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**HOW DO THE ZERO-TOLERANCE POLICIES LEAD
STUDENTS OF COLOR TO THE SCHOOL TO PRISON PIPELINE**

**A MASTER'S THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY
OF BETHEL UNIVERSITY**

**BY
DEANNA WILLIAMS**

**IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION**

AUGUST 2022

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STUDENTS OF COLOR TO THE SCHOOL TO PRISON PIPELINE**

BY

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AUGUST 2022

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I want first to take the opportunity to Thank God for bringing me through all the trials I have undergone while attending school and completing my thesis. I had contracted COVID three times and been in the hospital for two and half weeks fighting the virus. Many times I wanted to give up and broke down and cried.

I can't imagine if I would have gotten this far without the help of my thesis advisor Chuck Strand who worked tirelessly with me on this project, and the patience and understanding of my husband and other family members who supported me. I want to thank my PAR coach Matthew Barron for encouraging me to continue and relax. Finally, but not least, my children, who have always been my biggest cheerleaders. I have learned that anything worth having is worth working towards.

ABSTRACT

The school-to-prison pipeline in the United States is significantly affected by the zero-tolerance policies and mainly impacts students of color. The school to prison pipeline refers to students of color who are disproportionately placed into the juvenile detention system (JDS). Several factors play a role in what can be done to minimize the number of students of color who enter the school-to-prison pipeline. One factor contributing to the school-to-prison pipeline is the ineffective school-based interventions that increase student dropout. Additionally, it is vital to analyze educators' perspective that intentionally or unintentionally promotes racial bias that may cause disparities and lead to the school-to-prison pipeline. Ultimately, when we refer to the data and injustice, it is important to discover what statistics and numbers show within various districts regarding the disproportionate number of minorities from disadvantaged backgrounds. The data presented in this thesis will show that one must be vigilant in the policies and procedures that negatively impact students of color.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Research shows that the zero-tolerance policy of penalties for significant misbehavior is another way to keep children of color in control. Initially, zero-tolerance was supposed to be a way to minimize the number of illegal activities or violent crimes that happen on school grounds by implementing strict disciplinary consequences that often lead to student removal. Instead, the policy aims to criminalize less fortunate students of color and open the door to the school-to-prison pipeline. Any offense, big or small, has negative consequences on the students and pushes them further behind in school. After over five years of teaching inner-city students of color, the researcher realized that the trajectory of success is problematic if a student cannot read by the third grade (more than 80% of students in 3rd grade were unable to read and graduate) (Byran, 2017). Some parents can't help their children succeed and are stereotyped as lazy, without the perspective that parents themselves may be struggling too. Therefore, it becomes a survival mode for students of color to achieve academic success who don't know how to read, write, or use proper punctuation.

"Zero-tolerance" policies criminalize minor infractions of school rules, while cops in schools lead to students being criminalized for behavior that should be handled inside the school. Students of color are especially vulnerable to push-out trends and the discriminatory application of discipline" (Frankfurter & Martin, 2022, para. 2).

This researcher chose the topic because of the firsthand accounts after over five years of teaching in an urban setting IV school and the (JDC) Juvenile Detention Center in the summer months. This thesis author will show how the system overlooks children of color and gives them enough lead to set themselves up for failure. In today's society, black youth are more than four

times more likely to be detained or committed to juvenile facilities than their white peers and are incarcerated five times higher than their white peers (Rovner, 2021). When students of color who reside in an urban area are suspended or expelled, the students' first choices while out of school are the distribution of illegal narcotics or gang affiliation. "According to research under the zero-tolerance policies, students have been *expelled* for bringing something as small as a nail clipper to school, and the rates of *suspension* have increased dramatically" (Frankfurter & Martin, 2022, para 1).

Racial bias is blatant across the board in education and amongst the individuals who have sworn to serve and protect. To address the concerns, this researcher will review if educators' unconscious bias could cause them to disconnect from what is happening in our society today and the roles our educational system plays in the pipeline to prison (Mohamed, 2021). Suppose the instructor already has white guilt, aiming to save children of color and judge the parent's involvement as neglect. In that case, the inclination is already put into educators, administrators, counselors, and social workers' minds that they are there to save the children. For 9 minutes and 29 seconds, the world watched, too fearful of approaching or standing up for what was right, while then officer Derek Chauvin pressed his knee into the neck of George Floyd, an unarmed Black man (Peeples, 2020). Continued racial injustice or inequality relates to the thesis topic because it hasn't gone away and affects all ages especially students of color in schools. Racial injustice continues into adulthood for students of color as well.

How can school districts, educators, and support staff work on strengthening the school system to make education equitable for all students, no matter if they have a disability or income? What are some interventions that can be put into place to help create a system where everyone is created equally and not judged by the color of their skin? Students of color need to

be held to the same high standards as their white peers and have a sense of belonging in the classroom. The materials and curriculum presented in schools need to be engaging and relevant, and there needs to be more support for students from teachers of color. Educators can no longer continue to be enablers and insult our student's intelligence. This thesis writer will show various interventions that have been successful in school systems that can be applied to our public schools to help dismantle the pipeline.

Finally, many students of color come from a less fortunate background. Students who encounter adverse childhood experiences such as trauma, growing up in poverty, and not having their emotional or physical needs met play a big part in a child's success. A school is a place of safety and possibly the only meal they will receive for the day. For some students of color, their lack of success at school does not come from not wanting to learn, but rather from the anxieties about their life experiences that await them once they leave the safety of their school environment.

Thesis Question

How do the zero-tolerance policies lead students of color to the prison pipeline, and to what extent does zero-tolerance policies that are implemented in public schools lead to the school to prison pipeline?

