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A CASE STUDY ANALYSIS OF ALTERNATIVE OUT-OF-SCHOOL SUSPENSION
STRATEGIES USED IN TITLE I ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS IN A LARGE URBAN
SCHOOL DISTRICT

By
Jonathan A. Brooks

A Dissertation Submitted to the
Gardner-Webb University College of Education in
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Gardner-Webb University
2022

Approval Page

This dissertation was submitted by Jonathan A. Brooks under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the 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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Acknowledgments

Wow, so much has changed both professionally and personally from when I started this journey in April 2019. I have of course aged; I am closer to 40 now than I am to 35. I have matured; my goals and values have changed. I have had some setbacks, challenges, and obstacles along the way. I have changed jobs, adjusted to working in an entirely new city, lost some friends, gained others, and learned some valuable life lessons along the way. In March 2020, all of our lives were changed forever. The Covid-19 pandemic has changed the way we work and live for the past 3 years and potentially forever. When I started my first class in August 2019, I would have never guessed that I would have been completing two thirds of my program while simultaneously navigating life during a global pandemic as a full-time father, husband, and principal. It has been a humbling experience, to say the least. Throughout it all, I have relied on the encouragement, support, and prayers of my friends and family. Most importantly, I have reconnected with my faith and embraced the fact that I can indeed do all things through Christ while learning to live by my new mantra of choosing “Faith over Fear.”

As I reflect on my educational path, I think about those educators who have influenced my life and ultimately played significant roles in who I am today. I want to thank my third-grade teacher, Patricia Wiseman, for encouraging me, loving me, advocating for me, and believing in me when other adults did not. Thank you for reminding me that it was ok to be me and that it was ok to, in her words, “dream audacious dreams.” To my middle school coach, Coach Charlie Keegan, thank you for recognizing an athletic gift in me and encouraging me to make something of myself. I thank you for literally forcing me to join the team. I still remember the hours you spent

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Abstract

A CASE STUDY ANALYSIS OF ALTERNATIVE OUT-OF-SCHOOL SUSPENSION STRATEGIES USED IN TITLE I ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS IN A LARGE URBAN SCHOOL DISTRICT. Brooks, Jonathan A., 2022, Dissertation: Gardner-Webb University.

The purpose of this study was to compile or detail alternative out-of-school suspension (OSS) strategies using a qualitative method. Within this study, I evaluated the overall thoughts and perceptions of stakeholders, including teachers, school staff, and administrators as it relates to the strategies being used in Title I elementary schools in a large urban district. The following terms or word combinations were searched: alternative, elementary school, decreasing, reducing, attendance, restorative practices, principal, assistant principal, perceptions, stakeholders, teachers, strategies, out-of-school suspension (OSS), elementary, urban school, multi-tiered system of support, restorative practices, positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS), and zero tolerance. After the collection of strategies and the evaluation of thoughts and perceptions of the school stakeholders, I comprised a comprehensive list of suggestions or alternative options for elementary school leaders in Title I schools in large urban school districts to use in place of or in addition to OSS. This research yielded information in the area of school discipline in Title I urban school settings. The strategies shared by school leaders can be used to help support leaders in similar settings.

Keywords: Title I, suspension, elementary school, urban school, alternative

Table of Contents

	Page
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Introduction	1
Statement of the Problem	2
Purpose Statement	4
Conceptual or Theoretical Framework	4
Research Questions	6
Significance of the Study	7
Nature of the Study	9
Setting	10
Role of the Researcher	12
Definition of Key Terms	12
Limitations	14
Chapter Summary	15
Chapter 2: Literature Review	17
Overview	17
Conceptual or Theoretical Framework	19
Urban Schooling and Title I	21
OSS	23
History of OSS	23
North Carolina OSS Data Trends	25
Zero Tolerance Policy	26
School-to-Prison Pipeline and OSS	30
Introduction to SROs	32
Impact of Zero Tolerance Policies	32
Labeling Theory	33
Exclusion From School, Socialization Into Crime	34
Harsh Punishment	36
Stigma of Exclusion	36
Multiple Suspensions	38
OSS and Special Populations (Exceptional Children)	39
Landmark Cases	40
Federal, State, and Local Policies	41
Black Students and Higher Rates of Suspensions and Expulsions	42
New Trend of PBIS	42
Significance	45
Chapter 2 Summary	46
Chapter 3: Methodology	47
Introduction	47
Methodology	47
Data	47
Participants	48
Data Collection	49
Instrumentation	51
Staff Perceptions	52

New Trends	52
Guidelines and Requirements	52
Research Design.....	52
Data Analysis	53
Research Questions	53
Chapter 3 Summary	57
Chapter 4: Results	58
Chapter Introduction	58
Pre-Interview Questions.....	59
Summary of Principal Participants	60
Summary of Teacher Participants	60
Individual Participant and School Profiles	61
Findings	64
Participant Interview Data and Emerging Themes	68
Overview of Interview Responses	77
Limitations of Study	78
Chapter 4 Summary	78
Chapter 5: Discussion	80
Chapter Introduction	80
Overview	80
Conclusions.....	81
PBIS	87
SEL	89
Responsive Classroom	93
Parent Appeal Process for OSS.....	94
Implications for Practice	95
Limitations/Delimitations	96
Overall Implications for Future Research.....	97
Recommendations for Future Research	97
Recommendations for Practice	98
Chapter 5 Summary	100
References	102
Appendices	
A Pre-Interview Script	111
B Interview Questions	113
Tables	
1 Federal, State, and Local Policies	41
2 Principal Participant Demographics	58
3 Teacher Participant Demographics	59
4 School Demographics of Participants	62
5 Principal Experience, Gender, and Race.....	63
6 Teacher Experience, Gender, and Race	63
7 Effective Strategies	64
8 Top Three Themes Identified by Principals.....	65
9 Top Three Themes Identified by Teachers	65
10 Themes From Principals and Teachers	67

11	Correlation Between Research Questions and Themes	76
Figures		
1	Total Suspensions and Rate of Suspensions Per Student in North Carolina	25
2	Suspensions and Expulsions by Race in North Carolina	26
3	2019 Suspension Breakdown in North Carolina	26
4	House Bill 736; School Discipline.....	30
5	National Statistics of Youth Incarcerations	31
6	Ninth-Grade Suspensions and Postsecondary Outcomes	35
7	Three-Tiered Model of PBIS	44
8	Zones of Regulation (Colors).....	90
9	Second Step RULER.....	91
10	Responsive Classroom Model.....	93

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

On February 11, 1983, my mother celebrated her 17th birthday. Seventeen days later, on February 28, 1983, she became a first-time mother when I was born at 10:49 p.m. My father finished eighth grade but never attended high school; he opted to begin working in the tobacco farms at age 14. Being the son of parents who both were not high school graduates created some environmental challenges specifically associated with socioeconomic status. I often spent time in schools that would be considered failing or “low performing.” As early as I can remember, behavioral concerns existed in many of my classrooms and within my school as a whole. Although my mother did not graduate high school, she did instill in her children the importance of education from an early age. From as early as I can remember, she communicated to me that I would be required to graduate from high school, no exceptions. A huge part of her expectations for us at school also included being well-mannered and well-behaved. I attended three elementary schools before third grade, each of which was very different from the other. The schools varied in size, county geographical location, demographics, and social-economic statuses. What I noticed from a very young age was that (a) students in generally every school misbehaved to some degree; (b) consistency in how students were disciplined based on age, gender, and background was an issue; and (c) the administrators at the schools with higher incidents of behavioral challenges often did more to be proactive in preventing misbehavior and were more creative in the solutions or consequences they administered when necessary. Though my mother made her expectations clear, I did not always listen. I was suspended 11 times in elementary school. Most of my suspensions were for

noncompliance, insubordination, or refusal to follow directives. Fortunately for me, my luck changed in sixth grade. An amazing thing happened because of the principal at my middle school. My suspensions for noncompliance were suddenly replaced with referrals to the school counselor, afterschool detention detail, and conferences, and I was never suspended again. As I began my journey as an educator, I often wondered why those strategies used at my middle school were not common practice, particularly at the elementary level. Since then, I have dedicated my professional life to helping improve the experience of students in challenging environments or students with academic and/or behavioral concerns. This research is personal to me; I hope it allows educators more insight or strategies to support students in urban Title I elementary schools.

Statement of the Problem

Research supports the reality that many Title I school leaders and staff members officially and unofficially implement strategies and policies designed to reduce or eliminate out-of-school suspensions (OSS) for elementary-age scholars. The objective of this research was to compile and detail some of these strategies and to evaluate the overall thoughts and perceptions of stakeholders as it relates to the alternative OSS strategies being used in Title I elementary schools in a large urban school district in North Carolina. Some of the official and unofficial strategies used in our most challenging schools can also be implemented in other schools to work to decrease the frequency of occurrence of OSSs as well as the total sum of students being suspended from school, ultimately decreasing a practice referred to as the school-to-prison pipeline. The American Civil Liberties Union (2021) defined this as being a process in which students are pushed out of schools and into prisons through a systematic practice of

criminalizing youth carried out by disciplinary policies and practices within schools that put students into contact with law enforcement. Actions that one time led to a visit to the office of a school administrator for a conversation now frequently lead to suspension or arrest, mainly due to a policy referred to as “zero tolerance” procedures that decree punitive consequences for trivial misbehavior in schools, procedures that mandate fixed consequences, typically severe, punitive, and exclusionary (School Discipline Support Initiative, 2021). Yearly, 3.3 million students are suspended, doubling the number from the 1970s. Discipline guidelines often disproportionately affect students of color (Anti-Defamation League [ADL], 2015). African American students are suspended at rates three times more than their White peers. African American and Hispanic students are twice as likely to drop out of school as their White peers (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). While there are several elements and contributing influences, school suspensions are among the best gauges for which students will drop out of school (ADL, 2015). A student who has been suspended from school is more than three times as likely to drop out in the first 2 years of high school than a student who has never been suspended (ADL, 2015).

Students who drop out of school have more difficulty finding employment, have much lower earning power when they are employed, and ultimately are more likely to become involved with criminal justice (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). The U.S. Department of Labor details that the unemployment rate for high school dropouts is almost double the national average. It is also reported that high school dropouts on average bring home \$600 less monthly or \$8,000 less yearly than individuals with high school diplomas. The correlation between resources, income, opportunity, and criminal

activity as adults may play significant factors in the data that detail that students suspended by schools are further likely to interact with the justice structure. Studies suggest that 23% of elementary school students suspended interacted with a youth probation officer by high school age. That figure stands at less than 5% among those not suspended. Students who have been suspended are three times more likely to encounter the juvenile probation system by middle school (ADL, 2015). Students will make mistakes in school; however, it is important that they are allowed an opportunity to learn from those mistakes. Creating a school environment that acknowledges and supports the social and emotional needs of learners while ensuring the safety and welfare of stakeholders is critical for elementary school leaders.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to compile or detail alternative OSS strategies using a qualitative research method. Within this study, I evaluated the overall thoughts and perceptions of stakeholders including teachers and administrators as it relates to the strategies being used in Title I elementary schools and their effectiveness towards reducing OSS. After the collection of strategies and the evaluation of thoughts and perceptions of the school stakeholders, I evaluated the trends and themes from the interview responses in order to comprise a comprehensive list of suggestions or alternatives for elementary school leaders in Title I schools to use in place of or in addition to OSS.

Conceptual or Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that was explored is the learning theory of radical constructivism. Constructivism is a method of learning or development that holds that

individuals actively build or create their own awareness and that actuality is shaped by their experiences. Radical Constructivism believes in personal structure of significance by the learner through experience and that meaning is influenced by the interaction of prior knowledge in addition to new events. There are five elements of constructivism: learning is a social activity, learning is an active process, learning is contextual, knowledge is personal, and motivation is key to learning (Stevens-Fulbrook, 2019).

This research is important because it directly affects an increasing concern within public education leaders. OSSs affect all stakeholders of the entire ecosystem of a Title I elementary school. The student misses instructional time, the teacher misses opportunities for positive impact on the student, and the parent has to adjust to account for the student being away from campus during the duration of the suspension. There has been increased discussion over recent years if suspensions in elementary school are effective at all.

Many districts across the state have mandated or implemented strict guidelines for elementary school suspensions and some have even banned them completely. In fact, nine states and the District of Columbia currently have eliminated or placed significant restraints on OSS. Those states include Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Louisiana, Nevada, New Mexico, North Carolina, Rhode Island, and Oregon. Most of the states have chosen to focus on limiting suspensions based on grade levels. For example, in Connecticut, only students in third grade or higher are subject to OSS with exceptions only being considered for weapons or extreme acts of violence. Oregon has a similar policy as Connecticut and extends the approach to include Grades 3-5 or all of elementary. The District of Columbia has implemented an elementary-restricted approach and has taken a step further to require that no elementary suspensions extend past 3 days

for any violation.

Several other states have practices in place to address specific infractions that warrant suspensions. For example, students in Louisiana cannot be suspended for several acts, specifically uniform violations; North Carolina, Arkansas, Rhode Island, District of Columbia, New Mexico, and Oregon exclude suspensions for issues related to attendance in any grade level. California has a unique policy that outlines that students are not subject to suspension for disruptions or acts of defiance in Grades K-12.

However, despite the trends in some states, some states, school districts, and school leaders still implement what others may consider harsh practices related to student discipline, including zero tolerance policies and mandatory suspensions for specified violations. This research provides some insight into the effectiveness and the overall perceptions of those directly impacted by elementary school OSS, specifically those in Title I elementary schools in a large urban school district.

Research Questions

Through this study, alternative OSS strategies for Title I elementary schools were explored through the lens of current school administrators, teachers, and staff. This research investigated perceptions and views of strategies as well as the overall observations of school leaders. The research questions that guided this research were

1. How are strategies that are being used as opposed to OSS in Title I elementary schools impacting suspensions?
2. How do educators perceive the effectiveness of OSS prevention strategies used in Title I schools and what recommendations do they have to rely less on OSS?

Significance of the Study

Students who are suspended in elementary school face a higher risk of encounters with the juvenile justice system later during their educational experience (Cole, 2019). This study is significant because it offers insight and suggestions for decreasing suspensions of elementary students. The study also takes into account the perceptions of the effectiveness of alternative suspension strategies from targeted stakeholders. Student suspensions are directly related to student academic and overall quality of life outcomes. The findings in this research provide a better understanding of options for school leaders to use in order to avoid OSS for elementary students in order to influence their ability to lead. In fact, in most states, there are multiple indicators specifically associated with principal performance evaluations related to managing student discipline within the school setting. In North Carolina, those standards include routinely processing ways to safeguard instructional time from disruptions; monitoring staff feedback regarding their thoughts about solutions to possible conflicts and issues to ensure that all staff opinions are respected; resolving conflicts in a way that is in the best interest of staff and students while also understanding the importance of clear expectations, structures, rules, and procedures for students and staff; and being knowledgeable of policy and law related to student conduct while communicating and enforcing clear expectations, guidelines, and fair procedures for students and staff (North Carolina State Board of Education, 2013).

In 2018, The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent and Adult Health concluded a 15-year study in which students were followed for a period as they transitioned from adolescents to young adults (Rosenbaum, 2018). Scholars were surveyed in Year 1, took the survey again 2 years later, and completed the final survey 13

years afterward when they were between 24-32 years old. The survey encompassed questions about their physical well-being and background data about family, communities, and friendships. The research details how 480 students from the dataset who received their first suspension during the initial survey school year were identified. Those 480 students were matched with 1,193 students who were exactly like them with the only exception being that they never received OSS. Student trajectories were compared for both groups and shocking information or correlations were found. Five years after their first suspension, students were 8% less likely to earn a high school diploma and 40% more likely to have been arrested than their non-suspended peers with similar backgrounds. Twelve to 15 years after their first suspension, students were 24% less likely to have received a bachelor's degree, 51% more likely to have been arrested two or more times, and 23% more likely to have been in prison than their non-suspended peers with similar backgrounds. Data analysis suggests that the suspension of students potentially led to lower academic achievement and increased negative consequences as adults.

The Journal of School Violence cited a 2012 report done by the U.S. Department of Education, which outlined that suspensions may do more harm than good, specifically for elementary-age students (Chen et al., 2012). The Journal of School Violence detailed that most school districts continue to use OSS even for minor disciplinary issues even though OSS tends to intensify problem behaviors and may lead to academic problems (Chen et al., 2012). OSS is not fairly applied with minority youth, including African American and Hispanic students, being assigned punitive suspensions at greater rates than nonminority youth, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES;

Brey et al., 2019). North Carolina public school data reported that in 2019, of the 110,927 individual students who received suspensions, 49.48% were Black students (Childress, 2020). More specifically, 32.73% were Black males, followed by Black females at 16.75% and Hispanic males at 8.91% (Childress, 2020).

