will now be required to collect data from school districts on different forms of exclusionary discipline.
2. State education agencies will receive funds to support activities and programs on behavioral interventions.
3. State education agencies will develop plans for supporting school districts in reducing their use of exclusionary discipline.
4. School districts will develop plans for reducing the use of exclusionary discipline.
5. School districts will identify schools with high rates of discipline disaggregated by subgroups (Gregory & Edwards, 2017, p. 120).

Although ESSA does not explicitly mention discipline disparities, a resource guide for the US Department of Education makes the connection between disparate outcomes and some of the ESSA policy provisions, framing racial disparities in the discipline as a civil rights issue. According to Bell (1980), white people may support social justice and equity-based policies and practices while believing that injustice can be remedied effectively without altering the status of white people. Those in a position of power will advance social justice agendas when such advances converge with their self-interests (Castagno & Lee, 2007). People in power are, in theory, supportive of policies and practices that do not oppress and discriminate against others as long as they, those in power, do not have to alter their ways as systems, statuses, and privileges of experiencing life. Interest convergence centralizes the belief that white people will tolerate, advance, and even claim as their own the interests of Black people only when those interests promote the self-interests of whites (Lopez, 2003). This Interest convergence is how and why many alternative discipline reform models are now being researched and implemented in America's schools. Some of those alternative discipline reform models include the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) and Restorative Practices (RP).

### **Multi-Tiered System of Supports**

Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) is a systemic, prevention-focused, data-informed framework or structure for continuous improvement, providing a continuum of support for all learners (MTSS Network, 2019). MTSS is an umbrella term that encompasses both responses to intervention and positive behavioral interventions and supports. Schools are implementing MTSS to simultaneously address both behavioral and academic concerns, recognizing that they often go hand in hand. ESSA briefly mentions MTSS in the context of

helping students with disabilities and English-language Learners access challenging academic standards. There are six fundamental tenets of the MTSS framework: (1) All students are capable of grade-level learning with adequate support; (2) MTSS is rooted in proactivity and prevention; (3) the system utilizes evidence-based practices; (4) decisions and procedures are driven by the school, and student data; (5) the degree of support given to each student based on their needs; and (6) implementation occurs school-wide and requires stakeholder collaboration (MTSS Network, 2019).

Initially framed as Response to Intervention or (RtI), MTSS results from federal education initiatives after the 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), that calls for more alignment between IDEA policy and the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 (Besler, Shillingford, Joe, 2016). MTSS programs in schools provide a more systematic, data-driven, and equitable approach to solving academic and behavioral issues with students. Students are divided into three-tiered categories based on risk and need: Tier 1 serves thriving students in the general education population. Tier 2 serves students who need a slightly more intensive intervention that can be delivered individually and in a small group setting. Tier 3 serves students who require intensive individualized interventions (MTSS Network, 2019). The MTSS process involves universal screening or testing, intervention implementation, and progress monitoring built upon white cultural norms. MTSS is often linked to Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports as additional support for students to combat the problem behaviors.

### **Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports**

Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS): This is a school-wide framework that focuses on positive behavioral expectations. By teaching students what to do instead of what

not to do, the school can focus on the preferred behaviors. PBIS utilizes a systems approach for establishing a continuum of proactive, positive discipline procedures for all students and staff members in all types of school settings (Midwest PBIS Network, 2019). The focus of PBIS is to enhance the school's capacity to prevent disruptive behavior and, where necessary, modify a student's behavior, often within an existing paradigm or school climate of punishment (Morris, 2016). School-wide PBIS establishes the social and behavioral supports needed for all children to achieve social and academic success. PBIS is an approach that defines core elements made through various strategies using core elements at each of a three-tiered prevention approach. Morris (2016) points out in her study of PBIS that the populations included in the studies on PBIS included Black youth. However, the study design did not examine the specific behaviors for which PBIS interventions by tier are determined. Neither were those interventions varied in effectiveness by levels of youth cognition, perceived racial bias, stereotype threat, law enforcement reactivity, or other attribution features that may impact school behaviors. Morris (2016) further discusses the lack of information on how PBIS specifically impacts responses to Black students because PBIS and its outcomes are outliers compared to other conditions associated with disproportionate discipline, exclusion, and marginalization of the youth of color. For example, "implicit bias in school discipline decision making or the impact of a school's structure of dominance on students' structural change or leadership development to reduce the use of exclusionary discipline practices" (p. 228). PBIS is a federally funded intervention. Therefore, there is a more supportive legislative environment for adopting its policy, practice, and philosophy despite the lack of evidence that it directly impacts Black students in schools. It strives to create a cohesive, supportive, and positive social climate for all students by providing early intervention services and unifying resources. PBIS has four central tenets: outcomes,

evidence-based practice, data-based decision making, and systemic change (Sugai & Horner, 2006). PBIS has the backing of policy support and is popular in schools across the nation.

The literature has not been able to resolve three critical issues: (1) making PBIS culturally responsive; (2) facilitating reciprocal and sustained student, family, and community involvement; and (3) addressing disproportionality (Bal, 2017). When PBIS came on the scene a couple of decades ago, its design to be practiced as a school-wide endeavor so that the social benefits of creating a common, shared understanding of desirable school behaviors among school community members. PBIS promotes having great potential as one of the essential innovations in special education in addressing discipline issues and discipline disparities (Kauffman & Landrum, 2006). PBIS implementation decreased general exclusionary discipline practices. The decrease appeared to pertain to the white student population, while Black students remained overrepresented (Vincent & Tobin, 2010). Utley, Kozleski, Smith, and Draper, 2002 noted that much of the research and development of PBIS occurs in suburban, white culture schools. The assumptions about how and who should be involved in developing school-wide discipline systems were connected, predicated upon hegemonic cultural norms intertwined in social and emotional learning competencies.

### **Social and Emotional Learning Framework**

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL): SEL is not considered an alternative to exclusionary discipline but it is considered a discipline reform model or practice to deter negative school behaviors. SEL proposes to enhance students' abilities to deal effectively and ethically with daily tasks and challenges. SEL builds upon the premise that if students can only be mindful and control their anger and outburst, they will learn to collaborate and communicate with others. Then their behavior issues will disappear, leading to decreased discipline disparities

that plague Black students in schools. This mindfulness and trauma-informed practice disguised as yet another equity reform is compelling but shifts the ownership of responsibility away from schools and onto the youth cheated out of equitable opportunities (Gorski, 2019). Social and Emotional Learning focuses on integrating the following five core competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2017). Schools implementing this model claim they are strengthening the SEL program to improve the whole child instead of treating discipline and mental and behavioral health separately by focusing on five key competencies (Gregory & Fergus, 2017).

**Self-awareness** - the ability to understand your own emotions, values, and personal goals

**Social-awareness** - the ability to take the perspective of people with different backgrounds or cultures and to empathize and feel compassion

**Self-management** - includes skills and attitudes that regulate emotions and behaviors.

**Relationship skills** - help establish and maintain healthy interactions among individuals.

**Responsible Decision-making** - provides for the consideration of ethical standards, safety, social norms, and your wellbeing and that of others when making choices about personal behavior and social interactions (pp. 128-130).

As with other discipline and school reforms, SEL based upon hegemonic principles seeped into deficit thinking. Gregory and Fergus (2017) state that discipline reforms that fully embrace SEL as its currently conceptualized will encounter difficulty eliminating disparities for two not-so-apparent reasons. One reason is that the colorblind notions of SEL do not consider power,

privilege, and cultural differences. The second is that prevailing SEL models center on students and not on the adults who interact with them. Student-centered SEL does not consider the school environment, with all its multifaceted oppressive influences, including policies, disciplinary practices, and interactions guided by culturally informed adult and student social and emotional competencies.

Gregory and Fergus (2017) reiterate Bonilla-Silva's argument that "the third feature of Color Blindness ideology, ignoring and minimizing racial differences of people although there are some commonalities across cultures. Color blindness in SEL leads to an unspoken conceptualization of social and emotional competencies based on white socialized ideologies and the idea of commonalities. The five SEL competencies outlined by the CASEL network could be augmented to make them more sensitive to the ways culture, power, and privilege affect schools and students (Gregory & Fergus, 2017). The SEL competencies overlap conceptually with restorative practices that help students correct their behavior, problem-solve, repair harm, learn replacement school behaviors, and restore their good standing. "Schools should consider how students from marginalized groups expected to attain the same SEL competencies as white students, who do not face the constraints imposed by power and privilege" (Gregory & Fergus, 2017, p. 128). Dena Simmons (2019) poses the question are we at risk of bastardizing SEL to the point where SEL loses its potential effectiveness and becomes more harmful for the students we seek to serve? The former Yale educator and current keynote speaker describe that when teaching SEL to Black students without any context, SEL can become inherently problematic. She further declares there is no point in teaching Black children about conflict resolution skills when schools are not talking about the conflicts that exist because of racism or white supremacy. Without that nuance, Simmons says SEL risks turning into "white supremacy with a hug."

Simmons (2019) contends that people's lives are at stake, and so educators have to see beyond the trendiness of SEL. Simmons (2020) describes what she hears and sees as she works and supports educators teaching social and emotional learning as an unfortunate trend among some educators, practitioners and scholars in the SEL field describing students of color behavior before participating in an SEL program. The deficit words describing the students of color include rowdy, misguided, disengaged, and violent. These purposely chosen words highlight the urgency for SEL programs for "these kids," a hidden racialized term. In other words, educators and scholars promote SEL as a sort of savior for the disenfranchised that transforms Black students from being unmotivated, loud, lazy, and uninterested into motivated, enthusiastic about school quiet learners. These claims may not seem to be an issue at the surface level, but scholars and educators must dig deeper beneath the surface.

Simmons (2017) states from a 2011 study of 213 schools, SEL instruction, helped improve students' social and emotional skills, attitudes, and behaviors, and academic performance. Although stories about the impact of SEL may feel hopeful and uplifting to educators and parents, they can also convey subtle messages that harm students inside and outside of the classroom. University of Alabama professor Latrise Johnson (2017) calls one of those subtle messages a failure narrative, suggesting that Black youth need SEL skills more than white children. Black youth would be better off if they would learn to build relationships, utilize more self-control and learn to be calm. The result is that Black students and their teachers internalize the idea that Black students are naturally deficient and in need of a teacher or some intervention to save them from themselves.

## **Restorative Practices**

Restorative Practices (RP) is an alternative intervention or discipline practice that addresses the overuse of punitive discipline practices in schools. Restorative practice comprises various methods ranging from the intervention (after an infraction) to prevention (before an infraction). Restorative practice is the practice of restorative justice, a philosophical approach to crime and wrongdoing that puts harm done, accountability for that harm by the wrongdoer, and repair the harms at the center of the problem solving, involving all the stakeholders in the matter (Thornsborne & Blood, 2013). Restorative practice is an emerging social science that integrates developments from various disciplines and fields. It ties to research, theory, and practice in education, psychology, social work, criminology, sociology, organizational development, and leadership. Restorative Practices has roots in Restorative Justice. The emphasis is on repairing harm and restoring relationships rather than punishing offenders (Zehr, 1990). Restorative Justice originated in the 1970s as mediation or reconciliation between victims and offenders. In 1974 Mark Yantzi, a probation officer, arranged for two teens to meet their victims face-to-face after a vandalism spree and agree to restitution. This incident led to the first victim-offender reconciliation in Kitchener, Ontario, Canada, with support from the local Mennonite Central Committee and collaboration with the local probation department (McCold, 1999). The Office of Victims of Crime (1998) states that this action spread to North America and Europe through the 1980s and 1990s. Restorative Justice mirrors ancient and indigenous practices employed in cultures worldwide, from Native Americans to First Nation Canadians to Africans, Asians, Celts, Hebrew, Arab, and many others (Eagle et al., 2001). Restorative Justice looks like the silver bullet that will change the culture and climate in school systems across America on the surface. Schools are jumping on board with the notion of Restorative Practices being the answer

once again without researching in what ways, if any, do these restorative practices or approaches address or impact racial inequities in schools PK-12.

There are two major core features of Restorative Practice. Those affected by an incident or crime come together to identify how the incident impacted people, then they jointly problem-solve and identify actions to repair the harm (Coates, Umbreit, & Vos, 2003; Gal & Moyal, 2001). Typically, Restorative Practice conferences and circles for serious incidents follow a formal procedure. People impacted by the conflict voluntarily participate. If they agree, they attend a pre-conference to get oriented to the process (Costello et al., 2009). During the actual conference, participants sit in a circle facing one another. The facilitator uses a structured set of questions to guide the conversation among all the participants. All involved have a choice and opportunity to reflect on the incident and respond to preset questions about What happened? Who has been harmed by what you have done? What part of the incident are you responsible for; and how will the harm be repaired? (Gregory, Huang, Eldridge, & Downing, 2018). The participants mutually develop a plan to repair the harm. The plan aims to hold everyone accountable for breaching trust with the community and find ways to help them reintegrate peacefully back into the community (Braithwaite, 1989, 2001; Costello et al., 2009). Lyubansky and Barter (2019) point to Illinois legislation, Senate Bill 100, that mandates schools first exhaust all appropriate and available behavioral interventions (the list includes restorative practices) before expelling or suspending students for more than three days (Illinois General Assembly, 2015). In addition, there is no widely accepted restorative implementation roadmap, only a set of guiding principles and a small but growing group of restorative justice pioneers with sufficient experience to provide schools with initial training and system-building support.

MTSS, PBIS, SEL, and Restorative Practice focus solely on the students as the problem and Black students with perceived SEL deficits. Unfortunately, these alternative discipline reforms pay little to no attention to beliefs about race and racialized groups that set the stage for how these reform practices are interpreted and enacted (Gregory & Fergus, 2017). Researchers have shown that teachers' beliefs correlate with students' academic and behavioral performance. Nevertheless, views alone do not produce disparate outcomes. Instead, expectations foster discriminatory behaviors that then contribute to excessive referrals of racialized students for special education and discipline (Gregory & Fergus, 2017).

MTSS tends to focus on changing student behavior, identifying students' behavioral needs, and developing individualized interventions to help those students (Gregory & Fergus, 2017). Restorative Practices focus on giving students new ways to build community, resolve conflict, and repair harm. PBIS strives to create a cohesive, supportive, and positive social climate for all students by providing early intervention services and unifying resources that adults designed. In these support systems, adults may need to shift away from a tendency to reprimand and toward a habit of acknowledging and teaching positive behaviors. They may also need to learn to listen as students share their perspectives and practice sharing their own emotional experiences of discipline incidents. The concern is that schools adopt discipline reforms. Students become the sole focus, and schools do not seek to improve the equity-oriented social and emotional competencies of adults or the system.

## CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I restate the purpose of this study and describe the investigation of the study. The research design presented will include a profile of Sundown School District that is the site of the present investigation, the participants of the study, and procedures and methods for data collection. Furthermore, I describe my case study design, include my data collection methods and describe the data analysis process. Lastly, I identify the strategies I used to ensure the trustworthiness of the research, describe my role as a researcher, and end this chapter with a summary.

### **Purpose and Overview**

Entrenched and widespread racial discipline gaps in public education have come under intensifying scrutiny, to some extent in response to increased national attention highlighting the unfair and punitive treatment of students of color, specifically Black students (United States Department of Education, 2014). The use of more punitive and invasive school discipline practices reflects a growing crime control approach to students' school misbehavior (Morris & Perry, 2016). For example, uniformed police present and stationed in schools demonstrate the direct connection from the educational context to the criminal justice system. The presence of security cameras and the practice of random property searches on school grounds emulate criminal justice techniques of surveillance, and zero-tolerance policies mimic rigid legal guidelines, requiring automatic suspension or expulsions for specified offenses (Noguera, 2003). Therefore, leading to the overrepresentation of Black students in suspensions and expulsions and the focus of much recent research on racial equity in education.

An overreliance on punitive discipline methods for addressing wrongdoing in schools has caused educational leaders to pause and consider their alternatives. The enforcement of zero-

tolerance policies and the use of corresponding strategies like detentions, suspensions, and expulsions are no longer proving to be effective. These antiquated efforts focus only on broken rules and the so-called deserved punishment while failing to repair relationships and recognizing root causes. In 2014, U.S. Department of Education Secretary Arne Duncan made plain that the need to rethink and redesign school discipline practices is long overdue. To further support Arne Duncan's comments, The U.S. Department of Education (2014) statistics and data schools desperately need a new story of justice. Wadhwa (2016) describes the needed new justice as a form of justice that bridges racial divides of structural inequalities inherent in social institutions. A form of justice that pluralizes the common humanity, a form of justice that is not colorblind but embraces cultural diversity as a way of dancing with new possibilities while inviting ancient wisdom. That ancient wisdom she is referring to is restorative justice or restorative practices (RP) in school settings. Restorative Practice discipline emerged as an effective tool that responds to wrongdoing. This approach offers an alternative model that provides a respectful focus on accountability and the reparation of harm. The emphasis of a restorative practice discipline is to recognize individual needs and to promote collaboration, cooperation, and problem-solving. Research and discussions regarding alternative approaches and reform models such as Restorative Practices to address school behavior and eliminating exclusionary discipline are available. However, none are looking specifically at the role race and racism play in the implementation. Several studies (Braithwaite, Ahmed, Morrison, & Reinhart, 2001; Payne and Welch, 2015) conducted on RP found that in schools with a higher percentage of Black students, teachers and administrators used more punitive and less reparative approaches to discipline. Further research is needed because school initiatives implemented by white staff and administrators, particularly initiatives that seek to manage student behavior, have a long history

of disproportionate and harsh discipline of Black students that push them out of the classroom (Carter, Skiba, Arredondo, & Pollock, 2014; Ferguson, 2001; Noguera, 2009; Skiba, Arredondo, & Rausch, 2014). Furthermore, the literature lacks studies that use Critical Race Theory to analyze Black students' experiences of restorative approaches and their effects. The lack of understanding of the effects on Black students, the non-reduction of the disciplinary gap, the addition of another method by which to criminalize Black students negates the purpose of RP. The purpose of this case study is to explore the ways anti-Blackness influences the implementation of restorative practices and results in further racial inequities and racial oppression through the lens of Critical Race Theory by interviewing five Black students and 17 Black and white teachers and administrators. The following research questions address various aspects of discipline disparities and bring to light the ways Restorative Practices affect Black students in K12 schools:

In what ways, if any, does Restorative Practice (RP) address racial inequities in PK-12 schools?

In what ways do districts implement restorative practices?

In what ways, if any, does RP impact institutional racism in school systems?

How does RP address the social and emotional issues of historically marginalized students as it relates to education?

How, if any, has racialized factors impact the implementation of RP?

In what ways, if any, does RP provide support and connectedness in schools to Black students?

## **Methodology/Case Study**

According to Merriam (1998), qualitative research is descriptive, inductive, and process-oriented. During qualitative research, the researcher remains focused on finding meaning from the participants' data regarding a particular issue or problem and does not focus on the meaning in literature or the researcher's meaning. The researcher must also understand that the qualitative process is emergent, meaning that it is unpredictable, and the initial plan can change as the research evolves (Creswell, 2014).