Research Questions

- 1. How do Zero-Tolerance policies lead to negatively impact students of color and push them into the school to prison pipeline?*

2. *Does unconscious racial bias cause teachers, administrators, and counselors to unknowingly create stereotypes about certain groups of students which sequentially lead to expulsions, suspension and the school to prison pipeline?*
3. *Does the zero-tolerance policy overwhelmingly affect a disproportionate number of students of color from disadvantaged backgrounds?*
4. *What are some school based interventions that could be used to dismantle the school to prison pipeline?*

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

INFORMATION RESEARCH PROCESS

In order to obtain the information needed for this thesis the researcher used the Bethel reference library, Google search engines, and Sage Journals, to find the peer reviewed literature needed for the completion of this thesis. The researcher also used search terms such as “zero-tolerance policies”, “school-to-prison-pipeline”, “teacher or administrative racial bias”, “disparities amongst students of color” and, ACEs.

Thesis Goal

The goal of this chapter is to review the literature published about zero-tolerance policies and how the system negatively affects students of color and, to what extent does the zero-tolerance policies that are implemented in public schools lead to the school-to-prison pipeline? It will also focus on whether racial bias toward students of color and their disadvantaged backgrounds is present at a higher rate than their white counterparts.

1. How do Zero-Tolerance policies lead to negatively impact students of color and push them into the school to prison pipeline?

History of Zero-Tolerance Policy (ZTP)

The evolution of the zero-tolerance policy was put into place in 1980 as a part of the war on drugs, drug usage and violence in schools to help to minimize the number of violent acts on school property (Stahl, 2016). The violent crimes targeted were firearms or other weapons brought to school that would cause bodily harm. Several presidents proposed acts to prohibit the use of firearms either on the grounds or near the premises of a school. In 1990 President Joe Biden proposed the “Gun-Free School Zones Act of 1990.” The proposed act stated a person

could not discharge a firearm within 1000 feet of the school property, and again, in 1993, President Clinton signed the Gun-Free Act to go into effect in 1994. Under Clinton's proposal, schools were required to expel students for one year if they brought a gun or other weapon on the school premises. Furthermore, schools were required to report the incidents to the police or judicial system to continue receiving elementary and secondary funding under the Education Act of 1965 (Stahl, 2016). The Federal government had to step in and decline proposals from both presidents and have them rethink the policy. Several schools across the states began to adopt their policies which included guns, drugs, and even fighting for grounds to suspend or expel students from school along with additional offenses that may not have been exclusions under the policy. "By 1999, schools started to include swearing, truancy, insubordination, disrespect and dress-code violations under the umbrella of zero tolerance policies"(Stahl 2016, p. 13). These zero-tolerance policies immediately impose severe punishment on students no matter how small the circumstances. Students of color have been suspended or expelled for as little as pointing a chicken nugget at a student and saying "Bang" or bringing a plastic or paper gun to school. Rates of suspension have drastically increased from 1.7 million in 1974 to 3.1 million in 2000 and have been most dramatic for students of color (Frankfurter & Martin, 2022).

The tragic shootings at Columbine High School in 1999 opened doors for various items to be added to the zero-tolerance and anti-violence policy to include lesser penalties. Students began getting disciplined for acts as small as sharing over-the-counter medicine, bringing utensils, weapons made of plastic or paper, and making comments or gestures that an individual may feel threatening (Stahl, 2016). Zero tolerance policies send a message to students that something negative must happen when inappropriate actions get out of control, but students of color need to be aware that they may be targeted for these actions at a higher level than

their white peers. Zero-tolerance policies make their way through the education system from kindergarten to twelfth grade, where students of color may not have clear and accurate expectations for themselves and their education. The most recent view of the zero-tolerance policy was placed in force with the "broken glass theory" in mind (Children's Defense Fund, 2009). This new zero-tolerance policy eliminates or minimizes more significant incidents that may occur ahead of time by increasing the punishment (Smith, 2015). Although over time, the minimization of more significant incidents seemed not to be the case.

Failure to meet the needs of children of color will cause them to drop out of school due to not understanding the curriculum and disengagement, which later brings the court system into the situation. Government entities have designed programs such as the "No Child Left Behind Act," which at times have given school administration incentives to push out students who are performing below grade level to boost or improve overall school test scores (Frankfurter & Martin, 2022; Fenning & Rose, 2007). "No child left behind" is a way to pass students along that can't read or write at a grade level to meet standards. The term school-to-prison pipeline is for researchers and policymakers to make the correlation between discipline and the likelihood of the students entering the judicial system. No matter the population, expulsion and suspensions lead to a negative student education outcome (Skiba et al., 2014).

Zero-Tolerance and other school disciplines play an enormous role in the success or failure of our students of color in the school systems (Smith, 2015). Most schools are not required to provide school work when the students are suspended or expelled, which causes them to fall further behind. When the students return, many are so far behind that they tend to act out in class for fear of embarrassment, and may eventually be escorted out of the school by the police and placed into the judicial system.

“As a result, of staff needs to feel in control of students' behaviors; if a particular group of students (especially students of color) does not fit within the "norm," they are labeled as dangerous or trouble makers” (Fenning & Rose, 2007, p. 536). Sometimes after suspensions, arrests, and/or expulsions, students are referred to alternative self-contained classrooms which may not have the appropriate staffing and predominantly deal with behavioral issues. A classroom that focuses strictly on behaviors removes the time needed to focus on educational standards for students and their needed success. Educators have complained about being fearful or threatened by the school climate rather than admitting to not having the ability to manage or control their classroom (Skiba & Peterson, 1999), which sheds light on why vulnerable students fall into the harsh discipline of the zero-tolerance policies. Unfortunately, students of color are the majority who are targeted and fall into this category of fear and anxiety. The students' anxiety and fears are based upon the continued adverse reactions from staff they perceive to be biased or racist toward them.

