HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' EXPULSION REINTEGRATION FOLLOWING

ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Michael Eric Zellous

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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APPROVED BY:

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was used to understand the lived experience of ninth through twelfth-grade high school expelled students and their perception of support when returning to their home campus in "Pecan Canyon School District" (a pseudonym). This qualitative study examined existing research on exclusionary discipline and documents the expulsion and reentry processes the students faced when leaving and returning to their home campuses. The research, deeply rooted in Moustakas's approach to transcendental phenomenology, has produced a description text of life. Transcendental phenomenology is an attitude of approaching lived experience. Short-term expulsion was the removal of students for a period not to exceed the remainder of the current school quarter or semester. Permanent expulsion was the removal of a student for the remainder of the current school year but not beyond one full school term. The research analyzed the academic school year, 2022–2023. The study consisted of three high school African American females and seven high school African American male students varying in ages from 15-19. The participants selected attended a discipline-based alternative program before returning to their home school. Data were collected through student interviews involving an informal, interactive process utilizing open-ended questions; electronic journal questions allowed students to share their experiences in a relaxed environment; and the focus group consisted of the four returning students sharing their experiences. The research revealed the following six themes: frustrating alternative school experiences, no relationship with peers, no support from teachers and counselors in transition, support from family members, coping strategies, and changes in behavior.

Keywords: expulsion, suspension, at-risk students, student reentry, reinstatement.

Copyright Page

Dedication

All praises to God who is the head of my life. This dissertation is dedicated to all the people that I love. My mother, Alma J. Zellous, you gave me love unconditionally, my father Issac Armstead for pushing me to become a better man, my wife, and best friend, Tara Zellous, you are my everything my two daughters Melana Alexandria, and Miranda Alisha, and three sons Michael Eric, Matthew Elijah, and Jamar Lewis for your continued inspiration, and love that I receive daily. Constance Ann my big sister, my mother, my friend your overall present inspires me. Barbara Louise thank you for always being honest with me and giving me the wisdom to follow my dreams. Linda Faye thank you for your love and support that we share daily. My big brother Alvin Q. Zellous you have taught me how to be the man that I have become, you are my source of inspiration and I walk proudly in your footsteps. Lowell Williams, we took a 900 class and completed the journey together. Dr. Yocum, your detailed comments, changes, and supportive comments helped me become a better writer and thinker. Dr. Michael-Caldwell your mentoring and forward thinking continued to challenge me to think outside the box. The faculty and staff at Liberty University thank you for challenging me through each class and the continuous support you have provided me throughout this journey.

Acknowledgments

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List of Abbreviations

Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB)

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

Gun-Free School Act of 1994 (GFSA)

In-school Suspension (ISS)

Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC)

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)

Out-of-school Suspension (OSS)

School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

This phenomenological study aimed to understand the lived experience of expelled students' level of support when returning to their home campus after attending an alternative high school program in North Central Georgia. Since the implementation of the zero-tolerance policy, exclusionary discipline referrals and placement at alternative schools have increased for African American and Latino students. Students who have attended an alternative school often received little support after returning to their home school, which made it difficult to transition back into regular classes. Furthermore, students who have not made a successful transition back to their regular school continue to be faced with the possibility of returning to the alternative school, dropping out of school, or entering the school-to-prison pipeline.

Background

Students who have attended a disciplinary alternative school for an extended period face the uncertainty of readjusting to their home school. Some students understand that they must walk a fine line to ensure that they are not sent back for infractions. In the 2017–2018 school year, 50.9 million students attended public schools (U. S. Department of Education, 2021). African American students represented 15.1% of the population, yet they were expelled more than twice their enrollment rate of 38.8% (U. S. Department of Education, 2021).

The 1994 Gun-Free Schools Act required states that received federal funds to expel students for not less than one year for possessing a weapon on school grounds (Irby & Coney, 2021). As a result of the 1994 Gun-Free Schools Act, a zero-tolerance policy was passed, enacting a get-tough approach to school discipline (Irby & Coney, 2021). In creating a safe and orderly environment for all students to learn, administrators relied on a zero-tolerance policy to

eliminate racial biases and enforce disciplinary consequences (Kennedy et al., 2019). However, students of color were disciplined more harshly than their Caucasian peers, creating a disproportionate suspension and expulsion rate (Kennedy et al., 2019).

The potential negative impact of students who have received expulsion could include falling behind in grades, lower standardized tests, being disengaged from peers, and being involved with the juvenile justice system (Mallett, 2017). Chronically suspended students can create a downward spiral effect, ultimately leading to incarceration (Mittleman, 2018). According to Mittleman (2018), three basic principles could lead to incarceration regarding student suspensions. First, selection bias is used when teachers write referrals according to procedural and disciplinary guidelines (Mittleman, 2018). Evidence suggests that students of color receive harsher consequences than their Caucasian peers (Mittleman, 2018). Second, these students often receive simultaneous sanctions, whereas the offense can be punished by both the school and the legal system (Mittleman, 2018). The problem with exclusionary discipline is that once compounded by police contact, it can lead to juvenile justice involvement (Mittleman, 2018). Finally, suspensions result in downward spirals that result in poor grades due to loss of instructional time and undermining school leaders' authority when the student feels the consequences are unjust (Mittleman, 2018).

When students feel that they are being targeted for disciplinary consequences by biased teachers for being problem students, it makes them feel unwelcome and unsupported in the classroom (Letita et al., 2021). Maslow's hierarchy identifies needs for which human survival, safety, social belonging, and self-actualization are necessary to maximize students' potential (Letita et al., 2021). When assigning punishment, school leaders must also examine the whole student (Amitay & Rahav, 2018). Administrators should also consider alternative strategies such

as building teacher-student relationships to reduce discipline referrals, collaborating with community agencies offering teacher support, and involving parents with open lines of communication, emphasizing a safe and productive school environment (Skiba & Losen, 2016). Schools that have partnered with local non-profit organizations in the community, which provided social services to the students and their families, helped students get on track to graduate (Letitia et al., 2021).

Historical Context

Educators increased use of exclusionary discipline has increased students' placement in an alternative school (Kennedy et al., 2019). Exclusionary discipline pushes students of color out of schools and into the juvenile justice system (Letitia et al., 2021). This discipline measure caused one-fourth of young African American males to become involved in the criminal justice system in 1991 (Nayeem, 2020). In 2021, over two million people will have been incarcerated because of school suspension and expulsion (Letitia et al., 2021). African American and Latino students are more likely to receive discipline referrals, which could lead to suspension and expulsion at a rate nearly four times that of their Caucasian peers (Whitford et al., 2019).

When some students of color breach social norms, their actions are viewed as problematic (Anyon et al., 2018). However, when teachers and administrators try to understand each student's racial identity, the effort can help reduce bias and improve student-teacher relationships (Anyon et al., 2018). School administrators implemented exclusionary discipline practices to change students' behavior. However, evidence suggests that this practice is ineffective and harmful to students (Anyon et al., 2018). Students who are suspended or expelled from school are less likely to graduate and more likely to become involved in the school-to-prison pipeline (Anyon et al., 2018).

Expulsion has significant negative consequences for a student's day-to-day life. Students who are expelled have lower grades, lower ratings on standardized tests, lower graduation rates, and lower college admittance compared to their peers (Coleman, 2015). Expulsion and suspension rates are disproportional between African American, Hispanic, and Caucasian racial groups (Skiba et al., 2014). The impact of suspensions can be measured on the states' end-of-year test scores. Students are tracked by the state reading and math tests (Kennedy et al., 2019). Those students who receive low scores on the state test are placed in a remediation class with little teaching to help students increase their scores (Kennedy et al., 2019). Most of the instructional time was spent with the teacher chastising the students, failing to maximize their academic growth (Kennedy et al., 2019).

Suspended students may develop social and academic deficiencies (Novak & Fagan, 2022). Exclusionary discipline has deleterious effects on student outcomes associated with lower academic achievement (Yaluma et al., 2022). Students who have experienced expulsion could be the turning point for delinquent behavior (Novak & Fagan, 2022). Students with a history of involvement in the juvenile justice system are likely to be linked to school expulsion (Novak & Fagan, 2022). However, a positive teacher-student relationship where the student feels invited to interact with their teacher is less likely to receive administrative punishment (Loomis et al., 2023). Once teachers have built a trusting relationship with students, they can agree with the disciplinary consequences of their actions (Lustick, 2021). Yet school suspension and expulsion lead to negative outcomes such as behavior problems, lower academic scores, and dropping out of school (Loomis et al., 2022).

The short-term effects of school suspension and expulsion are that some students cannot take advanced placement courses, and some teachers and administrators are more likely to view

students of color as problematic students (Fisher et al., 2022). Long-term effects of school suspension and expulsion can include students increasing their chances of further suspension and involvement in the juvenile justice system (Fisher et al., 2022). School discipline can lead to unintended consequences such as lower academic achievement, an increased dropout rate, and involvement in the juvenile justice system (Fisher et al., 2022). Students who have been suspended in the ninth grade have increased chances of receiving suspension throughout their high school tenure (Fisher et al., 2022). Therefore, a student's path from school to prison pipeline includes being suspended from school, stopped by police for a violation, or not being in school (Garcia et al., 2022).

Social Context

The zero-tolerance policy was intended to reduce or prevent the sale of drugs or carrying weapons on school property (Basford et al., 2020). Instead, it was utilized to administer severe punishment for misunderstandings, mistakes, or minor infractions (Basford et al., 2020). Furthermore, the zero-tolerance policy disproportionately impacted young men of color (Basford et al., 2020). Traditionally, applying exclusionary discipline practices such as in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, and expulsion has a long history of discrimination (Green et al., 2018). Caucasian students, when compared to African American students, are expelled nearly twice as much without receiving services (Green et al., 2018). The misconception that suspension or expulsion cultivates a positive school climate does not accurately address the problem (Green et al., 2018). When students are suspended or expelled, these practices do little to change the student's behavior (Green et al., 2018). Yet, school suspension channeled students into the juvenile justice system for breaking minor school infractions (Nolan, 2021).

Suspended students are likely to experience negative outcomes such as low academic achievement, repeating a grade, or ultimately entering the school-to-prison pipeline (Gerlinger, 2022). Students who are expelled from school and unsupervised at home could join with adolescents who are involved in delinquent behavior (Widdowson et al., 2021). The zero-tolerance policy is designed to be colorblind, yet students of color were disciplined over three times more than Caucasian students (Kennedy et al., 2019). Exclusionary discipline contributes to a host of negative school outcomes that include underperforming academically, school disengagement, low employment rates, and delinquency (Whitford et al., 2019).

The potential negative impact of students punished under zero-tolerance policies can taint their view of their academic achievement. Students who are removed from an academic environment are more likely to fail to graduate on time or drop out of school (Voight et al., 2015). Studies continue to show that the more students are away from school, the greater the likelihood that they will become part of the juvenile system.

The U. S. Department of Justice (2018) noted African Americans were incarcerated three and a half times more than Caucasians. While African American students represent approximately 16% of the student population, 32–42% are suspended; furthermore, the discipline disparity gap begins as early as preschool. Suspended preschool students are denied the right to formative developmental years and the adjustment of socialization skills (Smith, 2014).

Two factors in public schools contribute to discipline gaps: some teachers' tendency to write more office referrals for African American students because of their biases based on stereotypical views (Wint et al., 2022) and overlooking the institutional policies and environment of the school (Bottiani et al., 2023). According to Bottiani et al. (2023), nationally, 12.9% African American, 3.8% Hispanic, and 3.3% Caucasian students were suspended in the 2017–

2018 school year. Furthermore, African American students are subjected to expulsion due to disruption and moderate infractions (Whitford et al., 2019). One way educators can demolish the color complexities in schools' disciplinary gaps is to develop strategies instead of unconscious bias (Monroe, 2016). Teacher's training is instrumental in supporting the family, community, and the whole student (Whitford et al., 2019).

When teachers can create an environment where diversity is respected, all learners have a relaxed and enjoyable learning environment (Whitford et al., 2019). According to Kline (2016), Georgia's Clayton County school system implemented a multi-integrated system to respond to disruptive students. This approach increased the graduation rate by 20% and decreased delinquent felony rates by nearly 50%. Providing restorative justice professional development for teachers that addresses the impact of racial stereotyping builds their capacity to connect with students (Basford et al., 2020). Continuous restorative justice professional development must focus on student and staff behavior (Basford et al., 2020).

The positive effects of restorative justice practices should be extended to all students (Jabbari & Johnson, 2023). However, schools with high suspension rates should implement these practices (Jabbari & Johnson, 2023). According to the Georgia Department of Education (2023), during the 2022–2023 school year, 36.5% African American and 37.4% Caucasian students enrolled in public school; however, the suspension rate was 64% African American to 20% Caucasian students.

The principals adhered strictly to the district's discipline policies in schools serving a high rate of African Americans with high suspension rates (Jabbari & Johnson, 2023). In contrast, principals of low-suspension schools adjusted their districts' discipline policies to fit their students' needs (Jabbari & Johnson, 2023). The impact of the high suspension of both

African American and Caucasian students is associated with loss of instruction time, higher

dropout rates, and a negative effect on math and reading scores (Jabbari & Johnson, 2023).

Therefore, students who attended a high-suspension school have a 43.5% chance of attending

college, compared to a 56.5% chance for those attending a low-suspension school (Jabbari &

Johnson, 2023). Furthermore, students from low-income urban communities rarely challenge

disciplinary actions, believing it is futile and possibly facing more difficulties (Sanders, 2022).

Removing at-risk students from school makes them susceptible to involvement in the

juvenile justice system (Monahan et al., 2014; Wald & Losen, 2003). Federal programs and

evidence-based practices were developed with civil rights laws that promote positive

environments, keeping students in classrooms by improving school climates and educational

practices (Brent, 2016). Therefore, federal funding must be used to improve school practices

regarding suspension and expulsion because students not attending school consistently suggest

that their likelihood of criminal behavior would increase (Monahan et al., 2014).

Theoretical Context

School leaders face challenges in creating a safe and orderly learning environment

(Mittleman, 2018). There was no clear-cut solution to address the challenges (Mittleman, 2018).

However, after the 1990s, a more punitive approach was used to create a safe learning

environment (Mittleman, 2018). The results suggested that a punitive approach promoted

juvenile delinquency (Mittleman, 2018). In the 1990s, zero-tolerance policies were developed by

the federal government to combat drug use and gun violence in schools (Basford et al., 2021).

The policy was overused, severely punishing students of color for misunderstandings, mistakes,

or minor infractions (Basford et al., 2021). Excluding disruptive students from an educational

setting by suspension or expulsion increases their chance of entering the criminal justice system (Jabbari & Johnson, 2023).

Although the educational system is viewed as the cornerstone of social and economic development, some African American students are excluded due to disciplinary actions (Fisher et al., 2022). Students in low-income schools' grapple with overcrowded classes, teacher retention, and poor academic performance (Fisher et al., 2022). The lack of resources increases students' punitive discipline measures, resulting in suspension (Fisher et al., 2022). Suspension and expulsion from school may limit students' academic success as compared to their non-suspended peers (Tadors & Vlach, 2022). Over time, students who are chronically suspended may develop a negative attitude toward school, which could eventually lead to dropping out (Tadors & Vlach, 2022). As a result, suspension can push students out of school, causing them to experience depression or anxiety (Tadors & Vlach, 2022). Without a high school diploma, it may be hard to obtain stable employment or live independently (Tadors & Vlach, 2022).

Exclusionary school punishment has unintended psychological negative consequences, such as suspension, an inability to trust in school authorities, and lower students' academic achievement (Pyne, 2019). Furthermore, suspended students may get pushed out of school, commit crimes, or become involved in the juvenile justice system (Pyne, 2019). Continued exclusion may lead to isolation (Novak & Fagan, 2022), whereas an individual may seek out gang membership to find acceptance from peers (Tadors & Vlach, 2022). In addition, students who are suspended or expelled are more likely to get incarcerated (Loomis et al., 2023). This snowball effect can lead from school to prison (Loomis et al., 2023). The school-to-prison pipeline explains how disproportionate discipline pushes African American students out of schools and into the criminal justice system (Basford et al., 2021).

Research has shown that students from low-income families are in danger of experiencing exclusionary punishment (Basford et al., 2021). Studies have shown that the zero-tolerance policy disproportionately impacts African American students (Basford et al., 2021). In a school district where 92% of its students qualify for free or reduced lunch, at least 85% have experienced chronic suspension and expulsion, and 66% have experienced involvement with the criminal justice system (Basford et al., 2021). Chronically suspended students are more likely to engage in criminal behaviors such as theft, breaking and entering, or property damage (Novak & Fagan, 2022). Therefore, exclusionary discipline is considered a trajectory into the school-to-prison pipeline (Novak & Fagan, 2022).

African American students are suspended nearly at four times the rate as compared to Caucasian students (Morgan, 2021). The higher suspension rate removes students from an environment with structured supervision and increases unsupervised time (Morgan, 2021). Implementing restorative justice instead of exclusionary discipline can help reduce disproportionate discipline (Morgan, 2021). Restorative justice is a policy designed to promote conflict resolution (Morgan, 2021). Restorative justice creates opportunities for communication and addressing problems without the use of exclusionary discipline (Morgan, 2021).

Policymakers at the national, state, and local levels have written initiatives to increase the use of alternatives to suspension and expulsion (Skiba & Losen, 2016). Research on restorative justice programs showed a reduction in out-of-school suspensions while also yielding a 16% decrease in suspension rates (Morgan, 2021). Restorative justice will not eliminate disproportionalities in suspension; the intent is to repair the relationship between the student and the school (Jabbari & Johnson, 2023). The theoretical framework that underlies this study is Critical Race Theory (CRT). CRT provides a framework in education for addressing inequalities

in the educational system (Smith, 2020). Since race is an important issue in American society, CRT explains how African Americans are sometimes left out of the American dream (Smith, 2020).

Problem Statement

The problem addressed in this study is that students returning from a disciplinary suspension tend to receive minimal classroom instruction with little support which creates barriers to making adequate progress towards a high school diploma (Kim et al., 2010). Expelled students returning from an alternative school to their home school that experience alienation increase their dropout rate however, when educators who implemented the holistic pedagogy for all students foster a sense of belongingness which increases the learning environment (Amitay & Rahav, 2018).

The administrators of suspended/expelled students returning to their home campus must provide a clear pathway promoting positive outcomes through learning, social, and emotional intervention (Owens et al., 2021). As students transition to their home school, educators should transform the student's environment from punitive to positive and supportive (Griffiths et al., 2019). Students returning from an alternative school often encounter other students with negative behavior (Pyne, 2019). Therefore, peer support is critical in the reintegration process (Owens et al., 2021). A few students were pretending to fight in the halls; one of those students was suspended for roughhousing, noting that "access to peers and social engagements were seen as privileges to be taken away" (Webster & Knaus, 2020, p. 76).

Chronically suspended/expelled students feel their voice is silent when faced with consequences (Webster & Knaus, 2020). Some students felt frustrated, hopeless, angry, and mistreated because "when I explain myself, I've always just gotten suspended" (Webster &

Knaus, 2020, p. 75). Some students almost gave up and quit school because of the racism they faced from their teachers (Webster & Knaus, 2020). During a school assembly, a few students sang the Black national anthem and were scolded by a Caucasian teacher (Webster & Knaus, 2020). One student refrained from confrontation with the teacher for fear of retaliation and said he was a bad student to other teachers (Webster & Knaus, 2020). One student noted, "We're scared to speak up because of the consequences we will get" (Webster & Knaus, 2020, p. 76).

Out-of-school suspensions (OSS) have been associated with a higher dropout rate for African American and Caucasian students (Jabbari & Johnson, 2023). According to the U. S. Department of Education (2022), during the 2017–2018 school year, 15.1% of the nation's enrollment were African American, yet 38.2% received OSS, and 37.7% were expelled. Students who were suspended or expelled increased their involvement with the justice system threefold (Novak and Fagan, 2022). Students who are placed in OSS are often left at home without adult supervision, and as a result, they could connect with others involved in delinquent activities (Widdowson et al., 2021).

Suspension/expulsion hurt some students, leaving them feeling isolated from their peers and the school (Novak & Fagan, 2022). Schools are critical for students' academic learning and cognitive, social, and behavioral development (Cohen et al., 2023). Suspending students from school removes them from a positive learning environment and could expose them to the justice system (Cohen et al., 2023). Students who returned from an alternative school felt as if they were targeted for minor infractions, noting they received little support to succeed (Kennedy et al., 2019).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to understand the lived experiences of expelled students concerning the support, or lack thereof, that they receive when returning to their home campus after attending an alternative high school program. This research has taken place at *Pecan Canyon School District*, a medium-sized suburban school district serving 18,600 students in the southeastern region of the United States.

At this stage in the research, an expelled student is generally defined as any student expelled, short-term or permanent. Transcendental phenomenology is a way or attitude of approaching the lived experience phenomenon (Van Manen, 2014). How does the school system provide support for students returning to their home campus? The answer is simple: delve into their community and their home situation.

In the 1960s and early 1970s, alternative schools were designed to provide a positive learning environment for students who could not succeed in traditional school settings. Still, today, alternative schools are for bellicose students (Kelchner et al., 2017). In Gurantz's 2010 analysis of students transitioning from alternative schools to high schools, 17% returned to an alternative school, and 24% were not enrolled, either stating the transition was difficult or there was no support system to help them adjust to a high school setting (Kennedy et al., 2019). Some students returning from an alternative school were less than successful due to their academic performance (Kennedy et al., 2019). Some students were frustrated by the lack of support received from teachers, and others felt as if the school did not welcome them back (Shafi, 2019). Because of the lack of transitional support, students are placed in an environment that causes them to fail, eventually returning them to an alternative school, or worse, they may drop out altogether

(Kelchner et al., 2017). The transition for students returning to their home school is a difficult

one for a variety of reasons (Kelchner et al., 2017).

Students indicated that returning from an alternative school was labeled as problematic

by the school resource officers and administrators (Novak, 2019). Students had to transfer back

to larger class sizes and a more rigorous curriculum (Novak, 2019). Another factor to take into

consideration as students transition back to regular school is how school leaders must treat at-risk

students (Welsh, 2017). School leaders must also understand how to support and handle those

students expelled for drugs and fighting (Welsh, 2017). Restorative justice is an alternative

method to suspension by fostering a positive relationship between the students and the school

community (Novak, 2019).

Significance of the Study

A transcendental phenomenological investigation of transitioned expelled students to

their home campus may provide educators with information that is needed for building a positive

support system. The students returning are faced with academic challenges and adjustment to

mainstream education. Returning students understand they have been placed on a behavior

contract and must abide by the terms of that contract or face the possibility of returning to an

alternative school. The students selected to participate in this study are students who have

recently transferred from an alternative school.

Students that are suspended and expelled are usually associated with negative outcomes

such as decreased graduation rates, lower achievement test scores, and higher dropout rates

(Cholewa et al., 2018). Due to the potential negative consequences of suspension and expulsion,

the federal government recommends that states implement programs to reduce suspension and

expulsion rates (Conners Edge et al., 2018). Some of the guidelines for implementing the

programs are policies that limit exclusionary practices, promote social and emotional development, foster a deeper understanding of culture, and strengthen family partnerships (Conners Edge et al., 2018). Program implementation requires additional years and resources; therefore, school climate and classroom discipline can help reduce students' frequent behavioral issues (Jean-Pierre & Parris-Drummond, 2018).