Bell (2020) studied the impact of suspensions on student academic achievement. In this study, students indicated that their achievement declined by as much as two letter grades during the duration of their suspensions. This research also indicated that both students and parents attributed the academic declines to missing assignments, instruction, and activities due to being suspended; missing guidance on completing assignments; experiencing difficulty catching up once returning from suspension; missing vital instruction while they were away; and educator's reluctance to allot makeup assignments to suspended students once they returned from suspension. Bell also detailed a recent phenomenon in public education that is a direct result of school suspensions known as Black and Brown educational flight. Parents being fed up with excessive school suspensions specifically targeted towards African American and Hispanic students is driving them to remove their children from a school district and explore alternate educational options. Bell expressed that school systems should use alternatives to school suspensions and work to better recognize how students and parents view school discipline overall.

Nature of the Study

What distinguishes this research from previous studies is the specific focus on Title I elementary school stakeholders, specifically those in large urban school districts. This study also focused heavily on the perceptions of the alternative OSS strategies of

school-based staff including teachers and administrators. Finally, this study provided a detailed list of what includes the perceived most and least effective alternative OSS strategies to guide and assist elementary school principals with discipline decisions. The qualitative method was used to assist in accomplishing the goals of the study, as this method involves collecting and analyzing nonnumerical data to understand concepts, opinions, or experiences. It can be used to gather in-depth insight into a problem or generate new ideas for research. During this study, this method was used to gain insight on alternative OSS strategies being used in Title I elementary schools in order to offer ideas to others regarding alternative strategies that can be used in all elementary schools in order to have a positive impact on student outcomes.

The research questions that were used included “How are strategies that are being used as opposed to OSS in Title I elementary schools impacting suspensions,” and “How do educators perceive the effectiveness of OSS prevention strategies used in Title I Schools and what recommendations do they have to rely less on OSS?” This research investigated perceptions and views of strategies as well as the overall observations of school leaders. The research questions included were designed to gather information and insight regarding suspensions from individuals who are actively involved and experiencing the current research topic, Alternative OSS Strategies Used in Title I Elementary Schools.

Setting

The large urban school district is located in central North Carolina and is comprised of 30 elementary, nine middle, 10 high, two secondary (6-12), and two alternative/hospital schools. The district serves more than 32,000 students within the 53

schools and is within the top 10% of districts in the state as far as size. The ethnic composition of the district's student population is quite diverse. Over 40% of students are Black, more than 30% are Hispanic, nearly 20% are White, and approximately 7% are other races. As noted, minorities make up nearly 80% of the student population. Further, 62% of all students enrolled are eligible for free/reduced lunch; however, this breakdown does not correspond to the overall population of the county, which is roughly 42% White and 58% minority. Over the years, there has been a steady departure of White students from the school system. The beneficiaries of the White students leaving the district appear to be local charter and private schools. Low graduation rates, low school report card grades, low test proficiency rates, and high discipline rates are factors contributing to the cause of the multi-year enrollment decline. The district has several unique factors that contribute to the overall culture of the district. The first factor worth noting is the comprehensive district-wide commitment towards equity and inclusion. In 2017, an audit conducted by the North Carolina Department of Education revealed several inequitable practices related to equity in experiences associated with academic opportunities and disciplinary practices for African American and Hispanic students. Due to the discoveries, the district was proactive in creating a department and dedicating resources to monitor, support, and address district-wide concerns and challenges related to equity. The second factor that affects the overall culture of the district is the strong presence of the teacher union. There are approximately 5,000 employees in this district; 35% of the employee population are official members of the organized teacher union. This makes many decisions and practices highly political and occasionally oppositional within the urban school district.

Role of the Researcher

I am currently an elementary school principal serving the school district. I am a veteran educator who has served in elementary, secondary, and alternative public school settings and has experience as a teacher, coach, and assistant principal. For the past 5 years, I have served as principal in two school systems. Credentials include B.S. in elementary education with a concentration in health and physical education with a second minor in parks and recreation management, MSA in school administration, K-12 education administration licensure, and EdD in Educational Leadership (in progress). In my current role as a Title I school principal, I am responsible for a variety of tasks associated with school leadership containing but not restricted to budgeting, testing, marketing, instructional leadership, community relations, school discipline, facilities, communication, professional development, student transportation, and school-based emergency response efforts. The experience I have as a Title I principal helped with this research. I aspire to be a school superintendent, and I am excited to have completed this dissertation on a topic that currently affects my colleagues, staff, students, the school district, and the entire field of education.

Definition of Key Terms

The following terms or word combinations have been searched: alternative, OSS, elementary school, decreasing, reducing, attendance, multi-tiered system of support, restorative practices, positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS), urban, Title I, principal, assistant principal, perceptions, stakeholders, teachers, and strategies.

Alternative

Different from the usual or conventional, such as existing or functioning outside

the established cultural, social, or economic system (Merriam-Webster, n.d.a).

Assistant Principal

The executive of a school community under the supervision of the principal (Merriam-Webster, n.d.b).

Attendance

The action or state of going regularly to or being present at a place or event (Merriam-Webster, n.d.c).

Elementary School

A school for the first four to six grades, usually including kindergarten (Merriam-Webster, n.d.d).

Multi-Tiered System of Support

A systemic, continuous-improvement framework in which data-based problem-solving and decision-making are practiced across all levels of the educational system for supporting students (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2021).

OSS

An impermanent, comprehensive barring from school and events. In other words, a student is barred from being on school property (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2021).

Principal

The primary executive of a school community; supervises the assistant principal.

PBIS

An evidence-based three-tiered framework to improve and integrate all the data, systems, and practices affecting student outcomes (Ditrano, 2015).

Title I Schools

Schools in which children from low-income families make up at least 40% of the total enrollment (U.S. Department of Education, 2021).

Urban Schools

Schools that are inside an urbanized area and primary city with a population of 100,000 or more (U.S. Department of Education, 2021).

Reducing

To make smaller or less in amount, degree, or size (Merriam-Webster, n.d.e).

Restorative Practices

A social science that studies how to build social capital and achieve social discipline through participatory learning and decision-making.

Stakeholder

A group, corporation, organization, member, or system that affects or can be affected by an organization's actions (Merriam-Webster, n.d.f).

Strategies

A plan of action or policy designed to achieve a major or overall aim (Merriam-Webster, n.d.g).

Teacher

One whose occupation is to instruct (Merriam-Webster, n.d.h).

Limitations

Some limitations of this study included that the study primarily focused on Title I elementary schools. This research did not gather data or information on non-Title I schools. Another limitation is that I did not gather feedback from students or parents. The

focus of this research was primarily on the school administrators and school-based staff. Another limitation is that this research only focused on one school district. The final limitation is that this research did not track the success of strategies but rather categorized a list and gathered feedback on the perceptions of each option on the list from school-based staff working in Title I elementary schools.

Chapter Summary

My research purpose was to compile or detail some alternative OSS strategies and to evaluate the overall thoughts and perceptions of stakeholders as it relates to the strategies being used in Title I elementary schools. This study explored the observations, experiences, and feedback of school staff members directly involved or impacted by OSS. Some of the official and unofficial strategies used in our most challenging schools can also be implemented in other schools in order to work to decrease the frequency and number of students being suspended from school, ultimately decreasing the school-to-prison pipeline for students.

Chapter 1 outlined the background, purpose, significance, questions, and limitations associated with this study; outlining and detailing the importance and significance the research will have in the field for future researchers. Chapter 2 illustrates the theoretical framework on which the study was based and reviews the changing approach towards school discipline and the efforts of school leaders to address those challenges. Chapter 3 outlines several elements of the study including the description of the participants, variables, instrumentation, and materials to be applied, and a collection of data. Chapter 4 presents the collected data and answers research questions to determine the results of the case study. Chapter 5 is a summary of the study and all findings with

recommendations for practical use for future researchers.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Overview

The necessity for plans to address discipline within public schools is far from a new phenomenon. In fact, discipline practices have been well documented by prominent researchers as far back as the beginning of United States schooling during early colonialism (Lisa, 2020). In every era of history where formal school has existed in the country, some students have been disruptive and disobedient. Research details that although responses to unwanted student behavior have changed from the early 19th century when corporal punishment of students was the primary strategy used to address unwanted behavior in schools, disciplinary challenges and practices do not exist in a vacuum but are part of the developing sociological scene. In the current educational climate, increased consideration was given to the lack of discipline and the increasing use of violence among young people, particularly in and around schools (Jones et al., 2018); because of this, various practices have emerged in recent years to deal with the perceived issue of disorder in public schools. Research indicates that some of the applied programs generated positive outcomes such as decreases in-school suspensions as well as decreases in reoccurring suspensions for students (Lisa, 2020).

This literature review addresses available literature as it relates to (a) agendas to avoid classroom difficulties, (b) discipline strategies in present practice, (c) importance of rules, (d) methods for changing inappropriate behavior, and (e) zero tolerance policies. Practices to avoid classroom or school concerns use a wide range of approaches. Several school-based discipline deterrence programs function under the basis that misbehavior is a learned behavior (Jones et al., 2018).

Curwin et al. (2018) detailed that classrooms are workshops of knowledge and for disciplinary programs to be effective, each educator within a school should be involved in the comprehensive program that includes (a) executing an action plan to address school conduct, (b) a fair and consistent system of addressing rule violators, and (c) a process designed to involve students as decision makers. Curwin et al. pointed out disciplinary issues in school affect all students, even the students who are not the perpetrators of misconduct. If children are afraid or distracted because of school disciplinary issues, learning is interrupted. This is why it is key that all stakeholders are actively involved with ensuring the climate related to school discipline is positive (Curwin et al., 2018). Educators should be mindful that for any school discipline program to be successful, everyone within the learning environment must contribute (Jones et al., 2018). According to The Education of Al Shanker published by *Education Week* in 1996, Al Shanker, the former president of the American Federation of Teachers, believed that unless you have order and civility, not much learning will go on in schools.

Through this study, alternative OSS strategies for Title I elementary schools were explored through the lens of current school administrators and teachers. This research investigated perceptions and views of strategies as well as the overall observations of school leaders. The research questions that guided this research were

1. How are strategies that are being used as opposed to OSS in Title I elementary schools impacting suspensions?
2. How do educators perceive the effectiveness of OSS prevention strategies used in Title I schools and what recommendations do they have to rely less on OSS?

Conceptual or Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that was explored is the learning theory of radical constructivism. Ernst von Glasersfeld developed radical constructivism theory in 1974 (McLeod, 2019). Constructivism is an approach to learning that holds that people actively construct or make their own knowledge and that reality is determined by the experiences of the learner. Constructivism believes in the personal construction of meaning by the learner through experience and that meaning is influenced by the interaction of prior knowledge and new events. Western Governors University (2020) outlined that there are many specific elements and principles of constructivism that shape the way the theory works and applies to students. Constructivism theory expresses the following:

1. Knowledge is constructed. This is the basic principle, meaning that knowledge is built upon other knowledge.
2. Learners take pieces of information and put them together in their own unique way.
3. The learner's previous knowledge, experiences, beliefs, and insights are all important foundations for their continued learning.
4. People learn to learn as they learn. Learning involves constructing meaning and systems of meaning; each thing we learn gives us a better understanding of other things in the future.
5. Learning is an active process. Learning involves sensory input to construct meaning. The learner needs to do something in order to learn; it is not a passive activity.
6. Learning is a social activity. Learning is directly associated with our

connection with other people.

7. Learning is relative, meaning learning is not a series of isolated facts and theories separate from the rest of our lives; we learn in ways connected to things we already know, what we believe, or what we have experienced in our past. The things we learn and the things we tend to remember are connected to the activities going on around us.
8. Knowledge is personal. Because constructivism is based on your own experiences and beliefs, knowledge becomes a personal affair. Each person will have their own prior knowledge and experiences to bring to the table. So, the way and things people learn and gain from education will all be very different.
9. Learning exists in the mind. Hands-on experiences and physical actions are necessary for learning, but those elements are not enough. Engaging the mind is key to successful learning. Learning needs to involve activities for the minds, not just our hands. Mental experiences are needed for retaining knowledge.
10. Motivation is key to learning. Students are unable to learn if they are unmotivated. Without motivation, it is difficult for learners to reach into their experience and make connections for new learning (Western Governors University, 2020).

I chose constructivism theory because stakeholders who are actively participating and experiencing factors associated with OSS in urban Title I elementary schools and the previous experiences and perceptions of those individuals directly influence dynamics

linked to decisions being made in schools, ultimately affecting students. Related to consequences and disciplinary practices, what principals have experienced in the past may dictate current decisions. What teachers sense and feel or their perceptions regarding disciplinary decisions being implemented within the school environment may influence their interactions, outlook, and ultimately relationships with students, other teachers, and school administration.

This research is important because it directly focuses on what is an increasing concern within public education. OSS affects all stakeholders of the entire ecosystem of an elementary school. The student misses instructional time, the teacher misses opportunities for positive impact on the student, and the parent has to adjust to account for the student being away from campus during the duration of the suspension. Allman and Slate (2011) detailed that there has been increased discussion over recent years if suspensions in elementary school are effective at all. Many districts across the state have mandated or implemented strict guidelines for elementary school suspensions, and some have even banned them completely (Allman & Slate, 2011). However, some school districts and school leaders still implement what others may consider harsh practices related to student discipline, including zero tolerance policies and mandatory suspensions for specified violations. This research will provide some insight into the effectiveness and the overall perceptions of those directly impacted by elementary OSS.

Urban Schooling and Title I

Urban Schools

Urban education is a method of schooling that takes place in large, densely populated areas with diverse populations. It can refer to the situations and demands that

characterize teaching and learning in large metropolitan areas. Schools that offer an urban educational experience usually have a high enrollment rate and a complex bureaucratic system. Urban education refers to a mode of learning and teaching that mainly takes place in urban areas. Three types of urban education are “urban intensive,” “urban emergent,” and “urban characteristic.” Urban intensive schools are those concentrated in large, metropolitan cities such as New York. Urban emergent schools are in large cities but not as large as major cities. They also have similar resources and academic development of students relative to urban intensive schools. Urban characteristic schools are not in big cities and are only just beginning to experience challenges associated with urban contexts. Urban schools enroll 24% of all public school students in the United States, 35% of poor students, and 43% of minority students (Superville, 2015).

Title I

Title I, Part A (Title I) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act, provides financial assistance to local educational agencies and schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards (U.S. Department of Education, 2016.). A Title I school is operating a targeted assistance program. The school provides Title I services to children who are failing, or most at risk of failing, to meet challenging state academic standards. Schools in which children from low-income families make up at least 40% of enrollment are eligible to use Title I funds to operate school-wide programs that serve all children in the school in order to raise the achievement of the lowest-achieving students (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

OSS

OSS is defined as a short-term, complete removal from school and school-sanctioned activities (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). During OSS, a student is restricted from being on school property and even restricted from being on any other property owned or operated by the school district. Typically, OSS can last a few days; however, it is important to note that suspensions by description can range from a few hours to indefinite amounts of time. This penalty is one of the most severe a school can enforce and stops short only of expulsion, or being completely removed from school and/or school activities. The offenses that warrant OSS often vary; however, among the offenses that will likely land a student in OSS are weapons, bullying, drug offenses, extreme disrespect or disregard for the safety of others, and repeated, smaller offenses (Allman & Slate, 2011). Despite many attempts to reduce occurrences, OSS has continued to be reported as one of the most commonly used disciplinary consequences for student misbehavior (Ketchum, 2020). More recently, the use of OSS has even been used for minor offenses, despite its original intention to address serious infractions of school policies and more severe inappropriate behaviors (Allman & Slate, 2011). Brunette (2010) examined student surveys that encompassed questions about in-school suspension and OSS. Follow-up questions included an assessment of the actions that resulted in the school suspensions. The most common reasons for student suspension were physical aggression, verbal disrespect, and profanity with school staff (Allman & Slate, 2011).