Once the students with significant behavioral needs and have been diagnosed with these needs are classified as “troublemakers”, they are referred to and enrolled in the self-contained school environment. This researcher has had a number of students referred to our program from other non-contained schools, who are sometimes placed without proper due process or paperwork such as IEPs or Evaluation Reports. The students now have a negative label, making it hard to return to the mainstream school system without being singled out. Negative behaviors are expected in these self-contained schools or classrooms because it is customary in certain schools, and there is no consistency of consequences. Consequences are means to teach correct behavior. There is an increased dependence on hired police in schools who have no experience dealing with students rather than the administration and teachers taking control and handling the

situation at the school level (Frankfurter & Martin, 2022). Some students are forced into the judicial system due to harsh zero-tolerance policies and are in juvenile detention. The judicial system does not require the students to be provided with any educational services during their absence. Therefore, it would be appropriate if schools provided more interventions to help students with significant behavioral needs.

Most students expelled or suspended are African and Latino American students due to minor offenses (Frankfurter & Martin, 2022). Suppose the students of color continue not to be provided with adequate educational opportunities. In that case, they will not be able to successfully obtain meaningful employment to provide for themselves and their families that pay over minimum wage. "Incarcerated men are worth more in private prisons than they are to their communities on the streets of urban America (Smith, 2015, p. 136). It is a survival mode or a state of being to survive for students of color in the school system. Racial disparities still exist across the states. Research continues to show that zero-tolerance policies are another way to keep students of color in control and take away their ability to have a voice or be themselves. "Nearly two decades of a "zero tolerance" mentality has contributed dramatically to a spike in exclusionary discipline that involves racial disparities, youth and civil rights advocates say (Khadaroo, 2013, para. 13). This discipline continues to open the door to the school-to-prison-pipeline for students of color in tremendous numbers and the actions are unfair and unwarranted in many instances.

2. Does unconscious racial bias cause teachers, administrators, and counselors to unknowingly create stereotypes about certain groups of students which sequentially lead to expulsions, suspension and the school to prison pipeline?

Unconscious racial bias

Unconscious Bias Definition- When an individual or group unknowingly creates stereotypes about certain groups of people. Being unconscious of a situation can cause someone to subconsciously disconnect from what is fair in a particular situation.

Color Blindness

Color Blindness Definition: A form of racism in which white people minimize or deny the extent of racial inequality and discrimination, or try to explain racial inequality as resulting from factors unrelated to race.

The term "color blindness" refers to the potential to approach various matters without consideration of race, which some argue is a fairer approach and looking at people based upon nonracial characteristics but things such as their skills or character. However, one must look at students' race to see the oppressed minority groups based upon white dominance. There are disparities and biases in testing, resources, and relevant materials being presented to students of color (Dutil, 2020). In 2014 The Obama administration wrote a Dear College letter addressing the unequal punishment among students of color, discrimination, and illegality. President Obama furthermore provided examples for colleges to view "(e.g., a school issuing unequal punishments to "similarly situated" students of different races who get into a fight) and disparate impact (e.g., a facially neutral school uniform policy that adversely impacts students of a particular race), and describes remedies for violations" (Barrett et al., 2018, p. 2).

The researchers purpose is to show the various ways that students of color are funneled down the path of what is called the School to Prison Pipeline (STPP) and how it works. There

has been plenty of research that shows the inequality in school discipline but we need to look at how it may begin. In research from Barnes & Motz (2018), To understand this, we must consider how student race could play into the causal process. It may be that the causal process begins with the student's race (or, teachers' perception of the student's race). From there, the student's race might affect his/her probability of receiving a school-based punishment (i.e., the first part of the "pipeline" is: race school-based punishment). If a school-based punishment is meted out, then that student is expected to have an increased probability of being arrested later in life (i.e., the second part of the "pipeline" is: school-based punishment arrest probability) due to the processes noted above (p.6). When students of color attend predominantly White schools, they are often misjudged and misunderstood and become victims of racial microaggressions because they usually do not fit within mainstream of white middle-class schooling expectations (Bryan, 2017).

The license exams given to the teachers and the students are culturally biased and surround white teachers' knowledge and experiences. Some students of color are tested and placed in Special Education schools and self-contained classrooms after qualifying under the disability of (EBD) Emotional Behavioral Disorder based on subjective and culturally biased testing (Bryan, 2017). Placement in these settings makes it difficult for those students of color to return to a general education setting. As a result of so many behavioral problems, students of color may not be taught the academic fundamentals and cannot read, write a complete sentence or use proper punctuation as compared to their peers of the same age.

Many White teachers have had generations of stereotypical behaviors taught to them at a young age, and grow up to have a preconceived negative outlook on students of color. These students may be labeled as thugs or criminals before they have the opportunity to learn or be

successful by the White teachers, counselors, and administrators who are in charge of the schools. "White teachers are naturally socialized into systemic oppression from birth. Unintentionally and unknowingly, they also play a role in the systemic oppression of people of color" (Bryan, 2017, p. 13). Some White teachers are taught these behaviors in church, home, and in their community. A percentage of these individuals have a superiority complex (white privilege) in which they believe that the white race is superior to people of color.. With this preconceived mindset, these teachers carry these thoughts into the classroom, affecting how they interact with students of color.

