THE INFLUENCE OF DISCIPLINE ON AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN A MIDDLE SCHOOL: AN ACTION RESEARCH STUDY

by

KAREN NICOLE ALLEN

(Under the Direction of Sheneka M. Williams)

ABSTRACT

An action research case study was conducted to determine the perceptions of discipline and the effectiveness of a newly implemented 5-Step Discipline Protocol among African American male students with disabilities. The study took place in a predominately African American urban middle school located in a transient community.\(^1\)

To gain a clearer understanding of school discipline, classroom and behavior management through action research, the following questions guided the study:

1. How do teachers perceive the ways in which African American males are disciplined in middle school?

2. How might a culturally responsive school-wide discipline protocol affect teacher discipline practices?

3. How does the action research process affect the overall discipline and school climate?

\(^1\) The names of the school, district and all participants were assigned pseudonyms.
A mixed methods approach was utilized to answer the above questions. Findings from the case study suggest that African American male students and students with disabilities receive harsher punishments, as evidenced in the literature; teacher-student relationships influence the occurrence of discipline; students are less likely to be redirected in a whole group; fewer discipline infractions occur when rules are modeled and reviewed within the classroom environment; culturally responsive plans encourage more opportunities to address discipline while increasing accountability; and, while there was a significant decrease in the number of students receiving discipline consequences, the protocol had relatively low significance on overall school discipline.

INDEX WORDS: African American, discipline, students with discipline, action research study
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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family and friends for their continued support and encouragement throughout this process. Upon completing one of the greatest accomplishments in my life, it is an honor to give thanks to God for providing me the courage and wisdom to carry out such a task. I am beyond blessed for the opportunities I have been given.

To my husband, Derrick, thank you for simply being you. Your relaxed and “everything will work out” demeanor was exactly what I needed when this journey got difficult. Thank you for believing in me and not allowing me to quit. I am forever grateful for you and I love you for life.

To my son, Derrick Jr., I will continue to do everything I do to make you proud. Although you are just a baby, I pray that when you get of age, you understand the sacrifices made to ensure you have more opportunities than your father and I had growing up. I love you with all of me.

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To my parents, thank you for instilling in me early that I do not have to be a product of my environment and surroundings. Mom, you have always encouraged me to do better than yesterday. Because of you, education has always been nonnegotiable: thank you for such a strong foundation.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Sharkey and Fenning (2012) and Ryan and Goodram (2013) have reported data that reveals disparities within discipline implementation based on race and ethnicity. Urban schools continue to fall behind in the educational system because of factors outside of their control. One factor, in particular, is the rate at and offenses for which students are disciplined. Students attending urban schools are disciplined at much higher rates than those attending suburban or rural schools. Prior to the implementation of zero-tolerance policies, African Americans were suspended and expelled more frequently than their peers (Irby, 2013), and African American males continue to be overly represented among those disciplined (Sharkey & Fenning, 2012). Losen (2013) found data in a 2010 report that revealed that one-third of the African American males in 15 of 18 of the nation’s largest districts are suspended one or more times throughout their educational career: “Approximately one out of every seven Black students enrolled was suspended at least once compared to about one out of every 20 White students” (Losen, 2013, p. 389). African American students in California are suspended at rates six times higher than White students (Rodriguez, 2013). Figure 1 illustrates the number of Black students enrolled in 13 Southern states compared to the number of suspensions for which Black students account in discipline infractions.
Smith and Harper (2015) found that, nation-wide,

1.2 million Black students were suspended from K-12 public schools in a single academic year—55% of those suspensions occurred in 13 Southern states.

Districts in the South also were responsible for 50% of Black student expulsions from public schools in the United States (p. 1).

Many factors contribute to the disproportionate number of suspensions that have manifested in the Southern region of the United States. Howard (2015) stated “African Americans have a long and challenging history in the United States, enduring trials such as the hideous brutality of chattel slavery, Jim Crow, Civil Rights, school integration and various levels of present day racism” (p. 15). These residual effects subconsciously influence the way in which African American students are disciplined. The obstacles
Black people have faced historically in the South also set the tone in which they are treated presently.

**Statement of Research Questions**

The purpose of this action research project was to determine the effect of classroom management among teachers who teach African American male students, specifically those who receive special education services in a transient middle school. This case study investigated the influences that account for poor classroom management, resulting in high discipline and behavior incidents, so that the AR team can later develop the necessary and meaningful professional developments through professional learning communities that support general and special education teachers. Members of the action research team worked together and reflected on the methods used to answer the following specific research questions:

- How do teachers perceive the ways in which African American males are disciplined in middle school?
- How might a culturally responsive school-wide discipline protocol affect teacher discipline practices?
- How does the action research process affect the overall discipline and school climate?

**Theoretical Framework**

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy provides insight into potential influences on the high rates of suspensions among African Americans students with and without disabilities in today’s schools. Research has proven that the large number of reported discipline incidents is a result of teacher referrals. Violent or major reports of discipline
are not the root of disproportionality; it is the number of students who are being punished for minor offenses such as disrespect and disorderliness instead. Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, and Curran (2004) found that “a lack of multicultural competence can exacerbate the difficulties that novice teachers (and even more experienced teachers) have with classroom management” (p. 26). Through culturally responsive pedagogy, students are engaged in the classroom based on their own cultural experiences and backgrounds. Teachers can reach students through student-centered activities and positive relationships.

Culturally Responsive Classroom Management (CRCM) encompasses five distinct characteristics: ethnocentrism, cultural knowledge, societal context, culturally responsive management strategies, and caring classrooms (Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, & Clarke, 2004). Ethnocentrism is defined as understanding other’s cultures based on the beliefs of one’s own culture. It is imperative to recognize the differences between cultures. Teachers that choose to understand and teach the whole child demonstrate cultural knowledge (Skiba, Ormiston, Martinez, & Cummings, (2016). Having the knowledge or understanding of students’ cultural differences helps teachers to make instruction relevant to the students’ day to day life, in addition to creating a safe place. Through CRCM, it is crucial that teachers understand how society influences the local school. In additional to accepting the societal context, Skiba et al. (2016) found that teachers who model and explicitly teach students acceptable behaviors experience fewer discipline infractions. Lastly, caring classrooms with increased opportunities for students to learn and grow exhibit CRCM. Teachers that adopt culturally responsive pedagogy strategies are less likely to encounter many of the subjective offenses that result in a form of suspension or disciplinary action.
Justification of Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework model represents the potential outcome through the implementation of culturally responsive interventions. Future professional development opportunities will be designed based on the findings from teacher interviews, classroom management surveys, and discipline data from the most recent three school years, as well as input based on observations from the action researcher. The purpose of the professional development sessions is to provide support, strategies, and interventions to encourage relationship building and increase classroom and behavior management skills. Teachers lose “power” when they are unable to manage the children in the room and have to rely on their teammates, security or those in leadership positions. Providing teachers with strategies that are relevant to the students they teach will allow them to reclaim authority within the classroom. Simmons-Reed and Cartledge (2014) theorized that students respect teacher authority when there are positive teacher-student relationships and are less likely to respond negatively when redirected. When students experience
fewer discipline consequences, more time is spent delivering and receiving instruction. Students cannot learn if they are constantly missing valuable instructional time. As members of the action research team, it is crucial we create a setting in which African American male students with disabilities are able to succeed, by providing teachers with appropriate skills and supports so that students’ needs can be met.

**Action Research Approach**

As Coghlan and Barannick (2014) state, “Action research has a large degree of messiness and unpredictability about it, in that it is research in real-life action” (p. 83). The action research team understood their role as change agents throughout the duration of this project. It was imperative that each member kept an open mind and used this opportunity as a learning experience and a time for reflection. When conducting interviews or focus groups, it was imperative for the AR team to dismiss any personal bias so not to interfere with the data collection. Furthermore, due to the sensitivity of the problem, it was crucial that the team member designated to conduct the interviews and administer the surveys did not have any negative interactions that may have led to distrust and potentially prohibited openness.

**Our Action Research Approach**

For the intent of this particular action research project, I found that a mixed methods approach was the most favorable to strengthen the overall research design. The data from the quantitative and qualitative data can be complementary when answering each of the research questions. Qualitative data permitted the researcher the opportunity to ask clarifying and follow-up questions by which to gain a clearer understanding of how the participant felt in that moment. In addition, once the interviews were complete, the
researcher had the opportunity to listen several times. Through interviews, the interviewer heard and appreciated the subjects’ emotion and passion. Data collected from the classroom management surveys and discipline incident reports was used to further explain the problem of discipline at LMS and determine if the action process itself resulted in change.

**Explanation of Action Research**

Action research is the process of inquiry to address a relevant problem to a particular organization. Simply put, action research focuses on answering why something is happening, and what can be done to potentially address the problem. Completion of this action research required that each member of the action research team employ constant reflection. By doing so, members were able to make meaningful progress towards answering the immediate problem.

This particular action research project took place over the course of 5 months, although archival data was used to support discipline trend data. The AR team worked through the project using the following research cycle: data collection, analyzing the data, reporting the data, and taking action. Data collection included, but was not limited to, the following forms: surveys, interviews, focus groups, and discipline incident reports. The AR team carefully analyzed the data to determine if there were any reoccurring themes, if research questions were answered, and the effects/impact of professional learning opportunities focusing on classroom management, discipline and behavior strategies and interventions, in their current state as related to discipline amongst African American male students with disabilities. After data analysis, it was imperative we shared this
information among the leadership team and the rest of the faculty and staff. The action research team agreed to continue the cycle until the process was exhausted.

**Action Research as the Preferred Methodology**

Action research allowed the action research team to research a problematic phenomenon relevant to our organization, the urban middle school. Relevance encouraged members’ investment in solving the problem. Nevertheless, action research was not a quick fix; it was a process that started with a focus and cycled through attempts of reform. Based on the discipline data and the fact that the district was identified as disproportionately suspending African American students, it was apparent that discipline was a major challenge that needed to be addressed before Lions Middle School (LMS) continued on a downward spiral. Action research was the preferred method for investigating the high rates of discipline administered to African American males, as well as students with disabilities, because it was completed by those who are most impacted by the change. Action researchers were vested in both the process and the outcome.

Throughout the action research method, it was necessary for participants to regularly reflect on not only the data being collected but the action research process as a whole and what all of it means to them as change agents and stakeholders of the organization. Reflection and observation of the implementation supported the AR team’s decision to adjust interventions based on the conclusions. Because change was constant, and action research was not constrained by time parameters, the process alone added to the knowledge of focus.
Significance

Discipline disproportionality among African American males and those with identified disabilities is not new; in fact, there are numerous articles written discussing who contributes to this unfortunate practice, the reasons why African American students receive harsher discipline consequences more regularly, and the meaning of these experiences for their future. The initial literature review revealed that most discipline encounters are a result of subjective teacher referrals. Specific discipline policies were created to decrease violent discipline within the school environment; however, the rise in discipline comes from nonviolent infractions such as rude and disrespectful misconduct.

Research has also indicated that African American students are expected to be more likely to demonstrate inappropriate behaviors, yet studies fail to support this claim. The correlation between discipline and culturally responsive teaching is not positive. This disconnect stems from the majority of teachers being white yet teaching students of color. The gap in the literature that this action research study aims to answer is how a predominately African American faculty influences discipline among African American males and students with disabilities.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Sharkey and Fenning (2012), undesirable behaviors negatively influence the school climate and hinder student achievement and growth. When students exhibit inappropriate behaviors, as defined by their teachers and administrators, they are often suspended or expelled from school. Rodriguez (2013) refers to suspension as a student being absent from school for less than ten days as a consequence for an inappropriate behavior that requires a disciplinary action. Mergler, Vargas, and Caldwell (2014) reported a significant rise of more than 3.3 million suspensions since 2006. Based on Rodriguez’s (2013) research, a reported 3,081,240 children were suspended at least once during the 2009-2010 school year nationwide. In addition, a disciplinary consequence resulting in more than ten days is defined as expulsion (Rodriguez, 2013). These disciplinary actions affect students in numerous ways, such as an increase in truancy, the continuation of unwanted behaviors (Sharkey & Fenning, 2012; Haight, Gibson, Kayama, Marshall, & Wilson, 2014), lasting psychological effects (Rodriguez, 2013), lower student retention, decreased motivation (Haight et al., 2014), students dropping out of school, and exposure to the juvenile justice system (Mergler et al., 2014; Barbon & Nishloka, 2014). Hirschfield (2008) found that “trouble-making students are more likely to be defined as criminals—symbolically, if not legally—and treated as such in policy and practice” (p. 80). Placing labels on children preemptively may taint their future instead of allowing children
to learn from their mistakes. Furthermore, educators are seemingly setting students up for failure by not gaining an understanding of deeper issues that may be impacting the student.