I chose to conduct a qualitative case study in conjunction with CRT to collect data in various ways to have a more complex understanding of educators' approaches and Black students' experiences with Restorative practices and center race in the implementation and effects of RP in schools. Case studies allow for in-depth investigations while gathering data from various sources by using different methods, such as observations and interviews. Case studies analyze specific issues within the boundaries of a specific environment, situation, or organization (Merriam, 1998).

This case study centers the voices, experiences, and understandings of Black students, Black and white teachers, and administrators around discipline disparities. It also seeks to capture students' lived experiences, adult perceptions of the black students' lived experiences at school and analyze them through utilizing critical race theory. It also focuses on how race intersects with discipline policies and how Black students are affected or not affected by the implementation of Restorative Practices.

### **Researcher Positionality/Teacher – Leader – Administrator – Black Woman**

While interviewing the participants in this study, many memories filled with vast and powerful emotions flood my mind. I reflected on my why I chose to enter the education field. I

became acutely aware of my disdain for racial inequities I witnessed over the years. Experiences of family and friends, along with my education, drew me to the world of teaching and learning. Although I constantly worked to provide equity and equal access to all of my students and teachers, I witnessed the inequitable treatment of students who did not receive privileges afforded to others with mainstream linguistic, cultural, and economic backgrounds. Those experiences led me to administration, which brings me to this topic of inequity in discipline practices. I embarked on this alternative to discipline research for marginalized students by the educators whose deficit beliefs and actions limit the potential of Black students.

The Anti-Blackness racist mentality is prevalent in the educational system today. My experiences as a leader reflected the underlying principles that compromise the anti-Blackness caste system. A caste system of hierarchy of humanity where white is always on top, and Black comprises the bottom. While analyzing the data from this study, I began recalling a district where we had a weekly deficit-focused problem-solving/student review process that I dread to attend. The team's goal was to discuss the school behaviors of each student and determine which interventions or potential support to implement to ensure school success. When this team of principals, social workers, psychologists, and district-level officials met, stories shared about how awful the students were and how they or their families did not value school and did not respect authority. The more graphic our stories while painting images and pictures of these students, the more we forgot we talked about children.

I would feel the steam rising, my blood boiling before, during, and after each meeting, because we did nothing but glamorize, awfulize, and criminalize our students' through the files brought before this team. As the team looked at the files, a glaring fact stood out; over 85% of the students discussed by this team were Black. The feeling of dread would overtake me because

it was evident that the room filled with white educators had the privilege of throwing away another Black student in the school system. I can still hear the hurtful comments ringing out week after week by the educators around the table. "They do not belong in our schools. We have tried everything to fix them. Their parents do not support our decisions, so what more can we do?" Gorski (2019) calls this the deficit ideology detour. He states, "If we spend any of our equity efforts attempting to "fix" students of color fortifying their grittiness, modifying their mindsets, adjusting their emotions, we need re-accounting of our equity understandings and intentions" (p. 59). Gorski (2016) further states that the most definite sign of deficit ideology is locating the source of educational outcome disparities within communities of color while ignoring the role of racism. Disparate educational outcomes seeped in a deficit ideology while ignoring systemic racism throughout the problem-solving process led to the fixation on fixing the students and not the educational system. Therefore, the inequities and discipline disproportionality increased.

Even though the team was to problem solve, it was highly apparent that the ultimate purpose of this team was to determine if an alternative placement found for these students outside of the traditional school setting would happen. Having to admit regretfully, over 90% of the time, we successfully removed these students from our schools because they were "dysfunctional." At the same time, we failed at providing them the support they needed and deserved to be successful in any educational setting. Problem-solving? No way! We were fast-tracking these students right into the prison system. We were living Pearl's (1991) structural inequality model of allowing political influence over school policy and practices (macro politics) and top-down, authoritarian nature of schooling to contribute to the school failure of every student we discussed. According to Pearl (1991), structural inequality refers to the policies and

ways of knowing that build inequity in an organization's structure. Leading from what is best for students and not what makes adults feel good was not an option. The pressure from the teachers' union, parents, community members, and other political factors weighed heavily on the decisions made around the problem-solving table.

The anti-Black racism is embedding the institution of schooling due to the history of slavery, and suppression was guiding the whole student review and discipline process. The political power of educators I experienced leveraged in the decision-making process determined the future of many Black students. It was like playing a Monopoly game when the player pulled the "Do not pass go, go straight to jail" card. It was evident that these particular students were required the support that the traditional school setting could not or would not provide. Students that were removed from the traditional school setting and "sentenced" to alternative schools because the suspensions and other exclusionary discipline tactics did not work had an extremely marginal chance of finishing high school. They generally dropped out altogether.

Even if the students were allowed to go back to their traditional home school, nothing changed in the school, and there were no supports available to help transition the students back. The lack of support and nothing in the racially biased school environment change led to a high recidivism rate or repeated undesirable actions. The challenges experienced in school by some Black students are misattributed to deficits within Black children or their families, leading to a failure to address school system-level biases and racism (Gibson, Wilson, Haight, Kayama & Marshall, 2014). With schools smothered in hegemonic monolithic thinking, it is the universal belief that the system is excellent, and it is the students and their families that need to change. Students are placed right back into the same setting and environment. According to several educators, it is the expectation for students to figure it (the educational game) out and be thankful

they have another opportunity at free public education, a free public education they indeed did not value.

Contrary to popular deficit thinking, not all discipline and behavior issues are caused by students. After spending time as a high school principal, I became more aware of the discipline disparity. I tried empowering my students and giving them a voice but was met with a great deal of opposition from staff and accused of letting students (Black in particular) get away with things because I listened to them. They chose to listen to me about their concerns. I was developing a trusting relationship with my students. In fact, in one year, because I focused heavily on relationship building, empowering my Black students, and ensuring they felt like they belonged, their test score increased by nine percentage points.

Watching the news daily and seeing senseless murders of unarmed Black men and women make it difficult for me not to feel the pain of every Black mother across America. When my son leaves the house, I give him extra hugs and kisses and ensure he is somebody. As he was growing up, I would tell him every day not to be afraid to be excellent because I knew he was not receiving that message at school, where he spent a great deal of his day. Today, I yet feel compelled as a Black mother to extend that message of restorative hope and address the discipline disparity plaguing our schools and Black students in particular.

Being a Black mother and educator in the Midwest, I have grown drained and weary of witnessing the abuse of Blacks inside and outside the classroom. It is evident to me that Institutional racism is alive and well in the Midwest school districts. Therefore, I am adamant that how we tell stories about Black students matters. Black students should enter their classrooms daily without the concern of hearing deficit rhetoric concerning their lives. They do not have to look too far to see negative images of themselves beleaguered throughout social

media without experiencing in their classrooms. As a Black educator who grew up extremely poor, I know how dehumanizing it is to hear that our Black youth need to be saved and tamed. I have seen many school reforms come and go, and not one has addressed race or racism. The reform pendulum swings from poverty being the number one factor Black students have behavior issues to a lack of social and emotional control being the number one factor to school behaviors. Some educators believe these same students lack SEL competencies, which is the reason for the behavior issues. Although I have reservations about discipline reform models that incorporate SEL practices, I believe that one, in particular, Restorative Practices, has a place in schools. Black students will respond effectively to RP when addressing racism and providing them a voice, respect, and a sense of belonging.

### **Data Collection**

#### **Sundown District**

I conducted the historical case study in an urban PK-12 school district in the Midwest, Sundown School District. I selected Sundown District because it is essential to use a district with discipline disparity issues and has attempted to implement various alternative discipline reforms as a response to the needs of Black students. I collected and analyzed their fifth -12th-grade discipline data while using a cross-section of schools from the district that experience pre- and post-Restorative Practices implementation.

Sundown is a large district in the Midwest. The district serves nearly 15,000 students in grades PK through 12. Sundown District has more than 35 campuses and employs near 3,000 teachers, 90 administrators, 300 support personnel that includes social workers, behavior interventionists, civilian security officers and school resource officers. With proximity to Universities and Community Colleges, Sundown School District is able to build strong

community partnerships, which provide unique, world-class educational opportunities to students. Their goal is to foster positive learning environments and prepare all students for college and career readiness after graduation.

According to the 2019 School Report Card, Sundown District has several schools in the academic under-performing and lowest-performing categories according to the State Board of Education school report card. Student demographics are 41% Black students and 42% white students, with the remaining 3% Hispanic, 2% Asian, and 12% two or more races. The percent of low-income students receiving public assistance, living in substitute care, or eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunches is 65%. All of the demographic data have remained stable over the last five years. Sundown District's racial makeup is as follows: teachers include 9% Black, 90% White, and 1% other. The principal racial breakdown is 44% Black and 56% white. The discipline assistant principals are 17% Black and 35% white. Sundown District, a district over-identifying Black students for Special Education services, is also out of compliance with discipline disparity between Black and white students.

Sundown District is an identified school district with disproportionate discipline resulting in out-of-school suspensions and expulsions for Black students, particularly Black male students at all levels. Sundown District followed the past practice of zero-tolerance punitive discipline measures that led to the discipline disparity finding from the State Board of Education. In response to this finding, Sundown District decided to name RP as a model to help address the discipline disparity. They added the word restorative in front of the section labeled Discipline Options for Classroom managed Behaviors and added a few bulleted items for restorative practices (Circles, Skills-based coaching). RP should have a section with the process, expectations, and supports all laid out for staff, students and families to understand.

Sundown District, in response to a court ordered mandate brought about from a consent decree, created a social justice task force comprised of staff and community members. From this task force, a committee evolved that on paper is to focus on racial identity development. This focus on racial identity development per Sundown District's written philosophy stems from the belief that diversity is a strength that is welcomed and respected. The agreement states that the educators and administrators are intent on dismantling barriers to learning and making it a priority to provide equitable learning opportunities to those students that have been traditionally marginalized and underserved in Sundown District. The racial identity development group consists of administrators and teachers that have created a learning and leadership opportunity focused on racial identity development and advocacy. In collaboration with caring adults, selected students, this team will work to meet the following objectives:

- To learn about their own racial identity, the racial identities of others, and how racial constructs inform societal norms and outcomes
- To formulate amongst students a progressive understanding about race and identity
- To empower high school students, boys in particular, to advocate for racial/social justice and become leaders for social justice
- To empower Black students to positively influence the narrative about race in their community
- To facilitate a process for high school students to pay it forward and act as mentors to the younger generation and to continue this into adulthood
- To provide mentors to younger students who can help them be color brave and not color blind in school and the community

I selected the Sundown District because of its social justice slant that centers racial identity in their social justice ideals. Their social justice ideals led to the development of a racial equity analysis instrument/protocol to be used when school leadership is making decisions that impact students. The expectation is for leadership to use the instrument as a screening tool for any new and pre-existing initiative to avoid (un)intentionally marginalizing or negatively impacting any group of students. The instrument/protocol has five steps that include identifying the issue; determining which part or parts of the system are affected by the issue; determine the overarching purpose or goal; discuss who is currently benefiting and who is marginalized; and finally, how can the practice, policy or initiative be more just. The 2012-2013 developed instrument's goal is to determine if a policy, practice or initiative has any components of inequity that needs to be addressed be addressed or eliminated.

### **Participants**

My sampling technique was purposeful. Purposeful sampling in case study research provides the researcher with the opportunity to select and learn from the most promising participants. "Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (Merriam, 1998, p. 61). The building principals provided me with disaggregated student discipline data of all their students in grades 5-12. This data included both suspensions and expulsions. I purposefully selected ten Black students for focus group interviews ranging from grades 6-12. Black girls and boys impacted by suspensions and expulsions that may or may not have participated in Restorative Practice circles were used as criteria to participate in the study. Once I identified and selected the students, I requested the building principals provide me with the parental contact information of several students. I contacted the parents of the student

participants under the age of 18 for parental consent (Appendix C). Upon receiving parental consent verbally, I sent a consent form (Appendix D) via email to the parents to sign and email back to me. I also spoke to the student participants, and after explaining the study and what I needed from each of them, they signed an assent form (Appendix H) and emailed it back to me. I did not disclose to the principals which students were selected or participated. Only 5 of the ten students I selected chose to participate in the focus group interview. I also asked Principals to identify the staff directly involved in the administration of Restorative Practice and peace circles for my data collection. Upon receiving that information, I looked up these individuals on the Sundown website and requested their participation via email.

**Table 1**

*Participants*

Participant Pseudonym(s)	Classification	Activity
Carter	Student	1.5 hours Focus Group Interview
Dionne	Student	1.5 hours Focus Group Interview
Kamiah	Student	1.5 hours Focus Group Interview
Aysia	Student	1.5 hours Focus Group Interview
Avery	Student	1.5 hours Focus Group Interview
Ashleigh	Principal	1 hour 1 on 1 interview
Aaron	Principal	1 hour 1 on 1 interview
Greg	Principal	1 hour 1 on 1 interview
Matt	Principal	1 hour 1 on 1 interview

(Table Continues)

(Table Continued)

Participant Pseudonym(s)	Classification	Activity
Randy	Principal	1 hour 1 on 1 interview
Jacob	Principal	1 hour 1 on 1 interview
Brandon	Teacher	1 hour 1 on 1 interview
Karen	Teacher	1 hour 1 on 1 interview
Sabrina	Teacher	1 hour 1 on 1 interview
Iris	Teacher	1 hour 1 on 1 interview
Sylvia	Teacher	1 hour 1 on 1 interview
Cassidy	Teacher	1 hour 1 on 1 interview
Terrance	Teacher	1 hour 1 on 1 interview
Rod	Teacher	1 hour 1 on 1 interview
Sarah	District Administrator	1.5 hour 1 on 1 interview

I interviewed a total of 5 Black students in a focus group format. This number includes students from one of the high schools, the alternative school, and one middle school. I conducted a one-to-one interview with eight administrators and eight teachers at the elementary, middle, and high school levels, and one District-level administrator. Interviewees included 3 Black teachers and five white teachers; 5 Black principals, two white, and one Black AP; and 1 Black district-level administrator. I chose the building principals because they set the tone, vision, and expectations for their respective schools. I interviewed a District-level administrator to learn of the overall expectation for discipline and Restorative Practices implementation across Sundown District.

## Focus Group Participants

This case study focused on the student participants in the focus group and their responses to the semi structured interview questions. The participants fed off of each other's comments and began to have a dialogue amongst themselves as I facilitated and captured the dialogue. In this section, I give a brief description of the students: Carter, Dionne, Kamiah, Aysia and Avery.

Carter is a fifteen-year-old, long, thin soft spoken Black boy in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade. He is in advanced and honors courses. Carter's laid-back demeanor and quiet voice made it a challenge to elicit more than one-word responses. A few times all that was seen on the Zoom screen was the top of his hair. I had to ask clarifying questions and probe him in order to get to the heart of what he was thinking, feeling and sharing. However, he was extremely insightful and knew the rules of navigating the culture of whiteness in his school. He expressed his dislike of the issues surrounding the suspension process but was not willing to speak up for himself at school unless invited.

Dionne is an eighteen-year-old boisterous, outspoken and extremely insightful Black girl that was placed in an alternative high-school program before she decided to drop out of school completely. She may not have the exact words to describe her experiences and thoughts, but that did not stop her from sharing openly and freely. I did not have a difficult time getting Dionne to speak or speak out. She was laid back with her feet propped up while totally engaged in the conversation. Dionne did not bite her tongue, nor was she apprehensive in sharing. She talked a great deal about the inequities she experienced, and her reactions and responses were not always without conflict. I noticed that when Dionne was sharing a response or story that impacted her more than she wanted us to know she would laugh uncomfortably, and her voice would trail off as she were reliving the experience. Dionne started in her freshman year of high school taking

advanced and honors courses and she ended up dropping down to 4- track or average classes when she then failed every class due to the number of suspensions she received. Dionne was placed in an alternative high school program her tenth grade year because she refused assimilate to the culture of the traditional high school setting. She eventually gave up on the school system she describes as giving up on her.

Kamiah is a large frame eighteen-year-old Black girl in the 12<sup>th</sup> grade. She is an Honors student in Advanced Placement classes and in the STEM Academy designed for students that are interested in the medical field. Kamiah would start and stop her sentences and responses in mid thought and just shake her head as if in disbelief. Kamiah joined the Zoom focus group in her car and for the most part we could not see her and often had to ask her to repeat her responses because she spoken in a rather timid manner. Kamiah shared she generally was easy going but grew tired of the unfair treatment she and other Black students received. Kamiah was not so readily or willing to share her thoughts. She would hold her head down while shaking it slowly. She stated she did not get in any trouble at school until she entered high school where the culture was negative. It was that statement that made me realize the down head signaled her shame. Her grades dropped from passing to failing. Kamiah would say repeatedly, “I just don’t know, or I didn’t care” in the middle of her responses.

Aysia is a petite, Black, seventeen-year-old 12<sup>th</sup> grade girl who attends the alternative high school program. Aysia describes herself as a person that minds her own business and is focused on her future. Aysia was active in her high school along with her many friends. Aysia made it a point to repeat when referring to herself, “I am not a trouble-maker. I don’t get into trouble. My mom is extremely involved in my education.” I believed her when she shared these obviously important to her factors. She was an above average student and a member of her high

school poms squad prior to being placed in the alternative high school program. She was very upset that the alternative program she was forced to attend did not offer the above average classes she was used to taking. Aysia was a no nonsense as a matter-of-fact participant in the focus group. She was braiding the hair of one of her peers while responding to the questions and sharing her thoughts. She spoke with clarity of thought and did not hold back in the conversation.

Avery is a large, Black, thirteen-year-old 7<sup>th</sup> grade boy in average level classes. Avery, despite me asking, kept his camera off for all except the first five minutes of the 90-minute interview. He shared he is easily aggravated and has difficulty controlling his emotional outbursts. Avery stated his responses to unfair treatment landed him in “team focus.” Team focus is when students are sent to another classroom teacher for the class period or longer depending on how much time the student requires to calm down, prepare an apology or create a plan to make better choices going forward. The goal is to help the student and the teacher with whom there is a conflict form a relationship or bond. Avery was the youngest member of the focus group and he really did not share much, but he spoke volumes when he shared, he honestly felt and believed his teachers do not like Black students at his school. He connected that perception to the treatment, tone of voice and lack of care he experienced in school.

### **Teacher Participants**

This case study also focused on the responses of the teacher and administrator participants in their semi structured interviews. In these next two sections, I give a brief description of each of these participants.

Brandon is a well-groomed 52-year-old white man educator with experience as both a classroom teacher and a teacher who focuses solely on restorative processes. He has nine years as an educator. This is his second career. Brandon has corporate experiences. Brandon had issues

with connectivity during his interview requiring him to turn his camera off during portions of his interview. At times Brandon rambled in his responses as he was searching for just the right thing to say. Brandon was enthusiastic and stated he was honored to be a part of the data I was collecting. Brandon acknowledged his privilege and stated often that the students and their families did not have a fair chance in life, and it troubled him. This trouble he described and discussed leads him to want to help, I equate it to “save” as many Black families in his school that he can.

