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### Disciplinary Policies and Practices: Dismantling the School to Prison Pipeline

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# Consultancy Project & Report

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|--------------------|---|
| Organization:      | Gardner-Webb University College of Education                                      |
| Project Title:     | DISCIPLINARY POLICIES AND PRACTICES:<br>DISMANTLING THE SCHOOL TO PRISON PIPELINE |
| Candidate:         | Ricky Johnson Jr.   |
| Consultancy Coach: | Dr. Jeff Hamilton   |
| Defense Date:      | July 15, 2022   |
| Authorized by:     | Kellie Easton, Executive Director of Action4Equity                                |

## Approval

This consultancy project was submitted by Ricky Johnson Jr. under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to Gardner-Webb University College of Education and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Gardner-Webb University.

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Dr. Jeffrey Hamilton, Faculty Advisor  
Gardner-Webb University

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Date

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Kellie P. Easton, Site Advisor  
Executive Director of Action4Equity

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Date

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## **Abstract**

DISCIPLINARY POLICIES AND PRACTICES: DISMANTLING THE SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE. Johnson Jr., Ricky, 2022: Consultancy Project, Gardner-Webb University.

Dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline has been a problem for decades that seems to have come to no answer. This project aims to analyze the current conditions and create ways to dismantle the pipeline through new policy, leadership, alternative practices, and school/community programs. The disproportionate rates of suspension and expulsion and their ties to the juvenile justice system, along with everything dealing with education, should be alarming to most. However, far too often, these alarming numbers are swept under the rug. It is beyond time for disciplinary policy and practice change on a micro and macro level; something must be done to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline. This cannot and will not be done if there is not an intentional effort and major buy-in from those in power in the school system, the community at large, and city and county elected officials who have the power to make things happen to dismantle the pipeline.

*Keywords:* discipline, school-to-prison pipeline, policy change, community, school/district leadership

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## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Project Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to analyze and interpret the data on discipline and disciplinary actions within school systems. Those systems disproportionately suspended and expelled Black and Brown students which has shown to increase their chances of entering the juvenile and criminal justice systems. This has been termed the “school-to-prison pipeline,” and this project aimed to find and create ways to dismantle that pipeline.

The school-to-prison pipeline is tied to numerous things within school systems from curriculum to teacher training/professional development to school leadership to school/campus climate. Things directly or indirectly tied to the school-to-prison pipeline have to be challenged and/or changed in order for the school-to-prison pipeline to be dismantled. Otherwise, the disparities that have been consistent in suspension and expulsion will continue to be perpetuated within school systems locally, across the state, and around the country.

The challenge in attempting to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline has been that of political influence, who holds the power to make changes happen, and the unwillingness to reimagine what discipline looks like within school districts. People who have the power and political influence must see the inequity in discipline as an urgent priority that cannot be avoided or ignored. This urgency must be approached with multifaceted methods that honestly address the problems of disproportionate suspension and expulsion.

### **1.2 Project Qualification**

Dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline became a project because of the awareness of the disparities in discipline and disciplinary actions that exist on the local, state, and national levels in school districts. Black and Brown students have been disproportionately suspended and expelled at alarming rates. The alarm must become an urgent issue to be addressed by the local district if the school-to-prison pipeline is to be dismantled.

The partnering organization was chosen to take on this project because of the past and current work the organization has been doing when it comes to honestly addressing inequities that are happening in the local district, while at the same time pushing for policy change that will lead to a change in disciplinary practices district-wide. The organization, Action4Equity, has been a pillar in the community since its inception in 2016 that began to fight for inequities around facilities (a new Ashley Academy being built because of mold found in the school). Action4Equity was and has been the perfect organization to push for policy and practice change when it comes to dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline through their systems change approach and moving as a grassroots organization that has become well connected in the community.

### **1.3 Project Complexity and Impact Assessment**

The completion of the Project Assessment Matrix was a process that was in consultation with the project host organization. The determination was that on a local level, dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline was of high medium complexity. This determination was made because of how political education is and how complicated it can be to push for systems

change in a large organizational system that serves almost 54,000 students and employs almost 8,000 people across the entire district. With so many moving parts and having to get buy-in from many stakeholders, there would have to be a major push by the majority of stakeholders to move the district to change policies and practices.

### **1.3.1 Project Complexity**

The complexity of the project was determined by the likelihood of the organization's ability to get buy-in from stakeholders to confront the issues with discipline/disciplinary actions and the willingness to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline. The criteria used to determine complexity were (a) the stakeholders who the organization needs to get majority buy-in from, (b) an understanding of what needs to happen from an operational standpoint for the school-to-prison pipeline to be dismantled, (c) the in-house expertise on the subject from an organizational standpoint, (d) who the success of the dismantling depends on (politically, influentially, or otherwise), and (e) finally, the complexity of the contract. The scoring in each criterion was determined, along with the host organization, on how likely we would be able to be successful in each category within the local school system and the political climate in which we are currently.

### **1.3.2 Project Impact**

When it came to the project impact, the determination was made by thinking about how certain aspects of the project would negatively or positively tie into the dismantling of the school-to-prison pipeline, as well as how much weight or influence one criterion may have had over the others when it came to the project's success or failure. The scoring for all criteria landed moderately and did not indicate that anything would fall under the negative category when it comes to impacting the project. The decision on the scoring was based on being realistic about the return on the investment (with time and potential money allotted to the school-to-prison pipeline), strategic contributions, and the impact on the operational effectiveness within the school district if the program is to be successful.

## **1.4 Project Charter Information**

This project aims to push for new policies and practices around discipline within the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools system with the help of stakeholders within and outside the school system, ultimately dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline that exists within the district that disproportionately affects Black and Brown children (specifically boys) through policy development and change, leadership on the district and school level, restorative justice practices, and alternative programs that involve the community. We must intentionally take a multifaceted approach to dismantle the pipeline.

The project had many stakeholders throughout the process because of the changes in the school system that happened due to the pandemic and the shooting in one of the high schools. Throughout the project, I was responsible for creating and recreating the project and making the necessary adjustments with the help of the site supervisor. The creation and re-creation were also in alignment with current work the organization has been doing that is connected directly or indirectly to dismantling the pipeline.