Some practices in k-12 schools seem to dehumanize children of color, making the discipline harsher for them than for their white counterparts. There are systems moving students of color into the (STPP) school-to-prison pipeline even at a young age. The Office of Civil Rights reported in a 2014 article in (Byran, 2017) "...although Black boys represent 9% of the current kindergarten population, they represent between 48–50% of all suspensions and expulsions at this level" (p. 10). The attitudes of many White teachers toward students of color are deep-rooted in racist generalization. Some instantly target students of color as super predators and criminals who must be disciplined and controlled as if they are some type of animal that needs to be tamed. These negative thoughts are based on the bias that any minor misbehavior by students of color constitutes grounds for being removed from our schools (Alvarez, 2022).

Are the educators, administrators, and unions working towards making a change and dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline? Everyone has partiality; the first step is recognizing them and going in another direction (Alvarez, 2022). Educators and administrators must set aside personal biases to make that change. Teacher educational systems need to require training and

curriculum for teachers to engage in classroom management practices that allow them to listen to the voices of Black male students in PreK-12 classrooms without them feeling intimidated or threatened (Bryan, 2017). Listening to the voices of our students of color will provide an understanding of our differences, tones, and way of speaking to help minimize the disproportionate number of students of color being expelled and placed into the judicial system. The department of education offers grants to help teachers learn how to control their classrooms opposed to suspension or expulsion of the students of color (Khadaroo, 2013). Creating additional training would help and assist schools to educate administrators, teachers and other school staff about racial disparities.

Research and Civil Rights groups have said for years that there is no equality regarding disciplinary actions in our schools. Students of color, particularly African Americans, Hispanics, and students with disabilities such as (EBD), continue to be suspended or expelled at a very high rate. Students of color are continued to be held back and punished more severely than their White peers for the same activities. The make-up of the school itself makes a big difference. Research has shown schools with a high number of students of color (urban and suburban) were six times more likely to receive out-of-school suspensions than students attending schools with a low Black population (Khadaroo, 2013). Data continues to show and prove that even though students of color make up 18 percent of the student population in 72 thousand schools surveyed, almost 46 percent of the students were suspended on multiple occasions, 39 percent were expelled, and 36 percent of the students were arrested on campus (Khadaroo, 2013).

3. Does the zero-tolerance policy overwhelmingly affect a disproportionate number of students of color from disadvantaged backgrounds?

The school-to-prison pipeline is created by punishing students who seem out of control or don't fit within the norm, so they are expelled or suspended and referred to the juvenile justice system (Dutil, 2020). It has not often been taken into consideration that several factors contribute to why a student may act a certain way in the classroom. Has that child had enough rest? Do they have a home to call their own, or are they sleeping in a car with their siblings? Are they hungry from not eating over the long weekend? Experiencing all of these situations and combining them with trying to learn can be very difficult for students. A punitive approach to this unwanted behavior may also be detrimental and cause additional trauma for the child (Dutil, 2020). Most of these students come from less fortunate backgrounds and need support from teachers and administrators familiar with implementing trauma-informed practices (TIP).

Critical race theorists contend that educational disciplinary policies are a way to control and hold back students of color. The school-to-prison pipeline is a tool that White supremacists use to prevent students of color from gaining the same educational advantages as their White peers (Dutil, 2020). (Sleeter, 2017) examined, when this author said as quoted in (Dutil, 2020, para. 18), "the dominance of Whiteness in teacher education through a critical race lens, suggested that the notions of colorblindness, neutrality, and power do not effectively prepare teachers for diverse youth or educate non-White students."

“A study published in *Sociology of Education* analyzed a data set of more than 60,000 schools in more than 6,000 districts. It found that schools with relatively larger minority and poor populations are more likely to implement criminal justice-oriented disciplinary policies — such as suspensions, expulsions, police referrals, and arrests —

and less likely to connect them to psychological or behavioral care” (Lopez, 2018, para. 13).

“According to the most recent report on the educational attainment of incarcerated persons, 56% of federal, 67% of state, and 69% of jail inmates did not complete high school” (Pesta, 2018, p.1490). Many students of color have endured a tremendous amount of trauma throughout their lives and need a place to feel safe. School is supposed to be one of those safe places. Students of color continue to be overrepresented for adverse outcomes in each chart provided below based on the population that exists at the school (Lopez, 2018; Fenning & Rose, 2007).

Most students of color come from single-family homes, raised by their grandparents with limited income, and living in poverty. There has always been a struggle day to day with where they will obtain their next meal or sleep. The majority were on some form of public assistance, received free and reduced lunch and the guardians of the students of color did not have a diploma (Barrett et al., 2017; Meiners, 2011).

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics

	All students		Race comparison		Poverty comparison	
	N	%	Black	White	FRPL	Non-FRPL
Total	9,999,240					
Suspended	1,802,382	18%	25%	12%	21%	12%
Suspended, violent infraction	870,791	9%	13%	5%	11%	5%
Suspended, nonviolent infraction	1,370,761	14%	19%	9%	16%	10%
Race/Ethnicity						
Black	4,630,883	46%	100%	0%	62%	21%
White	4,810,988	48%	0%	100%	32%	74%
Other	549,214	5%	0%	0%	6%	5%
Poverty status						
Free lunch	5,456,642	55%	77%	33%	88%	0%
Reduced-price lunch	738,126	7%	6%	9%	12%	0%
Full-price lunch	3,804,472	38%	17%	58%	0%	100%
Special education status						
SPED	1,057,802	12%	13%	11%	14%	8%
Non-SPED	7,936,088	88%	87%	89%	86%	92%
Gender						
Male	5,126,563	51%	51%	52%	51%	52%
Female	4,872,677	49%	49%	48%	49%	48%
Standardized state test score (0-1)						
English language arts	3,622,000	0.12	-0.17	0.37	-0.09	0.47
Math	3,625,553	0.11	-0.25	0.42	-0.11	0.49
Science	3,512,728	0.10	-0.30	0.45	-0.13	0.50
Social studies	3,511,937	0.10	-0.24	0.39	-0.11	0.47

Notes: The unit of observation is the student-year, meaning that students observed in multiple years account for multiple observations. In total, the data contain 9,999,240 student-year observations from 1,778,128 students. The columns with test scores show standardized scores, not percentages.