**Disproportionality**

Students with disabilities are suspended twice as frequently as their non-disabled peers (Rodriguez, 2013; Ryan & Goodram, 2013). Zero-tolerance policies are vague and prevent authority figures from using background information on the students when assigning these consequences (Simmons-Reed & Cartledge, 2014; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). These policies were designed to decrease violent infractions not those considered classroom management infractions. In addition, students in urban communities deal with more external factors that may contribute to their behaviors, such as environment, limited family support or poor academic skills. Skiba and Peterson (2000) noted that:

> Well-defined disciplinary requirements and attention to school security have a place in schools in maintaining order and ensuring safety. Yet harsh and punitive disciplinary strategies have not proven sufficient to foster a school climate that can prevent the occurrence of school violence. Rather, a broader perspective, stressing early identification, comprehensive planning, prevention, and instruction in important social skills, is necessary if schools are to prevent the tragedies that happen too often in our schools (p. 335).

Academically underperforming students tend to be more defiant, to either escape the current task or to seek attention (Mitchell & Bradshaw, 2013). Disabled students and Hispanic and African American students are punished more harshly for similar behaviors displayed by their counterparts (Losen, 2013; Ryan & Goodram, 2013). Communities with
excessive levels of poverty and racial seclusion characteristically report punitive and unforgiving disciplinary measures. These reactions are not sending the correct message to urban community members.

Additionally, school punishment has become more formal and lacks discretion (Hirschfield, 2008). It is crucial that educators seek research-proven methods to address behavioral problems so that students do not continue to suffer beyond the classroom. Garman and Walker (2010) believe those administering suspensions should have the flexibility to make a sound decision based on all facts and not rely solely on guidelines and policies. Research states that school violence and disruptive behaviors have decreased since the mid-80s (Rodriguez, 2013); however, this is alarming because suspension statistics suggest the exact opposite. As Hirschfield (2008), notes, “an overall trend in school criminalization has accelerated since the early 1990s across the socio-economic and geographic spectrum” (p. 81). Likewise, Sharkey and Fenning (2012) emphasize that suspensions are ineffective because they do not decrease unfavorable behaviors. Rodriguez (2013) pointed out that the “‘school-to-prison pipeline’ is a term coined to describe the phenomenon of the influx in the number of students being referred to the criminal justice system for school-based offenses” (p. 473). There is a clear disconnection between the purpose of school discipline and what actually occurs.

Above all, “a free public education is not a privilege or reward for good behavior, but rather is a fundamental right mandated by the constitutions of every state in this Nation” (Rodriguez, 2013, p. 478), and exclusionary discipline violates students’ educational rights (Sharkey & Fenning, 2012). When students are removed from their appropriate learning
environment, they fall even further behind academically. A student’s discipline occurrence has a direct impact on learning.

**Discipline Policies**

The creation of the Guns Free School Act 1994 resulted in the mandate of zero-tolerance policies. Skiba and Peterson (2000) reported that the zero-tolerance policy was initially designed to address violent infractions while deterring future occurrences and creating safe learning environments, yet it quickly evolved into a policy that addresses both violent and minor incidents. Garman and Walker (2010) explain that any student bringing a weapon to school would require expulsion, as a minimum ten-day suspension is required by the passing of the Act; they add that “[n]inety-four percent of public school systems in the nation have initiated at least one policy creating zero-tolerance for some specific rule infraction” (p. 296). The zero-tolerance mandate led to the use of exclusionary punishments, including the immediate removal from school by means of out-of-school suspension or expulsion (Losen, 2013). By removing students who commit violent infractions immediately, the message is sent that schools are a safe place. According to Skiba & Peterson (2000), “Stringent disciplinary policies are adopted less for their effectiveness than for their symbolic value, attempting to reassure administrators, parents, and teachers that strong actions are being taken in response to a perceived breakdown of school order” (p. 337). These policies have resulted in an increase in discipline (Barbon & Nishloka, 2014). As Irby (2013) states: “Punitive frameworks are not grounded in sound education philosophy and practice. Instead, they rely on law and order and militaristic philosophies including zero-tolerance, panoptic surveillance of student bodies, and removal as a form of punishment” (p. 198). There is no evidence to support the
improvement of misbehavior or safety when zero-tolerance disciplinary policies are enforced (Garman & Walker, 2010; Losen, 2013). Exclusionary punishments are quick fixes that are believed to address issues that compromise the safety of the school. However, they are immediate punishments rather than those that create lasting positive results on student behavior in the future. Irby (2013) stated that

To be clear, understanding and challenging unwanted student behaviors is important, but not necessarily a problem per se. The problem rests in the creation and enforcement of more rules than may be necessary in a context of punitive regulatory frameworks. (p. 200).

The educational system continues to suspend the “trouble” students instead of getting to the root of the problem.

Most students are suspended for minor and nonviolent offenses that do not jeopardize the learning environment or the safety of others (Losen, 2013; Barbon & Nishloka, 2014; Sharkey & Fenning, 2012). Not only are students suspended for non-threatening behavior, but data also shows a significant disproportion of exclusionary punishments among students of color. Racial disproportionality affects not only the student and his or her immediate family but also the school and the community (Haight et al., 2014). Administrators lack discretion during the decision-making process due to the policies put in place (Garman & Walker, 2010). Hirschfield (2008) stated that authorizing codes to govern outcomes has contributed to the rise of suspensions. Discretion sanctions those in charge to use their judgement to regulate a punishment equivalent to the violation. Coercing exclusionary disciplinary punishments, Mergler et al. (2014) argues, creates more of a negative effect than a positive effect on students when inconsequential behaviors result
in unwarranted discipline actions. For example, “31% of students with at least one suspension or expulsion repeated their grade level, compared to only 5% of students with no disciplinary involvement” (p. 26). These punishments are not correcting or preventing future occurrences, but they are damaging the students’ future chances of success.

**Teacher Influences**

A crucial component of school safety is discipline. Students are less likely to get into trouble when they are engaged, minimizing unwanted and distracting behaviors. Mitchell and Bradshaw (2013) noted that classroom management alleviates discipline but does not completely eliminate it. Teachers set the precedent for classroom expectations; therefore, when teachers depend heavily on referrals to address behaviors, teachers lose authority, and students’ perception of the school climate is altered (Mitchell & Bradshaw, 2013; Milner & Tenore, 2010). Longstreth, Brady and Kay (2013) argue that “high-quality discipline policies enable early childhood programs to build an infrastructure that promotes a social climate conducive to learning and academic success” (p. 254).

There is no evidence that the over-representation of discipline for African American students is due to higher rates of misbehavior (Kelly, 2010; Losen, 2013; Hirschfield, 2008). It is assumed that the person who decides the punishment is subjective and biased. Irby (2013) declares that the disciplinary experience is grounded on who is given the punishment and at what point they become involved with the behavior. Students who are often suspended or expelled believe their teachers’ views of them become negative and that the teacher does not support them as much as students who do not receive such disciplinary action (generally, White students). Students who are frequently disciplined are also looked at differently by their peers and other community members (Ryan &
Goodram, 2013; Kennedy-Lewis & Murphy, 2016). They are often assumed guilty of future disciplinary infractions as well.

**Culturally Responsive Teaching**

Hershfeldt, Sechrest, Pell, Rosenber, Bradshaw, and Leaf (2009) define “culture as beliefs, customs, practices, and social behavior of a particular group of people (inclusive of age, gender, race, ethnicity, culture, disability or sexual preferences)” (p.4). Three principles define culturally relevant pedagogy: “1) students must experience academic success; 2) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; 3) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 160). Gay (2002) defines culturally responsive teaching as “using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively” (p. 106). The lack of cultural responsiveness in today’s classroom is even more impactful on the way in which students behave. Culturally responsive classrooms are most effective when teachers and building leaders put in the necessary work towards making a change (Hershfeldt, Sechrest, Pell, Rosenber, Bradshaw, & Leaf, 2009).

Unfortunately, teachers are not equipped to engage in such diverse or different settings, which may not mirror their personal beliefs and cultures. As capacity is built within the local school organization, teachers must first reflect on their own culture and perceptions about differences and how these factors influence the way in which they make decisions about behavior (Hershfeldt et al., 2009). When teachers engage in self-reflection, they formulate a sense of awareness. The act of self-reflecting can also lead individuals on a path to recognizing biases, as well as to understanding students’ behaviors (Hershfeldt et
It is through this understanding that actions become more functional and purposeful.

Culturally responsive teaching is most effective when teachers establish and nurture authentic relationships (Hershfeldt et al., 2009; Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Beaty-O’Ferrall, Green & Hanna, 2010). Positive relationships established between students and teachers can prevent behavior problems from occurring. Students who trust their teachers are more likely to respond both academically and behaviorally by creating a risk-free environment. Beaty-O’Ferrall et al. (2010) reported that teachers can strategically cultivate and build relationships by showing empathy, seeing the positive in negative influences, and being conscientious when responding to misbehaviors or releasing the power struggle.

Methods to Address Discipline

A means of addressing the disproportionality of discipline in urban schools is through restorative justice. Restorative justice is the development of positive relationships between students, teachers, administrators and community members (Mergler et al., 2014). Such relationships establish respect and trust, which enable authority figures to address misbehaviors by anyone affected. Peer relationships inspire students to be accountable for not only their actions but also the actions of others (Haight et al., 2014). It is essential for children in urban communities to feel a genuine sense of support from those they come in contact with on a daily basis.

There is a clear disconnect between the intent of suspensions and their effectiveness. Suspensions were meant to decrease the number of undesirable infractions; however, research demonstrates suspensions being used to decrease minor disciplinary
problems, and this is not working. Therefore, school leaders and teachers must work together and brainstorm alternative methods. In fact, Skiba and Peterson (2000) reported that by “implementing comprehensive programs that improve overall school climate and reduce minor disruption, schools may also be reducing the risk of more serious violent incidents that appear to be associated with higher levels of minor disruptions” (p. 336). Programs like this take time and require constant monitoring. Furthermore, the implementation for specific students who require more attention and behavior management would benefit from Functional Behavior Assessments (FBA). Completing FBAs provide insight regarding the root of the problem, frequency, and duration to assist with strategies to replace the unwanted behavior with more desirable behaviors (Skiba Orminston, Martinez, & Cummings, 2016). Students with disabilities should not receive more than 10 days of out-of-school suspension without it being considered a change of placement, thereby forcing educators to implement effective strategies.

Assessments in Empirical Research

The studies listed in Table 1 provide additional literature demonstrating the seriousness of discipline disproportionality due to racial disparities among African American male students. Kennedy-Lewis and Murphy (2016) provide insight into how these students who are frequently punished form perceptions of the teachers and administrators enforcing the consequences. Furthermore, the studies provide implications that can assist the action research team when developing professional learning opportunities for teachers. There is an unfortunate lack of understanding due to personal bias, which must be addressed prior to educators seeing a change in which children receive disciplinary consequences.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s), Date</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Method(s)</th>
<th>Result(s)</th>
<th>Conclusion(s)</th>
<th>Implication(s)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gregory, A., Cornell, D., &amp; Fan, X. (2011)</td>
<td>The Relationship of School Structure and Support to Suspension Rates for Black and White High School Students.</td>
<td>Black students are suspended at greater rates than White students. There is a correlation between the achievement and discipline gap in public schools. “Firm” parenting can impact student discipline.</td>
<td>Quantitative Research</td>
<td>Ninth-grade students in 289 of the 314 public high schools in the state of Virginia. Ninth-grade students were chosen because they tend to have discipline problems at higher rates. The schools were located in urban communities.</td>
<td>Student behavior is a minor problem in most schools, student behavior typically improved over the course of the school year, and behavior is impacted by some community partnerships, resulting in a decrease in discipline problems.</td>
<td>Future studies can focus on a wider range of behaviors, versus major violent behaviors, and a more explicit outline of partnership activities.</td>
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<td>Haight, W., Gibson, P.A., Kayama, M., Marshall, J.M., &amp; Wilson, R. (2014)</td>
<td>An Ecological-Systems Inquiry into Racial Disproportionalities in Out-of-School Suspensions from Youth, Caregiver</td>
<td>The researchers decided to interview all parties involved in suspensions (suspended students, caregivers of</td>
<td>Qualitative Research</td>
<td>28 Black youths who were suspended during 2013-2014, 25 caregivers, and 16 educators.</td>
<td>Suspension is a racial issue, responsibility for causes include both student and adult, suspensions negatively impact</td>
<td>Based on the findings, relationships are extremely important in preventing discipline problems. The</td>
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<tr>
<td>Authors</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>Findings</td>
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<td>Kennedy-Lewis, B.L. &amp; Murphy, A.S. (2016)</td>
<td>Listening to “Frequent Flyers”: What Persistently Discipline Students Have to Say About Being Labeled as “Bad”</td>
<td>Qualitative Research</td>
<td>The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of middle school students who have been labeled as “bad” and how this label impacts them educationally. Perceptions included: teachers acted collectively instead of individually when determining if students were “bad,” referrals damaged student-teacher relationships, punishments were not equal, and teachers and administrators presumed the students were “bad.” Paper trails led to the label of “bad kids.” The students interviewed did not identify as being “bad” but did play the role of “bad kid” in some instances. Overall, students felt they were not understood by the adults and were rarely given the opportunity to achieve their potential. Students and the adults reported the need for positive relationships. Educators in working in urban communities should initiate the development of these relationships and partnerships. Praising students who are “bad” when they demonstrate they want to</td>
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<td>Milner IV, H.R. &amp; Tenore, F.B. (2010)</td>
<td>Classroom Management in Diverse Classrooms</td>
<td>To further examine the classroom management approaches of two teachers based on ethnicity of the teachers, students, and context.</td>
<td>Qualitative Research</td>
<td>Through observations, artifacts, interviews, and analyzed documents, the researchers found the culturally responsive classroom management came from the need for teachers to understand the difference between equity and equality; understand power structures among students; immerse themselves.</td>
<td>“Teachers should work to manage student learning opportunities not to control students” (p. 598).</td>
<td>Teachers should work towards engaging in the principles of culturally responsive classroom management.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Study</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>Findings</td>
<td>Recommendations</td>
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<td>SKiba, R.J., Horner, R.H., Chung, C, Rausch, M., May, S., &amp; Tobin, T. (2011)</td>
<td>Race Is Not Neutral: A National Investigation of African American and Latino Disproportionality in School Discipline</td>
<td>Quantitative Research</td>
<td>Disproportionality occurs when teachers make disciplinary referrals, as well as when administrators make a decision of the consequence. Black students in elementary and middle school are more likely to be suspended than when compared to their White peers.</td>
<td>There is a need for a change in policy which determines the way in which students are disciplined. Discipline can be addressed through graduated discipline/multi-stepped protocols.</td>
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<td>Skiba, R., Michael, R., Nardo, A.,</td>
<td>The Color of Discipline: Sources of Racial and Gender</td>
<td>Quantitative Research</td>
<td>The ranking in which students were likely referred to the “This investigation explored a number of</td>
<td>Many classroom management styles focus on negative</td>
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<td>Conclusion</td>
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<td>Peterson, R. (2002)</td>
<td>Disproportionality in School Punishment.</td>
<td>The office is as follows: Black male, White male, Black female, then White female. This information was based on the rates in which classroom teachers submitted referrals, however it was determined that the administrators were consistent with the consequences given.</td>
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<td>Alternatives to bias as an explanation for gender, race and socioeconomic disproportionality and found that none were capable of accounting for large and consistent disparities in the discipline of Black and White students” (p. 35).</td>
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<td>Consequences instead of positive reinforcement. Teachers’ perceptions and level of understanding children, specifically Black males, influence the way in which teachers address certain behaviors. The results from indicate a need for appropriate training in the area of cultural competence.</td>
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CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The action research case study was conducted at one site, working specifically with one grade level of teachers who teach exceptional learners. However, the entire faculty and staff were expected to engage and implement the intervention as it was related to the study. The action research team, which also served as the leadership team, was expected and required to monitor and provide continuous support after the In-Service explaining the newly designed 5-Step School-Discipline Policy, Procedure, and Protocol.² The principal made it very clear that support was ongoing and should not be implemented as a “one and done” intervention.