History of OSS

Allman and Slate (2011) detailed that inappropriate behavior of students in school

is not a new issue in public education; teachers have reported behavioral problems in school since the early beginnings of the public school system. Due to the high enrollment spearheaded by making public school mandatory, schools had to hire a principal who oversaw school operations. This created a new hierarchy at the school; teachers were no longer the source of the discipline. In 1910, corporal punishment was the most common form of discipline in schools. Teachers would use switches, birch, rulers, etc. for discipline and academic issues. Teachers were able to hit students when they were not paying attention in class or had discipline problems and for academic issues. A popular form of discipline was “time-out” instead of using corporal punishment. The teacher would send students to time-out whenever there were discipline problems. Students would be isolated to a corner instead of being with the class. Time-out interrupts and prevents aggressive behavior, protects the rights and safety of the other students, and keeps them from turning into an admiring and encouraging audience.

Throughout history, problem behaviors exhibited by students have been addressed in schools through school consequences including verbal reprimands, corporal punishment, after-school detention, in-school suspension, and OSS. School administrator use of OSS began as a method of reducing student misbehavior in the 1960s and has continued to be used since that time (Childress, 2020). Early 2000 discipline schools adapted a new discipline procedure by using referrals in the classroom. Schools decided their own type of procedure for writing a referral. Most teachers were expected to give warnings and call parents before a referral was given to the student. Teachers could refer students to the principal’s office and even to the counselors. The goal is to get the child help so they can come back to class later and be successful (Meador, 2018). Researchers

agree that educational discipline procedures have come a long way since the 1800s. Current discipline and classroom management procedures include preventative discipline. Teachers establish expectations and rules for behavior during the first few days of class. They create a safe, nonconfrontational classroom. Positive reinforcement is another type of replacement technique. Students are rewarded when they exhibit positive behavior. Teachers can add positive reinforcements to their teaching methods and curriculum to decrease the chances of behavioral issues (Meador, 2018).

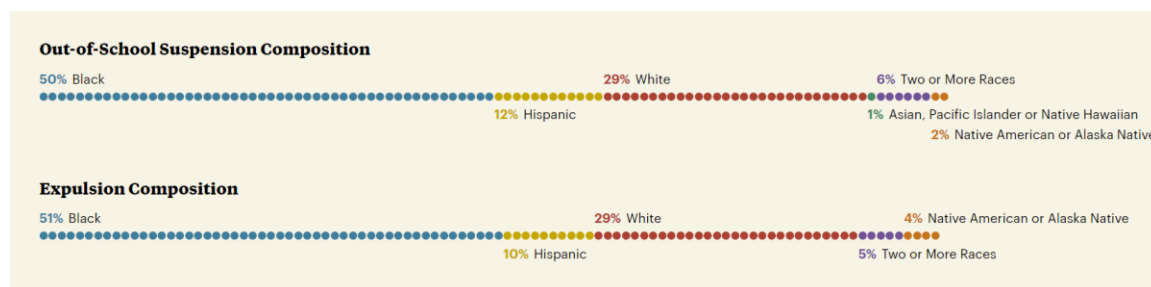
North Carolina OSS Data Trends

Figure 1

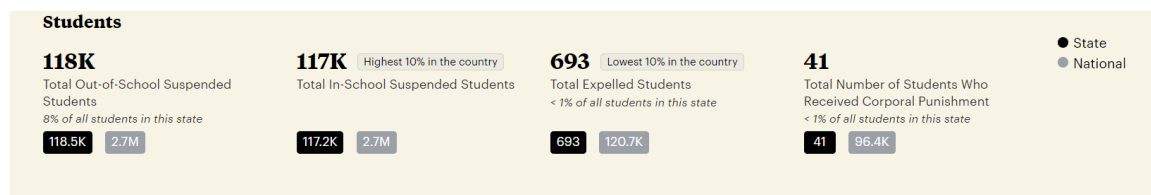
Total Suspensions and Rate of Suspensions Per Student in North Carolina

Location	Data Type	2010 - 2011	2011 - 2012	2012 - 2013	2013 - 2014	2014 - 2015	2015 - 2016	2016 - 2017	2017 - 2018	2018 - 2019	2019 - 2020
North Carolina	Number	262,858	254,735	254,735	194,177	201,232	209,656	203,346	204,300	195,654	147,287
	Rate	18.6	17.8	17.1	13.5	14.0	14.6	14.2	14.4	13.9	10.5

Data show a significant decrease in suspension totals in North Carolina over the past 10 years. The highest rate of suspensions comes from 2010-2011, and the lowest comes from 2019-2020. It is important to note that many districts went remote in March 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Figure 2*Suspensions and Expulsions by Race in North Carolina*

Data show that during the 2019-2020 school year, Black or African American students were the primary recipients of both suspensions and expulsions by an average of 21%. Asian students were the least suspended students during this same time.

Figure 3*2019 Suspension Breakdown in North Carolina*

Data show there were 118,000 suspensions in 2019-2020 statewide. This accounts for 8% of all students. Two point seven million students were suspended nationally during the 2019-2020 school year. North Carolina ranks in the lowest 10% in the country with expulsions.

Zero Tolerance Policy

Zero tolerance policies were developed in response to school shootings and school violence. In 1994, the federal government passed the Gun-Free Schools Act, which allowed schools to expel any student who brought a gun to school Gjeltén (2015). Schools can use harsh punishment whenever a student breaks a certain rule with the zero

tolerance policy. The goal was to cut down on crime to decrease behavioral issues. Zero tolerance policies account for offenses for students bringing any type of weapon to school, having alcohol or drugs on campus, fighting, and threatening students or teachers (Gjelton, 2015). Schools started using school resource officers (SROs) to monitor halls during the school day. Key education stakeholders supported zero tolerance policies. The expansion of zero tolerance policies in schools throughout the United States might be one cause for the increased use of out-of-placement disciplinary consequences because the term has broadened since the start of its use. Zero tolerance policies developed from drug enforcement policies established in the 1980s at the federal and state levels (Huang & Cornell, 2021). Zero tolerance became a term used from the 1980s to refer to policies in which all offenses were harshly punished; by the late 1980s, schools were beginning to form zero tolerance procedures that included the suspension and expulsion of students for specific offenses (Huang & Cornell, 2021). Examples of student behaviors that were categorized into zero tolerance policies included drug possession, involvement in gang activity, and possession of weapons. Over time, however, school districts began developing zero tolerance policies across the United States for less significant violations such as tobacco use or possession, school disruption, and less violent behaviors (Huang & Cornell, 2021). Chicago public schools described an increase in school-combined suspensions by 51% the year succeeding the adoption of a zero tolerance discipline policy. The implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) has furthermore played a key role in the sustained progress of zero tolerance policies, according to Huang and Cornell (2021). The National Association of School Psychologists (2018) cited the NCLB requirement of states to adopt a zero tolerance policy that empowers teachers to

remove violent or persistently disruptive students from the classroom. The purpose of this policy is an attempt to uphold school district accountability for safety in public schools across the United States (National Association of School Psychologists, 2018). However, specific guidelines for the advancement of zero tolerance policies are not provided in NCLB and might account for the inconsistency present among zero tolerance policies in schools.

An example of inconsistency in zero tolerance policies can be observed in a study conducted by NCES (Heaviside et al., 1998). In this study, NCES surveyed 1,234 public elementary, intermediate, and high schools from across the United States and the District of Columbia. Survey data were collected from school administrators regarding the number of disciplinary actions assigned to students and the percentage of schools that adopted zero tolerance policies for three specific acts such as possession or use of a gun or weapon; possession, distribution, or use of alcohol or drugs or tobacco; or physical fights. Heaviside et al. (1998) concluded that 79% of schools adopted zero tolerance policies for school violence and tobacco, 87% utilized zero tolerance for alcohol and drugs, and 94% incorporated zero tolerance for weapons. Disciplinary actions reported by school administrators comprised the assignment of short-term suspension, placement in a disciplinary alternative education program, and extended OSS.

Data available from Diliberti et al. (2017) indicated that despite the intent of zero tolerance policies to keep schools safe and reduce serious misbehavior in schools, the number of disciplinary actions reported by schools for physical aggression, insubordination, and the possession of firearms or other explosive devices has not changed to a measurable degree since the 2003-2004 school year. Though legislation has

provided guidelines for student discipline and specific offenses, a more important aspect to consider is the use of these guidelines in schools and school districts (Huang & Cornell, 2021). School staff need to be familiar with the current legislation and the implications of these mandates to uphold the consistency of educational law with school policy and discipline execution. These mandates provide guidelines not only for when and how long students receive consequences in specific school disciplinary sanctions but also for how these programs are implemented and have influenced how programs are set up for students. The implementation of zero tolerance policies by schools continues to be a contentious topic in education, as these policies have been shown to be broad and loosely defined, leaving them open for interpretation (Verdugo, 2002). Zero tolerance policies fail to take into account the intent of student behaviors and the context surrounding behavior occurrences (Verdugo, 2002). Researchers have proposed that zero tolerance policies might not be effective in reducing severe behavior and might increase the likelihood of future suspensions of students and lead to academic failure and student dropout (Huang & Cornell, 2021).

In 2011, North Carolina signed into law a new discipline code. The state worked with Duke Children's Law Clinic to create a policy that would significantly change how discipline is implemented in schools. This law prohibits zero tolerance in that one punishment may not be set for a specific offense. North Carolina Governor Beverly Perdue signed North Carolina House Bill 736 into law a revised school discipline code (North Carolina General Assembly, 2011). The new law affects all the school districts in North Carolina, requiring them to revamp their school discipline policies. House Bill 736 mandates that school boards are no longer able to prescribe a certain penalty for a

specific offense; instead, they must allow the superintendent to take into account all the circumstances surrounding the incident (Sondland, 2018).

Figure 4

House Bill 736; School Discipline

**GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA
SESSION 2011**

**SESSION LAW 2011-282
HOUSE BILL 736**

AN ACT TO REORGANIZE THE GENERAL STATUTES RELATING TO SCHOOL DISCIPLINE; PREVENT LITIGATION BY ADDING DEFINITIONS TO, AND CLARIFYING AMBIGUITIES IN, THE CURRENT LAW; CODIFY EXISTING CASE LAW; AND INCREASE LOCAL CONTROL AND FLEXIBILITY REGARDING DISCIPLINE.

The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

SECTION 1. G.S. 115C-390 and G.S. 115C-391 are repealed.

SECTION 2. Article 27 of chapter 115C of the General Statutes is amended by adding the following new sections:

"§ 115C-390.1. State policy and definitions.

(a) In order to create and maintain a safe and orderly school environment conducive to learning, school officials and teachers need adequate tools to maintain good discipline in schools. However, the General Assembly also recognizes that removal of students from school, while sometimes necessary, can exacerbate behavioral problems, diminish academic achievement, and hasten school dropout. School discipline must balance these interests to provide a safe and productive learning environment, to continually teach students to respect themselves, others, and property, and to conduct themselves in a manner that fosters their own learning and the learning of those around them.

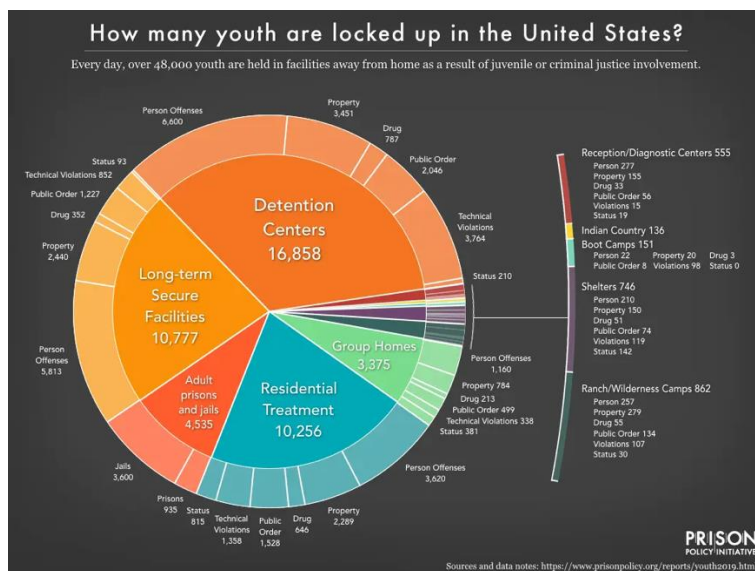
School-to-Prison Pipeline and OSS

The school-to-prison pipeline is described as the practice of students who are pushed out of educational institutions and into the juvenile justice system. It is a process of criminalizing youth behavior through corrective strategies and practices in schools, eventually placing students into a path leading to interaction with law enforcement. Once students are put into contact with police for disciplinary reasons, often they are then removed from the educational setting and placed into the juvenile and criminal justice structures. There are key policies and practices that shaped the school-to-prison pipeline, including zero tolerance policies that mandate harsh punishments for infractions, exclusion of students from schools through punitive suspensions and expulsions, and the presence of police on campus as SROs. The school-to-prison pipeline is reinforced by

budgetary decisions made by the U.S. government. From 1987 to 2007, funding for incarceration significantly increased, while funding for higher education was marginally raised (Sondland, 2018). Evidence supports that the school-to-prison pipeline primarily captures and affects Black students, which mirrors the overrepresentation of this group in America's prisons and jails. These racial inequalities are particularly prominent among both Black boys and Black girls. Black boys and girls are extremely overrepresented relative to the total youth population. While 14% of all youth under 18 in the U.S. are Black, 42% of boys and 35% of girls in juvenile facilities are Black (Sawyer, 2019).

Figure 5

National Statistics of Youth Incarcerations



The two key forces that maintain the school-to-prison pipeline are the use of zero tolerance policies that mandate punitive punishments for students and the presence of SROs on school campuses. These policies and practices were initiated with good intentions related to increasing safety within schools succeeding a deadly surge of school violence across the country in the 1990s. A partnership developed between U.S.

policymakers and educators who held that severe consequences for disciplinary infractions would aid in ensuring improved safety on school campuses (Sondland, 2018). Applying a zero tolerance policy often means that a school or district has zero tolerance for specific acts of misbehavior or violations of school rules, no matter how minor, unintentional, or subjectively defined they may be. In an environment with a zero tolerance policy, suspensions and expulsions are typical and common methods of dealing with student misconduct.

Introduction of SROs

An SRO program is a nationally accepted program that places law enforcement officers including police and sheriffs within the school environment. The SRO can serve in a variety of roles within the school and is allowed to take action on criminal issues that may occur. Many school districts and schools utilize SROs as resources for areas such as violence diffusion, safety programs, alcohol and drug use prevention, and crime prevention. In the late 1950s, the first SRO program was started in Flint, Michigan. The overall goal or objective in implementing SROs was to improve the relationship between the local police and youth within the community. The National Association of School Resource Officers estimates that between 14,000 and 20,000 SROs are currently in service nationwide.

Impact of Zero Tolerance Policies

Research supports the theory that the implementation of zero tolerance policies has led to substantial upsurges in suspensions and expulsions. Citing a study conducted by educational scholar Henry Giroux (2017), it was observed that over a 4-year period, suspensions increased by 51% and expulsions by nearly 32 times after zero tolerance

policies were implemented in Chicago schools. The district overall soared from 21 suspensions or removals from school during the 1994-1995 school year to a staggering growth of 668 during 1997-1998 (Giroux, 2017). Correspondingly, Giroux mentioned a report from the Denver Rocky Mountain News that discovered that suspensions expanded by more than 300% in the city's public schools between 1993 and 1997. After being suspended or expelled, statistics show that students are less probable to complete high school, more than twice as likely to be arrested, and more likely to become involved with the justice system throughout the year that follows the initial suspension. In fact, sociologist David Ramey (2015) conducted a national study that outlined students experiencing school punishment before the age of 15 are directly associated with future contact with the criminal justice system, specifically for boys. Additional research illustrates that students who do not finish high school are more likely to be incarcerated (Rios, 2011).

Labeling Theory

Labeling theory is a sociological theory of deviance, which contends that individuals will identify and behave in habits that imitate how others label them (Stevens-Fulbrook, 2019). Applying this theory to the school-to-prison pipeline proposes that being labeled as a “bad” kid by school staff and being treated in a way that reflects that label (punitively) ultimately leads kids to internalize the label and act in ways that make it factual through action. In other words, it is a self-fulfilling prophecy. Sociologist Victor Rios (2011) found in his studies the effects of policing on the lives of Black and Latinx boys that amplified scrutiny and efforts at controlling “at-risk” or deviant youth eventually nurture the very criminal behavior they are intended to avert. These “at-risk”

youth are often labeled as bad or challenging which often results in stripping them of dignity while failing to acknowledge their struggles and perpetuating disrespect, rebellion, and misconduct from those same youth are acts of resistance. According to Rios, social foundations and their authorities do the work of criminalizing youth, based on how they are treated and managed initially.