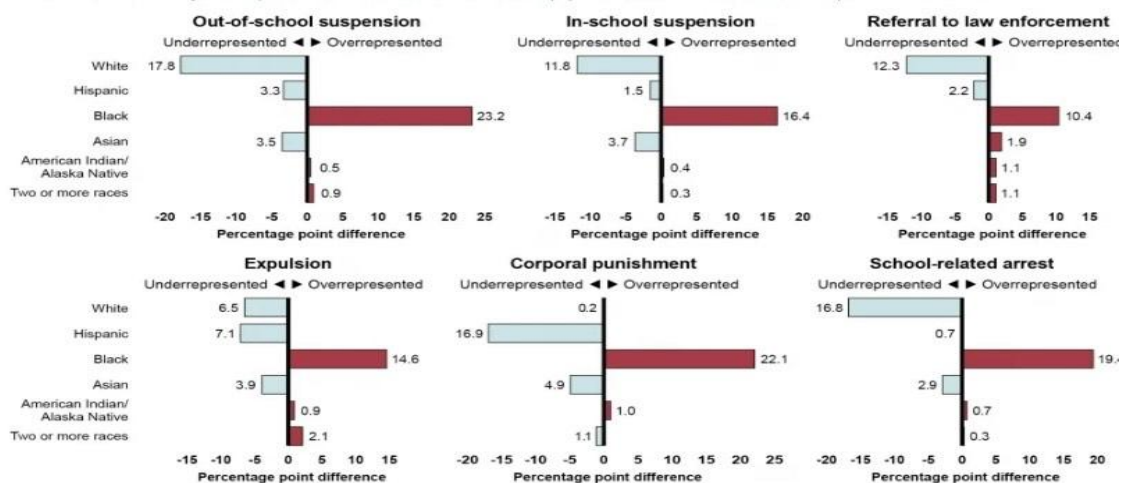
Barrett et al., 2017

As shown in the graph pictured above, no matter the number of students of color they are always overrepresented in the student population when it comes to out of school suspensions compared to their White peers. The graph also breaks down the various areas of discrepancies, math, science, English, social studies, sex, poverty, free lunch and SPED status.

This was true no matter the type of punishment:

Figure 2: Representation of Students Who Received Disciplinary Actions Compared to Overall Student Population, by Student Race or Ethnicity, School Year 2013-14

This chart shows whether each race or ethnicity was underrepresented or overrepresented among students who received six types of discipline. For example, White students were underrepresented among students suspended out of school by approximately 18 percentage points, as shown in the chart, because they made up about 50% of the overall K-12 student population, but 32% of the students suspended out of school.



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Education, Civil Rights Data Collection | GAO-18-258

Government Accountability Office

Research continues to show that even though the laws prohibit discrimination, it seems the school systems have been overlooked or feel they have diplomatic immunity. The continued inequality in punishment for students of color for the same offense or lesser offense than their White peers is unacceptable. These disparities are across school districts in the U.S. "Moreover, Black students receive longer suspensions slightly after interracial fights (controlling for discipline histories and background characteristics), suggesting at least some degree of intentional discrimination (Barrett et al., 2018).

4. What are some school based interventions that can dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline?

What interventions can be used to assist students of color in being successful in school so they don't have a fear of being singled out because of the color of their skin or their differences? Several interventions could be put in place to assist with minimizing the unequal treatment of

students of color when it comes to suspensions and expulsions. Administrators and teachers need to realize there is a melting pot of cultures in the school system today. Educators need to set aside their own bias and open up to acknowledging and respecting students' differences. The thesis will reveal to you various options rather than immediate expulsion or suspension for students of color. If there isn't an openness to improving school behavior policies, it leaves no room for problem-solving or figuring out why the student is having a problem. Behavior is a form of communication. In different settings, there is a need to figure out why students are doing what they're doing and the ramifications of their actions. Having proactive alternatives instead of reactive when disciplining all students is the most efficient way as opposed to expulsion or suspensions (Pitlick, 2015). However, there may be moments for the safety of the school and, at times, even the student where removal is necessary but is not always the only answer.

School Wide Information System (SWIS) is an intervention that monitors staff, and the students suspended or expelled to see if there is a trend amongst a particular race. If there is a trend, the team is brought together to evaluate the situation and provided additional training on classroom management (Fenning & Rose, 2017). There can also be a continuing ED course to assist with cultural competency within the district or particular school.



SWIS is your comprehensive, online home for understanding the student behaviors happening in your building every day.

When you enter office discipline referral information, you document what's happening school-wide. SWIS transforms these data in real-time so your teams can get students the support they need faster, sooner, and targeted to their specific needs.

Restorative Justice focuses on not just the students' behavior but the behaviors of staff, pedagogical choices, and school policies. Students should not have to change who they are and how they act or look to make a teacher or administration feel comfortable. Students of color are being removed from class because a teacher feels threatened when a student of color may look at her. What can be done differently to prevent the high number of expulsion and students not feeling welcome in their classrooms (Basford et al., 2020).

