

STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR POSTSECONDARY ASPIRATIONS AFTER
FACING LONG-TERM SUSPENSIONS

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SECTION ONE:

INTRODUCTION TO THE DISSERTATION-IN-PRACTICE

As a freshman, Todd talked about becoming an architect, a lofty but achievable goal for a first-generation prospective college student. Halfway through his sophomore year, Todd made a poor decision and sold an ounce of marijuana to a friend of his while on school grounds. The district in which he attended employed a zero-tolerance policy for disciplinary infractions concerning drug and violent offenses, and Todd was summarily issued 90 days under the guidelines of the 1996 Missouri Safe Schools Act (Missouri Center for Safe Schools, 2005). In the months that followed, without the financial or family support to complete online classes and with no other school willing or able to enroll him (Kraetzer, 2002; “Missouri’s Safe Schools Act,” 2013), Todd abandoned his attempt to keep up with his classes. Ninety school days later, Todd returned to school, four inches taller and more than a semester behind in credits. Within six weeks, overwhelmed by the pressure of retaking his sophomore-year classes as well as his junior-year classes, Todd dropped out of high school.

The scenario above has become all too common in our nation’s public high schools. In October of 2014, the Education Commission of the States (ECS) published its “Blueprint for College Readiness: A 50-State Policy Analysis” (2014). In it, the ECS reiterated the understanding that “high school policies are at the heart of helping students succeed and transition to postsecondary education” (p. 4). However, if those policies include exclusionary practices, do they serve the children who are most affected by them?

Statement of the Problem

The Safe Schools Act, both federal and state, demands that children expelled from schools due to infractions that violate the act are forbidden to physically enter a school or school

grounds (“Missouri’s Safe Schools Act,” 2013) and that other public schools within the state can deny enrollment to those children (Kraetzer, 2002). Likewise, if a child has been pulled from the classroom for a long-term suspension of more than ten school days and less than 180, the school will provide make-up work, but is not required to provide arranged instruction (“Missouri’s Safe School’s Act,” 2013). The burden falls on the students and their families to ensure uninterrupted continuation of their education (Caton, 2012). These situations are problematic, especially when the United States Department of Education (2015) has stated its goal is to “ensure that all young people are prepared to succeed in college and careers, that historically underserved populations are protected, and that educators have the resources they need to succeed” (p. 1). As reported by Losen, et al. (2015), states such as Connecticut, Delaware, and Texas, as well as individual cities such as Baltimore, Los Angeles, and Memphis, have revamped their disciplinary policies to address both the disproportionality in disciplinary measures and the achievement gap. The State of Missouri, however, continues to retain its 1996 Safe Schools Act policy (“Missouri’s Safe Schools Act,” 2013).

History of Exclusionary Discipline Policies

In order to delve into the subject, the history of exclusionary policies must be understood. In 1986, Attorney General Edwin Meese, under the Reagan Administration, set forth a federal drug policy designed to eradicate the traffic of drugs between the United States and other countries (Kingery, 2000; Skiba & Peterson, 1999; Skiba & Rausch, 2004). The term “zero tolerance” was applied to the administration’s “get tough” stance on drug trafficking (Skiba & Peterson, 1999). Subsequently, that same term began to infiltrate educational disciplinary policies as early as 1989, and by 1993, zero tolerance policies had swept the nation’s schools (Skiba & Peterson, 1999).

During the Clinton Administration, the original 1965 Elementary and Secondary Schools Act was reauthorized to include the Gun-Free Schools Act (GFSA) (1994) that tied school funding to compliance of the act, and set a mandatory one-year expulsion for all weapons violations (Sinclair, Hamilton & Gutmann, 1999). In order to remain in compliance, the State of Missouri issued its own Safe Schools Act (1996), one that included zero tolerance recommendations for weapons, drug, and other behavior violations, and also mandated the sharing of disciplinary records between school districts and judicial courts (Burgess, 1997; Kraetzer, 2002). In Missouri as well as around the country, expulsions and long-term suspension of ten days or more skyrocketed. Between 2009 and 2010, more than three million American children were suspended or expelled from school, the vast majority being African American males (Losen & Gillespie, 2012).

Current Trends Regarding Exclusionary Discipline Policies

Although unintended in its original concept of providing a safe education for all students, racial and gender disproportionality in the metering out of exclusionary discipline has become the outcome of zero tolerance policies (Caton, 2012; Kayama, Haight, Gibson, & Wilson, 2015; Monroe, 2009; Skiba and Rausch, 2006). Educational research consistently highlights the fact that zero tolerance policies affect males at a higher rate than females, and Black males at a higher rate than White males (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). Furthermore, children of lower socio-economic status (SES) and Hispanic/Latino males are similarly affected (Skrla, Scheurich, Garcia, & Nolly, 2004). These groups of students are also at an increased risk for low academic achievement and dropout rates, which is discordant with the objectives of the No Child Left Behind Act (2001), a federal law created to decrease the achievement gap between student groups (Lee, 2006).

In response to the plethora of research that highlights racial and gender disproportionality, as well as its correlation to the juvenile justice system, the United States Department of Education, the Department of Justice, and the Council of State Government (2011) released a report that denounced the use of zero tolerance policies, referring to the connection between school discipline and the risk of delinquency, or “the school-to-prison-pipeline” (Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2005). Their report also cited evidence that “nearly six in ten public school students were suspended or expelled at least once between their seventh- and twelfth-grade school years” (p. 1). Furthermore, the Academy of American Pediatrics (2003) and the American Psychological Association (2008) have urged policy makers to discontinue the use of exclusionary disciplinary practices (Losen & Martinez, 2013), citing mental health issues. Unfortunately, these disciplinary practices continue, even when mounting research highlights the debilitating effect of such policies.

Existing Gaps in Literature

What is not well understood is the affect long-term suspensions and expulsions have on children and their perceptions of their postsecondary aspirations. Brown (2007) suggested that future research should “focus on students’ experiences from their own perspectives” (p. 452). Gregory, Cornell, and Fan (2011) wrote that studies should concentrate on how the student’s socioeconomic status played into his or her ability to overcome the harmful effects of suspension. The American Psychological Associations Zero Tolerance Task Force noted that little research has been conducted on how exclusionary policies impact families and communities. Gregory, et al., (2011) called for more focused research on how school structures and support contribute to student behavior and achievement. Further, Howard (2003) pointed to

the lack of research on how students perceive their place within the school, in relation to their connections with staff members.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to discover North Ridge School District's (pseudonym) former students' perceptions of how exclusionary policies affected their postsecondary aspirations; how these students perceived their academic identities before and after their exclusionary discipline consequences; how these students described the influences their familial and SES circumstances had on their ability to maintain their educational momentum while out of school; and how students assessed the support they received from educators during their suspensions, as well as when they returned to school. For the purpose of this study, suspensions will be defined as a period of not less than ten days and not more than 180 days outside of school; expulsions will be defined as a period of 180 days, or one-calendar year, outside of school, or until the local board of education deems an appropriate time for re-admittance (Brown, 2007; Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education). Furthermore, academic identity will be defined as the way in which young adults become aware of their place within an organized structure, such as education (Zirkel, 2002).

Research Questions

The overarching research question is: What are North River School District's former students' perceptions of exclusionary disciplinary practices in relation to their postsecondary aspirations?

Other sub-questions guiding this study are:

1. How do students perceive their academic identity within the educational community (classroom, school, course selection) before and after long-term suspensions and/or

- expulsions, and how do these exclusionary consequences influence their perceptions of attaining their postsecondary aspirations?
2. How do students describe the influence their family or SES had on their ability to maintain focus on their education while away from the classroom?
 3. How do students describe the support they received from educators (teachers, counselors, administrators) upon their return to the classroom, after their suspensions?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study, critical theory, begins with the advocacy/participatory approach, which Creswell (2009) describes as a philosophical worldview that “focuses on the needs of groups and individuals in our society that may be marginalized or disenfranchised” (p. 9). Archbald (2008) discussed the importance of the advocacy approach, suggesting that the research should be of value to a “larger community” (p. 709). This worldview, then, gives clarity to critical theory. Critical theory is practical due to its accessibility to the researcher as well as the participant. It seeks to “motivate the individual person.... Otherwise, theory becomes a statement of mere words which have meaning for the objective researcher but not for the person engaged in human behavior” (Peca, 2000, pp. 14-15). Therefore, critical theory, which has at its core social justice and equality, power structures, and democracy (Dant, 2003; Freeman & Vasconcelos, 2010; Peca, 2000), provides the lens through which issues surrounding exclusionary policies and their relation to student achievement can be examined.

Social Justice and Equality

With origins in late-eighteenth-century Europe, critical theorists concerned themselves with solving economic and social problems (Freeman & Vasconcelos, 2010; McKernan, 2013).

McKernan (2013) reported that critical theory seeks not only to understand these societal problems, but to change the circumstances that would enslave those most keenly affected (p. 425). Critical theorists and educators are enraged by practices within the field that segregate and displace the “dispossessed,” or the very segments of society who are in most need of the benefits of education (McKernan, 2013, p. 426).

More recently, Kincheloe (2007) has taken the mantle of critical theory and introduced a subset, critical pedagogical theory, which sets forth the inter-relational aspect of not only “social education but also of critical consciousness itself” (p. 39). According to Ali-khan and Siry (2012), Kincheloe and McLaren articulated the need for sustained qualitative research in the field of pedagogy and its impact on social justice. The intersection between critical theory and critical pedagogical theory illuminates the heart of the framework, in that, as stated by Vinson, Ross, and Wilson (2010), it is “directed toward a socially just social transformation, a pedagogy in opposition to dominant, mainstream, and disconnected or reproductive schooling that serves, in this critical view, primarily the interests of the powerful” (p. 100).

Power Structures

Societal structures and thereby structures of power are differentiated by race, gender, ethnicity, and class and these stratifications become the assumptions of critical theory (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2002; Peca, 2000; Scheurich & Imber, 1991). Furthermore, critical theory is grounded in the assumption that education can bring about emancipation, not only for the oppressed but for the oppressor (Armaline, 2010; Freire, 1970/2000). In order to bring about structural change, those within the organization must “engage in a critique of the prevailing organizational ideology” (Peca, 2000, p. 34). In part, the critique must include the use of

language within educational structures, because language not only describes the world but also constructs it (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2002).

Leistyna (2009) stated that too often educational policies meant to increase achievement gaps and other woes fail because they disregard these stratifications within society and how those structures inform practices. When policies and strategies seek to understand these structures and the interconnection between pedagogy and ideology, then transformation within “existing undemocratic social practices and institutional structures that produce and sustain inequalities and oppressive social relations” can occur (Vinson, Ross & Wilson, 2010, p. 96).

Transformation, then, becomes the optimal state for critical theorists (Dant, 2003; Freeman & Vasconcelos, 2010; Leistyna, 2009). It is through transformation that, as Freire (1970/2000) reported, “the culture of domination is culturally confronted” (p. 10).

Democracy

John Dewey (1916), an influential American educator, wrote extensively about the duty to educate all children in order to create a more democratic society (Armaline, 2010; Kadlec, 2006; Kellner, 2003). For Dewey, democracy and education were not separate, but inexorably linked (Boyles, Carusi, & Attick, 2009). Moreover, democracy “is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living” (Dewey 1916, p. 94). Education, then, is the key that unlocks “an egalitarian and participatory democracy” (Kellner, 2003, p. 56).

In relation to more current educational issues concerning democracy, Henry Giroux (2003) directed his appraisal of the ways in which zero tolerance policies inhibit children’s ability to take part in the democratic process. Giroux wrote that expulsions and long-term suspensions exclude children, especially children of color and from low socioeconomic backgrounds, from the educational process, which is a “crisis of democracy itself” (p. 556).

Furthermore, Giroux (2014) warned of the “coercive forces shaping American culture” and how these forces affect democracy and justice (p. 240).

A theoretical framework in qualitative research “provides an overall orienting lens for the study of questions of gender, class, and race (or other issues of marginalized groups)” (Creswell, 2009, p. 62). Moreover, a theoretical lens informs the types of questions to be asked, as well as influences the way in which data is culled and examined (Creswell, 2009). Therefore, critical theory, with its assumptions about social justice and equality, power structures, and democracy, will provide the framework upon which this research will be built.

Design of the Study

In order to elicit students’ perspectives and experiences concerning exclusionary policies and their postsecondary achievements, this study will apply qualitative methods of research to collect and analyze data. Qualitative research seeks to discover individuals’ interpretation of the worlds they experience, and how they attribute meaning to those experiences (Merriam, 2009; Roberts, 2010). Further, Eisenhart (2006) wrote that qualitative researchers attempt to evoke descriptive images in order to encapsulate those events that lead to individuals’ experiences. The culmination of qualitative research is to improve the practice within a particular profession, as well as serve the larger community by contributing a new body of research (Archbald, 2008; Merriam, 2009).

Within the qualitative method, data analysis will follow the advocacy/participatory approach. This approach, as defined by Creswell (2009), employs the following research practices:

Collects participant meanings; focuses on a single concept or phenomenon; brings personal values into the study; studies the context or setting of participants; validates the

accuracy of findings; makes interpretations of the data; creates an agenda for change or reform; collaborates with the participants (p. 17).

Qualitative research seeks to tell the stories of the participants through multiple strategies, “instead of deploying etic and nomothetic approaches that emphasize the goal of discovering and describing universal principles by quantifying the observed phenomena” (Heppner & Heppner, 2004, p. 139). These methods are in keeping with critical theory, in that the marginalized participant is given voice, and the expressed desire of the research will bring about transformation for the participants, as well as the larger community (Archbald, 2008; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2002).

This study will follow the case study methodology. Creswell (2009) described this methodology as one in which the “researcher explores in depth a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals” (p. 13). The type of case study to be conducted will follow the heuristic focus, which contributes to the reader’s understanding of a central phenomenon (Corcoran, Walker, & Wals, 2004; Merriam, 2009). Along with the type of focus pertinent to this type of methodology, case studies are bounded systems. Merriam (2009) described bounded systems as the unit of analysis, not the problem to be studied. As quoted by Merriam (2009), Adelman, Jenkins, and Kemmis (1983) added to the definition of bounded systems, writing, “The most straightforward examples of ‘bounded systems’ are those in which the boundaries have a common sense obviousness” (p. 3).

Site Description and Setting

This case study will be bounded by a setting that will be defined as public high schools within the same district, in a suburban Midwestern city. These high schools abide by and enforce the district’s disciplinary policies, and they share comparable academic profiles and student

demographics (student population, SES factors, racial and ethnic subgroup sizes). Furthermore, student-participants will be chosen using purposeful sampling (Coyne, 1997; Creswell, 2009), and will be limited to those who fit the requirements of the study; will be limited to those who have received disciplinary suspensions lasting ten or more days while in high school; will be limited to those individuals whose disciplinary infractions, when applicable, do not fall under the legal definition of a felony violation; will be limited to those students who are a minimum of 18 years old and who are former students of the district; will be limited to those who were enrolled within ten years of the date of initial research.

Participant Sample

The number of participants, or samples, for this study will fulfill the requirements for addressing the research questions and will consist of a diverse cross-section of students in terms of gender, race, and ethnicity. Furthermore, the number of participants, or samples, will be dictated by purposeful sampling, a strategy that, according to Merriam (2009) allows “the investigator to discover, understand, and gain insight” (p. 77). Moreover, “the sample size will continue until the researcher feels saturation of information has been reached (Merriam, 2009, p. 81).

Data Collection Tools

Data collection will involve open-ended interview questions, following protocol set forth by Fink (2013) and Merriam (2009). All interviews will be transcribed, in accordance with Krueger and Casey (2009). Research participants’ transcribed interviews will be held up against all other artifacts in order to support the internal validity (Merriam, 2009). Data collection will utilize the story-telling technique, which allows the participants to describe their own stories (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011), as well as the counter-storytelling technique, which, as defined

by Solorzano and Yosso (2002), is a “method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told (i.e., those on the margins of society” (p. 32). Caton (2012) added to the importance of the counter-storytelling method as one that is a “powerful means to deconstruct the notion of ‘equity in the practice of school policies’” (p. 1063).

Data Analysis

Once data are gathered, Creswell (2009) recommends the use of triangulation in order to validate findings. The use of reviewed literature and archival documents will assist in identifying themes. The documents that will be triangulated include student interview transcripts, existing research, and district policy documents. These documents will be further analyzed for consistency across data points, as well as how their content compares to the research questions (Howard, 2003; Merriam, 2009).

Coding is the method by which words and phrases are organized with relation to the central research question (Charmaz, 2010). Emerson et al., (2011) described coding as “looking to identify threads that can be woven together to tell a story” (p. 171). The three types of coding to be used will be open coding, to identify themes and issues; focused coding, to search for topics that have previously been identified; and axial coding, relating the codes to each other (Emerson, et al., 2011).

Limitations

This case study focuses on one district’s former high school students, and is thereby limited by its small sample size. The topic itself, which is pertinent to those concerned with disciplinary policies and how they affect secondary students, is also a form of limitation. Merriam (2009) wrote about the limitation of generalizability, suggesting the researcher must think in terms of the reader and the applicability of the study to his or her situation (p. 226).

Furthermore, in light of the fact that only the participants' perspectives of their disciplinary events will be explored, this one-sidedness presents a limitation. In conjunction with that narrow glimpse into the each research subject's narrative is the conceit that the researcher will be unaware of biased or exaggerated details offered by the participants.

Indeed, the researcher's own biases may play a part in the limitations of the study. Every precaution will be taken to guard against bias, including the honest and objective reporting of information that might be counter to the researcher's personal opinion (Roberts, 2010, p. 39).

Delimitations

Merriam (2009) remarked that case studies are naturally bounded by "what is to be studied," and that this "what" created a "unit around which there are boundaries" (p. 40). This research is bounded and therefore delimited by the age and proximity of its participants, as well as the situations that created their convergent grouping. In order to proceed within ethical guidelines, only participants who have reached the age of 18 will be interviewed. A further delimitation of participants will involve the nature by which they earned long-term suspensions. No participants within the study will have committed a felonious act. Furthermore, only former students from one Midwestern, suburban district will be interviewed.

Ethics

All participants will be made aware of the researcher's ethical obligations, as set forth by IRB. All participants will be given a letter of informed consent, and will be advised that their participation within the study is voluntary (Merriam, 2009; Roberts, 2010). All participants' privacy will be protected, and the nomenclature used to signify participants will be anonymous (Creswell, 2009; Roberts, 2010). Furthermore, the researcher will abide by the rules and values set forth by the American Educational Research Association (AERA, 2011).

Furthermore, as Banaji, Bazerman and Chugh (2003) revealed, “even the most well-meaning person unwittingly allows unconscious thoughts and feelings to influence seemingly objective decisions” (p. 115). In order to protect against bias, the researcher will be aware of her personal story concerning the topic. Chenail (2011) warned “insider” qualitative researchers to be aware of their own affinity for the topic, suggesting that such biases may limit their “curiosities so they only discover what they think they don’t know, rather than opening up their inquiries to encompass also what they don’t know they don’t know” (p. 257). Therefore, the researcher will ward against allowing such biases to creep into the research by following the advice given by Krueger and Casey (2009), who suggested “Seek insights from colleagues, particularly those with different backgrounds. Be ready to release your grip on an interpretation and embrace alternatives” (p. 126). By being aware of inherent bias, the researcher can better guard against it.

Assumptions

Inherent in the risk of interviewing older students concerning their former aspirations is the assumption that memories fade or can be manipulated by time. That being said, the research assumes that all responses from participants are given openly and honestly, and that these responses reflect the participants’ perceptions of the topic, not the researcher’s.

Definition of Key Terms

Achievement Gap. Anderson, Medrich, and Fowler (2007) defined the achievement gap as how “racial and ethnic subgroups in a given school are performing relative to their white peers” (p. 548).

Disciplinary Policies: Policies created by local school boards concerning expected behavior and the consequences incurred for offenses. These policies are aligned with state and federal guidelines and legislation.

Disproportionality: The over- and under-representation of subgroups as compared to other groups within a common population.

Educational Community and Setting: Any place where one would go to acquire education, either formally or informally.

Exclusionary Discipline Policies: Any disciplinary consequence that removes a child from his or her educational setting.

Expulsion: Disciplinary consequence that involves an indefinite amount of time and requires a school board's approval for readmission ("School Discipline").

High School Equivalency Test: An assessment for students who are unable to finish high school but would like to earn alternative credentials. Formerly called the General Education Test (GED), Missouri adopted the High School Equivalency Test (HiSET) in 2014 ("High School Equivalency").

In-School Suspension: Disciplinary action that removes a child from regularly scheduled classes in order to serve a detention in a segregated area, but that does not remove the child from the building.

Long-term suspensions: A fixed amount of time that a child is removed from his or her educational setting, lasting no less than 10 days and no more than 180 days, after which time the child automatically returns to school ("School Discipline").

Out-of-School Suspension: A disciplinary action that disallows a child from entering the educational setting while serving a suspension.

Postsecondary Aspirations: The hoped-for level of educational attainment after high school graduation.

Postsecondary Education: “Any of the educational choices afforded to high school graduates” (Hodgkinson, 1983, p. 111).

Power Structures: The distribution and acquisition of power and influence between groups.

Secondary Education: Formal education of students in grades nine through twelve

Social Justice: A concept that speaks to the equal distribution of wealth, opportunities, and rights within a society.

Socioeconomic Status (SES): An indicator of a person’s or family’s social, educational, and financial position as compared to others.

Student Achievement: An indicator used to determine academic growth from year to year and between students within the same educational setting or cohort.

Significance of the Study

When describing the influence education has on a child, John Dewey (1916) wrote, “Growth is not something done to them; it is something that they do” (p. 48). In an effort to curb our nation’s youth violence, zero tolerance policies attempted to do something about student behavior (Burke & Herbert, 1996; Rausch, Skiba, & Simmons, 2004). The unintended result of such exclusionary discipline policies was an avalanche of student suspensions and expulsions, culminating in the loss of classroom time (Hanson, 2005; Hoffman, 2014). Therefore, the intended purpose of this study is to shed a more focused light on the student experiences with exclusionary policies and how those experiences influenced their postsecondary aspirations.

Furthermore, it is hoped these perspectives will contribute to scholastic research as well as practice.

Scholarship

The significance of this study is to contribute an additional voice to the vast body of literature addressing zero tolerance policies and their impact on student achievement. That voice belongs to the students who have incurred suspensions and expulsions. This study will amplify their perspectives of how those disciplinary measures became enmeshed with their education and their aspirations of postsecondary achievement.

Aside from the well-researched topic of racial and gender disproportionality (Aud, Fox, and Kewal Ramani, 2010; Balfanz & Fox, 2015; Gordon, Piana, & Keleher, 2000; Losen & Martinez, 2013), researchers have also spotlighted the inefficacy of zero tolerance policies in regards to altering behaviors (Arcia, 2006; Brown, 2007; Wu, Pink, Crain, & Moles, 1982). More recent studies have shown a correlation between get-tough discipline policies and academic achievement (Gregory, et al., 2011; Nishioka, 2013). Missing from the scholastic undertakings is the students' perspective, which this study seeks to repair.

Practice

In their report on equity audits, Skrla, et al., (2004) reminded educators and policy makers that “students who are routinely and consistently caught up within a discipline system are commonly removed from their regular classes and thus denied equal access to learning” (p. 147). Consequently, those who are most in need of class time become overwhelmed and frustrated with makeup work and gaps in information, which often leads to higher dropout rates (Bock, Savner, & Tapscott, 1998; Caton, 2012; “Keeping Youth Connected,” 2011; Raffaele Mendez, 2003).

Therefore, the goal of this study is to allow educational leaders a glimpse into the lives of those who are excluded and how disciplinary consequences influence students' postsecondary aspirations. By placing a value on student perceptions, educators can transform our schools, our policies, and our society. It is hoped that this research will be used in professional development in order to provide educators with a different perspective, one that allows them to examine biases within their educational practices.

Summary

The history of exclusionary discipline policies dates back to the Reagan Administration. In an attempt to incapacitate drug activity, zero tolerance measures were employed (Skiba, 2000). Educators and policy makers then appropriated the term "zero tolerance" to define a more punitive approach to discipline. The consequences have included racial and gender disproportionality in suspensions and expulsions, as well as a startling number of classroom days lost to students being kicked out of school (Losen et al., 2015).

Although there is a vast corpus of research on the racial and gender disproportionality of exclusionary policies, as well as the effect suspensions and expulsions have on the achievement gap, little research has been conducted concerning those who incur such disciplinary measures. Brown (2007) stated that more research from the students' experiences should be carried out. Gregory et al., (2011) suggested that future research should include how individual students' socioeconomic status effects their achievement. This study endeavors to fill those gaps by providing students a chance to describe how disciplinary policies shaped their educational experiences, specifically how these exclusionary policies may have shaped their perceptions of themselves as college-bound students.

