

IMPACT OF CULTURAL COMPETENCE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ON THE
SUSPENSION REFERRALS OF MINORITY STUDENTS

by

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Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

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ABSTRACT

Racial disparity in discipline practices is a concern in public schools across the United States. Racial disparities in exclusionary discipline practices (EDP), such as in-school and out-of-school suspensions of minority students, have been well documented. The purpose of this causal-comparative quantitative study was to examine if a relationship exists between cultural competence (CC) professional development training of faculty (administrators and professional teachers) and the suspension referral counts of Latinx and African American students in an affluent, award-winning public school system in a Mid-Atlantic state. Discipline referral data was collected from the Office of Planning and Evaluation to run a Mann-Whitney U test to analyze the data from the random sample of 140 faculty. The results of the test revealed no statistical difference among measures of the independent variables between groups of faculty serving in schools having CC training and faculty serving in schools that did not have CC training. This type of training that would support faculty in educating and managing students in diverse classrooms is not a 'one and done' learning experience. The CC training should be ongoing and embedded in the philosophy of the school. Additional wrap-around supports such as tiered interventions that support positive relationships between staff and students and establishing equity teams with school equity audits would support the training of educators and may reduce the disparity in EDP. Several recommendations for further research are shared and include using a larger sample size to help generalize the research, parsing out administrators, and examining faculty age, race, and experience on minority suspension referrals.

Keywords: Cultural competence, discretionary offense, exclusionary, suspension

Dedication

I dedicate my dissertation work to my family. Thank you to my Peruvian goddess, Susy, and my two sons, Joshua and Joseph. You are the loves of my life, and I appreciate your support, encouragement, and love throughout this endeavor. A special feeling of gratitude and dedication goes to my parents, Phil and D'Ann Bonar, who did an amazing job of raising three boys in the fear and admonition of the Lord. Thank you for always encouraging me to be the best me I can be, encouraging me to start this journey years ago, and for loving me through thick and through thin. Finally, I want to dedicate this work to Jesus, for His amazing grace, for being my vine, and for giving peace that passes all understanding, even when working on a dissertation.

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List of Abbreviations

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

Cultural Competence (CC)

Exclusionary Discipline Practices (EDP)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Juvenile Justice System (JJS)

Office Discipline Referral (ODR)

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)

Restorative Justice Practices (RJ)

School Resource Officer (SRO)

School-to-Prison Pipeline (SPP)

Social Control Theory (SCT)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

The purpose of this quantitative, causal-comparative study is to determine the impact of cultural competence (CC) professional development on the suspension referrals of minority students. Chapter One provides a background for the racial disparity in discipline practices in public schools across America. Included in the background is an overview of the theoretical framework for this study. The problem statement examines the scope of recent literature on this topic. The purpose of this study is followed by the significance of the current study. Finally, the research questions are introduced, and definitions pertinent to this study are provided.

Background

Public school systems implement discipline practices to help maintain safety and order for both students and the staff that serve them. Research suggests racial disparities in the rates of exclusionary discipline practices (EDP), such as in-school and out-of-school suspensions (Nance, 2016; Smolkowski et al., 2016). Throughout public-school systems, minority students are suspended at higher rates than their White peers (Dameron et al., 2019). This racial disparity in discipline practices is a rising concern in public schools across America. The disproportionality in disciplinary practices has been well documented and most pronounced for African American public-school students (Smolkowski et al., 2016). One example of the disproportionality can be seen in national discipline data from the 2011-2012 school year (Blackaby & Blackaby, 2011). Administrators suspended 23% of African American students compared to 7% of White students in secondary schools (Losen et al., 2015).

Exclusionary discipline practices, such as in-school and out-of-school suspension, separate students from their peers and the instructors from whom they learn. Even though the

achievement gap between students of color and their White peers fails to close, these EDP are still used, keeping students out of class and away from much-needed instruction (Hanushek et al., 2019). Several research studies reveal a higher probability of EDP, Latinx, and African American students as compared to their peers from other cultural groups (Curran, 2016; Hines-Datiri & Andrews, 2017; May et al., 2018).

Additionally, studies revealed that African American students' suspension rates have more than doubled in kindergarten through 12th grade in American schools (Heilbrun et al., 2015). EDP poses significant challenges to single-parent families that must take time off from work or provide and pay for child-care for those days students will be excluded from school (Berlowitz et al., 2017).

Not only is the data disproportionate, but the educational landscape is changing. The fastest-growing minority group in America is now the Latinx population, and Latinx students are the fastest-growing minority group in the educational system, with the highest dropout rate (31%) among ethnic groups in 2009 (Nelson et al., 2015). Research data documents that students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who are frequently suspended from school have an increased risk of poor academics, behavior, and post-secondary outcomes (Simmons-Reed & Cartledge, 2014). Some researchers have suggested that the dramatic increase in EDP since the 1970s has created a funnel structure wherein negative school outcomes have led to increased involvement in the criminal justice system (Rocque & Snellings, 2018).

Racial inequalities in criminal justice system outcomes have been well documented and have shown that certain minority groups in America are stopped for alleged infractions more often than Whites. In addition, minorities receive harsher punishments and tend to experience arrest more frequently than Whites. Many are now linking African Americans' over-

representation in the criminal justice system to the disproportionate EDP in public schools, calling it the school-to-prison pipeline (SPP) (Barnes & Motz, 2018).

There is clear evidence indicating a link between student suspensions, stunted academic growth, increased risk of failing in school, and an increased risk of dropping out of school (Boneshefski & Runge, 2014). The SPP is now gaining national attention as student involvement in the juvenile justice system (JJS) is also being linked to school failure and federal, state, and local public-school discipline policies (Rocque & Snellings, 2018). Public school systems are concerned about the disproportionate suspension rate of minority students. Research suggested that policymakers may reduce the racial gap in arrests by reducing the gap in the EDP of minority students (Barnes & Motz, 2018).

Some school systems are implementing CC professional development training of faculty to deal with minority suspensions' disproportionality and reduce the SPP. One of the leading books used for CC training encourages educators to have courageous conversations with each other about race and stresses that educators can avoid faulting children for who they are or what background they may come from by focusing on the need to stop placing blame on the places and the people that are beyond their control or realm of influence (Singleton & Linton, 2006).

Research suggests that teachers and counselors holding a deficit view of students from differing backgrounds or social class will likely believe that these same students have moral and cultural value deficits, leading to lowered expectations and fewer interactions with the educators (Pietrantonio & Glance, 2018). Research on CC training suggests several positive results. Participants of the professional development report having eye-opening experiences providing new insights exposing the aspects of being culturally competent, recognition of strengths already

existing in schools, the importance of the school leader's role, road maps or the impetus for change, and the empowering of marginalized groups (Nelson et al., 2015).

Problem Statement

In public-school systems in the United States, minority students are suspended at higher rates than their White peers (Nance, 2016). Most suspensions involve discretionary decisions by teachers and administrators (Koppelman, 2017; Nance). Students punished for deviant behavior by teachers and administrators in the United States often achieve lower grades, acquire less knowledge, and achieve lower overall academic success (May et al., 2018). The adoption of zero-tolerance policies has widened the problem by increasing harsh punishments for students while removing faculty discretion in choosing less serious behavior consequences (May et al.). The strong connection between problematic, deviant, or criminal behavior and dropping out of school is another important problem (May et al.). Some researchers argue that not all students are at equal risk, as African Americans and Latinx are at a much higher risk of being funneled into the SPP in the United States, with a significant presence of juveniles in the criminal justice system due to harsh discipline consequences (May et al.).

A considerable amount of time, effort, and challenges are involved in providing assignments and courses dedicated to enhancing levels of CC (Erba et al., 2020; Gottlieb & Shibusawa, 2020). The increased level of misbehavior by students and the lack of professional development regarding behavioral interventions have resulted in the reliance on increasingly harsh consequences in dealing with students' behavior in many schools (Ryan et al., 2018). There is research supporting the need for CC training as necessary for educational leaders to meet credentialing standards, as well as state and federal requirements for subgroups of students (Clayton & Goodwin, 2015; Morettini et al., 2019). Furthermore, the Association of Teacher

Educators identifies CC training as a goal for all educators (Morettini et al.). Researchers believe this training is important when 80% of teachers are White women working in classes where student demographics are changing rapidly, and students' culture may be used as a vehicle for learning (Ruppert et al., 2017). The literature cited how CC training is needed because cultural clashes between teachers and students may undermine the learning process and increase feelings of mistrust (Flory & Wylie, 2019). The concept is complicated because successful CC training is challenging to measure and teach and is not very well defined in the literature (Jani et al., 2016). Critics of CC training emphasize that teachers cannot permanently attain competence in a culture. Competence involves more than merely understanding and valuing other cultures and the assumption that culture is a uniformly positive phenomenon (Jani et al.). The problem is that the literature has not fully addressed research suggesting a link between CC professional development training and an improvement in the gap in minority student suspensions.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this causal-comparative quantitative study was to determine whether CC training of public school faculty reduced the referral counts of Latinx and African American student suspensions. For this study, the independent variable was the individual faculty whose school staff have or have not participated in CC training. The study involved a quantitative research design because it systematically investigated social phenomena using statistical techniques. The dependent variable was the EDP, or in-school and out-of-school suspension referral counts of the minority students by faculty in these same public schools. The independent variable addressed the CC professional development training that may or may not have affected the rate of minority student suspensions.

Cultural Competence refers to how well a school system addresses its diversity through its programs, policies, and practices, such as EDP (Nelson et al., 2015). EDP refers to the disciplinary procedures that remove disruptive students from class. It is believed that this creates a safer learning environment, such as in-school and out-of-school suspensions (Simmons-Reed & Cartledge, 2014).

The study participants were teachers and administrators from an affluent and award-winning public school system in a Mid-Atlantic state whose school staff had and had not participated in CC professional development. The county residents have the highest levels of education in the state, and the students served by the school system come from very diverse backgrounds, representing 120 different countries and speaking over 90 languages. This school system has committed a substantial amount of money and time to provide CC training to the teachers and administrators due to the disproportional suspension referrals of minority students. School-based data from the system's data warehouse was used for this study. The database contains discipline data that includes in-school and out-of-school suspensions of all students and key performance indicators.

Significance of the Study

Exclusionary discipline practices, which keep students out of class and away from needed instruction (Hanushek et al., 2019), have been linked to increased dropout rates and increased involvement of students in the criminal justice system (Rocque & Snellings, 2018). This is now known as the SPP (Barnes & Motz, 2018). This research is significant to educators serving in diverse communities and schools and school systems dealing with gaps in suspension rates.

In the school system chosen for this research, the minority students' suspension rate is disproportional to White students, and most of the EDP are discretionary. Discretionary offenses

are usually individual discipline decisions made by faculty that may or may not have required suspension. Nondiscretionary offenses required automatic suspensions, such as bringing a weapon to school, the possession of illegal substances on school grounds or at school-sanctioned events, or being under the influence of illegal substances. Research shows that African American students are more likely to experience school exclusions due to discretionary offenses than nondiscretionary exclusions in public schools (Simmons-Reed & Cartledge, 2014).

Most educators want success and equity for all students. CC may help faculty when making these discretionary decisions where the interactions in the classrooms and halls occur. Many faculty members in public schools are learning as they do the job while they teach or administrate. Many are trying to support students with life experiences and cultural backgrounds that are much different from their own and do not have the experience of serving in buildings where equitable outcomes for minorities have been achieved (Browne II, 2012).

Additionally, most university administrators and teacher preparation programs do not include training or education on CC, corrective measures to eliminate covert or overt discrimination, and cultural racism (Browne II, 2012). Most teachers and administrators probably have minimum exposure to CC training. As a result, public school faculty may not be prepared to work with culturally different backgrounds or foster equitable educational outcomes. The lack of experience and preparation may lead teachers to give more office discipline referrals (ODRs) than students deserve.

Research shows that African American students, more than their peers, are more likely to be issued ODRs by teachers (Smolkowski et al., 2016). This research aims to help determine if CC professional development training of public school faculty is making a difference in reducing minority suspensions. This may decrease the SPP.

Research Question

The research question addressed and explored was:

RQ1: Is there a difference in the number of suspension referrals of minority students among individual faculty whose school staff have participated in cultural competence training and individual faculty whose school staff have not participated in cultural competence training?

Definitions

1. *Cultural competence (CC)* – Cultural competence refers to how well a school system addresses its diversity through its programs, policies, and practices, such as EDP (Nelson et al., 2015).
2. *Discretionary offense* - An offense that may or may not require suspension (Simmons-Reed & Cartledge, 2014).
3. *Exclusionary* - The term used for disciplinary procedures that remove disruptive students from class to create a safer learning environment, such as in-school suspensions and out-of-school suspensions (Simmons-Reed & Cartledge).
4. *Nondiscretionary offense* - An offense that results in automatic suspension from school, such as possession of a weapon, possession of an illegal substance (Simmons-Reed & Cartledge).
5. *School-to-prison pipeline (SPP)* - The increased connection between school failure, public school disciplinary procedures, and student involvement in the criminal justice system (Rocque & Snellings, 2018).
6. *School resource officers (SRO)* - Commissioned police officers that have been selected, trained, and then assigned to serve and protect staff and students in an educational environment (Wolf, 2018).

7. *Social class* - The interaction between students' social, cultural, and economic status and backgrounds (Pietrantonni & Glance, 2018).
8. *Suspension referral* - The referral to the school administrator for a reason, which could include delinquency, crime, alcohol or drug use, attendance, conduct problems, disrespect for others, aggressive behavior, defiance of authority, rebellious behavior (Anderson, 2019).
9. *Zero-tolerance* - A discipline practice in which mandatory sanctions that remove students from school are imposed for disciplinary infractions without regard for the severity of the violation (Heilbrun et al., 2015).

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

A thorough review of research was conducted to identify studies that explored the disproportionality of the suspension/expulsion referrals of minority students that may lead to the school-to-prison pipeline (SPP) and CC professional development. An overview of the existing literature about the study will be provided in this chapter. The first section of the literature review will focus on the theories selected as a framework for the study and how they relate to the central phenomenon. The second section will synthesize the recent literature about racial and ethnic disparities in discipline practices, zero-tolerance policies, school resource officers, and the SPP, followed by studies on CC and implicit bias of educators. Finally, a focused area of need for this study exploring the disparity in the discipline of minority students and educators' CC professional development will emerge.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Race Theory

Educational researchers are increasingly using critical race theory (CRT) to examine educational opportunities, pedagogy, representation, and school climate (Ledesma & Calderón, 2015). These same authors used the following definition to explain the theory and the link to education:

Critical race studies in education could be defined as a critique of racism as a system of oppression and exploitation that explores the historic and contemporary constructions and manifestations of race in our society, focusing on how these issues are manifested in schools. Critical race studies in education then-like critical pedagogy-is ultimately concerned with employing multiple methods and borrowing from diverse traditions in the law, sociology, ethnic studies, and other

fields to formulate a robust analysis of race and racism as a social, political, and economic system of advantages and disadvantages accorded to social groups based on their skin color and status in a clearly defined racial hierarchy. (Ledesma & Calderón, p. 208)

There are three main theoretical tenets of CRT that may be helpful to this research. The first tenet holds that racism is an ordinary everyday experience for people of color in America, and because it is not acknowledged can be difficult to address. Secondly, the psychological power and accumulation of material may lead to interest convergence. In other words, because racism benefits Whites psychically and materially, this majority group has little incentive to eradicate it. Lastly, the non-racialized majority group benefits from manipulating racism as a social construct with no genetic basis. Groups of people in America are subject to what those in power do to stratify and categorize people (Wesp et al., 2018).

Because of their call for an intersectional analysis of oppression, highlighting the voices of those marginalized in our society, such as Fredrick Douglas, Bayard Rustin, and Mary Church Terrell, have been considered the intellectual ancestors of critical race theory (Annamma et al., 2019). Some researchers suggest that racism is a fundamental way of organizing society, and a core premise of CRT is that racism is endemic, institutional, and systematic (Sleeter, 2017).

The theory exposes the policies, practices, and laws that reinforce normative standards of Whiteness, even though they may be considered neutral by many (Annamma et al., 2019). Although racism may be seen as fundamental in society, a literature review shows victimization and discrimination in health care, at work, at home, and in school

may lead to overwhelming negative health effects (Wesp et al., 2018). The disparities in educational resources that led to racialized outcomes have caused scholars in education to take up CRT to address the problem (Annamma et al.). The theory can provide a lens to analyze and address the Whiteness of teacher education and be used to locate how race and racism manifest themselves in public education while offering tools to address these issues in the classroom (Cole, 2017; Ledesma & Calderón, 2015; Sleeter, 2017).

There is evidence that educators will focus on their White students' emotional needs over the emotional needs of the minority students in their class when teaching race-related content (Sleeter, 2017). The theory may help educators better understand the advantages and disadvantages of minority students in their classrooms. This offers help in locating how race and racism are manifested in schools.

When it comes to educational reform, scholars believe the theory may be helpful when thinking about praxis, policy, and practice (Annamma et al., 2019). An understanding of CRT may also help White educators in understanding that racism can be institutional and help them look for and try to understand their hidden biases. The theory may also be helpful because the prevailing narratives regarding students of color are connected to the ways race operates in both our schools and in our society (Annamma et al.). Therefore, CRT could inform educators with an emancipatory perspective toward CC, one that serves students by shifting the current discourse from accepting the status quo to critiquing the processes of power and structure in education as a society (Wesp et al., 2018).

Social Control Theory

General delinquency and school misbehavior have been explained through control theories, but Hirschi's social control theory (SCT) has received the most empirical and theoretical attention (Latimore et al., 2018). SCT is a benchmark for theory construction and research in the field of delinquency and suggests that delinquency is intrinsic to human nature, so conformity must be explained (Wiatrowski et al., 1981). Conformity is achieved through socialization and the formation of bonds. The theory suggests that bonds are formed through attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief (Wiatrowski et al.).

Attachment represents the emotional, and psychological sensitivity individuals feel toward others and the sensitivity to others' opinions (Neely & Vaquera, 2017). Commitment refers to the benefits of investing in activities that prevent delinquent behaviors, especially when the activities outweigh the risk of conforming (Neely & Vaquera). Involvement represents the amount of time or level of participation a person spends in culturally legitimate activities. An increased level of involvement may reduce juveniles' time to immerse themselves in delinquent behavior (Neely & Vaquera). Lastly, belief refers to the extent to which a juvenile respect and endorses society's prevailing rules and behavioral norms (Neely & Vaquera). These four elements' strength determines social bonding with strong use, resulting in less likely delinquent human behavior (Wiatrowski et al., 1981).

Students are more likely to misbehave when they have weak bonds with teachers and school due to low levels of attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief (Latimore et al., 2018). The short-term costs and consequences of others' reactions, such as a student's teacher, play a significant role in engaging in delinquent behaviors (Ward et al., 2015). Hirschi (2004) had a newer conceptualization of self-control that can be summarized as follows:

Redefined, self-control becomes the tendency to consider the full range of potential costs of an act rede. This moves the focus from the long-term implications of the act to its broader and often contemporaneous implications.

With this new definition, we need not impute knowledge of distant outcomes to persons in no position to possess such information. Put another way, self-control is the set of inhibitions one carries with one wherever one happens to go. Their character may be initially described by going to the bond elements of the bond identified by social control theory (p. 543).

In terms of the theory, students with low self-control are also more likely to exhibit deviant behaviors because they may care less about the long-term effects of their behavior in society (Nasi et al., 2016).

One of the essential aspects of the theory that correlates with education is that of the student's belief or acceptance of the school's moral validity of the school's central social-value system or classroom (Wiatrowski et al., 1981). The acceptance of social rules is central to SCT (Wiatrowski et al.). In other words, the less rule-bound students feel, the more likely they are to break the rules. Additionally, a person's sense of responsibility will increase when strong bonds are formed with social institutions, reducing delinquent behavior (Chan, 2019).