Karen is a sarcastic 44-year-old white female classroom teacher with 23 years of experience in public education. She incorporates restorative practices in her everyday classroom occurrences. Karen has a stoic personality and was extremely direct in her responses. She expressed how white privilege irritates her especially when displayed in her colleagues.

Sabrina is a white thin bubbly 36-year-old female administrative intern in her 15th year of education. She spent three years working solely with implementing restorative practices school wide. She is considered a teacher but does not have the responsibility of a classroom teacher. She is released to provide school-wide discipline support. Sabrina has a vibrant energetic personality that captured me right from the beginning. She does not like to rock the boat too much since she is still in the teacher ranks. However, she recognizes discipline disparities exist and students need and deserve mediated conversations and an opportunity to restore relationships.

Iris is a short, thoughtful “woke” white 47-year-old woman in her 20<sup>th</sup> year of education. Iris recognizes her own privilege and is not afraid to speak to it when the opportunity presents itself. She has experience as an Academic Interventionist and an English Language Arts Teacher. Implementing Restorative practices is second nature to Iris and the students she has daily

contact. Iris had a great deal to share but was not comfortable having her camera on during the interview. I asked her to please leave her camera on and she complied with my request. Iris stated she has a great deal of experience with discussing dismantling systemic racism. She was thoughtful and analytical in her responses. Iris spends a lot of her free time in the Black community attending church and other events.

Sylvia is a small frame, soft spoken, yet talkative and frustrated Black 33-year-old woman with 10 years of experience in education. Two of the years she spent subbing as a special education attendant and is currently a school social worker. Sylvia displayed her frustration with the system in which she works because of the continual perpetual use of oppressive practices although the pretense of addressing the system is prevalent. A few times she had tears in her eyes and her voice was shaking.

Cassidy is a boisterous and giggly Black 34-year-old woman, with 13 years in education. She spent the first 10 years teaching elementary school along with middle school English Language Arts. Cassidy currently serves in the capacity of a Behavior Support Strategist and Coach. Cassidy's interview went over the allotted 1-hour interview because she is a talker. She provided detailed examples with each and every response to the questions posed. Cassidy expressed her disdain in the lack of consistent implementation of RP in her school. She has a nervous giggle when trying to provide a politically correct answer followed by a blunt tell it as it is response to the interview questions.

Terrance describes himself as an unapologetic African American 41-year-old man who serves as a behavior and attendance specialist. He is of average build and has a no-nonsense demeanor. He comes to Sundown District from out of state with minimal prior educational experience. Terrance does not bite his tongue nor hold back on his thoughts. He supported all of

his responses with personal stories and experiences. His greatest comment was, “I am these students.” His conviction and passion about eradicating racism in order for RP to work was evident. He stated several times that Black students want, need and deserve an opportunity to be heard. When interviewing fast talking Terrance all of his east coast Bronx vernacular and body language took over when he was describing RP and adults to student interactions. He said he believes RP will work if barriers of hierarchy and fidelity of implementation were addressed.

Rod, an average build, Jewish, white, 36-year-old man with 13 years in education. He has extensive experience working with students that have endured trauma in alternative educational settings. He is currently a Behavior Support Interventionist and Coach for students. Rod spoke about growing up poor and raised by a single mother. Rod described himself as an angry youth that understands why so many Sundown District students are angry and looking for an outlet to unleash their anger. He believes the RP circles are a necessary part of the reparation process in order to provide students an opportunity and space to speak their truths. Rod also shared the RP process has great potential if adults would listen and not always want to be heard.

### **Administrator Participants**

Ashleigh is a Black 35-year-old woman and principal in her 13<sup>th</sup> year in public education. She has spent time at both the elementary and middle school levels as a teacher. Ashleigh looks like she is still in high school, but with the understanding of America’s past and history of racial oppression of an individual that lived during the Jim Crow time period. She is a passionate educator when it comes to restorative practices. Ashleigh has extensive knowledge about the system of oppression and how it operates in institutions such as schools. Throughout the interview Ashleigh shared her belief that RP was just one more box to check because Sundown

District does not have clear or consistent expectations for its implementation. RP sounds nice but not valued.

Aaron is a Black 56-year-old man and high school principal with 26 years of experience in public education. He has previous experience as an administrator in an alternative school program and as a special education teacher. Aaron was apprehensive with his responses and did not directly answer the interview questions. He would not finish a thought or sentence before he jumped to another.

Greg is a tall athletic build Black 57- year-old man with 25 years in public education. He spent 8 of those years as a paraprofessional. Greg is currently a middle school principal in a predominantly Black school. Greg was open with his responses and often shared his thinking about students' backgrounds and home lives leading to the discipline concerns he and his staff openly discuss.

Matt is a short white 48-year-old man with a nervous laugh in his 24th year in public education. He is currently an elementary principal with vast experience spanning elementary, middle, and high school. While choosing his words cautiously, Matt stated that RP is consistently in place in his school. Whenever the word or topic of racism came about, he would politely redirect and avoid a direct response. He was visibly uncomfortable with the interview, but he completed it in thirty-five of the allotted 60 minutes.

Randy is a large Black 42-year-old man with 17 years in the field of education. He was once an English teacher and is currently principal at an alternative school. Randy adamantly believes in RP as an alternative to exclusionary discipline fits perfectly in his alternative education school. He repeatedly stated his concern for the lack of formal training and professional development for his predominantly white staff serving a school of over 90% Black

students. He called this out because race is stopping the relationship-building process between his staff and students.

Marissa is a Black woman, age 55 with 32 years in education. Those years include middle school teacher, elementary principal and middle school principal. She was friendly, good-natured and easy to talk to about the RP and its implementation in her school. Marissa admitted that her teachers do the bare minimum with RP and it shows in the rate of recidivism. Her nostrils flare as she describes the deficit thinking and savior mentality of her staff.

Jacob, a slender white man, age 43 in his 19th year in education. Jacob's smile is contagious and even as he is speaking about the issues plaguing his school the smile never left his face. He has experience across all school levels to include middle, high and now he is an elementary building principal. Although Jacob rambled as he responded to the interview questions, he was pleasant and attentive in the interview process.

Caleb is a 32-year-old young Black male with 11 years in education. He is a former reading recovery trained elementary teacher and is currently an assistant principal passionate about equity and empowering Black students. The passion was visible and audible with his every response. A couple of times he stopped mid-sentence, regained his composure and finished his thought. He would laugh, shake his head and, say "you really want me to be honest?" Caleb shared relationships are key, and, in his experience, the white teachers struggle in that area because many do not understand their Black students.

### **Interview data**

I interviewed a total of 5 Black students in a focus group format. This number includes students from one of the high schools, the alternative school, and one middle school. I conducted a one-to-one interview with eight administrators and eight teachers at the elementary, middle,

and high school levels, and one District-level administrator. Interviewees included 3 Black teachers and five white teachers; 6 Black principals and two white; and 1 Black district-level administrator. I chose the building principals because they set the tone, vision, and expectations for their respective schools. I interviewed a District-level administrator to learn of the overall expectation for discipline and Restorative Practices implementation across Sundown District.

In order to make the interview process honest, morally sound, equitable, and gather a realistic picture (Fontana & Frey, 1994) all of the interviews with the participants were semi-structured. I conducted one-to-one semi-structured interviews with eight teachers directly connected to the implementation of Restorative Practice. Each interview was a one-hour audio and video recorded session via Zoom. I also conducted eight one-to-one semi-structured audio and videotaped interviews via Zoom with building administrators responsible for discipline and the overseeing the implementation of RP in their buildings. I sent emails directly to each administrator and teacher participant outlining the overview of the study, the protocol for the interview and requested each to voluntarily participate. Each participant signed a waiver and emailed them back to me (Appendix E). I was able to locate their email information from the Sundown District website.

All of the teacher and administrator interviews were transcribed and provided to each of the participants for review. I utilized member checking with two of the participants and the district level administrator via a thirty-minute follow-up zoom conversation with each of them. Member checking is generally considered an essential method for verifying and validating information observed and transcribed by the researcher (Merriam, 1998; Mertens, 1998; Stake, 1995) meant to check and critique the data. Member checking also provides material for further investigation and triangulation. After each interview, I transcribed verbatim what the participants

stated, and within three weeks of each transcribed interview, each participant received a rough copy of the transcript. To my surprise, only minor changes for clarity of a name or phrase needed to be made by the adult participants. I did not give copies of the transcribed student focus group interviews to the students. Instead, I chose to call them for clarity of statement or phrase when necessary.

The focus group interview was conducted on a weekday after the school day was over. All the teacher and administrator interviews were conducted over a long three-day weekend. The focus group data was transcribed, reviewed and studied to discover salient points about discipline and restorative practices implementation. A follow up debriefing as well as the one and half hour Zoom interview with the initial District Administrator in charge of district discipline policies and practices was conducted to share findings and elicit their reflections in an endeavor to obtain a complete picture of Restorative practice implementation in the district and obtain as much information as possible to provide the district with some implications related to the continuance or deepening the implementation of restorative practices as an alternative to exclusionary discipline practices.

### **Observations**

Due to COVID-19 mandated school closures, I was unable to observe peace circles as planned. I originally planned on observing restorative circles, but due to restrictions imposed by COVID-19 mandates, I had to instead rely on virtual observations. I replaced the observation of restorative circles with viewing a public *Edutopia* (2018) clip on-line of a restorative circle held by Black students in Pearl-Cohn High School located in Nashville, TN. Pearl-Cohn is a 9-12 public high school that has a 90% Black student population with an emphasis on Restorative Practices. The school utilizes a space called the Zone instead of suspensions for students to come

together in a collaborative space and discuss what their behaviors were and ways to correct it. I observed this video to get a sense of Black students' responses and interactions to inform my notions of what is possible for Black students in RP. As I observed the interactions between the Black students with each other and between the staff to the students, I noticed students' voices were heard, respected and honored by each other and the staff. It was evident in the video that the purpose and rationale of restorative conversations in school which is to help guide all participants to healthier interpersonal relationships was occurring.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis helps tell the nonverbal story. Merriam (1998) states that data analysis is the process of making sense out of the data and involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read. Yin (2003) provides the following four tenets of high-quality analysis. The analysis must:

- 1) Attend to all the evidence
- 2) Address all major rival interpretations
- 3) Address the most significant aspect of the case study, and,
- 4) Utilize the researcher's prior expert knowledge. (p. 137)

These four elements have been considered and built into this research study design and was used to guide the data analysis and ensure its quality.

The documents examined and analyzed include discipline handbook, web site, disaggregate discipline data, and perception data from the Elements of School Success Survey. I analyzed disaggregated data on student discipline to potentially reveal discipline patterns that can be masked by larger aggregate data. Sundown District has been cited for the over representation of Black students in exclusionary discipline practices such as suspensions and expulsions. I

analyzed the suspension and expulsion data between Black and white students along with the infractions that led to the use exclusionary discipline. I also analyzed the student and family handbook to see if and how RP was included, its stated purpose, and to discover whether it was being used in practice and part of the culture of the district. Finally, I analyzed the Elements of School Success Survey that is given each year to students in grades 6-12 in Sundown District. The survey system is based on more than 20 years of research by the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research and is an evidence-based system designed to drive improvement in schools nationwide. It reliably measures changes in a school organization and climate and culture through the eyes of staff, students and families. The Survey provides individualized, actionable reports for each school to improve the educational environment to help ensure student success. For the purpose of this research, I focused on the student areas of the survey that provides data around students' responses to behavioral support provided and their sense of belonging and relationships to staff. These areas all speak to the effectiveness of RP that is mentioned in the student and family handbook.

The data was triangulated by the following: 1) district and school-level interviews; (2) focus groups; and 3) document analysis of artifacts and other resources including copies of the district and state discipline guidelines and policies, discipline data guidelines post-Restorative Practices. Triangulation of multiple data sources is built into data collection and analysis for the purpose of achieving trustworthiness. Member checking is an important part of triangulating the researcher's observations and interpretations. As part of the member checking process, one month after the data analysis was completed, three of the participants, Ashleigh, Terrance and Sarah, were given an opportunity to review the data materials and provide further responses to the research questions and themes that surfaced. Ashleigh and Terrance were selected because of

the depth of their responses during the initial interview process. Sarah, the District-level administrator was selected because she understands the importance of data analysis and was able to provide some insight around the emerging themes. I wanted to give all three an opportunity to provide me feedback on the accuracy of the themes and if I fairly interpreted their responses per Creswell, (2005).

The collected qualitative data that included the interviews of students, teachers, administrators, an analysis of student discipline data, student handbook and the data collected from the Elements of School Success Survey was reviewed and analyzed to discover common themes among the participants' responses. These common themes were grouped and triangulated to inform the research questions regarding the impact of Restorative Practices on racial inequity in the discipline process.

### **Consideration of Ethical Issues/Reciprocity**

Although my case study has IRB approval, it is important to continuously be cognizant of ethical considerations. Creswell (2005) cites the importance of ethical considerations as we recruit, involve participants, and ask participants to give considerable time to our research. Merriam (2009) discussed the ethical dilemmas that are likely to occur in the study as a result of power imbalances. Furthermore, Hatch (2010) stressed the importance of reciprocity in our studies so participants can gain insight and knowledge that can inform their practice.

Reciprocity is defined as a process of sharing, an exchange of responsiveness that creates a sense of community (Glesne, 2006). To address reciprocity, I created a space, although via Zoom, for participants' stories and voice through presence and active listening. Because students, teachers and administrators, choose to speak to me about their experience regarding race and discipline, it provides them with the opportunity to share in an interview exchange and

feel heard. I expressed my gratitude for their willingness to participate, share their thoughts, and for their valuable time. I gave each of the student participants electronic gift cards to express my gratitude and appreciation for the value of their time and energy put forth in participating in the focus group conversation.

When Merriam (1998) referenced the human instrument as a research tool to be examined she meant that the information gathered in qualitative research is done by humans' observations and interpretations. These observations and interpretations are based upon the researchers' construction of reality. Because of the many different experiences that humans encounter there is an impact on their realities. People can see the same thing, experience the same situations and walk away with varying interpretations. It is these interpretations, perspectives and understandings of the world that were observed and or reported. Merriam (1998) also discusses the importance of the human instrument conducting the investigation in an ethical manner. In order for the qualitative studies to be taken seriously the interviews and other research tools must prove to be reliable and valid as well as the content of the documents properly analyzed (Merriam, 1998). This is all resting upon the human instrument.

As I gathered my research, I needed to understand even more clearly why the "human instrument" needs to be examined. I am researching a topic that is dear to my heart for obvious reasons such as I am a Black educator, I have a son that is for the most part was successful in school academically, but experienced various discipline issues. The data I see on a daily basis shows an alarming number of Black students, boys in particular that are victims of discipline disparities. My current school district has been sanctioned for the discipline disparities in regard to Black males with IEPs. Because of all of these factors I had to make sure my questions, body language, facial expressions and interpretations are not leading to results I want to find.

## CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, RESULTS, AND INTERPRETATION

### Overview

In this chapter I discuss the analysis of Sundown District's policies on Restorative Practices, disaggregated student discipline data Student Success perception data, student focus group data, teacher and administrator interview data. I analyzed the Student Success perception data of one of the high schools and two middle schools because all of the students in the focus group attend these selected schools. I analyze student interview data and connect the data back to the RP policies. In this chapter I also discuss the evidence from the interviews and the focus group that Sundown District does not utilize RP to deal with race, racism or discipline disparities. The reality is, Sundown District does not utilize RP as outlined in their student handbook. I discuss the important themes that emerged from my data analysis that stemmed from this research and in chapter 6, I will answer the following research questions:

1. In what ways, if any, does Restorative Practice (RP) address racial inequities in pk-12 schools?
2. In what ways do districts implement restorative practices?
3. In what ways, if any, does RP impact institutional racism in school systems?
4. How does Restorative Practice address the social and emotional issues of historically marginalized students as it relates to education?
5. How, if any, has racialized factors impact the implementation of Restorative Practices?
6. In what ways, if any, does Restorative Practices provide support and connectedness in schools to Black students?

## **Analysis of Interview and Focus Group Data**

After looking at the data I was able to answer the research questions that will be addressed in chapter six. The following interview and focus group case analysis will illuminate convergent themes found throughout the focus interviews with the students and one-on-one interviews with the adults participated in this study. At the heart of qualitative data analysis, the researcher has the task of identifying themes. Themes are abstract, often fuzzy, constructs that researchers identify before, during, and after data collection (Ryan & Bernard, 2005; Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen, & Snelgrove, 2016). The themes for this study came about from word and concept repetitions from the participants' responses during the interviews. The four identified themes are: Relationships, Anti-Blackness, Power Sharing and White Privilege.

### **Relationships**

In order for restorative practices to be effective building and sustaining relationships is a must because Black students must know that their teachers and administrators care about them. "I am because we are and we are because I am," expresses the universal African core belief that the individual exists only in relationship to the collective, (Davis, 2019, p 17). Davis (2019) states that the pioneer of restorative justice, Howard Zehr connects restorative justice to the Judeo-Christian concept of shalom or right relationships between individuals, groups of people, between people and the earth and between people and the divine. Restorative practices which stem from restorative justice is relational is designed to bring people together. Generally, RP is linked only to a reaction to harm or wrongdoing it is also a proactive relational strategy to create a culture of connectivity where all members of the community thrive and feel valued, (Davis, 2019). Romero (2015) posits students with a sense of belonging in school feel socially connected, supported, and respected. They trust their teachers and their peers, and they feel like

they fit in at school. They are not worried about being treated as a stereotype and are confident that they are seen as a person of value. The semi-structured interview questions and responses led to the theme of relationships and belonging.

Jacob, a slender white man, age 43 in his 19th year in education, in response to the question of what challenges in implementing RP, shared making time and being intentional with relationship building is key. He further stated,

“Being creative enough to structure the environment or the schedule, to allow us to build more relationships to allow us to have that restorative practice. It's, it's a priority thing... allow people to see that repairing relationships needs to be a priority over pretty much, pretty much anything besides someone dying, right or... or having to go to the hospital. And I know, as an instructional leader of a building, yes, instruction is, is very important. But next to that relationship piece, it doesn't stand up. It doesn't stand up because no kid's gonna listen to a word you have to say, if they hate you.”

Sabrina, a white thin bubbly 36-year-old female administrative intern in her 15th year of education extends Jacob's thinking regarding relationships. She discussed the value of relationships. Sabrina spent three years working solely with implementing restorative practices school wide and saw the lack of relationship building impact discipline practices in her school, Marcus Garvey Middle School. She directly calls out the lack of relationships as the leading cause of discipline disparities at Marcus Garvey, a school filled with predominantly Black students and over 90% of the teachers are white women. She shared,

“I think it's just relationship building. I think, also when you when you have built different kinds of relationships with different groups of students, then that either grabs your attention more to get more involved, and or causes more of that ability to try to like

push back. I think that is also something that plays in with that discipline route too. I think that's probably the biggest because you're going to end up with more discipline issues or perceived discipline issues when some of those relationships aren't intact. The re-entry conversations that teachers want to skip are important to restoring relationships. They can be used to reduce the number of suspension days.”