SECTION TWO: PRACTITIONER SETTING FOR THE STUDY

Educational organizations have two prime directives—to educate and to socialize (Mitchell & Mitchell, 2011, p. 125). Although the federal government provides guidance and the backbone of policies, the vast preponderance of educational policy-making and legislation is relegated to the individual states, as stated in the 10th Amendment of the Constitution (Pendell, 2008). The Missouri State Board of Education was formed to align federal policies with state, to shape state policies, to create and enforce budgets, and to set curriculum standards (“Facts about the Missouri”). Further, each local education association implements legislation set by the state, as well as creates policies that are pertinent and unique to their own district needs (“The Role of School Boards,” 2016).

The creation of educational policy, from federal down to the local school board, is about political power, organizational change, and hierarchical processes (Mitchell, 2011, p. 1). Each organization is held together by their coordination of functions, their “symbiotic relationship between the organization and its environment” which in turn create “cultural myths and ritualized actions” (p. 14). For these organizations to function at peak efficiency, there must be a “reliable system of administrative management” (p. 14). Mitchell (2011) expressed that this type of hierarchical structure could be defined as goal-oriented functionalism, one that is formed by “individuals who are engaged in cooperative pursuit of mutually appreciated goals” (p. 13). Furthermore, these goals require an “acceptance of a cultural value system and alignment with existing power relationships and/or democratic preferences to give concrete expression to those values” (p. 13). Long before Mitchell set down these words, Dewey (1919) articulated the need for such hierarchical structures in order to “make schools professional and efficient” (p. 14).

This chapter will analyze the history of pertinent federal and state educational legislation; the history, organizational analysis and leadership structure of the U. S. Department of Education, the Missouri State Board of Education, and the North River School District (pseudonym); the social paradigm by which policies are created within each organization; the leadership analysis in regards to this social paradigm; and the implications on researcher within the practitioner setting.

History of Organizations

The history of educational organizations has evolved as the needs of education have changed. These evolutions have included social and economic changes, legislative demands, and variances in educational decision-making. This section will highlight the historical overview of the United States Department of Education, the Missouri State Board of Education, and the North River School District (NRSB), their responsibilities and duties, as well as the federal and state mandates that inform educational policy.

U. S. Department of Education

In 1867, the Office of Education was established, and throughout its history has upheld a mission to “promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access” (“The Federal Role in Education,” 2012). The agency’s responsibilities have evolved through the years, from initially being a data-collection organization to track curriculum and student progress, to advising the President on important educational issues (“An Overview,” 2015). The Department of Education found its true purpose in the civil rights laws of the 1960s and 70s (Mitchell & Mitchell, 2011, p. 121). In 1980, the department became a cabinet-level agency, and is the driving force behind educational programs and policies that have become federal laws (“The Federal Role in Education,” 2012).

Federal Education Acts and Court Cases

In Rizvi and Lingard's (2009) book entitled *Globalizing Education Policy*, the authors defined the purpose for policies as being “designed to ensure consistency in the application of authorized norms and values across various groups and communities: they are designed to build consent, and may also have an educative purpose” (pp. 8-9). Even though the Tenth Amendment of the Constitution allows for states to enjoy certain dominion over the education of its citizens (Pendell, 2008), a number of federal laws and court cases have profoundly affected educational policies, and those policies have filtered down to the local level, tying federal funds to compliance (“The Federal Role in Education,” 2012):

The 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). ESEA sought to diminish the achievement gap and to provide a more equitable playing field between schools with local financial support and those that lacked financial support (Standerfer, 2006, p. 26).

The 1994 Gun-Free Schools Act (GFSA). A reauthorization of the 1965 ESEA, the GFSA tied school funding to the compliance of the act, and it set mandatory one-year student expulsions for all weapons violations (Sinclair, et al., 1999; Stader, 2004).

The 2002 No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). NCLB placed mandated testing and strict progress rates on schools, as well as “severe consequences for schools that do not meet adequate yearly progress” (Pendell, 2008, p. 519). The Twenty-First Century's version of the ESEA, NCLB sought to identify deficiencies in math and reading (Klein, 2015).

The 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). This latest incarnation of the original ESEA seeks to place a priority on college- and career-readiness standards, and to place student performance targets and accountability back in the hands of the individual states (“Every Student Succeeds,” 2015).

Brown vs. Board of Education. This seminal 1954 Supreme Court case ruled on the unconstitutionality of segregated schools and that these schools were in direct violation of the State’s role as *parens patriae* (the State as guardian) and the local educational organization’s power of in *loco parentis* (the school acting as the parent) (Mitchell & Mitchell, 2011).

Goss vs. Lopez. The basis of disciplinary due process, Goss vs. Lopez mandated that students be given notice in some form before being suspended (Mitchell & Mitchell, 2011). Furthermore, the Supreme Court, in ruling for the plaintiffs, “determined that a student’s interest in his/her continuing access to education is protected by both the property and liberty clauses of the Fourteenth Amendment” (p. 127).

The Missouri State Board of Education

Mitchell and Mitchell (2011) wrote that the purposes of state boards of education were to provide “instruction and political socialization” by granting local school board the “authority to control students’ actions during the school day” (p. 120). In this same manner, the State of Missouri’s Act of 1835 created a Board of Commissioners that would oversee “literary purposes” (Phillips, 1911, p. 9). The Act of 1835 also created a State Superintendent, “whose duties were to look after the general interests of schools in the State” (p. 10). Although the Civil War halted public education and the need for such organizations, in 1865 the State Superintendent’s Office was re-established (p. 17). In 1945, the State Board of Education and the Commissioner’s Office were created (“Commissioner History”).

The duties of the Missouri State Board of Education cover the education of the state’s preschool students to those students attending postsecondary education (“Facts About the State Board”). The eight-member board, all of whom are appointed by the governor, oversees a vast array of duties, which are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

The Missouri State Board of Education Primary Duties

Duties
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Appoint the Commissioner of Education and set policies for the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.• Define performance standards and assessment tools for public schools.• Accredite local school districts through “Missouri School Improvement Program”• Establish requirements for the education, testing, assessment, certification and recertification of public educators.• Operate the Missouri School for the Blind in St. Louis and the Missouri School for the Deaf in Fulton, as well as the statewide system of Missouri Schools for the Severely Disabled.• Oversee federal education programs and the distribution of federal funds to local schools.• Establish regulations for school bus safety and for fiscal management in local school districts.• Submit an annual budget recommendation for education to the Missouri Legislature.• Administer the state’s Vocational Rehabilitation and Sheltered Workshop program, which serves Missouri adults with disabilities.

Note. Adapted from Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Retrieved from <https://dese.mo.gov/state-board-education/about-state-board>.

The North River School District

The North River School District, according to the 2015 Business Services Department report on the district’s demographics, began as a rural, prairie school. In 1854, the first school was built which housed first through eighth graders. In 1885, locals built a school for the Black children of the area, and in 1924, the county, located in the northwest region of Missouri, built its first high school, but only for White students. Both of these schools remained open until desegregation laws in the 1950s made them constitutionally illegal.

As enrollment grew and buildings went up, the fiscal responsibilities to provide for the education of children became overwhelming. Therefore, the local board petitioned for a re-organization of the county, and in 1951, the county’s Board of Education authorized the redistricting, and the North River School District was formed. Since then, through vast changes

in political and economic trends, the district has evolved into a more suburban, sprawling community, made up of a thriving commercial tax-base, luxurious homes, middle-income neighborhoods, and government subsidized housing.

The 2015-2016 student enrollment for the NRSD stands at 11,111, which continues a trend toward a steady increase over the last 18 years. Further, the percentage of children qualifying for free or reduced lunches has grown, reaching 29.5% in 2014. Ethnic diversity also continues to increase, with 29.5% of the student enrollment made up of members of minority groups. NRSD's diversity of enrollment profile can be quantified accordingly—70.5% White; 10.7% Black; 9.3% Hispanic; 3.2% Asian; .5% Native American; 1.2% Pacific Islander; 4.6% Multi-racial.

Organizational Analysis

Educational structures are a series of vertically aligned components. As education has evolved, new structures have been created. As stated in Mitchell (2011), organizations begin with missions and goals, from which policies and programs, as well as the justification for multi-layered structures, are created (p. 13). In Jaques' (1990) article, "In Praise of Hierarchy," managerial hierarchies are shown to be conducive for unifying complex systems and the multitude of task, such as those in a large educational organization (p. 233).

This section will show how educational organizations align with these hierarchical structures, from the federal level to the local level, as well as the function of each level, and how these structures identify, discuss, and implement new initiatives and policies that have been agreed upon (Mitchell, 2011, p. 13). Further, the hierarchical relationship between each level will be discussed, as will the responsibilities of the individual roles within the structure.

The U. S. Department of Education

The Department of Education is a multi-layered structure, with the Secretary of Education at the top (“Coordinating Structures,” 2004). According to the department’s website, twelve sub-offices fall directly below the Secretary, including the Office of Communication and Outreach, the Office of Civil Rights, and the Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development. The Secretary also oversees the Office of the Deputy Secretary and the Office of the Under Secretary (“Coordinating Structures,” 2004). The Secretary is responsible for the “overall direction, supervision, and coordination of all activities of the Department and is the principal advisor to the President on Federal policies, programs and activities related to education in the United States” (“Principal Office Functional Statements,” 2007). The alignment of political initiatives with the “existing power relationships” is a hallmark of goal-oriented functionalism (Mitchell, 2011, p. 13).

The Office of the Deputy Secretary “assists the Secretary in the discharge of Secretarial duties and responsibilities. The Deputy Secretary focuses on the development and implementation of policies, programs, and activities relating to elementary and secondary education matters” (“Principal Office Functional Statements,” 2007). The Deputy Secretary manages five sub-offices, including the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, and the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (“Coordinating Structures,” 2004). The Under Secretary “coordinates policies, programs, and activities related to vocational and adult education, postsecondary education, college aid, and the President’s financial reforms for the Pell Grant program.” The Under Secretary oversees seven sub-offices, including Federal Student Aid, the Office of Postsecondary Education, and White House Initiatives on Historically Black

Colleges and Universities, American Indian and Alaskan Native Education, and Educational Excellence for Hispanics (“Principal Office Functional Statements,” 2007).

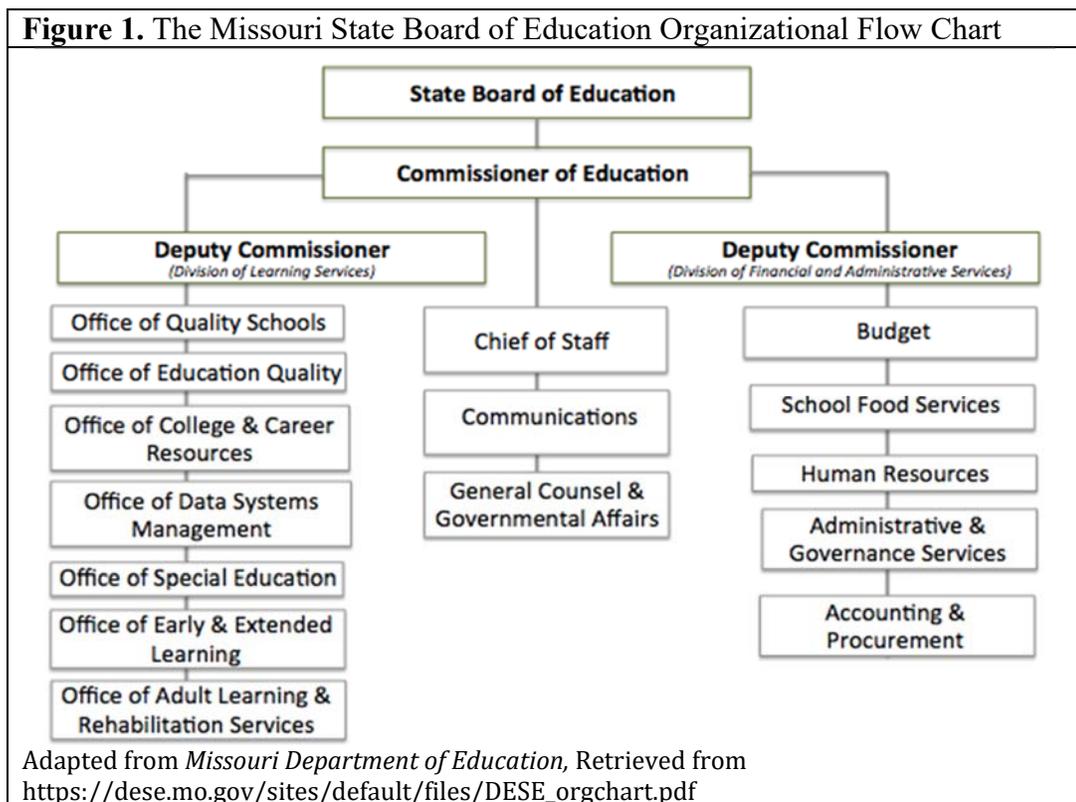
The Missouri State Board of Education

According to Mitchell (2011), the most important gauges of an effective organization are “efficiency in pursuing established goals and a reliable system of administrative management” (p. 14). A prime example of this paradigm can be found in the Missouri State Board of Education, which consists of eight members, of whom no more than four may consist of the same political party. Appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate, this “state-level governing body” elects its own officers (“Facts about the Missouri State Board”). The Missouri State Board of Education (MSBOE) also appoints the Commissioner of Education, who heads the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), as seen in figure 1. The administrative body of the Board, DESE oversees two divisions, Learning Services and Financial and Administrative Services (“Facts about the Department of Elementary”). The MSBOE creates goals through what Mitchell (2011) described as working within “democratic preferences to give concrete expression to those values” (p. 13).

A further example of the hierarchical structure of the MSBOE is governance over other educational bodies, such as the Missouri School for the Blind, the Missouri School for the Deaf, and the Missouri Schools for the Severely Disabled (“Facts about the Missouri State Board”). Although it has no authority over postsecondary education, the Board does set certification requirements for teacher training and licensure (“Facts about the Missouri State Board”).

Within each level of governance, these divisions oversee every aspect of state-level education. Starting with the Commissioner of Education, DESE manages the relationship

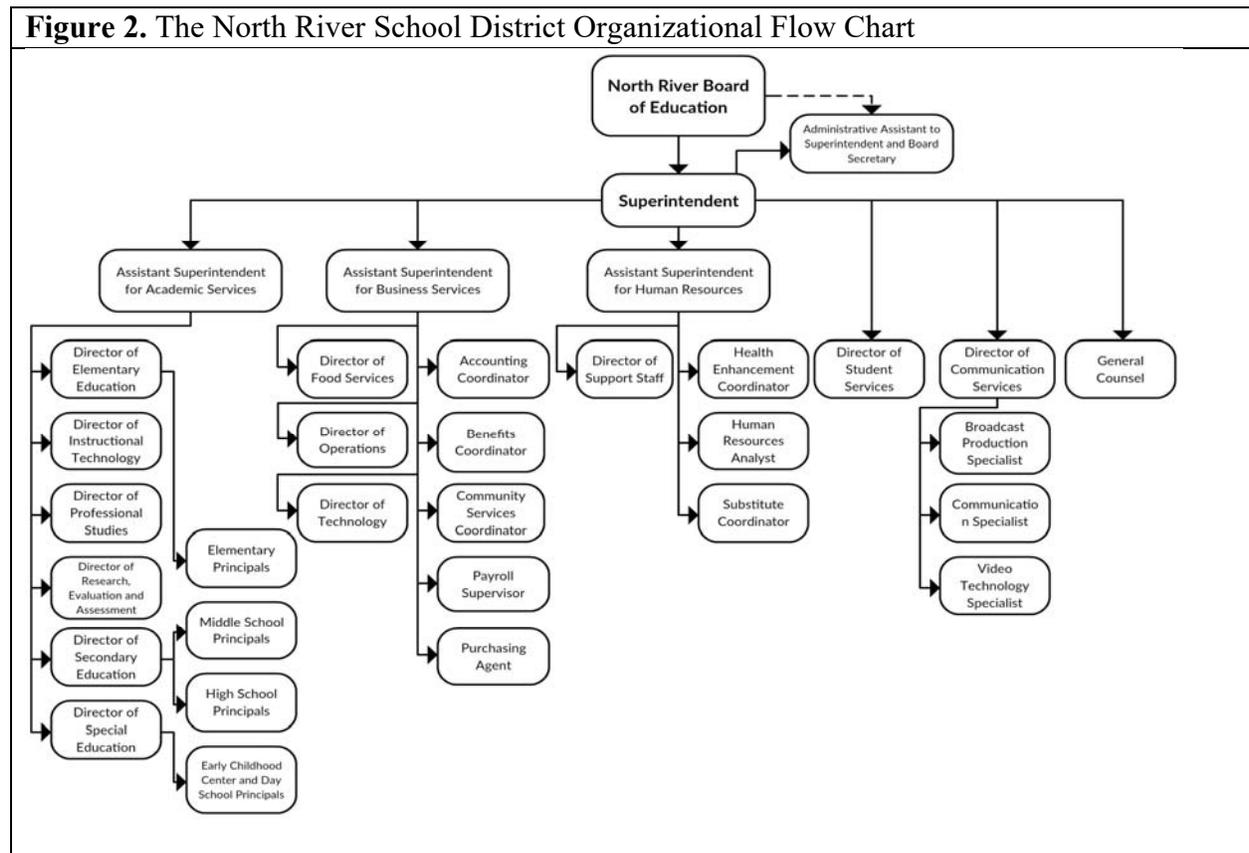
between educators, legislative actions and initiatives, community leaders, and other stakeholders (“Facts about the Department of Education”). Further, the Commissioner leads two other divisions. The Division of Financial and Administrative Services is responsible for dispersing state and federal monies to Missouri’s districts. The division lends support for districts in their fiscal duties, as well as manages the federally funded school lunch program (“Facts about the Department of Education”). The Division of Learning Services “is responsible for all of the



department’s activities related to educational success of students, educators, and schools” (“Learning Services”). Within the division are the offices of Quality Schools, College and Career Readiness, Special Education, Educator Quality, Adult Learning, and Data System Management (“Learning Services”).

North River School District

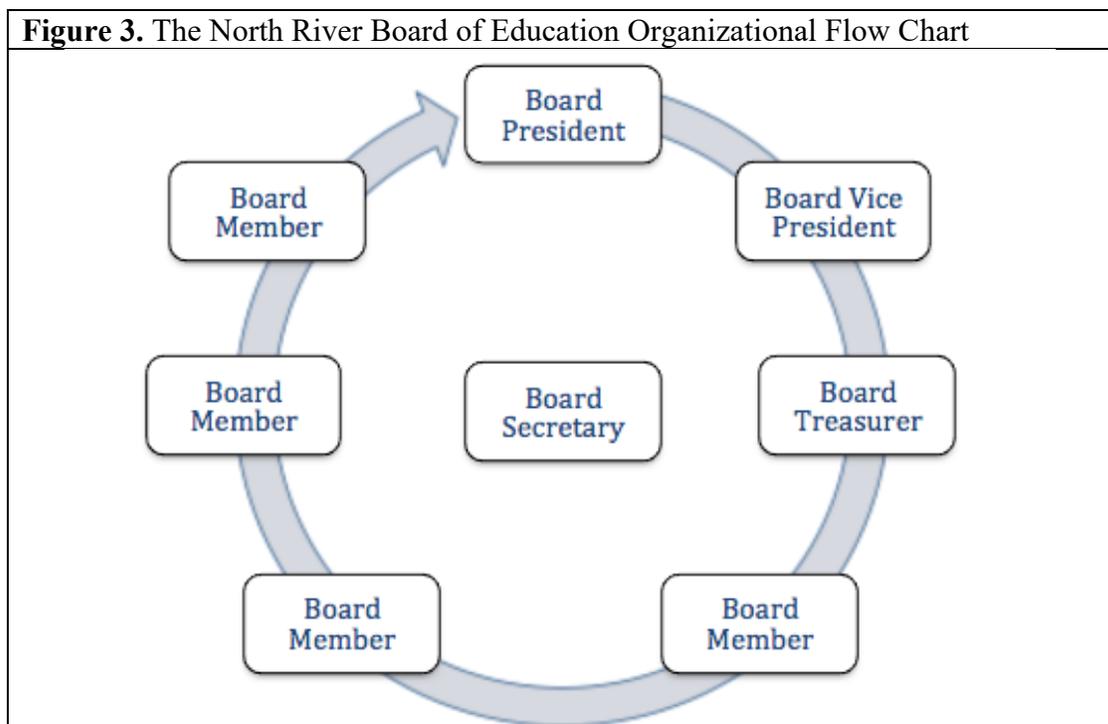
An seven-member Board of Education, a superintendent, three assistant superintendents, and two directors lead the North River School District, which is comprised of 11,111 students and 18 schools. The flow of power and responsibilities begins with the BOE and works down to building-level leadership. Its organizational configuration and responsibilities are closely aligned with the state’s BOE organizational layout, as seen in figure 2.



North River School District Board of Education. The North River School District’s Board of Education complies with the state’s definition of a local educational organizations board of education, as described by the Missouri School Boards’ Association (2016), which states that local BOEs are “not responsible for the day-to-day management of the school district.” Instead, local BOEs “serve as a bridge between the community and the professional

educators in the district.” As shown in figure 3, the flow of power and responsibilities begins with the president. Furthermore, as learned in a personal communication (February 12, 2016) with Board Member Ms. Smith (pseudonym), the discourse follows Robert’s Rules of Parliamentary Procedures. These rules provide for an arena “to facilitate and expedite the transaction of business and promote cooperation and harmony,” as well as to assure “free and full debate” over those matters that come before the board (“Parliamentary Procedures,” 2004).

North River’s BOE consists of seven members, a president, a vice president, a treasurer,



and four members. A board secretary records all the minutes of each meeting, and also works with the superintendent. The BOE’s responsibilities include conducting searches for new superintendents, for managing the vast and varied facilities within the district, and employing those who work for the district, as well as the adoption of salary schedules and other employment agreements. BOEs also define disciplinary policies for the district, based on

alignment with state mandates and with issues pertinent to the district (Smith, personal communication, February 12, 2016).

The creation of disciplinary policies for children within the district is part of the orderly approach to hierarchical organizations (Mitchell, 2011). School discipline has a history of responding to societies perception of children's lack of discipline and the communities' needs to control drug use among their youth (Shipps, 2011, p. 260). Disciplined children are a sign of a society focused on common goals, and within organizations built upon adherence to functions and common goals, those who do not comply with these goals are often seen as deviant (Mitchell, 2011, p. 14). Therefore, each BOE is charged with articulating a set of behavioral standards for children and adults within the district, as well as defining the consequences incurred upon noncompliance with those standards, in compliance with Missouri Statute 167.161 ("School Discipline").

North River School District's District Office Administration. Whereas the BOE is characterized by a simple organizational flow of power, the North River School District administrative team is a complex structure of levels and workloads. These hierarchical layers are stratified by "the complexity of problems encountered in a particular task, project, or strategy" (Jaques, 1990, p. 234). Furthermore, these levels are broken down into manager-subordinate relationships, and into time-span metrics (p. 235). The manager-subordinate level is created, in short, to provide accountability and leadership, whereas the time-span range of defining the manager-subordinate relationship is characterized by the scope of and time needed for each member's tasks (p. 234-235). Jaques (1990) further described hierarchical structures as multi-layered, writing, "It is the level of responsibility, measured in terms of time span, that tells you how many layers you need in an enterprise" (p. 237).

In terms of managerial hierarchy in organizations, Jaques (1990) stated that leadership has three components:

- Leaders are accountable for their subordinates' work
- Leaders are accountable for building and maintaining a team of efficient, productive subordinates
- Leaders are accountable for setting directions and for motivating subordinates to follow (p. 234).

This type of managerial organization is evident in the North River School District's administrative team, from the district level, down to the building level.

North River School District Superintendent. In the NRSB, the leader of the administrative team, and the bridge between that team and the BOE, is the Superintendent, Dr. Shepard (pseudonym). Dr. Shepard's office contends with problems that are the most complex as well as far reaching, setting long-range plans, between five to ten years, for the district and putting teams in place to respond to district needs (Jaques, 1990, p. 234). Dr. Shepard oversees the Assistant Superintendent for Academic Services, the Assistant Superintendent for Business Services, and the Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources, as shown in Chart 2. Their responsibilities include task that require less time, three to five years, than the Superintendent's long-range goals, and to "place people with the necessary competencies at each organizational layer" (Jaques, 1990, p. 234). Each assistant superintendent manages directors of areas within their department, and those directors oversee leadership at the building level or coordinators of programs within their departments. This hierarchical organization establishes a flow of power and responsibilities that produce an efficient management team, able to address common goals (Mitchell, 2011, p. 14).