Exclusion From School, Socialization Into Crime

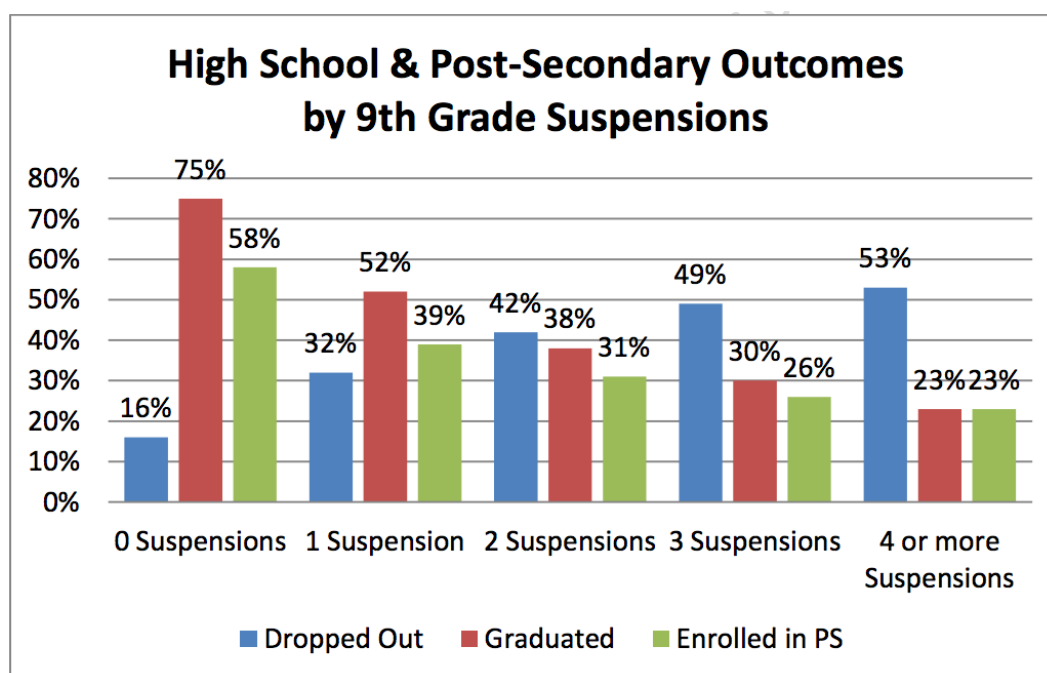
The sociological idea of socialization also helps shed light on why the school-to-prison pipeline exists (Stevens-Fulbrook, 2019). Generally, after family, school is the second most important and formative place of socialization for children. School is where children often learn social standards for behavior and interaction and receive moral guidance from adults. Removing students from schools as a form of discipline takes them out of this formative environment and essential process, and it removes them from the safety and structure the school often provides. Many students who express behavioral issues at school are acting out in response to stressful or dangerous conditions in their homes or neighborhoods, so removing them from school and returning them to a problematic or unsupervised home environment hurts rather than helps their development (Jones, 2018).

Research also supports the theory that suspensions and expulsions do little to change behavior and ultimately these punitive acts can actually push students out of school altogether. A student who is suspended one time in the ninth grade is at an elevated or increased risk of dropping out, according to Everyone Graduates Center (2012). That same study found that suspension increased the chance of leaving school prior to graduation from 16% to 32%, and students who were suspended in elementary

school were 29% more likely to drop out at some point during their high school experience. Studies also demonstrate that the effects of exclusion could be cumulative, with each additional suspension increasing the risk of dropping out by 10% (Jones, 2018). While removed from school during a suspension or expulsion, students are more likely to spend time with others removed for similar reasons and with those who are already engaged in criminal activity. Rather than being socialized in school, students who have been suspended will be socialized by peers in similar situations, including alternative programs and within the community. Because of these factors, the punishment of removal from school potentially creates the conditions for the development of criminal behavior (Jones, 2018). Figure 6 outlines the correlation between suspensions, graduation, and postsecondary enrollment (Jones, 2018).

Figure 6

Ninth-Grade Suspensions and Postsecondary Outcomes



Harsh Punishment

Handling students as criminals when they act out in minor, nonviolent ways weakens the power of educators, police, and other members of the juvenile and criminal justice sectors (Childress, 2020). In some circumstances, the punishment does not fit the crime; so, it suggests that those in positions of authority are not trustworthy or fair and are even immoral (Childress, 2020). Authority figures seeking to do the opposite should behave in a way that actually teaches students that they and their authority are to be respected or trusted. When this is not done, it fosters conflict between them and students (Childress, 2020). This conflict then often leads to further exclusionary and damaging punishment administered by adults and experienced by students.

Stigma of Exclusion

Once excluded from school and labeled bad or criminal, students often find themselves stigmatized by their teachers and other community members. Students may experience confusion, stress, depression, and anger because of being excluded from school and from being treated as what they perceive to be harshly and unfairly by those in charge. This makes it difficult to stay focused on school and hinders the motivation to study and a desire to return to school and to succeed academically. Cumulatively, these social forces work to dishearten academic studies and hinder academic achievement and even completion of high school (Sawyer, 2019). Negatively labeled youth are incidentally at times led to criminal paths and ultimately into the criminal justice system. Black and Indigenous students face harsher punishments and higher rates of suspension. While the total of Black people encompasses 13% of the total U.S. population, they comprise the greatest percentage of people in prisons and jails at 40% (Sawyer, 2019).

Latinx are also overrepresented in prisons and jails but by far less. While they comprise 16% of the U.S. population, they represent 19% of those in prisons and jails. In contrast, White individuals make up just 39% of the incarcerated population, despite the fact that they are the majority race in the U.S., comprising over 60% of the total national population (Sawyer, 2019).

Data from across the U.S. that illustrate punishment and school-related arrests show that the racial disparity in incarceration begins with the school-to-prison pipeline. Research shows that both schools with large Black populations and underfunded schools, many of which are majority minority schools, are more likely to employ zero tolerance policies (Huang & Cornell, 2021). Nationwide, Black and Indigenous students face far greater rates of suspension and expulsion than White students (Huang & Cornell, 2021). In addition, data compiled by NCES (Brey et al., 2019) detailed that while the percentage of White students suspended decreased from 1999 to 2017, the percentage of Black and Hispanic students being suspended increased. A range of studies and metrics show that Black and Indigenous students are punished more frequently and more harshly for the same, mostly minor, offenses than White students (Sawyer, 2019). Legal and educational scholar Daniel J. Losen (2018) pointed out that there is no evidence that these students misbehave more often or more severely than White students; however, research from across the country shows that teachers and administrators punish students of color more, especially Black students. Losen stated that one study found that the disparity is greatest among nonserious offenses like cell phone use, violations of dress code, or subjectively defined offenses like being disruptive.

Black first-time offenders in these categories are suspended at rates that are

double or more than those White first-time offenders (Losen, 2018). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2018), approximately 5% of White students have been suspended during their schooling experience, compared with 16% of Black students. This means Black students are more than three times more likely to be suspended than their White peers. Although they comprise just 16% of the total enrollment of public school students, Black students comprise 33% of OSSs (Sawyer, 2019). This disparity begins as early as preschool; nearly half of all preschool students suspended are Black, though they represent just 18% of the total preschool enrollment.

Multiple Suspensions

Black students are also far more likely to experience multiple suspensions in schools (Superville, 2015). Though Black students are just 16% of the total public school enrollment, they are a full 42% of those suspended multiple times. This means their presence in the population of students with multiple suspensions is more than 2.6 times greater than their presence in the total population of students within public schools. White students are underrepresented among those with multiple suspensions, at just 21%. These contrasting rates play out within school districts where suspension data based on race are accessible. In the Midlands area of South Carolina, data show that suspension figures in a mostly Black school district are double what they are in a mostly White neighboring district (Superville, 2015). There is also evidence that shows that the overly harsh punishment of Black students is focused in the American South, where the legacy of human enslavement Jim Crow exclusionary policies and violence against Black people seem to manifest in everyday life. Alarming, of the 1.2 million Black students who were suspended or expelled nationwide during the 2011-2012 school year, more than half

were concentrated in 13 southern states (Superville, 2015). According to the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights, in several of the school districts located in the South, Black students comprised 100% of students suspended or expelled in a given school year (Superville, 2015).

OSS and Special Populations (Exceptional Children)

Principals are given authority to discipline all students within a school, including students who have been identified as exceptional children (EC). The Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (2004) and state law provide guidance to principals regarding what steps must be followed when disciplining a student with a disability within the school setting (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2006). It is important to know that students who currently have Individual Education Plans require special procedures. EC students can be suspended for up to 10 days when necessary as every other student can be for violating school or district policy; however, students with disabilities have unique rights if the school district wants to suspend them for more than 10 days because this is considered a change of placement. This counts for any consecutive or cumulative occurrence of suspensions. When this happens, schools are required to schedule manifestation determination meetings. The manifestation determination meeting is to determine if the behavior was caused by or had a direct and significant relationship to the child's disability. If the team decides during the meeting that the behavior was a manifestation of the student's disability, the student cannot be suspended for more than 10 days. If the team decides that the behavior was not a manifestation, the student can be suspended for more than 10 days consecutively or cumulatively.

Landmark Cases

Several landmark cases have been heard that guide the process or policy related to school-based discipline. Below are some of the key cases that influence or guide current practices or policies.

Goss v. Lopez (1975)

The U.S. Supreme Court affirmed the constitutional rights of suspended students to due process through notice and a hearing. Subsequent cases have established the rule that if a student is to be suspended or expelled from school for more than 10 days, the school must hold a hearing and provide due process to the student.

New Jersey v. T.L.O. (1985)

The U.S. Supreme Court held that the Fourth Amendment applies to searches and seizures in schools; however, the Court declined to require probable cause or a search warrant before a student could be searched. Instead, the legality of a search of a student should depend simply on the reasonableness, under all the circumstances, of the search. The search must pass a two-part test: (a) the school official must have good reason to believe evidence of wrongdoing will be found, and (b) the search must not be more intrusive than necessary to find the item the school expects to find.

Ingraham v. Wright (1977)

Courts held that due process did not require students to receive notice or an opportunity to be heard and that the Eighth and Fourteenth Amendments do not forbid corporal punishment in schools.

Federal, State, and Local Policies

Table 1

Federal, State, and Local Policies

Due to state and federal statutes and State Board of Education policies, a record of incidents involving the following must be reported	Due to state and federal statutes and State Board of Education policies, a record of incidents involving the following must be reported (continued)	Actions related to law enforcement involvement: (must be reported)
Any assignment to an alternative school or alternative learning program	Taking indecent liberties with a minor	Arrest of a student for any activity conducted on school grounds, during off-campus school activities (including while taking school transportation), or due to a referral by any school official
Any use of corporal punishment	Assault on school personnel	Assault resulting in serious bodily injury
Robbery without a weapon	Bullying	Assault involving the use of a weapon
Robbery involving the use of a weapon or robbery with a firearm	Cyberbullying	Rape
Possession of a weapon	Discrimination	Sexual Offense
Possession of a firearm	Verbal harassment	Sexual Assault
Possession of a controlled substance	Sexual harassment	Kidnapping
Possession, underage sales, provision, or consumption of alcohol	Bullying or harassment based on sex (sexual harassment), race, disability, sexual orientation, or religious affiliation	Homicide
Burning of a school	A violent assault not resulting in serious injury (as defined by criminal statute)	Taking indecent liberties with a minor
Building bomb threat	Fighting	Possession of a firearm
Assault resulting in serious personal injury	Affray	Possession of a weapon
Assault with a weapon or physical attack with a firearm	Communicating threats	Possession of a controlled substance
Kidnapping	Gang activity	
Sexual assault	Extortion	
Sexual offense	Property damage	
Rape	Possession of tobacco products	
	Use of tobacco products	

Federal, state, and local policies outline specific acts that must be reported or recorded. According to Table 1, these are usually significant acts. While policy strictly

outlines or details what must be recorded or reported, principals are still given the autonomy to utilize a wide range of appropriate consequences in order to address the code of conduct violations.

Black Students and Higher Rates of Suspensions and Expulsions

Research supports that there is a correlation between the experience of being suspended from school and the eventual engagement with the criminal justice system. Black and Latinx students comprise 70% of those who face referral to law enforcement or on-campus arrests. Once students are in contact with the criminal justice system, the process generally referred to as the school-to-prison pipeline is frequently validated. As a result, students are far less likely to complete high school (ADL, 2015). Data detail that the school-to-prison pipeline is existent and that Black and Brown students are disproportionately affected by its manifestation. The results and outcomes of suspensions cause excessive damage to the communities of people of color across the United States. (ADL, 2015).

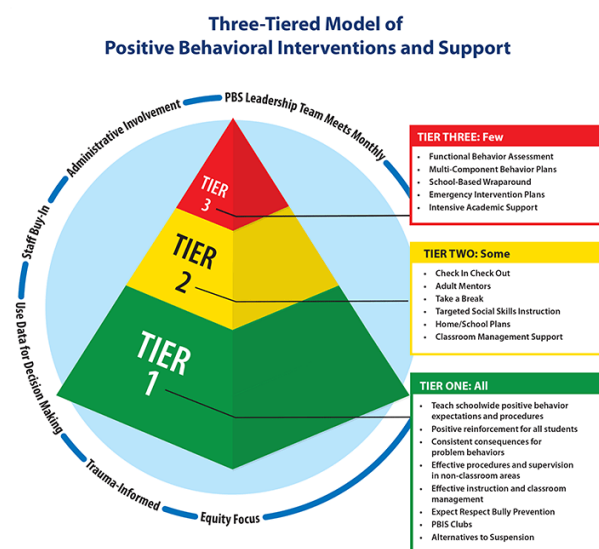
New Trend of PBIS

Define PBIS

PBIS is an evidence-based three-tiered framework for improving and incorporating all the data, systems, and practices affecting student outcomes every day. PBIS is a way to support all students, especially students with challenges within the school community in order to ensure all students are successful in school. PBIS is a commitment to addressing student behavior through systematic changes. When it is implemented well within schools, students achieve improved social and academic outcomes, schools experience reduced exclusionary discipline practices, and school

personnel feel more effective. PBIS is set up on a tiered system. Tier 1 systems, data, and practices affect everyone across all settings. They establish the foundation for delivering regular, proactive support and preventing unwanted behaviors. Tier 1 emphasizes prosocial skills and expectations by teaching and acknowledging appropriate student behavior. Tier 2 systems, data, and practices provide targeted support for students who are not successful with Tier 1 support alone. The focus is on supporting students who are at risk for developing more serious problem behaviors before those behaviors start. Tier 2 supports often involve group interventions with 10 or more students participating. The support at this level is more focused than Tier 1. At most schools, there are 1-5% of students for whom Tier 1 and Tier 2 supports have not connected. At Tier 3, these students receive more intensive, individualized support to improve their behavioral and academic outcomes. Tier 3 strategies work for students with developmental disabilities, autism, and emotional and behavioral disorders, and students with no diagnostic label at all (Simonsen et al., 2021).

Although initially established to disseminate evidence-based behavioral interventions for students with a behavioral disorder, the National Technical Assistance Center on PBIS shifted focus to the school-wide behavior support of all students and an emphasis on implementation practices and systems. As a result, PBIS is defined as a framework for enhancing the adoption and implementation of a continuum of evidence-based interventions to achieve academically and behaviorally important outcomes for all students (Simonsen & Sugai, 2013).

Figure 7*Three-Tiered Model of PBIS**History of PBIS*

In the late 1980s, Sugai and Horner, researchers from the University of Oregon, developed the effective behavior supports program, which has since come to be known as PBIS (Sugai & Horner, 2009). In the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Act of 1997, a grant to establish a national center on PBIS was legislated to disseminate and provide technical assistance to schools on evidence-based practices for improving support for students with behavioral disorders.

Driven by the early results of researchers Sugai and Homer, new researchers at the University of Oregon successfully competed for the opportunity to further develop the PBIS Center (Sugai & Horner, 2009). In the 2000s, The National Technical Assistance Center on PBIS assisted in shaping the PBIS framework (also referenced as “school-wide positive behavior supports”) and providing direct professional development and technical assistance to more than 16,000 schools.