## 2. Project Objectives

Action4Equity has a policy demand that aims to end exclusionary discipline; meaning to keep students in the classroom, end the criminalization of student behavior, and repair harm by focusing on the whole student and not just their negative behavior. Action4Equity demands an end to exclusionary discipline and the implementation of restorative justice practices. This means the creation of safe spaces in schools, a prioritization of mental health and trauma-informed practices, and implementation of the Whole School, Whole Community, and Whole Child policy.

During the 2017 academic school year, the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools discipline record showed that county wide, Black students made up only 28.8% of the county's enrollment but 51% of in-school suspensions, 55% of out-of-school suspensions, and 61.9% of expulsions. These numbers dwarf those of White students who in the same year made up 38% of the county's enrollment but only 17% of in-school suspensions, 14% of out-of-school suspensions, and 11.5% of expulsions.

This policy demand of the organization aligns with the project's goal of dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline. The project acknowledges that alternative practices need to be created for how we discipline within our school district. We cannot automatically resort to suspending and/or expelling students who have minor infractions that violate the student code of conduct at the expense of feeding students into the school-to-prison pipeline. The current disciplinary policies and disciplinary actions must be reimaged in a way that does not continue to criminalize students within school districts.

### 2.1 Outline of Partnering Organization's Objectives

#### 2.1.1. Objective

Action4Equity Objectives on Discipline

- End exclusionary discipline
- Focus on and understand the whole child, not just the “negative” infraction (Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child Model)
- Implementation of restorative justice practices in schools
- Creation of safe schools
- Trauma-informed school

Action4Equity is a nonprofit organization that focuses on policy and systems change. The organization addresses the inequities it sees that disproportionately affect Black and Brown students; suspension and expulsion have become two of those inequities the organization has addressed and challenges. The project aiming to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline is directly tied to the organization's policy demand to end exclusionary discipline.

#### 2.1.2 Success Criteria

The success of the project will be measured by educating the community about exclusionary discipline, efforts towards policy changes when it comes to the student code of conduct, the school district aiming to reduce the suspension and expulsion

rates of Black and Brown students, and the effort to push for more and continued restorative justice practices within schools.

## **2.2 Student's Personal Leadership Objectives**

### **2.2.1 Objectives**

Going into this project, I wanted to develop myself as a person who understood how to be an effective leader who learned how to lead, follow, collaborate, and work through problems with other people within organizations and the community. I have gained those abilities as well as many others. One of the main skills I learned in the process of this project was how to adapt and adjust and still be able to complete things that needed to be done. This happened because our school district had a student murdered in one of the high schools about a year ago and this put the school district and the community at an all-time high alert about how we discipline and how we can effectively prevent things like this from occurring again. Additionally, our district, along with others across the nation, went through a pandemic and recently had students return to school. Discipline issues seemed to frequently come up in many schools, which forced the district to create ways to deal with disciplining students and address the mental health of students coming back from a pandemic.

### **2.2.2 Success Criteria**

The goals were and have been measured through self-assessment and how I feel I have come along as a leader since the beginning of the project, how different I would do things from a leadership standpoint, and what I would do differently to improve myself as a leader looking back.

## **3. Project Scope**

### **3.1 Definitive Scope of Work**

This project was responsible for researching and creating ways to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline. That consisted of acknowledging what the cause of the pipeline was, ways to avoid the pipeline, who the stakeholders were who directly or indirectly contributed to the pipeline, what the barriers were to dismantling the pipeline, and what could be done to create alternatives to the pipeline, as well as who could help create those alternatives.

### **3.2 Project Benefits**

The tangible benefits of this project would be a reduction in the disproportionate suspension and expulsion rates of Black and Brown students within the school district. This reduction in suspensions and expulsions would be directly connected to graduation/dropout rates, achievement gaps, violence happening in schools, connections to the community, changes in disciplinary policies and actions, and changes in the school climates and cultures because of the changes in the dynamics in leadership on the school and district levels.

### **3.3 SMART Goals**

1. Promote and push the need for policy development and change around discipline.
  - Student code of conduct revision/recalibration (that are evaluated frequently)

2. Collaborate with community stakeholders and form strategic partnerships in order to influence policy decisions and create alternative programs.
  - Push for expansion of mentorship programs with schools that need community assistance.
  - Push for more programs that involve the community entering the school to assist educators and school leaders.
3. Educate teachers, administrators, and staff on the ways that can help them understand the negative impact on students who are disproportionately disciplined under the current disciplinary policies and practices.
4. Train teachers, administrators, and staff on restorative practices around discipline.
  - In this training, incorporate the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child model of education.

## **4. Disciplined Inquiry**

### **4.1 Introduction and Theoretical Framework**

The work of the Consultancy Project Evidence Plan aimed to take a qualitative approach through interviewing. I used the techniques of ethnographic interviewing and phenomenological interviewing. I used this method to gain an understanding of the culture, myths, rituals, and hierarchies of the school where the individuals have worked or currently work, as well as capture those same aspects by looking at the school system as a whole. Taking this approach captured a narrative as to why things are the way they are when it comes to suspension, expulsion, and the school-to-prison pipeline. Numbers and statistics do not tell the whole story of why things are the way they are.

The theoretical framework that was used to guide the research project was critical research, namely critical race theory. This framework was chosen and used because it aims to critique and challenge with the intent to transform. This framework seeks to acknowledge the structural, systemic, and social aspects that created and have perpetuated the school-to-prison pipeline and gives the lens to see what is needed to dismantle the pipeline.

### **4.2 Hypothesis**

Building an understanding of the school-to-prison pipeline has been and will be imperative for policy and practical change within school districts on the local, state, and national levels. Developing and creating a concrete understanding within the community and the school system of how detrimental the current policies and practices are that contribute to the pipeline will be where the challenge to changing the culture of “discipline” lies. Challenging the culture of what the system knows, perpetuates, and practices without thinking about it will be a difficult task. That task is what is ultimately needed in order to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline.