Social relationships are an important aspect of creating a personal value system and normative behavior beliefs (Nasi et al., 2016). SCT suggests helping students build strong bonds with their school, staff, and peers to restrict engagement in delinquent behavior (Neely & Vaquera, 2017). Students that have built strong bonds now have something to lose. Researchers argued that reduced delinquency and conformity increase when individuals form social bonds with families or schools (Neely & Vaquera). In this sense, education can be viewed as a social

bond that reduces student behaviors that lead to EDP. In the SCT, abstaining from delinquent behaviors may be due to many protective factors that lead students to avoid delinquent behaviors and delinquent peers (Chan, 2019). Literature regarding SCT specifies family and school experiences as clearly relevant explanatory factors for juvenile delinquency (Neely & Vaquera). The more functional and developed these bonds become, the more they support individuals as restraints and impediments to delinquent behaviors (Neely & Vaquera).

Though it is not the objective of this study to test the tenants of SCT, the theoretical framework will guide the analysis of the relationship between building CC relationships or bonds between faculty and students and the suspension referrals of minority students' delinquent behavior. Both theories would be essential to help educators understand how race and racism manifest themselves and build strong relationships with students to help prevent delinquent behaviors.

Related Literature

Racial and Ethnic Disparities

A topic of great concern in America, especially public school systems today, is the racial disparity in student suspension (Boneshefski & Runge, 2014; Nance, 2016; Tajalli & Garba, 2014;). Minority students in secondary public schools are suspended at a significantly higher rate than their White peers. Most researchers agree that minority students are the primary recipients of school discipline practices (Boneshefski & Runge; Tajalli & Garba).

Investigative research finds that African American students in this country have been disciplined, not only harshly but more frequently than their White peers because of their race (Nance, 2016). Research findings document that students from diverse backgrounds, especially

African Americans, are consistently overrepresented in EDP compared to their enrollment rate in American schools (Simmons-Reed & Cartledge, 2014).

Currently, there is a disparity in the suspension rate of minority males in our public schools, with most suspensions involving discretionary decisions by teachers and administrators (Koppelman, 2017). Koppelman shared, "[b]lack students are more likely to be suspended for behaviors requiring a subjective judgment such as being disrespectful, being too loud, and loitering" (p. 169). Increased use of EDP in public schools has been linked to higher dropout rates, which in turn correlates to increased involvement in the criminal justice system (Rocque & Snellings, 2018).

The racial disparity in discipline practice is a great concern in public schools across the country. An overwhelming majority of student suspensions involve discretionary decisions by teachers and administrators (Koppelman, 2017; Tajalli & Garba, 2014). Discretionary discipline infractions are concerning because they are usually individual decisions made by faculty at the time of the offense (Koppelman).

Research findings refute the effectiveness of increasingly harsh discipline practices in reducing delinquent behavior and have a negative impact on a growing diverse segment of our student population (Simmons-Reed & Cartledge, 2014). Literature documents that African Americans, Latinx low achievers, males, and students with disabilities have a higher exclusion rate than students from other cultural groups (Simmons-Reed & Cartledge). These exclusionary practices keep students out of class and away from needed instruction when our public schools' achievement gap fails to close (Hanushek et al., 2019). African American students are significantly overrepresented in disciplinary programs in urban school districts rather than in rural districts, and the Whiteness of a school district may lead to the overrepresentation of

African American students (Tajalli & Garba, 2014). The disparity in minority students' representation in public school disciplinary practices has been documented for over 25 years (Latimore et al., 2018). The practice of removing disruptive students to create safer school environments has not been substantiated in the research literature.

Long-term trends have been documented, showing a connection between socio-economic background and school achievement (Hanushek et al., 2019). The opportunity gap has not grown or closed in the past 50 years, with family background strongly affecting school performance (Hanushek et al.). The research suggested that African American students underperform on standardized tests because they worry that they will confirm the stereotype that they are inferior to their peers (Whaley, 2018). This threat has been extended to racial disparities in criminal justice (Whaley). The achievement gap is linked to the disproportionality of discipline practices. There is clear evidence indicating that suspensions are associated with stunted academic growth, increased school failure, and dropping out of school (Boneshefski & Runge, 2014).

Research consistently linked the failure to graduate from high school with detrimental economic outcomes such as limited income mobility, higher unemployment rates, reduced lifetime earnings, and decreased wages. There are also many social consequences linked to dropping out of school, such as disparities in overall well-being, lower civic engagement, reduced health care rates, higher likelihood of welfare dependency, and increased criminal activity rates, including incarceration (Neely & Vaquera, 2017).

Zero-tolerance Policies

One practice that has been implemented in public schools to remove disruptive students is a zero-tolerance response. Over the last few decades, the zero-tolerance discipline response has become a pervasive feature of the school discipline discussion (Curran, 2019). Public schools

are an important part of our national community, and educators are being held responsible for the academic instruction and the social education of students (Bleakley & Bleakley, 2018). To support educators' growing responsibility, most public schools have adopted zero-tolerance policies that may involve harsh penalties for minor discipline infractions (Bleakley & Bleakley). Zero-tolerance can be defined as a discipline practice in which mandatory sanctions that remove students from school are imposed for disciplinary infractions without regard for the severity of the violation (Heilbrun et al., 2015). Researchers traced the zero-tolerance movement in education back to the passage of the Gun-Free Schools Act (1994) enacted by the Clinton administration as a method to hold students responsible for illegal activities (Hines-Datiri & Andrews). This method was founded on a philosophy that holds that the smallest acts of disruption should be dealt with quickly and with punitive consequences to send the message that inappropriate behaviors will not be tolerated (Moreno & Scaletta, 2018).

The Gun-Free Schools Act required public schools to expel students for at least one school year for bringing weapons to school to keep receiving federal funding (Curran, 2016). Almost every school system in the country adopted zero-tolerance policies by 1999 (Curran). Incorrect predictions of juvenile crime rates and worries about racial demographic changes fed these policy shifts across the country (Dunning-Lozano, 2018).

There is little dispute that schools need to be safe for children, and school safety has recently become a very politicized issue due to high profile school shootings such as Columbine High School (1999) and Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School (2018). Still, zero-tolerance policies have preceded these violent acts by several years (Moreno & Scaletta, 2018). Many public school systems have expanded their zero-tolerance policies meant for weapons to include more aggressive behavior, alcohol, and illegal substances (Heilbrun et al., 2015). Some school

systems have even broadened their policies' scope to suspend students for minor infractions to include insubordination and classroom disruption through zero-tolerance responses (Heilbrun et al.). Zero-tolerance policies have become a way to legally discipline students for major and minor discipline infractions during school hours or school events. Students' standard disciplinary action through these policies is an exclusionary out-of-school suspension or expulsion (Hines-Datiri & Andrews, 2017).

Researchers suggested that harsh discipline policies are now being applied to physically unsafe behaviors and cause others to feel unsafe. These include offensive gestures, foul language, verbal threats, abuse, and even dress code violations (Kodelja, 2019). Additionally, the zero-tolerance policies have enlarged the scope of infractions considered to suspend students to more minor infractions such as insubordination and disrupting class (Heilbrun et al., 2015).

Furthermore, these policies may lead to unreasonable or unfair discipline responses compared to student misbehavior (Wolf, 2018). The media has highlighted students' stories given exclusionary discipline responses for seemingly minor behavior (Wolf). The studies of the use of exclusionary discipline reveal that they are often used for relatively minor misbehavior (Wolf). There are two core assumptions of these zero-tolerance policies that 1) harsh discipline sanctions will deter student misbehavior, and 2) the removal of students engaging in serious offenses will improve the safety and climate of the school (Heilbrun et al., 2015). The policies have also led to increased student surveillance, including increased searches, metal detectors, and police officers in schools (Hines-Datiri & Andrews, 2017). However, the policies presuppose harsh punishment to make it effective, but they also permit equal punishment for unequal offenses (Kodelja, 2019).

Evidence now suggests that zero-tolerance policies may be harming by lowering student academic achievement, increasing the dropout rate, and contributing to racial discipline gaps in

public schools (Curran, 2019). The combination of examples of excessive and unreasonable use of zero-tolerance and the possible link to racial disparities has gained the attention of policymakers and the public (Curran). Some are now calling for the repeal of these policies (Curran). Despite the need for policies to keep students safe at school, zero-tolerance policies have disproportionate consequences for students of color (Hines-Datiri & Andrews, 2017). African American students are suspended two to three times more than their White peers and overrepresented in discipline referrals and expulsions (Hines-Datiri & Andrews). Curran (2016) suggested that the racial disparities are not just for behavior incidents but also due to the differential use of the procedures and policies by teachers and administrators across all grade levels. Analyses of school discipline practices show that some school administrators have been inconsistent but unfair in applying zero-tolerance policies (Moreno & Scaletta, 2018). Some researchers suggested that the movement from contraband or weapon possession to more subjective offenses has led to a disproportionate exclusionary discipline based on the student's race, gender, and disability (Moreno & Scaletta). Berlowitz et al. (2017) suggested that lower-income public schools with a high number of African American students are more likely to enforce strict zero-tolerance policies that end in expulsion for threats and violence.

Additionally, these same researchers shared that teachers would find alternative punishments for White, middle-class students to minimize parental concerns about student records and college applications (Berlowitz et al., 2017). Minority students who were considered behavior problems to teachers were dismissed from school through strict zero-tolerance policies (Berlowitz et al.). For example, in the 2011-2012 school year, African American females in public schools in America were suspended at a rate of 12%, while White females were suspended at only 2% (Wun, 2018).

African American females were suspended more than White males, Asian males, and more than females of any ethnicity or race (Wun, 2018). One study found that zero-tolerance policies almost doubled expulsions for African American students compared to a 40% increase for White students and a 20% increase for Latinx students (Curran, 2016). Lacoé and Steinberg (2018) concluded that these policies have failed to make three essential distinctions:

First, the policies treated all children equally, making no distinction in the child's age or grade. Therefore, they imposed the same punishment-suspension or expulsion-irrespective of whether the child was a kindergarten student or a high school senior. Second, students could be expelled for what was construed as a weapon-such as a water pistol or what appeared to be an illicit substance such as Tylenol. Third, no consideration was made regarding the educational achievement, psychological development, or learning needs of a student so that all students, regardless of individual circumstances, received the same punishment. Ultimately, zero-tolerance policies replaced teachers' and school leaders' authority and discretion to interpret and address individual disciplinary infractions (p. 210).

Another concerning aspect of zero-tolerance policies is the effect they have on families. Parents' expectations and parental involvement at school may be punitive for some families (Dunning-Lozano, 2018). Pushing to increase parent involvement may be unhealthy or adverse to parents and their relationships with educators and even their students (Dunning-Lozano). Furthermore, data indicated that schools implementing zero-tolerance discipline practices often have higher suspension and expulsion rates, spend more time on discipline problems, and have increasingly negative school climates (Simmons-Reed & Cartledge, 2014). The problem is

systemic, with disparities in disciplinary outcomes for minority students starting as early as preschool and remaining consistent across all settings and grades (Welsh & Little, 2018).

There is a need to balance maintaining order and safety in schools across the nation while minimizing EDP. Research suggests changing policies and disciplinary practices (Curran, 2016). No single reform will solve these issues or be appropriate for all school settings (Curran, 2019). Meanwhile, more students are subject to EDP's negative outcomes, while, in the view of principals, the policies do not reduce student misbehavior (Curran, 2016).

There is now consensus that zero-tolerance policies are pushing students out of the school system and into the criminal justice system (Berlowitz et al., 2017). This is concerning when decades of evidence demonstrate that these policies do not improve school safety, and investigations demonstrate that teachers lacking classroom management skills are more likely to make referrals for misbehaving students for subjective concerns by citing zero-tolerance policies (Moreno & Scaletta, 2018). Many believe that the zero-tolerance approach has led to the increased use of school resource officers (SROs) in public schools to help enforce school discipline, but involving police officers in students' behavioral management may have serious implications (Bleakley & Bleakley, 2018).

School Resource Officers (SRO)

Policymakers, parents, and school staff have called on communities to increase school safety measures due to concerns about drugs, violence, and high-profile shootings in schools across the United States (Lynch et al., 2016). Schools across the nation have implemented a wide range of strategies to include counseling, violence prevention curriculum, exclusionary practices, and zero-tolerance approaches to remove high-risk students from educational settings (Lynch et al.). Security practices now include security cameras and metal detectors, but the most favored

security procedure is to deploy SROs to serve in schools (Devlin & Gottfredson, 2018).

According to the National Association of School Resource Officers, SROs are commissioned police officers that have been selected, trained, and then assigned to serve and protect staff and students in an educational environment (Wolf, 2018). The first SRO in the United States was appointed to a school in Flint, Michigan, in 1953. Several Florida communities assigned police officers to schools in the 1960s and 1970s (Normore et al., 2015).

The term 'school resource officer' was first used by a police chief in Miami, Florida (Normore et al., 2015). School resource officer programs began to grow throughout the United States, and by the late 1970s, there were approximately 100 SROs. By the mid-1990s, there were about 2,000 officers in schools (Lynch et al., 2016). Before 1999, SROs were primarily confined to larger urban schools and were linked to zero-tolerance policies in the 1980s and 1990s. Still, interest in assigning police to schools grew after the high-profile school shooting incident at the Columbine High School in 1999 (Weisburst, 2019).

From 1997 to 2007, the number of SROs in schools increased by approximately 38%. Police departments assigned almost 17,000 officers to schools across the country (Zhang, 2019). Since 1999, over 6500 SROs have been hired through the funding of over \$750 million by the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (Zhang, 2019). The safety of students in schools has become an increasing priority (Wolfe et al., 2017). The mass shootings at Columbine High School and Virginia Tech were shocking. Still, the murder of 20 first-grade students and six staff members at Sandy Hook Elementary School on December 14, 2012, may have been the tipping point in the debate about school safety and the use of SROs in schools (Wolfe et al.). After several more shootings in public schools and the tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary School, officer placement in schools was identified as a centerpiece in President Obama's plan

for increased safety (Theriot & Cuellar, 2016). The President's plan called for creating federal incentives for schools across the country to hire SROs and added approximately 1000 more officers and counselors to make schools safer (Theriot & Cuellar). By 2014, about 43% of the public schools in this country had an SRO in the building at least once a week, which affected over 70% of students across America. According to government surveys, at least 20,000 SROs are now working in schools (Weisburst, 2019).

Although schools are relatively safe places to learn and the likelihood of a violent crime to occur is relatively low, some schools are more violent than others (Crawford & Burns, 2015). In 2010, it was reported that there were approximately 828,000 nonfatal victimizations, with 359,000 occurring among 12 to 18-year-old students. Additionally, during the 2009-2010 school year, almost 74% of the countries' public schools reported at least one act of violence; 16% of those were severe violent incidents (Crawford & Burns). Originally, SRO positions began with a philosophy of community policing, emphasizing partnerships between communities and police, but increased violence has created a radical change in police work (Rhodes & Clinkinbeard, 2020). The roles of SROs have been evolving, and zero-tolerance policies may have led to more punitive discipline results. However, many still believe that schools are an area where community policing can be very effective (Rhodes & Clinkinbeard).

SROs' responsibilities in schools are based on a 'triad concept' of serving as teachers, counselors, and law enforcement professionals (May et al., 2016). They serve as teachers of the law in classes or as guest lecturers, as counselors to support students with issues relating to the law and community service, and, finally, law enforcement officers with the authority to arrest students (May et al.). Statistics released in 2011 indicated that SROs spend 48% of their time dealing with law enforcement, 24% of their time as advisors and mentors, 12% teaching

students, and 16% serving in other miscellaneous duties (Ryan et al., 2018). Even though SROs serve in a more constrained environment, regular police officers may be busier due to these broad responsibilities (Ryan et al.).

SROs have the ability or authority to carry a firearm in school, enforce the penal code, and have jurisdiction outside of the school building and beyond school property (Javdani, 2019). They can enforce school rules, engage in search and seizures, arrest students, or remove them from school without parental consent. This means that they can serve a much different role than other police officers (Javdani).

Research has given mixed results when it comes to the effectiveness of SROs in schools. Some findings have shown that they have been effective in bullying, gangs, disrespect, racial tension, and in some instances, a decrease in crime and suspensions (Crawford & Burns, 2015). Other research has highlighted the increased use of SROs and more incidents of drugs, weapons, and an increased percentage of reports of non-serious crimes (Crawford & Burns). Some research indicated positive results, such as SROs in one state being less likely to refer students for minor offenses than victims and their families, and the vital role SROs play in reducing cyberbullying (Pigott et al., 2016; Wright, 2016).

Survey results showed that principals feel that student fighting decreased when SROs were initiated in their schools. They also indicated that drug use, incidents with weapons, and general illicit behavior did not decrease (Wolfe et al., 2017). Either way, principals felt that the SROs constituted a significant part of their school safety plans (Wolfe et al.).

Interestingly, research has also indicated that the presence of SROs in schools helped decrease the students' arrests for serious crimes. It indicated increased students' arrest rates for more minor offenses such as disorderly conduct and misdemeanor charges (Pentek & Eisenburg,

2018). Even though principals may be positive about decreases in arrests for serious crimes and the support of zero-tolerance policies, there is concern about the connection to SROs and the increase in crime rates due to minor offenses of disorderly conduct and general misbehavior (Pentek & Eisenburg).

Some research has identified that many behavior issues that previously would have been handled by school staff with school disciplinary results are now becoming legal issues (Ryan et al., 2018; Zhang, 2019). For example, in the county of Clayton, Georgia, between mid-1990 to 2004, the number of student referrals to the juvenile court system by SROs increased by approximately 1,248% (Zhang). The majority of these court referrals were for minor offenses such as fighting, disorderly conduct, and disrupting the school day (Zhang). More recently, in 2014, 260,000 students were referred to SROs, 92,000 were arrested, 70,000 were restrained, and 37,000 were placed in seclusion in school (Ryan et al.).

Additional research results indicated that students attending schools with increased SRO presence were more likely to report minor offenses than students in schools without increasing SRO presence (Wolfe et al., 2017). The results indicated that the SRO relationship with the school might increase student reports of minor behavior. These would have been handled by educators or not come to their attention at all (Wolfe et al.).

Critics of the increase in student involvement with the juvenile justice system agree with the U.S. Department of Justice that SROs in schools are more likely to criminalize minor infractions, which may force students out of school and into the SPP (Ryan et al., 2018). It is believed that in 2010 alone, a quarter-million students were referred by SROs for legal consequences that would have, in the past, led to a serious or severe reprimand by teachers or administrators (Ryan et al.). The rising number of school-based arrests over the last few decades

may indicate that increased SRO presence leads to criminalizing behavior (Theriot & Cuellar, 2016). Examples included the rise in school-based arrests in an Ohio county from 1,237 in 2000 to 1,727 in 2002 (Theriot & Cuellar). Similarly, there was a threefold increase in Miami-Dade County, Florida, from 1999 to 2001, with 2345 school arrests (Theriot & Cuellar). Both school districts used SROs extensively, and the majority of the arrests were for minor discipline offenses, simple assaults, disorderly conduct, or unruly behavior (Theriot & Cuellar).

There may be a causal link between schools with an assigned SRO and arrest rates for disorderly conduct (Bleakley & Bleakley, 2018). In schools with an SRO, some studies indicated that students are five times more likely to be arrested for disorderly conduct, even after controlling for socio-economic disparities (Bleakley & Bleakley). Research now suggests that an increase in SROs in the schools may diminish educators' usual discretionary roles and criminalize minor offenses that would not constitute a charge for adults outside of school, such as running away from home or truancy (Pigott et al., 2016). However, this same research concluded that SROs' influence on the SPP could not be supported by the study (Pigott et al.).