North River School District Assistant Superintendents and Directors. The Assistant Superintendent for Academic Services is responsible for curriculum, assessment, instruction, professional development, special services, and support-service programs. The Assistant Superintendent manages six directors, four of whom lead building principals. Two directors oversee initiatives that are PK-12, the Director of Instructional Technology and the Director of Professional Studies.

The Assistant Superintendent for Business Services directs issues concerning the fiscal life of the district. The office of the Assistant Superintendent for Business Services manages budgets, financial and capital planning, facility operations, the maintenance of the physical plant, transportation, as well as payroll and employee benefits. This office works closely in conjunction with the state's financial arm of DESE.

The Assistant Superintendent for Human Resource Services is responsible for human capital. This office reports to the BOE on matters pertaining to employment, labor issues, and the district's calendar. It also makes sure the district is in compliance with labor laws. A further duty is that of overseeing the district's fitness and wellness program.

Three outlying departments, Director of Student Services, Director of Communication Services, and the district's General Counsel, report directly to the Superintendent. The Director of Student Services is the Superintendent's designee in matters concerning disciplinary issues. This office also oversees the safety and security of students and employees while on school grounds. The Director of Communication Services is the conduit in which district information is disseminated. The Director of Communication Services works closely with the Superintendent and the Board of Education, crafting information in such a way that is compatible with the district's values, mission, and objectives. NRSD also employs an in-house General Counsel, who

works in concert with the BOE, the Superintendent, and the Director of Student Services. The General Counsel assures that the district is in compliance with all legal matters and assists the board with the precise language necessary in policy making (Smith, personal communication, February 12, 2016). The concordance of these three offices typify goal-oriented functionalism, whose paradigm seeks to bring order, professionalism, and efficiency to large organizations, such as NRSB (Mitchell, p. 14).

North River School District Building-Level Administration. North River School District has two high schools, serving between 1610 and 1850 students, respectively. The goals set by these building-level administrators generally are carried out in the shortest amount of time, one to three years (Jaques, 1990, p. 236). Both high schools are led by principals, who are responsible for the entire school, four assistant principals, and one athletic/activities director, who also serves as an assistant principal. Each assistant principal is responsible for a myriad of building-level initiatives and for maintaining the school's compliance with district-level policies.

Furthermore, each administrator oversees an equal portion of the student body and is responsible for the attendance and disciplinary compliance issues of those children. Although the vast majority of disciplinary consequences fall within 30-minute detentions to a day of in-school suspension, Missouri Statute 167.171 states building-level administrators "may suspend students for no more than ten school days" (Mo. Rev. Stat. § 167.171), which is also in accordance with the district's disciplinary policy. The fidelity in the implementation and management of the board's disciplinary policy is in alignment with goal-oriented functionalism, in so much as fidelity to common goals and standards allows the organization to "maintain itself and socialize new generations of participants into its coordinated action system" (Mitchell, p. 14).

Leadership Analysis

As discussed in the previous section, hierarchical models allow for large organizations to efficiently and professionally work toward a common goal (Mitchell, p.14). In order to navigate the journey, however, organizations must have leaders at each level. Leadership, as defined by Northouse (2013), “is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (p. 5). Northouse (2013) further identified leadership within these stratified models as willing to change with the task and responsibilities issued from a manager to a subordinate (p. 140). More so and in accordance with working toward a common goal, leaders must be able to respond with a variety of styles in order to “motivate subordinates to accomplish designated goals” (Northouse, 2013, p. 137).

Levi (2014) also recognized that hierarchical structures require different types of leadership. The author cited functional leadership as one the operating system that assists multi-layered teams to function more effectively (p. 194). This type of leadership relies less on the behaviors of leader, and more on the importance of establishing direction for the team, managing the team’s functions, and supporting the team’s leadership (p. 195). These leaders are also responsible for the emotional wellbeing of teams, helping to “manage the team’s stress and promote a positive mood among team members” (p. 196).

Path-Goal Theory

Path-goal theory, as described by Northouse (2013), further explores the importance of the manager’s ability to motivate subordinates in order to accomplish a common goal (p. 137). Path-goal theory is characterized by the awareness of a leader’s ability to balance subordinate performance, motivation, and satisfaction within a hierarchical system. Path-goal theory explains the leadership choices managers select to increase success within their teams (p. 137).

This section explores NRSD’s leadership through the lens of the path-goal theory, as described by Northouse (2013). Further, this section offers examples of the four types of leader behavior and the influence that behavior has on subordinates, which are exemplified within NRSD’s administrative hierarchical system. Those behaviors are directive leadership, supportive leadership, participative leadership, and achievement-oriented leadership.

Directive Leadership

As defined by Northouse (2013), directive leadership is characterized by one who “gives subordinates instructions about their task, including what is expected of them, how it is to be done, and the timeline for when it should be completed” (p. 139). Directive leaders create straightforward standards of performance, and they communicate those expectations to all subordinates. The very nature of education is directive, from teacher to student, and administrator to teacher; however, at the North River district level, the Superintendent exemplifies the concept of directive leadership, implementing district policy and educational standards, in accordance with state and local expectations (Smith, personal communication, February 12, 2016).

As discussed in the Organizational Analysis section, the NRSD Superintendent is the bridge between the BOE and the central office administrative staff. A former superintendent of the district, Dr. Wilson (pseudonym) provided clarity to position’s responsibilities (Personal communication, January 26, 2016). Dr. Shepard’s top priority is to analyze the BOE’s directives and provide a strategic plan to meet those goals (Wilson, personal communication, January 26, 2016). The Superintendent gives immediate orders to her assistant superintendents and directors, and she “sets clear standards of performance and makes the rules and regulations clear to subordinates” (Northouse, 2013, p. 139). Once tasks have been established in alignment with

district goals, the Dr. Shepard's main responsibility is to remove "obstacles and roadblocks to attaining the goal, and making the work itself more personally satisfying" (p. 138). She does so by offering support at every level of the structure.

In terms of student discipline, the Board of Education creates a disciplinary code that address student behavior that is "prejudicial to good order and discipline in the schools or impairs the morale or good conduct of other students." The code, which aligns with federal and state mandates, is then given to the Superintendent, whose responsibility it is to uphold the disciplinary policy. Dr. Shepard, in conjunction with the Director of Student Services and the General Counsel, must also communicate the policies to the district, using appropriate language and directives for each segment of the district's community (Smith, personal communication, February 12, 2016). The Director of Student Services, who acts as the Superintendent's designee in matters pertaining to individual students, is responsible for training administrators on how to carry out disciplinary actions, as well as the importance of providing due process for all children.

From the district level, all building-level administrators are tasked with educating the students on disciplinary violations and the consequences incurred. Furthermore, classroom teachers are given the authority by the board to "make and enforce necessary rules for internal governance in the classroom, subject to review by the building principal." This form of directive leadership aims to create a safe and respectful environment for all.

Supportive Leadership

Jaques (1990) wrote that efficient, productive hierarchical models, like the organizational structure of the NRSB, "can release energy and creativity, rationalize productivity, and actually improve morale" (p. 231). However, in order for organizations to reach this level of competency, leaders must be not only directive but supportive (Jaques, 1990; Levi, 2014; Northouse, 2013).

According to Northouse (2013), the defining characteristic of the supportive leader is the manager who is “friendly and approachable as a leader and includes attending to the wellbeing and human needs of subordinates” (p. 140). The Superintendent of NRSB, Dr. Shepard, provides support from the top down and communicates her guidance and expectations, not just to her immediate staff, but out to the community (Wilson, personal communication, January 26, 2016).

Where disciplinary matters are concerned, the Director of Student Services is the main support for building-level administrators. In the NRSB, the Director of Student Services “assists principals with interpretation of disciplinary policies,” as well as “recommends long term suspensions of students in cooperation with principals to the Superintendent.” The Director of Student Services also is responsible for providing leadership for the district’s safety issues and the development of the crises plans, once again in concordance with the supportive leadership model, which seeks to provide for the “well-being and human needs of subordinates” (Northouse, 2010, p. 140).

Participative Leadership

One of the hallmarks of the NRSB is its belief in the participative process. Teachers in every building are encouraged to be part of building and district leadership committees. Those committees range from policy issues, to curriculum building, and to professional development. The leadership required in this participative model is characterized by the ability to “help group members feel comfortable about themselves, their coworkers, and the situation” (Northouse, 2011, p. 101). The administrator who leads from this framework “consults with subordinates, obtains their ideas and opinions, and integrates their suggestions into the decisions about how the group or organization will proceed” (p. 140).

Although the Board of Education creates the goals for the district and aligns policy with state and federal mandates (Smith, personal communication, February 12, 2016), it is the district leadership that provides the framework for implementation and realization of those goals. In the NRSD, four areas that drive the district's operations are noted within the Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (CSIP): financial, academic, climate, and employee. The Superintendent is responsible to report the progress within each area to the BOE, and the assistant superintendents are responsible for reporting the progress of their areas to the Superintendent. Furthermore, at each building, principals are responsible for aligning their Building School Improvement Plan (BSIP) with the CSIP, and each assistant principal is responsible for creating action plans to address one area of the BSIP. Those action plans are created within BSIP committees, made up of both certified- and support-staff members from the school. This group approach to BSIP is emblematic of participative leadership (Northouse, 2010, p. 140).

Additionally, policy making is a participatory activity within the district, lead by the NRSD's Policy Committee. This committee is made up of an equal number of elementary and secondary teachers, administrators and support staff members. If a policy is up for renewal, revision or proposal, the Policy Committee discusses it and makes recommendations. It is then sent to the Superintendent for her suggestions and approval, and is then sent on to the Board of Education (Smith, personal communication, February 12, 2016). These policies, built through participatory leadership, promote group cohesion by being evidence of and consistent with "the philosophies, goals and objectives of the district."

Achievement-Oriented Leadership

According to Northouse (2013), achievement-oriented leaders "establish a high standard of excellence for subordinates and seeks continuous improvement" (p. 140). The North River

School District has enjoyed a reputation of academic excellence as well as excellence in its employees. In order to continue these high levels of expectations, the district has created specific goals and action plans for its employees. Section 4.2 of the CSIP directly speaks to standards of excellence, stating, “Certified staff will demonstrate high performance, improvement, and innovation to support student-centered learning.” The plan further details how district- and building-level leadership will provide support and professional development to achieve these goals.

In order to maintain this high level of achievement, the district’s disciplinary policy reflects language that mirrors its values. As described in the NRSB’s Parent-Student Handbook (2015), disciplinary rules are established to “maintain a classroom environment that allows teachers to communicate effectively with all students in the class and allows all students in the class to learn.” In the wake of Columbine, many districts, including NRSB (Wilson, personal communication, January 26, 2016), tightened their disciplinary policies in hopes to maintain academic achievement, but also to bring order to the perceived lack of discipline in public schools (Losen & Martinez, 2013; “Missouri Safe Schools Act”; Skiba & Raush, 2004).

However, as these studies and many more have shown, an achievement gap has been created by such punitive disciplinary policies (Gregory, et al., 2010; Hanson, 2005; Howard, 2003). The North River School District’s Policy Committee and the Board of Education, in response to these educational trends, has begun to move away from such aggressive forms of discipline. Instead, the district is more often choosing to invoke its right to discretion (Smith, personal communication, February 12, 2016), and to stand by its own mission: “Through the expertise of a motivated staff, the North River School District provides a meaningful education in a safe, caring environment to prepare each student for success in life.”

Implications for Research in the Practitioner Setting

Since 2006, the North River School District has reported 961 incidences of suspending children for ten days or more to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (“District Discipline Incidents,” 2015). Although the trend since 2010 has begun to show a decline in this practice, from the district to the national level, the rate at which children are being excluded from educational settings remains high (Balfanz & Fox, 2015; Losen, et al., 2015). This study seeks to find how these disciplinary actions impact those who are most affected by them, the students. By giving voice to students who have withstood long-term suspensions and expulsion, educational organizations and the stakeholders who influence policy can have a more informed understanding of their decisions. Moreover, this study seeks to shed light on the research question: What are North River School District’s former students’ perceptions of exclusionary disciplinary practices in relation to their post-secondary aspirations?

Furthermore, by analyzing the affect exclusionary disciplinary policies have on students and their families, as well as the perceptions students have concerning their return to school after long-term suspensions, the study will provide the district and other educational institutions with qualitative evidence concerning such policies. If, indeed, the goal of public education is to create an educated and productive citizenry (Mitchell & Mitchell, 2011), districts must be willing to appreciate every aspect of their policies, especially those that exclude students from this goal. This research, then, aims to change these punitive disciplinary policies.

Summary

By understanding the history of an organization, its leadership structure and purpose, policy makers are able to make more informed choices about policies and for whom those policies are created. Further, by viewing such structures through the framework of the path-goal

theory (Northouse, 2013), educational leaders can begin to understand the sociological and political workings of such organizations. More over, by flipping the hierarchical mechanism of an organization and viewing it from the vantage point of the students, not from the Board of Education down, school districts may refocus their policy making to best represent the goals for each child.

Through interviews with key participants, a clearly defined understanding of educational disciplinary policies can be created. Once created, this more robust picture can be presented to policy makers and educational leaders at the district level, as well as at state conferences. The researcher's hope is to provide policy makers with a different voice than that to which they are accustomed, the voice of their primary stakeholders.

SECTION THREE:

SCHOLARLY REVIEW FOR THE STUDY

The implications of suspensions on children's academic achievement have a long history within public discourse (Insley, 2001). In 1975, the Children's Defense Fund (Edelman, Beck, & Smith) published a seminal study that illuminated the multiple repercussions that exclusionary policies have on students. The study, "School Suspensions: Are They Helping Children?" indicated that a quarter of all elementary students and one in every 13 secondary students had been suspended at least once during the school year (Edelman, Beck, & Smith, 1975). The issues highlighted included disproportionality between races, ethnicity, and gender, as well as how disruptions in schooling, due to discipline infractions, affect children socially, educationally, and psychologically. Even so, educational policy makers not only eschewed the study, but have, in the last forty years since the CDF study, created more punitive disciplinary policies, most reacting to public outcries for safety, as well as for drug- and violence-free schools (Kingery, 2000; Skiba & Peterson, 1999; Skiba & Rausch, 2004).

In the intervening years since the CDF study, a plethora of studies have shown the negative affect suspensions and expulsions have had on students' academic lives (Raffaele Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Skiba & Peterson, 2000). However, an area of concern that has not received enough attention is affect these disciplinary actions have on secondary students and their perceptions of their postsecondary aspirations. This study, then, seeks to understand the stories of those most intimately affected by long-term suspensions, and it does so by asking the question: What are students' perceptions of exclusionary disciplinary practices in relation to their postsecondary aspirations?

Theoretical Framework

Although the issues concerning exclusionary policies have been well documented in court cases and research, these punitive strategies continue to have a stronghold on schools (Fabelo, et al., 2011), increasing achievement gaps and exacerbating social injustice (Giroux, 2003). Social justice, equality, and democracy, then, become the lenses through which some researchers compose their studies (Gordon, et al., 2000; Rubin, et al., 2014;). Sheurich and Imber (1991) conducted a case study of a school district, finding unequal distributions of power, knowledge, and resources, and connecting those inequalities to the district's demographics (Rubin, et al., 2014). Others have questioned the ethics of exclusionary policies and their negative influence on children's rights to equal education (Pollack & Schnall, 2003; Verdugo, 2002). Discipline as a symbol of law and order, meant to assuage the fears of parents and the media, was discussed by Noguera (2003), who denounced zero tolerance policies for leveling the harshest discipline on those children with the greatest need. Finally, Theoharis (2007, 2008) reflected on the importance of school leadership to bring about social justice. The common theme among all these studies is equality, one of the assumptions of critical theory.

Assumptions of Critical Theory

Critical theory holds assumptions concerning social justice, power structures, equality, and democracy at its core (Dant, 2003; Freeman & Vasconcelos, 2010; Peca, 2000). With origins in late-eighteenth-century Europe, critical theorists concerned themselves with solving economic and social problems (Freeman & Vasconcelos, 2010; McKernan, 2013). Meanwhile, John Dewey (1916), an influential American educator, wrote extensively about the duty to educate all children in order to create a more democratic society (Armaline, 2010; Kadlec, 2006; Kellner,

2003). For Dewey, democracy and education were not separate entities, but inexorably linked (Boyles, et al., 2009).

Critical theorists begin with assumptions about values concerning democracy, equality, and social justice, and then question individuals and groups to consider their experiences within those values and power structures (Cohen, 2013). Further, Kincheloe and McLaren (2002) affirmed that society is differentiated three ways: by race, ethnicity, and gender, and these three become part of the assumptions that critical theory hold self-evident. Critical theory seeks to enlighten inequalities, create a more socially just world, and empower the marginalized through the democratic process (Ali-khan & Siry, 2012; DeLeon & Ross, 2010; Freeman & Vasconcelos, 2010; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2002). Furthermore, researchers who frame social issues through the lens of critical theory desire to change conditions and emancipate those most affected by injustice (Freeman & Vasconcelos, 2010; Hansen, 1993; Leistyna, 2009; Peca, 2000). Social change comes through education, and the result of this education is a democratization of all (Armaline, 2010; DeLeon & Ross, 2010; Denhardt & Campbell, 2006; Dewey, 1916; Giroux, 2003; Kellner, 2003; Popkewitz & Fendler, 1999). Perhaps the most influential critical theorist was John Dewey, whose work on social justice, equality, and democracy through education continues to permeate American educational policy (Boyles, et al., 2009).

History of American High School Students

Secondary education, which flourished in the 20th century, is based on many of the egalitarian ideals about which John Dewey wrote. Goldin (1998) suggested that high schools are a “uniquely-American invention,” preparing young adults “for life,” rather than postsecondary aspirations (p. 350). Hemmings (2004) defined American high school students as young adults who are bounded by grade (9-12) and geographical location, and that this stage in a student’s

education is seen as the convergence of “identity formation” and “community integration” (p. xii). However, defining what makes an American high school becomes more difficult, because there is no one single American culture (p. xi).

Prior to 1900, secondary education was attended by those few who were college bound (Goldin, 1998). The Inter-University Consortium and Social Research report of the 1940 census stated that in 1886, only 8.3% of Americans men had a high school degree (table 1). Cuban (1984) wrote that the high-school curriculum in 1893 revolved around college-preparatory subjects. In an effort to formalize the college-preparatory track in high schools, the Committee of Ten, a consortium of university presidents under the leadership of Harvard University President Charles Eliot, determined the scope and sequence of each course taught, and that these courses should include Latin, Greek, English, other modern languages, such as German and French, Mathematics (Algebra and Geometry), Physics, Chemistry, and Astronomy, Natural History, History, Civil Government, and Political Economy, and Geography (National Education Association, 1894).

However, the vast majority of high-school-aged students were not college bound. They worked on the family farm, in factories, or wherever their families required (Palladino, 1996). Furthermore, because public education is funded primarily by the locality it serves, secondary education came under attack in the late nineteenth century by those same communities, stating they were “elitist” institutions (Goldin & Katz, 1998). If local taxers were going to pay for the education of their older students, secondary education had to change. Therefore, as Cuban (1984) reported, high school curriculums quickly transformed from the college-preparatory courses that would fulfill the need of the very few, to vocational and professional curriculums, that would help to fortify the economic, familial, and social needs of the community.

Aided by compulsory schooling and child labor laws, the number of those enrolled in secondary education doubled every year from 1880 to 1930 (Brint & Karabel, 1991; Lleras-Muney, 2005; Snyder, 1993). Furthermore, Goldin and Katz (2007) reported that early 20th century citizens began to understand that even one extra year of high school amounted to a significantly higher return in lifelong earnings. Thus began the high school movement (Goldin, 1998).

The High School Movement: 1910 to 1940

The high school movement, 1910 to 1940, was a period of explosive growth in secondary education that created the modern American high school (Goldin, 1998). In those thirty years, high school enrollment rose from 18% to 73%, and high school graduation rates rose from 9% to 51% (Goldin, 1998, p. 347). Students who entered schools during this period became known as the G.I. Generation and would become the human capital behind World War II's military machine (Strauss & Howe, 1991). High school curriculum shifted from "preparatory institutions to schools that awarded terminal degrees to the vast majority" (Goldin, 1998, p. 352).

A population created from traditional values, historical events shaped the G.I. Generation, and those events required sacrifices for family, home, and country (Gleason, 2008). Education, therefore, needed to uphold this generation's values. Hemmings (2004) described the work of twentieth-century secondary education as being the support for family and community expectations to develop children who are industrious, law-abiding citizens, who are productive workers, and who hold dear those values important to the communities (p. 8).

In 1918, the federal Bureau of Education commissioned the Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education report, which stated, in part, that the traditional, classical curriculum did not provide the necessary education for the country's high school students (Rothstein &

Jacobsen, 2006). The report articulated the need for “a balanced approach to the goals of education.” Their recommendations articulated the need for health education, academic skills, household economics (and gender divisions of such), vocational education, civic education, and fine arts (Rothstein & Jacobsen, 2006, p. 268). Mirel (2006) wrote that the nation’s schools adopted a fusion of the Committee of Ten’s and the Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education’s recommendations, and by 1920, most urban school districts began offering four educational tracks: college preparatory, commercial (office skills, primarily geared for girls), vocational (including home economics and industrial arts), and general (p. 17). The Kansas Board of Education adopted plans for tracking into their state’s curriculum in 1925 (Modell & Alexander, 1997). By 1939, studies showed that tracking of students created a gap between student achievement and expectation levels (p. 8). Indeed, assigning students into tracks was more often based on socioeconomic status and gender, rather than ability (p. 10). This practice that sought to provide education for all had, indeed, created social hierarchy. “What you were in the 1930s determined who you were and how far and fast you could expect to go in life. An adolescent’s future rested squarely on a parent’s past” (Palladino, 1996, p. 14).

Despite the social segregation of tracking, as more school districts embraced this new curriculum, and more families enrolled their children in high school, communities began to understand the financial returns to students who had even one year of high school. For each year spent in high school, young adults averaged a 12% increase in annual earnings (Goldin & Katz, 1998, p. 7). Even so, graduation rates remained low, in part due to the surging economy. In 1928, only 17% of high school students earned their diplomas, with most choosing to take their new skills and education into the workforce (Mirel, 2006, p. 17). Goldin (1998) wrote, “The economy had begun producing large numbers of white-collar jobs that demanded formal education in

excess of that provided by the common school but less than that furnished by college” (p. 352). Green (1998) wrote that in 1930, nearly two million women worked in offices, in part due to the new vocational education (p. 105). Even so, during this time period, girls enrolled in and graduated from high school at a much higher rate than boys (Goldin, 1998, p. 363).

However, the Great Depression forced children out of the workforce and into high school. Palladino (1996) reported that by 1936, 65% of 14-17 year olds were enrolled in school (p. 5). Furthermore, as reported by Mirel (2006), by the end of the Great Depression, 73% of that same age group were in high school (p. 17). Due to economic constraints, the varied educational opportunities of the past became less diverse, especially for those students from blue-color homes. Angus and Mirel (1999) wrote that both boys and girls of this era either chose or were tracked into vocational or professional classes (p. 38). The economic crisis also created a new perception of secondary education’s role, which, as Mirel (2006) continued, was to keep children occupied while the adults worked (p. 18).

World War II to 1960

However, World War II once again changed the social and educational trajectory of the nation’s young adults. With family members going off to war, some high school students, members of the Silent Generation (Strauss & Howe, 1991), left school to fulfill family obligations, either at home or at work (Palladino, 1996, p. 60). Others left in order to receive on-the-job training, rather than to learn job skills sitting in a classroom (Ugland, 1979, p. 446). In 1940, just under one million high-school-aged children were in the work force, and by the summer of 1942, that number had risen to three million (Gilbert, 2014, p. 20). For those students who either dropped out of high school to enter the workforce or who dropped out to serve in the

nation's military, the government created a program to exam-certify older students, called GED (General Education Development) (Heckman & LaFontaine, 2010).

For those who stayed in high school, curriculums across the country changed. In his article on the history of the Victory Corps during World War II, Ugland (1979) affirmed that from 1942-1943, high school enrollment declined 9.9% (p. 444). Furthermore, of those 1.3 million high-school-aged boys between the ages of 16 and 18, 80% would be drafted into military service (p. 435). Schools, then, like industry, were to prepare for war. However, of great concern was the knowledge that “many youth did not possess the physical stamina or process necessary for waging war” (Ugland, 1979, p. 436). Thus, the Victory Corps was created as a way to create war-ready youth through membership into divisions deemed important to the government—land, sea, air, production, and community service. These divisions tracked students into areas where they would acquire important wartime skills and experience, as well as required all students to take compulsory physical education (p. 438).