### **4.3 Research Questions**

- What grades do you teach or have you taught? What subjects did you or have you taught?
- When it comes to demographics, what would you say is the makeup of your school/school system?

- When it comes to your school/school system, how well do you think they handle discipline?
- Can you give me an example of acts committed by students that you feel warrant disciplinary actions?
- What types of consequences do you think are reasonable and why?
- Are you familiar with or have you heard of the school-to-prison pipeline phenomenon? If so, could you describe how you understand it?
- Do you think your school/school district contributes to the school-to-prison pipeline? Why or why not?
- Are you familiar with the suspension rates of your school/school district?
- Are you aware of the number of students that get referred to juvenile court because of complaints from the school/school district?
- What are some alternatives to discipline that you feel could possibly reduce the number of suspensions and help dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline?

#### **4.4 Literature Review**

##### **Dismantling the School-to-Prison Pipeline**

When it comes to school discipline, in both policy and action, there have long been questions about why the numbers look the way that they do. Looking at the demographics and the data around who is suspended, one thing is drastically clear, Black students are disciplined more harshly and suspended disproportionately compared to their counterparts who differ in race. Those harsher disciplinary actions and disproportionate suspensions have often led to referrals to the juvenile courts and students being convicted of a crime. Education scholars refer to this concept as the school-to-prison pipeline, and it has led to many attempts to challenge policies and practices, as well as attempts to create ways to dismantle or disrupt the pipeline.

In this professional literature review, I will discuss information from seven peer-reviewed articles that discussed the pipeline, as well as four published books that address the continued growing concern around the effects of how schools currently discipline. The themes I came up with were due to the frequency of how much I saw certain things mentioned within the articles and books that were reviewed. The four themes I will use will be racial bias and the dynamics of race, policy development/change, the role of leadership in schools/school districts, and restorative justice practices.

##### **Themes**

##### ***Racial Bias and the Dynamics of Race***

One of the main things that was clear in the research were the dynamics of how race played out for both students, teachers, and administrators. The Racial Equity Report Card from the Southern Coalition for Social Justice points out the racial inequities when it comes to suspension rates, how much more likely Black students are suspended short term compared to their counterparts, and what percentage of juvenile arrests come from referrals from school districts. Mallett (2016) made the argument that students of color, especially those who come

from low-income backgrounds, are ultimately targets for arrests stemming from suspensions and expulsions.

Kunjufu (2002) added other aspects of what contributes to the school-to-prison pipeline: (a) the gender of the teacher, (b) the gender of the students, and (c) the cultural disconnect between the two. Howard and Howard (2021) insisted that there needs to be a “radical care” for Black boys that challenges the exclusive classroom and school climates, does not avoid addressing racism, shows interest in students and their community, and is mindful of the implicit biases that may exist. Riddle and Sinclair (2019) proved how much rates of racial bias are associated with the racial disparities in school discipline.

### ***Policy Development/Change***

The next theme that was mentioned often was the emergence of the “zero-tolerance” policy and how detrimental it has been for Black students, specifically Black boys. Schiff (2013) posited that not only have zero-tolerance policies had disproportionate impacts, but they are by and large the greatest contributing factors in creating the school-to-prison pipeline. Vitale (2017) offered that three major factors helped lead to the emergence of the school-to-prison pipeline: (a) the “superpredator” myth that led to media coverage, public fear, and legislative action; (b) the Columbine High School shooting that shocked the country; and (c) the emphasis on high stakes testing, the federal/state money associated with those tests, and the possibility of budget cuts. Both Schiff and Vitale agreed that however convincing, there was no need for over policing schools with both policy and actions.

### ***The Role of Leadership in Schools/School Districts***

Scully (2015) understood the detriment of policies such as zero-tolerance and suggested that new policies be created and implemented on the local and state levels (laws may differ from state to state). For most larger urban districts, according to McAdams (2006), the power to create, vote on, and implement new school policies lies in the hands of the local school boards. Policy development usually comes from the recommendation of the superintendent, school board members themselves, and school committees formed by the school board. Ultimately, the power will remain in the hands of the school board which will have to have a majority vote in favor of the policy. This can be a tricky task as school board members are often elected officials and can be driven by the politics of their constituents. Because of the dynamics that may exist with the school board members, Fenning and Rose (2007) offered a route that relies on school principals and assistant principals to take the lead with the schools they are charged with managing. There is a need for schools to have teachers and staff who are serious about professional development around cultural competence. There is also a need for staff and teachers to consider culturally responsive approaches to student behavior and decipher whether or not certain behaviors should warrant disciplinary actions that could lead to suspension.

### ***Restorative Justice Practices***

One of the main alternatives that came up as an attempt to counter the school-to-prison pipeline was the use of restorative justice practices that have been implemented in numerous districts/schools across the country. Wing (2018) argued that we should use restorative justice practices as a form of education for our students and the community, as most

disciplinary problems stem from deeper underlying issues. Scully (2015) showed us that there have been positive results in improving both the school climate and academic achievement scores. Morrison et al. (2005) informed us that the use of restorative justice practices is much needed because it is a challenge to the needed culture change when it comes to discipline. This culture change must start with changing mindsets and attitudes around the school community.

### **Summary**

Reviewing the literature offered a more detailed explanation of the school-to-prison pipeline and why there should be an urgent need for educators, administrators, and the community to intentionally dismantle it. If education is the gateway for the future, we should aim to make a pipeline for opportunities, not a pipeline for incarceration to which many Black and Brown men fall victim. If we are to dismantle this school-to-prison pipeline, it is a must that we understand the biases that exist in schools/school systems and the dynamics of race; we must understand the role of policies and how they turn into practice; we must understand the role of leadership in schools/school districts and what they have the capacity to do; and lastly, we must know and understand the importance of restorative justice practices.