Case Study

This case study was instrumental. Although it shared similarities to case studies previously conducted, the readings indicated that “each case is unique…and [should] be used to maximize what we can learn” (Simons, 2009, p. 30). I found this particular case to be unique because frequently, research discusses culturally responsive pedagogy as it relates to differences in race. However, the ethnicity of the faculty, staff, and the children whom we served was predominately African American, and therefore, the action research teams sought to address the problem from the perspective of teachers and students of the same race.

² This 5-Step Protocol was adapted from the Osceola Middle School’s Discipline Policy. See Osceola Middle School (2017).
The action research team and I conducted a single case study focusing on the influence of discipline on African American male students with disabilities. This instrumental case sought to understand the impact of discipline and how a strictly monitored intervention can address the high occurrences of discipline among this population. The phenomenon or quintain for this particular case study included the disproportionate rates at which African American males with disabilities were being suspended and punished during the school day (Stake, 2006). Although this was a single case study, there were many situational cases that may have impacted the data.

**Action Research Cycles**

Coghlan and Brannick (2014) elaborated on the four basic but necessary steps included in a single cycle of action research that specifically studies a phenomenon within one’s organization. Stakeholders must first establish or identify the problem, followed by developing a plan to address the issue identified in step 1. Next, the plan is implemented, and finally, the actions are examined to determine if they addressed the issue, if an appropriate action plan was created, and what the next steps are if said issue is not resolved. This leads to a continuation of cycles (see Figure 3).
Although discipline and how teachers address discipline based on perceptions and classroom management styles is not a problem that can be fixed overnight, for the intent of this action research project, the action research team planned for a total of two cycles. However, an ongoing effort continued past the extent of the project. When presenting the problem to the team, the following cycle suggestions were made (qualitative data collection did not begin until the official IRB approval was granted):

- **Cycle 1 (November 2016 – December 2016)** – The first cycle of the study consisted of a review of the discipline data from Fall 2014 until Fall 2016. During the leadership retreat held in July 2016, the leadership team discussed a new vision and mission for the school and how discipline impedes its success. Participant recruitment took place during the initial phase. At this point in the school year, there were thirteen teaching positions then available within the sixth-grade academy; however, there were two vacancies, and one teacher was on Family Medical Leave. The research team anticipated a minimum of six to eight teachers would show interest in participating, yet
participation was strictly voluntary. Pre interviews, surveys, observations, and the initial focus group were conducted. Based on the data collected, recommendations for changes to the newly implemented restorative 5-Step Discipline Protocol (see appendix D) were made.

- Cycle 2 (January 2017 – March 2017) – Changes to the implementation of the restorative protocol took place. The number of discipline incidents and referrals were continuously monitored and reported to the researcher. Post interviews and focus groups, surveys, and observations were also completed.
  - (April 2017 – May 2017) – Pre and post data were compared, as well as trends in the number of reported discipline incidents and referrals. Completed data analysis was prepared as well as preparation for presentation of completed study results.
- Cycle 3 (June 2017- ongoing) – Presentation of findings was made during the summer leadership retreat and recommendations were made for any additional changes and unofficial cycles for the next school year.

Sample Selection

As a new member of the support staff at LMS, it was imperative that I quickly establish positive professional relationships with members not only of the LAB but also with teachers throughout the building. During preplanning, I made my presence known as the Lead Teacher for Special Education (LTSE) and that I was there to support all teachers who interacted regularly with students receiving special education services. Relationship building is essential to my role as LTSE and researcher, especially when addressing a sensitive topic such as discipline and classroom management.
Teacher Participants

Having established relationships with many members of the faculty and staff at LMS, I was hopeful regarding teachers’ willingness to participate. The study was essentially open to all current sixth-grade teachers. An email soliciting volunteers was sent upon IRB approval to each teacher in the sixth grade. The sixth grade academy consisted of 10 general education teacher positions and three special education teacher positions. At the start of the school year, there were two vacancies, and one teacher was on Family and Medical Leave (FMLA). Teachers were asked to reply to the email if they were interested in obtaining further information. Only three teachers responded to the initial email. Due to low response, as the action researcher, I spoke to each teacher individually and reminded them of the approaching deadline. Once this was complete, an informational session was also held after school for thirty minutes. This brief session allowed teachers to hear once more the purpose, requirements, and expectations. Teachers were also permitted to ask any additional questions or have their concerns addressed at that time. At the conclusion of the informational session, six teachers agreed to participate in the study, although only five completed the action research study in its entirety. Consent was also obtained.

Action Research Team Members

The Leadership Advisory Board (LAB) consists of many building leaders whose varied positions include Department Chairpersons, Assistant Principals, a number of Support Staff Members, two state employees, and the Building Principal. As the researcher, I asked specific members of the LAB team to participate due to how influential their current position was on discipline and students with disabilities. The
Building Principal, the Assistant Principal assigned to Special Education, the Instructional Support Specialist, and Head Counselor all accepted the request to participate as action research team members. Information was noted from the portion of the LAB meeting that focused on both discipline and any updates regarding the special education department.

**Data Collection**

Data collection was completed using a mixed methods approach consisting of quantitative and qualitative data. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research authorizes the researcher to discover phenomena from the perspectives of the study participants. When conducting qualitative research, it is vital that the researcher recognize significant and interrelated themes amongst those participating in the study. The data collected can be used to begin to illuminate a significance intended for a specific group. The following data tools were used to answer the proposed research questions: surveys, interviews, meetings, teacher observations, and a system-wide discipline incident report. Table 2 further breaks down the methods as they relate to the specific research question.

Table 2

*Triangulation Matrix*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions/Data Collection</th>
<th>Qualitative</th>
<th>Quantitative</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R1: How do teachers perceive the ways in which African American males are disciplined in middle school?</td>
<td>Teacher interviews using classroom management interview protocol <em>(Appendix A)</em></td>
<td>Classroom management survey <em>(Appendix B)</em></td>
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<td>R2: How might a culturally responsive school-wide discipline</td>
<td>AR Team focus groups</td>
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<td>protocol affect teacher discipline practices?</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher observations</td>
<td>Incidents (reported and processed) (Infinite Campus Discipline Reports-counts and indents)</td>
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<td>R3: How does the action research process affect the overall discipline and school climate?</td>
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</table>

**Interviews**

Interviews were conducted individually between the researcher and the sixth-grade teacher participants. Each interview was held within the local school setting so that participants were not inconvenienced. The researcher reviewed the guidelines for the interviews, emphasizing the importance of each interaction being recorded and later transcribed. Interviews followed the outline of sample interview questions found in Appendix A. I personally transcribed all interviews. Each participant was given the opportunity to review the transcription and opt for any unwanted information to be omitted. All teachers approved the final transcriptions. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the action research study at any time.

**Classroom Observations**

Observations of participating teachers were also to be completed by me, the action researcher. It was imperative that each participant acknowledged that all identifiers were removed by the researcher; each participant was allowed and encouraged to review all notes taken during the observation. Similar to the interviews, during the review of observation notes, any portion with which they were uncomfortable with was removed immediately prior to being shared with the AR Team.
**Discipline Incident Report**

Student discipline reports (referrals and incidents) were retrieved from the Infinite Campus Database. Information found in this section of the database is used as a tool for monitoring and recording behavior incidents. Each incident details the following information: status, name of the individual who submitted the occurrence, date and time of the incident, location, narrative, and resolution. Reports have the option of being generated by detail, student, average per day, type of behavior, gender, race, time, discipline counts, and a detailed summary of in-school and out-of-school suspensions.

Although discipline information was accessible to me, due to Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) guidelines, the Assistant Principal responsible for discipline shared this information each month during the LAB meeting. For the intent of this action research project, information collected was based on the number of incidents/referrals, grade, and gender. All incidents were provided and later compared to special education students in the sixth grade.

**Action Research Team Meetings**

The action research team participated in focus groups or meetings as outlined by members of the school’s leadership team. Action research notes were only taken during the specific point, outlined by the agenda, that discussed discipline and students with disabilities. These discussions were recorded and reviewed later. Each participant was permitted to review and omit information prior to the final analysis. Participants were reminded of the study’s confidentiality clause. Focus groups were completed during regularly scheduled LAB meetings.
Prior to data collection, a local school agreement was signed (Appendix C), as well as a district agreement and UGA IRB. Once these steps were completed, participants were recruited and were asked to sign a letter of consent.

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis was ongoing throughout this action research project. Because I chose to transcribe the interviews personally, I completed this task after each interview. Qualitative data was audio recorded to eliminate loss of information. Simons (2009) states that “codes can be descriptive or more analytical and explanatory” (p. 121). The use of these codes and categorizing demonstrated a means of saturation of the data, which was essential to finding meaning to the problem. Discipline data was collected regularly, charted, and then compared to the previous month’s referrals and incidents. Survey data was analyzed, graphed and shared with the action research team. This information was discussed during February’s meeting. Due to the simplicity of the quantitative data, a formal statistical data program was not required.

**Timeline and Intervention Plan**

With IRB approval taking place late in the school year, anecdotal data was used in addition to the data formally collected over the course of five months. Hill County School District’s research approval required researchers to cease data collection prior to the first of April of the approval academic year. Once the project ended, it was vital that the faculty and staff understood that the work required to address discipline occurrences was not finished; therefore, it was up to the building stakeholders to continue with the cycles until a definitive decrease in discipline was established.
Limitations

As powerful and meaningful as the results were intended to be, there were limitations. Due to unforeseen circumstances, the action research project officially started at nearly the mid-point of the school year. Although an intervention was introduced and fully implemented at the beginning of the 2016-2017 school year, it was assumed that collecting data later in the year would potentially have had a negative impact on teacher buy-in. Each year, the school has experienced many challenges beyond the control of the building principal and the district as a whole. Compared to the year prior to the action research study, there were only three vacant positions. Within the first few weeks of school, three vacancies became a minimum of three vacancies at each grade level, leading to an increase in class size and obvious teacher frustration. Large class sizes increased the possibility of discipline issues, and with the school and district initiative focused on the number of suspensions, teachers felt hopeless and not as supported.