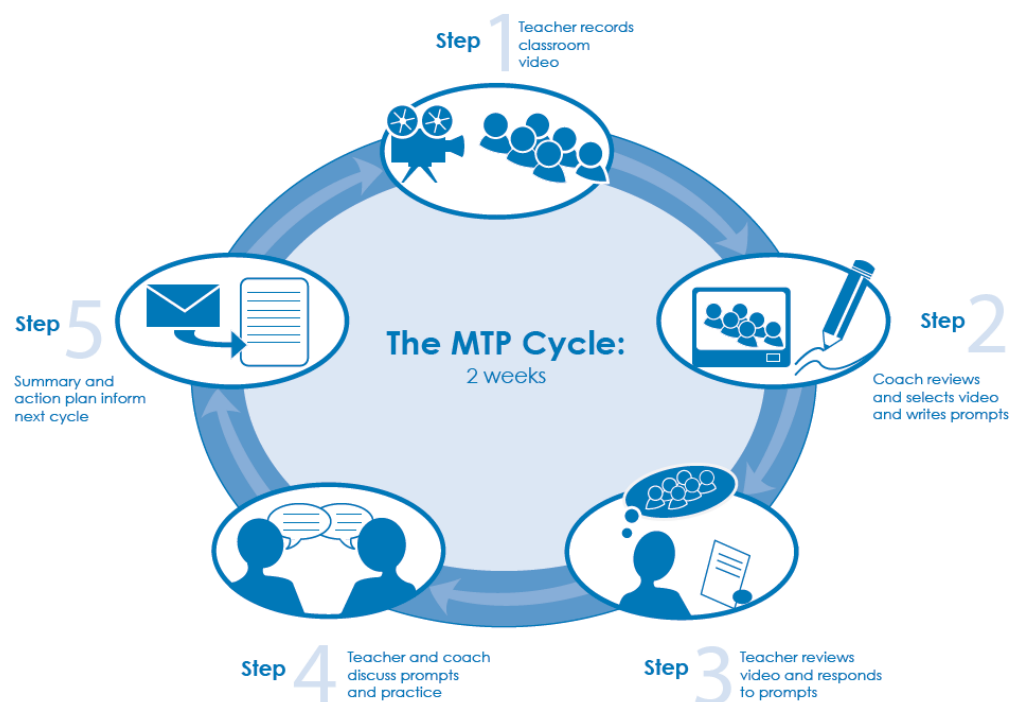


Restorative Justice (RJ) can work for students and staff in working in harmony in schools.

Teachers and staff need to reciprocate (RJ) for mutual respect of cultural differences.

(MTP) system is My Teacher Partner, has been proven to minimize harsh punishment for students of color and works on keeping them in class rather than expulsion and having them fall behind on their education (Schimel, 2015).

To further explain this intervention, teachers need to learn to collaborate as they coach each other in classroom management and student behaviors. This system can be used as a teacher to teacher consultation/collaboration method.



The primary intervention is a system that focuses on the school as a whole and not just one particular ethnic group. The primary intervention system also incorporates (SEL) Social

Emotional Learning, which teaches students how to deal with certain situations, recognize feelings, and deal with them (Basford et al., 2020).

Trauma-informed Pedagogy Despite what we may have learned about ACEs and how trauma affects students of color, staff continues to dish out the most severe punishment instead of the needed support. "Adverse childhood experiences (such as physical or emotional abuse, domestic violence, drug or alcohol addiction in the home, or having a family member in prison) are linked to unfavorable health outcomes and negative performance in school"(Basford et al., 2021).

This system can help in understanding how to work with students having these types of problems or challenges.

Mental Health Practitioners is another option to help minimize the number of expulsions or suspension by students of color. (MHP) can assist with emotional concerns. There are several benefits of school-based mental health plans, such as 1:1 support throughout the day and support of the teacher and the families involved (Pitlick, 2015).

Mental Health support is a very important and needed intervention when working with students who have significant behavioral/mental health challenges. Therefore, schools need this type of intervention available to their student population.

Increasing the number of teachers of color is one of the high priorities to creating a supportive and successful school environment. . Students can feel comfortable interacting with teachers and staff members throughout the day that they feel like they can relate to. . "We see huge jumps for them, and there are lots of societal gains to be had from that," Lindsay said. "There's been

extensive work on the cost-benefit of intervening with children earlier rather than later. So it makes sense to do some of these relatively low-cost investments of increasing [Black boys'] exposure to Black teachers" (Ahebee, 2021, para. 17).

This concludes the Literature Review Chapter II. The third chapter will describe the application of research shared in Chapter II.

CHAPTER III: APPLICATION OF THE RESEARCH

Based on the research and having the privilege to work with a diverse group of students throughout my career, I have had the opportunity to take a close look at how educators should address the inequitable treatment of students of color. Many interventions are available for schools and districts to minimize the number of students of color expelled so that their suspension and expulsion rates align with their White peers.

I have chosen to focus on a combination of interventions put into one. Restorative Justice is listed above as one of the interventions to lessen the number of students expelled or suspended due to their skin color. Several teachers and administrators fear our young colored youth. Some teachers have stated and shown fear in their look and tone of voice. Restorative Justice is where the individuals involved come together and identify the problems while attempting to make it better with that group or individual by restoring trust and ability to work together.

Acknowledgment from both parties is key to changing the outcome of all situations. Students recognize when they are belittled or degraded by a teacher who is supposed to be there to teach them. The negative interaction will change the terms of engagement between that student and teacher, which will need to be repaired with communication. Restorative Justice also focuses on the actions that happened as a result of the conflict. Both students and staff are able to acknowledge their actions and the roles that they played while processing through how to learn from and restore the relationship and experiences that happened. For a long period of time, students of color were not allowed to have an education during the Jim Crow Era, and now it seems as if the school system and society is reverting to the old slave mentality ways of doing things. Instead of assessing the problem, our children of color are immediately funneled into the judicial system as demonstrated in the school system this researcher works.