A review of the literature suggested that SROs may feel that they have conflicting roles as an instructor, counselor, and police officer and that their training and the expertise of the educators they work with is devalued. Across studies, SROs reported that even though they received scarce training in informal counseling and mentorship, they felt pressured to mentor and educate. SROs indicated that educators utilize them improperly to enforce school policies, procedures, and obligations outside of their responsibilities as police officers. They stated that their primary responsibility is enforcing the law. Still, teachers and administrators expect them to involve themselves in school matters that should not involve them. They go as far as to say that teachers have abandoned their role in student discipline (Barnes, 2016).

Additionally, schools have created a climate where the teachers and staff in schools increasingly lean on the SROs to handle classroom management and minor behavior issues (Javdani, 2019). In one study, 77% of the SROs surveyed indicated they had arrested a student at school just to calm them down, 68% had arrested students for showing them that their actions had consequences. Interestingly, 55% had arrested students for minor discipline offenses because the teachers wanted the student to be arrested (Merkwae, 2015).

SROs reported that they are now controlling students in classrooms when teachers should be managing the classroom, and they reported that the number one reason they had to put students in handcuffs was to calm them down (Javdani, 2019). Furthermore, this increase in SROs controlling classrooms leads to removals and court referrals that increase the caseloads of probation officers, prosecutors, public defenders, and judges across the nation (Javdani, 2019). In one county alone, probation officers' caseloads increased by 150 students per SRO, with an increase in referrals (Javdani).

An additional concern is a disproportion in the students being referred. From 1985 to 2009, minor offenses such as disorderly conduct and obstruction of justice increased by 108%, with the most adversely affected population being students with disabilities and students of color (Ryan et al., 2018). Data from 2014 indicated that while African American students represented 27% of students referred to SROs and 31% of students arrested in their schools, they made up only 16% of the overall student population (Ryan et al.). Research indicated that African American and Latinx students are punished more often and more harshly in their schools than their peers, and African American students are four times more likely to be cited for a minor discipline infraction (Lynch et al., 2016). Additionally, African American students make up 31% of all school arrests and receive exclusionary discipline at a rate three times more than their

White peers (Lynch et al., 2016). Even in well-integrated racially diverse settings with academic support, students of color are policed disproportionately (Pentek & Eisenburg, 2018). Many minor disciplinary offenses are based on discretionary decisions (May et al., 2016). Teachers and administrators have the discretion to determine what constitutes a referral to an SRO. The SROs have the discretion to determine whether an offense constitutes disorderly conduct, class disruption, a fight, and an assault (May et al.).

Rural SROs are almost twice as likely to refer students to the JJS for minor offenses than urban SROs. These discretionary decisions may lead to unnecessary arrests for minor incidents that contradict the purpose of students' education (May et al., 2016). SROs have been encouraged to have training in school topics such as adolescent development, crisis management, and classroom management. Nevertheless, the level and quality of training vary across schools and school systems across the country because there are no consistent training requirements for police to serve in schools (Theriot & Orme, 2016). Furthermore, SROs have stated that their training as police officers requires them to assert their authority to solve problematic situations at school (Theriot & Orme).

It is also important to note that even though there seems to be a pattern that an increase in SROs, assignments in schools have led to increased referrals to the JJS, which have increased consequences and may fuel the SPP. Both national and individual analysis suffer from methodological weaknesses (Bolger et al., 2019). For example, there is an absence of an adequate control group to isolate the independent variable (Bolger et al., 2019). Additionally, these study results cannot be generalized to all SROs in all schools across all school systems (Bolger et al.). These studies cannot account for contextual factors such as crime rates and the school's local culture (Bolger et al.). Some research even suggested that schools, families, and

police outside of the school refer more students to the JJS than SROs and that these three groups are shaping the SPP more than any other entity (May et al., 2018). One comparison suggested that police outside of school are much more likely to refer juveniles to the courts for minor offenses (May et al., 2018).

The effects of SROs on EDP of suspensions and expulsions have also reported mixed findings. Several studies reported a null effect for suspensions, and other studies indicated an opposite effect for SROs with an increase in exclusionary discipline incidents (Zhang, 2019).

In sum, the research is mixed, but several studies mentioned an increase in student involvement with the JJS. Case law analysis points to the law enforcement of SROs in schools adding to legal violations of students. Actions deemed unacceptable to parents increased the criminalization of school-aged children (Zirkel, 2019). Furthermore, the legal status in the interactions that SROs have with students may be unclear due to their dual roles as school administrators and law enforcement officers. Some researchers suggested that an effective way to protect student rights would be to remove SROs from disciplinary responses to minor infractions (Wolf, 2018).

Researchers also suggested that the number of students referred for criminal prosecution would increase because minor disciplinary offenses like fighting could now be treated as assault, and disrupting class could result in disorderly conduct (Zhang, 2019). Public perceptions led to an increase in SROs in schools, but violent crime is somewhat rare (Devlin & Gottfredson, 2018). For example, homicides and the percentage of students carrying weapons on school grounds have decreased substantially, but theft and vandalism have increased (Devlin & Gottfredson).

Students increased levels of misbehavior and the lack of professional training by educators have resulted in many schools relying on harsh discipline consequences to deal with challenging behavior to include exclusionary practices. One of the consequences of the increase of student misbehavior is having SROs deal with this student behavior instead of teachers. This, in turn, may have increased the criminalization of discipline issues previously the responsibility of teachers and administrators, thus amplifying the SPP (Ryan et al., 2018).

Additionally, the increase of SROs in schools and zero-tolerance policies have had a disproportionate impact on minority students and pathways toward incarceration (May et al., 2016). The political push for funding of SROs in schools was initially to prevent significant school shootings and significant violent incidents, but the adoption of these programs has enormous legal consequences for students (Merkwae, 2015). Some scholars suggested that the link between school discipline practices and involvement in the criminal justice system has created a funnel structure known as the school to prison pipeline (Barnes & Motz, 2018; Rocque & Snellings, 2018; Seroczynski & Jobst, 2016).

School to Prison Pipeline (SPP)

The over-representation of Black citizens in the criminal justice system is now being linked to the disparity in public school disciplinary practices in what many call the SPP (Barnes & Motz, 2018). A partnership has developed over the past 30 years between schools and the JJS that can be punitive and harmful to vulnerable students (Mallet, 2015). Some scholars believe the pipeline is a pattern that is not random chance. It removes students from schools, usually through zero-tolerance discipline policies, and sets them on a track to involvement in the criminal justice system (Miguel & Gargano, 2017). The SPP is gaining national attention because of the link between school failure, federal, state, local public school disciplinary policies, and student

involvement in the JJS (Rocque & Snellings, 2018). Several scholars referred to the pipeline as the criminalization of school discipline in our society (Nance, 2016).

There may be a connection between the increase of arrests in schools and the increase in referrals to the JJS to the increased use of police officers or SROs in public schools, along with the increased use of zero-tolerance policies for discipline (Mallet, 2015). The concern is the growing number of students transitioning from urban educational institutions to criminal justice institutions because exclusionary school discipline increases at an alarming rate (Annamma et al., 2019). The increased use of EDP in public schools has been linked to increased dropout rates, which, in turn, correlates to students' increased involvement in the criminal justice system (Rocque & Snellings, 2018). Students who are expelled or suspended from school have a higher correlated risk of ending up in the criminal justice system at some point during their lives (Miguel & Gargano, 2017).

Furthermore, students who become involved with the JJS are significantly more likely to continue to be involved with the courts and recidivist outcomes such as detention and even incarceration (Mallet, 2015). Youth who are suspended are usually males who are academically at risk, involved in special education, from low socio-economic status, and are more likely to become involved in the criminal justice system (Simmons-Reed & Cartledge, 2014). Certain groups are disproportionately connected to the SPP, including African Americans, Americans, Alaskan natives, low-income students, students with mental disabilities, and those at risk of failing in school (Rocque & Snellings, 2018). There is ample evidence showing minority students are disproportionately represented in every stage of the SPP, leading from school to the JJS (Nance, 2016).

White people comprise 64% of America's total population, only 39% are incarcerated in the criminal justice system (Miguel & Gargano, 2017). Latinx comprise 13% of the population and represent 19% of incarcerated people (Miguel & Gargano). The most disproportionate rate involves Black people that only comprise 13% of the population but represent 40% of those incarcerated in our prisons (Miguel & Gargano). It is no surprise that Black students are 2.3 times more likely to be involved in discipline with police officers than their White peers when 51% of high schools with a majority of Black students have school resource officers functioning as security guards (Miguel & Gargano).

Study results revealed that Black students had odds of exclusionary discipline that are roughly 1.759 times higher than White students after adjusting for covariates and are more likely to be reported (Barnes & Motz, 2018). Racial disparities in exclusionary discipline are generally not driven by more serious or objective behavior such as possession of a weapon at school but seem to be driven by minor infractions and the more subjective categories of student behavior (Annamma et al., 2019). Researchers further suggested that the effects that lead to an arrest may be avoided if policymakers would intervene to eliminate racial inequalities in school-based discipline practices and make teachers aware of their implicit biases (Barnes & Motz).

Black female students have the fastest-growing suspension rate, with 31% of females being referred to law enforcement by school faculty and representing 43% of those arrested at school. In comparison, they only constitute 17% of the overall student population (Annamma et al., 2019). Black students are not the only minorities involved in the SPP. Approximately 18,000 Latinx youth are incarcerated annually, and they are 1.5 times more likely to be incarcerated than their White peers (Seroczynski & Jobst, 2016). In six states, Latinx youth are at least three times more likely to be incarcerated (Seroczynski & Jobst).

Research also suggested that being suspended out of school on a school day more than doubles the probability of a criminal offense and found that the effect is larger for Black students (Cuellar & Markowitz, 2015). Suspension can likely lead to days spent in the community where students are not supervised, and the opportunity to commit crimes is increased (Nance, 2016). Even short exclusionary practices disrupt the educational experience and give juveniles more time to engage in harmful and illegal activities (Nance). Students who fall behind due to exclusionary discipline may be more likely to drop out of school, leading to greater crime (Cuellar & Markowitz).

Scholars suggested that children arrested and incarcerated are less likely to graduate from high school. Their criminal records limit their eligibility for federal grants and loans that might help them afford a college degree (Owens, 2017). Students who become involved with the criminal justice system at a young age are more likely to continue involvement with the criminal justice system and may suffer from negative employment consequences because of their records (Owens). Multiple studies supported the idea that students who experience exclusionary discipline consequences are less likely to be promoted to the next grade and are less likely to enroll in college. At the same time, it is more likely that they will commit a crime, become arrested, and even serve time in prison as an adult (Nance, 2016). Schools perpetuate the SPP by being one of the primary referral sources to the JJS because of EDP (Goldstein et al., 2019).

It may not help matters when states spend more money on corrections than education. Spending on corrections has increased by over 100% in some states while decreasing overall education (Le, 2016). For example, money in correctional facilities has increased in percentage every year from 1988 to 2000, while local and state expenditures toward higher education had decreased (Le, 2016). The research suggested that pre-arrest diversion programs can reduce

arrest rates and protect students from the consequences of involvement with the JJS (Goldstein et al., 2019). Scholars suggested that exposing the SPP is important so that society can move away from deficit thinking and stop blaming the victims instead of the institutions involved (Le). If educators can help reduce EDP that funnel students into the SPP, the funds may be funneled back into schools to create more programs that support minority students and marginalized groups.

The economic costs of incarcerating students are extremely high (Nance, 2016). The average cost per year for detaining a single juvenile is \$148,767 across the nation, and the cost per year in the state of New York can be as high as \$352,663 (Nance). A greater focus on a win-win cycle of saved money going back to the students that educators serve and support every day can be established.

Something needs to change as more researchers claim the practices and discipline policies in our public schools create an SPP. This makes it more likely for minority students to become criminally involved with the JJS than acquire a quality education (Mallet, 2015). It may help educators be properly trained, receive professional development to encourage success in multicultural classes, and ensure all students receive the same support, positive relationships, and discipline consequences for their behavior.

Cultural Competence

More than 50 years after the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the ideals of freedom and equality elude many of our citizens (Bellack, 2015). American society is plagued by disparities in health, wealth, work, justice, and education (Bellack). Many public-school systems invest in cultural competence (CC) training for staff members to combat the disparity. It has been three decades since the inception of CC in the field of psychology. The approach offers guidelines to educators

serving students from a broad range of linguistic, socio-economic, and cultural backgrounds (Landa & Stephens, 2017). The training includes the significance of understanding different cultures and the importance of talking about racial issues with staff and students (Landa & Stephens). CC is a hot topic today in public schools. America is a diverse nation, and citizens can either embrace and learn about its diversity or choose to ignore it (Koppelman, 2017). We are a diverse society, but we are also a democratic one and, therefore, have the freedom to choose our perceptions, assumptions, and behaviors (Koppelman, 2017). According to Koppelman (2017), "We need to understand all kinds of diversity- including opinions, appearances, values, and beliefs- as well as the categories of race, ethnicity, social class, gender, sexual orientation, and disability" (p. 1). For educators and students to understand diversity, CC training and multicultural education should be a part of their learning (Nganga, 2020). Teacher education programs in America rarely train educators in cultural awareness, and researchers believe this professional development is critical (Nganga, 2020).

There are many different definitions of CC, and they have been shared and promoted by many groups for many years. According to Teasley et al. (2014), CC "can be defined as a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system or agency or among professionals and enable the system, agency, or professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations" (p. 695). A simple definition may be the attitude, knowledge, and skills needed to interact effectively and appropriately with diverse people (Bustamente et al., 2016).

Most teachers enter the profession without preparation in teaching culturally diverse students from their preservice training and may not understand the importance of social and cultural influences on their beliefs and behaviors (Dornoo, 2015). Teacher preparation programs have been criticized for their lack of preparing teachers to meet children's needs today. The

research highlighted teacher candidates' voices who lack an awareness of their limited experience, cultural knowledge, and how it will impact teaching (Landa & Stephens, 2017). The research suggested that social consciousness's inadequacy among college-age Americans and teacher-candidate knowledge of social and cultural issues is limited. Many maintain minimal knowledge in undergraduate teacher preparation programs minimize the sociopolitical facets of teaching and learning (Landa & Stephens, 2017).

Research indicated that unconscious cognitive associations based on race, or racial bias, have been observed in racial disparities in education outcomes (O'Malley et al., 2019). Cognitive bias has been linked to teacher classroom mismanagement and disproportionate discipline practices for students of color (O'Malley et al.). Researchers have stressed the importance of teacher preparation programs that prepare teachers to become culturally competent. They may work effectively with diverse groups of learners and demonstrate culturally relevant and responsive classroom experiences that support all students' academic achievement and positive experiences (Bustamente et al., 2016).

Research also stressed that CC is intentionally implemented into teacher preparation programs because teachers have been identified as the most influential determinant to student learning success (Bustamente et al., 2016). Teachers should be trained in CC and culturally responsive teaching practices because children of color are expected to represent the majority of public-school students at 54% by the year 2024 (Morettini et al., 2019).

Cultural competence professional development involves the significance of learning about other cultures and focuses on learning about hidden biases and the importance of having courageous conversations about racial issues with staff and students (Singleton & Linton, 2006). CC training for faculty in this study involves completing a diversity awareness profile, attending

monthly cultural competence training sessions lead by trained teachers, and having courageous conversations about race and the impact of race in small group sessions. The training has four overarching goals: rising achievement, eliminating the gap, responsive education, and effective relationships (School System's 2007-2008 Guide to Courageous Conversations).

Cultural competence is relevant to education today because the disparity is real. Cultural Competency training may reduce the gap (Booker et al., 2016). Findings revealed that students in classes taught by faculty with diversity training experienced a greater sense of community, personal growth, and conflict resolution skills (Booker et al., 2016).

Diversity scholars have moved past static group identities attached to diversity training to explore the concept of CC (Povenmire-Kirk et al., 2015). CC acknowledges the knowledge of differences and the skills to allow educators to navigate differences to achieve the best outcomes for students (Povenmire-Kirk et al., 2015). Educators have used CC models, such as the Self and Others Awareness Project (SOAP), to help students explore cultural diversity, identify their own cultural identity, increase their knowledge of minority groups and group dynamics, and help them develop cross-cultural communication skills (Teasley et al., 2014). The research suggested that students involved in CC models have experienced a statistically significant change in racial attitudes and were significantly more aware of racial privilege and blatant racial issues (Teasley et al.).

One of the CC framework's strengths is building strong relationships with students and staff members (Singleton & Linton, 2006). According to attachment theory, relationships are crucial when dealing with challenges or stress, and research suggested that children are more open to learning and increasing skills in the presence of a warm and trusting educator (Thijs & Verkuyten, 2017). Literature indicated that the quality of teaching and learning in a school or

classroom, student motivation, and student cognitive learning outcomes could be linked to teacher-student relationships (Pennings et al., 2018). Positive student-teacher relationships are a forerunner of academic success, increased school engagement, higher grades, long-lasting impact on student academic trajectories, and decreased dropout rates in high school (Chan, 2019). Researchers found significant associations between positive teacher-student relationships and key educational outcomes such as self-efficacy, academic performance, social functioning, peer acceptance, and importantly for this study, be a resource for at-risk children and reduce discipline referrals (Elledge et al., 2016). An overall review of the literature revealed that strong teacher-student relationships correlate with higher engagement, attendance, and academic achievement while diminishing levels of dropout, suspension, and disruptive behaviors in school (Quin, 2017).

On the other hand, research now questions the strength of CC training of faculty, pointing out areas where the training falls short (Fisher-Borne et al., 2015). Weaknesses in the professional development framework include the failure to encourage critical self-awareness, the focus to expose educators to different cultural groups, and the failure to account for the complex history and reality of inequalities (Fisher-Borne et al., 2015). For example, CC training may leave faculty thinking that just learning about another person's culture is enough. They may not see a need to strive for social justice with students or to eliminate oppression. CC is a lifelong process, and just knowing about group differences is not a sufficient strategy, nor has it resulted in a transformative agenda to address inequalities (Fisher-Borne et al.). Nevertheless, researchers believe that explicit instructional opportunities offered during preservice teaching programs would help educators develop CC and become more aware of their own hidden or implicit bias (Nganga, 2020).

Implicit Bias

An educator that is culturally aware should have the ability to question institutional advantages and disadvantages such as ableism, sexism, classism, and racism (Nganga, 2020). Educators should be culturally aware enough to consistently question their understanding of the cultures and diverse learners in the classroom and their own implicit bias (Nganga). Implicit or hidden biases are unconscious and may affect how educators interact, perceive, and even evaluate students from groups that their biases target (Tate & Page, 2018). Because these implicit biases are hidden or unconscious, it is increasingly essential for future and current educators to receive CC training through preservice, orientation, or professional development opportunities (Nganga). Implicit biases are pervasive, distinct mental constructs that do not always align with a person's declared beliefs, favor one's ingroup, are malleable, and be gradually unlearned (Staats et al., 2015).

Research has shown that biases can start early in life (Xiao et al., 2015). Implicit racial biases have shown up in children as young as three years of age. Children growing up in mono-racial families may begin to show explicit racial biases at the age of five (Xiao et al.). Research data revealed that these racial biases formed at an early age do not change over time without interventions (Xiao et al.). The subconscious causes us to have implicit biases concerning others based on age, appearance, race, and ethnicity. They develop over a lifetime with origins that also may come from news programming and the media (Staats et al., 2015). Researchers believe that people with pro-White bias will be less friendly to Blacks, make unfavorable economic decisions towards Blacks, and allocate fewer medical resources for their health care (Xiao et al.). There is an increased concern that these implicit biases are evident in our classrooms. The teaching force in America is not prepared to meet the needs of culturally changing demographics (Nganga,

2020). Additionally, teachers are reluctant to implement multicultural education due to the lack of experience and training (Nganga).

There may be hope in reversing implicit biases in individuals (Xiao et al., 2015).

Previous studies have shown that more contact with people of another race effectively reduces attitudes of bias and talking about race with children, and changes in environmental factors such as educational, social, and legal policies might make a significant difference (Xiao et al.). This knowledge that suggests implicit biases are malleable is further reason to consider CC professional development for educators.