Currently, 16,000 school teams have been trained on the PBIS implementation framework, and there are three states with more than 60% of schools involved in PBIS implementation, nine states with more than 40%, and 16 states with more than 30%. This impact reflects efforts by state and district leadership teams to build capacity for sustaining and scaling up their implementation of PBIS. Schools that are effective in their implementation are considered to have more than 80% of their students and staff who can indicate the desired positive behavioral expectations for a given school setting, high rates of positive acknowledgments for contributing to a positive and safe school climate, and more than 70-80% of their students who have not experienced an office discipline referral for a disciplinary rule infraction.

Significance

Researchers have highlighted the challenges associated with student discipline. Students who are suspended by schools are also more likely to end up in the juvenile justice system. Studies have found that of students suspended in elementary school, 23% of them ended up in contact with a juvenile probation officer by high school. That figure stands at less than 2% among those not suspended. Students who have been suspended or expelled are three times more likely to be exposed to the juvenile probation system by middle school. The district where the research took place is a predominately African American and Hispanic school district located in the Southeast region of the United States. Providing resources for school leaders to help support the reduction or elimination of elementary school suspensions could have huge implications, including increasing student attendance, increasing school safety, increasing social-emotional wellness for staff and students, improving student academics, and eliminating the school-to-prison

pipeline. It is my goal that this research supports school leaders in those areas, therefore positively affecting the lives of students and citizens in the entire community.

Chapter 2 Summary

The research related to school disciplinary practices is wide-ranging. The importance of having safe and orderly school environments is evident by the literature that is supported by research. The classroom is repeatedly inundated by misbehaviors that disrupt the flow of activities and interfere with learning. Well-disciplined schools tend to be those that place school-wide emphasis on the significance of learning and make use of proactive practices that assist with discipline problems (Nelson, 2002). Research has shown school discipline and suspension are some of the most serious challenges facing the nation's educational system. Changing inappropriate behaviors and teaching misbehaving students general skills to manage or replace unwanted behavior can help diffuse disruptive situations in schools that affect learning. Even in school environments with exceptional preemptive discipline plans, problems still arise and must be addressed; therefore, having comprehensive plans in place and routine conversations regarding expectations for addressing student conduct is important in all schools.

Administrators should take accountability for dealing with serious infractions of conduct within schools; however, administrators should also support school staff to ensure teachers are able to enhance their classroom management and discipline skills and create positive classroom cultures. To maximize outcomes, school discipline should be a proactive and comprehensively approached operation. Collaboration from administrators, teachers, parents, students, and community stakeholders is needed to support schools as safe places that are conducive to fostering learning.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

Chapter 3 offers a description of the qualitative methodology that was applied to conduct this study and encompasses comprehensive descriptions of the methods of data gathering, procedures followed, data analysis, and instrumentation. The purpose was to compile or detail alternative OSS strategies using a qualitative method. Overall thoughts and perceptions of stakeholders including teachers, school staff, and administrators were evaluated as it relates to the strategies being used in Title I elementary schools.

Answering the following research questions was the goal of the study:

1. How are strategies that are being used as opposed to OSS in Title I elementary schools impacting suspensions?
2. How do educators perceive the effectiveness of OSS prevention strategies used in Title I schools and what recommendations do they have to rely less on OSS?

Methodology

Qualitative studies involve collecting and analyzing data that are primarily nonnumerical to recognize concepts, sentiments, or experiences. Qualitative studies can be used to gather insights into a problem or generate new ideas for research in general. Throughout this research, the qualitative method was used to gain insight into alternative OSS strategies being used in Title I elementary schools in order to offer ideas to others regarding alternative strategies that can be used in all elementary schools.

Data

Observations support that oftentimes in schools that are considered challenging

such as Title I elementary schools, many school leaders and staff members officially and unofficially implement strategies and policies designed to reduce or eradicate OSS for elementary-age students. The purpose of this research was to compile or detail some of these strategies and to evaluate the overall thoughts and perceptions of stakeholders as it relates to the strategies being used in Title I elementary schools. Some of the unofficial and official strategies used in our most challenging schools can also be implemented in other schools in order to work to decrease the frequency and number of students being suspended from school, ultimately decreasing the school-to-prison pipeline for students.

Participants

The participants in this study were Title I principals and teachers. I had nine elementary Title I principals participate. The demographics of the schools of the principals that were interviewed are discussed in further detail in Chapter 4. Four teachers at participating schools were interviewed. Each staff member was asked to talk about alternative OSS strategies being used on their campus and provide feedback on the effectiveness of the strategies. Staff members selected to interview were selected to participate randomly. At the beginning of each interview, background demographic data were collected including years of experience, race and gender, and years of experience (Appendix A). All participants were current employees of Title I elementary schools in a large urban school district. I was able to gain access to participants through an already established cohort of schools known as schools on the rise. This cohort consists of 14 Title I elementary schools, and I am a member of this leadership cohort. I was given permission by the district to contact the 13 other principals in this cohort for participation via email. Since I am a member of this cohort, we communicate regularly and I have

email addresses for each principal saved. I was able to gain access to teachers through the support of the principals. Using a random selector tool, I selected a grade level per school. Each principal provided me with the names of teachers in that specific grade. Using a random selector tool, I selected one teacher per school to participate. Once selected, each teacher was contacted via email. The district server allows me to connect with other district employees via email by using the “search names” feature to gain access to email addresses. I was given permission by the district to contact teachers for participation via email.

Data Collection

Interviews were with school leaders and teachers from a large urban school district. School leaders received an initial email explaining the purpose of the research as well as an invitation to participate in an interview. Each principal and teacher was interviewed individually. Interview options included zoom, phone, or in-person interviews. Each candidate was allowed to select their preference of interview format. Interviews were conducted using scripted questions and did not exceed 45 minutes. Each interview was recorded, and notes were taken during each interview. Interviews with five to seven principals were conducted as well as interviews with individual teachers separately or privately from principals. Preliminary contact emails were sent to the participants to verify their addresses and to notify them of the forthcoming survey. Participant information is unspecified and conserved for research purposes, protecting and accounting for ethical issues that may exist which could include retaining the confidentiality of data, preserving the privacy of participants, and using the research for intended purposes only.

Data was collected by using a general interview guide with open-ended questions. All participants were given as much time as they felt necessary to reply to questions. With the articulated permission of each participant, the interviews were recorded and transcribed. Copies of transcribed data were available upon request. Names of participants were not used. Interview sessions were coded with a label in order to identify responses and then link any corresponding information and trends of teachers and administrators from the interviews. The identification number was not used to determine participant identity. The interviews were led by me as the primary researcher and recorded. The interview process lasted roughly 45 minutes. Interviews were kept confidential, and the recordings were disposed of once the transcriptions were checked for correctness. Considerable consideration was given to guarantee that both the participants and the interview material were kept private. A copy of the records from this study will be stored in a protected file cabinet at my home for at least 3 years after the conclusion of this research. Recordings used for this study were destroyed instantaneously following transcription and verification of the transcription coinciding with the conclusion of the dissertation requirements. The results of this study will be published and or presented during conferences without naming any participants or the specific school district. All records will be kept completely confidential according to existing legal requirements. Records will not be publicized unless required by law or as noted above. Teachers were selected randomly from each school utilizing the simple random sampling technique. Each school had a grade level selected utilizing the simple random sampling technique. Participants were contacted directly; if individuals declined to participate, new names were selected. Some of the questions asked during the

interview could have made the participant feel uncomfortable or may have been difficult to answer. Participants were free to stop the interview without prejudice at any time and could choose not to answer any question that made them feel uncomfortable. My role was to facilitate contact, solicit participation, and ask the predetermined interview questions. I am currently an elementary school principal within this district. I am connected to the principal participants through my position as a colleague in an already established cohort of schools known as schools on the rise. This cohort consists of 14 Title I elementary schools. I had no connection to the teachers who were interviewed. I did not anticipate any conflict of interest during this research. The research was published internally at Gardner-Webb University. Results from the research were shared with the district. With adherence to confidentiality, results may also be shared at conferences, presentations, and publications.

Instrumentation

Experts in the field of education including principals, assistant superintendents, and superintendents validated the interview questions. I used Lawshe content validity ratio, ratings, and index. Teachers were selected randomly from each school utilizing the simple random sampling technique. Each school had a grade level selected. Within that grade level, one teacher was selected to interview. The principal provided me with the names of the teachers at the appropriate grade level. Teachers were randomly selected during this process and were interviewed. The only person aware of which teachers were contacted to participate in an interview was the interviewer. Potentially a few of the questions posed during the interview may have made the participant feel uncomfortable or may have been challenging to answer.

Participants were allowed to stop the interview without reprisal at any time.

Participants could choose not to answer any question that made them feel uncomfortable.

Staff Perceptions

Throughout the research, I identified staff perceptions related to programs for alternative suspensions, the perceived impact on student attendance and academics, and staff morale associated with school discipline strategies.

New Trends

Throughout the research, I identified and reported new trends being used within a large urban school district including but not limited to restorative practice, social and emotional learning (SEL) programs, Capturing Kids' Hearts, and alternative programs or placements.

Guidelines and Requirements

Throughout the research, I identified and reported federal, state, and local guidelines associated with OSS as well as guidelines associated with special populations such as EC, McKinney Vento, and 504 students. This research also briefly explored the parent appeal process related to school discipline (OSS).

Research Design

This qualitative study included interviews in a North Carolina urban school district. Qualitative research involved collecting and analyzing nonnumerical data to understand ideas, sentiments, or experiences. It can be used to gather in-depth insights into a problem or produce new ideas for research. During my research, I used this method to gain insight into alternative OSS strategies being used in Title I elementary schools in order to offer ideas to others regarding alternative strategies that can be used in all

elementary schools. The objective was to pinpoint themes, compare, and expand information built upon accounts expressed within the focus groups. Semi-structured interviews were conducted, using a set of questions that were predetermined allowing an opportunity for adjustments based on the answers received from the participants.

Data Analysis

I used a nonexperimental qualitative design to conduct interviews. Recordings from each interview were submitted for transcribing. Trends from the transcriptions were analyzed and reported. A detailed report of responses was used to create a full qualitative description of alternative OSS strategies.

Research Questions

1. How are strategies that are being used as opposed to OSS in Title I elementary schools impacting suspensions?
2. How do educators perceive the effectiveness of OSS prevention strategies used in Title I Schools and what recommendations do they have to rely less on OSS?

The strategies principals used in the most challenging schools were analyzed through interviews. I looked at the frequency of strategies implemented in other schools to decrease the frequency of students being suspended from school, ultimately decreasing the school-to-prison pipeline for students. Though the participants' rights and confidentiality will be preserved, the Gardner-Webb University Institutional Review Board and the Gardner-Webb College of Education will have access to the study records. Benefits or forms of compensation of any kind for participants are not included in this study. The timeline for data collection was 3-4 weeks or 28 days. The interview questions

used included the following.

Pre-Interview Script

Thank you for agreeing to help with this research.

The interview should take 30 to 45 minutes.

Let me reiterate the purpose/importance of your participation. The purpose of this project is to compile or detail alternative OSS strategies. Within this study, I will evaluate the overall thoughts and perceptions of teachers and administrators as it relates to the strategies being used in Title I elementary schools in a large urban district. After the collection of strategies and the evaluation of thoughts and perceptions, I will comprise a comprehensive list of suggestions or alternative options for elementary school leaders in Title I schools to use in place of or in addition to OSSs. Your input is and the information you share is valuable.

I want to reassure you that the information you share will remain confidential and if you are uncomfortable with any question, you may refuse to answer. You may also choose to conclude your participation at any time.

Do you have any questions for me before we begin?

Before we jump into specific questions, can you tell me a little bit about yourself?

How many years have you been in education and briefly describe the roles/positions you have held in the education field, how many years in Title I elementary schools? How long have you been at your current school?

Interview Guide for School Administrators

1. To what degree does student misconduct generate a challenge for you as well as staff?

2. Do you think instructional time is impacted due to discipline problems? How?
3. What current discipline practices do you use in your school?
4. Which practice do you consider the most effective?
5. Which practice do you consider the least effective?
6. How do you think inappropriate student behavior should be handled?
7. Are you familiar with zero tolerance? Do you think these practices have been effective in reducing disciplinary challenges?
8. Do you feel that there are any additional barriers to effective disciplinary practices that we have not discussed? If so, what are they and how do you address them in your school?

Interview Guide for Homeroom Teachers

1. What is your view on current discipline practices in your school?
2. Do you believe that your school requires more or less practices in place to address conduct issues for students?
3. Do you think instructional time is impacted due to discipline problems? How?
4. What current discipline practices are used in your school?
5. Which practice do you consider the most effective?
6. Which practice do you consider the least effective?
7. What do you believe is the principal's role in the implementation of discipline practices within the school?
8. Do you believe that there are any further barriers to effective disciplinary practices that we have not discussed? If so, what are they and how would you like to see them managed in your school?

Chapter 3 Summary

This study's goal was to answer research-specific questions and to compare and develop themes centered on answers from the interviews. The interviews were structured, and the conversations were constructed around a set of fixed questions with room for variation and deviation based on the answers received from the interviewees. The purpose was to compile or detail alternative OSS strategies using a qualitative method.

Chapter 4: Results

Chapter Introduction

The goal of this research was to collect or detail substitute OSS strategies using a qualitative research method. Within this study, I evaluated the overall thoughts and perceptions of stakeholders including teachers, school staff, and administrators as it relates to the strategies being used in Title I elementary schools and their effectiveness towards reducing OSS. After the collection of strategies and the evaluation of thoughts and perceptions of the school stakeholders, I compiled a comprehensive list of suggestions or alternatives for elementary school leaders in Title I schools to use in place of or in addition to OSS.

Over several weeks, I conducted participant interviews. Originally, I planned to interview five to seven school principals; however, I was able to secure nine participants for this research. Due to the restrictions related to participant recruitment, I was only able to secure four teacher participants. Each participant was assigned a coded identification, and all interviews were conducted using the interview protocol developed for the study (Appendix B). The interviews ranged from 19 to 36 minutes in length. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed to ensure there was a complete and accurate recording of discussions with each participant. Once participant interviews were completed, copies of transcripts were provided to all participants through a secure email sharing option.

Participants were allowed 5 business days to review the interview transcripts and inform me of any discrepancies or errors. None of the participants identified any errors in their interview transcriptions.

Data collected from the participant interviews provided great insight into the overall climate of school discipline within urban Title I elementary schools. As a fellow principal serving in urban Title I elementary schools, I was very eager to hear the views of my colleagues and teachers. My time with the participants allowed me to gather valuable insight into the minds and experiences of many school leaders and teachers.

Before conducting the interview questions, I asked participants pre-interview questions designed to gather background information on each participant. This information provided critical insight with understanding years of experience for each participant including prior experience working in urban Title I elementary schools.

Pre-Interview Questions

Can you tell me a little bit about yourself, how many years have you been in education, and briefly describe the roles/positions you have held in the education field, and how many years in Title I elementary schools? How long have you been at your current school?

On the administrative side, overall educational experience ranged from 9 years to 33 years; years as a principal ranged from 1 year to 22 years; and years at current school ranged from 1 year to 17 years. Finally, educational experience in Title I elementary schools ranged from 1 year to 33 years.

Table 2

Principal Participant Demographics

Category	Total years	Years in Title I	Years as a principal	Years at current school
Percentage (9 participants)	0-3 years (0%)	0-3 years (0%)	0-3 years (11%)	0-3 years (44%)
	4-7 years (0%)	4-7 years (33%)	4-7 years (44%)	4-7 years (44%)
	8-11 years (11%)	8-11 years (22%)	8-11 years (11%)	8-11 years (12%)
	12-15 years (11%)	12-15 years (11%)	12-15 years (22%)	12-15 years (0%)
	15-20 years (11%)	16-20 yeas (11%)	16-20 years (0%)	16-20 years (0%)
	21 + (67 %)	21+ (23%)	21+ (11%)	21+ (0%)

Summary of Principal Participants

The experience level of the principal participants varied significantly. As Table 2 details, 67% of the participants have over 21 years of total experience in education, making this a very experienced participant pool. Another interesting data point indicates that 100% of the participants have at least 4 years of experience in Title I elementary schools. The principal experience of the participants varies significantly. The majority of the principal interviewees have between 4 and 7 years of experience as school-based principals. Finally, Table 2 highlights that 88% of the participants have been in place at their current schools from 0-7 years, with only 12% of the pool being in place longer than 7 years.