According to U. S. Department of Education (2021), there were 50.9 million students attending public schools in the 2017–2018 school year, with 15.1% African American, 27.2% Hispanic or Latino/a, and 47.3% Caucasian. Yet looking at the disproportionalities in discipline questions educational equality (Welsh & Little, 2018). In the 2017–2018 school year, 33.3% of African American students were expelled without educational services (U. S. Department of Education, 2021). When African American students are expelled for discipline reasons, it doubles their chance of repeating a grade and triples their chance of entering the school-to-prison pipeline (Yang et al., 2018).

The zero-tolerance policy increased discipline disparities among students of color, which in turn caused federal, state, and district leaders to implement alternative strategies to reduce suspensions and expulsions (Welsh & Little, 2018). When a student misbehaves in the classroom, he or she could receive an office referral in which the school administrator decides the consequences of the action (Welsh & Little, 2018). School systems that have implemented PBIS teach students positive behavior, regularly monitor those behaviors, teach problem prevention, where all students receive support from the teachers' as well as administrators, and provide behavior support throughout the school as a learning community (Horner & Macaya, 2018).

One alternative form to help reduce referrals for fighting or drug-related offenses is called Building Bridges (Hernandez-Melis et al., 2016). Building Bridges Intervention was a pilot program during the 2012–2013 school year where students completed activities based on their referrals and were taught social coping strategies, decision-making skills, and conflict resolution (Hernandez-Melis et al., 2016). Another intervention to reduce office referrals is to have administrators and each student develop a comprehensive behavior plan that addresses the problem and offers positive support throughout the school (Jean-Pierre & Parris-Drummond, 2018).

Schools with a higher suspension rate do not equate to a safe school environment; therefore, creating a positive school environment requires support from teachers and administrators (Skiba & Losen, 2016). Furthermore, excluding students from an educational setting increases poor student attendance and dropout rates, which jeopardize their capital accrual (Duffield, 2018). Hence, the most direct pathway from school to prison is through expelled students (Cuellar & Markowitz, 2015). Consequently, turning off the school-to-prison pipeline requires developing personal and professional knowledge concerning effective teaching and learning that engage students (Wilson, 2014). This study is to understand how to offer support to students returning from an alternative school.

Research Questions

An alternative school in the suburbs of Washington DC was designed to address behavioral issues in a smaller school setting to keep students on track for graduation (& Powell, 2016). The school district had an ethnically diverse student population consisting of 36% African American, 34% Hispanic, 21% Caucasian, 6% Asian/Pacific Islander and American Indian, and 3% unspecified (Horsford & Powell, 2016). The school quickly became a dumping ground for

disruptive students serving 60% African Americans, and 37% Hispanics (Horsford & Powell, 2016).

Students having relational resources such as friendship, family, and community activities enhance their ability to stay engaged in their education (Sanders et al., 2016). However, not every positive resource generates positive educational goals (Sanders et al., 2016). Students' inability to graduate from high school greatly reduces potential future income and reduces their labor marketability (Sanders et al., 2016).

Teacher-student relationships supported by collaboration with the school and parents increase student engagement (Sanders et al., 2016). Students transitioning back to their home campus require strong administrative support for successful integration, including training for teachers, administrators, and all staff members (Fenning et al., 2004; Goodman-Scott, 2013; Jean-Pierre & Parris-Drummond, 2018; Mayer, 2001; Nishioka, 2013; Ryan & Zoldy, 2011; Skiba & Losen, 2016; Warren et al., 2006).

School administrators intervene when students' behavior is not aligned with the school culture and climate. Administrative support teams must develop a behavioral plan that rewards returning students and reinforces self-reflection about their decision-making processes to develop self-control (Jean-Pierre & Parris-Drummond, 2018). The behavioral plan should include a preventative component that raises awareness among students' social skills and conflict resolution (Jean-Pierre & Parris-Drummond, 2018). Providing students with an alternative disciplinary intervention fosters a positive school culture that supports academic achievement for all students (Jean-Pierre & Parris-Drummond, 2018).

What has been the lived experience of expelled students concerning support or lack of, that they receive when returning to their home campus, after attending an alternative high school

program? Based on the preceding information, the following research questions guided this study:

Research Question One

How does the student perceive their home campus, teachers, counselors, and administrators' transition support for returning students in their home campus? A positive teacher-student relationship is critical for student engagement in helping transitioning students get accustomed to the school's culture and environment (Grace & Nelson, 2018; 2019). Yet, a teacher's perceptions of students can impact the quality of education he or she receives, also it innately affects how discipline is unequally applied (Grace & Nelson, 2018; 2019). Students returning to their home campus are faced with a period of readjustment to the school's environment and teacher's perception (Sinclair et al., 2016). Therefore, returning students should be assigned a supportive faculty as their mentor providing guidance and helping them stay focused on their educational goals (Semanchin Jones et al., 2018). Returning students' curriculum should include social skills, treating others with respect, and acts of kindness (Sinclair et al., 2016).

Research Question Two

What family and community supports are provided for expelled students returning to school? Low-income communities that are associated with crime, drug selling, and violence can be attributed to student's aggressive behavior and lack of school attendance (Mallett, 2017). Students returning from an alternative disciplines program require positive support both academically and socially (Horner & Macaya, 2018). The best way to provide support for returning students is to have him or her understand the problem, teach the corrective behavior, provide mentorship, and give positive feedback daily (Horner & Macaya, 2018). The transitional

process begins once the student is placed in an alternative setting by developing a set of long-term goals upon release (Tarabini et al., 2019). The key components of these goals include mentoring, family support, and community programs that build confidence (Tarabini et al., 2019). Students who are enrolled in career and technical education or work-based programs to develop their employment skills have a positive impact on students completing high school (Zaff et al., 2017).

Research Question Three

What do formerly expelled students attending an alternative high school program perceive as difficulties in the reentry process? Students of color were disproportionately impacted by the zero-tolerance policy pushing them out of school (Kennedy et al., 2019). Critical race theory is used to examine how race and racism impact students of color (Yaluma et al., 2022) and how it fails to serve all students equally (Kaerwer & Pritchett, 2023). Students returning to their home school want to receive a fresh start (Kennedy et al., 2019) free from bias, stereotypes, and negative labels associated with expulsion (Tadros & Vlach, 2022). However, some students also felt their behavior was monitored for the possibility of further suspension (Kennedy et al., 2019). Also, the transition was difficult because students were not taught on the same level of rigor as their home school (Kennedy et al., 2019). Some students felt they were behind academically, lost motivation to come to school, and contemplated dropping out (Weber & Knaus, 2020).

<div align="center">**Definitions**</div>

The following list of terms was selected for the definition to ensure their methodical application throughout this study and because the said application was relevant to the understanding of the depth of the study:

1. *Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB)* – ASVAB is a multiple-
   aptitude battery that measures developed abilities and helps predict future academic
   and occupational success in the military. Developed during World War I, the Army
   Alpha and Beta Tests were used to classify draftees and volunteers for military
   service (Duran, 2016).

2. *At-Risk Students* – The term at-risk students have been defined as students at risk of
   not graduating from high school because of academic and behavioral shortcomings.
   This also includes suspension and expulsion which resulted in their removal from
   traditional classrooms and placement in an alternative educational setting (McGee &
   Lin, 2017).

3. *Expulsion* – Expulsion of a student from a public school beyond the current school
   quarter or semester. Students permanently expelled from a district may be enrolled at
   an alternative educational facility (Brown, 2007).

4. *Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps* – Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps is a
   high school program funded by local school districts and the Department of Defense.
   The goal is to help students develop their leadership skills, communication skills,
   physical fitness, and citizenship, and improve graduation rates (Pema & Mehey,
   2010).

5. *School-to-Prison Pipeline* – School-to-Prison Pipeline is used to refer to tracking
   students out of educational institutions and /or indirectly into the juvenile and adult
   criminal justice systems (Berlowitz et al., 2017).

6. *School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS)* – SWPBIS
   has reduced the number of students who receive office referrals; considerable work

remains to reduce the disproportionate discipline of African American students (Boneshefski & Runge, 2014).

Summary

In the United States, discipline disparities are prevalent among students of color. For years, finding answers to eliminate disparities has been the topic of discussion amongst various researchers, education reformers, and school district administrators and leaders. Despite public concern, the creation of numerous intervention programs, and increased federal involvement in education, school discipline continues to be imbalanced. At-risk students must deal with low-quality teaching, poverty, racism, and homelessness.

Supporting students returning from suspension and/or expulsion requires effective training for all educators, helping them to redirect misbehaving students and increase learning activities. Understanding the perceptions and needs of alternative students helped the process of making informed decisions by district and school leaders and guided them in creating programs and services that guarantee success for all. Research has shown that positive support can benefit students with disruptive behavioral issues.

Chapter two is a review of the literature with sections covering the history of alternative schools, alternative schools, and student success, as well as expelled students' resilience as it relates to supporting at-risk students' transition back to their home campus. The transition process has been analyzed through critical race theory and the zero-tolerance policy. Students returning from long-term suspension and expulsion face the daunting task of adjusting to larger class sizes, less one-on-one instruction, and less flexible choices in the curriculum. The re-entry process is a key component of helping each student transition successfully back to their home campus.

In chapter three, I discussed the investigation approach, my role as the researcher in gathering data, explain the criteria and strategies used when selecting participants, described systems used for collecting and storing information, detailed the design of my study as well and provided a description of the methodology. I also included a discussion of phenomenology and why and how I utilized phenomenological methodology to answer my research questions.

Chapter four presented the student's analyzed lived experience that included a rich description of my participants' experiences. Chapter five addressed the conclusion of the study based on the findings outlined in chapter four and concluded the positive support of student-teacher relationship, family support, and peer relationships that helps to facilitate a successful transition for students back to their home school.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Students who chronically disrupt the learning environment may be placed in a disciplinary alternative school. Suspension or expulsion seems to be a common practice for removing disruptive students. Upon reentry from expulsion, students may have to sign a behavior contract and complete the contract terms for successful reentry. However, the information available to teachers and counselors may be limited to providing the necessary support. In chapter two, I will discuss the history of alternative schools, the school-to-prison pipeline, supporting at-risk students, expelled students' reentry, and alternatives to suspension.

Theoretical Framework

Paulo Freire's views on pursuing a utopian education were often hindered by oppressive social structures, relationships, and practices (Roberts, 2015). The outcome of a person's life is not determined by their material condition; however, it is determined by their choices in life (Roberts, 2015). Freire's vision of a utopian education was based on two elements: denunciation and annunciation (Roberts, 2015). The first element involves a deep understanding of the past and present social conditions and the reality that has given rise to the oppressed (Roberts, 2015). The second is the willingness to act to address oppression now rather than later (Roberts, 2015).

The United States Constitution offers equal protection under the law for all citizens, yet people of color, especially African Americans, have been victimized by politicians and criminal justice officials (Ortiz & Jackey, 2019). White privilege can be explained by critical race theory (Bhopal, 2023). Arguably, Bhopal (2023) stated that White privilege is a system of oppression that supports the White racial social order. A social order in which policymakers excluded

Blacks from buying housing reinforced housing segregation (Bhopal, 2023). On the surface, policymakers may suggest improvements in racial equality, but nothing changes (Bhopal, 2023).

The goal is to understand the expelled students' re-entry process as they return to their home campus by linking it to the Critical Race Theory (CRT). Within this goal, CRT examines race centered on political views and social structure (Rocco et al., 2014; Tate, 1997) as an analytical framework for shaping racism in contemporary society (Gillborn, 2015). CRT scholars noted that racism is deeply rooted in US institutions, where power and privilege are favored by a White majority group (Anyon et al., 2018). An example of structural inequalities and disparities in school discipline has led to the development of the zero-tolerance policy (Anyon et al., 2018). Critical Race Theorists believe that colorblindness is a key component in helping reduce racial disparities (Anyon et al., 2018). Yet, students of color were disciplined for not conforming to White norms (Anyon et al., 2018).

CRT was initiated in the 1970s by legal scholar Derrick Bell, an African American civil rights lawyer (Delgado & Stefancic, 1998). The CRT scholars examined current and historical laws that have been established to benefit White Americans, leaving Black Americans to pay the price (Kaerwer & Pritchett, 2023). There have been discussions about racism noticeably absent from the Caucasian American legal system, addressing racial inequalities in our society (Ladson-Billings, 2014). CRT is used as an instrument to examine racially inequitable practices, but it also offers an equation for evaluating reform efforts (Alvaré, 2018; Wallace & Brand, 2012).

Critical race theory scholars suggest that racism is woven into the fabric of America throughout its society (Alvaré, 2018; Bell, 1992). Scholars challenge the notion that education equality is for all students (Kaerwer & Pritchett, 2023). Noting that equality for all students merely exists on paper, US institutions must acknowledge the history of exclusion and take steps

to bring about equal change for all (Kaerwer & Pritchett, 2023). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) published data indicating inequitable learning opportunities for Black, Latino, and Pacific Islander students. According to NCES (2023), Asian and White students had higher reading scores than other racial groups generally because of the school's poverty level. If systems in place are not providing equitable education for all students, then changes must be made to provide supportive services (Kaerwer & Pritchett, 2023).

Often, inexperienced teachers are placed in schools serving low-income students of color (Anyon et al., 2018). For teachers who struggle to gain control of their classes, the results are evident in end-of-year assessments (Kennedy et al., 2019). However, when experienced teachers teach classes, the students have high-level engagement activities (Kennedy et al., 2019). For some White teachers, critical race consciousness opens their minds to see the institutional bias that some students of color face (Lee & Lee, 2020). If the White norm measures students of color, it will be hard to build positive relationships with some teachers (Anyon et al., 2018). This lack of trust between students of color and their teachers can negatively impact their academic success (Lee & Lee, 2020). Additionally, teachers need to understand their own biases in order to create a comprehensive and just learning environment for all students (Anyon et al., 2018).

We must also recognize a framework that increases a racially diverse teacher candidate population (Lee & Lee, 2020). In a white center-of-gravity teacher education program, most white teacher candidates evade the topic of cultural diversity and shift the focus to race and gender (Lee & Lee, 2020). Although there is an increase in the student population of color in public elementary and secondary schools, most teachers in these educational systems are White and do not understand the historical and structural barriers for Black students (Lee & Lee, 2020). In the 2017-2018 school year, 18% of the overall teaching population was teachers of color, yet

the overall student population was 48% students of color (Lee & Lee, 2020). Future teachers need to understand the role race plays within the school system (Lee, & Lee, 2020).

Critical race theory scholars argue that racism is deeply rooted in United States institutions and state that society is divided along racial lines in ways to promote inequality and impose privileged behaviors on racialized groups (Anyon et al., 2018). Educational institutions in the United States support the values and cultural practices of a White majority group (Anyon et al., 2018). Schools are the center for learning subjects such as English and math; they also teach social rules and ideologies that reinforce inequality (Anyon et al., 2018). Because of this teaching, young people are conditioned to understand that Whiteness has privileges (Anyon et al., 2018). This environment extends a system where minorities are treated with less equality, while the White majority group maintains its privileged position (Anyon et al., 2018). Therefore, racial inequality is deeply embedded in society, changing individuals' experiences and opportunities based on their race (Anyon et al., 2018).

Related Literature

Since the introduction of the zero-tolerance policy, many schools have relied heavily on exclusionary practices such as suspensions (Jabbari & Johnson, 2023). This approach has often been characterized by social isolation, a high rate of unemployment, poverty, and higher rates of violent crime (Jabbari & Johnson, 2023). A study found that 31% of suspended students repeated a grade, while 10% of suspended students dropped out of school (Jabbari & Johnson, 2023). Students with multiple suspensions were in contact with the juvenile justice system (Jabbari & Johnson, 2023). As a result of exclusionary practices have forced many students into the school-to-prison pipeline and further away from academic achievement (Jabbari & Johnson, 2023). These exclusionary practices, such as suspensions, negatively affect the vulnerable student

population, particularly those from urban communities and students of color (Jabbari & Johnson, 2023). Instead of being offered the support needed to succeed academically, these students often find themselves placed in a cycle of punishment which could lead to incarceration (Jabbari & Johnson, 2023).

History of Alternative School

The history of alternative schools can be traced back to the birth of American education (Lange et al., 2002). Alternative schools emerged around the 1960s to re-energize at-risk students to earn an effective education (Lehr et al., 2009; Wilkerson et al., 2016). Alternative schools offer more focused curricular content, learning contexts, or teaching methodologies than those typical in traditional settings (Gold & Mann, 1982; Lehr et al., 2009; Perzigian et al., 2017; Raywid, 1994). Alternative schools signify an innovative approach to education, which can be categorized into three broad types: schools of choice, behavior reassignment, and academic recovery (Perzigian et al., 2017; Raywid, 1994).

Young (1990) describes the birth of American educational opportunities as based on race, gender, and social class. Andrew Bell and Joseph Lancaster's experiments in mass education had opposite views. Bell suggested that the church should govern education, while Lancaster encouraged that the state should adopt free education, causing Jean-Jacques Rousseau to dictate what was to be taught to students (Ferguson, 2016). In the systematization of laws, each society expanded its educational system, reflecting society's ways of doing things (Ferguson, 2016).

African Americans received very little education after the Civil War, which created high rates of illiteracy (Bertocchi & Dimico, 2014). Former slaves completed fewer years of schooling than Caucasians, creating racially segregated public schools in the South (Bertocchi & Dimico, 2014), thus creating a racially divided educational system. Theobald's (2016; 2015;

2009) concept of a free educational system was not welcomed by all members of society. Established citizens of wealth refuted the idea that educating all citizens has given them a democratic voice, which can impact policies (Theobald, 2016; 2015; 2009). The wealthy argued that a free educational system would increase taxes, and only those who paid taxes should be able to obtain education. Additionally, they believed that education for all citizens would jeopardize the existing social order and threaten their privileged positions in society.

Thomas Jefferson proposed a failed educational bill three times that would create free schools to educate all Caucasian children (Theobald, 2009; 2015; 2016), engendering debates that created a division between economic classes. Thomas Jefferson's educational bill failed because the wealthy and well-born resisted a system that would educate the common citizens (Andrew, 2018). In America, there exists an economic and social inequality between African Americans and Caucasians (Shen, 2018). Social inequalities further exacerbate racial achievement gaps by examining the impact of expulsion (Yaluma et al., 2022). Expelled students had the option of enrolling in private schools, public schools in other districts, online schools, or not attending school during their expulsion (Welch, 2022).

Based on John Dewey's ideas, alternative schools in the United States emphasized learning by doing. The purpose of alternative schools has been marginally defined (Raywid, 1994). Raywid (1994) introduced three types of alternative programs. Type I focuses on popular innovations, sometimes resembling magnet schools, likely reflecting programmatic themes students need and often serving dropouts who want to earn a diploma (Duffield, 2018). Type II or last-chance programs are for students who are unable to be in a traditional education classroom because of behavior problems (Duffield, 2018). Type III is a remedial focus program that serves students with social and emotional problems (Duffield, 2018).

The alternative school movement of the 1970s redistributed learning to offer additional choices to disenfranchised families that are victims of unjust regulations (Meador, 2020). Sadly, the basic skills of competencies, critical thinking, problem-solving, and analytical reasoning continue to be separated along socioeconomic and racial divides (Meador, 2020). As the rich and poor are served differently in the school system, true change must begin with the equal distribution of educational resources for all students (Meador, 2020). However, for some students, alternative schools had a different meaning, as they were forced to attend to prevent them from dropping out of school (Serpell et al., 2020). Therefore, forced attendance documents the racial disparities in alternative schools (Serpell et al., 2020).

More recently, alternative schools were designed to provide a secondary mode of education for students who were unable to succeed in traditional learning environments (Kelchner et al., 2017). In the past, alternative schools provided students after the age of 16 with more freedom for learning and served disruptive students who might otherwise drop out of traditional schools (Welsh, 2022). During the mid-1990s, alternative learning environments offered programs such as school vouchers, charter schools, and magnet schools to narrow the achievement gap for diverse students (Kelchner et al., 2017). Alternative schools have evolved into behavioral institutions for addressing students who display disruptive behavior in regular school (Welsh, 2022).

Today, alternative schools function as rehabilitation schools for undisciplined students or as a second-chance program for students recovering credits needed for graduation (Kennedy et al., 2019). Free schools, often referred to as storefront schools, were an alternative option, providing mentoring, dropout recovery, and tutoring services for urban youth in the community (Meador, 2020). Free schools promote positive teacher-student relationships, allowing for open

and honest communication to provide a utopian environment that allows personal growth and self-confidence among students (Meador, 2020).

For most school districts, discipline alternative schools' purpose is to house and rehabilitate behaviorally challenged students who break district zero-tolerance policies (Kennedy et al., 2019). The goal is to address the needs of students who exhibit a pattern of disruptive behavior (Novak, 2019). The aim is to improve student behavior (Novak, 2019). However, when students transition back to school, the reintegration and rehabilitation process requires the school to establish programs for support (Novak, 2019). Educators' goal is to reform unruly students through provisions of additional support and service (Kennedy et al., 2019). Alternative schools work with behaviorally challenged students to improve their learning by offering small class sizes and providing appropriate interventions to improve students' long-term outcomes (Novak 2019).

Georgia offers several alternative programs designed to recover at-risk students by offering alternative routes toward graduation. Programs include attendance recovery, credit recovery, disciplinary programs, early college, evening school, and Open Campus (Georgia Department of Education, 2015). Teachers working in disciplinary alternative schools must develop creative ways to reach at-risk students (Ashcroft, 1999; Bascia & Maton, 2016; Morgan et al., 2013; Plows, 2017). These students often face several barriers that can delay their academic progress in a regular classroom settings (Lee & Lee, 2020). Students attending alternative educational settings often must overcome multiple barriers to maximize their learning (Plows, 2017). Examples include poverty, mental health issues, housing environment, substance abuse, and challenging behavior (Plows 2017). Furthermore, these obstacles can significantly impact students' ability to concentrate and succeed academically (Morgan, 2021).

School-to-Prison Pipeline

The discipline rules and policies of the school-to-prison pipeline increased the likelihood of students misbehaving and entering the juvenile justice system (Tadros & Vlach, 2022). This link between discipline rules and the juvenile justice system is significant, as it disproportionately affects marginalized groups (Tadros & Vlach, 2022). Student discipline is tracked through office referrals, which could eventually lead to suspension or expulsion (Tadros & Vlach, 2022). Black students are more likely to experience a hostile school climate and racism, which would lead to a higher suspension rate as compared to their white peers (Tadros & Vlach, 2022). The zero-tolerance policy has increased suspensions and expulsions, which have led to legal involvement for children of color (Henry et al., 2022).

The school-to-prison pipeline is a longstanding problem that has plagued students of color at times forcing them out of school due to teacher misunderstandings and police surveillance (Webster & Knaus, 2020). With the increase in school resource officers in schools with a higher population of children of color, it is suggested that young men of color are being arrested on and off school campuses (Webster & Knaus, 2020). As the prison systems profited from forced labor, unjust policies channeled more students out of school and into the juvenile justice system (Webster & Knaus, 2020). The zero-tolerance policy forces students out of school and into the criminal justice system via expulsion or suspension (Tadros & Vlach, 2022).

