

2013

## **Stakeholders' Perceptions Regarding Zero Tolerance and Disproportionate Exclusions of African-American Male Students**

Bertha Kornegay Dixon  
*North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital.library.ncat.edu/dissertations>

---

### **Recommended Citation**

Dixon, Bertha Kornegay, "Stakeholders' Perceptions Regarding Zero Tolerance and Disproportionate Exclusions of African-American Male Students" (2013). *Dissertations*. 48.  
<https://digital.library.ncat.edu/dissertations/48>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Electronic Theses and Dissertations at Aggie Digital Collections and Scholarship. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Aggie Digital Collections and Scholarship. For more information, please contact [iyanna@ncat.edu](mailto:iyanna@ncat.edu).

Stakeholders' Perceptions Regarding Zero Tolerance and Disproportionate Exclusions of  
African-American Male Students

Bertha Kornegay Dixon

North Carolina A&T State University

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department: School of Education

Major: Leadership Studies

Major Professor: Ceola Ross Baber, Ph.D.

Greensboro, North Carolina

2013

The Graduate School  
North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University  
This is to certify that the Doctoral Dissertation of

Bertha Kornegay Dixon

has met the dissertation requirements of  
North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University

Greensboro, North Carolina  
2013

Approved by:

---

Ceola Ross Baber, Ph.D.  
Major Professor

---

Daniel M. Miller, Ph.D.  
Committee Member

---

Paula Faulkner, Ph.D.  
Committee Member

---

Abul Pitre, Ph.D.  
Committee Member

---

Comfort Okpala, Ed.D.  
Department Chair

---

Ellen Van Velsor, Ph.D.  
Committee Member

---

Dr. Sanjiv Sarin  
Dean, The Graduate School

© Copyright by  
Bertha Kornegay Dixon  
2013

## Biographical Sketch

Bertha Kornegay Dixon is the daughter of the late Elijah Kornegay and Bertha L. Kornegay-McRae. She was reared on a farm in the small, southern town of Hazlehurst, Georgia. She graduated from Hazlehurst High School in 1957 and earned her B. S. from Savannah State College in 1961 with a major in Business Education and a minor in English. She moved to Chicago, Illinois in 1961 and married James N. Dixon, Jr., a retired Chicago Public Teacher, in July of 1961. She and her husband have three children, Dr. Anona L. Dixon-Brown, a first grade teacher in Chicago, James R. Dixon, a high school French teacher for Guilford County Schools, and Terrence R. Dixon, a journeyman electrician. She worked as a buyer-secretary for Spiegel, Inc. from 1961 until 1963 when she became a teacher for Chicago Public Schools teaching Social Studies and Language Arts at Mason Upper Center. In 1980, she resigned from teaching to establish her private law practice. She earned her M. A. in Inner City Studies from Northeastern Illinois University in 1976, a J.D. from DePaul University in 1978, and a M. A. in Educational Leadership and Administration from Chicago State University in 1994. In 1986, she returned to teaching at Gladstone Elementary School where she taught Language Arts until 1994 when she became assistant principal in charge of discipline at Gladstone. She worked in this capacity until she retired in 2004 to work full-time in her law practice. She and James relocated to Browns Summit, North Carolina in 2006, and she became an adjunct professor at North Carolina A & T State University (NCAT) teaching Business Law and Legal Environment in Business. In 2010, she was accepted into the Leadership Studies doctoral program at NCAT and became a doctoral candidate in 2012. During her tenure at NCAT, she was inducted into the Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi and the 4.0 Club. Her research examined perceptions of stakeholders regarding the relationship between zero tolerance and disproportionate exclusions of African-American males.

## Dedication

All of us have to live with ourselves, so we should see to it that we are always in good company (Menius, 1544).

There are many to whom I dedicate my dissertation. The first and foremost is the Holy Trinity, whose blessings and mercy brought me this far. I also dedicate my dissertation to my company of family and friends who have stood beside me and supported me spiritually and emotionally during the last three years. I give thanks to God for sending you my way to stand with me during the good times and the bad times. I humbly dedicate my dissertation to my children, Dr. Anona L. Dixon, Rod, and Terry for not letting me forget that it's never too late to realize your dreams. I say, "Thank you," to my son-in-law, Sam, who answered my many telephone calls and computer questions, my daughter-in-law, Noela, who knew just when I needed one of her "special" dishes, and my daughter-in-law, Chanda, who was there just in case. I dedicate my dissertation to all my grandchildren for all their calls, computer assistance, and hugs and kisses just when I needed them the most. To my Vegas-8 family, I also dedicate my dissertation to you for calling at the "right" time just to check on me and to tell me, "Just hang in there, you can do it." Lastly, but foremost in my life, to the company of my solid rock, my husband, James Dixon, who shared my moments of joy and excitement, as well as my fears and disappointments. I thank you for allowing me to fulfill my dream, and for doing your part as well as mine while asking, "You're still on that computer?" JD, I give honor and praise to God for the years that we have spent together, sometimes in the valley, but thank God most of the time on the mountains. To all of my company of family and friends, I dedicate my dissertation to you.

## Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I give honor to God, who is the head of my life, without whose guidance, this journey would have been impossible. Even though there were times when I felt alone, I knew there was a circle of friends, both personal and professional, whom I could count on for encouragement and support.

To Dr. Ceola Ross-Baber, my advisor and chairperson, not only were you my advisor and chairperson, you were my mentor, my counselor, and my friend. Thank you for pushing me, guiding me, and most of all, believing in me. I appreciate the frankness and genuineness in your leadership. It was God's blessing that allowed me to be a part of your guidance. I want to thank the other members of my dissertation committee: Dr. Paula Faulkner, Dr. Daniel Miller, Dr. Abul Pitre, and Dr. Ellen Van Velsor, to whom I am gratefully indebted for their assistance, motivation, and "You can do this" throughout this process. I am honored and blessed to have you on my team. I also want to thank the entire faculty and staff of the Leadership Studies program. To you I owe my sincere gratitude and appreciation for taking the time to answer my questions and for your advice, assistance, support, and coordination. Lori, you are the greatest! I would like to thank my colleagues who offered their technical assistance which I so desperately needed. It was your willingness and kindness that enabled to me to gain new technical knowledge that made life so much easier. Because of that, I am grateful. "Thank you" to my daughter, Dr. Anona L. Dixon-Brown, and my colleague, Pernella Koonce, for assisting me in the peer debriefing of my research. I would also like to thank my former co-workers from Gladstone Elementary School in Chicago, Illinois for agreeing to be a part of this journey. I cannot forget your eagerness to be part of a project that I was required to do as partial fulfillment for one of my courses. I do not know what I would have done without you. A word of thanks

also goes to my pastor, Dr. James A. Webster and my Oak Ridge First Baptist Church family for the constant “How Are Things Going,” encouragement. Special thanks go to Dr. Webster and Dr. Alberta Herron for the part they played in one of my assignments by readily agreeing to let me interview them, and Dr. Frances Harris-Burke for introducing me to the superintendent of the school district where I did my research. Finally, to the superintendent, administrators, teachers, students, parents/caregivers, and especially the secretary of Urban High School, I am grateful for their willingness to contribute to my study by giving of their time and assistance. You are the reason I am where I am today. Thanks to all of you!



## Table of Contents

List of Tables .....	xi
Abstract.....	2
CHAPTER 1 Introduction.....	3
Statement of Problem .....	3
Theoretical Orientation: Critical Race Theory .....	9
Purpose of the Study.....	19
Research Questions.....	19
Context of the Research Site.....	20
Definition of Terms .....	21
Limitations and Delimitations of the Study.....	23
Significance of the Study.....	23
CHAPTER 2 Review of the Literature .....	25
Establishment of Zero Tolerance Initiatives.....	25
Implications of Legal Decisions Related to the Implementation of Zero Tolerance Policies	29
Studies on the Disproportionate Representation of Exclusions of African-American Males	33
Studies Utilizing Critical Race Theory.....	35
Key Stakeholders' Perceptions of Disciplinary Policies and Procedures.....	39
Administrators' perceptions .....	40
Teachers' perceptions.....	42
Students' perceptions.....	44
Caregivers' perceptions.....	47
Summary.....	49

CHAPTER 3 Methodology.....	50
Assumption and Rationale for Qualitative Research.....	50
Case Study Design.....	54
Role of Researcher.....	56
Participants .....	61
Data Collection Procedures .....	68
Data Analysis Procedures.....	75
Trustworthiness.....	75
Summary.....	76
CHAPTER 4 Results.....	78
Introduction.....	78
Demographic Characteristics of Participants.....	79
Participant Profiles.....	80
Microlevel Analysis.....	83
Understanding Zero Tolerance .....	84
Impact of Zero Tolerance .....	94
Exclusions.....	98
Policies and Rules.....	123
Macrolevel Analysis .....	127
Understanding Zero Tolerance .....	128
Impact of Zero Tolerance .....	136
Policies and Rules.....	170
Summary of Similarities and Differences between the Microlevel and Macrolevel Analyses .....	175

CHAPTER 5 Discussion.....	178
Alignment of the Results with the Research Questions.....	179
Research Question 1: Perceptions of Stakeholders .....	180
Research Questions 2 and 3: Similarities and Differences in Perceptions of Stakeholders	184
Research Question 4: Integration of Perceptions to Decrease Disproportionality of Exclusions of African-American Males .....	190
Implications .....	193
Recommendations for Future Research.....	197
Conclusions.....	197
References.....	200
APPENDICES .....	234
Appendix A: School District Permission Letter .....	234
Appendix B: IRB Approval Form.....	235
Appendix C : Informed Consent Form for Administrators .....	237
Appendix D: Informed Consent Form for Teachers.....	240
Appendix E: Informed Consent Form for Students Over 16 .....	243
Appendix F: Informed Assent form from Parents/Caregivers for Students Under 16 .....	246
Appendix G: Informed Consent form for Parents/Caregivers .....	249
Appendix H: Administrator Interview Protocol .....	252
Appendix I: Teacher Interview Protocol .....	254
Appendix J: Student Interview Protocol.....	256
Appendix K: Parents/Caregivers Interview Protocol .....	258
Appendix L: Administrator Focus Group Interview Protocol.....	260
Appendix M: Teacher Focus Group Interview Protocol .....	262

Appendix N: Student Focus Group Interview Protocol.....	264
Appendix O: Parents/Caregivers Focus Group Interview Protocol.....	266
Appendix P: Example of Member Checking.....	268
Appendix Q: Member Checking Explanation Letter.....	269
Appendix R: Release for Interview Transcript.....	270
Appendix S: Microlevel Analysis Codes.....	271
Appendix T: Macrolevel Analysis Codes.....	274

**List of Tables**

Table 1 Comparison of Exclusions (Suspensions and Expulsions) for African-American Males to Other Students.....	20
Table 2 Timeline for Data Collection .....	74
Table 3 Demographic Characteristics of Administrators.....	79
Table 4 Demographic Characteristics of Teachers .....	79
Table 5 Demographic Characteristics of Students.....	80
Table 6 Demographic Characteristics of Parents/Caregivers .....	80
Table 7 Microlevel Themes and Indicators .....	84
Table 8 Comparison of Microlevel and Macrolevel Themes and Indicators.....	128

### **Abstract**

The purpose of this qualitative instrumental case study was to understand perceptions of key stakeholders regarding disproportionate exclusions of African American males under zero tolerance policies. Data was gathered through in-depth individual and focus group interviews with key stakeholders (administrators, teachers, students, and parents/caregivers) in an urban high school in central North Carolina. Four themes emerged from microlevel and macrolevel analyses of the data: (a) understanding zero tolerance, (b) impact of zero tolerance, (c) exclusions, and (d) policies and rules. Findings from this study revealed similarities and differences in the stakeholders' perceptions regarding disproportionate exclusions of African-American males. While stakeholders agreed that zero tolerance is necessary for various reasons, they differed on the effectiveness of zero tolerance and the disproportionality of suspensions and expulsions of African-American male students. Some of the participants from each group felt that the students were disciplined unfairly, but other participants rejected this notion. Students and parents/caregivers acknowledged they were aware of the school's policies and rules but they also indicated they had little or no knowledge of the zero tolerance policy before the students were suspended. The students believed their behavior changed for the better after the suspensions. A majority of stakeholders perceived that administrators, teachers, and parents/caregivers should have input on the consequences assigned for violations under zero tolerance. The results also showed that most of the stakeholders would take advantage of an opportunity to make recommendations to the school district for changes in the application and implementation of the zero tolerance policy.

## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

In the crossing zone between childhood and adulthood stands adolescence, with its many celebrated troubles. Most of these troubles are, happily transient. But not all. Adolescents in trouble because they drop out of school, engage in criminal acts, or have children too soon are embarked on a rocky life course. Their troubles are a source of pain for themselves and their families, and often a burden for the rest of us. But much of that private pain and public cost can be prevented. With knowledge now at hand, society can improve the childhood experiences of those at greatest risk, and thereby reduce the incidence of school failure, crime, and teenage childbearing – and some of their most serious consequences (Schorr, 1998, p.1).

#### Statement of Problem

The practice of racial disproportionality in the exclusionary practices, including suspensions and expulsions of African-American male students has been consistently documented for over 35 years (Advancement Project/Civil Rights Project, 2000, 2005; Bennett & Harris, 1982; Children’s Defense Fund, 1975; Costenbader & Markson, 1998; Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2011; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Lewis, Butler, Bonner, & Joubert, 2012; Losen & Gillespie, 2012; Losen & Skiba, 2010; McCarthy & Hoge, 1987; Milner, 2013; Morrison & D’Incau, 1997; Office of Civil Rights, 1993; Skiba & Peterson, 1999; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, 2000; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002; Skiba & Rausch, 2006). The consistent overrepresentation of racial minority students, especially African-American males in school suspension and expulsion, is not a new finding, and causes grave concern (Skiba & Rausch, 2008). In one of the first studies of statistical evidence related to school suspension, the Children’s Defense Fund (1975), the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) gathered national data on school discipline, and reported rates of school suspension for Black students that exceeded White students using a variety of measures. The study rejected the claim that the overrepresentation in suspensions of Black children reflected their disproportionate misbehavior. Accordingly, it was

concluded that “disproportionate suspension of blacks reflects a pervasive school intolerance for children who are *different*” (original emphasis) and that “the incidence of suspension is more a function of school policies and practices than that of students behavior” (Children’s Defense Fund, 1975, p. 13). This study further showed that the rates of suspension for Black students were between two and three times higher than the rates of suspension for White students at the middle and high school levels (Skiba et al., 2002). Over two thirds of the school districts represented in OCR’s national sample indicated rates of Black suspensions that exceeded rates for White students (Skiba, et al., 2002). According to Skiba, et al., (2002) African-American students’ suspensions tended to be for more subjective behaviors, such as being disrespectful or threatening; while White students were suspended for more objective behavior including smoking or leaving the classroom. The consensus of the research is that when the rates of behavior for African-Americans and other groups of students are considered, behavior makes a minor difference when explaining the disparity in the rate of suspensions for Blacks and Whites (Skiba & Peterson, 1999). Therefore, a logical conclusion can be made that this disparity can be contributed to the race/ethnicity and gender of the students. When zero tolerance was introduced into public schools in 1996 as a direct result of a perceived escalation of violence, African-American males were disproportionately punished Advancement Project/Civil Rights Project, 2000; Morrison & D’Incau, 1997; Skiba, et al., (2000). Recent studies that have replicated and extended these findings show that during the last 35 years, this pattern of disproportionate representation seems to have increased (Lewis, et al., 2010; Losen & Skiba, 2010; Noltemeyer & Mcloughlin, 2010a, 2010b; Milner, 2013; Skiba et al., 2011; Wallace, J. M., Goodkind, Wallace, C., & Bachman, 2008).



Recent reports by Losen & Skiba (2010) Skiba, Trachok, Chung, Baker, & Hughes (2012) and the latest data released by the United States Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights (2012) indicated that the disparity in school discipline of African-American male students continues across local and national school districts. The data showed that one in five African-American male students received an out-of-school suspension. These studies revealed there is a continuing trend of racial disparity especially with regard to school discipline where African-American students are more than three-and-a-half times as likely to be suspended or expelled when compared to White students. The data also indicated that while African-American students represent only 18% of students of those enrolled in the 72,000 schools in 7,000 districts, they accounted for 35% of students suspended once, 46% of students suspended more than once, and 39% of students expelled (U. S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, 2012). Additionally, the report indicated that districts that reported expulsions under zero tolerance policies reflect that although African-American and Hispanic students comprise 45% of the student population, they make up 56% of the students expelled under these policies (U. S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, 2012).

Disruptive behavior has been identified as one of the top concerns of teachers and parents. In an effort to maintain school safety and to facilitate school achievement, many schools across the U. S. have adopted more punitive approaches of school discipline under the guise of zero tolerance. Zero tolerance policies in public schools are a direct result of a federal reaction to the national cry for help to stem the fear of the public's visualization of the apparent increase in juvenile crime in the late 1980s and early 1990s following such widely publicized events as: Columbine, Colorado; Jonesborough, Arkansas; and Paducah, Kentucky (Advancement Project/Civil Rights Project, 2000). Such events increased the fear in the general

public and caused school security to be placed at the top of educational concerns for policymakers, schools and parents (Kelley & Beauchesne, 2002; Mawson, Lapsley, Hoffman, & Guignard, 2002; Strawhacker, 2002). In the wake of these multiple-victim incidents, schools began to employ “zero tolerance” policies to send a strong message that schools would take a tough stance position to ensure safety in and around the school zone.

There is no disagreement or dispute about the need of schools to maintain a safe and secure environment for learning. Nor is there any dispute that schools have a mandate to utilize whatever measures are available to ensure safety in order to provide all students an opportunity to learn (Rausch & Skiba, 2006; Skiba & Sprague, 2008). There is consensus in the research that school violence continues to be a public concern and a collaborative effort is needed to deal effectively with the problem of violence in the schools (Hilarski, 2004; Hill & Drolet, 1999; Hong & Eamon, 2011; Klonsky, 2002; Pietrzak, Peterson & Speaker, 1998). Nevertheless, there are controversies over how this should be accomplished. These controversies have been dominated by the philosophy of “zero tolerance” policies. Although no official definition of the term “zero tolerance” exists, the term is generally considered to mean “a harsh predefined mandatory consequence that is applied to a violation of school rules without regard to the seriousness of the behavior, mitigating circumstances, or the situational context” (American Psychological Association, 2008 p. 852). Henault (2001) characterizes zero tolerance as policies that apply “a one-size-fits-all solution” (p. 548) and “prescribe severe punishment for certain offences, no matter how minor, in an effort to treat all wrongdoers equally and to send a message of intolerance for rule breaking” (p. 547).

These policies have drawn extreme and drastic criticism. However, they have also generated some support. Some supporters have argued that “zero tolerance policies” improve the

learning environment by removing disruptive students and deterring other students from misbehaving (Ewing, 2000). Others in favor of zero tolerance argue that this practice deters the problem of drug and alcohol use by students, reduces violent incidents and crimes, maintains order and civility within the school environment, and deters gang activity (Kana'iaupuni & Gans, 2005). Opponents counter by showing that 'zero tolerance' policies are inconsistently implemented and applied and the brunt of suspensions and expulsions are borne by racial/ethnic minority students, mostly African-American and Latino students (Skiba, 2000). It has been found that African-American students are consistently suspended at rates two to three times higher than those for other students, further; they are also overrepresented in office referrals, expulsions, and corporal punishment. When Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson (2002) analyzed the disciplinary records of over 11,000 students in 19 middle schools in a large, urban Midwestern public school district, they found that a "differential pattern of treatment, originating at the classroom level, wherein African-American students are referred to the office for infractions that are more subjective in interpretation" (p. 317) while office referrals for White students are more objective. Even though this study and previous studies that investigated the disparity of exclusionary practices showed that Black males receive more office referrals that lead to suspensions, no research has provided evidence that there is a pattern where these students misbehave at a considerably higher rate than other groups of students, or that the higher rate of discipline African-American students receive is the result of "more serious or more disruptive behavior" (Skiba, et al., 2002, p. 335). In addition, it is maintained by the critics that zero tolerance policies fail to deter the behaviors that they punish and that there are various, broad interpretations and definitions of the policies by individual states (Kana'iaupuni & Gans, 2005).

For decades, the American public in general and educators specifically, have expressed a grave concern for safety in our public schools (Elam & Rose, 1995; Metropolitan Life, 1993; Nichols, 2004). Years of research have also shown the relevance that the nation and its schools place on this topic (Advancement Project and the Civil Rights Project, 2000; Hyman, Weiler, Dahbany, Shamrock, & Britton, 1994; National Institute of Education, 1977; Price & Everett, 1997; Wayne & Rubel, 1982). Moreover, of particular concern are the severe and consistent racial disproportionalities documented in school suspensions and expulsions (Skiba & Rausch, 2008), and the lack of voices of significant stakeholders—students and parents—when decisions for creating and maintaining safe effective learning environments are made. Students’ perceptions of school violence, in particular are rarely sought (Leinhardt & Willert, 2002). In *Early Warning, Timely Response: A Guide to Safe Schools*, the U. S. Department of Education argued, “Effective schools need to include families and the entire community in the education of children...and actively involve them in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of violence prevention initiatives” (Dwyer, Osher, & Wagner, 1998, p. 14). Even though there is consensus in the research that a collaborative effort is needed to deal effectively with the problem of school violence, Leinhardt and Willert (2002) made the following points: (a) school safety policies, programs, and initiatives are frequently formed exclusively by school personnel and school administrators; and (b) stakeholders who are not teachers or administrators are rarely asked to contribute. Consequently, the voices of significant stakeholders including students, parents, and community members are not adequately heard and their feedback is lacking when decisions for creating and maintaining safe and effective learning environments are made. Rausch and Skiba (2006) contend that the views of school principals who look for alternative practices to zero tolerance are missing from much of the studies done on this issue. The aim of this study was to

attain the perceptions of key stakeholders, including students and parents, concerning the reasons for the disproportionality in suspensions and expulsions of African-American males under zero tolerance discipline policies.

### **Theoretical Orientation: Critical Race Theory**

This study examined the disproportionality in suspensions and expulsions of African-American males using Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a theoretical orientation to interrogate this disproportionality. CRT is a lens that allows a discourse about race, class, and gender to be the center for an examination of the disproportionality in suspensions and expulsions of African-American males when compared to Whites and other groups of students (Howard, 2008).

This particular analytic lens acknowledges the presence and perniciousness of racism, discrimination and hegemony, and enables various cultures and racial frames of references to guide research questions, influence the methods of collecting and analyzing data, and to inform how findings can be interpreted (Howard, 2008, p. 4).

Tillman (2002) asserted that the aim of theoretical approaches such as CRT is to provide a counterscript for the voices of individuals that have historically been silenced in educational research thereby enabling them to give an account of their realities.

While Tierney (1993) defined CRT as “an attempt to understand the oppressive aspects of society in order to generate societal and individual transformation” (p. 4), Solorzano and Yosso (2001a) argued that it is important for educators to understand that CRT is different from any other theoretical framework because it centers on race. Matsuda (1991) views CRT as:

...the work of progressive legal scholars of color who are attempting to develop a jurisprudence that accounts for the role of racism in American law and that works toward the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of eliminating all forms of subordination (p. 1331).

Yosso (2006) referred to CRT as a framework that is employed to examine and to challenge the ways race and racism implicitly and explicitly shape social structures and discourses. Race is

still a salient factor that is intertwined within the fabric of American society, and CRT has proven to be a useful approach to examine issues related to justice and equality. Hence, I proposed using CRT as a theoretical framework to examine the disparity of suspensions and expulsions of African-American males under zero tolerance discipline policies.

CRT is a theoretical approach which emerged in the mid-1970s in the midst of the Civil Rights Movement as a response to what the founders, Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman, “viewed as a standstill in a racial reform” (Ballard & Cintron, 2010, p.14). In Donnor’s (2005) view, CRT is:

an intellectual and methodological perspective grounded in the particulars of society reality based on an individual’s lived experiences, and his or her racial group’s collective historical experiences within the United States... which challenges mainstream notions of race, racism, and racial power in American society (p. 51).

Delgado and Stefanie (2001) contend that CRT focuses on the experiential knowledge of ethnic minorities and their communities with regards to race and race relations.

Although CRT emerged more than four decades ago as a means of confronting racism, racism is still a part of the deep structure of our society. In spite of the passage of federal and state mandates that prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, racism has never waned (Bell, 1995a, 1995b, 1995c; Crenshaw, 1995; Delgado, 1995a, 1995b, 1995c, 1997; Matsuda, 1996; Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado & Crenshaw, 1993). In fact, the only difference between racism today and that of the past is that today’s racism is more subtle, invisible, and insidious (Lopez, 2003). Parker (1998) asserts that popular beliefs such as color blindness and equal opportunity have only driven racism underground, thereby making it significantly more difficult for persons of color to name their reality. Messner, McHugh and Felson (2004) point out that hate-related violence is not a new occurrence. Jenness and Grattet (2001) agree when they point out that, “it is an identifiable feature of human societies across the globe, both historically and at present” (p.

17). However, when compared to the blatant, intentional, undisputed racism of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it is now harder to prove intentional racism, and tangible proof such as hate crime, hate speech, burning crosses, lynching or other physical or symbolic assault is needed to prove the existence of racism (Brown, 2004; Matsuda et al., 1993; Williams, 1995).

CRT grew out of the Civil Rights and Critical Legal Studies movements, and its premise was to critically interrogate how the law reproduces, embodies, and normalizes racism in society (Lopez, 2003). According to Delgado (2000), CRT had its beginning when members of the legal profession, including lawyers, activists and legal scholars realized the slow change in laws to promote and to improve racial equality. Their major concern was the snail-like pace of racial reform in the United States in the post-civil rights movement era (Howard, 2008) in that many of the early legal victories of the civil rights movement e. g., *Brown vs. Board of Education* (1954) were either eroding or obstructing justice (Bell, 1980; Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller & Thomas, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). It is the contention of Delgado and Stefancic (2000) that the CRT movement is a “collection of activities and scholars interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism and power” (p. 2).

While CRT had its beginning in the legal field and derived from scholarship in Critical Legal Studies, and has largely been used in the area of legal research (Caraballo, 2009; Crenshaw, 1995), its influence has flowed over into other fields including education. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) are credited with introducing CRT to education more than 15 years ago with the publication of their article, *Towards a Critical Race Theory of Education*. The authors asserted in this article that because race is under-theorized as a scholarly educational topic, it remains a significant factor in society and in education in particular. Therefore, Dixson and Rousseau (2005) argue that Ladson-Billings and Tate proposed CRT “could be employed to

examine the role of race and racism in education” (p. 8). According to McDonald (2003), several other publications exposed educational researchers to CRT: special issues on CRT in the *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* in 1998 and in *Qualitative Inquiry* in 2002 as well as chapters by critical race theorists in the *Handbook of Qualitative Research* and the *Handbook of Interview Research*. In these publications CRT is examined for its potential as a means through which educational practice and policies can be investigated (Ladson-Billings, 1999), and as a methodological tool that can show “greater ontological and epistemological understanding of how race and racism affect the education and lives of the racially disenfranchised” (Parker & Lynn, 2002, pp. 7-8). CRT’s proponents argue that a broader application to other disciplines where race is critical in disparities and society is organized around property rights as in the United States, the intersection of race and property creates a logical tool for understanding inequalities (Ladson-Billing & Tate, 1995). While CRT focuses on racial subordination, prejudice, and inequality, it also accentuates the socially constructed and discursive nature of race (Graham, Brown-Jeffy, Aronson, & Stephens, 2011). Consequently, for the purpose of educational research, CRT can be viewed as a powerful theoretical and analytical framework (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004).

According to Solorzano in 1998, CRT within the field of education was still an evolving methodological, conceptual, and theoretical construct that makes an effort to examine and to disrupt race and racism found in the schools. Lynn and Parker (2006) asserted that after a decade of the introduction of CRT in education, several scholars have written articles that “explained, defined, or framed CRT and its connection of example” (p. 268). CRT can also be utilized to interrogate how “Black parents feel race and racism have influenced their sons’ schooling experiences and educational outcomes” (Reynolds, 2010, p. 147). Considering that this study



examined issues of race, class, and gender, and CRT is a theoretical framework that explicitly acknowledges the salience of these factors in everyday life, including schools, this researcher thought it was imperative to use this theory to understand the disproportionality of suspensions and expulsions of African-American males under zero tolerance policies.

CRT is characterized by four basic tenets or doctrines. However, this study is only concerned with three tenets. The first will be the tenet of normalcy and permanence of racism. CRT began with the notion that racism is normal in American society (Delgado, 1995a). Solorzano and Yosso (2001) posited that the principle of normalcy and permanence of racism can be utilized to challenge the prevailing discourse on race and racism as it relates to the field of education by investigating how educational theory and practice are used to control certain racial or ethnic minorities. Instead of subscribing to the belief that racism is an abnormal or unusual concept, critical race theorists start with the assumption that racism is a normal endemic of our social fabric (Banks, 1993; Collins, 1991; Gordon, 1990; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Scheurich & Young, 1997; Tatum, 1997; Tyson, 1998). The assumption that racism is normal provides a platform for racial oppression and domination to be challenged by CRT in "legal, institutional, and educational domains" because CRT centers the investigation on racism and affords researchers an opportunity to inquire as to what part racism plays in the inequities in education (Howard, 2008) and discipline. Not only does CRT place race as the focus of the research, it also emphasizes other patterns of oppression; namely, "class and gender, which have important implications for African-American males as well" (Howard, 2008, p. 964.)

An additional element of CRT that was used in this study is the principle of interest convergence (Bell, 1995a). Bell (1980) explained interest convergence as a concept that states, "the interest of blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges

with the interests of whites” (p.523). Educational scholars and researchers have specifically used CRT when questioning the way “in which race, racism, and racial power function in the schooling of African-American and other students of colour” (Donnor, 2005, p. 52). In fact, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) maintained that “unlike the theoretical considerations of gender and class which have proliferated... and continue to merit considerations as theoretical models for understanding social inequality... race has been untheorized... and not been systemically employed in the analysis of educational inequality” (p. 51). While Bobo and Kluegel (1993) argued that issues of race and racism are deeply rooted in American society, Milner (2008) maintained that interest convergence may be used to help explain and operationalize race and racism in the field of education and that it can also be used as a tool to elucidate and help make sense of the salience of race and racism in teacher education policies and practices; and Alexandre (2007) agreed that, “a coalescence of interests across sectors can aide in the protections of marginalized individuals” (p.11). Notwithstanding that Milner (2008) stated that the principle of interest convergence initially centered on the pursuit of interests that “converged with the interests, needs, expectations, and ideologies of Whites” (p. 333), Tate (1997) insisted that educators could use this principle “to challenge the ahistorical treatment of education, equity, and students of color” in current policy discourse (p. 235). This led to Tate’s (1997) examination of the possible use of the interest convergence principle as a lens to investigate claims of neutrality in the prevailing liberal discourse or equality in education. Cashin (2012) contended that even though the principle of interest convergence is pessimistic in its outlook, it still “offers a key insight into human nature and American race relations that can and should be harnessed in order to build the sustainable multiracial coalitions that will be necessary if we are to close existing gaps of racial inequality” (pp. 254-255). Carmichael and Hamilton (as cited in

Cashin, 2012), skeptically argued that with certain limitations and preconditions, sustainable coalitions can be formed among opposing groups. Out of the four preconditions that Carmichael and Hamilton (1967) listed, I assert that three of those preconditions were applicable to this study: (a) the involved parties recognized their respective interests, (b) the parties believed that each party can benefit in terms of self-interest partnering with the others, and (c) the parties realized that the coalition is concerned with specific and identifiable goals.

Alexandre (2007) advocated that it is common that individuals who are marginalized will continue to be ignored if points of interest convergence remain unidentified. In consistency with Alexandre (2007) and to enhance Tate's (1997) and Cashin's (2012) philosophies, I contend that Bell's (1980) interest convergence principle of CRT can be used to understand the ingrained and embedded racism in the disproportionality of suspensions and expulsions of African-American males under zero tolerance discipline policies. This contention is based on my conclusion that the principle of interest convergence can provide the stakeholders a tool to discuss the issue of race and its influence on the disproportionality of exclusions of Black male students.

Additionally, this principle can be utilized to extract the interests of key stakeholders concerning this issue and identify where the interests of each group of stakeholders converge and diverge with those of the other major stakeholders.

Interest convergence principle in this study was used to accomplish the following: (a) help to understand how all stakeholders can work closely together to develop a more flexible approach for reducing suspensions and expulsions of African-American males, (b) develop a realization of the importance to the administrators and teachers that students and caregivers' voices must be heard on the issues of racial imbalance of student discipline, (c) build a shared sense of community exhibited in a partnership formed between schools and families to immerse

students in a single, coherent, consistent, and continuous disciplinary environment (Brown & Beckett, 2007), (d) develop a program whereby the most disruptive students will be removed in the interest of the other students and parents, (e) develop a program other than zero tolerance where all stakeholders have specific responsibilities to fulfill (Brown & Beckett, 2007), (f) develop a program where African-American males and other racial/ethnic minority students will feel they are more fairly treated, and teachers feel safer and more focused on instructions (Brown & Beckett, 2007), and (g) involve all stakeholders in a development process that result in substantive agreement on and commitment to a new set of discipline policies among groups holding very different values and with a history of mistrust and opposition (Brown & Beckett, 2007).

The final concept of CRT utilized in this study was the privileging of stories and counter-stories (Delgado, 1995b, 1995c). Counter storytelling has been defined as a method of telling stories of those marginalized groups, especially the stories that value people of color “whose experiences are not often told” (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 32); and as a method of telling stories whose aim is to debunk legitimized myths and stories of the majoritarian (Delgado & Stefancic 2001). Delgado (1995b, 1995c) related to counter storytelling as a means of telling stories of individuals whose experiences have not been told, and as a method for analyzing and challenging the stories of those individuals in power whose stories are natural parts of the majority discourse. Lawrence (1995) pointed out that storytelling is traditionally seen in law litigation; however, the stories of ordinary people are not in the literature of law or research. He argued that while this may be the case, this does not mean that their stories are not important. Ladson-Billings (1998) asserted that the “voice” component of CRT “provides a way to communicate the experience and realities of the oppressed, a first step in understanding the

complexities of racism and beginning a process of judicial redress” (p. 14). She contended that the inclusion of this group’s voice is needed for a thorough understanding of the “educational system” (p. 14). According to Delgado and Stefancic (2001), counter-storytelling theory can have important implications for educational research related to African-Americans and other marginalized populations. The idea of using counter-storytelling as a means of inquiry offers a methodology grounded in the specifics of the social realities and lived experiences of racialized groups (Matsuda, 1993). Howard (2008) concluded:

Given the troubling state of affairs experienced by an increasing number of African-American males in preK-12 schools, paradigms must be created which will allow their voices to shed light on the day-to-day realities in schools and challenge mainstream accounts of their experiences (p. 968).

It is asserted by Howard (2008) that one of the most noticeable absences of much of the research associated with African-American males has to do with the exclusion of first-hand, detailed accounts from African-American males about the roles that they believe power, race, and racism play in their educational experiences. Tillman (2002) referred to narratives and counter-storytelling as “culturally sensitive research approaches” and described these approaches as “interpretive paradigms that offer greater possibilities for the use of alternative frameworks, co-constructions of multiple realities and experiences, and knowledge that can lead to improved educational opportunities for African-Americans” (p. 5).

According to Parker and Lynn, (2002), (as cited in Graham, et al., 2011), CRT has three primary objectives:

(a) to present stories about discrimination from the viewpoint of people of color, (b) to argue for the eradication of racial subjugation while simultaneously acknowledging that race is a social construct, and (c) to deal with other matters of dissimilarity, such as sexuality and class, and any injustices experienced by communities (p. 82).

While these objectives have guided educational research to expose racism in existing educational practices and policies, much of this research has focused on the experiences of racial/ethnic minority students and teachers in secondary or higher education (Bernal, 2002; Fernandez, 2002; Solorzano, 1998; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Parker (1998) as well as Villenas, Deyhle, and Parker (1999) have used CRT to critique specific legal issues concerned with education. Several educational researchers (e.g., Duncan, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Solorzano and Bernal, 2001), have used CRT to examine practices for preparation of teachers to teach culturally diverse students. However, to date, CRT has not been used to examine or understand the reasons for the disproportionality in suspensions and expulsions of African-American males under zero tolerance discipline policies.

For all of these reasons, I proposed that CRT can be employed not only in an examination of zero tolerance discipline policies to expose the racism and injustice that are embedded in the disproportionality in suspensions and expulsions of African-American male students; but also to guide qualitative research that enables administrators, teachers, students, and caregivers to give their perceptions about the nature of these policies and practices and how they influence their lives. Therefore, I argue that CRT provides a natural lens to explore the racist, discriminatory practice that is associated with zero tolerance discipline policies, and is ideal for understanding the underlying assumptions, practices of marginalization and exclusion that negatively influence the realities of African-American students that are affected by such policies. Additionally, CRT is an ideal framework because it not only places race at the center of its analysis, it also emphasizes other forms of oppression, namely class and gender, which have several important implications for African-American males as well (Howard, 2008).

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative instrumental case study was to understand the perceptions of key stakeholders regarding disproportionate exclusions of African American males under zero tolerance policies. Case study is a qualitative strategy of inquiry used when the researcher explores a policy, one or more individuals, or events in depth; the case is bounded by setting, time and activity; and detailed information is collected using several sources for a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time (Creswell, 2009; Creswell, 2012; Stake, 1995). Creswell (2009) recommends the use of a qualitative approach when the study is designed to bring voices to oppressed or marginalized members of society. The participants in this proposed study included four administrators, seven teachers, five students, and five parents/caregivers at a selected high school in a North Carolina urban school system how many in each group?

## **Research Questions**

The research questions for this study were designed to gather key stakeholders' perceptions regarding the reasons for the disproportionality in exclusionary discipline of African-American males under zero tolerance policies. The central research question was: What are the perceptions of administrators, teachers, students, and parents/caregivers regarding the disproportionate exclusions (suspensions and expulsions) of African-American males under zero tolerance policies?

The following related questions used to guide the study included:

1. What are the perceptions of key stakeholders (administrators, teachers, students, and parents/caregivers) regarding the disproportionate exclusions (suspensions and expulsions) of African American males under zero tolerance policies?

2. How are the perceptions of the key stakeholders similar?
3. How are the perceptions of the key stakeholders different?
4. How can these perceptions be integrated to decrease disproportionality in exclusions of African American males?

### Context of the Research Site

Urban High School is a zero tolerance high school in a small, urban school district in North Carolina's Central Piedmont region. The 782 students enrolled for 2012-2013 consisted of 201 Whites, 390 African-Americans; 136 Hispanics, 3 American Indians, and 52 Asians.

Table 1

*Comparison of Exclusions (Suspensions and Expulsions) for African-American Males to Other Students*

Gender	Ethnicity	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011
Female	Asian	4	N/A	N/A
Female	Black	215	37	<5
Female	Hispanic	10	5	N/A
Female	White	26	5	N/A
Female	Other/Missing	20	N/A	N/A
Female	American Indian	N/A	<5	N/A
Female	Multiracial	N/A	<5	<5
Male	American Indian	2	N/A	N/A
Male	Asian	13	<5	N/A
Male	Black	351	68	12
Male	Hispanic	84	13	<5
Male	White	176	40	<5
Male	Other/Missing	27	<5	N/A
Male	Multiracial	N/A	10	N/A

It should be noted that the Supreme Court case, *South Dakota v. Dole* (1987), was used by the federal government to leverage its position for zero tolerance policies in schools by



conditioning the receipt of federal funds on the states' enactment of legislation requiring local educational agencies to expel any student who either brings a firearm to school or is in possession of a firearm in school for a minimum of one year and to refer the student to the juvenile justice system (Richards, 2004). The prospect of the loss of federal funds for any school was reinforced by the inclusion in the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (Pipho, 1998). Urban High School's zero tolerance policy is described in section 5.3.3.7 of the school's *Policy Manual*.

Andrew Academy is the alternative school for Urban School District, and serves Urban High School students that are assigned short-term suspensions under zero tolerance. Two of the student participants were assigned to Andrew Academy at the time of the interviews. Andrew Academy is perceived by the participants to be the best alternative to reduce the number of suspensions of African-American males because it allows the students to remain in a school environment rather than being removed completely from the school environment and left unsupervised or walking the streets.

### **Definition of Terms**

For the purpose of this study, the following operational terms are applicable:

**Administrator:** Anyone who handles office discipline referrals, including principals, assistant principals, dean of discipline, or an interventionist (Gerke, 2004; Kupchik, 2009; Strong, & Cornell, 2008).

**African-American:** A person of African ancestral origin who self identifies or is identified by others as African American (Agyemang, Bhopal, & Bruijnzeels, 2005).

**Caregiver:** An individual who attends to the needs of a child or dependent adult, and includes: parent, foster parent, adoptive parent, grandparent, great grandparent, aunt,

uncle, sibling, or extended family member (The American Heritage Dictionary, 1995; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010; Cluver, & Gardner, 2007; Horwitz, & Reinhard, 1995; Roe, Minkler, & Saunders, 1995; Waldrop, & Weber, 2005).

**Disciplinary action:** Any consequence given to a student for misbehavior as a result of being referred to an administrator by a teacher (Harris, 2001).

**Disproportionality:** The over- or under-representation of a subpopulation if its proportion in the target classification (e.g., suspension) exceeds its representation in the population by 10% or more of that population (Reschly, 1997; Skiba, et al., 2000).

**Disproportionate number:** Number or percentage of disciplinary actions received by an ethnic group of students that is greater than their number or percentage of enrollment within the school or school system (Harris, 2001).

**Exclusionary discipline:** Out-of-school suspension, expulsions, and other disciplinary actions taken by administrators to remove a student from the educational setting (Noltemeyer & Mcloughlin, 2010).

**Exclusion:** Out-of-school suspension and expulsion (Skiba & Knesting, 2001).

**Expulsion:** Complete exclusion from the public school system of a student who is at least 14 years of age whose continued behavior indicates that his or her continued presence presents a clear threat to the other students or employees or the student has been registered as a sex offender (North Carolina General Statutes, 2008, Section 115C-391d-1, 2).

**Overrepresentation:** A larger proportion of a group that is present at a certain stage than would be expected based on their proportion in the general population (U. S. Department of Justice, 1999).

**Short-term suspension:** a specific amount of time that a student is not allowed to attend school or be allowed on school grounds (Skiba, et al., 1997). Short-term suspensions are the removal of the student “for a period of 10 days or less” (North Carolina General Statues, (2008), 115C-391b).

**Long-term suspension:** Suspensions “in excess of 10 school days but not exceeding the time remaining in the school year” (North Carolina General Statues, 2008, 115C-391c).

**Zero tolerance policies:** Policies which deal out severe punishment for all offenses, no matter how minor, ostensibly in an effort to treat all offenders equally in the spirit of fairness and intolerance of rule-breaking (Skiba & Peterson, 1999). In this study, policies and initiatives are used interchangeably.

### **Limitations and Delimitations of the Study**

Gay and Airasian (2000) defined limitations as conditions that are not under the control of the researcher. I identified several limitations related to the current study. The first limitation was associated with the method of data collection. The reliability of the study may have been enhanced had I used a mixed methods research design instead of just the qualitative design. A second limitation is related to the fact that the study was conducted in only one high school. A collective case study involving more than one school would have enhanced the trustworthiness and transferability of my findings. Notwithstanding these limitations, my study rendered important insights into the views of the stakeholders who are directly affected by the disproportionality in the suspensions and expulsions of African American male students.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study will be relevant to key stakeholders in K-12 schooling, policymakers, and scholars. First, although numerous studies show that as a consequence of zero tolerance policies,

there is an overrepresentation of Africa-American males in office referrals, suspensions, and expulsions (Skiba et al., 2002); there has been no research to examine or to understand the perspectives of some of the key stakeholders concerning the reasons for this disproportionality. This study can provide data for policymakers that will enable them to recognize the importance of the involvement of all stakeholders in the development of discipline policies. My study can also provide a platform for the “outsiders” to have their voices heard on issues that concern them. Findings from this study can provide data that may result in the reduction or elimination of the inequity in exclusionary discipline practices. My study may be of interest to others who are interested in research concerning student discipline, zero tolerance, and perceptions of key stakeholders concerning disproportionality in suspensions and expulsions of African American males. Finally, this study may be of interest to those who wish to expand research on the utilization of CRT in the examination of the disproportionality in suspensions and expulsions of African-Americans or other racial/ ethnic minority students under zero tolerance policies. According to Howard (2008), discipline is one of two areas where CRT would be “ideal” for examining issues related to racial justice for African-American males.

## CHAPTER 2

### Review of the Literature

Increasingly children seem to have no standing in the public sphere as citizens and as such denied a fair sense of entitlement and agency. Children have fewer rights than almost any other group and fewer institutions protecting these rights. Consequently, their voices and needs are almost completely absent from the debates, policies, and legislative practices that are constructed in terms of their needs (Giroux, 2003, p. 554).

The purpose of this qualitative instrumental case study was to understand the perceptions of key stakeholders regarding disproportionate exclusions (suspensions and expulsions) of African American males under zero tolerance policies. The review of the literature illuminated research that examined the disproportionality in suspensions and exclusions of African-American males under zero tolerance policies. This section reviews the literature that relates to the disproportionality in exclusions of African-American males with emphasis on four major areas: (a) establishment of zero tolerance policies, (b) implications of legal decisions related to the implementation of zero tolerance policies (c) studies on the disproportionate representation in exclusions of African-American males, (d) studies utilizing critical race theory, and (e) key stakeholders' perceptions of zero tolerance policies and practices. Lastly, this section summarizes the major findings of the literature review, and how these findings relate to and support this proposed study.

#### **Establishment of Zero Tolerance Initiatives**

According to Blumenson and Nilsen (2003), the rationale underlying zero tolerance in public schools is to protect and better educate one group of students by removing the other group of students who have been identified as superpredators, delinquents, or potential troublemakers. These authors contended that zero tolerance was intended to be a powerful and efficient deterrent

whereby almost all of the students would be well behaved. Consequently, only a few students would be deprived of an educational opportunity.

Feldman (1998) and Shanker (1995, 1997) related that advocates considered the zero tolerance policy as a necessity for safety and effective instruction. Other reasons given for adhering strictly to the policy include deterring misconduct, limiting legal liability by treating all disorders the same, creating an environment that is conducive to learning and averting tragedies (Advancement Project, 2005; Casella, 2003). Litke (1996) postulated that zero tolerance would result in fewer suspensions and expulsions as students became acclimated to the policy. Casella (2003) asserted that the rationale underlying the practice of zero tolerance is the supposed neutrality of the policy that allows teachers to be indifferent to history and color. It is this supposed neutrality that causes teachers to believe the same punishment results in the same consequences for all students. However, rather than this rationale actually existing, it is only an illusion that teachers are exercising authority fairly (Casella, 2003).

Zero tolerance initiatives in public school are a direct result of a federal reaction to the national cry for help to curtail the fear of the public's visualization of the apparent increase in juvenile crime in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Such widely publicized events as: Columbine, Colorado; Jonesborough, Arkansas; and Paducah, Kentucky were at the root of this fear (Advancement Project and the Civil Rights Project, 2000).

There is no disagreement or dispute about the schools' mandate to provide and maintain a safe and secure environment for learning. Neither is there any dispute that the schools have a responsibility to employ whatever measures are available to accomplish this mission. Nevertheless, there are controversies over how this mission is accomplished and the increase of exclusionary discipline.

This controversy has been dominated by the philosophy of zero tolerance policies. Even though there is no official definition of the term zero tolerance, the term is generally considered to mean a harsh, predefined mandatory consequence that is applied to a violation of school rules without regard to the seriousness of the behavior, mitigating circumstances, or the situational context (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008). Despite the fact that these policies have drawn drastic criticism, they have drawn support as well. Supporters have argued that zero tolerance improves the learning environment by removing disruptive students and deterring other students from misbehaving (Ewing, 2000). Opponents counter by showing that zero tolerance policies are not consistently implemented and the brunt of suspensions and expulsions are borne by mostly African-American and Latino students (Skiba, 2000).

This controversial policy originated at the federal level in 1986 with the passing of the Anti-Drug Abuse Act to combat illegal drug-related crime. Research conducted by Skiba and Peterson (1999) revealed that the term, zero tolerance, grew out of 1980s state and federal drug enforcement policies. School districts began to employ zero tolerance policies to send a strong message that schools would take a “tough” stance to ensure safety in and around the school zone (Skiba, 2000).

The need to address the perceived increased awareness of violence in schools gained ground in the early 1990s. In 1986, the Reagan administration implemented mandatory expulsion for fighting and possession of drugs, alcohol, and tobacco on school grounds. The strategy for the get-tough initiatives was modeled after similar initiatives in cities such as New York, Los Angeles, and Philadelphia. Zero tolerance school policies had their beginning in two places (Robbins, 2005). One place was the Crime Control Act 1990: The Gun-

Free School Zone Act (GFSA) (1990) which prohibited guns within 1,000 feet of schools. The other place was President Bush's (1991) *America 2000*, where he called for the elimination of violence and drugs from schools by the year 2000 (Robbins, 2005).

In an effort to meet this goal, Congress passed the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act of 1994 that allocated funds for schools to develop substance abuse and violence prevention programs (Robbins, 2005). According to Robbins (2005), the GFSA entitled Title VIII of Goals 2000: Educate America Act, was passed under the Clinton administration as an amendment to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 and the Improving America's School Act of 1994. While the GFSA's primary intent was to provide safe learning environments by removing guns from schools, it formed the foundation for zero tolerance policies.

The GFSA is directly responsible for the introduction of zero tolerance, the only federal law in the nation's schools that mandates specific consequences for student misbehavior. Using the Supreme Court case, *South Dakota v. Dole* (1987), the federal government leveraged its position by conditioning the receipt of federal funds on the states' enactment of legislation requiring local educational agencies to expel any student who either brings a firearm to school or is in possession of a firearm in school for a minimum of one year and to refer the student to the juvenile justice system (Richards, 2004). According to Richards (2004), the Court's ruling in *Dole* (1987) cautioned that Congress "...may not explicitly force states to comply via monetary threats/gains" (p. 103). The prospect of the loss of federal funds was reinforced by the inclusion in the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (Pipho, 1998). Further, the law allows the chief administering officer of the local educational agency to adjust the penalty on a case-by-case basis, and the school districts are permitted—not required, to provide



an alternative education program for students subject to a one-year expulsion (GFSA, as cited in Skiba, 2000). According to Insley (2001), most states complied within a year.

The GFSA (1994) was originally intended to be used to issue harsh punishment for serious violations involving weapons. Therefore, it did not include provisions for the use of alcohol and/or illicit drugs by students in public schools. Neither did zero tolerance policies distinguish between serious and non-serious offenses (American Bar Association, 2001). Consequently, many states have used the lack of such provisions to broaden their zero tolerance policies to include mandatory suspension and/or expulsions for fighting, possession of drugs, alcohol, tobacco, excessive absence, defiance of authority, and disruptive or disorderly behavior (McCord, Hager, & Mattocks, 2007; Skiba, 2000). Moreover, many schools have gone further and included in their zero tolerance policies seemingly harmless objects such as treating cough drops, aspirins, and Midol as drugs; while nail clippers and paper clips have been treated as weapons. Some school districts have expanded their zero tolerance policies to include infractions that pose little to no threat to safety (Advancement Project, 2005; Justice Policy Institute, 2009; Skiba & Peterson, 1999).

### **Implications of Legal Decisions Related to the Implementation of Zero Tolerance Policies**

It is the courts' responsibility to resolve disputes; while at the same time to weigh the facts against the law and constitutional provisions (McCord, et al., 2007). It seems that almost since the commencement of zero tolerance policies, the courts have been challenged with cases testing the constitutionality of these policies. After conducting a search of cases involving zero tolerance policies, McCord, et al., (2007) selected specific cases related to the issues that the courts are reviewing with respect to these policies. According to McCord, et al., (2007), the cases generally fit into one or more of the following six broad categories: (a) zero tolerance

policies violate the protected right of the student to procedural and substantive due process, (b) zero tolerance policies are faulty because of the failure of those responsible for implementation to use reasonable care in hiring, supervising and retaining employees, (c) zero tolerance policies are unconstitutionally vague and in some cases interfere with the free speech provision of the First Amendment, (d) zero tolerance policies infringe on the student's protected right to attend school. . . ., (e) zero tolerance policies frequently involve illegal search and seizure, and (f) zero tolerance policies are unconstitutionally vague when determining if a true threat exists.