## **4.5 Methodology**

### **Qualitative Research**

The qualitative research tool I used doing research on dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline was interviewing. I used the techniques of ethnographic interviewing and phenomenological interviewing. Ethnographic interviewing was used to gain an understanding of the culture, myths, rituals, and hierarchies of the schools where the individuals have worked or currently work, as well as capturing those same aspects looking at the school system as a whole. The phenomenological interviewing aimed to capture the interviewee's personal experience in schools with disciplinary policy and practices. Both offered a needed understanding and perspective of how schools and the school system discipline kids from kindergarten through high school.

The reason I decided to use the interview process for qualitative research was because of the perspectives the interviewees will offer. I know and understand that different educators will likely give different answers, but that will somewhat give an understanding of the complexity of the issue. Some educators may not know about the school-to-prison pipeline and what it entails; some educators may know but feel that they cannot do anything by themselves; some may not want to fight against the grain; and some may be fighting against it already.

For the interviews, I reached out to 10 people who currently work in education or have retired from the field. Of those 10 people, three responded to participate in the interview for the project. Participant 1 is a current teacher in a Title I predominantly Black and Brown school; Participant 2 is a retired teacher and administrator; and Participant 3 is a current charter school principal.

### **Quantitative Research**

The quantitative data used were the statistics gathered by the Southern Coalition for Social Justice through their annual Racial Equity Report Cards and survey questions that were given to a small sample size of teachers and administrators. The Racial Equity Report Cards provide the breakdown of district demographics (teacher, principals, and students), short-term suspension rates, and percentage of students referred to the juvenile justice court by the school system. The data provided were used to analyze how disproportionately discipline plays out in the school district. The data from the survey questions were used as a cross-reference to identify gaps between perceptions of discipline and the statistical numbers that are reported yearly.

For the survey, I reached out to teachers and administrators who are in my network of educators. There were about 50 people working in some type of educational setting or institution who originally responded to me, but there were only 20 people who actually met with me to fill out the survey. The teachers and administrators who completed the survey were from a range of schools from public to private to alternative. All the participants worked in either middle or high school.

## **5. Continuous Improvement Systems**

### **5.1 Continuous Improvement Planning**

The organizational challenge in dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline is one that has many different layers. It is a challenge/problem that is tied to the student code of conduct, the “norms” of disciplinary actions, school/district leadership, the lack of alternatives to suspension/expulsion, and restorative justice practices not being practiced across the district. The challenge is both that of the larger community being unaware of the alarming statistics around disproportionate suspensions, the perpetuation of this being the norm, and the unwillingness to change and challenge this norm of the school-to-prison pipeline.

There is an intention to implement and/or expand some of the recommendations that are tied to things that are already in place within the district and the community. Because of everything that was made more visible due to the pandemic that connects to behavior and the shooting/killing that happened in 2021 in one of our predominantly White high schools, there has been more of an effort and willingness to address the connections between violence/ issues happening in the community that “spill over into the school.” The newly found urgency has opened the doors for many discussions on what the school system can do to combat the issues.

### **5.2 Continuous Improvement Actions**

In collaboration with my partnering organization, we have had the opportunity to partner with two other local grassroots organizations to pilot a mentorship program that aims to combat behavioral issues in schools. The program is in four schools (two middle and two high schools) working with 50 students chosen by school leaders who they deem to be at-risk and in need of mentorship. The mentors have been working with students in schools and the community to intentionally combat disproportionate suspensions, which will help students stay in school and graduate.

There has also been an intentional effort to work with another local grassroots group called Triad Restorative Justice, which has connections with both the school system and the juvenile justice system in Forsyth County. The group works with the school system and the juvenile justice system in a partnership to divert teenagers who have gotten into trouble away from the juvenile justice system. The work this organization has been doing is pushing for alternatives to discipline and keeping students out of the pipeline through restorative justice practices and getting the teenagers in programs that could alter their behavior.

When it comes to policy development and change, there has been an intentional effort to get on task force groups that are working towards policy changes to the student code of conduct. For the last year (June 2021-June 2022), with the help of the partnering organization, I have been a part of the Student Code of Conduct Task Force. The work of the task force has been to push for a recalibration of the current student code of conduct policy in hopes that suspensions and expulsions will see a decline after the new student code of conduct policy has been approved by the school board of education and implemented across the school district.

### **5.3 Continuous Improvement Feedback**

Feedback systems to ensure full implementation of recommendations:

1. Create a quarterly evaluation system that will monitor progress and implementation of newly formed policies.
  - How has the transition been?
  - Has there been pushback from those responsible for implementation at the leadership level?
  - Has there been teacher pushback?
  - Are there additional training sessions that need to be created for buy-in?
2. How many alternative programs geared towards restorative justice practices have been created?
  - What are their aims?
  - How does the program affect students and discipline?
  - How are the restorative justice practices being perceived?
3. How much have city and county officials contributed to the dismantling of the pipeline?
  - Who has been involved?
  - Has their involvement or lack thereof been beneficial or detrimental?
  - What needs to be done for everyone to be fully on board?
4. How much has the community been involved with the entire process of dismantling the pipeline?
  - Have we been working with the community?
  - How much influence does the community have in decision-making?

### **5.4 Continuous Improvement Implementation**

Recommendations critical for the planning process:

1. Evaluation system that will monitor progress and implementation of newly formed policies around discipline and student code of conduct.
2. Alternative programs
  - Restorative justice practices



- Community-driven programs
- 3. Buy-in from city and county elected officials who have the power to implement and influence change in the city and county as a whole.