As it relates to teacher participants, overall educational experience ranged from 1 year to 22 years. Years at current school ranged from 1 year to 15 years, and educational experience in Title I elementary schools ranged from 1 year to 22 years.

Table 3

Teacher Participant Demographics

Category	Total years	Years in Title I	Years at current school
Percentage (4 Participants)	0-3 years (25%)	0-3 years (25%)	0-3 years (25%)
	4-7 years (0%)	4-7 years (0%)	4-7 years (25%)
	8-11 years (25%)	8-11 years (25%)	8-11 years (25%)
	12-15 years (25%)	12-15 years (25%)	12-15 years (0%)
	15-20 years (0%)	15-20 years (0%)	15-20 years (25%)
	21 + (25 %)	21 + (25 %)	21 + (0 %)

Summary of Teacher Participants

The experience level of the teacher participants varied. As Table 3 details, 50% of the participants have 8-15 years of total experience in education, and 25% have over 21 years, making this a very experienced participant pool. Another interesting data point indicates that 100% of the participants have all their experience in Title I elementary

schools. Finally, Table 3 highlights that 50% of the participants have been in place at their current schools for 4-11 years, with another 25% of the pool being in place at their current Title I school longer than 15 years.

Individual Participant and School Profiles

To protect confidentiality, each participant was assigned a coded identification. Principal participants are labeled as PP along with a specific number. For example, all principal participants will be referred to as PP1-PP9. Teacher participants are labeled as TP along with a specific number. For example, all teacher participants will be referred to as TP1-TP4.

PP1 serves a Title I elementary school in a large urban school district consisting of 650 students in Grades K-5. PP1 directly supervises 35 classroom teachers in Grades K-5. PP2 serves a Title I elementary school in a large urban school district consisting of 400 students in Grades K-5. PP2 directly supervises 26 classroom teachers in Grades K-5. PP3 serves a Title I elementary school in a large urban school district consisting of 650 students in Grades K-5. PP3 directly supervises 37 classroom teachers in Grades K-5. PP4 serves a Title I elementary school in a large urban school district consisting of 700 students in Grades K-5. PP4 directly supervises 41 classroom teachers in Grades K-5. PP5 serves a Title I elementary school in a large urban school district consisting of 490 students in Grades K-5. PP5 directly supervises 28 classroom teachers in Grades K-5. PP6 serves a Title I elementary school in a large urban school district consisting of 420 students in Grades K-5. PP6 directly supervises 23 classroom teachers in Grades K-5. PP7 serves a Title I elementary school in a large urban school district consisting of 600 students in Grades K-5. PP7 directly supervises 32 classroom teachers in Grades K-5.

PP8 serves a Title I elementary school in a large urban school district consisting of 330 students in Grades K-5. PP8 directly supervises 21 classroom teachers in Grades K-5.

PP9 serves a Title I elementary school in a large urban school district consisting of 375 students in Grades K-5. PP9 directly supervises 23 classroom teachers in Grades K-5.

On average, principal participants lead schools of approximately 400 students and 24 teachers. PP8 has the smallest school with 330 students, while PP4 has the largest school with 700 students. Demographics of each school vary; however, African American and Hispanic students are the leading demographic base consistently throughout. Table 4 details school size and demographics related to race in more detail, while tables 5-6 detail specific principal and teacher data regarding years of experience.

Table 4*School Demographics of Participants*

Participants	School size	Demographics (race) (significant representation)
PP1	650	African American-40% Hispanic-30% Caucasian-20% Multi-Racial-8%
PP2	400	African American-35% Hispanic-25% Caucasian-30% Multi-Racial-5%
PP3 TP2	650	African American-50% Hispanic-45% Multi-Racial-3%
PP4	700	African American-45% Hispanic-35% Multi-Racial-15%
PP5 TP1	490	African American-45% Hispanic-30% Caucasian-10% Multi-Racial-10% Asian-5%
PP6	420	African American-40% Hispanic-25% Caucasian-30% Multi-Racial-5%
PP7 TP3	600	African American-40% Hispanic-30% Caucasian-20% Multi-Racial-8%
PP8	330	African American-48% Hispanic-38% Caucasian-10% Multi-Racial-4%
PP9 TP4	375	African American-50% Hispanic-20% Caucasian-25% Multi-Racial-5%

Table 5*Principal Experience, Gender, and Race*

Category	Total years	Years in Title I	Years as a principal	Years at current school	Gender	Race
PP1	21	21	2	2	M	C
PP2	30	6	15	7	F	C
PP3	31	28	20	2	F	AA
PP4	21	15	11	11	F	AA
PP5	21	21	9	2	F	AA
PP6	18	5	6	6	M	AA
PP7	12	7	7	4	M	AA
PP8	21	10	4	4	F	AA
PP9	9	9	6	3	F	C

Table 6*Teacher Experience, Gender, and Race*

Teacher data	Total years	Years in Title I	Years at current school	Current grade	Previous grades	Gender	Race
TP1	2	2	2	1	N/A	F	AA
TP2	11	11	11	4	5, 2	F	AA
TP3	15	15	7	Kindergarten	1, 5	F	AA
TP4	22	21	17	3	5, 2, 4	F	AA

Findings*Research Question 1*

How are strategies that are being used as opposed to OSS in Title I elementary schools impacting suspensions?

Feedback from principal interviews suggests strategies being used in opposition to OSS in Title I elementary schools are impacting suspensions by reducing the rate of the occurrence of suspensions. Principal participants indicated that they are more frequently using strategies such as conferences, restorative practices, and alternative placements in

opposition. Principal interviews detail proactive strategies that are also being used to reduce suspensions such as restorative circles, zones of regulations, PBIS, parent communication, mentoring, buddy classrooms, Capturing Kids' Hearts, trauma-informed teaching, and responsive classroom practices.

Table 7

Effective Strategies

Most Effective Strategies Used Opposed to OSS			
Principal	Most effective strategies	Teachers	Most effective strategies
PP1	*Trauma-Informed Classroom	TP1	*Restorative Practices
PP2	* Responsive Classroom Practices * Restorative Practices *Capturing Kids' Hearts	TP2	*Restorative Practices *PBIS
PP3	*Capturing Kids' Hearts *Zones of Regulation *Restorative Practices *PBIS	TP3	*Restorative Practices
PP4	*Restorative Practices *Capturing Kids' Hearts	TP4	*Capturing Kids' Hearts
PP5	*PBIS		
PP6	*Restorative Practices		
PP7	*PBIS *Written Behavior Plans		
PP8	*PBIS *In-school suspensions *Capturing Kids' Hearts		
PP9	*Buddy classrooms *Restorative Practices *Alternative placements.		

Table 7 shows the strategies that principals and teachers found most effective. Overall, the principals found restorative practices to be the most effective alternative strategy to OSS. The majority of teachers identified restorative practices as being the most effective strategy to OSS. Principals also listed Capturing Kids' Hearts as an effective strategy, followed by PBIS.

Table 8 identifies the three main themes from principals and teachers as a result of the strategies listed in Table 7.

Table 8

Top Three Themes Identified by Principals

Themes identified from principal feedback	
Restorative Practices	PP2, PP3, PP4, PP9
Capturing Kids' Hearts	PP2, PP3, PP4, PP8
PBIS	PP3, PP5, PP7, PP8

Table 9

Top Three Themes Identified by Teachers

Themes identified from teacher feedback	
Restorative Practices	TP1, TP2, TP3
PBIS	TP2,
Capturing Kids' Hearts	TP4

The overwhelming theme for teachers was restorative practices and were common strategies for principals as well. Teachers also identified or discussed PBIS as being a strategy. Although principals identified Capturing Kids' Hearts as a strategy, only one teacher expressed these sentiments.

PP7 stated,

Support teams are integral in helping to implement proactive strategies

preventative measures to assist in reducing student misconduct. They coordinate our daily morning meeting, they coordinate the implementation of our restorative practices programming, and they coordinate the implementation of our Second Step curriculum. In addition, they facilitate restorative circles. In addition, those will be our students who are like Tier 2 or Tier 3 concerning student needs.

Restorative practices serve as an alternative to OSS and even ISS and the role of what that looks like in schools.

Research Question 2

How do educators perceive the effectiveness of OSS prevention strategies used in Title I Schools and what recommendations do they have to rely less on OSS?

Feedback from principal interviews suggests that the strategies being used in opposition to OSS in Title I elementary schools are being perceived positively. Teacher participants outlined that the strategies being used are more effective for specific behaviors and less effective for others. Teacher participants recommended increases in proactive strategies and administrator visibility for schools to be in a position to rely less on OSS. The principals and teachers identified the following.

Table 10*Themes From Principals and Teachers*

Least effective strategies and perceptions of zero tolerance			
Principals	OSS/use of zero tolerance	Teachers	OSS/use of zero tolerance
PP1	*Trauma-Informed Classroom	TP1	*Restorative Practices
PP2	* Responsive Classroom Practices * Restorative Practices *Capturing Kids' Hearts	TP2	*Restorative Practices *PBIS
PP3	*Capturing Kids' Hearts *Zones of Regulation *Restorative Practices *PBIS	TP3	*Restorative Practices
PP4	*Restorative Practices *Capturing Kids' Hearts	TP4	*Capturing Kids' Hearts
PP5	*PBIS		
PP6	*Restorative Practices		
PP7	*PBIS *Written Behavior Plans		
PP8	*PBIS *In-school suspensions *Capturing Kids' Hearts		
PP9	*Buddy classrooms *Restorative Practices *Alternative placements.		

Participant Interview Data and Emergent Themes

The principals were able to identify issues of managing behaviors as well as other issues that may help implement alternative strategies to OSS.

PP4 stated,

We are very excited this year to have a very stacked Student Support Services team. We have a full-time school nurse, full-time social worker, but we currently have a nurse vacancy. We also have two school counselors, which includes one at risk counselor and the other one is a three, five (grades) counselor. We also have a restorative practices coordinator along with a dean of students slash in TSS facilitator.

Some of the principals mentioned in interviews that the amount of support services determines the use of alternative learning strategies. More than one principal, when addressing behaviors and issues, mentioned proper staffing.

Many similarities were shared during the principal participant interviews. PP1 expressed that student discipline plays a major role in schools, specifically potentially impacting the principal's ability to be an instructional leader due to being pulled away to manage major disciplinary infractions. PP1 described how resources, specifically human resources being pulled to manage student discipline, often lead to significant challenges in other areas within the school, especially instructional time within individual classrooms. The strategies being used within PP1's school include trauma-informed teaching, in-school suspensions, and written behavior plans. The most effective strategy according to PP1 is utilizing trauma-informed classroom practices, while the least effective strategy to manage discipline is OSS. PP1 was aware of zero tolerance but expressed that zero tolerance policies were ineffective and therefore not implemented within their school. Some of the current barriers to effectively managing student behavior expressed during this interview were the social-emotional states of students and training for teachers to manage significant student behavior.

PP2 expressed that student discipline plays a major role in schools, specifically impacting the administrator's ability to be involved in other aspects of the school due to being pulled away to manage major disciplinary infractions. PP2 described how disciplinary challenges vary and often are directly related to the classroom teacher's ability, planning, and relationship with students. The strategies being used within PP2's school include responsive classroom practices, restorative practices, and the Capturing Kids' Hearts curriculum. The most effective strategy according to PP2 is utilizing the responsive classroom practices, while the least effective strategy to manage discipline is OSS. PP2 was aware of zero tolerance but expressed that zero tolerance policies were ineffective and therefore only implemented within their school for incidents involving crime or law enforcement reportable offenses. One of the current barriers to effectively managing student behavior expressed during this interview was consistency across classrooms. PP2 expressed that is important to ensure that getting every single adult in the building on the same page is the most important factor for success.

PP3 expressed that student discipline plays a major role in schools, specifically affecting the quality of instruction delivered in classrooms where major disciplinary issues exist. PP3 described how she often observes lost instructional time from teachers managing difficult behaviors and how that lost time has a cumulative impact on overall learning for all students within a specific class. The strategies being used within PP3's school include Capturing Kids' Hearts, zones or regulation, restorative practices, and PBIS. The most effective strategy according to PP3 is utilizing the restorative practices approach, while the least effective strategy to manage discipline is OSS. PP3 was aware of zero tolerance but expressed that the idea of zero tolerance is not implemented within

their school. Some of the current barriers to effectively managing student behavior expressed during this interview were training teachers to manage significant student behavior and additional resources to support trauma and mental health.

PP4 expressed that student discipline plays a major role in schools, specifically in the area of beginning teacher development. PP4 expressed that new teachers often struggle with learning to deliver content, and when disciplinary issues are present, those challenges for new teachers are exacerbated. PP4 described how they have witnessed the stunting of growth and development of teachers when, due to necessity, they focus on classroom management and less on effective instruction. The strategies being used within PP4's school include restorative practices and Capturing Kids' Hearts. The most effective strategy according to PP4 is utilizing the restorative practices strategies, while the least effective strategy to manage discipline is OSS. PP4 was aware of zero tolerance and expressed that they did in fact implement zero tolerance for bullying. All forms of bullying that were confirmed were met with zero tolerance consequences within this school. Some of the current barriers to effectively managing student behavior expressed during this interview were the social-emotional states of students and training for teachers to manage significant student behavior.

PP5 expressed that student discipline plays a major role in schools, specifically because it causes the principal to be pulled away to manage major disciplinary infractions. PP5 detailed that many district and state deadlines associated with teacher observations and reports are often impacted due to being involved in managing student behavior. PP5 described how initially so much time was spent during the day managing discipline that almost all administrative work was done on nights and weekends. The

strategy being used within PP5's school is PBIS. The most effective strategy according to PP5 is PBIS, while the least effective strategy to manage discipline is OSS. PP5 was aware of zero tolerance but expressed that zero tolerance policies were ineffective and therefore not implemented within their school. Some of the current barriers to effectively managing student behavior expressed during this interview were funding specifically associated with hiring staff to support students as well as funding for resources for students with significant behavioral challenges.

PP6 expressed that student discipline plays a major role in schools, specifically affecting teacher ability to teach and student ability to learn. PP6 described how time spent on managing discipline within the classroom directly correlates with student growth and academic performance. The strategies being used within PP6's school include restorative practices. The most effective strategy according to PP6 is utilizing restorative practices, while the least effective strategy to manage discipline is OSS. PP6 was the only principal to state during the interview that OSS is not an option at their school. PP6 was aware of zero tolerance but expressed that zero tolerance policies were ineffective and therefore not implemented within their school. One of the current barriers to effectively managing student behavior expressed during this interview was managing the placement of EC students who are often placed in traditional classrooms without additional support, resources, or training.

PP7 expressed that student discipline plays a major role in schools, specifically what the participant described as "toxic disruptions" or disruptions from one student or a small group of students that then cause others to misbehave. PP7 described how many toxic disruptions could be prevented in classrooms with proper planning and procedures

proactively in place. The strategies being used within PP7's school include PBIS and written behavior plans. The most effective strategy according to PP7 is utilizing the PBIS practices, while the least effective strategy to manage discipline is OSS. PP7 was aware of zero tolerance and expressed that they did in fact implement zero tolerance for bullying. All forms of bullying that are confirmed are met with zero tolerance consequences within this school. One of the current barriers to effectively managing student behavior expressed during this interview was access to quality teachers. PP7 believed that quality teachers could eliminate 90% of classroom behavioral challenges.

PP8 expressed that student discipline plays a major role in schools, specifically potentially impacting the principal's ability to be an instructional leader due to being pulled away to manage major disciplinary infractions. PP8 described how being pulled away for behavior meetings, conferences, and functional behavior analysis for students during instructional time negatively affects the school leader's visibility within individual classrooms throughout the day. The strategies being used within PP8's school include PBIS, in-school suspensions, and Capturing Kids' Hearts curriculum. The most effective strategy according to PP8 is utilizing the Capturing Kids' Hearts classroom practices, while the least effective strategy to manage discipline is OSS. PP8 was aware of zero tolerance but expressed that zero tolerance policies were ineffective and therefore not implemented within their school. One of the current barriers to effectively managing student behavior expressed during this interview was the time schools are allowed with onboarding or training new staff. The participant described that the 1 workday allotted each summer is not significant enough time to train new staff on school culture and classroom management.