Another initial limitation to this study included the assistant principals’ (AP) perceptions of discipline and offenses that warrant a consequence. Teachers are no longer permitted to complete referrals; instead, they were given the directive of completing a narrative and submitting to their grade-level assistant principal. Once the AP received the narrative, each assistant principal had the autonomy to determine which consequence should be given for the infraction. As the LTSE, the principal gave a directive that each AP should include me in the discipline discussion for all students with disabilities. There were two factors that interfered with the decision-making process: two of the three assistant principals had openly stated that they did not agree with restorative
practices and that they believed students who were disruptive should be immediately removed from the learning environment; moreover, my personal bias against suspensions and the importance of providing opportunities for change also influenced the process.

**Conclusion**

Culturally competent interventions have been found to aid in assisting students who are culturally and linguistically different than their teachers. These interventions include empowering student-teacher relationships through trust, implementing school-wide positive behavior supports, meeting students where they are academically, and revising local school discipline policies (Simmons-Reed & Cartledge, 2014). The methods teachers use to address discipline can be influential on how students react. Students respond less combatively when approached one-on-one, for example with a non-verbal cue or a private conference in the hall. Positive behavior supports and reinforces desired behaviors by clearly defining and modeling expectations. Teachers who offer additional academic support beyond the instructional day demonstrate an attitude of caring. Students who fall behind academically or are isolated based on ability may use undesired behaviors as tactics to escape the task assigned. Therefore, teachers who are familiar with the needs of the students and can implement strategies to intervene may experience behavior problems less frequently.
CHAPTER 4

CASE STUDY: STORY OF THE ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

The purpose to of this chapter is to provide the reader with a clear picture of how and why this action research project was conducted. The context in which the action research study took place is described in detail, as is how this project impacted my personal role in the school community. I also provide background information for each of the participants and discuss the importance of results moving in the right direction.

Description of the Context

This action research was conducted at LMS (a pseudonym), one of nineteen middle schools in Hill County School District (a pseudonym). LMS is located in a transient city, which is reflected not only in the enrollment but also in the mobility of faculty and staff. Approximately 67 percent of the faculty and staff are either new to their positions or new to the building. Included in this percentage was also the principal, Mr. Williams, whose first assignment here was as building principal, after serving in the capacity of assistant principal at the feeder high school for the three previous years. With every new leader comes a new vision and mission. Mr. Williams was no different. He made it very clear that we, the faculty and staff, must change the community’s perception of the school by addressing school climate and culture through discipline and instruction. His vision and mission were directly aligned with that of the district’s new superintendent.
The faculty and staff comprised 53 teachers, including 12 special education teachers, four classroom paraprofessionals, and two 1:1 paraprofessionals. LMS also had three counselors, several support staff members, and two academic coaches. The administrative team includes Mr. Williams and three assistant principals. Ninety-one percent of the faculty, staff, and students are African Americans. Male and female students each account for 50% of the student body. Of the 906 students enrolled at LMS, 113 (13%) are eligible for special education services and are identified as students with disabilities (SWD); this does not include those identified as gifted. It is important that students who receive special education services spend 80% of their instructional day in the most appropriate, least restrictive environment (LRE) with their non-disabled peers; 64 (57%) of LMS SWDs receive instruction in the LRE. Currently, 38 (31%) of these students are females and 78 (69%) are males. Students of color made up 100% of the special education population: 97% African American and 3% Hispanic. The largest special education category in LMS consists of 54 (47%) students with specific learning disabilities. Seventeen (15%) students had mild or moderate intellectual disabilities; 17 (15%) students were serviced for Other Health Impairments (OHI), many with a diagnosis of Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) or Attention Hyperactive Deficit Disorder (ADHD); 13 (12%) students were diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder, and 10 (8%) were diagnosed with an emotional and behavioral disorder. LMS is one of the few Title I schools in the district where all students receive free lunch.

For the two years prior to this research, the district has been identified as suspending African American students at higher rates than white students. To solve this problem, the district used 2.5 million dollars of special education funding to address
disproportionality. The rationale in the shift of funds was to implement programs, such as Check & Connect, to intervene and decrease the number of discipline referrals among general education students. According to the University of Minnesota’s Institute on Community Integration (2017), Check & Connect is a specialized student engagement intervention. Trained individuals serve as mentors for students in grade K-12 that are identified as “at-risk” due to a large number of behavior referrals, absences and tardiness, and overall disengagement from the school structure. Students receiving the intervention are tracked for two years with the hopes of no longer being identified as at-risk.

This decision, however, was problematic because students with disabilities were not able to benefit from the same interventions due to specific participant restrictions and were also known to receive many undocumented consequences. Within the context of this study, I observed many of the students in my program placed in an alternative setting (a classroom other than their scheduled class) or even wandering the hall. Many of the teachers expressed a lack of patience and hopelessness when interacting with students with disabilities, especially those who had behavioral needs. I was challenged by Mr. Williams to assist with the reform of the local and district’s vision and mission by focusing on this particular demographic.

**Initial Problem Identification**

According to the state’s Department of Education, LMS was identified as a Focus School in July 2015. Focus Schools are defined as ranking in the lowest 10 percent among Title I schools in the state based on the three-year average College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) achievement gap among high and low-performing students. Not only was achievement an area of concern at LMS, but high discipline
incidents also continued to be a problem. Discipline consequences at LMS include but are not limited to out-of-school suspensions (OSS), in-school suspensions (ISS), and alternative placements (Off Team). Unfortunately, many general and special education teachers at LMS expressed hopelessness when addressing disruptive behaviors, specifically among African American male students with disabilities (SWD), and relied on suspensions or students being “kicked out” and told to “find another classroom to go to.” More than three-fourths of the current SWD are performing below grade level; therefore, disciplinary consequences resulting in students missing valuable instructional time only increase the opportunities for the achievement gap to widen. With 13% of the student enrollment eligible for special education services, SWD were a demographic group that impacted the schools’ achievement gap and CCRPI score. Discipline disproportionality is not unique to LMS or the district, as African American males and SWD continue to be suspended at higher rates locally and when compared to their counterparts nationwide. According to an analysis conducted at the University of Pennsylvania by Edward Smith and Shaun Harper (2015), the most recent federal data available indicate that 55% of all Black suspensions from U.S. public schools within a single academic year occurred in 13 Southern states. In the state in which the study was conducted, African American students account for 37% of students enrolled but 67% of the students suspended (Smith & Harper, 2015). Researchers Simmons-Reed and Cartledge (2014) found that “African American students with disabilities are more than twice as likely to be suspended” (p. 98). Not only were students failing to receive a Free and Appropriate Education (FAPE), they were more likely to continue the cycle of being suspended.
Initial Data Collection

Stringer (2014) describes action research as a means to explore efficient resolutions to dilemmas within an organization. With the district’s recent identification of disproportionality and LMS being one of five middle schools to receive support through Check & Connect, it was evident that discipline is an area of concern at the local level. District, state, and national student demographics and discipline data were crucial when defining the problem of the local context, and this information was used to support the assertion that discipline disproportionality among African American male students with and without disabilities was not unique to LMS. Initial contextual data was collected by focusing on previous discipline data, which was available on the state’s Department of Education website as well as the current discipline incidents report monitored by local support staff members. As the LTSE, I was responsible for monitoring the discipline counts for students with disabilities. This information was used to determine the equity among the type of consequence, infraction, ethnicity, and gender. All of this data was utilized to define the problem of discipline among African American male students with disabilities at LMS. As Stringer (2014) notes, “[p]roblems do not exist in isolation but are part of a complex network of events, activities, perceptions, beliefs, values, routines, and rules” (p. 103).

Initial Findings

It was evident that African American males, as well as students with disabilities, experienced discipline consequences at higher rates when compared to their peers. Although LMS was predominately African American, discipline was a major problem within the organization, adding to the disproportional discipline rate within Hill County.
School District. Figure 4 displays a comparison of discipline incidents over the course of the last three school years. LMS experienced an increase in ISS, OSS, and students sent to the alternative school during the 2014-2015 academic year. There was a shift in administration during the 2014-2015 school year due to the building principal receiving a promotion and an assistant principal serving in the capacity of interim principal, which left two assistant principals responsible for behavior and instruction for approximately 900 students. Figure 5 illustrates a comparison of monthly incidents between 2014-2015 and the 2015-2016 school year. Overall, the number of discipline incidents reported was much higher during the previous school year. During the 2014-2015 school year, discipline was on a constant rise, with the most occurrences during March. Discipline incidents during August and September 2016 were higher when compared to those during 2014.

![Lions Middle School Discipline Trends](image)

*Figure 4. Three-year discipline trends.*
Students at LMS were often referred for minor disorderly conduct or disrespectful offenses, both subjective. Through conversations with members of the Leadership Advisory Board and classroom teachers, it was clear that interactions with disruptive students may deem as disrespect with one teacher but either nonexistent or potentially ignored by another. The administrative team shared with the leadership team that there are few students who were disruptive in all classes and teachers who lacked the knowledge or skill set necessary to demonstrate appropriate classroom management.

Figure 6 shows the percentages of the types of offenses resulting in in-school or out-of-school suspensions. According to the data monitored and collected by the assistant principal and myself, it was also determined that in-school and out-of-school suspensions among students with disabilities account for 25% of the total number, in spite of this subgroup consisting of just 13% of the student population at LMS.
Based on the information shared by the administrators on the action research team, discipline decreased significantly when compared to the previous two years, when the school had been under different leadership. There was a bit of speculation that the visibility of the new principal and the additional support staff the county has afforded the building may have had an impact on the overall discipline. However, Mr. Williams still feels strongly about the incidents that have taken place and the perception of the school as a whole; therefore, he wants this problem addressed accordingly and efficiently. The principal and I met throughout the second semester of the 2015-2016 school year to discuss the direction of the building as it pertained to discipline, and specifically, the discipline of students with disabilities.

**My Role**

I served in the capacity of Lead Teacher for Special Education (LTSE). This role not only required me to ensure that my current school remained in compliance, based on
the district, state, and federal laws, but also to work closely with the administrators to minimize discipline infractions for students with disabilities. Because discipline data was more accessible, I was required to monitor frequently, as I am in a position to identify trends and provide research-based strategies to decrease discipline. Every two weeks, per the district, I was required and expected to meet with at least one administrator to discuss safety nets and next steps for students with disabilities who were getting into a lot of trouble. During those meetings, we discussed how close particular students were to reaching the ten-day suspensions limit, how students were being serviced while receiving consequences while in school, and if there were any needs for any manifestation, discipline or behavior conferences. Manifestation meetings were required when a student committed a disciplinary act that would typically warrant removal from the current school placement for more than 10 days (Skiba, 2002). It was crucial that we, the IEP committee, conducted these meetings to determine if the act was related to the student’s disability. The bi-weekly meetings also encompassed conversations about students who had not received discipline referrals resulting in ISS or OSS but who were kicked out of class for constantly being disruptive during instruction. I was able to use the data and the conversations to brainstorm alternative resolutions for discipline referrals based on the students’ needs. I met with teachers as needed to discuss potential alternatives and monitor if they are being used with fidelity and establish any next steps.

Prior to obtaining the position of LTSE, I served as a teacher leader at a similar middle school. Throughout my tenure there, I established powerful professional relationships with the building administrator and his team, as well as many of my colleagues which allowed me to build leadership capacity early in my career. These
relationships provided me with leadership skills and encouraged me to seek networking opportunities that could assist me with addressing the problem within my organization. My passion and determination, paired with my political power and established relationships, have placed me in a position in which reform has potential to take place. It is imperative to foster my relationships with well-connected district members so that we can work collectively to improve the current state of the discipline problem at LMS.

As mentioned in Chapter Three, this action research study included two groups of participants: the first were building leaders who were specifically asked to participate due to their daily role in school-wide discipline; the second consisted of classroom teachers who taught sixth grade. The following section briefly describes the two action research groups that completed the study:

**Background of Action Research Team Members**

**Building Leader Participants**

**Bryce Williams.** Bryce Williams served as the principal for two years. Prior to working at LMS, he was a high school discipline assistant principal. He demonstrated a level of expertise with discipline, specifically how to decrease occurrences among young African American males. Mr. Williams spent most of his career serving students in urban school districts and was pleased to share those experiences with anyone willing to listen.

Under his direction, building leaders were forced to explore other avenues to address behavioral misconduct. When he met his leadership team, he shared his vision and mission for the school and explicitly stated the importance of everyone’s role as it related to the success of the school. He allowed the discussions about discipline to “happen,” taking more of an observer role. Mr. Williams believed that it was imperative
for the administrative team to be empowered and have the ability to make decisions that are in the best interest of those we serve.

**Franklin Green.** Mr. Green was recruited to be a member of the action research team because of his building responsibility to the special education department. He demonstrated the most resistance to the idea of decreasing discipline through a school-wide restorative practice protocol. Mr. Green’s four years of administration experience in urban schools also provided insight on the impact of disciplining African Americans, especially males. Prior to the action research project and being reassigned to LMS, he often boasted that he had previously been a member of an administration team that had one of the largest suspension rates in the district, resulting in what he often referred to as “an environment for learning.”

Mr. Green officially served as the sixth-grade assistant principal the first semester, before being moved to seventh grade. He played an active administrative role in many of the discipline problems in the sixth grade academy. Although he disagreed with the idea of a 5-Step Discipline Protocol, he attempted to enforce the policy when discipline data was reviewed during monthly LAB meetings.