## **6. Deliverables**

### **6.1 To Partnering Organization from Candidate**

- Push for new disciplinary policies and practices throughout the district
  - Benefits: Fewer suspensions/expulsions of Black/Brown students
- Push for racial bias testing
  - Benefits: Bringing awareness to teachers, administrators, staff, and school board members
- Push for cultural competence training
  - Benefits: Awareness of cultural/racial disconnects
- Push for restorative justice training for teachers, staff, administrators, and school board members
  - Benefits: Understanding alternatives to automatically resorting to write-ups, suspensions, expulsions, and juvenile court referrals
- Push for schools/school district to deeply engage with the communities they serve
  - Benefits: Understanding the need to know the whole school, whole community, and whole child
- Training around the school-to-prison pipeline
  - Benefits: Awareness of inequities/disproportionalities in the district

### **6.2 Deferred Deliverables**

- Push for racial bias testing
  - This deliverable was deferred because of the political climate of the school system. The political climate was one that was drenched with people associating everything with critical race theory that did not align with their political agenda.
- Push for cultural competence training
  - As stated with the previous deferred deliverable, political pressure and pushback forced this deliverable to be deferred.
- Training around the school-to-prison pipeline
  - The school-to-prison pipeline seemed to be an issue that was to be avoided because it challenged the practices and culture of discipline in the school district.
  - This deliverable also received political backlash because of the political climate and anti-critical race theory people showing up at school board meetings.

## **7. Communications Plan**

### **7.1 Communications Plan Development**

The purpose and goals of the communication plan were to determine major stakeholders who would be needed in order to piece together what would be needed to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline. The project host would be organizing events and literature to educate the community on the disparities; Triad Restorative Justice would serve the community by pushing for restorative practices that offer healing and alternative methods to

suspension/expulsion; the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools Student Code of Conduct Task Force will serve to recalibrate the current code of conduct within the district, and Southern Coalition for Social Justice would serve as the organization that will continue to provide current statistics around the inequities in discipline. Each organization is assigned these different tasks because of the work they are currently doing in the community and how they can equip Action4Equity in dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline. The frequency of the meetings between the groups and project manager was determined to be as needed to meet the project needs because some may need to meet more or less frequently than the other groups.

| <b>Stakeholder</b>  | <b>Information Needs</b>  | <b>Why Needed</b>   | <b>Methods Used</b>   | <b>Frequency</b>                                  |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| <i>Project Manager</i><br>Ricky Johnson Jr  | All phases of the project   | To understand what is needed for project to be a success and why the project is a need  | Schedule Meetings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Virtual</li> <li>• In-Person</li> </ul> Send Emails, Texts, and Make calls for information | Daily, Weekly, Monthly, or As Needed              |
| <i>Project Sponsor</i><br>(GWU) Dr. Jeff Hamilton                                 | Project Milestones  | Guide Consultancy Process   | Virtual Meetings, Documentation, Emails   | As needed for project needs                       |
| <i>Project Host</i><br>(Action4Equity) Kellie Easton                              | Tools needed to educate community and policy makers on statistics on the school-to-prison pipeline  | Disciplinary actions disproportionately affect Black and Brown students   | In-person and virtual meetings  | As needed for project needs                       |
| <i>Project Support</i><br>(WSFC School System) Student Code of Conduct Task Force | Current Student Code of Conduct (Policy 5131) that drives disciplinary actions  | To understand what offenses lead to disciplinary actions, as well as what is drenched in bias and discretion when it comes to disciplinary actions taken; Recalibration of WSFC Schools Student Code of Conduct | Virtual Meetings  | Monthly Task force meetings (June 2021-June 2022) |
| <i>Project Support</i><br>Southern Coalition For Social Justice                   | Statistics for discipline in regards to race and suspension rates; Tools needed to educate community about the need for police/SRO free schools in Forsyth County | To understand the discipline disparities and disproportionalities in Forsyth County when it comes to the disciplinary actions, suspensions, and expulsions of Black and Brown students                          | Virtual Meetings  | As needed for project needs                       |
| <i>Project Support</i><br>Triad Restorative Justice                               | Best practices for restorative justice in K-12 schools (specifically middle and high school, grades 6-12)   | To offer alternative practices to automatically resorting to suspension/expulsion   | Virtual and In-person meetings  | As needed for project needs                       |

## 7.2 Stakeholder Engagement Plan

Each stakeholder was chosen because they were identified as being directly or indirectly connected to children within the school district and their ability to advocate and influence policy and practice change when it comes to the school-to-prison pipeline.

- The Winston Salem/Forsyth County Schools system (superintendent/board of education) has the power to create, approve, and implement policy within the school district.
  - They also have the power to approve programs within the district.
- Parents/guardians have kids within the district.
- Grassroots organizations have the ability to organize and push for policy and practice change when it comes to discipline, especially if they are organizations that are focused on education and educational policy.
- City council members and the Forsyth County Board of Commissioners have the power and influence to create and fund programs that will address the issues that happen in the community that are connected to what goes on in the school system (Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child model)

## 8. Risks

### 8.1 Mitigation and Contingency

| Risk Description                             | Mitigation Plan (what to do to avoid the risk occurring)  | Contingency Plan (what to do if the risk occurs)   | Impact (what the impact will be to the project if the risk occurs)  | Likelihood of occurrence (e.g., %, or high/medium/low) |
|--|---|--|---|--|
| Student Code of Conduct                      | Push school district to recalibrate or recreate a new Student Code of Conduct that will decrease the number of suspensions and expulsions;<br><br>Incorporate Restorative Justice practices within the ways we "discipline" | Continue to push against the current student code of conduct that continues to equate to disproportionate suspensions and expulsions | If the student code of conduct is not recalibrated and/or changed, there will be a continuation of disproportionate suspensions and expulsions. | Medium   |
| Disciplinary Practices on the District Level | Create policies/practices that dismantle the school to prison pipeline;   | Continue to push for policy change on the district level around  | Reduction in suspension and expulsions;   | Medium   |

|  |   |  |  |        |
|--|---|--|--|--------|
|  | <p>Create policies and practices that will end exclusionary discipline on the district level;</p> <p>Incorporate Restorative Justice practices within the ways we "discipline"</p> <p>Do away with Zero tolerance policies;</p>   | discipline and disciplinary action.  | <p>Possible increase in graduation rates;</p> <p>Potential decrease in achievement gaps</p>  |        |
| Disciplinary Practices on the School Level | <p>Create policies/practices that dismantle the school to prison pipeline;</p> <p>Create policies and practices that will end exclusionary discipline on the individual school level;</p> <p>Do away with Zero tolerance policies;</p> <p>Incorporate Restorative Justice practices within the ways we "discipline"</p> | Continue to push for policy change on the district level around discipline and disciplinary action.                              | <p>Reduction in suspension and expulsions;</p> <p>Possible increase in graduation rates;</p> <p>Potential decrease in achievement gaps</p> | Medium |
| School Leadership (Micro/Macro)            | <p>Change school culture, one that will not throw kids away throw the guise of discipline;</p> <p>Lead by being student-centered</p>  | Continue to fight for leaders who are willing to change the culture of schools that have high rates of suspension and expulsion. | School culture will remain the same and continue to provide the same results   | Medium |