My plan has steps of identifying discrepancies and problem solving them. It is like finding and putting the pieces of a broken puzzle back together.

Increasing the percentage of teachers of color is another crucial piece of the puzzle. One benefit for students of color is to see themselves in their instructors who are of the same race. This may help them to contemplate a future in the teaching profession. The students need teachers and staff they can relate to and see themselves. Proper training is also necessary so that all teachers provide culturally relevant work to all the students in the class, not just one particular group. Districts would benefit from educators of all backgrounds to have opportunities to collaborate and share their own experiences as both staff and as individuals. Administrators could work with staff on reenacting different scenarios during the school day and brainstorm how situations could be handled differently instead of immediate suspension or expulsion.

To speak to this point, it is vital to provide culturally specific non-punitive interventions based on music, movement, and art. Current interventions are based on European ways and do not correlate with most students of color discipline at home or in the community. Research continues to show students of color exposed to teachers of color by third grade are 13% more likely to enroll in college. The expectancy of entering college increased by 19% if the student experienced more than one teacher of color in their classroom. Hart (a teacher) and her colleagues call this the role model effect (Ahebee, 2021).

The literature also touches on recognizing trauma that may have occurred in a student's life, which could cause outlandish behaviors. Many people don't realize several incidents contribute to a student experiencing trauma. Trauma can manifest physically, mentally, and emotionally. A student seeing their parent taken from the home and placed in prison is traumatic; a parent slumped over the toilet for the second time from a drug overdose is traumatic,

and being suspended or expelled from school is also a traumatic experience. Traumatic experiences can happen at any age. It can come from things that may be lacking in the child's day-to-day life, which will lead to behavioral issues that will affect their ability to learn. I'm going to touch on some interventions that I have practiced and noted in my references that I have found to be beneficial.

The final and most crucial intervention is **family and community support and building genuine relationships** with the students. If a student does not trust you, they will not learn from you. Parents or guardians play a vital role in this connection. The support of the student's family members and the community will enable you (the teacher) to control many situations that don't require a teacher or administrator to open that door to the STPP.

My school district has continuous annual mandatory training on building strong working relationships with community, family and students.

The literature continues to provide examples of years of overrepresentation of specific ethnic groups regarding out-of-school suspensions and expulsions. The level of discipline that has been inflicted on minority students has been much more rigid than their White peers. The plan I see will hopefully assist with bringing the numbers of students of color in line with other students for the same offenses. I'm focusing my strategy on what would be most effective for classroom management, students, teachers, and administrators.

Trauma Strategies (Notes about how to help students process traumatic events)

- The steps presented below assist staff members with looking at the student and the particular behaviors they may be experiencing.

"Type" of Student	Possible Behaviors	Possible Coping Mechanisms	Suggested Responses & Exercises
Defended & Anxious	Rigid and fast, sudden movements, impatient, easily aggravated, aggressive.	Fighting, aggressive language & behavior	Push-ups Clapping Machine, Energy Ball, 4-Part Breathing
Collapsed & Disassociated	Lacking confidence, often spacing out, slow and loose movements, lack of boundaries	always sleeping, solation, silence	Body Tapping, Jumping Jacks, Balancing Poses, Flying Eagle, Infinity Drawing
Needy & Idolizing	Attention seeking, calls out often when not spoken to, clingy, lack of boundaries	Too talkative, unhealthy attachments	Balance Poses, Plate Balancing, Gratitude Meditation, Confident Qualities, Self-Declarations
Integrated & Self-Aware	Respectfully sets boundaries, Patient & Understanding, Leader.	Journaling, meditation	Confident Qualities, Brain Screen, Energy Master

Connection Coalition (2020). *Outreach Training & Certification*. New York, NY.

Restorative Justice Strategies -

- *Strategies to fix what has been broken between students of color and the educators hired to teach them.*
- *Music therapy - Classical music, Rap, R&B, working with instruments such as drumming and keyboards, and dance (movement).*
- *Getting to know/ Repair harm done - Listening to students of color voices and interacting with the students of color and their culture and tone of voice.*

Getting to know the students and their various cultures will help to minimize the Negative opinions formed ahead of time without having sufficient evidence to support The claim or feelings. Every child is different. A teacher may have a bad experience with another student of color that does not apply to all students of color. There is good and evil in all of us, no matter the color of our skin.

- *Providing students the opportunity to “fix” or restore their wrong doing directly with those that were wronged helps prevent the consequences from going to an extreme such as expulsion or suspension.*

Classroom environment -

- *Making the environment welcoming to all students is essential. Students like to come into an environment and feel welcomed or see themselves not only in the material being taught but also in the classroom. I had a Hmong student who attended my school. He was the only Hmong student, and he would express, even with the language barrier, how he felt alone and did not feel a sense of belonging. I provided culturally relevant books for him to see himself in the characters and provided food for him to teach others in class about his type foods he ate. In fact, he demonstrated how to eat seaweed by wrapping it in rice.*

Teachers of color in the classroom -

- *Teacher Expectations include making sure that their expectations and accountability of their students of color are high, rigorous, and equal to their peers.*
- *Students of color seem to trust those that look like them and can build those relationships with family members and people within the community to support the students.*
- *Anyone can feel if a person cares if they succeed or fail. Being genuine and truthful with students of color goes a long way.*

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

- *There are a variety of ways that students learn. Some are kinesthetic, auditory, visual, and reading and writing. We have to find a way to draw the interest of our students of*

color so they don't become bored. Boredom often causes students to have behavioral issues, and the teacher begins to lose control of the classroom for a lack of knowledge of how to manage the particular behaviors. Pedagogy builds on the premise that learning changes across cultures; once material is embedded into a child, they will not forget it. Teachers need to have knowledge of the content they are teaching and find ways for it to connect with the student's own experiences at home, in the community, and globally (Irvine, 2010, p. 59).