In public schools, suspension is the primary form of discipline, including in-school and out-of-school suspension (Widdowson et al., 2021). Corporal punishment, restraint, and arrest are forms of punitive punishment used to address disorderly students (Yaluma et al., 2022). Suspension was first used to address serious offenses such as weapons on campus, drug use, fighting, and gang activities (Widdowson et al., 2021). With a tough-on-crime approach, public

schools were mandated to use zero-tolerance policy for violent offenses (Yaluma et al., 2022). Over time, the zero-tolerance policy has been used to punish students for minor offenses such as disobedience and disrespect, determined because it was at the discretion of administrators (Yaluma et al., 2022).

School districts across America have implemented a "zero-tolerance policy," which includes suspensions and expulsions, to reduce violence in schools. Zero-tolerance was enacted after the 1994 Gun-Free Schools Act (Cuellar & Markowitz, 2015). Students who are affected most by this policy are low-income males of color (Mallett, 2017). Students are arrested at school for behavior that would not normally be considered dangerous (Pigott et al., 2018). Implementing the zero-tolerance policy in schools placed students in the pipeline, which involves the police for minor infractions, often leading to juvenile detention, referrals, and incarceration, exacerbating the school-to-prison pipeline (Berlowitz et al., 2017).

Scholars in the field of education have noted that African American males are disciplined at a disproportionate rate in public schools, which has become an underground railroad for entry into the school-to-prison pipeline, through which they channel students from public school classrooms into the criminal justice system (Bryan, 2017). Office referrals open the gateway to suspension and/or expulsion from school (Caton, 2012). Recognizing the misuse of the zero-tolerance policy, it should not be a quick or hasty reaction substituted for classroom management (Berlowitz et al., 2017). Teachers are role models (Bryan, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2011), exhibiting equal treatment to all students, yet Caucasian teachers' biases and stereotypes about African American boys are passed down through generations (Bryan, 2017). In the 2011–2012 school year, 82% of public-school teachers were Caucasian in comparison to 16% of students

who were African American, and 7% of public-school teachers were African American (U. S. Department of Education, 2016).

Caucasian teachers must understand the disproportional discipline African American male students receive because they break school and classroom rules (Bryan, 2017; Allen & White-Smith, 2015). Bottiani et al. (2023) indicate that the excessive use of exclusionary discipline is influenced by local school policies, principals, and staff. African American students are three times more likely than Caucasian students to be suspended for disruptive behavior in school (Bryan, 2017; Osher et al., 2012). If these discipline problems are not addressed, the behavior could escalate into more serious behavioral problems, which could lead to the school-to-prison pipeline (Bryan, 2017; Osher et al., 2012).

School districts have adopted the zero-tolerance policy to reduce violence on campus, in turn, causing an increase in the expulsion rate. Students suspended out of school have a greater chance of committing a crime than non-out-of-school students (Cuellar & Markowitz, 2015). The school-to-pipeline receives its students under the zero-tolerance policy. School leaders must engage community stakeholders, including juvenile court, law enforcement, parents, and citizens, to identify positive alternatives that help all students learn and grow (Wilson, 2014). By collaborating with community stakeholders, school leaders can develop strategies that can address the root causes of student misconduct (Owen et al., 2021).

Supporting at-risk Students

Students placed in foster care experience a myriad of educational difficulties, such as social-emotional adaptation, not conforming to behavioral standards, and academic deficiency (Palmieri & La Salle, 2017). The impact of positive early relationships is likely to promote an adequate educational and supportive environment for students to succeed (Palmieri & La Salle,

2017). When students struggle with the accumulation of social-emotional and behavioral standards, they are faced with a greater risk of academic deficiencies (Palmieri & La Salle, 2017). More so, social-emotional challenges change students' dynamic of adjusting to school culture and climate, which increases discipline problems, causing students to receive school suspension and eventually drop out of school (Palmieri & La Salle, 2017).

Because disciplinary alternative schools handle students with social-emotional and behavioral issues, they have adopted the schoolwide positive behavior strategies and support (SWPBIS). This framework aims to create a positive and supportive school environment that promotes social skills, emotional control, and appropriate behavior (Griffiths et al., 2019). By implementing SWPBIS, alternative schools aim to reduce problems, improve academic performance, and foster a sense of belonging among students (Griffiths et al., 2019). Furthermore, this approach help administrators highlights the importance of early intervention and individualized support to address the underlying causes of students' challenging behaviors (Griffiths et al., 2019).

The challenge for administrators when it comes to helping at-risk students is the adoption of typical reactive, temporary interventions for chronic patterns of misbehavior. Most at-risk students do not have the skills to act appropriately according to classroom rules and the expectations of teachers and administrators (Long et al., 2018). Students returning from an alternative setting to their home schools are faced with daunting tasks for several reasons. Firstly, they fall behind academically as they struggle to catch up with their peers (Webster & Knaus, 2020). Secondly, they have a lack of respect for school authority, which makes it difficult for them to re-engage in the classroom setting (Serpell et al., 2020).

Students returning must readjust to the larger class sizes and less one-on-one support with their academic studies (Kelchner et al., 2017). Students' behavioral challenges are often a result of their learning gap (Wehby & Kern, 2014). Academically struggling students require a considerable amount of the teacher's time and energy (Wehby & Kern, 2014). Building consistent classroom routines and procedures is a preventative measure to reduce the likelihood of problematic behavior (Long et al., 2018). Establishing clear guidance and rules as well as providing a structured learning environment can help students feel supported while reducing behavioral incidents (Long et al., 2018). Also, using differentiated instruction can help address individual learning gaps and provide targeted support to academically struggling students (Kelchner et al., 2017).

Most teachers need help implementing classroom management practices (Long et al., 2018). Therefore, it is critical to provide teachers with classroom management strategies resulting in on-task behavior, which can also be easily and quickly implemented (Conklin et al., 2017). African American and Hispanic male students' office referrals can be attributed to students' and teachers' differences in their cultural norms, values, and language styles (Pas et al., 2016). These cultural differences can lead to misunderstandings between students and teachers, resulting in a high suspension rate for African American males (Morgan, 2021). To address this, it is essential for educators to receive training and support in culturally responsive teaching practices that are based on culturally sustaining pedagogy to empower historically and socially marginalized students (Borck, 2020).

Educators must understand students' diversity and incorporate students' culture into their teaching (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b; Pas et al., 2016; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Classroom management strategies combined with cultural response strategies provide

intervention support, promoting better teacher behavior and student outcomes (Pas et al., 2016). Whereas teachers understand that students are diverse by nature, value their diversity, and incorporate it as part of schools' everyday work involving all their students (Tarabini et al., 2019). School principals are responsible for enforcing disciplinary policies and procedures; therefore, a shared approach ensures that disciplinary actions are fair and consistent by examining the perspectives of teachers and parents (Serpell et al., 2020). At the same time, principals must maintain a positive and safe learning environment for all students (Serpell et al., 2020).

Disciplinary interventions for at-risk students involve straightforward synergy from the entire school community. First, the synergy of administrators, teachers, school staff, and students is required to achieve long-term positive changes (Jean-Pierre & Parris-Drummond, 2018). Second, consistency is the utmost for developing a positive school culture (Jean-Pierre & Parris-Drummond, 2018). Third, building positive relationships between students and school staff helps to achieve positive behavior (Jean-Pierre & Parris-Drummond, 2018).

Expelled students experiencing harmful effects associated with day-to-day life conditions increase the likelihood of negative outcomes (Coleman, 2015). Interacting with positive and caring school personnel helps to facilitate resilience in children and adolescents (Coleman, 2015; Garmezy, 1991; Howard et al., 1999; Rak & Patterson, 1996; Werner, 1993; Werner & Smith, 1989). Building resilience for at-risk students is paramount to mitigating harmful consequences (Coleman, 2015). Resilience-building strategies before expulsion prevent negative behavior or after expulsion help students recover from the damage of the experience (Coleman, 2015). These strategies can provide students with the necessary skills and support systems to recover from adversity and continue their educational plight towards success (Kaerwer & Pritchett, 2023).

Alternative School Transition Support

Disparities among students of color raise questions governing the role of alternative schools as well as their placement on the school-to-prison pipeline (Advancement Project 2010; Kennedy et al., 2019; Skiba, Arredondo et al., 2014; Texas Appleseed 2007; Vanderhaar, Petrosko & Muñoz 2013). According to the National Reentry Resource Center, most incarcerated youth do not attend schools that have the same rigorous curriculum and performance standards as traditional public schools (Council of State Governments, U. S. Justice Center, 2015). School administrators sometimes stigmatize youth leaving detention centers as being difficult to manage (Thomas, 2014). School district administrators also discourage re-enrollment for youth coming from detention facilities in which these students have not been challenged academically to meet the school's academic needs (Thomas, 2014).

Students transitioning back to a traditional school is a critical period of adjustment; however, the youth transitioning back to their schools are not always provided with valuable transition services (Jolivette et al., 2016; Rutherford et al., 2002). The support system may not be clearly defined for students returning to their home campus. Students who are successful in a discipline alternative school experience school policies and educator practices creating barriers that cause them to be unsuccessful (Kennedy et al., 2019).

Some students transitioning to their regular school are not as successful due to decreased grades (Kennedy, 2019). After transitioning from an alternative school, students experienced success in face-to-face classes (Kennedy et al., 2019). Educators should be accountable for implementing positive classroom management practices (Kennedy et al., 2019). When educators use a punitive practice to remove students from class, it harms the removed student (Kennedy et al., 2019). Long-term suspension from school gradually disengages students from academic and

social interactions and thus strongly predicts increased academic failure and dropping out of school (McNeill et al., 2016).

Expelled Students Re-Entry

Franklin et al. (2016) noted the concerns of parents, who stated that public schools were not providing the necessary challenges for all students. Parents were facing difficult decisions on where they could best educate their children (Franklin et al., 2016). In the 1960s, alternative schools began offering smaller classrooms, behavioral support, and a curriculum to address the needs of students who struggled in traditional schools (Free, 2017).

Alternative schools became the last chance to educate students in a school environment, preparing them to become productive citizens of society (Sander et al., 2016). Class sizes, as well as the low teacher-student ratio at an alternative school, allow the students to cultivate a positive relationship, building the resilience needed to change their behavior (Sander et al., 2016).

The original intention of alternative schools was designed for students failing in a traditional school (Free, 2017). Discipline alternative schools have become dumping grounds for students who exhibit disruptive, aggressive, and violent behaviors in educational institutions (Free, 2017). Exclusionary discipline has short-term negative consequences, such as lost instructional time (Nese et al., 2022). It is no surprise students leave school for a variety of reasons; studies consistently found that relationships between the student, family, school, and community are linked with the decision to drop out (Rendón, 2014).

The impulse to leave high school does not signify the end of one's educational completion (Boylan & Renzulli, 2017). Students expelled from Louisiana public schools were assigned to virtual schools; the Virtual Learning Program is inexpensive in comparison to

traditional alternative schools (Champion, 2015). Parents were able to monitor their child's progress without the aid of support from the school system (Champion, 2015). Students were able to work at the pace at which they enjoyed learning, and the parents approved the program (Champion, 2015). Students who struggle to adjust to an alternative setting now have a second chance to complete a high school diploma, which is a win all around (Champion, 2015).

Despite the barriers and challenges of expulsion, students have an opportunity to overcome their situation and be successful through support (Land et al., 2014). Spiritual growth allows some students to overcome their past behavior and their negative perceptions at school (Land et al., 2014). Student reentry programs include continuity of care, family involvement, and cultural competency (Pace, 2018). Schools provide at-risk students with meaningful participation in decision-making and setting goals. Students are given hope after failure by receiving positive support and respect for improving their social skills and experiencing academic success (Washington, 2008).

The school-to-prison pipeline is an onset of academic failure and exclusionary discipline practices among at-risk students (Allday & Christle, 2015). Poor academic skills, along with student disengagement, are strong predictors of exclusion from school (Allday & Christle, 2015). Schools are generally viewed as a caring and nurturing environment conducive to learning (Allday & Christle, 2015). Yet, research has indicated that students' academic failure is contributed in part by non-supportive school personnel (Allday & Christle, 2015).

Teachers' perception of certain students depicts little interaction in developing teacher-student relationships (Steinberg & Lacoe, 2017). Research shows teachers' fostering relationships with disruptive students may result in positive consequences for the student (Steinberg & Lacoe, 2017). Thus, out-of-school suspension and expulsion practices are used to

remove disruptive students from their educational environment before forming positive

relationships (Kelchner et al., 2017). As a result of this practice, students are at a greater risk of

dropping out of school (Smith & Harper, 2015).

Some students who were sent to an alternative school for excessive office referrals felt

the punishment was unjust (Kennedy et al., 2019). When transitioning back to school, students,

parents, and counselors must make appropriate decisions about class placement (Kennedy et al.,

2019). Transitional support is crucial for preventing students from going back to an alternative

school (Kelchner et al., 2017). Students who are most successful in their transition are in classes

with students of diverse skill levels and abilities and experienced teachers, which demand high

levels of engagement (Kennedy et al., 2019).

Alternative to Suspension

Excluding students from school places them on an island of uncertainty and further

exacerbates inappropriate behavior in school, which may cause an increase in dropout and

juvenile delinquency rates (Baroni et al., 2020). The suspension is used to help restore discipline

in schools for a temporary period (Baroni et al., 2020; Christle et al., 2004), yet this method of

discipline hinders students' academic success (Kupchik & Catlaw, 2015).

Students of color are suspended at a disproportional rate. This less-than-effective use of

suspension raises serious concerns about its equitable application to minority youth (Hernandez-

Melis et al., 2016; Skiba, 2014). Hernandez-Melis et al. (2016) stated that several conflict

resolution programs, such as "Making the Smart Choice: Tools for Conflict Resolution," that are

implemented in larger public suburban high schools reduce suspension rates and increase

graduation rates. The effects of alternatives to the suspension program showed promising results;

however, discipline referrals should be examined to assess the proper intervention (Hernandez-Melis et al., 2016).

The use of suspension and expulsion as a deterrent to school discipline practices should not ignore the disparities among the youth of color, particularly African American males (Anyon et al., 2014). Depending on the severity of the student's behavior, in-school suspension and restorative approaches are promising strategies for maintaining school discipline while allowing the student to remain in an educational environment (Anyon et al., 2014). Considering the negative effects of out-of-school suspension (OSS), in-school suspension (ISS) provides a safe learning environment (Cholewa et al., 2018). However, students placed in ISS had lower GPAs and were four times more likely to drop out than their peers (Cholewa et al., 2018).

High schools need to rethink their methods of resolving conflict, discipline referrals, and re-engaging students after an incident is committed. Restorative practices are a positive way of building teacher-student relationships. This practice relies on three underlying processes: promoting interpersonal support and connection, a fair discipline process, and integrating student voice (Gregory, Clawson et al., 2016).

Schools that employed restorative practices reported a reduction in office disciplinary referrals, an improvement in the way students resolve conflicts with teachers and peers, reduced suspension rates, and a reduction in African American and Caucasian discipline disparities (González, 2015). Alternatives to suspension are not a replacement for school policies and/or programs (Welsh & Little, 2018). It is designed to examine how other policies and/or programs are integrated into the schools and how their implementation redirects the racial disparities in school discipline (Welsh & Little, 2018). Restorative practices have been in alignment with reducing office referrals among African American and Latino students (Bottiani et al., 2021). By

focusing on repairing harm and building relationships, these practices have been found to improve conflict resolution skills among students (Bottiani et al., 2021).

Alternative Schools and Student Success

Alternative education influenced public schools by establishing school choices to provide academic success for a diverse population (Meador, 2020). School choice facilitated equitable educational opportunities in African American communities to rise above neighborhood poverty, trauma, disengagement, and failed schools (Meador, 2020). The social mission of schools is to provide services in the school building, such as mental health assistance and economic assistance, to families in need (Meador, 2020). The aim was to provide effective teaching and learning, services that meet the needs of students and families, and family involvement (Meador, 2020). The social mission is intended to enhance the whole-child approach, which helps improve attendance, reduce dropout rates, and increase academic achievement (Meador, 2020).

Students who have been unsuccessful in traditional school settings due to low academic achievement compounded with significant behavior challenges are placed in a behavioral alternative school (Wilkerson et al., 2016). Alienation from school increases the likelihood of academic failure and dropout (Amitay & Rahav, 2018; Taines, 2012). Research suggests that students at risk for social-emotional or academic difficulty should be placed in an alternative setting before experiencing significant behavioral problems (Menendez, 2007; Wilkerson et al., 2016).

Raywid (1994) and Wilkerson et al. (2016) provided evidence suggesting that remediation-based schools made little progress in resolving students' academic and behavioral challenges, even though class sizes were smaller. Teacher-student relationships helped establish a sense of personal closeness through school relationships, creating an active role in student

learning (Amitay & Rahav, 2018). However, teachers realized that if the lessons were not engaging, then there was no chance of them reaching the students (Meador, 2020).

School connectedness through interactions with the school staff produces a student-staff relationship, which creates teaching and learning processes and better-adjusted student engagement in learning (Amitay & Rahav, 2018; Petrie et al., 2009). A school culture that promotes students' positive potential instead of focusing on their negative energy increases engagement and involvement in the learning environment (Allman, 2013; Henderson & Barnes, 2016; Wilson, 2006).

Students experienced success through empowerment, which included the capacity to improve decision-making skills, modify behavior, and improve confidence in their ability to succeed (Henderson & Barnes, 2016). Students attending an alternative school setting earn an average of 2.73 credits per semester compared to their peers in a traditional school earning an average of 2.34 credits per semester (Wilkerson et al., 2016).

Students exhibit a greater sense of motivation when they are supported and encouraged in their academic challenges (Thayer et al., 2018). However, students who are placed in a disciplinary alternative educational setting have a history of academic and social failure (Zolkoski et al., 2016). African American males are perceived to be challenged academically.

Often, African American students in an urban school environment have less rigorous education, fewer qualified teachers, and larger class sizes (Mcgee, 2013). Students who believe teachers care about them as individuals, teachers who believe they could succeed by making better choices academically, and they consciously understand the social impact on others (Coleman, 2015; Shepard et al., 2012)

School is a major part of the development of adolescents into adulthood (Sanders et al., 2016). Teacher-student relationships help reinforce students' positive outlook toward school and their academic performance (Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Sanders et al., 2016). Parental involvement with the school also influences student educational motivation (Cheung & Pomerantz, 2012; Sanders et al., 2016).

The community school approach fostered a connection between nongovernmental agencies and families needing support (Meador, 2020). Three criteria are used to categorize the support: a commitment to effective teaching and learning, wrap-around services that address the needs of students and families, and family engagement to address the whole-child (Meador, 2020). The goals of the whole-child approach are to raise achievement, decrease dropout rates, and enhance attendance (Meador, 2020). By focusing on effective teaching and learning, the community school approach goal is to improve academic success for all students child (Meador, 2020).

School Culture and Relationships

Students who are placed in an alternative setting are eligible to return to their home school based on fulfilling the conditions of their expulsion requirements (Kelchner et al., 2017). Expelled students returning to their home school face several challenges adjusting to the school's culture, larger class sizes, and limited small-group instruction (Kelchner et al., 2017). Teachers who build positive student relationships have a greater effect on helping at-risk students prevent reoccurring discipline incidents (Gregory & Fergus, 2017). Therefore, restorative justice programs should be embedded to help at-risk students readjust to their school culture (Morgan, 2021).

Students with a sense of belonging and connectedness to their school, teachers, and peers are more engaged in the school's culture, which increases their participation in school activities (Main & Whatman 2016; Skinner et al. 2008). Students who are behind their peers academically may cause classroom disruptions, eventually causing them to be removed from the classroom (Sander et al., 2016). Positive teacher-student relationships for students who are at risk of failure and defiant behavior help facilitate better student choices (Sander et al., 2016).

High school dropout plagues our nation's graduation rates; however, many students who drop out of school eventually return to high school to earn their diploma either at a traditional or non-traditional educational system (Boylan & Renzulli, 2017). Students leave high school for several reasons; one reason is due to disciplinary policies along with conflicts with teachers or administrators (Boylan & Renzulli, 2017; Stearns & Glennie, 2006), and if we combine students' attendance records, this is a recipe that is sure to have dangerous results for students being unsuccessful (Boylan & Renzulli, 2017).

Most public high schools in Chicago are filled with low-income students of color (Anderson, 2017). These children experience violence, social isolation, and high-poverty neighborhoods, which pose unique challenges for students to be successful (Anderson, 2017). A positive school culture provides a safe climate for students to learn (Ennis & Gonsoulin, 2015). Despite the conditions of each student and the school they attend, all students know that when the staff is there to support them, it helps all students to graduate and change their lives for the better (Anderson, 2017).

Parents, students, and school leaders must advocate for all students. At the end of the day, students' educational attainment depends on whether their parents have chosen to be involved advocates for their children versus silently unsupportive (Coleman, 2015). The effects of

expulsion may have serious negative consequences. According to Coleman (2015), expelled students are at an increased risk of social exclusion and emotional problems because of zero tolerance. A person's resilience is impacted by the mitigating risk factors he or she experiences (Coleman, 2015). Encouragement from school personnel, accepting responsibility, parental and school support, community programs, and academic success allow expelled students to experience success later in their adult years (Coleman, 2015).

The cultivation of a positive teacher-student relationship greatly increases at-risk students' chances for graduation. Toland and Carrigan (2011); and Sanders et al. (2016) noted that the emotional students' ecological environment supports a systemic framework that needs to address student support at schools. Often, students are expelled without understanding the root of their problems (Sander et al., 2016). The resilience of support that is acquired when teachers build positive relationships with students results in young people staying engaged in education irrespective of levels of risk (Sander et al., 2016).

Expelled Students' Resilience

A plethora of research has been conducted on students who are expelled, low academic achievement, high school dropout factors, and the effects of the zero-tolerance policy (Coleman, 2015), yet there is little research on the student re-entry process. Students who fail to graduate from high school are more likely to have periods of unemployment and cycles in and out of the prison system. Programs that connect meaningful community service with academic learning can be a powerful vehicle to help students become productive citizens. Students who eventually dropped out of high school displayed patterns that went unnoticed by educators (McMahon, 2018). Students who drop out of school are now susceptible to unemployment, making less income as compared to students who graduate (Hoffer, 2016).

These students often have poor health due to not receiving proper medical care, increased crime rates, and higher welfare usage (Hoffer, 2016). Teachers' supportive role is critical in redirecting the pathways of at-risk students. When teachers build positive relationships with students, they have more resilience and resources to help them stay on track (Sanders et al., 2016). School leaders must develop effective interventions for recovering excluded students, which can positively change their lives (Coleman, 2015).

Educators must get to know each student and understand the factors that caused them to make their choices in education to foster academic success for expelled students. Student achievement is connected to students' perceptions and classroom performance (Bishop & Pflaum, 2005; Downey, 2014). Educators who misunderstand students' cognitive processes may contribute to their poor choice selection (Downey, 2014). Considering the impact that academic failure has on students and society, there is a need to understand students' perspectives, which play a pivotal role in fostering students' educational resilience (Downey, 2014).