|                       |   |  |  |        |
|-----------------------|---|--|--|--------|
|                       | and keeping kids in school so they will not miss instruction time;<br><br>Do away with Zero tolerance policies  |  |  |        |
| Community Involvement | Push for alternative solutions to discipline;<br><br>Push district to use restorative justice practices;<br><br>Push district to create needed programs to counter disciplinary "needs" for students; | Continue to fight for children who are disproportionately affected by the discipline policies and practices in schools that have high rates of suspension and expulsion. | Voices in the community heard;<br><br>Reduction in suspension and expulsion;<br><br>Policy and practice change around discipline | Medium |
| Parental Involvement  | Challenge disciplinary disproportionately in discipline on the school level;<br><br>Advocate for students   | Continue to fight for children who are disproportionately affected by the discipline policies and practices in schools that have high rates of suspension and expulsion. | Parental voices heard;<br><br>Reduction in suspension and expulsion;<br><br>Policy and practice change around discipline         | Medium |

## 8.2 Constraints

The main constraints for the project were time, costs, and political resistance to the organization. Because of the pandemic and the murder that happened inside one of the schools in the district, there was somewhat of an urgency for something to happen immediately to handle violence that “spilled over into the schools,” as well as coming up with a way to deal with disciplinary issues that may have been a byproduct of the pandemic (i.e., trauma, mental health, etc.). This quickly became a political issue that leaned towards reactionary solutions that were knee-jerk reactions to make the public feel safe. Many of the suggestions that surfaced were statistically and historically counterproductive.

## 9. Budget

In order to effectively dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline, educating the community is a must. The organization will have to have a staff person who will go into the community and educate people on the statistics on the disparities around discipline, what we need to do in order to push for change, who we need to lobby with/against who will be able to leverage their power, and who in the community can provide additional contributions to dismantle the pipeline. For this to happen, collaborations will need to be made with other organizations that will provide key pieces for the project to be effective.

| <b>BUDGET ITEMS</b>  | <b>YEAR 1<br/>Budget</b> | <b>YEAR 2<br/>Budget</b> | <b>YEAR 3<br/>Budget</b> | <b>TOTAL Budget</b> |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|
| <b>1. Research/Training Teams</b>  |                          |                          |                          |                     |
| Action4Equity  | 15,000                   | 15,000                   | 15,000                   | 45,000              |
| Triad Restorative Justice  | 5,000                    | 5,000                    | 5,000                    | 15,000              |
| Southern Coalition For Social Justice  | 5,000                    | 5,000                    | 5,000                    | 15,000              |
| <b>Subtotal Research/Training</b>  | <b>25,000</b>            | <b>25,000</b>            | <b>25,000</b>            | <b>75,000</b>       |
| <b>2. Travel Costs</b>   |                          |                          |                          |                     |
| Travel costs to lobby/attend state and local government meetings that are linked to education/educational policy | 3,500                    | 3,500                    | 3,500                    | 10,500              |
| <b>Subtotal</b>  | <b>3,500</b>             | <b>3,500</b>             | <b>3,500</b>             | <b>10,500</b>       |
| <b>TOTAL</b>   | <b>28,500</b>            | <b>28,500</b>            | <b>28,500</b>            | <b>85,500</b>       |

## 10. Analysis and Recommendations

### Professional Recommendations

#### 1. Policy development/change

- As a district, there needs to be a recalibration and continued monitoring of the student code of conduct because the code of conduct is the policy that guides what warrants suspension and/or expulsion.

- The current code of conduct has continued to disproportionately suspend and expel Black and Brown students (specifically boys). We cannot continue to ignore this inequity issue if we plan to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline.
- Schiff (2013) and Vitale (2017) both made it clear that the current policies, like zero-tolerance, have not only created the pipeline but have continued to perpetuate it. Policies that are to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline cannot parallel zero-tolerance policies that have been detrimental for Black and Brown students in school districts.
- Get buy-in from the school board and make sure they understand the importance of policy development and change around the student code of conduct and disciplinary policy.
  - Push for recalibration of student code of conduct and ensure that the implementation is taken seriously (This should be done through evaluations).

## 2. The Role of Leadership in Schools/School Districts

- There has to be a push for leaders at the school and district levels to stray away from throwing kids away for any and every infraction that violates the student code of conduct.
- Although any infraction (according to the current student code of conduct) can result in suspension and/or expulsion, leaders on the school and district levels have to create and/or find ways to deal with some infractions (especially the minor infractions) other than in-school or out-of-school of suspensions.
- McAdams (2006) acknowledged the fact that the power to create, vote on, and implement new school policies in the case of dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline lies in the hands of the local school boards. As servant leaders who are elected, it is their duty to ensure that students stay in school and graduate prepared for college or the workforce. Fenning and Rose (2007) also offered a route that relies on leadership at the individual school level to take the lead with the schools they are charged with managing. Although principals and assistant principals have guidelines to follow at the district level, they have the authority to dictate what happens at the schools they are leading.
- On the school level, we have to push school leaders to intentionally change the school climate and culture that currently exist within our school district.

## 3. Restorative Justice Practices

- There has to be a push for alternative and restorative practices that do not perpetuate the norms of automatic suspension.
- There needs to be a new norm created that focuses on healing and being proactive versus being reactive and suspending after situations have already happened.
- Because many issues are interconnected to other things outside of schools, Wing (2018) argued that we should use restorative justice practices as a form of education for our students and the community.

## 4. We have to use the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child approach to solving the problems we see in our schools and our community.