Often First Amendment claims allege that policies are vague. One such example is the 2004 case of *Tyler Chase Harper v. Poway Unified School District, et al.* where the plaintiff wore a t-shirt that strongly expressed his belief against homosexuality. The administration considered the t-shirt disruptive and requested the student to remove it or face expulsion. The student alleged in the complaint that the district's policies--which dealt with prohibited student dress, speech that restricted obscene or libelous expressions, and hate behaviors--were vague. The court ruled in favor of the school district and found that the district's policies were not vague and that any reasonable student would have known that the t-shirt was prohibited.

Even though the U. S. Supreme Court has been quiet with regards to police involvement in searches in public schools, there is no shortage of Fourth Amendment violation claims where search and seizure approaches are being questioned. The Supreme Court's 1985 decision in *New Jersey v. T. L. O.* gave some guidance on this issue. In this case, the Court ruled on the legality of a search of a high school student's purse by a public school assistant principal that produced a pack of cigarettes and rolling paper that was commonly associated with marijuana and evidence of drug dealing. The Court ruled that students were entitled to some expectation of privacy.

Nevertheless, the Court also held that school officials should not have to meet the probable cause standard usually required of police officers who conducted a search.

In reaching its decision, the Court argued that “reasonableness” which is a more flexible standard, should be applied to school searches and could be determined by using a two-prong test. First, the search must be justified at its inception that such a reasonable basis, fact pattern, or history amounts to “reasonable grounds for suspecting that the search will turn up evidence that the student has violated or is violating the laws or rules of the school” (*New Jersey v. T. L. O.*, 1985, p. 342). Second, the search must be reasonable in scope. In other words, measures that school official adopt must be “reasonably related to the objectives of the search and not excessively intrusive in light of the age and sex of the student and the nature of the infraction” (*New Jersey v. T. L. O.*, 1985, p. 342). Less rigid than probable cause, the reasonableness standard was meant to give school officials the power and authority to manage and sustain order and discipline through the “dictates of reason and common sense” (*New Jersey v. T. L. O.*, 1985, p. 343) while simultaneously protecting the interests of the students. Even though the Court’s decision was implicit and direct in certain respects, the standard for police involvement was not resolved. Refusing to address this issue, the Court stated:

We here consider only searches carried out by school authorities acting alone and on their own authority. This case does not present the question of the appropriate standard for assessing the legality of searches conducted by school officials in conjunction with or at the behest of law enforcement agencies and, we express no opinion on that question. (*New Jersey v. T. L. O.*, 1985, p. 341, n. 7)

In addition to *New Jersey v. T. L. O.* (1985), the U. S. Supreme Court has rendered two other decisions related to students’ Fourth Amendment rights in schools. In *Vernonia School District 47 J v. Acton* (1995), the Court’s ruling gave judicial approval to schools nationwide for mandatory random suspicious-less drug testing of student athletes using the rationale that public

schools are a special environment because of their responsibilities owed to students. In *Board of Education of Independent School District 92 of Pottawatomie County v. Earls* (2002), the U. S. Supreme Court upheld random drug testing of students involved in extracurricular activities. In both cases, the Court emphasized a profound concern for the health and safety of students involved in and subjected to the use of illegal drugs.

*Goss v. Lopez* (1975) was the first case heard by the U.S. Supreme Court which addressed zero tolerance and the due process issue of the Fourteenth Amendment. In *Goss* (1975), a public school principal in Columbus, Ohio suspended nine African-American high school students after their involvement in a demonstration that included “disruptive” and “disobedient” behavior. The principal failed to provide a hearing, but instead invited the students and their parents to participate in a conference to discuss the students’ future. Ohio’s law provided that when a student was suspended, the principal was required to notify the students’ parents within 24 hours to explain her or his reason for the action taken. The state law provided that parents could appeal a suspension decision to the State Board of Education. However, Ohio school district did not have any written procedure for suspension. The students challenged the state law and filed a lawsuit alleging that the Ohio law violated their 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment by allowing public school officials to deprive them of their rights to an education without a hearing. The U. S. Supreme Court upheld the district court’s decision and found that the students’ 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment was violated. The Court ruled that education is a property right under state law, stating that “a student’s legitimate entitlement to a public education is a property interest which is protected by the Due Process Clause and which may not be taken away ... without adherence to the minimum procedures required by that Clause” (*Goss*, 1975, p. 574).

*Goss* (1975) set the standard for the minimal constitutional requirements when students are suspended for 10 days or less. The Court ruled that students must be given oral or written notice of the charges. However, if the student denies the charges, school officials must present an explanation of the evidence, and offer the student an opportunity to present his or her side of the story.

### **Studies on the Disproportionate Representation of Exclusions of African-American Males**

Findings of disproportionality in the implementation of school disciplinary exclusionary policies and practices have been repeatedly and consistently documented in studies and reports for decades, and show African-American students bearing the brunt of suspensions and expulsions (Advancement Project, 2005; Children's Defense Fund, 1975; Bradshaw, Mitchell, O'Brennan, & Leaf, 2010; Sundius & Farneth, 2008; Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2011; Eitle & Eitle, 2004; Lewis, Butler, Bonner, & Joubert, 2010; Losen & Gillespie, 2012; Losen & Skiba, 2010; McCarthy & Hoge, 1987; McFadden, Marsh, Price, & Hwang, 1992; McLoughlin & Noltemeyer, 2010a, 2010b; Payne & Welch, 2010; Raffaele, Mendez, Knoff, & Ferron, 2002; Rocha & Hawes, 2009; Skiba, Horner, Chung, Rausch, May, & Tobin, 2011; Theriot & Dupper, 2010; Wu, Pink, Crain, & Moles, 1982). Zero tolerance policies reinforced in the public imagination the image of students of color as a source of public fear and a threat to public school safety. Zero tolerance policies and practices appear to be made-to-order for mobilizing racialized codes and race-based moral panics that portray Black and Brown urban youth as a frightening and violent threat to the safety of decent Americans (Webb, 2006, as cited in Sundius & Farneth, 2008).

The consistent research documenting these disparities is disturbing. One of the earliest studies of evidence relating to school suspensions and expulsions was conducted by the

Children's Defense Fund (1975). National data provided the U.S. Office of Civil Rights (OCR) with statistics on school discipline was studied and the researchers reported that rates of school suspensions for Black students were two to three times higher than suspensions for White students at the elementary, middle and high schools. Over two thirds of the school districts represented in the national OCR sample showed rates of Black suspensions that exceeded rates for White students.

A study completed by the U.S. Department of Education showed that although African-American students comprised only 17% of the public school population nationwide, they made up 32% of out-of-school suspensions. At the same time, White students constituted 63% of the enrollment, yet they represented 50% of suspensions and 50% of expulsions (U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 1998; Elementary and Secondary School Civil Rights Compliance Report, 2000). The most recent study conducted by the U. S. Department of Education indicated that even though African-American students make up only 18% of public school students, they represent 36 % of students suspended once, 46 % of students suspended more than once, and 39% of those expelled (U. S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2012). These statistics alone do not prove intentional discrimination. Whether these disparities are intentional or unintentional, they do suggest that this type of exclusionary disproportionality is nationwide and more likely to be found in predominately Black and Latino school districts (Advancement Project/Civil Rights Project Report, 2000; U. S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2012).

Payne and Welch's (2010) research confirmed that African-American students are consistently being disciplined more frequently and more severely than other students for the same behavior. They compared their findings to the manner that African-American criminals are

being subjected to harsher criminal punishment than other criminals. Their study found that the trends in school policies and punishment are similar to those sanctioned by the criminal justice system.

Skiba, Peterson, and Williams (1997) conducted two studies which examined various issues related to school discipline documented in archived office disciplinary referral records. The studies showed that most referrals were of a nature that did not pose any threats, but rather were offenses that represented noncompliance or disrespect. They found that the referrals and suspensions disproportionately affected African-American males.

Skiba, Eckes, and Brown (2009/10) studied two categories of suspensions and expulsions; those in which students have been suspended or expelled for what seemed to be trivial infractions, and those where racial disparities in suspensions and expulsions are clearly evident. The researchers also reviewed the status of case law and research related to school discipline in general and racial/ethnic disparities in school discipline in particular. Their research confirmed that there is a disproportionate rate of suspensions and expulsions of African-American males; however, they found that the courts have refused to provide access for relief to the students in school disciplinary cases.

### **Studies Utilizing Critical Race Theory**

Ladson-Billing and Tate(1995) postulated that while race was a major factor in society in general, it was specifically a major factor in education. However, as pointed out by these authors, race was still untheorized in education at that time. Consequently, Ladson-Billing and Tate put forth the proposal that CRT could be employed to remedy this oversight by investigating the part that race and racism play in education. Shortly after the publication of their article, “Toward a critical race theory of education” in 1995, Tate’s (1997) published review of CRT explained in

details its history and importance, and how CRT is linked to education research. Since that time, several CRT scholars have conducted studies that focused on the experiences and lives of students of color.

Duncan's (2002b) ethnographic study explored the reasons for exclusion and marginalization of Black males in a large high-performing magnet Midwest high school. From January 1999 to June 2001, Duncan and his team collected data through individual and focus group interviews with the Black male students. They also obtained data through participant observations in a variety of settings, demographic, standardized testing, attendance, graduation rates and other documents related to the school's historical, ideological and programmatic features. Through the use of the counter storytelling tenet of CRT, the researcher found that the narratives of the administrators, teachers and the students support the evidence they gathered concerning the exclusion and marginalization of Black male students at the school.

Similarly, Fernandez (2002) used the counter storytelling principle of CRT to reflect on the educational experiences of a Latino college student in a Chicago high school. She employed ethnographic interviews to record the student's life history and to get his views on what education means to him. His reflections on his experiences at the predominately Latino/a school included his descriptions of teachers' low expectations, focus on discipline, and a lack of difficulty in the curriculum for students who aspired to go to college. The findings indicated that he strongly believed in the value and significance of education.

Howard (2008) conducted a qualitative case study to examine the perceptions of African-American males in PreK-12 schools of how they believed race and racism played a part in their schooling experiences. The author spent one year documenting the educational experiences of two hundred African-American middle and high school males. The participants for this smaller



study consisted of 10 African-American students from the larger group who were interviewed in order to gather an in-depth analysis of their perceptions and experiences. Five of the students attended schools located in urban, low-income areas, and the students were largely African-American and Latino. The other five participants attended schools that were more racially mixed and were located in suburban areas that were mostly White and middle class. Using counter storytelling within a CRT framework, the results showed that the participants were cognizant of how race changed the views of their teachers and administrators.

DeCuir and Dixson (2004) employed CRT to examine the effect of race and racism on the experiences of Black students attending a predominately White private school located in an affluent White area. Of the 599 kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade students, only 44 were African-Americans. The authors used CRT's storytelling to critique the tenet of "whiteness as property" space of the school, and interviewed the Black students to get their perceptions of how racism affected their lives as students. CRT's tenet of interest convergence was used to analyze the students' beliefs that some of the Black students were recruited because of their athletic ability which was viewed by the majority of White students and school administrators as a means of improving the school's sports status. Additionally, CRT revealed how the concept of the permanence of racism was embedded in the implementation of school disciplinary rules when the administration did not take the recommended disciplinary action for a racially motivated incident that involved a White student who allegedly posted hate speech on his Facebook account.

Teranishi's (2002) study of Asian Pacific American (APA) students in California used a CRT framework to examine APA students' high school racial and ethnic experiences, and the factors that played a role in their success. The participants included 80 Chinese American and 80

Filipino American male and female seniors attending four California public high schools with GPAs between 2.8 to 3.5, and who were believed to be most likely to extend their education beyond high school. Two of the schools had a large Chinese ethnic population, and the other two schools had a large percentage of Filipino students. These schools were purposefully selected because of their large enrollment of each group of Chinese or Filipino students. The data were collected through a survey followed by semi-structured, in-depth interviews with the students, and field notes for each school. The author concluded that CRT allowed him to conceptualize how APA students' high school experiences varied for the two ethnic groups, and to reveal "the susceptibility and vulnerability of supposed resilient model minorities to inequality and oppressed in social contexts" (Teranishi, 2002, p. 152).

A study conducted by Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2002) utilized CRT to explore racial microaggressions and campus racial climate of African-American students on college campuses. The participants consisted of 18 female and 16 male African-American students attending three elite, predominantly White universities. There were two public and one private university located in the U. S. These researchers used a qualitative research design employing focus groups which were purposefully selected to gather the data. An analysis of the data led to the emergence of themes which showed that there was a negative and marginalized perception of African-American students on college campuses.

Finally, Horsford's (2010) study examined "the experiential knowledge and wisdom" of retired Black school superintendents who attended all Black schools and had led desegregated school districts "to determine if and how the valued aspects of segregated schooling could be reestablished in African-American educational contexts today" (p. 62). The author utilized critical race methodology in order to present the reflections and perspectives of Black

superintendents so that interested stakeholders can have an enhanced “understanding of how the positive aspects of *valued segregated schools* (emphasis original) can improve Black education today” (p. 58). The eight purposefully recruited participants included four females and four males who were reared in segregated homes in the Midwest, Mid-Atlantic, and Southern regions of the U. S. They were born between 1932 and 1947, and graduated from high school before school desegregation, between 1950 and 1965. To gather the data, the author traveled to a variety of cities over a three-month period to conduct one-on-one semi-structured interviews. The notes that were taken during the interviews were used to triangulate the responses from the interviews and other data collected by the author. Member checking was used to enhance credibility and to ensure that the participants’ intended meanings were accurate. The counter-stories of the participants reflections resulted in five themes that the superintendents perceived as critical regarding “separate and unequal schooling contexts” (p. 58).

### **Key Stakeholders’ Perceptions of Disciplinary Policies and Procedures**

The review of the literature related to key stakeholders’ perceptions of zero tolerance indicated few qualitative studies have been specifically conducted regarding this issue. The focus of the existing research mostly concentrated on the stakeholders’ perceptions of safety, interpretation, fairness, violence, effectiveness, drug policy, and implementation of discipline policies in general. Even though the U. S. Department of Education (2000) advised that families and the entire community need to be involved in children’s education, and others have observed that voices of major stakeholders are missing in the development and implementation of discipline policies and decisions for effective schools, none of these studies considered the stakeholders’ perceptions of the reasons for the disproportionate suspensions and exclusions of African-American male students under zero tolerance policies (Leinhardt & Willert, 2002).

**Administrators' perceptions.** The review of the literature revealed that most of the research related to the views of administrators' perceptions of disciplinary policies and procedures relates to discipline in general. However, some studies have been conducted regarding the perceptions of administrators regarding zero tolerance.

Dunbar and Villarruel's (2002) study consisted of 36 principals in a Michigan urban school district with a majority of African-American students, and examined how urban school leaders interpreted and implemented zero tolerance policy, and how their decisions subsequently affected students of color. The data were gathered by semi-structured, face-to-face open-ended interviews and observations. The results showed that the principals had varied perceptions and interpretations which resulted in disparate interpretation and implementation of the zero tolerance that negatively affected the number of suspensions and expulsions of African-American and Latino students.

Another study was conducted by the same researchers, Dunbar and Villarruel (2004), in which they utilized a policy analysis framework to explore how urban, suburban, and rural administrators interpret, implement, and enforce zero tolerance policies differently. The data were collected from face-to-face, structured interviews with 36 principals employed in a predominately African America Michigan urban school district with a student population of 75% African-American, 17.1% non-Hispanic White, 2.4% Hispanic, and about 5% Asian and Native American. Eight principals were selected from two Michigan rural districts. The students were approximately 92% non-Hispanic White, 4% Hispanic/Latino, 2% Native American, and 1% either African or Asian American. They found that some principals from both districts modified the policies to take into account the needs and culture of their particular districts, while some administrators in both districts adhered strictly to the policies without modification.

Beckham's (2009) study used a survey to examine school principals' perceptions of the effectiveness of zero tolerance policies as a preventive tool against school violence. The participants consisted of 91 administrators from five of the Big Eight Urban school districts of Ohio, including Akron, Columbus, Dayton, Toledo, and Youngstown who were responsible for implementing zero tolerance discipline policies. The study revealed that while the administrators did not see expulsion as the best alternative, they did perceive that their schools were safer since the implementation of zero tolerance policies.

Wyatt (2010) conducted a study of assistant principals to examine their perceptions of student discipline. The participants included 371 assistant principals working in a large, Gulf Coast metropolitan area. The study used survey utilizing cognitive interviews with open-ended questions for one-on-one interviews. When asked to identify the extent to which they perceived student discipline as an essential part of a good school, 31% answered that student discipline was important to an effective school and 69% viewed discipline as being very important to the effectiveness of a school.

A qualitative study conducted by Lewis (2009) focused on the perceptions of administrators, teachers, and parents related to effective discipline practices. The administrators' focus group consisted of two administrators and the superintendent or his/her designee from a small, rural area northeast of Atlanta, Georgia. The findings showed that the administrators perceived that discipline policies are the most effective when there is communication, consistency in policies, expectations, and consequences, responsibility and accountability of all stakeholders.

Another study related to discipline was conducted by Mohrbutter (2011) that examined the perceptions of twelve assistant principals from four high schools in North Carolina

concerning the use of in-school suspension. The qualitative study consisted of an online survey, face-to-face interviews, field observations, focus groups, and discipline documents. The researcher employed open-ended questions for both individual and focus group interviews. The study's results indicated that even though the assistant principals perceived in-school suspension to be an appropriate consequence for minor unacceptable violations, they viewed it as having little effect on behavior improvement.

**Teachers' perceptions.** As in the case of research related to the perceptions of administrators on zero tolerance, the same is true regarding teachers. That is, some studies do not relate specifically to zero tolerance. They do however; pertain to teachers' perceptions of discipline in general.

A study was completed by Konter (2002) that described teachers' perceptions of zero tolerance. The author used surveys to collect data from 85 teachers who worked in a school in Eagan, Minnesota with less than 500 students and a school in Independence, Wisconsin also with less than 500 students. The findings suggested that the teachers perceived the policy to be beneficial and effective in violence reduction.

A study which employed both legal and qualitative methods was conducted by Fries and DeMitchell (2007) to examine teachers' perspectives of zero tolerance and its relationship to the notions of fairness. The participants consisted of two focus groups including eight experienced teachers, and six teacher interns at a K-8 school in the northeastern United States. The study showed that factors such as context, intent, history, and teacher judgment were not mentioned in the policy. The authors found that from the teachers' perspectives it is imperative that these factors should be considered when implementing zero tolerance policies.

Sullivan and Keeney (2008) conducted a study of 70 middle school teachers and 238 high school teachers working in small, medium, and large schools in Brooklyn, Bronx, Manhattan, and Queens, New York assessing their perceptions of safety and discipline in their schools. The data were collected using surveys, interviews, focus groups, New York City and State school report cards for the 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 school years, and a variety of reference data from research and policy reports. The results showed that among others, some of the teachers perceived that: (a) the most often reported threat to school safety was a lack of cohesive culture and positive relationship between teachers and students, (b) there is no clear system for discipline, (c) teachers have some or no influence over discipline and safety policies, but should have a lot or most influence over these issues, (d) students have some or no influence over discipline and safety policies, but should have some or most influence over the matters, and (e) students never or rarely feel safe with armed NYPD officers in the school.

Using face-to-face interviews and open-ended questions, Garcia and Taaca-Warren's (2009) study of eight high school teachers from Woodland, California and seven teachers from surrounding high schools in Sacramento, California examined teachers' perceptions of suspension. The outcome revealed that some of the teachers perceived suspension as being effective; however, all of the teachers viewed suspension as arbitrary and biased.

Gregory and Mosely's (2004) study used face-to-face, semi-structured interviews to examine teachers' implicit theories regarding causes of behavior problems and particularly how they regard race and culture as they relate to the discipline gap. The participants consisted of 14 White teachers, four African-American teachers, and one Latino teacher. The sample was 58% female and 42% male. The results indicated that the teachers perceived the causes for discipline

problems as being forces inside the school, the adolescent, and the community, and race did not account for the discipline gap.

According to Hemmings (2002), the understandings of teachers and students are rather different concerning control, power, and respect. The author concluded that these differences in understanding affect the assigning and perceptions of discipline.

**Students' perceptions.** Just as in the case of limited research found on the perceptions of administrators and teachers on zero tolerance, there is a dearth of research in the area of students' perceptions of zero tolerance. However, research has been done related to students' perspectives on discipline and suspensions. The studies in this strand represent findings on students' perceptions on zero tolerance policy and disciplinary practices in general.

McNeal and Dunbar (2010) employed a qualitative method study which consisted of individual face-to-face interviews and focus groups to gain an understanding of student perceptions of the implementation of zero tolerance policy and school safety. The study was comprised of 90 eleventh and twelfth grade students ranging in age from 16 to 19 years old from different high schools in the Midwest. Students in the study were 15% female, 85% female, 99% African-American and 1% Hispanic. The findings indicated that high school students perceived that there was a significant philosophical difference between what zero tolerance policies were designed to do and what they actually accomplish. The findings also showed that the students overwhelmingly indicated that they perceived zero tolerance policies as ineffective and they still do not feel safe in their schools.

Varvus and Cole (2002) conducted a study over a five-year period using videotapes, interviews, and field notes in a school that used a zero tolerance policy. Data for the study came mostly from observation of two freshman-level science classes attending Jefferson High School



located in a large urban area in the Midwest. As a result of an analysis of the data, the authors concluded that discipline of minority students was largely unjustified. They observed that the teachers frequently removed minority students from class after being singled out when a series of minor, non-violent, non-threatening events occurred.

A study to assess students' perceptions of implementation and communication of school drug policies to students and parents was conducted by Evan-Whipps, Bond, Toumbourou, and Catalano (2007). The researchers surveyed 3899 seventh and ninth graders from public and private schools in two states in the United States and Australia to determine how effectively schools are communicating school drug policy information to parents and students, to gain insight into how schools policies are implemented, and to investigate what policy variables impact students' drug use at school and their perceptions of other students' drug use at school. The results indicated that students were generally knowledgeable about the likely consequences for drug policy violations in their schools. The researchers concluded that this could be important because it shows that "school drug policy will only impact student behavior if it is perceived to be well enforced" (Evan-Whipp et al., 2007, p. 144).

Costenbader and Markson (1998) conducted an investigation examining relevant characteristics associated with the students who had been suspended and their perceptions regarding these suspensions. The study surveyed 620 middle and high school students from an urban school district and a rural school district. The findings showed that suspended students reported feeling "angry at the person who sent me to suspension" or "happy to get out of the situation" (p.76).

Ruck and Wortley (2002) conducted a study of Canadian students to assess their perceptions of school disciplinary practices and other aspects of the school climate. The sample

was composed of 1870 students in 10<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grades from 11 randomly chosen high schools from a racially and ethnically diverse school district in the Metropolitan Toronto section of Ontario, Canada. The participants consisted of 49% White or European descent, 18% Asian descent, 14% Black or African descent, 8% South Asian descent, and 8% of “other” racial/ethnic background. The study found that the responses from Black students showed that they believed they were more likely: (a) to be subjected to worse treatment by teachers and police, (b) to be suspended more than other students, (c) and the police was called for them more than for others.

Kupchik and Ellis’s (2008) study focused on students’ perceptions of fairness of school rules and safety. In their study they analyzed data from a nationally representative survey which gathered data by interviewing students about their school behavior and their perceptions of school safety, school rules, and the school climate in general. The findings showed that African-American students perceived less fairness and consistency of school rules and their enforcement than White students; however the Latino/a students’ perceptions are not significantly different than those of White students.

Arum (2003) conducted a study of the perceptions of the fairness of rules and their enforcement. Using data gathered from four national surveys and over 6000 court cases, the author analyzed and coded 1204 court cases related to a school’s right to discipline students. This data were related to: (a) data on the use of corporal punishment as well as the adoption of school rules and discipline conduct codes; student surveys on students’ perceptions of the strictness and fairness of discipline, (b) public school teachers’ perceptions of the enforcement of school rules, and (c) teachers’ perceptions of principals’ support. The findings revealed that African-American students perceived that they receive less fairness in school than White students.

A study by Bracy (2011) collected ethnographic data in two Mid-Atlantic public high schools to examine students' perceptions of school resource officers, discipline policies, punishment, and fairness in rule implementation. About 75% of the students at Cole High School were White and 20% were African-American. Vista High School's student population consisted of about 36% White, 50% African-American and 11% Latino/a. The data were collected through observations, face-to-face interviews, and audiotaped interviews during the 2006-2007 school years. The interviews included all the administrators, school resource officers, disciplinary staff, five teachers, ten students, and five parents at each school. The findings indicated that the students perceived their schools are safe, many of the schools' safety strategies are not needed, and because of the manner that their schools issue punishment and implement rules, they feel powerless.

Johnson, Arumi, and Ott (2006) conducted an analysis of a study by Education Insights at Public Agenda on student perceptions on discipline. The authors found that 19% of White students, 26% of Hispanic students, and 33% of African-American regarded discipline as being inconsistently applied.

Other research was conducted by Bru, Stephens, and Torsheim, 2002; Partington, 1998; Partington, 2001; Wu, Pink, Crain, and Moles, 1982. Their findings revealed that if students perceive they are treated fairly and the relationship with their teachers is positive, they are more likely to view discipline as being fair.

**Caregivers' perceptions.** Similarly to the lack of research surrounding the perceptions of zero tolerance of the other groups of key stakeholders, the same is true for parents. In fact, the review of the literature failed to reveal any studies related to caregivers' perceptions of zero

tolerance policy. Following are studies that related to the perceptions of parents/caregivers regarding discipline in general.

Bernard, Freire, Bascunan, Arenas, and Verga (2004) conducted an exploratory study to understand: (a) parents' views of and concern about disciplinary practices at school, (b) parents' ideas about the connection between home and school discipline, and (c) parents' understanding of the officially prescribed consequences of behavior identified as non-tolerable. The participants were 38 Latino parents with at least one child under the age of 18 who had come to Canada within the last 10 years. The findings revealed that: (a) parents perceive teachers as being overly bureaucratic, impersonal, and arbitrary, (b) parents and teachers do not distinguish major and minor misbehavior in the same ways (c) parents downplay verbal exchanges, and (d) parents do not agree with a legalistic or zero tolerance approach.

Surveys were used by Evans-Whipps et al., (2007) to conduct a study: (a) to determine how effectively schools are communicating school drug policy information to parents and students, (b) to gain insight into how schools' policies are implemented, and (c) to investigate what policy variables impact students' drug use at school and their perceptions of other students' drug use at school. The data were collected from a total of 3744 parents of the participating students attending schools in two states in the United States and Australia. The 15-minute telephone interview was administered in English, Vietnamese, Spanish, Korean, and Russian. The results indicated that a great percentage of the parents were aware of specific drug policies at their children's schools. However, the findings indicated that very few parents were involved in the policy setting process.

In Johnson's et al., (2006) study cited above, 1379 parents participated in two focus groups. The results showed that four in 10 Black parents reported that they felt that their child had been unfairly punished by a teacher.

### **Summary**

The review of the literature illuminated the high consistency disparity of exclusions under zero tolerance policies. Such disparities have been found in national, state, and local level data (Guilford County OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Assessment, 2010; Kinsler, 2005, 2011; Losen & Gillespie, 2012; Losen & Skiba, 2010; North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2011; Skiba, et al., 2012; U. S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, 2012). Of special concern is that the consistent disproportionality of suspensions and exclusions of African-American males remains ubiquitous in American public schools. Although there is a body of research that examined the perceptions of administrators, teachers, students, and parents/caregivers regarding general disciplinary policies and procedures, the review of the literature demonstrated that the voices of the major stakeholders are often missing or silent regarding zero tolerance policies and procedures specifically (Dwyer, et al., 1998; Leinhardt & Willert, 2002; Wald & Kurlaender, 2003).

Additionally, the literature produced several studies that focused on CRT and how the theory is used to reveal how race and racism impact the lives and experiences of marginalized students even today. The studies show how CRT can be utilized to give voice to those stakeholders who would otherwise remain "nameless and voiceless" (Lynn, & Parker, p. 277). My study provided the opportunity to contribute to this field of research by providing a much needed platform for these "nameless and voiceless" stakeholders in relationship to zero tolerance policies and procedures (Lynn, & Parker, p. 277).

## CHAPTER 3

### Methodology

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretative, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretative, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3).

The purpose of this proposed qualitative study was to examine and to understand reasons for the disproportionality in suspensions and expulsions of African-American males under zero tolerance policies from the perspectives of key stakeholders. This chapter describes the research design, role of researcher, participants, data collection procedure, data analysis procedures, and trustworthiness of the research.

#### **Assumption and Rationale for Qualitative Research**

A review of methodology literature revealed the following about the qualitative research approach: (a) it is exploratory in nature as its aim is to provide a rich description and a broad view of the processes and issues under study, (b) the researcher is not interested in outcomes or the testing of a hypothesis, but rather in generating a hypothesis through the emerging of themes and improvement through the stories and experiences of the participants, (c) it is inductive rather than deductive, (d) and the researcher is the major tool for gathering data and brings her/his bias into the research (Creswell, 2002; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Glasser, 1992; Henwood & Pidgeon, 1993; Horsburgh; Janesick, 2002; Maxwell, 2004; Mehra, 2001, 2002; Popay, Rogers, & Williams, 1998; Porter, 1993; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Rossman and Rallis (2003) distinguished qualitative research as: (a) being naturalistic, (b) drawing on multiple methods that respect the humanity of participants in the study, (c) focusing on context, and (d) being

emergent, evolving, and fundamentally interpretive. Marshall and Rossman (2011) added that qualitative research is a broad approach to the study of social occurrences. When the research facilitates investigation of a phenomenon within its environment using a variety of data sources, qualitative methodology is an appropriate approach (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Baxter and Jack (2008) further contended that this strategy allows the issue to be explored through a variety of lenses which provides for more than one facet of the phenomenon to be understood. Further, since qualitative research is naturalistic and attempts to probe the everyday life and experiences of various groups of people in their natural setting, it is especially helpful in studying educational settings and processes.

The five research purposes for employing qualitative studies were outlined by Maxwell (1998):

(a) understanding the meaning that participants in a study give to events, situations and actions that they are involved with; and of the accounts they give of their lives and experiences, (b) understanding the particular context within which the participants act, and the influence this context has on their actions, (c) identifying unanticipated phenomena and influences, and generating new, grounded theories about them, (d) understanding the process by which events and actions take place, and (e) developing causal explanations (p. 66).

Accordingly, Domegan and Fleming (2007) maintained that this approach's goal is to investigate and discover answers about the current problem because of the lack of information about the problem. Myers (2009) asserted that qualitative research is appropriate when researchers wish to understand people, and the social and cultural environment in which they live. This approach allows the complications and differences of this environment to be explored and represented (Philip, 1998). Crabtree and Miller (1999) stated that the close collaboration between investigator and participant is one of the advantages of qualitative research. Furthermore, it is maintained by Lather (1992) and Robottom and Hart (1993) that a researcher

can better understand the actions of the participants, and the participants are able to describe their views of reality as they tell their stories.

According to Creswell (2009), qualitative research utilizes in-depth interviews which provide a rich text that helps to give voice to a group whose voice is often not heard and not well documented. Historically, African-Americans have been considered as a marginalized group whose voice is not often heard and whose experience has not been well documented. Hence, I determined that qualitative research was the most appropriate approach to understand reasons for the disproportionality in suspensions and expulsions of African-American males under zero tolerance policies from the perspectives of key stakeholders.

Additionally, the study employed a qualitative study design because it is congruent with the researcher's critical postmodernism/advocacy philosophical worldview. Worldview is defined by Galt (2008) as a "framework of ideas and beliefs through which an individual interprets the world and interacts with it" (p. 1). It is contended by Creswell (2009) that such a philosophical approach "should contain an action agenda for reform that may change the lives of the participants, the institutions in which individuals work or live, and the researcher's life..." (p. 9). Creswell (2009) continued to argue that certain issues such as empowerment, inequality, oppression, domination, suppression, and alienation that speak to important social issues of the day should be addressed.

Gephart (1999) concluded that critical postmodernism is a combination of two differing worldviews; namely, critical theory and postmodernism scholarship. The critical theory which is based on the German tradition of philosophical and political beliefs of Marx, Kant, Hegel and Max Weber, was developed in Germany by the Frankfurt School (Gephart, 1999). Partly through the work of French intellectuals such as Lyotard, Derrida and Foucault, postmodernism



emerged as a type of scholarship (Gephart, 1999). According to Revees and Hedberg (2003), this philosophical paradigm tends to engage in an on-going conflict with the forces of oppression and aims to bring about educational reform. Gephart (1999) expressed that critical post-modernism's goal is to open opportunities for social participation for groups who have been previously excluded and dominated by displacing the present structures of power and domination.

Furthermore, advocacy research gives a voice for the participants thereby raising their consciousness or advancing an agenda for change to improve their lives, and becoming "a united voice for reform and change" (Creswell, 2009, p. 9). Further, Creswell (2009) asserted that the most important aspect of the critical postmodernism/advocacy worldview is that it focuses on the needs of groups and individuals in our society that may be marginalized or disenfranchised. Not only will this worldview focus on empowering people through the process of constructing and utilizing their own knowledge (Reason & Bradbury, 2008), it will also allow meaningful integrations. . .of numerous perspectives and lived experiences of each participant (Morris, 2006).

I think that each of us tends to see the world through a specific lens. This could be the result of several factors including our cultural history, educational attainment, political views, or economic status. Whatever the reason is that individuals cultivate a particular worldview, it is an interwoven part of their identity. Learning about critical post-modernism/advocacy worldview was the inspiration of utilizing this approach because the research highlighted issues that are important to the participants, and it enabled me to gather information that is uniquely the perceptions, experience, and expertise of the participants, rather than of an outsider.

## Case Study Design

The following overview is not meant to be the history or an introduction to case study research. It is only intended to explain why I chose this approach for my study.

The history of case study research expands across many decades and is identified by spans of intensified use and times of nonuse. Its earliest use dates back to Europe and its early popularity extends to such disciplines as psychology, medicine, law, and political science (Creswell, 2013). According to Platt (1992) and Van Maanen (1988), case study research in the United States had its beginning at the Chicago School of Sociology in the fields of anthropology and sociology studying contemporary society in university surroundings.

A review of the literature indicated that case study as a research strategy has been investigated extensively particularly by three authors, Merriam (1998), Stake, (1994, 1995, 2000, 2005, 2008). Merriam (1998) argued that the “single most defining characteristic of case study research lies in delimiting the object of study: the case” (p. 27), which is “a thing, single entity, unit, or phenomenon with defined boundaries” (p. 29).

Stake (2000) stated, “case studies are useful in the study of human affairs because they are down-to-earth and attention-holding” (p. 19). In 1995, Stake’s position was that the researchers' most important role is that of interpreter. In his most recent discussions related to case study, Stake’s (2005, 2008) focus continued to be on the researcher’s role as interpreter because he argued that if the case is “more human or in some ways transcendent, it is because the researchers are so, not because of the methods” (2005, p. 443). Creswell (2009) and Stake (1995) recommended that when a proposed study will employ a variety of methods to collect data, a case study is typically the most appropriate design for the study. Stake (1995) maintained that

case studies are utilized when the researcher is exploring in depth a program, event, activity, process or one or more individuals.

I thought that because of the nature of my study, the definition of case study research would prove helpful in understanding why I chose a case study design to conduct my research. Case study is considered as a qualitative investigation of a contemporary phenomenon to answer specific research questions within its real-life context; which consists of multiple sources of evidence or development of a theoretical proposition that is used to guide in-depth data collection over time through multiple sources of information; and derives its meaning from bounded individual cases of interest rather than the method of inquiry (Creswell, 2013; Gillham, 2000a; Stake, 1994).

According to Creswell (2013), qualitative case studies are determined by the size of the bounded case, that is, the case may involve “one individual, several individuals, a group, an entire program, or an activity” (p. 99). Stake (1994) identified three types of case studies according to the intent of the case analysis: (a) intrinsic which explores a particular case because the case itself is of interest and to gain a better understanding of it, (b) instrumental which examines a particular case to gain information or insight on issues or to refine a theory, and (c) collective which studies a number of cases jointly in order to understand a phenomenon, population, or general condition.

Because the study focused on a particular issue, and Creswell (2012) took the position that an instrumental case study “serves the purpose of illuminating a particular issue” (p. 465), I believed that an instrumental qualitative case study design presented the most logical approach to examine and to understand the perspectives of key stakeholders regarding disproportionality in suspensions and expulsions of African-American males under zero tolerance policies. The

bounded system was a selected high school in an urban public school district in the Central Piedmont region in North Carolina.

### **Role of Researcher**

The issue of bias in qualitative research is of importance and must be discussed in any qualitative research study. Bias is defined by Maxwell (2004) as “the ways in which data collection or analysis are distorted by the researcher’s theory, values, or preconceptions” (p. 243). The researcher, will serve as the primary means of data collection, interpretation, and analysis. Therefore, it is obvious that some biases are instinctive,. It is pointed out by Creswell (2002) that the researcher serves as the primary instrument for data collection, and it was necessary to disclose my personal values, assumptions and biases at the beginning of the research. Creswell and Miller (2000) confirmed that the disclosure and acknowledgement of the researchers' assumptions, beliefs, and biases early in the research add to the validity and “allow readers to understand the researcher’s position. . .” (p. 127). Mehra (2002) argued that what is decided to study is determined by ones' beliefs and values. This statement was interpreted to mean that “what the researcher wants to study is based on who they are.” According to Mehra (2001), one’s educational and professional background also influences the selection of a research topic, and most often a topic is selected because of a personal connection to the topic. She contended that because the researcher is considered to be a significant part of the process of qualitative research, it is impossible for the researcher to separate her/himself from the topic or people that are being studied (Mehra, 2002). It is widely asserted that in qualitative research bias is inevitable because the researcher is the primary instrument of research and regardless of the method of research; the researcher brings to the study her/his mindset, biases, skills and knowledge; and the researcher’s bias enters into the research even if s/he tries to stay out of it

(Glasser, 1992; Janesick, 2002; Mehra, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Horsburgh (2003)

similarly argued when she stated:

Qualitative research usually operates from the premise that total detachment on the part of the part of the research is unattainable (even if deemed desirable) and that the individual who carries out research comprises an integral component of the entire process and product, as opposed to being a disembodied bystander with the capacity to provide an “uncontaminated” account (p. 308).

Horsburgh (2003) referred to this detachment as reflexivity which occurs when the researcher acknowledges that her/his personal “actions and decisions will inevitably impact upon the meaning and context of the experience under investigation” (p. 308). Henwood and Pidgeon (1993), Mason, (1996), and Porter (1993) noted that reflexivity takes place when it is realized by the researcher that because s/he is an essential part of the world that is being studied, her/his neutrality and detachment in relation to the collection, analysis, and interpretation of the data is impossible. It is also argued by Popay, Rogers and Williams (1998) that: “Given the involvement of the researcher in the research process, the question is not whether the data are biased, but to what extent has the researcher rendered transparent the processes by which the data have been collected, analyzed and presented” (p. 348).

Even though it is widely agreed that personal beliefs, values, and emotions cannot be put aside when one engages in qualitative research, what and how much personal information should be provided in the research study is still under debate (Shenton, 2004). Maykut and Morehouse (1994) recommended that the researcher include any personal and professional background that is relevant to the phenomenon being studied.

I am not an impartial, a disembodied, or a detached bystander when it comes to my advocating for African-American males. Therefore, it was important for me to enhance the validity of this proposed study at the forefront of the study (Creswell, 2002). I cannot recall

when my desire to advocate for males began. I suppose I can say that it may have begun when I was just a small child growing up with six brothers. I remember on numerous occasions when I took the blame for something that my brother, who was two years older, actually did because I knew what would happen if he admitted doing it. Looking back, perhaps this was the beginning of my advocacy for boys. I recollect noticing when I was in the third grade how the boys were paddled, while the girls wrote lines as punishment. Even though punishment was not as frequent, the difference in the types of punishment did not stop even as we went through high school. Somehow this did not seem right, but that was how things happened and nobody questioned the teachers.

I suppose that memories of the past accompanied me when I obtained my first job as a teacher. I was assigned to a school on the west side of Chicago, Illinois teaching language arts to all-boys eighth grade classes. At the end of my third year, I was asked to be in charge of graduation exercises. I recall that I was able to secure one of the top African-American judges in the state of Illinois as our commencement speaker. The next year, the judge invited my class to observe his court room proceedings. As I watched and listened, I observed that practically all of the African- American males were represented by the public defender, and that most of them were found guilty by plea bargaining. It seemed to me that very little time was spent on their cases, and they appeared willing to accept their fate. Even though I had not attended law school at that time, I believe it was this event that started me thinking about becoming an attorney. My experience as an intern at the Chicago Boys Club mentoring African-American males cemented my decision to become an attorney. As an attorney, I specialized in Family and Juvenile Law often representing some of my former and current students, usually *pro bono*.

My personal history includes over 20 years as an African-American teacher and administrator working with a majority African-American population. As an assistant principal in charge of discipline, I felt I could really make a difference in the lives of my students, especially the boys. At that time, Chicago had one of the highest rates of suspensions and expulsions in the country. In my attempts to incorporate new ideas into the implementation of zero tolerance at our school to reduce the number of suspensions, I often grappled with difficult issues and personnel.

My decision to examine the reasons for the disproportionality of suspensions and expulsions of African-American males under zero discipline policies was guided not only by my passion for studying the unfair treatment of African-American males, but also for who I am as well. Because of the energy and time required to finish a doctoral program, I believe that the chances of finishing such program are highly unlikely if one is not deeply and personally committed to accomplishing the job. As previously stated, I do not know precisely the historical moment that led to my way of thinking that African-American males are treated unfairly. However, I do know that my commitment to this particular proposed study can be traced to my undying curiosity to find out why African-American males have been and still are the victims of much harsher discipline, before and after zero tolerance discipline policies.

It is apparent that my personal experiences and passion about the topic of this study pose some biases which need to be accounted for and controlled. While it is impossible to eliminate all my bias from this research, I took steps to minimize my bias in a number of ways. First, I think the historic account of my background and my straightforward, honest opinions on the subject of this proposed study went a long way toward this end (Denzin, 1997). Maykut and Morehouse (1994) concurred that including personal and professional information relevant to the

issue being studied enhances the researcher's credibility. Second, according to Savenye and Robinson (2001), my bias could also be lessened in the construction of the interview questions by avoiding leading questions, being cognizant of my body language and tone of voice. Third, Flowers (2009) and Lopez and Willis (2004) suggested that maintaining a reflective learning journal throughout the study for reflection in analysis would aid in minimizing my bias. Fourth, a comprehensive method put forth by Brunelle, Brochu, and Cousineau (2000) in their study of drug-consuming juvenile delinquents suggested allowing the free flow of participants' realizations and insights through open-ended questions together with "relaunchings" (p. 840). Fifth, bias may also be minimized by paraphrasing the interview questions while concentrating on the purpose of the research, but giving the participants an opportunity for an in-depth investigation (Brunelle et al., 2000). Sixth, Apori-Nkansah, (2008) posited that researchers need to maintain a "high degree of consciousness" concerning the possibility of bias (p. 113), and seventh, priority should be given to reflections of the participants and to the preconceptions of the researchers (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). This last strategy can be accomplished through recording preconceived beliefs regarding the participants' values and norms (Miner-Romanoff 2012). Creswell (1998) and Moustakas (1990) agreed that this procedure can be used to facilitate analysis of participants' reflections thereby increasing the validity and reliability of the findings. I agree with Maxwell (2004) that the goal throughout my research "is not to eliminate my influence" but rather to keep in mind how important it is to remember and to understand how I influence what the participants say and how to use this influence to "most productively (and ethically) to answer my research questions" (p. 243).



## Participants

Creswell (2009) recommended that in qualitative research the participants should be purposefully selected so that they can best help with understanding the problem and the research questions. Teddlie and Yu (2007) defined purposive sampling as the selection of individuals, groups of individuals, or institutions for a specific purpose related to answering the study's questions, and this type of sampling technique is typically utilized in qualitative studies. Purposive sampling was defined by Maxwell (1997) as a kind of sampling in which, "particular settings, persons, or events are deliberately selected for the important information they can provide that cannot be gotten as well from other choices" (p. 87). Bernard (2002) as well as Lewis and Shepherd (2006) and Tongco (2007) pointed out that researchers employ purposive sampling after making a decision on what needs to be discovered, then finding participants who are able and willing to provide the information because they have the knowledge and experience. Due to the fact that a sufficient number of teachers, students, or parents/ caregivers could not be initially identified, the snowball sampling method, which is used when "the population cannot be identified other than by someone who knows that a certain person has the necessary experience or characteristic to be included" (MacNealy, 1999, p. 157) was employed.

Mason (2010) asserted that because of the many factors that may determine the sample size in qualitative research, many researchers shy away from recommending what is considered an appropriate sample size. Factors that should be considered when determining a sufficient sample size are: (a) the point of saturation, (b) time available for gathering the data, (c) the purpose of the research, (d) the type of research questions to be answered, (e) the methodology that the study utilizes, and (f) the budget allotted for the study (Adler & Alder, 2012; Brannen,

2012; Bryman, 2012; Doucet, 2012; Flick, 2008, 2011, 2012; Marshall, 1996; Mason, 2012; Ragin, 2012; ten Have, 2012).

Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, and Davidson (2002) asserted that it is not necessary to have a bare number of participants to conduct a sound qualitative study; nevertheless, enough data needs to be collected so that the phenomena is sufficiently described. This is evidenced when the research has reached saturation; which is a point when no new themes or categories are emerging. According to Bryman (2012), saturation is an advantage that can be considered to justify the appropriate size of the sample in qualitative research.

After considering these factors, Adler and Adler (2012) advised that the sample size should range from 12 to 60, with a mean of 30. Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) maintained that the minimum acceptable sample size is fifteen. Looking at the numbers leads one to conclude that there is a large difference in perceptions about what should be the minimum requirements for the numbers of participants for qualitative research.

Based on the findings of these scholars, I concluded that three to eight participants for each group of stakeholders should be sufficient for the purpose of my qualitative study. The site for my research was a zero tolerance high school in an urban school district in North Carolina's Central Piedmont region. The four groups of participants for this proposed study were purposively selected, and included school administrators, teachers, African-American male students who had been suspended or expelled at least once under zero tolerance, and their respective parents/caregivers. These participants were appropriate for this proposed study because I examined their perceptions related to the disproportionality of suspensions and expulsions of African-American male students under zero tolerance policies.

I sought and was granted approval from the school district superintendent's office (see Appendix A) for the study to be conducted at Urban High School (pseudonym) in a small urban city in the Central Piedmont region of North Carolina. The school was selected on the recommendation of an employee for the State of North Carolina Department of Public Instruction with knowledge of the concern about discipline in the school. Selection of a study location in which I had no prior connection served to exacerbate the study's trustworthiness, and reduce researcher's bias.

Recruitment of potential participants commenced only after the researcher obtained approval from the North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University Institutional Review Board to study humans and vulnerable subjects; namely minors (see Appendix B). Due to the difficulty that I experienced in several failed attempts to contact the principal, on the recommendation of my chairperson I made an unannounced visit to the school and was able to meet with the principal. During the meeting with the principal, he consented for me to speak to administrators, teachers and students, and a date was set for me to return and speak with potential participants. Parents/caregivers were contacted after selection of the students.

On the next visit, I met with each of the four administrators individually. The administrators consisted of an African-American male principal, two Caucasian female assistant principals, and one Caucasian male assistant principal. After using the informed consent letter (see Appendix C) to explain the purpose, intent, importance, procedure of the study, and the conditions for their participation, all the administrators agreed to participate in the study. Informed consent forms were distributed and appointments were set with each administrator for the individual interviews.

To enhance the study's trustworthiness and to reduce researcher's bias, I solicited the assistance of the principal, assistant principals, and the school secretary in selecting the teachers for the study. After I met individually with the selected teachers, explained the purpose and procedure of the study, intent, importance, procedure of the study, and the conditions for their participation, the informed consent letters were distributed (see Appendix D). Of the 12 teachers which were recommended, seven agreed to take part in the study. The teachers included two African-American females, two Caucasian females, two African-American males, and one Caucasian male. Appointments for the interviews were made with each teacher.

Several Consolidated Data Reports of the North Carolina State Board of Education (2008-2009; 2009-2010; 2010-2011), showed that the largest number of short-term suspensions in the state are received by ninth grade Black males. Even though the Consolidated Reports showed that Urban High's suspensions decreased, the number of African-American males suspended was still disproportionate to other groups of students. Based on these statistics, my original proposal required the student participants to be ninth or 10<sup>th</sup> grade African-American male students who had been suspended or expelled at least once under the zero tolerance policy. Tenth grade African-American males were to be considered because of the time that I expected to conduct my research. I relied on this information for the selection of the potential student participants. Even though I prepared a recruitment flyer to be used in the recruitment of the student participants, it was not used on the recommendation of the principal because of the school's relatively small enrollment of less than 800 students. Instead the principal and counselors, who had knowledge of suspensions of the African-American male students in the school, and based on the criteria for the selection of the participants, recommended ninth and 10<sup>th</sup> grade students as possible participants for the study. This selection process further enhanced the

trustworthiness of the study and lessened researcher bias. On the pre-set date and time, I returned to the school, and the secretary called the selected students individually to the office. Meeting with each student in the conference room, I used the informed consent letters (see Appendix E) to explain the purpose, intent, importance, and procedure of the study, as well as the conditions of the students' participation. I also answered the students' questions. Minor assent letters (see Appendix F) and parental informed consent letters (see Appendix G) were distributed to the six ninth grade students who indicated they wanted to be a part of the study. However, only two of these six students returned the signed assent letter and the parental informed consent letters. After discussing this concern with the principal, the school secretary, who proved to be extremely helpful in setting up the appointments and who also served as my key gatekeeper, recommended that I contact the director of the alternative school, Andrew Academy, (pseudonym) and ask about the possibility of meeting with some of the students who were currently in attendance. However, before I could proceed, it was necessary to ascertain that Andrew Academy was included in the superintendent's approval. After receiving verbal assurance that the Academy was included in the approval, I met with the director and discussed the study and its purpose. As a result, I was given the names of six students, including one ninth grader, three 10<sup>th</sup> graders, one 11<sup>th</sup> grader, and one 12<sup>th</sup> grader. After meeting individually with the six students to explain the purpose, intent, procedure of the study, and the conditions of their participation, the ninth grader, one 10<sup>th</sup> grader, the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders agreed to be participants. Minor assent and parental informed consent letters were given to these students. However, only the ninth grader, one 10<sup>th</sup> grader, the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders returned the signed assent forms.

Two other students from the alternative school were recruited using the snowballing sampling method also known as network sampling, and is thought of as a type of purposive

sampling (Frey, Botan, & Kreps, 2000). This type of sampling is used “in those rare cases when the population of interest cannot be identified other than by someone who knows that a certain person has the necessary experience or characteristics to be included” (MacNealy, 1999, p. 157). Also included in snowballing is the reliance on identified participants to identify others who possibly share the same characteristics as the previously identified participants (Henry, 1990). After I met with each of these two students to again explain the purpose, intent and procedure of the study, and the conditions of their participation, they were both given assent and parental informed consent forms. One of these two students, a tenth grader, returned the signed minor assent consent form.

My next appointment was to collect the remaining unreturned, signed informed consent forms from all the participants and to begin interviewing the students and teachers who had previously returned the assent and informed consent forms. All the administrators and teachers returned their signed consent forms. Six students returned signed minor assent forms. However, only two signed parental consent forms were returned. After I discussed this dilemma with my chairperson, it was decided that I should offer the four parents/caregivers a \$25.00 gift card as an incentive with the understanding that they could withdraw from the study any time without any penalty or hard feelings. Studies have shown that in the case of research conducted by face-to-face or telephone interviews, response rates among laypersons and professionals can be increased with unconditional, pre-paid monetary incentives (Berry & Kanouse, 1987; Brennan, Hoek, & Astridge, 1991; Church (1993); Everett, Price, Bedell, & Tellijohann, 1997; Fox, Crask, & Kim, 1988; Goyder, 1994; Harvey, 1987; Hopkins & Gullickson, 1992; Jobber, Sauders, & Mitchell, 2004; Singer, Groves, & Corning, 1999; Yammarino, Skinner, & Childers, 1991). Additionally, Jackie and Lynn (2008) contended that monetary incentives are likely to be more

effectives in studies with low response rates than in other studies without incentives. I contacted the remaining four parents/caregivers by telephone using the numbers provided by the students to answer any questions they had related to the study's purpose, intent, importance, procedures, the conditions of their participation, and to offer them an unconditional \$25.00 Wal-mart gift card. After the offer of the Wal-mart gift cards, the four other parents/caregivers agreed to participate in the study. In order to avoid the appearance of partiality, the other two parents/caregivers were also given \$25.00 Wal-mart gift cards.