- *For example, types of cultural music are used in the classroom.*
- *Relating to students by really knowing interests and preferences of students and providing activities to teach them around their interests and preferences.*
- *Instructional strategies by using music and other ways to learn reading, math and other strategies.*

CHAPTER IV: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

SUMMARY OF LITERATURE

As the researcher for this thesis, I chose the topic of zero tolerance policies and how they funnel our children of color into the judicial system, leading to the school-to-prison pipeline. After working in the school system for more than five years, I have noticed the difference in punishment for minority students compared to others. I have expressed my concern about the unequal treatment of students of color throughout various districts and schools.

The literature reviewed in this thesis highlights the beginning of the zero-tolerance policy and how it escalated into much more, especially after the 1999 Columbine High School shootings. Schools were threatened to have funds withheld if the school did not report to the police or the judicial system when a student was caught bringing a weapon or drugs to school. Each incident was grounds for suspension or expulsion. Furthermore, the zero tolerance policy became more strict with suspending students, especially students of color for minor offenses because the teacher lacked classroom management. There have been situations when the zero tolerance policy began to incorporate violations for suspension for things like talking back, sharing a Tylenol with a student, or being out of control in the classroom even if the student has been labeled with a disability.

Every child is entitled to a free appropriate public education (FAPE). While students are out of school or in the judicial system, many states don't require schools to provide students with the materials for continued education. The blatant disregard for these students' learning has to stop. Many colored youth drop out of school because they feel they don't belong due to falling so far behind academically. Teachers, counselors, and administrators must set aside their conscious and unconscious biases to figure out how to handle the educational gap. Schools need

to have intervention plans for a variety of scenarios with all of their students. In many cases, it's not that students don't want to learn; instead there are so many obstacles in their way that educators need to help them navigate through that maze to reach success.

If something isn't done now, crime rates and shootings involving minority youth will increase. As opposed to being in the classroom getting an education that allows them to be law-abiding citizens, these students may be on the streets being pressured into how to hold a gun, rob a store or person, become addicted to drugs, or commit suicide because they are so lost.

LIMITATIONS OF RESEARCH

A plethora of information has been collected from data dating back 30 years or more. The reports researched still touch on the concerns of inequitable treatment in the school system and our society today. Some of the most recent articles that touch on the disproportionate number of students of color being funneled to the STPP are considered the new "Jim Crow" for students of color. There continue to be several articles that touch on the unfair treatment and discipline of students of color in our school that prevent them from being successful in our society. Several researchers believe there needs to be more training as outlined in the intervention portions of the literature review. Therefore, more research needs to be done to develop effective strategies to help students stay in school and be successful.

IMPLICATIONS OF FUTURE RESEARCH -

I've learned it is vital to address the needs of children of color prior to the gap in mathematics reading and writing begin to grow wider. Providing students with culturally relevant learning that they can relate to and build off that knowledge down the road will help them have continued success and investment in their educational setting. Just as urban students

may not know what a pole barn is, there are other suburban students who may not know what a goat is in a test. Making the material and testing culturally relevant and fair is essential to student success. The more a student knows about themselves the more they are willing to know about one another.

More research needs to be completed to emphasize the importance of teachers of culture and strategies of how to keep students in school and not in the judicial system.

PROFESSIONAL APPLICATION -

It would be most beneficial if there were enough teachers of color in a school; collaborating with white teachers. My professional application would be applied by having teachers team up and get to know each other's way of doing things. It allows the students to see that everyone is there for each other. The staff can brainstorm and learn from one another. Teachers should talk to the students they may have had an altercation with to restore the damage that the family and the student may have caused. The relationship between the two can then roll over for the students to see the restorative justice that needs to take place. Open communication will build positive relationships and have teachers who look like all the students who attend the school and not just one group. Students of color feel good when they see someone who looks like them in the classroom, but having teachers that make intentional efforts on treating them equitably and with kindness is the next best thing. Having different strategies listed across the board for students to use when they have some adverse childhood experiences (ACES) or PTSD, there needs to be a plan based on the type of behavior, coping skills, and responses. "Early Trauma (during childhood) related to basic needs not being met requires the brain to stay in the "survival" stage of development, strengthening those neurons that activate our "fight, flight or

freeze" response" (Connection Coalition, 2020). Culturally Relevant Pedagogy allows all children to learn from one another and about each other's cultures globally (Ivine, 2010).

I have provided a detailed description of interventions in Chapter III outlining how our schools can be more successful in helping students. Some of these strategies are

- 1) Teachers of color
- 2) Trauma strategies
- 3) Restorative justice
- 4) Classroom environment
- 5) Building strong working relationships
- 6) Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

CONCLUSION

Based on what I've learned, these interventions will minimize the number of students of color expelled or suspended and funneled into the school-to-prison pipeline. As the researcher, I agree that a change is needed in our school system and communities. The achievement gap and the number of students of color in our juvenile detention centers keep returning because they don't have a place they feel they belong, either in the school system, or home due to the overwhelming number of traumatic experiences. Many of these students find themselves in the justice system due to the inequitable actions of their educators who took them out of their school settings instead of trying to meet their needs within their school environment. This situation only worsens with age for students of color who are overrepresented in the numbers compared to their White peers. All students mean the world to me, and I want to make a difference in everyone's lives, no matter the color of their skin.

Therefore, I will try to work with my school staff to develop more preventative/alternative measures of keeping students in school and opposed to suspensions/expulsions.

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