RP has the potential to reduce the racial discipline gap (Carter, Skiba, Arredondo, & Pollock, 2014) through repairing and building relationships rather than punishing students. Relationships are a key component of RP.

Matt is a short white 48-year-old man with a nervous laugh in his 24th year in public education was extremely comfortable while discussing the relationships aspect of RP.

“Relationships, we have to create the relationships. It helps to actually create the relationship.” Students who are confident they belong and are valued will feel connected to their schools and take the risk of building important relationships (Romero, 2015).

Ashleigh is a Black 35-year-old woman and principal validated this statement. She works in a school that is 90% Black and 85% white women teachers. Ashleigh shared that many of her Black students live in the neighborhood while the teachers do not live in the city, but in small rural towns with no Black neighbors. The stereotypical comments and attitudes from teachers prevail. There is a great deal of disrespect and negative tone from staff to students leading both groups, students and teachers feeling disconnected from one another. When asked how RP was regarded in her school and its connection to relationship building, Ashleigh, eyes filled with hurt and pain stated, “I think that people think it's a joke. I think that they feel that we have it [RP] because of schools like ours like, like the one I work in, because they just automatically think that it comes from a prison mindset of social justice and that it isn't going to fix anything.” She

went on to say if our students do not feel a connection to our school, trust will not develop and therefore, no meaningful and lasting relationships.

The theme regarding relationships and belonging came about a bit differently during the student focus group. Their comments centered on lack of relationships due to race and racism. Steele (1995) states, students from underrepresented or negatively stereotyped groups may worry about whether people like them and being accepted by their peers and teachers. Sometimes, students may question whether or not they belong in their classroom or school. These questions about belonging are most common among students from negatively stigmatized groups. These students are aware that they are underrepresented in a particular environment and recognize that negative stereotypes exist about their group. Claude Steele compares this to the feeling of being told there is a snake in your house. It could be anywhere, and it could harm you, but it also might not; regardless, you are constantly on the lookout. When students were asked to discuss whether a RP conversation with a teacher in which they had issues would be beneficial to them, they had a great deal to say. Dionne an eighteen-year-old boisterous, outspoken and extremely insightful Black girl shared when describing the ongoing issues, she had with her math teacher, “Now if somebody else was to sit down to kind of be like okay, well, you know, mediate the situation then I feel like maybe it would have come out different or hopefully it would have come out different.” Dionne shared the relationship was so bad in the math class that she had to switch math teachers. She revealed,

“So, I feel like it (RP conversation) ... it can maybe help... if it's just one altercation that's different. I could have been having a bad day. She could have had a bad day, things happen. But if you steady going to the same teacher your steady getting kicked out the same classes obviously for a reason. I felt like we should all we could all sat down and

had a conversation. Maybe she felt like I was doing something that I didn't know about, or maybe I felt like she was doing something that she didn't know about. So, a conversation would have been different. I don't feel like a conversation between me and her personally just us two would have ended up that good because clearly that's what led to some of my some of me getting kicked out not all of them but some, most of 'em getting kicked out of class."

Dionne also said,

"The teacher and other white teachers like her just don't know or take the time to know me. They take my reactions or comments as being rude or disrespectful, because I could just say okay, and they [teachers] take it as aww she got an attitude. Yeah, like all I said was okay. And to them, that's getting smart. I feel like white kids can get away with being verbally like, I've seen white kids... like they'll when they get in trouble They'll yell at a teacher or they'll make the scene and it's just like, Okay, calm down, go to the office or something like that. But a black kid do it, they (are viewed as) just disrespectful. It just turned out a whole different way."

The other students in the group called what Dionne was describing as the impact of stereotyping that Black students must navigate on a daily basis. Carter, the 10<sup>th</sup> grade Black boy quietly shared, "I agree. Because I've seen, I've seen in class, my teacher arguing with a, with a white girl for a very long time. But then, the next day, she is arguing with a black boy, in two seconds, she already called her security to come get him out of the classroom." What I was hearing the students say was having a tense or strained relationship with white teachers, a teacher who the students feel judges them by stereotypes and anti-Black thoughts make it difficult, if not impossible to engage in an effective RP conversation. The focus group students had the general

feeling that they would be judged differently than their white peers, therefore, they would not receive the benefit of the doubt. Their past experiences in school proved that relationships with their white teacher cannot be built because trust was lacking as well as the opportunity for acceptance or being authentically Black in school.

Teacher perceptions of Black students influence their relationships with their students. These perceptions contribute to how Black students' exclusion experiences from learning opportunities for minor school behaviors often escalate into exclusionary discipline. The students described the racialized exclusionary practices of their teachers, including being singled out in class and unfairly or excessively disciplined. The students in the study appeared conscious of the role race played in their schooling. They critiqued how black students, pathologically positioned as deviant, and their deviancy assumptions contributed to unfair discipline practices within their respective schools. Still, despite their criticisms, it was also clear that the students internalized some of the pathologizing discourses about Black students. As other research has shown, it is not uncommon for Black students to both resist and accommodate the positioning discourses of the school in inconsistent and contradictory ways (Dhondy et al. 1982; Ferguson 2000; MacLeod 1987). Black students are routinely exposed to anti-Black ideas and perceptions. These lived experiences make Black students aware of the fact that racism is part of existential reality. Though they may not have a critical awareness (Friere, 1972), they are sensitive to the overt and covert negativity of anti-Blackness. Dionne shared, "I feel like I, like other black kids, pay attention to discrimination and racial stuff more often than another race. Because, I mean, if like, we see stuff, and we'll be like, but if a white kid did it, it'd be different." Dionne further stated, "Because, from our background, just in general, like, just with being slaves, and you know, our black history, so of course, we still pay attention. And sometimes it's not even oh my gosh, we

used to be slaves, or we used to be like this. It's just more so you pay attention to it because you see discrimination or racism against black people way more than... I don't wanna just say any other race, but way more than the white race. Because that's what I feel is that we have more against us, and I just feel like we pay attention to it more.”

If students do not have a good relationship with teachers that stems from anti-Black perceptions the awareness of not belonging or being accepted increases and negates the potential of RP conversations. Students who are negatively stereotyped lack relationships and the sense of belonging because of anti-Blackness they believe racism is a normal part of the school experience. They remain uncertain about whether they belong. They are vigilant for cues in the school environment that signal whether or not they belong, fit in or are welcomed (Romero, 2015). All of this leads to the concern of confirming the negative stereotypes that fuel the anti-Black narrative. The lack of relationships and hypervigilance manifests in school behaviors and discourages Black students from building relationships the foundation of RP. Restorative Practices is not just a reactive response to healing the harm (Davis, 2019), but RP is also a relational pathway to connecting all in the community to belong and feel valued.

### **Anti-Blackness/Need to be Heard**

In the Restorative Practices process students’ voices are heard, respected and honored by each other and the staff through the peacemaking circle. RP circles, when implemented correctly, elevates the voices in conflict and provides a safe and brave space for vulnerable conversations and healing journey (International Institute for Restorative Practices, 2009). According to John Hopkins, Institute for Educational Policy, (2017) most restorative practices programs include ongoing communication across the school and reparative opportunities designed to produce the following outcomes:

- Accountability, community safety, and competency development (Ashley & Burke, 2009);
- A reduction in racial and ethnic disparities in school discipline (Rumberger & Losen, 2016);
- A reversal of the negative academic effects of zero tolerance school discipline policies (Rumberger & Losen, 2016); and
- A reduction in contact between police and students on school discipline issues (Petrosino, Guckenburg, & Fronius, 2012).

Participants in this study emphasized out-of-school suspensions in Sundown District were unfair because the punishment was excessive when compared to the infraction. Students also emphasized that their voices were marginalized in the disciplinary process as school officials denied them the opportunity to explain their perspective. The student participants suggested if they were permitted to disclose their side of the situation school administrators would have likely concluded an out-of-school suspension was not warranted. Student participants also offered several recommendations for how their particular incident should have been resolved in lieu of school removal. It is evident from the student comments that although the student discipline handbook states a reentry or RP conversation will be held if a student received an out of school suspension or was removed from a particular class for an extended period of time, those conversations rarely happened for Black students.

Carter shared a RP peace circle would have been beneficial to him and his friends to have their voices respected and heard. Carter describes an incident when he and a group of 3 other boys received an out of school suspension and a RP circle was needed to help get a clear

understanding of the whole situation on the part of the students and the adults. I asked Carter if he believed his voice would have been heard if a RP peace circle was utilized because Carter stated that one of the four boys involved in the altercation was white and his consequence was not as harsh as the Black boys involved, and a peace circle was not offered to this group of boys. Carter said, “yes, because, I could’ve said how I have felt about that, if I think he should have got like more or less [days out of school]. Not just, not even just him, but everybody. If I felt like anybody else should have more or less days out of school, then I could have said that or anybody else could have said that about somebody else. Everybody, everybody would have got the... got to... got to tell their side of the story. And like why they did what they did, so then other people would have understood it. Like the school would understand why.”

Kamiah, an eighteen-year-old relatively quiet Black girl in the 12<sup>th</sup> grade begins to describe her perception of Black students being disciplined more harshly and how Black students are not given the benefit of the doubt, which strips them of the ability to speak on their own behalf. She says, “I feel like the white students tend to argue with teachers and stuff, because they know they’ll get away with it with it, which they will. And I mean, we do it. I mean, not because it’s right. But sometimes we feel like we should be heard. And then when we do it, we get disciplined for it. If I, and it’s like they expect us to like get smart with them or for us to get in trouble. They don’t expect it out of the white students.” I could see the expression on Aysia face, so I asked her to share her thinking on Black students being disciplined more harshly and needing to be heard. She stated, “Um, I just think that in some cases, sometimes I feel like we ... they still may view us as a target or like, you know, or just, I don’t really know how to explain it. Like, well, I have a teacher, my Spanish teacher, it’s almost like she is scared of us Black kids. Like, the first thing she would do is like, call the office, call security, call, on anything or bring

the black teacher from next door to come to the class to speak to her class.” I pushed just a bit to see if any of them thought the reason RP was not consistently offered to Black students had to do with race or racism. “They just expect it out of us to get in trouble and stuff, and then they're starting to normalize it. And it shouldn't be that way.” Kamiah stated a matter of fact. Dionne, never loss for words, chimes in, “I don't know why they expect us to be targets. It's just like a stereotype like she was saying earlier because when you hear like all Black girls always gotta an attitude, Black boys always in gang. Like it's just something that's been a perception for a really long time. So, I feel like Black kids are targets.” The students in the focus group who attend school in Sundown District, the same district that “uses” RP are saying race particularly snit-Black impedes the implementation of RP.

Dionne made a point to discuss the difference in the implementation of RP in the predominantly white school and the minoritized school she attended. She could not understand why the school that served predominantly Black students did not utilize RP to address anti-Black or race in general. When she recalled what RP was, she said, “Restorative Practices, and that's funny because I forgot that's exactly what they called it. Like we would get into an altercation with some girls or not just black kids, but anybody you get into it with them, and the teachers or principal automatically do that RP process. And RP worked a lot of the time, but then again, that's also a different race too so it worked a lot of the times.” Dionne looked puzzled as she tried to figure out why RP worked or was used more consistently with mixed race issues. After her experiences with RP in her predominantly white school she realized RP worked. However, she also realized as did the others in the focus that no one at either of her schools brought or started a peace circle around the anti-Blackness that students experienced. It was alluded to as the reason in Dionne’s predominantly white school experience. I asked Dionne if she believed race was the

reason adults in her predominantly white school is why a RP conversation instead of exclusionary discipline was offered to her or was it just the way they did school. Her response was interesting.

“They [white school] did RP with like everybody, but it was mostly with the black kids. But I wouldn't say... the restorative practice wasn't just for like just altercations with other females or, you know, like physical problems. It was just simply, maybe you got into it with a teacher about an assignment, or maybe you felt a teacher wasn't being fair to you, or maybe you just felt, you know, you didn't like a certain rule that the school had. So, any problem any little problem, the littlest problem, they'll always be like, okay, well, let's sit down and figure out what we can do or how to make it better. And then like I said, they really catered to black students. The teachers all felt like what can we do to make the black kids feel comfortable? Or what can we do to make sure that y'all don't be...that you're not viewed as always getting in trouble?”

As Dionne is sharing her experience, it was apparent that RP is not just about the peace circles, although an integral part, but not the only part of the process. It is a whole healing process that focuses on relationships, conversations and community building while elevating the voices of the whole community. It was interesting to note that Dionne pointed out that the school that was predominantly white where she was one of ten Black students RP was built into the system. As she was speaking, she had a very perplexed look on her face as she was recalling the vast differences in how discipline was handled in the two schools. She could not understand why her other school she last attended that was filled with mostly Black students did not take the time to build relationships nor hear and respect their Black voices and utilize the RP peace circles to address anti-Blackness in her school.

Lyubansky and Barter (2019) posit that from a restorative perspective, we got it all wrong. It is not conflict that is dangerous but how we have learned to interpret and respond to it. The failure to hear, learn and understand the unmet needs of justice and respect behind the conflict creates conditions for the unheard to turn up the volume. The unmet needs may be initially the literal volume that may turn to violence (Barter, 2012). Black justice is vital for members of marginalized groups, our black students in schools, whose histories and recent experiences are often characterized by erasure, invalidation, and oppression (Lyubansky & Barter, 2019). Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1968) made it clear that a riot is the language of the unheard. Educators must view and understand that through the lens of Dr. King, a conflict is an opportunity to understand what is not working for people and figure out together how to address it. Conflict engagement does not get in the way of safety. It increases it (Lyubansky & Barter, 2019).

### **Power Sharing**

Effective conflict management requires collaboration and power sharing. The focus group students verbalized the desire to be heard and respected by teachers and administrators at all times. Although, the Black students in this study had limited experience with RP circles, they want respect and the ability to be heard inside and outside a circle. The students believe that in order for that to happen the adults need to let go of their power and authority long enough to listen to the students in order for RP to work in schools. Dionne stated, “for most administrators, their thought process is we are in control of y'all. We get to tell y'all what to do. And you'll hear a lot of teachers say it whether students admitted or not.” Dionne does not trust that the adults can share power because with her limited experience in peace circles in Sundown District power sharing did not happen. She is saying that the relationships are so bad in her school that there is

no way students and teachers can share power. Aysia when asked if teachers were willing to share their power in a RP conversation would that conversation be more beneficial to her. She responded, “yes, because it would show teachers are willing to listen and have an open mind.” In a restorative school environment, (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 1990) students are empowered to play an active role in the decisions that affect them most while strengthening a connection to the teachers around them.

The power sharing that happens in the RP peace circles is not happening in Sundown District for one of two reasons. First, the teachers and administrators, when peace circles do occur, refuse to listen and work with the students when the conflict involving student and teachers is the issue. Teachers and administrators find it impossible to let go of the we must “control” mentality thus fostering a punitive culture. The International Institute of Restorative Practices (2009) discusses how punitive cultures consolidate social power at the top of hierarchies and suppress discussion about who has power and how it’s exercised. Second, when analyzing the student handbook and discipline the words Restorative Practices were printed, but the process was not outlined. Teacher and administrators’ power are protected by both a structural and social punitive cultural that provides a one-way flow of communication and action from those in charge (teachers and administrators) to those under control (students) particularly Black students. Highly punitive cultures may establish order, but they ultimately generate resentment, resistance and formation of negative or alternative subcultures (Braithwaite, 1989, p. 8).

Iris, a white female teacher that believes in RP and the peace circles say a great deal to about power in schools. The following concepts, relationships, voices heard and respect along with sharing power were a large part of every response she gave to the interview questions to

support her beliefs about RP. Iris considers herself a white ally in the racial equity work. She is very careful to speak her truth while being conscious of the words she chooses. When asked about power sharing in peace circles implemented in her particular school situated in Sundown District, she shared the following, “So when restorative circles are done properly, where everyone's voice is equally valued and even a teacher is honoring the process that I can only speak when the talking piece is in my hand. That is when I can say that everyone's voice is equally valued, everyone's voices equally honored... the teacher is not giving up power but sharing power. So, it's a, it's a leveling. Iris' comments echo those of Dionne. Iris further stated, “sharing power is really empowering all of the humanity that's present, you know. But I think that's a struggle for some grownups. But I think it's critical for restorative justice to happen. There has to be that sharing of power.” The difficulty of relinquishing power by adults in schools is a reality, and race or anti-Black racism, in particular, complicates power sharing even more.

Restorative practice in schools is interested in hearing the voices tell what happened. RP concerns itself with the motivation of those involved in making their choices and their impact on themselves and others. Ideally, RP examines the systemic conditions that may have led to those choices. RP is a community process at its root, not a so-called impartial authority who must understand the facts but rather those directly involved and impacted who must understand each other (Lyubansky & Barter, 2019). When Black students do not feel like they are a part of the community or belong, it is difficult and even impossible for them to understand or help others understand them. As Dionne stated, students shut down, give up, and will not open up. The Black justice students are seeking is not operationalized because all they see and receive is punishment. Therefore, anti-Blackness and its corresponding power differentials impact or lessen the ability for students to be heard in Sundown District.

The focus group students made it clear that the need for RP peace circles would be helpful between students, but crucial for adult to student issues and altercations. They voiced that until the adults relinquished their power of authority and intently listened to what students had to say regarding the impact of their racist actions towards Black students RP is pointless. The adults in the schools must be willing to understand when they are holding on to their power and belief that they control the Black students, much like modern day slavery, no understanding in order to move forward will be possible. The data analyzed shows that the focus group students are interested in RP but, because of power dynamics in the Sundown District and the lack of consistent implementation consistently throughout the district, when Black students occasionally participate in an RP peace circle, they may experience power dynamics and shut down.

Restorative practices in school settings must address the school system's hierarchy. In a school system's hierarchy, in order to implement an effective restorative movement inclusions and collaboration will be necessary. This may manifest as a demand that those with structural power voluntarily share some of that power with those who lack power (Lyubansky & Barter, 2019). Power sharing does not mean handing power over to someone else and abdicating the responsibility that goes with decision-making. During the Restorative Practice process power sharing is vital on the part of the one who holds the power because it builds trust and community for all involved. Lyubansky and Barter (2019) further point out that with power-sharing, those with more power are still involved and still responsible. The empowered are just choosing collaboration over unilateral decision-making. When a student or adult behavior causes harm, those with power need not give up their power to make decisions that promote safety and learning. Therefore, with the practice of peace circles, healthy school environments can reclaim antisocial individuals because restorative environments satisfy students' innate need to establish

self-worth and influence their environment (The International Institute of Restorative Practices 2009). Restorative cultures apply communal pressure to change behavior by utilizing relationships and social connections instead of force and coercion. I could not locate this restorative culture perspective of how and why RP in the school setting is vital in the Sundown District's student handbook and discipline policy that I analyzed.