After I sent the gift cards to the parents/caregivers by the respective students, I contacted the parents/caregivers by telephone to: (a) verify the receipt of the gift cards, (b) to answer any further questions related to the study, (c) to set appointments for the individual interviews; and (d) to give the location of the meeting place. Initially, six parents/caregivers agreed to participate in the study included, but one withdrew after the first individual interview. The remaining five were: three biological mothers, one maternal grandmother, and one paternal uncle.

In accordance with Creswell (2009, 2012), protection for the participants is vital and to follow this process, I did the following: (a) filed my research proposal outlining the procedures and information for my research with North Carolina Agricultural and Technical University Institutional Review Board (IRB) and received approval to conduct research with humans and vulnerable beings, (b) secured written permission from a Central North Carolina urban school district to interview administrators, teachers and students in Urban High School, (c) obtained verbal permission from the principal of Urban High School to gain access to the school, administrators, teachers, students; (d) distributed consent and assent letters for the purpose of assuring the participants I would follow all prescribed IRB procedures to protect their rights

during and after the research, and (e) masked names of participants by using pseudonyms of the participants' choice. To identify potential study participants, I relied on the principal, assistant principals, counselors, school secretary within the selected Urban High School, and the director of Andrew Academy to identify students at that site.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Despite the fact that it is commonly agreed that interviews are the most often used strategy for collecting qualitative data, there is no concurrence regarding the number of samples or interviews that is appropriate for collecting such data. Warren (2002) suggested that the least number of interviews should be from 20 to 30 if the qualitative study is going to be published. It was recommended by Gerson and Horowitz (2002) that “fewer than 60 interviews cannot support convincing conclusions and more than 150 would produce too much material to analyze effectively and expeditiously” (p. 223). I conducted 21 individual interviews and four focus group interviews (with a total of 21 participants).

Creswell (2009) and Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) suggested that interviews are the most appropriate method for collecting data for research of this type because they allow the researcher to collect data when the participants cannot be observed, and allow the researcher to have control over the questioning of the participants. According to Shneiderman and Plaisant (2005), there are three main advantages of using interviews to collect data: (a) direct contact with the participants which often leads to specific, constructive suggestions, (b) they are helpful for obtaining detailed information, and (c) few participants are necessary to obtain rich and detailed data. While Bhavnani (1993) and Haraway (1988) maintained that interviews offer power in sensitive conversations, Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (2011) contended that interviews are beneficial in exploring and capturing stakeholders' perspectives.



Stake (1995) has identified three types of interviews: structured, unstructured, and semi-structured. Since semi-structured interviews have features of both structured and unstructured interviews, they allow the researcher to ask questions that specifically target the research questions (Myers, 2009), and “to facilitate more focused exploration of a specific topic” (Fossey, et al., 2002, p. 727). Additionally, I was able to access “areas of reality” such as the participants’ “subjective experiences and attitudes” (Perakyla & Ruusuvuori, p. 529). For these reasons, semi-structured interviews were chosen for this study.

Data for this study were collected from: (a) one individual interview with each administrator, (b) one individual interview with each teacher, (c) one individual interview with each student, (d) one individual interview with each parent/caregiver, and (e) focus group interviews within each group of participants (Creswell, 2009; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007).

Eight types of interview protocols were utilized in the study; namely: (a) Individual Administrator Interview Protocol, (see Appendix H), (b) Individual Teacher Interview Protocol, (see Appendix I), (c) Student Individual Interview Protocol (see Appendix J), (d) Parents/Caregivers Individual Interview Protocol (see Appendix K), (e) Administrator Focus Group Interview Protocol (see Appendix L), (f) Teacher Focus Group Interview Protocol (see Appendix M), (g) Student Focus Group Interview Protocol (see Appendix N), and (g) Parents/Caregivers Focus Group Interview Protocol (see Appendix O). The objectives for the use of these various interviews protocols were to achieve the strategy of triangulation in order to reduce researcher’s bias, thereby enhancing the trustworthiness and the validity of the findings. Triangulation is referred to as a process which compares, examines, and substantiates findings linked to data compiled from two or more sources (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Janesick, 2002).

The individual interviews were semi-structured with open-ended questions based on the central focus of the study. Even though DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) recommended that the questions should be developed before the data collection in order to obtain specific information and allow comparison among the participants, the questions still enabled me to remain open and flexible and able to explore the participants' stories more fully. While the participants were asked some of the same questions, it was possible for me to seek more information in specific areas that emerged for each interviewee, and vary the sequence in which the questions were asked (Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997; Hill, Knox, Thompson, Williams, Hess & Ladany, 2005). Flick (2002) agreed that the protocol in such semi-structured interviews serves as a guide and a foundation for the interview and allows for creativity and flexibility to ensure that the story of each participant is fully uncovered. The interviews lasted 45 minutes to one hour. The individual Interview Protocols are attached in the Appendices.

A semi-structured, qualitative approach for the individual interviews was used for the data collection. According to Marshall and Rossman (1999), "The most important aspect of the interviewer's approach concerns conveying the attitude that the participant's views are valuable and useful" (p. 108). This type of interview not only provided a broad variety of information, it also allowed the opportunity to conduct immediate follow-up for more details and clarification (McMillian, 2004). Patton (1982) posited, "The truly open-ended question does not presuppose which dimensions of feeling, analysis, or thought will be salient for the interviewee" (p. 170). Consequently, the open-ended questions I developed by using data from the literature review on disproportionate exclusions of African-American male students, allowed the participants the freedom to choose their own words and thoughts when giving their perceptions without the

worry of manipulation by me. However, as suggested by deMarrais (2004), I listened more than talked; while offering “supportive, encouraging nods, smiles, and verbal expressions” (p. 64).

The interviews commenced only after I informed each participant there was no right or wrong answer, and she or he was free to express her or his personal thoughts. I also obtained permission from each participant to audiotape the interviews. The individual interviews for the administrators were done in their respective offices at pre-set appointments and lasted from 45 to 60 minutes. Individual interviews of the teachers lasted from 45 to 60 minutes and were done during their preparation periods in their respective classrooms. The students’ interviews were conducted during the second through fourth periods; they were called to the office by the school secretary during what she considered to be the best time. The students were interviewed in the conference room and each interview lasted from 25-60 minutes. I contacted the parents/caregivers via telephone to set appointments for their interviews. These interviews were conducted in the conference room and lasted from 45 minutes to one hour and 20 minutes. While the participants were primarily asked to answer the questions contained in the protocols, I occasionally asked additional questions for clarifications or for more details.

To avoid any misconstruction and to ensure accurate interpretation of the participants’ answers, the interviews were audiotaped using a digital recorder. There are several advantages to using a digital recorder; namely: (a) because of its superior sound clarity and quality, (b) more reliable in comparison to traditional tape recording, (c) reliability, (d) enhanced transcription, (e) user’s ability to determine the accuracy of multiple speakers, (f) user’s ability to recognize subtle speech, sighs, laughter, mumbling, and inflections, and (g) ease of use (Hancock, Windridge, & Ockleford, 2007; Matheson, 2007). The taping of the interviews also allowed me to repeatedly listen to the interviews before and during transcription. Each day after interviewing the

participants, the digital recording from the recorder was saved on a password protected computer hard drive, and then permanently deleted the interviews from the digital recorder to preserve confidentiality of the data. For cautionary reasons, I also saved a copy on a flash drive in the event something happened to the original recording. During the course of the research, I promptly and properly secured all interview logs, recordings, and transcripts. After transcribing and coding the interviews, they were safely stored in a locked cabinet in my home, to which only I have the key.

After the interviews were transcribed, I submitted the verbatim transcripts along with a letter of explanation (see Appendix Q) to each participant to member check. Member checking or respondent validation is the process where the researcher's interpretations of the data are shared with the participants and they have the opportunity to check the findings to determine their accuracy, to discuss, to clarify, and to rule out the possibility of the researcher misinterpreting what the participants intended to say (Baxter & Jack, 2008), and to identify the researcher's personal bias. After the participants had an opportunity to member check her or his verbatim transcript, each participant was asked to read and sign a transcript release (see Appendix R) stating that they had read and made any additions, deletions, or changes to the transcript.

Focus group interviews are very similar to individual interviews. However, Preece, Rogers, and Sharp (2002) considered them to be less structured than the three categories of interviews indicated by Stake (1995). Focus groups which consisted of the respective groups of participants were used to gather data through group dialogue on the topic of the study. As recommended by Schneiderman and Plaisant (2005) the focus group interviews were conducted after the individual interviews in order to expand the investigation of the comments gathered

from the participants, and to triangulate the data that were collected from the individual interviews. According to Thomas, MacMillian, McColl, Hale, and Bond (1995), focus group interviews have the distinct features of group dynamic, and because of the type and range of data generated through the social interaction of the group, the data are often deeper and richer than those obtained from one-on-one interviews. Further, focus groups may provide information about a range of ideas and feelings that individuals have about specific issues, as well as illuminating the differences in perspectives between groups of individuals (Thomas et al., 1995). Focus groups are also appropriate when the study aims to understand the groups' differences in perspectives or to discover factors that influence their opinions (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

After all the participants were individually interviewed, the information was transcribed and analyzed for commonalities in the responses. The commonalities were used to construct the Interview Protocols for each focus group interviews (see Appendices L, M, N, and O).

There were four focus groups. The focus group for administrators consisted of one principal and three assistant principals. Seven teachers made up the focus group for teachers. After one student and one parent/caregiver withdraw from the study, only five students, and five parents/caregivers were a part of their respective focus groups. However, these focus groups were large enough to gain a variety of perspectives and small enough not to become disorderly or fragmented (Rabiee, 2004).

After approval of the focus group Interview Protocols by my chairperson, I contacted the school secretary to visit the school and to speak with the participants to arrange a date and time to conduct the respective focus group interviews. The teachers agreed to meet before school, and I agreed to provide breakfast. The students and parents/caregivers agreed to meet on the same day; with the students meeting at 9:00 a.m., and the parents/caregivers meeting at 12:00 noon.

Due to the end of school year activities (i.e., testing, graduation, etc.), the administrators' focus group interview was set for a day after school ended for the summer at 10:00 a.m. With the exception of the teachers, who met in the school library, the other interviews were conducted in the conference room.

For the same reasons outlined above, with the participants' permission, the focus group interviews were digitally tape recorded. I used the same cautionary measures to save to secure the interviews. The same precautions used to preserve confidentiality of the individual interviews were followed with the focus group interviews. The data were collected beginning in March 2013, and ending in June 2013 as indicated on the timetable below.

During the months of March through June 2013, the data were collected using individual and focus group interviews. The analysis of the data occurred from June through August 2013, and the complete write-up of the study took place from August through October 2013 (see Table 2).

Table 2

*Timeline for Data Collection*

Date	Task
November 2012	Defended proposal
November 2012	Received approval to conduct research in a North Carolina high school
December 2012	Submitted IRB application
January 2013	Received IRB approval
March - June 2013	Data collection
June – August 2013	Data analysis
August – October 2013	Write-up of data analysis
October 2013	Defended dissertation
October – November 2013	Revised and submitted dissertation to Graduate Studies
December 2013	Graduation

## **Data Analysis Procedures**

A linear, hierarchical approach was used to analyze the data as recommended by Creswell (2009). Step one involved transcribing the notes from individual interviews. Step two involved member checking. Step three involved reviewing all data collected from the individual interviews to gain a general idea and tone of the participants' input. Step four involved organizing, preparing, and arranging the data into various codes, chunks, clusters, or categories. Step five involved peer debriefing. Step six consisted of constructing questions for the focus group Interview Protocols. Step seven consisted of transcribing the information from the focus group interviews. Step eight entailed developing and clustering emerging themes, coding and recoding of themes. I repeated these steps in analyzing the focus group interviews. The final step in data analysis involved generating detailed descriptions of the setting, participants, and themes for interpretation.

## **Trustworthiness**

In qualitative research “validity” and “reliability” are established through establishing trustworthiness of the study (Creswell, 2009; Maxwell, 2004). There are several strategies for ensuring trustworthiness; however, as Maxwell (2004) cautioned, every strategy may not apply to a specific study. For this study, I utilized strategies which I believed were applicable for use in my study. The first strategy was triangulation, which is a procedure to reduce the investigator's bias and refers to a process which compares, examines, and substantiates findings linked to data compiled from two or more sources for convergence of themes or categories in a study (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Janesick, 2002; Creswell, & Miller, 2000). To enhance the rigor or trustworthiness of the findings, this strategy was used to examine and to compare the sources of

data derived from the two data sources; namely, the individual and focus group interviews, The second trustworthiness strategy was member checking or respondent validation which is described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as “the most crucial technique for establishing validity” (p. 314) is the process where the researcher’s interpretations of the data are shared with the participants who have the opportunity to check the findings to determine its accuracy, to discuss, to clarify, and to rule out the possibility of the researcher misinterpreting what the participants intended to say (Baxter & Jack,2008). The third strategy was peer debriefing which involves the reviewing and confirming the findings’ interpretations by someone who has no interest in the research, and is used to strengthen the accuracy of the findings to add validity to the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The fourth strategy was to give rich, thick, and detailed descriptions of the participants, themes, and findings which would be transferable for the readers:. “. . .thick descriptions are deep, dense, detailed accounts.... Thin descriptions by contrast, lack detail, and simply report facts” (Denzin, 1989, p. 83). The fifth and final strategy involved self-disclosure of my assumptions, beliefs, and biases as the researcher. Creswell and Miller (2000) referred to this strategy as researcher reflexivity.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this qualitative instrumental case study was to understand the perceptions of four groups of key stakeholders regarding the disproportionate exclusions (suspensions and expulsions of African-American male students under zero tolerance discipline policies. The study employed three tenets of critical race theory as a theoretical framework to explore the disparity of suspensions and expulsions of African-American males under zero tolerance discipline policies. Data were collected from four groups of stakeholders; namely, administrators, teachers, students, and the students’ respective parents/caregivers. Semi-



structured interviews with open-ended questions were administered individually and to four focus groups which consisted of administrators, teachers, students, and parents/caregivers respectively. The interviews were conducted in designated locations at an Urban High School. The transcripts were stored in a locked cabinet in my home. The data was analyzed by coding and categorizing for emerging themes.

## CHAPTER 4

### Results

Since the advent of formal education in the United States, both the educational system and that system's every reform have been premised on adults' notions of how education should be conceptualized and practiced. There is something fundamentally amiss about building and rebuilding an entire system without consulting at some point those it ostensibly is designed to serve. Authorizing student perspectives introduces into critical conversation the missing perspectives of those who experience daily the effects of existing educational policies-in-practice. (Cook-Sather, 2002, p. 3)

#### Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine the perceptions of key stakeholders regarding the reasons for the disproportionate exclusions of African American male students under zero tolerance policies. The goal was to examine what the stakeholders perceived as the underlying reasons of the relation between zero tolerance and the continuing trend of the disproportionate number of African-American male students. Utilizing an instrumental case study design, data were gathered through (a) individual administrator interviews, (b) individual teacher interviews, (c) individual student interviews, (d) individual parent(s)/caregiver(s) interviews, (e) administrator focus group interviews, (f) teacher focus group interviews, (g) student focus group interviews, and (h) parent(s)/caregiver(s) focus group interviews. Semi-structured interviews were used to explore a wide assessment of administrator, teacher, student, and parent(s)/caregiver(s) perceptions of the problem. All of the participants were interviewed at the school site. This chapter presents a description of the demographic characteristics of the participants, a microlevel analysis (emergent themes from the individual interviews), a macrolevel analysis (emergent themes from the focus group interviews), and a summary discussion of the similarities and differences between the microlevel and macrolevel analyses.

### Demographic Characteristics of Participants

The following Tables 3 through 6 show the demographic characteristics of the respective groups of participants.

Table 3

#### *Demographic Characteristics of Administrators*

Name	Current Position	Gender	Race/ Ethnicity	Years in Public Education	Highest Educational Level
Dexter	Principal	Male	African- American	18	Master's
Sally	Assistant Principal	Female	Caucasian	15	Master's
Mama Bear	Assistant Principal	Female	Caucasian	19	Master's
Joe	Assistant Principal	Male	Caucasian	26	Master's

Table 4

#### *Demographic Characteristics of Teachers*

Name	Current Position	Gender	Race/ Ethnicity	Years in Public Education	Highest Educational Level
Brooke	Counselor	Female	African- American	4	Master's
Christopher	Alternative School Teacher	Male	African- American	33	Graduate Study
Fern	Marketing Teacher	Female	African- American	8	Master's
John	Social Studies Teacher	Male	Caucasian	1	Bachelor's
Johnny	Athletic Director	Male	African- American	16	Master's
Polly	English Teacher	Female	Caucasian	18	Post- Master's
Sandra	Culinary	Female	Caucasian	22	Master's

Table 5

*Demographic Characteristics of Students*

Name	Age	Grade	Years at UHS	Number of Suspensions
Ben	15	Ninth	1	1
John Luke	16	Ninth	1	1
MJ	17	11 <sup>th</sup>	3	1
Mario	18	12 <sup>th</sup>	4	2
Tony	15	10 <sup>th</sup>	2	1

Table 6

*Demographic Characteristics of Parents/Caregivers*

Name	Relationship to Student	Name of Student
Amy	Mother	John Luke
Bre	Maternal Aunt	Tony
Carlye	Paternal Uncle	Mario
Jane	Mother	Ben
Shirl	Mother	MJ

**Participant Profiles**

Dexter is an African American male, ending his second year as principal at Urban High School. He has a master's degree in administration, and has been in public education for 18 years as a middle level teacher and served as an administrator at the middle and high school levels. He seemed to love working with students, faculty and staff. He was doubtful about Andrew Academy at first. However, now he would recommend that it be duplicated in other districts.

Sally is a Caucasian female, and has served in her current position of assistant principal for three and one-half years. She earned a master's degree in education, and has been in public education for 15 years. The students appeared to be at ease with her both in her office, the halls, and lunchroom.

Mama Bear is a Caucasian female who has served in her current position of assistant principal for five years. She earned a master's degree in education, and has been in public education for 19 years. She compared herself to Mother Bear whose job is to care for the ninth graders in the Freshman Academy.

Joe is Caucasian male who has earned a Master's degree in education, and has served as assistant principal for three years and has 26 years' experience in public education. He seemed to be passionate about his job and understood that something is missing when it comes to making the transition from middle school to high school for all students.

Brooke is an African-American female with a master's degree in counseling, and has worked for four years in public education. She appeared to be genuinely compassionate about her position as a counselor and was never too busy to take time for the students.

Christopher is an African-American male who has studied at the graduate level with 33 years of experience in public education. He is currently an alternative school teacher who is straight forward, and often times seemed to become frustrated when discussing the issue of disproportionality of suspensions of African-American male students.

Fern is an African-American female who has earned a Master's degree in business administration. She has taught marketing for eight years in public schools. Her interaction with students tells them that she cares for them; while at the same time, they know she means what she says.

John is a Caucasias male who has earned a bachelor degree, and was finishing his first year as a social studies teacher. Although he is a "rookie" teacher, the students appeared to have a good deal of respect for him both in and out the classroom.

Johnny is an African-American male with a Master's degree in sport education, and has been in public education for 16 years and in his current position as athletics director for one year. Both males and females seemed to search him out just to say, "Hello."

Polly is a Caucasian female with a Master's in education and currently working toward a doctoral degree in education. She has 18 years' experience in public education both as an administrator and teacher, currently teaching English. Her experience as an administrator gave her an advantage regarding zero tolerance which allowed her to be able to discuss the topic more fully than some of the other participants.

Sandra is a Caucasian female with a Master's degree in home economics who has taught for 22 years in public schools and currently teaches culinary arts. Initially, she appeared to be somewhat reluctant to discuss the questions. However, after a while she became extremely interested in the questions and gave information that appeared to show she went over and above to let the students that she was there in other roles than a teacher. The students often came in and had lunch with her just to spend time with her.

Ben is a ninth grade student who seemed to have a vocabulary larger than most of the all student participants. Ben appeared to be eager to tell his story and came to check every day that he saw me to check and see how things were going. John Luke is a ninth grader who appeared to be rather shy in the beginning. However, as the interview progressed, he seemed a little more relaxed and told me he actually enjoyed the opportunity to be a part of the study. MJ is a 11<sup>th</sup> student who seemed delighted to finally let someone know he thought he had suspended unfairly. He was rather upset he had been suspended, and just being able to talk about it seemed to be somewhat a relief. Mario was a 12<sup>th</sup> student who seemed concerned he would not be able to find a summer job so he could have more money for himself and his "little" sister. He appeared to be

happy that he *was* graduating, but he was a bit worried about what he was going to do after graduation. He also seemed pleased he could talk about his experiences. Tony was an 10<sup>th</sup> grade student who appeared to really regret what he had done. He sensed it was wrong, and seemed to be worried about the effect his suspension would have on his chances of being accepted by a good college.

Amy seemed to be a bit shy during the individual interview. Even though she did not engage as deeply as other parents/caregivers during the focus interview, she did seem to be more relaxed. She was the first one to say she was happy she had been asked to help. Bre, unlike Amy, was never shy. Her individual interview was the longest of all the interviews. She would have talked longer telling me about the woes of Tony's mother. She also said how happy she was to be able to be a part of something like this. Initially, Carlye appeared to be skeptical about I was doing or why I was doing it. However, as the interview went along, he seemed to become more interested and actually said this was a good thing, and he was glad to be involved. Jane seemed eager from the very beginning to be a part of the study and wanted to know if there was anything she could do to be more helpful. In spite of Shirl's initial hesitancy, she became a willing participant and gave detailed responses to the questions. Now that she knew something about zero tolerance, she seemed anxious to let someone know what she thought about it.

### **Microlevel Analysis**

Subsequent to review of transcripts from the individual interviews, I undertook a detailed qualitative analysis process. This process involved repeated, continuous readings of the transcripts to discern indicators within the individual interviews and themes across the interviews. Even though the participants' responses were unique and specific to each one's personal experience, repeated commonalities in the data led to the emergence of four major

themes and indicators (see Table 7). The themes were: (a) understanding zero tolerance, (b) impact of zero tolerance, (c) exclusions, and (d) policies and rules.

Table 7

*Microlevel Themes and Indicators*

Theme	Microlevel Indicators
Understanding Zero Tolerance	Definitions
	Applications and Enforcement
	Effectiveness in Reducing School Violence
Impact of Zero Tolerance	Views on Discipline
	Behavior Modification
Exclusions	Disciplinary Actions
	Disproportionality
	Equity/Fairness
	Reduction Efforts
Policies and Rules	Clarity
	Awareness and Knowledge
	Source of Knowledge

**Understanding Zero Tolerance**

Understanding zero tolerance includes the following indicators: (a) definitions, (b) application and enforcement, and (c) effectiveness in reducing school violence. *Definitions* discuss how participants understand the meaning of zero tolerance as it is enforced in their



school. It should be noted that only the administrators and teachers commented on the definition of zero tolerance. Their responses reflected a personal understanding of zero tolerance gained as a result of their experiences as public school employees dealing with disciplinary problems in a manner that they perceived best resolved the problems. Principal Dexter, an African-American male with 18 years' experience in public education who was finishing his second year as principal at Urban High School, perceived zero tolerance to be:

Basically the decision to suspend a student and takes the subjectivity out of the hands of an administrator, and there is no gray area when the principal has to decide whether to suspend or not suspend because the law is written very strict as to how many days a student has to be suspended for a certain infraction.  
(Personal Communication, 03/06/13)

Dexter shared, "That definition of zero tolerance is not written in the handbook; that's my opinion of what zero tolerance means" (Personal Communication, 03/06/13).

Assistant principal Sally, a Caucasian female with 15 years' experience in public education who has served three and one-half years as assistant principal at Urban High School, referred to zero tolerance policy as, "Having the same rules across the board for certain activities, such as drugs or weapons" (Personal Communication, 03/06/13). Assistant principal Joe, a Caucasian male who has been in public education for 26 years and in his current position for three years, defined zero tolerance as:

In my mind, zero tolerance is a very fine and definite line that says, 'If you step over this line, there are consequences regardless of the circumstances or situations. On this side of the line, you are fine.' This means there is a definite line in terms of where consequences begin and there are no mitigating circumstances that would replace or change those consequences. Whatever is here, that's what we do. (Personal Communication, 03/06/13)

Assistant principal Mama Bear, a Caucasian female who has twenty-six years' experience in public education and five years in her current position, understood zero tolerance as "My definition is pretty black and white, and that if it happens, it has to be dealt with in school

systems we have to have a little bit of flexibility, also due to the personalities of the different students and the difficulties that some students bring with them to school” (Personal Communication, 04/10/13).

The teachers’ definitions of zero tolerance indicated that their understanding of zero tolerance was also based on personal experiences. While some teachers pointed out the need for some flexibility in the policy, they nevertheless appeared to agree that it is a necessary tool for controlling negative behavior. For example, Fern, an African-American female with eight years of public school experience, considered zero tolerance to be:

My perception of zero tolerance means there will be no breaking of or not obeying the rules of tolerance in the school system, meaning whatever is in the policies or procedures, then those rules will be adhered to by the students. They do *not* break the rules. You give them the rules, you explain the rules, and those rules need to be followed. (Personal Communication, 03/07/13)

Polly, a Caucasian female has worked in public schools for 19 years with eight of those years as a high school principal. Since moving to North Carolina, she is now employed as a teacher and understood zero tolerance as “A behavior that is considered unacceptable, nonnegotiable” (Personal Communication, 03/06/13). Brooke, an African-American female who has worked four years as a public school teacher, said her definition “Would probably be more of that it doesn’t matter what you do as far as behavioral wise or whatever the disciplinary problem it is, there is *no* tolerance for it. Therefore, there are consequences for it (Personal Communication, 03/06/13). Sandra, a Caucasian female who has been in public education as a teacher for 22 years, concluded that zero tolerance meant “Addressing all inappropriate activities within the confines of the school’s discipline policy” (Personal Communication, 03/07/13). Christopher, an African-American male alternative school teacher who has taught in public schools for 33 years, believed that zero tolerance meant:

That the students will comply with all the rules without any flexibility outside of whatever the disciplinary infraction is. Such as if a student incurs a disciplinary infraction, there is no discussion about the consequence. That's the bottom line. If you committed the crime, you do the time without any opportunity to explain the situation. (Personal Communication, 04/18/13)

John, a Caucasian male teacher who has only taught in public schools for one year, defined zero tolerance briefly by stating, "I believe zero tolerance is a policy in which disciplinary action is enacted regardless of the individual situation. If a certain act takes place, the punishment will be carried out regardless of the individual circumstance" (Personal Communication, 04/24/13).

Finally Johnny, an African-American male with 17 years of experience as a public school teacher, regarded zero tolerance as, "A broad policy where there is no leaning to the right or the left, you can't straddle the fence; and it is foreseen by many educators is that you either comply or you have to pay the price" (Personal Communication, 04/25/13).

While the administrators agreed that zero tolerance is a policy which is used to discipline a student for misbehavior that is considered to be beyond the boundaries of expectations for following rules and policies, and carries with it extreme consequences, they differ in their opinions as to how and when it should be enforced. Although the principal was concerned that the policy does not provide for the principal to use his discretion as to the number of days that a student is suspended, nevertheless, agreed with the other three administrators that zero tolerance should be enforced regardless of circumstances. However, Mama Bear recognized that the policy may need to have some flexibility to allow for differences in the students' personalities. Similarly, with the exception of one teacher, the teachers also viewed zero tolerance as a method of dealing with inappropriate behavior strictly by the rules. Christopher showed concern that the policy does not allow for flexibility or an opportunity for the students to give their side of the story.

The second indicator, *application and enforcement*, describes the participants' perceptions on the uniformity of how zero tolerance is applied or/and enforced; and if the application is appropriate for the misbehavior. The reflections of the administrators and teachers varied as to the uniformity of application and enforcement of the zero tolerance policy. Neither the administrators nor the teachers were in agreement as to the reasons for uniformity and fairness of the application and enforcement of zero tolerance in their school district. For example, Dexter expressed that the policy was applied uniformly across the district because "if a student had committed the same infraction at any other school in this district, he would have gotten the same punishment" (Personal Communication, 03/06/13). Sally agreed on the uniformity:

Because we are a small school district, it's easier to do it. We don't really have a lot of problems in the elementary school. It's basically the middle school and the high school, and we try to operate on the same page. Being the only high school here, we would be probably the one with the most problems. All the administrators pretty much handle everything the same way. If the incident would be affected by zero tolerance, then we have certain protocols we have to follow in order to make sure that we are all on the same page. (Personal Communication, 03/06/13)

Mama Bear speculated that because "We all attempt to do the right thing," the policy was uniformly applied for the "most part" (Personal Communication, 04/10/13). Joe was in opposition because he was not sure if he believed in zero policy:

I believe that every circumstance or situation requires you to look at it differently to see if there are mitigating circumstances for a particular situation. I don't know if we have a zero tolerance policy. It's has never been said to me that we have a zero tolerance policy. In my mind, we have a group of recommended consequences for behaviors that are generally strictly zeroed outlined for what happened. (Personal Communication, 03/06/13)

The teachers had various perceptions for why zero tolerance was effective at times or not at all. Fern thought that sometimes the policy is very effective, and at other times "they are very lenient on that because sometimes, and it all depends on the circumstances, the policy may not be

followed. It just depends on the circumstances and what's going on with the students" (Personal Communication, 03/07/13). In explaining the circumstances when zero tolerance is not enforced, Fern stated:

Unless they have done something real-l-l-y bad, they don't get rid of them. What they do is—they take them out the population and move them to Andrew Academy. Hopefully being away from the population of the school system itself, they will want to come back to it. Sometime it works, and sometime it doesn't. Unless it's something very serious, I mean very serious, they won't send them home, because the more they are away from instruction, the farther behind they will get. However, Andrew Academy is a unique place where they don't miss any of their classroom instruction. (Personal Communication, 03/07/13)

Since she has only taught for four years in North Carolina, Polly was undecided about whether or not Urban High School implements its zero tolerance policy effectively and fairly because she "is not quite sure what our system considers zero tolerance" (Personal Communication, 03/06/13). Sandra assumed that zero tolerance was effective, but only to "an extent" (Personal Communication, 03/07/13).

The students appeared divided on whether they thought the consequences matched their misbehavior. Ben could not "think of a time when I thought the consequences did not match my misbehavior" (Personal Communication, 03/06/13). For his misbehavior, he was assigned to Andrew Academy instead of being charged. Mario's experiences caused him to think that the consequences matched his behavior when he was assigned to Andrew Academy. While assessing the situation, John Luke recalled a time when he thought the consequences did not match his consequences. He remembered:

Because of some of the behaviors I have done—it was like a *minor* situation like in-school suspension type of situation; but instead I got suspended. It's even in the court system, you can't be sentenced—hum—what'd you call it? You can't have two consequences for the *same* crime that you did, like if they've already given a consequence for that crime, and it's done and over with, they can't bring it back in court and give me another one for the same thing. So with my situation, they wrote me up; they put it all on one write-up. But then they took it out and put one situation on another

write-up, they gave me another consequence for the same thing. (Personal Communication, 04/18/13)

MJ was also thought that his consequences were not appropriate:

“I don’t think so because I was pretty cooperative with them, and like—I don’t think that I should have been suspended because it was *before* the bell, *if* it’s before the bell, then it shouldn’t be considered “skipping.” So I think that the consequences did *not* match my misbehavior at all. *Not at all*”. (Personal Communication, 04/11/13)

Tony was also of the opinion that the consequences did not match his misbehavior

...because there are other students that got in trouble for marijuana, and they got 10 days in Andrew Academy—this is Andrew Academy. This is where you come when you get suspended from school. One other person just came down here for marijuana and he only got 10 days. And another friend he was smoking marijuana in school, and he got 10 days, and *I* got the rest of the year. I would say the consequence matched my misbehavior if everybody else had got the rest of the year down here. But naw, [sic] it did not match my misbehavior because everybody didn’t get the same that I got. (Individual Interview, 04/23/13)

Despite the fact that some of the administrators and teachers thought the policy was applied uniformly across the school district, they gave varied reasons for the uniformity and application of the policy. Their reasoning ranged from the principal’s leadership to the circumstances to the diversity of the students who were suspended to attempting to do the right thing. Others believed that the policy was applied uniformly at times depending on the circumstances. Even though one administrator and one teacher thought the school district did not enforce the policy uniformly, they thought so for various reasons.

When the students gave their perspectives on whether the consequences matched their misbehaviors, Ben and Mario were in agreement that they did because they were assigned to Andrew Academy. However, in another instance Mario was in agreement with the other three students in thinking that the consequences did not match their misbehaviors.

The perspectives that each participant had regarding the reasons for *the effectiveness of zero tolerance* in reducing school violence were his or her own unique reflections. Among the

stakeholder groups, the perceptions of the effectiveness were similar. However, the similarities within each of the stakeholder groups did not indicate agreement about the effectiveness of the zero tolerance policy. Among the four administrators, two found the policy to be effective, one found it to be ineffective, and one was undecided. Of the teachers, four found the program effective, one found it ineffective, and two were undecided. As for the students, two found the program effective and three found it ineffective. Among the parents, three found it effective, one found it ineffective, and one thought it may be effective for some students, but ineffective for other students.

Both of the administrators who indicated that zero tolerance is effective also indicated that there is more that can be done along with zero tolerance. Mama Bear exclaimed:

Ah, I think zero tolerance is really the only way to go based on when you are thinking about violence. However, in many situations with certain students there has to be more done than what we can do. And by that, I mean the students may need counseling or some kind of therapeutics involvement to get them over what caused that to happen in the first place. (Personal Communication, 04/10/13)

Sally remarked that zero tolerance was effective because the students know that the staff will not tolerate violence. Further, Sally believes that in addition to zero tolerance, relationships are most effective in reducing violence. Dexter declared that the program was ineffective because those who commit the infractions are adolescents, and are not thinking about the consequences while acting out. Further, he added that it does not allow them to learn from their mistakes. Joe was undecided about the program, stating that it is effective

...to a certain extent, I think it's effective as far as everyone to understand where that line is drawn and what will be allowed to happen next. I think that's happening for the most part. But I still think that regardless of the situation, you have to listen to the surrounding circumstances of whatever happened. I do think that should be consequences for acts of violence, but even if the act falls under zero tolerance, all sides and mitigating circumstances should still be always heard. "But I still think that regardless of the situation, you have to listen to the surrounding circumstances of whatever happened. (Personal Communication, 03/06/13)

The teachers who expressed zero tolerance is effective indicated that it can minimize violence, make students reconsider their actions, and can be a deterrent. Brooke said, “I think it’s effective as when there’s some type of violent act going on. Like if a student lashes out at another student, or if a student brings a weapon, or things of that nature” (Personal Communication, 03/06/13). Fern agreed that zero tolerance is effective and added, “Because of the kids that we have and if we did not have these rules, this school would be a zoo” (Personal Communication, 03/07/13). Polly thought the policy is effective because “it’s a deterrence” (Personal Communication, 03/06/13). Christopher expressed the policy is ineffective in reducing violence because individual situations are not examined. He viewed it as, “It’s a more of a profiling situation. So, there’s no equity in regards to how zero tolerance is implemented” (Personal Communication, 04/18/13). Johnny, one of the two remaining teachers who was undecided about the policy’s effectiveness, supposed the students feel that any attention is good attention, and some of the students believe that if someone notices them, even if it is for poor behavior, the student will continue with the behavior to get attention. Sandra, who was also undecided, indicated that she may tolerate behavior she typically would not tolerate because, “Culturally the school’s population is very different. Because maybe perhaps you don’t have the guidance or direction that you need at home to get you directed? Umh, some of the students here don’t know how or haven’t been taught how to constructively exhibit anger” (Personal Communication, 03/07/13).

The students were asked to give their perspectives regarding the effectiveness of zero tolerance as it relates to reducing school violence. One of the students, MJ who has seen a change from the last principal to the current principal, and who found the program to be effective said:



I guess so because like when we had different principals and they like would—like they—they were like a little loose on the rules, and we literally had riots here... The principals that we have now are more firm with the rules, and they—like they'll see to the rules more. And if they see someone violating some of the rules, they'll stop them and they'll talk to them and tell them they are not supposed to do that. (Personal Communication, 04/11/13)

John Luke, Mario, and Tony all proclaimed that the program was ineffective. John Luke commented, “Not really! Cuz [sic] it's still stuff going on while they got the zero tolerance rule. Stuff like people fighting every day, schools are getting shot up, everything. So-o it's not really effective” (Personal Communication, 04/18/13). Mario agreed that zero tolerance is ineffective because students still fight, still get sent to Andrew Academy, still get suspended, and expelled, and they don't learn from the policy. Tony added “Naw [sic], I don't think it's effective because you ain't [sic] teaching the student nothing [sic]; you're just kicking him out of school. He ain't [sic] really, like learning wrong from right” (Personal Communication, 04/23/13). Ben, who was uncertain about the effectiveness of zero tolerance, said it is as effective as he would expect it to be, but he believes the administration should understand the situation prior to making a decision.

Of the parents who responded that zero tolerance is effective, rationalized for various reasons. Amy indicated that if the children did not have the strict rules, there is no telling what they would be doing. Bre perceived zero tolerance as effective because if the students want to graduate, they will follow the rules in order to make it through and graduate. Jane agreed that zero tolerance is effective because rules make, “the children less likely to participate in drugs and bring them to school, or bring weapons on campus and be a threat to their teachers” (Personal Communication, 04/15/13). Caryle who believes zero tolerance is ineffective felt that way because it makes the children feel as if they are not responsible for their actions. He stated, “It gives students an opportunity to not have to be accountable for their behaviors” (Personal Communication, 04/24/13). Shirl thought zero tolerance may be effective for some students;

however, for those students "...who only understand violence, it's not effective at all" (Personal Communication, 04/30/13).

As I analyzed the participants' responses, it was apparent that even if they agreed or disagreed regarding the effectiveness or the ineffectiveness of zero tolerance, there was no agreement as to their reasons for the agreement or disagreement. However, I considered this to be an advantage because each stakeholder is entitled to his/her own opinion. Further, this is an indication that they believed me when I said, "There is no right or wrong answer. I am only interested in what you think."

### **Impact of Zero Tolerance**

This theme emerged with two indicators: (a) views on discipline and (b) behavior modification. The indicator, *views on discipline*, is concerned with the participants' opinions on how zero tolerance has impacted their views on discipline as a result of how they feel zero tolerance has influenced their attitudes on suspensions and expulsions.

All the administrators discussed how teachers are impacted by zero tolerance in one way or another. Dexter and Mama Bear agreed that zero tolerance has minimum impact on the teachers. Dexter expressed that he did not think zero tolerance had much effect on teachers "because they are not the ones that initiate the suspensions or expulsions. All that they do is write up the referrals as they see the situation, and we take care of it as administrators" (Personal Communication, 03/06/13). Mama Bear also thought that:

It's kinda taken out of the teachers' hands—I mean once the referral is brought to us or the fight or drugs are brought to our attention, it is taken out of the teachers' hands. We do a very good job as administrators here to *immediately* take charge of that and take that out of the teachers' hands. (Personal Communication, 04/10/13)

Sally added that zero tolerance gives teachers what they "are striving for—clearly defined rules.

It's important that everyone understands where we stand from the beginning" (Personal

Communication, 03/06/13). Joe commented that for teachers, zero tolerance provides, “that clear line of distinction of what will not be tolerated and teachers feel more confident in their class” (Personal Communication, 03/06/13).

As for the impact of zero tolerance on students, Dexter and Sally both thought that zero tolerance set the bar with clear expectations. Dexter explained that the policy “...lets them know that zero tolerance has no gray area. The rules are set, and they have no options when they commit a zero tolerance violation” (Personal Communication, 03/06/13). Sally said zero tolerance

...sets a clearly defined rule and lets the students know where we stand. It’s good not to have a gray area. They know if they bring a weapon to campus, what’s going to happen. Joe expressed hope that “students and parents will feel safer in the building because they know drugs and weapons are not tolerated in the building. (Personal Communication, 03/06/13)

Similarly, the teachers succinctly voiced their opinions on the impact of zero tolerance on students and parents. Fern pointed out that zero tolerance is helpful to the students and parents because “Everybody understands that hopefully we are implementing the same rules and applying them effectively based on whatever the circumstances are” (Personal Communication, 03/07/13). Polly’s comments reflected that “zero tolerance ups the ante, if you will. I think it got parents’ attention. It got students’ attention. So, that in itself is somewhat a deterrence” (Personal Communication, 03/06/13). While Brooke felt that the impact of zero tolerance “depends on the family as to what the effect is” (Personal Communication, 03/06/13), Sandra thought, “Zero tolerance has really made the students become more responsible for their behavior. I’ve seen things change here in that students are becoming more responsible for their behavior.” (Individual 03/07/13). Caryle commented:

Students feel that administrators are never going to deal with them fairly as individual students due to the fact that they put students who may have had disciplinary infractions

in one big category without other students who have disciplinary infractions. (Individual Interview, 03/07/13)

According to John, the policy has a positive impact on students and parents because they understand there is no gray area, and “a line is drawn of what’s appropriate and what’s not appropriate, what will and what will not be acceptable” (Personal Communication, 04/24/13). In spite of the positive impact of zero tolerance on students and parents, John was concerned with a possible drawback or negative impact in that there are different circumstances; some are extenuating and deserve individual attention. But if it falls under zero tolerance policy, there is not a whole lot of leeway to change the consequences. Johnny stated that he thinks the majority of the students “understand that there is a line that they cannot cross,” and “If I cross this line, there’s a price to pay” (Personal Communication, 04/25/13).

While most of the administrators and teachers conceptualized that zero tolerance has an impact on parents, they did not think it differed much from its impact on students. Dexter pointed out that zero tolerance gives parents a lesser reason to argue when there is a set of rules to follow. He was of the belief, “They need to understand there is no negotiation. They need to accept the consequences and move on” (Personal Communication, 03/06/13). Even though Mama Bear agreed with Dexter that “we have a lot of arguments and disagreement from the parents and the students when we give certain disciplines here” (Personal Communication, 04/10/13), it is because of the lack of clarity and communication about zero tolerance.

When commenting on the impact of zero tolerance on parents, Fern implied that just as in the case of students, zero tolerance helps the parents understand that the same rules are implemented and applied effectively “based on whatever the circumstances are” (Personal Communication, 03/07/13). Brooke expressed a feeling that, “Some parents don’t understand it. They feel like maybe their child is being picked on” (Personal Communication, 03/06/13).

Sandra sensed that zero tolerance has an impact on parents when they understand that it causes students to become more responsible for their behavior. Johnny indicated that he sensed zero tolerance impacts parents by causing them to realize and to understand that there is a repercussion for certain types of behavior.

Despite the fact that all the participants did not agree on the extent of the impact that zero tolerance had on the different groups of stakeholders, they did agree that teachers, students, and parents are impacted to some degree by this policy. This could be the fact that the impact only resulted in better understanding of the policy which led to less argumentative situations about the types of consequences or students becoming more responsible for their behavior.

The second indicator of impact of zero tolerance is *behavior modification*, which is concerned with the student participants' beliefs of how and why their behavior changed or remained the same after the suspensions or expulsions. All the students thought their behavior changed for the better after their suspensions. Ben gave an emphatic "Yes!" (Personal Communication, 03/06/13) in response to whether his behavior changed after his suspension because he saw the error of his ways, and vowed to never to do that again. Even though John Luke was not as emphatic as Ben, John Luke's suspension made him think about his actions in advance. MJ's suspension taught him to never leave school again. Tony's behavior was altered by his suspension because his behavior could have gotten him

charged for—aah—possession of marijuana with intent to sell and distribute. I mean they charged me, but they ain't called me back yet. So of course, I won't do this again because number one, it was dumb and it can ruin your future because when you apply to college they want a clean record. And it's really competitive and somebody with a clean record will get accepted before me. (Personal Communication, 04/23/13)

Mario's behavior changed for a little while after his behavior, and he was doing "good." [Sic] Then "I started hanging around the wrong type of people, and I came right back down" (Personal Communication, 04/16/13).

What the students revealed about their behavior modification, with the exception of Mario, indicated that despite the fact that their suspensions were the results of unacceptable or inappropriate behavior; the students were convincing that they served to change their behavior in positive ways.

### **Exclusions**

This theme includes four indicators: (a) disciplinary actions, (b) disproportionality, (c) equity and fairness, and (d) reduction efforts. All stakeholders discussed *disciplinary actions*, which are suspensions/expulsions and the reasons for these actions. Administrators and teachers indicated whether they had or had not suspended students or recommended students for suspension under the zero tolerance policy. They also commented on the reasons for their actions or inactions. The students and parents discussed how they or someone they knew had been suspended under zero tolerance. They also included in their discussions the reasons for such suspensions.

Dexter stated that he had not suspended any students under zero tolerance "...because there have not been any students here who have committed any crimes that are quite up to the standards of zero tolerance" (Personal Communication, 03/06/13). Mama Bear elaborated on students she suspended under zero tolerance stating:

I've suspended a White female for a threat against a teacher; Hispanic male for drugs and drug paraphernalia; a Black male for drug and drug paraphernalia; as for fights—we've had Black-on-Black female fights; we've had Hispanic-on-Hispanic girl fights; White-on-White girl fights; they were all suspended for 10 days in our Andrew Academy, our alternative school; and depending upon the severity of the fight either charges are brought by our SRO or not depending upon the situation. (Personal Communication, 04/10/13)

In relating her experience on suspension, expulsion, or exclusion under zero tolerance, Fern indicated that she had not recommended any students for suspension or expulsion because that is not her decision; the only thing that she does is write the office referral. While she has only referred students who were assigned to Andrew Academy, she was aware:

...of some students who have been totally suspended. At some point, they will bring them back to Andrew Academy. Those are the students who may have come on the campus with drugs or some type of violence going on. Even after school, they may have caused some type of disruption. (Personal Communication, 03/07/13)

Polly indicated that as a principal, she had suspended students under zero tolerance:

One was possession of a hand gun on school grounds, and that student was zero tolerance for a full calendar year—365 days. Another was for an assault on a teacher. And another was for possession and distribution of illegal drugs. (Personal Communication, 03/06/13)

In relating her experience on suspensions under zero tolerance, Brooke related that although none of her students had been suspended under zero tolerance, some had been suspended for repeated write-ups in class. She explained that it is her understanding that after numerous write-ups, the student is suspended. She continued to explain “that’s the way the school is set up; it’s not really a zero tolerance policy school. It’s more of a “We’re giving you a chance to do what you need to do before we take the next step” (Communication, 03/06/13).

Sandra described how she has referred students for in-school suspension, and:

at some point—a lot of times when students are recommended for ISS, it escalates because a lot of these students have probably been referred by other teachers. Then they compile all the discipline referrals together, and sometimes they do get suspended. Long-term like out of school and that kind of thing. (Personal Communication, 03/07/13)

As for Sandra’s experience with the zero tolerance policy, she described an incident when she thought a student should have been, but was not suspended. She elaborated as follows:

One particular time, it wasn’t at this school, there was an African-American student who threatened me, and I wrote him up, and the principal didn’t do anything. I was a little upset about that because I thought that he should have been suspended. This particular

student had been—he was in trouble *all* the time—had been completely suspended from school the year before and was not allowed to come back. (Personal Communication, 03/07/13)

Christopher commented that he had recommended students for in-school suspension, but not for out-of-school suspension, “Because if I can’t maintain the students; the other option is in-school suspension which we very seldom use it because we do it ourselves” (Personal Communication, 04/18/13). Christopher was aware of some of his students who were suspended for up to five days for: (a) continued school disruption, (b) continued disrespect toward authority figures, and (c) continued disability to comply with school protocol.

John assumed that as a teacher, he did not have the authority to recommend students for suspension or expulsion. However, he had referred students for looking at pornography, and they were suspended as a result. John also had a student who was suspended under zero tolerance for smoking marijuana on school property.

Johnny boasted that he had never recommended any students for suspension. He commented that:

I’ll deal with the worst of the worst regardless if they are on medication or being disruptive. I think that’s my gift! I deal with all the trouble kids here in school. I put them to work. We clean up, straighten up, empty trash cans, whatever, you name it. We clean bathrooms, we do things. And you *talk* to them while working—feed them—and they will have a tendency, you know when they get in trouble, “Go get Mr. Jones, go get Mr. Bennett, go get Mr. Johnny.” And those guys will come, you know. And then they will release and say, “Why I was cutting up in Miss Jackson’s class was because she said this.” And they pull them and say, “Who controls you?” “I do.” “There you go. You control you. You control what comes out of your mouth. You even control the thoughts between your two ears” (Personal Communication, 04/25/13).

While Johnny had not recommended any students for exclusion, he did know of times when students were suspended for being violent because:

You know when a child is violent, it’s hard to keep them housed here because this is a safe zone, and we want individuals to feel safe and comfortable while in a learning



environment. And so if a child in any way crosses that line, we have to look out for the other students that are here in the facilities. (Personal Communication, 04/25/13)

The students, some of them reluctantly, described incidents that resulted in their or someone else's suspensions. Ben recounted how he was suspended for bringing three knives to school, and selling one of them to another student. However, instead of getting out-of-school suspension, he was assigned to Andrew Academy, which he described as, "It is sort of a school, except you don't really do much at *all*. I can't really explain it" (Personal Communication, 03/06/13). John Luke talked about some students who were suspended for the rest of the year "for something pertaining to drugs like they were making brownie weeds. Weed brownies. It's like you put the weed in the brownies, and you eat them and you get high! Fudge brownies" (Personal Communication, 04/18/13).

MJ painfully recalled how he was suspended for 10 days for "skipping" school *before* the bell rang. He hotly disputes that this was under zero tolerance when he stated, "It wasn't under the zero tolerance policy that we got suspended. It was—like—we kinda disobeyed one of the rules in the handbook. It wasn't *anything* that had to do with the zero tolerance policy at *all!*" (Personal Communication, 04/11/13).

Mario detailed how he was suspended on two different occasions:

One time, the reason that I'm in here now is because I made a threat. I said, "If you touch my f----- book bag, I'm going to kill you." But I said it to *nobody*, because I left my book bag in the gazebo. When I went to retrieve it that's when I yelled it out and nobody was around, so I yelled it out. And then a teacher came out of *nowhere*. I *don't*, know *where* that teacher came from, but she overheard me, and she said, "You can't say that." I said, "I'm sorry, but I can't take it back—it's already out there. It's already done and over. I can't go back and change it." Then two days later, I'm down here (Andrew Academy). The year when I was in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade, I brought a ski mask, a fake gun or a toy gun to school and I got 10 days. (Personal Communication, 04/16/13)

As the parents described the suspensions of their sons or wards, they also gave the reasons for the suspensions. Amy discussed hearing about other kids who were suspended, but

she was not sure why they suspended. She reiterated how her son, MJ, was assigned to Andrew Academy “for skipping school.” Bre described why her grandson, Tony, was suspended:

Like I’ve already said, they said he went home, made some brownies and went to basketball practice. The next day he took them to school. I thought that since he’s taking home economics, they were just brownies because he said he told the teacher he was going to bring brownies and give to the children. I thought they were for home economics until the principal called and asked, “Did Tony make some brownies at home?” I said, “Yes, he made some brownies.” He said, “Well, you know we have him for selling brownies with marijuana in them.” I said, “Marijuana!” I know he made brownies at home, but I didn’t know they had marijuana in them.” (Individual Interview, 04/23/13)

Carlye spoke of his nephew’s suspension as well as the suspensions of some his friends:

Yes, my nephew was suspended under zero tolerance for the reasons that I’ve already mentioned. I know of some of his friends that were suspended under zero tolerance. The specific incident was possession of a controlled substance of a higher quantity that created the situation where they were removed from the school system for the remainder of the year because they were seen as distributors of this item. (Personal Communication, 04/24/13)

Jane could think of the one time that her son, Ben, was assigned to Andrew Academy for the knife incident when he brought knives to school and sold one to another student. Shirl did not consider her son’s assignment to Andrew Academy as a “suspension,” and she did not think that any of her son’s friends had been suspended. However, she gave details of the suspensions of some kids whom she heard were just suspended:

But I do know of some kids that have been suspended. I heard of a student that was just suspended. He was at the prom and he smoked marijuana outside where the prom was. They smelled the smoke and they found him. And as a consequence, he was suspended for 10 days for smoking marijuana at the prom. I don’t know the specifics of the fights that took place. I don’t know why they were fighting. But I know there was a couple of kids who were fighting, over what, I have no idea. But I know they were suspended for 10 days. (Personal Communication, 04/30/13)

Even though all the administrator or teacher participants may or may have not recommended suspension or suspended a student, the majority of the participants at least knew

of someone who had been suspended. And while the suspensions may have been for various reasons, the reasons were sufficient to result in out-of-school suspension or assignment to Andrew Academy. Even though one student did not think highly of Andrew Academy, the majority of the participants seemed to think that it serves a good purpose; namely, keeping the students off the streets where they were certain to get into more trouble.