The problem with the plan, according to educators, was that high school students are not soldiers, and the complexities of war preparation and the necessarily fluid changes in industry “set practical limitations to what could accomplished” (Ugland, 1979, p. 446) The objectives of creating highly specialized reservists out of high school student, then, were not entirely met. What was accomplished was that two-thirds of polled high school students believed that secondary education did not prepare them for life. Further, because post-high-school jobs required very little education in part due to burgeoning labor and factory jobs, drop out rates began to increase (Rosenbaum, Deil-Armen, & Person, 2007). Even so, graduation rates were at an all-time high, with 50.2% of the age group receiving their diplomas in 1940, and 59.8% of age-appropriate graduates in 1950 (Hodgson, 1976, p. 53).

Coming off the strident measures necessary to prepare for war, the 1950s brought about social, civil, and educational change for the whole nation (Gilbert, 2014, p. 6). In the beginning of the decade, born of the baby and housing boom after the war, the suburban school districts were formed (Rury, 2002). The affect of the migration, primarily of white, middle class families, was the bifurcation of the public schools once again, “creating a new cultural geography defined by race and income” (Rury, 2002, p. 311).

However, the 1950s also gave rise to the “teenage delinquent,” which, Gilbert (2014) theorized, came from the American culture’s fear of losing what it had fought so hard to attain—peace, prosperity, and the family way—and that media played a part in creating a subculture of rebellion (p. 10). Hostility and confusion about this new youth culture divided generations. In Suburbia, the typical high school student of the 1950s could expect to come home to a mother or grandmother (Palladino, 1996). According to adults, teenagers, Gilbert (2014) wrote, “lacked a sense of the line between good fun and delinquency” (p. 12). To adults trying to understand the teenagers of the mid-century, their music and language seemed “hostile and aggressive” (p. 15). Local schools, reacting to their stakeholders’ wishes, primarily their parents, instituted dress codes, equating teenage fashions to disciplinary problems (p. 16). Furthermore, high schools were the incubators for “premature adulthood” (p. 17), and these young adults worked in order to provide themselves with material things, like cars, clothes, and music. High schools also were becoming more heterogeneous, allowing middle and working class children to interact, as well as black and white students (Gilbert, 2014, p. 18).

Even as many larger schools were integrating, still more districts remained segregated. Putnam (2015) wrote, “despite their egalitarian claims, these pre-Civil Rights era reforms largely excluded African Americans” (p. 161). Williams (1999) stated that much of this segregation

came directly from local government, which decided where funds would be allocated. It wasn't until the Civil Rights Act of 1964, ten years after *Brown vs. Board of Education*, that federal funding could be withheld from districts continuing discriminatory practices (Hochschild, Scovronick, & Scovronick, 2004). Further progress came when the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act pumped billions of dollars into poor schools (Hochschild, et al., 2004, p. 33). In 1950, 75% of 14-17 year-old black children were enrolled in high school. That number rose to 94% by 1980 (Murray, 1984, p. 98). However, even in progressive, integrated schools, black students were consistently tracked into non-academic subjects (p. 179).

Girls in high school during the 1930s through to the 1970s were also tracked in commercial and vocational directions (Reynolds & Burge, 2008), even though they consistently earned higher GPAs than their male counterparts. Reynolds and Burge (2008) stated that the practice of tracking girls away from college-bound courses stemmed from girls' perceptions that they did not receive encouragement from their families to attain postsecondary education (p. 485).

1960 to 1980

The Baby Boomers entered high school in the 1960s, and 87% of their age-appropriate peers were enrolled (Golding, 1998). This generation's high school students came of age in a time where the family's television broadcast assassinations, body counts, and the women's rights movement (Gleason, 2008). These post-war students perceived high school to provide a vocational education (Flanagan, et al., 1964). However, these same students also brought with them a decline in graduation rates for the first time since the high school movement began (Heckman & LaFontaine, 2010). By 1965, the highest level of education earned by most Americans was a high school degree (Rosenbaum, et al., 2007). For those Baby Boomers who

did pursue a college degree, they could expect their hourly wages to be 50% higher than those of their peers with only a high school diploma, a rate that would see a steady increase throughout the next five decades. In 2009, college-educated workers averaged 95% higher wages than non-college-educated workers (Autor, 2011, p. 14).

Wey Smola and Sutton (2002) described Baby Boomers as having grown up “embracing the psychology of entitlement, expecting the best from life” (p. 364). Furthermore, Gleason (2008) wrote that Baby Boomers valued “rejection of authority, individualism, optimism, competitiveness and consumerism” (In Touch). This set of values often put Boomer high-school students in opposition with authorities, or those born of the Silent or G.I. Generation (Howe & Strauss, 2010). A result of such conflict was the rise of student activism and voice, which characterized the students of the 1960s, especially when that activism centered on the growing protest over the Vietnam War (Johnson, 1997). The student activism of the 1960s, as well as for the children who entered secondary schools after 9/11, demanded education, not schooling, in order to “evaluate and assess” cultural identity (Shujaa, 2003, p. 187). Shujaa (2003) made a distinction between schooling and education: “schooling, in contrast to education, is a process intended to perpetuate and maintain a social order and its existing power relations” (p. 187).

In 1965, three students were suspended from a Des Moines, Iowa high school for defying a ban on black armbands, which protested the Vietnam War. The school district stated that in wearing the armbands, the students “threatened school order because the armband wearers themselves would be targets for anger or violence” (Johnson, 1997, p. 133). The 1969 Supreme Court decision, *Tinker vs. Des Moines Independent Community School District*, recognized that high school students had a constitutional right to free speech (Johnson, 1997). Palladino (1996)

summarized the affect this ruling had on secondary education, saying, “Thus, high school had to practice democracy as well as teach it” (p. 241).

Another form of rebellion was drug use. Drug-use trends among high school students have fluctuated over the past four decades. Johnston, O’Malley, Bachman, and Schulenberg (2012) reported that in 1975, 55% of secondary students had used an illicit drug before they left high school; in 1981, 66% of students said they had used illicit drugs. Use among secondary students fell to 41% by 1992, only to begin a gradual rise to 50% by 2011 (p. 10). Marijuana use, which had seen a decline in use during the 1990s, has been on the rise since 2008. Johnston, et al., (2012) believe there is a correlation between increased marijuana use and public discourse over the legalization of the drug (p. 5).

Insinuation within a social group has long defined high school students, just as membership within cultural groups, and throughout public education, there has been a history of equating African American Vernacular English (AAVE) with inferior intelligence and social inequality (Eckert, 1989, p. 174). William Labov (1982) wrote an article outlining the case *Martin Luther King Junior Elementary School Children et al. v. Ann Arbor School District* (p. 167). The case centered, in part, around the district’s failure to recognize Black English Vernacular as the children’s “home language,” and had “failed to take into account the nature of Black English in teaching children to read” (p. 170). In 1979, Judge Charles W. Joiner found for the plaintiffs, saying that if there was a language barrier between educators and children, it existed in the “form of unconscious negative attitudes formed by teachers towards children who spoke Black English, and the reaction of those attitudes” (Eckert, 1989, p. 193). Champion, Cobb-Roberts, and Bland-Stewart (2012) found that educators’ attitudes have remained consistently negative toward speakers of AAVE (p. 85).

Furthermore, studies have shown a growing trend toward Black students who aspire toward academic success and the cultural accusations of “acting White” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Kao & Tienda, 1998; McGee & Martin, 2011). McGee and Martin (2011) explored the cultural bias toward White speech patterns in educational settings and how some Black students feel pressured to adopt the vernacular of “the dominant culture as an adaptive technique throughout their educational career” (p. 1369).

1980 to 2000

The 1980s saw the first Generation X-ers enter high schools. Tulgan (2000) defined this generation as those born between 1963 and 1977, who, unlike the Baby Boomers, the Silent Generation, and the GI Generation before them, have no significant historical event to call their own. Whereas Baby Boomers were born into a world that took for granted America’s international dominance, Generation X grew up in a time when the nation suffered one battering after another, “kicked off by the Vietnam War and punctuated by the Iranian hostage crisis” (Tulgan, 1990, p. 42). Gleason (2008) further articulated this generation, saying “these experiences shaped Gen Xers into independent and skeptical individuals who question the military, the government, organized religion, corporations and marriage” (In Touch).

In terms of a national identity, Howe (2009) wrote, Gen Xers entered high school during the 1980s, a time in which societal crimes seemed to be on the rise, from laced Tylenol tablets to the sexual abuse of children in day cares (Howe, 2009). For this set of emerging adults, money isn’t as important as happiness, and relationships are the key to obtaining such happiness (Arnett, 2000a). For the students who attended high school in the 1980s, the world was a disconcerting, disharmonious place with ever competing forces, such as increased promiscuity on TV and the ravages of the AIDS epidemic; the return to traditional family values and the rise of the gay

community; Nancy Reagan and the War on Drugs and the constant barrage of celebrity drug abusers (Tulgan, 2000, p. 47). Parents and policy makers grew more and more vigilant, and thus “the era of the protected child had begun” (Howe & Strauss, 2009, p 32). Pimental (2013) reported that the problem with this type of overly protective parenting is:

“It leads us to shelter our children from the harsh realities of the world far later into their lives, and at the same time, it causes us to lash out against those who threaten us and our children, including the teen offender” (p. 73).

Moreover, where education is concerned, according to Howe (2010), Generation X grew up in an era where one study after another informed them that “their schools had failed and that the passionate hopes of ‘60s reformers had miscarried” (p. 2). All told, Generation X held a pessimistic view of both their economic possibilities and the promise of a college education (Arnett, 2000a; Tulgan, 2000). To add to their malaise, more than half of the 1992 graduating class lacked basic math skills and required remediation upon entering college (Rosenbaum, p. 57, citing Murnane & Levy, 1996).

In a rudimentary way, as suggested by Luke and Luke (2001), Generation X ushered in the age of interactive entertainment. Some of this media aimed to promote literacy, such as Sesame Street and The Electric Company (Howe & Strauss, 2009; Luke & Luke, 2001). Once in high school, these same children quickly became known as the “MTV Generation,” and indulged in emerging video games and the electronic culture, which raised the consternation of both conservatives for its moral content and liberals for its materialism (Luke & Luke, 2001, p. 102). Educators and parents railed against the encroaching youth culture, decrying its habits of gaming and constant media consumption as producing a “social and health hazard” (Luke & Luke, 2001, p. 102). Much maligned by corporate America and the media, the generation has often been

depicted as cynical, lazy, and unappreciative (Arnett, 2000a; Coupland, 1991; Tulgan, 2000). In 1995, Ohio Governor George V. Voinovich remarked that society had one recourse in order to recommit to the health, wellness, and education of children, and that was to move forward with the next generation: “The only way to do it is to pick one generation of children—draw a line in the sand—and say to all: This is where it stops” (Voinovich, 1995).

2000 to Present

In response to the nation’s concern over the safety of its children, the Clinton administration enacted the Gun Free Schools Act of 1994 (Sinclair, et al., 1999), and each state followed suit, creating and implementing its own policies in compliance with the federal act (“Missouri’s Safe Schools Act,” 2013). Entering high school in the year 2000, students experienced increased security and more restrictive disciplinary policies (Skiba & Peterson, 1999; Howe & Strauss, 2009). Indeed, Christle, Jolivette, and Nelson (2005) reported that in the years following the inception of these zero tolerance policies, “nearly six in ten public school students were suspended or expelled at least once between their seventh- and twelfth-grade school years” (p. 1).

Pimentel (2013), in an article written for the Texas Tech Law Review, illuminated the ironic crosshairs between these types of policies and the public outcry, particularly from parents, that led to their creation. There seemed to be discord between the need to protect our children while also demanding that youth be prosecuted at an ever-younger age (Pimentel, 2013): “And yet, they may share a common root—the perception that the world is a far more dangerous place than it used to be” (p. 73). Furthermore, the fear of the unknown dangers that awaited children was disproportionate to the actual statistical prevalence of violence (Howe, 2010). Howe and Strauss (2009) reported that students in high schools post-Columbine were much safer than they

had been in the previous three decades. For these reasons, Elmore (2010) described this current generation as being “overwhelmed, overconnected, overprotected, and overserved” (p. 28).

In past generations, late-aged teenagers transitioned from adolescence into adulthood once their secondary matriculation was complete, entering the workforce, continuing their education, joining the military, or starting their families (Walsh, 2004). However, what was once described as being the years between 13 and 17, adolescence has shown to be lasting up to a full fifteen years (Walsh, 2004, p. 15). Luke and Luke (2001) discussed this elongated definition of adolescence, saying that “life pathways” have been changing throughout the post-World War II years (p. 94). Pimental (2013) concurred with this finding, noting that because these post-war years have been riddled with the perceived degradation of traditional values, the decline of the American society and economy, “intensive, highly-protective parenting is now the norm” (p. 72).

However, Millennials are also a generation of highly individualized students, which is a product of their ability to use technology (Rosen, 2011). This is the generation that has grown up with the Internet, who has never dialed a rotary phone, and uses technology not just as a tool, but “as an extension of their brains” (Black, 2010, p. 95). Luke and Luke (2001) discussed the irony of Millennials’ parents who grew up on the first generation of video games being the same people complaining about their children’s use of technology. One reason for this, they suggested, was that, unlike past generations that could exert some control over their children’s media intake, parents of Millennials “have become outsiders to kids’ insider know-how, their exclusive community anti-languages, symbols systems, and frames of reference” (p. 103). Prensky (2001) was on the forefront of the ways in which this generation utilized technology, as well as how that affected their relationship with education, writing they “think and process information fundamentally differently from their predecessors” (p. 1). Educators, said Prensky (2001), are

simply not reaching these “Digital Natives,” because education is stuck in the mid-20th Century, and Millennials are living in the 21st (p. 3). For Millennials, who overtly acknowledge their technological superiority, the accuracy of information isn’t as important as the speed at which it can be found (Weiler, 2005, p. 51).

A part of that schism concerns Millennials’ disbelief in the college-for-all paradigm pushed by school counselors, teachers and parents. Wilson and Gerber (2008) wrote that Millennials “are powerfully shaped by parental reaction to the perceived laxness of the Sixties and Seventies” (p. 39). Moreover, the Millennials are an amalgamation of a rise in conservatism and their own sense of idealism, but idealism as they define it (Wilson & Gerber, 2008). Education for the Millennials is a hoop, not life-changing event (Wilson & Gerber, 2008). This is the generation that has grown up in the time of standardized tests, end-of-course exams, and the push toward honors, AP/IB, and other tracking mechanisms (Grubbs & Oakes, 2007; Howe & Strauss, 2009; Wilson & Gerber, 2008). Thus, as Grubbs and Oakes (2007) pointed out, high school students in the 21st century are a product of the same curricular reforms evident in the Committee of Ten’s recommendations (p. 20). Millennials are caught in the intersection of a society that says college isn’t for everyone, but that that “everyone” is other people’s children, not their children (Carnevale, 2008). Coupled with the recent economic downturn and the rising costs of education, Millennial high school students are weighing the cost-benefit of a college education (“15 Facts About Millennials,” 2014; Carnevale, 2008). As such work-bound Millennials find themselves disenfranchised in schools where college is pushed on all students and vocational education is looked down upon (Carnevale, 2008; Rosenbaum, 2001). Grades, Millennials believe, are for the college-bound (Rosenbaum, 2001, p. 42). Ironically, they are also more hopeful about their futures than their parents, and are more apt to find a career in which

they can find their specialized niche (Elmore, p. 24). All said, the students who currently fill the nation's public high schools are "skilled with technology, determined, diverse, and more educated than any previous generation" ("15 Facts About Millennials," 2014).

Postsecondary Pathways

The 1973 National Commission on the Financing of Postsecondary Education defined the term postsecondary "to mean any of the educational choices afforded to high school graduates" (Hodgkinson, 1983, p. 111). In the nineteenth century, before the introduction of compulsory education, a person's life trajectory was primarily controlled by familial and societal circumstances (Shanahan, 2000). However, in the last 150 years, postsecondary pathways have opened to include not only the choice to proceed straight into the labor force, but also the choices of attending college and university, of enrolling in community college, vocational or technical educational organizations, and enlisting in the military (Arbona, 2000; Adelman, 2004; Kleykamp, 2006; Reynolds, Stewart, MacDonald, & Sischo, 2006).

Postsecondary aspirations throughout the 20th and the 21st centuries have revolved around human capital theory (Mattila, 1982), which provides a narrow "set of alternative activities: schooling, market work, military service, and other activities including unemployed job search" (pp. 245-246). The criteria for choosing one path or another can point to student aspirations and goals, family tradition and need, or economic circumstances. Oreopoulos and Petronijevic (2013) suggested that, due to the rising costs of tuition, the cost-benefit ratio becomes part of this postsecondary choice.

Straight to the Labor Force

In 2009, 70.1% of high school graduates were found to be attending some form of postsecondary education (Lee, Jara Almonte, & Youn, 2013, p). For students entering the labor

force directly out of high school, economic trends suggest three areas of concern: early entry before postsecondary education has a significant affect on subsequent career trajectories than a century ago (Modell, Furstenberg, & Hershberg, 1976); employment instability, in which “job transitions are often necessary for maintaining employment and may indicate economic vulnerability” (Wray-Lake, Syvertsen, Bridell, Osgood, & Flanagan, 2010, p. 1114); and the disappearance of middle-level, middle-wage blue-collar employment opportunities (Autor, 2010, p. 12). These significant changes in the labor force are particularly consequential for African-American and Latino males and those of lower SES who are less likely to attend college (Wray-Lake, Syvertsen, Bridell, Osgood, & Flanagan, 2010).

These economic changes have occurred within the last four decades. For those workers with only a high school diploma, unemployment rose from 12.9 to 19.8 percent between 1980 and 2005 (Autor & Dorn, 2013, p. 1556). The Great Recession has furthered this economic downturn, pushing some graduates to reconsider other postsecondary pathways (Dunbar, et al., 2011; Vuolo, Staff, & Mortimer, 2012; Barr & Turner, 2015). For those remaining in the labor force, the primary area in growth has been in the service industries, where wages and employment opportunities have been on a rise for the last 25 years (Autor, 2010; Wray-Lake, et al., 2011; Autor & Dorn, 2013). Service industry workers include food service workers, janitors, security guards, and other jobs that involve caring for and assisting people. However, those positions offer low wages and often only contingent employment (Osterman, 2014).

Missouri A+ Scholarship Program

In 1993, the state of Missouri passed Senate Bill 380, which introduced the A+ Schools Program. Senate Bill 380 sought to bolster more rigorous high school curricula and career readiness initiatives, especially for those students who were not traditionally associated with

having postsecondary aspirations (Missouri Governor's Office, 1993). Further, the bill's objective was to prepare students for college, for higher-paying jobs, and to provide the financial means for those pursuits (Missouri Governor's Office, 1993). Schools that applied and were chosen to be A+ Schools were given the responsibility to create an A+ Program in their schools, one that implemented specific requirements for students seeking scholarships through the A+ Schools Program (Department of Elementary & Secondary Education, 2009). In 2015, the closest public certificate- and associate's degree-granting institution to the North River School District enrolled 2,172 A+ Program recipients. Those recipients received \$4,976,744 in state-funded scholarships (Missouri Department of Higher Education, 2015).

North River School District is an A+ School designee, and within their handbook, and in conjunction with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, students must complete the following requirements in order to earn state-funded scholarships to community colleges and technical schools:

- Must enroll in an A+ designated school for at least three years
- Maintain 95% attendance over four years
- Earn at least a 2.5 grade-point average over four years
- Must complete a minimum of 50 hours of community service
- Must maintain an acceptable disciplinary record, one that specifically avoids disciplinary infractions for unlawful drug use. (A+ Schools Program, 2010; North River School District Parent/Student Handbook, 2015)

As stated within the state and district guidelines, if subjected to a long-term suspension of 10 days or over, students are summarily removed from the program. Although there is an appeal process for students who are unable to comply with one or more requirements, this process does

not apply to students whose disciplinary actions involve drug use and other nonviolent offenses (A+ Schools Program, 2010; North River School District Parent/Student Handbook, 2015).

Four-Year College or University

More often than not, when defining postsecondary educational aspirations, the thought of a four-year degree leads the list. However, the history of attending a degree-granting university is a relatively new path for many Americans (Goldin, 1998; Snyder, 1993). In 2000, 57% of those employed in offices had some college credentials (Carnevale & Desrochers, 2002, p. 7), as compared to only 2% of high school graduates in 1880 (Snyder, 1993, p. 5). Although WWII removed many of the men and women enrolled in college, enrollment numbers have continued to rise throughout the 20th Century (Brint & Karabel, 1991; Caplow, et al., 2001). In 2012, 60.7% of graduating seniors reported they would graduate from a four-year program (Bachman Johnston, & O'Malley, 2014, p. 26).

However, aspiration to attend a four-year university is not enough to attend (Reynolds, et al., 2006). Students with high academic achievement in high school are more likely to not only aspire to postsecondary education, but to achieve it (Arbonna, 2000; Parker, et al., 2012; Guo, Marsh, Parker, Morin & Yeung, 2015). A further indicator of attending a four-year program is having earned college credits while still enrolled in high school (Adelman, 2004).

Community College

The rise in community college enrollment has been spurred by the affordability, the open enrollment, and the geographic desirability of campuses (Brint & Karabel, 1991; Rosenbaum, 2001; Jepsen, Troske, & Coomes, 2014). Jepsen, Troske, and Coomes (2014) stated that 45% of students in postsecondary education were enrolled in community colleges during the 2006-2007

enrollment period (p. 1). Furthermore, as reported by Rosenbaum, Deil-Arman, and Person (2007), since 1965, enrollment at community colleges has increased “five-fold” (p. 4).

“Monitoring the Future,” a forty-year longitudinal study of secondary students, has consistently surveyed students about their postsecondary aspirations. Data from the graduating seniors of 1992, 2002, and 2012 have shown a steady increase in student-reported plans to attend community colleges, from 16.3% to 22.2% (Bachman, Johnston, & O’Malley, 1997, 2005, 2014). This rise in enrollment may be attributed to the need for the labor force requiring at least perfunctory education (Rosenbaum, Deil-Arman, & Person, 2007). Other studies suggest the rise in enrollment may be attributed to its open-access policies, which allows all postsecondary students an opportunity to participate in some form of tertiary education (Reynolds, Stewart, MacDonald, & Sisco, 2006). Furthermore, the variety of programs, certificates, and alternative settings have been shown to be attractive to prospective students (Brint & Karabel, 1991; Jepsen, Troske, & Coomes, 2014).

Military

Enlistment in the military is affected by many different variables, but has remained fairly consistent for the last forty years (Segal, Bachman, Freedman-Doan, & O’Malley, 1999; Kleykamp, 2006; Bachman, Johnston, & O’Malley, 1997, 2005, 2014). In the last four decades, since the end of the military draft and the transition to the all-volunteer force, the percentage of seniors who said they would definitely serve has remained consistently at 5% (Segal, et al., 1999; Eikenberry, 2013). “Monitoring the Future” has corroborated this data point throughout the last thirty-five years (Bachman, Johnston, & O’Malley, 1997, 2005, 2014).

Military presence in the community is one factor that influences enlistment, increasing the number of enlistees where there is a strong presence (Kleykamp, 2006). Moreover, the

military offers a perception of “social mobility,” particularly for African American males (Torres-Reyna & Shapiro, 2002; Kleykamp, 2006; Castro, 2015). Kleykamp (2006) further reported that parental service in the armed forces has a strong impression on whether a young person will enroll (p. 275).

However, recruitment in the military can hinge on the recruit’s secondary education level. In 1987, the Department of Defense instituted its three-tiered system of enlistment criteria (Assistant Secretary of Defense, 2000). Based on research that indicated a correlation between recruits’ educational attainment and attrition rate, the military places recruits with at least a high-school diploma or more on tier one, those with alternative credentials on tier two, while those holding no credentials on tier three (General Education Development, 2009). In the year 1999, the percentage of recruits with only alternative credentials, such as Missouri’s HiSET, ranged from 9.9 percent for the Army to .2 percent for the Air Force, while those without any secondary credentials rarely were enlisted (Assistant Secretary of Defense, 2000; “High School Equivalency”).

Vocational and Technical Education

Vuolo, Staff, and Mortimer (2012) wrote that it is regrettable that parents and school officials often leave out vocational and technical education when discussing postsecondary plans with high school students. In the era of “college for all,” vocational education is often dismissed as being lesser than liberal arts education (Carnevale, 2008; Rosenbaum, 2001). “Monitoring the Future” asked the question “Suppose you could do just what you’d like and nothing stood in your way. How many of the following things would you WANT to do?” and the 2012 seniors reported that 14.1% would go to vocational or technical schools (Bachman, Johnston, & O’Malley, 2014, p. 26).