"[In RP circles] students have a greater ability to share their belief that a teacher's behavior toward them was inappropriate and their belief that their race played a role in this process" (Simson 2014, p. 558). RP's focus on restoration and recovery might lead to more open dialogue about the anti-Black lived reality and painful consequences that Black students contend daily. Their lived reality is likely to influence both behavior and disciplinary decision-making at school (Simson, 2014). Although RP does increase self-awareness and how to address and peacefully resolve conflicts, there is a critical consciousness component.

The critical consciousness development aspect of an RP environment has the potential, at least, to transform schools. I say this because, according to Freier (1972), ignorance is a tool for maintaining oppression. Sundown's punitive discipline policy and lack of implementing a restorative approach to student's school behavior continues the cycle of oppression and the perpetuation of anti-Black racism. According to David (2009), the development of critical consciousness happens through group conversations, participatory action, and empowerment. When teachers, students, and administrators in the Sundown District can develop critical consciousness, they will develop and apply critical thinking skills to discussions about their school communities, openly discuss race and anti-Black racism in particular as the barrier to effectively implementing RP in Sundown District. Sabrina, the young white female administrative intern puts it this way, "Adults in schools do not understand the role they play in

causing harm in the school environment towards our Black students that often lead to Black students' responses that lead to exclusionary disciplinary actions." This is a difficult task for the 80% majority white adults working in our schools because of engrained implicit bias, stereotype threat and racism.

The impact of the RP circles is broader than the circles themselves. Students are to consider themselves as agents of this change. Wadhwa (2016), an international expert on the successful implementation of RP in school settings, believes in training students as RP practitioners. In her words, she "flips the hierarchy" between teacher-as-expert and student-as-observer because the goal of RP is to "shift the paradigm" of the teacher/ student relationship from one of powerful/powerless to "adults and youth in equal partnership (p. 116). Schools must acknowledge that power exists, and it cannot be ignored if a shift in culture is expected. Power must be approached creatively and inclusively. Restorative practices can change how schools talk about power and authority and whom they include in the conversation. In restorative environments, individuals and communities can realize their full social potential, unimpeded by the suppressing effects of punitive manifestations of authority. In restorative environments, individuals and communities can realize their full social potential, unimpeded by the suppressing effects of punitive manifestations of authority. These truths make discipline policy reform in Sundown District and the consistent implementation of RP nonexistent, and continue the school to prison pipeline because of the lack of conversations necessary because of white privilege.

### **Is it White Fragility or White Privilege?**

The teaching profession is overwhelming white, middle-class women. The preponderance of white women appears static because most teacher education candidates come from the same demographics (Allen & White-Smith, 2015; Goings & Bianco, 2016; Sleeter & Milner, 2011).

DiAngelo (2018) works rest upon the conclusion that whites live and grow up in segregated contexts in America. She asserts whites are the beneficiaries of separate and unequal. Whiteness allows a type of insulation that provides and justifies unearned advantages that feed a sense of entitlement. As a result of these segregated experiences, whites experience cognitive dissonance in the navigation of feelings of guilt, denial, and overwhelm in a racialized discussion. Both Bonilla-Silva (2006) indicate that whites express fragility to disregard and dis-engage in discussions about race and privilege. Whites view challenges to their racial world as unfair and an attack against their morals and become defensive. White fragility is a defense mechanism deployed by whites to disengage from race and privilege discussions. It manifests as defensiveness that communicates anger, fear, guilt, and silence. Each of these responses work to reinstate white equilibrium as they repel the challenge, return their racial comfort, and maintain their dominance within the racial hierarchy. White fragility is triggered by discomfort and anxiety, but it is born of superiority and entitlement. DiAngelo (2018) reminds us not to equate white fragility to weakness because it is a powerful means of racial control and protection of white advantage.

Iris, the white teacher who works in a school that has a predominantly Black student population taught by predominantly white teaching staff, received a calendar of RP peace circle topics for the classroom teachers to follow. Iris stated passionately with tears in her eyes that she believes the voice of students must be valued and adults must be willing to listen in order to foster relationships and remove power hierarchy. When asked about how issues of race are addressed in peace circles, Iris said, So, that's such a beautiful question. Um, and I will tell you that if we follow the script of, you know, like, on Monday, May, whatever, um, here's what you're talking about in circle issues of race are not discussed. Period. It's not, it's not on the, not

on the calendar.” Iris mentioned a book each teacher received about Restorative Circle. “There's a big huge book on Restorative Circles we all received with all kinds of stuff including how to discuss racism. But um, no, the assigned circle conversations are about homework and um self-management and, um, you know, academic this and that, um, how well at least at Marcus Garvey Jr. High school (pseudo name). Those issues are not, um, it's not addressed. It's not on a calendar. Um, however, for those conversations to happen restorative peace circles would be the best place for it because again, one voice at a time, every voice being valued, um the transformation that happens.”

Iris had so much to say about white privilege and how it starts young. When she goes against the norm in her school and opens the door to “real talk” that includes anti-Black racism here is what she said,

“Having kids who are blind because of their privilege, to hear what from their peers of color to hear their experiences, and to hear about, um, you know, like, they... wait, you have a conversation about what to do when you're pulled over kind of thing? Like, I've never thought about that, or like, what do you mean when you go through the store someone follows you around? I've never had that, or what do you... what do you... you know, um, and so I feel like that would be one of the safest places. That would be one of the most powerful places for those conversations to happen. I can tell you at Marcus Garvey junior high, where I teach, it's not happening.”

Greg the tall athletic build Black 57- year-old principal with 25 years in public education agreed with Iris, though he was reluctant to speak to the extent to which race impacts restorative practices. He guarded his words and exhibited some reluctance to call out racism and implicit bias. His response to a question that asks how racial issues are addressed in peace circles

indicates how Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) must be aware of and learn how to navigate white fragility. He started by answering the question indicating that he “believes changing the community’s perception of the school is predicated upon the students not being their authentic selves and fitting into how a student is supposed look and act.” In this deficit statement, he is essentially making the case that Black students need to conform to whiteness to be successful. Greg said,

“Yeah, well, unfortunately, we had a lot of students that believe their teacher is racist, and they will say that. Yeah, that's the way they bring it out. Now, I know when a...and they say it in personal, personally to the teacher, the teacher takes some offense, but I don't think they (teacher) try to delve into why that statement is made from that student. You know, you know, I think the student sees that as sometimes just, well, this is a white teacher, and she's dealing with me, she doesn't understand me so I'm gonna throw that out there. We're attempting to change our image. Our school has a perception in the community. And you know, we hear it all the time whether it's when our boys go to play ball against (parochial school) or our boys go to (small white town) or our boys go (another small white town), wherever it is, you know, there is always a perception, because our boys come in looking like boys. But particularly I was I was proud of the boys’ basketball team this year because all those boys were ‘A’ students. All those boys had good attitudes, very respectful young men.”

Greg is admitting he has to walk the line of white privilege as a Black leader of his school in Sundown District. A young Black woman, Cassidy, a teacher shared that her white colleagues have the privilege to not talk about racism. She shared they are afraid or uncomfortable to discuss race and or racism, so they shift that conversation off on her, the Black teacher. Cassidy

said, “A lot of times, teachers, they won’t to say that they're uncomfortable, but sometimes they're just uncomfortable and they don't know why. They're like, oh, I need to send this to someone else to deal with it. And unfortunately, a lot of it, a lot of the times in those instances where they are uncomfortable, it's with students of color. And I found that it's... teachers don't want to admit that they feel guilty. Instead of actually admitting that, they don't know or maybe they need to check themselves, and they don't want to be seen as being racist. And so, they get really nervous whenever you even talk about it (race).”

Cassidy had a great deal to share concerning her school and the discipline data. She shared the discomfort of her white colleagues when disaggregating the student discipline data is obvious in her building.

“I know when we look at data for discipline, we ask why is this there? Why is the disparity so large between Black students being suspended and other student groups? And even when we look at the office referral numbers a lot of the time, because our office referrals are sky high, and we're trying to figure out why and what's going on? We ask why it is so bad for this student group versus another? I don't know, aside from people, (A) not being confident in dealing with things on their own. Um, (B), they have some internal prejudices and biases that they either don't recognize or know that it is there, or they don't want to know (because they have the privilege to not know) or they're nervous or scared. Um, and I also think a part of it is, sometimes people aren't getting called to the carpet by administrators.”

By refusing to name the racism that is prevailing in schools it allows the acceptance of a colorblind ideology to run rampant throughout America’s schools. Schools are sites where dominant ideologies about race and discourses of colorblindness conceal the subtle ways in

which racialized school practices grant access and privilege to some, while creating barriers and challenges for others (Pizarro, 1999; Lewis, 2003; Staiger, 2004; Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Barajas & Ronnkvist, 2007; Hurd, 2008). Colorblindness creates an environment where racialized hierarchies thrive even when race is not named (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). Ultimately, colorblind ideology serves to maintain white power and privilege while obstructing efforts to address racial inequality (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Leonardo, 2009). DiAngelo (2018) reminds us that interrupting racism takes courage and intentionality. She states that interruption is not passive or complacent. Because racism does not solely rely on individual actors, the racist system is reproduced automatically. In order to interrupt racism, white people need to recognize and challenge the norms, structures and institutions that keep it in place. Because these norms and structures benefit white people, racially inequitable relations are comfortable for most white people. Therefore, if school systems want to interrupt their systems of racial discipline disparity and oppression of its Black students, they have to get racially uncomfortable and be willing to examine the effects of their racial encounters and how Black students are responding.

In summary the above section identifies and connects the prevailing themes from the student focus group and teacher and administrator interviews. The missing elements impeding the effective and consistent implementation of Restorative Practices and peace circles in Sundown District call out the subtle and not subtle anti-Black racism.

In this next section, I present the purpose of Sundown District's handbook and the expectations of implementing Restorative Practices across the whole district. I discuss how the disconnection of the expectations and the reality of the implementation RP do not align. The RP language is dropped into student handbook to look effective, inclusive and protective, however the effects are not being felt nor experienced by all students. I also analyze and connect family

and student perception data from the Student Success Survey data as it relates to RP in Sundown District. This next section substantiates the themes that emerged from the student focus group and teacher and administrator interviews.

### **The Reality of Sundown District**

Through my document analysis, I found all the below information that does not align with the reality of the culture of Sundown District. Ultimately, the policies do not do what they explicitly stated they intended to do. I have included a few excerpts from different portions of the handbook to counter the narrative shared in the student focus group and interviews. There are no words or policies listed that address the apparent discipline disparity. There are, however, extensive lists with no substantial directives on how or why the policies created will support an environment that will address the anti-Black racism exposed in the disproportionate exclusionary discipline data.

#### **Student Handbook Policy - Portrayal in Words**

##### ***Purpose***

The Student and Family Handbook is a guide for students and families in Sundown Public Schools District. The Handbook includes information about student academic and behavior expectations, student and family rights and other various requirements and policies pertaining to enrollment in Sundown Public Schools. This Handbook contains valuable information pertaining to the Policies, Rules and Regulations of the Board of Education of the Sundown Public Schools. These Policies, Rules and Regulations are reviewed each year and must remain in line with the Midwest State School Code. Every effort is made to ensure that all Policies, Rules and Regulations required by law for this handbook are subject to the Policies and Mandates, new, revised or existing, that are contained in the Midwest State School Code.

### ***School Culture***

Creating a positive school culture requires that students, families, teachers and administrators work together to uphold and respect each other's rights as outlined in this handbook.

### ***Shared Responsibility***

Sundown District is dedicated to providing a safe learning environment and orderly instruction. We expect students to commit to learning and families to support that commitment and reinforce the importance of expected behavior.

A small excerpt from the student rights, teacher responsibilities and restorative discipline section includes the following:

### ***Student Rights***

- Be disciplined in a humane and appropriate manner
- Adult representation when in conflict with school authority
- A school climate free of violence, disruption, sexual harassment and bullying
- A written code of conduct — clear and concise
- Knowledge of the reasons for any discipline which may be administered
- Due process in matters of disciplinary action
- A reentry plan following an out of school suspension or transitioning to and from alternative programs.

### ***Teacher Responsibilities and Rights***

- Develop and enforce a Classroom Management Plan (CMP) that is approved by the building administration

- Manage classroom routines that contribute to instruction, a well-ordered classroom and the development of civic responsibility
- Be sensitive to the behavior of students and alert to changes that require additional assistance for the student
- Know and enforce the rules courteously, consistently and fairly — deal with misconduct quickly, firmly and impartially
- Consistently employ de-escalation techniques
- Handle behavior problems according to established restorative practices as guided by culturally responsive and developmentally appropriate discipline

***Restorative/Discipline Options***

- Conference/Processing with student
- Behavioral contract/student plans
- Restorative Practices (Circles, Skills-based coaching, etc.)
- Restitution or Contribution
- Consequences as stipulated in the approved Classroom Management Plan
- Detention
- Parental contact (all contacts should be documented using the parent communication log on the infosystem)
- Time out
- Verbal reprimand
- Withdrawal of privileges

### ***Disciplinary Procedures***

There is immediate intervention by the staff member who is supervising the student or who observes the misbehavior. If the violation occurs in the classroom setting, the teacher invokes the Classroom Management Plan as approved by the building principal/designee. Repeated misbehavior may require a parent/teacher conference, re-entry conference, restorative circle or a parent conference with guidance staff and/or administrator. A proper and accurate record of the offense and disciplinary action is maintained by the staff member.

The written language in the Sundown student handbook states that Sundown District is dedicated, but nothing outlines how Sundown District will provide a safe learning environment. There is nothing shared in that statement. All the onus is upon the students and families. Unfortunately, the student handbook and discipline policy in Sundown District is saturated in white hegemony and colorblind rhetoric. They both support the narrative that school behaviors and discipline disparities result from the problem of some children and their families, and the school's role is to prevent and manage it for specific students, not all.

### **The Issue of policy**

The issue of disproportionate discipline of students of color is not openly being addressed or acknowledged making it a colorblind policy. When the policy is filtered through the many layers of the educational system in place, it looks quite different than what is stated in the district handbook and the implied meaning and intent. There exists countless ways school alternative to exclusionary discipline policies could be understood, enacted, and filtered through federal requirements, state laws and policies, the regional climate, the district climate and policies, the school climate and policies, the student populations, the administrative beliefs and values, the teachers, and the students.

During the 2018-2019 school year, Sundown District received notification they were in and the top twenty percent of schools who are disproportionately disciplining students of color at the highest rates comparatively and they had to come up with a plan to address this. Due to Senate Bill 100 (exclusionary discipline) restorative practices was a part of their plan. The implementation and written policy surrounding RP did not match and was left to open interpretation.

### **Elements of School Success Survey**

What is the Elements of School Success Survey? The school success survey is an evidence-based system designed to drive improvement in schools nationwide—it reliably measures changes in a school organization through the Survey and provides individualized, actionable Reports for each school. The Survey system is based on more than 20 years of research by the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research on five components found to be critical for school success:

- **Effective Leaders:** The principal works with teachers to implement a clear and strategic vision for school success.
- **Collaborative Teachers:** Teachers collaborate to promote professional growth.
- **Involved Families:** The entire school staff builds strong relationships with families and communities to support learning.
- **Supportive Environment:** The school is safe and orderly. Teachers have high expectations for students and support students to realize their goals. Classmates also support one another.
- **Ambitious Instruction:** Classes are academically demanding and engage students by emphasizing the application of knowledge.

Elements of School Success Survey is taken by all prekindergarten through 12th-grade teachers and all fourth- through 12th-grade students and usually requires no more than 30 minutes to complete. The information collected through the survey is rigorously reviewed and analyzed to generate a report for each school. The report includes a breakdown of teacher and student responses and, most importantly, provides a comprehensive picture of the school environment based on predetermined essential areas critical for school improvement in a meaningful context of similar and successful schools (University of Chicago, 2021).

The State Board has long recognized that test scores alone do not provide a full picture of teaching and learning in any one school. Under recent legislation (Public Act 100-1046), the State Board is now mandated, on an annual basis, to implement a learning conditions survey that will finally help paint that fuller picture. While this survey may help inform state policy and improvement initiatives, it is primarily intended to help local administrators, such as teachers, principals, and superintendents, identify strengths and weaknesses at the district and school level and better target resources and interventions. Aggregated data from the survey will also be shared with parents and the general public on school report cards released in the fall (University of Chicago Impact, 2021).

The Elements of School Success Survey for the Midwest States derives from 20 years of research on improving schools. These reports' raw data is based on a total score of more than 80 students and 150 teacher questions compiled into 22 measures of school climate and practice and formed into detailed elements. As measured by the Midwest State Survey, those elements are leading indicators of school improvement. The power of the survey comes from their prediction of school success, the intuitiveness of the overall framework components (Instruction, Environment, Leaders, Teachers, and Families), and the reliability of the survey measures (2019

about the Elements of School Success Survey). For the purpose of this study the researcher will focus on component Supportive Environment because Sundown District places heavy emphasis on this data and it is reported on their state report card.

Starting in school year 2018-19, the survey was required annually. The survey was deemed an important component to balanced accountability under the state's Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) plan by stakeholders, which resulted in state legislative changes requiring the survey annually. Sundown School District participates in all multiple-choice survey. The Elements of School Success Survey asks questions about students' experiences, attitudes, and activities in school. The Supportive Environment student portion of the survey the researcher analyzed includes the following areas:

- Emotional Health
- Student-Teacher Trust
- Safety in and around the school
- School Connectedness

The Elements of School Success data is not disaggregated by student demographics therefore the researcher is unable to identify which students feel trust towards their teachers. The Black students who participated in the focus group did not corroborate the data collected from the district surveys. Overall, the Black focus group students felt disconnected unsafe and lacked trust in their schools as compared to the aggregate district data that showed an above average student-to-teacher trust. Below are a few excerpts to their responses regarding how they feel about their school experiences:

“Mainly the most discrimination I feel is when it comes to the dress code in the schools.

Most of the time, I feel like they call on or call out black students more because, you

know, normally they'll try to say that we have more curves or we have this, we have that.

When a rule is a rule. If one should follow, then all should follow it.” - Aysia

“Sometimes school can make you feel like you're hated. If you are hated, like you don't want to be there like you just feel uncomfortable. And that's not how you should feel about school. School is somewhere that you should want to be.” - Dionne

“We shouldn't be looked at that way because it's like nobody should be scared of me. Especially at school. I'm coming to learn and get an education. My teachers shouldn't look at me that way.” – Carter

“I feel like white kids can get away with being verbally like, I've seen white kids... like they'll when they get in trouble They'll yell at a teacher or they'll make the scene and it's just like, Okay, calm down, go to the office or something like that. But a black kid do it they just disrespectful. It just turned out a whole different way.”- Kamiah

“I felt like it in certain situations, there's some, I feel like some, for some reason, some teachers when it comes discipline, they come down too hard on Black kids for some reason. It's because they're scared of us or something like that. I do feel that way sometimes. And I don't know why they would think or feel that way. But I do feel that way sometimes.” – Avery

These responses are indications of the microaggressions that accompany anti-Black racism in Sundown District. The sad reality these experiences are not unusual or uncommon.