*Disproportionality* discusses the participants' thoughts and opinions on whether or not the application and enforcement of zero tolerance results in a disproportionate number of suspensions and expulsions of African-American male students and reasons why African-American male students are or are not disproportionately referred to the office or excluded.

All of the administrators, with the exception of Joe, felt there is a disproportionate number of exclusions of African-American male students, and they offered different reasons for this disproportionality. Dexter stated that there were more Black males being suspended or expelled. However, this was because:

I think they disproportionately commit those infractions more than anyone because of the definition of zero tolerance where everyone is governed by the same policy, and gets the same number of days for the same infraction. This once again is where zero tolerance takes subjectivity off the plate. (Personal Communication, 03/06/13)

Dexter continued to explain that the disproportionality is due to outside-of-school culture and to social issues. He emphasized his point by stating:

Our student population is pretty much one-third African-American and one-third Caucasian, but more than one-third of those students who commit those acts are African-American. I think that goes back to their culture, social battle, and living conditions. It's not something that can be just done by the school itself alone. (Personal Communication, 03/06/13)

Mama Bear concurred with Dexter that more Blacks are suspended. However, she thought that it was due to the higher number of minorities in the school population. She continued to make her point by stating:

Yes, we suspend more Black males. But—we are 87% minority here—so proportionately to our population, I don't think that we are inclined as so other places that I've heard of. I don't think that we target kids.... But ultimately it comes back down to 'the child makes the choice, and we have to deal with giving the consequences to the kids.' The 87% includes all our minorities. Blacks, Hispanics, and Asians are our biggest populations here. (Personal Communication, 04/10/13)

Sally also noted that because the school has a high number of minorities, she was unable to accurately describe reasons for the disproportionality in suspensions and expulsions.

In assessing whether African-American male students are disproportionately suspended or expelled, three of the teachers indicated that they did not think that some students are disproportionately suspended or expelled based on gender or ethnicity. Brooke expressed that regardless of student gender or race, the consequences faced for committing an infraction are the same. She emphasized this point by stating, "...I think that it doesn't really matter what gender or ethnicity you are.... If you've done it, you've done it.... The consequences are still there" (Personal Communication, 03/06/13). John concurred with Brooke by indicating that the emphasis is on the action, not on race or gender:

It hasn't been my experience that students have been suspended based on gender or ethnicity. I haven't seen that as a factor in terms of who gets suspended and who doesn't. It has been pretty much coming down to what the actual action was. (Personal Communication, 04/24/13)

Sandra indicated that even though the statistics on the number of infractions by race are high, she does not think that students are disproportionately suspended or expelled based on ethnicity.

When I asked if she thought that there was disproportionality based on gender or ethnicity,

Sandra replied:

No, I don't. I don't. ... and I did look at the data on discipline referrals. And in the data it was something like 120 African-American students, a slight majority, of all discipline problems at this school. There were students who had one, maybe two. So you're talking about a small group who is responsible for the majority of the disciplinary problems, I think. They weren't all African-Americans. They were mixed. Males and females. (Personal Communication, 03/07/13)

However, later in the interview, in contrast to what she had initially stated earlier, Sandra noted that because of material factors, African-American males disproportionately had more disciplinary problems. When I asked about the statistics of African American disciplinary problems, she responded:

They were mixed...But I'd say more of them were African-Americans males. But you know that's a lot of material factors for that. Like the absence of a positive model role, which is very common...So when you start looking at school personnel demographics, is that a cause? So you can never say that this is the cause because there are multiple reasons. (Personal Communication, 03/07/13)

Polly similarly indicated that even though

the research is overwhelming in showing that African American male students are suspended at a much higher rate than other students...I am very familiar with the national research that shows African American students are suspended at a very, very disproportionate rate than other students. (Personal Communication, 03/06/13)

She further explained that when she was principal: "Most of my zero tolerance suspensions were the rich, White kids who were selling mom and dad's medicines out of the medicine cabinet" (Personal Communication, 03/06/13). Johnny elaborated on the disproportionality from the stand points of both race and gender with regards to targeting when he stated: "Personally, I do think there have been times when Black males and minorities in general have been targeted by White female teachers. Especially young, White, female teachers who are right out of college" (Personal Communication, 04/24/13). Fern gave an example of how she noted the disproportionality of suspension and expulsion is based on targeting:

Well, I had a kid come to me to say, 'this teacher just don't [sic] like me.' It was one of my students who was trying to get back in my class. You know if the kids feel that a teacher doesn't like you, it doesn't matter what you do. He said, 'I don't do anything, she'll just send me out.'...I've talked with his counselor and as you talk with other teachers, you might find out that this is what happened. I just think that if we have a problem with who is sitting in our classrooms, then we shouldn't be teaching them. That tells me right there that kid is going to be targeted. (Personal Communication, 03/07/13)

Christopher concurred with Johnny and Fern:

Yes, I do feel that students are suspended or expelled at times because of ethnicity.... And once again, with the preconceived notions of how behavior is presented in the media to occur with certain ethnic groups, once again a lot of times it's more of a profiling situation with that individual student or group of students before I guess the problem is really investigated. (Personal Communication, 04/18/13)

As for the students' perceptions on disproportionality and the associated reasons, three of the students thought African-American male students are disproportionately suspended or expelled. When Ben was asked if he felt that students were disproportionately expelled or suspended, he exclaimed, "Yes!" (Personal Communication, 03/06/13), and noted that from his personal experiences and some of his friends' personal experiences, he believed that African-American boys are suspended more than everybody else. He went on to add that teachers and staff may misconstrue who is lying and who is telling the truth about certain situations. He concluded, "that the student who is African-American or of color gets wrongfully treated" (Personal Communication, 03/06/13). He attributed the teachers' misconceptions to stereotypes. Additionally, John Luke contributed to this line of thought when he stated, "I barely see—no offense—any Caucasian people down here in suspension. I mean I barely see people that are not African-American down here, except for like Hispanic or something. I barely see Caucasians down here" (Personal Communication, 04/18/13). MJ stated that even though he thought that African Americans and Hispanics get in the most trouble, he didn't think that it is because of race. Rather he thought that it was a result of how they behave and how they carry themselves. He stated, "I don't think it's the race. I just think that it's the way that someone carries themselves cause [sic] some people, when you look at them, they look like they're trouble makers" (Personal Communication, 04/11/13). He elaborated on this point by adding:

Like they sag really hard, they like wear really baggy clothes. They just—they *just* look like someone that will cause trouble, but some of them are really not—that's just the way

they are. But it's mostly African-American and Hispanic males that get into the most trouble. ... I really don't know why. But every time that I walk by the office, most times when I walk by the office, there's like an African-American in there, and I'm like, 'What did you do?' And they're like, 'Nothing at all.' I'm just like, 'A-a-h.'" I just don't know what to say. (Personal Communication, 04/11/13)

Mario did not think that students are proportionately suspended or expelled based upon gender or ethnicity. He based his conclusion on the fact that he thinks:

...some teachers are not racists. Because if they wuz [sic], they wouldn't work in the schools with different kinds of people: Blacks, White kids, Mexicans, Hispanics, Asians, Latinos, any of them. They just wouldn't put up with it. (Personal Communication, 04/16/13)

Tony agreed with Mario and indicated, "For the most part, whatever you do, if you do something wrong...everybody gets the same treatment" (Personal Communication, 04/23/13).

There was a wide array of thoughts from the stakeholders pertaining to the disproportionality of exclusions and the reasons for such exclusions. In spite of the different reflections, all of them gave powerful and personal insight into the "whys and hows" of disproportionate exclusions of African-American male students, as well as the reasons for thinking there are not disproportionate exclusions of this group of students.

The indicator, *equity and fairness*, involves the participants rationalizing whether the administrators and teachers treat all students equally and fairly when writing office referrals, or assigning disciplinary consequences. The participants also expounded on the reasons they think the administrators and teachers either treat or do not treat students equally and fairly.

Although administrators and teachers were not asked about equity and fairness, some of them did address this issue in the Personal Communications. For example, Brooke shared her reasoning as to the equal and fair treatment of students when she remarked:

just reflecting on how many students are suspended and how many students are in and out of school. It seems like it's diverse. It's going to depend on the incident and how long it has been building up. But from what I can see, it seems that from the students that

are out, it's pretty diverse. What I mean is that the kids that are suspended from school seems like a mix of males and females; seems like it a mix of African-Americans, Hispanic, and Caucasians. It's going to depend on the student. But from my records and the kids that I know that have been suspended, it seems to be kind of diverse as to who it is that is being disciplined. (Personal Communication, 03/06/13)

In Christopher's opinion, "Zero tolerance is not facilitated appropriately. So fairness is not what is looked at in regards to the students' situations" (Personal Communication, 04/18/13).

John disagreed with Christopher because "In my opinion, it has been fair. Whenever a student commits a certain act that falls under zero tolerance policy, the punishment has been carried out equally regardless of the student, in my experience" (Personal Communication, 04/24/13).

Ben commented that as far as he knows, teachers treat all students the same. He also speculated that, "...every time that I've been disciplined, I pretty felt like I was wrong. I think the consequences fitted the violation" (Personal Communication, 03/06/13). It should be noted that none of the other students agreed with Ben as to fair consequences and treatments. John Luke disagreed that teachers treat all students the same when writing office referrals when he noted:

I don't think so because when I was in class one day, I got written up for talking. But he put a little bit more—he put that I was yelling and singing and stuff. The other person, he like helps him do the work and stuff; he got written up too; but he just put "talking," whispering to another student." But we were both talking to each other. (Individual Interview, 04/18/13)

Additionally, John Luke did not agree with Ben that he was disciplined fairly. He explained by stating:

Because that's the reason I'm down here. I was actually given two consequences for the same thing. My teacher wrote me up on one write-up; like put both of the things on one write-up. And then for the consequence, they gave me ISS for two days. But then he wrote one of the *same* things that was on *that* write-up on *another* write-up; and then they suspended me. (Personal Communication, 04/18/13)

Regarding equal treatment by teachers, MJ felt strongly that he does not think teachers treat all



students the same with regards to office referrals. He declared:

I don't think they do. I don't think they treat students the same at *all* with office referrals because there was one time I was-s-s aah—like there was one time last year these students were playing around, and I guess one of them was one of the teacher's favorite, and so she wrote one of them up and let the one off with a slap on the wrist. I was just like, "That's not right at all." The one that she wrote up served three days in ISS and the other was still in class acting goofy, running around, and the teacher just allowed it. (Personal Communication, 04/23/13)

MJ signified that even though he does not get in trouble a lot, and when he does, he thought he was treated "pretty fair because I know what I did was wrong, and so I wouldn't really mind it" (Personal Communication, 04/23/13). Mario was of the view that depending on what the students did, some students are treated differently. In addition, "...they don't understand that the teachers have the right to do what they have to do because that's what they are working for. They are working so that we can get our education and so that we can become better adults in life" (Personal Communication, 04/16/13). Despite Mario's opinion that students' treatment by teachers depends on what they did, he thought there was one time when he was disciplined unfairly. He remembered:

...there was the one time when I was in foster care in Eden. We were playing dodge ball, and I threw the ball at this kid; he fell down to the ground, and I went to see if he was alright. He just started banging his head, and I was trying to stop him from banging his head. This was an all-White school, and I was the only Black guy there, so-o-o. They thought that I was actually banging his head on the floor. I tried to tell them that I wasn't, but they just suspended me. (Personal Communication, 04/16/13)

Tony emphatically describes why he thinks students are not treated the same when he commented:

Naw [sic], all students are *not* treated the same cuz [sic] there was this one time in my first period class, and I had my phone out. She came and like, "You are not supposed to have your phone out." So she came to get it, and I said, "Naw, I'll just put it up." So I put it in my pocket, and she said, "No, no, give it to me." And I said, "Naw, I'll just put it up." And she said, "If you are not going to give it to me, I'll just write you up." So she went to go write me up. Then there was another student with the same scenario where he

had his phone out, and she said, “Give it to me.” And he said, “I’ll put it up.” She just went on about her business and let him put it up. (Personal Communication, 04/23/13)

Despite Tony’s strong feelings that he was not treated equally by teachers, he did think that he was disciplined fairly when he was assigned to Andrew Academy for selling marijuana brownies.

When Amy expressed her belief on the equity and fairness of treatment of the students by the teachers and administrators, she stated that based on the situation with her son, MJ, she did not think that he was treated fairly by the administrators. She reasoned that he should have gotten in-school suspension, but not 10 days in Andrew Academy for skipping school; *if* he was skipping. She stated that she did not know if all teachers treated all students the same when making office referrals.

Carlye made it clear that he did not think that administrators treat all the students when assigning consequences. He drew this conclusion based on “...the fact that it depends on who the child may be in relationship to influential people in the community” (Personal Communication, 04/24/13). For an example, he said a high school student whose relatives are part of the athletics Booster Club and school board had an incident; and nothing at all was done with that student” (Personal Communication, 04/24/13). Carlye did not think that teachers treat all students the same when they write office referrals. He thought that, “Once again, it’s according to who the teacher may know and what influence there is to implement a different consequence based upon who the individual is based upon their family’s connections” (Personal Communication, 04/24/13). To illustrate, he recalled an incident where his nephew and another student committed the same infraction, but his nephew received a “worse or stricter consequence” because “the teachers may not have liked him as a student” (Personal Communication, 04/24/13). Carlye also thought that Mario was treated unfairly by a teacher.

As with Amy, Bre was also unable to say if the administrators treated all students the same when they assigned consequences. Nor was she able to say if all students are treated equally when teachers write office referrals. However, she rationalized that because of her relationship with the administrators and teachers, they always informed her of what's going on with her grandson, Tony. Consequently, she thought that he was treated fairly by the administrators and teachers.

Similarly Jane held that her son, Ben, was treated fairly by the administrators because he and the other student received the same consequences for the incident involving the knives. Because Ben had never been in trouble like that before, Jane was unable to say whether or teachers treated Ben like the other students when doing write-ups. Since she could not think of any examples when she thought Ben was treated unfairly by teachers or administrators, she could only hope that teachers and administrators treat all the students fairly.

Shirl was of the belief that administrators treat all students the same when they assign consequences under zero tolerance because otherwise they would be showing favoritism. She expanded her reasoning, saying:

Well, the school here is majority Black. So-o-o I think that they use that policy a lot because it's mainly Blacks that come from low income families. So sometimes what's goes on in the neighborhood carries over into the school. So I think they try to have that not happen by using the zero tolerance policy by trying to keep that kind of stuff out of the school or keep it out as long as possible. So I think the administrators treat all the students the same when assigning consequences using zero tolerance because they try to—well, they have to do that because if not, then they're showing favoritism, and hopefully the parents will not allow the administrators to show favoritism as to one student got more days or didn't get as many days or was not suspended at all. So hopefully they're following the correct policy when they suspend students according to the zero tolerance policy. (Personal Communication, 04/30/13)

However, Shirl was less sure about whether the teachers treat all the same when writing office referrals. Regarding whether or not teachers treat students differently, she thought that it may be for the same reasons that Carlye gave. She remarked:

It might be for one reason that teachers and the students don't get along. So I think that they need to have that student not be in the classroom. So that student may get more referrals than the other students. But once again, there might be some history behind the teacher and that student as to why that student might get more office referrals.  
(Personal Communication, 04/30/13)

Even though Shirl was of the belief that teachers do not treat all the students the same when writing office referrals, she did not think her son had been treated unfairly by teachers or administrators because, "She tries to teach him to do as he's supposed to do" (Personal Communication, 04/30/13).

The majority of the student and parents/caregivers participants conceptualized that the administrators and teachers treated all students equally and fairly when assigning consequences under zero tolerance, writing office referrals, or treating students fairly in general. However, some differences with regards to equity and fairness in student treatment were cited.

The final indicator for the exclusion theme was *reduction efforts*. This indicator deals with the participants' insights on what each group of stakeholders can do to reduce the number of exclusions of African-American male students. Speaking as an administrator, Dexter supposed that exclusions of African-American males would be reduced if there was a change in the school's culture in order for the students to realize that there is "another form of avenue other than committing those infractions, and making sure that the students know up front what's going to happen if they do commit those infractions. That way they won't put themselves in those situations to begin with" (Personal Communication, 03/06/13). Sally maintained building relationships was one definite way to reduce suspensions. Further, she added that being

proactive, listening to the students, and interacting with the students also plays a BIG part in avoiding suspensions because by doing all the things “students will tell you anything—I mean—they will tell you all sort of stuff” (Personal Communication, 03/06/13). Joe agreed that by working together and clearly communicating with the home and community, the school can avoid issues that are occurring. He remarked:

I think by working together and communicating clearly what those perimeters are so if there are issues that are happening at home or in the community, the school is aware of them and can intercede before it becomes a larger issue. My experience has been is that a kid has a reason to bring a weapon to school to protect himself. If things get to that point where a kid feels that he has to protect himself, we need to intercede before things get to that point. (Personal Communication, 03/06/13)

Mama Bear imagined that suspensions could be reduced by involving outside service agencies and getting male mentors. She commented that:

What really needs to happen is to have those counseling pieces in place, to have those therapeutic environments in place; put that other layer of support there for him, to get him a male mentor, or to get him some therapeutic help from an outside agency. (Personal Communication, 04/10/13)

Polly’s perception of how administrators can reduce suspensions of African-American males was similar to those of Mama Bear and Sally in that she believed providing mentors would go a long way in forming relationships that would last long after the students are gone. She stated:

They can consider the students as individuals first; then students. The students are in need of mentors—adult mentors. And if possible, of the same ethnicity. Speak to them other when disciplining them. This forms lasting relationships. Long after they leave here. (Personal Communication, 03/06/13)

Brooke reiterated that she, too, thinks that relationships play a major role in reducing suspensions. She seemed confident that if the administrators formed relationships with the students as well as the teachers, this would lead to a decrease in suspensions of African-American boys. She detailed how this could happen:

Again, like I said, the administrators need to be a part of that circle. They need to be a part of those options and resources that the students have. They need to form a connection with the students so they know they have that extra person they can go to. Someone who the students know is a part of that circle, who they know want to be a part of that circle, who they know is there just to listen. As I've said, sometimes all that it takes is just knowing you have someone with whom you can talk will solve the problem. They also need to be able to connect with the teachers so that if they see a student that's known for lashing out, they can contact the teachers to let them know that this student is having a bad day. Then the teacher can be on the watch out, and take extra steps or go out of the way to let the student know that he or she is there for him or her. (Personal Communication, 03/06/13)

In addition to being of the same views as Fern, Polly, and Brooke in believing that the administrators should support the teachers and develop relationships, Sandra thought that administrators should make the students be accountable for their behavior. She stated:

They need to back the teachers and make the students own their behavior, by asking them, "Why did you do this or why did you do that?" Because there is a procedure. I never write a student up for the first occurrence. I talk to them, I change his seat, and I talk to the parent— unless it's something really bad the first time. I try to develop a relationship with them (students) before I write them up. So I think administrators need to develop relationships, too. (Personal Communication, 03/ 07/13)

Christopher simply mused that if administrators "Do not over react when an African-American male walks into their offices, regardless of the ethnicity of the administrator" (Personal Communication, 04/18/13), this would help reduce the suspensions of these students. John thought that based on his experience, consistency is the key to reducing suspensions of African-American males. He pronounced:

Be consistent. Just be consistent. I've seen in my experience some students who would be facing more serious consequences have a parent or guardian advocate that is very much a participant in the scenario where they advocate for the student, and they'll drop some of the consequences because the child had a good advocate. Whereas some students, like African American males don't have as much of an advocate as possible and don't have someone going to bat for them. (Personal Communication, 04/24/13)

Johnny, in addition to agreeing with Mama Bear and Polly, speculated that suspensions could be reduced if the administrators provided outside services such as counselors or motivational

speakers, providing athletic outlets and changing the standards could help in reducing suspensions of African-American males. He rationalized:

Administrators can continue to provide outlets such as athletics for the students. You know, sometimes you may need to lower the standards in order for the students to make the team. In order to accommodate the students, lower the standards and tutor them. They can also continue to be fair when passing out the buck, “If I did something wrong, then I should get the same punishment. I shouldn’t get anything worse.” That’s really all the administrators can do. Well, they can provide individuals to come in and talk to the kids—whether it’s counselors or motivational speakers. I find that to be awesome because they don’t know if these persons have been through the same thing they’re experiencing. They need to see living examples of people who were at the bottom, but made it through hard work and prayer. I think mentoring programs are wonderful. Have local pastors, community leaders, or someone who cares come in and talk to the students. (Personal Communication, 04/25/13)

The student participants’ reflections were as elaborate as the administrators and teachers. John Luke, after pondering briefly, said suspensions of these students could be reduced if administrators treat everybody the same. He responded, “What can I say? Just give African Americans the *same* treatment that you give the other races. *Everybody* should be treated the *same*” (Personal Communication, 04/18/13). Due to the attitudes of African-American males, Mario perceived that administrators cannot really do anything to reduce suspensions of the students “...because the African-American males actually do what they want to do, because they don’t want to listen to authority any way. They do whatever they want to do and suffer the consequences” (Personal Communication, 04/16/13).

As for the parents, Bre and Jane agreed that if administrators look “carefully” at the rules and follow them; this would help reduce the suspensions of African-American boys. Bre stated:

I think they’re doing good, (sic) because they’re going by the rules, you know. And it’s not so much they can do legally or whatever. So I guess they’re doing all they can do, because they’re going by the school rules or whatever. Whenever Tony got in trouble, they wrote him up and called me. So I guess that’s about all they can do. (Personal Communication, 04/23/2013)

Jane commented:

I think they should look very carefully at the rules that they have set, and know that there are special needs there and give them the opportunity just like they've given Ben. Some of them don't know that they have that right. (Personal Communication, 04/15/2013)

Carlyle defiantly responded that the administrators need to be truthful about the number of incidents. Going into details, he pointed out:

I'm a parent and I know that multiple students have been suspended for various situations, or my son's school mates. When an article appears in the paper that "X School System has not had any incidents or incidents under five for an entire year," and I know there have been many situations connected to my son's school that will cause that number to go above 10, that means that there is not transparency within the collection and distribution of true data. (Personal Communication, 04/24/13)

When I asked Carlyle how that will reduce the suspensions? He responded:

It would probably cause those involved with the consequences to take a greater amount of time and try to work with the students as opposed to looking at it from a zero tolerance standpoint and then not reporting accurate data. (Personal Communication, 04/24/13)

According to Dexter, if teachers include character education, create a diverse climate in the classrooms, and make certain that the students are knowledgeable about the discipline policy would result in a decrease in suspensions of African-American males. The other three administrators agreed that building relationships and trusting the students would be beneficial in reducing exclusions of African-American males. Mama Bear summed it up best when she replied:

The teachers can build relationships with the kids not let it be something that is just superficial—"I am teaching you algebra, and I going to teach you algebra the best that I can." But let it also be, "I'm also teaching you algebra you, but I care about you. How was your weekend? What's going on? What can I do to help you otherwise?" Make yourself available. (Personal Communication, 04/10/13)

The majority of the teachers were of the same belief as Sally, Joe, and Mama Bear that teachers should: (a) develop relationships with students, (b) set expectations, (c) have a closer dialogue with the students, (d) provide flexibility in disciplinary recommendations, (e) reach out,



( f) show love and care, (g) build trust, and (h) encourage the students. Additionally, Brooke indicated that:

It's important that students have options and resources. It's important for teachers, administrators, parents, and students to work together to have a plan in place. If a student is known for acting out, and you see him or her acting a certain way, give him a minute. Dismiss him from class for a few minutes, tell him to go down to the counselor's office, tell him to take a walk, or something like that to get himself together. Or just listen. Sometimes a student just wants you to listen, and that may solve the issue. Maybe a teacher can be a mentor to a student. (Personal Communication, 03/06/13)

Fern reasoned that the teachers should follow the rules, and not look in the past. She held that if everybody is saying the same thing and following the same rules, this would make the students better students. While Polly posited that using positive reinforcement for behavior and classroom learning would reduce suspensions of African-American boys, John contemplated that following a strict standard protocol and not skipping any steps of a unified school policy would be helpful.

The students had different perceptions of what teachers can do to help reduce the suspensions/and expulsions of African-American students. Other than their acting immediately, quickly, and precisely *before* things start, Ben could not think of anything else that they could do. Similarly to Ben, Tony was of the impression that there is not much teachers can do besides do their job, which is to teach and, "Just be more lenient toward how quick they are to write you up" (Personal Communication, 04/11/13). MJ reasoned that African-American boys would be suspended less if the teachers:

... would just like—first ask "What's going on?" Because sometime they don't ask, "What's going on?" They just see what's happening, and it could be something totally different than what they're thinking. So I think they should first ask, "What going on?" and then go from there. (Personal Communication, 04/11/13)

Mario felt that if the teachers secluded the students from their friends who influenced them so they would not “do bad things and stuff” (Personal Communication, 04/16/13) this might be something that would reduce suspensions of African-American males.

The majority of the parent(s)/caregiver(s) also perceived that building relationships would be valuable in reducing suspensions of African-American males. Amy concluded that the teachers could find time to listen to find out how they can relate to the students about things that are not related to school. Carlye also thought that forming relationships within the high school climate and culture could be one way to reduce suspensions. Shirl pondered that there should be a relationship but should not on friend-to-friend level. She supported her concept as follows:

I think the teachers should not be their friend; but be there for them. Maybe not on the level as a friend, but on a level as someone where they can come and talk to when they need someone to talk to. Sometimes they just can't confide in someone else and so, the teacher might be the one person that that student can go to. So just to have a relationship, a kind of relationship with a counselor, anyone in the school in which he can confide might reduce the number of suspensions of African-American male students. (Personal Communication, 04/30/13)

Bre gave an example of how she believed closing the generation gap would be one step towards reducing suspensions of African-American students. She described a situation involving the football coach.

This is a new day, this is a new generation, and you can't treat the students today like old school, so to speak. We're from the old school. I'll give you a good example. The football coach had called a meeting during the middle of the season, and he was talking about he let them go to study hall every evening to make sure that all of his players stay on top of their grades or whatever. (Personal Communication, 04/23/13)

In addition to building relationships with the administrators and teachers, and learning to trust them, Dexter deemed, “Students need to check their own behavior. I know that as an adolescent, it's sometime hard to do. But they have to be aware of the policies and make sure that they abide by them” (Personal Communication, 03/06/13).

The teachers' perceptions of what students can do to reduce suspensions of African-American male students covered a broad spectrum. Several teachers, including Fern, Sandra, Christopher, and John described how, among other things, (a) students need to understand and take responsibility, (b) take more advantage of opportunities, (c) exercise their brains, (d) dialogue with teachers or some other adults, (e) own their behavior and (f) don't think of drugs as glamorous and quick money. Brooke and Polly were of the belief that students should stand up, have a voice, have hope, and see beyond their immediate circumstances. John employed the theory of the phenomenon of the Black church to illustrate that African-American boys know how to behave.

There's this phenomenon of Black church where you sit a bunch of what society might call unruly African-American boys. You sit them altogether in one place and they don't want to act "the fool" in front of other Black males. Okay. This is called phenomenon of Black church. So if you have a classroom full of African-American males, they're used to sitting in a Black church for four hours on a Sunday or something like that. So they're capable of sitting down, being quiet, and getting it done. But it's when they're integrated or in front of girls and want to "show out" that can get them in trouble. But I thought that was interesting. I haven't seen it for myself because we got fairly diverse classes here. You don't have classes with all one ethnicity for the most part. (Personal Communication, 04/24/13)

The students had different views of what they could do to help reduce the number of suspensions of African-American males. Ben said, "Students can: think over their actions, convince friends not to do violent things, try to make peace, look deep inside themselves, don't give into peer pressure, and follow their own path" (Personal Communication, 03/06/13). John Luke commented that students can get their act together and do the right thing. He used the following to illustrate his point:

When you know it wrong, do the right thing. Just like the man says, "I got some candy in the house, but don't climb through my window, go through the front door?" You want to climb through the window, but you are going to go through the front door because you know that there's some candy in there. You're going to do the *right* thing instead of the *wrong* thing. (Personal Communication, 04/18/13)

MJ just concluded that if all students could cooperate with the teachers and follow the rules, there would not be any suspensions.

In assessing what students can do to reduce the suspensions of African-American males, some of the parents had some of the same views as the other participants. Their discernments included: (a) speaking up when they see or hear something that they think may lead to something bigger, (b) telling the teachers or the principal, (c) taking responsibility for or owning their behavior, (d) following the rules, (e) learning to speak up, (f) venting their feelings, (g) letting someone know what they're thinking, (h) opening up and talking with somebody, (i) taking advice and encouragement from adults, (j) stop trying to be bullies, (k) stop following the wrong crowd, and (l) stop being afraid to jump ship and go another path.

When discussing what parents can do to reduce the numbers of African-American male students that are suspended, the administrators related that in addition to taking similar actions as the other stakeholders such as building relationships with the administrators and teachers and trusting the school, Dexter particularized that:

Parents can start early on to instill values and beliefs so that the students will appreciate and understand the value of an education, so that they will not do anything to get excluded or take away that chance for education for themselves or others by default. (Personal Communication, 03/06/13)

The teachers rationalized different ways parents can help reduce suspensions of African-American male students. They consisted of: (a) parenting their children, (b) stop enabling them, (c) letting them stand on their own feet, (d) listening more to their children, (e) being supportive of their children, (f) being a part of the connection, (g) building parental relationships, (h) taking responsibility for their children, (i) being involved in their children's education, (j) understanding the school's role, (k) understanding the discipline policy, (l) not taking their children's side, and

(m) staying in contact with the school. Polly elaborated on how parents can take advantage of opportunities offered by the school system. She expounded by giving an example of such an opportunity:

I would hope that parents would take advantage of the opportunities that we as a school system provide them. For example, one of the things that we are hoping to do within the next year in our school system is to implement some adult ESL classes to help the 30% of our Hispanic parents who speak different language than English at home. We speak 18 different languages in our school system. It's really difficult for those parents to help their children with their school work. It's not that they *don't* want to, they *just can't!* They are literate in their language, but illiterate in ours. To teach them how to read in our language, may be learn how to speak a little more English. I am not in any way being derogatory toward these parents. I just hope that if this opportunity becomes available to them, they will take advantage of it and be able to help the students. I would say that's what parents can do. Not just the Hispanic subculture, but all parents as well. When we offer opportunities as a school system that would allow parents to help our students, I hope that they would take advantage of them. I think that it's a matter of record that when academics go up, behavior issues go down. Then if we can get students' academic to start rising, then behavior issues are going to get lower. (Personal Communication, 03/07/13)

In addition to the other suggestions, Johnny cited how important it is for parents to be involved and provide parental support for their children.

Parents *must* get involved. *Get involved!* And I know it's hard, but a lot of those parents who are having problems with their children don't work. But for those who do work, they must get involved. Get involved with PTA or the Booster Club. If your child's on a team, we should see you on Friday night or whatever night. We need to see you in the stands to help us keep *your* child in check and to show your child that you're supporting him. Then the child will be saying, "My mama and daddy came to practice." My mama and daddy came to the game." "My mama and daddy came to the team's parents' meeting." That's embarrassing when you ask a student, "Mr. Jones, where's your mama?" "She's at home." No, that shows she doesn't really care. So if his mother doesn't care, then my care won't be a 100%. So I think parental involvement helping out the school in any kind of way, volunteering, keeping order, going on field trips, just being seen. Parental involvement is the key. Parental involvement is critical. Parental involvement is *so important!* And yet we have so little of it in inner city schools. (Personal Communication, 04/25/13)

Carlye expressed that parents could:

Communicate with their African-American male relatives for support for their sons, nephews, whatever the case may be to hopefully instill in that person a sense of respect,

responsibility, and accountability so that moving themselves toward a suspension or expulsion is *not* an option for them because they'll be focused on success, and not having themselves removed from the educational setting because of inappropriate choices they make. (Personal Communication, 04/18/13)

The students had simple points as what parents can do to reduce the suspensions of African-American male students. While Ben concluded that parents should be:

...a *lot* stricter. I mean a lot-t-t stricter. I mean whenever their child is acting out, choose the appropriate punishment. Don't just let them off with a warning. Only one warning. After that, *just drop the hammer*. (Personal Communication, 03/06/13)

Mario felt that parents can talk and listen to the students. He exclaimed:

Talk to their kids! *All* they have to do is talk to them and figure out what's going on in their minds and everything. They can't ask them and *not* listen. They have to actually talk to them *and* listen, and get the kids' opinions of how the kids feel and everything. (Personal Communication, 04/16/13)

However, MJ agrees with Ben that parents should discipline their children. And keep them under control. Speaking from personal experience, Tony declared:

They can make sure, like me, if I had a son, I would make sure he wouldn't be—I would check his room every now and then cuz [sic] that's where I stored my marijuana. I won't do it no more cuz [sic] I just got in trouble for it, so I don't want to get in trouble no more. But I used to have marijuana in my room all the time. So I guess if it was me, I'd check my son's room and make sure he ain't got nothing in there. I'd check his pockets and everything when he leaves the house or come out of the house to make sure he ain't got nothing [sic]. (Personal Communication, 04/23/13)

John Luke imagined that taking the students back to history would prove helpful. He summed it up by pronouncing:

Take them back to history. Show them the fight; the hard work that people—our African-American people went through just to get us in school with the people that we are in school with now. Basically, if you show them why you are in school—what's the reason you are in school, then they'll have a reason to want to stay in school. (Individual Interview, 04/18/13)

The parents agree with the administrators and teachers on some activities that they can do to reduce the suspensions of African-American male students. These include: (a) spending time

with the children, (b) getting to know the principal and teachers, (c) being involved in the school, (d) having a good connection with the school, (e) staying in close communication with African-American administrators, (f) getting involved in what's going on with the school, and (g) working together with administrators and teachers. Shirl summed it up well when she observed:

They got to be involved! There are many parents that are not involved with their kids' school life. For that matter, in their own home life. So I think they need to become more involved. So the parents, administrators, teachers need to *all* work together to help reduce the problems that the school may face, or the problems that the students may face as far as discipline is concerned. (Personal Communication, 04/30/13)

After assessing the comments of the various groups of stakeholders, it is apparent that all the participants had similar perceptions of what each group can do to reduce the suspensions and exclusions of African-American male students. While the majority of responses indicated that the participants considered building relations and trust to be major factors in reducing the exclusions of these students, at the same time, they realized that among other things: (a) the importance of parental involvement, (b) communication, (c) speaking up, (d) taking responsibility for student behavior, (e) taking time with the students, (f) understanding and abiding by the rules, (g) being supportive, (h) listening, and (i) "just being there" are just as important and need to be considered as possible means of accomplishing what everybody seemingly want to accomplish—reducing the suspensions and expulsions of African-American male students.

### **Policies and Rules**

The final theme in the microlevel analysis, policies and rules, has three indicators: (a) clarity which is related to how the students and parents/caregivers conceptualize their understanding of the policies and rules, (b) awareness and knowledge which involves whether or not the participants were aware of zero tolerance and school policies and rules before the

suspension, and (c) if they had knowledge of the policies and rules, what was the source of this knowledge.

There were similarities and differences in the student and parents/caregivers groups' responses. The students had conflicting views on the clarity of the school policies and rules. After contemplating, Ben remarked that sometimes the school rules are clear and sometimes they are not. He explained, "There are some things that I can understand, okay. Then on the other part, it's like I'm in over my head" (Personal Communication, 03/06/13). John Luke similarly noted that, "They can be at times." But most of the time, they don't go by them. Just some times" (Personal Communication, 04/18/13). Tony also voiced a similar sentiment, "They are clear, but sometimes they are not enforced evenly as far as... I mean they're clear" (Personal Communication, 04/23/13). Mario reasoned that the rules "are pretty clear" (Personal Communication, 04/16/13). MJ speculated that for the most part the rules are clear and self-explanatory, "and like if you read the rules, the handbook and everything, you'll understand it. Cause [sic] after they state the rule, they'll explain it, you know, under it, so you'll understand what you're reading" (Personal Communication, 04/11/13).

With the exception of Carlye, the other parents/caregivers concurred with the students that they considered the school rules to be clear. Carlye voiced his dissent: "No, I do not think they are clear due to the fact that teachers nor administrators truly form a relationship with the students" (Personal Communication, 04/24/13). When I inquired, "What does forming a relationship with the students have to do with the clarity of the rules?" Carlye replied, "From my perception, if teachers and administrators want to have a positive learning climate where discipline is less than more, clarity should be given to all the rules and regulations for all students" (Personal Communication, 04/24/13).



Even though the majority of the students noted that the school rules are clear, clear most of the times, or clear 50 percent of the times, only Ben and Mario implied that they knew of the zero tolerance policy before they were suspended. Ben revealed that he knew, “Things like narcotics or weapons are not tolerated at *all*. Those could lead to suspensions or being charged with possession of that item” (Personal Communication, 03/06/13). However, he was not sure where he got his information, “...I got the information from the rule book, I think. As I said, it might be in there. I just know that I knew of it. So it might be in there, or I might have heard of it. I can’t really remember. Sorry” (Personal Communication, 03/06/13).

Mario also acknowledged that he knew what zero tolerance meant before he was suspended. He verbalized:

Yes. I just know zero tolerance means that you can put up with something or you can’t put up with something. And zero tolerance means they are not putting up with it. The principal told us and it was in the handbook. (Personal Communication, 04/16/13)

When Mario pointed out that a zero tolerance policy does indeed exist, he declared: “They actually have a zero tolerance. They won’t put up with no student crap or anything. That’s why we get sent down here to Andrew Academy” (Personal Communication, 04/16/13).

While John Luke declared that he knew “Nothing!” (Personal Communication, 04/18/13) about the zero tolerance policy except for bullying before his suspension because, “They’ve never explained it to me” (Personal Communication, 04/18/13), his common sense told him that there was something like that. He also remembered, “Oh, well, one time when I was living—one of my friends brought a BB gun to school. I do remember that, and he got sent to ALC” (Personal Communication, 04/18/13). Before his suspension, MJ confirmed that he had not heard of the zero tolerance policy when he declared, “No madam. Not at all. Not at all!” (Personal Communication, 04/23/13). Since this was his first time getting in trouble, neither did

he really understand zero tolerance. He articulated that he only knew what would happen if you brought weapons to school:

I know that we can't bring weapons to school. Like, now if you get in trouble, like if you get in a fight or whatever, they'll charge you now. Like if you're fighting, you'll get an assault charge. I think it's an assault charge. If you, a-a-a-h, like threaten someone, you'll get, I forgot the name of that charge. But they charge you now. They don't just send you to ISS or suspend you. (Personal Communication, 04/23/13)

Just as the other students, by his own admission, Tony was not aware of the zero tolerance policy, "I didn't know we had one" (Personal Communication, 04/23/13). However, he bemoaned: "I mean I knew it was the wrong thing to do, and I knew that if I got caught, I would be suspended or whatever, but I never I thought about it. I was just being dumb!" (Personal Communication, 04/23/13).

While the parents/caregivers were aware of disciplinary actions, they were not specifically aware of a zero tolerance policy. Amy succinctly exclaimed that she had no knowledge of the school's zero policy, "I don't know *anything* about school's zero tolerance policy" (Personal Communication, 04/23/13). Bre mentioned that because Tony had previously only gotten in-school suspensions, she had no knowledge of zero tolerance or the suspension process: "I'm sure they have it. But like I said, we never had to go through this before" (Personal Communication, 04/23/13).

Carlye had some prior knowledge of the school's zero tolerance policy from the student handbook as it relates to different types of weapons, and knew there was no recourse for situations that warrant removal from school. While Jane mentioned that she was aware of the school's suspension process from reading the student handbook, she had "no idea" of the school's zero tolerance or the suspension process under zero tolerance before her son was suspended (Personal Communication, 04/15/13). Shirl was knowledgeable of the school's

suspension process from reading the student handbook. However, she emphasized, “To tell you the truth, I don’t know what’s tolerated and what’s not tolerated under the zero tolerance policy.

After I explained some of what is included in the zero tolerance policy, Shirl observed:

Oh. Okay. So in that case, they are not tolerant toward any of those actions. In so far as having drugs, they’ll be suspended maybe no more than 10 days. Then they’ll be allowed back into the school. Fighting, hum, fighting among themselves, there is no tolerance there either. They will be suspended; no matter who started the fight or who’s involved. If you’re involved, they you’re suspended also, even if you didn’t start the fight. I believe both students get 10 days of out-of-suspension. (Personal Communication, 04/30/13)

As I reflected on the responses of the students and parents/caregivers, it became evident that some of the participants in both groups had limited to no knowledge of the school’s suspension process. However, they were noticeably unaware of the school’s zero tolerance policy or zero tolerance in general before the students were suspended under zero tolerance.

### **Macrolevel Analysis**

This section presents a macrolevel analysis of the focus group interviews. The analysis of the focus group data revealed the same four themes as the Personal Communications. However, there were some slightly different indicators as shown in Table 6. These indicators will also be discussed in the following macrolevel analysis. Macrolevel indicators for the theme of zero tolerance are (a) modification of the zero tolerance policy and (b) effectiveness in reducing school violence. Each focus group commented on *modification of the zero tolerance policy* in terms of changes they would recommend to the school or school district.

Table 8

*Comparison of Microlevel and Macrolevel Themes and Indicators*

Theme	Microlevel Indicators	Macrolevel Indicators
Understanding Zero Tolerance	Definitions	
	Applications and Enforcement	Modification of Policy and Implementation
	Effectiveness in Reducing School Violence	Effectiveness in Reducing School Violence
Impact of Zero Tolerance	Views on Discipline	Behavior Modification
	Behavior Modification	Input on Consequences:
Exclusions	Disciplinary Actions	
	Disproportionality	Disproportionality
	Equity/Fairness	Equity/Fairness
	Reduction Efforts	Reduction Efforts
Policies and Rules	Clarity	Communication
	Awareness and Knowledge	
	Source of Knowledge	

**Understanding Zero Tolerance**

Dexter and Sandra (administrators) wholeheartedly assumed that the school rules and the school district's zero tolerance policies are seemingly working well because unlike other school districts, the policies are consistently followed. Sally agreed with Dexter when he declared:

I think we do a good job with it here. Not like in other districts where they don't necessarily administer the zero tolerance policy consistently. I've been in some districts where they have **too** many zero tolerance policies within a school district. This is a model that if I am here or go somewhere else, that I would definitely like to see replicated in as many systems as possible. I would definitely say that the philosophy and the policy that are here need to be adopted elsewhere. (Personal Communication, 06/24/13)

Although he was positive about the overall school district's zero tolerance policy, Dexter did have some thoughts about its modification:

Putting in more wrap-around services to make sure that we can provide the necessary tools they need to be successful while they are in school other than sending them to long-term suspension for the rest of the school year. (Personal Communication, 06/24/13)

Joe's remarks reflected his perceptions, as well as those of Mama Bear, when he articulated that even though they had not seen the zero tolerance policy in writing in this school district, they would still recommend that the school and the school district take steps to insure that:

...under any disciplinary situation, there is due process and everyone gets the opportunity to have their say and to explain the situation. And I think that implicit within due process is the understanding that you will listen to the circumstance and the situation and act accordingly....That's not only the right way to do things—but the lawful way to do things in terms of dealing with students and school issues. (Personal Communication, 06/24/13)

When commenting on how the implementation of the current zero tolerance policy would be different if they had the opportunity to give input on the implementation of this policy, the teachers' conceptions ranged from: leaving it as it is, to making minor changes in small increments. Fern, John, and Sandra considered that they would recommend a sliding scale or a demerit system be used when consequences are assessed for misbehavior. John's comments best summed up their speculations:

Maybe a sliding scale should be considered for the circumstance. I know in the criminal justice system a lot of the consequences that are assessed for behaviors are proportioned according to *intent*—what your intent was. I think if we give the students, like Fern and Sandra said, give students the chance to advocate on their own behalf, a chance to assess their behavior, or assess the possible consequences, I think we can build the kind of relationship between teachers and students that maybe was lacking before. (Personal Communication, 06/10/13)

Christopher would:

...make sure that everyone understood that all students are different and every situation should be dealt with on an individual basis; and that all infractions can't always be put in

one exclusive category and dealt with exclusively based upon that situation because there are varying circumstances that occur every day in the students' and parents' communities. So I feel it would be inappropriate to look at all situations as if there is only one way to deal with it. It should be some flexibility in every situation. (Personal Communication, 06/24/13)

John thought that the present zero tolerance policy does not give the students, “a last chance to do the right thing” (Personal Communication, 06/24/13). Therefore, he conceptualized:

that if we had a sliding scale for *intent* because at the end of the day we are just trying to teach students to do the *right* thing. I think that's how my proposed implementation would be different from the zero tolerance we have now. (Personal Communication, 06/24/13)

Polly was persistent in her view on due process, stating:

I would probably refer you back to what I said about due process earlier—that it's every student's legal right—that during that process that parents and students be afforded as much information as possible. And I don't think that's always the case. So with the implementation of the zero tolerance policy, I think I would like to see parents and students given more information under due process; all the information that's fair and legally theirs. (Personal Communication, 06/24/13)

While all of the students concurred that zero tolerance should remain as it is in regards to drugs and weapons, they rationalized that they would recommend to the school and school district that the zero tolerance policy be changed whereas consequences would be “assigned on a case-to-case basis” (MJ, Personal Communication, 06/17/13), because as Ben observed, “there is really not a “fit-all” rule (Personal Communication, 06/17/13). John Luke stated: “I think I would also recommend that zero tolerance rules be changed so that if you don't do something that's really bad, then you shouldn't get the same punishment as somebody else who did” (Personal Communication, 06/17/13).

In addition, the students would include the consistency element that the other participants discussed. Ben pointed out, “No matter how small the grain of sand, or

how fast the world is, you'd still get the same amount of days. No exceptions!" (Personal Communication, 06/17/13). To illustrate, Tony expounded:

For instance, if Ben brought a knife to school and he got 10 days; and then there's another instance where somebody else brought a knife to school and they got 25 days, that's not fair. They should have consistency. So if Ben got 10 days, then everybody else should get 10 days. It should not be different; everybody should get the same treatment. For instance, I would put in the rules that if you brought a knife to school, **everybody** would get 15 days—nothing more, nothing less. That way it's consistent and even. I would just have a number of days for every case. For marijuana, there would be a certain amount of days. That way everything would just be even. (Personal Communication, 06/17/13)

The students agreed with MJ that their proposals would not change “the rules as far as weapons and drugs are concerned” (Personal Communication, 06/17/13). However, John Luke was of the opinion that, “the rules should include something that lets the principal have the last word” (Personal Communication, 06/17/13), and MJ thought that, “... in some cases, I think there should be some room to be flexible” (Personal Communication, 06/17/13). MJ expanded his point by giving an example:

Say for instance, if a student leaves campus but is back before the bell rings, I don't think that he should be suspended or sent to Andrew Academy for 10 days just like the student is who had marijuana. To me, that's just not fair. That's why I think I would give the administrators some room to make the final decision on something like that. Now if the student did something that he shouldn't have done while he was off campus—like smoking marijuana—then that's a different story. Then maybe then he should get the 10 days. (Personal Communication, 06/17/13)

Mario reasoned:

...that somewhere in the rules it oughta be something that talks about what if the teacher who wrote you up is somebody that don't like you, and maybe just out to get you or something like that. Cuz [sic] I know that happens. (Personal Communication, 06/17/13)

Most of the parents/caregivers concurred that they would recommend that was consistency in following the policy. Shirl pointed out, “I would recommend that they make sure that there is consistency throughout. If you are punishing several students for the same violation,

make sure that the punishment is the same for everyone. I would make sure there is consistency”

(Personal Communication, 06/17/13). Amy agreed with Jane when she declared:

I haven't had an encounter with all the rules of the zero tolerance policy. So all that I could recommend would be to ask them to just make sure that they are following the policy by giving the same consequences for the same offenses. And let the principal be able to decide what's meant by a weapon or drugs. If not the principal, somebody should define that. (Personal Communication, 06/17/13)

While Johnny stated that he could not make any recommendations because he did not exactly know what the policy entailed, Carlye supposed that:

I would make sure that all the administrators understood the zero tolerance policy, and that the superintendent of that specific school system had a clear understanding of how the system understands the policy. It's one thing to have a policy in a school system and people do not understand it; consequently it's never implemented properly. Thus, it has to be a meeting of the minds of the people that make the final decisions on zero tolerance before it's going to be implemented appropriately. (Personal Communication, 06/10/13)

All of the parents mentioned that the implementation should be fair and consistent. Amy articulated, “I just think all I that would do would be to make sure that everybody gets the same punishment for the same thing—not giving some students more or less punishment depending on who they know” (Personal Communication, 06/17/13). Bre insisted, “We've got to be consistent. If you bend the rules for one, you've got to bend them for all the rest of them.

Because you don't, then you are going to run into trouble. Now that's how I feel about it”

(Personal Communication, 06/17/13). Both Jane and Shirl agreed with MJ that their proposal would include some flexibility. In addition, Shirl rationalized that her proposal:

Would not be any different as far as things like weapons and drugs, no student should be allowed to bring those things on campus. And if they do, they should not be allowed on campus for a certain amount of time if they violation the policy. I think I could be a little flexible when I look at the reason the student violated the rule in the first place, or how a weapon is defined. You can't look at pointing fingers when you are playing “Catch the robber” as if the students had weapons. That's just insane. So I would definitely look at the “weapon.” And when we are talking about drugs, I think I would look at what we are calling drugs. “Are we talking about aspirins or are we talking about marijuana?” I think that's makes a world of difference. We have to use common sense. Of course, marijuana



would definitely be a violation of zero tolerance. But I don't think aspirins fall into that category. So I would be looking at what is being called a weapon or drugs. (Personal Communication, 06/17/13)

In addition, Carlye noted, "I would only hope to make sure that my procedures would take into consideration the whole child, and not be bias because of ethnicity, culture, or gender issues" (Personal Communication, 06/17/13).

The majority of the participants agreed that they would recommend to the school district the importance of being consistent when following the zero tolerance policy to assign disciplinary consequences. The students particularized that the school district should recognize that there is not a "fit-all" policy; and therefore assign consequences on a "case-by-case" basis. The concerns related to the due process rights of the students and parents indicated that the rights should be explained to the students and parents in order for them to advantage of them. The stakeholders realized that zero tolerance is necessary for violations including weapons and drugs; however, they pointed out that there is a need for a definition of the items, as well as, providing clear communication of the policy. It was expressed that the school district and administrators should have a clear understanding of the policy so they would be able to clearly explain it to the students and parents. There were also concerns that the policy had not been made available in writing. The participants agreed that if they were given the opportunity to have input on the implementation of the zero tolerance policy, they imagined that their proposed implementation of the zero tolerance would be different from the current implementation of the zero tolerance policy. Their proposed implementations among other things would: (a) make certain that the policy and its procedure are consistent and clearly defined, (b) utilize outside services to assure that the students are given the tools that are necessary for their success, (c) make sure that the students' due process rights are not abandoned and listen to all sides, and act accordingly so that

a fair decision is reached under all circumstances and in all situations, (d) consider the definitions of weapons and drugs, (e) be flexible in assigning consequences, and (f) consider the whole child regardless of gender or ethnicity.