The education students receive at vocational and technical schools generally seeks to provide skills for specific jobs, but does not lead to a university degree (Hanushek, Schwerdt, Woessman, & Zhang, 2016). For students who do not wish to pursue a college education but recognize the importance of gaining skills in order to increase employability, technical and vocational education is a viable option (Vuolo, Staff, & Mortimer, 2012).

History of Zero Tolerance Policies

The federal legislation that ushered in “get tough” discipline policies (Fabelo, et al., 2011) was the Gun Free School Act (GFSA) of 1984, which mandated 180-day expulsions (one school year) for weapons violations, and tied school funding to compliance with the GFSA (McNeal & Dunbar, 2010; Mongan & Walker, 2005; Skiba, 2000). States clambered to revamp their policies to include the new zero tolerance language (Fabelo et al, 2011), including Missouri, which issued its own Safe Schools Act (SSA) of 1996 (Burgess, 1997; “Missouri Center for Safe Schools,” 2005). The act included disciplinary actions for weapons, drugs, and additional safety violations, in keeping with other states (Skiba & Rausch, 2006; Verdugo, 2002). Consequently, the use of suspensions and expulsions exploded (Losen & Gillespie, 2012), often for varied behavior infractions, most of which did not pose a safety issue (Insley, 2001; Kraetzer, 2002; Raffaele Mendez, 2003; Skiba & Rausch, 2006).

Consequences

The proliferation of zero tolerance policies culminated in unintended results, such as disproportionality among those who incurred the vast majority of these exclusionary sanctions (Skiba, et al., 2002; Skiba, Peterson, & Williams, 1997; Verdugo, 2002; Wu, et al., 1982). Another consequence is the greater reliance on juvenile services for school disciplinary problems (Skiba & Rausch, 2006; Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, & Bachman, 2008; Gregory, et al., 2010),

creating a school-to-prison pipeline (Christle, et al., 2005; Skiba & Rausch, 2004; Wallace, et al., 2008). Furthermore, research has indicated the negative effect suspensions and exclusions have on student achievement (Arcia, 2006; Losen & Gillespie, 2012).

These negative factors have a greater impact on children of lower socio-economic status (SES) (Lee, 2006; Rubin, et al., 2014; Skiba, et al., 2002), those of Hispanic/Latino descent (Cass, Curry, & Liss, 2006; Wehlage & Rutter, 1985), and Black males (Civil Rights Project, 2000; Skrla, et al., 2004; Wallace, et al., 2008). These are also the children who are the focus of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001), legislation created to ameliorate the achievement gap between students (Lee, 2006; Leistyna, 2009). The discordant relationship between the SSA (1994) and NCLB (2001) has fueled groups to denounce zero tolerance policies (Academy of American Pediatrics, 2003; American Psychological Association, 2008; the U. S. Department of Education, 2011) and have urged policy makers to discontinue the use of such exclusionary measures (Losen & Martinez, 2013). Others have gone so far as describing zero tolerance policies as “draconian” in nature (Giroux, 2003; Leistyna, 2009; Skiba and Rausch, 2004).

Moreover, in the thirty years since the GFSA, studies have shown that exclusionary strategies have very little effect on school safety (Brown, 2007; Childrens’ Defense Fund, 1975; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2007; Planty, et al., 2009). In 2000, Skiba and Peterson reported that statistics on school violence and disruptions had not changed since the implementation of GFSA; however, suspensions and expulsions had significantly increased. Other studies focused on the topic of lost classroom time due to exclusionary strategies (Balfanz & Fox, 2015; Losen and Gillespie, 2012). The Civil Rights Project (2015) reported that during the 2011-2012 school year, 3.5 million students were suspended. Furthermore, by their study, the

Civil Rights Project (2015) estimated that nearly 18 million days of instruction were lost due to suspensions (p. 4).

Legal Issues Concerning Exclusionary Strategies

Children's rights and exclusionary strategies have also played out in legal arenas. The topic of a student's right to a due process hearing before serving a long-term suspension became the focus of the Supreme Court case *Goss v. Lopez* (1975) (Insley, 2001; Wilkinson, 1975). Mongan and Walker (2012) discussed *Seal v. Morgan* (2000), which placed the burden of proof on the district concerning a student's knowledge of possessing and intentions to use a weapon, as well as *San Antonio ISD v. Rodriguez* (1973), a case that clarified education as a student's constitutional right only if education is part of that state's constitution (Pollack & Schnall, 2003; Verdugo, 2002). Hanson (2005) compared zero tolerance policies to *Brown v. Board of Education*, which required equal education for all.

Landmarks in Research

The issue of exclusionary policies and their effect on students first came to light in the landmark study by the Children's Defense Fund (1975), which reported that one in every 13% middle- and high-school students had been suspended, and that miscommunication and misunderstandings between students and staff accounted for many of those suspensions. This pivotal study shaped an entire branch of educational research (Cohen, 2013).

In 1982, Wu, Pink, Crain, and Moles conducted seminal research on student misbehavior and suspension rates, teacher judgment and attitudes, school structures, and racial bias. Their landmark research concluded that suspension rates are a product of the school structure. Since the time of this, a number of studies have built upon their foundational research (Raffaele Mendez, et al., 2002; Skiba, et al., 2002).

The American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force (2008) ushered in yet another avenue for research, the inefficacy of suspensions (Boccanfuso & Kuhlfield, 2011; Delaware House of Representatives, 2010), as well as the appropriate level of discipline for adolescent behavior (Losen & Martinez, 2013). Together, these critical studies have assisted in the shift in thinking about the way we meter out disciplinary actions to our youth.

Advocacy of Exclusionary Discipline

Although the vast majority of research in the last thirty years soundly denounces the use of exclusionary methods, proponents of the effective use of suspensions/expulsions have offered their perspectives on the topic. Wilkinson (1975), in his review of the Supreme Court ruling *Goss v. Lopez* (1975), stated that due process debilitated schools' ability to effectively discipline children. Portner (1995) reported that teachers and unions applauded tougher discipline policies. Quoting the sitting president of the American Federation of Teachers, Albert Shanker, the article stated, "Some of these disruptive kids are sick, and they need help. But a school isn't a psychiatric ward, it's an educational institution" (p. 1). In response to the Columbine tragedy (Skiba & Peterson, 2000), Owens and Salazar (1999) asserted the need for stronger disciplinary methods, "where students pay the price for the disruptions" (p. 9).

From a legal standpoint, Kingery (2000) made clear that suspensions and expulsions are appropriate when used to curtail violent offenders, in relation to the original language of the Safe Schools Act (1994). However, the author suggested, the more prevalent use of exclusionary policies provide districts with powerful symbols of their tough disciplinary tactics.

Student Perceptions of Exclusionary Practices

Few studies have explored exclusionary practices from a student's point of view (Brown, 2007; Caton, 2012; Howard, 2003), but most reported that students find disciplinary policies

capricious and unfair (American Psychological Association, 2008; Brantlinger, 1993; McNeal & Dunbar, 2010; Wehlage, & Rutter, 1986). Other factors include students' interactions with staff members (Raffaele Mendez & Knoff, 2002, 2003; Wu, et al., 1982), including teacher bias (Ferguson, 2003; Gordon, et al., 2000; McLoughlin & Noltemeyer, 2010; Skiba, et al., 1997; Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007) and teachers' misinterpretation of behavior (Edelman, Beck, & Smith, 1975; Hyman & Perone, 1998; Monroe, 2006; Skiba, et al, 2002; Wallace, et al., 2008). Students also perceive their own worth through the language adults use to describe them and their behavior (Bowditch, 1993; Brantlinger, 1991; Kayama, et al., 2015).

Affects of Exclusionary Policies on Students

The corpus of literature on the efficacy or inefficacy of disciplinary policies dovetails with those studies linking lower academic achievement and students who have been kicked out of school. The participants in the extant literature range from children in different socioeconomic statuses, to children from different cultural backgrounds, to children of different genders and gender identities. These studies also vary in determining the affects of exclusionary practices. Furthermore, research into the topic has revealed studies that support the use of long-term suspensions on student morale and discipline. However, gaps in the research are present.

Race and Ethnicity

A significant amount of studies have shown a connection between Black males who have incurred suspensions and lower achievement tests (Aud, et al, 2010; Gregory et al., 2010; Wallace, et al., 2008). Many of these studies continue the progression of scholastic linearity, and connect zero tolerance policies with dropout rates (Arcia, 2006; Balfanz & Fox, 2015; "Keeping Youth Connected," 2011; Losen & Gillespie, 2012), particularly among African American males (Bock, Savner, & Tapscott, 1998; Brooks, Schiraldi, & Zeidenberg, 2000).

Psychological Effects

Aside from the challenge of overcoming loss of classroom time (Gregory, et al., 2010), exclusionary practices also take a toll on the child's emotional well-being (American Psychological Association, 2008; Hanson, 2005; Hyman & Perone, 1998). These studies indicated that exclusion from school creates high levels of anxiety among children (Hyman & Perone, 1998). Furthermore, children with the greatest need for services only offered to them in schools, such as counseling, are often excluded from school (Brown, 2007; Lamont, 2013; Noguera, 2003). The American Academy of Pediatrics (2003) urged its members to offer increased care to those patients who have been suspended from school.

Postsecondary Aspirations

Students who have been removed from school increase their odds of dropping out (Fabelo, et al., 2011; Raffaele Mendez, 2003; Wehlage & Rutter, 1985). In a joint announcement between the U. S. Department of Education and the U. S. Department of Justice (2011), Secretary Duncan and Attorney General Holder urged policy makers to eliminate exclusionary practices, asserting that multiple suspensions lead to students being held back, having to recover lost credits, or to dropping out (Stewart, Stewart, & Simon, 2007). Furthermore, in one study using a logistic regression model, the odds of enrolling in postsecondary education decreased by 12% with each suspension (Balfanz & Fox, 2015).

Associated Language

Along with teacher bias and misinterpretation, the topic of the language associated with behavior has been researched (Bowditch, 1993; Brooks, et al., 2000; Kayama, et al., 2015). In a number of studies, the term "troublemaker" was shown to be associated with exclusionary strategies (Brantlinger, 1991; Brooks, et al., 2000). Furthermore, in the wake of GFSA (1994),

the increased use of criminal justice language has been used to describe students and their behavior (Kayama, et al., 2015), which additionally adds to the complexity of students' self-perceptions (Brown, 2007; Howard, 2003; McNeal & Dunbar, 2010).

Gaps in Literature

Although the body of research on this topic is extensive, there are gaps that need to be filled. The American Psychological Association's Zero Tolerance Task Force noted that little research has been conducted on how exclusionary policies impact families and communities. Brown (2007) suggested further research should be conducted from the student's perspective on how exclusionary measures affect their academic, social, and emotional wellbeing.

Historic Trends in Postsecondary Aspirations

The need to define postsecondary education rose at a dramatic rate in the number of students not only choosing those available avenues, but also the number of students who graduated from high school (Hodgkinson, 1983; Goldin, 1998; Lucas, 1996). One hundred years before the commission's report, the Department of Education was pleased to announce that 80,000 students were enrolled in secondary education; however, that number constituted only 2% of the age group's population (Snyder, 1993, p. 5). Still fewer, only 1.1%, enrolled in colleges and universities (Clotfelter, et al., 2008, p. 31). By 1970, nearly 40% of the nation's 18-24 year olds were enrolled in a postsecondary institution (Clotfelter, et al., 2008, p. 31).

1880 to 1910

In the 1800s, postsecondary education was largely perceived to be for the elite of society, where those who could afford to pilfer their time away studying classics in the classic, European tradition probably did not have the work ethic to be productive citizens (Rudolph, 1962; Lucas, 1996). The sole purpose of the university was to train the "mental and moral discipline" of its

students (Veysey, 1970, p. 23). It was observed by many of the nation's citizens, noted Rudolph (1962), that a college education had little relevance where achieving success in life was concerned. In fact, as reported by Brint and Karabel (1991), 84% of the most prominent businessmen in 1890 did not have any postsecondary education (p. 4). Moreover, for those not interested in a college education, high school seemed unnecessary, due to the perception that those who went on to secondary education did so only to prepare for college (Goldin, 1998; Snyder, 1993). However, by the end of the 19th century, economic inequality began to expand (Golding & Katz, 1998; Goldin & Katz, 2007). Education provided the path to economic mobility (Rudolph, 1962; Brint & Karabel, 1991).

1910 to World War II

At the turn of the century, the workforce in the United States consisted of 42% within primary occupations, such as agriculture, fishing, forestry, and miners, 38% within secondary occupations, such as laborers, craftsmen, and repairmen, and 21% within tertiary occupations, such as professional, managers, officials, and clerical workers (Caplow, Hicks, & Wattenberg, 2001, p. 25). By 1998, whereas secondary occupations retained 38% of the workforce, tertiary occupations rose to 58% of the workforce, and primary occupations plummeted to only 4% (Caplow, et al, 2001, p. 25).

As the percentage rate of high school enrollment rose, the percentage rate of postsecondary enrollment fell (Brint & Karabel, 1991; Goldin, 1998; Lucas, 1996). In 1910, 50% of high school graduates planned to attend college. However, in 1933, only 25% of graduates planned to pursue a college education (Goldin, 1998, p. 350). The explanation for this trend was in the terminal-nature of the high-school diploma, which, in the 1920s, provided credentials necessary for the growing demand for blue-collared workers “in the more capital-intensive and

higher-technology industries of the day” (Goldin, 1998, p. 372). Most students entering high school during the high school movement sought education to improve their employability, not to prepare for college (Golding, 1998, p. 352). In fact, in the first half of the 20th century, when a third of the workforce was made up by farmers, a person with a high school diploma was considered well-educated (Goldin & Katz, 2007, p. 27). If the American middle class was going to send its children to a college or university, the education they received had better be practical (Nelson & Wright, 1992, p. 1948).

It was during this time period that community colleges were established in order to provide vocational training to students unable or uninterested in earning a Bachelor’s degree (Gelber, 2007, p. 2265). In 1906, the Douglas Commission concluded that America’s schools were not meeting the demands of the rising industrial sector (Goldin, 1998, p. 352). Furthermore, these junior colleges were a more palatable bridge between high school and a college degree. In 1911, the president of the University of Missouri created several two-year colleges that enticed parents who might otherwise be reluctant to send their children off to a four-year school (Brint & Karabel, 1991, p. 27). These junior colleges were seen as “an avenue of cultural and social mobility for farmers, shopkeepers, artisans, and workers” (Brint & Karabel, 1991, p. 28).

The Great Depression also created student interest in attending college (Brint & Karabel, 1991). In the years before the Great Depression, eighteen- and nineteen-year-olds had entered the workforce directly out of high school; in 1937, nearly 25% of this same age group was unemployed (Brint & Karabel, 1991, p. 53).

In 1910, young women who graduated from high school outnumbered men during this time period; however, the attainment of a postsecondary degree lagged, with women earning only 19% of bachelor’s degrees (Caplow et al., 2001, p. 54). By 1930, that number doubled, and

it remained at that level until World War II (Caplow, et al., 2001, p. 54). Furthermore, in 1900, three-fourths of women in the workforce were employed in farming, factories, or service fields. Teaching and nursing were the only careers that necessitated postsecondary education and that were readily available to women (Caplow, et al., 2001, p. 42). By the end of the century, this trend would upend itself, and would also include the equitable allotment of female managers, college professors, psychologists and accountants, as well as 25% of the nation's lawyers and physicians (Caplow, et al., 2001, p. 42).

1945 to 1960

In 1944, President Truman signed the Serviceman's Readjustment Act, more commonly known as the G.I. Bill (Lucas, 1996; Nelson & Wright, 1992; Snyder, 1993; Symonds, Schwartz, & Ferguson, 2014; Walters, 1984). In 1948, veterans made up nearly half of all college attendees (Lucas, 1996, p. xv). By 1960, 3.5 million veterans had taken advantage of the G. I. Bill (Hodgkinson, 1983, p. 36). The Truman administration continued its support of postsecondary education by commissioning a 1947 report, "Higher Education for American Democracy," which affirmed the federal government's role in postsecondary education, as well as the ideal that college should be afforded to all (Gelber, 2007; Hodgkinson, 1983). The report suggested that 49% of the nation's population had the cognitive ability to complete four years of postsecondary matriculation, and 32% should be able to complete a certification program (Brint & Karabel, 1991, p. 69).

This report also set forth the establishment of a network of community colleges, which would provide postsecondary education to a more diverse cross-section of students at little or no cost. Between 1938 and 1953, the number of community college systems grew from 258 to 388 (Brint & Karabel, 1991, p. 71). By 1950, 35.3% of men had attained more than just a high school

degree (Goldin, 1998, p. 346). In 1956, President Eisenhower's Committee on Education Beyond High School led to the National Defense Education Act of 1958, which provided student loans to those who chose to enter fields critical to national interests (Hansen, 1983; Hodgkinson, 1983). During the fall of 1956, the percentage of the 18-24 year olds rose nearly five percentage points over the fall of 1955, to 22% (Snyder, 1993, p. 76).

However, it was during this time period, particularly in 1947, that the disparity between male and female college enrollment reached a high of 2.3 men to every one woman (Golding, Katz, & Kuziemko, 1998, p. 3). Up until 1930, male to female undergraduates ratios were about even. In the 1980s, gender parity in enrollment was once again reached. Since the 1980s, women have outnumbered men on college campuses (Golding, et al., 1998; Hodgkinson, 1983; Lucas, 1996; Reynolds & Burge, 2008).

1960 to 1990

At the height of the Cold War, President Kennedy signed the Health Professions Educational Act of 1963, which provided federal money to postsecondary education to meet society's need for medical research and national security, as well as to provide grants to those interested in entering the fields (Hodgkinson, 1983, p. 39). President Johnson built upon his predecessor's legislation and added components that complemented the Civil Rights Act of 1964, by signing the Higher Education Act of 1965, which provided federal aid to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (Albritton, 2012, p. 311). This act set aside grants that targeted minority students who were underrepresented in higher education in order "to provide opportunity for all citizens to participate fully in national life" (Hodgkinson, 1983, p. 40). The Higher Education Act of 1965 also established federally guaranteed student loans (Hansen, 1983).

During this thirty-year period of 1960 to 1990, enrollment at four-year colleges doubled and enrollment in community colleges increased five times (Rosenbaum, 2001, p. 55). Conversely, because many jobs in the workforce required little education, high school dropout rates began to increase (Rosenbaum, et al., 2007, p. 4). Symonds, Schwartz, and Ferguson (2014) wrote that in 1973, 72% of the American workforce was made up of people who had a high-school degree or less, and that it was still possible earn a middle-class wage (p. 2). However, those jobs would be disappearing. Furthermore, in the last third of the 20th century, the only gains in job growth were in those positions that required at least partial postsecondary education (Symonds, et al., 2014, p. 2). Indeed, as reported in the William T. Grant Foundation Commission On Work, Family, and Citizenship (1988), stable employment in manufacturing, transportation, utilities and communication that was once available to high-school graduates under 20, dropped from a 57% in 1963 to 36% in 1986 (p. 282).

In 1978, President Carter signed the Middle Income Student Assistance Act that expanded federal aid and lifted the financial-need requirements for guaranteed student loans (Hansen, 1983; Hodgkinson, 1983). However, as studies have shown, these financial-aid programs did not dramatically increase student enrollment at four-year universities (Hansen, 1983, p. 95; Progress of Education, 1994). Between 1980 and 1991, the number of bachelor's degrees for men increased by only seven percent, whereas during that same period, the number earned by women increased by 27% (Progress of Education, 1994, p. 29). Indeed, of the 29.5 million citizens who made up college-aged students in 1979, 353,000 students were enrolled in occupational programs, 1.5 million students were enrolled in community college or non-credit programs, 1.6 million were enrolled in trade schools, and 229,000 were involved in military training, both on- and off-duty (Hodginkson, 1983, p. 61-62). Furthermore, Reynolds, Stewart,

MacDonald, and Sischo (2006) wrote that between the years of 1970 and 2000, student enrollment at community colleges increased by 156% (p. 190).

1990 to Present

In 1990, the median school years completed by males was 12.8, compared to 8.6 in 1940 (Snyder, 1993, pp. 18-19). Furthermore, in 1991 the annual mean income for males with a high school diploma was \$24,737, as compared to males with a college degree, \$48,259 (Snyder, 1993, p. 22). However, as Bowen, Chingos, and McPherson (2009) wrote, the 1990s also ushered in a “flattening out” of educational attainment (p. 3). Kao and Tienda (1998) explored the relationship between postsecondary aspirations, status attainment, and the ways in which socioeconomic statuses and culture affect these goals. They found that a major obstacle to postsecondary education, and thus higher median incomes, was two-fold: skepticism about upward mobility due to education and a distinct lack of information on how to access postsecondary education (pp. 378-379).

Similarly, the authors Bowen, Chingos, and McPherson (2009) reported that the White House had acknowledged that an “opportunity gap” existed between races, ethnicities, and genders, as well as between SES groups (p. 8). The authors produced data that showed “thirty-six percent of white women earned a bachelor’s degree by age 26 compared with 22 percent of black women and 13 percent of Hispanic women” and that “just under 30 percent of white men earned a bachelor’s degree compared with 11-12% of black and Hispanic men” (p. 8). Furthermore, the data showed that of those college-aged students from the highest SES brackets and who had at least one parent with a bachelor’s degree, 68% earned a four-year degree by age 26, as opposed to just nine percent of those from the lowest SES brackets who would be first-generation college students (p. 8). These data speak to what Kutscher (1993) called “occupational segregation” (p.

10) and to how Carnevale and Desrochers (2002) described the state of the nation as having “the widest income differences among the world’s advanced economies” (p. 2).

The need for a more highly educated citizenry derives from a shift in the labor market (Barr & Turner, 2015; Carnevale, 2012; Carnevale & Desrochers, 2002; Reardon, 2013). Carnevale and Desrochers (2002) reported that, at the turn of the century, the greatest increase in requiring postsecondary education came from positions that had previously only needed a high school diploma. This trend toward “upskilling” can be seen in white-collar jobs. In 1973, 47% of office workers were high school graduates and 30% had at least some college experience. Compare that to 2000, when only 27% were high school graduates and 57% had at least some college experience (Carnevale & Desrochers, 2002, p. 7). More notably, in the technology sector, in 1973, 31% of information-technology workers had earned no more than a high school diploma, whereas by 2000, that number had dropped to 13% (p. 8).

The Great Recession of 2007-2009 had an impact on national postsecondary aspirations, as well. Barr and Turner (2015) found that in those intervening years when unemployment spiked, university enrollment increased 7.2% for recent high school graduates. Further, Dunbar, et al. (2011), reported that the Great Recession also brought forth an increase in community college enrollment among high school graduates, which they attribute to perceived affordability of junior colleges versus four-year schools, and the lack of employment for those who may otherwise have entered directly into the workforce (p. 6). Although it saw less dramatic increases than the other sections of the nation, the Midwest also experienced an increase in college enrollment (p. 20).

“Monitoring the Future,” or MTF, a forty-year-old longitudinal study of the nation’s young adults, has contributed a wealth of quantitative data to educational research in order to

“study changes in the beliefs, attitudes, and behavior of young people in the United States” (“Purposes of Monitoring the Future,” 2016). Although primarily a study to show trends in health issues, MTF has consistently asked participants questions pertaining to their postsecondary aspirations. In 2002, MTF reported that 18.9% of seniors stated they would graduate from a two-year college program, and 56.5% stated they would graduate from a four-year program (Bachman, Johnston, & O’Malley, 2005, p. 25). Further, in 2012, 22.2% of seniors stated they would graduate from a two-year college program, and 60.7% stated they would graduate from a four-year program (Bachman Johnston, & O’Malley, 2014, p. 26). Likewise, ACT Inc.’s “College Choice Report, part 2” (2014), reported that of the nearly 1.8 million students who took the college entrance exam in 2013, 87% expressed interest in a postsecondary education; however, only 69% enrolled the fall after their graduation (p. 6).

For the purposes of this study, it is appropriate to explore recent college enrollment and aspirational data based on the bounds of the study. In 2010, the State of Missouri reported that 61.4% of its high school graduates went directly on to college (“College Participation Rates,” 2016). In the same year and by comparison, the North River School District affirmed that 80% of its graduates were found in colleges the fall after their graduation (“District Graduate Analysis,” 2016). Moreover, out of 115 counties in the state of Missouri, the U.S. Census Bureau (2010) estimated that the county where North River School District is situated had the third highest percentage of adults with at least an associate degree. That percentage, 47.48, is fully 12 percentage points higher than the state average (Lumina Foundation, 2012, p. 2) and five percentage points higher than the national average (Ryan & Bauman, 2016).