### **Racial Disproportionality in School Discipline**

The so-called Black-white achievement gap has long been a concern of educators across the United States (Vanneman, Hamilton, Baldwin Anderson, & Rahman, 2009). There is an accompanying disparity in school discipline suspension rates of Black students are 2 to 3 times

as likely to be suspended as white students that is not discussed as often as the achievement gap (Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, & Bachman, 2008). This racial discipline gap has been documented since the 1970's (Children's Defense Fund, 1975). The disproportionality based on race remains significant after removing the effects of socioeconomic status (Raffaele Mendez, Knoff, & Ferron, 2002; Skiba, 2002).

Sundown District is an identified school district with disproportionate discipline resulting in out-of-school suspensions and expulsions for Black students, particularly Black male students at all levels. Sundown District followed the past practice of zero-tolerance punitive discipline measures that led to the discipline disparity finding from the State Board of Education. In response to this finding, Sundown District decided to name RP as a model to help address the discipline disparity. In this section I will discuss the data from the three schools attended by the students in the focus group, Midwest Jr. High, Marcus Garvey Jr. High and Sundown High School.

The Black students receiving more severe punishment than the white students discussion is in the below data from three identified schools in Sundown District, Marcus Garvey Jr. High, Midwest Jr. High, and Sundown High School. These schools met my selection criteria due to the high percentage of Black student populations and Black student suspensions, and office referrals. The researcher chose the Black focus group participants from these schools as well. For my own data analysis purposes, I broke the data down. I reviewed the total student enrollment, Black students, two-or-more races (generally identified and treated as Black students in Sundown District), and white students that receive office discipline referrals (ODR) and out-of-school suspensions (OOS). I determined the risk ratio or relative risk for receiving an ODR or an OOS

for Black students compared to white students. The relative risk is the ratio of the proportions of cases having a positive outcome in the two groups.

The office referrals, written generally by classroom teachers, lead to 70% of the out of school suspensions (OOS) of Black students in all three schools represented. The OOS results in Black students being greater than 2 times as likely to receive an OOS suspension as their white classmates. At Midwest Jr. High School the number of Black is almost equal to that of white students. However, Black students were referred to the office for discipline 40% more often than their white counterparts. At Marcus Garvey Jr. High School, the number of Black students is nearly 15% greater than that of white students. Black students receive out of school suspensions at a 52% higher rate than their white counterparts. At Sundown High School Black students outnumber the white students by 2%, yet they are referred to the office for discipline 200% more than their white counterparts. The disproportionate number of Black students being referred to the office for discipline cuts across all of the schools represented in the research.

The disheartening finding is the percentage of Black to white students attending each identified school are relatively equal in number. This finding is why and how Sundown District was identified as a district that has a significant disparity in exclusionary discipline by the State Board of Education. The discipline data is in direct correlation to the comments from the focus group interviews. The student focus group participants verified this data through their reflections and discussions. The students articulated on several occasions that Black students were punished more severely than whites for relatively minor and subjective offenses. Kamiah shared, "I feel like white kids can get away with being verbally like, I've seen white kids... like they'll when they get in trouble, they'll yell at a teacher or they'll make the scene and it's just like, Okay, calm down, go to the office or something like that. But a black kid do it they just disrespectful. It just

turned out a whole different way.” Avery, a Black, thirteen-year-old 7<sup>th</sup> grade boy added, “some teachers when it comes to discipline, they come down too hard on Black kids for some reason. It's because they're scared of us or something like that.” The more subjective the category of offense, for example, insubordination, disobedience and defiance, the greater the risk that explicit or implicit bias will seep into the discretionary process (Davis, 2019).

### **Summary**

This study suggests that Sundown District’s school policies limits the forms of student expression to white standards, without validating Black student’s ways of being, and may actually worsen discipline problems and related disparities. The consequences for Black students who breach social norms result in exclusionary practices that impede access to educational and economic success. Ultimately, the behaviors or actions of Black students are viewed as problematic when in reality they may be an expression of racial identity. These expressions of racial identity may also be developmentally normative for adolescents of color as they have an additional plane from which to individuate and resist social control (Steinberg 2010). As long as whiteness is accepted as the standard by which Black students will be judged, it seems unlikely that efforts to reduce implicit bias, eradicate anti-Black racism and improve student-teacher relationships will be fully successful thus impeding the implementation of restorative practices fairly and consistently with Black students.

## CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Introduction**

Presented in this chapter are the conclusions/findings, recommendations, and implications for practice developed as a result of this investigation. I answer each research question in this section. A brief review of the study is provided, followed by a section dedicated to a discussion of the findings. The third section of this chapter offers recommendations for practitioners from Sundown School District, identifies possible uses and limitations of this study, discusses the significance of this research, and gives suggestions for further research. The final section elaborates further on the findings in terms of the implications for practice at Sundown School District.

### **Overview of Study**

The purpose of this case study was to explore the ways anti-Blackness influences the implementation of restorative practices and results in further racial inequities and racial oppression through the lens of Critical Race Theory. The location of the school district is in the Midwest. I named the district “Sundown District” because it was an official Sundown town during the early to mid 1900’s. This study is significant because little is known about the relationship between Restorative Practices and race, specifically how Black students experience RP when race is not centered.

In this study, I framed the problem and its components which include a history of harsh discipline of Black students that pushes them out of schools and into prisons through policies that support this. I also explained the potential RP holds but that it is problematic to not understand the ways RP is affecting our Black students. I contextualized the Black student experience in the history of Black education in the US. This discussion grounds and justifies my

use of Critical Race Theory as the theoretical framework including the ways anti-Blackness have shaped school reform. I provided an extensive discussion of the ideological impetus of restorative justice from which restorative practices emerged, and the circumstances in which schools embraced these approaches. I discussed the case study, my positionality, data collection, discussion of the site, and participants and data analysis method. I presented findings in accordance with the research questions. Finally, I provide a summary of the findings and recommendations for future research.

### **Conclusion/Findings**

In this section, I will answer each research question with data collected from the study.

#### **Research Question 1**

*In what ways, if any, does Restorative Practice (RP) address racial inequities in PK-12 schools?*

Restorative practice in schools is born out the indigenous ethos of restorative justice. The Nguni proverb, “I am because we are and we are because I am,” expresses the African belief that individuals exist only in relationship to the collective. This is referred to as Ubuntu (Davis, 2019 p. 17). Ubuntu, a concept from several African languages including Zulu and Xhosa, affirms our inherent interconnectedness and the responsibility we bear for one another that stems from our deep connection to one another. Because of appropriation the resistance to fully implementing RP in schools for all students exists. This is apparent because the connectedness piece is missing from the American whitewashed version of restorative practices in our schools. Schools are picking and choosing which pieces of the indigenous culture they want to use that fits into their own purpose. Davis (2019) states,

“Consonant with African and other indigenous communitarian values, restorative justice is profoundly relational and emphasizes bringing together everyone affected by wrongdoing to address needs and responsibilities and to heal the harm to relationships and community to the degree possible. While often mistakenly considered only a reactive response to harm, restorative justice is also a proactive relational strategy to create a culture of connectivity where all members of a community thrive and feel valued” (p.19).

There are very few studies focused on the potentiality of RP to reduce racial disparities in school discipline. However, according to Restorative Solutions, inc., schools in both Oakland, California and Denver, Colorado are leading the way in the implementation of RP in school systems. The launching of Restorative Justice for Oakland Youth (RJOY) is California’s first urban school-based RP pilot at an Oakland middle school (Jain, Bassey, Brown, & Kalra, 2014). The pilot used restorative conversations and circles proactively to create a culture of connectivity and responsively provide an alternative to exclusionary discipline. Denver Public Schools (DPS) also launched a RP pilot program at four of its schools to address racial disparities in discipline practices. Between 2006 and 2013, the overall suspensions rate in DPS dropped from 10.58 percent to 5.63 percent, a decline of 47 percent (School-wide Restorative Practices, 2016). The suspension rate for Black students dropped 7 percent. The discipline gap between Black students and white students is still prevalent, however it decreased from a twelve- point gap to an eight- point gap, 33 percent (Davis, 2019).

Sundown District, in response to a court ordered mandate brought about from a consent decree, created a social justice task force comprised of staff and community members. From this task force, a committee evolved that on paper is to focus on racial identity development. This focus on racial identity development per Sundown District’s written philosophy stems from the

belief that diversity is a strength that is welcomed and respected. The agreement states that the educators and administrators are intent on dismantling barriers to learning and making it a priority to provide equitable learning opportunities to those students that have been traditionally marginalized and underserved in Sundown District.

In this study the discipline gap still persists for Sundown District. Sundown District decided to name RP as a model to help mitigate the disproportionate discipline of Black students, particularly Black boys. The staff, although hopeful, underestimated the impact of anti-Black racism in Sundown District on the implementation of RP. Staff and students admit the RP process has potential but the inconsistent implementation due to implicit bias, stereotype threat and institutional racism impede the impact RP could have on addressing racial inequities.

## **Research Question 2**

*In what ways do districts implement restorative practices?*

Decreases in out-of-school suspensions as cited by Restorative Solutions is one of the most widely cited outcomes of restorative practice in the literature (Fronius, Darling-Hammond, Persson, Guckenburg, Hurley, & Petrosino, 2019). One of the most comprehensive studies conducted in the U.S. was the pilot program in West Oakland, California. Two years after the whole school implementation, suspension rates decreased from 50 suspensions per 100 students to only six suspensions per 100 students (Sumner, Silverman, Frampton, 2010). As a result of success of the pilot, the Oakland Unified School District with a 52% Black and Brown student population, adopted restorative justice as a system-wide alternative to zero-tolerance discipline and as an approach to creating healthier school communities (Gonzalez, 2012). A Minnesota Department of Education study found that implementing restorative justice in schools reduced suspensions between 30 to 50 percent (Stinchcomb, Bazemore, & Riestenberg, N. 2006). In a

Michigan middle school, suspensions decreased 15% (Zaslaw, 2009), and 86% of students that participated in a restorative intervention used those skills to avert potential conflicts. More and more schools are utilizing restorative practices to mitigate conflict. An alternative school in Illinois serving students with severe emotional and behavioral issues implemented peacemaking circles as a standard for resolving classroom disputes. As a result, detention referrals decreased by 35% overall, and 43% for Black students (IBARJ, 2011).

In the literature the primary barriers that restrict the implementation of restorative practices are: (a) resistance to changes in beliefs and practices and pressures to suspend, (b) time demands, especially during the initial phase, and (c) funding for training. Descriptions of implementation processes in various districts highlight the need for and importance of using voluntary participation at the start due to outright opposition (Rodosky, 2012). Once resistant staff see changing behavior, the buy-in is likely to follow. It is suggested that schools may implement restorative justice gradually into their existing discipline process.

Sundown implements RP in pockets across the district. I found some inconsistencies in practice and the stated restorative justice ideas. The written materials indicate that even though their Family Discipline Handbook states teachers will handle are to handle behavior problems according to established restorative practices as guided by culturally responsive and developmentally appropriate discipline. According to Caleb, a Black male assistant principal at Midwest Jr. High stated:

“People didn't buy it, like, people didn't buy into it. I'll be completely honest. They just thought it was another thing to do. They just thought that it was just a philosophy for the lack of better words to make it seem as if we had a behavior system in place. Their thought train was exclusively exclusionary practices, they want to go back to a no

tolerance policy. Whereas you know, if a kid you know, looked at you incorrectly or used an incorrect tone with you, or dropped a cuss word, you automatically get suspended from school. Like they were not trying to get down to the bottom of what was going on. So as a result of that, that fix mindset and they really wasn't able to conceptualize, or they chose not to conceptualize what the idea of restorative practice was for what the purpose of it was.”

Caleb points out in his narrative that with white privilege, the choice to not change is an option. He also validated the existence of anti-Black racism wrapped in a colorblind ideology that both Greg and Iris discussed. Caleb also shared that the white teachers in his building did not shift their thinking to permit the needed grace and accountability for the students. “That was very unsettling. It's very unnerving. And especially knowing when you look at the discrepancies in the discipline data and knowing that kids are being targeted by specific teachers, where the administration didn't hold that teacher accountable and say, ‘Hey, no, this is wrong.’ So, it was frustrating to say the least.” Sundown District, according to the district level administrator, Sarah, did not roll out the RP process in phases and she admits there was no in-depth ongoing job-embedded professional development to help focus on the why RP was needed. The lack of intentional connection to eradicating anti-Black racism was non-existent. Sundown District, out of sheer compliance, looked to RP as the silver bullet to address the disproportionate discipline prevalent in their data.

The school systems that have adopted restorative approaches have tended to start small with pilot programs. The schools within the districts are encouraged to move towards whole-school adoption, at the institutional level adopting restorative practice within policy as a systemic, comprehensive alternative to zero-tolerance discipline and as an approach to creating

healthier schools. It has been suggested that an implementation plan could range from three- five years focusing on key areas (Gonzales, 2012). This approach will serve Sundown District well.

### **Research Question 3**

*In what ways, if any, does RP impact institutional racism in school systems?*

Institutional racism shows up as a default mode that schools want to maintain. The policies and practices produce outcomes that consistently advantage white students while disadvantaging Black students, especially in office referrals and exclusionary discipline. Schools must evolve for all students, but in particular our Black students. Schools as designed definitely do not work for Black students. Institutional racism does not require any individual culprits with malicious intent. Instead, it reflects prevailing attitudes that tell us who is intelligent and who is simple-minded, who is up to no good and who is well-intentioned, who deserves a break and who deserves to be made an example of. Implicit racial bias explains why, in today's society where scarcely anybody would admit openly to being racist, we still have racialized outcomes that stack up in predictable ways (Ford, 1998). When systems can predict your outcome based upon your gender, neighborhood, and ethnicity and rely upon zero-tolerance discipline policies as a crux for keeping schools safe, institutional racism and inequity are at their finest.

Zero tolerance policies disproportionately impact students of color. Nationally Black students are nearly four times as likely as their white classmates to experience exclusionary discipline in school for similar infractions as discovered in this study as well. Behavioral differences do not explain the disparities (Davis, 2019; Bryan, 2017). Reliance on exclusionary discipline, the presence of police in schools mixed with implicit bias and institutional racism pushes Black students into the school-to-prison pipeline. These punitive policies have no place in our schools. Although zero tolerance policies are decreasing as a result of activism, research, and

pressure to implement processes such as RP as an alternative, racial disparities are narrowing at a slower rate. For example, in Sundown District, it appears, the number of overall suspensions has declined with the “adoption” of RP over the past couple of years for all students, Black students, however, continue to be suspended roughly three times the rate of white students, about the same as before the adoption. Because I spoke to Black students, Black and white teachers and administrators regarding the ways anti-Blackness influences the implementation of restorative practices and the experiences of Black students with RP, I cannot share the RP experiences of their white counterparts in my findings.

Very few studies focus on the potential of RP to reduce racial disparities in school discipline because that would mean calling out and addressing anti-Black racism and admitting the colorblind ideology that previous discipline reforms are steeped in do does not work, because they ignore race. In this study in Sundown District, the participants boldly called out why RP did not address anti-Black racism. Terrance, the unapologetic African American 41-year-old man who serves as a behavior and attendance specialist says it best when asked what the barrier to RP is to have an impact on institutional racism in school districts. He said in his fast-speaking east coast accent, “You just gotta remember restorative um, restorative practices it can expose somebody's true nature, true attitude. Like, your true agenda because now like I said, you gotta, you gotta, now you got to look at the, the Keisha or the Tyrone and you can't, you can't do what you normally did. Because before it was 'get them out of here, suspend them, lalala'... Now, you got to sit in a meeting and talk with that kid talk with that parent. Listen to them. And let's just say you quote unquote don't like that particular race of people Yep, You're racist. Yeah, yeah, you're not going to want to take you're... not going to want to take that extra step to listen to Tyrone's story to realize that, ‘yo, his pops just came home and literally just went back in’. You

know what I'm saying? You ain't gonna have patience for that, because you already prejudged Tyrone before you met him.”

Terrance makes the point that race complicates the RP interactions between participants. Race clouds the mind and distorts the conflict already present. Terrance also continues the narrative about white privilege as did other participants. Teachers in Sundown District have the privilege to ignore and do nothing to address the various sources of pain their students experience on a daily basis.

“I would like to see more individualized centered treatment and care. That's not treat these kids like in, you know, patients in the hospital or anything. But they need that individual care and attention, you know, and it needs to be consistent. You can't just do it one day, like you got to follow up with the kids, the next day follow up with their teachers, you got to have a staff that that has truly engulfed the concept of restorative and really talk to the kids and listen to the kids. Somebody has to make a decision. They make that same punitive decision over and over. There's never any conversation about what we can do to help this kid.”

Implementing RP with fidelity means disrupting the status quo in the school system.

Relationship building is required with all students which means addressing anti-Blackness racism, implicit bias, power sharing and recognizing the white privilege that permits not doing anything.

The Oakland Unified School District pilot used restorative conversations and circles proactively to create a culture of connectivity and responsively provide an alternative to exclusionary discipline. Although there is no clear data that shows OUSD focused on anti-Black racism, there is data that shows the policies that were anti-Black in nature were intentionally

addressed. RP was implemented consistently across the school system. Students were empowered, conflict was viewed as learning opportunity, healthy relationships between staff and students were the focus. Sitting in circles, passing a talking piece, acknowledging this process originated with indigenous people is only the beginning of eliminating racially disproportionate discipline. According to Davis (2019) suspension rates dropped by 87 percent the first two years, violence and teacher attrition were eradicated, and academic outcomes increased. The entire Oakland Unified School (OUSD) district adopted RP as official policy to address alternative to suspensions. The RP process is co-implemented with other school climate initiatives such as PBIS much like what Sundown District attempted four years ago. From 2012-2017 the overall suspension rates in OUSD dropped early 55 percent and the black/white discipline gap narrowed from 12.1 percent to 6.4, or a 47 percent decrease. It is important to note that the motivation to adopt the RP model district wide as official policy was the legal imperative to address racial disparity in school discipline. What began as compliance moved towards a commitment to eradicate the discipline disparity has the potential to acknowledge and eradicate anti-Black racism. The OUSD was under investigation by the U.S. Department of Education for civil rights for violations in their school discipline against their Black students. OUSD agreed, in response to the investigation and the findings of disparate rate of arrests, suspensions and expulsions of Black students compared to their white classmates, to implement RP to address the disparities.

Fundamental to CRT is the belief that institutional policies and resulting practices favor, support, and benefit one racial group over all others (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Educational institutions in the United States have been birthed, developed, and sustained based on the values and cultural practices of the white majority racial group. Schools are centers of learning, not just

about subjects such as math or grammar, but also about social rules and ideologies that reinforce inequality (Anyon, 2005; Leonardo, 2009; Apple, 2006). As a result, adults and young people of all racial identities are conditioned to recognize whiteness as desirable and deserving. Schools then become the location of social lessons and consequences about non-white racial conformity, sustained and enforced by alleged colorblind policies.