Summary

A gap in the literature exists in exploring the role of CC or diversity training in reducing the suspension referrals of Latinx and African American students. This research is necessary to provide educators with relevant information that may reduce the disparity in discipline practices and dismantle SPP. The study involves an affluent, award-winning school system in the Mid-Atlantic states that have invested a large amount of time, money, and resources into CC training for teachers and administrators.

The county residents have one of the highest education levels in the state, with 74% holding bachelor's degrees and 39.1% with graduate degrees. The pre-K-12 enrollment is just over 28,000 students learning in 23 elementary schools, six middle schools, and six high schools. The student population is made up of White (46.4%), Latinx (28.2%), Black/African American (9.7%), Asian (9.1%), American Indian/Alaskan (0.3%), Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (0.1%), and Multiple (6.2%) pupils. The staff diversity is 54.8% White, 20.1% Black, 16.9% Latinx, 6.7% Asian, and 1.5% other.

The more specific problem is that even though the school system has one of the lowest suspension rates in the state, it has one of the largest disparities, with minority students receiving most of the suspensions. This problem will be investigated quantitatively using a two-sample t test to see if there is no statistically significant difference in the number of minority students' suspensions based on cultural competency training of students' faculty and race. This study aims to discover information that will be valuable in reducing the discipline gap between minority students and their peers.

One of the core components of modern organizational leadership is managing diversity (Blackaby & Blackaby, 2011). Building unified teams or a unified culture with staff members that hold differing worldviews may be a great challenge (Blackaby & Blackaby). In Philippians 2:3, the Bible instructs, "Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves" (English Standard Version). Teachers are responsible for the safety and health of students due to *loco parentis* laws. They must be fair, evenhanded, and aboveboard with everyone, no matter what cultural differences are present (Brummelen, 2009). Reflective educators will look at their practice and use their best judgment to do what is best for all students (Brummelen). By helping educators learn how to be culturally competent, providing the tools to support the whole child, and teaching students about diversity and the possibility of social change, students may be empowered. They may see that their own needs are being put first, even though it may not be easiest for teachers.

This study will be an important addition to the empirical research and provide important data to all educators. The research will be of interest to school leaders who want to reduce racial disparities in discipline practices and end the SPP.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

This chapter outlines the methodology used in comparing minority student suspension referrals by individual faculty whose school staff have participated in cultural competence (CC) training to the minority student suspension referrals by individual faculty whose school staff have not participated in CC training. The chapter offers a synopsis of the data collection and the procedures used to analyze the problem. This chapter's details will enhance the credibility, reliability, reproducibility, and quality of data used in the research. In this quantitative study, how minority student suspension counts compare between individual faculty whose school staff have and have not participated in CC training in a public school system serving families living in a Mid-Atlantic state will be explored. The study data will be obtained from the school systems discipline database known as the Data Warehouse. One research question and hypothesis will be used to determine if there was a statistically significant relationship between the variables identified. In this quantitative study, there will be an exploration of the relationship between CC professional development training and the suspension referrals of minority students. This research may help educators analyze whether faculty professional development can reduce the disproportionality of public school students' suspension referrals. Additionally, this study may be valuable in providing future professional development for teachers and administrators and may help evaluate the cost-effectiveness of the CC.

Design

This was a quantitative causal-comparative, ex post facto study to test the CRT and the theory of social control that relates CC professional development training of faculty to school suspension referrals of minority students. The independent variable, CC training (participated/not

participated), was generally defined as learning the congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a school to enable professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations. The dependent variable of interest was defined as the number of discretionary suspension referral counts by faculty of Latinx and African American students at all school levels. Only discretionary offenses were used in this research, as zero-tolerance offenses result in mandatory suspensions.

The study involved a quantitative research design because it would systematically investigate social phenomena using statistical techniques (Rovai et al., 2013). This was *ex post facto* because the presumed cause, CC training, the effect, and suspension referrals of students had already occurred and were studied after the fact (Rovai et al.). The research was a quantitative causal-comparative design because the independent variables and the groups were occurring naturally were not manipulated (Warner, 2013). The research was causal-comparative because it involved selecting two groups that differ on a single variable of interest (Creswell, 2015).

Causal-comparative studies typically involve two or more groups, and the participants are chosen because they belong to a specific population (Rovai et al., 2013). The specific population or pre-determined group for this study will be the individual faculty whose school staff have participated in or have not participated in the training. Creswell (2015) stressed, "in educational settings, this type of design is practical because researchers cannot often manipulate different conditions" (p. 295). The nature of the proposed study aligned with quantitative research and a causal-comparative design because it explored the possible causes of differences that already existed between the two groups of faculty members. This was an appropriate design because this causal-comparative research was a non-experimental investigation seeking to identify cause and

effect relationships by forming two groups of individuals in whom the independent variable, CC training, was present or absent, and then determined whether the groups differed on the dependent variable of suspension referrals of minority students (Gall et al., 2007).

Research Question

The research question addressed and explored was:

RQ1: Is there a difference in the number of suspension referrals of minority students among individual faculty whose school staff have participated in cultural competence training and individual faculty whose school staff have not participated in cultural competence training?

Hypotheses

For this study, it was determined whether there was a causal comparison between the observed variables. For the hypothesis, the variables were CC professional development training and suspension referrals of minority students.

H₀1: There is no statistically significant difference in the number of suspension referrals of minority students (Latinx, African American) among individual faculty whose schools staff has participated in cultural competence professional development training as compared to the suspension referrals of minority students among individual faculty whose school staff have not participated in CC professional development training.

Participants and Setting

The participants for this study were faculty in public schools whose staff had and had not participated in CC training. The training that faculty received was provided by facilitators trained by the school system's Council of Cultural Competence. The training specifically involved a one day workshop during teacher orientation, completing a diversity awareness profile assessment, reading the book, *Courageous Conversations About Race* (Singleton & Linton, 2006), and

participation in monthly one and a half hour sessions throughout the school year involving videos, chapter discussions, and small group discussions. The participants were taught three enduring understandings by Robinson and Swaim (2007), the creators of the courageous conversations guide for the school system:

- Courageous conversations about race and the impact of race on institutional structures are the first and necessary step in eliminating achievement gaps.
- Conversations about race should lead educators to examine their work. Educators will discover what they do not know and what they need to know to assure that Black and Latinx students succeed academically, socially, and emotionally. As educators use this new knowledge and practice, the quality of education for all students will increase.
- Educator perceptions of others are expressed through communication, behavior, and practices of relationship building. Each behavior directly impacts student and adult ability to take risks, work hard, be resilient, and achieve. (p. 3)

The training also involved five essential questions by Robinson and Swaim (2007):

1. As a professional, what skills, knowledge, behaviors, and attitudes do educators need to be culturally competent leaders?
2. How does race matter in the effective schooling of students?
3. Is a high achieving school district truly high achieving if segments of the population consistently underperform?
4. What educator behaviors support or undermine the academic, social, and emotional growth of students of color?
5. What are the indications that show educators are experiencing success? (p. 3)

The data was a convenience sample from the district database called Insight Data Warehouse. A convenience sample was used because most of the data had already been collected, suited the study's purposes, and was convenient (Gall et al., 2007). This study involved 100 individual teachers and administrators whose school staff did or did not participate in CC training. Statistical power analysis can maximize the likelihood of rejecting the null hypothesis when it is false (Gall et al., 2007). For this study, four factors were considered for power analysis: sample size, level of significance, directionality, and effect size. Statistical power increases with the sample size, and the sample of 200 faculty was large enough that the researcher was able to reject the null hypothesis at the .05 level of significance (Gall et al.). The second determinant was the p -value, at which the researcher rejected the null hypothesis. For this study, the p was set at the .05 level of significance. The third determinate of statistical power that was used was directionality. Observed differences and relationships can go in two directions. A two-tailed hypothesis test of statistical significance was used to increase statistical power effect size or estimate the magnitude of the difference, relationship, or effect in the studied population. It was used as the fourth determinate of statistical power (Gall et al.). The sample size is based on the two-sample t test because the outcome is the number of suspension referrals or suspension referral count. The following assumptions were used to calculate the sample size, assuming a moderate effect size and 80% power, given the two-sample t test.

The study involved an affluent, award-winning school system in a Mid-Atlantic state. It had invested a lot of time, money, and resources into CC training for teachers and administrators. The county residents have the highest education levels in the state, with 74% holding bachelor's

degrees and 39.1% with graduate degrees. The pre-K-12 student enrollment is just over 28,000 students attending 23 elementary schools, six middle schools, and six high schools. The students represent 120 different countries and speak over 90 languages.

Breakdown of racial data for students and faculty was also important to understand the school system and the disproportionate discipline problem for minority students. The student population is made up of White (46.4%), Latinx (28.2%), Black/African American (9.7%), Asian (9.1%), American Indian/Alaskan (0.3%), Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (0.1%), and Multiple (6.2%) pupils. The staff diversity is 54.8% White, 20.1% Black, 16.9% Latinx, 6.7% Asian, and 1.5% other (district database). This school system invested in the CC professional training for faculty because of the disproportionate EDP (suspensions) of minority students.

Instrumentation

School-based data from the Insight Data Warehouse was used in this study. These data are structured by the Information Services Department of the county public school system and the state with a pre-determined set of classifications and discipline codes. The database contains discipline data that includes in-school and out-of-school suspensions of all students and key performance indicators. All school divisions in this Mid-Atlantic state are required to report infractions and outcomes in a specific format. The descriptions of infractions are the same as other school systems in the Mid-Atlantic state, even though the suspension and outcome data used for this study was specific to this school system. Examining the discipline was consistent even though the data came from different schools across the school system. The instrument was appropriate because it contained the state-mandated discipline data from all schools whose staff participated in CC training and schools whose staff did not participate in training. The minority student suspension referral counts from individual faculty were pulled from multiple schools.

The data was filtered to remove faculty that moved from one school to another to eliminate faculty being in two groups. The school administrators for the school system entered the discipline data by student number and discipline infraction code such as OSS for out-of-school suspension and ISS for in-school suspension. For this research, the ISS and OSS codes were combined for each faculty member to form the single dependent variable of referral count. This data was submitted to the state every month. At the end of each school year, the state education department releases all school systems' data. The school system used for this study maintains its individual compiled data through the Insight Data Warehouse. At the end of each school year, the discipline data is compiled from the current school year's database and reported to each school principal. The database provides the total number of out-of-school and in-school suspensions for each school along with the notation of the type of staff member that made the referral, such as a principal, administrator, or teacher. The database also provides suspension referrals for minority students from the schools included in this study.

Some assumptions and threats were involved with using this instrument. There was zero tolerance for certain discipline incidents, such as weapons, drugs, intent to distribute, and assault and battery regarding assumptions. Faculty could use discretion when making referrals for suspensions and other forms of discipline for non-zero tolerance type offenses. Both administrators and teachers could refer students for disciplinary infractions. The administrator or teacher's name was entered into the database from the discipline referral form. If faculty were unfairly disproportionate in suspending minority students, it would most likely happen in suspensions for non-zero tolerance type offenses. In-school and out-of-school suspensions were considered the most extreme disciplinary procedure outside of expulsion and compared to other

forms of discipline, such as lunch detention, after-school detention, Saturday school, parent conferences, and referrals to administration.

There were also several threats involved with using this instrument. Generalization was not possible based on the convenience type sample selection of the data. Out of the convenience sampling of individual faculty whose school staff have participated in CC and individual faculty whose school staff have not participated in CC, a spreadsheet with columns of completion was created. A completion status of 1 was marked for individual faculty whose school staff have participated in CC training. A completion status of 0 was marked for individual faculty whose school staff have not participated in CC training. A random sampling of 100 cases was obtained from individual faculty whose school staff have not participated in CC training using SPSS.

Additionally, the findings of this research may not have reflected the administration of national discipline procedures. The consequences for discipline offenses may have changed from the first year of this study (2009-2010) to this one last year (2016-2017).

A good example is that knives less than three inches long are not allowed in school but do not need to be reported to the police, the state or require suspension from school anymore. There has been an increased focus and concern about minority suspensions and disproportionality due to the SPP (Barnes & Motz, 2018). There could simply be administrative errors in collecting and inputting the discipline data. Lastly, some minority students were counted multiple times in the discipline data. This research study was attempting to examine suspension referrals, both in-school and out-of-school. Students with multiple suspensions were counted multiple times.

Archival data constitute valid sources of data for dissertation research, and many peer-reviewed studies have used databases for valid instrumentation (Alverson et al., 2010;

Benchimol et al., 2015; Maimaris & McCambridge, 2014). Discipline referral and suspension data of African American and Latinx students were collected after applying for research approval from the school system's Office of Planning and Evaluation (Appendix A).

Procedures

The first step in this study's procedure was to obtain permission from the school system to collect the Insight Data Warehouse data. The process of obtaining access to the data from the Office of Planning and Evaluation involved completing an application and request for research, a research proposal, intended outcomes, and data usage. The Office of Planning and Evaluation for the school system approved the study and data collection in January 2020 (Appendix B).

After a successful proposal defense, the next step was to obtain the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for the study from Liberty University (Appendix A). Once the IRB approval was obtained, the data was retrieved from the school system database to which all administrators have access.

The CC professional development of faculty can be determined by year participating or not participating in training from 2009-2017. Administrators and teachers that moved from one school to another during the years of CC training was filtered out to eliminate faculty in both groups. The data sought was listed, collected from the Insight Data Warehouse, and confidentially maintained. A two-step security login system protected the storage of the data. The identities of participants were protected as faculty was not identifiable by name in the database. The data was collected from elementary schools, middle schools, and high schools in the public school system. The starting school year was 2009-2010, and the suspension referrals of minority students were collected through the 2016-2017 school year. The individual faculty members whose school staff had and had not participated in CC professional development

training within the school years studied and had referred minority students for suspensions were obtained from the school system's Professional Development Office. Faculty suspension referral counts from these schools were obtained from the data warehouse. The ISS and OSS suspension data linked to each referring and de-identified faculty member were combined to form one dependent variable. The Office of Planning and Evaluation provided the data from the Insight Data Warehouse once IRB approval had been granted. As a courtesy, the principals were informed that data from their schools were analyzed.

Individual school permission, consent forms, assent forms, protocol, and training manuals were not needed for this research. The data for suspensions of minority students had already been collected for this ex post facto study.

Data Analysis

All the descriptive statistics and statistical analysis were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics Standard Grad Pack version 24 with the level of significance set at alpha level = 0.05. This problem was investigated quantitatively using a two-sample *t* test to see if there was no statistically significant difference in referral counts of minority (Latinx, African American) public school students based on CC training of faculty. A two-sample *t* test was performed to analyze the dependent variable, minority suspension referral number, or count (interval), in terms of the participation in CC status (nominal). The dependent variable data was restricted to non-zero tolerance responses. The independent variable consisted of two groups, the individual faculty whose school staff participated in CC professional development training and the individual faculty whose school staff did not participate in CC professional development training.

The observations were independent as the data represented individual cases (Rovai et al., 2013). The data was sorted to look for unusual scores and inconsistencies. A box plot was used for each group to identify extreme outliers. A key test for this study was the *F*-test of the group's difference means to see if they were different enough not to have occurred by chance. The descriptive statistics include categories, *N*, mean, standard deviation, standard error, 95% confidence interval, minimum, and maximum (Rovai et al.). Levene's test was run for assumption testing assessing the homogeneity of variance. The alpha level was 0.05; partial eta squared was used as an effect size measure. The normality of distribution was assessed using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test as the sample is > 50 (Rovai et al.).

In this chapter, the methodological considerations used in this study are detailed. Additionally, the purpose of the research is restated, along with the research question and hypothesis. The research question was important in attaining the study aim and addressing the problem being assessed here.

Data needed for the study was gathered from the school system's Insight Data Warehouse. The instrument, data collection process, and procedure had been explained. The study incorporated suspension data from six years in which CC professional development training was offered to school staff. In the data analysis, the independent variable was individual faculty in schools whose staff had participated in CC professional development training and individual faculty in schools whose staff had not participated in CC professional development training.

The dependent variable was the suspension referral counts of minority students for the years studied. The independent variable represented the causal factors for minority suspensions. The use of the two-sample *t* test and central tendency measures using SPSS was expected to

highlight the relationship between the dependent variable and the independent variable. This was valuable in providing future professional development for teachers and administrators and evaluating such training's cost-effectiveness.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

This chapter outlines the descriptive statistics and compares suspension referrals of minority students by individual faculty whose school staff had participated in cultural competence (CC) training to the suspension referrals of minority students by individual faculty whose school staff had not participated in CC training. The chapter offers a review of the research question, null hypothesis, and a synopsis of the descriptive statistics and results used to analyze the problem. The findings helped the researcher explore how minority student suspension counts compared between individual educators whose school staff had not participated in CC training in a Mid-Atlantic school system. The findings may be valuable in providing future training for administrators and teachers serving in communities with diverse student populations.

Research Question

The findings helped address and explore the following research question:

RQ1: Is there a difference in the number of suspension referrals of minority students among individual faculty whose school staff have participated in cultural competence training and individual faculty whose school staff have not participated in cultural competence training?

Null Hypotheses

The findings determined whether there was a causal comparison between the observed variables. The variables were CC professional development training and suspension referrals of Latinx and African American students for the hypothesis.

H₀1: There is no statistically significant difference in the number of suspension referrals of minority students (Latinx, African American) among individual faculty whose school staff

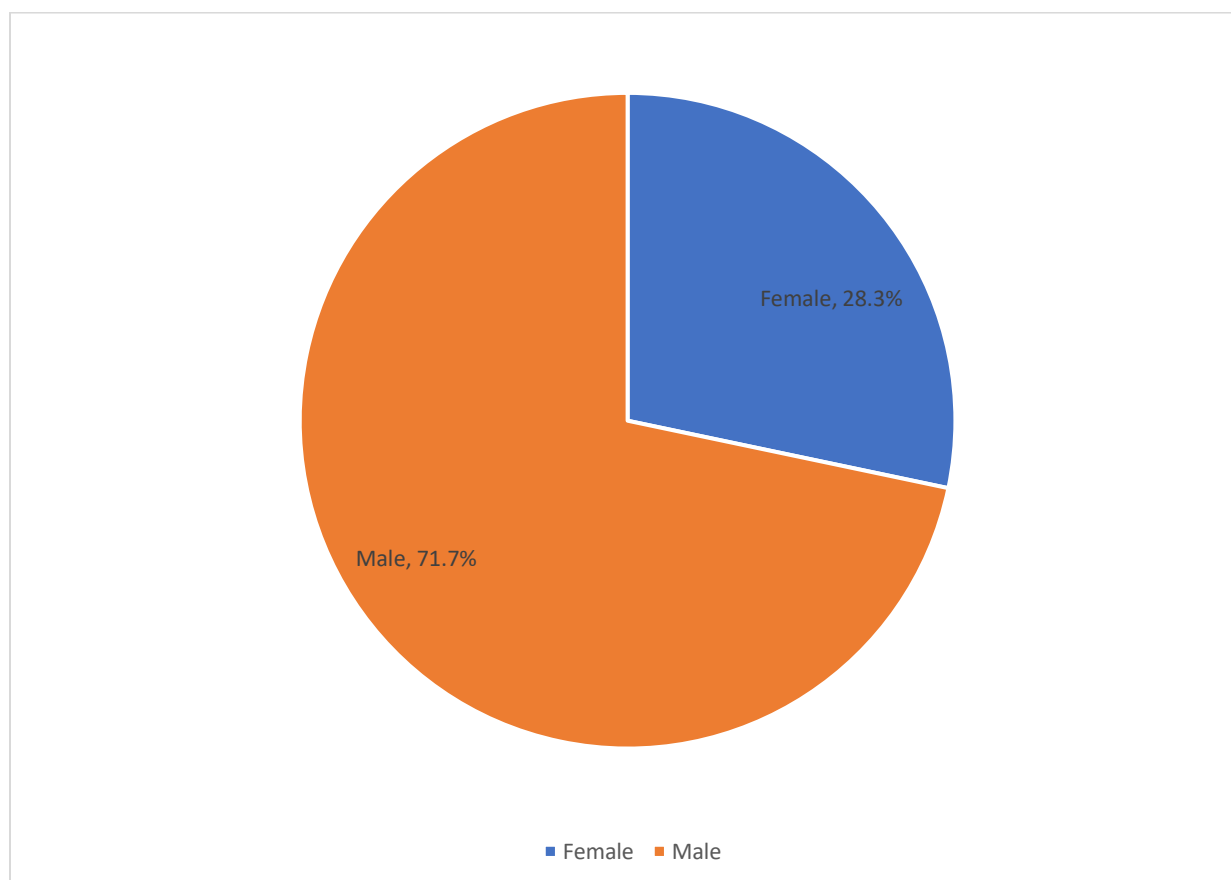
have participated in cultural competence professional development training as compared to the suspension referrals of minority students among individual faculty whose school staff have not participated in CC professional development training.