**Mary Anderson.** Working in a newly created district position, Instructional Support Specialist (ISS), Ms. Anderson was a constant advocate for teaching and learning. Due to the school’s history and reputation, she was openly and enthusiastically supportive of the vision and mission of the principal and school. Having taught at the middle and high school levels for over ten years and having just completed her first year in this new position, her experience supported the idea of relationship building and
classroom management being components of increased opportunities for teaching and learning.

**Ava Smith.** Mrs. Smith served as the school’s head counselor and has served in this capacity for over ten years. Prior to becoming a counselor, she worked as a secondary mathematics teacher in the heart of a metropolitan school district. As a mathematics teacher, she quickly realized that she wanted to reach children on another level. She returned to graduate school to obtain a degree in counseling; she has served in an urban district as counselor for more than twenty years. When asked to be a member of the action research team, she was eager to see what would come of the action research study.

Throughout the course of the action research study, she urged the other members of the action research team to stay on task and frequently reminded them that suspension should never be the initial disciplinary action when students misbehave. Mrs. Smith was an advocate for restorative practices and believed that they could work in any environment if carried out with fidelity. She believed the benefits of such practices are far greater in urban communities.

**Teacher Participants**

**Jasmine Hall.** Mrs. Hall was a young and eager educator. She had the least number of years of experience among the participants but exhibited a positive connection with the students and a willingness to meet the needs of the students both academically and behaviorally. Mrs. Hall delivered instruction in the co-taught setting to both general and students with a variety of disabilities. Her average class size is 32 students, with each class having a minimum of ten students with disabilities. Like many educators now,
Mrs. Hall was in the process of obtaining her teaching certification through an alternative teaching certification program. She shared her passion for teaching students that require additional support and would like to pursue a master’s degree in special education.

**Rebecca Jenkins.** Ms. Jenkins was by far one of the most flexible action research participants throughout this project. Ms. Jenkins came to LMS with over twenty years of teaching experience. She started the school year as a sixth-grade ELA and Social Studies special education teacher, then transitioned to the sixth-grade Mild and Moderate Intellectual Disability class (MID/MoID). Before the end of the year, she was promoted within the district. Although Ms. Jenkins’s class size was just under thirteen students, many of the students exhibited behaviors that are often deemed as behavioral misconduct. Ms. Jenkins was an essential action research participant; she not only implemented the school-wide discipline protocol but also created one specific to her students and their needs.

**Karen Nelson.** Ms. Nelson was a 27-year-old female teacher with six years of experience instructing mathematics core content in grades six and seven to students in the general education and collaborative education setting. She had four years of undergraduate and two years of graduate post-secondary education; she currently taught mathematics to sixth-grade students at LMS. She had completed a traditional teaching certificate program in her undergraduate studies in order to be a highly qualified teacher; Ms. Nelson was certified in middle grades 4-8 mathematics and English Language Arts. She has taught sixth-grade mathematics at LMS since August of 2013.

Ms. Nelson expressed that she believed classroom management was the key component in any educational setting; if students are in a safe environment, learning can
take place. She stated that setting the tone in a class plays an integral role in preventing behavior problems. Ms. Nelson made it very clear at the informational meeting that her major goal was implementing effective classroom management strategies during instruction that were conducive to learning and safety for all students.

**Bri Patterson.** Mrs. Patterson was a 29-year-old female teacher with five years of experience instructing mathematics core content to sixth-grade students in the general education and collaborative education setting. With a Bachelor of Arts degree in Mathematics Education and one semester shy of completing in a Masters of Education in graduate studies, she is now teaching Mathematics Tools to sixth-grade students during their Extended Learning Time period. Mrs. Patterson taught one sixth-grade collaborative mathematics tools class that comprised general and special education (with all categories of disabilities) students without an interrelated teacher. She had completed a traditional teaching certificate program in her undergraduate studies in order to be a highly qualified teacher. She is certified in middle grades 4-8 mathematics and science with a gifted education endorsement.

During the initial meeting, she also stated that one of her goals was to use preventive and supportive behavior strategies more than corrective. She hoped to achieve this by engaging lessons informed by constructivism and clear expectations in which students play an active role in the learning process. She described how she uses a range of humane teaching approaches including group work and cooperative learning; therefore, classroom management was proactive rather than reactive. She mentioned that in the event students display inappropriate behavior, intervention is called for.
Daniel White. As a career changer, Mr. White was the only male teacher who agreed to be a part of the action research project. Although it was his second year teaching, it was only his first year at LMS. Prior to agreeing to be a participant, he made it known that he was uncertain if working as a classroom teacher was something he really wanted to do. He was very candid about his aspirations and how teaching was a profession that provided stability until he could fully commit to what it was that he really wanted to do.

As a general education teacher, he also taught Extended Learning Time (ELT), a course in which students with disabilities typically do not receive direct instructional support. Unlike Mrs. Patterson, his ELT focused on English and Language Arts. Teachers responsible for delivering instruction during ELT are provided a copy of the students’ accommodations, supports and Behavior Intervention Plans (BIP) if applicable. Mr. White’s philosophy on discipline was simple: students should do what is expected of them and, when they do not, they should understand that a consequence will follow.

The action research team was strategically selected based on their current role and influence on both discipline and students with disabilities. Each member added to the analysis of the data collected and viewpoint of the intervention implementation. Although Mr. Green displayed the most resistance throughout the study, he participated until its completion. The teacher participants were eager to participate, and all concurred that discipline at LMS negatively impacted the culture and climate. Having this mentality in common, each teacher knew a change was needed yet struggled with a solid solution. With varied experience, one thing in common was a control of classroom and behavior management within their space.
CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

The purpose of this research is to understand and develop classroom management among teachers who teach African American male students, specifically those who receive special education services in a transient middle school. To accomplish this purpose, the action research team collected data to answer the following research questions:

1. How do teachers perceive the ways in which African American males are disciplined in middle school?
2. How might a culturally responsive school-wide discipline protocol affect teacher discipline practices?
3. How does the action research process affect the overall discipline and school climate?

Chapter 5 includes an analysis of data collected from teacher interviews, surveys, classroom observations, focus groups and discipline counts. All identifiable information was removed from the findings to protect the identity of the participants, as well as the school.

Research Question One

The action research team found that it was vital to the study to gain a clearer understanding of why teachers use particular methods when disciplining students and if there is a difference of perception between disciplining students with disabilities and their
non-disabled peers. Teacher interviews and classroom management surveys answered this research question. Although the literature focuses on disproportionality and discipline reported by White teachers and African American students, all members of the action research team and participating teachers were African American. Data collected and analyzed led to the emergence of the following themes:

1. African American male students, especially those with identified disabilities, receive harsher punishments for minor infractions.
2. Relationships between the student and teacher greatly impact how the student is disciplined.
3. Behavior redirection is more difficult when the authority figure directly addresses the student in a whole group setting.
4. Teachers encounter fewer discipline problems when classroom expectations are clearly stated and reviewed.

**Finding 1**

**African American male students, especially those with identified disabilities, receive harsher punishments for minor infractions.** It does not come as a surprise that teachers believe that African American male students receive harsher punishments for school infractions when compared to their counterparts. Mrs. Hall discussed how behavior has so much to do with the environment in which one is raised. Mrs. Hall elaborated, “If we constantly tell our boys that they are bad or don’t know how to listen, why do we think they will act any other way?” The data collected from the interviews not only supported the body of literature that discusses the rates at which African American males receive harsher punishments but also included how those students who
are also receiving special education services are punished at alarming rates for similar or minor infractions. It was revealed during Ms. Jenkins’ interview that “[w]ith so many demands of teaching, dealing with misbehavior is just something teachers do not want to deal with. They [teachers] would rather them [students] be removed from the environment so they don’t mess up the scores for their peers.” Ms. Nelson’s interview also revealed that not only the demands of teaching have a negative impact on student discipline and occurrences but also the time of day; she stated that “[a]s the day goes on, one’s level of patience decreases.” After reviewing the transcripts and reported incident types, the action research team agreed that most of the infractions were described as student misconduct or incivility. Both of these are extremely subjective.

As a special education teacher, Mrs. Hall showed in her interview a level of passion and concern with how identified students are punished regularly:

If a child has a known behavior problem, there should be more opportunities to get right, more leniencies. Unfortunately, that is not the case. Some adults that don’t really understand special education and the different disability categories feel like their “label” is an excuse and fails to prepare them for the real world. But clearly that is not the case, if a student has an identified behavior problem it should not be overlooked. Tolerance level for misbehavior is low because misbehavior happens so frequently. I believe it is our duty and responsibility to work with these students, teaching them ways to cope and respond to whatever their triggers maybe instead of handing out punishments as a solution.

She went on to say, “Let’s show them something they are not used to or expect.”
Mrs. Patterson’s response was parallel to her colleagues’. She summarized the situation by saying that “[e]veryone does not understand BIPs (Behavior Intervention Plans). Well, maybe it’s not that they don’t understand them, maybe it’s that they haven’t been properly trained.” BIPs are designed to replace problematic behaviors with more positive ones. If teachers are not trained on how to implement BIPs, the behaviors will continue and negative consequences will follow.

**Finding 2**

**Relationships between the student and teacher greatly impact how the student is disciplined.** The action research team found that teachers who experienced fewer discipline problems took the time to establish and maintain meaningful relationships with their students. Equally important were the relationships with the parents and other influential stakeholders. The importance of relationships confirmed the action research team’s assumptions prior to implementing the intervention. Ms. Jenkins stated, “Relationships with students and their parents or guardians is always beneficial.” Ms. Nelson described her method to create an environment built on trust by sharing this testimonial during her interview:

For the first few weeks of school, I focus on building relationships with my students. Teachers talk, so I pay close attention to those I have been “warned” about. Transitioning to middle school can be difficult for any student; couple that with a behavior or learning disability, the transition is even more challenging. So, within the first week, I have my students complete a getting-to-know-you activity. Students can participate orally or submit privately. Based on what they have shared and what I have learned from previous teachers, I engage in private
conferences with those that may require more attention later on. Quickly building a level of trust is key.

Ms. Nelson emphasized the importance of listening to her students and allowing them to get to know her, and vice versa, in building an environment of trust in which learning can occur.

Mrs. Patterson, a well-known and respected teacher leader, guided the evolution of the relationship theme with this declaration:

My classroom management style is that firmness mixed with love and compassion. My goal is that my students feel that they matter and are able to be successful when entering and leaving my classroom. I am firm but fair. I have two children of my own so I always go back to that, how do I expect my children’s teachers to interact with them?

Like Ms. Nelson, Mrs. Patterson noted the importance of students’ feeling like they matter to their teachers, as well as the teacher’s role in creating that feeling.

Ms. Jenkins attributed her success with building relationships to curb discipline to praising successes:

I have found quickly figuring out what a student is good at helps with the relationship building early on. I tend to make a big deal out of success, no matter how big or little; this opens the door for the student to feel safe and proud…in the event I have to address a behavior later on, they know it is coming from a good place.

Conversely, Ms. Nelson expressed during her interview that “one technique is to not always give a reaction to situations that may arise. Another technique is remaining calm
in every situation. The last is to handle different situations with care and wisdom.” It is not realistic for one to assume that he or she will be able to cultivate a relationship with every student. There may be contributing factors unbeknownst to the teacher that create unwanted obstacles consequently forcing the teacher to rely heavily on the support of others with whom the student feels a connectedness with. This was evidenced by Mrs. Hall’s response during the initial interview:

If I’m having a problem with a particular student with whom I don’t really have a relationship with, where we don’t see eye to eye or click for whatever reason, I’ll reach out to the student’s mentor if I know who it is. In the past, when I am having difficulty with a special ed student, I have asked the case manager for assistance and support; this has helped in some cases.

All these teachers emphasized the importance of forming personal relationships with their students, although some, like Mrs. Hall, noted that it was sometimes necessary to bring in outside assistance from a case manager or other administrator.

Nevertheless, it is imperative for teachers to create and maintain a rapport with students and not rely on administrators to address the disciplinary problems in their classroom. According to Mr. White, having an administrator get involved can be more of a disruption than an improvement on the undesirable behaviors:

I don’t like involving my administrator; I’d rather address the discipline issue in my class and move on. Sending discipline to an AP takes up too much time, the kid loses instruction, root cause is not fixed, and I still have to go back and provide the student with information they missed while in the office. It’s just not
worth it, plus it decreases the opportunity for me to build an effective and functional relationship with the child.

Discipline is minimized when it is addressed within the classroom. Students are more receptive to behavior redirection when they have a relationship with the teacher.