For better or worse, expulsion and suspension can have an irreparably destructive impact on students' futures. Students who are alienated from school are vulnerable to the disparities of society (Sanders & Munford, 2016), such as the juvenile justice system and health-related problems (Brady et al., 2014). Implementing new resilience models for at-risk students is challenging because of a lack of good-willed staff members (Sanders & Munford, 2016).

According to Coleman (2015), "Deon described his sense of how others saw him and his expelled peers: no names, no faces, no prayers, no hope" (p. 176). Despite the lack of effort at schools to implement resilience models, students expressed the positive relationships they had with teachers that helped make the school feel safe and welcoming (Sanders & Munford, 2016).

Sadly, students are hindered by their environment. There have been strong theoretical claims that neighborhood conditions influence the socioeconomic plight online. Students living in high-crime neighborhoods are often exposed to role models that have negative influences on their lives (Rendón, 2014). Conversely, family involvement is a strong predictor of educational attainment and of educational disparities (Entwisle, 2018; Gamoran & Long, 2007; Rendón, 2014). Students who do not succumb to their environment and school failure are better able to recover under conditions of adversity, both internal (i.e., self) and external (i.e., family, school, and community factors; Awang-Hashim et al., 2015; Santos, 2012).

School Transitional Support Involvement

Students of color are expelled twice as much as their Caucasian peers without receiving educational services (Green et al., 2018). The United States recognized the overuse of suspension, which caused the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Justice to publish a policy for improving school climate and discipline (Green et al., 2018). Schools implemented PBIS to increase academic achievement and decrease office discipline referrals and suspensions (Green et al., 2018). PBIS provided the foundation for behavioral expectations throughout the school, including the classrooms and hallways (Keller-Bell & Short, 2019).

Students returning from a juvenile justice program are met with uncertainties involving the school, educators, and social involvement (Platt et al., 2015). An effective transition plan is an essential aspect of reducing the negative effects of the school-to-prison pipeline (Platt et al., 2015). Juvenile offenders who return to their neighborhoods are likely to drop out of school if there are no interventions provided (Platt et al., 2015). Students who are constructively engaged in their school after release remain positively engaged in their neighborhood (Sinclair et al.,

2017). Educators must change their methods to change student outcomes by challenging the status quo (Platt et al., 2015).

Creating a positive school climate requires buy-in from teachers, students, and the staff. Conversely, the implementation process with fidelity is a factor that relates to negative student outcomes (Bradshaw et al., 2015; Bradshaw et al., 2009; Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 2002). PBIS creates a school-wide program that establishes positive behavioral expectations, promotes positive student-teacher interactions, and provides data-based decision-making to increase school climate and academic achievement (Bradshaw et al., 2015). The guiding principles of PBIS are for students to understand how to interact positively with others, for their behavior to be monitored regularly, and for those behaviors to be acknowledged (Horner & Macaya, 2018).

Tier I of PBIS provides universal behavior support to create a social climate that is predictable, consistent, positive, and safe, improving relationships between students and staff (Horner & Macaya, 2018). Family engagement is an important element of PBIS (Horner & Macaya, 2018). School environments are stronger when educators, students, and families are working together to shape the school culture (Horner & Macaya, 2018).

Tier II interventions are delivered in small groups, including social skills, school counseling, peer tutoring, and after-school clubs (Keller-Bell & Short, 2019; Walker et al., 2005). Students attending a disciplinary alternative school display higher levels of social, emotional, and behavioral problems addressed at the Tier II level (Griffiths et al., 2019). Tier III intervention helps students and families in crisis (Betters-Bubon et al., 2016).

Students' reentry services must be uniquely customized for every individual, which involves relationship building, collaboration amongst educators, and ensuring students are engaged in reducing their chance of recidivism (Sinclair et al., 2017). Students transitioning back

to public school need a structured and modified schedule accommodating their readjustment, enabling realistic goal-setting, a curriculum focusing on social skills, and a caring community (Sinclair et al., 2017). Community partnerships with agencies such as foster care, child welfare, vocational rehabilitation, and mental health can improve educational success and student participation (Mathur 2014).

Empowerment. Using the zero-tolerance policy, subjectively interpreted, and implemented, pushed out students deemed problematic (Henry et al., 2022). As a result, the zero-tolerance policy has pushed predominantly Afro-American males into the criminal justice system via suspensions and expulsions (Henry et al., 2022). Therefore, the development, implementation, and support of positive restorative interventions can help end zero-tolerance policies (Henry et al., 2022). Furthermore, research suggests school staff need more training in de-escalation and restorative approaches to reduce police involvement (Henry et al., 2022). For example, research suggests school staff should focus on improving classroom management, teaching social-emotional skills, and involving parents and the community in the development of behavior plans (Henry et al., 2022).

Critical events such as suspension or expulsion can positively or negatively affect students' trajectory (Pyne, 2019). Expulsion can serve as a negative turning point for students by connecting them with other adolescents during school hours who engage in delinquent behavior (Pyne, 2019). Whereas suspension can serve as a positive turning point, allowing students to understand the consequences of their actions (Pyne, 2019). Students who are suspended are deprived of the opportunity for academic support and adult supervision (Mittleman, 2018). Restorative justice is designed to help expelled and suspended students practice better communication skills to control anger (Basford et al., 2020). Restorative justice can also help

reduce racial disparities in school discipline (Basford et al., 2020). To move forward, administrators and teachers must understand that racial injustices exist in their schools (Basford et al., 2020). Nevertheless, restorative justice could benefit all students by putting their academic well-being and success at the forefront of discipline reform (Yaluma et al., 2022).

School climate is the dynamic applicability for maintaining or reducing educational disparities (Kirk et al., 2017). Suspending students reduces their prosocial behaviors and lacks the ability to control their emotions (Cohen et al., 2023). Teachers who provide quality classroom management using a proactive approach increase academic rigor and provide support for all students (Havik & Westergård, 2020). Schools are important for students' development by reinforcing positive behaviors necessary for social development (Gerlinger et al., 2021). When students are emotionally engaged in school, it allows them to receive a quality education (Pyne, 2019).

School Engagement. Students who are disengaged from school display a strong indication of dropping out of school (Tarabini et al., 2019). Students' sense of belonging does not correlate with positive school culture; conversely, students' perceptions of support and encouragement from teachers (Tarabini et al., 2019). Teachers who care have a positive impact on decreasing students dropping out of school and promoting school success for all (Tarabini et al., 2019).

Students engaged in the learning process are less likely to be disruptive in school (Havik & Westergård, 2019). Students having positive reactions in school influences their willingness to attend school (Havik & Westergård, 2019). For at-risk students living in a vulnerable community, the school allows them to build resiliency (Sander et al., 2016). A student's perseverance creates a sense of school safety; one student commented that the pressures of home

affected her behavior at school (Sander et al., 2016). Students who made mistakes were forgiven and understood as they were recognized for their positive potential (Sander et al., 2016).

Students who are chronically suspended from school have a decreased willingness to learn consistently (Cohen et al., 2023). Suspension can lead to other negative consequences, such as dropping out of school, substance use, and incarceration (Cohen et al., 2023). Understanding the impact that suspension has on students could improve a positive teacher-student relationship (Cohen et al., 2023). Teachers and students identified engaging classroom practices that were developed through a culture in which teachers believed in their students' ability to be successful while creating a positive learning community (Kirk et al., 2017). Classrooms where teachers allowed the students to share in the choices of adjusting their coursework positively affected learning (Kirk et al., 2017).

Schools that created a student advisory council established a building of trust (Kirk et al., 2017). According to Kirk et al. (2017), the administration and staff members were interested in the opinions of the students regarding school policies, which created a positive learning environment. The students' identification with their role as leaders resonated with students throughout many diverse groups (Kirk et al., 2017).

Academic Success. The balance of students not completing high school is negatively skewed toward the direction of minority students (Sander et al., 2016). Students who are successful academically in school have access to strong support systems (Collie et al., 2017). To better understand the importance of motivational support systems, it is important to consider demographic factors (Collie et al., 2017). As an example, females have lower social support, whereas there is no adversity by age (Collie et al., 2017).

For at-risk students, it is important to balance home, community, and school support. African American males are influenced by culture not to show weakness; therefore, African American males without a positive role model experience low self-esteem and low self-confidence (Orrock & Clark, 2018). Family values are the centerpiece for academic success, motivation, and fostering independent thinking (Orrock & Clark, 2018). Academic success is the cornerstone for all students. Students making a connection between the curriculum and their own experience helps increase their expectations for academic success (Hulleman et al., 2017).

Students who experience homelessness and child welfare are often faced with stressors of insecurity and educational deficits (Semanchin Jones et al., 2018). School support programs combined with understanding students' characteristics related to their culture have a positive impact on students' academics (Giraldo-García et al., 2019). These key functions are necessary to increase academic success among minority students (Giraldo-García et al., 2019).

A former foster student attributed their academic success to social support from family members, foster family, and school personnel (Hass & Graydon, 2009; Semanchin Jones et al., 2018). The teacher-student relationship helped students overcome academics and build positive family relationships (Guess & Bowling, 2014). This relationship facilitated student engagement while making learning fun by understanding student needs (Guess & Bowling, 2014).

Summary

Children who overcome adversity despite numerous obstacles and adjust to negative life events could succeed in school and in life (Newman & Dantzler, 2015). A teacher-student relationship needs to exist between at-risk students. It is also an important element to help at-risk students remain engaged in learning (Mirza & Arif, 2018). Students who are disconnected from

their academic studies are likely to drop out of high school without graduating (Main &
Whatman, 2016).

Most students' school failure is due to absenteeism, lack of academic performance, self-
esteem issues, and self-efficacy (Mirza & Arif, 2018). Students perform better in school when
they are engaged, and they can bounce back from setbacks in their academic path (Pitzer &
Skinner, 2017). The potential for building positive teacher-student relationships with all students
has a positive impact on at-risk students by helping them overcome adversity (Sander et al.,
2016). Students that arise from failure to success rely on a teacher's belief and defense of them in
an educational environment (Henderson et al., 2018). Many African American students need
teachers who want all students to succeed in school and who are willing to offer them support
during times of adversity (Henderson et al., 2018).

According to Jeffers (2017), student re-entry back to their home campus is a transitional
process that should begin the first day students arrive at the alternative school. The alternative
school needs to work with the schools to realign resources, change policies and procedures, and
create a culture that supports the goals of successful re-entry (Jeffers, 2017). The alternative
discipline school program needs to develop a transitional plan for each student to ensure they are
successful after completion (Jeffers, 2017). At the alternative school, students must have access
to a trained staff member promoting pro-social behavioral changes (Jeffers, 2017).

When a school establishes a positive culture, students are less likely to drop out or
experience behavior problems. The population of ethnic minority students has increased over the
past ten years (Henderson & Guy, 2017). The teacher-student relationship is critical to
cultivating a sense of belonging and connectedness (Henderson & Guy, 2017). However, the

most frequently targeted groups for punishment in school are often based on race, gender, and socioeconomic status (Reno et al., 2017).

In urban school settings, African American male students in a diverse environment do not receive quality education from public schools (Jeffers, 2017). Teachers without the proper diversity training are constantly monitoring African American behavior in fear of losing control of their classroom (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Jeffers, 2017; Raible & Irizarry, 2010). In a classroom environment, the African American male student must conform to three different cultural experiences: Caucasian American culture, African American culture, and the roots of African culture, which arise from the social, economic, and political oppression of minorities (Boykin, 2001; Jeffers, 2017). Supportive, effective classroom practices are needed to support all students (Jeffers, 2017).

Understanding this process leads to new, effective practices that support each student to ensure they have succeeded in school (Reinke et al., 2014). Expelled students returning to their home campus must be placed in classes where teachers have predictable routines. This ensures all students can build educational resilience and success despite obstacles, adversities, and the vulnerabilities of prior mistakes (McGee & Lin, 2017).

The school-to-prison pipeline is a by-product of zero-tolerance and exclusionary discipline policies that continually remove students of color from the classroom and into the streets (Baroni et al., 2020). This leaves them vulnerable to the likelihood of committing crimes, which would eventually place them in the juvenile justice system (Baroni et al., 2020). African American students are consistently suspended at rates two to three times higher than those for other students (Baroni et al., 2020; Skiba, 2014). The loss of educational instruction is a segue into the school-to-prison pipeline.

The zero-tolerance policy mandates predetermined consequences resulting in increasing suspensions, expulsions, and police involvement (Henry et al., 2022). Ultimately, the zero-tolerance policy forced students out of school and into the juvenile justice system (Tadros, 2022). The system is legally required to educate these youth (Pace, 2018). Incarcerated students now face bigger challenges with attending school (Pace, 2018). Some school districts elect not to re-enroll students, citing the safety of other students as a factor (Pace, 2018).

Other districts that elect to re-enroll students place them in an alternative school, so they don't want to deal with the student (Pace, 2018). Suspension and expulsion offer no academic support, removing them from their educational setting. Conversely, the psychosocial have destructive emotions that may lead to depression, anxiety, and aggressive behavior inside and outside of school (Baroni et al., 2017; Cameron, 2006). These negative emotions can further delay their academic progress and social development (Owen et al., 2021). Finally, without appropriate intervention and support, these students may struggle to reintegrate into the traditional school environment, continuing the cycle of academic and behavioral deficiencies (Owen et al., 2021).

As schools look for an alternative replacement for the zero-tolerance policy, disruptive students remain a growing concern in schools (Thompson, 2015). While the zero-tolerance policy was designed to maintain discipline and safety, its tough approach often failed to address the root cause of disruptive behavior (Webster & Knaus, 2020). Educators agree that suspension and expulsion should be the last resort for serious offenses (Thompson, 2015). District leaders are revising disciplinary policies to allow flexibility and reduce suspension lengths (Thompson, 2015). By implementing restorative justice measures, school leaders aim to explain disruptive behavior and promote positive outcomes for all students (Thompson, 2015).

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the lived experience of expelled students concerning the support, of lack thereof, that they received when returning to their home campus, after attending an alternative high school program. This chapter explains how I conducted this study and how participants were selected and recruited. Concurrently, I explained the collection of data, an in-depth analysis of it, and conclusions developed from primary themes created from interviews, journal questions, and focus groups. Also, I explained how I conducted member checks and discussed the limitations I encountered throughout this study. Typically, students returning from alternative schools are significantly behind their peers academically and socially, which causes the greatest concerns. Studies conducted on school discipline note the racial disparities in classroom discipline, ranging from office referrals to punishment meted out to students. Expulsions and suspensions have lasting effects on students, parents, and communities' daily life choices. In short, we hope that expelled students do not become discouraged and lose sight of the chance of receiving an education. By analyzing the former expelled student's lived experiences, we can begin to understand the best ways to provide support that reinforces prosocial skills, removes academic barriers, and helps students develop resilience to graduate.

Research Design

This qualitative study used a transcendental phenomenological design (Maxwell, 2005). A qualitative approach was appropriate because qualitative research designs, according to Creswell and Poth, (2018) "need to study a group or population, identify variables that cannot be easily measured, or hear silenced voices" (p. 45). Specifically, phenomenology is well-suited to

answer the research question discovering an in-depth inquiry into an individual's perspectives and lived experiences (Patton, 2015). The transcendental phenomenological approach fits the research problem because the phenomenological reduction process is consistent with assumptions about how knowledge is derived.

The phenomenological research approach fits with exploring the lived experience of the participants in a research study (Creswell & Poth 2018; Van Manen, 1944; Van Manen, 2016). Descriptive phenomenology was developed by Edmund Husserl. A study that is deeply rooted in Husserl's writings should emphasize the four philosophical perspectives (Creswell & Poth 2018). The study of these phenomena intends to capture the essence of the participant's experiences through their senses (Patton, 2015). From a logical standpoint, Husserl saw phenomenology as a way of reaching true meaning delving deeper into reality (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Using a phenomenological research design, participants have a pre-reflective experience reintegrating in public schools as it relates to their expulsion.

Transcendental phenomenology is a scientific approach with the appearance of things of the phenomena just as we see them and as they appear to us in conciseness (Moustakas, 1994). Transcendental phenomenology clarifies how evidence can be attained as is committed to the possibility of empirical knowledge in the world relating to the lived experience of expelled student's reintegration (Ramstead, 2015).

A hermeneutical approach is a theory and methodology of interpretation of the biblical text, wisdom literature, and philosophical texts used to discover the truth (Moustakas,1994). A transcendental approach was used as opposed to a hermeneutical approach because it described an understanding of the lived experience of expelled students' support or lack of, that they

receive when returning to their home campus, compared to expelled students who then attend an alternative high school program (Creswell, 2013).

Transcendental means "everything is perceived freshly for the first time" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 34). This analysis intends to bracket or set aside personal experiences as an educator and allow for a fresh perspective on lived experiences of expelled students when they return to their home school after being expelled and sent to an alternative school. The hermeneutical approach presents no formal procedures to reduce bias (Creswell, 2013).

Furthermore, according to Meador, (2020) families looked for results that allowed for equal educational opportunities in African American communities. Some schools placed in African American communities were in impoverished neighborhoods that were filled with disengagement and trauma (Meador, 2020). Nevertheless, nongovernmental agencies need to provide support for families in these areas that are in dire need (Meador, 2020). Support can come from providing effective teaching and learning services to meet the needs of the students and their families, which can help improve attendance, reduce the dropout rate, and increase achievement (Meador, 2020).

Research Questions

What has been the lived experience of expelled students concerning support or lack of, that they receive when returning to their home campus, after attending an alternative high school program? The following research questions guided this study:

Research Question One

How does the student perceive their home campus, teachers, counselors, and administrators' transition support for returning students in their home campus? (Grace & Nelson, 2018;2019).

Research Question Two

What family and community supports are provided for expelled students returning to school? (Mallett, 2017).

Research Question Three

What do formerly expelled students attending an alternative high school program perceive as difficulties in the reentry process? (Sinclair et al., 2017).

Setting and Participants

Gaining access and establishing rapport with participants is an important step needed for quality data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This is not a probability sample, rather it is a purposeful sample of a small group of people to examine. It is unlikely that I gained access to expelled students' private information without affiliation to the school district.

Site

The school district leadership structure consists of seven board members governing the superintendent. There are also six executive cabinet members and four assistant superintendents supervising schools. There are two at the elementary level, one at the middle school level, and one at the high school level. I submitted an application to conduct my research to the school district. Pecan Canyon School District has three traditional high schools Walnut high, Chestnut high, and Hazelnut high (a pseudonym), and five non-traditional high schools.

Walnut high school population is composed of 60% African Americans, 17% Hispanic, 18% Caucasians, 4% multi-racial, 1% Asians, and 0.2% Hawaiian, also with 54% of students are economically disadvantaged. Chestnut high school population is composed of 82% African Americans, 8% Hispanic, 6% Caucasians, 2% multi-racial, 2% Asians, and 0.1% Native American Indian, also with 67% of students are economically disadvantaged. Hazelnut high

school population is composed of 73% African Americans, 11% Hispanic, 11% Caucasians, 2% multi-racial, 2% Asians, and 0.2% Hawaiian, also with 64% of students are economically disadvantaged. The student population for the traditional high school is 5,010 students and 212 students in the non-traditional schools. Economically disadvantage in the school district is 73% of its student population. The district school population is composed of 66.30% African Americans, 14.68% Hispanic, 13.72% Caucasians, 3.36% multi-racial, 1.59% Asians, 0.27% Hawaiian, and 0.08% Native American Indian.

Participants

To investigate student support as it relates to expelled students, I have learned a great deal by focusing in-depth on understanding the support structure, incentives from family and community, and adjusting to the rules of a small number of returning expelled students. Potential participants were those who meet the following criteria: expelled students which have transitioned back to their home campus between the ages 15 through 19, who were previously enrolled in a disciplinary alternative education program. Participants and their parents received an informed consent form about the purpose of my study then I provided a consent form requesting permission to conduct the study.

I explained the purpose and significance of my study to each school's principal to obtain access to these participants. This study consists of 10 participants, 3 African American females, and 7 African American males selected through purposeful sampling used to "select individuals for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study" (Patton, 2015, p. 157). This was done until data saturation. Data saturation is the point in the research process when no new information is needed in data

analysis (Creswell, 2013). This sampling method is suitable for this study because I collected data from more than one source.

Researcher Positionality

As an African American educator teaching in a Title I school, I have noted many students repeatedly receiving punishment for attitudes related to disruption, disrespect, and noncompliance with school uniform rules. Eventually, some at-risk students became frustrated with the school's discipline policy and chose to drop out of high school. Students failing to receive a high school diploma may become a threat to society by committing criminal activities such as theft by taking, aggravated battery, and sale or transport of illegal drugs.

There is a need to provide support for at-risk students to remediate the behavior, but also keep them on target to graduate. I want to intervene and impede the challenging behaviors presented by students perceived as "problematic students" before they become chronically suspended, which can lead to expulsion from school.

Interpretive Framework

As a pragmatist and a social constructivist, I believe that personal experiences are derived from interactions with participants' understanding of their lived situations. The lens that I conducted my study was through social constructivism focusing on the participants' views of the situation (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Through their experiences, I understood how the participants view themselves as capable students for success and how they interact with peers and teachers and adjust to their school climate.

Philosophical Assumptions

My philosophical assumption is derived from my experience of attending elementary, middle, and high school where I was not treated as a student wanting an education however, I

was treated as a student that would disrupt the educational environment. I approached this study from three frames of reference: pragmatism, social constructivism, and critical race theory. As a pragmatist, I have focused on the outcome of the research (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The interviews, journal questions, and focus groups guided me through the questions I have formulated. As a social constructivist, I understood the alternative school experience through each participants' views of their experience (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The questions asked were semi-structured interviews and open-ended questions so that the participants gave in-depth and robust accounts of their experiences. Critical race theory allowed me to challenge traditional research theories explaining people of color and offer solutions to racial, gender, and class in our institutional system (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

Ontological Assumption

Ontology is a system of beliefs that reflects an interpretation that an individual has about what constitutes a fact (Marsonet, 2018). Ontology is associated with the question of whether entities should be perceived as objective or subjective (Marsonet, 2018). It also deals with the nature of reality in one's life. Ontological realism exists independent of our knowledge while epistemological realism views the world natural order (Marsonet, 2018).

Epistemological Assumption

Epistemolgy is the study of how knowledge is obtained through the experiences of people. Throughout my study, I gained knowledge of the participants' experiences through interviews, journal entries, and focus group. A strength that surrounded this study was an insight into what motivates at-risk students returning from alternative schools to succeed.

How do the students' home school (zoned school before expulsion), teachers, counselors, and administrators provide the support of transitioning students into the home campus? What

family and community supports are provided for student recovery? What difficulties contributed to the re-entry process as perceived by former students who attended an alternative program? I am interested in obtaining firsthand information from the participants and hearing about their lived experiences.

Axiological Assumption

As a Christian educator teaching in a public school, I understand that students make mistakes. I remind myself of the conversation between Peter and Jesus. In Matthew 18:21-22, Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times" (*New International Version*, 2011). All students should be held accountable for their actions. As educators, we should make efforts to know and understand our students before writing a referral. Therefore, building a positive teacher-student relationship helps reduce misbehaving students and increase academic success for at-risk students (Free, 2017). At-risk students are no different from any other student. He or she wants to receive an education and become a productive citizen in society. Teachers ensure that all students are treated fairly. In Matthew 5:16, "In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven" (*New International Version*, 2011). We as Christian educators, we can be a beacon of light for others to follow.