Descriptive Statistics

Data for this study was obtained from the school system's Office of Planning and Evaluation. Only statistics obtained from this office were utilized for analysis for the purpose of this study. The breakdown of racial data for students and faculty was discussed in chapter three. Descriptive graphs of the discipline data for the year 2013-2014 are provided below. The gender of the students referred for suspension was 71.7% male and 28.3% female (Figure 1).

Figure 1

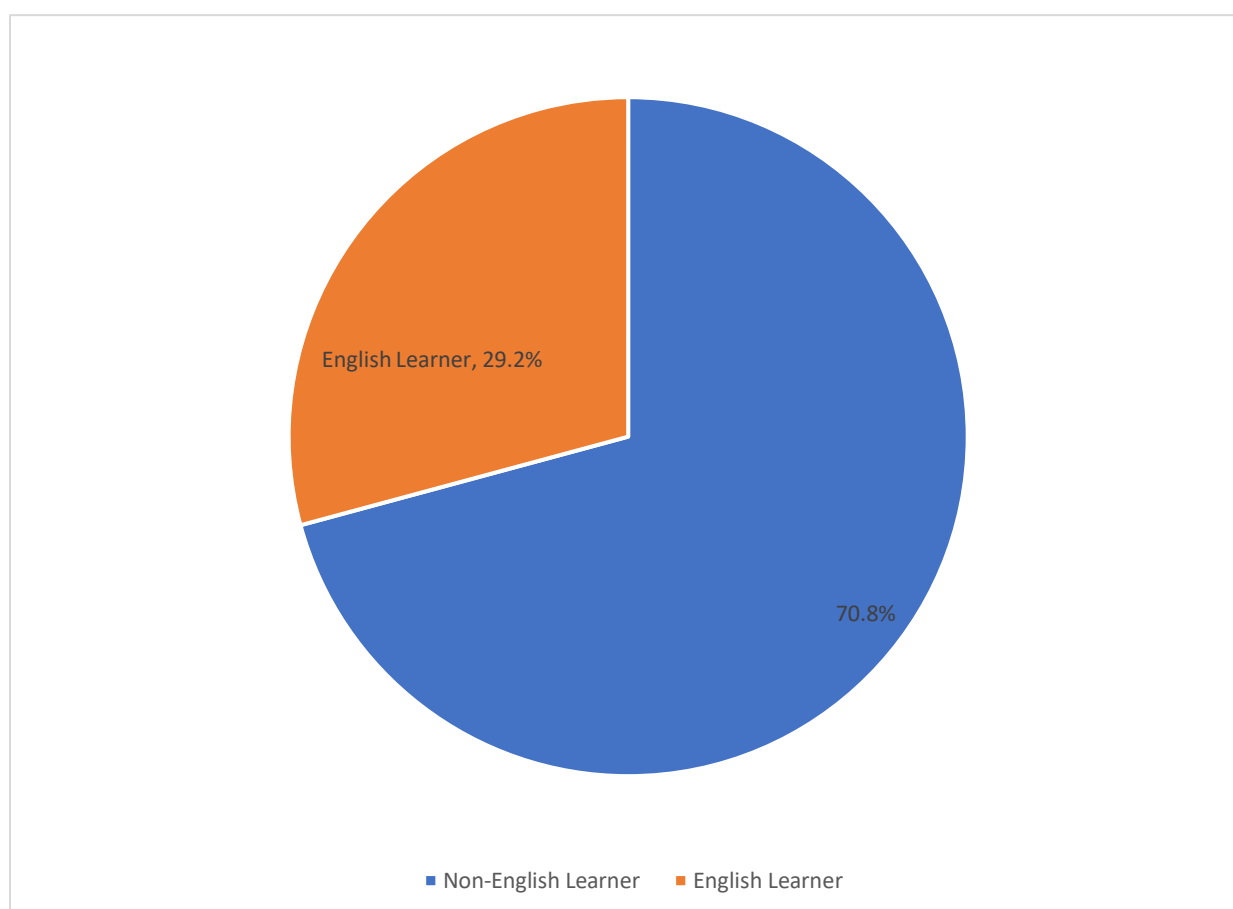
Gender of Students Referred for Suspension



The ELLs currently make up 25.5% of the student population, and the student body is made up of 74.5% non-ELLs. The ELLs represented 29.2% of suspension referrals and non-ELLs represented 70.8% of the EDP (Figure 2).

Figure 2

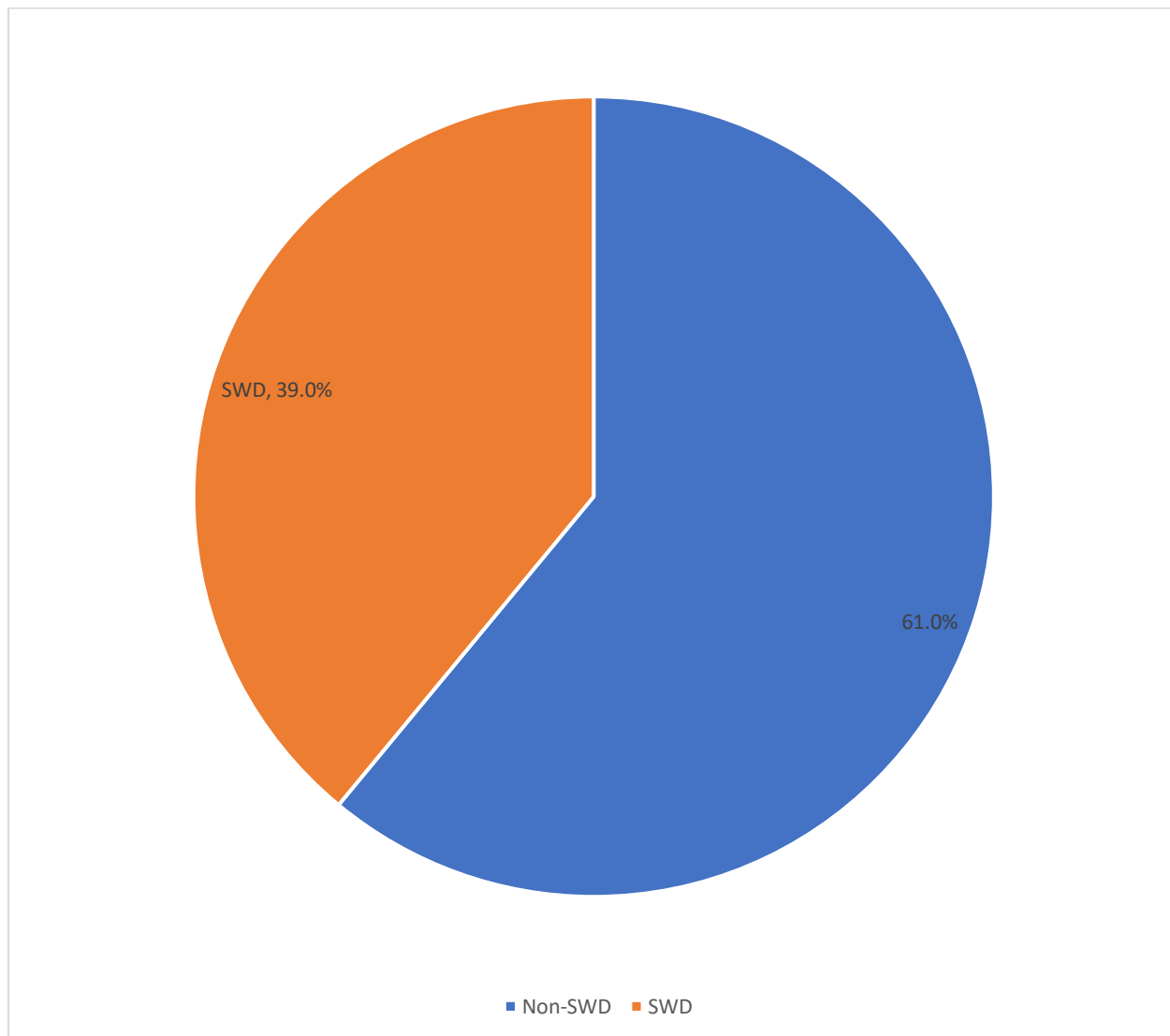
Non-English/English Language Learning Students Referred for Suspension



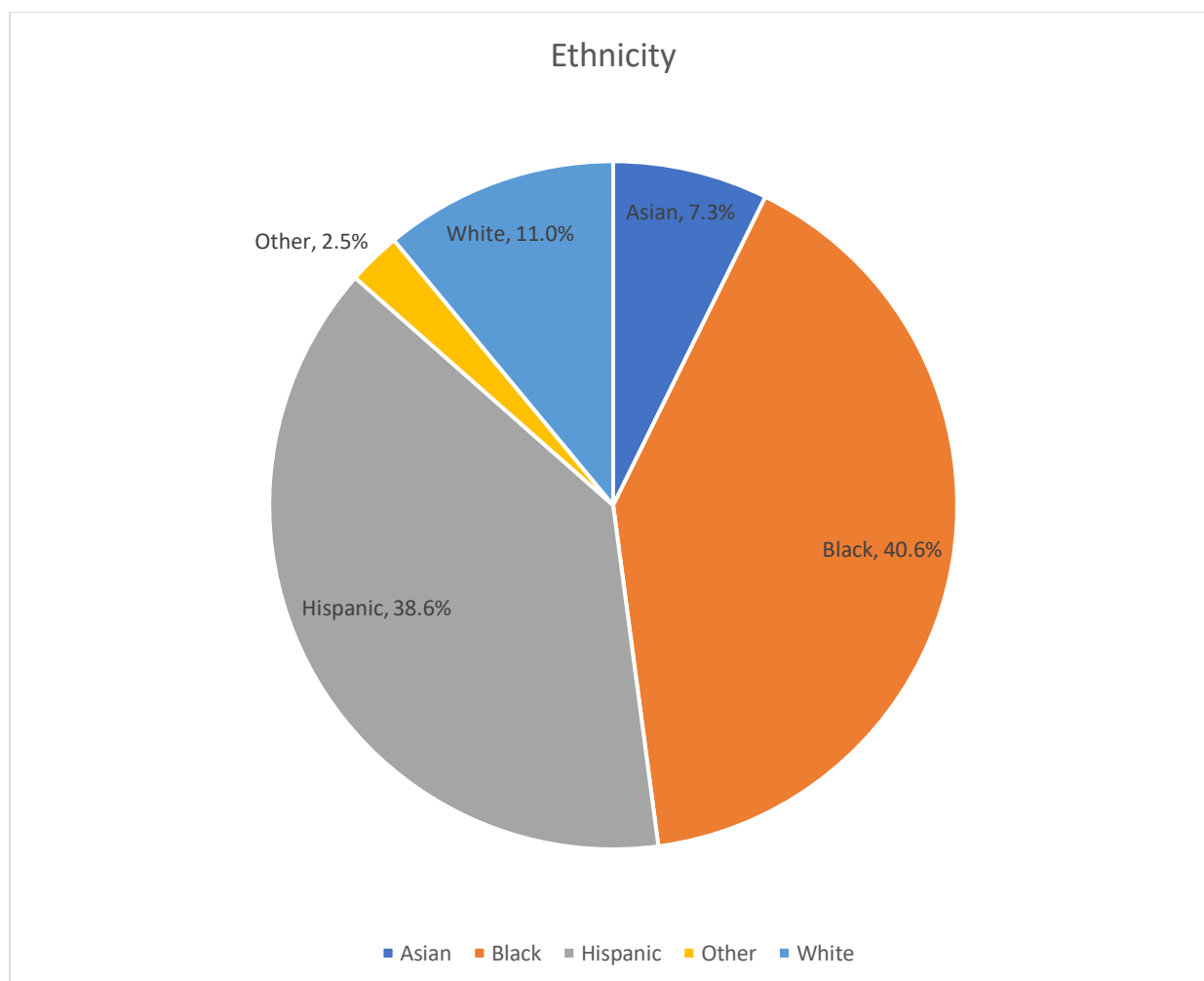
The students with disabilities made up 14.1% of the student body, and all the other students made up almost 86% of students. Students with disabilities represented 39% of suspension referrals while students without disabilities represented 61% of the referrals (Figure 3).

Figure 3

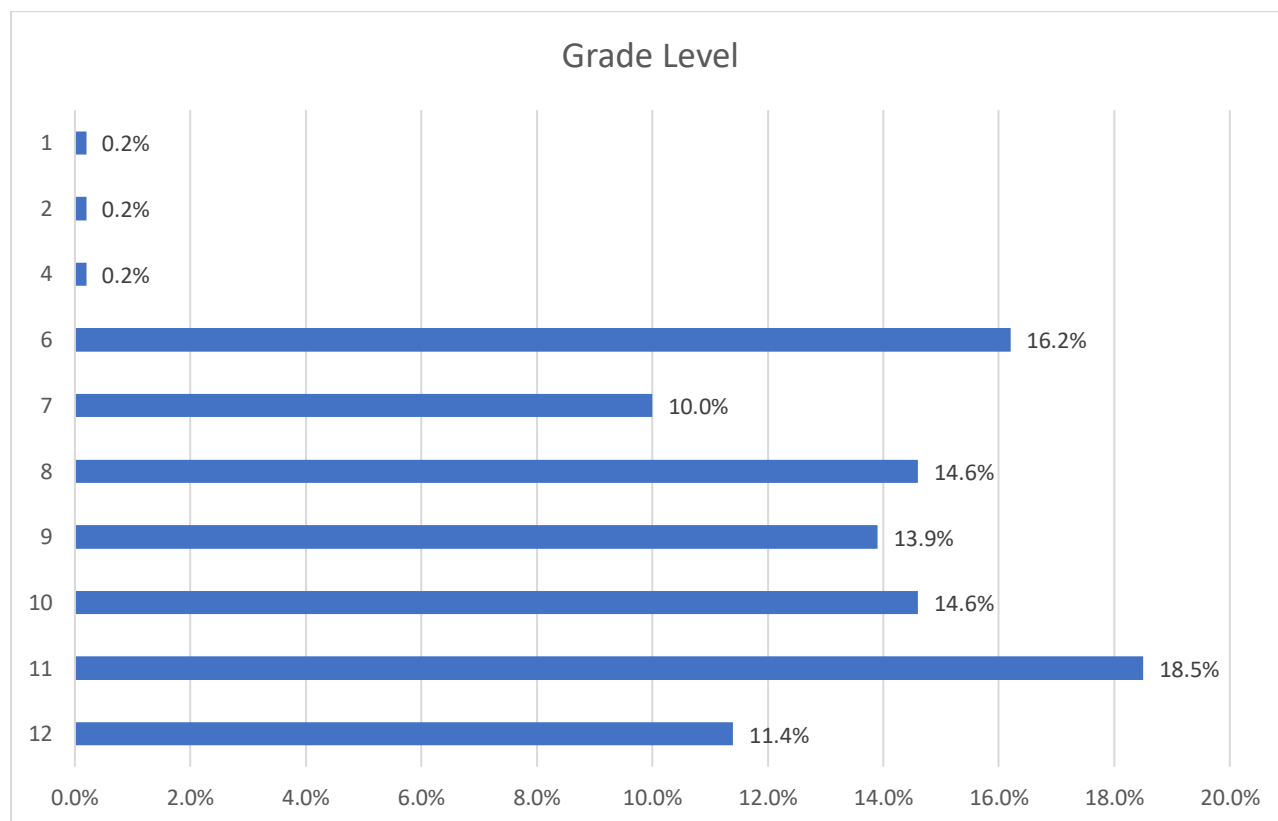
Suspension Referrals for Students with/without Disabilities



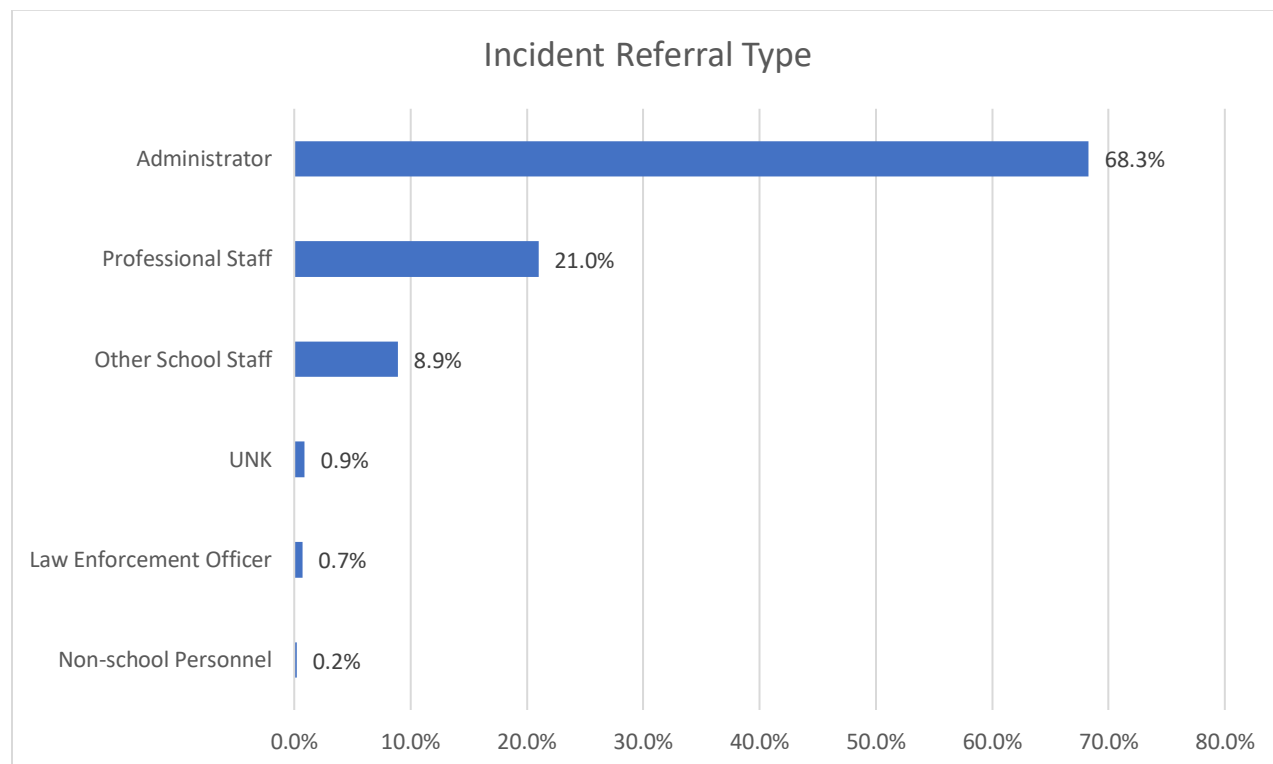
African American students represent 10.3% of the student body, and Latinx students represent 28.9% of the student body, representing a combined 39.2% of students in this school system. The suspension referrals by ethnicity reveal 40.6% were given to African Americans and 38.6% of EDP referrals were given to Latinx students (Figure 4).