Study Underpinnings through the Lens of Critical Theory

In order to more firmly ground this research, each underpinning must be filtered through the lens of critical theory. As stated in the title, the underpinnings concerning this research are students, postsecondary educational aspirations, and the effect long-term suspensions have had on those aspirations. Furthermore, critical theory includes a spectrum of filters, including social justice, power structures, and democracy.

Social Justice

Within the context of social justice as it applies to critical theory, this research seeks to understand the societal problems within education, specifically the inconsistent and deleterious use of long-term suspensions (DeLeon & Ross, 2010; McKernan, 2013). Moreover, as it applies to the education of our children, Kincheloe (2007) wrote of the importance of providing an equitable, just society that not only educates its youth, but provides a place where the seeds of social justice can grow.

Power Structures

Throughout the last two centuries in the United States, structures have existed that segregate children, not only from their right to an equitable education, but from their right to aspire toward greater educational opportunities (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2002, Peca, 2000; Scheurich & Imber, 1991). Policies such as long-term suspensions and expulsions contribute to the segregation of children, even as they seek to cure the ills within the organization (Leistyna, 2009). Giroux and Penna (1979) stated that:

“Once the relationship between schooling and the larger society is recognized, questions about the nature and meaning of the schooling experience can be viewed from a

theoretical perspective capable of illuminating the often ignored relationship between school knowledge and social control” (p. 20).

Democracy

An educated citizenry is the key to protecting and affirming our democracy (Armaline, 2010; Kadlec, 2006; Boyles, Carusi, & Attick, 2009). Children who are removed from their educational settings due to stringent disciplinary consequences are also removed from their ability to take part in the democratic process (Giroux, 2003; Kellner, 2003). Through the lens of critical theory, questions regarding the ways in which exclusionary policies affect and subvert academic achievement can be asked (Kellner, 2003; Creswell, 2009; Giroux, 2014).

Significance and Contribution of Current Study

The topic of exclusionary policies and student achievement has been well researched, particularly by those studies utilizing quantitative methods. However, as noted above, there is a gap in scholastic research on students’ perceptions of how exclusionary policies influence education. Employing qualitative methods, this study will seek to discover the relationship between suspensions/exclusions and students’ postsecondary aspirations. This study seeks to contribute to the body of knowledge by discovering how students describe the roles their families and socioeconomic statuses played in their ability to maintain their education while excluded from school. Furthermore, this study seeks to contribute to the breadth of knowledge concerning how students describe the support from educators while out on suspension or expulsions, as well as once they return to the classroom.

Summary

Exclusionary policies were created to ostensibly keep our nation’s schools safe. However, research has shown that not only are these policies ineffective and unethical, they are

creating a greater chasm in the achievement gap. Furthermore, time away from school without access to structured education has been proven to negatively influence postsecondary goals (Hanson, 2005; Hoffman, 2014). Therefore, the discordant nature between educational policy makers' verisimilitude of being tough on discipline and their more essential mission to educate each child, every day must be addressed (Giroux, 2003; Kellner, 2003; Skiba, 2000). Without the diverse voices and stories from those who have found themselves caught between a denial of education and the hope for an education, the conversation will not be complete. This vision of the importance of the continuous, unstoppable education for all our children is best summed up by John Dewey (1916), who said:

In final account, then, not only does social life demand teaching and learning for its own permanence, but the very process of living together educates. It enlarges and enlightens experience, it stimulates and enriches imagination; it creates responsibility for accuracy and vividness of statement and thought... The inequality of achievement between the mature and the immature not only necessitates teaching the young, but the necessity of this teaching gives an immense stimulus to reducing experience to that order and form which will render it most easily communicable and hence most usable (p. 9).

SECTION FOUR:
CONTRIBUTION TO PRACTICE

Plan for Dissemination of Practitioner Contribution

Who: Missouri School Boards' Association's Annual Conference fall of 2017 (School board members, district-level administrators, building-level administrators)

When: October 5-8, 2017

Submission Deadline: March 31, 2017 (Submitted February 19, 2017)

How: Through a PowerPoint presentation entitled "I'm Supposed to Be in School!"

Type of Document

Document type will be a slide show presentation that will be presented at the 2017 MSBA's Annual Fall Conference. The slide show will inform the audience of students' perceptions of their postsecondary aspiration following long-term suspensions and expulsions. The PowerPoint will be accompanied by an Executive Summary, which precedes the PowerPoint in this chapter. Upon request the full report can be made available.

Request for Annual Conference Proposal Application

Summary Description: The purpose of this presentation is to explore student perceptions of how exclusionary disciplinary policies affected their academic identity and postsecondary aspirations; how students described their familial and socioeconomic statuses' influences on their ability to maintain their education while out of school; and how students assess the support they received from educators during their suspensions, as well as when they returned to school. (447 characters)

Primary Focus of Presentation: Student Achievement and Contemporary Issues in Education

Vision Project Focus Area: Climate, Culture, and Organizational Efficacy

Rationale for this Contribution Type

In cooperation with the Missouri Association of School Administrators, the MSBA convention is a gathering of diverse educational leaders, those who create and implement disciplinary policies. This convention also includes an opportunity for policy makers to advocate on behalf of critical educational legislation with Missouri lawmakers.

Outline of Proposed Contents

- Statement of Problem and Purpose of the Study
- Mandates of Safe Schools Act of 1996
- Unintended Results
- National Call to End Exclusionary Policies
- Gaps in Literature
- Design of Study and Theoretical Framework
- Site Description and Setting
- Research Participants
- Research Questions
- National, State, District Disciplinary Data
- Findings: Themes and Patterns in Language
- Suggestions for Further Research
- Conclusion
- References

“I’m Supposed to Be in School!”

Student Perceptions of Their Postsecondary Aspirations after Facing Long-Term Suspensions—A Case Study

Jennifer Gross
University Missouri--Columbia

Statement of Problem

- The Safe Schools Act of 1996 stipulates mandatory suspension/expulsion for disciplinary infractions
- Although research decries the use of exclusionary policies, Missouri and its districts continue to implement the Safe Schools Act
- Little has been researched concerning how exclusionary policies affect students



Purpose of the Study

- Allow educational leaders a glimpse into students' lives
 - How suspensions affect their academic identities
 - How suspensions affect their postsecondary aspirations
 - How familial and SES contribute to either support/hinder students' educational momentum while suspended
- By placing a value on student perceptions, educators can transform our schools, our policies, and our society.



The Safe Schools Act of 1996

- Expulsion of children for violent offenses—"zero tolerance"
 - Weapons, drugs, other behavior violations
- Mandated sharing of disciplinary records between school districts and judicial courts (Burgess, 1997; Kraetzer, 2002)
- Forbidden to physically enter a school or school property during suspension
- Other districts within stay may deny enrollment
- Schools have discretion whether to provide instruction for students while suspended ("Missouri's Safe Schools Act," 2013)



Unintended Results

- Racial and gender disproportionality (Caton, 2012; Kayama, Haight, Gibson, & Wilson, 2015; Monroe, 2009; Skiba and Rausch, 2006).
 - Higher rate of males suspended
 - Higher rate of Black student suspended
 - Higher rate of children from lower SES suspended
 - Higher rate of Hispanic/Latino males suspended (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002)
- These groups also at increased risk for low academic achievement and dropout rates (Lee, 2006)



Call to End Exclusionary Policies

- 1975, Children’s Defense Fund—Suspensions have multiple repercussions for students
- 2003, American Academy of Pediatrics—Discontinue exclusionary practices: mental health issues with children
- 2008, American Psychological Association—Discontinue exclusionary practices: depression in children
- 2008, American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force—Inefficacy of suspensions
- 2011, US Department of Education, Department of Justice, and Council of State Government— “The school-to-prison pipeline”

Gaps in Literature

- Howard (2003)—Studies should analyze how students perceive their place within the school
- Brown (2007)—Research should “focus on students’ experiences from their own perspectives” (p. 452)
- Gregory, Cornell, and Fan (2011)—Studies should concentrate on how students’ SES played into ability to overcome effects of suspension
- Gregory, Skiba, and Noguera (2010)—Research should illuminate how school structures and support contribute to student behavior and achievement

Design of Study and Theoretical Framework

- **Qualitative case study**
 - Extant literature
 - State and district policy
 - Interviews
 - Transcribed
 - Coded
 - **Advocacy/Participatory approach**
 - **Bounded**
 - **Critical theory**
 - Social justice and equality
 - Power structures
 - Democracy
- Triangulation → Validity of internal findings
- 

Site Description and Setting

- Midwestern city
- One public school district with two high schools
 - North River School District (pseudonym)
- 2015-2016 student enrollment and demographics for district:
 - 11,111 students PK-12
 - 3,500 high school students
 - 29.5% free/reduced lunch
 - 70.5% White
 - 10.7% Black
 - 9.3% Hispanic/Latino/Latina
 - 4.6% Multi-racial
 - 1.2% Pacific Islander

Research Participants

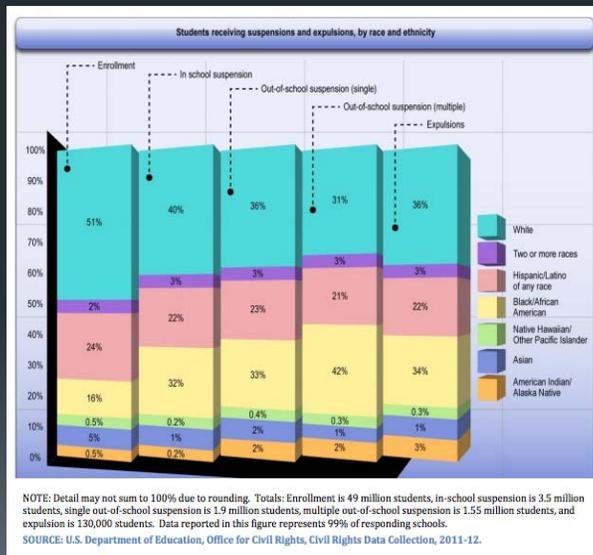
- 16 Former students of NRSD, between 2004-2015
- Long-term suspended between 10-180+ days
- Infractions resulted in legal misdemeanor offenses
- Purposeful sampling—Allows investigator to “discover, understand, and gain insight” into lives of participants (Merriam, 2009, p. 77).
- Diverse cross-section of students:

	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	Days Suspended	Violations
Total	M--12 F--4	W--8 B--4 H/L--3 MR--1	10 days--5 11-25 days--3 31-90--3 180/Expelled--5	Drugs/Alcohol--8 Fighting--3 Weapons--3(2 paintball guns; 1 tool) Other--2

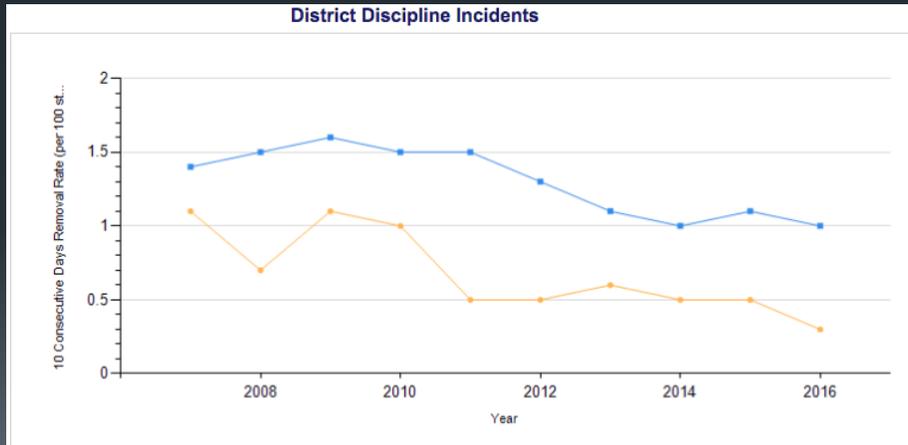
Research Questions

- What are North River School District's former students' perceptions of exclusionary disciplinary practices in relation to their postsecondary aspirations?
- How do students perceive or describe:
 - Their academic identity within the educational community?
 - Their academic identity before and after suspension/expulsions?
 - Journey toward attainment of postsecondary aspirations following suspensions/expulsions?
 - The influence their family or SES had on their ability to maintain focus on education during suspension/expulsion?

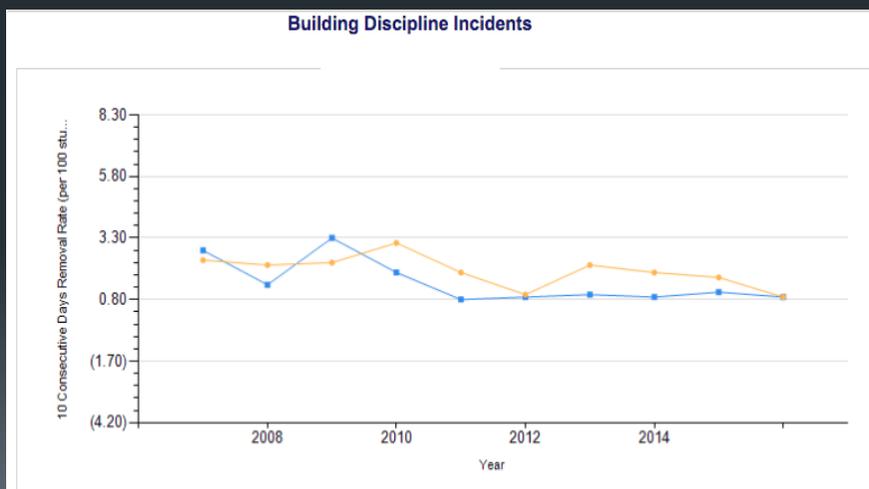
School Discipline: A National Snapshot—2011-2012



10 Days of Removal or More (per 100 students; 2007-2016) NRSD (--) and State (--) Comparison



10 Days of Removal or More (per 100 students; 2007-2016) NRSD's Two High Schools



Findings: Themes and Patterns in Language

- Four Themes
 - Academic Achievement and Maintaining Credits
 - Socioeconomic Status and Familial Support
 - Psychological Effects—Depression and Isolation
 - The Binary Language of Self-Perception
- Two Patterns in Language
 - Positive Outcomes from Suspension
 - Fear of Disciplinary Records and College Acceptance

Theme #1: Academic Achievement

Multiple suspensions lead to students being held back, having to recover lost credits, or to dropping out (Stewart, Stewart, & Simon, 2007).

- 8/16 participants—Suspensions directly influenced their postsecondary aspirations
 - Changing trajectory of academic track
 - Loss of credits
 - Disallowed to graduate with cohort
 - Disallowed to pursue postsecondary aspiration
- Suspensions lasting more than ten days or multiple suspensions increased postsecondary goals being altered
- Suspension lasting 30+ days senior year highly connected with dropout/dropped enrollment/inability to graduate with cohort



T1.1 Changing Academic Trajectory

- “Try being a fifteen-year-old and having to take an online math class. Algebra II online was ridiculous. It took almost a year to complete, so that’s where I really fell behind. Otherwise, I would have taken AP Calc and most likely AP Stats before I graduated.”
- Soccer scholarship taken away due to suspension: “So then, that’s why I went into cooking, instead of going to school and stuff.”



T1.2 Loss of Credits/Timing of Suspensions

- Courses requiring labs/classroom-centric courses— “I lost credit for all my classes that semester.”
- Timing of suspension: “I only had two more credits to graduate,” said one man, who was suspended for 180 days, two weeks before the start of his second and last semester. “I wasn’t able to take them through school, so I didn’t graduate.”
- Returning after 30 days: “Nah, it wasn’t even worth it. I was so far behind. I lost all my credits that semester.”
- Returning after 25 days: “I failed everything that semester. It took me two years to recover.”



T1.3 Disallowed to Pursue Postsecondary Aspirations

- Planned to go to Marines: “I had a recruiter. I knew where I was going, I knew what I was going to do within the Marine Corp, I knew a hundred percent my path. Um, in fact, the weekend after my expulsion, I was scheduled to take the ASVAB, but I never did, because... you know, one thing lead to another, and they wouldn't even let me at that point. I mean, I had a...I had a one-hundred-percent plan as to what I was gonna do once I left high school.”



Theme #2: Socioeconomic Status and Familial Support

A number of studies have shown a direct correlation between zero tolerance policies and dropout rates, particularly among African American males (Bock, Savner, & Tapscoff, 1998; Brooks, Schiraldi, & Zeidenberg, 2000; Arcia, 2006; Losen & Gillespie, 2012).

- Dramatic difference between family support for low and high SES
- Technology access plays major role in maintaining academic momentum



T2.1 Low and High SES

- Low SES—No parent at home during day
- High SES—Often one parent or extended family member home to monitor education

- Low SES—Sent to live with other family member for duration of suspension
- High SES—Allowed to intern at family businesses during suspension



T2.2 Technology and Academic Momentum

- Of four participants without computer/Wi-Fi access at home, three dropped out
- “I ain’t got not computer at home, so my momma be trying to email my teachers and all from her job.”
- “I went to the library and I said to the librarian to point me to something that could help me learn exponents. She said, ‘That’s math.’ I’m like, ‘I understand that, but I need to learn about exponents.’ She said, ‘You have to learn about them on your own?’ and I said, ‘I don’t really have a choice here. I have to do this if I want to finish high school.’



Theme #3: Psychological Effects— Depression and Isolation

Exclusion from school creates high levels of anxiety among children (Hyman & Perone, 1998). Further, children with the greatest need for services are often excluded from school (Brown, 2007; Lamont, 2013; Noguera, 2003).

- 9/16 participants reported feeling depressed during suspension
- 7/16 participants reported feeling isolated/ostracized during suspension
- Bitter irony of suspension
- Language of exclusion and isolation



T3.1 Depression

- “It was a very stressful time for me and my parents, um, a very emotional time ‘cause we didn’t know if I’d even be back in school. I was pretty depressed.”
- “It was really depressing ‘cause, um, I was at home all day. I couldn’t leave. I didn’t have anything to do. Um, I just sat there...and worried the whole time.”
- “I was really down. My mom supported me.”
- “I was just kind of spiraling there for a while. My life was out of control.”

T3.2 Isolation and Ostracization

- “I was forced to teach myself, which was extremely frustrating. I felt as if that was a part of my punishment.”
- “Twelve months of sitting in my pajamas at the dining room table in front of a computer, and there’s no amount of Vyvance that could have helped with my discipline or work effort.”
- “Wasn’t allowed to go to my troop’s weekly meetings. Literally anything that took place on school grounds.”
- “Then I had to go into school and go into a room by myself to take all my finals.”
- “I had to go take my finals at the district office.”
- “I was completely removed from the school system.”
- “I had no contact with, uh, my teachers, you know, like, as far as, like, their lectures or anything like that.”
- “I felt totally disconnected.”
- District: “They were trying to get me away from the other students before I could, you know, do some harm.”

T3.3 Bitter Irony of Suspension

- “I mean the whole reason for education is to educate kids. When you kick them out you’re saying, ‘It’s important to stay in school, so I’m going to kick you out to prove that to you.’ That doesn’t make any sense.”
- “The biggest punishment for me was that I was, like, didn’t get any education at all for those long periods.”
- “They always be telling us you gotta get your education if you want to make anything of your life, and then they kick me out. I don’t know. That never made sense to me. I kept sayin’ ‘I’m supposed to be in school!’”
- “There are students who may be suspended for long periods of time who may not be capable of teaching themselves or working on their own. There are many who come from terrible homes and they don’t have food to eat unless they go to school. I have friends and family members who didn’t survive being suspended because school... Well, we need our teachers for more than just learning, and sometimes technology is not the best resort.”



T3.4 Language of Exclusion and Isolation

- “I mean, if I was so bad they couldn’t have me around the other kids, then I was, you know, dangerous. I guess that was their way of trying to get me away from the other students before I could, you know, do some harm.”
- “I missed school, because I love school.”



Theme #4: The Binary Language of Self-Perception

Academic identity—The way in which young adults become aware of their place within an organized structure, such as education (Zirkel, 2002).

Students perceive their own worth and academic identity through the language adults use to describe them and their behavior (Bowditch, 1993; Brantlinger, 1991)

- 10/16—Used binary language to describe their academic identity and to describe how others perceived them
- Entwinement of academic identity and perceived behavioral attributes
- Perceived shift in how educators described academic identity, before and after suspensions
- From Bad to Good—the Importance of One Adult



T4.1 Binary Description of Academic Identity—Self and Others

- “I was always a bad kid.”
- I was a good kid. I’d never been in trouble. My teachers knew I was going to college.”
- “The people who didn’t really know the story they were just like, ‘Oh, he got kicked out. And it was for drugs and stuff.’ And they were just like, ‘Oh, well he’s a druggie,’ and I’m just like, ‘Mmm, yeah. You could get to know me, and I’m kind of not, so-’”



T4.2 Entwinement of Academic Identity and Perceived Behavioral Attributes

- “He was always a good kid. What could he have done? He had to have done something bad.”
- “They perceived me to be a troublemaker, until I got a 33 on the ACT. ‘Well, maybe he’s not a bad kid after all!’”
- Student wanted to change educators’ minds, and did so “by hitting the books. It was the one way I was going to be able to change their minds that I was a good kid.”



T4.3 Perceived Shift in Educators' Description of Suspended Students

- “A student that you thought was a great student and has great grades comes back from OSS—it makes you rethink it. Like to me, it felt like they had pegged me as a bad student.”
- Return to school, treated like he was a “thug. When I came back, I was told by administration that I would be watched, and that if I did anything wrong, they’d kick me out again.”



T4.4 From Bad to Good—the Importance of One Adult

- 87% of participants reported they had one adult to mentor them and usher them through transition
- Two participants who did not have a mentor dropped out
- Emotional support
- “We are not our mistakes”—Life Lessons



T4.4.1 Emotional Support

- “My coach made me believe I could do it. He told me, ‘As long as you’re doing the right thing, I’ll always stand behind you, 100%.’ He’s the reason I’m here.”
- “My coach was the only person and the first person who cared about me.”
- “When I was first suspended, I... my family was put in touch with the Juvenile Office. What’s weird is, as an angsty teenager, the Juvenile Office really... I never expected him to be so good about it all. He’s the ones who helped me out and made me feel like I wasn’t... He was just very cool.”



T4.4.2 “We Are Not Our Mistakes”—Life Lessons

- “She showed me that actions do have consequences, but they’re not always negative. That you can make the right actions to have the most positive consequences and turnouts that you possible could for yourself. And that’s, that’s much more rewarding than having a risk.”
- The difference between “what I had to do and what I could do.”



Pattern #1: Positive Outcomes from Suspension

- 50% of respondents described certain positive outcomes of having been suspended
 - Self-advocacy
 - Alternative Learning Opportunities
 - Reflection on Postsecondary Aspirations
 - Behavior Modification



P1.1 Self-Advocacy

- “I learned how to be independent on my studies.”
- “Learning to ask questions”
- “I had to learn how to contact my teachers and ask the right questions.”



P1.2 Alternative Learning Opportunities

- “I was kind of nice being able to sleep in and do my work whenever I needed to do it.”
- During suspension, able to work at a law firm a few days a week, which “taught me about the real world...that cannot be learned in the classroom.”
- “I took online classes. It was better than going to actual school. I could go about my day.”



P1.3 Reflection on Postsecondary Aspirations

- Her suspension and the mentorship her coach provided for her reinforced her desire to become a teacher, “so I could teach students like me who had the attitude and need someone who cares.”

P1.4 Behavior Modification

- Time to consider the choices she had been making, “like hanging out with a certain group of people.”
- Threat of further suspensions as being the inspiration to continue applying healthy, productive decisions: “Having to pee into a cup on demand was a damn good motivation to stay clean.”
- “Now when I look back on it, it did, it helped me realize, well, how to make better decisions, and how to use your instinct, your gut instinct, and you know, learn from mistakes. So, I can definitely say that I wish it didn't happen, but that again, like it did help me look at my situations in life a little differently.”
- Although he believed he had earned a measure of maturity by being suspended, “Ten days is kind of a long time, and that I probably would have learned my lesson with, you know, three or even one.”

Pattern #2: Fear of Disciplinary Record and College Acceptance

- Half of respondents stated they feared not being accepted into college due to suspensions
 - Fear Leading to College Choices
 - Origins of Fear



P2.1 Fear Leading to College Choices

- “It scared me for a while. I was scared that I wouldn’t be able to go to certain colleges.”
- “I was scared. I thought, ‘I don’t know if they’re going to want kids who get in trouble.’”
- “At first I had thought, ‘Well, is this going to carry over? Is this something that people will look at as something that will, um, deter me from getting into a college that I want to?’”
- “I wondered if I’d be able to do (go to college), ya know, because, um, colleges might be looking at your record.”
- “I was really worried it would change my scholarships.”