Researcher's Role

As a researcher applying the social constructivist paradigm, through interviews, journal questions, and focus groups, I provided a voice for these participants and offer recommendations to school and district leaders on how to provide academic and social support needed to improve all students' educational experiences and outcomes. As a former student who attended a Title I

school, I knew my beliefs and experiences could influence my research; therefore, certain beliefs, values, and assumptions must be expelled to uncover new truths and knowledge.

I observed how other educators interacted with those students who were perceived to be a disciplinary problem. It was a frustrating experience to witness students constantly punished for minor school infractions committed. Those experiences, while beneficial, helped me as I understood and expected the behavior and motivations of my participants by creating a bias about the expected responses of the participants.

Currently, I am employed at one of the non-traditional schools, for most of the students, this is their last chance to graduate. I did not have any authority with the participants within this study. Most students decided to attend this academic environment due to their prior attendance and/or the number of credits needed for completing school. I supported those students and encouraged them to look beyond high school. The most significant presupposition of a phenomenology study is to be completely unbiased as I seek to understand the experiences of each participant (Moustakas, 1994).

I was cognizant throughout the study to ensure I am not clouding my analysis of the data with my bias through transcribing the participant's experiences verbatim. Analyzing the text from many sides, angles, and views until a sense of fulfillment is reached Moustakas refers to this method as bracketing (Moustakas, 1994).

Procedures

Permissions

Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved from Liberty University see Appendix A, for IRB renewal see Appendix B. The district approval from the superintendent of instruction in the target school district seeking permission to conduct the research study at the local school district

see Appendix C for approval. I then piloted the interview questions with non-participating students to achieve validity and reliability. I asked participants to independently review their responses for internal consistency. I obtained permission from the school district to conduct the study. Principals from Walnut, Chestnut, and Hazelnut high schools received the school leader consent form allowing me to gain access to interview 10 returning students from a disciplinary alternative school see Appendix D. The participants selected have returned to their home school within the past five years. Participants meeting the criteria were sent a recruitment letter see Appendix E. The interview sessions took place on Microsoft Teams after school hours and lasted from 45 minutes to one hour in length. The participants selected a time slot between 3:00 – 5:00 pm on Monday – Thursday for a virtual interview.

The process included the confidentiality of the schools, staff, student, and system anonymity protection; letter of approval from the researcher's principal and written agreement that all research findings are available at the Office of Professional Learning upon request. Although there are no incentives offered to students for participation in the study, the principal investigator explained the importance of participation in this research which helped improve the transition support back to their home campus. Students over 18 signed an adult consent form see Appendix F for consent form and students under 18 signed a parental consent form see Appendix G for assent form.

The informed consent form discussed the rights of the respondents informing them that they may drop out of the study at any time and may refuse to answer any questions. It stressed that this research is confidential, but also explained how the data was used and who had access to it. I sent consent forms to the school leaders, the local board of education, and the alternative high school principal see Appendix D.

Recruitment Plan

After I received the consent forms, I conducted individual interviews with each participant. The interview took place on Microsoft Teams. I asked the students for permission to record the interview session. I used a video recorder to test before the interview session began, ensuring the device was recording the interview data. Also, I had a backup digital recorder that was on hand in case of technical difficulties. The focus group was comprised of participants who had returned from a discipline alternative high school. The focus group also took place via Microsoft Teams. The focus group discussed the advantages and disadvantages of the participants who returned to their home school. The focus group was used for participants to provide an open discussion about their experiences transitioning back to their home school. Themes identified related to the research questions, and findings were organized around those themes. Each participant was encouraged to participate sharing their growth and glows of their transition support process, comparing the academics of the alternative school to their home school, and having mentors and positive peer support.

Students over the age of 18 signed an informed consent form see Appendix F, and students under 18 signed a parental consent form see Appendix G. I conducted interviews and focus groups as my primary means of gathering their responses via Microsoft Teams. I sent each student seven electronic journal questions see Appendix H. I provided directions for the students on completing the questions as well as instructions to return them to me via email.

The interviews and focus groups were audio recorded. During interviews, focus groups notes were taken by noting the inflection of the participants voice and information pertaining to the atmosphere of the data being collected. I transcribed the interviews and focus group data verbatim. The data collected was analyzed for identified themes.

Data Collection Plan

Data triangulation is defined as "the use of a variety of data sources in a research study" (Patton, 2015, p. 316). In this study, I achieved data triangulation by using three different data sources. This included interviews, journal questions, and a focus group session. The triangulation of data involves using several sources of data collection to ensure the connectivity of the evidence of the shared phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell 2017). I achieved triangulation using Microsoft Team interviews, Microsoft Team focus group sessions, and journal analysis.

Triangulation of data is an important part of qualitative research because it adds to the credibility of the research study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). During the data collection process, I recorded the interviews and focus group sessions via Microsoft Teams. I used an electronic journal questionnaire for participants to share their experiences.

Interviews were the first method of gathering data and the most important for this study was the interview (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Interviews were conducted with individuals identified per the criterion sampling method. The interview sessions were audio recorded via Microsoft Teams (permission granted by the participants). A description of the themes of a case requires in-depth interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The student returning to their home campus was interviewed for 60-90 minutes using a general interview approach. A general interview was necessary for the foundation for in-depth qualitative interviewing evoking thoughts, feelings, and experience for both the interview and interviewee (Patton, 2015). Open-ended questions are designed to stimulate extended conversation and encourage participants to provide in-depth details needed to address the research questions (Patton, 2015). Open-ended questions allowed the participants to speak freely

concerning their support while at the alternative school and as they returned to their home campus.

I transcribe the audio recorded interviews verbatim. From the transcription of the interviews with each participant, I identified themes, central ideas, and conclusions from the research questions. The methods of data collection involved interviews, journal questions, and focus groups.

Journal questions were the second method of gathering data. The intent is to gain a deeper thought from participants. Interviews and focus groups require instantiations responses while journal questions allowed participants time to reflect on their experiences.

The focus group was the third source of data collection. The focus group was used to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' attitudes, feelings, beliefs, experiences, and the reaction to being transitioned back to their home school. A focus group was conducted with four of the participants.

The order of data collection was chosen because I want to explore the individual opinions and experiences of the participants concerning transitioning back to their home school. Next, journal questions were conducted with participants in a natural setting at their home. The focus group was used to gain a more in-depth understanding of the participants as a group. The data collected was analyzed to foster a supportive environment for all students and provide support to ensure students graduate. The privacy of student's information is paramount. All data is kept in a secure file, password protected on the computer.

Individual Interviews Data Collection Approach

The first method for gathering data in a phenomenological study relies primarily on open-ended structured interviews for data collection (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Unstructured interviews

do not follow a formal list of questions. The unstructured interviews are designed to follow more open-ended questions which allow for a discussion with the interviewee rather than a straightforward format.

The advantage of unstructured interviews allows each participant to relax and have a free-flowing conversation with the interviewer having minimal control over the conversation yet, guide the participants to stay on topic, and discuss relevant information. The disadvantage of unstructured interviews requires more time to reach data saturation. The advantage of semi-structured interviews is that they can be prepared ahead of time. Besides, semi-structured interviews also allow the participant the freedom to express their thoughts, perceptions, and views on their terms (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Creswell (2017) reported that semi-structured interviews engage the participants in a two-way discussion on certain topics. The semi-structured interviews provided an opportunity for the participants to learn from me asking their questions and the reasons behind questions. In addition, semi-structured interviews allowed the participants a way to open up on sensitive topics. Also, semi-structured interviews provide qualitative data that can be compared to previous, current, and future data (Creswell & Creswell 2017).

Prior to the interview session, the questions were piloted. Piloting the questions helps to improve the interview and allow changes to be made prior to meeting the participants. The piloting was completed by 10 colleagues who each hold a master's degree in education. My colleagues were not part of the study. My colleagues answered the questions prior to the study to determine if the wording was appropriate to elicit the participants' thoughts and to correct any confusing language.

The interview question guide for the semi-structured interviews anchors each question in

relevant literature on the topic (Patton, 2015). During this transcendental phenomenology study, I transcribed each interview after the actual meeting, and read the transcripts as they were produced. After the transcripts of the Microsoft Teams interview sessions were generated, I studied the transcripts seeking to organize the data topics, going back to the original research questions in order to devise a list of appropriate themes for sorting out the findings.

The goal of my research is to generate data and to provide insight into the experiences of each participant as it related to reintegration to and from the alternative learning program as well as the participant's experiences at both the origin school and the alternative learning program. Conclusions for the findings followed the interpretations. I hoped to gain a deep understanding and insight into the participant perspectives. The questions are designed to look deeply at the lived experiences of at-risk students when they were in an alternative school program.

The interview sessions took place via Microsoft Teams after school hours and lasted from 45 minutes to one hour in length. Also, the individual interviews were recorded via Microsoft Teams. The Microsoft Teams was tested before the interview session began to make sure the internet was working properly for recording the interview data.

Individual Interview Questions

The following questions guided the individual interviews:

1. Tell me about yourself, where you grew up, your school experiences, family, and your community. RQ2

2. Describe your experience in an alternative school setting. RQ1

3. What kind of relationship did you have with your peers at the alternative school? RQ3

4. What are some strategies you have learned at the alternative school that would prevent you from returning? RQ1, RQ3

5. How did the alternative school program impact your behavior? RQ3

6. What kind of relationship did you have with your teachers at the alternative school? RQ1

7. What impact did a mentor program or character education program in the alternative school have on you? RQ3

8. What are some support your teachers, counselors, and administrators provided you in your transition back to your home school? RQ1

9. What are some family and community support programs you received to help you transition back to your home school? RQ2

10. What are some difficulties you experienced in your transition back to your home school, anything else you would like to share? RQ3

The data generated from the individual semi-structured interview addressed the following research questions**:** (1) How do the home campus, teachers, counselors, and administrators provide support to transition formerly expelled students back into their home campus? (2) What family and community supports are provided for expelled students returning to school? (3) What do formerly expelled students attending an alternative high school program perceive as difficulties in the reentry process? Teachers, counselors, and the school administration need to provide support to formally expelled students to properly transition back to their home school. Also, these students needed support from their parents and the community to make the necessary changes to integrate back to their home school.

Focus Groups Data Collection Approach

A focus group was conducted with four of the high school students for triangulation purposes to understand the lived experience of expelled students' support or lack of, that they receive when returning to their home campus, after attending an alternative high school program.

Creswell and Poth (2012) reported that a focus group was used in qualitative research to draw upon the participants' attitudes, feelings, beliefs, experiences, and reactions in a way that would not be feasible using other methods such as one-to-one interviews, or questionnaires surveys.

The focus group was appropriate in this study because an open discussion format led to a stronger understanding of diverse perspectives among the participants (Patton, 2015). Then some participants might perceive participating in a focus group setting less threatening than speaking one-on-one with me as the researcher. This increased their willingness to share their true experiences on transitioning back to their home school. The focus group took place on Microsoft Teams and lasted 23 minutes in length. I tested Microsoft Teams and the internet conductivity before live use. In addition, I took notes on the focus group session.

Focus Group Questions. I facilitated the focus group session with the following questions:

1. What were the positive aspects of the alternative school, if any, when you look back on your experience? RQ1

2. What were the negative aspects of the alternative school, if any, when you look back on your experience? RQ1

3. What are some supporting practices your teachers, counselors, and administrators provided you in your transition back to your home school? RQ1

4. What would you do to improve the alternative school program if you had the power to change it? How did the program help you or change the direction of your educational experience? RQ3

5. What are some difficulties you experienced in your transition back to your home school? RQ3

6. What else would you like share about the transition back to your home campus? RQ2

The data generated from the focus group session will address the following research questions: (1) How do the home campus, teachers, counselors, and administrators provide support to transition formerly expelled students back into their home campus? (2) What family and community supports are provided for expelled students returning to school? It is important for all employees at the home school such as the teachers, administration, and the counselors to work with the formerly expelled students to integrate bask at their home school in a timely manner.

Journal Prompts Data Collection Approach

The journal entries were completed prior to the focus group interview to establish rapport with each student. The students answered each question honestly. It is important for the students to feel relaxed and write candidly for me to derive rich information. Each student was given the following seven questions:

1. What would you guess the principal, teachers, and counselor respect most about you? RQ1

2. How did your expulsion shape what do you care about? RQ3

3. How could your community and school help support you in your transition back to your home school? RQ2

4. Could you have taken a different path to prevent expulsion from school? RQ3

5. How did expulsion impact your views of school? RQ2

6. What key factors will prevent you from entering the school-to-prison pipeline? RQ3

7. What might be a goal you might set for yourself after this experience? How is that achievable? What are the steps you would have to take? RQ2

Completing the journal questions before the focus group interview provided each participant the opportunity to start thinking in-depth about their transition back to their home school. The transition from journal entries to Microsoft Teams interviews and focus group provided richer and deep conversations for information gathered. The journal entries provided each student with the opportunity to write what events he or she felt comfortable explaining in detail. Journal entries provided participants with time to respond to the information given a deeper reflection in a nonthreatening and comfortable environment (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The journals were received electronically.

Data Synthesis

After the completion of the data collection with the individual interviews, focus group session, and journal questions, I analyzed the data to look for patterns and themes concerning the research questions. The data analysis procedures included constant comparative, epoche, analysis, open coding, axial coding, selective coding, and thematizing (Creswell & Creswell 2017; Moustakas, 1994). These data analysis processes are important for analyzing qualitative data which consist of memoing, bracketing, coding, and identification of themes.

Constant Comparative Analysis

A constant comparative analysis is an approach to qualitative data analysis that focuses on interpreting and describing the themes that are evident in the content of communication when framed against the research objectives of a research study (van Manen, 2014). A constant comparative analysis was a powerful tool when you combine it with other qualitative methods such as journal questions, interviews, and archival records. A constant comparative analysis was also used to look at communication in text or transcripts and when you want to view the central theme in social interaction (van Manen, 2014).

The data collected from interviews and journal questions allows the participants to freely express their experiences as it relates to their transition back to their home school. This process stimulates thought which leads to descriptive and explanatory categories (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The constant comparative method breaks data down into discrete units which are used to code them into categories (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This is important for validating the themes which emerged also, ensuring the units and categories are aligned systematically. The participant's experiences were organized into common groups, categories refined, and keywords linked to meaning to create a richer thematic grouping. The thematic units were organized and presented to the participants for discussion during the focus group sessions.

Epoche

Epoche was the first step in the data analysis. Epoche is a Greek word that means to suspend judgment (Schwandt, 2015). In the epoche process, I set aside my personal beliefs, preconceived thoughts, judgment to be more receptive to the views reported by the participants in this study (Moustakes, 1994). I carried out the epoche through reflective mediazation which involves letting my preconceived and prejudgment enter and leave my mind until I experienced closure in this research study (Moustakas, 1994). As I reflected on the data, I wrote down the prejudgments to disconnect myself from them. I also bracketed my personal views regarding expelled students returning to their home schools through memoing before, during, and after the data collection process.

Coding

Coding was the process of identifying a passage in a text or other data items and searching for identifying concepts and finding relationships between them (Creswell & Creswell 2017). The coding of the transcripts was completed in the order of the interviews conducted. I

reviewed the transcripts in groups of two at a time, to allow for editing the interview questions for patterns and themes that emerge from the data. Coding was conducted to allow me to understand the views of the participants and analyzed their experiences.

Codes were conducted during the research process and were based on the data collected to be analyzed (Creswell & Creswell 2017). Coding was conducted both using computer qualitative software and manually for data analysis. The process of analyzing and comparing new data with existing data for constant comparison (Urquhart, 2013). As each step in the coding process began, it was important for me to review previous data so that a connectiveness can be made until saturation was achieved (Urquhart, 2013).

Open Coding and Axial Coding

Open coding was a process of analyzing textual content in open coding. Open coding included labeling concepts, defining, and developing categories based on the properties and dimensions of data analysis (Creswell & Creswell 2017). Also, open coding is when each line of the transcribed text is coded (Urquhart, 2013). This method of coding helps me to focus in-depth on each interview. The coding line-line in open coding usually results in me using many codes in my data analysis (Urquhart, 2013).

Axial coding was a qualitative research technique that involves bringing data together to reveal codes linking participants' voices to data categories, and subcategories. This type of coding was grounded in the participants' voices within my collected data. Axial coding is a technique to connect linkage between the data (Creswell & Creswell 2017). I used open coding to analyze the transcript content to focus in-depth on each of the participants' interviews, journal questions, and focus group session. Whereas axial coding was used to make a connection and linkage to the data from the participants.

Selective Coding

Selective coding was when I found categories and themes in the collected data. It was noted that sometimes I may have many selective codes as open codes (Urquhart, 2013). Urquhart (2013) suggested that I should revisit selective code categories if you have too many selective codes that emerge from the original codes. Urquhart also suggested that I should look at selective codes to find a relationship between the categories that may emerge from the data. I used selective codes to search for categories to develop patterns and themes that emerged from the data.

Thematizing

Thematizing referred to data analysis of the interview responses (Moustakas, 1994). I analyzed the interview responses; the data was analyzed to develop patterns and themes. This type of interview data analysis produced information that I could not have anticipated. I clustered the data and gave thematic labels after the identification of important constituents (Moustakas, 1994). This step in the data analysis process helped me to discover the logical order of the collected data by defining the phenomena the views of the high school expelled students support he or she received after returning to their home school.

Atlas.ti Software

Computer assisting qualitative software, Atlas.ti, was used to aid in data management and analysis. The Atlas.ti software was also used to find keywords for comparison with manually coded categories, patterns, and themes. The Atlas.ti software was useful as a repository and for sorting patterns and themes the data for analysis (Scientific Software Development, 2017).

Trustworthiness

Some researchers in the qualitative community have questioned the trustworthiness of some qualitative studies because the concept of validity and reliability cannot be addressed properly in naturalistic settings (Lincoln, 1985). Nevertheless, many researchers have demonstrated how qualitative research methods can incorporate measures that deal with these issues of validity and reliability through their studies.

Lincoln and Guba coined the term trustworthiness to deal with the issues of validity and reliability in judging the appropriateness of qualitative injury with credibility dependability, confirmability, and transferability. I addressed trustworthiness through several methods to ensure credibility dependability, confirmability, and transferability. These methods included triangulation of the data, member checking, the use of rich, thick descriptions of the data, and a thorough peer review (Creswell & Creswell 2017). The overall format of your member checking allowed participants to review their transcript checking for an accurate account of all information shared informed by Yocum et al. (2015).

Patton (2015) noted that the goal of triangulation was to arrive at consistency across data sources. Using triangulation of the data gave it credibility and should be viewed as an opportunity to uncover deeper meaning, while clarifying researcher bias, clearly identifying background and connection to member checks, if any existed, strengthened this study.

Credibility

Credibility involves making sure the research study is credible or believable (Creswell & Creswell 2017). Credibility also reveals the internal validity of the research study. The use of credibility in a study is to link the research study's findings with reality to demonstrate the truth of the findings (Creswell & Creswell 2017; Patton, 2015). Credibility determines whether the

study reflects its purpose. I demonstrated credibility in this research study by employing the triangulation of data, peer review, and member checking.

The triangulation of data is using more than one method of data collection. Triangulation provides strategies to reduce systematic bias to ensure the validity of the research study (Patton, 2015). I conducted triangulation by collecting three forms of data collection. These included personal interviews, journal questions, and a focus group. This allowed me to obtain different aspects of the participants' experiences. This also allowed more validity by using more than one source of data collection. Also, the themes established from various experiences from the participants which added to the validity of this research study (Creswell & Creswell 2017).

A peer review was a process of checking a researcher's work by another expert in the field (Creswell & Creswell 2017). The purpose of peer review was to check a researcher's quality content and accuracy before conducting a study. I employed peer review of the interview questions, journal questions, and focus group questions. The review ensured that appropriate materials were being used to capture the experiences of the participants in the study. Also, the peer review process ensured the validity of the study and avoided research bias.

Member checking form see Appendix I was the process of helping to improve the credibility, accuracy, validity, and transferability of the study (Creswell & Creswell 2017). This process could be done by providing a summary of the findings or sharing the complete findings with the research participants. I conducted member checks throughout this research study. I provided copies of the transcribed data to each participant. The participants had the opportunity to review their interview responses and communicate changes if necessary.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the degree to which the results of a qualitative research study can be generalized or transferred to other contexts or settings (Bloomberg & Volpe, p. 30). This is done by providing the audience with evidence that the findings from the research study can apply to other situations, times, contexts, and populations (Patton, 2015). Transferability is parallel to external validity referring to the degree of similarity between the case studied and the case to which findings might be transferred from one situation to another similar situation (Patton, 2015). When transferability is applied to a study my research study becomes stronger for future researchers. Also, the use of triangulation of data increased the transferability of this study (Creswell & Creswell 2017). The use of rich and thick descriptions of the data aided future researchers to be able to replicate this study in the future.

Dependability

Dependability refers to the reliability and consistency of the findings on the degree to which the procedures are documented, and allow someone outside the research study to follow, audit, and critique the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Dependability focused on the process of the inquiry and the inquirer's responsibility for ensuring that the process was logical, traceable, and documented. I noted that the best way to establish dependability was to provide an audit trail to examine the process of the data collection, data analysis, and to result of the research study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). An audit trail was established to make sure there was accuracy of the research findings and to ensure the findings were supported by the data collected.

Confirmability

Confirmability was concerned with establishing the fact that the data and interpretations of an inquiry were not merely figments of the inquirer's imagination (Patton, 2014). I presented

the collected data in this research study without bias through the practice of constant comparative analysis. A constant comparative analysis was used to look at communication and text or transcripts and when you want to view the central theme in social interaction (van Manen, 2014). I completed the analysis process with notes and memoing. I made reflective notes before and after working on any part of this research study. This allowed me to separate myself from the data collection process. Memoing helped me in writing down my feelings and thoughts set aside any bias from this research study.

Ethical Considerations

To maintain confidentiality, pseudonyms were used to identify study participants and the schools they attended. According to Creswell (2017), ethical considerations were an ongoing process throughout the research study. To protect the rights of the participants, I obtained approval to conduct the study from Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the school district where the study took place. All the participants completed the informed assent or consent form before the interviews took place. Parents or guardians were also asked to provide informed consent for students who are under 18 years of age.

To protect privacy and confidentiality, I conducted the interviews individually and used pseudonyms for each of the participants in the study and school that each participant was affiliated with. Also, I reviewed with each participant the purpose of the study. Each participant understood he or she had the right to withdraw from the study at any time during the research process and any data collected from the participants could not be used in the research study.

A copy of the IRB approved from Liberty University for studies involving human subjects is included as a part of this study. All transcripts, field notes, pseudonym code book and data are stored in a locked file cabinet also password protected on the computer for three years,

after that time all data will be destroyed. Participants were allowed to check the accuracy of their responses and my interpretations throughout the interview. Also, participants could elect to opt-out of the study.