**Finding 3**

**Behavior redirection is more difficult when the authority figure directly addresses the student in a whole group setting.** During the back-to-school Leadership Advisory Board meeting, the principal reminded the designated department chairs to speak on the tone and presence of teachers when interacting with the students. He reminded everyone of the demographics and community whom the school serves. As building stakeholders, it is crucial that we teach the “whole” child and engage in interactions that will not destroy the environment, mission and vision of the school. The data collected from the participant interviews and the classroom management survey revealed that disciplining students in whole group settings resulted in combative responses and damaged relationships. Ms. Nelson had this to say about behavior redirection: “Middle school students are easily influenced by their peers; calling them out for their wrongdoing in front of their friends is embarrassing.” During her interview, Mrs. Hall shared her perception of how students feel when addressed in front of their friends: “Middle school students are at a vulnerable stage in their lives, they are constantly changing and attempting to find themselves, getting in trouble in front of others can potentially ruin their day.” Most students prefer to be addressed discreetly, as it is less threatening.
Participants completed the classroom management survey and submitted it anonymously. One survey question asked participants if, in the last two weeks, they had “Discipline[d] students in front of their peers so they will be an example to the group that is also engaged in such behaviors (i.e., reprimand a student in front of the class).” One response indicated that, although the teacher did not use sarcasm, name calling, or shouting to address a student, the teacher did, however, discipline the student in front of peers. The teacher included a notation indicating that doing so only stopped the behavior for the moment; addressing the student in front of peers did not eliminate the unwanted behavior. Three responses indicated that the teacher(s) never addressed students in front of their peers, but they frequently demonstrated a “with-it-ness,” meaning “communicating to students that you are aware of everything that is happening in the classroom; always scanning the room, making eye contact with individual students, as well as physical proximity (nonverbal cues).” From these responses, it is clear that nonverbal cues can eliminate unwanted behaviors while continuing instruction and not embarrassing a child.

By sitting down with each participant to conduct the interviews, I was able to not only listen and reflect on what they shared with me but also to observe and feel their passion for working with students. Curiosity led to the question of how they deal with extremely challenging students. When asked to remember and describe one of the most challenging discipline encounters with a student, Ms. Nelson shared:

The most challenging discipline problem I’ve encountered was when a student, plagued with emotional challenges, became enraged when I asked him to step out of the classroom so that he could gather himself. I remained calm while he
violently beat on the classroom door. The teacher adjacent to my classroom came and restrained him, so I really didn’t have to do much. I was sort of prepared by several classes that I had taken previously, but I don’t feel one can really prepared until he/she actually goes out into the field. In hindsight, I do not believe that I would have handled the situation too differently.

As we continued the interview, Ms. Nelson shared that although the student was outraged, by not responding the way most would expect and by staying calm, she and the student were able to revisit the situation and collaborate on ways to handle similar situations in the future. She continued with the following statement: “I am here to teach math and influence students in a positive way; what I’m not here to do is make any personal situation worse for them.”

As the interviews concluded, Mrs. Patterson simply stated, “There should be a yearly mandatory training or in-service on behavior management because some people just don’t know how to talk to these kids.” The teacher participants would all agree the tone in which one addresses a student can quickly make a bad situation worse.

**Finding 4**

**Teachers encounter fewer discipline problems when classroom expectations are clearly stated and reviewed.** The data from interviews, surveys and, subsequently, researcher observations, shows that teachers encountered fewer discipline problems when classroom expectations were clearly stated and reviewed. All participants reported that they communicate classroom expectations frequently. Mr. White shared that he designated students in each class as responsible for explaining rules and expectations to new students who might transfer into the school throughout the school year. Ms. Nelson
stated, “These [rules] are established by an open discussion held by the students and myself about what showing respect looks like.” The following interview excerpts demonstrate a level of teacher understanding and the benefits of teachers modeling and reviewing expectations throughout the instructional day and school year.

Mrs. Patterson recalled her experience when she went into a career in education:

I have noticed over the course of my career that by creating a safe place for my students, I experience fewer discipline problems. This, of course, took time and did not happen my first year in the classroom. A veteran teacher once told shared with me that the way to a phenomenal classroom is to set the tone early on, don’t smile or be nice but stern and establish a zero tolerance for foolishness. Oh and it helps when you make an example out of a student or two. Yeah this definitely did not work with my personality.

As Mrs. Patterson explains in this portion of her interview, teaching styles vary between instructors, and what works for one teacher may not work for another. However, she sees it as important to figure out what a “safe place” for students looks like and work to construct that.

Compared to other participants, Ms. Jenkins had this to say about her expectations:

I haven’t had many major discipline issues because of my being proactive, but one I’ve encountered was with a student that refused to follow any sort of directive given. I worked with this student by letting him know on a consistent basis what the expectations were. Eventually, he was able to understand those expectations and the consequences that would follow if he couldn’t or wouldn’t
comply. I was prepared for this situation and I wouldn’t have handled this any differently because I was able to find success with that student.

Consistency is key, and habit is not instantaneous. Based on the findings from this action research study, it is evident that the majority will appreciate and adhere to routine. Even as the demands of teaching are regularly increasing, teachers must still meet school community, district and state standards. Therefore, it is imperative to maximize the opportunity for teaching and learning while creating safe learning environments with few to no discipline problems.

**Research Question Two**

During the 2014-2015 school year, discipline was at an all-time high at LMS. Upon the end of the school year, the principal was promoted to a higher position within the district, an assistant principal was promoted to building principal at another local school, and Mr. Williams was given the opportunity to become building principal of LMS. When he accepted the position, he knew it came with many challenges and obstacles and that he had three years to make a difference. Mr. Williams immediately brought the discipline data to one of the first LAB meetings. He challenged each member of the team to work together to address these alarming in-school and out-of-school suspension rates. Within his first year of being principal, discipline was decreased by half. During the 2016-2017 leadership retreat, he shared the need to continue this trend. The district has made a big push towards Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS); however, LMS was not selected to implement the official program. Because of this, the action research team saw this as an opportunity to collectively create a culturally responsive tiered protocol specific to the needs of the school and community: The LMS
5-Step School-Wide Discipline Policy, Procedure, & Protocol (Appendix D). It was through this the data presented two themes: there are more opportunities to get to the root of the disruptive behavior or discipline problem and the level of administrator accountability increased.

**Finding 1**

**Multiple opportunities to address behaviors in isolation.** Data collected from observations exhibited multiple opportunities for teachers to address behaviors in isolation as well as not getting an administrator involved for the first offense. Observations took place in the participants’ classrooms and during transition in the hallways while they were on duty. Although a formal observation form was not completed during each observation, I looked for the following: evidence of relationship building, the tone teachers used when speaking to the class, especially those that may demonstrate the need for redirection, and in what ways the 5 Step School-Wide Protocol was being implemented. My observations and reflections were parallel to what each participant shared during their interviews and surveys.

Four out of five teachers conducted getting-to-know-you activities during the first month of school and, subsequently, with any new enrollee. These activities included a homework assignment in which the parents were asked to write a minimum one-page letter to the teacher. I found the purpose of this was to get to know the student through the parent or guardian’s eyes. They were also asked about their expectations for the child, teacher, and school for the academic year. Through these activities, the teacher was able to initiate the foundation for the relationship between school and home and the community. Another activity required the students to complete a questionnaire with
components such as the following: “describe what makes you mad; what makes you happy; best and worst subject; favorite food, color, and activity away from school; do you participate in extracurricular activities through the school or a local recreation center? If yes, do you mind providing a copy of the schedule?” Teachers who administered the questionnaire had 100% participation from their students; students received a grade of 100 as participation.

Teachers were also observed modeling desired behaviors. Two of the five teachers addressed students using their last name. All teachers were observed using appropriate manners, for example, replying using “yes ma’am/sir,” “no ma’am/sir,” thank you,” and “please.” The classrooms were clear and neat of clutter. Expectations, rituals, and routines were displayed as reminders. The participants were, in general, pleasant and warm when interacting with their students.

During Mrs. Hall’s and Ms. Nelson’s classes, I was able to observe the use of break passes. I asked if that tool was just for students with disabilities and was informed that, although the idea originated from a disruptive SWD, all students receive break passes that can be used during the nine weeks. Once the allotted passes have been used, then the student has to wait until the next progress report. However, SWD with documented behaviors are allotted more break passes.

When I was observing Mr. White, he used the last ten minutes of instruction to make phone calls home while the students were completing a group activity. Although some calls were positive, some parents/guardians were made aware of any behavior concerns and informed of the next steps. These were documented in a shared communication document.
It was evident in one classroom that student-teacher conferences were a part of the classroom norm. It was interesting to see the calendar; students looking at the calendar were unable to decipher if the conference was for behavior or academics. Mrs. Patterson stated that the team strived to conduct team conferences once per month, although there was some inconsistency. If an administrator was present, their role was minimal, and they were not there to be punitive.

All teachers participating in the action research study had a list and a log of students who had been assigned silent lunch or a form of detention. After-school detention was rare due to transportation issues. Many parents did not have a means to come get the child after school, and the school was no longer on a city bus route.

The teacher participants did not have any formal referrals from their class. Discipline was rare in their classrooms and was able to be addressed immediately. For many of the students, action research participants acted as the mentor or go-to person because of their relationship/ability to effectively communicate with the student.

Finding 2

**Increased administrator accountability for the number of children suspended.** The development and implementation of the 5-Step Protocol was designed to regulate the number of discipline referrals and to address disproportionality within the middle school. Prior to the 2015-2016 academic school year, teachers were permitted to submit referrals directly to their grade-level assistant principal. However, under Mr. Williams’ leadership, an executive decision was made to change how referrals were submitted. The logic behind this decision was to enable grade-level administrators the opportunity to monitor and investigate discipline infractions as they occurred.
Each LAB meeting agenda included discipline as a topic. During this time, administrators and the LTSE were expected to report on the current discipline data and concerns for their particular grade level. If large numbers of discipline narratives were submitted by a particular teacher, the principal wanted to know why and if additional support was required. It was made clear that, with the support of the leadership team, teachers were expected to address discipline infractions accordingly. In addition to the monitoring of teacher narratives, assistant principals were held accountable for the number of days given for each infraction. An explanation was required for excessive suspensions for the following Student Code of Conduct violations: student incivility and rude and disrespectful behaviors.

**Research Question Three**

**Students with Disabilities Received Fewer Referrals**

The most important finding from this research question was that students with disabilities received fewer referrals. However, the overall number of discipline incident counts increased with the implementation of a school-wide plan. The action research team recognized that the most efficient method to understanding the effectiveness of the intervention on student discipline would be through monitoring the number of incidents reported and processed. As seen in Figure 7, a comparison of behavior referrals reported over the course of three academic years was reviewed and discussed during a LAB meeting. There were more than 2,000 behavior referrals during the 2014-2015 school year. The following school year, discipline and referrals drastically decreased by more than half. Nevertheless, LMS saw an increase of discipline in 2016-2017 after the implementation of the 5-Step School-Wide Discipline intervention.
Figure 7. Total school-reported behavior referrals.

Figure 8. Behavior referrals by grade.
Based on the reported behavior referrals, it was evident that the intervention was most influential during the start of the new school year. The leadership team was hopeful that the culturally responsive discipline protocol would positively change the way in which the teachers encountered discipline. As mentioned in a previous section, the intervention was introduced to the faculty and staff during preplanning the first week of the school year. As seen in Figures 7 and 8, discipline followed a similar rate of increase as the years previous. Discipline reported during the month of March was the second-highest for the duration of the action research study. According to the members of the action research team, it has been their experience that discipline is the highest around October and March; therefore, this was not a surprise. One can assume that high rates of referrals and discipline infractions correlate with the lack of breaks from school, in addition to administrators’ tolerance for misbehavior.

The percentage of SWD being referred for behavior infractions decreased over a three-year data review. Results show that 609, or 29%, of the behavior referrals in 2014-2015 were a result of students with disabilities violating the code of conduct. Half of the SWD population received a behavior referral that school year. In 2015-2016, 257 (25%) referrals occurred for students receiving special education services. Although there was an increase in discipline incidents in 2016-2017, the school experienced the greatest decrease of special education students being referred to the administrator. While every referral does not result in a suspension resolution, it does interrupt the learning environment and opportunities for learning are lost. The action research team all agreed that this was a starting point, but there was more work to be done addressing the discipline problem.
Figure 9. 2014-2015 percentage of referrals for non-disabled peers vs SWD.

Figure 10. 2015-2016 percentage of referrals for non-disabled peers vs SWD.
Based on the analysis of the ISS and OSS summary report for the past three years, it was obvious that a large number of instructional days were lost. It is the expectation that students in ISS receive their missed work and are given the opportunity to submit it upon returning to class. The action research team discussed how this method is not realistically beneficial to the student. Most of the time, the work is an alternative to what is being taught during the regular class period. Students with disabilities are required to receive a minimum of 15 minutes of direct instruction for any classed missed in which they would typically receive service minutes. Much of this time is used quickly explaining the directions and providing a brief overview of how to complete assigned tasks. Assignments given in an alternative setting due to missing instruction in the normal learning environment are not the same. Therefore, students will likely not comprehend said material as proficiently.
Although this study did not seek to complete a detailed comparative analysis between instructional time lost and student achievement, the action research team did concur that suspension should not and cannot be the solution to all discipline. Collectively, the team understands that when students are not in class, their academics suffer, resulting in poor grades and test scores. These findings led to the discussion of future incentive programs and changes to the 5-Step Discipline Protocol.