#### **Research Question 4**

*How does RP address the social and emotional issues of historically marginalized students as it relates to education?*

Black children are not broken and do not come with the deficits that schools so quickly label, such as at-risk, defiant, or lacking self-control. Under the clay mud of bias, oppression and racism are geniuses and gifts waiting to be accepted and cultivated. The questions awaiting answers are: What does it feel like to not be trusted, not be heard, or seen as smart or good enough? The social and emotional learning standards and practices build upon the premise that if students can only be mindful and control their anger and outburst, they will learn to collaborate and communicate with others. Then their behavior issues will disappear, leading to decreased discipline disparities that plague Black students in schools. This mindfulness and trauma-informed practice disguised as yet another equity reform is compelling but shifts the ownership of responsibility away from schools and onto the very youth cheated out of equitable opportunities (Gorski, 2019).

Black students in Sundown District are hurt, angry and afraid, and rightfully so. Racial trauma is prevalent, but Black students cannot be helped with SEL prevention and intervention methods that in any way ignore and discount how both colorblindness and cultural assaults dehumanize them in school. Most educators and mental health professionals in Sundown are

white and too few have extensive formal preparation in equity, diversity, and inclusion. The need to focus on Black students is not the fault of Black students. It has everything to do with the effects of systemic racism on Black students. Black students come of age in a cultural environment, where viewed from birth as a threat. Carter and Avery described what it felt like to come to school every day realizing, but not understanding why their teachers feared them just because they are Black. Aysia, Kamiah and Dionne call out the body shaming of Black girls through the dress code policy that teachers are quick to enforce by race. Aysia said it best, “When a rule is a rule. If one should follow, then all should follow it.” As each of the focus group students spoke about anything that was glaringly anti-Black, I could see the hurt in their eyes and hear pain in their voices, and in some cases in their body language. The students would tighten up, lower their heads or increase the rate of their breathing.

In the history of this country, we see everywhere that Black children, Black people, Black consciousness, the Black physical body, the Black spirit are under daily attack and daily assault. Public schools in America are in dire need of racial healing regarding the disciplinary disparities. Terrance brought up that until the Sundown District embraces diversity and inclusion, RP will not address the SEL needs of the Black students. He said, “It is a lack of relatability and diversity within the school and the school district. I mean, I'm not trying to sound negative and nothing, but you can't expect a frog to know what it is like to be a rabbit. You know what I'm sayin? Unless you have the time to talk to the frog and talk to the rabbit.” He continued, “You know, I'm saying basically, people don't understand where some people, some of these students, some of these families are coming from, right. There's a lot of a lot of prejudgment.” RP has become increasingly popular in American schools as the evidence shows that when implemented with fidelity successfully reduces exclusionary discipline and decreases racial disparities (Fronius,

Darling-Hammond, Persson, Guckenburg, Hurley, & Petrosino, 2019; Wadha, 2016). However, schools tokenize social justice and restorative practice. From this study, I conclude that if RPs were implemented in the spirit of communitarian spirit, as designed, it would address the social and emotional issues of Black students.

Relationships are a must. Black students in the focus group stated they must know their teachers and administrators care about them. Unfortunately, this was not always the case. The students stated they felt they were hated and a threat at school because they are Black. Therefore, they do not believe RP will be effective until the dismantling of anti-Black racism. Terrance, one of the Black teachers in the interview process, validated the students' experiences with this comment,

“I could be sitting in my room and listening on the walkie talkie. I hear one particular staff member who's responsible for the restorative piece, you know, this staff member is very punitive. But at one point in time, this staff member was restorative, but now that they have a position of power, they're punitive. All you hear over the walkie is that particular staff member escorting poor children of color to send him to in house suspension with no form of resolution it's like a pattern just, just this EVERY DAY.”

Unfortunately, the staff member Terrance was describing refused the interview for this study.

There is a lot to unpack in that statement from Terrance. Anti-Black racism is present along with the white privilege and power-sharing in Sundown District. In some instances, they are undercover and protected in the policies, and in other instances, they are all out in the open for public viewing. Terrance described what Greg, the Black middle school principal, eluded who does not challenge the white privilege. Therefore, the status quo of whiteness in his building because he accepts and speaks to the discourse that Black students must behave how whiteness

demands they behave. The mentality of Greg is prevalent across Sundown District. Terrance describes what it looks like when Black students in his school situated in Sundown District decide not to behave in how whiteness dictates and when there is a lack of or refusal to share power because white privilege is prevailing,

“After a while it creates a culture and energy around that particular staff member that is just horrible because all you know that this staff member does is just want to put these [Black] kids in in-house suspension. I think the in-house, the enclosure rooms need to be eliminated from the school district as a whole because that is too much like prison to have a kid sitting in a room for six hours staring at a black wall where teachers are not bringing down work. That's, that's prison and it's not fair and it bothers me a lot. It makes me very, very furious with my job every day that I got to listen to on a walkie these staff members sending kids to in-house and it hurts because in my position I have no power, so I can't even try to step in and be restorative because I get overruled.”

RP is not addressing the social and emotional needs of the traditionally marginalized students. For this study, Black students, because RP is not a proactive measure or process. The data analyzed points to the RP as another compliance box checked by Sundown District, just as Principal Ashleigh pointed out in her interview.

Restorative practices which stem from restorative justice are relational and designed to bring people together and promote racial healing and growth. However, if all the Black students get, the adults in schools dropping knowledge on how they should behave, how they should feel, and how they should respond to life's inequities are like dropping seeds on concrete. That knowledge will never take root and grow. Black children are hurting from the daily trauma they experience in their schools. Educators need to understand why Black children are showing up

with a "defiant" attitude. Until they do, according to Dena Simmons (2020), the SEL practices schools are determined to teach will continue to feel like white supremacy with a hug. Sundown district must realize and embrace the notion that when utilizing the RP process, it is not unusual for agreements to not only address the unmet needs of those who were directly harmed but also of those who did the harm and of the community in which the harm occurred.

### **Research Question 5**

*How, if any, has racialized factors impact the implementation of RP?*

Schools and districts should recognize that restorative practice is not simply a set of behavior modification techniques. Nor should it be viewed as a way to reduce conflict, but rather a whole philosophy that would need to be adopted not just in schools but also at all educational system levels. Most research indicates that restorative policies will be sustained in schools and continually produce positive results only when restorative practice ideas are an adopted philosophy. The entire school population must buy-in and implement, rather than one program in one classroom or at one level of administration (Braithwaite, 1989; Cameron & Thorsborne, 1999; Watchel, 1999). At the same time, there is great promise in the restorative approach to student discipline. The likelihood that the current white hegemonic punitive trends may substantially hamper implementing these methods in school discipline. When Black students attend predominantly white schools or, for that matter, attend predominantly Black schools filled with white female teachers, they are often misjudged and misunderstood. The Black students become victims of racial microaggressions because often they do not fit within mainstream white middle-class schooling expectations (Emdin, 2016; Hotchkins, 2016). White women make up approximately 80 percent of the teaching force in America's schools. These white teachers need to understand themselves before they can successfully teach and reach Black

students. Stevenson (2014) says white teachers must understand that racial stress is a matter of competence, not character.

Racial stress is the anxiety compounded by the fear of saying or doing something racially offensive, when it's a lack of racial literacy—not talking about race—that heightens that likelihood. Racial literacy hones teachers' ability to resolve racially stressful encounters by strengthening their skills to recognize when they're overwhelmed. When teachers are overwhelmed, in some instances in a matter of moments some to turn to fight or flight behaviors. Stevenson (2014) states, she does not need to have teachers who are overwhelmed by her son or children who look like him be a bad person. She just needs to know if they're so overwhelmed that they're going to do something that's not in her child's best interest. That's what [racial] competency is about. Understanding includes knowledge, knowledge leads to self-awareness that leads to skills and those skills will lead to action (Neville, Gallardo, & Sue, 2016). It is important to go beyond knowledge and get to action because that is where racial competence resides. White teachers must recognize racism and intervene with it inside and outside of themselves in order for RP to be effective and implemented with fidelity. When white educators go into fight, flight or freeze reactions it impedes their ability to listen deeply and therefore they cannot be an empathetic listener (Stevenson, 2014).

Since addressing the issues of race is rare in schools or education across the U.S. it is not unusual that most white teachers are uncomfortable with talking about racial issues or racism. Having the option of not talking about it, navigating it, or understanding it is white privilege. Often when the racial discourse particularly anti-Black racism, white teachers respond defensively and resist the discussion. The conversations are difficult and risky because they are focused on unlearning racism and encouraging the acknowledgment of the historical oppression

that continues to manifest in schools. The conversations are in direct opposition to the deficit ideology that most white educators and the reform models they embrace when addressing Black students and their perceived needs. It has been my experience to watch the anti-Black racism discussion derail or get met with silence and shutdown from my white colleagues because of guilt or simply white privilege they refuse to acknowledge. Therefore, institutional racism continues in schools.

Because of institutional racism, schools have been much more supportive of harsh approaches to preventing and identifying student misbehavior. The growing presence of surveillance cameras, metal detectors, drug-sniffing dogs, security-oriented School Resource Officers (SROs), and even armed police supports the institutional racist focus on student behavior (Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 2001; Simon, 2007). Further, schools have enthusiastically endorsed severe punishments for rule-breakers that include revoking certain privileges and sanctioning detentions, suspensions, and expulsions (Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 2001; Welch & Payne, 2012). Some schools are now even involving the juvenile and criminal justice systems in addressing severe violations. This harsh trend can produce even harsher consequences for the offending students who are found responsible or guilty.

The implementation of RP calls for collaboration and inclusion. Schools are designed with a hierarchical structure. RP demands that those with structural power voluntarily share some of that power with those that lack it (Lyubansky & Barter, 2019). The data I analyzed exposed that those with power in Sundown District and the development of the discipline process, are not choosing collaboration but unilateral decision making. The teachers and administrators I interviewed talked about the system in Sundown District and those with power not being willing to share it in order to implement RP and the peace circles. The data I collected spoke volumes. It

is easier for some in Sundown District to say, we are restorative look it is written in the student handbook. To outsiders and even to some of the parents and staff, RP is working until it is not. There is a false narrative spoken and unspoken at the same time that if the system as it is established and currently operating is not oppressive to me and my voice is heard and respected, that means the system is great it must be the “others” at fault.

Ideally, RP examines the systemic conditions that may contribute to the motivation or the actions of those causing the perceived harm. Because it is, at root, a community process, it is not a so-called impartial authority who must understand the facts but rather those who are directly involved and impacted who must understand each other. Lyubansky and Barter (2019) explain, “RP is a community process there must be an understanding that those involved must understand each other. From such an understanding it is possible to make agreements about how to move forward. When this happens, justice is then operationalized not as punishment, but as restorative actions designed to make amends by repairing harm and creating conditions for future well-being. It is not uncommon for these agreements to not only address the unmet needs of those who were directly harmed but also of those who did the harm and of the community in which the harm occurred. The whole RP process takes time and resources in order for it to be effective in schools. Schools must realign resources such as people, time and finances and be willing to address the structural and institutional racial factors that permeate school systems. Compared with traditional discipline approaches such as suspension, restorative programs are more time consuming during the initial periods of implementation yet are able to save time by preventing or diffusing problems early. Depending on the practices and programming selected for implementation, funding will vary. If solely incorporated into class time or a current standing structure/function it can be cost free. However, funding is typically necessary for training and

materials. Funding support has been provided to schools and districts through discretionary grants through the U.S. Department of Education, and local service agencies and universities are also being used to support the costs associated with implementation.

### **Research Question 6**

*In what ways, if any, does RP provide support and connectedness in schools to Black students?*

When the focus group participants talked about the potential of restorative practice, they were adamant that it would not work if there were no relationships established between the adults and the students. Building positive and meaningful relationships is important for all students; however, it is imperative that school staff intentionally cultivate relationships with Black students as these students often report feeling less safe among, and less connected to, adults in schools (Anyon et al., 2016; Voight, Hanson, O'Malley, & Adekanye, 2015).

With its roots in African indigenous knowledge, RP holds a world view affirming all life's interrelatedness and numerous social institutions, cultural bonds, and practices that give life daily that firmly held sense of oneness and community (Davis 2019). Community is central. The concept of family in Africa and for Blacks embraces the nuclear family and the extended family as well as people who are not related by blood. The students in this study wanted their voices to heard and respected as a sign that they belong. Focus group students Aysia and Dionne stated that without that sense of belonging and feeling connected, schools make them feel hated because they are Black and because they are Black teachers and administrators feel at ease enforcing harsh discipline practices. The young ladies said this led to the sense of hopelessness because no one cares anyway. I described the restorative circle to the participants for the benefit of those that were not familiar with it. They were intrigued and thought it would help if their

voices were heard and respected along with some power sharing. Unfortunately, the Black focus group students realized their schools had a long way to go in feeling supported and connected to school. Their experiences with disparate discipline, feeling hated and feared because they are Black made the group skeptical of any hope of change and relief RP could bring them. Dionne shared that she experienced RP circles in a school she once attended that served predominantly white students. She stated, “I enjoyed having my voice heard, and it helped with restoring relationships to a point, but not with a sense of belonging because I was one of ten Black students in the whole school, and that is a whole other issue. I will say every time a Black student or any student had an altercation; we had a circle.” Dionne believed if the school she attended in Sundown District that serves predominantly Black students practiced peace circles with all students, it might help with relationships. She said she could feel like her teachers wanted her and the other Black students at school because they would get to know her and her Black classmates.

The restorative circle process connects the participants. Its technique works to build and restore relationships through equitable opportunity via sharing and listening. Talking circles proactively build individuals' skills when conflicts arise because they allow everyone to speak and be heard. Restorative circles are especially beneficial for youth learning how to negotiate conflict, as they help them practice respectful listening and healthy self-expression. In schools, these circles are often conducted to respond to wrongdoing or conflict as an alternative disciplinary strategy. However, this technique can be equally as effective in providing preventative factors for when future challenges arise. Circles have the power to create and strengthen support systems between peers and lay the groundwork for a trusting classroom environment. Because these talking circles provide both restorative and preventative measures,

they are used in various group settings, including but not limited to schools, foster homes, rehabilitation, correctional, and mental health facilities. Some schools choose to start each day with a circle as it helps create and maintain a safe environment for reflection.

I could not observe restorative circles in Sundown School District due to COVID-19 and all schools mandated to remote only learning. To get a better sense of the ways that peace circles operated, I was able to view a public Edutopia clip on-line of a restorative circle held by Black students in Pearl-Cohn High School located in Nashville, TN. The school utilizes a space called the Zone instead of suspensions for students to come together in a collaborative space and discuss what their behaviors were and ways to correct it. In the video a student, who was a Black girl, indicated they have the Zone every morning for two hours. The students have peace circle guidelines they all agree to in order to help everyone feel connected and heard. The guidelines are simple and to the point: Say just enough, be your best self, what is shared in the circle, stays in the circle, listen from the heart, speak from the heart and respect the speaker. The fact that there is not a power dynamic was addressed made the circle authentic and effective. The students were all seated in an inward facing circle and only the individual with the talking piece was allowed to speak. Students stated they felt empowered in the Zone because they had caring adults in the space willing to listen to them. This is what was missing from the teachers and administrators from the students' perspective. Although I did not hear or witness any conversations regarding race, race did not appear to be a barrier to the effectiveness of the RP peace circle. The leaders in the Zone were helping the students build context. This is necessary in conflict resolution and community building. Students learn and realize everyone plays a part in the conflict even if they do not want to admit this fact. The students were attentive and leaning

into the conversation. The connected piece of RP is built into the restorative circles. Sundown District staff and students have not reached this point in a consistent implementation.

### **Implications**

Most research indicates that restorative policies will be sustained in schools and continually produce positive results only when restorative practice ideas are an adopted philosophy. At the same time, there is great promise in the restorative approach to student discipline. The likelihood that the current white hegemonic punitive trends may substantially hamper implementing these methods in school discipline. When Black students attend predominantly white schools or, for that matter, attend predominantly Black schools filled with white female teachers, they are often misjudged and misunderstood. The Black students become victims of racial microaggressions because often they do not fit within mainstream white middle-class schooling expectations.

State and federal discipline policy reforms aim to reduce reliance on suspension as a response to behavior issues in schools. In doing so, they make room for more developmentally appropriate Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) oriented approaches to behavior. Many school districts are undertaking multifaceted reforms that integrate a range of programming, some with the potential to provide SEL opportunities to marginalized students. Yet we believe that a student- focused and colorblind conceptualization of SEL limits the potential of these reforms to substantially reduce racial and gender discipline disparities. If my case study and research show that when teachers implement RP with an equity lens to Black students and not allow their bias and or institutional racism impede on the implementation Black students will respond favorably to RP and it will become a viable alternative discipline reform, then my hopes are that schools

will utilize this approach consistently and with fidelity. When this happens the school to prison pipeline will diminish.

### **Future Research**

The review of the research literature in the United States reveals that implementation of restorative justice practices is increasing as an intervention to school misbehavior as both a reactive and proactive measure to improve school culture, relationships, and student outcomes. The purpose of this case study was to explore the ways anti-Blackness influences the implementation of restorative practices and results in further racial inequities and racial oppression through the lens of Critical Race Theory. I focused on a district that utilized Restorative Practices and wanted to explore how race was addressed. I found that race is not addressed in Restorative Practices, though some of the participants thought it could. However, issues such as the educators unable to share power with students, have a deeper awareness of self to combat white privilege, percepts, norms, and anti-Black biases prevented race as some of the root causes of disciplinary issues exposed.

There is limited research on the implementation of RP as an alternative to the racial discipline gap in Midwest school districts. Future research comparing Black and white students' experience in a fully integrated RP framework in the Midwest would be beneficial to see if RP, when utilized systemically, decreases the discipline gap.

Future research is needed on the RP as a response to discipline disparities, especially given growing beliefs among policy makers and practitioners about its gap-reducing benefits. Schools and districts adopt RP with the assumption that the approach promotes racial equity. Studies examining RP for reducing racial disparities are sparse. Future research and studies need to focus on RP as a preventative measure rather than an intervention.

## Summary/Recommendations

Interpreting my findings to be signals of systemic racism is consistent with the tenets of CRT and is also supported by overwhelming qualitative evidence that a potentially effective alternative to exclusionary discipline such as Restorative practices covered in colorblind, anti-Black institutional policies and practices serve to reproduce racial inequalities in school discipline. Such an analysis reveals the potential limitations of ‘race neutral’ behavioral and relational strategies for individual racism and bias reduction when they are implemented in isolation of structural reforms. Although popular recommendations for discipline reform are framed as responsive to the needs of Black students, they tend to be colorblind in their implementation. Moreover, they do not address the conditions of egalitarianism, collectivity, and cooperation that provide the foundation for individual implicit bias reduction (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2000).