- The COVID-19 pandemic and the shooting/murder that happened within one of our district's high schools have made all things directly or indirectly connected to education more visible to the general public who were not previously aware.
  - In order to solve some of the issues we deal with in our school district, including things that cause suspension/expulsion, we have to intentionally address the things that happen outside of the walls of our schools. We also have to be intentional about going outside of those walls of education.
5. Collaborate with city and county officials to expand, create, and re-create programs that are invested in youth and youth development.
- There has to be an intentional effort to collaborate with elected officials on the city and county level to expand, create, and/or re-create programs that will provide services for our youth that will decrease their chances of acting in ways that will result in them being suspended/expelled.
  - Push for elected officials on the city and county level to invest money and resources in order for the youth to thrive within our city/county.

## 11. Reflection

### 11.1 Professional Learning

Taking on this project has taught me more and more about how political education is and has always been. It taught me from the very beginning of the research aspect of the project that the politics of education are a beast. If you do not know the many different stakeholders that come into play with challenging a system to change its ways, you will ultimately be unsuccessful in that challenge. Professionally, I have grown in the aspect of learning to build relationships, work through differences, and not letting my feelings overpower my intelligence.

This project took on two tasks that were both unexpected and pushed me to rethink what leadership looks like in both crisis, chaos, and unexpected transformation. Our school district, along with others across the globe, was forced to transform from an in-person “norm,” to a new normal that none of the school leaders anywhere were prepared for. Everyone was in a trial-and-error period in hopes that they would get virtual learning right. It is up to the perception of the person interpreting the data and student learning on whether our specific district got it right or not; however, what is clear is that the district had no clue what to do with students who were returning to school from virtual learning for over a year.

Once the students returned, numerous things came into the equation for which neither the school system nor the community was prepared. The “residue” from the pandemic, whether it be mental health, community issues, lack of structure in virtual learning, or whatever the case may have been, the district saw the effects “spill over” into the schools. The most unfortunate situation was that of a student who was shot and killed inside one of the high schools within our district. This created a whirlwind of knee-jerk reactions and political solutions drenched in emotions.



The shooting and killing changed the trajectory of the approach of my project because it forced the community at large to pay attention to community issues that could possibly continue to spill over into schools within our district. What was most alarming to the community at large was that the shooting happened at a predominately White high school that was located in a predominately middle class to upper class White neighborhood. Professionally, this taught me the importance of understanding how race, class, and power play a part in how systems react to situations. Although I had been a student of the racial, socioeconomic, and political aspects of education and society in general, this shooting made it clear how they played out. Because of this incident, there was now and continues to be some sense of urgency to make changes when it comes to community involvement and violence prevention.

Professionally, the pandemic and the unfortunate shooting have taught me how to think on my feet as a leader and the need to be proactive instead of reactive. It taught me how to think through questions about prevention; how, as a leader, I can avoid future violence from happening; and how to be forward-thinking just in case we do find ourselves in the midst of another pandemic. It also taught me the importance of being strategic with the relationships that are built and created when you are a leader because they may be one of the most important things you need as a leader.

## **11.2 Personal Development**

Personally, this project has forced me to become more of a strategic and critical thinker when it comes to being a leader. The project pushed me to think deeper on the issues of discipline, disciplinary actions, the student code of conduct, the community, teacher discretion, the criminal justice system, and school leadership, and how they all are connected when it comes to dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline. The project developed me as a personal leader who thinks about things from a 30,000-foot view and attempts to look through multiple lenses. It further taught me and developed me as a political thinker who moves without feeling but moves based on the evidence and best practices that can create solutions.

My character has developed to be stronger than ever. Over the years I have fought for inequalities and inequities to be addressed and not avoided. This project has pushed me to make sure I stand on that and not be moved by the politics of education or those in power who may try to persuade me otherwise. The project and the research involved with the project have developed me as a leader to speak truth to power no matter the consequences or the backlash that may come with it because in education, avoiding doing so will only perpetuate the issues we need addressed and resolved.

## Appendix

### Quantitative Survey Questions

1. What grades do you teach or have you taught? What subjects did you or have you taught?
  - All participants are currently in MS or HS serving as a teacher or administrator.
  - Subjects being taught were Social Studies, History 1 and 2, English, and Math
  - 2 of the participants were principals, 2 assistant principals, 1 student support specialist, and 2 guidance counselors.
2. When it comes to demographics, what would you say is the makeup of your school/school system?
  - All of the participants work at Title 1 schools that are predominantly Black and Brown.
3. On a scale between 1 and 10, how familiar are you with your schools/school system's Student Code of Conduct?
  - 15% of the participants marked 6 or higher for the familiarity of the Code of Conduct
  - 85% of the participants marked between 1 and 5 for the familiarity of the Code of Conduct
4. On a scale between 1 and 10, when it comes to your school/school system, how well do you think they handle discipline?
  - 70% of the participants marked 7 or higher on how well they thought their school handles discipline
  - 30% of the participants marked between 1 and 6 on how well they thought their school handles discipline
5. On a scale between 1 and 10, do you feel that the disciplinary consequences are fair in your school/school system?
  - 60% of participants marked 6 or higher when it came to how fair they thought disciplinary consequences are.
  - 40% of participants marked between 1 and 5 when it came to how fair they thought disciplinary consequences are.

6. On a scale between 1 and 10, how familiar are you with the suspension rates in your school/school system?
  - 20% of the participants marked 8 or higher when it came to their familiarity with the suspension rates in your school
  - 80% of the participants marked 3 or lower when it came to their familiarity with the suspension rates in your school
7. On a scale between 1 and 10, how much influence do you think the race of the student has when it comes to discipline/suspension?
  - 30% of the participants marked 8 or higher when it came to the influence they thought race has in discipline/suspension
  - 70% of the participants marked between 1 and 4 when it came to the influence they thought race has in discipline/suspension
8. On a scale between 1 and 10, how familiar are you with the school-to-prison pipeline phenomenon?
  - 30% of the participants marked 8 or higher when it came to their familiarity with the school-to-prison pipeline phenomenon
  - 70% of the participants marked between 2 and 5 when it came to their familiarity of the school-to-prison pipeline.
9. On a scale between 1 and 10, how much influence would you say school leadership/district has on discipline?
  - 30% of the participants marked 8 or higher when it came to how much influence school leadership/district has on discipline
  - 70% of the participants marked between 3 and 6 when it came to how much influence school leadership/district has on discipline
10. On a scale between 1 and 10, how familiar are you with the number of students that get referred to juvenile court because of complaints from the school/school district?
  - 100% of the participants marked a 3 or below when it came to their familiarity with students that get referred to juvenile court because of complaints from the school/school district
11. On a scale between 1 and 10, how would you rate the need for some alternatives to discipline within your school/district?