PP9 expressed that student discipline plays a major role in schools, specifically managing students with social-emotional concerns and mental health challenges. PP8 described how resources, specifically human resources, not being available to support these specific students leads to significant challenges in other areas within the school, especially loss of instructional time within individual classrooms. The strategies being used within PP8's school include buddy classrooms, restorative practices, and alternative placements. The most effective strategy according to PP8 is utilizing the buddy classrooms, while the least effective strategy to manage discipline is OSS. PP8 was aware of zero tolerance but expressed that zero tolerance policies were ineffective and therefore not implemented within their school. Some of the current barriers to effectively managing student behavior expressed during this interview were the social-emotional states of students and training for teachers to manage significant student behavior.

TP1 expressed that the current practices within the school were effective in managing and supporting discipline. TP1 expressed that support and communication were extremely noticeable and that many concerns and challenges are solved before administration needing to support; however, administrative staff were supportive when needed. TP1 detailed that the school did not need more practices in place but rather something to support students who are not motivated by the basic school-wide practices and may benefit from some additional support. TP1 stated that instructional time was indeed impacted by discipline concerns. TP1 described concerns with deciding between teaching content and addressing disruptive behavior. The current discipline practices TP1 could recall were restorative practices, in-school suspensions, and PBIS. The most effective was restorative practices, due to the focus on addressing the root cause of the

behavior and providing strategies for the future. The least effective was in-school suspension, due to the punitive nature and loss of instructional time for students. TP1 stated that the principal's role in discipline should be to support teachers with behavioral concerns that cannot be managed in class and to identify and secure district-based support for significant concerns.

TP2 expressed that the current practices within the school were effective, specifically for mild to moderate behavioral concerns. TP2 expressed that more could be done for supporting major disruptions when they do occur. TP2 detailed that the school did not need more practices in place but did need improved consistency in the implementation of strategies, specifically restorative circles. TP2 stated that instructional time was indeed impacted by discipline concerns. TP2 described concerns with deciding between teaching content and addressing disruptive behavior. The current discipline practices TP2 could recall were restorative practices and PBIS. The most effective was PBIS, due to the incentives provided to students and consistency with procedures for staff to follow. The least effective was restorative practices, due to the inconsistency and lack of training. TP2 stated that the principal's role in discipline should be to create the framework, communicate the expectations, provide staff training, and then support teachers with behavioral concerns that cannot be managed in class.

TP3 expressed that the current practices within the school were effective in managing and supporting discipline. TP3 expressed that support and communication were extremely noticeable and that many concerns and challenges are solved before administration needing to support; however, administrative staff were supportive when needed. TP3 detailed that the school could use more mental health support resources and

continued training with staff on managing behavior. TP3 stated that instructional time was indeed impacted by discipline concerns. TP3 described how “snowball behavior” often created issues in classrooms.

Students observe misbehavior and then begin to model that behavior themselves. The current discipline practices TP3 could recall were restorative practices, in-school suspensions, and PBIS. The most effective was restorative practices, due to the focus on addressing the root cause of the behavior and providing strategies for the future, in addition to providing closure for staff and students who were harmed or impacted by the initial behavior. The least effective was in-school suspension, due to the punitive nature and loss of instructional time for students and the consistency with the availability of staff to actually implement the in-school suspension: “Students often end up back in class.” TP3 stated that the principal’s role in discipline should be to support teachers with behavioral concerns that cannot be managed in class and to train staff and students on expectations.

TP4 expressed that the current practices within the school were effective in managing and supporting discipline. TP4 expressed that administrative staff were supportive when needed. TP4 detailed that the school did not need more practices in place, but consistency across grade levels regarding implementation could improve. TP4 stated that instructional time was indeed impacted by discipline concerns. TP4 described concerns with deciding between teaching content and addressing disruptive behavior. The current discipline practices TP4 could recall were restorative practices, OSSs, and Capturing Kids’ Hearts. The most effective was Capturing Kids’ Hearts, due to the focus on building relationships and proactive solutions to potential behavior. The least effective

was OSS, due to the punitive nature and loss of instructional time for students and the lack of impact it has on decreasing future behaviors. TP4 stated that the principal's role in discipline should be to build relationships with students, be visible in classrooms, and support teachers as needed with building classroom culture.

Table 11

Correlation Between Research Questions and Themes

Questions	Theme	Correlations
Research Question 1: How are strategies that are being used as opposed to OSS in Title I elementary schools impacting suspensions?	Overall, the principals found restorative practices to be the most effective alternative strategy to OSS. Most teachers identified restorative practices as being the most effective strategy to OSS.	Restorative practices are the most effective and most well-received within the school setting. Restorative practices were perceived to reduce OSS, and teachers support this practice within Title I elementary schools.
Research Question 2: How do educators perceive the effectiveness of OSS prevention strategies used in Title I Schools and what recommendations do they have to rely less on OSS?	The overwhelming theme for teachers was support being needed for school based options to manage discipline. suspensions being the least effective strategy were common for both for principals and teachers.	Overall, OSS was not viewed as effective in solving long-term disciplinary challenges. School-wide alternative strategies such as Capturing Kids' Hearts, SEL, and conferencing were favored and recommended.

Overview of Interview Responses

Principal responses indicated that most principals are working to implement discipline practices within the school that do not include OSS. Principal responses detail that most of the disciplinary measures being implemented are considered proactive strategies. Principals indicate for the most part that zero tolerance and punitive-focused policies within schools are ineffective. Finally, most principals detailed that school

discipline is a comprehensive process involving all stakeholders. Teacher interview responses indicated that most teachers believe there is evidence of an effort to address student behavior. Teacher interview responses described that the principals' practices within the Title I Elementary schools within this large urban school district are appropriate and effective as it relates to managing student disciplinary issues.

Limitations of Study

Some of the limitations of this study include the lack of teacher participation and the focus on one school district. District guidelines limited the amount of contact I could make with potential teacher participants. The interviews for this research occurred during the holiday season and midyear-testing season; this is typically a very busy time of the year for educators and therefore potentially affected teacher participation. Research was done in one large urban school district; therefore, the feedback is limited to the views of a very specific group of teachers and school leaders. Many of the ideas, thoughts, and perceptions may be influenced by district norms, guidelines, or expectations.

Chapter 4 Summary

Chapter 4 provided significant data and detail associated with strategies being implemented by school administrators as well as perceptions of those strategies by teachers within those schools. Participants from a variety of schools with varying school sizes and demographic bases provided feedback and information. Both the teacher and administrator participants have varying experience ranging from novice to career experts. All teacher participants were African American females; however, principal participant demographics varied consisting of male and female participants as well as African American and Caucasian leaders. Many themes emerged from the interviews that also

effectively answered the intended research questions. The theoretical framework that was explored was the learning theory of constructivism. Constructivism is a process of learning or development that believes people actively shape or create their personal awareness and that actuality is shaped by the experiences (Stevens-Fulbrook, 2019). Specifically in this research, that theory is evident as it relates to the alternative OSS strategies being used and the perceptions of effectiveness of those strategies by the stakeholders. The experiences of the principals have constructed the thought processes they possess related to managing student behavior in Title I elementary schools. The experiences the teachers have had shaped the perceptions of effectiveness they share, and those perceptions have ultimately created the reality or actuality they accept as true. Limitations were also discovered and noted associated with teacher participation and limitations with all participants working in the same district. A detailed list of alternative OSS strategies is discussed in Chapter 5. Recommendations for future research are discussed in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Chapter Introduction

The purpose of this study was to compile a list of alternative OSS strategies in Title I urban elementary schools. From this study, I also examined the perceptions of teachers as it relates to disciplinary strategies in Title I urban elementary schools.

Structured interviews were conducted with nine principals of urban high-poverty (Title I), high-minority elementary schools in a large urban North Carolina school district. This chapter consists of an overview, a summary of study findings, a review of literature/research as it relates to OSS for elementary school students, and recommendations to school leaders for future implications.

Overview

This research has allowed me to evaluate strategies that principals and teachers deem as an alternative to OSS in Title I schools. Research has supported that certain practices and strategies have been used to reduce or eliminate OSS for elementary-age students. The overall goal is to decrease the number of suspensions from school and make sure we are not adding to the school-to-prison pipeline. The criminalization of youth through disciplinary practices within schools may introduce them to law enforcement at an early age. OSS suspension may be a short-term solution; however, it does not deter or change the behavior for many students, especially ones who are in Title I schools. The perceptions of these stakeholders are vital to changing how we view students and how we can best keep them in school.

The purpose of this study was to compile and detail some of these strategies and evaluate the overall thoughts and perceptions of stakeholders as it relates to the strategies

being used in Title I zero tolerance procedures that decree punitive consequences for trivial misbehavior in schools, practices that mandate predetermined consequences, typically severe, punitive, and exclusionary (Supportive School Discipline Initiative, 2021).

Conclusions

My research yielded that zero tolerance policies were not the most effective in solving the issue or problem (Supportive School Discipline Initiative, 2021). Zero tolerance policies often seem to disproportionately affect students of color, as they are often suspended at higher rates than their White counterparts. According to Jones (2018), students removed from school create conditions for the development of criminal behavior by engaging with other students who experience the same challenges.

Based on research and the perception of effectiveness of teachers and school leaders, recommendations from this research include school leaders implementing the following practices within their schools to reduce or eliminate the need for OSS in urban Title I elementary schools: restorative practices, Capturing Kids' Hearts, and PBIS. I found that my interviews from this research supported previous literature that alternative strategies are perceived to best support students.

Restorative Practices

According to Costello et al. (2019), restorative practice approaches in school are designed to build community and foster healthy school-community relationships.

Restorative practices are built on the theory that when individuals feel connected to a supportive community, they will inevitably respect others in that community and become accountable for protecting the wellbeing of others in it. With effort and intentionality,

schools can foster a sense of community through the implementation of restorative circles. Restorative circles help participants understand each other better, generating a sense of empathy and connection with one another. Restorative circles can be powerful tools to address student misbehavior when facilitated effectively. To facilitate restorative circles, individuals should ideally sit in a circle around an object that has meaning for the group; this object is referred to as the talking piece. Restorative circle participants pass the talking piece, and everyone must wait until the talking piece comes to them before speaking. In a restorative circle, everyone is an equal participant; no one is in charge or placed on a hierarchy. Restorative circles give all participants a chance to share what they are feeling and or experiencing in a safe trusted space. When effective circles are held routinely, over time the restorative circle becomes a safe space where everyone believes they are heard and they belong.

Principals explained how the use of strong support teams helped with the implementation of restorative practices in class. PP7 stated,

Support teams are integral in helping to implement proactive strategies preventative measures to assist in reducing student misconduct. They coordinate our daily morning meeting, they coordinate the implementation of our restorative practices programming, and they coordinate the implementation of our Second Step curriculum. In addition, they facilitate restorative circles. In addition, those will be students who are like Tier 2 or Tier 3 in regard to student needs.

In order for students to use social and emotional skills they may not have fully developed, a sequenced curriculum can guide circle keepers in gradually building these skills. Those skills could include active listening, handling strong emotions, and

respecting differences. Combining an SEL curriculum with circles can be highly effective within schools. One SEL curriculum recommended from this research is Zones of Regulation. Zones of Regulation is an approach used to support the development of self-regulation in children in order to teach children how to identify their feelings, be aware of what zone they are in, and use tools to be in the appropriate zone for the moment. All the different ways children feel and the states of alertness they experience are categorized into four colored zones: blue zone (tired, sad); green zone (calm, happy); yellow zone (silly, frustrated); or red zone (angry, out of control).

Restorative practices offer a variety of responses to use in circumstances where disciplinary challenges occur. Restorative circles provide a foundation that can prevent problems and help support them when they occur. Using a mediation process or group problem-solving session to address problems can also be a part of the restorative practice community. If serious harm happens within the school, a restorative intervention may be necessary. During this intervention, the individual who caused the harm meets with others involved in the incident, often including the person or people who have been harmed or who have perceived harm. The individual who has harmed others reflects on the harm that has been done, and all individuals involved work to agree on how it can be resolved. The intent behind the restorative intervention is to allow the person who caused harm to have a chance to truly understand the impact of their actions, to be heard, to repair the harm that may have been done, and to be welcomed back (restored) to the community (Costello et al., 2019). From a leadership lens, it is important to note that it requires a dedicated principal and comprehensive school-wide planning to effectively implement restorative practices within a school community. The shift to restorative

approaches can take time and commitment from the entire school community. The principal leading a restorative practice school community should convene a collaborative team of school leaders to build the school's discipline policy and create a phased implementation plan for restorative practice.

Conferencing

Conferencing is an effective tool to use to manage student discipline.

Conferencing involves purposeful conversations to address decision-making, discuss solutions, problem solve, and encourage accountability. Conferences are often informal but can be effectively used as a formal piece of a school-wide behavior management program. Conferences can occur between student and teacher or between administrator and student or include a collective group of individuals such as administrator, student, parent, or teacher.

Capturing Kids' Hearts

Capturing Kids' Hearts is defined as a relationship-building approach to discipline that helps to create self-managing groups within the school community. According to the designers of Capturing Kids' Hearts, The Flippin Group, teachers effectively implement the Capturing Kids' Hearts framework through a model used to communicate with students known as the EXCEL model. One of the unique features of Capturing Kids' Hearts is the process in which students help to create their own rules and expectations of the classroom through a process called the social contract. Students also are allowed the responsibility and autonomy to utilize a system of "checks" and "fouls" in order to hold each other accountable. Within the Capturing Kids' Hearts environment, a culture is created that highlights positivity through "good things" and affirmations. The EXCEL

model is used within Capturing Kids' Hearts to build relationships to build self-managing groups in order to build safe school communities. The acronym EXCEL is broken down to include engage, x-plore, communicate, empower, and launch. The engage concept includes the system of greeting students as they arrive with a handshake, eye contact, and a genuine welcome. The x-plore factor includes teachers listening and attending to the personal, emotional, and academic needs of all students. The EXCEL model also expresses that teachers should communicate care as well as content; this may include understanding the need to temporarily pause teaching in order to repair the class community or recalibrate the classroom in order to ensure students are focused on learning. Empowering students to gain the ability to “use and do” the things they have been taught within the community is a powerful tool that teachers can use. The launch is critical in the EXCEL model; it details how teachers “end and send” students into the world or away from their classrooms. The purpose of a great launch is to start students on a positive course of action by ending classes or school on a powerful and positive note.

Social Contract

Establishing social contracts is a critical component of setting the foundation for positive behavior in the Capturing Kids' Hearts program. The social contract is established at the beginning of the school year or semester. It is important that the students create the social contracts; the teacher should serve as a facilitator for this process. The focus of the social contract should be to answer four very specific and targeted questions regarding the environment of the classroom. The four questions include the following:

- What do you want from your teacher regarding how they treat you?

- What do you want from your classmates regarding how they treat you?
- In your opinion, how does your teacher want to be treated?
- When conflicts do happen, how do we want to respond to each other?

A list of adjectives should be comprised of the answers students provide. Those adjectives should serve as the basis for student expectations of behavior in the classroom. The entire classroom community should sign the social contract. If students are not willing to sign, they are reminded that they are still a part of the class community and are welcome to sign the class contract whenever they feel comfortable. The contract is a living document and should be referred to on a regular basis to highlight success and serve as a guide for when challenges arise.

The Four Behavior Questions

These questions should be asked to help stay true to the social contracts within the school. The tone, disposition, and location of where and when the redirection questions are taking place are important. The goal of the four behavior questions is to redirect or deescalate, not to provoke or embarrass.

1. What are you doing?
2. What are you supposed to be doing?
3. Are you doing that?
4. What are you going to do about that?

Checks and Fouls

When a student is not following the social contract, other students can and should “check” that student. This behavior should be modeled and reviewed by the adults within the community prior to being implemented by students to ensure effectiveness. A check

or a foul is a silent reminder of a thumbs up to remind peers that they should reflect and change their behavior. When a student is not meeting community expectations, other students will foul that student. The student is then asked to give “put ups” for the “put down” they gave. This system of affirmations creates accountability and builds a positive culture.

Good Things

Usually, at the beginning of class, teachers will start with “good things,” in which students and teachers share something good that is going on with them at home or within the school community. This creates an environment of positivity and helps build relationships, setting the tone for a positive classroom environment.

PBIS

PBIS is a proactive approach schools use to improve school safety and promote positive behavior. It is important to note that the emphasis of PBIS is prevention, not punishment. At its basis, PBIS schools teach scholars positive behavior strategies, just as they would teach about any other subject or core content area. In schools that use a PBIS system, all scholars learn about positive behavior, not just students who exhibit challenges. PBIS recognizes that much like adults in professional settings, students can only meet expectations if they know what the expectations are. PBIS clearly defines expectations specifically associated with behavior for all school community members. Everyone learns what is considered appropriate behavior, and common language is used to talk about it. Throughout the school day in class, at lunch, and on the bus, students understand what is expected of them at all times, in all situations throughout the day. Data support the theory that PBIS leads to better student behavior in most students. In

many schools that use PBIS, fewer suspensions are recorded for students (Ditrano, 2015).