Summary

This chapter emphasizes the research questions providing an understanding of the level of support suspended and/or expelled students received returning to their home campus. The goal was to provide at-risk students' necessary support after they transitioned back to their home school. Interviews were the first method of gaining an understanding to analyze students' lived experiences which helped create solutions for the problem.

I chose to focus on expelled students simply because they have a greater probability of dropping out of high school compared to those suspended. Focusing on reintegrated students provided an understanding of their reentry experience and it helped inform support systems necessary for at-risk students. Chapter 4 discussed the major findings of the data analysis from this study.

I presented verbal images for each participant, describing their support returning to their home campus after attending an alternative high school. Chapter 5 provided a summary of the study, discuss the findings, draw conclusions based on the findings of chapter four, and made recommendations which concluded the positive support of student-teacher relationship, family support, and peer relationships that helped to facilitate a successful transition for students back to their home school.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the lived experience of expelled students concerning the support, or lack thereof, that they received when returning to their home campus after attending an alternative high school program. In this chapter, I presented the findings from the data analysis. For this study, purposeful sampling was used, selecting participants with the same phenomenon from a common site. Thematic analysis was used to analyze individual transcripts, a focus group, and an electronic journal. This chapter allowed me to describe the commonality of the lived experience by discussing the essence of each participant's descriptive experience of the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In chapter five, I discussed the summary of findings, the theoretical and empirical literature, the practical implication of the study, the delimitation and limitation of the study, and recommendations for future research. I have described the students' perception of the support the administrators, counselors, and teachers provided them as they returned from an alternative school. I have also discussed how the community provided support for students' success and how family members provided emotional support, ensuring that their youth remained academically focused.

Participants

There were 17 participants who agreed to participate in the study. Five participants were unable to participate due to COVID-19 as they remained in alternative school until graduation. I sent out 10 adult consent forms and two parental consent forms to the remaining 12. Two participants opted out of the interview because they were trying to catch up academically and having to work after school. There were 10 students who completed both the individual interview and journal questions. Of those 10, four of them also participated in the focus group.

Table 1 displays the demographics of each participant used in this study. In addition, five

participants completed the member check to ensure the accuracy of their transcript from their

semi-structured interview and two participants completed a member check to ensure the accuracy

of the focus group.

Table 1

Participant Demographics in the study

Pseudonym	Age	Classification	Pseudonym Home School
Asim, Black, Male	18	Senior	Hazelnut High School
Chisisi, Black, Female	19	Senior	Walnut High School
Gamila, Black, Female	18	Senior	Walnut High School
Imhotep, Black, Male	19	Junior	Chestnut High School
Jabari, Black, Male	18	Junior	Hazelnut High School
Lateef, Black, Male	17	Junior	Chestnut High School
Menes, Black, Male	15	Sophomore	Hazelnut High School
Sadiki, Black, Female	18	Senior	Chestnut High School
Taafeef, Black, Male	17	Junior	Walnut High School
Waaiz, Black, Male	18	Junior	Hazelnut High School

To ensure there is a deep, rich, description of participants I used pseudonyms for each participant. I also remove any identifiable information to ensure their anonymity was not compromised. I used 10 individual interview questions, seven journal questions and five focus group questions to seek the finding of three research questions of this study. The individual interview questions provided a deeper analysis of the study through a rich discussion concerning the amount of support participants need to be reintegrated back to their home school.

Asim

Asim is now 21 years old; he was an 18-year-old senior when he was sent to an alternative school. He works temporary jobs, tossing around the idea of attending college to

study music and become an audio engineer. He comes from a family of educators he viewed education as a way to get ahead in life. Once he entered high school, it challenged him to become an independent person. He stated "I was always guided through school so. . . when I got to high school area. It's more of I had to do things for myself, and I had to do the grade and the work for myself."

After attending an alternative school, he knew the curriculum differed from his home school. Alternative school was not viewed as a school; instead, he saw it as a detention center where students were placed to complete their expulsion. He stated the differences between alternative school and his home school:

> It felt like as soon as I stepped in, I was in prison. The room the lights were very dim. The energy and everything were so quiet. Nobody said a word like they knew they didn't want to be there. Umm. . . it was a ton of police officers, like it was almost ah a police station. Umm. . . I felt like I was more there for security purposes rather than for educational purposes.

He continued by comparing the alternative school curriculum to his home school's curriculum:

> Not then really view it as a real school. I felt as if it is there to do a sentence to you, go back to your school, back to regular, back to the regular schedule because they tried to make a schedule to fit you school schedule, but it was nowhere near accurate. It was just something to keep you busy during the daytime, someone or something, just to keep you there and they'll still give you school credits. Because aside from different things, like the different work kids were doing there. I doubt it was the same work from their school. Because the way the teachers give it, just like plain simple, worksheets and this and that, there's no real curriculum.

His experience once he arrived at the alternative school was not pleasant. The environment was not conducive to learning because of the hostility, the constant fighting, and the lack of quality teachers choosing to work at the alternative school. The group of students he surrounded himself with at his home school were students headed off to college after graduation or going into the military. He did not associate himself with students at the alternative school because they caused trouble in school. At the alternative school, students challenged him because he was new to the school. He was constantly on guard for fights and students wanting to do dumb stuff. Asim said:

> They liked to fight more, like to get more days to do this and that, and I was there for over six months. So, I was like, yeah, I don't wanna do add any more days more than this. Well, for people want to do dumb stuff umm is the environment with peers. It's like if you don't know them, they were very hostile.

The support that Asim received after alternative school was a positive one. His former principal was assigned to the alternative school. The relationship that the two shared was a positive one. His principal granted him special privileges such as going to the restroom without an escort, allowing him to keep his snacks and reporting directly to the principal whenever a situation arose.

The principal placed his trust in him therefore, Asim ensured that he took precautions to keep it. Asim's math club teacher from his home school was his teacher at the alternative school that challenged him to always put forth his best effort. Asim returned to his home school two days before graduation because his principal, counselor, and teacher wanted him to complete school without any more incidents.

Asim's community around the high school was in a low-income neighborhood. Most of the houses are subsidized housing, families receive food stamps, and students were limited in the

amount of clothing. There were no community services offered therefore, his home school was his safe haven because he was in the band club. That is where he found his comfort in his rehabilitation by transferring back to his home school. The band club provided him with opportunities to earn college scholarships, and he also had friends that supported him for the actions that sent him to an alternative school.

The challenges that Asim faced when returning to his home campus were being socially accepted by his teachers and peers. The students whom he thought were his friends didn't want to associate with him because of his involvement, which led him to attend an alternative school. Some of his teachers and administrators thought that he had dropped out or transferred to another school. He felt socially awkward as he traveled throughout the school. He described his absence as that of someone sent to jail. He stated, "If a person in jail is like, you forget about him, you forget there alive until they're back out." His experience in alternative school was needed for him to grow independently as a person and become a man with a clearer vision of life.

Chisisi

Chisisi is a very bright student with a positive vision for her future. With the guidance she received from her teachers and staff at school, she wants to become an educator after college. Her experience of attending an alternative school; Chisisi says she would like to share her experience with other students in similar situations. Through her experience, she found out that following other students was not the best decision she had made.

Chisisi spent most of her education in private schools. When she entered public school, she was shocked by the sheer volume of students. She had a tough time adjusting to the public-school environment. She met a student from JROTC and began to act out. Not fully understanding how her behavior impacted her school year. Chisisi followed the lead of a

particular student, and the results led her to go to an alternative school. Chisisi describes her experience at the alternative school as: "When I first went there. I would say it was people there that were ok, how can I say this. . . they were like bad influence." Chisisi also stated few of the students would break certain rules to extend their time at the alternative school because the rules were relaxed compared to their home school.

She attended alternative school during the pandemic therefore, she did not receive a transition plan, nor did she receive any support from the staff. When she reviewed her graduation requirements with her counselor, she was not on track to graduate for another two years. The support that she did receive came from three teachers that provided her with the mentorship and guidance needed to keep her on track and graduate. After her father passed away, Chisisi did not find any reason to attend school. Her three support teachers reminded her that he was watching over her and he did not want her to give up this close to the finish line. Chisisi stated: "I just say keep peace and prosperity in your life." These are the words that give her strength and comfort to make it through a challenging day.

Chisisi is a thoughtful and caring person with a big heart. She tries to help everyone that she can help. She began to realize the more that she helps people, the less support she receives. Her frustration at times affects her attitude at home. She sometimes takes out her frustration on her brothers and sisters. Through the midst of her frustration moments, she still receives support from her mother and sister. Chisisi stated: "I just say they like they, really push me and was like even though there were times where I didn't agree with them, we were mad at each other and stuff like that they still pushed me. They were just like you still can do it just because we are mad at each other, does not mean anything. Like so I'll say my biggest support is my family."

Chisisi did not experience any difficulties in her transition back to her home school. However, some of the students she knew before attending alternative school wanted to fight her. She was thankful for the three mentors that worked with her. Her mentors would tell her that students do not want to see her succeed. If you fight with them, you will receive a 10-day suspension and most likely sent back to the alternative school. One of her mentors told her if she concerns herself with all the negativity then she would receive negative energy. Therefore, make it a great day to focus on the positive knowing you got what it takes to graduate.

Gamila

The area where Gamala was raised is not the safest of neighborhoods on the outskirts of Atlanta. The community center which created a haven for many students in the past to receive tutoring, fellowship, and mentorship eventually closed due to the number of violent fights. The children were forced to play in the streets with little adult supervision. She was raised by her mother and grandmother. Her mother worked long hours and her grandmother was the primary parent. In high school, Gamila gave birth to her son. The love and joy that filled his face was her motivation for change. "As a teen mom, I wanted to create a different narrative for my son so that he would not have the difficulties that I did growing up."

Her grandmother instilled in her that education is a privilege and she was throwing it away "as an African American woman I realize that my ancestors before me longed for the education that I am receiving." Raised in a neighborhood that was filled with violence and was taught if someone hits you do not come in the house unless you beat them. Gamila stated: "My upbringing has taught me that violence "is" the answer." It was a matter of time before her home life transitioned to school. In school, Gamila worked hard to keep her grades above a C average, determined not to let her past dictate her future.

Alternative school was the wake-up call Gamila needed letting her know that she was held to the same "account as others." She distances herself from most of her peers at the alternative school because of their immaturity. A few of the students caused disruption to extend their expulsion, and some students even resorted to violence to extend, yet Gamila stayed focused because she knew that she belongs at her regular school. She was able to reflect on the lack of educational success her older family members experienced. Gamila was determined to break the "generational curse" not only by graduating from high school but also by becoming the first family member to "gain acceptance in a full-time college program."

Gamila's teachers and counselor knew that she was more than capable of the academic rigor she faced in the classroom. Her assistant principal respected her "ability and drive to make positive life changes." She developed a positive relationship with a few of her teachers whom she would often seek out for guidance on college and life challenges. For some students sent to an alternative school is a traumatic experience, but Gamila understood the power of a mentorship program. She had hoped that her home school would offer a mentor program after returning because some students need more guidance in life than others.

Gamila's community did not have an afterschool program because of the continuous violence. Her expectation of the community and home school was to be given a "fair" second chance free of "bias or judgment." Gamila has the determination to keep moving forward by using her past mistake as fuel for success. Growing up in her community, she knew that she wanted more out of life using education as her mode of transportation.

The experience Gamila had in an alternative school with the threat of violence from students helped her to develop a positive relationship with a few teachers, and her counselor. "I had someone that I could talk to when I had problems that I felt I couldn't handle." She would

often go home and tell her mother and grandmother about the day she had at school. Gamila knew that she had the support of her mother and grandmother. Her family did not tell her what she wanted to hear; they told her what she needed to know so that she could rise above each situation. Gamila's main support came from her son. She knew firsthand the destruction that came from violence. Therefore, she promised herself that she would be a positive role model for her son knowing that it is "critical" for his "development and success."

The grades Gamila received at the alternative school were not a true representation of her academic progress. The work there was easier and less challenging. Her goal was to complete assignments because she did not want to be delayed any more days than necessary. The readjustment back to her regular school was difficult for several weeks. Her assignments were challenging, her class size was larger, and she had to readjust to all her teachers.

Living in a rough neighborhood being labeled as a snitch would not offer any protection. Transferred to alternative school, Gamila realized that she should have utilized her teachers, counselor, and assistant principals to intervene on her behalf. She did not want the stigma of being a snitch and settled her confrontations with what she knew best; "fighting." Through alternative school and counseling, Gamila has learned how to combat violence by talking and writing down her thoughts. She has taught other students to ask their favorite teacher or counselor for help with "any issue."

Gamila used her experience to bring about a positive change for her and the small group of friends in her circle. She was able to address the root of her issue associated with violence "feeling sorry/making excuses for the learned behavior." She was comfortable enough to ask for help when the pressures of life were too much to bear. She refused to become a statistic of dropping out of school and receiving hand-outs from the government. She realized that hard

work would help her get ahead in life and she was very excited to be the first in her family to attend and graduate from college.

Imhotep

Imhotep was an only child raised in a middle-class neighborhood with his mother and father. The family attended church weekly experiencing faith and love through community worship. His parents worked in the school system where they valued education as paramount. Imhotep excelled in elementary school. In middle school, some of his classmates would ridicule him because of his grades. His parents sheltered him as much as they could at home and spoke with the school administration for support at school. The constant ridicule for being called a bookworm took its toll on Imhotep in high school.

Imhotep begins to fight at school which caused him to receive 10 days of suspension. Being at home unsupervised, he would wander aimlessly throughout the neighborhood. "I was fascinated with the street life; school I really didn't care much about it because the shit was boring, so I was turned to living in the streets." He started skipping school to hang out with the local ruffians. His parents tried desperately to keep him engaged in school, but he was too involved with street life. When he did attend school, his behavior was so disruptive that the school officials were forced to send him to an alternative school.

The first alternative school Imhotep attended "was a fucked-up situation." Most of the students he had problems with at his home school also attended the same alternative school. The second alternative school was out of the county. "I felt like the teachers hated me and hated to see me come since I came from a different county." His peers in the alternative school thought he was privileged "but shit to tell the truth I was no more privileged and then them mother fuckers." Imhotep was constantly on guard because at any moment he would have to defend himself from

his peers. When confronted by his peers, he "had to step up my game and knock them mother fuckers in the head before they was able to knock me in the head." He did not last long before attending his third alternative school. Three alternative schools later Imhotep completed his expulsion and returned to his home school.

The transition from alternative school to regular school was not a pleasant experience for Imhotep. His teachers and assistant principals constantly pointed out his "past mistakes." After returning from an alternative school, Imhotep hoped that he would receive a fresh start back to school. Despite being placed under the spotlight he tried desperately to change his image. However, Imhotep past plagued him throughout his short high school years. He wanted counseling to "fix what is broken inside of me" and he did not know how to ask for help.

His parents tried desperately to help him to graduate from high school. His dad offered to buy him a car if he stays in school and graduates. Instead, Imhotep was too deep into street life because he learned how to hotwire cars. He begins to steal cars to save himself "the fucking trouble of graduating." The community support was not there for him. He hoped the local community center "offered a safe place for us to hang out after school." He also wanted a mentorship program that taught "me how to survive in the street."

Imhotep found it difficult to return to school because his assistant principal informed him that if you "do anything else wrong" he would get "kicked out of school." Therefore, he limited his school week to two days per week. This meant that he could spend five days in the streets perfecting his unlawful behavior. It was not long after returning from expulsion that he would have trouble with the law which caused him to drop out of school.

For Imhotep, expulsion was not the best way for him to get reformed. He was constantly on guard for his safety because some of the same students he had problems with at his regular

school were also sent to an alternative school. He describes the alternative school as "being a lion in the jungle." He had to be bold and make all the students "fear me." The alternative school brought out the rage for hurting other students, and the training Imhotep received from the streets provided him with the training he needed to survive in an alternative school.

His parents poured all their available resources into getting Imhotep "a great lawyer" so that he would not go to jail. He knew once the school labeled him as "violent" it increased his chances of entering the school-to-prison pipeline. He once faced "life without parole" for his mischievous acts. His lawyer was able to get the charges reduced and he was placed on probation. Being a high school dropout and with no formal education, Imhotep "hooked on street life" continued to stay in trouble with the law until he finally spent some time in a juvenile detention center.

Jabari

Jabari was the eldest of his twin brothers. He was born in New York in a single-family home. His mother did not feel comfortable raising her two sons in New York. She decided to move south to give her kids a better environment to succeed. Early in elementary school, Jabari was in trouble. His mother did not know what to do to help control some of Jabari's energy, so she placed him in several clubs, one being Boy Scout. With the positive male presence, she hoped that being around male figures; the Boy Scout's leader would provide the discipline needed to help Jabari become a productive citizen.

Jabari was an adventurous young man that spoke out when frustrated. At a youthful age, he did not understand the words that he used towards his fellow students and his teachers could get him into trouble. Being placed in an alternative school was the wake-up call he needed to get refocused so that he may graduate high school. Once he returned to his home school, he was

behind academically. His counselor placed him in a self-paced computer class where he could get caught up academically. His teacher in the self-paced class was the right fit for him because she kept him on task and provided him with the support to succeed.

His counselor placed him into classes where the teachers had patience and were willing to give him the support needed to succeed. Jabari often spoke with two teachers in the building to get support for schoolwork as well as offer him guidance whenever he felt that life was too unbearable for him. His zeal for knowledge was contagious in all his classes which made him a model student once he returned to his home school. Jabari understood that his teachers were there to help him succeed and he felt comfortable asking for help.

Jabari's family relocated from Brooklyn, NY. to Atlanta, GA. His mother knew that the neighborhood in Brooklyn was a recruiting community for the gang. There would be gunshots ringing throughout the neighborhood at times bullets would strike the buildings. The decision to move down south was easy. The family relocated from the suburbs of Atlanta to a middle-class neighborhood. His mother prayed that the change to a safer environment would be the rehabilitation Jabari needed to get focused on school and eventually graduate.

Jabari's neighborhood was filled with houses, there was no local park, and the community center was on the other side of town. There was no public transportation that Jabari could take to get to the community center. Therefore, he would take an Uber or wait for his mother so that he could go to the community center. Jabari said the community center is nice however, he wished that the community center offered "smaller community classes that will offer support on schoolwork." His mother's prayers are answered her son values education after being removed from public school he understands that education is the key or opening doors of opportunity.

Jabari wants to open a small business selling and trading retroactive sneakers. The difficulty in his opportunity for business is the level of rigor at his regular school. At the alternative school, most assignments were on a computer with little teacher-student engagement. His counselor provided him with the teachers that could support him best. The assistant principal would check on him offering him guidance in his readjustment. Since Jabari skipped class often, he was not able to progress at the level that he could when he returned from the alternative school. When Jabari became frustrated at his coursework, he was allowed to visit one of the two teachers that could calm him down.

Jabari had a considerable amount of help from his teachers' counselors and administrators at his regular school however, he stated "the supporters like my family I got like it's really my family because only like I know they wanted me to succeed." The difficulties he did receive came from his unwillingness to turn in his assignments on time. His mother checked his grades constantly to ensure that he was turning the assignments in on time, also she encouraged him to redo his low grades so that he may continue to grow academically.

Lateef

Lateef spent his youthful years growing up north in Massachusetts. He comes from a large family where he was the second to the last of his siblings. His parents moved down south before he entered middle school. His parents often praised him for his academic accomplishments and provided him with a neutering home so that he could weather the difficulty he would face as a preteen. In middle school, Lateef was content being an outsider as he watched other students interact with each other. In high school, Lateef became friends with a few of the students from his middle school.

Lateef was sent to an alternative school, and he took full credit for his actions "I should not have pity for myself. Life do not owe me nothing I must get things for myself." In alternative school, he had a few close friends that helped him cope with each day's uncertainty. He established positive relationships with his teachers knowing that his teachers wanted him to succeed. He also participated in the mentorship program offered. Lateef stated the mentor program offered "a lot of life skills, a lot of like things I need to know, and things I like." Lateef succeeded in alternative school because he kept a limited number of friends, classes were smaller, and he developed positive relationships with his teachers.

He felt welcome as he returned to his home school. The assistant principal would speak as they passed each other in the halls, his teachers provided him with the instructional support needed, and his counselor registered him for night classes to help him get on grade level. Lateef took advantage of the mentorship program at the alternative school. After returning to his home school, Lateef asked one of his teachers to become his mentor which was beneficial as he continues to learn life skills.

There was no community support provided in his neighborhood. His family always supported Lateef. His family checked his grades to ensure he was on track for graduation. His mother encouraged him to attend afterschool tutoring, and his family reminded him that his past actions do not define his future. Being supported and loved, Lateef continued to make strides in becoming a model student in school, in the community, and at home.

He was not upset at his teachers or administration staff after receiving his expulsion because his family constantly reminded him that education helps accomplish dreams. For Lateef, going to the alternative school brought his education into focus. He had smaller classes with fewer distractions, the school was structured so that the students were not congregating in a

particular location, and he was able to catch up academically. Lateef hoped that his community

would offer a center where students go after school to play games, get tutored in academic

subjects, and receive mentorship.

For Lateef, it was difficult for him to adjust to being in larger classes. His mind would often

wander as he waited for his teacher to give him one-on-one instruction. Knowing his goal and his

family's expectation was for him to graduate, he attended tutoring weekly. As time passed and

attending tutoring, Lateef adjusted to being in larger classes. Lateef knew after graduation he was

not ready for college he planned to work and see what opportunities were presented.

Menes

Menes was a sophomore in high school when he went to an alternative school. He grew

up South of Atlanta in the suburbs of a middle-class environment. He played park league football

until middle school. Once he went to high school, he found his passion was in JROTC. His high

school had a Marine JROTC, and Menes knew that he wanted to join the military. At one time he

thought about joining the Marine Corps before being placed in the alternative school. After

completing his stay at the alternative school, Menes returned to his home school. The support

was not there for him. He stated, "My ROTC instructors even held the mistake over my head,

and it made it tough for me to earn their trust again."

Menes knew that his mistake would define his future. While at the alternative school, he

remained separated from the other students. His main goal was to complete the program and

return to his home school and show his parents that he was not a problem child. Spending time in

a juvenile detention center, he focused on which path he wanted to walk. It was to study and pass

the ASVAB, join the Army, and serve as a mechanic.

At the alternative school, Menes knew of some students that were showing up but not making progress to complete the program. The relationship that he had with his peers at the alternative school was mediocre. As he transitioned back to his home school, the support was non-existent. His guidance counselor and other teachers frowned on him because he was sent to an alternative school.

The community in which he grew up did not have any clubs or organizations that supported the youth. It was the love and support from his parents that made him realize that his mistake would not change the future that he had planned for himself. While in the alternative school, he was placed in a business class, giving him life skills. Menes analyzed the application of profits and sales helped him to visualize how to make a profit. This gave him the strength each day to put in the work and complete his courses.

Menes's difficulties in returning to his home school were the lack of support he received from his administrators, and teachers. His teachers knew that he made a mistake, and they would not let him leave their classroom because he commits another offense that may result in sending him back to an alternative school. He felt since he completed his expulsion and could return to his home school, he should be treated the same as other students. However, he did not receive the same treatment. His friends did not continue the same relationship with him as he returned. He felt like a misplaced student as he walked down the hallways of his school. He wanted to graduate, join the military, and forget that time after returning from an alternative school.