Figure 4***Suspension Referrals by Ethnicity***

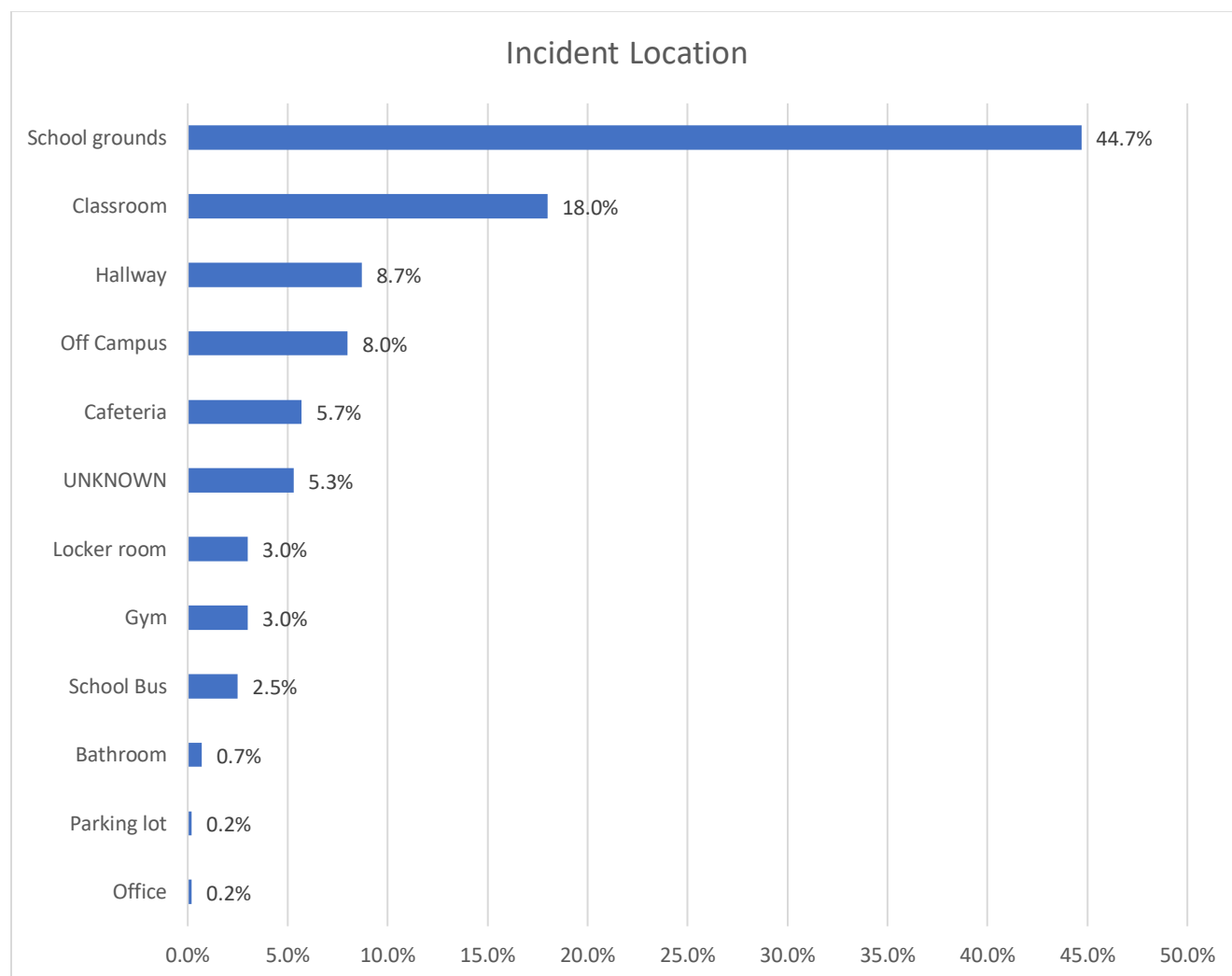
Suspension referrals by grade level indicate that secondary students made up most discipline referrals or EDP, with 6th-grade and 11th-grade students receiving the highest percentage of discretionary suspensions (Figure 5) at 16.2% and 18.5%, respectively. Secondary students, grade 6 through grade 12, account for 99.2% of the EDP in this school system. The elementary students account for less than 1% of all discretionary or non-zero tolerance EDP in this public school system. Interventions for secondary students that may help reduce EDP are shared in the last chapter of this study.

Figure 5***Suspension Referrals by Grade Level***

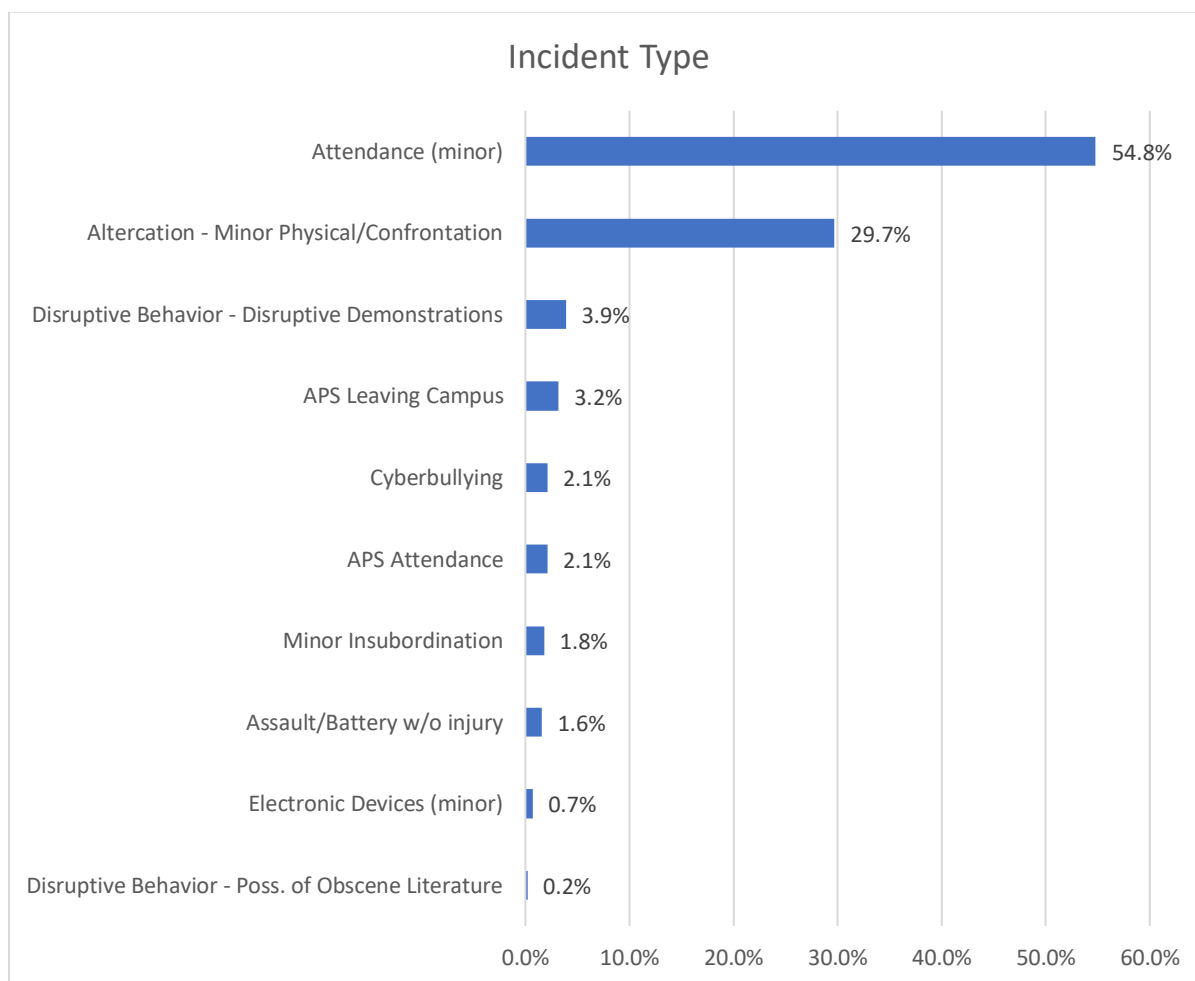
Only administrators and teachers (labeled professional staff) were included in this study, and these faculty made most of the discipline referrals of Latinxs and African Americans in this study by far (Figure 6). Administrators and teachers combined made up 89.3% of all discretionary suspensions of students. These faculty were the focal point of this research as they were the staff members that participated in the CC professional development training. The additional incident referral types represented other staff members such as bus drivers, lunch workers, extended day workers, School Resource Officers (SRO), and school security workers, who made 10.7% of the referrals but were not involved in school CC training.

Figure 6***Suspension Referrals by Referral Type***

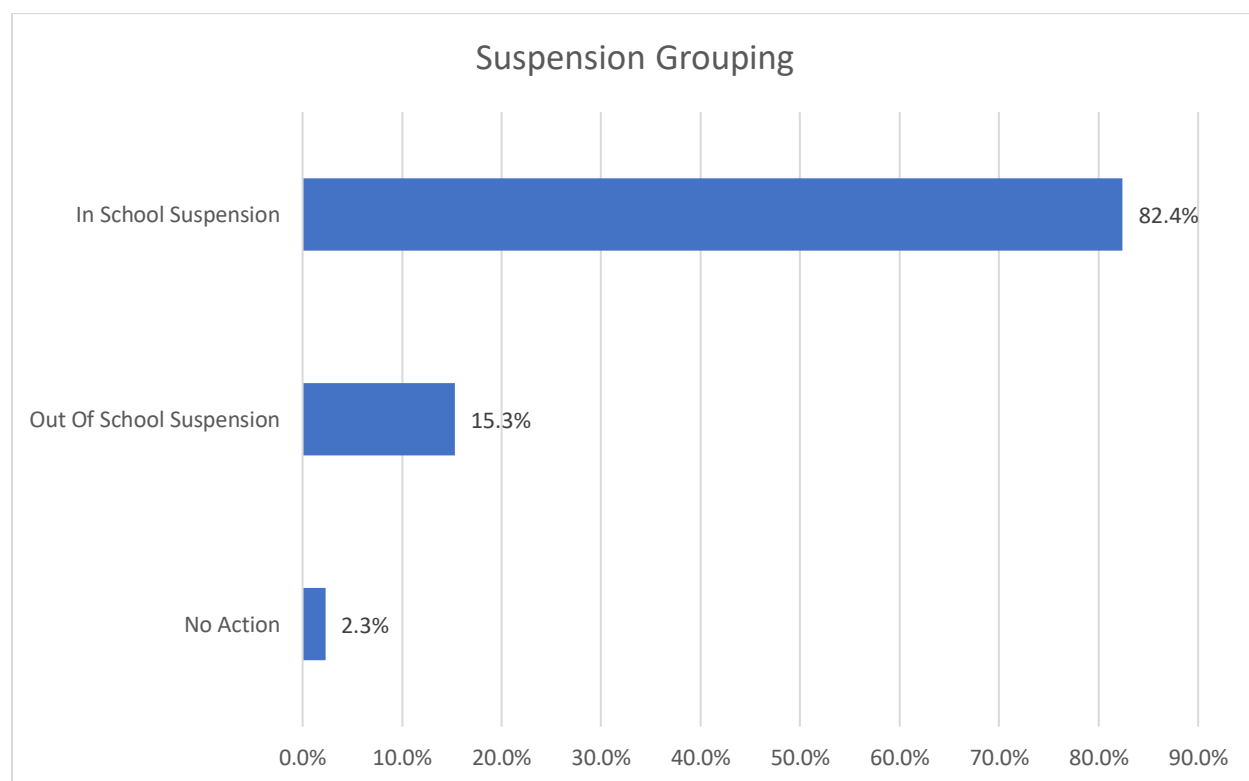
Over 70% of the suspension referrals happened from incidents on the school grounds, in classrooms, or the hallways of the schools (Figure 7). Close to 50% of the suspension referrals are linked to incidents on school grounds but not in the classroom, halls of the schools, or the cafeteria. Suspension referrals from incidents on school grounds usually resulted from skipping school, leaving campus without permission, insubordination, or minor physical altercations. One might think that most non-zero tolerance or discretionary suspension referrals resulted from incidents happening in classrooms where staff and students spend most of the day together. This data shows that only 18% of these suspension referrals came from behavior incidents happening in classrooms.

Figure 7***Suspension Referrals by Incident Location***

Over half of the discretionary suspension referrals involved attendance or truancy incidents such as skipping school, skipping class, or accumulation of tardy to class incidents (Figure 8). Altercations involving minor physical confrontations were the second highest type of incident referred for suspensions at 29.7%. Disruptive behavior and disruptive demonstrations accounted for just 3.9% of the discipline referrals in this study.

Figure 8***Suspension Referrals by Incident Type***

Over 80% of the suspension referrals for students resulted in EDP of in-school suspensions. These referrals did not take students out of the school but removed them from the classroom where instruction was taking place. Out of school suspension referrals made up 15.3% of the EDP for students. The suspension grouping of No Action was entered when students with an Individual Education Plan (IEP) have a manifestation determination meeting to see if their disability was the reason for the discipline incident. Special education students are not suspended from school if their disability is determined to be the reason for their behavior.

Figure 9***Suspension Grouping of Referrals***

A random sample for the two groups identified as the independent variable consisted of 70 individual faculty whose school staff had participated in CC training and 70 individual faculty whose school staff had not participated in CC training, providing a total sample size of 140 (Table 1, Table 2). The data was filtered to remove faculty that moved from one school to another to provide two independent groups for the *t*-test. A completion status of 1 marked the individual faculty whose school staff had participated in CC training. A completion status of 0 marks the individual faculty whose school staff had not participated in CC training. Seventy faculty samples from schools did not participate in CC training (marked as 0), and 70 faculty samples from schools who did participate in CC training (marked as 1). Faculty serving in schools that did not participate in CC training had more minority student (Latinx and African

American) suspension referrals ($M = 4.66$, $SD = 14.697$) than faculty serving in schools that did participate in CC training ($M = 2.46$, $SD = 3.260$). The mean number of referrals for Latinx and African American students by faculty from schools that did not participate in CC training was approximately double the mean number of Latinx and African American students from schools participating in CC training (Table 1).

Table 1

Descriptive of Total Referrals

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
.0	70	4.66	14.697	1.757	1.15	8.16	1	105
1.0	70	2.46	3.260	.390	1.68	3.23	1	17
Total	140	3.56	10.664	.901	1.78	5.34	1	105

Table 2

Cultural Competence Training Descriptive

	Cultural Competence	Statistic	Std. Error
Total Referrals	.0	Mean	4.66
		95% Confidence Interval for Mean	1.757
		Lower Bound	1.15
		Upper Bound	8.16
		5% Trimmed Mean	1.82
		Median	1.00
		Variance	215.997
		Std. Deviation	14.697
		Minimum	1
		Maximum	105
		Range	104
		Interquartile Range	1

	Skewness		5.682	.287
	Kurtosis		34.730	.566
1.0	Mean		2.46	.390
	95% Confidence	Lower Bound	1.68	
	Interval for Mean	Upper Bound	3.23	
	5% Trimmed Mean		1.84	
	Median		1.00	
	Variance		10.629	
	Std. Deviation		3.260	
	Minimum		1	
	Maximum		17	
	Range		16	
	Interquartile Range		1	
	Skewness		3.412	.287
	Kurtosis		11.926	.566

There is a difference in the true mean or confidence level of the two groups (Table 2). The 95% confidence level of referrals made by faculty in schools that did not participate in CC training was between 1.15 and 8.16 referrals. The confidence level of the referrals made by faculty in schools that did participate in CC training was closer and between 1.68 and 3.23 referrals.

Results

Hypothesis

H₀1: There is no statistically significant difference in the number of suspension referrals of minority students (Latinx, African American) among individual faculty whose school staff have participated in cultural competence professional development training as compared to the suspension referrals of minority students among individual faculty whose school staff have not participated in CC professional development training.

The null hypothesis for this study stated that there was no significant difference between the suspension referral rates of Latinx and African American students by faculty between schools whose staff had and had not participated in CC training. As discussed in the Methodology section, a two-sample *t*-test was planned to determine if a difference existed between the means of two independent groups on a continuous dependent variable, such as suspension referrals of minority students. The data for the two different groups were filtered to remove zero-tolerance suspensions, referrals from staff who were not faculty (police officers and other school staff), faculty who transferred schools, and all student referrals other than Latinx or African American. The data were then entered into SPSS to calculate for assumptions and the two-sample *t*-test.

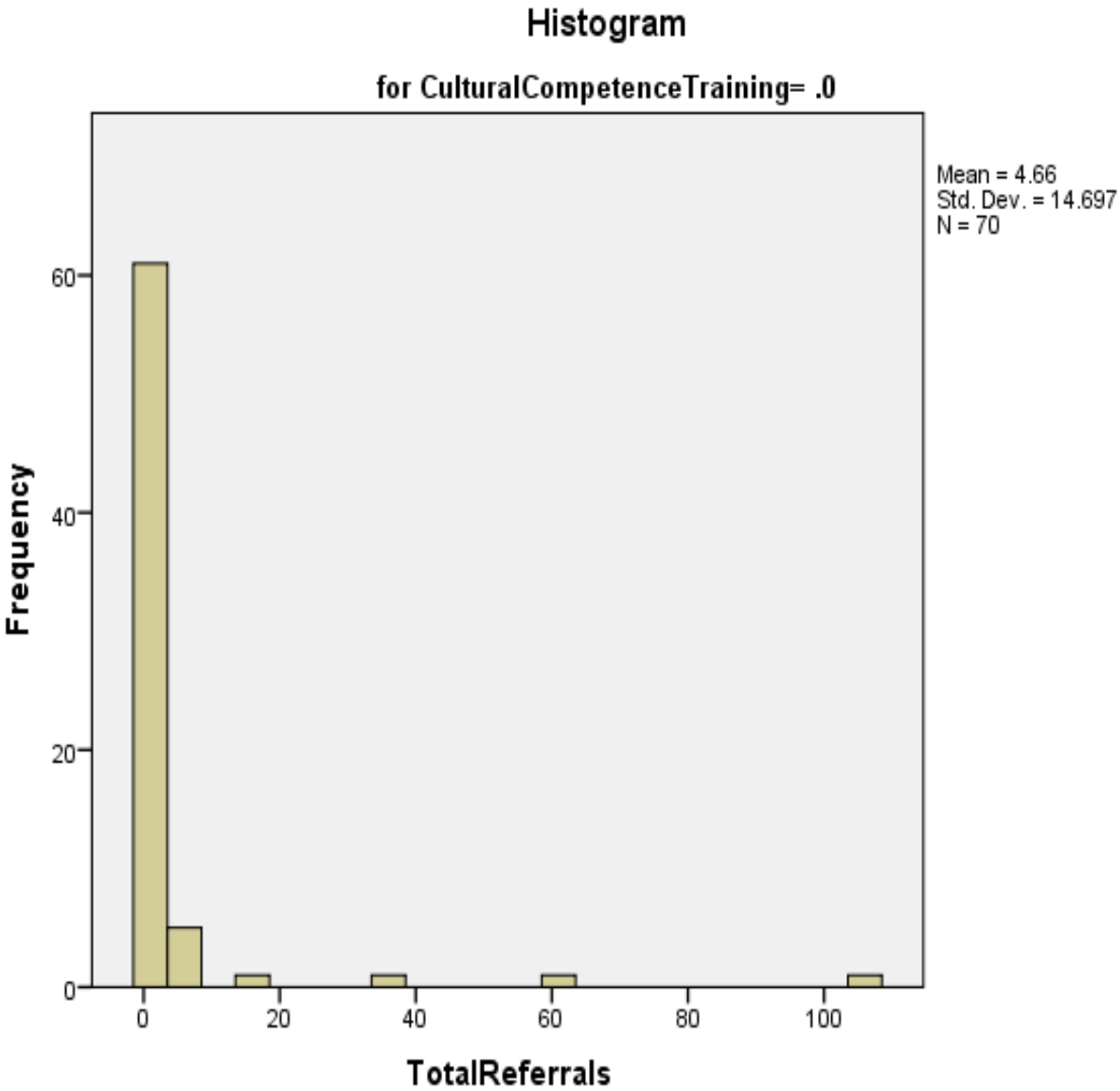
There are six basic requirements or assumptions that needed to be considered when running an independent or two-samples *t*-test (Laerd Statistics, 2015). The first assumption was that one dependent variable was measured at the continuous level, such as suspension referral count. The second assumption was that one independent variable consists of two independent groups, such as had CC or did not have CC training. The third assumption was that observations were independent, meaning there was no relationship between the observations in each group of the independent variable. Therefore, faculty that transferred to another school were filtered out to have different participants in each group. The fourth assumption was that there were no significant outliers of the independent variable in terms of the dependent variable, such as suspension referral counts. Histograms (Figure 10, Figure 11) and a box plot (Figure 12) were created using SPSS to test for outliers. The fifth assumption was that the dependent variable, suspension referral counts, be approximately normally distributed for each group of the independent variable, CC training (Table 3). The sixth assumption was that the data have homogeneity of variances. Therefore, the variance of the dependent variable, suspension referral

counts, was equal in each group of the independent variable, CC training. The study design met assumptions 1-3. The tests in SPSS for assumptions 4 and 5 are shown below.