While reflecting on what could be done to make zero tolerance more *effective in reducing school violence*, the administrators' responses included: (b) input from all stakeholders, and (c) building relationships. Dexter reasoned zero tolerance could be made more effective in reducing school violence by:

Building more consistent communication so that every student understands what zero tolerance policies are in school, and what's going to happen if they commit an infraction along that line; and that should always be forefront in their minds. That way they can at least be aware of what the policies are and what the consequences are going to be before they commit an infraction that's going to put them into a situation where zero tolerance consequences come into play. (Personal Communication, 06/24/13)

Sally held that awareness on the part of the students, "especially the freshmen that things are different than they are at middle schools today. They need to know what is acceptable and not acceptable here at the high school and what the consequences would be. Joe indicated that he thinks it is vital to have everyone's input because,

Too often the policies seem to come top-down.... You still have to get to the point where everybody's voice is being heard. Whether it's understood or not, you have to go through that process because everyone has to feel what is best to do in this situation. And the more everyone is on the same page; I think the more effective it's going to be. (Personal Communication, 06/24/13)

Mama Bear argued that relationships play a major part in causing zero tolerance to be more effective in reducing school violence. She reasoned:

Well, it's all about that relationship piece that I talked about in the first interview. The better you build relationships with your students all the way across the board, the less chance you are going to have for those zero tolerance types of activities to occur. I mean that is the crucial piece. If you are going to make anything better, you got to have a relationship and a buy-in from the people all across the board—the stakeholders in the situation. (Personal Communication, 06/24/13)

In responding to what can be done to make zero tolerance more effective in reducing school violence, the teachers overwhelmingly indicated that: (a) consistency, (b) structure, (c) communication, and (d) clarity are major factors in accomplishing this objective. John and Johnny agreed with Fern when she reflected:

Well, the bottom line is: “You make the policy, you put forth the policy, and you need to stick to the policy. And that maybe where they are finding that it is not being enforced because everybody is *not* sticking to the policy. And that’s probably where we are lacking—sticking to the policy. (Personal Communication, 06/10/13)

John and Johnny also concurred with Sandra that clarity of the zero tolerance policy is badly needed. Sandra elaborated:

I think that the policy needs to be clearly explained to the students—every detail of it. Explain what a weapon is! Explain what is considered to be drugs. And on and on. Then make sure they know what the consequences are, making sure that everybody gets the prescribed consequences for those violations. (Personal Communication, 06/10/13)

Polly was persistent in thinking that communication is the missing piece. She expounded:

I don’t know if our students have ever been...I don’t know if zero tolerance has ever been discussed with our students. I would anticipate that the majority of our students don’t even know what a zero tolerance policy *is*. I think if it was communicated to them, “This is what zero tolerance policy is—if there’s an assault, if there is a weapon, if there are these things which fall under zero tolerance policy—this is what will happen.” I think with that, again communication, giving our students the information—I think that would discourage their engaging in behavior that would put them in a position to have that consequence. (Personal Communication, 06/10/13)

Concerning what can be done to make zero tolerance more effective in diminishing school violence, the students had few suggestions. Besides suggesting, “letting everybody have input on making the rules that we are expected to follow would go a long way in making zero tolerance more effective” (Personal Communication, 06/17/13), the students went along with Tony and MJ’s suggestions:

I like what Tony said about having other steps before you get kicked out. Maybe giving you a warning and what will happen if you do the same thing again. Now I’m not talking

about like we said about knives and drugs. But if you left campus and stuff like that. (Personal Communication, 06/17/13)

The parents' perceptions of what can happen to make zero tolerance more effective in reducing school violence mirrored those of the other participants. They, too, thought that consistency, communication, parental involvement, and clarity will prove beneficial in reducing school violence. In confirming that consistency is necessary, Shirl pointed out:

Zero tolerance has to be followed across the board. Everyone has to be in agreement of whatever happens. For a certain violation, the punishment should be the same no matter who the student is. I think that's one thing; because there is a lot of an inconsistency on who's being punished and for how long they're being punished even if the violation is the same. So I would make sure there is consistency throughout the building. That's one thing I'd like to see. (Personal Communication, 06/17/13)

Jane summed up the parents' views on parental involvement when she indicated:

I think if a lot more parents get involved in their child's well-being, come to the school, come to school meetings to help with the zero tolerance policy and having a say-so in it. The kids can't have a say so because they want what they want. But if the parents get involved and have more say-so with the teachers, it will help level out the balance between the people who make the rules and the school system and help make a better zero tolerance policy. (Personal Communication, 06/17/13)

A review of the participants' perspectives of what can be done to make zero tolerance more effective in diminishing school violence revealed that all the stakeholders perceived that consistency, communication, clarity, and input are factors that should be taken into consideration when this matter is discussed. Further, some of the participants described how they viewed the importance of relationships and parental involvement in improving the effectiveness of zero tolerance. The students specifically suggested that the policy should include several steps before the students are suspended.

### **Impact of Zero Tolerance**

Macrolevel indicators of this theme include behavior modification where participants discuss how their proposed modifications would encourage positive behavior and discourage

negative behavior of the students; and input on consequences where participants explain why who should or should not have input on the consequences that are assigned for violations of school and zero tolerance policies.

The administrators expounded on several ways their proposed implementation of the zero tolerance would affect *behavior modification*. Dexter explained how the implementation of his proposed changes would encourage positive behavior and discourage negative behavior:

It would provide for rewards and incentives for the students who do things the right way and publicize this as much as possible so the students can see that when they do things correctly, when you do things right, then that behavior is rewarded. As far as discouraging negative behavior, we need to be as firm as possible with the rules and policies so that the students will realize when things happen within the school, punishment is carried out in the same way and as consistently as possible. (Personal Communication, 06/24/13)

Joe agreed with Dexter because he would, “in terms of negative behavior, or having consequences for behavior in order to stop unwanted behavior, I think you have to have a very firm set of consequences for proven poor choices” (Personal Communication, 06/24/13). He would be opposed to Sally’s suggestion of “...giving incentives for positive behavior goes a long way in encouraging that type of behavior. The students will know that we appreciate that type of behavior and they will behave appropriately if they know they are going to be rewarded” (Personal Communication, 06/24/13). Joe also opposed Mama Bear’s idea of “putting in place some sort of training or positive things that we can do for kids that are staying out of trouble, types of reward system, or types of positive points system could be put into place” (Personal Communication, 06/24/13). Instead Joe indicated:

So as opposed to a reward for good behavior system, I see my situation as an effort to intercede before we get to a place where we have to those bigger issues to deal with. So my positive element would be a proactive approach to intercede in students’ lives at school, at home, and in the community to build relationships and trust with our students, our parents, and our community. (Personal Communication, 06/24/13)

Mama Bear pondered, “Hopefully the discouragement of negative behavior would be the disciplinary issues that would come along with making a bad choice” (Personal Communication, 06/24/13).

Teachers, including Fern, John, Johnny, and Sandra articulated how they would encourage positive behavior in ways similar to Sally and Mama Bear in that they would consider using either a reward or point system to earn points as Fern said, “for certain behavior that is beyond what is expected of them” Personal Communication, 06/10/13). Brooke explained how she would encourage positive behavior by building relationships:

To encourage positive behavior, first and foremost I’m all about relationships. So if you build a relationship with the students and help them find people whom they can go to in times when they need assistance with academics, behaviors, even with basic life things that will help them to be successful.... connecting them with activities around the school and in the community, and things of that nature to keep them distracted from the negative that they are often around. (Personal Communication, 06/10/13)

Christopher and Polly both asserted that respect is important in encouraging positive behavior.

Christopher reasoned that he would “...make sure that my students understood respect, responsibility, accountability, and that the students understand they are ultimately in charge of their destiny” (Personal Communication, 06/10/13). Polly stated:

I think that my experience has been as a teacher and as an administrator—that when I give all the respect due—all the respect that I can possibly give a kid, respect as an individual—not as a child, not as an adult, because which they’re not. But when I give them all the respect that I can afford them in any given situation, then I feel that that is reciprocated many times, and that moves the process forward in a positive direction. (Personal Communication, 06/10/13)

Fern and Sandra explained how they would use a modified version of the point or reward system to discourage negative behavior. Fern pointed out, “I would take away points. When they get to an unacceptable number of points, then I would have increasing consequences

depending on the violations—from calling parents, and so forth” (Personal Communication, 06/10/13). Sandra made clear:

I would also use a point system to discourage negative behavior. Maybe the class could come up what the consequences would be for breaking the rules with the consequences ranging from the least negative to the most negative behaviors. (Personal Communication, 06/10/13)

John “would resort to various levels of punishment depending on the violations to discourage negative behavior” (Personal Communication, 06/10/13). For the students who need to be disciplined, Johnny would “leave them out of the reward system and the leisure and social part of the mainstream” (Personal Communication, 06/10/13). Polly reflected:

To discourage negative behavior, I think I would have to go back to the communication piece. By giving as much information as possible to parents and students during due process, and I think that would discourage negative behavior because at that point they have all the information that I have. (Personal Communication, 06/10/13)

The stakeholders who contributed to this discussion were in accordance that positive behavior could be encouraged by: (a) establishing or continuing a reward or point system, (b) building relationships and trust, (c) gaining mutual respect, (d) providing incentives, and (e) establishing positive reinforcement. When considering ways to discourage negative behavior, the participants discussed: (a) using of a firm set of rules and guidelines, (b) leaving the students out of sports and leisure activities, and (c) enlisting the help of the community. Overall, the participants thought that consistent enforcement of the disciplinary policy would discourage negative behavior.

The indicator, *input on consequences* assigned for violations of the zero tolerance policy, allowed stakeholders to express their thoughts and justifications regarding who should or should not have input on this issue. First, teachers and students comment on input related to administrators. Second, all stakeholders present their thoughts on teachers’ input. Then, all

stakeholders discuss if students should have input on consequences they receive for misbehavior. Lastly, the stakeholders put forth their perspectives regarding input from parents/caregivers.

The majority of the teachers contemplated that the administrators should have input on the consequences that are assigned for violations of the zero tolerance policy, but they gave different reasons why they thought so. Their rationales are summed up by Brooke: “In every situation you need someone in charge. Because if there is no one in charge, who’s going to carry out the rules? Administrators would be my choice as to who should have input” (Personal Communication, 06/10/13). Johnny thought, “Yes, without a doubt. Because with the exception of the school board and the superintendent, it starts and ends with the administrators, they have the final say-so as the policies change” (Personal Communication, 06/10/13). Sandra agreed with Fern’s observation that, “It’s very important for administrators to have input because there might be something else going on that maybe the teachers are not privy to that they also need to address to give that student his or her confidentiality” (Fern, Personal Communication, 06/10/13). According to John:

Administrators should have an input on the consequences assigned for violation of zero tolerance policies because they play a very important part in such assignment, and often times they have the last word about that. So their input should go a long way in deciding what consequences the students receive because they are the ones that parents confront when their children are punished. (Personal Communication, 06/10/13)

While Christopher held that, “Whoever is making the final decision has to have some degree of control” (Personal Communication, 06/10/13), Polly asserted that although she did not want to

diminish the administrators’ capacity; she did not think that they should have any input because...at some point someone has spent a great deal of time establishing what that policy is, looking at all of the possibilities for the consequences and looking at research and what’s effective and what’s not effective. So I think if you can say, “Zero tolerance



policy has been implemented” and I really don’t think administrators should be able to go in and change or alter that in any way. (Personal Communication, 06/10/13)

All of the students indicated that they thought administrators should have input on the consequences assigned for violations of the zero tolerance policy. Voicing his opinion, Tony commented that this should be the case because administrators are in charge of the teachers and, “When somebody has a plan and they are doing it all by themselves and don’t get any help, they need some constructive criticism to help them better understand what’s wrong” (Personal Communication, 06/17/13). In addition to agreeing with Tony, Ben believed that, “Things seem to get done quicker with the administrators rather than the teachers. Also everything needs opinions or input so they can improve; and if there are no other opinions, things could get worse or become outdated” (Personal Communication, 06/17/13). Both Mario and MJ agreed that since the administrators have the last word or say “about what we are going to get,” (Mario, Group Focus Interview, 06/17/13), or “what violations get what consequences, they should be a part of what those consequences will be” (MJ, Personal Communication, 06/17/13).

Despite the fact that the parents gave different reasons for thinking that administrators should have input on the consequences assigned for violations of the zero tolerance policy, they were unanimous that they should be involved in that process. For example, Amy thought, “They are the ones responsible for the children” (Personal Communication, 06/17/13). Bre pointed out:

The school is a part of the system, and they should have input on whatever goes on in the school or the school system. Also, the administrators are here with the students, and they know what’s going on or whatever. (Personal Communication, 06/17/13)

When Jane observed that administrators should definitely be involved because “they are the authority figures in the school” (Personal Communication, 06/17/13), Shirl agreed that, “They are the head of the building; they’re the ones in charge” (Personal Communication, 06/17/13).

The administrators' responses varied as they reflected on the reasons they thought teachers should or should not have input on the consequences assigned for violations of the zero tolerance policy. Although they agreed that teachers should have input concerning this subject, they rationalized why they agreed with Dexter when he suggested, "I think teachers should have an input or opinion to a limited degree about the consequences that are assigned, but the ultimate decision should be in the hands of the administrator" (Personal Communication, 06/17/13).

Sandra agreed with Dexter, "... because in that way you remain consistent. If you start getting other hands in the pot, a lot of inconsistencies will come about especially if you listen to some of the ones that are more compassionate than others" (Personal Communication, 06/17/13). Joe articulated:

I would say on the policy or procedural level, teachers should be involved and have input into the policy, how it's structured, how it's interpreted, and all those other elements of it. But when you get down to the individual cases, because of student confidentiality and those kinds of things, that's where their input stops. That's where a policy or a set of criteria starts to come into play to guide an administrator in terms of establishing those consequences, and not necessarily going to any teacher input into individual cases. (Personal Communication, 06/17/13)

Mama Bear concurred:

The teachers should have a voice in basically laying down the consequences. But they don't necessarily understand some of the things on the administrators' side. So some things might need to be tweaked after they put in their input. (Personal Communication, 06/17/13)

While commenting on the possibility of teachers having input on the consequences assigned for violations of the zero tolerance policy, the teachers discussed why they should or should not play a part in this process. Five of the teachers signified that they should be involved when decisions are made regarding consequences for zero tolerance violations. Brooke argued:

If there's going to be a level playing field, if there's going to be a general method of consequences for all students, if we're going to be practical about it, then it would make

sense for teachers to have input because we need more people who are giving input. (Personal Communication, 06/17/13)

John conceptualized that teachers should have input because:

...given the amount of time that teachers spend with students each day, I mean we build relationships; many students **trust** the teacher, and I think by providing input as what the consequences would be, I mean that's a part of parenting. We're supposed to be the parents in lieu of the parents when the students are at school. Therefore, I think teachers should have input. (Personal Communication, 06/17/13)

Johnny reasoned that while the policy should start and end with administrators, he justified the value of teachers' opinions: "Of course, the teachers are the first line of offense, and they interact more with the students than the administrators. So the teachers' input is extremely valuable as to what will work and what won't work" (Personal Communication, 06/10/13).

Christopher and Polly concurred that they think teachers should not be involved in this process. Christopher explained his opposition:

I don't think teachers should have any input because if the infraction occurs in their classroom, they probably are not going to be objective about the situation because that's the location of the occurrence; naturally there is going to be a lot of emotion brought into play. So those people don't do well in making those decisions if they are highly emotional. Specifically teachers (Personal Communication, 06/10/13)

Polly's opinion was based on the concept that:

...because that's not what teachers are trained to do, and that's not what they spend their time, energy or passion doing. Teachers are trained to **teach**; they are not trained to deal with disciplinary issues, which for many, many times are going to be affected by either state or federal law and they have not been versed in that. It's not their fault—they are not supposed to have been versed in that. And so I think that puts some responsibility in teachers' hands that just doesn't belong there. (Personal Communication, 06/10/13)

When the students discussed this subject, John Luke was unsure if teachers should or should not have input on the consequences assigned for violations of the zero tolerance policy, "...because some teachers may not like you, and they can tell the administrators you should get more punishment than what you really deserve" (Personal Communication, 06/17/13). For various reasons, the other students noted that they thought teachers should participate in deciding

what consequences should be assigned for violations of the zero tolerance policy. Ben supposed this should be the case, "... because they *are* authority figures, and they should have a sort of an input on this. It's sort of their job, shall we say" (Personal Communication, 06/17/13)? Since teachers write the office referrals, Mario thought:

They should have something to say cause [sic] they are the ones that be sending us to the office. I mean they know first-hand what we did. So they can tell the administrators what punishment they think we should get. (Personal Communication, 06/17/13)

MJ opinionated that since teachers are adults, "they should know what's right and what's wrong. So when we do something wrong, they ought to know what punishment is right for what we did wrong. So yea, their opinion should be included" (Personal Communication, 06/17/13).

Tony gave his opinion from the viewpoint of a teacher when he observed, "...like if you bring a gun to school, you're putting their lives in danger, too. If I'm a teacher, and you're putting my life in danger, I'd want to have some input on your consequences" (Personal Communication, 06/17/13).

During the parents/caregivers' deliberations, Amy agreed with the parents/caregivers who assumed that the teachers should have a part in deciding which consequences should be assigned to the students for violating the zero tolerance policy. Bre's opinion expressed that because teachers are in the school, and they know what's going with the students, "They should have some input on anything that's going on in the school system" (Personal Communication, 06/17/13). Jane stated that the teachers, especially the counselors should have some input. She continued to explain:

It's like a circle of people on a table that should come together and make this community where people have a say-so in the policies of their individual child. So yes, if everybody comes together and not just a few people or the government because these people are not here. They are not here. (Personal Communication, 06/17/13)

Shirl simply remarked that "...because teachers are also stakeholders, they should have input on what should be and what should not be done" (Personal Communication, 06/17/13).

Caryle was alone when he voiced his opinion that teachers should not participate in this process when he declared:

I would say "not" because most teachers base their decisions on emotions specific to the incident as opposed to looking at the whole child or the whole student. So no, they should not have any input on the consequences that are assigned for the situation. (Personal Communication, 06/17/13)

When the administrators considered whether or not the students should be involved in the decision-making process regarding which consequences should be assigned when they violate the zero tolerance policy, they had different opinions on how the students should be involved.

Sally provided her viewpoint::

I often like to hear what students have to say about what they think their punishment should be. I don't always take that into account, but it's interesting to hear because if they tell you what they think their punishment should be, then you kind of get an understanding of what level they thought they did wrong. (Personal Communication, 06/24/13)

Dexter remarked that:

I agree. It's always interesting to hear their opinions if you ask them, "What do you think should happen to you in this situation?" So they'll take ownership of the behavior that they have displayed; otherwise they'll feel like they're being punished and don't have any input in it. (Personal Communication, 06/24/13)

Mama Bear reasoned that students should have input:

In a foundational way. Having input on the front end before anything happens, and with the teachers having input, "Yes." I think we could hear the students' voices at that point. But, after that point that's when their input stops. (Personal Communication, 06/24/13)

In concurring with Mama Bear, Joe commented, "And I agree. I think it's important that on the front end for *all* stakeholders to be involved with setting up a policy" (Personal Communication, 06/24/13).

While teachers were contemplating this subject, Fern, John, and Sandra agreed for different reasons that the students should have input on the consequences they receive for zero tolerance violations; Johnny only thought they should have a voice to some degree; and Brooke, Christopher, Polly rationalized that students should not have any input on this subject. Fern used the concept of the court system, “You are innocent until proven guilty” (Personal Communication, 06/10/13) to justify why:

They (students) should be allowed to express why that behavior or why that action is taking place. They should be given a voice in their own disciplinary by explaining why or what happened. We should allow them that opportunity. (Personal Communication, 06/10/13)

John quickly agreed with Fern about the “innocent until guilty.” However, he expanded his rationale when he noted:

I also think that self-reflection and basically being able to judge their own actions and reflect on what they have done is one of the skills that teachers try to impart to students every day. And I think giving them a role in assessing their own consequences will be very valuable for them in the future. They can have real understanding of how consequences are related to actions. (Personal Communication, 06/10/13)

Sandra added that although she believes students should be allowed to have input, “You have to set the guidelines so they won’t just start spurring off everything, making accusations and saying things that aren’t necessarily true” (Personal Communication, 06/10/13). Johnny was of the opinion that they should have input or a voice to some degree because, “It’s important for them to feel a part of any program where they are being taught. But there again, there are limitations as what the students can and cannot ask for” (Personal Communication, 06/10/13).

Christopher joined Brooke and Polly in their disagreement. Neither thought that students should be allowed to participate in this process. Brooke based her opposition on the maturity level of the students. She speculated that even before it gets to the point where the students are being punished, she declared, “I don’t know if they are mature enough to understand how to

assign the consequences. Basically, they shouldn't have anything to do with consequences they receive" (Personal Communication, 06/10/13). Although Polly's reasoning was different from Brooke, she rationalized that:

I do **not** think they should have any input because they understandably so have their perspectives, and they certainly are entitled to that. Even though I don't think they should have any input on the consequences, obviously I do think that it's law that they are afforded due process. (Personal Communication, 06/10/13)

In spite of the fact that Christopher thought that students should not be allowed to have a voice in which consequences they should receive when they violate the zero tolerance policy, he nevertheless, expressed that:

I think the students should be held accountable for their actions and willing to at least be able to explain their situation. But at times their explanation may be complicated by the fact that they are unwilling to accept responsibility for the infraction. (Personal Communication, 06/10/13)

Granted that the students had different reasons why they should have input on the consequences that are assigned for zero tolerance violations, all of them agreed that they should have input when the decisions are made. They basically conceived that whether they were represented by class officers in the hierarchy or individually, they should be represented for several reasons including: (a) everybody in the school should have a little voice in the consequences; (b) it shows that students are respected; and (c) they would know their punishment beforehand.

As for the parents/caregivers' opinions on this issue, only Carlye and Shirl contemplated that students should have some input. Carlye asserted:

I feel the students should at least be able to express their thoughts on the nature of the infraction and also on the consequence based on the differing infractions. We need to see how cognitive they are in taking responsibility for their behavior. (Personal Communication, 06/17/13)

Shirl pointed out:

I do believe that students should have input as well, maybe not as much. Hopefully they will be mature enough to come up with reasons why they should be punished under zero tolerance and reasons they should not be punished under zero tolerance. (Personal Communication , 06/17/13)

Bre, Amy, and Jane were adamant in their views on why students should not be included in this process. Bre based her justification on the fact that:

No, no because students are not adults yet, and that's another ballgame. They are not mature enough to be making policies that will punish them for doing something they shouldn't have done. And then too, they may make policies that always favor them. (Personal Communication, 06/17/13)

Amy agreed with Bre and stated, "I agree with Bre. Because these teenagers nowadays have their own way of thinking when it comes to how they should be punished" (Personal Communication, 06/17/13). Even though Jane gave no reason for opposition, she agreed, "No they don't need to have any input about how they should be punished" (Personal Communication, 06/17/13).

In responding as to whether or not the parents/caregivers should have input on the consequences students should receive for violations of the zero tolerance policy, the administrators enthusiastically voiced their support for input from parents/caregivers on this matter. Without hesitation, Dexter elaborated:

Yes! Yes! Yes! Because the way with students, you can't come up with a positive way around a solution for the students, and that's what it's all about. If you take the parents out of the equation—a parent needs to know what they did and why that punishment is being put in place. Then once again the parent should definitely have an opinion about it. But of course, the final decision still lies with the principal. However, the parents **need** to have involvement with that process so that when the students do return to school they can be made whole. (Personal Communication, 06/24/13)

Sally eagerly agreed with Dexter, explaining,

That I agree with. Parents' voices need to heard from the beginning—not when the punishment is being given. They should have input on the consequences that the students receive for infractions. That way they will know up front what to expect when



the students do something that's wrong under zero tolerance. (Personal Communication, 06/24/13)

Joe declared that since the community is affected,

I think they should have input because it affects the community as a whole. Well, when kids are out of school, it affects everyone. I don't think anybody wants that. I think everyone should have a say. (Personal Communication, 06/24/13)

Mama Bear ends the discussion with, "Yes! And the more voices that are heard in a major decision like that, the better the buy-in is for support behind that" (Personal Communication, 06/24/13).

Some of the teachers were as enthusiastic as the administrators in verbalizing why they thought parents should be involved in making decisions about the consequences the students should receive for violating the zero tolerance policy. I think that the teachers' concepts were best summarized when Fern eagerly pronounced:

Definitely! Definitely! Whatever is going with that child, I think the parent should be notified at every step. Not only should the parent hold the school responsible, but the school should hold the parent responsible as well. We should be partners in partnering with that student's education. (Personal Communication, 06/10/13)

Johnny proclaimed that:

As for parents—without a doubt because that's their child that's supposedly being taught in the school system; that's also their child that's being punished if he or she breaks or violates the rules. I think parents always have a serious stake in the outcome of any kind of punishment or policy that affects their children. (Personal Communication, 06/10/13)

John added to the enthusiasm, when he observed:

I'm not a parent yet. But if I were, I'd definitely think that they should have input on the consequences assigned for violations not only of the zero tolerance policy, but violations in general. After all, they are responsible for their children before we are. I think that the consequences that the school assigns would be more effective if they were somehow aligned with consequences that the parents might give at home. (Personal Communication, 06/10/13)

Again Brooke and Polly concurred that parents, as the students, should not be involved when students are assigned consequences for violating the zero tolerance policy. As Brooke rationalized why she believes this, she stated:

I'll have to say, "No," because parents sometimes favor their children. In a lot of cases they favor their children in spite of the fact that their children have done something wrong. And if everybody had input in the decisions that are being made for one specific child, then you may never come to a consensus. Obviously the parents are going to want what's best for their child, and if the zero tolerance policies don't align with what the parents think their child should receive, more likely they're against it. So I don't think it's necessary for extra people to decide on the punishment or policy. (Focus Personal Communication, 06/10/13)

In her opposition to parents being involved in this process, Polly outlined:

I don't think so. Again parents are doctors, lawyers, garbage collectors, Taco Bell employees, house cleaners—all of which I've been—a lot of those, the lower ones. They are very good at what they do. But again, they are not educators, and that's not their responsibility. Responsibility is not always a fun thing, but that's what administrators sign up for; that's what school boards sign up for. So no, I don't they should they should have any input. (Personal Communication, 06/10/13)

Even though the students agreed that the parents/caregivers should have input on the punishment they received for violating the zero tolerance policy, they disagreed on the reasons.

Tony led the discussion and noted similarly to what he said about the students:

I think they should have input. It's sort of the same thing as the students. They should have a parent committee, not a crowd of parents. Maybe they could put out a survey for the parents. But they should have *some* input because their kids go here. And if I don't like this school, I'm gonna just take my kid to another school. (Personal Communication, 06/17/13)

John Luke and Mario summed up the views of the students when they concurred that since "the parents are the first ones to know them," (John Luke, Personal Communication, 06/17/13) and they know them better than anybody else, "the parents are the first ones that should have input on what consequences their kids get" (Mario, Personal Communication, 06/17/13).

Unlike the disagreement among the parents/caregivers as to their thoughts about the students having input on the consequences assigned for violating the zero tolerance policy, all of them agreed that parents/caregivers should be able to participate in this practice. Amy remarked:

I believe that the parents should be in on it before they come up with the rules because parents got rules, too. You know what I'm saying. I think the parents should be in the room with them when they make the rules. I do. I really do. (Personal Communication, 06/17/13)

Although Bre expressed a bit of skepticism that the parents would be taken seriously because "...when Tony got sent to Andrew Academy for 10 days, I couldn't say anything about that" (Personal Communication, 06/17/13), she still thought the parents should be involved in the making of the rules. Shirl noted, "The parents, too, are stakeholders. These are our children. The whole community should have input" (Personal Communication, 06/17/13). Because Jane would want to know if the punishment that is passed to her son is fair, she thinks, "that parents should have input on whatever punishment their children receive" (Personal Communication, 06/17/13).

Caryle asserted that parents/caregivers should have input, but:

Only if parents can give an unbiased response in regards to the situation or adding information that may allow the administration to make an appropriate decision because if a student has reacted inappropriately because of a situation that occurred the night before that caused him to react that way. In a case like that, the parent can provide information that could help the administration make a decision to fit the situation. (Personal Communication, 06/17/13)

In assessing the participants' conceptualizations regarding whether or not the stakeholders should or should not be given the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process pertaining to the consequences that should be assigned to students when they violate the zero tolerance policy, it was apparent that the majority of the participants conceived that most of

the stakeholders should be included in this process. However, it could not be overlooked that while the administrators wholeheartedly speculated that the parents/caregivers should be allowed to give input, they would only consider giving the teachers and students limited input. Likewise, while the majority of the teachers and all the parents observed that the parents should have a voice in the decisions concerning the consequences assignments, the parents were not at all supportive of the students having any input. Except for a few oppositions, it was viewed appropriate for the administrators and teachers to be given consideration when decisions are made regarding the consequences that are assigned for violations of the zero tolerance policy.

### **Exclusions**

The macrolevel indicators for this theme are: (a) disproportionality, (b) equity and fairness, and (c) reduction efforts. *Disproportionality* focuses on steps that stakeholders can take to ensure African American males are not disproportionately excluded. The administrators' discussion of this indicator centered around: (a) education, (b) communication, (c) consistency, and (d) transparency in data. Dexter considered:

Education and communication to make that they are aware of what goes on in resolving the problem. Because in some cases they end up being punished under a zero tolerance policy and they had no idea that that zero tolerance policy existed. Also making sure that they understand what their rights and privileges are under that zero tolerance policy. If they don't agree with the decision of the administrator, they can appeal it to the superintendent. That way they do feel they do have some place where to go if they don't agree with what's going on. (Personal Communication, 06/24/13)

Sally was concerned that because the school is in the public eye, there needs to be consistency, and pointed out:

Once again, the consistency. We are in the public eye all the time, people talk, and they know if we are being consistent or not, and they will know if they are treated unfairly. So I just think that if you can show on a daily basis that you are consistent, then people won't question it as much. (Personal Communication, 06/24/13)

Joe and Mama Bear were in agreement that transparency in data could be a part of assuring that there is no disparity in exclusions. Joe observed that:

I think that transparency is right in terms of how things are dealt with. But I think numbers are numbers, you know. And if there is a disparaging amount, then we have to look into why there is. “What is the reason for it?” It may not be because of being targeted. It maybe because they are a large part of the student population. It maybe, you know whatever the reasons are behind it, we have to follow up and dig into what those reasons are. Not just what those reasons are, how do we change those reasons—whatever they are. What needs to happen beneath to not only even out the numbers, but to get rid of those kinds of number across the board. (Personal Communication, 06/24/13)

It is apparent from a review of the responses that the administrators have a strong belief that consistency is a major element in more than one category. The consensus appears to be that if consistency is applied in any area that pertains to discipline, the chances of disproportionality are lessened. Therefore, they are certain that the application of consistency to assure that African-American male students are not disproportionately excluded is no exception.

The administrators, students, and parents/caregivers assessed steps that could be taken regarding the second indicator related to expulsions—*equity and fairness*—which ensures that consequences match the students’ misbehavior. Dexter reasoned that although the school rules are in the student handbook, there is still a need:

...to make sure that the students are reading the information that’s being reviewed by the teachers at the beginning of the year all year on a consistent basis. And that the students have an opportunity to ask any questions about the policy that they don’t understand so they can fully understand what the expectations are of the school, of the teachers, and of the administrators. Also they can clearly understand what the consequences are going to be if there is an infraction of that policy. (Personal Communication, 06/24/13)

In addition to agreeing with Dexter, Sandra stated that, “I just wish we had a way to make sure that the parents also read the policy and ask questions if they didn’t understand it” (Personal Communication, 06/24/13). Joe rationalized that since the ultimate decision when dealing with a zero tolerance violation is the superintendent’s responsibility,

It becomes all of our responsibility in terms of whether it's the superintendent, principal, assistant principal, teachers—all of us, again to continue relationships with the community, to remain as transparent as possible, and at the same time respect the privacy of the individuals in terms of their situations. And there has to be a level of trust that the right thing is being done in the best interest of the individual weighed against the best interest of the group. (Personal Communication, 06/24/13)

Mama Bear concluded that:

...you know if all of the administrators kinda follow the Same disciplinary matrix, there shouldn't be any major fluctuations in how we handle one student to another... whatever is done should be done in the best interest of the safety of the school and students. (Personal Communication, 06/24/13)

The students were in agreement with Tony's observation that the administrators could develop descriptions for the violations. Tony explained:

I guess they should come up a description, and what fits the description to get that amount of days. So as far as like if you brought to school, I guess the description would be "Student brought drugs to school with the intention of selling them." Then by that description, the student would get that certain amount of days. (Personal Communication, 06/17/13)

The administrators once again emphasized consistency, relationships, and transparency as factors that are necessary and should be considered when looking at steps administrators can take to assure that African-American male students' consequences match their misbehavior. Further, they realized that the students' clear understanding of the expectations and the consequences will also help in this solution. However, they are mindful that whatever is done is in the best interest of the student and the school. The students concurred that perhaps a description code for the violations could be used to make sure there is consistency when assigning consequences to assure that they match the misbehavior.

The participants presented their views on steps they thought can be taken by the administrators and teachers to assure African-American male students and their parents/caregivers that all students are treated fairly when disciplined and office referrals are

written. Sally again agreed with Dexter when he declared that education of the policies has a place in how students are treated and the writing of office referrals. He reasoned that:

...on one side of it, you want to make sure that everyone is educated about all the policies and the law; and on the other side of it, you want to make sure that you have counselors and other student services and support teams available for students so that they can try to be corrected as far as going to counselors or social workers to help them stop any negative behavior that's going to end up putting them in a situation where they are going to get into trouble. (Personal Communication, 06/24/13)

Joe agreed with Mama Bear that, "we have a disciplinary matrix that gives a guideline that we follow. "If they do this, then this should be their consequences" (Personal Communication, 06/24/13). Joe pointed out that teachers do not actually assign disciplinary consequences.

However, he noted that:

As far as being treated fairly by administrators and teachers, that's about challenging the culture of the school. That's consistency in terms of how the leader of the school treats individuals; whether they are teachers, students, parents, and how we treat each other within the building as to the whole culture of the school. (Personal Communication, 06/24/13)

In contemplating what steps administrators and teachers can take to assure that African-American males and their parents/caregivers that all students are fairly with regard to discipline and office referrals, the teachers speculated that although there is a limited amount that they can do, Brooke thought they could be verbal, have a voice, and speak up if you notice a trend developing. Christopher and Polly showed concern with stereotyping. Christopher held the belief that:

Teachers have to not subscribe to national stereotypes of African-American males.... So teachers have to look at the reality of the situation, and that is, all African-American males are **not** negative members of society or negative students in a school system. (Personal Communication, 06/10/13)

Similarly, Polly asserted:

...We need to look at each individual as an individual, not as a stereotype, not as, "He's a Black male, so this, this, and this," or "She's a White female, so this, this, and this." I

think if we look at each student as an individual, and that means establishing a relationship with that student, because you can't just look at the outward appearances or even outward behaviors until you have that relationship and break down some walls. I think once we do that, then we can ensure that all students, and to specifically answer your question, African-American male students are not disciplined unfairly. (Personal Communication, 06/10/13).

Sandra and John viewed this circumstance as another situation where building relationships is vital. Sandra rationalized:

I think the biggest thing is just build a relationship with them—a relationship of trust which is the basis of any effective classroom any way. Trust and respect—mutual respect so that you respect the students, and the students will then in turn respect you. Respect is not freely given—it's **earned**. When you develop that rapport and that relationship with them, and I think have a conversation with them saying, "I love you, but this can't happen," and just talk about why. That's part of the relationship. (Personal Communication, 06/10/13)

Johnny suggested monitoring of the information on the disciplinary form to see if a particular group is being targeted:

Those things can be monitored by administrators to see how many African-American males are being referred, what's the average age of these individuals who are acting out, what's the norm as far as to the individuals who keep getting into trouble. And use this information to see which group is being targeted the most. (Personal Communication, 06/10/13)

The students had different perspectives on what steps administrators and teachers can take to assure African-American males and their parents/caregivers that all students are treated fairly when disciplined and referred to the office. Ben inferred that administrators and teachers treat African-American male students as White police officers treat African-American drivers.

When I asked Ben to explain, he elaborated to make his point:

Okay. Well, let's see. Let's just say an African-American man is driving home from work, and then a Caucasian cop pulls up and tells him to pull over, and he's being all racist toward the African-American man, like "Do you know why I stopped you?" "Where did you get those wheels." (Personal Communication, 06/17/13)



When I asked, “How would you use that to make a comparison to what steps can be taken by administrators and teachers to make sure something like that doesn’t to the students?” Tony answered:

That sorta (sic) the same thing when the White officer stops you while you are driving home, like when you’re walking the halls and you’re African-American, the teacher might be more suspicious that you’re skipping and vice versa if it’s a Caucasian student walking up ahead. (Personal Communication, 06/17/13)

MJ rationalized that:

...that administrators and teachers just need to make sure that when they discipline students for reasons other than for like the hard stuff like weapons and drugs, they just don’t single out the African-American males or females and give them tougher punishment than any other students. (Personal Communication, 06/17/13)

John Luke added, “I think what everybody said is true. They need to treat everybody the same. They can do that by just forgetting what color everybody is, and treat everybody like human beings” (Personal Communication, 06/17/13). Mario summed up the discussion when he observed:

Because whether they know it or not, word gets around about what the punishment everybody gets for doing whatever. And like they said, it shouldn’t matter who you are or what you look like, they just need to treat everybody alike. So I think they just need to stop stereotyping. (Personal Communication, 06/17/13)

The parents/caregivers discussion reflected that they thought relationships and communication are important steps that can be taken to assure African-American male students and their parents/caregivers that their sons are treated fairly when they are disciplined or referred to the office. While Amy was defiant when she replied, “None. None!” (Personal Communication, 06/17/13), the other stakeholders in the group concurred that steps that can be taken include: (a) communication, (b) relationships, and (c) parental involvement. Bre held that students may be treated differently because of lack of communication or relationship between the administrators and teachers. She offered this explanation:

If the parents would show interest in the students. Come and see what the students are doing. Whenever the administrators call on the parents, some of the parents don't even come regardless of what that child does. They just send their children to school, get rid of them and that's it. They don't come and check on them, they don't see what they're doing. And when they get in trouble, some of the parents come up and defend the students rather the administrators or teachers, you know. I think those parents don't really know what's going on with their child. And that problem might be one reason the administrators and teachers treat the students differently because the parents are not interested. I think that may make a difference in how students are treated by the administrators and teachers. (Personal Communication, 06/17/13)

In addition to agreeing that relationships are important, Shirl also thought that:

...there needs to a relationship not only between the school and the students. But also between the administrators and the parents, between teachers and parents, even between the parents. The parents need to talk to each other. The more everybody talks to each other, the deeper the relationship will be. (Personal Communication, 06/17/13)

In their deliberation on what steps they reasoned administrators can take to assure African-American male students and their parents/caregivers that teachers treat all students the same when making office referrals, the administrators mainly discussed the possibility of training and staff development. Dexter's speculations synopsisized the views of the administrators. He asserted:

Training at the beginning of the year so that teachers understand when office referrals take place. They can understand what interventions should have taken place before referrals were put in place, and having an across-the-board standard—whether that be positive behavior intervention services, self-training, or whatever system you want to use for your school. But everyone is using the Same system throughout the whole building, and understanding what should be done before an office referral is written and what should be done when an office referral is written so that all those things are consistent with the teachers and students. (Personal Communication, 06/24/13)

Mama Bear added that, "...we could do training with the teachers on how to write a referral and what needs to be included in the referral" (Personal Communication, 06/24/13).

While deliberating on steps they thought teachers can take to assure African-American male students and their parents/caregivers that teachers treat all students the same when making office referrals, the teachers concluded that teachers need to consider consistency, fairness, and

firmness. Although Brooke assumed that because confidentiality prevents teachers from “disclosing who else is being written up” (Personal Communication, 06/10/13), she really does not know what teachers can do. Even though Polly was of the opinion that she does not think that teachers can do anything because, “one cannot mandate behavior on a teacher” (Personal Communication, 06/10/13), the majority of the teachers thought otherwise. Emphasizing the importance of consistency, Sandra declared, “The only thing I can add to that is consistency. If it’s wrong now, it’s wrong *every* time, and it’s wrong for *every* student regardless if it’s male, female, Black, White, whatever. Consistency!” (Personal Communication, 06/10/13).

Christopher conceptualized that:

Once again, teachers, regardless of ethnicity have to look at the reality of the fact that just because African-American males who you see with an office referral doesn’t mean that’s a bad student. Maybe that student made a decision that was not the most appropriate. However, teachers at times do the same. So first, teachers need to look at themselves as to why they are getting ready to write that referral and ascertain whether or not there is any bias that is going to be implemented once that referral is written. (Personal Communication, 06/10/13)

John joined in and said, “‘firm but fair’ (Personal Communication, 06/10/13) is the philosophy that I go through. I let them know early on that I care about them and that tough love is sometimes the best love. And mix it in with praise, because you can’t have the carrot and the stick and just use the stick” (Personal Communication, 06/10/13).

As the students discussed what steps they thought teachers could take to assure African-American male students and their parents/caregivers that they treat all students the same when they write office referrals, the students reflected on what they thought would assist teachers to treat all students fairly. John Luke believed that before teachers write you up, “I think maybe they should try to talk to you and find out what’s really going on” (Personal Communication, 06/17/13). Mario was of the same opinion, “Just like John Luke said, they need to talk to the

students and see if they can see if they are acting that way before they write them up. Especially if they know that's not how they usually act. Somebody said earlier, give them a warning or a second chance" (Personal Communication, 06/17/13). MJ agreed that "Everybody deserves a second chance, and the teachers shouldn't just write up students from what they hear about him from other teachers" (Personal Communication, 06/17/13). Tony was of the opinion, "I don't know what you can do. A teacher is a human, and a human is going to be human. You're just human and there's not much you can do about that..." (Personal Communication, 06/17/13).

In the parents' discussion of what steps teachers could take to assure African-American male students and their parents/caregivers that they treat all students the same when they write office referrals, the parents verbalized their reflections in different ways. Jane agreed with Amy as to the need for consistency when Amy argued that:

Teachers should stop having teacher's pets. That was going on when I was in school, and it's still going on now. If you're going to write up one student up for doing A, B, C, then you need to write up any student for doing A, B, C. Again, you don't write up students based on who they are. I've heard of that being done all the time. (Personal Communication, 06/17/13)

Bre declared, "I think that teachers just have to be careful to make sure that they write up all the students alike for the same things" (Personal Communication, 06/17/13). Carlye held the belief that, "Until teachers forget the biases and the stereotypes, they are never going to treat all African-American justly. It's just like a habit, and that includes African-American teachers" (Personal Communication, 06/17/13). Shirl opinionated:

There should be something in writing somewhere so when a teacher needs to refer a student for any type of violation, then they should be following guidelines that have been established by the parents, teachers, students, and administration. Are all the teachers following these guidelines, these rules that were created to be used when students are written up for violations? Then if the parents think that their children are being written up more than other groups of students, they need to speak up—speak to the administrators—and ask them to speak to the teacher or teachers. (Personal Communication, 06/17/13)

To recap the perceptions of the participants regarding what steps administrators and teachers could take to assure African-American male students and their parents/caregivers that they treat all students the same when they write office referrals, it has to be noted that all the participants expressed their thoughts and opinions concerning this issue. Most of the participants held the view that steps taken by administrators and teachers should include: (a) consistency, (b) fairness, (c) firmness, (d) teacher training, (e) staff development, and (f) eliminate stereotypes. Throughout the discussion, it was obvious that these concepts were of utmost importance to the participants as they deliberated on what the administrators and teachers can do to assure that all students are treated fairly when they are disciplined or office referrals are written.

Participants' discussion of *reduction efforts* centered on building relationships, accountability, and alternative solutions. The administrators shared thoughts on their role as leaders in relationship building. Dexter was hopeful that during my "...conversations with the students and the teachers you gleaned that we do have a positive relationship with the students, and we do try to talk and joke around with them, sit with the students in the cafeteria..." (Personal Communication, 06/24/13). After Mama Bear detailed how the Freshman Academy has weekly meetings to share ways they relate with the students and parents, Joe joined in to tell how he uses telephone calls to talk to parents about things that do not relate to school and ask for their input on things of interest to them. After Sally's elaboration, they agreed as Dexter proclaimed, "She got that one! She pretty much hit all the levels with her response" (Personal Communication, 06/24/13). Sally expounded:

I think one thing that can be done is just being visible and not always being in the role of an administrator. You know being someone that people can come to. I know that parents come to Dexter all the time just to talk, vent, or whatever about their children. Just having that comfortable relationship. People seeing you out at the games and just being your normal self, and not always in your office. That means a lot to everybody—

students, parents, teachers, administrators. Being able to communicate with them on things that are *not* school related. This sometimes helps to build that relationship and helps them to see you as a *real* person, and somebody that's actually on their side. It also makes your job a lot easier when you have that relationship with them. (Personal Communication, 06/24/13)

During the teachers' deliberations on how relationships could be built among the various stakeholders, I noticed terms such as: "want," "team," "genuineness," "involvement," and "consistency." Brooke was passionate in her response when she asserted, "That has to be a 'want' by a team of people with a vision (parents who are willing to be active in the community, teachers who are passionate about their jobs, administrators with a vision) who want to build relationships." She also reasoned that, "The teacher may check in with the students regularly, reward the students when they're doing great things, talk with the students when they need someone to talk to, and just show that you care" (Personal Communication, 06/10/13).

Christopher implied:

Genuineness has to be within the person that is facilitating the larger program. If there is a principal of a school, or the teachers of a school that don't really know themselves or they are not genuinely in the position for the correct reasons, there will not be any relationship building because this is *only a job*. (Personal Communication, 06/10/13)

Fern inserted, "Continue to have an open-door policy. Work on finding a way to involve more parents in school activities and not just calling them when their child is in trouble. Have parents' nights. Find out what they are interested in and build the parents' nights around those interests" (Personal Communication, 06/10/13). Johnny added, "Consistency as a school. If it's a rule or policy, from day one, we as teachers not only need to implement it, but we need to live it"

(Personal Communication, 06/10/13). Polly observed that she thought:

Administrators can build relationship among themselves, teachers, students, and parents by getting out their offices. If the principal will get out of his or her office, if they will be in the hallway with the students, if they will be in the classrooms with the teachers, and if they will be in the community with the parents, then relationships that can be trusted will be built. (Personal Communication, 06/10/13)

She continued, “As for the parents, they have to be present. A parent *has* to be willing to be present to be able to build that relationship with administrators and teachers. For students, I think the same will apply” (Personal Communication, 06/10/13).

The students’ perceptions of how relationships could be built among the stakeholders included what each group could do toward accomplishing this objective. Ben believed in the proverbial saying, “Treat others how you would treat yourself.” He explained, “That means if you treat yourself kindly, then be kind to others. Don’t’ be just thinking you are royalty. I would like to say that it just depends on how you represent yourself to others” (Personal Communication, 06/17/13). Tony was of the impression, “I guess it would start with me, the student. They say, “The first impression is the last impression” (Personal Communication, 06/17/13). To illustrate his point, Tony articulated:

If I walked up to you all nice and friendly, smiling and doing everything nice for you, you are going to remember me as a nice person. But if I walk up to you with my pants sagging, not talking right, not using good vocabulary, and saying just any kind of things, you are going to look at me as I am a thug. You know what I’m saying? So it’s just all in the way you present yourself. (Personal Communication, 06/17/13)

Mario agreed with Tony; however, he added:

...some of the administrators and teachers act like they don’t want to be bothered. So you can do everything you can on your part, but they gotta (sic) to do their part, too. Most of them just say something to you when you’ve done something wrong, or when they want you to do something for them. So everybody got be willing to at least try to be friendly. (Personal Communication, 06/17/13)

MJ concurred with Mario:

I mean the students shouldn’t have to always be the first one to say something. Some students may be shy and don’t know how to start a conversation. So then it’s up to the administrators and teachers to say something. Sometimes they do need to be the first one to say something. (Personal Communication, 06/17/13)

As for the parents’ part in building relationships, John Luke pondered that:

The parents can come up the school when they don't have to come because we've done something bad. Maybe they can help the teachers out in the classroom or at the games. Just be available if they can when the school needs some help. That's how I think we can build relationships. (Personal Communication, 06/17/13)

Even though there was mention of teachers in the parents/caregivers' discussion about how the various groups of stakeholders could build relationships, the discussion was mostly centered on what the parents could do. While Amy did not join in the discussion, the other parents/caregivers discussed the need for communication and parental involvement. Jane thoroughly explained what she thought parents/caregivers must do to build relationships:

I think by recognizing your position, and recognizing that you have to be involved in your child's life by coming to the school for meetings, calling with questions. Ask the school and come up to the school to find out something, find out what's going on. You are going to have to go through the administrators or guidance counselor. And that's part of building a relationship. There are some parents who don't even know who their principals are. They don't know who the principals are. They don't know the guidance teachers. They don't know because they are not involved in their child's life. All they know is that they drop them off at school, they ride the bus, or they are at home when they get home from work. (Personal Communication, 06/17/13)

Carlye pointed out, "Parents should visit the school as often as possible and talk to the administrators, and don't be afraid to ask questions if there is anything they don't understand adequately; and don't stop until they get the answers they feel are just" (Personal Communication, 06/17/13).

In addition to being in accord with Jane, Shirl added:

Parents need to step up and be involved. If they really cared that much about their children, they need to make sure that they are involved. They shouldn't put everything on the administrators and the teachers; they should make sure that they are involved with their own children's education. (Personal Communication, 06/17/13)

Bre pointed out, "Relationships don't end at school. Even when I'm in Wal-Mart or somewhere, I see the teachers and we speak to each other. So relationships are so important—in school and out of school" (Personal Communication, 06/17/13). While Carlye felt, "Administrators and



teachers should communicate openly without biases” (Personal Communication, 06/17/13), Shirl held:

The teachers can help relationships by reaching out to the parents and students. When your call isn't returned, see if you can get another number. If they see that parent in the school, make it their business to speak to her. It doesn't have to be about the student, just talk. Make an extra effort to be there for the student. Don't always talk about the lesson or the school. Talk and find out what the student likes to do outside the school. Sometimes that student might not have anyone else that he can talk to. You'll be surprised how many students can't even talk to their parents. But everybody needs someone that he or she can go to. (Personal Communication, 06/17/13)

Each group of participants reflected on how all the stakeholders could play a part in building relationships. While some responses were more detailed than others, I believe that everyone realized the importance of relationships as they relate to the success of the students and the school. The responses indicated that the participants recognized that relationships cannot be formed by the work of one group alone. Instead, it is a team effort with all the stakeholders passionately and genuinely involved.

When the students rationalized what steps they could take to be more accountable for their behavior and actions, they were concise in their responses. Ben proclaimed, “I got this! It's common sense! Well, I have to recognize that *I* am at fault, that I did something wrong. I should have seen it coming, I mean before it was too late (Focus Group 06/17/13). MJ and Tony agreed with Ben's rationale. MJ commented, “Like Ben said, use common sense. Be careful who you hang out with. Take responsibility for what you do and don't blame it on others. Because you are old enough to make your own decisions” (Focus Group 06/17/13).

Tony used his suspension as an example of common sense:

Bringing brownies to school. Common sense should have told me, “You don't bring drugs to school.” I mean that's just a given. I should have known better than that. Read the rules and follow them. (Personal Communication, 06/17/13)

Also using his suspension for an example, Mario stated:

For me, I just have to be more careful in what I say. If you don't mean it, then don't say it because you never know who will hear you. And whether you mean it or not, you said it, and you can't take it back. So just watch what I say and where I say it. (Personal Communication 06/17/13)

The parents/caregivers' perspectives on what steps they could take to be more accountable for the students' behavior and actions included: (a) punishment, (b) communication with the school, and (c) consistency with home rules. Amy noted the students should be punished at home when they do wrong, "So when they come to school and do something wrong, they know they are going to get punished here, too. Don't let them get away with anything" (Personal Communication, 06/17/13). Bre concurred with Amy, "I agree. I agree. You got to have rules at home, be consistent, keep them the same, ask questions, check and make sure they are being followed. All this kind of stuff" (Personal Communication, 06/17/13). Carlye and Jane concurred that the parents need to visit the school even if there is not a problem. Jane expanded her view:

By coming to the school. Not only coming to the school, but doing what I need to do at home first. So when he leaves the house, he knows how to carry himself, and he knows that he has to be accountable for his actions when he comes to this school. Because this school has the rules and it's going to go by those rules. And if he breaks the rules, you are going to be held accountable. (Personal Communication, 06/17/13)

Shirl elaborated on how she is involved in her son's education:

I'm involved with my son's education. When he does something, I get emails from his teachers. We have very good communication whether they are calling me about something that's good or bad. I set that up at the beginning of the school year, and I let them know if they see things that he should not be doing, be sure to email or call me, and we will take care of it at home. And you *will* see a change. (Personal Communication, 06/17/13)

The students' reflections on what they thought they could do to be more accountable for their behavior and actions indicated they rationalized that: (a) using "common sense," (b) being

more responsible, and (c) not blaming others would be what they considered they needed to do. The parents/caregivers were a bit more elaborate when they conceptualized what their parts were in being more accountable for the students' behavior and actions. They indicated that they could: (a) be more consistent in following rules and punishment, (b) get more involved with the school, and (c) be involved with the students' education.