**Figure 12.** School-wide ISS and OSS days reported.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this action research study was to understand the ways in which African American male students with disabilities are disciplined and to develop and maintain classroom management skills that can be implemented throughout the school to
decrease the number of discipline referrals. The research findings are summarized in Table 3 below, and then discussed in greater length.

Table 3

Research Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. How do teachers perceive the ways in which African American males are disciplined in middle school? | a. African American male students, especially those with identified disabilities, receive harsher punishments for minor infractions.  
b. Relationships between the student and teacher greatly impact how the student is disciplined.  
c. Behavior redirection is more difficult when the authority figure directly addresses the student in a whole group setting.  
d. Teachers encounter fewer discipline problems when classroom expectations are clearly stated and reviewed. |
| 2. How might a culturally responsive school-wide discipline protocol affect teacher discipline practices? | a. Multiple opportunities to address behaviors in isolation.  
b. Increased administrator accountability for the number of children suspended. |
| 3. How does the action research processes affect the overall discipline and school climate? | a. Decrease in SWD referrals; however, overall discipline counts increased. |

Based on the data collected, it is evident that positive and effective relationships create an environment conducive to learning and limit discipline problems. Skiba et al. (2016) thoroughly explained the importance of preventive measures that should be taken when addressing discipline within the school setting. Teachers who model rituals and
routines at the beginning of the school year encounter fewer disciplinary infractions when compared to those that struggle in this area. In addition to teaching and providing explicitly stated rules and expectations, it is crucial that teachers approach negative situations with positivity and concrete examples of the desired behaviors.

Secondly, students are forever changing; therefore it would be absurd to think mistakes are not going to happen or that students are not going to need to be redirected for displaying undesirable behaviors. While the teacher participants demonstrated an understanding of culturally responsive teaching, data collected from observing each teacher in their setting was extremely beneficial to the action research team. Students that are often described as at-risk or identified as having a disability, as well as Black males, require monitoring and more carefully established relationships. Transparency through modeling behaviors (Skiba, Orniston, Martinez, & Cummings, 2016), praising the positive (Beaty-O’Ferrall, Green, & Hanna, 2010), and increasing the number of opportunities for the students to learn and grow in a safe and warm environment (Ladson-Billings, 1995) all support the framework of culturally responsive teaching.

Finally, numerous researchers have supported the need to find alternative to suspensions and expulsions. Culturally responsive pedagogy encourages educators to engage in meaningful relationships with students so that one can better understand cultural factors that influence the individual student’s life. Through this method of teaching, teachers and school leaders can collaborate on practical strategies to address difficult students. Creating an environment focused on teaching and reaching the whole child creates a pathway to decrease the number of suspensions and disproportionality rates among Black males and those with disabilities. The findings from this action
research study revealed that discipline as a whole was not greatly impacted by the discipline intervention; however, the findings show there was a significant decrease in the number of SWD referrals. Policies, protocols, and procedures that follow a tiered guideline provided a problem-solving approach rather than punitive (Skiba et al., 2016). The data continues to hold both teachers and administrators accountable for high numbers of discipline referrals and disproportionality. The results outlined in Chapter 5 demonstrate a need for change in discipline practices in transient urban communities.
CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this action research study is to understand how African American male students with identified disabilities are disciplined and to maintain effective classroom management skills among teachers. Over the course of five months, the action research team collected data to address perceptions of discipline among African American male students, the impact of a culturally responsive school-wide discipline protocol, and the effect action research processes have on discipline and school climate. Chapter Six will include a summary of findings, conclusions and implications for key stakeholders such as teachers, administrators, and the school. In addition, a brief description of the limitations of the study and suggested recommendations for further research are provided.

Summary of Findings

The action research team comprised a group of building leaders who are in constant engagement with general and special education students who display behavior problems. An action research approach was selected to determine how, if at all, the process impacted discipline among African American male students, specifically those with disabilities. A mixed methods approach was chosen to answer three research questions. Once participants were selected, and the necessary agreements were made, formal data collection commenced. Data was collected through face-to-face interviews, teacher surveys, classroom observations, meeting notes, and figures acquired from the
district’s online data information system. All audio recorded data was transcribed, coded, and analyzed. Information was shared with participants to ensure they were in agreement with what was documented. Confidentiality remained throughout the course of the study. A summary of the results is shared in the sections below:

**Perceptions and Contributing Factors to School Discipline**

Several themes emerged from the face-to-face interviews conducted with the study participants: African American males and students with disabilities receive harsher punishments; relationships make a difference; students are more likely to be compliant when redirected in a one-to-one setting; and clearly stated and modeled rituals and routines decrease classroom disruptive behaviors.

Teachers who volunteered to participate in the action research study did not have any documented discipline infractions. The data from the interviews supports the literature, indicating that students are not punished equitably to their peers. African American males receive harsher punishments for similar infractions. Students with disabilities are also more likely to receive harsher punishment for discipline infractions. The action research team found that relationships between teachers and students contribute to students’ behavior. Students were more likely to comply when they had an established relationship with the teacher. Relationships build a sense of trust. Teachers reported getting-to-know-you activities as the best way to set the foundation for relationship building. These methods started at the beginning of the year because, like any relationship, it takes time to develop. Once relationships were recognized, students began to feel safe in the learning environment.
An additional component to the relationship-building aspect of teaching was setting the example for students. Teacher participants found when they modeled what good behavior looked like, students would also emulate this behavior and take accountability for their peers. Rituals and routines were not a one-time introduction; instead, teachers and students were in constant review. In one class, a specific student was selected to introduce new students to the way in which the class was conducted. The data collected indicated that students demonstrated better behavior when the expectations were explicitly stated. Students were easily redirected when they were addressed privately. Disruptive behaviors were not resolved or did not diminish when addressed in the whole group setting. On the contrary, the behavior actually became worse.

**Opportunities and Accountability**

The action research team sought to answer Research Question 2 through observations and classroom management survey results. The data collected supported the idea of multiple opportunities for teachers to address discipline through restorative practices. The implementation of the 5-Step Discipline Protocol (adapted from the Osceola Middle School’s discipline philosophy) promoted opportunities for teachers to get to the root of the problematic behavior. The intervention also gave students an opportunity to own their behavior and feel supported with the attendance of adults who advocated for them. As the researchers, teachers were observed demonstrating a desire to foster relationships. One participant was observed making phone calls home. Communication with the parent was important because it focused on the relationship between community and school. The implementation of break passes was evident. Students were permitted to use these passes to remove themselves from the learning
environment to regroup. Both students with and without disabilities utilized this form of reinforcement. A space identified for student-teacher conferences was found in one participant’s classroom. When asked about the space, the teacher elaborated on its purpose; students were aware the space is for conferences, but others were unable to determine if the conference was for behavior or academics. The teacher went on to say that, as a team, they attempted to meet with those in need of more of a team intervention. Mentors were invited to these conferences, as well as other staff members who had a rapport with the student. The purpose was to collectively recognize a resolution.

In addition to increasing opportunities for faculty and staff to address the behavior and student in isolation, the 5-Step Protocol increased administrator accountability. As much as time permitted, the building principal monitored the number of discipline incidents by grade level. Teachers were no longer allowed to submit behavior referrals; instead, the new procedure required the teacher to provide the grade-level administrator a narrative of the event. It was the expectation that, unless the infraction was egregious, the teacher should address the discipline within the classroom while following the protocol.

**Influence of Action Research on Discipline**

Action research is the intent to problem solve and create change in an organization through analysis, implementation, and reflection. Data collected and analyzed from the incidents reported indicated a relatively low significance in change with discipline collectively. Although discipline decreased by more than half during the 2015-2016 school year when compared to the previous year, LMS saw an increase in discipline in 2016-2017. Sixth grade reported the highest number of referrals in 2016-
The action research determined that there was a constant decrease in the number of students with disabilities receiving referrals. In 2014-2015, SWD accounted for 29% of the discipline reported; 25% in 2015-2016; and 17% in 2016-2017. While special education saw a decrease in the number of students being referred to an administrator for discipline, the action research team was reminded that students with disabilities only accounted for an average of 13% of the student population each year.

Table 4

Summary of Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How do teachers perceive the ways in which African American males are disciplined in middle school?</th>
<th>How might a culturally responsive school-wide discipline protocol affect teacher discipline practices?</th>
<th>How, if at all, does the action research process affect the overall discipline and school climate?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• AA male students receive harsher punishments</td>
<td>• Multiple opportunities</td>
<td>• Relatively low significance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Relationships impact discipline</td>
<td>• Administrator accountability</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Redirection is difficult in whole group setting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Clearly state and review expectations</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Conclusions and Implications

Several conclusions were drawn from the findings from this study. These conclusions examine the role of teacher on student discipline, proactivity, and the influence action research has on the implementation of school wide policies and protocols.
Conclusion #1: Misbehavior is Subjective and Influenced by Student-Teacher Relationships

School discipline in urban communities continues to be an issue because of the unfortunate disproportionality of suspensions and expulsions between African American, Hispanics, and students with disabilities and their White peers. Discipline in an urban setting has a negative impact on the school and community climate and set students up for failure at higher rates than their counterparts. Positive relationships can increase academic achievement, student motivation, and minimize discipline occurrences. It is essential that the emotional and social needs of African American male students are met. Building and fostering relationships between students and their teachers can also be used as a means to change the school climate.

Effective relationships are built on trust. The opportunity for this to take place is often established by the initial contact with one another. Students in middle school are some of the most impressionable individuals; therefore, they are influenced by both positive and negative encounters with individuals in their home, school and community. Teachers’ perceptions of the students in their classroom weigh heavily on how they act daily. Those that implement adequate classroom and behavior management strategies are less likely to find certain behaviors as disruptive or misconduct. Students thrive on structure; therefore, constant modeling and review of rituals and routines should be a practice of all teachers. Control and authority is maintained when teachers address discipline within the current setting rather than seeking others to handle all of their discipline. Removing students for behaviors that can be addressed immediately only
causes more work for the teacher later on. Students suspended lose instruction and the behavior is likely to occur again, subsequently instituting a never-ending cycle.

**Conclusion #2: Proactive Discipline Results in Fewer Discipline Problems**

The action research found that the more teachers were involved in teaching and reaching the whole child, the fewer discipline problems they encountered. Relationships were established or identified early in the school year. It was evident through observations that teachers paid attention to what was shared and used this knowledge when redirecting students. Setting the tone happens before discipline can ever be a problem.

Multiple opportunities or a tiered approach to address misconduct in a non-emotional state of mind continue to build trust between the student and teacher. These opportunities also teach the student how to be accountable for one’s own actions; in addition, the student is aware of the steps to follow when the behavior is not “fixed” initially. Students take ownership over how the instructional period flows and hold classmates accountable for their actions. Teachers who own their classroom through clearly stating and enforcing expectations, rituals and routines will infrequently use referrals as a means to address behavior within the classroom. Teachers who use more of a reactive approach spend most of their instructional period gaining control of the class or can quickly lose control of the environment as a whole. The use of one’s title or a “do as I say” mentality intensifies the situation, and it can become combative rather quickly. Unfortunately, the reactive approach rarely addresses the behavior in question.
Conclusion #3: School-Wide Discipline Protocols are Effective When Implemented with Fidelity

The purpose of the action research study was to change the way in which discipline was addressed by gaining a better understanding of teachers’ perceptions of discipline and management strategies. LMS is one of the few middle schools in the district with consistently high discipline occurrences. A newly created culturally responsive tiered school-wide protocol rolled out at the beginning of the 2016-2017 school year. This intervention was created to address the discipline referrals by providing opportunities for faculty and staff to support the student. Teachers encounter fewer repetitive behavior infractions when they have created an atmosphere in which expectations are explicitly stated and modeled, students have the opportunity to own their behaviors, and the student is included in the restoration of the relationship through conferencing.

While the data revealed an increase in discipline when compared to the previous school year, there was nonetheless a decrease in the percentage of students with disabilities receiving referrals. When I reviewed my reflection notes, I questioned if teachers and administrators truly understood the potential damage we as a school could be causing these students. Per the principal, the expectation was that in my role as LTSE, I was to be included in all conversations regarding suspended students with disabilities. This initiative was imposed and supervised by both the principal and district coordinators. This conclusion indicated that when protocols are implemented, followed, and monitored with fidelity, they can have an impact on the greater good of the environment.
Implications

Several implications materialized from the conclusions from this action research study. The findings provide insight and next steps for faculty and staff members who work in school settings where discipline may have a negative impact on the teaching and learning. Although the action research study took place in an urban school in which the population was predominately African American, the action research team agrees that these implications are not based on demographics and can be modeled within any educational setting that demonstrated a need.

General Education and Special Education Teachers

Data was collected using a number of methods, and each method used was selected to focus on a particular part of the identified problem. It was crucial to the action research team to understand how and why teachers discipline their students a particular way. While those teachers who participated in the study exhibited exemplary classroom and behavior management strategies, the data revealed their perceptions of the ways in which African American males are disciplined, generally speaking.