P2.2 Origins of Fear

- No defined answer
- Part of urban myth of school— “Your permanent record”
- Three participants were shocked to hear that disciplinary records rarely were disclosed



Suggestions for Further Research

- How do educational organizations and societal messages perpetuate the fear of revealing disciplinary records, and for what purpose?
- How do suspensions and expulsions affect the parents of suspended children, emotionally and financially?



Conclusion

This research stands on the shoulders of giants, such as Skiba, Skrla, Kincheloe & McLaren, Giroux, and Dewey.

- The participants in case study are an almost exact analogous subset of quantitative disciplinary trends.
- Understanding the emotional, visceral aspects of how postsecondary aspirations are affected by long-term suspension allows a crucial voice to be heard in discussions concerning disciplinary policies.
- If extant research casts a harsh light on the continued use of exclusionary, punitive disciplinary policies that broaden the achievement gap and inhibit postsecondary goals, why are they still in use?

Conclusion (continued)

- Exclusionary disciplinary consequences create a double-edged sword: social and educational exclusion.
- If Missouri and its school districts are to continue using exclusionary discipline strategies, we must provide more support for the children who are excluded from the classroom. Support should include:
 - Content-specific educators assigned to students
 - Technology support
 - Contact persons
 - Emotional
 - Family assistance
 - Outside resources:
 - Mental health
 - Juvenile offices
 - Community outreach programs
 - Mentorships

Conclusion (continued)

- Furthermore, it is hoped these perspectives will contribute to scholastic research as well as practice. By placing a value on student perceptions, educators can transform our schools and our society. It is imperative that this research and research like it will be used to provide educators and those who create educational policy a different perspective, one that includes the student voice. Perhaps then, when all voices are heard, can policy makers examine practices and policies and find them to be stultified and archaic.



Therefore...

- As districts around the state struggle to maintain academic rigor and standards, how have we created a more cumbersome achievement gap by summarily excluding students?
- In light of all the research on exclusionary policies, if a district does not include alternative education for those students banned from school, what is the district's culpability?
- What steps could a district take to create a procedure for maintaining communication with an excluded student? What would be the cost?
- If, indeed, the cost is too high, what is the cost for our students who must overcome the time spent out of the classroom?

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SECTION FIVE:
CONTRIBUTION TO SCHOLARSHIP

Target Journal

The target journal for publication is “Children and Youth Services Review: An International Multidisciplinary Review of the Welfare of Young People.” This journal is published by Elsevier Education.

Rationale for this Target

The rationale for choosing “Children and Youth Services Review” pertains to its commitment to providing critical scholarship on the subjects of children and their academic, social, and emotional well-being. Elsevier Education, the parent company, employs double-blind, peer review criteria to all manuscripts, as well as “Elsevier Publishing Campus,” an online site geared toward assisting authors on how to prepare and structure their papers.

Outline for Proposed Contents

As described in the “Author Information Pack”

Title Page: (included separately; title, author’s name and affiliation—University of Missouri-Columbia and address, and complete personal address and email)

Abstract: 100-125 words; purpose, principal results, major conclusions. References avoided.

Highlights: 3-5 bullet-pointed core findings that convey the essence of study.

Keywords: 3-6 keywords, avoiding general and plural terms

Blinded Manuscript:

1. Introduction
2. Theory
3. Materials and Methods
4. Results

5. Discussion
6. Acknowledgment (separate section)
7. References: APA, Sixth Edition

Plan for Submission

Who: Jennifer Gross

When: Upon defense of this dissertation

How: Via the online submission guidelines

Submission-Ready Journal Article

Abstract:

For decades, researchers have shed light on the injurious effect exclusionary discipline policies have on academic achievement and postsecondary aspirations. By providing personal narratives, these stories can enhance our understandings of how regressive policies transform students' lives. This case study is based on interviews with 16 former students of one Midwestern school district, all of whom received long-term suspensions while in high school. Findings include the parallels between the district and national trends, as well as the binary language students use to associate student behavior and perceived academic identity. The findings suggest that fear of the one's disciplinary record being revealed plays a cumbersome role in students' academic journeys.

Highlights:

- Socioeconomic factors and family circumstances often dictate subsequent academic success
- Lack of access to technology greatly inhibits student achievement

- Psychological elements such as isolation and depression play a crucial part in determining student success while excluded from school
- A majority of students fear that their disciplinary records will inhibit their ability to achieve their postsecondary aspirations.
- For some students, being suspended provided positive motivation to change behaviors and to become more self-reliant

Keywords:

- Exclusionary discipline policies
- Academic achievement
- Postsecondary aspirations
- Socioeconomic status
- Psychological effects

1. Introduction

The Gun Free School Act of 1984 ushered in a “get tough” stance on student discipline, one that mandated 180-day suspensions (one school year) for weapons violations and tied school funding with compliance (Fabelo, et al., 2011; McNeal & Dunbar, 2010; Mongan & Walker, 2005; Skiba, 2000). States clambered to revamp their policies to include the new zero tolerance language (Fabelo et al, 2011), including Missouri, which issued its own Safe Schools Act (SSA) of 1996 (Burgess, 1997; “Missouri Center for Safe Schools,” 2005). The act included disciplinary actions for weapons, drugs, and additional safety violations, in keeping with other states (Skiba & Rausch, 2006; Verdugo, 2002). Consequently, the use of suspensions and expulsions exploded (Losen & Gillespie, 2012), often for varied behavior infractions, most of

which did not pose a safety issue (Insley, 2001; Kraetzer, 2002; Raffaele Mendez, 2003; Skiba & Rausch, 2006).

The Safe Schools Act, both federal and state, demands that suspended or expelled children are forbidden to physically enter a school or school grounds (“Missouri’s Safe Schools Act,” 2013) and that other public schools within the state can deny enrollment to those children (Kraetzer, 2002). Likewise, if a child has been pulled from the classroom for a long-term suspension of more than ten school days and less than 180, the school has discretion in the amount of make-up work it will provide, but is not required to provide arranged instruction (“Missouri’s Safe School’s Act,” 2013). The burden falls on the students and their families to ensure uninterrupted continuation of their education (Caton, 2012). These situations are problematic, especially when the United States Department of Education (2015) has stated its goal is to “ensure that all young people are prepared to succeed in college and careers, that historically underserved populations are protected, and that educators have the resources they need to succeed” (p. 1).

Although unintended in its original concept of providing a safe education for all students, racial and gender disproportionality in the metering out of exclusionary discipline has become the outcome of zero tolerance policies (Caton, 2012; Kayama, Haight, Gibson, & Wilson, 2015; Monroe, 2009; Skiba and Rausch, 2006). Educational research consistently highlights the fact that zero tolerance policies affect males at a higher rate than females, and Black males at a higher rate than White males (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). Furthermore, children of lower socioeconomic status (SES) and Hispanic/Latino males are similarly affected (Skrla, Scheurich, Garcia, & Nolly, 2004).

Despite the incredible body of quantitative research on the relationship between long-term suspensions and the deleterious affect on student achievement and postsecondary aspirations, little has been researched concerning how these exclusionary policies impact the students' perceptions of their postsecondary lives. By conducting research into how respondents believed suspensions influenced their academic identities and goals, this investigation sought to provide insight into the lives of those most intimately affected. In this article, the study considered the responses from 16 participants from a school district in a Midwest town, all of whom had incurred two or more weeks of suspension while in high school. This qualitative, heuristic case study, while acknowledging the oftentimes poor behavioral choices made by the subjects, revealed the life changing, emotional impact suspensions had on each of the participants.

2. Exclusionary discipline policies and postsecondary aspiration

The issue of exclusionary policies and their effect on students first came to light in the landmark study by the Children's Defense Fund (1975), which reported that one in every 13 middle- and high-school students had been suspended. This pivotal study shaped an entire branch of educational research (Cohen, 2013). In 1982, Wu, Pink, Crain, and Moles conducted seminal research on student misbehavior and suspension rates, teacher judgment and attitudes, school structures, and racial bias. Their groundbreaking research concluded that suspensions rates are a product of the school structure. Since the time of this, a number of studies have built upon their foundational research (Raffaele Mendez, et al., 2002; Skiba, et al., 2002).

In more recent years, the American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force (2008) ushered in yet another avenue for research, the inefficacy of suspensions (Boccanfuso & Kuhlfield, 2011; Delaware House of Representatives, 2010), as well as the

appropriate level of discipline for adolescent behavior (Losen & Martinez, 2013). Together, these critical studies have introduced the discussion of how exclusionary policies create many more burdens for the suspended children than they do to ameliorate discipline issues within schools. These burdens include restricting academic achievement, particularly for students of certain races and lower SES, increasing psychological barriers, and fostering a sense of dichotomized language to describe one's academic worth.

2.1 Academic achievement

Students who have been removed from school increase their odds of dropping out (Fabelo, et al., 2011; Raffaele Mendez, 2003; Wehlage & Rutter, 1985). In a joint announcement between the U. S. Department of Education and the U. S. Department of Justice (2011), Secretary Duncan and Attorney General Holder urged policy makers to eliminate exclusionary practices, asserting that multiple suspensions lead to students being held back, having to recover lost credits, or to dropping out (Stewart, Stewart, & Simon, 2007). Furthermore, one study suggested the odds of enrolling in post-secondary education decreased by 12% with each suspension (Balfanz & Fox, 2015).

Although the overwhelming evidence illuminates how negative, punitive measures affect student perceptions and outcomes (Noguera, 2005; Skiba, et al., 2002; Wu, et al., 1982), contrasting research has shown the relationship between positive, progressive interactions and student achievement (Gregory, et al., 2010). Conversely, those whose behavior contributed to their exclusions felt alienated by their teachers and peers (Brantlinger, 1991; Gregory, et al., 2010). Further, Howard (2003) pointed to the lack of research on how students perceive their place within the school, in relation to their connections with staff members.

2.2 Race and socioeconomic status

The corpus of literature on the efficacy or inefficacy of disciplinary policies dovetails with those studies linking lower academic achievement and students who have been kicked out of school. A significant amount of studies have shown a connection between Black males who have incurred suspensions and lower achievement tests (Aud, et al, 2010; Gregory, 2010; Wallace, et al., 2008). Many of these studies continue the progression of scholastic linearity and connect zero tolerance policies with dropout rates (Arcia, 2006; Balfanz & Fox, 2015; “Keeping Youth Connected,” 2011; Losen & Gillespie, 2012), particularly among African American males (Bock, Savner, & Tapscott, 1998; Brooks, Schiraldi, & Zeidenberg, 2000). Gregory, Cornell, and Fan (2011) wrote that studies should concentrate on how the student’s socioeconomic status played into his or her ability to overcome the harmful effects of suspension. The American Psychological Associations Zero Tolerance Task Force (2008) noted that little research has been conducted on how exclusionary policies impact families and communities.

2.3 Psychological effects

Aside from the challenge of overcoming loss of classroom time (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010), exclusionary practices also take a toll on the child’s emotional health (American Psychological Association, 2008; Hanson, 2005; Hyman & Perone, 1998). These studies indicated that exclusion from school creates high levels of anxiety among children (Hyman & Perone, 1998). Furthermore, children with the greatest need for services only offered to them in schools, such as counseling, are often excluded from school (Brown, 2007; Lamont, 2013; Noguera, 2003). The American Academy of Pediatrics (2003) urged its members to offer increased care to those patients who have been suspended from school.

2.4 Associated language patterns and fears

Students also perceive their own worth through the language adults use to describe them and their behavior (Bowditch, 1993; Brantlinger, 1991; Kayama, Haight, Gibson, & Wilson, 2015). The topic of the language associated with behavior has been researched (Bowditch, 1993; Brooks, et al., 2000; Kayama, et al., 2015). In a number of studies, the term “troublemaker” was shown to be associated with exclusionary strategies (Brantlinger, 1991; Brooks, et al., 2000). Stewart, Stewart, and Simons (2007) reported on the direct connection between students’ aspirations for post-secondary education and their perceptions of being a good student, based on their bond with teachers and school. Conversely, those whose behavior contributed to their exclusions felt alienated by their teachers and peers (Brantlinger, 1991; Gregory, et al., 2010). Further, Howard (2003) pointed to the lack of research on how students perceive their place within the school, in relation to their connections with staff members.

2.5 A critical theory approach

Although the issues concerning exclusionary policies have been well documented in court cases and research, these punitive strategies continue to have a stronghold on schools (Fabelo, et al., 2011), increasing achievement gaps, exacerbating social injustice, impinging on children’s basic rights, and derailing the journey toward a more educated citizenry (Dewey, 1916; Giroux, 2003). Social justice, equality, and democracy, then, become the pillars of critical theory (Dant, 2003; Freeman & Vasconcelos, 2010; Peca, 2000). DeLeon and Ross (2010) and McKernan (2013) wrote of the awesome responsibility educators have to provide a learning experience for all children, while also fighting against social inequities. Furthermore, Leistyna (2009) criticized No Child Left Behind (2008) and zero tolerance policies for their power to

further stratify our nation's youth through the saturation of standardized tests and exclusionary discipline strategies.

3. Data and methods

3.1 Data collection

This heuristic case study drew on qualitative research methods, particularly interviews, with sixteen participants who had received two or more weeks of suspension while enrolled in the pseudonymously named North River School District (NRS D). This district is situated in the Midwest, and has two high schools. All of the respondents are former students of the two high schools, and none had been suspended for infractions that may have been deemed of a felonious nature. The participants were recruited by word of mouth, through social media, and through referrals. Interviews were conducted in participants' homes, in public libraries, and in offices. Interviews lasted between 20 and 30 minutes long, and none of the participants were compensated. Each participant was screened for the appropriateness of their particular story and the boundaries of the research. Every attempt was made to provide diversity within the number of days suspended, as well as gender and ethnicity of the respondents. Further, an equitable number of participants from each high school was sought and interviewed.

I began each recorded interview by reading over the informed consent. Interviews then began with scripted, open-ended questions, allowing the respondents to lead the conversation, probing for clarification and more information when necessary. Each participant was asked the same series of questions; however, due to their responses, some questions were modified.

3.2 Sample description

According to the 2015 Business Services Department findings on the district's demographics, the North River School District reported that the 2015-2016 student enrollment

stood at 11,111, which continues a trend toward a steady increase over the last 18 years. Further, the percentage of children qualifying for free or reduced lunches has grown, reaching 29.5% in 2014. Ethnic diversity also continues to increase, with 29.5% of the student enrollment made up of members of minority groups. NRSD's diversity of enrollment profile can be quantified accordingly—70.5% White; 10.7% African American; 9.3% Hispanic; 3.2% Asian; .5% Native American; 1.2% Pacific Islander; 4.6% Multi-racial.

The research participants for this study included twelve males and four females, as shown in Table 1. Of the sixteen participants, an equal disbursement attended the district's two high schools. In terms of ethnic demographics, four reported to be Black, eight reported to be White, three reported to be Hispanic, and one reported to be multi-racial. All participants had been suspended while students of the NRSD, and all had incurred their disciplinary consequences within ten years of each other, all under the same Board-approved disciplinary policy.

Participants were chosen for their common narratives, which included long-term suspensions or expulsions. Furthermore, participants were chosen based on the fact that the behaviors, which resulted in school discipline, were considered legal misdemeanors.

Finally, in order to validate all findings, triangulation was employed (Creswell, 2009). The documents used in triangulation included student interview transcripts, existing research, and district policy documents. These documents were further analyzed for consistency across data points, as well as how their content compared to the research questions (Howard, 2003; Merriam, 2009).

Table 2

Research Participant Disciplinary Information

Participant demographic and cohort when suspended	Reason for suspension	Length of suspension	Postsecondary goal	Postsecondary attainment
1—Male, White, senior	Fight in school; no charges	Expulsion	Military	Dropped out; work
2—Male, Hispanic, senior	Weapons violation; paintball gun in car	10 days	College	College
3—Male, White, senior	Drugs; misdemeanor charge	180 days	College and college athletics	Withdrew based on district recommendation; college
4—Female, Black, freshman	Classroom disruption; threat to teacher (later dropped)	25 days	Military	College
5—Male, White, senior	Drugs; misdemeanor charge	180 days	College and college athletics	Withdrew based on district recommendation; work
6—Male, multi-racial, sophomore	Drugs; misdemeanor charge	190 days	College	Withdrew based on district recommendation; re-enrolled; college
7—Male, White, junior	Alcohol; under the influence	10 days	College	College
8—Male, Black, sophomore	Drugs; under the influence (2)	30 days	Military	Dropout; work
		180 days	College	College

9—Male, Hispanic, freshman	Fight on school property; misdemeanor charge			
10—Female, White, freshman	Drugs; under the influence	10 days	College	College
11—Male, White, junior	Weapons violation; dissembled paint gun in car	23 days	College	Work, then college
12—Male, White, sophomore	Drugs; under the influence	10 days	College	College
13—Female, Black, freshman	Fight in school; misdemeanor charge	30 days	College	College
14—Male, Hispanic, sophomore	Vandalism; misdemeanor charge	10 days	College	College
15—Female, White, senior	Weapons violation; carpet knife (belonging to uncle)	10 days	College	College
16—Male, Black, sophomore	Drugs; misdemeanor charge	90 days	College	Dropout; work

3.3 Data analysis

Interviews were audio recorded and field notes were taken during interviews, as well as after each interview. Every participant was given a pseudonym and all identifying descriptors were changed to ensure privacy and confidentiality. The interviews were then transcribed, and those transcriptions were read multiple times over the course of three weeks. Focus was placed

on academic identity, postsecondary goals and postsecondary attainment, social, emotional and scholastic costs of suspensions, the role families and SES played a part in the process, and associated language common to participants' narratives.

Participants described sixteen different incidents that lead to disciplinary consequences. Each interview was coded, first using the open coding approach, which allowed for themes to emerge that correlated with the original research questions. Then, transcriptions were coded using the axial method, which allowed for patterns in language to inductively emerge, such as the words they used to describe themselves, to the fears they shared concerning their postsecondary aspiration. These narratives served to reflect each respondent's perception of her or his particular situation and the challenges his or her families personally encountered. Former students' first-hand accounts illuminate the human, emotional toll suspensions have on children, well beyond the stark context of quantitative data sets.

4. Results

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to discover North Ridge School District's former students' perceptions of how exclusionary policies affected their postsecondary aspirations; how these students perceived their academic identities before and after their exclusionary discipline consequences; how these students described the influences their familial and SES circumstances had on their ability to maintain their educational momentum while out of school; and how students assessed the support they received from educators during their suspensions, as well as when they returned to school. In order to execute this study, sixteen participants were interviewed over the course of two weeks, and their narratives were analyzed. Through this analysis, four themes emerged that directly related to the research questions and to extant literature, and two patterns of language appeared. A substantial portion of the respondents

spoke to the direct affect suspensions had on their academic achievement, particularly the interaction between being excluded from the school setting and the loss of credits. As discussed in Section 2.1, this cessation of ongoing education often resulted in fractured or deferred postsecondary goals. Many participants commented on the support they received from their families, as well as the stress their suspensions placed on their parents. Others revealed how their socioeconomic status played into their ability to maintain their education while away from school, which connected to the discussion in Section 2.2. Often, participants spoke to how their suspensions affected their emotional well being during their exclusion from the school setting, and how the feelings of aimlessness and isolation resided within them, which directly links to the research cited in Section 2.3. Finally, in accordance with Section 2.4, a portion of these former students used binary terms to describe how they and others perceived them, often utilizing negatively associated descriptions to adjust for their disciplinary events.

In terms of patterns in language and thoughts that inductively appeared through this study, the examination of the participants' narratives revealed surprising results. One pattern was the positive outcomes respondents gained from their suspensions. A second pattern was the common expression shared among the participants of the fear they had over not being accepted into college based on their disciplinary record.

4.1 Academic achievement and maintaining credits

Of the sixteen, eight participants stated that their suspensions had a direct influence on their education. These effects ranged from changing the trajectory of their academic progress, to loss of credit, to disallowing them to graduate with their cohort. Additionally, as is shown in Section 2.1, students whose suspensions lasted more than ten days or who had multiple suspensions were more likely to have their postsecondary aspirations altered, if, indeed, they

were able to graduate. For some, the preponderance of multiple challenges were simply too difficult to overcome.

For the eight who reported their academic achievement was affected, the most often cited culprit was time away from classes, particularly in hands-on course that required in-person learning experiences. One participant stated that he had to take a failing grade in his Chemistry class because he was unable to complete the required laboratory work. Three other participants reported that the timing of their suspensions, near the end of the semester, impacted their progress. A respondent said that the length of his suspension frustrated him because he was unable to complete his final projects and, as a result, “I lost credit for all my classes that semester.”

For the participants who were given long-term suspensions of more than 90 days during their senior year, the inability to complete their education placed tremendous stress on their postsecondary goals, as well as on their families. Of the contributors who were suspended during their senior year for more than 90 days, all suggested that the length and timing of their suspensions made it impossible for them to finish their last credits in order to graduate, forcing them to find other methods of procuring their graduation requirements. “I only had two more credits to graduate,” said one man, who was suspended for 180 days, two weeks before the start of his second and last semester. “I wasn’t able to take them through school, so I didn’t graduate.” Two other participants whose suspension followed very similar paths reported that their families were forced to provide them with alternative methods of obtaining an education, and even so, they were not allowed to graduate with their cohorts.

Furthermore, suspensions that were incurred close to a student’s graduation date had the most detrimental influence on postsecondary aspirations. Aaron, a man who had held the goal of

entering the military throughout his entire high school career, was forced to abruptly change his postsecondary aspirations when his suspension disallowed him to complete his vocational education nor to graduate with his cohort:

Aaron: I had a recruiter. I knew where I was going, I knew what I was going to do within the Marine Corp, I knew a hundred percent my path. Um, in fact, the weekend after my expulsion, I was scheduled to take the ASVAB, but I never did, because... you know, one thing lead to another, and they wouldn't even let me at that point. I mean, I had a... I had a one-hundred-percent plan as to what I was gonna do once I left high school.

For the participants who were suspended earlier in their high school careers, a similar story emerges. One man stated that he had been on track to take AP Calculus during his junior year, but due to his year away from the classroom, when he was forced to take online classes to maintain his credits, his progress in math became stymied. "Try being a fifteen-year-old and having to take an online math class. Algebra II online was ridiculous. It took almost a year to complete, so that's where I really fell behind. Otherwise, I would have taken AP Calc and most likely AP Stats before I graduated." Others, who said their time away from the rigor and the immediacy of face-to-face education, shared this sentiment. Two participants who had been suspended for at least 25 days said trying to work at home in order to maintain their educational momentum was nearly impossible. Returning after their extended suspensions proved to be a fruitless endeavor. "Nah, it wasn't even worth it. I was so far behind. I lost all my credits that semester." Danielle, a college senior who had been suspended for 25 days during her freshman year, shook her head, and stated, "I failed everything that semester. It took me two years to recover." As discussed in Section 2.1, the lack of academic progress can dramatically affect

students' postsecondary goals. Of the sixteen participants in this case study, almost one third reported that their suspensions were direct contributors to altering, if not destroying, their postsecondary aspirations.

4.2 Socioeconomic status and familial support

The most powerful indicator in determining a child's academic success is socioeconomic status. As discussed in Section 2.2, a plethora of studies have linked SES, suspensions, and the nation's dropout rate. Conversely, there is a positive correlation between children who come from higher SES backgrounds and their ability to weather time away from school. Respondents in this study confirmed those findings, often reporting that the single most important factor in their success was the support they received from their families. They cited their families' ability to furnish them with technology and to afford online education as being factors that allowed them to stay current with their education. Those participants who rebounded most quickly from their exclusions had parents who were continuously engaged in their schoolwork and the need to progress. Furthermore, students whose extended families helped to support them were also at a greater advantage. "My uncles are both lawyers, so during my suspension, I was able to go to their office and do some intern-like work. They also made me do my homework in one of their offices." The contrast to this scenario is the participant who was sent away from his home to live with an aunt in the city who worked two jobs and who was unable to monitor his activities during most of the day. Therefore, his days were spent "walking all over the city, doing what I do."

For the former students whose families were not able to afford the neither financial support nor time necessary to help their children remain on track, the loss of credits and the number of those who dropped out greatly increased. Notably, of the four participants who shared

that they were not able to have a computer at home, three dropped out of school. The need for equal access to technology has begun to widen the achievement gap, particularly with students who face a dislocation between themselves and school. Jake, a Black young man who works to support his mother and two younger siblings, remembered trying to communicate with teachers during his extended suspension without the benefits of having either a computer or Wi-Fi access in his home: “I ain’t got no computer at home, so my momma be trying to email my teachers and all from her job.” Other participants recalled the challenges of staying on track in their virtual classes when the only technology available to them was a computer at the public library. Aaron shared a story of trying to study for the high school equivalency exam after his suspension, without having a computer in his home:

Aaron: I went to the library and I said to the librarian to point me to something that could help me learn exponents. She said, “That’s math.” I’m like, “I understand that, but I need to learn about exponents.” She said, “You have to learn about them on your own?” and I said, “I don’t really have a choice here. I have to do this if I want to finish high school.”