Current recommendations in the school discipline literature that focus on tiered student support services and teacher professional development on relational strategies therefore obscure the power dynamics that sustain racism and prejudice in schools. The district that was the focus of this study has engaged in sustained discipline reforms for over ten years that rely on alternative approaches to out-of-school suspension like counseling, PBIS, BIST and universal social emotional learning programs. The integration of RP with the previous discipline reforms was done haphazardly as a response to Senate Bill 100 (exclusionary discipline reform). District-level discipline policies do not mandate training for educators on implicit bias or culturally responsive pedagogy, eliminate colorblind codes of conduct that criminalize the dress and mannerisms associated with youth of color (e.g., banning hoodies, hats, leggings and particular hairstyles), or address structural concerns such as resource allocation, teacher preparedness, or

school segregation. They did not change the reality that Black students in this district attend hyper-segregated schools with low expectations and less qualified teachers facing extreme pressures to raise student achievement as measured through standardized tests that normalize whiteness (Darling- Hammond 2007; Leonardo 2007).

It is recommended that Sundown District do the following:

1. Address and mandate ongoing professional development on Institutional Racism and the history of Restorative Justice and Restorative practices simultaneously
2. Build an infrastructure of Buy-In from the ground up to include the voices of the community, students and staff
3. Address the power dynamics during the system building process
4. Promote realistic expectations and hold everyone accountable to the process developed collaboratively
5. Commit to expend the necessary resources to the process (time, people, finance)
6. Use the data from this study to help guide the process
7. Develop Community/District/University partnerships

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## APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PRESET QUESTIONS

(Principal & Restorative Practice Facilitators)

A recent study has discovered discipline disparities in your district/School. What do you believe is the cause of this?

Please describe when and how suspensions or expulsions are handled.

How is RP regarded in the district/school? In what ways do RP help the district/school meet its social justice and equity aspirations?

What are the benefits of RP? What are some of the challenges?

What is your view on the RP process? Does it work? Why or why not?

How are issues of race handled in the RP circle?

How are issues related to race handled in the district/school?

How do you deal with race related issues?

How does RP deal with issues related to race?

## APPENDIX B: FOCUS GROUPS INTERVIEW PRESET QUESTIONS

(Black Students)

Have you ever been suspended from school? If yes, please describe how you felt.

Describe your view on who is suspended. Why?

Do you know what RP is? If yes, describe when it is used in this school.

Have you ever personally experienced RP?

Have you personally participated in a RP circle? If yes, please describe the experience. If no, why not?

What is your view on the RP process? Does it work? Why or why not? Do you believe you benefitted or (would have benefitted) from the use of RP? Why or why not?

Have you ever felt discriminated against or experienced racism at school? If yes, please discuss why and how you felt?

Do you believe RP helped you resolve a racial issue?

## APPENDIX C: PARENTAL RECRUITMENT

(verbal/via Zoom or via email)

My name is Shelia Boozer, and I am a doctoral student with Illinois State University. You are being asked to allow your child to participate in a research study that I am conducting under the supervision of Dr. Pam Hoff of the Educational Administration and Foundations Department at Illinois State University. The purpose of this study is to examine Restorative Practices and its impact on racial inequities in school discipline and its potential to be used as an alternative to exclusionary discipline (for example: out of school suspensions or expulsions).

If you choose to allow your child to participate in this study, your child will participate in one audio and video taped focus group interview via Zoom with other students with the same experience with a suspension or expulsion. I will ask the students questions and give them an opportunity to provide me with straight honest answers. In total your child's involvement will last approximately one and a half hours.

Zoom is a third party owned cloud-based video and web conferencing platform that allows people such as teachers and students to meet across multiple locations to take part in learning, sharing files and collaborating. Zoom partners with K-12 schools to provide video communication to support traditional and virtual learning. Zoom may be used by students, including students under the age of 16 because of Zoom's commitment to K-12 education. Students in your district have been taking part in Zoom meetings with their teachers during this COVID 19 Pandemic that has closed all schools across our state.

Zoom states, "We are particularly committed to protecting the privacy of K-12 users, and Zoom's K-12 Schools & Districts Privacy Policy is designed to reflect our compliance with the requirements of the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act ("COPPA"), the California

Consumer Privacy Act (“CCPA”), the Federal Education Rights and Privacy Act (“FERPA”), and other applicable law.”

We do not anticipate any risks beyond those that would occur in everyday life. To reduce the risk of being uncomfortable your child does not have to answer any question that may cause stress or discomfort. Your child may decide not to participate at any point of the interview. Your child’s responses will be kept confidential. All of your child’s responses in the interview will be anonymous; nothing that will identify your child will be linked to your child’s responses.

Participation is voluntary.

If you agree to allow your child to participate in this research study, I will email you a parent permission form for you to read and to sign. Please email it back to me at the following email [sboozer@ilstu.edu](mailto:sboozer@ilstu.edu) or mail it to:

Shelia Boozer

1900 W. Monroe

Springfield, IL 62702

Do you have any questions now? If you have any questions later about the research or wish to withdraw from the study, contact me at [sboozer@ilstu.edu](mailto:sboozer@ilstu.edu) or my supervisor Dr. Pam Hoff at [phoff@ilstu.edu](mailto:phoff@ilstu.edu).

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, contact the Illinois State University Research Ethics & Compliance Office at (309) 438-5527 or [IRB@ilstu.edu](mailto:IRB@ilstu.edu)

## APPENDIX D: PARENTAL PERMISSION FORM

You are being asked to allow your child to participate in a research study conducted by Shelia Boozer under the supervision of Dr. Pam Hoff of the Educational Administration and Foundations Department at Illinois State University. The purpose of this study is to examine Restorative Practices and its impact on racial inequities in school discipline and its potential to be used as an alternative to exclusionary discipline (for example: out of school suspensions or expulsions).

### **Why is your child being asked to participate?**

Your child has been asked to participate because your child is Black and has a past experience with a school suspension or expulsion.

Their participation in this study is voluntary. Neither you nor your child will be penalized if either of you choose to skip parts of the study, not participate, or withdraw from the study at any time. I will conduct this study during school hours at your child's school.

### **What would your child do?**

If you choose to allow your child to participate in this study, your child will participate in one audio and video taped focus group interview via Zoom with other students with the same experience with a suspension or expulsion. I will ask the students questions and give them an opportunity to provide me with straight honest answers. In total your child's involvement will last approximately one and a half hours.

### **What is Zoom?**

Zoom is a third party owned cloud-based video and web conferencing platform that allows people such as teachers and students to meet across multiple locations to take part in learning, sharing files and collaborating. Zoom partners with K-12 schools to provide video

communication to support traditional and virtual learning. Zoom may be used by students, including students under the age of 16 because of Zoom’s commitment to K-12 education. Students in your district have been taking part in Zoom meetings with their teachers during this COVID 19 Pandemic that has closed all schools across our state.

Zoom states, “We are particularly committed to protecting the privacy of K-12 users, and Zoom’s K-12 Schools & Districts Privacy Policy is designed to reflect our compliance with the requirements of the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (“COPPA”), the California Consumer Privacy Act (“CCPA”), the Federal Education Rights and Privacy Act (“FERPA”), and other applicable law.”

**Are any risks expected?**

We do not anticipate any risks beyond those that would occur in everyday life. However, there is a minimal risk to reputation should a breach of confidentiality occur. To reduce the risk of reputation and being uncomfortable your child does not have to answer any question that may cause stress or discomfort. Your child may decide not to participate at any point of the focus group interview.

**Will your child’s information be protected?**

Your child’s responses will be confidential; nothing that will identify them will be linked to their responses. The video and audiotapes are only for my use to accurately capture and write up the responses. We will use all reasonable efforts to keep any provided personal information confidential. I, the researcher, will keep all of your child’s responses including the audio and videotapes under lock and key as well as password protected. Your child’s responses will be combined with the responses of other participants. Information that may identify your child or potentially lead to re-identification will not be released to individuals that are not on the research

team. However, when required by law or university policy, identifying information (including your signed consent form) may be seen or copied by authorized individuals.

The findings from this study may be presented in conferences, meetings, and publications. When these findings are presented, your responses will be combined with the responses of other participants. The audio and videotaping is solely for my use to accurately capture and write up the responses. Your child's data may be used in other research projects.

The findings from this study may be presented in a case study to help answer the question if the implementation Restorative Practices has an impact on racial inequalities Black students experience when disciplined at school. The findings from this study may be presented in conferences, meetings, and publications. When these findings are presented, your child's responses will be combined with the responses of other participants. After your child's data has been de-identified, your child's data may be used in other research projects.

**Will your child receive anything for participating?**

I will email a \$10 food/drink gift card to your child for participating in the focus group.

**Who will benefit from this study?**

School districts across the country will benefit from this study. Discipline is a major concern in our schools. Many schools continue to use suspensions as a normal everyday practice for responding to students' issues even though suspensions are largely ineffective. Black students are the ones suspended and disciplined more than any other racial group of students. The goal is to find an alternative solution that repairs and builds relationships and keeps Black students in their classrooms learning.

**Whom do you contact if you have any questions?**

If you have any questions about the research or wish to withdraw your child from the study, contact me at sboozer@ilstu.edu or my supervisor Dr. Pam Hoff at phoff@ilstu.edu.

----- If you have any questions about your child’s rights as a participant, or if you feel that your child has been placed at risk, contact the Illinois State University Research Ethics & Compliance Office at (309) 438-5527 or IRB@ilstu.edu

**Documentation of Permission**

**Sign below if you are 18 or older and willing to allow your child to participate in this study and email to me at sboozer@ilstu.edu**

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

## APPENDIX E: ZOOM PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT VIA EMAIL

My name is Shelia Boozer, and I am a doctoral student with Illinois State University. You are being asked to participate in a research study that I am conducting under the supervision of Dr. Pam Hoff of the Educational Administration and Foundations Department at Illinois State University. The purpose of this study is to examine Restorative Practices and its impact on racial inequities in school discipline and its potential to be used as an alternative to exclusionary discipline (for example: out of school suspensions or expulsions).

If you choose to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in an audio and video taped interview via Zoom. I will ask you questions and give you an opportunity to provide me with straight honest answers about student discipline and Restorative Practices. In total, your involvement in this study will last approximately 60 minutes.

We do not anticipate any risks beyond those that would occur in everyday life. To reduce the risk of being uncomfortable you do not have to answer any question that may cause stress or discomfort. You may decide not to participate at any point of the interview. Participation is voluntary.

If you would like to participate in this research study, please read over the attached participant consent form, sign it and return it to me at the following email [sboozer@ilstu.edu](mailto:sboozer@ilstu.edu)

Do you have any questions now? If you have any questions later about the research or wish to withdraw from the study, contact me at [sboozer@ilstu.edu](mailto:sboozer@ilstu.edu) or my supervisor Dr. Pam Hoff at [phoff@ilstu.edu](mailto:phoff@ilstu.edu).

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, contact the Illinois State University Research Ethics & Compliance Office at (309) 438-5527 or [IRB@ilstu.edu](mailto:IRB@ilstu.edu)

## APPENDIX F: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Shelia Boozer under the supervision of Dr. Pam Hoff of the Educational Administration and Foundations Department at Illinois State University. The purpose of this study is to examine Restorative Practices and its impact on racial inequities in school discipline and its potential to be used as an alternative to exclusionary discipline (for example: out of school suspensions or expulsions).

### **Why are you being asked?**

- You have been asked to participate because of your connection with working with students and your familiarity with Restorative Practices.
- You are ineligible to participate if you are under the age of 18.
- Your participation in this study is voluntary. You will not be penalized if you choose to skip parts of the study, not participate, or withdraw from the study at any time.

### **What would you do?**

If you choose to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in an audio and video taped interview via Zoom. I will ask you questions and give you an opportunity to provide me with straight honest answers about student discipline and Restorative Practices. In total, your involvement in this study will last approximately 60 minutes.

Zoom is a third party owned cloud-based video and web conferencing platform that allows people such as teachers and students to meet across multiple locations to take part in meetings, learning, sharing files and collaborating. Zoom partners with K-12 schools to provide video communication to support traditional and virtual learning. Teachers and staff in your district have been taking part in Zoom meetings with each other during this COVID 19 Pandemic that has closed all schools across our state.

Zoom states, “We are particularly committed to protecting the privacy of K-12 users, and Zoom’s K-12 Schools & Districts Privacy Policy is designed to reflect our compliance with the requirements of the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (“COPPA”), the California Consumer Privacy Act (“CCPA”), the Federal Education Rights and Privacy Act (“FERPA”), and other applicable law.”

**Are any risks expected?**

We do not anticipate any risks beyond those that would occur in everyday life. However, there is a minimal risk to reputation/employability should a breach of confidentiality occur. To reduce the risk of being uncomfortable or to reputation/employability you do not have to answer any question that may cause stress or discomfort. You may decide not to participate at any point of the interview.

**Will your information be protected?**

Your responses in the interview will be confidential; nothing that will identify you will be linked to your responses. The findings from this study may be presented in conferences, meetings, and publications. When these findings are presented, your responses will be combined with the responses of other participants. The audio and videotaping is solely for my use to accurately capture and write up the responses. After your data has been de-identified, your data may be used in other research projects.

**Who will benefit from this study?**

While you may not directly benefit from this study, your responses will help inform best research practices and develop guidelines for ethical research. School districts across the country will benefit from this study. Discipline is a major concern in our schools. Many schools continue

to use suspensions as a normal everyday practice for responding to students' issues even though suspensions are largely ineffective. Black students are the ones suspended and disciplined more than any other racial group of students. The goal is to find an alternative solution that repairs and builds relationships and keeps Black students in their classrooms learning.

**Whom do you contact if you have any questions?**

If you have any questions about the research or wish to withdraw from the study, contact me at [sboozer@ilstu.edu](mailto:sboozer@ilstu.edu) or my supervisor Dr. Pam Hoff at [phoff@ilstu.edu](mailto:phoff@ilstu.edu).

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If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, contact the Illinois State University Research Ethics & Compliance Office at (309) 438-5527 or [IRB@ilstu.edu](mailto:IRB@ilstu.edu).

**Documentation of Consent**

Check the box below if you are willing to participate and return it to me via email at [sboozer@ilstu.edu](mailto:sboozer@ilstu.edu)

I am 18 or older and willing to participate in this study

**I agree to be audio and/or videotaped**

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

## APPENDIX G: STUDENT RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

My name is Shelia Boozer, and I am a doctoral student at Illinois State University. You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by me under the supervision of Dr. Pam Hoff of the Educational Administration and Foundations Department at Illinois State University. The purpose of this study is to examine Restorative Practices and its impact on racial inequities in school discipline and its potential to be used as an alternative to exclusionary discipline (for example: out of school suspensions or expulsions).

You have been asked to participate because of you are a Black student and have a past experience with a school suspension or expulsion.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You will not be penalized if you choose to skip parts of the study, not participate, or withdraw from the study at any time.

If you choose to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in an audio and video taped focus group via Zoom with other students. I will provide you and the other participants with a \$10 food and drink gift card as a thank you for your time. I will ask you questions and give you an opportunity to provide me with straight honest answers about race, racism, student discipline, and Restorative Practices. In total, your involvement in this study will last approximately 90 minutes.

I do not anticipate any risks beyond those that would occur in everyday life. However, there is a minimal risk to reputation should a breach of confidentiality occur. To reduce the risk of being

uncomfortable or to reputation you do not have to answer any question that may cause stress or discomfort. I cannot guarantee confidentiality due to the nature of a focus group, but all participants are encouraged not to share any information that is discussed in the focus group. You may decide not to participate at any point of the focus group.

I have received your parent's permission for you to participate. I have a form for you to check off and sign if you agree to participate that you can email back to me.

Thank you.

## APPENDIX H: STUDENT ASSENT

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Shelia Boozer under the supervision of Dr. Pam Hoff of the Educational Administration and Foundations Department at Illinois State University. The purpose of this study is to examine Restorative Practices and its impact on racial inequities in school discipline and its potential to be used as an alternative to exclusionary discipline (for example: out of school suspensions or expulsions).

### **Why are you being asked?**

You have been asked to participate because of you are Black and have a past experience with a school suspension or expulsion.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You will not be penalized if you choose to skip parts of the study, not participate, or withdraw from the study at any time.

### **What would you do?**

If you choose to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in an audio and video taped focus group via Zoom with other students. I will ask you questions and give you an opportunity to provide me with straight honest answers about race, racism, student discipline, and Restorative Practices. In total, your involvement in this study will last approximately 90 minutes.

### **Are any risks expected?**

We do not anticipate any risks beyond those that would occur in everyday life. However, there is a minimal risk to reputation should a breach of confidentiality occur. To reduce the risk of being uncomfortable or to reputation you do not have to answer any question that may cause stress or discomfort. You may decide not to participate at any point of the interview. Other students will be a part of the focus group and each of you are agreeing to keep the responses and

conversations confidential. I cannot guarantee confidentiality due to the nature of a focus group, but all participants are encouraged not to share any information that is discussed in the focus group.

**Will your information be protected?**

Your responses in the interview will be confidential; nothing that will identify you will be linked to your responses. We will use all reasonable efforts to keep any provided personal information confidential. I, the researcher, will keep all of your responses including the audio and videotapes under lock and key as well as password protected. Your responses will be combined with the responses of other participants. Information that may identify you or potentially lead to re-identification will not be released to individuals that are not on the research team. However, when required by law or university policy, identifying information (including your signed consent form) may be seen or copied by authorized individuals.

The findings from this study may be presented in conferences, meetings, and publications. When these findings are presented, your responses will be combined with the responses of other participants. The audio and videotaping is solely for my use to accurately capture and write up the responses. After your data has been de-identified, your data may be used in other research projects.

**Will you receive anything for participating?**

I will email a \$10 food/drink gift card to you for participating in the focus group.

**Who will benefit from this study?**

While you may not directly benefit from this study, your responses will help inform best research practices and develop guidelines for ethical research. School districts and Black students across the country will benefit from this study. Discipline is a major concern in our

schools. Many schools continue to use suspensions as a normal everyday practice for responding to students' issues even though suspensions are largely ineffective. Black students are the ones suspended and disciplined more than any other racial group of students. The goal is to find an alternative solution that repair and builds relationships and keeps Black students in their classrooms learning and their voices heard and respected.

**Whom do you contact if you have any questions?**

If you have any questions about the research or wish to withdraw your child from the study, contact me at [sboozer@ilstu.edu](mailto:sboozer@ilstu.edu) or my supervisor Dr. Pam Hoff at [phoff@ilstu.edu](mailto:phoff@ilstu.edu).

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If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, contact the Illinois State University Research Ethics & Compliance Office at (309) 438-5527 or [IRB@ilstu.edu](mailto:IRB@ilstu.edu).

**Documentation of Assent**

Please sign below if you are willing to participate and email it back to me at [sboozer@ilstu.edu](mailto:sboozer@ilstu.edu) .

**I agree to be audio and/or videotaped**

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

You will receive a copy of this form for your records.