The findings from this action research project imply that teachers need to establish a rapport with their students. This foundation can be accomplished through a variety of getting-to-know-you activities and should be left up to the autonomy of each teacher. Encouraging teachers to build and maintain relationships with their students is beneficial in both the short and long term. LMS follows the Team Model; therefore, based on information provided by parents/guardians, previous teachers, initial encounters and observations, teachers can identify those students in need of immediate mentors. Once students are identified and mentors are selected, these relationships can be shared
with administrators and other important faculty and staff members that may come in contact with these students. In the event that misbehaviors occur, the adult will know who has established a trustworthy relationship with the student.

The action research team determined that teachers who model appropriate behavior, establish and review classroom rules and expectations, and plan engaging lessons deal with fewer behavior problems. Hence, teachers should begin the school year with this in mind. Teachers who lack skill or experience in these areas should be specific and intentional when seeking additional support from building leaders.

**Administrators**

During the Leadership Advisory Board meeting in February, it was discussed that there was a lack of monitoring the 5-Step Discipline Protocol. While the action research team reviewed the protocol with the faculty and staff mid-year, there was a consensus that monitoring should be ongoing. Now that teachers are required to submit a narrative of the behavior incident, the grade-level administrators will be held accountable for ensuring that the previous steps took place. With the rise of technology, a potential method for monitoring is through the creation and implementation of a shared online document. Each grade-level administrator will be responsible for their respective hall. Upon receiving a discipline narrative, the administrator will have access to the file and can review if and when the necessary steps took place. With these tools, the teams of teachers have a shared responsibility of relationship building and ensuring multiple opportunities to address misbehaviors. Proper monitoring of the discipline can address and decrease, if not eliminate, discipline disproportionality among African American males and students with disabilities.
School

The findings from this action research study provide a number of implications for the school as a whole. The aforementioned participants did not experience a lot of behavior misconduct in their classrooms. However, the development of a mentorship program for new teachers, as well as those who may be struggling with classroom and behavior management strategies, has great potential to decrease discipline incident occurrences generally. Mentoring programs have been on the rise in education, and regardless of the purpose, the potential for positive influence is high. Teachers who demonstrate effective classroom and behavior management strategies can share these with their mentees. Through the mentoring program, both teachers will be permitted to observe each other and provide meaningful feedback. Mentoring teachers can also serve as an advocate seeking additional support for those still having difficulty.

In addition to mentoring programs and in-services in the 5-Step School-Wide Discipline Protocol, there is a need for school-wide supplementary learning and support of classroom and behavior management. Over the course of three years, data revealed that discipline is a major problem at LMS. Providing support through continual learning opportunities allows the teachers to seek understanding beyond their education pedagogy, while gaining a deeper knowledge based on their lived experiences. Professional developments also create a climate and culture of a collaborative environment. Teachers no longer work in isolation. As a result, teachers can share strategies and pose questions in a safe place without judgment.

Lastly, the implementation of a formal school-wide incentive program would increase positive behavior and decrease the number of out-of-school and in-school
suspensions. The program design focuses on promoting positive behavior by recognizing and rewarding students for modeling good behavior. Faculty and staff members can give tickets to students who demonstrate positive character traits or are “caught in the act” of making good choices. Behaviors can include, but are not limited to, actions such as: maintaining a clean area, displaying good manners, following rituals and routines, avoiding conflicts, paying attention, showing respect, and demonstrating a positive attitude. It is clear that suspensions are not impacting the large number of discipline occurrences the way the punishment is intended; therefore, a different approach should be taken.

Limitations of the Study

This action research study included several limitations that were unavoidable by the action research team. The district in which the study took place permitted data to be collected until March of the IRB-approval school year. IRB from the university was not granted until November; therefore, the duration of the action research study was five months. Although the intervention was implemented in August, anecdotal notes were discussed during the LAB meeting in November. The first cycle consisted of a review of the discipline trends from August until December, as well as the initial interviews and observations of participants. Recommendations from the first cycle were limited due to the dynamics of the school environment; there were teacher vacancies throughout the school, and teachers were asked to heavily assist their teammates. At the conclusion of cycle one, the action research team asked that teachers be reminded of the newly implemented protocol and Mr. Williams switched some grade-level administrators. Cycle two lasted for three months. Discipline was monitored, and the LTSE continued to
discuss bi-weekly discipline, with the focus on student with disabilities and consequences they received for infractions.

Sample size was also a limitation for the study. Although six sixth-grade teachers volunteered to complete the study, only five participated from beginning to end. All of the participants have taught before, and four have been members of the LMS faculty prior to the study. Small sample sizes make it difficult to generalize findings to a larger population. Efron and Ravid (2013) suggest a smaller sample size when the purpose is to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon being investigated; however, a larger sample size is necessary when implementing a new approach. Participants also typically represent themselves and do not attempt to make generalizations. Furthermore, participating teachers typically did not have any major discipline problems. It was important for the participating teachers to address discipline as it happened so as to protect instructional time and relationships and promote a sense of authority over what happened in their individual classrooms.

Lastly, balancing the role of change agent and a member of the faculty was also determined as a limitation. Throughout the action research study, I found myself constantly wanting a deeper understanding of what teachers with higher discipline referrals were doing to address the problem and why. I also wanted to “fix” the problem but was forced to allow change and participant response to happen naturally.

**Future Research**

Stringer (2014) stated that “[p]roblems do not exist in isolation but are part of a complex network of events, activities, perceptions, beliefs, values, routines, and rules” (p. 103). This action research study holds true to this statement. Findings from this study
indicate that discipline disproportionality has many contributing elements that do not come with a simple solution. As the study moved through the cycles, action research team members were asked to be in constant reflection. At the conclusion of each LAB and research meeting, we discussed next steps. Although discipline did not conclusively decrease, the study permits further action and research with hopes of a more apt approach.

Disproportionality in discipline is a multifaceted problem that many schools face. Future research in this area can focus on the implementation of several interventions with the emphasis of decreasing discipline infractions for minor offenses. Discipline is not affected by one single event or lack thereof, hence the importance of addressing teaching pedagogy, classroom and behavior management, and support just to name a few. Finally, this action research study only added to the limited literature on discipline and disproportionality among African American teachers and students. There is an abundance of research that examines patterns of discipline between White teachers and African American students compared to White students. Through this research, one can potentially gain a deeper knowledge of how other factors beyond ethnicity influence discipline.

**Summary**

While there was a low significance in the impact of the intervention on discipline and disproportionality, the study exemplified next steps for teachers who may struggle with classroom and behavior management. African American male students, specifically those with disabilities receiving instruction in the most inclusive setting, should feel comfortable knowing that the adults around them care for their well-being. Instead of
being reactive when submitting disciplinary referrals and immediately giving out consequences, one should be proactive. It is crucial to the development of children in urban areas who face more obstacles that they be given opportunities to rehabilitate and change inappropriate behaviors. In order for this to occur, relationships built on trust and not fear should be established and maintained.

This action research study encouraged the team to collaborate on ways to address high discipline occurrences among struggling teachers. It also gave those with the authority to administer consequences the opportunity to reflect on their processes when giving said resolutions. As education reforms continue and accountability increases, it is imperative that school, family, and community strive to do their due diligence to ensure strategies and interventions are put in place to address the unjust discipline in poverty-stricken communities (Warren, 2005). From the findings, the action research team was able to suggest possible changes to the 5-Step Protocol and determine the most efficient way to monitor and support those teachers in need. Negativity has an influence on students’ behavior and perception of themselves, and it is necessary that as educators we work to break the cycle of discipline and disproportionality among young African American males and students with disabilities. Through this study, the conversation and creation of a mentoring program has started, in addition to an improved incentive program for students displaying positive behaviors.
REFERENCES


Kennedy-Lewis, B. L. & Murphy, A.S. (2016). Listening to “frequent flyers”: What persistently disciplined students have to say about being labeled as “bad.” *Teachers College Record, 118*, 1-40.


APPENDIX A

SAMPLE TEACHER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Classroom Discipline & Classroom Management

1. Describe your philosophy regarding discipline.
2. What techniques would you use to handle discipline problems that may arise in your classroom?
3. What was the most challenging discipline problem you’ve encountered and how did you handle it? Were you prepared to handle this situation? In hindsight, would you have handled this situation any differently?
4. Do you think you discipline students the same? What are your thoughts about equity vs equality when students are disciplined?
5. What kind of rules do you have in your classroom? (Share an example.) How are they established?
6. How would you create and promote a safe atmosphere in your classroom?
7. What is your classroom management plan/style? What are your goals?
8. Describe what you consider to be the model classroom. What would a typical day look like in this classroom?
9. Share three interesting classroom management techniques used in your classroom.
10. When students say they want their teacher to be fair, what do you think they mean?
### APPENDIX B

**CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUE PREVALENCE SURVEY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technique</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Once</th>
<th>Twice</th>
<th>3 Times</th>
<th>More than 3 Times</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Praise (i.e., verbal praise, “Great job!”)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking back at the past 2 weeks, how often would you say you used this technique to modify behavior?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Use physical proximity (i.e., stand closer to the students who is misbehaving)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking back at the past 2 weeks, how often would you say you used this technique to modify behavior?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Involve parents (i.e., phone call home, email, notes home, home visits)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking back at the past 2 weeks, how often would you say you used this technique</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Use of a token system with points or a chart (i.e., table points, marble jar, candy)

| Looking back at the past 2 weeks, how often would you say you used this technique to modify behavior? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Demonstrate With-it-ness (communicating to students that you are aware of everything that is happening in the classroom; always scanning the room, making eye contact with individual students)

| Looking back at the past 2 weeks, how often would you say you used this technique to modify behavior? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Discipline students in front of their peers so they will be an example to the group that is also engaged in such behaviors (i.e., reprimand a student in front of the class)

| Looking back at the past 2 weeks, how often would you say you used this technique to modify behavior? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Give student a physical consequence (i.e., run 2 laps, give me 20 push-ups, stand on one foot or hands up)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Looking back at the past 2 weeks, how often would you say you used this technique to modify behavior?</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Separation: Removal from class/Time-outs/Standing apart in a classroom location**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Looking back at the past 2 weeks, how often would you say you used this technique to modify behavior?</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Once</th>
<th>Twice</th>
<th>3 Times</th>
<th>More than 3 Times</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Use sarcasm to modify behavior (i.e., “Now that was a bright thing to do!”)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Looking back at the past 2 weeks, how often would you say you used this technique to modify behavior?</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Name calling (i.e. crybaby, stupid, retarded)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Looking back at the past 2 weeks, how often would you say you used this technique</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>to modify behavior?</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yelling/Shouting/Using a very loud voice</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking back at the past 2 weeks, how often would you say you used this technique to modify behavior?</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Once</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make comments to students such as “When are you going to grow up?” or “Would you please act your age?”</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking back at the past 2 weeks, how often would you say you used this technique to modify behavior?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Date: October 17, 2016
Re: Research Project

LOCAL SCHOOL SITE APPROVAL LETTER

University of Georgia
Tucker Hall
310 East Campus Road
Athens, GA 30602

Subject: Site Approval Letter

To whom it may concern:

This letter acknowledges that I have received and reviewed a request by Nicole (Egging) Allen to conduct a research project entitled "The Influence of School Discipline on Middle School African American Male Students with Disabilities" and I approve of this research to be conducted at our facility.

When the researcher receives approval for his/her research project from the University of Georgia's Institutional Review Board, I agree to provide access for the approved research project. If we have any concerns or need additional information, we will contact the University of Georgia's IRB at (706) 542-3199 or irb@uga.edu.
APPENDIX D

2016-2017 LIONS MIDDLE SCHOOL-WIDE DISCIPLINE POLICY, PROCEDURE,
AND PROTOCOL

Step 1
- **Relationship-Based Behavior Management**
  - Knowing our students; building and maintaining good relationships with them; creating community in our classrooms; modeling expected behaviors; when students make mistakes they are coached in the importance of self-control/responsible independence while preserving the relationship.

Step 2
- **Break Away**
  - Allow the student to take a few minutes in private to gain self control. Once the student has regained self-control the student is able to rejoin the activity. Student should not be punished for the entire period/day.
  - **Initial Parent Contact**

Step 3
- **Student Teacher Conference or Team Conference**
  - A private conversation between the teacher and student within 24 hours of the incident. It is imperative that the student has an opportunity to reflect on his/her actions.
  - The team will schedule a team-conference with the student (suggested attendees: teachers on the team, student, mentor, grade level counselor, and grade level administrator). There should be a discussion about why the student has decided to continue to display the behaviors. (this should not be one-sided)

Step 4
- **Detention/Parent Conference**
  - The teacher will assign detention (silent lunch, before, or after school) in addition to contacting the parent/guardian and scheduling a conference.

Step 5
- **Administrative Referral**
  - The teacher will email a detailed description of the situation to the appropriate grade level administrator. The email must include documentation of the previous 4 steps being implemented.
Automatic Administrative Referral

The following behaviors/situations require an immediate Administrative Referral and notification of an administrator post-haste:

- Drugs, alcohol, or tobacco possession/use
- Firearms, weapons, or bomb possession/use
- Fighting or physical violence
- Sexual harassment or inappropriate physical contact
- Bullying, hazing harassment, or intimidation
- Gang related activities
- Stealing of significant property