4.3 Psychological effects—Depression and isolation

Studies have shown the deleterious affect isolation has on children, as discussed in Section 2.3. The participants in this study reinforced those studies by recounting their own struggles with overcoming emotional challenges while excluded from school. Chief among the descriptions was the common theme of self-reported depression. Neal, a gregarious young man who is transferring from community college to a four-year university five years after his high school graduation, stated that his time out of school impacted him and his family: “It was a very stressful time for me and my parents, um, a very emotional time ‘cause we didn’t know if I’d even be back in school. I was pretty depressed.” A similar story came from the quiet, earnest

Owen, who said, “It was really depressing ‘cause, um, I was at home all day. I couldn’t leave. I didn’t have anything to do. Um, I just sat there...and worried the whole time.” The feelings of being down or depressed while out of suspension accounted for more than half of the participants, and the likelihood of depression becoming a factor rose with the length of the suspension.

The sense of being isolated and ostracized was the second most reported hardship for the participants. Isolation manifested itself in emotional and academic challenges, such as having to learn difficult skills without the collaboration of peers or the guidance of a teacher. Grant, who was suspended for 190 days, described the year he spent away from school as “twelve months of sitting in my pajamas at the dining room table in front of a computer, and there’s no amount of Vyvanse that could have helped with my discipline or work effort.” Other participants mirrored this sentiment, recalling the difficulties of having to seek out resources that would have been availed to them had they been in the classroom. Miranda, who had been suspended during her freshman year, said, “I was forced to teach myself, which was extremely frustrating. I felt as if that was a part of my punishment.” Quinn recalled that at the time of her suspension, when she was struggling with maintaining her grades, her thoughts flew to those who didn’t have the self-discipline and motivation that she had:

There are students who may be suspended for long periods of time who may not be capable of teaching themselves or working on their own. There are many who come from terrible homes and they don’t have food to eat unless they go to school. I have friends and family members who didn’t survive being suspended because school... Well, we need our teachers for more than just learning, and sometimes technology is not the best resort.

Indeed, four respondents spoke of the irony of removing students from the educational setting in order to prove how important one's education was. Lou, a highly intelligent young man who rose above his station in life to become a dental student, stated, "I mean the whole reason for education is to educate kids. When you kick them out you're saying, 'It's important to stay in school, so I'm going to kick you out to prove that to you.' That doesn't make any sense."

Throughout the course of the interviews, words such as "removed," "disconnected," and "by myself" infused the conversations. Participants described the shame they felt at having to be separated from other students in order to take mandated examinations. "I mean, if I was so bad they couldn't have me around the other kids," Ronald shared, "then I was, you know, dangerous. I guess that was their way of trying to get me away from the other students before I could, you know, do some harm."

4.4 The binary language of self-perception

The sense that one was perceived as "dangerous," as reported by the above participant, informs the last theme, the binary language that the participants used to describe their academic identities before and after incurring suspensions. Ten out of the sixteen participants described their own perception of who they were or others' perceptions of them in terms of dichotomous descriptors. The connection between the dualistic nature of self-perception was highlighted in Section 2.4. Moreover, as shown in this study, often participants connected that "good kids" go to college and "bad kids" don't. Participants described their academic identities as being entwined with their behavior—"I was always a bad kid," or "I was a good kid. I'd never been in trouble. My teachers knew I was going to college." Others spoke of the perceived shift in how their teachers and peers responded to them: "He was always a good kid. What could he have done? He had to have done something bad."

This sense that children turn from good to bad with one disciplinary infraction closely aligned with how Miranda characterized her teachers' responses to her out-of-school suspension: "A student that you thought was a great student and has great grades comes back from OSS—it makes you rethink it. Like to me, it felt like they had pegged me as a bad student." Further, suspensions impacted the way these students felt about their own place within the educational setting. Lou shared that when he returned to school after having been suspended the entirety of his freshman year, adults in the building treated him as if he were a "thug. When I came back, I was told by administration that I would be watched, and that if I did anything wrong, they'd kick me out again." Lou said he spent the rest of his high school career trying to convince people that he was not the thug they initially believed him to be, and he did so "by hitting the books. It was the one way I was going to be able to change their minds that I was a good kid." Indeed, others reported that past indiscretions could only be swept away through exemplary academic achievements. Grant laughed as he said, "They perceived me to be a troublemaker, until I got a 33 on the ACT. 'Well, maybe he's not a bad kid after all!'"

For others, the metamorphosis between who they perceived themselves to be into the person they could be started with one person, be that a coach, a teacher, or another mentor. These integral mentors helped students realize their potential and allowed them to regain the ownership of "the good kid" designation. In fact, 87% of the participants reported that they had one person who helped to usher them through the difficulties of the suspension and to mentor them. The only two subjects who did not report having a mentor relationship were two of the three who ended up dropping out of school.

The importance of a mentor cannot be understated, especially for children who have been excluded from school for long periods. These mentors provide not only academic support, but

invaluable emotional support. For Grant, that person was his Juvenile Officer, with whom he worked throughout his detention: “When I was first suspended, I... my family was put in touch with the Juvenile Office. What’s weird is, as an angsty teenager, the Juvenile Office really... I never expected him to be so good about it all. He’s the ones who helped me out and made me feel like I wasn’t... He was just very cool.” Ronald, who had been removed from school for having vandalized part of the building, recalls the importance of his mentor in fostering in him a new concept of himself. “She showed me that actions do have consequences, but they’re not always negative. That you can make the right actions to have the most positive consequences and turnouts that you possible could for yourself. And that’s, that’s much more rewarding than having a risk.” Quinn, a superlative student who made terrible social decisions, remembers the embarrassment of being removed from her college-preparatory program based on her disciplinary problems. Her teacher from the program continuously checked in with her, and taught her the difference between “what I had to do and what I could do.” Indeed, one participant credits his high school coach for his academic successes: “My coach made me believe I could do it. He told me, ‘As long as you’re doing the right thing, I’ll always stand behind you, 100%.’ He’s the reason I’m here.”

4.5 Positive outcomes from suspension

The vast majority of scholastic research into exclusionary practices points to the destructive power they have over academic achievement and postsecondary goals. However, half of the subjects in this study reported that there were certain positive elements of their suspensions. Notably, participants suggested that by being on their own they had to learn how to self-advocate and to be disciplined, independent students. For others, having to continue their education in an alternative setting taught them that they enjoyed learning at their own pace and

on their own schedule: “I was kind of nice being able to sleep in and do my work whenever I needed to do it.” Likewise, by not being restricted to the traditional school schedule, Charlie was able to work at a law firm a few days a week, which “taught me about the real world...that cannot be learned in the classroom.” Additionally, Danielle reported that her suspension and the mentorship her coach provided for her reinforced her desire to become a teacher, “so I could teach students like me who had the attitude and need someone who cares.”

A different positive outcome centered around how their disciplinary consequences prompted the students to reflect on their behavior. Miranda stated that her suspension afforded her a time to consider the choices she had been making, “like hanging out with a certain group of people.” Owen, Neal and Grant all agreed that the district’s close monitoring of their behavior after the suspensions supplied them with a certain amount of motivation to continue making positive behavioral choices. Grant described the threat of further suspensions as being the inspiration to continue applying healthy, productive decisions: “Having to pee into a cup on demand was a damn good motivation to stay clean.”

That being said, most of the participants agreed that the lessons they learned could have been gained in fewer days or by eschewing out-of-school suspension for in-school suspension. Ronald, who stood out from the other participants in his agreement with the disciplinary policy that defined the length of his suspension, suggested that although he believed he had earned a measure of maturity by being suspended, “Ten days is kind of a long time, and that I probably would have learned my lesson with, you know, three or even one.”

4.6 Fear of disciplinary record and college acceptance

Perhaps the most troubling element to emerge from the study was the number of times these former students shared their fears about not being able to move forward due to their

disciplinary records. Owen seemed particularly bothered by the fear that consumed him during and after his suspension. He described having spent hours sitting alone in his house, worried that he would not be able to attend college. In fact, his decision to apply to a small college was based on his belief that he'd have a better chance of being accepted, that big colleges probably required student disciplinary records. Brent and Miranda, too, shared a similar fear, recalling, "I was scared that I wouldn't be able to go to certain colleges." For Sammie, who had signed to play college tennis just two weeks before she was suspended from school, her trepidation was that she'd lose her scholarship, even though her suspension centered on a carpet-cutting tool that was left in the car, a car that was owned by her uncle who was a carpet salesman.

When asked how these participants had come to fear the reprisal of having a tarnished disciplinary record, none had a definitive, specific reason for believing such a misconception. Most believed it was something that was simply expected and understood. Three of the participants were shocked to learn that student disciplinary files were rarely revealed, which begs the question: How is the fear of a student's disciplinary record being used to block postsecondary aspirations perpetuated? This, then, is an area for further research.

5. Discussion and conclusion

By examining the narratives of those most intimately affected by long-term suspensions within one Midwestern school district, a richer, more visceral picture emerges beyond the quantitative data. The stories provided by the participants offer a ground-level vision into the psychological affect these exclusionary practices have on young people; how these disciplinary policies put hurdles in front of students, which are often insurmountable; how a child's family's circumstances have the utmost impact on his or her ability to maintain educational momentum; and how the length of the suspension is one of the greatest indicator of whether a child can

recover from the time away from school. Moreover, this study highlighted how students' experiences with exclusionary discipline policies molded their academic journeys well beyond the four years of high school.

As mentioned in Section 4.6, further research would provide interesting data on how educational organizations and society perpetuate the fear of revealing disciplinary records, and for what purpose. Further, additional research into how suspensions personally affect the parents of suspended children could provide further context into the role SES plays on academic identity and postsecondary aspirations.

In addition, just as the research in this study gave rise to the participants' belief that out-of-school suspensions were not as effective as in-school suspensions, future research might delve more closely into the thoughts students can provide concerning appropriate, affective discipline. Moreover, the notion of doing away with disciplinary measures that are punitive in nature and incorporating discipline that addresses behaviors and transforms lives must be addressed. Therefore, the discordant nature between educational policy makers' verisimilitude of being tough on discipline and their more essential mission to educate each child, every day must be addressed.

Despite extant research into the debilitating affect suspensions have on student achievement, postsecondary aspirations, and the psychological well being of children, these policies continue to exist. On the broader question of the original research question, the study found that the North River School District and the sixteen former students who incurred disciplinary consequences while enrolled in high school are an almost analogous subset of national disciplinary trends. The question, then, must be asked: If scholastic research casts a harsh light on the continued use of exclusionary measures, especially as those policies affect

student achievement and postsecondary aspirations, why do districts like NRSD persist in the outdated and detrimental practice associated with them?

Wholesale changes in policies do not occur quickly. Changes must be deliberate and purposeful. However, until exclusionary discipline policies are eradicated, districts must do more to assist their students while excluded from the educational venue. If alternative education is not available, districts must consider providing support for students in terms of technology, mental health awareness, mentorship, and assistance to families. School districts would also benefit from creating relationships with outside resources in order to support suspended students, such as mental health workers, juvenile offices, community outreach programs, and possible internship work. By supporting students who are removed from school settings, districts increase college and career readiness indicators like staying on track for graduation, continuing in prescribed academic tracks, increasing academic achievement, and creating a culture that values, through word and deed, the educational opportunities for all children.

Furthermore, it is hoped these perspectives will contribute to scholastic research as well as practice. By placing a value on student perceptions, educators can transform our schools and our society. It is imperative that this research and research like it will be used to provide educators and those who create educational policy a different perspective, one that includes the student voice. Perhaps then, when all voices are heard, can policy makers examine practices and policies and find them to be stultified and archaic.

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SECTION SIX:
SCHOLARLY PRACTITIONER REFLECTION

Introduction

In December of 2012, my life as a teacher and a mother came to an unenviable crossroad when I had to reconcile my position as a policy-upholding employee in a school district that was about to suspend my son for 180 days or more. Initially, I was unable to advocate for my son because of my deep loyalty to my district. In this way, I failed him. However, what I once believed as a failure in my motherhood became, instead, a springboard for the formalization of my own leadership; for the need to understand organizations; for the desire to analyze policies; and for the recognition of the synergistic effect the preceding three have on the context and content of learning.

As in all great stories, another incredible plot twist occurred, when, in the summer of 2015, my school district called me to take on the role of Administrative Intern at the high school where I had taught for ten years. I accepted the position with no small amount of trepidation—How would I be able to carry out the district’s disciplinary policies and potentially suspend children when those types of exclusionary consequences directly conflicted with my own philosophy and with all that I had learned? That was the first question I asked before accepting the position. Frankly, it’s a question I ask every day.

Three weeks into my new position, the first time I was placed in the situation of having to uphold the district’s disciplinary code and suspend a child for 10 days with a recommendation for long-term suspension, I held myself together until the ordeal was over and the child had gone home with his mother. Then, I stumbled down to my former department’s workroom and wept. This was a tsunami of painfully uprooted emotions, of personal, familial knowledge, and of

disquieting scholastic research. I was overwhelmed and undone by what would happen to this child, what could happen to this child, and my own culpability in this child's now tenuous educational journey.

However, retreating from my new responsibilities was not an option. Instead, I made the decision to use all my resources, both personally and from my doctoral studies, to create a different reality within the world in which I now found myself. I would work from the inside to change the policies by inviting conversations with District Office administrators and with Board members. Then, if I could not change policy overnight for the students in the path of suspensions, I could work to change the outcome for their families. I began by remembering the most painful lesson I had to learn when my child was expelled—the entire family is affected. Taking care of the parents and the siblings, then, would become the first way I would establish my leadership and, in turn, create change in my district and, it is hoped, within the state.

Dissertation Influenced Practice as Educational Leader

In my current leadership role, not only as an administrator tasked with upholding discipline, but also in charge of the building's Climate Committee, which seeks to enlighten and empower our adults through Culturally Relevant Teaching strategies, it is important for me to ask the questions concerning practice and policy, and those questions often lead to fruitful conversations. When we do not ask the question, we turn our backs on the core of our purpose, creating a nurturing, effective, safe environment for our children. It is my fervent desire to transform education, so that all children receive what is their right—an equitable education. In order to do so, I must become a transformative leader. As defined by Hightower and Klinker (2012), this type of moral, ethical leadership "deliberately reflects on and attempts to solve intractable, complex, messy problems" (p. 109). Being able to question and then provide

leadership through the quagmire transforms that which is a problem into an opportunity for growth.

Dissertation Process Influenced as a Scholar

Through my dissertation process, I have come to have a greater understanding of what it means to be an agent of change, as well as the immense responsibility placed on those who wish to lead. Leaders who embrace conflict can provide the foundation for greater success within the organization. Kotter (1990/2011) defined leadership as a person who is adept at coping with change. More often than not, change is a product of conflict. In our nation, the pendulum has swung away from exclusionary discipline policies, but many districts, including my own, have been reticent to change their policies. Levi (2013) discussed conflict and its importance to change: “Although conflict might be unpleasant, it is important that it takes place because it promotes the sharing of different perspectives” (p. 43).

Before our son incurred his disciplinary consequences, I did not see myself as an educational leader beyond the scope of my curriculum. However, as Kotter (1990/2011) wrote, these skills “can be acquired, and honed” (p. 39). Through the Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis program and my immersion into administration, I now perceive my leadership to be one based on the moral and ethical imperative educators have to protect, educate, and nurture children. For me, leadership means always asking, “What is best for the child?”

Therefore, my experiences as a classroom teacher, district committee member, administrator, doctoral student, and mother have molded who I am. George, Sims, McLean, and Mayer (2007/2011) asserted that through experiences, we discover our authentic leadership. It’s through these stories that we begin to understand our style of leadership. The authors stated, “Your life story provides the context for your experiences, and through it, you can find the

inspiration to make an impact on the world” (p. 165). Since my experience as a mother whose child faced expulsion spurred my desire to change exclusionary disciplinary policies for all children, I believe it is not only my ethical responsibility to speak for those families who cannot, but it is my responsibility as an educational leader to assist my district in becoming more empathetic and up-to-date with current policy trends.

In the immediate days and weeks that followed our son’s suspension, I gave in to what Mihelic, Lipicnik, and Tekavcic (2010) called “the four classic rationalizations for doing nothing”—the policy had been set, and was therefore an accepted practice; time constraints did not allow me to consider the matter further; the fear that, as a subordinate in the district, it was not my place to question the policy; and finally, the need to show loyalty to my district (p. 34). Through my experience and through the ELPA program, I have learned that those who rely on the status quo, retaining habits of the past without a vision of what could be, follow what Johnson (2006) warned as “the path of least resistance” (p. 93). Educational agents of change must be willing to analyze their organizations, and, if appropriate and necessary, eschew former habits and policies in favor of more progressive trends. Kowalski and Lasley (2008) stated that as the demands for change become apparent, and as cultural, societal needs become clear, leaders must rely on data, dialogue, and their own interpretive skills to drive their decision-making (pp. 383-384).

Consequently, my dissertation journey has been intimately aligned with my practice. What I bring to my current position is the amalgamation of all that has come before, my own personal experiences, as well as the research I have conducted on the history and deleterious affects of exclusionary disciplinary policies. That which I have learned through my extensive

review of literature runs parallel with my research into students' perceptions of their own academic journeys, and both those paths run alongside my own professional leadership.

In our readings and discussions throughout the program, the study of ethical leadership resonated with me. Mountains can be moved if a leader creates trust in her people. Trust, then, is at the core of ethical leadership (Ettling, 2012; Lencioni, 2002; Levi, 2013). Confidence in a leader is created when one believes he or she is safe to take risks, to explore, and to change. In turn, the leader creates a culture of trust, one in which each member is consigned to place ethics above all else. In Lencioni's (2002) *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, it was asserted that the absence of trust leads to the greatest dysfunction among its members: "Essentially, this stems from their unwillingness to be vulnerable within the group. Team members who are not genuinely open with one another about their mistakes and weaknesses make it impossible to build a foundation for trust" (p. 188).

Ethical leadership, then, became the center of my mission to create change. One year after our son was suspended, we were given a hearing in front of the School Board in order to ask permission to re-enroll him. At the end of the meeting, I was given a chance to speak, and my comments came directly from my experience as a student in the Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis program at the University of Missouri. Emboldened by my matriculation, I locked eyes with each member of the Board and the gathered administrators. Brooking no nonsense, I told them that by upholding exclusionary disciplinary measures established 15 years earlier, they had met the legal obligation, but that they had not met the ethical obligation. That although I could not change the past for our son, I would fight to change the future for the next child who violated our draconian disciplinary code. It may well have been the single most difficult moment of my life, staring down the very people who employed me and who held our

son's future in their hands. However, the ELPA program taught me that leadership is not easy, nor does it stand by when injustices are perpetrated to those who are unable to stand up for themselves.

Two years later, sitting in my administrative office, my building principal said that the district had dramatically changed its position on the lengths of suspensions for non-violent offenses. That change was in great part to the advocacy we provided for our son. Although more work is to be done, I am proud to say my dissertation process not only influenced my practice but has contributed to a tangible, powerful change in my organization.

The good news is the pendulum has begun to swing away from exclusionary policies, due to the realization that data and other artifacts can no longer support the practice. Scholarly practitioners have decried the use of exclusion as being ineffective and, more to the point, socially unjust. As an educational leader, I believe my duty is to also be a social justice leader. Theoharis (2008) asserted that social justice leaders are focused on advocating for those who are underserved and unrepresented, due to "race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalizing conditions in the United States" (p. 5). Add to that list those children who have been excluded from the educational process due to zero-tolerance policies.

Conclusion

What began as a mother's quest to provide education and justice for her son turned into a galvanized assumption of the theoretical foundation upon which my scholastic endeavors are built. Through the dissertation process, I have found my home in critical theory. The values of social justice, power structures, and democracy that define critical theory also define my life as a practitioner (Freeman & Vasconcelos, 2010). Further, as a qualitative researcher, I believe the

stories and perceptions of those enmeshed in any given environment provide incomparable data. As a researcher and an educational leader, the diverse voices of our entire community must be heard if we are to make informed, equitable decisions concerning policy.

When children are excluded from a formal educational environment, they are deprived of their basic needs. Asking a fourteen-year-old child to continue his or her education unaided for extended periods serves only to place that child at a disadvantage, which is contradictory to the role of education. Without equal access, as stated in the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education*, “it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education” (Brown, 1954, p. 493).

Based on the instruction I have received through the ELPA program, as well as through my own research, I have become a scholarly practitioner, and I am inspired and determined to bring about change within the educational community. My resolve comes in part from my seventeen years of teaching, an experience that has time and time again fortified my belief in the power of education, especially education that has at its core social justice. At the center of my advocacy are those children denied education as a result of exclusionary policies.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

- How would you describe your academic identity, or how you view yourself as a student?
- Who or what are the most important influences on your academic identity?
- When you entered high school, what were your postsecondary aspirations?
- What grade were you in when you incurred disciplinary actions for your behavior?
- How would you describe your teachers', counselors' and/or administrators' perceptions of your academic identity before and after your suspension/expulsion?
- How did you continue your education while you were away from school?
- What are your current postsecondary aspirations or goals?
- How have your postsecondary aspirations changed since you entered high school?
- What role has your suspension/expulsion had, if any, on your postsecondary goals? On your academic identity?

(Adapted from Howard, T. C. (2003). "A tug of war for our minds:" African American high school students' perceptions of their academic identities and college aspirations. *High School Journal*, 87(1), 4-17)

Appendix B
INFORMED CONSENT

Purpose of Study:

The purpose of this study is to examine how exclusionary discipline policies affect students' perceptions of their postsecondary aspirations.

Principal investigator:

Jennifer Gross

Institute:

Northwest Missouri State University
University of Missouri Columbia

Introduction:

You are invited to participate in an interview that will become the data for this study. The study will help shed light on students' academic journeys after being suspended, how their families were affected by the suspensions, as well as how school staff members perceive the academic behaviors of students who have been suspended or expelled.

Background Information:

This is research for a dissertation within the Educational Doctorate Program through the University of Missouri-Columbia and Northwest Missouri State University.

Procedures:

Interviews: In this study, you will be asked a series of open-ended questions, which will be audio recorded. Those recordings will be transcribed verbatim. Your name will be changed to a pseudonym in the transcriptions and in the study in order to protect your privacy. All other distinguishing characteristics that might disclose your identity will also be changed. This interview should take no more than 20 minutes.

Possible Risks or Benefits:

There is no risk involved in this study except your valuable time. This research has the potential of having an impact on other schools and districts who are examining their disciplinary policies.

Right of Refusal to Participate and Withdrawal:

You are free to choose to participate in the study. You may also withdraw at any time from the study. You may also refuse to answer some or all of the questions.

Confidentiality:

Any information you provide will remain confidential. Nobody except the principal investigators will have an access to it. Your name and identity will also not be disclosed at any time.

Available Sources of Information:

If you have further questions, you may contact Dr. Carole Edmonds(cake@nwmissouri.edu), the researcher's dissertation advisor.

AUTHORIZATION

I have read and understand this consent form, and I volunteer to participate in this research study. I understand that I will receive a copy of this form. I voluntarily choose to participate, but I understand that my consent does not take away any legal rights in the case of negligence or other legal fault of anyone who is involved in this study. I further understand that nothing in this consent form is intended to replace any applicable federal, state, or local laws.

Participant’s Name (Printed or Typed): _____

Participant’s Signature: _____

Date: _____

Principal Investigator’s Signature: _____

Date: _____

CONSENT TO BE AUDIO-RECORDED DURING THE INTERVIEW

I consent to be audio-recorded during the approximately 20 minute interview. I understand I can decline to be recorded at any time.

Participant’s Name (Printed or Typed): _____

Participant’s Signature: _____

Date: _____

Principal Investigator’s Signature: _____

Date: _____

(Audio-recorded consent adapted from the U.S. Department of Human services, 1998, Informed Consent Checklist)

VITA

Jennifer Gross is originally from Ann Arbor, Michigan, and is a proud product of public education. In 1987, she completed her undergraduate at Michigan State University in Secondary Education (English and Vocal Music), and in 1996, she completed her Master's of Arts in English at Oakland University. With the completion of this dissertation, she will have earned her Doctorate in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis through the University of Missouri. At the time of this writing, she was finishing her Educational Specialist in Administration from Arkansas State University.

Her career in education has spanned two states, beginning in Michigan and then on to Missouri. She has held positions within vocal music and language arts departments, as well as a multitude of leadership roles. In 2015, Mrs. Gross was offered the opportunity to become an administrative intern within her district. She hopes to use her experiences as an educational leader and research practitioner to assist legislators and policy makers to create more equitable, progressive disciplinary plans.