PBIS Has Some Significant Guiding Principles and Benefits

- Students can learn and practice conduct expectations for different circumstances to guide choices throughout the school day.
- Schools communicate expected behaviors through explicit instruction, with chances for students to practice behavior and get feedback.
- Schools gather and use data to make decisions about behavior interventions.
- School staff members become consistent in how they encourage anticipated conduct and discourage misbehavior.

Tiered Support

Most PBIS programs set up three tiers of support for students. The first tier, or Tier 1, is the school-wide system for everyone. Essentially what this means is that each student within the school community learns fundamental behavior expectations. From the staff perspective, Tier 1 is critical. During Tier 1, school staff recognize and praise students for good behavior, progress, or improvement. Small rewards, like tokens or prizes, to recognize students are key in Tier 1. The next level of PBIS is known as Tier 2. In Tier 2, extra-targeted support for struggling students is implemented to build upon Tier 1. Some students may have a difficult time with meeting behavior expectations; in that case, the school should give students evidence-based interventions and instruction intended to support learners in reaching goals and meeting expectations. An example may be a case where some students struggle with social interactions. The Tier 2 approach could include providing social support to assist the student in learning how to read and respond to situations with peers within the school setting.

The last level of PBIS is Tier 3. Tier 3 offers intensive support for individual students with substantial requirements. Tier 3 is for students who need individualized supports and services because of ongoing behavioral concerns that have not been successfully addressed in Tiers 1 or 2.

SEL

SEL is described as the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. SEL skills help students build community, maintain positive relationships, and feel a sense of belonging. Students explicitly learn skills that are useful to thrive in school and life in school environments that concentrate on implementing a strong SEL program. Effective SEL program skills include understanding and managing oneself, developing problem-solving skills, as well as how to effectively work with others. This creates a positive culture and climate in the classroom and the school as a whole. Positive environments have the potential to mitigate discipline concerns. Strong SEL programs also help to foster a sense of belonging and an appreciation for collective well-being and can support equity, advocacy, and service learning. By working together, educators, students, families, and communities can build healthy learning communities.

SEL should be an essential part of all students' education across all grade levels; however, SEL may look differently at different developmental stages. The key question school leaders should consider is how a specific SEL program can best support student learning and development. SEL programs support students in acquiring and applying the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to develop healthy identities, manage emotions,

and achieve personal and collective goals. SEL programs assist learners in acquiring skills to feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions. The benefit of SEL programs ensures that schools that pay attention to student developmental needs can create supportive learning environments and coordinate practices across classrooms, schools, and communities to enhance social, emotional, and academic learning for students.

Zones of Regulation

Zones is an SEL curriculum developed to help all students understand and learn to manage their emotions individually. Zones is supported by research around cognitive behavioral therapy, with a framework that uses four colors—blue, green, yellow, and red—to help students identify their feelings and levels of alertness. The curriculum also provides strategies to support emotional regulation; teaching students how to read their body’s signals, detect triggers, read social context, and consider how their behaviors impact those around them, which ultimately leads to improved emotional control, sensory regulation, self-awareness, and problem-solving skills.

Figure 8*Zones of Regulation (Colors)*

What Zone Are You In?			
Blue	Green	Yellow	Red
			
Sick Sad Tired Bored Moving Slowly	Happy Calm Feeling Okay Focused Ready to Learn	Frustrated Worried Silly/Wiggly Excited Loss of Some Control	Mad/Angry Mean Yelling/Hitting Disgusted Out of Control

Second Step

The Second Step program is a developmental and sequential curriculum designed to promote school success and prevent problem behaviors while increasing self-awareness and self-management for students. Key components or benefits of the Second Step SEL curriculum in schools are listed below:

- Control of impulsive behavior
- Personal and academic goals
- Social-awareness and interpersonal skills
- Establish positive relationships
- Decision-making skills
- Recognize and accurately label emotions
- Recognize personal qualities and external supports
- Recognize that others may experience situations differently from oneself

- Use listening skills to identify the feelings and perspectives of others
- Recognize individual and group similarities and differences
- Describe the ways people are similar and different
- Describe positive qualities in others
- Demonstrate appropriate social and classroom behavior
- Demonstrate an ability to prevent, manage, and resolve interpersonal
- Consider ethical, safety, and societal factors in making decisions
- Explain why unprovoked acts that hurt others are wrong
- Identify social norms and safety considerations that guide behavior
- Identify a range of decisions that students make at school
- Make positive choices when interacting with classmates
- Use listening skills to identify the feelings and perspectives of others
- Describe approaches for making and keeping friends

Figure 9

Second Step RULER



Responsive Classroom

Responsive Classroom is an evidence-based approach to teaching and discipline that focuses on engaging academics, positive community, effective management, and developmental awareness. The four components of Responsive Classroom include the following.

Engaging Academics

Learner-centered lessons that are participatory, appropriately challenging, fun, and relevant and promote curiosity, wonder, and interest.

Positive Community

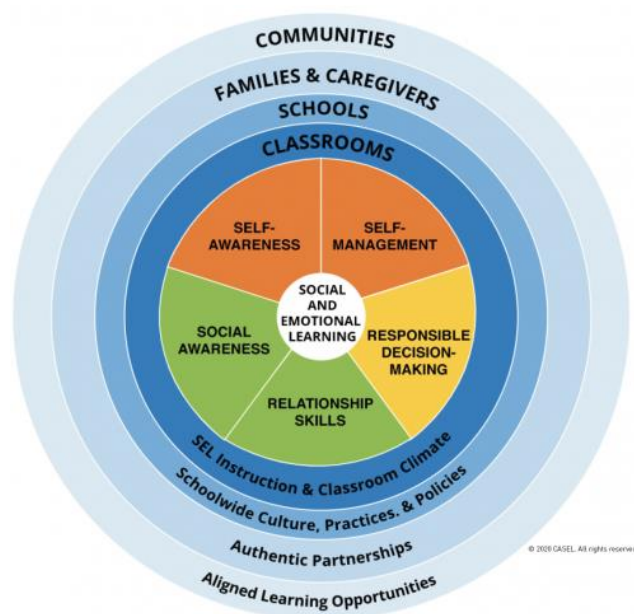
A safe, predictable, joyful, and inclusive environment where all students have a sense of belonging and significance.

Effective Management

A calm and orderly learning environment that promotes autonomy, responsibility, and high engagement in learning.

Developmentally Responsive Teaching

Basing all decisions for teaching and discipline on research and knowledge of students' social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development.

Figure 10*Responsive Classroom Model***Parent Appeal Process for OSS**

Whenever students are suspended from school, parents have a legal right to appeal that suspension through a formal process known as an appeal. An appeal is defined as the formal written claim by a parent/guardian that there has been a violation, misinterpretation, or misapplication of federal or state law or regulation or school policies. Appeals specifically include decisions associated with recommendations for a student's long-term suspension, expulsion or 365-day suspension. The intent of appeal policies is to ensure that equitable solutions to problems periodically affecting students are upheld. Appeal proceedings are official business of the district, formal, and as confidential as possible at all levels of the procedure. A student or parent/guardian should first attempt to resolve any concern through discussion with the school leadership. If a grievance cannot be resolved at this level, the aggrieved party may request a conference with the district office before filing an official appeal form. Failure of the school district

administration to comply with timelines will result in an automatic right of appeal to the next level.

Implications for Practice

In a school with traditional discipline practices, educators frequently correct conduct through reprimand or punitive actions. Schools implementing PBIS handle behavior challenges comprehensively differently. PBIS schools view student conduct as a method of communication. For example, before a student misbehaves, the teacher theoretically would notice that the student is seeking attention. To address this attention-seeking behavior in a positive way, the teacher would offer the student the opportunity to share an opinion. If the student still acts out after the attempt at positive reinforcement from the teacher, the school will work to create a strategy to prevent similar behavior from happening again. Strategies could vary in this case from break time to cool off or a conference with a peer mentor. Having a collaborative approach that includes and involves families in supporting behavior is beneficial when possible. PBIS schools often offer training for families to ensure the skills and strategies being utilized on campus are supported or reiterated at home. Behavior strategies are “fluid.” PBIS schools track the student's behavior and may change strategies as needed if what is being implemented is not working for the student. Being a PBIS school community does not imply that problem behaviors should be ignored. Schools still use discipline; however, punishment or punitive consequences are not the emphases. Instead, the concentration is on teaching expectations, averting difficulties, and using reasonable consequences designed to support sustainable changes in behavior.

Restorative circles, Capturing Kids’ Hearts, and PBIS strategies can be used to

affect the occurrence of OSS in urban Title I elementary schools. Teachers and school leaders express that these strategies have been successful and therefore deemed effective. As with anything being implemented within schools, it is critical to work with teachers to make sure they are utilizing strategies and various systems with fidelity, making sure teachers understand that differentiation and customization need to happen for students who need them in order to be successful.

Limitations/Delimitations

Limitations and delimitations from this research include the succeeding:

- The population of this research was restricted to one county in North Carolina.
- The emphasis of this study included only Title I elementary schools within the school district.
- This study had limited teacher participation with only four teachers. More teachers could have resulted in more strategies.
- Alternative strategies are subject to principal experiences or expertise in a certain area. The principals had varying levels of experience and educational backgrounds.
- The principal experience of the participants varies significantly. Most of the principal interviewees have between 4-7 years of experience as school-based principals, which could be subjective.
- Participants were not representative of the diversity of the school district for teachers. All teacher participants were African American.
- All participants from this study worked in one district and may have shared common approaches or attitudes towards discipline that may vary in other

large urban school districts.

The research method used in this study was based on the response of participants. Results were contingent on the participant's aptitude to honestly self-reflect and respond. Because of this, accurate data may not have been produced. I must assume that the information received from principals and teachers is authentic and accurate data. Participants who self-report their own behaviors or actions may report what reflects positively on their individual knowledge, approaches, and actions (Cook & Campbell, 2002).

Overall Implications for Future Research

Some of the limitations outlined provide an opportunity for future research. All participants from this study worked in one district and may have shared common approaches or attitudes towards discipline that may vary in other large urban school districts. Restorative practices is multifaceted and consists of several components. Future research specifically focused on which component of restorative practices has the most significant positive impact on managing student discipline within Urban Title I schools could add value for educators. Emerging research suggests that restorative practices may be a particularly effective approach to preventing office discipline referrals and OSS (Morrison & Vaandering, 2011). Minority students are less likely to experience an exclusionary discipline sanction in schools where the principal has a prevention orientation to student discipline and implements alternative consequences such as in-school suspension (Skiba et al., 2010).

Restorative approaches that focus on repairing the harm caused by a discipline incident through classroom circles (group dialogues) and conferencing (mediation) with

victims and offenders appear to be particularly promising. Although research on restorative practices is evolving, specific measures and factors are needed in evaluating its proper use and effectiveness.

Finally, a limited amount of teacher input was collected during this research. Future research focused primarily on teachers could have significant implications and outcomes for educators regarding the perceptions of teachers regarding disciplinary practices in Title I urban elementary schools.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study addressed the perceptions of principals and teachers in urban Title I elementary schools. Several recommendations can be derived from this study to improve impending research in the field. The subsequent recommendations can be made:

- Conduct research that includes principals from other districts in North Carolina to measure alternative strategies to OSS. Adding more participants to the analysis should help gain a wider view of alternative OSS strategies.
- Research restorative practices, Capturing Kids' Hearts, and PBIS to measure their impact on student behaviors and ultimately graduating high school.
- Examine the impact of strategies across different grade levels and compare the similarities and differences of the participants.
- Research the reasons why Black, Latino, and Multiracial students are punished more harshly than White students for the same offense. This study can look at the practices and perceived or implicit biases.

Recommendations for Practice

There are several recommendations for practice generated from this study. The

following recommendations can be made:

- Incorporate teacher college classes that will include alternative learning practices in the curriculum. New teachers are often excited and fearful of entering the classroom for the first time. One of the most common issues they face is classroom management. College students need to prepare teachers to use certain strategies and preventive measures that have an impact on student behavior (Morrison & Vaandering, 2011).
- Deliver professional development to educators on how to implement alternative behavior strategies. Most school discipline derives as an office referral from a teacher. Office referrals are determined by minor violations, are subjective, and can be inconsistent in nature. Those referrals tend to be driven by minor infractions and subjective categories of student misconduct, such as defiance and disrespectful behavior, rather than more objective and serious behaviors like bringing a weapon to school (Skiba et al., 2010). Teachers need professional development on incorporating alternative strategies into their classrooms. Teachers will need proper professional development that goes beyond introduction of the strategy or program. Training and support for how incorporating alternative strategies should be implemented consistently will be needed. Principals should define clear expectations of how the strategies should be utilized in the classroom and within the school. New skills for educators should be supported by the district and implemented in each school. Principals and building leaders should encourage continued professional development to ensure teachers are exposed

and understand how to process any misbehaviors of students. Strategic professional development will affect teachers and in turn benefit all students.

- Encourage teachers and staff to develop mentor relationships with students such as a check and connect. Teachers and staff have a responsibility to teach and model appropriate ways to handle situations. These leaders often make more of an immediate impact than parents do. Although parental support is much needed and proved effective, students often communicate more with these leaders, teachers, and support staff.

Chapter 5 Summary

Based on the findings of this study and the review of the literature, educators continue to encounter obstacles and barriers connected directly to school discipline. While managing student behavior without comprising instruction can be a daunting task, there are several strategies that school leaders can implement to reduce OSS in Title I elementary schools. The participants in this research overwhelmingly oppose zero tolerance practices and OSS; however, several strategies were discussed that could serve as beneficial. Capturing Kids' Hearts, PBIS, and restorative practices are the top strategies discussed throughout this research. Finding preventive measures for students will ultimately reduce the high rates of suspension and referrals for minority students and will reduce the pattern of higher rates of misbehavior among these populations. Efforts should be made to reduce exclusionary discipline measures that target the attitudes and behaviors of the school and not students. Some limitations exist. More input from teachers could offer more insight into perceptions; however, based on those who participated and the likelihood of the strategies being useful for urban Title I elementary

schools seems promising.

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Appendix A
Pre-Interview Script

Thank you for agreeing to help with this research.

The interview should take 30 to 45 minutes.

Let me reiterate the purpose/importance of your participation. The purpose of this project is to compile or detail alternative OSS strategies. Within this study, I will evaluate the overall thoughts and perceptions of teachers and administrators as it relates to the strategies being used in Title I elementary schools in a large urban district. After the collection of strategies and the evaluation of thoughts and perceptions I will comprise a comprehensive list of suggestions or alternative options for elementary school leaders in Title I schools to use in place of or in addition to OSSs. Your input is and the information you share is valuable.

I want to reassure you that the information you share will remain confidential and if you are uncomfortable with any question, you may refuse to answer. You may also choose to conclude your participation at any time.

Do you have any questions for me before we begin?

Before we jump into specific questions, can you tell me a little bit about yourself? How many years have you been in education and briefly describe the roles/positions you have held in the education field, how many years in Title I elementary schools? How long have you been at your current school?

Appendix B

Interview Questions

Interview Guide for School Administrators

1. To what degree does student misconduct generate a challenge for you as well as staff?
2. Do you think instructional time is impacted due to discipline problems? How?
3. What current discipline practices do you use in your school?
4. Which practice do you consider the most effective?
5. Which practice do you consider the least effective?
6. How do you think inappropriate student behavior should be handled?
7. Are you familiar with Zero Tolerance? Do you think these practices have been effective in reducing disciplinary challenges?
8. Do you feel that there are any additional barriers to effective disciplinary practices that we have not discussed, if so what are they and how do you address them in your school?

Interview Guide for Homeroom Teachers

1. What is your view on current discipline practices in your school?
2. Do you believe that your school requires more or less practices in place to address conduct issues for students?
3. Do you think instructional time is impacted due to discipline problems? How?
4. What current discipline practices are used in your school?
5. Which practice do you consider the most effective?
6. Which practice do you consider the least effective?
7. What do you believe is the principal's role in the implementation of discipline practices within the school?

8. Do you believe that there are any further barriers to effective disciplinary practices that we have not discussed, if so what are they and how would you like to see them managed in your school?