The participants discussed and described alternatives and the reasons they thought these alternatives would reduce the exclusions of African-American male students. Dexter rationalized what he thought was an alternative:

You can't really write this into a policy, but it has to be part of your philosophy. But it goes a long-g-g way when you do build relationships with parents and students. So building and teaching people how to build relationships. I think that would be one of the most positive things you could do within this school. (Personal Communication, 06/24/13)

Sandra joined in and stated:

With those relationships, that allows you the possibility to be more proactive before anything happens to send them to Andrew Academy. You will actually know the students and can see the signs that something is going to build and something is going to happen, and you can actually stop it before it does and keep the student in school. (Personal Communication, 06/24/13)

Joe mentioned how mentoring could be an alternative to reducing exclusions of African-American males. He observed:

I think that some of the things that we are doing in terms of the mentoring program that's in place, our "Excellence" program" that's in place. Our "Males Only Club" is a strong piece of mentoring for our young males. We have things like individuals that work with kids that we think are struggling with making good decisions versus making bad decisions. These individuals that are involved with certain kids are like our social worker, guidance counselor, drop-out specialist, or whoever it is. (Personal Communication 06/24/13)

Mama Bear agreed with Joe that they have put a lot of support in place; however:

It really falls back on the relationships with the kids. Once you build a good, solid relationship with the kids, then they won't want to come in here and do things that are

part of zero tolerance. They'll want to come in and make you proud and do the right things. (Personal Communication, 06/24/13)

The teachers had an intensive discussion of what they considered alternatives that could reduce exclusions of African-American males. However, other than Andrew Academy, the teachers could think of very few alternatives. Regarding Andrew Academy, Brooke asserted:

Now I think that Andrew Academy is good for what it is, but it's too general. We need academies that are going to be specifically for building relationships and character with these students—not just African-American students—but all students. They need something that's going to connect them with the real world. Something that's going to help them transition back to the regular school system. Just as I've said with the regular school system—having people that work in the Academy who really care and go beyond the school and track and monitor these students for their well-being. So I'm just basically saying, "Restructure Andrew Academy". (Personal Communication, 06/24/13)

Johnny also reflected on Andrew Academy:

I think Andrew Academy is a great thing. Instead of putting kids out of school, it gives them an alternate site to continue to get their education. I think it's a great idea instead of just suspending a child and that child staying at home, and for some odd reason get into trouble or do something that's not quite right. (Personal Communication, 06/24/13)

Sandra recognized that Andrew Academy is where some of the kids go in an effort to try to keep them in school. However, she also implied "some of the kids that go to Andrew Academy should have been suspended. They should be suspended for things like smoking drugs and bringing cookies with marijuana in them to school" (Personal Communication, 03/07/13).

Similarly, Johnny expressed his approval of Andrew Academy as well:

Andrew Academy houses those individuals so they can still be educated and they can still comply with state laws that say this child must have so many hours of education. The trouble makers would walk the streets; cause other trouble for law enforcement and local communities. So let's keep them here. Let's keep reaching out to them before they become 18 or decide to possibly quit. (Personal Communication, 04/25/13)

Sandra further justified Andrew Academy because, "In our school culture and in our situation, I don't think out-of-school suspension is an option. Because I just think it would make things much worse. So in my opinion, Andrew Academy is probably the best alternative in our

particular situation” (Personal Communication, 06/24/13). John asserted that even though Andrew Academy is not perfect, he agreed:

...Andrew Academy is a great thing. Instead of putting kids out of school, it gives them an alternate site to continue to get their education. I think the philosophy behind it is better than the alternative. I’m sure that we’ve all echoed this in our individual interview. Having a safe place that’s mandatory that they go to for out-of-school suspension rather than running the streets is a good thing. (Personal Communication, 06/24/13)

The students succinctly discussed other alternatives that could reduce the exclusions of African-American males. Ben noted, “There is really a very scare selection” (Personal Communication, 06/17/13). John Luke remarked, “I only know about Andrew Academy, and I can’t think of anything else either” (Personal Communication, 06/17/13). Mario reflected, “I can’t think of anything else that they can do. I don’t know of anything else” (Personal Communication, 06/17/13). MJ agreed with the others students, “Andrew Academy seems to be alright. If there’s anything else, I don’t know about it” (Personal Communication, 06/17/13). Tony remarked, “I think Andrew Academy is fine! It’s good enough” (Personal Communication, 06/17/13).

With the exception of Shirl, the parents/caregivers could only think of Andrew Academy as the alternative to reducing exclusions of African-American male students. Amy stated, “I won’t change anything about Andrew Academy where the students can go without getting expelled for the rest of the year. Instead they can go over there and still get their work done” (Personal Communication, 06/17/13). Bre occurred with Amy, “The way Andrew Academy is set up is working just fine. Otherwise those students would be out on the street doing whatever. I’m sure that there are some alternatives, I just don’t know about them” (Personal Communication, 06/17/13). Carlye joined the agreement, “Andrew Academy is good. It has its

good points, and I haven't heard anything bad about it. And I haven't heard of anything else that could take its place" (Personal Communication, 06/17/13).

Jane elaborated:

I applaud Andrew Academy because it used to be if you were suspended from school, you didn't have the opportunity to do your homework. Now you have the opportunity to keep up with the school, the teachers are giving you your class work, and the school and the parents know where you are. Now you can have Andrew Academy for a certain amount of days before you are suspended to go home. I applaud that, and I don't know of anything that I would change. (Personal Communication, 06/17/13)

Shirl was of the opinion:

I think that maybe if there were more mentoring programs, making sure that the community is involved because then the students know there *are* people who care about them. Maybe some type of community outreach program just to get the students' mind off school. Because even school is a big part of the students' lives, school isn't the *only* thing in their lives. (Personal Communication, 06/17/13)

While the stakeholders were unable to think of many alternatives to reduce exclusions of African-American male students, the majority of them applauded Andrew Academy for many varied reasons. Throughout the discussions, the participants lauded the work of Andrew Academy in that it prevents the students from being on the street perhaps getting into more trouble. The participants who did not completely accept Andrew Academy as overwhelmingly as the other participants, agreed with Brooke when she speculated that if there was a revamping of the Academy to make it more "specifically for building relationships and character with these students," (Personal Communication, 06/10/13) perhaps it would better serve its intended purpose.

### **Policies and Rules**

The macrolevel theme for this indicator revolved around *communication*. Participants reflected on what steps they thought could be taken to ensure adequate communication and dissemination of school and zero tolerance discipline policies to teachers, students, and

parents/caregivers. While the administrators indicated that there are efforts such as: the newsletter, handbook, and web page to communicate with the parents, they realize that it is still a struggle to get any information, including the discipline policies, to the parents and into the community. To improve the lines of communication, Dexter made the suggestion:

Invite the parents to be a part of the School Improvement Team, the PTSO—where they can have input on any of those policies. So if they see a policy that they feel is unfair, not just the zero policy, but policies in general, then they can have their input on that. So, that's change that needs to be brought about. (Personal Communication, 06/24/13)

Sally pondered:

Just make sure they have copies in hand, and once again have staff members go over the policy with the students. Always have an open-door policy so that way if the students have a question about something, they can come ask. The same with the parents. (Personal Communication, 06/24/13)

Mama Bear observed that although it is less difficult to communicate with the teachers because they are in-house, it can be very difficult to communicate with the parents/caregivers. She commented:

So providing the opportunity for parents to come into the school as often as possible, providing opportunity for the parents to share any changes, or anything that's going on that we need to know about and change it in our system so we have that information, and that would make it much easier for us to communicate with one another. We need to discuss certain things with parents when we have them in front of us; when we have them in the building. That goes back to finding ways to get the parents in the building as often as possible, and making it very easy for the parents to share any concerns or anything with us. (Personal Communication, 06/24/13)

In addition to consistency, Joe and Mama Bear saw the need for communication and clarity of the policies. Mama Bear reflected:

I think having clarity from the central office on what our policy is would be good. It's really a clarity issue because we need to see what it is. I can intelligently come up with it in my head what zero tolerance should be, and that kind of what we function on. But it would be nice to have that document within our access so we can make sure we are doing the right thing. Then just making sure we have input from all of the stakeholders in looking at this to establish that base that we work from. That's really it. And then obviously we figure out how to communicate that to everybody involved. (Personal Communication, 06/24/13)

During the teachers' deliberation, they also discussed that communicating with the teachers and students is not the problem; the problem is communicating effectively with the parents. They discussed that this is because, according to John, "We got a language barrier with many parents at our school; not to mention that many families move often. It's hard to get a phone number or an email, or even a permanent address to maintain communication (Personal Communication, 06/10/13). Sandra elaborated that parents do not come to the school because they are intimidated by administrators, teachers, and unfamiliarity with the school. She suggested, "One of the ways that we can reach them is to go to them or have a neutral ground meeting. Build that relationship with the parents" (Personal Communication, 06/10/13). Additionally, Johnny noted, "Administrators should be a little more open, and make themselves more available to speak with parents" (Personal Communication, 06/10/13). Polly's idea was:

... holding administrators accountable. I think if your superintendent or if your human resource or your personnel director—you know whoever that is, if they hold administrators accountable for giving them a written document indicating how they have communicated with parents, teachers, and students. I think accountability is key. (Personal Communication, 06/10/13)

Brooke supposed that maybe there could be a person responsible for contacting the parents and emailing the teachers. She described a central system that she thought would be helpful:

Maybe you need to establish a central system where anything related to disciplinary problems will be charted or automatically sent out through the system that automatically emails parents, teachers, students, or anybody that's involved (Personal Communication, 06/10/13).

Brooke and Polly were in agreement with the recommendations of Joe and Mama in that they would also recommend to the school and the school district that the zero tolerance policy needs



to be more clearly communicated to the students and parents. Brooke reasoned, “I would recommend that they be consistent as it relates to their means of communicating what’s going on with the students and the parents” (Personal Communication, 06/10/13). Polly noted:

I would recommend that they better communicate what the policy is, what are the implications of the policy, and the legal ramifications. Because when we talk zero tolerance, there are many legal ramifications of zero tolerance. This is not like an in-school suspension or being suspended to an alternative school. And I think those legal ramifications have to be communicated in a much more effective way. (Personal Communication, 06/10/13)

Carlye pointed out that, “I would recommend that they should make sure that the parents have all the information that they need to talk to their children, and make sure that the policy is transparent, and that everybody understands it” (Personal Communication, 06/17/13).

The students seemed to think that the student handbook was adequate communication about the discipline policies. When I asked: “On the first day of school does every teacher go over the rules with the students?” and “Do you get a handbook?” Tony answered, “They have to. They have to read the rules to you, and yes, everybody gets a handbook. So those who said they didn’t know about the rules have *no* excuse” (Personal Communication, 06/17/13). The other students acknowledged and agreed with Tony, as Dexter mentioned earlier, the teachers read the rules to them on the first day of school, and there are handbooks. However, they also acknowledged, with the exception of Ben, that they do not read the rules. Ben admitted, “I do, but then I forget where the handbook is and just go on my own” (Personal Communication, 06/17/13). John Luke, Mario, and MJ admitted they do not read the handbook; we “just try to remember what the teachers tell us” (Personal Communication, 06/17/13). Besides reading the rules and giving them the handbook, Mario concluded, “I don’t know what else they can do” (Personal Communication, 06/17/13).

The parents/caregivers had similar perspectives as the students on what they thought could be done to ensure adequate communication and dissemination of discipline policies to parents/caregivers. They discussed the need for parents/caregivers to come to meetings, and to read the handbook. Amy and Bre concurred with Jane when she elaborated:

I think if the parents come to the meetings and if they read the guide books, everything is in the book, everything is in that little book they give you at the beginning of the year, and it tells you what they tolerate and what they don't tolerate, what the school's SMOD is, and I think there's a breakdown in it. But when you don't come to the meetings, when you don't talk to your children, when you don't ask them what happened in school today, when you don't ask them, 'What's going with you?' 'What's going on with you and your friends?' There's a breakdown with the communication. . . .(Personal Communication, 06/17/13)

Shirl's reflections added to Jane's thoughts about meetings, and also included some of the concerns of the teachers regarding telephone numbers and addresses:

I agree with Bre. Why don't the parents come to the meetings? When I come to the meetings, I see the same parents there all the time. You know who's going to be there before you get there. Same parents all the time. I don't care what the meeting is about. They send stuff home. The parents, and I'm included, need to read and listen to the voice mails. All the voice mails are not about something bad that the child has done. And the parents might need to do something on their part, like making sure there's a working number or their address is correct. And there are times when the school invites the parents to the school to discuss the things. So the parents need to make sure they are always involved. And if they can't make it to the meeting, then they need to send a representative to sit in on these things so they'll know what's going on. (Personal Communication, 06/17/13)

The participants' discernments regarding what steps could be taken to ensure adequate communication and dissemination of school and zero tolerance discipline policies to teachers, students and parents/caregivers were revealing. The majority of them was seemingly genuinely concerned about the difficulty in communicating with the parents/caregivers due to various factors including non-working telephone numbers, wrong addresses, and non-attendance at meetings. There were some suggestions that appear to be worthy to be considered. I was personally impressed with the idea of holding meetings at a neutral location in an effort to

eliminate the intimidation factor. It was also interesting to hear the students acknowledge that they received handbooks, and that the teachers did read the rules read to them. Overall, the participants realized that there is a need for more to be done with regards to adequate communication and dissemination of the school and zero tolerance discipline policies to all the stakeholders.

### **Summary of Similarities and Differences between the Microlevel and Macrolevel Analyses**

Four major themes emerged from within and across the microlevel (individual interviews) and macrolevel (focus group interviews) analyses: (a) understanding zero tolerance, (b) impact of zero tolerance, (c) exclusions, and (d) policies and rules. While these themes were consistent in both the microlevel and macrolevel analyses, there were some differences between the indicators of the two levels of analysis.

Regarding the understanding zero tolerance theme, the only common indicator was effectiveness in reducing school violence. Definitions and application and enforcement only emerged in the microlevel analysis. Modification of policy and implementation only emerged in the macrolevel analysis, reflecting what changes the participants would recommend or make in current zero tolerance policy. While the indicator, effectiveness in reducing school violence, appeared in both levels of analysis, the microlevel analysis discussions reflected the participants' thoughts on what effect, if any, zero tolerance had on the reduction of school violence. The same indicator in the macrolevel analysis centered on what steps the participants thought could be taken to make zero tolerance more effective in diminishing school violence.

While a comparison of the analyses of the theme for the impact of zero tolerance reveals one common indicator, behavior modification, the participants' opinions are presented from two different perspectives. During the microlevel analysis, the students reflected on whether they

thought their suspensions had any effect on their behavior. Whereas, this indicator in the macrolevel analysis focused on how the administrators and teachers believed they could encourage positive behavior and discourage negative behavior.

Views on discipline in the microlevel analysis, and input on consequences in the macrolevel analysis had nothing in common with other indicators that materialized under the exclusions theme. While the views on discipline indicator manifested the student participants' reflections on what ways, if any, zero tolerance impacted their behavior and actions; input on consequences included the participants' opinions and reasons they should or should not have input on the assignment of consequences for violations of school and zero tolerance policies.

Concerning the theme of exclusion, disproportionality, equity and fairness, and reduction efforts surfaced in both analyses. In the microlevel analysis of disproportionality, the participants presented their opinions and reasons regarding whether or not the application and enforcement of the zero tolerance policy results in disproportionate suspensions, expulsions, or office referrals of African-American male students. When the participants deliberated on disproportionality in the macrolevel analysis, they discussed steps that administrators and teachers could take to assure the students and their parents/caregivers that African-American males are not disproportionately excluded or referred to the office.

The participants' discussion of the indicator, equity and fairness, during the microlevel analysis focused on whether or not they thought the administrators and teachers treated all students equally and fairly when the students are disciplined or referred to the office; the students and parents/caregivers expounded on whether or not assigned consequences matched the misbehavior and the reasons for their conclusions. However, during the macrolevel analysis, the participants gave their insight on steps they perceived could be taken to assure that African-

American males receive consequences that are appropriate for the misbehavior, and that they are treated fairly when office referrals are written.

The indicator, reduction efforts, in the microlevel analysis reflects participant perceptions of what could be done to result in a decreased number of African-American male students that are excluded. Conversely, the macrolevel analysis: (a) replicates the participants discernments about the importance of relationships and why relationships are relevant in reducing suspensions, (b) what the students and parents/caregivers speculate they can do to be more accountable for the students' behavior, and (c) the descriptions of alternatives and the reasons such alternatives may reduce the exclusions of African-American male students.

The policies and rules theme had no common indicators across the microlevel and macrolevel. While there were three indicators that became apparent during the microlevel analysis: (a) clarity, (b) awareness and knowledge, and (c) source of knowledge; communication was the only indicator that emerged during the macrolevel analysis. The clarity indicator reflected students and parents/caregivers assessments of whether or not they had a clear understanding of the rules and policies. The awareness and knowledge indicator indicated how the students and parents/caregivers described what knowledge, if any, they had of the school and zero tolerance policies; and how the rules and policies were communicated to them. The communication indicator that emerged during the macrolevel analysis involved the participants' discussions and descriptions of steps they thought could be taken to increase communication among the stakeholders.

## CHAPTER 5

### Discussion

The debates surrounding the effects and supposed benefits of the law on the students it is meant to protect are important; they suggest either a turning back of the clock to pre-reform or a continuation of discrimination against the educationally disadvantaged (Daniel, 2006, p. 2).

Much of the existing literature focuses on what is referred to as the discipline gap revealing that there is a disparity in the rate of African-American students excluded from school when compared to White students. Study after study documented that this pattern of exclusion has been consistent for more than three decades (Advancement Project/Civil Rights Project, 2000, 2005; Bennett & Harris, 1982; Children's Defense Fund, 1975; Costenbader & Markson, 1998; Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2011; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Lewis, Butler, Bonner, & Joubert, 2012; Losen & Gillespie, 2012; Losen & Skiba, 2010; McCarthy & Hoge, 1987; Milner, 2013; Morrison & D'Incau, 1997; Office of Civil Rights, 1993; Skiba & Peterson, 1999; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, 2000; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002; Skiba & Rausch, 2006). However, little of the literature provided insight into the perceptions of key stakeholders regarding the reasons for this disparity. The purpose of this case study was to examine key stakeholders' perceptions of the relationship between zero tolerance and the disproportionality of exclusions of African-American male students. This study was designed to examine what and why administrators, teachers, students, and parents/caregivers thought about the disproportionate rate of suspensions and expulsions of African-American males.

Through the theoretical framework of critical race theory, this study examined the perceptions of administrators, teachers, students, and parents/caregivers in a central North

Carolina urban high school district. The qualitative instrumental case study methodology employed for this study included individual interviews with each stakeholder and focus groups interviews. The administrators consisted of principal and assistant principals who had suspended or expelled African-American male students under zero tolerance. The teachers included those who had recommended at least one African-American male student for suspension or expulsion under zero tolerance. Students consisted of African-American males who had been suspended or expelled at one time under zero tolerance. The last group of stakeholders was the respective parents/caregivers of these students.

### **Alignment of the Results with the Research Questions**

The research examined the perceptions of the stakeholders regarding the disproportionate exclusions of African-American male students under zero tolerance policies, and how these groups described reasons for this disparity. The central research question of my study was: What are the perceptions of administrators, teachers, students, and parents/caregivers regarding the disproportionate exclusions (suspensions and expulsions) of African-American males under zero tolerance policies? The following related questions used to guide the study included:

1. What are the perceptions of key stakeholders (administrators, teachers, students, and parents/caregivers) regarding the disproportionate exclusions (suspensions and expulsions) of African American males under zero tolerance policies?
2. How are the perceptions of the key stakeholders similar?
3. How are the perceptions of the key stakeholders different?
4. How can these perceptions be integrated to decrease disproportionality in exclusions of African American males?

**Research Question 1: Perceptions of Stakeholders**

The administrators' responses to the first research question regarding the perceptions of the stakeholders about the disproportionality of suspensions and expulsions covered a broad range of reasons for this disparity. Even though their responses indicated that African-American males are disproportionately excluded, it was reasoned that this could be due to (a) factors outside of school influences such as cultural and social issues, (b) a higher number of racial/ethnic minorities in the school population, and (c) a higher number of African American males committing the infractions. Two of the administrators gave no specific reason for this disparity based on ethnicity/ race or gender. One administrator noted that he did not perceive the number of suspensions and expulsions to be based upon any demographic. Instead he viewed it as doing his job when a weapon was brought to school regardless of the gender or ethnicity.

The teachers were divided on whether students are disproportionately suspended or expelled based on ethnicity/race or gender. Three of the teachers indicated that they did not think this was the case. Brooke and John expressed that regardless of the gender or race of the students, the consequences are assigned based on the infraction or action and not on race or gender. Sandra held the view that because a small number of students commits the majority of infractions, this group was responsible for the majority of the disciplinary problems. After farther questioning, Sandra contrasted what she initially stated earlier and noted that there were more African-American males who were excluded in this small group that was excluded. She explained this disparity could be the lack of a positive model in the home.

Two of the remaining teachers, Johnny and Carlye, perceived that African-American male students are disproportionately suspended or expelled based on gender or ethnicity/race. The teachers expressed that some reasons that contributed to this practice included targeting,



profiling, and bias. On the basis of her knowledge of the research that shows African-American students are suspended at a very disproportionate rate than other students, Polly agreed that this situation does exist.

Two of the students, indicated there is no specific reason for the disproportionate suspensions or expulsions based on ethnicity, while two students attributed the disproportionality to stereotypes. Mario remarked that the disparity cannot be due to race because teachers are not racists. Tony asserted he thought that for the most part, everybody was treated the same. MJ pointed out that although there were more African-American males excluded, it was not due to race. He indicated that he felt that African-Americans and Hispanics get in the most trouble, but stated that it is not due to race; it is a result of how they behave and how they carry themselves. The other two students, Ben and John Luke, thought that the disproportionate suspensions and expulsions of African-American male students were attributable to stereotypes.

Even though the parents/caregivers did not respond directly to the research question, they did respond to whether or not they thought the administrators treat all the students the same when assigning consequences under zero tolerance. Two of the parents/caregivers, Carlye and Sam indicated that in regards to punishments and consequences, they thought that students are treated unequally. Carlye expressed that this unequal treatment maybe due to influences outside of student control or teacher biasness. Shirl was of the opinion that this maybe that the teachers and the students do not get along. While Amy had no comments, Bre and Jane noted that they thought their sons were treated fairly.

A close examination of the responses revealed that although the stakeholders had different rationales for their perceptions, it was clearly indicated that some thought African-American males are disproportionately suspended. These findings are consistent with research

that documented that systemic racism is characteristic of disciplinary practices regarding African-American males (Advancement Project/Civil Rights Project, 2000, 2005; Bennett & Harris, 1982; Children's Defense Fund, 1975; Costenbader & Markson, 1998; Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2011; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Lewis, Butler, Bonner, & Joubert, 2012; Losen & Gillespie, 2012; Losen & Skiba, 2010; McCarthy & Hoge, 1987; Milner, 2013; Morrison & D'Incau, 1997; Office of Civil Rights, 1993; Skiba & Peterson, 1999; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, 2000; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002; Skiba & Rausch, 2006).

Feagin and Barnett (2005) defined systemic racism as a practice that "involves the racialized exploitation and subordination of Americans of color by white Americans" and encompasses the racial stereotyping, prejudices, and emotions of whites, as well as the discriminatory practices and racialized institutions engineered to produce the long-term domination of African Americans and other people of color (pp. 1102,1103).

The results also revealed that the administrators' responses regarding how they interpret the definitions of zero tolerance are congruent with Dunbar and Villarruel's (2002) study which showed that administrators implement zero tolerance policy in accordance with their interpretations of the definitions, subsequently affecting students of color. Further, their perceptions are consistent with the finding in the latest study conducted by the U. S. Department of Education that showed that even though African-American students make up only 18% of public school students, they represent 36 % of students suspended once, 46 % of students suspended more than once, and 39% of those expelled (U. S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2012).

The results of Gregory and Mosely's (2004) study which examined teachers' implicit theories regarding causes of behavior problems and particularly how they regard race and culture

as they relate to the discipline gap, were similar to some of the perceptions indicated by this study's participants in that the teachers in Gregory and Mosely's study perceived the causes for discipline problems as being the cultural and social issues outside the school, the adolescent, and the community, and race did not account for the discipline gap.

The recurring theme by the students that office referrals are often made because of the misconceptions of teachers of the ways African-American male students response to their demands to follow classroom and school rules is supported by Skiba and Peterson (1999) and Skiba, Peterson, and Williams (1997) in their studies that revealed that most referrals of African-American males were of a nature that did not pose any threats, or for infractions what seemed to be trivial and there were clearly racial disparities. The students' views that they are frequently referred to the office even though they do not consider their behavior to be threatening were consistent with the findings of McNeal and Dunbar (2010) which showed that there is a significant difference between what zero tolerance policies were designed to do and what they actually accomplish.

The findings in this study that students perceived office referrals as being unfair in that African-American male students are consistently more frequently referred to the office than other students for the same offense, parallel the findings of the study conducted by Skiba, Peterson, and Williams (1997) which documented that referrals for African-American male students are mostly of a nature that pose no threat, but rather were offenses that represented noncompliance or disrespect.

Overall the findings in this study do not contradict the findings of other prior studies regardless if these studies were done in 1975 or 2012. Rather, they affirm what these studies indicated – zero tolerance discipline policies negatively affect African-American male students.

While a review of the literature did not reveal any studies related to the perceptions of parents/caregivers regarding the fairness of treatment of all students by administrators when students are disciplined under zero tolerance, the results in Johnson's et al., (2006) study in which 1379 parents participated in two focus groups are similar. These results showed that four in 10 Black parents reported that they felt that their child had been unfairly punished by a teacher.

### **Research Questions 2 and 3: Similarities and Differences in Perceptions of Stakeholders**

The second research question examined the similarities and differences in the perceptions of the stakeholders. The data revealed that within and across the four groups of stakeholders, similarities and differences in the stakeholders' perceptions were revealed both in the microlevel and macrolevel analyses. During the microlevel analysis one similarity found among the perceptions of student stakeholders was that even though their reasons for the modifications differed; they all agreed their behavior did change after being suspended under the zero tolerance policy.

Another similarity materialized in the participants' perceptions of what can to be done to reduce the suspensions and expulsions of African-American males. Most of the participants concurred that relationships and trust are relevant factors to be considered for discussion of how to reduce the number of African-American male students that are excluded. There was also agreement that in addition to relationships and trust, other things that could lead to the reduction of the exclusions of African-American male students included: (a) parental involvement, (b) adequate communication of rules and policies, (c) and understanding and following the rules.

One of the similarities that appeared in the macrolevel analysis centered on the perceptions of the stakeholders regarding recommendations for changes in the zero tolerance

policy and the implementation of the policy to the school district. Although the participants' noted that they thought zero tolerance is necessary for some violations such as weapons and drugs, they would, nevertheless, recommend changes including more flexibility in assignment of consequences, and assuring that all participants had clear and adequate understanding and communication of the policy. They would also recommend the relevancy of being consistent when assigning consequences utilizing the zero tolerance policy and considering due process.

Similarities among the stakeholders' perceptions were also manifested regarding steps that they thought administrators and teachers can take to assure African-American male students and their parents/caregivers that they are treated fairly. The stakeholders emphasized that any steps should include: (a) consistency, (b) relationships, (c) fairness, (d) firmness, (e) elimination of stereotypes, (f) teacher training, and (g) staff development.

The importance of relationships was another similarity that surfaced among the perceptions of the stakeholders. Each of the stakeholders' perceptions indicated the importance they placed on need of relationships and the part they play in the success of all students.

The perceptions of the stakeholders were also similar with regards to what the students and parents/caregivers thought they could do to be more accountable for their behaviors and actions. The students perceived that they need to start taking responsibilities for behavior. The parents/caregivers realized that they need to be more involved in their students' education and with school activities.

Similarities were manifested when the stakeholders perceived what other alternatives were available to reduce the exclusions of African-American males. They were persistent that Andrew Academy was the best, if not the only alternative to reducing the number of African-American male students that are suspended or expelled.

The final similarity among the perceptions of the stakeholders concerned steps they thought could be taken to insure more adequate communication and dissemination of school and zero tolerance policies to teachers, students, and parents/caregivers. There was agreement among the participants that the difficulty in communicating was a major concern for the parents/caregivers. The stakeholders were of the opinions that in addition to reading the student handbook, current telephone numbers and addresses and attendance at meetings would be means of increasing communication to the students and parents/caregivers.

The second research question examined the differences in the perceptions of the stakeholders. The findings revealed that there were some important differences in the perceptions of the stakeholders. These differences related to the effectiveness of zero tolerance in reducing school violence, participants' input on consequences, whether or not the application and enforcement of zero tolerance result in a disproportionate number of exclusions of African-American male students, the fairness of teachers when making office referrals, and clarity of policies and rules.

The results of my study revealed that even though stakeholders were divided on the effectiveness of zero tolerance in diminishing school violence, for various reasons the majority of the stakeholders held the belief that the zero tolerance policy is effective. Two of the administrators held that the policy is effective; one thought that it was ineffective, and one was undecided. Four of the teachers also speculated that the policy is effective, one believed it was ineffective; and two were undecided. The teachers who expressed zero tolerance is effective indicated that it can minimize violence, encourage students reconsider their actions, and act as a deterrent to bad behavior. Christopher expressed the policy as ineffective in reducing school violence because individual situations are not examined. One of the two remaining teachers,

Johnny, who was undecided about the policy's effectiveness, thought the students believe that any attention received is good attention, and some of the students believe that if someone notices them, even if it is for poor behavior, the student will continue with the behavior to gain attention. Sandra, who was also undecided, indicated that she may tolerate behavior she typically would not tolerate because of the culture of school's population.

With regards to the students, one found the policy to be effective, and three students thought it was ineffective, and one was undecided. Finally, three parents/caregivers held the belief that the policy is effective, one believed it is ineffective, and one thought it may be effective for some students, but ineffective for others.

The reflections of the administrators and teachers varied as to the uniformity of application and enforcement of the zero tolerance policy. Neither the administrators nor the teachers were in agreement as to the reasons for uniformity and fairness of the application and enforcement of zero tolerance in their school district. Even though the majority of the students thought the consequences did not match their misbehavior, Ben said he could not "think of a time when the consequences did not match his misbehavior.

The students were asked to give their perspectives regarding the effectiveness of zero tolerance as it relates to reducing school violence. One of the students, MJ, perceived the policy was as effective because he has observed a change from the last principal to the current principal. John Luke, Mario, and Tony all thought the program was ineffective based on (a) misbehaviors are still going on, (b) people are still fighting every day, (c) schools are still getting shot up, (d) students are still getting suspended and expelled, and (e) teachers are not teaching the students anything. Ben, who was uncertain about the effectiveness of zero tolerance, said it is as

effective as he would expect it to be, but he believes the administration should understand the situation prior to making a decision.

Of the parents who responded that zero tolerance is effective, they had various reasons: (a) strict rules are necessary, (b) students follow the rules in order to graduate, and (c) students are less likely to bring drugs or bring weapons to school. Caryle believed zero tolerance is ineffective because it makes the children irresponsible for their actions. Shirl thought zero tolerance may be effective for some students, but not for all students.

Although most of the administrators and teachers perceived that the zero tolerance policy was applied uniformly in the school district, their perceptions for believing so were different. Their perceptions included the leadership of the principal, the school's population diversity, and the desire of the students to do the right thing. Some thought that uniform application of the policy depended on specific circumstances

As assessment of the stakeholders' perceptions regarding if they should have an opportunity to provide input on the consequences assigned for zero tolerance exclusions showed that there were differences in their perceptions of who should or should not be able to participate in this process. The majority of the stakeholders perceived that with the exception of the students, most of the stakeholders should be included at some time during this process.

The perceptions of the stakeholders differed pertaining to the clarity of school and zero tolerance policies. The administrators and some of the teachers disagreed with some of the students and parents/caregivers that the policies were not made known or explained to them. While the students and parents/caregivers acknowledged that they had received the school rules, for the most part they knew very little or nothing about zero tolerance before the students were suspended.



The majority of responses indicated that the participants perceived zero tolerance to be effective in diminishing school violence. The findings of a study conducted by Lewis (2009) which focused on the perceptions of administrators, teachers, and parents of effective discipline practices, showed that the administrators perceived that discipline policies are the most effective when there is communication, consistency in policies, expectations, and consequences, responsibility and accountability of all stakeholders. These factors that the participants thought were relevant for effective discipline are similar to the factors repeatedly mentioned by the stakeholders in this study. Beckham's (2009) study examined school principals' perceptions of the effectiveness of zero tolerance policies as a preventive tool against school violence and found that administrators thought that zero tolerance was effective. Even though the study revealed that while the administrators did not view expulsion as the best alternative, they did perceive that their schools were safer since the implementation of zero tolerance policies.

The perceptions of the majority of the teachers that zero tolerance is effective in reducing school violence are confirmed by a study that was done by Konter (2002) to describe teachers' perceptions of zero tolerance. The findings in this study suggested that the teachers perceived the policy to be beneficial and effective in violence reduction.

Just as some of the students in this study assumed the zero tolerance policy was ineffective, so did the students who McNeal and Dunbar (2010) studied to gain an understanding of student perceptions of the implementation of zero tolerance policy and school safety. The findings indicated that high school students perceived that there is a significant philosophical difference between what zero tolerance policies were designed to do and what they actually accomplish; and that the students overwhelmingly indicated that they perceived zero tolerance policies as ineffective and they still did not feel safe in their schools.

Most of stakeholders thought, with the exception of the students, that most of the other stakeholders should be given an opportunity to provide input on the consequences assigned to the students. Thinking that students should not have input in this process is in direct contrast to the findings of the U. S. Department of Education (2000) that reported that voices of major stakeholders are missing in the development and implementation of discipline policies and decisions for effective schools; and have advised that families and the entire community need to be involved in children's education.

The results of a study conducted by Sullivan and Keeney (2008) in which teachers' perceptions of safety and discipline in their schools was assessed showed that some of the teachers and students have some or no influence over discipline and safety policies. The researchers concluded that teachers and students should have more influence on these issues.

#### **Research Question 4: Integration of Perceptions to Decrease Disproportionality of Exclusions of African-American Males**

When one thinks of ways that the perceptions of the stakeholders can be integrated to decrease disproportionality in exclusions of African-American males, it can be reasoned that consideration should first be given to the factors that the stakeholders indicated would be beneficial in reducing suspensions and expulsions of these students. The stakeholders' perceptions in my study included: (a) building trust and open relationships among all the stakeholders, (b) implementing and enforcing consistent and fair consequences, (c) improving communication, (d) increasing parental involvement in the students' education and the school, (e) students and parents/caregivers being more accountable for the students' actions, (f) stakeholders having input in the decision-making process with regards to consequences assigned

for violations of the zero tolerance policy, (g) and considering other alternatives that may reduce exclusions of African-American students.

Regardless, if all or some of the perceptions are integrated to reduce the number of African-American males that are excluded, it must be remembered that the schools should not be expected to accomplish this alone. A collaborative effort is necessary, and all stakeholders must step up and do their share. Even then, the task may prove to be overwhelming. However, it needs to be remembered that what is first and foremost is that everyone is genuinely working toward a common goal---the success of the students and the school. This process can begin with giving voice to all stakeholders which should result in building trust and relationships which is seen as the “key” in this process. Relationships go a long way in breaking down barriers thereby resulting in better communication and understanding. The stakeholders appear to be of the opinions that once trust and relationships have been established, the foundation has been laid for the other pieces of the puzzle to fall into place. Some of the stakeholders perceived, and it has been shown, that students respond positively to adults whom they feel genuinely care about them and their success.

By creating opportunities that allow all the stakeholders to have input on the consequences assigned for violations of school and zero tolerance policies empowers them to be able to engage in these decisions. The objective of this collaborative effort is not only to make everyone more accountable, but to also stimulate discussion among the stakeholders that should lead to a safer school environment and assure fairness and equity in the disciplinary process. All the stakeholders should be committed to reducing the number of exclusions of African-American males and increasing the number of successful students, regardless of race/ethnicity or gender.

The responses of the stakeholders indicated that there are very few differences in their perceptions as to what can be done to reduce the number of exclusions of African-American males and the suggestions made (Brown & Beckett, 2007) as to how the CRT principle of interest convergence can be exercised to integrate the stakeholders' perceptions to decrease disproportionality in exclusions of African-American males. Brown & Beckett (2007) offered a variety of approaches that the principle of interest convergence could be employed to accomplish this neutral objective: (a) working closely together to develop a more flexible approach for reducing suspensions and expulsions of African American males; (b) developing a realization of the importance to the administrators and teachers that students and caregivers' voices must be heard on the issues of racial imbalance of student discipline; (c) building a shared sense of community exhibited in a partnership formed between schools and families to immerse students in a single, coherent, consistent, and continuous disciplinary environment; (d) developing a program whereby the most disruptive students will be removed in the interest of the other students and parents; (e) developing a program other than zero tolerance where all stakeholders have specific responsibilities to fulfill; (f) developing a program where African American males and other racial/ethnic minority students will feel they are more fairly treated, and teachers feel safer and more focused on instructions; and (g) involving all stakeholders in a development process that results in substantive agreement on and commitment to a new set of discipline policies among groups holding very different values and with a history of mistrust and opposition.

My study shows that the interest convergence tenet of critical race theory can be used to develop opportunities for dialogue among the various stakeholders which could be the pathway to a realization and development of policies that are colorblind to the inequalities. Additionally,

the stories and counter-stories of the stakeholders point out the disproportionality in exclusions of African American males under zero tolerance policies and practices, they also imply that they all stakeholders recognize their responsibilities and roles in the process of reducing the number of African-American male students excluded under zero tolerance policies.

Overall, the findings in my study do not contradict the findings of prior studies on disproportionality under zero tolerance, rather, my findings affirm what these studies indicated – zero tolerance discipline policies negatively affect African-American male students.

### **Implications**

Findings from this study suggest several implications for key stakeholders in K-12 schooling, policymakers, and leadership studies. Administrators may want to take a look at the steps recommended by all the stakeholders to ensure that all students, regardless of gender or race/ethnicity are treated fairly when disciplined or referred to the office (Brown & Beckett, 2007). Administrators may want to consider increasing teacher training, staff development, or cultural diversity workshops for teachers who appear to need assistance in this area. The school and school district may consider developing a program where African American males and other racial/ethnic minority students would feel they are more fairly treated, and teachers feel safer and more focused on instructions. (Brown & Beckett, 2007). Administrators may consider consulting with school district officials for a better and clearer understanding of the meaning of zero tolerance policy regarding implementation of the policy, as it was perceived by the students, on a case-by-case basis.

Some of the teachers expressed that they perceive the students' environment, lack of outside service agencies, the need for African-American male mentors, lack of relationships and trust, among other things, as factors that play a part in their behavior and actions. The

administrators and teachers may find it beneficial to review steps that the stakeholders thought would be valuable. These steps included: (a) seeking assistance from community leaders such as ministers and churches; (b) inviting parents/caregivers to become part of school committees and organizations, and (c) reaching out to students and parents/caregivers on unrelated school issues. A major concern of both administrators and teachers was parental involvement.

Administrators and teachers could seek programs that are geared toward involving parents to a greater extent, such as: (involving parents in the development of school policies and taking extra care to build rapport with parents and communicate with them at times other than when their sons get in trouble. These steps are in line with Brown & Beckett (2007) who advised that building a shared sense of community exhibited in a partnership formed between schools and families to immerse students in a single, coherent, consistent, and continuous disciplinary environment.

One factor that has not been considered that may play a significant part in the rate of African-American male students that are suspended and/or expelled could be, as observed by some of the administrators, the lack of mentoring during transition of these students from middle school to high school. Administrators from both middle and high school could continue to work together to develop a mentoring program comprised of students and teachers from the middle and high schools to ensure that the transition from middle school is less stressful and intimidating.

One clear finding from this study was that the students perceive they are referred to the office for offenses that are not considered to be threatening, and they are punished more severely and more frequently than other students for the same offenses. With this in mind, administrators have a responsibility to take steps to ensure that all offenses receive the same punishment. This

could be accomplished by implementing the suggestion made by one of the administrator; counseling teachers as to which consequences are appropriate for each offense, and making sure that the teachers provide detailed descriptions of the offense in the office referrals. This would ensure that the person who is responsible for interpreting, assessing and implementing the consequences for the violations would have a clear understanding of the violations. In addition, youth should receive training in the impact of nonverbal communication, especially related to cross cultural communication.

Policy makers must not only take responsibility of making sure that each group of stakeholder is actively involved at every step in the development of policies that directly or indirectly affect them, they must also take responsibility of making sure that each stakeholder is held accountable for doing whatever is necessary to making this mission a reality. Findings from my study also have implications for future policy. All the stakeholders may benefit from this study's findings. Typically, teachers, parents/caregivers, and students are never and administrators are seldom, if ever, involved in the development of school policies. As noted by an administrator and a parent, the policies are made at the federal, state, or local levels and are handed down to the school level without any input from the stakeholders who are directly impacted. This study indicated that an overwhelming majority of the stakeholders believed that they should be included in the decision-making concerning the consequences assigned for violations of school and zero tolerance violations. Therefore, policy makers involved at the federal, state, and local levels should seriously consider the advice of the U. S. Department of Education (2000) and Leinhardt and Willert (2002) that families and the entire community need to be involved in children's education, and that voices of major stakeholders are needed in the development and implementation of discipline policies and decisions for effective school, and

take a careful look at the perceptions of the affected stakeholders and seriously consider involving these stakeholders in the policymaking process. Perhaps the stakeholders' stories and the counter-stories analyzed from the interest convergence tenet of critical race theory can be utilized to involve all stakeholders in a developmental process that result in substantive agreement on and commitment to a new or revised set of discipline policies. Such a process would allow African-American male students and their parents/caregivers to perceive that they are treated more fairly, teachers would feel safer, and administrators, teachers, parents/caregivers, and students would perceive that they all have a role to play in the reduction or elimination of the practice of disparity in exclusions of African-American male students (Brown & Beckett, 2007).

The results of my study can make a valuable contribution to the literature by providing a platform for the voices of a marginalized group in a situation that affects them without any input. My study also contributes to the literature through the utilization of critical race theory in focusing on stakeholders' perceptions of zero tolerance and the disproportionality of exclusions (suspensions and expulsions) of African-American male students. Previous studies utilizing critical race theory focused on perceptions of how race and racism affect the school experiences of racial/ethnic minority students (e.g., Decuir & Dixson, 2004; Duncan, 2002b; Howard, 2008; Teranishi, 2002).

My findings may also be considered when one deliberates what can be learned to elevate knowledge in leadership studies as well as school personnel preparation. It is imperative for leaders and other school personnel to be cognizant of the importance of the need to have all stakeholders involved in the overall operation of the program. This does not mean, or it is expected that all stakeholders should be involved at all stages. However, they could be included



involved at various stages. This could be a formation of a body of students to represent the students at faculty meetings that are related to development of new courses, or what could be added to established courses that would be more beneficial to the students in real life situations.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Future studies should focus on utilizing a longitudinal study employing an ethnological method of inquiry. This method of inquiry would allow an opportunity for the researcher to become absorbed in the participants' lived experiences, thereby strengthening the validity and rigor of the evidence revealed in this study.

Future research should be conducted to examine the disproportionate rate of suspensions and expulsions of African-American female students and other racial/ethnic minorities. Such research may provide answers as to why such disproportionality exists among these groups.

Future studies to measure the effect of mentoring on the transition of African-American male students from middle to high school are recommended. Research of this type may be helpful in assessing if such programs would play a role in reducing the number of African-American male students that are suspended or expelled. Steps could be taken to study the "before" and "after" of successful mentoring programs in other schools to determine whether consideration should be given such a program at Unban High School.

### **Conclusions**

This study has led me to understand that regardless of my desires to have the results favor my assumptions, I must accept the fact that the findings are meant to support the data—not my assumptions. Further, I also came to understand more clearly what Horsburgh (2003) meant when she described the occurrence of reflexivity as the time when I was able to acknowledge that my personal actions and decisions would have an impact on how I wanted the results to

show. While I agree with Henwood and Pidgeon (1993), Mason, (1996), and Porter (1993) that reflexivity took place when I realized that because I was an essential part of the world that was studied, and my neutrality and detachment in relation to the collection, analysis, and interpretation of the data was impossible, I learned that I could not allow this neutrality and detachment as suggested by Popay, Rogers and Williams (1998) to bias the collection, analysis or the presentation of the data.

Zero tolerance is a discipline policy that prescribes predetermined consequences for certain violations, regardless of the circumstances, disciplinary history, or age of the offender. The results of my study make a valuable contribution to the literature by providing a platform for the voices of a marginalized group in a situation that affects them without any input. My study also provides a valuable contribution in utilizing critical race theory in looking at stakeholders' perceptions of the relationship between zero tolerance and the disproportionality of suspensions and exclusions of African-American male students.

The findings of the present study were congruent with other empirical studies which showed that African-American male students are consistently suspended or expelled at rates higher than that of other racial/ethnic minorities. It is hoped that the responses of the various stakeholders will be considered by policy makers in the development of discipline policies with a commitment to reduce the number of exclusions of African-American male students.

Finally, I conclude that the realization of each and every one of the key stakeholders in my study is that their involvement has to be more than mere words. Rather, they must put these words into action. Most importantly, the policy makers must not only take responsibility of making sure that each group of stakeholder is actively involved at every step in the development of policies that directly or indirectly affect them. They must also take responsibility of making

sure that each stakeholder is held accountable for doing whatever is necessary to making this mission a reality.

Another way of saying this is to use the quote:

A meaningful approach to school discipline is one that treats students and their families with respect throughout the process, seeks to learn from students and to nurture their learning and growth as human beings, and that finds ways to bring students more deeply into the school community. (Justice Matters Institute Report, 2009, p. 10).

## References

- Adler, P. A., & Alder, P. (2012). In S. E. Baker & R. Edwards (Eds.). *How many qualitative interviews is enough? Expert voices and early career reflections on sampling and cases in qualitative research* (8-11). Retrieved from [http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/2273/4/how\\_many\\_interviews.pdf](http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/2273/4/how_many_interviews.pdf)
- Advancement Project. (2005). *Education on lockdown: The schoolhouse to jailhouse tract*. Washington, DC: Advancement Project. Retrieved from <http://www.advancementproject.org/sites/default/files/publications/FINALEOLrep.pdf>
- Advancement Project and the Civil Rights Project. (2000). Opportunities suspended: The devastating consequences of zero tolerance and school discipline policies. Retrieved from [http://www.civilrightsproject.harvard.edu/research/discipline/opport\\_suspended/phd](http://www.civilrightsproject.harvard.edu/research/discipline/opport_suspended/phd)
- Agyemang, R. J., & Bruijnzeels, M. (2005). Negro, Black, Black American, African Caribbean, African-American or what? Labeling African origin populations in the health arena in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. *Issue Paper*, (1). Arlington, VA: Military Leadership Diversity Commission. Retrieved from <http://mldc.whs.mil/>
- Alkin, M. C., Daillak, R., & White, P. (1979). *Using evaluations: Does evaluation make a difference?* CA: Sage.
- Alexandre, M. (2007). Love don't live here anymore: Economic incentives for a more equitable model urban redevelopment. Retrieved from [http://works.bepress.com/michele\\_alexandre/1](http://works.bepress.com/michele_alexandre/1)
- American Bar Association (2001). *Report to house delegates, recommendations on school discipline*. NY: American Bar Association. Retrieved from <http://www.abanet.org/publiced/features/DYJpart.1.pdf>

- American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, .(2008). Are zero tolerance policies effective in the schools? An evidentiary review and recommendations. *American America Psychologist*, 63(9), 852-862.  
doi: 10.1037/0003-066X.63.9.852
- Anderson, R. A., Crabtree, B. F., Steele, D. J., & McDaniel, Jr., R. (missing year). Case study research: The view from complexity science. *Qualitative Health Research*, 15, 669-685.
- Apori-Nkansah, L. (2008). *Transitional justice in postconflict contexts: The case of Sierra Leone's dual accountability mechanisms* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation), Walden University.
- Arum, R. (2004). Judging school discipline: The crisis of moral authority. *Contemporary Sociology*, 33(6), 724-726.
- Ballard, H. F., & Cintron, R. (2010). Critical race theory as an analytical tool: African-American males success in doctoral education. *Journal of College Teaching and Learning*, 7(10), 11-24.
- Banks, J. A. (1993). The canon debate, knowledge construction, and multicultural education. *Educational Researcher*, 22(5), 4-14.
- Baxter, P., & Jack, S. (2008). Qualitative case study methodology: Study design and implementation for novice researchers. *The Qualitative Report*, 13(4), 544-559. Retrieved from <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR13-4/baxter.pdf>
- Beckham, J. E. (2009). *Zero Tolerance discipline policies: Urban administrators' perspectives*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Oxford, OH: Miami University.
- Bell, D. (1980). Brown vs. Board of Education and the interest-convergence principle. *Harvard Law Review*, 93, 518-533.

- Bell, D. A. (1992a). *Faces at the bottom of the well: The permanence of racism*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Bell, D. A. (1992b). *Race, racism, and American law*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown.
- Bell, D. A. (1995a). Racial realism. In K. W. Crenshaw, N. Gotanda, G. Peller., & K. Thomas (Eds.), *Critical race theory: The key writings that formed the movement* (pp. 302-312). New York, NY: The New Press.
- Bell, D. A. (1995b). Serving two masters: Integration ideals and client interests in school desegregation litigation. In R. Delgado (Ed.), *Critical race theory: The cutting edge* (pp. 228-238). Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Bell, D. A. (1995c). Who's afraid of critical race theory? *University of Illinois Law Review*, 4, 893- 910.
- Bennett, C., & Harris, J. (1982). Suspensions and expulsions of male and African-American students. *Urban Education*, 16(4), 399-423.
- Bernal, D. (2002). Critical race theory, Latino critical theory, and critical raced-gendered epistemologies: Recognising students of colour as holders and creators of knowledge. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 8(1), 105-126.
- Bernard, H. R. (2002). *Research methods in anthropology: Qualitative and quantitative methods* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.
- Bernhard, J. K., Freire, M., Bascunan, L., Arenas, R., & Verga, N. R. (2004). Behavior and misbehavior of Latino children in a time of zero tolerance: Mothers' views. *The Early Years Journal*, 24(1), 49-62.
- Berry, S. H., & Kanouse, D. E. (1987). Physician response to a mailed survey: An experiment in timing of payment. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 51(1), 102-114.

- Bhavnani, K. (1993). Tracing the contours: Feminist research and feminist objectivity. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 16(2), 95-104.  
doi: [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0277-5395\(93\)90001-P](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0277-5395(93)90001-P)
- Blumenson, E., & Nilsen, E. S. (2003). One strike and you're out? Constitutional constraints on zero tolerance in public education. *Washington University Law Quarterly*, 81(1), 67-117.
- Board of Education of Independent School District No. 92 of Pottawatomie v. Earls*. (536 U.S. 822 (2002).
- Bobo, L., & Kluegel, J. R. (1993). Opposition to race-targeting: Self-interest, stratification ideology, or racial attitudes? *American Sociological Review*, 58(4), 443-464.
- Bracy, N. L. (2011). Student perceptions of high-security school environments. *Youth & Society*, 43(1), 365-395. doi: 10.1177/0044118X10365082
- Bradshaw, C. P., Mitchell, M. M., O'Brennan, L. M., & Leaf, P. J. (2010). Multilevel exploration of factors contributing to the overrepresentation of Black students in office disciplinary referrals. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 102(2), 508-520.
- Brannen, J. (2012). In S. E. Baker & R. Edwards (Eds.). *How many qualitative interviews is enough? Expert voices and early career reflections on sampling and cases in qualitative research* (16-17). Retrieved from [http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/2273/4/how\\_many\\_interviews.pdf](http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/2273/4/how_many_interviews.pdf)
- Brennan, M., Hoek, J., & Astridge, C. (1991). The effect of monetary incentives on the response Rrate and cost-effectiveness of a mail survey. *Journal of Market Research Society*, 33, 229-241.
- Brown, D. A. (2004). Fighting racism in the twenty-first century. *Washington and Lee Law*

- Review. (61)4, 1485-1499.*
- Brown, L. H., & Beckett, K. S. (2007). *Building community in an alternative school: The perspective of an African American principle*. New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.
- Brunelle, N., Brochu, S., & Cousineau, M. (2000). Drug-crime relations among drug-consuming Juvenile delinquents: A tripartite model and more. *Criminal Justice Periodicals, 27(4)*, 331-339.
- Bryman, A. (2012). In S. E. Baker & R. Edwards (Eds.). *How many qualitative interviews is enough? Expert voices and early career reflections on sampling and cases in qualitative research (18-20)*. Retrieved from [http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/2273/4/how\\_many\\_interviews.pdf](http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/2273/4/how_many_interviews.pdf)
- Bush, G. H. W. (1991). *America 2000: A national educational strategy*. U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.
- Caraballo, L. (2009). Interest convergence in intergroup education and beyond: Rethinking agencies in multicultural education. *International Journal of Multicultural Education, 11(1)*, 2009.
- Carmichael, S., & Hamilton, C. V. (1967). *Black power: The politics of liberation in America*. New York: NY: Random House.
- Casella, R. (2003). Zero tolerance policies in schools: Rationale, consequences and alternatives. *Teachers College Record, 105(5)*, 872-892.
- Cashin, S. D. (2012). "Shall we overcome? Transcending race, class, and ideology through interest convergence. *St. John's Law Review, 79(2)*, 254-255. Retrieved from <http://scholarship.law.stjohn.edu/lawreview/vol79/iss2/1>



- Children's Defense Fund. (1975). *School suspension: Are they helping children?* Cambridge, MA: Washington Research Project.
- Church, A. (1993). Estimating the effect of monetary of incentives on mail survey responses rates: New Data. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *57*(1), 62-79.
- Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Cluver, L., & Gardner, R. (2007). Risk and protective factors for psychological well-being of Children orphaned by AIDS in Cape Town: A qualitative study of children and caregivers' perspectives. *AIDS Care*, *19*(3), 318-325. doi: 10.1080/09540120600986578
- Collins, P. H. (1991). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness and the politics of empowerment*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Cook-Sather, A. (2002). Authorizing students' perspectives: Toward trust, dialogue, and change in education. *Educational Researcher*, *31*(4), 3-14.
- Costenbader, V., & Markson, S. (1998). School suspension: A study with secondary school students. *Journal of School Psychology*, *36*, 59-82.  
doi: [http://0-dx.doi.org/sheba.ncat.edu/10.1016/50022-4405\(97\)00050-2](http://0-dx.doi.org/sheba.ncat.edu/10.1016/50022-4405(97)00050-2)
- Council of State Governments Justice Center. (2011). *Breaking schools' rules: A statewide study Of how school discipline relates to student's success and juvenile justice involvement*. Texas A & M University, Public Policy Research Institute. New York, NY: Council of State Governments Justice Center.
- Crabtree, B. F., & Miller, W. L. (1999). *Doing Qualitative Rresearch* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Newbury Park, NY: Sage.
- Crenshaw, K. (1989). Foreword: Toward a race-conscious pedagogy in legal education. *National*

*Black Law Journal*, (11)1, 1-14.