Sadiki

Sadiki is now a full-time college student that works a part-time job and is a single parent to a 3-year-old male. She grew up in a small community located outside of Savannah, Georgia. She lived in a community filled with love and support. With eight siblings, they were raised by

their mother and her grandmother on her father's side of the family. Her father was not present

for most of her life leaving her to receive male support system from the community.

Sadiki was involved in sports and popular amongst the students at her high school until

she was sent to an alternative school. While at the alternative school, her popularity was replaced

with an awkward feeling of loneliness. Surrounded by students she had nothing in common,

Sadiki did not make friends at the alternative school. She compared the alternative school to jail,

and the students there created mayhem. She stayed clear of the students to ensure her stay was

not extended at the alternative school. Her goal was to keep her head down, complete her work,

and return to her home school.

The alternative school had some teachers that were pleasant to speak with and get

directions on returning to her home school. However, there were a few teachers that had a bad

attitude, and she knew to stay clear of those teachers. Returning to her home school, the

administration did not provide her with a smooth transition. Sadiki would have benefited from a

mentor program to help her get adjusted back to her home school. Sadiki did receive support

from an old coach that she could ask for guidance when the pressures of school were more than

she could bear. She and her coach agreed that she must choose a new group of friends. She

selected her friends that focused more on academics instead of popularity.

Sadiki's transition back to her home school was not a smooth transition due to the

curriculum taught at the alternative school not aligning with her home school curriculum. The

administration did not provide her with the support structure needed to get readjusted, and she

felt that she was being judged for her past mistakes. She also felt that if the teachers deemed her

actions aggressive it could result in her being removed from class and the possibility of her

returning to an alternative school. Sadiki wanted to blend in with the rest of the students,

graduate, and head off to college. However, Sadiki felt that every day she was at school she was being looked down upon because of the mistake that sent her to an alternative school.

The community that Sadiki lived in as a high school student was a family-oriented unit. The community did not have any clubs or activity centers for the youth to attend after school. She stated: ". . . family wise they were a big help on my transition back because it was a lot for me emotionally." Her mother and grandmother provided her with the mental and emotional support needed to complete high school.

Taafeef

Taafeef grew up on the outskirts of Atlanta in a two-parent home. His two parents were not the traditional mother-and-father two-parent household. He was raised by his mother and grandmother. His mother was pregnant in her junior year of high school. Being young and pregnant, she decided to end high school before graduation. She worked several jobs trying to provide for her son. His father was a football star in high school, and he was offered a Division I football scholarship. His father abandoned his family leaving the mother to struggle to provide for her son. His mother moved often trying to survive off the income that she received from the jobs she worked. Taafeef attended several schools; therefore, he was unable to make friends.

By the time he made it to middle school, his mother moved in with her mother Taafeef's grandmother for support and stability. Taafeef was excited when they lived with his grandmother because he would get a chance to attend the same high school as his mother, and father, and many of his "cousins went there." His mother now with two children dated and later married their "stepdad." The family remained crowded in his grandmother's two-bedroom apartment for "like the first 2-3 years" of his mother's marriage. The neighborhood begins to change with time.

There was more "section 8" low-income housing, the crime rate was rising, and drugs began infiltrating the streets.

His mother decided that it was time to move again thus the family moved to the next neighboring county. This move for Taafeef made him feel uncomfortable because he saw "actual livestock", "Caucasian" people living in the neighborhood, and "white inside of the same classroom." Taafeef's felt his conversation was awkward in nature because he thought the students were "uppity." His mother is "a stickler for grades" Taafeef maintained a "3.2" grade point average. Therefore, he was not uncomfortable in the classroom because he knew that he could compete with any student in his class.

Taafeef tried out and made the varsity basketball team, and like his father, he was a natural athlete. He begins to feel accepted as he excelled in the classroom and on the basketball court. His teachers praised him for making a positive impact in the classroom. The assistant principals spoke highly of him for being a model student-athlete. Taafeef received various recruitment letters from several Division I and Division II Colleges/Universities to attend their school and play basketball. He now understands why his mother decided to move which allowed Taafeef better opportunities for success. For him, the move felt like "peaches and cream" the community had a crime rate of less than two percent, the educational system was better, the school took students on college campus field trips, and invited local community businesses to help plan future careers.

Taafeef's "peaches and cream" suddenly turned into heartache and pain as he was sent to an alternative school for breaking the school's zero-tolerance policy. His mother was heartbroken when the school informed her that Taafeef would get expelled and sent to an alternative school for the remainder of the school year. When he entered alternative school, it felt

like "a prison." Each day, the security guard "pat me down" searching for contraband, he was stripped of his "individuality" and "creativity," and he was escorted throughout the building. His mother "fought" to overturn his expulsion by having him return to his home school. Nevertheless, her request was denied, and she removed him from the alternative school program.

Taafeef was angry and blamed himself for being removed from high school for the remainder of the school year. His mother did not want his attitude to stand in the way of him receiving his high school diploma, therefore, she decided to send him to stay with his father. Taafeef had to adjust to his father's way of discipline because he would stay there for the remainder of the school year. He contacted his mother several times wanting to return home, yet she stood her ground and told him he was at home. She told him to learn what you need to know to become a man.

Taafeef received a letter from the school notifying them that he was cleared to return to school beginning the following school year. His assistant principal became a male role model the type of person he did not have in his life as a youth or young adulthood. The assistant principal placed Taafeef in a program called "The Fresh Start Initiative." The program meets every Wednesday where he had to "dress up in a shirt" and "tie", sit in the front of every class, and keep his grades above a 75 average. His teachers complimented him on his attitude and respect for his peers. The program gave him confidence and pride where he could walk the hallways "without having to pick up drama." He also did not have to fit his previous persona of being a "class clown" or "a cool guy."

As a young man, moving constantly caused Taafeef to lash out in anger towards other students for being the brunt of their jokes. Throughout high school, he continued to take "anger management courses" to help manage his emotions. One particular day in class he heard some of

the students refer to him as "a thug" and he "look angry all the time." Taafeef exploded in a violent rage the teacher tried to calm him down, but he was still enraged over the comments they made towards him. As he left the classroom, he heard one of his "white teachers" describe him as "the bad kid." He responded, "we ain't no bad kids, we just don't take no shit." Taafeef was unable to change the hearts and minds of most of his teachers once he returned from expulsion.

The assistant principal established a program with a partnership in the community. Taafeef received mentorship from positive role models within the community. He was able to express himself and find positive solutions to problems encountered at school and in the neighborhood. His mother also ensured that he receive counseling so that he would not "get triggered by" others' perceptions of him being "called a gang member." Taafeef received the positive support needed to become a productive citizen he was therefore offered a basketball scholarship at a Division I University.

Taafeef received a basketball scholarship which gave him the confidence that his past performance would not impede his future endeavors. However, he did not accept the scholarship instead he worked locally to help his mother to continue to live a stable life. Throughout my journey of attending several elementary schools, the constant moving, and getting expelled from high school. Taafeef's mother was the glue that helped him keep his life together. Her experience from dropping out of high school laid the foundation for him to obtain his high school diploma. By moving to a better neighborhood, the community provided him with the protection needed to live a better life. Nevertheless, it was the love and strength he received from my mother that helped him stay the course.

Taafeef's assistant principal, counselor, and several teachers welcomed him back to school. Conversely, some of the teachers and students had the perception he was a "scare big

angry black guy." Hearing the whispering rumors around the school kept Taafeef on guard looking mad. His younger brother also attended the same high school. His younger brother participated in theater, the step team, and the student cheer section. Consequently, as his "little brother" entered high school Taafeef's "reputation" was cast down on his brother. His younger brother was admired by the teachers and students yet, "as soon as he touched that campus" he was placed in "project Fresh Start." This was a result of Taafeef "getting expelled."

Despite the perception of being labeled "the bad kid", "a thug", or "scare big angry black guy" Taafeef was determined to finish high school. "The Fresh Start Initiative", positive role models in the community, and his mother's lack of completing high school gave him the motivation on days when he felt like giving up. Returning to the basketball team and having his assistant principal while he was at school, Taafeef was able to calm down when certain teachers provoked him. He worked hard in the classroom, chose his friends carefully, stayed on the course graduated, and saw the joy his diploma gave his mother.

Waaiz

Waaiz was born in New York as an infant his parents relocated to Georgia. The community where he lived was typical of Southern living. Neighbors provided watch over the houses and children as they played in the neighborhood. Waaiz was a mild student that stays to himself at school. At times during school, some students would bother him because of his New York accent. He would do his best to defuse the situation by walking away, telling his teachers, or letting his parents know how he was treated at school.

The principal and assistant principal often commended Waaiz for his behavior while at school. With the passing of each school day, it was a matter of time before Waaiz would succumb to the pressure of other students backing him into a corner. He finally released his

anger and frustration to defend himself. Entering an alternative school, he wished that he could

have found a way to avoid his actions. He understands that he must think before he acts. Waaiz

did not make any friends "Honestly, I had no friends not even a little bit, and stuff like that. Most

of the students wanted to get in trouble and stay at school because the work was easy. I stayed

clear of the trouble and was glad I had no friends." He was determined to keep his head down,

complete his work, and return to his regular school.

Returning to his home school, Waaiz "learned to think before I act" because he knew that

"alternative school was not fun. His assistant principal respected him because he mostly stayed

to himself and didn't want to cause any trouble. His perception of some of his teachers was not

pleasant because he thought they did not like him when he was in their class therefore, he would

cut class. He was placed back into his original schedule with some of his teachers, which made it

hard for him because of his past. He would talk with the assistant principal in passing for support

with some of his teachers. When asked if his school offered a mentor program he responded

"Unah we didn't have that."

Growing up in a neighborhood where the neighbors cared for and looked out for each

other Waaiz felt safe and protected. He enjoyed going outside and knowing that he was safe and

protected. However, he felt the one thing his neighborhood needed was a Community Center

offering after-school tutoring. He wanted the classes to be small enough so that he could focus,

complete his homework, and learn how to study to graduate. His mother would check his grades

and remind him daily to stay focused in school.

Alternative school was the wake-up call needed for Waaiz to attend all his classes daily.

He stated: "I take school seriously now because I understand how education can help change my

life." He faced difficulties once returning to his home school: larger classes, less teacher

interaction, and academic rigor. The teachers at his regular school provide guided learning and assigned homework. Waaiz did not want to stay after school for tutoring instead he wanted to go home because he was not comfortable sitting in class for long periods. His mother reminded him that his goal was to go to school and graduate to begin living the life he envisioned. His goal was to graduate from high school, get a job, and make something out of himself. College was not in his future because he didn't enjoy sitting in class listening to his teachers explain the assignments.

Results

The data collection for this research study started with the individual interviews conducted over Microsoft Teams. There were 17 participants who volunteered to participate in the research study. The participants were narrowed down to 10 participants who committed to conducting the individual interview and journal questionnaire. There were four of the 10 participants who also volunteered to conduct the focus group. The 10 individual interviews were conducted remotely over Microsoft Teams. The focus group was conducted in an empty classroom at one of the local high schools. The journal questions were emailed to each participant. The participant's emailed their questionnaire back to the researcher. The individual interviews and a focus group interview were recorded over Microsoft Teams and stored on a computer in a password protected file. The journal questionnaire was also stored on the same password protected computer as the individual interviews and focus group interview to protect the privacy and safety of each of the research participants. There is no identifying information in any of the data collected. Whereas the few instances potential identifiable information was provided, I stripped the identifying information from the collected data. Questions developed for

the individual interview, journal questionnaire, and the focus group were developed for the research questions in this research study.

Journal Questions

Journal questions were the second method of gathering data. The intent was to gain a deeper thought from participants. Interviews and focus groups require instantiations responses while journal questions allowed participants time to reflect on their experiences. The journal questions were conducted with participants in a natural setting at their home. The data collected was analyzed to foster a supportive environment for all students and provide support to ensure students graduate. Also, the data from the journal questions was used as a way to triangulate the data on the responses from the participants.

The results from the journal questions noted that the participants felt that some principals and teachers felt disgusted in some of the students getting into trouble and had to attend the alternative school. Several of the students noted in their journal questions that they pushed themselves very hard to pull their grades up so they could pass their classes at the alternative school. In addition, several of the students reported that the expulsion from their home school helped them see the need to change their behavior and develop different strategies to increase their academic and learning while at the alternative school.

Several of the students noted that they received support from the community through attending the boys and girls club tutoring programs and the mentoring program. This program also provided a safe environment where they could learn and grow as a person in the after-school program. Also, the alternative school helped them to see the need to change their negative behavior so they would not be part of the pipeline to prison where many students from low-income backgrounds end up due to their bad behavior. The students also noted in their journal

questions that listening to role models such as teachers, administrators' community leader and parents help them see the need to change their bad behavior. Excluding students from an educational setting increases poor student attendance and dropout rates which jeopardize their capital accrual. The most direct pathway from school to prison is through expelled students (Cuellar & Markowitz, 2015). Turning off the school-to-prison pipeline requires developing personal and professional knowledge concerning effective teaching and learning to better engage students (Wilson, 2014). This study is to understand how to offer support to students returning from an alternative school.

Focus Group Session

The focus group was the third source of data collection. The focus group was used to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' attitudes, feelings, beliefs, experiences, and the reaction to being transitioned back to their home school. A focus group was conducted with four of the participants. The order of data collection was chosen because I want to explore the individual opinions and experiences of the participants concerning transitioning back to their home school.

The results from the focus group session showed that several of the students expressed that going to the alternative school was a wakeup call for them in terms of seeing the need to stay out of trouble and completing high school. For example, Chisisi reported, "Going to alternative school gave me a wakeup call because I saw some of the same people that was at my regular school still getting in trouble. I know that I had to separate if I wanted to get myself back on track and graduate." Whereas, Asim noted, "Before getting expelled, I played around in school not caring too much about my grades. Arriving at the alternative school, I was learning at a grade level below what I was accustomed to learning. This new way of learning made me realize the

value of a quality education. I worked pushed myself to find ways to increase my learning."

Also, Taafeef reported, "going to the alternative school was a bad experience for me. It is a place I will make sure that I do not go again. It also helped me to see the need to complete high school and earn a diploma."

Several of the participants reported that they use several community programs to support them to increase their education and to use it as a safe place to go where they can play sports and receive counseling services. Some of these services include the boys and girls club, mentoring program and after school tutoring programs. Taafeef noted, I like the idea of using the community support for studying like in the library or the after-school programs. Whereas,

My mentor came to my games, he stayed on top of my grades. For me, it was just the total package. I had someone in my corner that I could express myself. I just loved everything about that, and the experience was phenomenal. My experience this program or a similar program would be amazing for the students that we have at Open Campus. At Open Campus, they have programs for students to adjust to their class.

All the participants in the focus group session reported that being expelled from their home school and going to the alternative school had a great impact on their views of the need to improve their negative behavior and the need to continue their education towards completion. For example, Asim and Gamila reported, going to the alternative school opened my eyes to stop my bad behavior and focus on my education and completing high school. Alternative schools signify an innovative approach to education which can be categorized into three broad types: schools of choice, behavior reassignment, and academic recovery (Perzigian et al., 2017; Raywid, 1994).

Theme Development

Developing themes during this qualitative phenomenological hermeneutic study helped to

better understand the lived experience of students' reintegration process back to their home

school following expulsion. Each part of the data collected using interviews, focus group session,

and journal questions were part of the larger part and was essential to the develop of the themes.

Codes are then used to develop descriptions of people and places. Codes also were used to

develop themes that present a broader abstraction than codes. Then themes may be layered or

organized to tell a story or may also be interconnected to portray the complexity of the

phenomenon. (Creswell, 2018, p. 4). Table 2 displays the results of the coding of the data

generated six themes from the data analysis.

Table 2

Themes Enumeration of Open-Code

Open-Codes	Enumeration of open-code appearance across data sets	Themes
Survival: Self-defense	2	Frustrating alternative school experiences
Personal development: Challenging environment	3	
Emotional Safety: Feeling judged	5	
Education: Negative school experience	6	
Injustice: Inequity	7	
Influence: Lack of support	6	
Education and personal development: Lack of guidance	6	
Security concerns: Perceived similarity to prison	5	
Security concerns: Hyper-vigilance	3	
Influence: Value of education	2	No relationship with peers
Personal development: Negative experience	4	
Injustice: Feeling of being an outcast	7	
Personal development: Belongingness	5	
Discrimination/Violence: Perceived discrimination	2	No support from teachers and

Academic Support: Disengaged academic experience	3	counselors in transition
Academic Support: Judgment	4	
Academic Support: Lack of academic support	8	
Values: Equality	3	
Education: Desire for leadership	2	
Influence: Ancestry	3	Support from family members
Influence: Role models	4	
Support network: Family support	8	
Values: Religion/Spirituality	4	
Goal attainment: Achievability	4	
Social determinants: Family	3	
Support network: Personal drive	3	
Alternative education experience: Empowerment	2	Coping strategies
Education and personal development: Personal development	4	
Education: Prevention strategies	5	
Personal development: Ambition	8	
Goal attainment: Overcoming obstacles	8	
Personal development: Mental health	7	
Values: Religion/Spirituality	4	
Resilience: Persistence	4	
Academic Support: Education	2	
Personal development: Self-improvement	2	Changes in behavior.
Influence: Role models	4	
Education and personal development: Mentorship	6	
Academic Support: School support	7	
Education and personal development: Positive role model	8	
Influence: Positive influence	6	
Values: Support	5	
Social determinants: Community	4	
Awareness: Awareness	3	

Theme 1: Frustrating Alternative School Experiences

Several of the participants noted that their alternative school experiences were frustrating

due to leaving their home school and going to a place where the teachers treat you like being in

jail. Also, some of the participants note that they felt stress often due to the way they were being

treated at the alternative school. Asim stated that they felt like being in jail each day while at the alternative school. Imhotep reported that the alternative school was a bad place for them to be during the year. They felt that the teachers did not do a good job in helping them with their academics. Also, Waaiz expressed that the small classes were a problem for him because he did not like small classes. On the other hand, Menes reported: my experience in an alternative school is somewhat good I had work that is assigned and teachers that were trying to get us back into the public school and, they were teaching us what we needed to know to pass the class and return to our main school. Alternative schools are designed to educate students who did not fit into regular school systems because of various behavioral problems (Kelchner et al., 2017).

Theme 2: No Relationship with Peers

Many of the participants interviewed reported that they had no meaningful relationship with other peers at the alternative school. Also, the participants noted that they did not come to the alternative school to make friends. Jabari reported, "my relationships were kind of mediocre I had one friend that uh, got kicked out a couple months after me so I knew one person and, it just happens that he lived in my neighborhood." Chisisi expressed, "I felt that I was at the alternative school not to make friend but to do my time and go back to my home school."

Lateef expressed, "I didn't. I didn't really have too many friends, but I had a few friends that I had we developed good relationship with which made a big difference to help me stay focused." Gamila noted, "I did not want to make friends there because like I said most of the students there were trying to do dumb stuff in order to stay at the alternative school." Taafeef reported, "I did not have time to make friends at the alternative, I was there because something bad happened to me at my home school." Whereas Sadiki noted, "I didn't make friends. Um I wasn't in there trying to make friends because I know that's ultimately not where I wanted to be."

Theme 3: No Support from Teachers and Counselors in Transition

Several of the students interviewed in this research study reported that they received little to no support from teachers and counselors in their transition back to their home school. Many of the students reported that their teachers and counselors did not help at all in their transition back to their home school. Chisisi reported "I did not receive any support from the counselor or my teachers when I moved back to home homes school." Jabari noted, the counselors and the teachers provided me with "Edginuity, night school, and teachers help me out" to make sure I was fine when moving back to my home school. Lateef expressed. "The counselor make sure that I received my grades so that I could move on in high school." Imhotep noted, "I am not sure my teachers knew that I came from the alternative school. Also, I don't think they cared about the transition." Whereas, Sadiki reported, "I didn't receive any support um the only support I received was um, an old um coach that I had and um she tried what she could try. I mean, she tried everything she could to kind of help me get adjusted to the new setting."

Theme 4: Support from Family Members

Several of the participants reported that they received help from different family members in their transition process to their home school after attending the alternative school. Also, the participants noted that family members such as their father, mother, and siblings. These family members provided emotional support and financial support in their quest to increase their academic achievement. Sadiki and Chisisi reported, "My overall support have come from my father. He provides a lot of emotional support through the alternative school process and returning to my home school." Lateef expressed, "I received support from my mother in the transition from the alternative school. She was always there for me in providing advice whenever

I need the advice." Whereas Gamila reported, "It was basically my mother and the drive that I have to ensure that my son did not experience some of the things that I experienced."

Theme 5: Coping Strategies

The participants reported from the interviews that they have some problems with coping strategies in their transition efforts back to their home school. The participants noted that the mentoring programs did not place emphasis on transitioning back to their home school. Menes reported, "I really, it started with me knowing that when I woke up and had to go to school the drive wasn't the closest, so it was kind of just out the way for starters. As far as school the alternative school should have taught me some coping strategies so I could adjust better back at my home school." Asim noted, "It is hard leaving your former school and go to an alternative school. I did not know what to expect at first and the new school. It would be nice to get help on academic success at the new school." Chisisi and Gamila stated, "I did not learn many strategies because like I said the teachers were not friendly and did not make the assignments complicated at all." Jabari expressed, "I feel that the alternative school should have done more on life skills for new students in the programs. It was hard for me to adjust to the new situation here."

Waaiz stated, "I learned to think before I act. The alternative school was not fun, I don't want to go back. I don't know like, but I don't think the teacher and the principal like me." Asim noted, "One thing I learn at the alternative school was to think before you act and that your negative actions can cause you problems in life." Whereas, Menes explained, "I learned to cope with the situation at hand and do what it takes to finish my time at the alternative school."

Theme 6: Changes in Behavior

The participants in the interviews reported that attending the alternative school had caused them to change their behavior. Some of the participants reported that they had a negative

behavior toward school and their situations in life, but the alternative school helped them to develop a more positive attitude toward life. For example, Sadiki noted, "I definitely straightened up. Um I became more focused on my academics rather than popularity. Um definitely chose my friends why I chose, you know, better people to hang out with sometimes." Jabari stated, I can say that the alternative school help me to change my behavior and the way I thought about things in life." Menes reported, "The alternative school help in me changing my attitude in life and helped to me to have a more positive outlook on life." Lateef reported, I can say that I have made several changes in my behavior as a result of going to the alternative school. Lateef noted, "The alternative school was a change agent for me with negative attitudes about school and life." Taafeef reported, the alternative school helped me to reduce my problem behavior in class. "I was sent there for bad behavior, and it changed my behavior because it felt like you were in jail there."

<div style="text-align:center">Research Question Responses</div>

The purpose of the research questions was to understand the lived experiences students perceived as difficulties transitioning from the alternative school to their home school. This research revealed lack of academic support made the transition difficult for most of the students because the curriculum was easier than their home school. Family support was instrumental in helping the students emotionally as they transitioned to the alternative school and returned to their home school. Most of the students as they transitioned to their home school felt like outcasts because they lost friends, the work was challenging as compared to the alternative school, and they did not receive support from some of their administrators and teachers. Research revealed that expulsion is not an effective way to ensure a safe school for all students (Skiba & Losen, 2016). School leaders must have an open line of communication with parents

and the community to help with effective school reform on discipline (Skiba & Losen, 2016).