- 40% of the participants marked 7 or higher when it came to the need for some alternatives to discipline within their school
  - 60% of the participants marked between a 3 and 5 when it came to the need for some alternatives to discipline within their school
12. On a scale between 1 and 10, how much participation do you think the community should have when it comes to discipline in school?
- 60% of the participants marked 7 or higher when it came to participation they felt the community should have when it comes to discipline in school
  - 40% of the participants marked between a 2 and 4 when it came to participation they felt the community should have when it comes to discipline in school

*Qualitative Interview Questions and Field Notes*

1. What grades do you teach or have you taught? What subjects did you or have you taught?
  - Participant 1: Elementary School teacher and Administrator
  - Participant 2: Director of Middle and High School and the Principal of the K-12 charter school
  - Participant 3: High School English
2. When it comes to demographics, what would you say is the makeup of your school/school system?
  - Participant 1: Black/Brown Title I elementary schools; School system is diverse and majority minority
  - Participant 2: 98% Black/Brown students in K-12
  - Participant 3: Title One high school that's predominantly Black/Brown
3. How familiar are you with your schools/school system's Student Code of Conduct?
  - Participant 1: Vaguely familiar with the Student Code of Conduct because of the work assigned as an administrator
  - Participant 2: At a Charter school that governs itself, familiar with Student Code of Conduct through interactions with students and independent School Board that's over the charter school.
  - Participant 3: Unfamiliar with student code of conduct.
4. When it comes to your school/school system, how well do you think they handle discipline?

- Do you think that your school/school system is fair when it comes to disciplinary action?
  - Do you think your school/school system is universal in their disciplinary consequences?
  - Participant 1: There needs to be some improvements. Been around long enough to remember how disproportionately Black/Brown students have been disciplined going back to when paddling was allowed in schools
    - School system inequitable when it comes to discipline
    - Not universal as Black/Brown students are disproportionately suspended/expelled
  - Participant 2: Handles discipline differently because of being a charter school. What helps is the culture of the school that has been in place since it was started in the 90's.
    - Fair because of not taking a zero tolerance approach to discipline; Ties back to culture of school
    - Universal because of standards and expectations set in school (school culture)
  - Participant 3: Have some work to do when it comes to how discipline plays out, particularly in title one schools that are predominantly Black/Brown
    - Not fair in discipline
    - Nowhere near universal
5. How familiar are you with the suspension rates in your school/school system?
- Participant 1: Not aware of exact and specific numbers but aware of disproportionality in suspension/expulsion in schools.
  - Participant 2: Familiar because the suspensions/expulsions have to go through the directors/principals office.
  - Participant 3: Not familiar with specific numbers but aware of how often the Black/Brown students, specifically in their class, are suspended from school because they are missing instruction time.
6. Do you think race plays a part when it comes to how your school/school system disciplines?

- Participant 1: Race plays a huge part, the numbers clearly show this.
  - Participant 2: Race does not play a part in how this school disciplines because of the demographic make-up of students and teachers, size of school, and culture of school.
  - Participant 3: Race plays a part of discipline; Has seen differences in how Black/Brown students are treated differently when it comes to discipline compared to white students.
7. How familiar are you with the school-to-prison pipeline phenomenon?
- If you are familiar with it, can you provide your understanding of it?
  - Participant 1: Familiar with the school-to-prison pipeline phenomenon through an equity lens because of the work as Director of Equity and Diversity
  - Participant 2: Familiar with the school-to-prison pipeline phenomenon and uses that familiarity as a means to not feed into it when it comes to charter school students.
  - Participant 3: Vaguely familiar with school-to-prison pipeline phenomenon on a surface level.
8. How much influence would you say school leadership/district has on discipline?
- Participant 1: Leadership extremely important as schools and districts rise and fall depending on leadership (or lack thereof).
  - Participant 2: Strong leadership driving force of schools and how they are able to handle students when it comes to discipline. School leaders set the tone of the school, as well as create/recreate the culture of the school.
  - Participant 3: School leadership important when it comes to discipline because they set the tone
9. How familiar are you with the rates and number of students that get referred to juvenile court because of complaints filed by the school/school district?
- Participant 1: Not familiar with the number of students that get referred to juvenile court.
  - Participant 2: Not familiar with the number of students that get referred to juvenile court by the public school system because charter schools operate as its

own entity; Resorts not to send Black/Brown students to court unless it is under extreme circumstances.

- Participant 3: Not familiar with the number of students that get referred to juvenile court, aware of the students that.

10. In your opinion, do you think there is a need for some alternative methods to discipline within your school/district?

- Do you think the community should play a part in how schools/school systems respond to discipline in school? If so, what ways do you think they should contribute?
- Participant 1: Needs to be something in place that will keep students in school where they will have as much classroom instruction time as possible; Current structure disproportionately disciplines Black/Brown students, we have to find another way.
  - Community needs to play a part in turning schools around, it has been done before and can be duplicated; Mentorship programs, volunteer programs, etc. should be implemented.
- Participant 2: The model used in charter school already looks differently than the model of discipline that is used in the public school system.
  - The charter school embraces the community and welcomes community help for the sake of the children enrolled
- Participant 3: Alternative methods need to be implemented, too many students are thrown away (i.e. suspended/expelled)
  - Community needs to be brought in schools to help in any way that the schools in their community need them to; Any program needed should be implemented.

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