- Crenshaw, K. W. (1995). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. In N. G. K. Crenshaw, G. Peller, & K. Thomas (Eds.), *Critical race theory: The key writings that formed the movement* (pp. 357-383). New York, NY: The New Press.
- Crenshaw, K., Gotanda, N., Peller, G., & Thomas, K. (Eds.), (1995). *Critical race theory: The key writings that formed the movement*. New York, NY: The New Press.
- Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J. W. (2002). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative research*. (4<sup>th</sup> ed). Boston, MA: Pearson.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J. W., & Miller, D. L. (2000). Determining validity in qualitative inquiry. *Theory into practice*, 39(3), 124-130. Retrieved from [http://dx.doi.org/10.1207/s15430421tip3903\\_2](http://dx.doi.org/10.1207/s15430421tip3903_2)
- Daniel, P. T. K. (2006). No child left behind: The balm of Gilead has arrived in American education. *Education Law Reporter*, 206(3).  
doi: 791-814. 10.1016/S1479-3660(06)09004-4

- DeCuir, J., & Dixson, A. (2004). So when it comes out, they aren't that surprised that it is there: Using critical race theory as a tool of analysis of race and racism in education. *Educational Researcher*, 33(5), 26-31.
- Delgado, R. (Ed.). (1995a). *Critical race theory: The cutting edge*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Delgado, R. (1995b). Rodrigo's chronicle. In R. Delgado (Ed.), *Critical race theory: The cutting edge* (pp. 346-354). Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Delgado, R. (1995c). Legal storytelling: Storytelling for oppositionists and others: A plea for narrative. In R. Delgado (Ed.). *Critical race theory: The cutting edge*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Delgado, R. (1997). Citizens. In J. F. Perea (Ed.), *Immigrants out: The new nativism and the anti-immigrant impulse in the United States*. New York, NY: New York University Press.
- Delgado, R. (2000). Storytelling for oppositionists and others: A plea for narrative. In Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (Eds.) *Critical race theory: The cutting edge*. (pp. 60-70). Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2000). *Critical race theory: The cutting edge* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2001). *Critical race theory: An introduction*. New York, NY: New York University Press.
- deMarrias, K. (2004). Qualitative interview studies: Learning through experiences. In K. deMarrias, & S. Lapan (Eds.) *Foundations for research: Methods of inquiry in education and the social studies*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Denzin, N. K. (1989). *Interpretive interactionism*. Newburg Park, CA: Sage.

- Denzin, N. K. (1997). *Interpretive ethnography: Ethnographic practices for the 21<sup>st</sup> century*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Denzin, N. K., and Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (2011). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research (4<sup>th</sup> ed.)*. New York, NY: Sage.
- Denzin, N. K., and Lincoln, Y. S., Eds. (2011). Introduction: The discipline and practice of qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin, & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research (4<sup>th</sup> ed.)*. New York, NY: Sage.
- Dicicco-Bloom, B., Crabtree, B. F. (2006). The qualitative research interview. *Medical Education, 40*(4), 314-321.
- Dixson, A. D., & Rousseau, C. K. (2005). And we are still not saved: Critical race theory in education ten years later. *Race, Ethnicity and Education, 8*(1), 7-27.
- Domegan, C., & Fleming, D. (2007). *Marketing Research in Ireland: Theory and Practice (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.)*. Dublin: Gill & Macmillan.
- Donnor, J. K. (2005). Towards an interest convergence in the education of African-American football students in major college sports. *Race Ethnicity and Education, 8*(1) 45-67.
- Doucet, A. (2012). In S. E. Baker & R. Edwards (Eds.), *How many qualitative interviews is enough? Expert voices and early career reflections on sampling and cases in qualitative research, 25-26*. Retrieved from [http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/2273/4/how\\_many\\_interviews.pdf](http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/2273/4/how_many_interviews.pdf)
- Dunbar Jr., D., Rodriguez, D., & Parker, L. (2002). Race, subjectivity, and the interview process. In J. Gubrium & J. Holstein (Eds.), *Handbook of interview research: Context and method* (pp. 279-298). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Dunbar, G. (2002). Critical race theory and method: Rendering race in urban ethnographic research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 8(1), 85-104.
- Dunbar, C., & Villarruel, F. A. (2002). Urban school leaders and the implementation of zero tolerance policies: An examination of its implications. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 77(1), 82-104.
- Dunbar, C., & Villarruel, F. A. (2004). What a difference the community makes: Zero tolerance policy interpretations and implementation. *Equity and Excellence in Education*, 37, 351-359.
- Duncan, G. (2002). Critical race theory and method: Rendering race in urban ethnographic research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 8(1), 85-104.
- Dwyer, K., Osher, D., & Wagner, D. (1998). *Early warning, timely response: A guide to safe schools*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.
- Elam, S., & Rose, L. (1995). The 27<sup>th</sup> annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 17(1), 41-60.
- Elite, T. M. N., & Elite, D. J. (2004). Inequality, segregation, and the overrepresentation of African-Americans in school suspensions. *Sociological Perspective*, 47, 269-287.
- Emerson, R. M., Fretz, R. I., Shaw, L. L. (2011). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) Chicago, IL: The University Press.
- Evans-Whipps, T. J., Bond, L., Toumbourou, J. W., & Catalano, R. F. (2007). School, parent, and student perspectives of school drug policies. *Journal of School Health*, 77(3), 138-155. doi: 10.1111/j.1746-1561.2007.00183.x
- Everett, S. A., Price, J. H., Bedell, A. W., & Tellijohann, S. K. (1997). The effect of a monetary

- incentive in increasing the return rate of a survey to family physicians. *Evaluations & the Health Professions*, (2), 207-214.
- Ewing, C. P. (2000). Sensible zero tolerance protects students. *Harvard Education Letter*. Retrieved from <http://www.eduletter.org/past/issues/2000~jf/zero.shtml>
- Feldman, S. (1998). We're all responsible. Where we stand. *Congressional Quarterly*, 1998. Retrieved from <http://www.aft.org>
- Fernandez, L. (2002). Telling stories about school: Using critical race and Latino critical theories to document Latina/Latino education and resistance. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 8(1), 45-65.
- Flick, U. (2002). *Qualitative research in psychology: A textbook*. London: Sage.
- Flick, U. (2008). *Designing qualitative research book 1 of the SAGE qualitative research kit*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Flick, U. (2011). *Introducing research methodology – A beginners' guide to doing a research Project*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Flick, U. Doucet, A. (2012). In S. E. Baker & R. Edwards (Eds.), *How many qualitative interviews is enough? Expert voices and early career reflections on sampling and cases in qualitative research* (27-28). Retrieved from [http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/2273/4/how\\_many\\_interviews.pdf](http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/2273/4/how_many_interviews.pdf)
- Flowers, P. (2009). *Research design*. UK: Cranfield School of Management.
- Fossey, E., Harvey, C., McDermott, L. D. (2002). Understanding and evaluating qualitative research. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, 36(1), 717-732. Retrieved from <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/12406114>
- Fox, R. J., Crask, M., & Kim, J. (1988). Mail survey response rate: A meta-analysis of Selected techniques for inducing response. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 52, 467-419.

- Frankel, R. (1999). Standards of qualitative research. In B. Crabtree & W. Miller (Eds.), *Doing qualitative research* (pp. 333-347). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Frey, L. R., Botan, C. H., & Kreps, G. L. (2000). *Investigating communication: An introduction to research methods* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Fries, K., & DeMitchell, T. A. (2007). Zero tolerance and the paradox of fairness: Viewpoints from the classroom. Retrieved from <http://www.reorbit.com/news/education/918159/zerotoleranceandtheparadoxoffair>
- Galt, K. A. (2008). Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches to research and inquiry. Retrieved from <http://spahp2.creighton.edu/OfficeOfResearch/sharedfiles>
- Garcia, M., & Taaca-Warren, A. M. (2009). *Suspension: A qualitative study of high school teachers' perceptions*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Sacramento, CA: California State University.
- Gay, L. R., & Airasian, P. (2000). *Educational research competencies for analysis and application* (6<sup>th</sup> ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Gephart, R. P. (1999). Paradigms and research methods. *Research methods division forum 4*. Retrieved from [http://www.aom.pace.edu/rmd/1999\\_RMD\\_Forum\\_Paradigms\\_and\\_Research\\_Methods.html](http://www.aom.pace.edu/rmd/1999_RMD_Forum_Paradigms_and_Research_Methods.html)
- Gerke, W. (2004). More than a disciplinarian. *Principal Leadership: Middle Level Edition*, 5(3), 39-41.
- Gerson, K., & Horowitz, R. (2002). Observation and interviewing: Options and choices. In T. May (Ed.), *Qualitative research in action*. London: Sage.
- Gillham, B. (2000a). *Case Study research methods*. London: Continuum.

- Giroux, H. A. (2003). Racial injustice and disposable youth in the age of zero tolerance. *Qualitative Studies in Education, 16*(4), 553-565.
- Glaser, B. G. (1992). *Basics of grounded theory analysis: Emergence versus forcing*. Mill Valley: Sociology Press.
- Gordon, E. W. (1990). The necessity of African-American epistemology for educational theory and practice. *Journal of Education, 172*(3), 88-106.
- Goss v. Lopez*, 419 U. S. 565 (1975).
- Goyder, J. (1994). An experiment with cash incentives on a personal interview survey. *Journal of the Market Research Society, 36*(4), 360-366.
- Graham, L., Brown-Jeffy, S., Aronson, R., & Stephens, C. (2011). Critical race theory as a theoretical framework and analysis tool for population health research. *Critical Public Health, 21*(1), 81-93.
- Gregory, A., & Mosely, P. M. (2004). The discipline gap: Teachers' views on the over-representation of African-American students in the discipline system. *Equity & Excellence in Education, 37*, 18-30. doi: 10.1080/10665680490429280
- Gregory, A., Skiba, R. J., & Noguera, P. A. (2010). The achievement gap and the discipline gap: Two sides of the same coin? *Educational Researcher, 39*(1), 59-68.
- Guba, E. G. (1990). *The alternative paradigm dialog*. In E. G. Guba (Ed.), *The paradigm dialog* (17-30). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How many interviews are enough? An experiment with data saturation and variability. *Field Methods, 18*, 59-82.
- Guilford County Gang Assessment: The OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model.
- Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994, 20 U.S.C. Section 8921



- Hammersley, M., & Atkinson. (1995). *Ethnography: Principles in practice (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.)*. London: Routledge.
- Hancock, B., Windridge, K., & Ockleford, E. (2007). An introduction to qualitative research. The NIHR RDS EM / YH.
- Haraway, D. (1988). Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective. *Feminist Studies*, 14(3), pp. 575-599.
- Harris, K. M. (2001). *Variables associated with disciplinary actions received by middle and high school African-American students in public schools: A synthesis of studies*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Blacksburg, VA: Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. Blacksburg, VA.
- Harvey, L. (1987). Factors affecting response rates to mailed questionnaires: A comprehensive literature review. *Journal of the Market research Society*, 29, 341-353.
- Henault, C. (2001). Chalktalk: Zero tolerance in schools. *Journal of Law and Education*, 30(3), 547-553.
- Henry, G. T. (1990). *Practical Sampling (Vol. 21)*. London: Sage.
- Henwood, K. L., & Pidgeon, N. F. (1993). Qualitative research and psychological theorizing. In M. Hammersley (Ed.), *Social Research: Philosophy, politics and practice* (pp. 14-33). London: Sage.
- Hilarski, C. (2004). How school environments contribute to violent behavior in youth. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 9, 165-178.
- Hill, C. E., Thompson, B. J., & Williams, E. N. (1997). A guide to conducting consensual qualitative research. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 25, 517-572.
- Hill, C. E., Know, S., Thompson, B. J., Williams, E. N., Ness, S. A., & Ladany, N. (2005).

- consensual qualitative research: An update. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 52, 196-205.
- Hill, S. C., & Drolet, J. C. (1999). Violence among high school students in the United States, 1993-1995. *Journal of School Health*, 69(7), 264-272.
- Hong, J. S., & Eamon, M. K. (2012). Students' perceptions of unsafe schools: An ecological systems analysis.
- Hopkins, K. D., & Gullickson, A. R. (1992). Responses rates in survey research: A meta-analysis of the effects of monetary gratuities. *Journal of Experimental Education*, 61(1), 52-62.
- Horsburgh, D. (2003). Evaluation of qualitative research. *Journal of Critical Nursing*, 12, 307-312.
- Horsford, S. D. (2010). Black superintendents on educating Black students in separate and unequal contexts. *Urban Review*, 42, 58-79. doi: 10.1007/s11256-009-0119-0
- Horwitz, A. V., & Reinhard, S. C. (1995). Ethnic differences in caregiving duties and burdens among parents and siblings of persons with severe mental illness. *Health and Social Behavior*, 36(2), 138-150.
- Howard, T. C. (2008). Who really cares? The disenfranchisement of African-American males in Pre-K-12 schools. A critical race theory perspective. *Teachers College Record*, 110(5), 954-985.
- Hyman, I., Weiler, E., Dahbany, A., Shamrock, A., & Britton, G. (1994). Policy and practice in school discipline: Past, present, and future. *Paper presented at the safe schools, safe students: A collaborative approach to achieving safety, discipline and drug-free schools conducive to learning conference*. Washington, DC.

- Insley, A. C. (2001). Suspending and expelling children from educational opportunities: Time to evaluate zero tolerance policies. *American University Review*, 50, 1039-1074.
- Jackie, A., & Lynn, P. (2008). Respondent incentives in a multi-mode panel survey: Cumulative effects on nonresponse and bias. *Survey Methodology*, 34, 105-117.
- Janesick, V. (2000). The choreography of qualitative research design: Minuets, improvisations, and crystallization. In N. K. Denzin, & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 379-400). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Jenness, V., & Grattet, R. (2001). *Making hate a crime: From social movement to law enforcement*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation
- Jobber, D., Sauders, J., & Mitchell, V. W. (2004). Prepaid monetary incentive effects on mail Survey response. *Journal of Business Research*, 57, 347-350.
- Johnson, J., Arumi, A., & Ott, A. (2006). *Reality check 2006: How Black and Hispanic families rate their schools*. New York: Education Insights at Public Agenda. Retrieved from <http://www.publicagenda.org/files/pdf/rcs602.pdf>
- Justice Policy Institute. (2009). The cost of confinement: Why good juvenile justice policies make good fiscal sense. Retrieved from [http://www.justicepolicy.org/image/upload/09\\_05\\_REP\\_Costof](http://www.justicepolicy.org/image/upload/09_05_REP_Costof)
- Kana'iaupuni, S. M., & Gans, M. (2005). How effective is zero tolerance? A brief review. Honolulu, HA: Kamehameha School—PASE, 1-.
- Kelley, B. R., & Beauchesne, M. A. (2002). Interventions for violence in children and adolescents. *School Nurse News*, 19(3), 36-39.
- Kinsler, J. (2005). *Racial disparities in school discipline: Racism or rational choice?* Retrieved from [http://public.econ.duke.edu/~staffwrkshop/papers/2005\\_Spring/JKinsler.pdf](http://public.econ.duke.edu/~staffwrkshop/papers/2005_Spring/JKinsler.pdf)

- Kinsler, J. (2011). Understanding the black-white school discipline gap. *Economics of Education Review*, 6(30), 1370.
- Klonsky, M. (2002). How smaller school prevent school violence. *Educational Leadership*, 59(5).
- Konter, D. A. (2002). *School violence and teachers' perception of the zero tolerance policy*. (Unpublished research paper). Stout, WI: University of Wisconsin-Stout.
- Krueger, R., & Casey, M. (2000). *Focus group: A practical guide for applied research* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Kupchik, A. (2009). Things are tough all over: Race, ethnicity, class and school discipline. *Punishment & Society*, 11(3), 291-317. doi: 10.1177/146247509334552
- Kupchik, A., & Ellis, N. (2008). School discipline and security: Fair to all students? *Youth & Society*, 39(4), 549-574. doi: 10.1177/0044118X07301956
- Ladson-Billings, G. J. (1998). Just what is critical race theory and what's it doing in a nice field like education? *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 11(1), 7-24.
- Ladson-Billings, G. J. (1999). Preparing teachers for diverse students populations: A critical race theory perspective. *Review of Research in Education*, 24, 211-247.
- Ladson-Billings, G., & Tate, IV, W. F. (1995). Toward a critical race theory of education. *Teacher's College Record*, 97(1), 48-62.
- Landy-Meyer, L., & Newman, B. M. (2004). *Journal of Family Issues*, 25, 1005-1025. doi: 10.1177/1092513X04265955
- Lather, P. (1992). Critical frames in educational research: Feminist and post-structural perspectives. *Theory into Practice*, 31(2), 87-99.
- Leinhardt, A. M. C., & Willert, H. J. (2002). Involving stakeholders in resolving school violence.

- NASSP Bulletin*, 86(631), 32-43.
- Lewis, C. W., Butler, B. R., Bonner III, F. A., & Joubert, M. (2010). African-American male discipline patterns and school district responses resulting impact on academic achievement: Implications for urban educators and policy makers. *Journal of African American Males in Education*, 1(1), 1-19.
- Lewis, L. H. (2009). *The development of effective discipline practices of a rural Georgia elementary school*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Statesboro, GA: Georgia Southern University.
- Lewis, J. L., & Sheppard, S. R. J. (2006). Culture and communication: Can landscape visualization improve forest management consultation with indigenous communities? *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 77, 291-313.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Litke, C. D. (1996). When violence come to our rural school. *Educational Leadership International*, 54(1), 77-80.
- Lofland, J. (1971). *Analyzing social settings*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Lopez, G. R. (2003). The racially neutral politics of education: A critical race theory perspective. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 39(1), 68-94.
- Losen, D. J., & Gillespie, J. (2012). Opportunities suspended: The disparate impact of disciplinary exclusion from school. The Civil Rights Project.
- Losen, D., & Skiba, R. (2010). *Suspended education: Urban middle schools in crisis*. Southern Poverty Law Center.
- Lynn, M., & Parker, L. (2006). *Critical race studies in education: Examining a decade of*

- research on U.S. school. *The Urban Review*, 38(4), 257-290. doi: 10.1007/511256-006-0035-5
- MacNealy, M. S. (1999). *Strategies for empirical research in writing*. New York, NY: Addison Wesley Longman.
- Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (2011a). *Designing qualitative research* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (2011b) *Designing qualitative research* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Marshall, M. N. (1996). Sampling for qualitative research. *Family Practice*, 13(6), 522-525.
- Mason, J. (1996). *Qualitative researching*. London: Sage.
- Mason, J. (2012). In S. E. Baker & R. Edwards (Eds.), *How many qualitative interviews is enough? Expert voices and early career reflections on sampling and cases in qualitative research* (27-28). Retrieved from [http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/2273/4/how\\_many\\_interviews.pdf](http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/2273/4/how_many_interviews.pdf)
- Mason, M. (2010). Sample size and saturation in Ph.D. studies using qualitative interviews. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 11(3). Retrieved from <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs100387>
- Matheson, J. L. (2007). The voice transcription technique: Use of voice recognition software to transcribe digital interview data in qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report*, 12(4). 547-560.
- Matsuda, M. J. (1991). Voices of America: Accent, antidiscrimination, law, and a jurisprudence for the last reconstruction. *The Yale Law Journal*, 100, 1329-1467.
- Matsuda, M. J. (1993). Public response to racist speech: Considering the victim's story. In M. J.

- Matsuda, C. R. Lawrence III, R. Delgado, & K. Williams Crenshaw (Eds.), *Words that wound: Critical race theory, assaultive speech, and the first amendment*. (pp. 17-52). San Francisco, CA: Westview Press.
- Matsuda, M. J. (1996). *Where is your body? And other essays on race, gender and the law*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Matsuda, M. J., Lawrence, C. R., Delgado, R., & Crenshaw, C. W. (1993). *Words that wound: Critical race theory, assaultive speech, and the first amendment*. San Francisco, CA: Westside Press.
- Mawson, A. R., Lapsley, P. M., Hoffman, A. M., & Guignard, J. C. (2002). Preventing lethal violence in schools: The case for entry-based weapons screening. *J. Health Polit Policy Law, 27*(2), 243-260.
- Maxwell, J. A. (1997). Designing a qualitative study. In L. Bickman, & D. J. Rog (Eds.), *Handbook of applied social research methods* (pp. 69-100). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Maxwell, J. A. (1998). Designing a qualitative study. In L. Bickman & D. J. Rog (Eds.), *Handbook of applied social research methods*, (pp. 69-100). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Maxwell, J. A. (2004). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Maykut, P., & Morehouse, R. (1994). *Beginning qualitative research: A philosophic and practical guide*. London: Falmer Press.
- McCarthy, J. D., & Hoge, D. R. (1987). The social construction of school punishment: Racial disadvantage out of universalistic process. *Social Forces, 65*, 1101-1120.

- McCord, R., Hager, J., & Mattocks, T. C. (2007). Zero tolerance: Balancing an uncertain expulsion policy. *Connexions Web*. Retrieved from <http://cnx.org/content/m1436/1.1/>
- McDonald, H. (2003). Exploring possibilities through critical race theory: Exemplary pedagogical practices for Indigenous students. *Paper prepared for NZARE/AARE Joint Conference*. Australia: James Cook University.
- McFadden, A. C., Marsh, G. E., Price, B. J., & Hwang, Y. (1992). A study of race and gender bias in the punishment of school children. *Education & Treatment of Children, 15*(2), 140-146.
- McLoughlin, C. S., & Noltemeyer, A. (2010). Research into factors contributing to discipline use and disproportionality in major urban schools. *Current Issues in Education, 13*(2), 1-21.
- McNeal, L., & Dunbar, Jr., C. (2010). In the eyes of the beholder: Urban student perceptions of zero tolerance policy. *Urban Education 45*(3), 293-311.
- Mehra, B. (2001). Research or personal quest: Dilemmas in studying my own kind. In B. M. Merchant, & A. I. Willis (Eds.), *Multiple and intersecting identities in qualitative research* (pp. 69-82). Mahwah, NH: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Mehra B. (2002). Bias in qualitative research: Voices from an online classroom. *The Qualitative Report, 7*(1). Retrieved from <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR7-1/mehra.html>
- Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Case study research in education: A qualitative approach*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Messner, S. F., McHugh, S., & Felson, R. B. (2004). Distinctive characteristics of assaults motivated by bias. *Criminology, 42*(3), 585-618.
- Metropolitan Life Survey, (1993). *Violence in America's public schools: The American teacher*. New York, NY: Louis Harris and Associates, Inc.



- Milner, H. R. (2008). Critical race theory and interest convergence as analytic tools in teacher education policies and practices. *Journal of Teacher Education, 59*(4), 332-346.
- Milner, H. R. (2013). Why are students of color (still) punished more severely and frequently than White students? *Urban Education, 48*(4), 483-489. DOI: 10. 1177/00420859 13493040.
- Miner-Romanoff, K. (2012). Interpretive and critical phenomenological crime studies: A model design. *The Qualitative Report, 17*, 1-32.
- Mohrbutter, T. L. (2011). *In-school suspension: A qualitative examination of assistant principal Perceptions*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Raleigh, NC: North Carolina State University.
- Morris, T. (2006). *Social work research methods: Four alternative paradigms*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Morrison, G. M., & D'Incau, B. (1997). The web of zero-tolerance: Characteristics of students who are recommended for expulsion from school. *Education and Treatment of Children, 20*(3), 316-335.
- Morse, J. (1995). The significance of saturation. *Qualitative Health Research, 5*, 147-149.
- Morse, J., & Richards, L. *README first for a user's guide to qualitative methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Morse, J. M., Barrett, M., Mayan, M., Olsosn, K., & Spiers, J. (2002). Verification strategies for establishing reliability and validity in qualitative research. *International Institute for Qualitative Methodology, 1*(2), 14-22.
- Moustakas, C. (1990). *Heuristic research: Design, methodology, and applications*. Newbury Park, NY: Sage.

- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Myers, M. D. (2009). *Qualitative research in business and management*. London: Sage.
- Napoles-Springer, A. M., & Stewart, A. L. (2006). Overview of qualitative methods in research with diverse populations: Making research reflect the population. *Med Care*, 44(3), S5-S9. Retrieved from <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/17060835>
- National Institute of Education. (1977). *Violent schools—safe schools*. Washington, DC: Department of Health, Education and Welfare.
- New Jersey v. T.L.O.*, 469 U.S. 325, 340 (1985).
- Nichols, J. D. (2004). Preventing and producing violence: A critical analysis of responses to school violence. *Harvard Educational Review*, 65, 189-212.
- Noltemeyer, A., & Mcloughlin, C. S. (2010a). Changes in exclusionary disciplines rates and disciplinary disproportionality over time. *International Journal of Special Education*, 25(1), 59-70.
- Noltemeyer, A., & Mcloughlin, C. S. (2010b). Patterns of exclusionary discipline by school typology, ethnicity, and their interaction. *Urban Education Journal*, 7(1), 27-39.
- North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (2009). North Carolina Consolidated Data Report 2008-2009. Raleigh, NC: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction
- North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (2010). North Carolina Consolidated Data Report, 2009-2010. Raleigh, NC: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction.
- North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (2011). North Carolina Consolidated Data Report, 2010-2011. Raleigh, NC: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction.
- Office for Civil Rights. (1993). *1990 elementary and secondary school civil rights survey: National summaries*. Washington, DC: DBS Corporation.

- Parker, L. (1998). Race is...race ain't: An exploration of the utility of critical race theory in qualitative research in education. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 11(1), 7-24.
- Parker, L., & Lynn, M. (2002). What's race got to do with it? Critical race theory's conflicts with and connections to qualitative research methodology and epistemology. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 8(1), 7-22.
- Partington, G. (1998). Power, Discipline and Minority Students in High School. *Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association*.
- Partington, G. (2001). Student suspension: The influence on students and their parents. *Australian Journal of Education*, 45(3), 323-340. Retrieved from <http://find.galegroup.com/itx/infomark>
- Patton, M. Q. (1982). *Practical evaluations*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Payne, A., Welch, K. (2010). Modeling the effects of racial threat on punitive and restorative school discipline practices. *Criminology*, 48(4), 1019-1062.
- Perakyla, A., & Ruusuvuori, J. (2011). Analyzing talk and text. In N. K. Denzin, & Y. S. Norman (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). (pp. 529-524). London: Sage.
- Philip, L. J. (1998). Combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to social research in human geography—an impossible mixture? *Environment and Planning*, 30(2), 261-276.
- Pietrzak, D, Peterson, G. J., & Speaker, K. M. (1998). Perceptions of violence by elementary and middle school personnel. *Professional School Counseling*, 1(4), 23-29.
- Pipho, C. (1998). Living with zero tolerance policies. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 80, 372-378.

- Platt, J. (1992). Case study in American methodological thought. *Current Sociology*, 40(1), 17-48.
- Podaskoff, P., MacKenzie, S., Lee, L., & Podaskoff, N. (2003). Common method biases in behavior research: A critical review of the literature and recommended remedies. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 88(5), 879-903. doi: 10.1037/0021-9010.88.5.879
- Popay, J., Rogers, A., & Williams, G. (1998). Rationale and standards for the systematic review of qualitative literature in health services research. *Qualitative Health Research*, 8(3), 341-351.
- Porter, S. (1993) Nursing research conventions: Objectivity or obfuscation? *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 18,137-143.
- Preece, J., Rogers, Y., & Sharp, S. (2002). *Interactive design: Beyond human-computer interaction*. New York, NY: Wiley.
- Price, J. H., & Everett, S. A. (1997). Teachers' perceptions of violence in the public schools: The Met Life Survey. *American Journal of Health Behavior*, 21(3), 178-186.
- Rabiee, F. (2004). Focus-group interview and data analysis. *Proceeding of the Nutrition Society*, 63, 655-660.
- Raffaele-Mendez, L. M., Knoff, H. M., & Ferron, J. F. (2002). School demographic variables and out-of-school suspension rates: A quantitative and qualitative analysis of a large, ethnically diverse school district. *Psychology in the Schools*, 39, 259-277.
- Ragin, C. C. (2012). In S. E. Baker & R. Edwards (Eds.), *How many qualitative interviews is enough? Expert voices and early career reflections on sampling and cases in qualitative research* (27-28). Retrieved from [http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/2273/4/how\\_many\\_interviews.pdf](http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/2273/4/how_many_interviews.pdf)

- Rausch, M. K., & Skiba, R. J. (2006). Exclusion is not the only alternative: The children left behind project. In A. H. Reyes. (Ed.), *Discipline, achievement, and race*. (pp. 105-126). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group.
- Reason, P., & Bradbury, H. (2006). *The SAGE handbook of action research: Participative inquiry and practice*. London: Sage.
- Reeves, T. C., & Hedberg, J. G. (2003). *Interactive learning systems evaluation*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Educational Technology Publications.
- Reschly, D. J. (1997). Disproportionate minority representation in general and special education: Patterns, issues, and alternatives. Des Moines, IA: Mountain Plains Regional Resource Center, Drake University.
- Reynolds, R. (2010). "They think you're lazy," and other messages Black parents send their Black sons: An exploration of critical race theory in the examination of educational outcomes for Black males. *Journal of African-American Males in Education*, 1(2), 144-163.
- Richards, J. (2004). Zero room for zero tolerance policies: Rethinking federal funding for zero tolerance policies. *University of Dayton Law Review*, 30, 91-117.
- Rois-Harrist, L. (2011). *The perception of principals and assistant principals on their role in parental involvement*. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from <http://udini.proquest.com/view/the-perceptions-of-principals-and-pqid:2412914701/>
- Robbins, C. G. (2005). Zero tolerance and Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Houston, TX: University of Texas. The politics of racial injustice. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 74(1), 2-17.
- Robottom, I., & Hart, P. (1993). *Research in environmental education: Engaging the debate*.

- Geelong, Victoria: Deakin University Press.
- Rocha, R., & Hawes, D. (2009). Racial diversity, representative bureaucracy, and equity in multicultural districts. *Social Science Quarterly, 90*(2), 326-344.
- Roe, K. M., Minkler, M., & Saunders, F. F. (1995). Combining research, advocacy, and education: The methods of the grandparent caregiver study. *Health Education & Behavior, 22*(4), 458-475.
- Rossman, G. B., & Rallis, S. F. (2003). *Learning in the field: An introduction to qualitative research*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Ruck, M. D., & Wortley, S. (2002). Racial and ethnic minority high school students' perceptions of perceptions of school disciplinary practices: A look at some Canadian findings. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 31*(3), 185-195.
- Savenye, W. C., & Robinson, R. S. (2001). Qualitative research issues and methods: An introduction for educational technologists. *The Handbook of Research for Educational Communities and Technology*, 1045-1071.
- Scheurich, J. J., & Young, M. D. (1997). Coloring epistemologies: Are our research epistemologies racially biased? *Educational Researcher, 26*(4), 4-16.
- Schoor, L. B. (1998). *Within our reach, breaking the cycle of disadvantage*. New York, NY: Anchor Press, Doubleday.
- Shanker, A. (1995). Classrooms held hostage: The disruption of the many by the few. *The American Educator, 19*(1), 8-13, 47-48.
- Shanker, A. (1997). Zero tolerance. *Congressional Quarterly*. Retrieved from <http://www.aft.org>
- Shenton, A. K. (2004). Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. *Education for Information, 22*, 63-72.

- Shneiderman, B., & Plaisant, C. (2005). Strategies for evaluating information visualization tools: Multi-dimensional in-depth long-term case studies. *Advanced Visual Interfaces Conference 2006 Beliv Workshop*. doi: 10.1145/1168149.1168158
- Singer, E., Groves, R. M., & Corning, A. (1999). Differential incentives: Beliefs about practices, perceptions of equity, and effects on survey participation. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 63, 251-260.
- Skiba, R. J. (2000). *Zero tolerance, zero evidence: An analysis of school disciplinary practice*. Bloomington: IN: Education Policy Center.
- Skiba, R. J., Eckes, S. E., & Brown, K. (2009/10). African-American disproportionality in school discipline: The divide between best evidence and legal remedy. *New York Law School Review*, 54, 1071-1112.
- Skiba, R. J., Horner, R. H., Chung, C.-G., Rausch, M. K., May, S. L., & Tobin, T. (2011). Race is not neutral: A national investigation of African-American and Latino disproportionality in school discipline. *School Psychology Review*, 40(1), 85-107.
- Skiba, R. J., & Knesting, K. (2001). Zero tolerance, zero evidence: An analysis of school discipline practice. *New Directions for Youth Development*, 42, 28.
- Skiba, R. J., Michael, R. S., Nardo, A. C., & Peterson, R. (2000). The color of discipline: Sources of racial and gender disproportionality in school punishment. Retrieved from <http://www.indiana.edu/~iepc/srs/.pdf>
- Skiba, R. J., Michael, R. S., & Peterson, R. (2002). The color of discipline: Sources of racial and gender disproportionality in school punishment. *The Urban Review*, 34(4), 317-341.
- Skiba, R. J., & Peterson, R. L. (1999). The dark side of zero tolerance: Can punishment lead to safe schools? *Phi Beta Kappan*, 80, 372-82.

- Skiba, R. J., Peterson, R. L., & Williams, T. (1997). Office referrals and suspension: Disciplinary intervention in middle schools. *Education and Treatment of Children, 20*(3), 295-315.
- Skiba, R. J., & Rausch, M. K. (2006). Zero tolerance, suspension and expulsion: Questions of equity and effectiveness. In C. M. Everton and C. S. Weinstein (Eds.), *Handbook for classroom management: Research practice and contemporary issues*, 1063-1089. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Skiba, R. J., & Rausch, M. K. (2008). *Using data to promote equity*. Presented at the Indiana Department of Education Disproportionality Solutions Summit. Indianapolis, IN.
- Skiba, R. J., & Sprague, J. (2008). Safety without suspension. *Educational Leadership, 66*(1), 38.
- Skiba, R. J., Trachok, M., Chung, C-G., Baker, T., & Hughes, R. (2012). Parsing disciplinary disproportionality: Contributions of behavior, student and school characteristics to suspension and expulsion. *Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association*, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.
- Smith, J. A., Flower, P., & Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, Method and Research*. London: Sage.
- Smith, M. L. & Shepherd, L. A. (1988). Kindergarten readiness and retention: A qualitative study of teachers' beliefs and practices. *American Educational Research Journal, 25*(3), 307-333.
- Solorzano, D. G. (1997). Images and words that wound: Critical race theory, racial stereotyping, and teacher education. *Teacher Education Quarterly, 24*(3), 5-19.
- Solorzano, D. G. (1998). Critical race theory, race and gender microaggressions, and the experience of Chicana and Chicano scholars. *International Journal of Qualitative*



- Studies in Education*, 11(1), 121-136.
- Solorzano, D. Ceja, M., & Yosso, T. (2000). Critical race theory, racial microaggressions, and campus racial climate: The experiences of African-American College students. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 69(1/2), 60-73.
- Solorzano, D. G., & Delgado, Bernal, D. (2001). Examining transformational resistance through A critical race and LitCrit theory framework: Chicana and Chicano students in an urban context. *Urban Education*, 36(3), 308-346.
- Solorzano, D. G., & Yosso, T. J. (2001a). Critical race and LatCrit theory and method: Counter-storytelling Chicana and Chicano graduate school experiences. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 14(4), 471-495. doi: 10.1080/09518390110063365
- Solorzano, D. G., & Yosso, T. J. (2001b). From racial stereotyping and deficit discourse toward a critical race theory in teacher education. *Multicultural Education*, 9(1), 2-8.
- Solorzano, D. G., & Yosso, T. J. (2002b). Critical race methodology: Counter-storytelling as an analytical framework for education research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 8(1), 23-44.
- South Dakota v. Dole*. (1986). 483 U.S. 203.
- Stake, R. E. (1994). Case Studies. In N. K. Denzin, & Y. S. Norman (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 236-247). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Stake, R. E. (2000). Case studies. In N. K. Denzin, & Y. S. Norman (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative research* (pp. 435-453). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Stake, R. E. (2005). Qualitative case studies. In N. K. Denzin, & Y. S. Norman (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed., pp. 443-466). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Stake, R. E. (2008). Qualitative case studies. In N. K. Denzin, & Y. S. Norman (Eds.), *The strategies of qualitative inquire* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 119-150). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Strawhacker, M. T. (2002). School violence: An overview. *Journal of School Nurses, 18*(2), 68-72.
- Strauss, A. L., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Newbury Park, NY: Sage.
- Strauss, A. L., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Strong, K., & Cornell, D. (2008). Student threat assessment in Memphis city schools: A descriptive report. *Behavioral Disorders, 34*(1), 42-54.
- Sullivan, E., & Keeney, E. (2008). Teachers talk: School culture, safety and human rights. New York, NY: National Economic and Social Rights Initiative (NESRI) and Teachers Unite.
- Sundius, J., & Farneth, M. (2008, January). Putting kids out of school: What's causing high suspension rates and why they are dangerous to students, schools, and communities. Retrieved from [http://acy.org.upimages/051\\_suspension.pdf](http://acy.org.upimages/051_suspension.pdf)
- Tate IV, W. (1997). Critical race theory and education: History, theory and implications. In Apple, M. W. (Ed.), *Review of research in education*. Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association.
- Tatum, B. D. (1997). *Why are all the Black kids sitting together in the cafeteria?" And other conversations about race*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Teddle, C., & Fen, Y. (2007). Mixed methods sampling: A typology with examples. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research, 1*(1), 77-100. doi: 10.1177/2345678906292430

ten Have, P. In S. E. Baker & R. Edwards (Eds.), *How many qualitative interviews is enough?*

*Expert voices and early career reflections on sampling and cases*

*in qualitative research* (27-28). Retrieved from

[http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/2273/4/how\\_many\\_interviews.pdf](http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/2273/4/how_many_interviews.pdf)

Teranishi, R. (2002). Asian Pacific Americans and critical race theory: An examination of school racial climate. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 35(2), 144-154.

*The American Heritage Dictionary*. (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). (1994). Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Theriot, M. T., & Dupper, D. R. (2010). Student discipline problems and the transition from elementary to middle school. *Education and Urban Society*, 42(2), 205-222.

Thomas, L., MacMillian, J., McColl, E., Hale, C., & Bond, S. (1995). Comparison of focus group and Personal Communication methodology in examining patient satisfaction with Nursing care. *Social Science in Health*, 1, 206-219.

Tierney, W. (1993). *Building communities of difference: Higher education in the twenty-first century*. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.

Tillman, L. C. (2002). Culturally sensitive research approach: An African-American perspective. *Educational Researcher*, 31(9), 3-12.

Tongco, D. C. (2007). Purposive sampling as a tool for informant selection. *Ethnobotany Research & Applications*, 5, 147-158.

*Tyler Chase Harper v. Poway Unified School District, et al.*, 345 F. Supp. 2d 1096; 2004 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 25209.

Tyson, C. (1998). Coloring epistemologies: A response. *Educational Researcher*, 27(9), 21-22.

United States Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, (1998). Study No. 2814.

- United States Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, (2012). Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/data.html>
- United States Department of Health and Human Services. (2010). Retrieved from <http://www.childwelfare.gov>
- Vavrus, F., & Cole, K. (2002). "I didn't do nothing": The discursive construction of school Suspension. *The Urban Review*, 34, 87-111. doi: 10.1023/A: 1015375215801
- Vernonia Schools District v. Acton*, 515 U.S. 646, 657 (1995).
- Van Maanen, J. (1998). *Tales of the field: On writing ethnography*. Chicago, IL: University Press.
- Villenas, S., & Deyhle, D. (1999). Critical race theory and ethnographies challenging the stereotypes: Latino families, schooling, resilience, and resistance. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 29(4), 413-445.
- Wald, J., & Kurlaender, M. (2003). Connected in Seattle: An exploratory study of student Perceptions of discipline and attachments to teachers. *New Directions for Youth Development*, 99, 35-54.
- Waldrop, D. P., & Weber, J. A. (2005). From grandparent to caregiver: The stress and satisfaction of raising grandchildren. In F. J. Turner (Ed.), *Social work diagnosis in Contemporary practice*, 184-189. USA: Oxford University Press.
- Wallace, J. M., Jr., Goodkind, S., Wallace, C., & Bachman, J. G. (2008). Racial, ethnic, and Gender differences in school discipline among U.S. high school students: 1991-2005. *Negro Educational Review*, 59, 47-62.
- Warren, C. A. B. (2002). Qualitative interviewing. In J. F. Gubrum., & J. A. Holstein (Eds.), *Handbook of interview research: Context and method*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Wayne, I., & Rubel, R. (1982). Student fear in secondary schools. *The Urban Review*, 14(3), 197-237.
- Williams, P. J. (1995). *The alchemy of race and rights: Diary of a law professor*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Wu, S. C., Pink, W. T., Crain, R. L., & Moles, O. (1982). Student suspension: A critical reappraisal. *The Urban Review*, 1(4), 245-303.
- Wyatt, R. W. (2010). *Voices of assistant principals on the importance of student discipline to effective schools*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Houston, TX: University of Houston.
- Yammarino, F. J., Skinner, S. J., & Childers, T. L. Understanding mail survey response behavior:  
A meta-analysis. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 55, 613-639.
- Yosso, T. J. (2006). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, 8(1) 69-91.

APPENDICES

*Appendix A: School District Permission Letter*

[REDACTED]

November 13, 2012


Institutional Review Board  
North Carolina A&T State University  
1601 East Market Street  
Greensboro, NC 27411

To Whom It May Concern:

Bertha K. Dixon, a student in the Leadership Studies doctoral program, has the permission of [REDACTED] to recruit subjects and/or conduct research for her study, **Examining Stakeholders' Perceptions Regarding the Relationship between Zero Tolerance and Disproportionate Exclusions of African American Male Students**, through this agency. The details of this study have been explained to us, and we support this research.

Please contact me for any further questions [REDACTED].

Sincerely,

  
[REDACTED]

Superintendent

RK/mcr

[REDACTED]

*Appendix B: IRB Approval Form*

NC A&T DIVISION OF RESEARCH AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT  
 1601 East Market Street  
 Greensboro, NC 27411  
 (336) 334-7314  
 Web site: <http://www.ncat.edu/~divofres/compliance/irb/index.php>  
 Federalwide Assurance (FWA) #00000013

**To:** Bertha Dixon

**From:** Behavioral IRB

Authorized signature on behalf of IRB

**Approval Date:** 1/15/2013

**Expiration Date of Approval:** 1/14/2014

**RE:** Notice of IRB Approval by Expedited Review (under 45 CFR 46.110)

**Submission Type:** Initial

**Expedited Category:** 7. Surveys/interviews/focus groups, 6. Voice/image research recordings

**Study #:** 12-0071

**Study Title:** Examining Stakeholders' Perceptions Regarding the Relationship between Zero Tolerance and the Disproportionate Exclusions of African American Male Students

This submission has been approved by the above IRB for the period indicated. It has been determined that the risk involved in this research is no more than minimal.

**Study Description:**

The purpose of this qualitative instrumental case study (Creswell, 2012) is to document the perceptions of key stakeholders regarding the disproportionate exclusions of African American male students under zero tolerance school discipline policies.

**Regulatory and other findings:**

This research, which involves children, meets criteria at 45 CFR 46.404 (research involving no greater than minimal risk). Permission of one parent or guardian is sufficient.

**Investigator's Responsibilities:**

Federal regulations require that all research be reviewed at least annually. It is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to submit for renewal and obtain approval before the expiration date. You may not continue any research activity beyond the expiration date without IRB approval. Failure to receive approval for continuation before the expiration date will result in automatic termination of the approval for this study on the expiration date.

When applicable, enclosed are stamped copies of approved consent documents and other recruitment materials. You must copy the stamped consent forms for use with subjects unless you have approval to do otherwise.

You are required to obtain IRB approval for any changes to any aspect of this study before they can be implemented. (Use the modification form at [ohre.unc.edu/forms](http://ohre.unc.edu/forms).) Should any adverse event or unanticipated problem involving risks to subjects or others occur it must be reported immediately to the IRB using the adverse event form at the same web site. **If you are conducting research in a location other than North Carolina A&T State University, such as an agency, organization, or school, you must provide written approval from an authorized representative (for example, the superintendent's office for research conducted in a public school) prior to conducting your research.**

This study was reviewed in accordance with federal regulations governing human subjects research, including those found at 45 CFR 46 (Common Rule), 45 CFR 164 (HIPAA), 21 CFR 50 & 56 (FDA), and 40 CFR 26 (EPA), where applicable.

CC: Ceola Ross Baber, Leadership Studies



*Appendix C : Informed Consent Form for Administrators*

**NORTH CAROLINA AGRICULTURAL AND TECHNICAL STATE UNIVERSITY**

**INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE  
IN A RESEARCH PROJECT**

**Study Title: Examining Stakeholders' Perceptions of the Disproportionate Exclusions of African American Male Students**

**Principal Investigator: Bertha K. Dixon, Ph.D. Student**

**Faculty Advisor: Ceola Ross Baber, Ph.D.**

**Purpose of the Research**

I am inviting you to voluntarily participate in this study to help me understand what you think about the disproportionate rate of suspensions and expulsions of African American males under the zero tolerance discipline policy in your school. I hope to be able to give these groups an opportunity for their voices to be heard about their perceptions for this disproportionality.

You have been asked to participate because you have suspended or expelled or recommended at least one student for suspension or expulsion under zero tolerance discipline policy.

**Procedures**

The study will involve your participation in two (2) one-on-one interviews with the researcher and in a focus group. A focus group is a group discussion with three to four administrators. Prior to the first one-on-one interview, you will be asked to complete a demographic form. All interviews will be conducted by me and will be audio-taped so that I will be able to study and review what the group discussed. The audio tapes will be transcribed into written transcripts at a later date for the purpose of analysis. The one-on-one interviews will take place at your school and will involve two sessions of approximately 60 minutes. The focus group will also take place at your school and will last approximately one and one-half to two hours.

**Risks**

I believe there are no risks associated with your participation in this research study. Potential discomforts may include emotional feelings when asked questions during the interviews about your personal experiences related to suspensions or expulsions under zero tolerance discipline policies.

**Benefits**

There are no direct benefits to you as a participant. One anticipated benefit of participation in this research study will be to give voice to the various groups related to their perceptions about the reasons for the disproportionate rate of suspensions and expulsions of African American male students under zero tolerance discipline policies. Another benefit will be to discuss feelings and concerns related to your experiences with zero tolerance discipline policies. Other African American male students may benefit from the information gathered in this study.

### **Confidentiality**

The information gathered during this study will remain confidential. Your participation in this study will be confidential. No personally identifiable information will be collected from you at any point in this study. There will not be any identifying information on the tapes, and at no time will participants' or school's name be identifiable. Should you disclose any information about child abuse or neglect, the researcher must report this according to state laws. The transcripts of all audio tapes will be coded so that your name does not appear. The data will be kept in a locked file cabinet in my home and will be destroyed upon completion of the researcher's doctoral dissertation. All participants in the focus group will be asked to keep what is said during the focus group discussion between the participants only. **HOWEVER, COMPLETE CONFIDENTIALITY CANNOT BE GUARANTEED.** You have the right to review the field notes and transcripts of the audio tapes made as part of the study to determine whether they should be edited or erased in part or in whole.

### **Participation/Withdrawal**

You should recognize that your participation in this study is voluntary and you may refuse to participate or stop participating at any time without penalty. There will be no hard feelings if you do not want to participate or decide to stop participating after you start.

### **Contact**

If you have any study-related concerns or any questions about your rights as a research study participant, you may contact the Office of Research Compliance and Ethics at North Carolina A&T State University at (336) 334-7995.

You may also contact Dr. Ceola Ross-Baber, my dissertation chairperson, at (336) 285-4363 or [crbabber@ncat.edu](mailto:crbabber@ncat.edu). You may also contact Bertha K. Dixon, the Principal Investigator, at (336) 375-6636 or [beekdee@bellsouth.net](mailto:beekdee@bellsouth.net).

### **Statement of Consent**

I have read the above information and have received answers to all my questions. I am at least 18 years old and voluntarily consent to take part in this research study and to have this interview audio recorded.

**I understand that by signing this form I am agreeing to take part in this research. I also understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form for my records.**

Participant's Name (Printed): \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Statement of Principal Investigator**

By signing below, I indicate that the participant has read and, to the best of my knowledge, understands the details contained in this document.

Principal Investigator Printed: \_\_\_\_\_

Principal Investigator Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*Appendix D: Informed Consent Form for Teachers***NORTHCAROLINA AGRICULTURAL AND TECHNICAL STATE UNIVERSITY****INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE  
IN A RESEARCH PROJECT**

Study Title: **Examining Stakeholders' Perceptions of the Disproportionate Exclusions of African American Male Students**

Principal Investigator: **Bertha K. Dixon, Ph.D. Student**

Faculty Advisor: **Ceola Ross Baber, Ph.D.**

**Purpose of the Research**

I am inviting you to voluntarily participate in this study to help me understand what you think about the disproportionate rate of suspensions and expulsions of African American males under the zero tolerance discipline policy in your school. I hope to be able to give these groups an opportunity for their voices to be heard about their perceptions for this disproportionality.

You have been asked to participate because you have recommended at least one student for suspension or expulsion under zero tolerance discipline policy.

**Procedures**

The study will involve your participation in two (2) one-on-one interviews with the researcher and in a focus group. A focus group is a group discussion with three to eight other teachers. Prior to the first one-on-one interview, you will be asked to complete a demographic form. All interviews will be conducted by me and will be audio-taped so that I will be able to study and review what the group discussed. The audio tapes will be transcribed into written transcripts at a later date for the purpose of analysis. The one-on-one interviews will take place at your school and will involve two sessions of approximately 60 minutes. The focus group will also take place at your school and will last approximately one and one-half to two hours.

**Risks**

I believe there are no risks associated with your participation in this research study. Potential discomforts may include emotional feelings when asked questions during the interviews about your personal experiences related to suspensions or expulsions under zero tolerance discipline policies.

**Benefits**

There are no direct benefits to you as a participant. One anticipated benefit of participation in this research study will be to give voice to the various groups related to their perceptions about the reasons for the disproportionate rate of suspensions and expulsions of African American male students under zero tolerance discipline policies. Another benefit will be to discuss feelings and concerns related to your experiences with zero tolerance discipline policies. Other African American male students may benefit from the information gathered in this study.

### **Confidentiality**

The information gathered during this study will remain confidential. Your participation in this study will be confidential. No personally identifiable information will be collected from you at any point in this study. There will not be any identifying information on the tapes, and at no time will participants' or school's name be identifiable. Should you disclose any information about child abuse or neglect, the researcher must report this according to state laws. The transcripts of all audio tapes will be coded so that your name does not appear. The data will be kept in a locked file cabinet in my home and will be destroyed upon completion of the researcher's doctoral dissertation. All participants in the focus group will be asked to keep what is said during the focus group discussion between the participants only. **HOWEVER, COMPLETE CONFIDENTIALITY CANNOT BE GUARANTEED.** You have the right to review the field notes and transcripts of the audio tapes made as part of the study to determine whether they should be edited or erased in part or in whole.