In testing for the fourth assumption, the histograms and box plots reveal extreme outliers. These outliers are administrative referrals and are important to the results of this study. The histogram for referral counts by faculty working in schools that did not participate in CC training reveals a concentration of referrals on the left with a long tail going past 100 referrals on the right (Figure 10). The histogram for referral counts by faculty working in schools that participated in CC training also shows a concentration on the left but reveals a much shorter tail of data going past 15 referrals (Figure 11). Neither of the histograms shows a normal curve, and both reveal outliers. The referral counts by faculty in schools that did not participate in CC training have extreme outliers (Figure 10) compared to the faculty in schools that did participate in CC training (Figure 11).

Figure 10

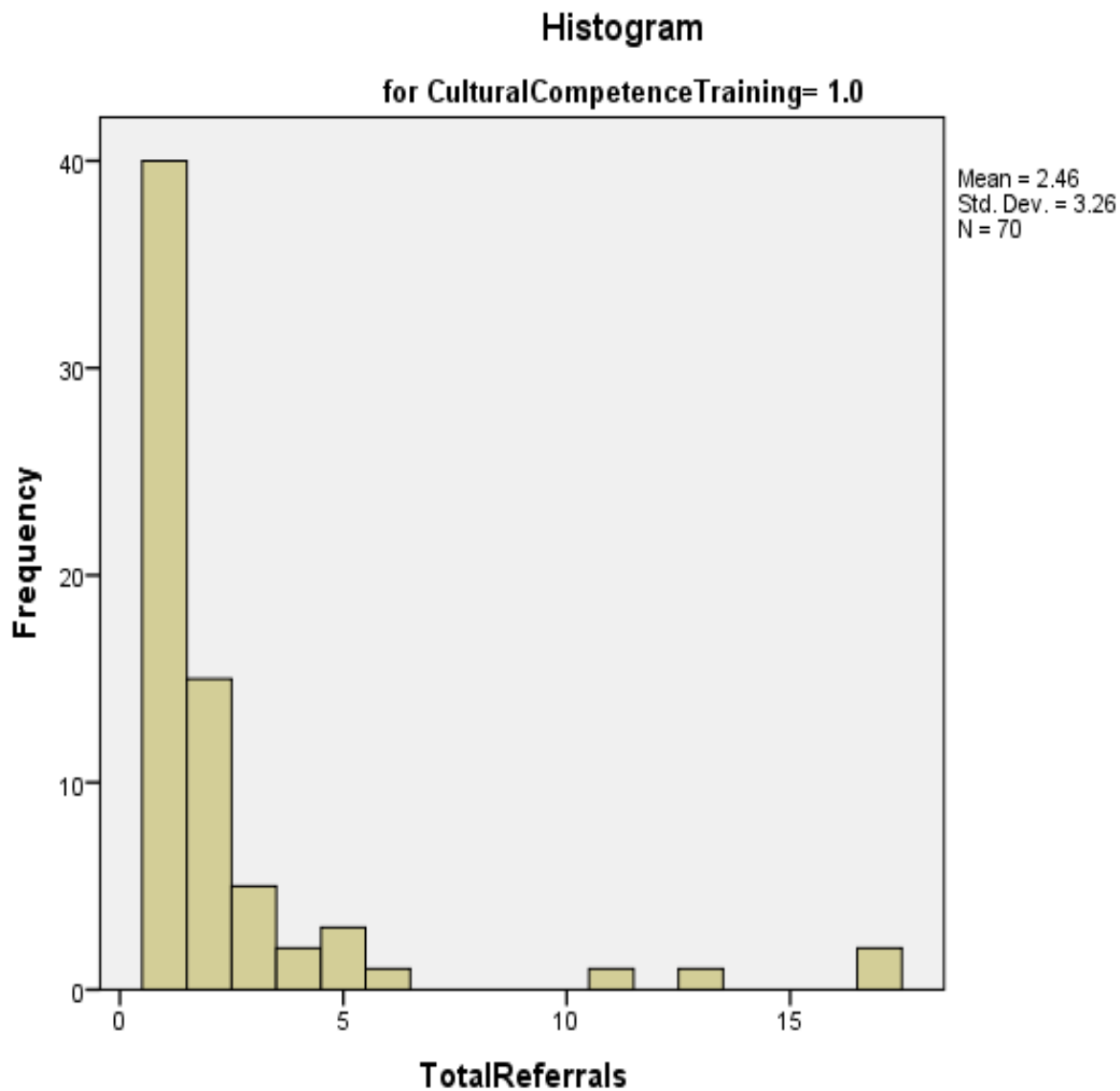
Referral Counts from Faculty in Schools with No CC Training



The histogram for referral counts of faculty in schools that did participate in CC training was far shallower with a shorter tail (Figure 11) than data from the group that did not participate in CC training.

Figure 11

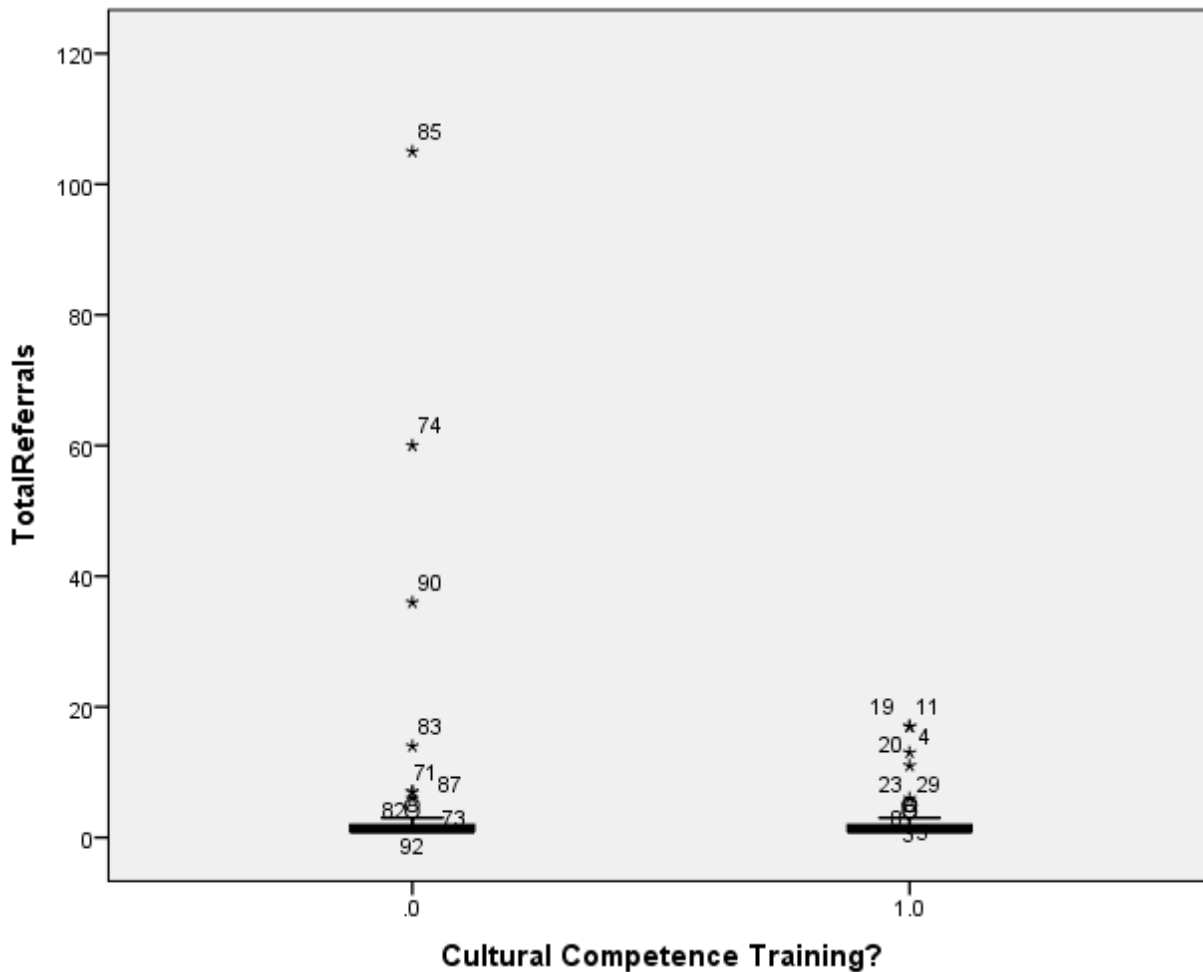
Referral Counts From Faculty in Schools with CC Training



The box plot comparing both groups shows outliers from both groups and the referral counts from faculty in schools that did not participate in the CC training revealing more extreme outliers (Figure 12).

Figure 12

Boxplot of Total Referrals with No CC Marked as 0 and Had CC Marked As 1



The outliers denoted in the above figures correlated to administrative referrals. The administrative referrals were higher than teacher referrals and were important to this study as both administrators and teachers were the staff used in both groups for this study. Therefore, the outliers were not removed, and Kolmogorov-Smirnov was used to check for assumption number five, normality (Table 3). The assumption of normality was violated, as assessed by the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test ($p = .000$).

Table 3*Tests of Normality*

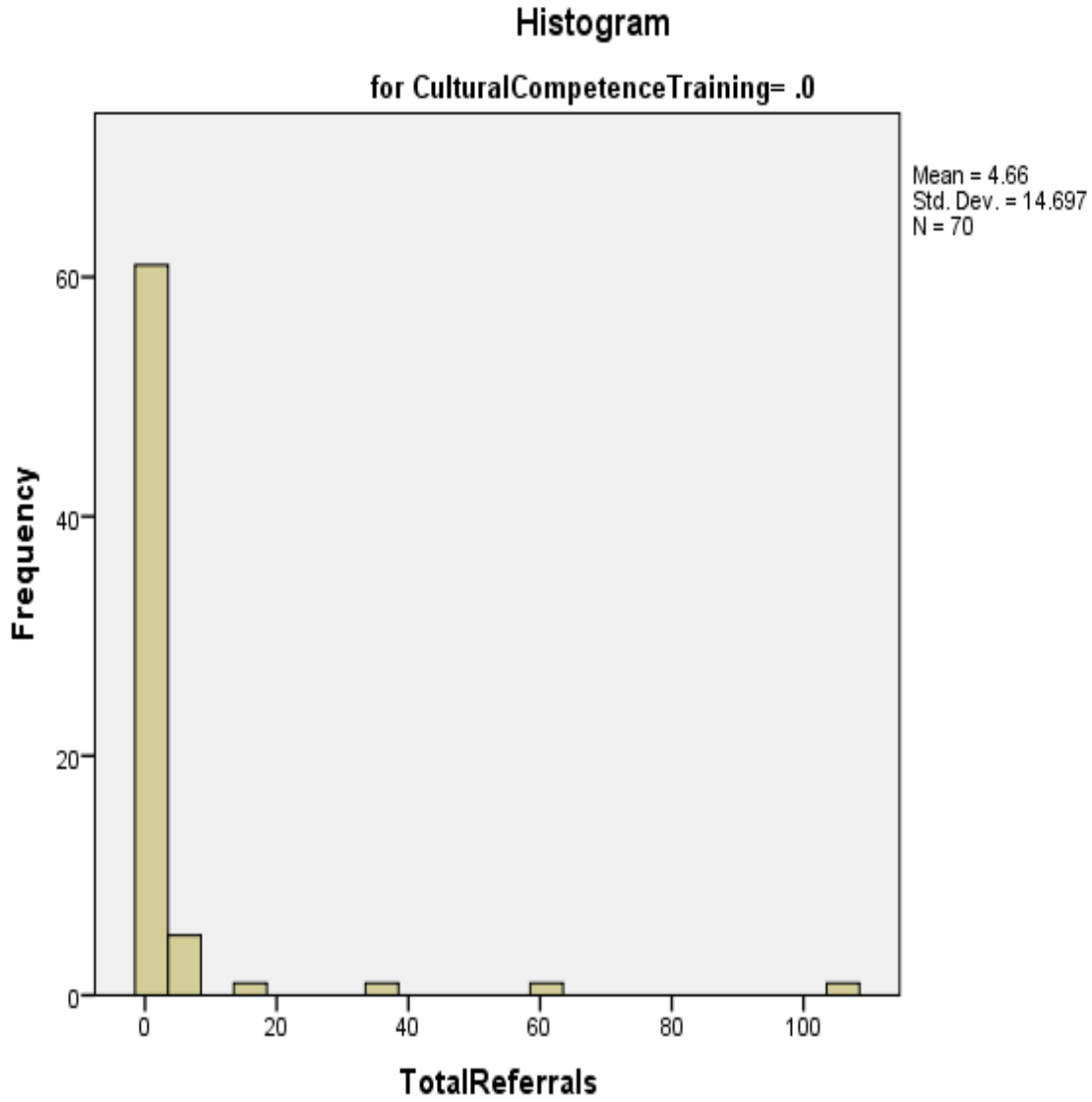
	Cultural Competence Training?	<u>Kolmogorov-Smirnov^a</u>			<u>Shapiro-Wilk</u>		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Total Referrals	.0	.416	70	.000	.261	70	.000
	1.0	.341	70	.000	.489	70	.000

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

A non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test was used when the data contained outliers and did not pass the test for normality (Laerd Statistics, 2015; Warner, 2013). This non-parametric test was appropriate when dealing with outliers and was not taught or used enough in quantitative research (Warner, 2013). There are four basic requirements or assumptions that needed to be considered when running the Mann-Whitney U test (Laerd Statistics, 2015). Three of the assumptions are related to the study design and the last assumption is determined by the nature of the data. The first assumption was that there is one continuous or ordinal variable, such as suspension referral count for this research. The second assumption was that the independent variable was categorical with two groups, such as had CC or did not have CC training. The third assumption was independence of observations, meaning there was no relationship between the observations in each group of the independent variable. The faculty that transferred to another school were filtered out to ensure independence in each group. The fourth assumption was to determine whether the distribution scores for the two independent variables had the same or different shape. Histograms of the referral counts for the two independent variable groups reveal that the distributions are not the same (Figure 13, Figure 14).

Figure 13

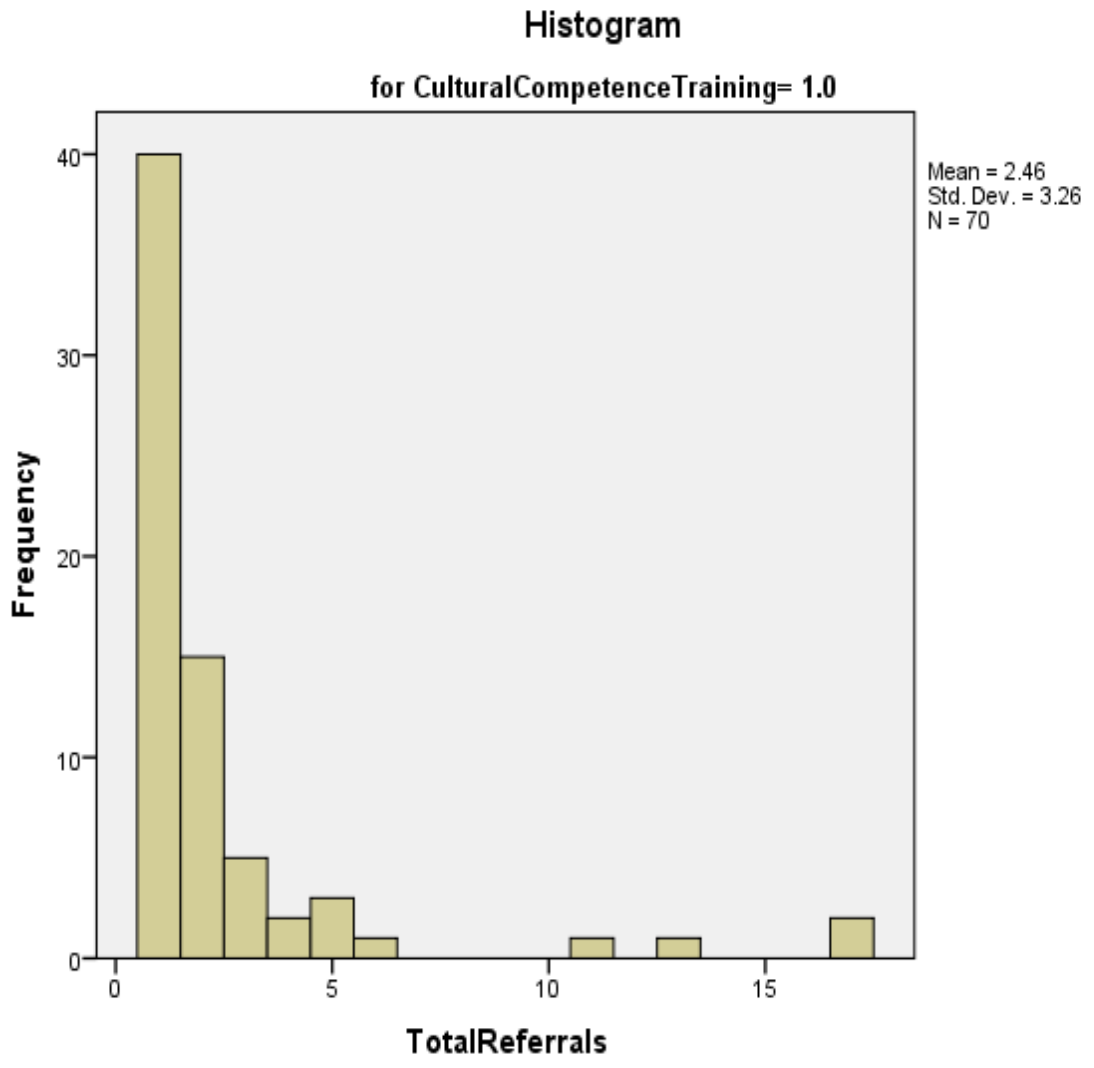
Referral Counts from Faculty in Schools with No CC Training



The histogram for referral counts by faculty working in schools that did not participate in CC training reveals a high concentration of referrals on the left with a very long tail going past 100 referrals on the right (Figure 13). The histogram for referral counts of faculty that did participate in CC training is shallower with a much shorter tail revealing referral counts that extend just past 15 (Figure 14).