### **Participation/Withdrawal**

You should recognize that your participation in this study is voluntary and you may refuse to participate or stop participating at any time without penalty. There will be no hard feelings if you do not want to participate or decide to stop participating after you start.

### **Contact**

If you have any study-related concerns or any questions about your rights as a research study participant, you may contact the Office of Research Compliance and Ethics at North Carolina A&T State University at (336) 334-7995.

You may also contact Dr. Ceola Ross-Baber, my dissertation chairperson, at (336) 285-4363 or [crbabber@ncat.edu](mailto:crbabber@ncat.edu). You may also contact Bertha K. Dixon, the Principal Investigator, at (336) 375-6636 or [beekdee@bellsouth.net](mailto:beekdee@bellsouth.net).

### **Statement of Consent**

I have read the above information and have received answers to all my questions. I am at least 18 years old and voluntarily consent to take part in this research study and to have this interview audio recorded.

**I understand that by signing this form I am agreeing to take part in this research. I also understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form for my records.**

Participant's Name (Printed): \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Statement of Minor Consent (if applicable)**

I have read the above information and have received answers to all my questions. My child/ward is under 18 years old and I will voluntarily allow consent for my child/ward to take part in this research study and to have his/her interview audio recorded.

Participant's Name (Printed): \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Statement of Principal Investigator**

By signing below, I indicate that the participant has read and, to the best of my knowledge, understands the details contained in this document.

Principal Investigator's Name (Printed): \_\_\_\_\_

Principal Investigator's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*Appendix E: Informed Consent Form for Students Over 16***NORTH CAROLINA AGRICULTURAL AND TECHNICAL STATE UNIVERSITY****INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE  
IN A RESEARCH PROJECT**

Study Title: **Examining Stakeholders' Perceptions of the Disproportionate Exclusions of African American Male Students**

Principal Investigator: **Bertha K. Dixon, Ph.D. Student**

Faculty Advisor: **Ceola Ross Baber, Ph.D.**

**Purpose of the Research**

I am inviting you to voluntarily participate in this study to help me understand what you think about the disproportionate rate of suspensions and expulsions of African American males under the zero tolerance discipline policy in your school. I hope to be able to give these groups an opportunity for their voices to be heard about their perceptions for this disproportionality.

You have been asked to participate because you have received at least one suspension or expulsion under zero tolerance discipline policy.

**Procedures**

The study will involve your participation in two (2) one-on-one interviews with the researcher and in a focus group. A focus group is a group discussion with three to eight other African American male students. Prior to the first one-on-one interview, you will be asked to complete a demographic form. All interviews will be conducted by me and will be audio-taped so that I will be able to study and review what the group discussed. The one-on-one interviews will take place at your school and will involve two sessions of approximately 60 minutes. The focus group will also take place at your school and will last approximately one and one-half to two hours.

**Risks**

I believe there are no risks associated with your participation in this research study. Potential discomforts may include emotional feelings when asked questions during the interviews about your personal experiences related to suspensions or expulsions under zero tolerance discipline policies.

**Benefits**

There are no direct benefits to you as a participant. One anticipated benefit of participation in this research study will be to give voice to the various groups related to their perceptions about the reasons for the disproportionate rate of suspensions and expulsions of African American male students under zero tolerance discipline policies. Another benefit will be to discuss feelings and concerns related to your experiences with zero tolerance discipline policies. Other African American male students may benefit from the information gathered in this study.

### **Confidentiality**

The information gathered during this study will remain confidential. Your participation in this study will be confidential. No personally identifiable information will be collected from you at any point in this study. There will not be any identifying information on the tapes, and at no time will participants' or school's name be identifiable. Should you disclose any information about child abuse or neglect, the researcher must report this according to state laws. The transcripts of all audio tapes will be coded so that your name does not appear. The data will be kept in a locked file cabinet in my home and will be destroyed upon completion of the researcher's doctoral dissertation. All participants in the focus group will be asked to keep what is said during the focus group discussion between the participants only. **HOWEVER, COMPLETE CONFIDENTIALITY CANNOT BE GUARANTEED.** You have the right to review the field notes and transcripts of the audio tapes made as part of the study to determine whether they should be edited or erased in part or in whole.

### **Participation/Withdrawal**

You should recognize that your participation in this study is voluntary and you may refuse to participate or stop participating at any time without penalty. There will be no hard feelings if you do not want to participate or decide to stop participating after you start.

### **Contact**

If you have any study-related concerns or any questions about your rights as a research study participant, you may contact the Office of Research Compliance and Ethics at North Carolina A&T State University at (336) 334-7995.

You may also contact Dr. Ceola Ross-Baber, my dissertation chairperson, at (336) 285-4363 or [crbabber@ncat.edu](mailto:crbabber@ncat.edu). You may also contact Bertha K. Dixon, the Principal Investigator, at (336) 375-6636 or [beekdee@bellsouth.net](mailto:beekdee@bellsouth.net).

### **Statement of Consent**

I have read the above information and have received answers to all my questions. I am at least 18 years old and voluntarily consent to take part in this research study and to have this interview audio recorded.

**I understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form for my records.**

Participant's Name (Printed): \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Statement of Minor's Assent**

My parent/guardian is aware of this study and has given permission for me to participate in this research.

I have read the above information and have received answers to all my questions.



Signing this document will indicate that you have been informed and give your assent to participate in this research study and your permission to have your interview audio recorded.

Participant's Name (Printed): \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Statement of Principal Investigator**

By signing below, I indicate that the participant has read and, to the best of my knowledge, understands the details contained in this document.

Principal Investigator's Name (Printed): \_\_\_\_\_

Principal Investigator's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_



*Appendix F: Informed Assent form from Parents/Caregivers for Students Under 16*

**NORTH CAROLINA AGRICULTURAL AND TECHNICAL STATE UNIVERSITY**

**INFORMED CONENT FROM A PARENT/CAREGIVER FOR A CHILDTO  
PARTICIPATE  
IN A RESEARCH PROJECT**

Study Title: **Examining Stakeholders' Perceptions of the Disproportionate Exclusions of African American Male Students**

Principal Investigator: **Bertha K. Dixon, Ph.D. Student**

Faculty Advisor: **Ceola Ross Baber, Ph.D.**

Dear Parent/Caregiver:

You are being asked to allow your child/ward to participate in a research study conducted by Bertha K. Dixon from the Leadership Studies Doctoral Program at North Carolina A&T State University. Dr. Ceola Ross Baber is my Chair Person. Before you give your permission for your child to participate, it is important that you read the following information and ask as many questions as necessary to be sure you understand what your child will be asked to do.

**Purpose of the Research**

I am inviting your child/ward to voluntarily participate in this study to help me understand what he thinks about the disproportionate rate of suspensions and expulsions of African American males under the zero tolerance discipline policy in his school. I hope to be able to give these groups an opportunity for their voices to be heard about their perceptions for this disproportionality.

He has been asked to participate because he has received at least suspension or expulsion under zero tolerance discipline policy.

**Procedures**

The study will involve his participation in two (2) one-on-one interviews with the researcher and in a focus group. A focus group is a group discussion with three to eight other African American male students. Prior to the first one-on-one interview, he will be asked to complete a demographic form. All interviews will be conducted by me and will be audio-taped so that I will be able to study and review what the group discussed. The audio tapes will be transcribed into written transcripts at a later date for the purpose of analysis. The one-on-one interviews will take place at the school and will involve two sessions of approximately 60 minutes. The focus group will also take place at the school and will last approximately one and one-half to two hours.

**Risks**

I believe there are no risks associated with your child/ward's participation in this research study. Potential discomforts may include emotional feelings when asked questions during the

interviews about his personal experiences related to suspensions or expulsions under zero tolerance discipline policies.

### **Benefits**

There are no direct benefits to your child/ward as a participant. One anticipated benefit of participation in this research study will be to give voice to the various groups related to their perceptions about the reasons for the disproportionate rate of suspensions and expulsions of African American male students under zero tolerance discipline policies. Another benefit will be to discuss feelings and concerns related to his experiences with zero tolerance discipline policies. Other African American male students may benefit from the information gathered in this study.

### **Confidentiality**

The information gathered during this study will remain confidential. Your child/ward's participation in this study will be confidential. No personally identifiable information will be collected from him at any point in this study. There will not be any identifying information on the tapes, and at no time will your child/ward's or school's name be identifiable. Should your child/ward disclose any information about child abuse or neglect, the researcher must report this according to state laws. The transcripts of all audio tapes will be coded so that your child/ward's name does not appear. The data will be kept in a locked file cabinet in my home and will be destroyed upon completion of the researcher's doctoral dissertation. All participants in the focus group will be asked to keep what is said during the focus group discussion between the participants only. **HOWEVER, COMPLETE CONFIDENTIALITY CANNOT BE GUARANTEED.** Your child/ward has the right to review the field notes and transcripts of the audio tapes made as part of the study to determine whether they should be edited or erased in part or in whole.

### **Participation/Withdrawal**

You should recognize that your child/ward's participation in this study is voluntary and he may refuse to participate or stop participating at any time without penalty. There will be no hard feelings if he does not want to participate or decide to stop participating after he starts.

### **Contact**

If you have any study-related concerns or any questions about your rights as a research study participant, you may contact the Office of Research Compliance and Ethics at North Carolina A&T State University at (336) 334-7995.

You may also contact Dr. Ceola Ross-Baber, my dissertation chairperson, at (336) 285-4363 or [crbabar@ncat.edu](mailto:crbabar@ncat.edu). [You may also contact Bertha K. Dixon, the Principal Investigator, at \(336\) 375-6636 or \[beekdee@bellsouth.net\]\(mailto:beekdee@bellsouth.net\).](#)

### **Statement of Consent**

I have read the above information and have received answers to all my questions. My child/ward is under 18 years old and I voluntarily allow consent for my child/ward to take part in this research study and to have his interview audio recorded.

**I understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form for my records.**

Child's Name (Printed): \_\_\_\_\_

Parent's Name (Printed): \_\_\_\_\_

Parent's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Statement of Principal Investigator**

By signing below, I indicate that the participant has read and, to the best of my knowledge, understands the details contained in this document.

Principal Investigator's Name (Printed): \_\_\_\_\_

Principal Investigator's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*Appendix G: Informed Consent form for Parents/Caregivers*

**NORTH CAROLINA AGRICULTURAL AND TECHNICAL STATE UNIVERSITY  
INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE  
IN A RESEARCH PROJECT**

Study Title: **Examining Stakeholders' Perceptions of the Disproportionate Exclusions of African American Male Students**

Principal Investigator: **Bertha K. Dixon, Ph.D. Student**

Faculty Advisor: **Ceola Ross Baber, Ph.D.**

**Purpose of the Research**

I am inviting you to voluntarily participate in this study to help me understand what you think about the disproportionate rate of suspensions and expulsions of African American males under the zero tolerance discipline policy in your school. I hope to be able to give these groups an opportunity for their voices to be heard about their perceptions for this disproportionality.

You have been asked to participate because your son has been suspended or expelled at least once under zero tolerance discipline policy.

**Procedures**

The study will involve your participation in two (2) one-on-one interviews with the researcher and in a focus group. A focus group is a group discussion with three to eight other parents/guardians. Prior to the first one-on-one interview, you will be asked to complete a demographic form. All interviews will be conducted by me and will be audio-taped so that I will be able to study and review what the group discussed. The audio tapes will be transcribed into written transcripts at a later date for the purpose of analysis. The one-on-one interviews will involve two sessions of approximately 60 minutes, and will take place at the school, your home, or in a mutually comfortable setting, such as a local restaurant, library, or park. The focus group interviews will take place at the school and will last approximately one and one-half to two hours. Snacks will be provided for the focus group session.

**Risks**

I believe there are no risks associated with your participation in this research study. Potential discomforts may include emotional feelings when asked questions during the interviews about your personal experiences related to suspensions or expulsions under zero tolerance discipline policies.

**Benefits**

There are no direct benefits to you as a participant. One anticipated benefit of participation in this research study will be to give voice to the various groups related to their perceptions about the reasons for the disproportionate rate of suspensions and expulsions of African American male students under zero tolerance discipline policies. Another benefit will be to discuss feelings

and concerns related to your experiences with zero tolerance discipline policies. Other African American male students may benefit from the information gathered in this study.

### **Confidentiality**

The information gathered during this study will remain confidential. Your participation in this study will be confidential. No personally identifiable information will be collected from you at any point in this study. There will not be any identifying information on the tapes, and at no time will participants' or school's name be identifiable. Should you disclose any information about child abuse or neglect, the researcher must report this according to state laws. The transcripts of all audio tapes will be coded so that your name does not appear. The data will be kept in a locked file cabinet in my home and will be destroyed upon completion of the researcher's doctoral dissertation. All participants in the focus group will be asked to keep what is said during the focus group discussion between the participants only. **HOWEVER, COMPLETE CONFIDENTIALITY CANNOT BE GUARANTEED.** You have the right to review the field notes and transcripts of the audio tapes made as part of the study to determine whether they should be edited or erased in part or in whole.

### **Participation/Withdrawal**

You should recognize that your participation in this study is voluntary and you may refuse to participate or stop participating at any time without penalty. There will be no hard feelings if you do not want to participate or decide to stop participating after you start.

### **Contact**

If you have any study-related concerns or any questions about your rights as a research study participant, you may contact the Office of Research Compliance and Ethics at North Carolina A&T State University at (336) 334-7995.

You may also contact Dr. Ceola Ross-Baber, my dissertation chairperson, at (336) 285-4363 or [crbabber@ncat.edu](mailto:crbabber@ncat.edu). You may also contact Bertha K. Dixon, the Principal Investigator, at (336) 375-6636 or [beekdee@bellsouth.net](mailto:beekdee@bellsouth.net).

### **Statement of Consent**

I have read the above information and have received answers to all my questions. I am at least 18 years old and voluntarily consent to take part in this research study and to have this interview audio recorded.

**I understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form for my records.**

Participant's Name (Printed): \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Statement of Principal Investigator**

By signing below, I indicate that the participant has read and, to the best of my knowledge, understands the details contained in this document.

Principal Investigator (Printed): \_\_\_\_\_

Principal Investigator Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*Appendix H: Administrator Interview Protocol***INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR ADMINISTRATORS****Pseudonym** \_\_\_\_\_

**Opening statement:** I will ask you some questions about your school's discipline policy. If you do not recall or understand some things, or if something does not make sense, then please let me know. I am interested in your perceptions and, I want you to know that your answers are neither right nor wrong. I especially want you to know that you will **not** be identified in this study.

**Participant Information:**

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_\_ Male

Race/Ethnicity: \_\_\_\_\_ White/Caucasian \_\_\_\_\_ Black/African American  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Asian American \_\_\_\_\_ Pacific Islander  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Native American \_\_\_\_\_ Hispanic/Latino  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

Current position: \_\_\_\_ Principal \_\_\_\_ Assistant Principal \_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_  
 Title

Years in current position: \_\_\_\_\_ Years in public education: \_\_\_\_\_

Highest education level: \_\_\_\_\_

**QUESTIONS**

1. What is your definition of zero tolerance?
2. Do you think the zero tolerance policy of this district is applied uniformly across the district? Why or why not?
3. Do you think zero tolerance is effective in diminishing school violence? If so, in what ways and why? If not, why do you think zero tolerance is ineffective?
4. Have you suspended or expelled any student(s) under zero tolerance? Please give me some examples.
5. In your opinion, what has been the effect of zero tolerance on your teachers, students, and parents or caregivers?



6. Do you think that some students are disproportionately suspended or expelled based on gender or ethnicity? If so, to what degree and why?
7. What, if anything do you think administrators can do to reduce the number of suspensions and expulsions of African American males?
8. What, if anything do you think teachers can do to reduce the number of suspensions and expulsions of African American males?
9. What, if anything do you think parents can do to reduce the number of suspensions and expulsions of African American males?
10. What, if anything do you think students can do to reduce the number of suspensions and expulsions of African American males?

**Final Comments**

This concludes the interview. Is there anything you would like to add about your feelings on zero tolerance policies?

Do you have any comments you would like to make about this interview process or anything related to this study?

*Appendix I: Teacher Interview Protocol***INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR TEACHERS****Pseudonym** \_\_\_\_\_

**Opening statement:** I will ask you some questions about your school's discipline policy. If you do not recall or understand some things, or if something does not make sense, then please let me know. I am interested in your perceptions and, I want you to know that your answers are neither right nor wrong. I especially want you to know that you will **not** be identified in this study.

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_\_ Male

Age: \_\_\_\_\_ 20 to 30 \_\_\_\_\_ 31 to 40 \_\_\_\_\_ 41 to 50 \_\_\_\_\_ 51 to 60 \_\_\_\_\_ 60+

Ethnicity: \_\_\_\_\_ White/Caucasian \_\_\_\_\_ Black/African-American  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Asian American \_\_\_\_\_ Pacific Islander  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Native American \_\_\_\_\_ Hispanic/Latino  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

Years in current position: \_\_\_\_\_ Years in public education: \_\_\_\_\_

Highest education level: \_\_\_\_\_

**QUESTIONS**

1. What is your definition of zero tolerance?
2. Do you think that your school implements its zero tolerance policy effectively and fairly? Why or why not?
3. Have you recommended students for suspension or expulsion? If so, why?
4. Have any of your students been suspended or expelled under zero tolerance? Without revealing any personal student information, can you describe any particular situation?
5. Do you think zero tolerance is effective in diminishing school violence? If so, in what ways and why? If not, why do you think zero tolerance is ineffective?
6. In your opinion, what has been the effect of zero tolerance on your students and their parents/caregivers?
7. Do you think that some students are disproportionately suspended or expelled based on gender or ethnicity? If so, to what degree and why?

8. What, if anything do you think the teachers can do to reduce the number of suspensions or expulsions of African American male students?
9. What, if anything do you think the administrators can do to reduce the number of suspensions or expulsions of African American male students?
10. What, if anything do you think students can do to reduce the number of suspensions or expulsions of African American males?
11. What, if anything do you think parents/caregivers can do to reduce the number of suspensions or expulsions of African American males?

### **Final Comments**

This concludes the interview. Is there anything you would like to add about your feelings on zero tolerance policies?

Do you have any comments you would like to make about this interview process or anything related to this study?

*Appendix J: Student Interview Protocol***INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR STUDENTS****Pseudonym** \_\_\_\_\_

**Opening statement:** I will ask you some questions about your suspension/expulsion (if applicable) and your school's discipline policy. If you do not recall or understand some things, or if something does not make sense, then please let me know. I am interested in your perceptions and, I want you to know that your answers are neither right nor wrong. I especially want you to know that you will **not** be identified in this study.

**Participant Information**

Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade: \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you attended this school? \_\_\_\_\_

Have you ever been suspended or expelled from school? \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Yes If yes, have you been suspended more than one time? \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Yes If yes, how many times? \_\_\_\_\_

**QUESTIONS**

1. Tell me a little about yourself.
2. Do you think the rules at your school are clear? Please explain.
3. In your opinion, do your teachers treat all students the same when making office referrals? If not, can you think of a time when you think students were treated differently?
4. Do you think there were times when you were disciplined unfairly? If yes, give an example.
5. In your opinion, are some students disproportionately suspended or expelled based on gender or ethnicity? Why or why not?
6. Tell me to what you know your school's zero tolerance policy.
7. Do you think zero tolerance is effective in reducing school violence? Why or why not?

8. Have you or any of your friends ever been suspended or expelled under zero tolerance? If yes, tell me about the specific incident(s) that led to the suspension(s) or expulsion(s).
9. Did you have any knowledge of the suspension/expulsion process under zero tolerance before this incident? If yes, how did you get that information?
10. In your opinion, did the administrators give out consequences that matched your misbehavior? Why or why not? Can you remember a time when you think the consequences did not match your misbehavior? Can you give me some details?
11. In your opinion, did your behavior change after the suspension/expulsion? Why or why not? Can you give me some examples?
12. What, if anything do you think the teachers can do to reduce the number of suspensions and expulsions of African American male students?
13. What, if anything do you think the administrators can do to reduce the number of suspensions and expulsions of African American male students?
14. What, if anything do you think parents can do to reduce the number of suspensions and expulsions of African American male students?
15. What, if anything do you think students can do to reduce the number of suspensions and expulsions of African American male students?

**Note:** This concludes the interview. Is there anything you would like to add about your feelings about zero tolerance policies?

Do you have any comments you would like to make about this interview process or anything related to this study?

*Appendix K: Parents/Caregivers Interview Protocol***INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR PARENTS/CAREGIVERS****Pseudonym** \_\_\_\_\_

**Opening statement:** I will ask you some questions about your son's suspension/expulsion (if applicable) and your school's discipline policy. If you do not recall or understand some things, or if something does not make sense, then please let me know. I am interested in your perceptions and, I want you to know that your answers are neither right nor wrong. I especially want you to know that you will **not** be identified in this study.

**Participant Information**

In which grade is your son? \_\_\_\_\_ How long has he been at this school? \_\_\_\_\_

Has your son ever been suspended or expelled from school? \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Yes If yes, has your son been suspended more than one time? \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Yes If yes, how many times? \_\_\_\_\_

**Questions**

1. Tell me a little about yourself.
2. Do you think that the rules at your son's school are clear? Please explain.
3. If your son ever been suspended or expelled from school, what were the reasons?
4. Did you have any knowledge of the suspension/expulsion process before this suspension or expulsion? Did you think that the consequences were fair? Why or why not?
5. Tell me what you know about your school's zero tolerance discipline policy?
6. Do you think zero tolerance is effective in reducing school violence? Why or why not?
7. Has your son or any of his friends ever been suspended or expelled under zero tolerance? If yes, tell me about the specific incident(s) that led to the suspension(s) or expulsion(s).
8. Did you have any knowledge of the suspension/expulsion process under zero tolerance before this incident? If yes, how did you get that information?

9. Do you think the administrators treat all students the same when assigning consequences under zero tolerance? Why or why not? Can you give me some examples?
10. In your opinion, do you think teachers treat all students the same when making office referrals? Why or why not? Can you give me some examples?
11. Can you recall an incident when you thought your son was treated unfairly teachers or administrators? If yes, can you give me some examples?
12. What, if anything do you think the teachers can do to reduce the number of suspensions and expulsions of African American male students?
13. What, if anything do you think the administrators can do to reduce the number of suspensions and expulsions of African American male students?
14. What, if anything do you think parents can do to reduce the number of suspensions and expulsions of African American male students?
15. What, if anything do you think students can do to reduce the number of suspensions and expulsions of African American male students?

### **Final Comments**

This concludes the interview. Is there anything you would like to add about your feelings about zero tolerance policies?

Do you have any comments you would like to make about this interview process or anything related to this study?

*Appendix L: Administrator Focus Group Interview Protocol*

**FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR ADMINISTRATORS**

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

1. If you had the authority to create and implement an ideal zero tolerance discipline policy, what would be differences between your proposed zero tolerance policy and the school district's current zero tolerance policy? How would your policy encourage positive behavior? How would your policy discourage negative behavior?
2. Do you think teachers at your school should have input about the consequences assigned for violations of the school and zero discipline policies? If yes, describe how. If not, why not?
3. Do you think students should have input about the consequences they should receive for violations of the school and zero tolerance discipline policies? If yes, describe how. If not, why not?
4. Do you think parents/caregivers should have input about the consequences students should receive for violations of the school and zero tolerance discipline policies? If yes, describe how. If not, why not?
5. What, if anything, do you think can be done to make zero tolerance more effective in diminishing school violence?
6. What steps, if any, do you think can be taken to assure African-American students and their parents/caregivers that African-American male students are not disproportionately suspended or expelled?
7. What steps, if any, do you think can be taken by administrators to assure African-American students and their parents/caregivers that administrators assign consequences under zero tolerance that are fair and match the students' misbehaviors?
8. What steps, if any, do you think can be taken to assure African-American male students and their parents/caregivers that all students are disciplined and treated fairly by administrators and teachers?
9. What steps, if any, do you think can be taken by administrators to assure African-American students and their parents/caregivers that teachers treat all students the same when making office referrals?



10. What steps do you think can be taken to ensure adequate communication and dissemination of school and zero tolerance discipline policies to teachers, students, and parents/caregivers?
11. What do you think can be done to build relationships among administrators, teachers, students, and parents/caregivers?
12. What recommendations, if any, would you make to the school district for changes in the zero tolerance discipline policy?
13. In addition to Jackson Academy, can you think of other alternatives to reduce suspensions and expulsions of African-American male students? If yes, explain. If not, why not?

*Appendix M: Teacher Focus Group Interview Protocol***FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR TEACHERS**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for agreeing to take part in our research study, **“Examining Stakeholders’ Perceptions of the Disproportionality of Exclusions of African American Male Students under Zero Tolerance Discipline Policy.”** Your individual responses will be treated confidentially. Statements made by others should also be treated confidentially and should not be shared outside of this group.

The investigator will audio tape this session so that I will be able to transcribe your responses verbatim. Please know that everything discussed in this session will be kept in strict confidence. Please give your fictitious name each time before responding so that the investigator will be able to identify your comments throughout the session. Remember that there are no right or wrong answers. I am looking for your honest perceptions regarding this research project and hopefully learn techniques that can reduce the number of African American male students that are suspended or expelled under zero tolerance.

1. Do you think administrators should have input about the consequences assigned for violations of the zero discipline policies? If yes, describe how. If not, why not?
2. Do you think teachers should have input about the consequences assigned for violations of the school and zero discipline policies? If yes, describe how. If not, why not?
3. Do you think students should have input about the consequences they should receive for violations of the school and zero tolerance discipline policies? If yes, describe how. If not, why not?
4. Do you think parents/caregivers should have input about the consequences students should receive for violations of the school and zero tolerance discipline policies? If yes, describe how. If not, why not?
5. If you had the opportunity to give input to the implementation of the zero tolerance discipline policy, explain what would be different between your proposed implementation and implementation of the current zero tolerance policy? How would you encourage positive behavior? How would you discourage negative behavior?
6. What, if anything, do you think can be done to make zero tolerance more effective in diminishing school violence?

7. What specific steps do you think can be taken by teachers to assure African-American male students that they are not disciplined unfairly?
8. What steps, if any, do you think can be taken by teachers to assure African-American male students that teachers treat all students the same when making office referrals?
9. What steps do you think can be taken to ensure adequate communication and dissemination of school and zero tolerance discipline policies to teachers, students, and parents/caregivers?
10. What do you think can be done to build relationships among administrators, teachers, students, and parents/caregivers?
11. What recommendations, if any, would you make to the school and school district for changes in the zero tolerance discipline policy?
12. In addition to Jackson Academy, can you think of other alternatives to reduce suspensions and expulsions of African-American male students? If yes, explain. If not, why not?

*Appendix N: Student Focus Group Interview Protocol*

## FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR STUDENTS

Date \_\_\_\_\_

1. Do you think administrators should have input about the consequences assigned for violations of the zero discipline policies? If yes, describe how. If not, why not?
2. Do you think teachers should have input about the consequences assigned for violations of the school and zero discipline policies? If yes, describe how. If not, why not?
3. Do you think students should have input about the consequences they should receive for violations of the school and zero tolerance discipline policies? If yes, describe how. If not, why not?
4. Do you think parents/caregivers should have input about the consequences students should receive for violations of the school and zero tolerance discipline policies? If yes, describe how. If not, why not?
5. If you had the opportunity to give input to the implementation of the zero tolerance discipline policy, explain what would be different between your proposed implementation and implementation of your school's current zero tolerance policy?
6. What, if anything, do you think can be done to make zero tolerance more effective in reducing school violence?
7. What specific steps do you think can be taken by administrators and teachers to assure African-American male students that they are not disciplined unfairly by administrators and teachers?
8. What steps, if any, do you think can be taken by administrators to assure African-American male students that the consequences match their misbehavior?
9. What steps, if any, do you think can be taken by teachers to assure African-American male students that teachers treat all students the same when making office referrals?
10. What steps do you think can be taken by administrators and teachers to ensure adequate communication and dissemination of school and zero tolerance discipline policies to students?
11. What do you think can be done to build relationships among administrators, teachers, students, and parents/caregivers?

12. What steps do you think you can take to be more accountable for your behavior and actions?
13. What recommendations, if any, would you make to the school and school district for changes in the zero tolerance discipline policy?
14. In addition to Jackson Academy, can you think of other alternatives to reduce suspensions and expulsions of African-American male students? If yes, explain. If not, why not?

*Appendix O: Parents/Caregivers Focus Group Interview Protocol*

**FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR PARENTS**

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

1. Do you think administrators should have input about the consequences assigned for violations of the zero discipline policies? If yes, describe how. If not, why not?
2. Do you think teachers should have input about the consequences assigned for violations of the school and zero discipline policies? If yes, describe how. If not, why not?
3. Do you think students should have input about the consequences they should receive for violations of the school and zero tolerance discipline policies? If yes, describe how. If not, why not?
4. Do you think parents/caregivers should have input about the consequences students should receive for violations of the school and zero tolerance discipline policies? If yes, describe how. If not, why not?
5. If you had the opportunity to give input to the implementation of the zero tolerance discipline policy, explain what would be different between your proposed implementation and implementation of your school's current zero tolerance policy?
6. What, if anything, do you think can be done to make zero tolerance more effective in reducing school violence?
7. What steps, if any, do you think can be taken by teachers to assure the parents/caregivers of African-American male students that administrators treat all students the same when assigning consequences under zero tolerance?
8. What steps, if any, do you think can be taken by teachers to assure the parents/caregivers of African-American male students that teachers treat all students the same when making office referrals?
9. What specific steps, if any, do you think can be taken by administrators and teachers to assure the parents/caregivers of African-American male students that their sons are not treated unfairly by administrators and teachers?

10. What steps do you think can be taken by administrators and teachers to ensure adequate communication and dissemination of school and zero tolerance discipline policies to parents/caregivers?
11. What do you think can be done to build relationships among administrators, teachers, students, and parents/caregivers?
12. What steps do you think you can take to be more accountable for your son's behavior and actions?
13. What recommendations, if any, would you make to the school and school district for changes in the zero tolerance discipline policy?

*Appendix P: Example of Member Checking*

**MEMBER CHECKING FOR PARENT JANE**

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES	INVESTIGATOR'S INTERPRETATIONS	AGREE	
<p><b>1. Do you think that the rules at your son's school are clear? Please explain.</b></p> <p><b>Jane:</b> I think they are very clear. I got a student handbook. Oh yes, they are very clear. They were very clear on why my son was being suspended.</p>	<p>Rules are very clear, and they are in the student handbook.</p>		
<p><b>2. If your son ever been suspended or expelled from school, what were the reasons?</b></p> <p><b>Jane:</b> The reason he was put in Jackson Academy? During the time he had what they called some little weapons that he brought to school and sold to a little boy. The little boy pulled it out and was threatening to use it against somebody; and they found out that Ben had sold it to him. And that's when Ben got involved and got suspended.</p>	<p>Son was sent to Jackson Academy for selling a weapon to another student.</p>		
<p><b>3. Did you have any knowledge of the suspension/expulsion process before this suspension or expulsion? Did you think that the consequences were fair? Why or why not?</b></p> <p><b>Jane:</b> Yes, actually I did. Oh yes, I think the consequences were very fair because Ben could have been suspended out of school or put in Jacket Academy for 365 days; but he only had two weeks to do. So I thought that was <i>very</i> fair.</p>	<p>Had knowledge of suspension process before son was suspended. Thinks consequences were very fair because son could have gotten OSS or sent to Jackson Academy for 365 days instead of 10 days in Jackson Academy.</p>		



*Appendix Q: Member Checking Explanation Letter*

## MEMBER CHECK EXPLANATION LETTER

To All Study Participants:

For me, this has been a meaningful and insightful experience. I am lost for words to express my gratitude for all that you have done to help with my research project. I have enclosed the complete verbatim draft of your individual interview transcript for your review. After reviewing the transcript, please indicate if you agree or disagree with my interpretation of your responses. If you disagree with my interpretations, please make corrections as needed and sign the enclosed transcript release indicating that you have had an opportunity to read the transcript and to make any corrections.

Again, I want to thank you for your participation. I am hopeful that our work will somehow help reduce the number of suspensions and expulsions of African-American male students by giving all stakeholders a voice in the development and implementation of discipline policies.

With best regards,

Bertha K. Dixon

*Appendix R: Release for Interview Transcript***RELEASE for INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT**

With regards to the study, “*Examining Stakeholders’ Perceptions of the Disproportionate Exclusions of African-American Male Students*,” I, \_\_\_\_\_, have received the complete transcript of my personal individual interview in this study, and have been given the opportunity to alter, add, and delete information in the transcript as necessary and appropriate. **Please note that changes indicating personal reflections, such “aah, uhmm, etc. are not to be changed.** After such changes, if any, I hereby acknowledge that the transcript now accurately reflects my responses in my personal individual interview with Bertha K. Dixon.

My signature below indicates that I consent to and authorize the release of this transcript to Bertha K. Dixon for use as described in the consent form.

I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this Transcript Release for my records.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Principal Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

*Appendix S: Microlevel Analysis Codes***MICROLEVEL ANALYSIS CODE DESCRIPTION TABLE**

<b>CODE</b>	<b>CODE DESCRIPTION</b>
<b>DZT (11)</b>	<b>Definitions of Zero Tolerance</b>
<b>EGA (1)</b>	<b>Examples of Gray Area</b>
<b>EHSW (1)</b>	<b>Examples of Handling Discipline the Same Way</b>
<b>FLEX (1)</b>	<b>ZT Needs Flexibility</b>
<b>UAZT (7)</b>	<b>Uniform Application of ZT policy</b>
<b>RUAZT (8)</b>	<b>Reasons for Uniform Application of ZT policy</b>
<b>NZTEF (3)</b>	<b>No Uniform Application of ZT policy</b>
<b>EZT (2)</b>	<b>Examples when ZT should be enforced</b>
<b>DBZT (1)</b>	<b>Don't Believe in ZT</b>
<b>NTZT (1)</b>	<b>Not sure ZT is Effective/Undecided</b>
<b>RUZTEF (2)</b>	<b>Reasons for No Decision</b>
<b>ZTDV/R (16)</b>	<b>ZT Is Effective in Diminishing Violence/Reasons</b>
<b>ZTNEDV (5)</b>	<b>ZT Is not Effective in Diminishing Violence</b>
<b>RZTNEDV (5)</b>	<b>Reasons ZT Isn't Effective in Diminishing Violence</b>
<b>RforINEZT (1)</b>	<b>Reasons for Inequality under ZT</b>
<b>ZTEandNE (2)</b>	<b>ZT can be both Effective and Ineffective in Diminishing Violence</b>
<b>EZTNEDV (1)</b>	<b>Examples of when ZT not Effective in Diminishing School Violence</b>
<b>ZTSEDV (1)</b>	<b>ZT Is Somewhat Effective in Diminishing School Violence</b>
<b>RZTSEDV (1)</b>	<b>Reasons ZT Is Somewhat Effective in Diminishing School Violence</b>
<b>EZTSEDV (1)</b>	<b>Examples of how ZT Is Somewhat Effective in Diminishing School Violence</b>
<b>CSNMO (1)</b>	<b>Certain Students Need More Services</b>
<b>ECSNMO (1)</b>	<b>Examples of More Services Certain Students Need</b>
<b>SSZT (2)</b>	<b>Suspended Students under ZT</b>
<b>RSSZT (2)</b>	<b>Reasons for Recommending OSS under ZT</b>
<b>NSSZT (5)</b>	<b>Have not Recommended Suspensions under</b>
<b>RNSSZT (2)</b>	<b>Reasons for not Recommending OSS under ZT</b>
<b>G/ESSZT (1)</b>	<b>Gender/Ethnicity of Students Suspended under</b>
<b>RJA (6)</b>	<b>Reasons for Jackson Academy Assignments</b>
<b>OAS (1)</b>	<b>Other Alternative Schools</b>
<b>EZTT (4)</b>	<b>Effect of ZT on Teachers/Reasons</b>
<b>REZTT (3)</b>	<b>Reasons for Effect of ZT on Teachers/Reasons</b>
<b>EZTSR (11)</b>	<b>Effect of ZT on Students/Reasons</b>
<b>EZTPR (4)</b>	<b>Effect of ZT on Parents/Reasons</b>
<b>RCOMM (1)</b>	<b>Reasons Communication Has Effect on Effect of ZT on Students and Parents</b>
<b>DS/EAAM (11)</b>	<b>Disproportionate Suspensions and Expulsions of AA Males</b>
<b>RDS/EAAM (10)</b>	<b>Reasons for Disproportionate Suspensions and Expulsions of AA Males</b>

<b>RNDS/EAMM (3)</b>	<b>Reasons for Non-Disproportionate Suspensions and Expulsions of AA Males</b>
<b>NDS/EAAM (6)</b>	<b>No Disproportionate Suspensions and Expulsions of AA Males</b>
<b>INDS/EAAM (1)</b>	<b>Not Inclined to Suspend/Expel More AA Males</b>
<b>SDSDSG/E (2)</b>	<b>School Data Showed Disproportionately Suspended Based on Gender/Ethnicity</b>
<b>RFS (1)</b>	<b>Reasons for Suspensions</b>
<b>RTDUMS (1)</b>	<b>Reasons Teachers Don't Understand Minority Students</b>
<b>AATRS (21)</b>	<b>Actions by Administrators to Reduce Suspensions</b>
<b>RAATRS (3)</b>	<b>Reasons for Actions by Administrators to Reduce Suspensions</b>
<b>EAATRS (1)</b>	<b>Examples for Actions by Administrators to Reduce Suspensions</b>
<b>OASVC (1)</b>	<b>Outside Agency Services</b>
<b>RRS (1)</b>	<b>Reasons for Relationships with Students and Teachers</b>
<b>EIC (1)</b>	<b>Example of Inconsistency</b>
<b>ATTRS (21)</b>	<b>Actions by Teachers to Reduce Suspensions</b>
<b>EBRs (1)</b>	<b>Examples of Building Relationships</b>
<b>EATTRS (2)</b>	<b>Examples of Teachers' Actions to Reduce Suspensions</b>
<b>ASTRS (21)</b>	<b>Actions by Students to Reduce Suspensions</b>
<b>EASTRS (1)</b>	<b>Examples of Reasons for Actions by Students to Reduce Suspensions</b>
<b>EPMR (1)</b>	<b>Example of Positive Role Model</b>
<b>RPMR (1)</b>	<b>Reasons for Positive Role Model</b>
<b>ESBIC (1)</b>	<b>Example of Seeing beyond Immediate Circumstances</b>
<b>SDTAH (1)</b>	<b>Students Doesn't Think Actions Will Happen</b>
<b>RSDTH (1)</b>	<b>Reason Student Doesn't Think Actions Will Happen</b>
<b>ESATRS (1)</b>	<b>Example of Right Thing</b>
<b>ESP (1)</b>	<b>Examples of Smart People</b>
<b>APTRS (21)</b>	<b>Actions by Parents to Reduce Suspensions</b>
<b>COR (10)</b>	<b>Rules Are Clear</b>
<b>RC/COR (6)</b>	<b>Teachers Treat All Students the Same When Making Office Referrals</b>
<b>COMM (2)</b>	<b>Communication</b>
<b>TTSSOR (4)</b>	<b>Teachers Treat All Students the Same When Making Office Referrals</b>
<b>TDTSSOR (6)</b>	<b>Teachers Don't Treated Students the Same When Making Office Referrals</b>
<b>RTDTSSOR (3)</b>	<b>Reasons Teachers Don't' Treat Students the Same when Writing Office Referrals</b>
<b>ETDTSSOR (3)</b>	<b>Examples of when Teachers Don't Treat Students the Same when Writing Referrals</b>
<b>ROR (1)</b>	<b>Reason for Office Referral</b>
<b>RORAAM (3)</b>	<b>Reasons for Office Referrals for AA Males</b>
<b>SNDF (3)</b>	<b>Students Disciplined Fairly</b>
<b>RNDUF (3)</b>	<b>Reasons Discipline Was Fair</b>
<b>SDUF (3)</b>	<b>Students Disciplined Unfairly</b>
<b>RDUF (3)</b>	<b>Reasons Students Were Disciplined Unfairly</b>
<b>HKZTP (4)</b>	<b>Has Knowledge of ZT</b>
<b>RHKZTP (1)</b>	<b>Reason for Knowledge of ZT Policy</b>
<b>NKZTP (5)</b>	<b>Has No Knowledge of ZT Policy</b>
<b>RNKZTP (1)</b>	<b>Reasons for Having no Knowledge of ZT Policy</b>
<b>SKZT (1)</b>	<b>Some Knowledge of ZT</b>
<b>RSKZT (1)</b>	<b>Reasons for Some Knowledge of ZT</b>
<b>ZTPB (1)</b>	<b>Zero Tolerance Broadened</b>

<b>KZTBS (5)</b>	<b>Knowledge of ZT Suspension/Expulsion Process before Incident</b>
<b>SOI (4)</b>	<b>Source of Knowledge of ZT Suspension/Expulsion Process before Incident</b>
<b>NKZTBS (5)</b>	<b>No Knowledge of ZT Suspension/Expulsion Process before Incident</b>
<b>CMMB (2)</b>	<b>Consequences Matched Misbehavior</b>
<b>RCMMB (2)</b>	<b>Reasons Consequences Matched Misbehavior</b>
<b>CDNMMB (4)</b>	<b>Consequences Didn't Match Misbehavior</b>
<b>BCAS (4)</b>	<b>Behavior Changed after Suspension</b>
<b>RBCAS (4)</b>	<b>Reasons Behavior Changed after Suspension</b>
<b>BCWAS (1)</b>	<b>Behavior Changed for a While after Suspension</b>
<b>RBCWAS (1)</b>	<b>Reasons Changed for a While after Suspension</b>
<b>FAZT (21)</b>	<b>Feelings about Zero Tolerance</b>
<b>RZTP (3)</b>	<b>Reasons for Zero Tolerance</b>
<b>COS (16)</b>	<b>Comments on Study</b>
<b>COMM</b>	<b>Communication or Contact with School</b>

*Appendix T: Macrolevel Analysis Codes*

**MACROLEVEL ANALYSIS CODE DESCRIPTION TABLE**

CODE (N) of Responses	CODE DESCRIPTION
<b>MODZTP (21)</b>	<b>Modification of Implementation of ZT Policy MODZTP</b>
<b>EMODZTP (3)</b>	<b>Examples of Modification of Implementation of ZT</b>
<b>RMODZTP (1)</b>	<b>Reason for Modification of Implementation of ZT</b>
<b>NPZTPR (1)</b>	<b>Does not Want to a Part of ZT Process (1)</b>
<b>RNPZTPR (1)</b>	<b>Reason She Does not Want to be Part of ZT Process (1)</b>
<b>WEPD (11)</b>	<b>Ways to Encourage Positive Behavior</b>
<b>WDNB (10)</b>	<b>Ways to Discourage Negative Behavior</b>
<b>ADIC (16)</b>	<b>Administrators Should Have Input on Consequences Assigned for Violations of ZT Policy</b>
<b>RADIC (16)</b>	<b>Reasons Administrators Should Have Input on Consequences Assigned for Violations of ZT Policy</b>
<b>NADIC (1)</b>	<b>Administrators Should <b>Not</b> Have Input on Consequences Assigned for Violations of ZT Policy</b>
<b>RNADIC (1)</b>	<b>Reason Administrators Should <b>Not</b> Have on Consequences Assigned for Violations of ZT Policy</b>
<b>TIC (12)</b>	<b>Teachers Should Have Input on Consequences Assigned for Violations of ZT/ School Policies TIC</b>
<b>PTIC (1)</b>	<b>Teachers Possibly Should Have Input on Consequences Assigned for Violations of ZT Policy</b>
<b>RPTIC (1)</b>	<b>Reasons Teachers Should Possibly Have Input on Consequences Assigned for Violations of ZT Policy</b>
<b>PEAD (1)</b>	<b>Policy Should End with Administrator</b>
<b>RPEAD (1)</b>	<b>Reason Policy Should End with Administrator</b>
<b>TNIC (2)</b>	<b>Teachers Should <b>Not</b> Have Input on Consequences Assigned for Violations of ZT Policy</b>
<b>RTNIC (2)</b>	<b>Reasons Teachers Should <b>not</b> Have Input on Consequences Assigned for Violations of ZT Policy</b>
<b>SIC (17)</b>	<b>Students Should Have Input about the Consequences They Should Receive for Violations of the School and Zero Tolerance Discipline Policies</b>
<b>RSIC (9)</b>	<b>Reasons Students Should Have Input about the Consequences They Should Receive for Violations of the School and Zero Tolerance Discipline Policies</b>
<b>ESIC (3)</b>	<b>Examples of Why Students Should Have Input about the Consequences They Should Receive for Violations of the School and Zero Tolerance Discipline Policies</b>
<b>DGSIC (1)</b>	<b>Students Should Have a Degree of Input about the Consequences They Should Receive for Violations of the School and Zero Tolerance Discipline Policies</b>
<b>RDGSIC (1)</b>	<b>Reasons Students Should Have a Degree of Input about the Consequences They Should Receive for Violations of the School and Zero Tolerance Discipline Policies</b>
<b>SNIC (5)</b>	<b>Students Should Have no input about the Consequences They Should Receive for Violations of the School and Zero Tolerance Discipline Policies SNIC (2)</b>

<b>RSNIC (5)</b>	<b>Reasons Students Should Have <b>no</b> input about the Consequences They Should Receive for Violations of the School and Zero Tolerance Discipline Policies RSN</b>
<b>SRC (2)</b>	<b>Students' Rights when Receiving Consequences</b>
<b>PIC (18)</b>	<b>Parents Should Have Input on Consequences Students Receive for Violations of the School and Zero Tolerance Discipline Policies (4)</b>
<b>RPIC</b>	<b>Reasons Parents Should Have Input on Consequences Students Receive for Violations of the School and Zero Tolerance Discipline Policies</b>
<b>PNIC (2)</b>	<b>Parents/Caregivers Should <b>not</b> Have Input about the Consequences Students Should Receive for Violations of the School and ZT Discipline Policies</b>
<b>RPNIC (2)</b>	<b>Reasons Parents/Caregivers Should <b>not</b> Have Input about the Consequences Students Should Receive for Violations of the School and ZT Discipline Policies</b>
<b>WZTMEDSV (21)</b>	<b>Ways to Make ZT More Effective in Diminishing School Violence</b>
<b>RWZTMEDSV (13)</b>	<b>Reasons for Ways to Make ZT More Effective in Diminishing School Violence</b>
<b>ENBSP (1)</b>	<b>Example of Non-Bullying School Program in Diminishing School Violence</b>
<b>EWZTMEDSV (2)</b>	<b>Example of How Ways Make ZT More Effective in Diminishing School Violence</b>
<b>SAAMNDS/E (4)</b>	<b>Steps Taken to Assure AA Males and their Parents/Caregivers that They Are not Disproportionately Suspended or Expelled</b>
<b>RSAAMNDS/E (3)</b>	<b>Reasons for Steps Taken to Assure AA Males and their Parents/Caregivers that They Are not Disproportionately Suspended or Expelled</b>
<b>SADACMM (4)</b>	<b>Steps Taken by Administrators to Assure AA Males that Consequences Match Misbehavior</b>
<b>RSADAACMM (3)</b>	<b>Reasons for Steps Taken by Administrators to Assure AA Males that Consequences Match Misbehavior</b>
<b>ESADAACMM (2)</b>	<b>Examples of Steps Taken by Administrators to Assure AA Males that Consequences Match Misbehavior</b>
<b>SADAACMM (5)</b>	<b>Steps that Can be Taken to Assure AA Males that all Students the same when Assigning Consequences</b>
<b>RSADAACMM (1)</b>	<b>Reason for Steps Teachers Can Take to Assure AA Male Students that Administrators Treat all Students the same when Assigning Consequences</b>
<b>ESADAACMM (1)</b>	<b>Example of Steps Teachers Can Take to Assure AA Male Students that Administrators Treat all Students the same when Assigning Consequences</b>
<b>SAAAMDF (23)</b>	<b>Steps taken to assure AA males and their Parents/Caregivers that They Are Disciplined Fairly SAAAMDF</b>
<b>RSAAAMDF (7)</b>	<b>Reasons for Steps Taken to Assure AA Males and their Parents/Caregivers that They Are Disciplined Fairly</b>
<b>ESAAAMDF (2)</b>	<b>Examples of Steps taken to Assure AA Males and their Parent/Caregivers that They Are Disciplined Fairly</b>
<b>ESUAD (1)</b>	<b>Example of speaking up to the administrator</b>
<b>EOS (1)</b>	<b>Example of stereotyping</b>

<b>EKGFSI (1)</b>	<b>Example of keeping goals in front of students</b>
<b>STAAAMOF (18)</b>	<b>Steps that Can be Taken to Assure AA Males that All Students Are Treated the Same when Making Office Referrals</b>
<b>RSTAAMOF (8)</b>	<b>Reasons for Steps that Can be Taken to Assure AA Males and their Parents/Caregivers that All Students Are Treated the Same when Making Office Referrals</b>
<b>RSTAAMOF (1)</b>	<b>Example of Steps that Can be Taken to Assure AA Male Students that Teachers Treat all Students the Same when Making Office Referrals</b>
<b>DNSTCDA (1)</b>	<b>Doesn't Know what the Teachers Can Do</b>
<b>RDNSTCD (1)</b>	<b>Reason Doesn't know what the Teachers Can Do</b>
<b>DTTCDA (1)</b>	<b>Doesn't Think Teachers can do Anything</b>
<b>RDTTCDA (1)</b>	<b>Reason Doesn't Think Teachers Can Do Anything</b>
<b>TTSSOF (1)</b>	<b>Teachers Treat All Students the Same when Writing Office Referrals</b>
<b>RTSSOF (1)</b>	<b>Reasons Teachers Treat All Students the Same when Writing Office Referrals</b>
<b>DKSTSSOF (1)</b>	<b>Doesn't Know what Steps Can Take to Assure AA Males Are Treated the Same when Writing Office Referrals</b>
<b>EKSTSSOF (1)</b>	<b>Example Doesn't Know what Steps Can Take to Assure AA Males Are Treated the Same when Writing Office Referrals</b>
<b>SADCOMSZTP (17)</b>	<b>Adequate Communication/Dissemination of School/ZT Policies</b>
<b>RSADCOMSZTP</b>	<b>Reasons for Adequate Communication/ Dissemination of School/ZT Policies</b>
<b>RLCOMMP (4)</b>	<b>Reasons for Lack of Communication to Parents</b>
<b>EXRR/EN (1)</b>	<b>Example of Rules Read and Enforced</b>
<b>ESTACOMMP (4)</b>	<b>Examples of Steps Taken to Ensure Adequate Communication and Dissemination of School and ZT Discipline Policies to Teachers, Students, and Parents/Caregivers</b>
<b>SBRADTSP (30)</b>	<b>Building Relationships among Administrators, Teachers, Students and Parents/Caregivers</b>
<b>SBRADTSP (6)</b>	<b>Reason for Steps to Build Relationships among Administrators, Teachers, Students, and Parents/Caregivers</b>
<b>SSACB/A (10)</b>	<b>Steps by Students and Parents/Caregivers to be more Accountable for Students' Behavior and Actions</b>
<b>ESSACB/A (2)</b>	<b>Examples of Steps by Students to be more Accountable for Behavior and Actions</b>
<b>RECCZTP (21)</b>	<b>Recommendations to the School and School District for Changes in the ZT Discipline Policy</b>
<b>RRECCZTP (9)</b>	<b>Reasons for Recommendations to the School and School District for Changes in the ZT Discipline Policy</b>
<b>ERECCZTP (6)</b>	<b>Examples of Recommendations to the School and School District for Changes in</b>



	<b>the ZT Discipline Policy</b>
<b>ARS/EAAM (22)</b>	<b>Other Alternatives to Reduce Suspensions and Expulsions of AA male students</b>
<b>RARS/EAAM (8)</b>	<b>Reasons for Other Alternatives to Reduce Suspensions and Expulsions of AA male students</b>
<b>EARS/EAAM (1)</b>	<b>Example of Other Alternatives to Reduce Suspensions and Expulsions of AA male students</b>
<b>RRVJA (1)</b>	<b>Reason for revamping Jackson Academy</b>
<b>RPINV (1)</b>	<b>Reason for parental involvement</b>
<b>RJAG (3)</b>	<b>Reason Why Jackson Academy is Great</b>
<b>RSNPR (1)</b>	<b>Reason Staff Needs to be Proactive</b>
<b>RJA (1)</b>	<b>Reason for Jackson Academy</b>