Figure 14

Referral Counts From Faculty in Schools with CC Training



The research design met all four assumptions, and a Mann-Whitney U test was run to determine if there were differences in minority student (Latinx and African American) suspension referral counts between faculty serving in schools that had or had not received CC training (Table 4). When the two distributions of the independent variables have different shapes,

the Mann-Whitney U test can be used to compare mean ranks (Laerd Statistics, 2015). Mean rank values for the data are listed below as well (Table 5). Distributions of the suspension referral counts were not similar, as assessed by visual inspection. Suspension referral counts of minority students from faculty serving in schools that had not received CC training (mean rank = 69.00) and suspension referral counts of minority students from faculty serving in schools that had received CC training (mean rank = 72.00) were not statistically significantly different, $U = 2345$, $z = -.495$, $p = .621$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was not rejected, and it appeared that there was no statistically significant difference in the number of suspension referrals of minority students (Latinx, African American) among individual faculty whose school staff had participated in CC professional development training as compared to the suspension referrals of minority students among individual faculty whose school staff had not participated in CC professional development training.

Table 4

Mann-Whitney U Test Statistics^a

Test Statistics ^a	
	TotalReferrals
Mann-Whitney U	2345
Wilcoxon W	4830
Z	-0.495
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.621

a. Grouping Variable: Cultural Competence Training?

Table 5

Ranks

Cultural Competence Training

Case Processing Summary							
Cultural Competence Training?		<u>Valid</u>		Cultural Competence Training?		<u>Total</u>	
		N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Total Referrals	Total Referrals			0	0.0%	70	100.
	1.0	70	100.0%	0	0.0%	70	100.
Total Referrals	.0	70	69.00	4830.00			
	1.0	70	72.00	5040.00			
	Total	140					

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

Overview

This chapter consists of four parts: a discussion of the research question and summary of the results of the study, the implications and conclusions drawn from the study, limitations in terms of the threats to the validity of the study, and recommendations for future research. This chapter will serve as a culmination of research designed to examine the relationship of each variable with the hope to further increase knowledge in this field for educators.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine whether cultural competence (CC) professional development training of public school faculty reduced the referral counts of non-zero tolerance or discretionary suspensions of Latinx and African American students. The independent variable was the individual faculty whose school staff had or had not participated in CC training, identified as two independent groups. The dependent variable of interest was the number of discretionary suspension referral counts by faculty of Latinx and African American students at all school levels.

Discussion of the results of this study was based on the research question. The research question used to address the aim of the study concerned the difference in the number of suspension referrals of minority students (Latinx and African American) among individual faculty whose school staff have and have not participated in CC training. Data were collected from the 2013-2014 school year because the referrer type, such as administrator, teacher, police officer, was not collected until the beginning of this academic year. The data were filtered to include only non-zero tolerance or discretionary suspensions, Latinx and African American student referral counts, and faculty referrers. This created a smaller sample size of 70 from each

independent variable group for a total sample size of 140 faculty referrers. This is an acceptable sample size to perform a two-sample *t*-test (Laerd Statistics, 2015). Histograms and a boxplot were used to test for outliers. The tests revealed that the data contain outliers, and the outliers were kept in the study because they were all related to administrative referrals and administrators make considerably more exclusionary discipline practice (EDP) referrals for students than teachers do. This data was important to this study. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test of normality was used to assess whether the minority discipline referral counts were normally distributed. Findings showed that the referral counts were not normally distributed. Therefore, the non-parametric Mann Whitney U test was used to compare the number of suspension referrals of minority students among the individual faculty whose school staff had not participated in CC training. Findings showed that the mean ranks of the two independent variables were not significantly statistically different ($p > .05$) and failed to reject the null. It appeared that the relationship between CC training of teachers was not related to Latinx and African American discretionary discipline referral counts.

The data in this research reveal several disparities. There were far more male students referred for suspension than female students (Figure 1). Almost 72% of the non-zero tolerance suspension referrals were given to male students, while female students accounted for only a little over 28% of the referrals. Most of the student suspension referrals were for non-English Language Learners (ELL) compared to ELL (Figure 2). Over 70% of the suspension referrals were given to non-ELLs, with just over 29% of the suspension referrals administered to ELLs. These numbers represent more ELL suspension referrals than actual ELLs in the school system. The ELLs currently make up 25.5% of the student population, and the student body is made up of 74.5% non-ELLs. Most of the student suspension referrals were given to students that did not

have a disability (Figure 3). Figure three shows a large inequity of suspension referrals for students with disabilities at 39%. All other students only accounted for 61% of the suspension referrals despite making up 86% of the student body. There is a disparity in suspension referrals, with Latinx and African American students making up 79.2% of the overall EDP (Figure 4). African American students represent 10.3% of the student body, and Latinx students represent 28.9% of the student body, representing a combined 39.2% of students in this school system. The suspension referrals by ethnicity reveal 40.6% were given to African Americans and 38.6% of EDP referrals were given to Latinx students (Figure 4). The suspension referrals of these two minority groups are approximately two times the percentage of students attending school in the system. White students made up 44% of the student body but only received 11% of the non-zero tolerance suspension referrals across the county. These data align with previous research in this study regarding the disparity in discipline referrals across the United States public school systems. African American students have been disciplined more frequently and more harshly than their White peers because of their race (Nance, 2016). Additionally, increased use of EDP in public schools across the nation has been linked to higher dropout rates, which correlates to increased involvement in the juvenile justice system (Rocque & Snellings, 2018).

Interestingly, disruptive behavior and disruptive demonstrations accounted for just 3.9% of the discipline referrals in this research (Figure 8). This may be surprising to educators, parents, and policymakers that believe most suspension referrals or EDP comes from disrespecting teachers or student disobedience/defiance in the classroom. These data on referrals by incidents type point to behavior issues in the public schools involving attendance and truancy of students and non-disrespectful behavior incidents in the classroom.

The data also reveal the mean number of referrals for Latinx and African American students by faculty from schools that did not participate in CC training was approximately double the mean number of Latinx and African American students from schools participating in CC training (Table 1). Standard deviation was also much larger for referrals from faculty in schools that did not participate in the CC training ($SD = 14.697$) compared to referrals counts from faculty in schools that did participate in the CC training ($SD = 3.260$). The maximum number of suspension referrals from a faculty member in schools that did not participate in CC training was also much larger at 105 than the maximum number of suspension referrals from faculty in schools that participated in the CC training at 17. The faculty members who gave the largest number of discretionary suspension referral counts for EDP of the minority students in this study were the school administrators in schools that had not participated in CC training for both groups making up the independent variable.

The racial disparity in EDP is real and creates a contentious issue in education today (Nance, 2016; Smolkowski et al., 2016). Throughout the public-school systems in the country, minority students are suspended at higher rates than White students (Dameron et al., 2019). Additionally, EDP keeps students out of class and away from teacher instruction (Hanushek et al., 2019) and has been linked to increased dropout rates and increased involvement with the criminal justice system (Rocque & Snellings, 2018). These findings are congruent with the theoretical framework, which involves critical race theory (CRT) and social control theory (SCT). Critical race theory holds that racism is an ordinary everyday experience for people of color in this country, including students. The theory could inform educators and serve students by shifting the discourse from accepting the status quo to critiquing the processes of power and structure in education (Wesp et al., 2018). A gap exists in applying CRT to educational

leadership, and the theory can be more than just a strong critique of racism if educators would view it as a framework that can lead administrators to apply steps and then changes in not only racial perspectives but learning outcomes and social justice goals for minority students (Amiot et al., 2020). The application of CRT by educational leaders can be used as a practical tool to help dismantle the normalization of failure for minority students in schools (Amiot et al., 2020). Social control theory (SCT) suggests that strong relationships are formed through attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief (Wiatrowski et al., 1981).

Conversely, students are more likely to misbehave when they have weak bonds with teachers and school due to their low levels of attachment, commitment, involvement, and self-belief (Latimore et al., 2018). The school system studied in this research engaged in CC training of faculty due to disparity in academics and EDP to reduce the gaps by encouraging staff to become culturally competent through courageous conversations, examining themselves, and becoming aware of implicit bias and practice of relationship building. The enduring understandings and essential questions that guided the learning for this training have already been discussed in this study (p. 56-57).

The racial disparity in discretionary suspension referrals is clear in this quantitative study as well, with Latinxs and African Americans making up 79.2% of the discretionary suspension referrals by administrators and teachers (Figure 4). The breakdown of racial data for the school system has already been discussed in this study, with Latinxs representing 28.2% and African American students representing 9.7% of the student population. This disparity in suspensions aligns with the previous research already discussed nationally. Generally, the results presented in this study have shown that teachers' professional development training did not make a significant difference in the EDP referrals of Latinx and African American students. In essence, the variable

CC training did not show a significant association with suspension referral counts of the minority students. This could be based on the length of time each school engaged in CC training. Each school involved in CC training completed one year and then was given a plaque for their accomplishment. Cultural competence training may be more effective when embedded in the school's philosophy, and faculty continuously trained and are made aware of their own hidden bias, year in and year out.

Implications

The results and findings from this study highlight the urgency in providing sufficient support and training for educators to eliminate the disparity in EDP for Latinx and African American students. Over 50% of students in the United States are students of color, and by the year 2026, they will represent 55% of all students (Arlington, 2018). The findings suggest that going through one or two years of CC training may not be enough. The tenets of CC training and equity need to be built into the philosophy of the school community on a continual basis. Cultural competence training should be an ongoing priority in both teacher and administrator schooling and the professional development planning for educators throughout their professional careers. The CC training should be implemented with fidelity by documenting staff attendance, recording training sessions for absent staff or review of concepts, providing exit tickets to track understanding and staff attitudes on the trainings, and by creating competency based modules for the tenets of the training to track qualities that each school, or school system, have decided are desirable for educators to possess, such as combining CC skills, knowledge, and ability. Furthermore, professional development or teacher certification credits can be awarded each year for successful and continued CC training. The CC training of faculty by itself may not be enough to eliminate the disparity in EDP. Several proven strategies could support the CC training of

educators, such as positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS), restorative justice practices (RJ), and equity audits provided through school equity teams.

Positive behavioral interventions and supports are a multitiered strategy used to establish positive school climates while providing behavioral support that reduces problem behaviors while enhancing student academic performance (Gagnon et al., 2018). The support strategy emerged from the field of applied behavior analysis emphasizing proactive teaching and the celebration of positive students' behaviors, as opposed to punitive responses (Houchens et al., 2017). Approximately 26,000 schools across the United States are implementing PBIS, which is an 80% increase over the last decade in this country (Gagnon et al.). Research suggests that PBIS effectively reduces office disciplinary referrals and suspensions when implemented with fidelity (Freeman et al., 2019; Gagnon et al.; Houchens et al., 2017; McDaniel et al., 2017). A schoolwide approach to PBIS is implemented in tiers to include universal school-wide, targeted, and finally intensive individual interventions, with the universal intervention making the broadest impact on school context and students (McDaniel et al.). Not only does PBIS support positive outcomes for students, but it is also associated with improvements in staff morale, collegiality, teacher efficacy, and job satisfaction of teachers (McIntosh et al., 2016).

Restorative justice practices (RJ) provide another framework that can support the CC training of faculty as an alternative method to EDP, which may help reduce the disproportionality of current discipline practices and help dismantle the SPP (Katic et al., 2020). RJ is a preventative, alternative approach to the more traditional discipline policies of controlling student behaviors through punitive EDP (Hammond et al., 2020; Weaver & Swank, 2020). School systems are implementing RJ to mitigate the negative impact of EDP because it prioritizes relationship building, addresses the underlying causes of conflicts, and repairs harm

(Sandwick et al., 2019). The three main principles of RJ include relationships and their harms, empowerment of all community members, and collaboration (Song et al., 2020). Punitive systems can decrease student's feelings of self-worth and negatively impact the relationships they have with school staff, but RJ can positively affect school culture by developing positive relationships and a path to resolving conflict (Farr et al., 2020).

Restorative justice practices may help reduce discipline disparities by proactively nurturing relationships between students and educators through active listening and respect, regardless of the demographics of the student population (Hammond et al., 2020; Weaver & Swank, 2020). The emphasis on building positive relationships to affect behavior is supported by SCT, as discussed in the theoretical framework of this study. Culturally responsive practices lie at the heart of RJ practices due to the focus on educators valuing and respecting the experiences and the cultural and social differences among students and staff (Archibald, 2016). The focus on valuing cultural and social differences while seeking to understand implicit or hidden bias is also supported by CRT, the other theory discussed in the theoretical framework of this research. Educational leaders can apply CRT as a theoretical and practical tool to help dismantle the normalization of failure of minority students (Amiot et al., 2020). Faculty can promote anti-racism, combat racism, and integrate racial justice issues with RJ practices (Song et al., 2020).

Multiple peer-reviewed studies have indicated positive outcomes for schools implementing RJ practices (Katic et al., 2020; Song et al., 2020). RJ has been effective in reducing EDP, racial disparities, and bullying behavior while increasing student self-esteem and positive social relationships and, therefore, becoming a substantial discipline intervention strategy in school systems and cities such as Denver Metropolitan Schools, Minnesota Public Schools, Oakland Unified School District, and New York City (Katic et al.; Sandwick et al.,

2019). Additionally, RJ practices may be implemented into the different levels of tiered systems such as PBIS, with community-building circles in Tier 1, peer mediation/responsive restorative circles in Tier 2, and restorative conferences for more intensive interventions in Tier 3 (Katic et al.).

Another strategy to support CC training and reduce the disparity in EDP is creating equity teams that implement equity audits in schools. The principal is pivotal in building equity in schools, and emerging research suggest schools and school systems may transform cultures and practices by engaging in new and collective learning (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2020). Equity refers to institutional, historical, economic, and social fairness in processes and outcomes that have resulted in unequal opportunities for minorities (Galloway & Ishimaru). Equity teams can be established to utilize experts who can assist in staff professional development, school-wide improvement, and additional resources to support and build cultural competence (Allen & FitzGerald, 2017). Equity teams can help build collaboration with families and communities by partnering with organizations like the Anti-Defamation League and implementing and engaging in activities and projects dedicated to eradicating hate, bullying, and defamation, such as the No Place for Hate campaign (Arlington, 2018).

Equity teams can organize and perform equity audits to help reduce disparity and understand the gaps in a school. Equity audits can help address the systemic inequities or internal causes of inequity that have become the norm in many schools (Amiot et al., 2020). The equity audit process can be powerful because of the space created for collective decision-making, collection of meaningful data, and collaborative planning that creates change (Green, 2017). Therefore, it is suggested that CC training be implemented with fidelity and supported by a tiered system of support such as PBIS that implements RJ practices within the tiers and is

complemented by equity audits created and implemented by equity teams that support the school community with activities that make a difference to marginalized students, such as No Place for Hate initiatives.

Limitations

As in all research, there were several limitations to this study. Although the sample size was appropriate for this quantitative study, the findings cannot be generalized to state or national statistics. This study involved a small school system with several data filters involved to focus on the research question. Additionally, generalization was not possible based on the convenience type sample selection of the data. Although generalizability was not applied, transferability may have been applied to help educators and policymakers when contemplating the training of faculty who serve in diverse schools and school systems. Limitations of the study design include the timeline of the study, the focus on faculty, small size of the school system, focus on EDP, and not parsing out the administrators from the teachers.

Another limitation is the tracking of the CC training for faculty. Although the training was mandatory, there was no way to determine whether faculty attended each meeting during staff orientation and monthly meetings. Staff was asked to sign in and sign out of each training, and that information was given to principals for monitoring but was not kept or logged in to any school management system during the years of the training. Additionally, an honor system was used for the required readings during the training for monthly small group meetings.

The findings of this research may not reflect the administration of national discipline procedures. There may be differences in the way school districts and states identify, assign, and report suspensions. This limits the interpretability of the findings in this study. School systems

and states may use differing approaches for interpreting and reporting EDP data into school management systems.

Additionally, there simply may be administrative errors in collecting and inputting discipline data into the data warehouse or school discipline management system. It is possible that there may be differences in the accuracy of the data across schools. The system used for this research does check for errors, but only if prompted to. The system cannot correct human errors such as entering the wrong discipline type, offender, infraction type, to name a few.

Recommendations for Future Research

There are several recommendations for further research that may help generalize this study and help understand the gaps or disparity in the EDP of minority students. In summary, the recommendations for further research are listed below.

1. Include a larger sample size to include multiple school systems or states and a more uniform sample of schools to make comparisons to gain results that can be generalized.
2. Study the effect of CC training on administrators vs. teachers by parsing out the administrators or staff members referring the most students for EDP.
3. Explore the effect of referring faculty race, age, and experience on minority suspension referrals.
4. Explore the effect of wrap-around supports to CC training, such as PBIS, RJ, Deep Equity Training, equity teams, equity audits, and No Place For Hate initiatives.
5. Expand the research to include alternatives to suspension, such as after school or lunch detention and Saturday school.

6. Utilize qualitative methods or mixed methods of research that include faculty interviews and document analysis to gain a deeper understanding of decision making, school climate, and school leadership.
7. Utilize an attitudinal study at the completion of the professional development to determine if the attitudes of administrators and teachers effect how they refer students for suspensions.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A**LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.**
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

January 11, 2021

Philip Bonar

John Bartlett

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY20-21-344 IMPACT OF CULTURAL COMPETENCE
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ON THE SUSPENSION REFERRALS OF MINORITY
STUDENTS

Dear Philip Bonar, John Bartlett:

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:

101(b):

Category 4. Secondary research for which consent is not required: Secondary research uses of identifiable private information or identifiable biospecimens, if at least one of the following criteria is met:

- (i) The identifiable private information or identifiable biospecimens are publicly available;
- (ii) Information, which may include information about biospecimens, is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be

ascertained directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, the investigator does not contact the subjects, and the investigator will not re-identify subjects;

(iii) The research involves only information collection and analysis involving the investigator's use of identifiable health information when that use is regulated under 45 CFR parts 160 and 164, subparts A and E, for the purposes of "health care operations" or "research" as those terms are defined at 45 CFR 164.501 or for "public health activities and purposes" as described under 45 CFR 164.512(b); or

(iv) The research is conducted by, or on behalf of, a Federal department or agency using government-generated or government-collected information obtained for nonresearch activities, if the research generates identifiable private information that is or will be maintained on information technology that is subject to and in compliance with section 208(b) of the E-Government Act of 2002, 44 U.S.C. 3501 note, if all of the identifiable private information collected, used, or generated as part of the activity will be maintained in systems of records subject to the Privacy Act of 1974, 5 U.S.C. 552a, and, if applicable, the information used in the research was collected subject to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, 44 U.S.C. 3501 et seq.

Your stamped consent form can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. This form should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

(personal information eliminated), MA, CIP

Administrative Chair of Institutional Research

Research Ethics Office

Appendix B

Planning & Evaluation

January 17, 2020

Philip Bonar

Dear Mr. Bonar:

Our research committee has completed its review of your application to conduct the research study entitled "Impact of Cultural Competence Professional Development on the Suspension Rates of Minority Students" in (identifying information eliminated). The committee has approved your research contingent on the following requirements:

1. The participation of any (public school) staff member, student, or family who might be involved is completely voluntary at all times. Each participant (or parent of participating students) must be informed in writing of the scope and potential impact of their participation. You should be prepared to provide proof of their informed consent, if requested.
2. You must maintain the total anonymity of all students, staff, and schools associated with (public school system) in any discussions or reports. Any disclosure that may reveal the participation of an (public school system) student, staff member, school, or the school system must be approved in advance by the (public school system's) Office of Planning and Evaluation.
3. Any change to the proposed research must be submitted to and approved by the (public School system's) Office of Planning and Evaluation in advance of implementation.
4. Liberty University must approve this study. When it is available, please provide approval documentation by emailing (personal information eliminated).
5. Provide a description of how you are defining "cultural competence" for the purpose of this study by emailing (personal information eliminated).
6. Provide additional details about how the sample will be selected by emailing (personal information eliminated).

We wish you success as you carry out this study.

Sincerely,

(personal information eliminated)

Assistant Director for Evaluation