Table 3 displays the results of the coding of the data generated for each response question.

Table 3

Research Question Enumeration of Open-Code

Open-Codes	Enumeration of open-code appearance across data sets	Research Question
Academic achievement	2	How does the student perceive their home campus, teachers, counselors, and administrators provide support to transition formerly expelled students back to their home campus?
Academic Support: Disengaged academic experience	3	
Academic Support: Education	2	
Academic Support: Judgment	4	
Academic Support: Lack of academic support	8	
Academic Support: Negative school experience	5	
Academic Support: Transition support	4	
Academic Support: Trust issues	3	
Support network: Community support	3	What family and community supports are provided for expelled students returning to school?
Support network: Family support	8	
Support network: Resilience	6	
Survival: Adaptation to environment	5	
Emotional Safety: Criticism	3	What do formerly expelled students attending an alternative high school program perceive as difficulties in the reentry process?
Attention: Distraction	2	
Education: Negative school experience	6	
Emotional Safety: Feeling judged	5	
Emotional Safety: Violence	5	
Influence: Lack of support	6	
Injustice: Feeling of being an outcast	7	

Research Question One

How does the student perceive their home campus, teachers, counselors, and
administrators' transition support for returning students in their home campus? As the students
transitioned back to their home school, they received little to no support. Sadiki stated, "Um I
didn't receive any support um the only support I received was um, a old um coach." Upon her

initial return, Sadiki was lost. She placed her trust and confidence in her coach as she made her adjustments back to school. Attending an alternative school was the wakeup call Lateef needed. His counselors placed him in classes where the teacher would not give up on him. However, Imhotep being a problematic student, his assistant principals repeatedly warned him, "if I do anything else wrong and I was getting kicked out of school." Constantly seeing his assistant principals and listening to the speech, Imhotep "decided to save them the trouble and kick myself out of school." Lateef's calm demeanor impressed his teachers at the alternative school. Most of his teachers "showed me that they wanted me to get out of here." His teachers saw the light in Lateef therefore, "a lot of them wanted want me to succeed after this." Chisisi stated, "Umm I'll say it was no support from the school but more my family and my sister."

Chisisi's family support helped her get through the tough times of returning from an alternative school. Taafeef heard one of his "white teachers" refer to the students returning from alternative school as "bad kids." Taafeef could deal with the students' comments, yet, he felt that his teachers were there for support. After hearing his teacher's comment, he decided to respond, saying, "we ain't no bad kids. We just don't take no shit." Menes's transition back was unpleasant because of his past. His teachers "frowned on me" for his mistake and "wouldn't want me to leave the classroom."

Some of the students at the alternative school commented that the school's curriculum was not aligned with that of their home school. Asim noted, "I doubt it was the same work from their school. Because the way the teachers give it, just like plain simple, worksheets and this and that, there's no real curriculum." Asim felt as if the teacher was giving them worksheets to keep them busy and occupied throughout the school day. He knew that once he returned to his home school, he would have to work harder just to get back to the level of rigor like the other students.

Gamila stated, "I lowered myself to do just enough work in order to pass. When I got back to my regular school, I had to step up my game. It was difficult in the beginning, but I knew I wanted more out of life, so I kept pushing myself harder and harder to graduate with good grades and to attend college." For other students who have attended an alternative school, it was the place for them to get caught up on the classes so they would be back on grade level. Menes stated, "I just did what I needed to do to pass the class and they gave me a grade for the ability, the work that I put in."

Several students had frustrating alternative school experiences. Asim, Taafeef, and Sadiki noted that their alternative school experiences were frustrating due to leaving their home school and going to a place where "the teachers treat you like being in jail." Asim stated, "It felt like as soon as I stepped in, I was in prison." He also noted, "Umm. . . it was a ton of police officers like it was almost ah a police station." Sadiki compared the alternative school to jail, and the students there created mayhem. Gamila stated, "the teachers were not very friendly, and the work was much easier than what I was accustomed to." Gamila being a strong-willed individual, knew the path ahead would be hard. She wanted to be welcomed back free of any "bias or judgement." Nor did she want any "handouts or favors", only to be granted "a fair second chance to make something of myself."

When students are not provided with the proper support after returning from an alternative school, they tend to look elsewhere for support. Imhotep stated, "it's like being a lion in the jungle you know the lion is the baddest mother fucker in there and he can eat whatever he wants to eat, and the rest of the animals are scared to come near." Imhotep found what he thought was his family in the streets using violence to survive. Several students stated they

wanted to receive counseling to help control their anger issues. As noted by Gamila, "the neighborhood where I grew up, violence was the answer to solving any and every situation."

Research Question Two

What family and community supports are provided for expelled students returning to school? Most of the students transitioning back to their home school credited their families for the transitional support. Chisisi came from a large family with eight siblings, and they were tough on her. At times, Chisisi "disrespected her" mom and sister for "tell me when I am doing wrong." The relationship was rocky, and being sent to an alternative school did not help. However, when Chisisi returned to her home school and the pressure was too great for her to handle on her own, "they still pushed me. They were just like you still can do it just because we are mad at each other, don't mean nothing."

When Sadiki was sent to the alternative school, the stress left her feeling helpless. She felt as if she had let everyone who loved her down. Sadiki felt that she was in a dark place, yet it was her "family definitely uplifted me and kind of carried me along and get me back on track." Menes felt the love and support from his family. He wanted to prove to his parents that their love and support helped him to become a productive citizen. His father told him to "tighten up in short words so, you know I just kind of did my best to stay on my best behavior."

The community was also an important factor in students transitioning back to their school. Lateef being grateful for his transition back to his home school, hoped that his community had a center to help "doing our homework." Whereas in Taafeef's community, he received a mentor, and he was placed in a program to help him become a better man. Taafeef was excited to have a black leader, and he felt comfortable because he had "black men that I was able to relate." Taafeef became a better student as a result of having his mentor from his

community. Taafeef stated, "I had someone in my corner that I could express myself." Chisisi stated, "I also think that the school should offer counseling around our neighborhood. Sometimes, I need someone other than my family to talk to about what I am feeling."

The students understood there was a need for community support services to help with the transition back to an alternative school. Asim noted the community should offer "a boys and girls club for high school age students" with programs to include "tutoring, mentoring, and a safe place to play games and hang out." In Chisisi's community, there was no supervised place for students to "relax before going home." She hoped the community would offer "dance or offer a sports program" as well as "counseling around our neighborhood" that could help her "stay calm." Imhotep wished that the community "offered a safe place for us to hang out after school." He also wished that the school did "a better job" by affording him the opportunity "to have someone I could talk to when I was about to get into more trouble." In Georgia, one of the counties with a high rate of expelled students implemented a program that identified mentors in the community to provide support for students transitioning back to their home school (Thomas, 2014).

Research Question Three

What do formerly expelled students attending an alternative high school program perceive as difficulties in the reentry process? Students transitioning back to their home school had no relationships with peers. Taafeef noted, "when I walked into the room, some people were still scared of me." Some of his classmates told him, "You just look angry." Taafeef had a perception of being a violent student, and "I hate that perception." When he returned to school, he wanted to be treated the same as the other students. However, he was not afforded the same treatment. Some of his classmates called him "a thug" or thought he was a "gang member."

Taafeef thought, because of his perception, that he "got suspended for a second time." Taafeef simply wanted "a chance" for everyone "to get to know me." Asim felt abandoned after returning to his home school. Asim stated, "People I would have considered friends at first. After not seeing me for about a whole year, they about forgot who I was, so I knew that wasn't a real friendship." Taafeef thought his friends treated him cold, "so shut up and do you work." Chisisi expressed, "I mean you had girl that you know they didn't like me. Yes, they wanted to fight me you know, but I didn't entertain it."

Some students did not receive any coping strategies as they transitioned back to their home school. They faced the challenge of peer abandonment. Sadiki's emotional trauma came from some of her peers' behavior, as she "felt like, you know, I was looked down upon." Menes stated, "transitioning back to my home school, I had lost friends because of my situation." He understood that he had made a mistake, but he didn't think that his closest friends would distance themselves from him. The isolation from his friends forced him to work harder in school, positioning himself for "joining the military", and graduating. Attending an alternative school is challenging because you're in a new environment, you have teachers who are unfamiliar with your personality, and the students often challenge you for territory. As Imhotep stated, "school was not teaching me what I needed to survive on the streets," yet his expulsion helped him to "understand how to survive in the jungle." Sadiki noted, "I felt like I was being judged, but no one ever said anything." When students returned to their home school, they expected their friends to welcome them back into the fold. Asim stated, "people I would have considered friends at first. After not seeing me for about a whole year, they about forgot who I was, so I knew that wasn't a real friendship."

Several students could benefit from speaking with a mental health counselor in their community. Taafeef's experience of being removed from school left him with deep emotional trauma "I sometime feel mentally wrong from that experience, and I really need psychiatric help." Gamila is a strong-willed and resilient individual. She was determined not to let her past mistakes close the doors to her future. However, her childhood environment was triggered while attending an alternative school. Gamila stated, "I was forced to utilize the tools I learned in alternative school and counseling to combat violent thoughts." The negative attention Taafeef received caused him to speak with a "therapist" because students and some of his teachers were "Pinpointing me as something that I'm not."

Returning from an alternative school changed some students' behavior. For Sadiki, it took an emotional toll on her because there was no support plan. Sadiki stated, "the fact that I had myself in that situation, it really um had an effect on me mentally, so my family definitely uplifted me and kind of carried me along to get me back on track." Menes received support from "family members like my father." The love and support he received from his family made Menes change his behavior; therefore, he wanted to ensure his parents were not "raising a juvenile."

Gamila felt she had three strikes against her. She was Black, a vocal female, and had a son before graduating high school. Returning from alternative school, she did not "want any handouts or favors" her only request was "to be granted a fair second chance to make something of myself." The neighborhood where she was raised was not the neighborhood for her son; she "wanted to create a different narrative for my son so that he would not have the difficulties that I did growing up." She knew the transition would be difficult for her because, as a defense mechanism, Gamila "resorted to violence instead of communicating with my peers, teachers, and counselors." Imhotep transition was not difficult for him because he "was transitioning out of

high school." He eventually dropped out of high school as he looked back over his decision: "if I can go back in time and change some shit on how it took school" I would have taken my education "seriously."

Imhotep understands the message his parents told him about getting an education to compete in society, "because now life is hard for a mother fucker." Students returning from the alternative school want the same dignity and respect as the other students in the school. The school district must coordinate with other agencies within the community to offer mental health services, as well as coordinate with business leaders, to help support teachers and students (Skiba & Losen, 2016).

Summary

In this chapter, I presented the findings from the data analysis. Phenomenology of expelled students lived experiences concerning the lack of support that they receive when returning to their home campus, after attending an alternative high school program located in Northeast Georgia. Analyzing the results from each recurring theme, data was categorized and discussed using direct quotes and pseudonyms for each participant. The quotes used were the original grammar of each participant in their own voice. Establishing each student's transition plan is critical for their successful reintegration after an alternative school placement. The purpose is to examine the lived experience of expelled students' support or lack of, that they receive when returning to their home campus.

The results of the coding of the data generated six themes from the data analysis. These include (a) frustrating alternative school experiences, (b) no relationship with peers, (c) no support from teachers and counselors in transition, (d) support from family members, (e) coping strategies, and (f) changes in behavior. The bar graphs below, figures one through six, represent

the codes used to generate the themes. I presented verbal images for each participant, describing their support returning to their home campus after attending an alternative high school. Chapter 5 provided a summary of the study, discuss the findings, draw conclusions based on the findings of chapter four, and make recommendations which concluded the positive support of student-teacher relationship, family support, and peer relationships that helps to facilitate a successful transition for students back to their home school.
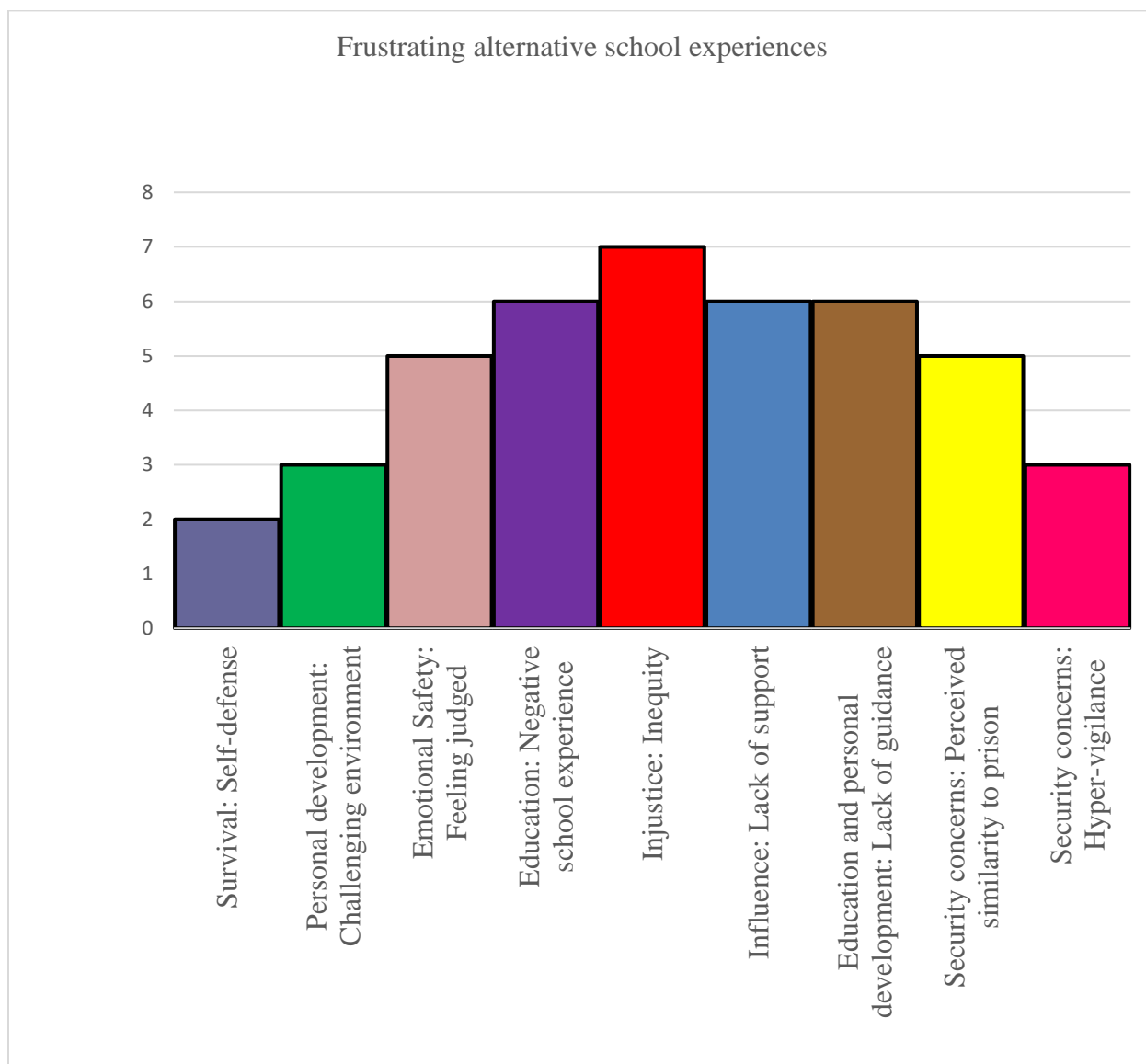
Figure 1

Frustrating alternative school experiences

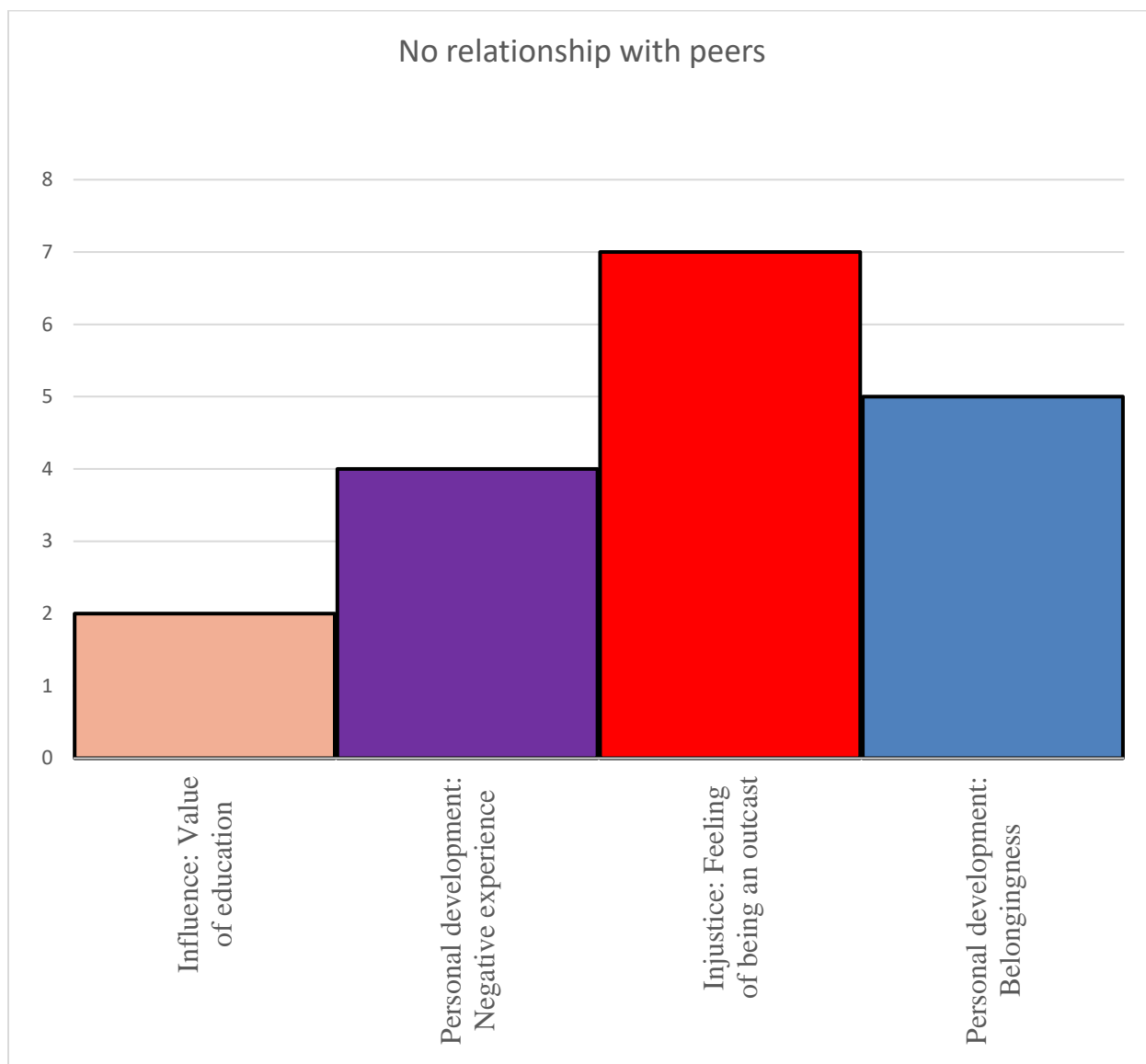**Figure 2**

No relationship with peers

Figure 3

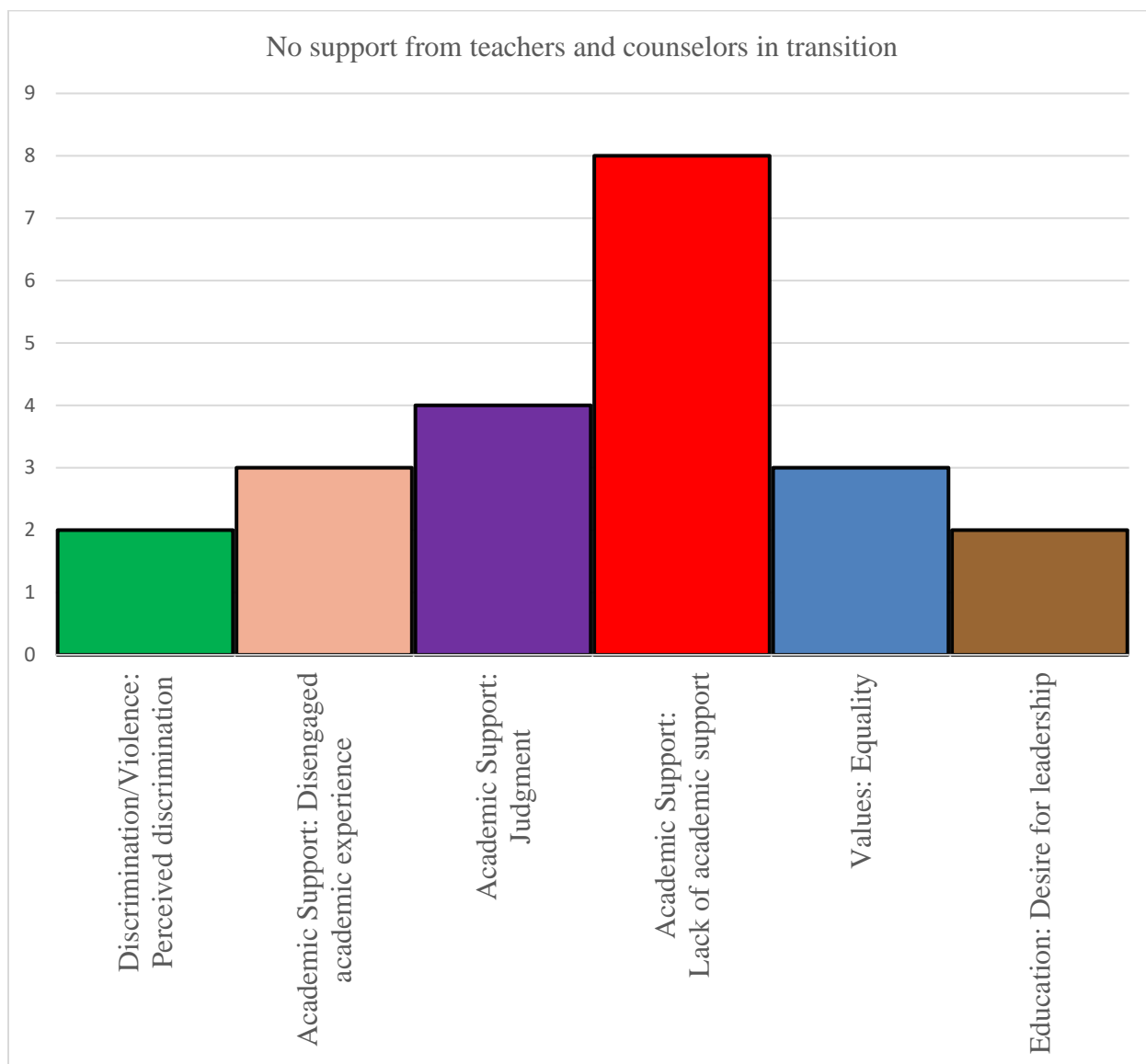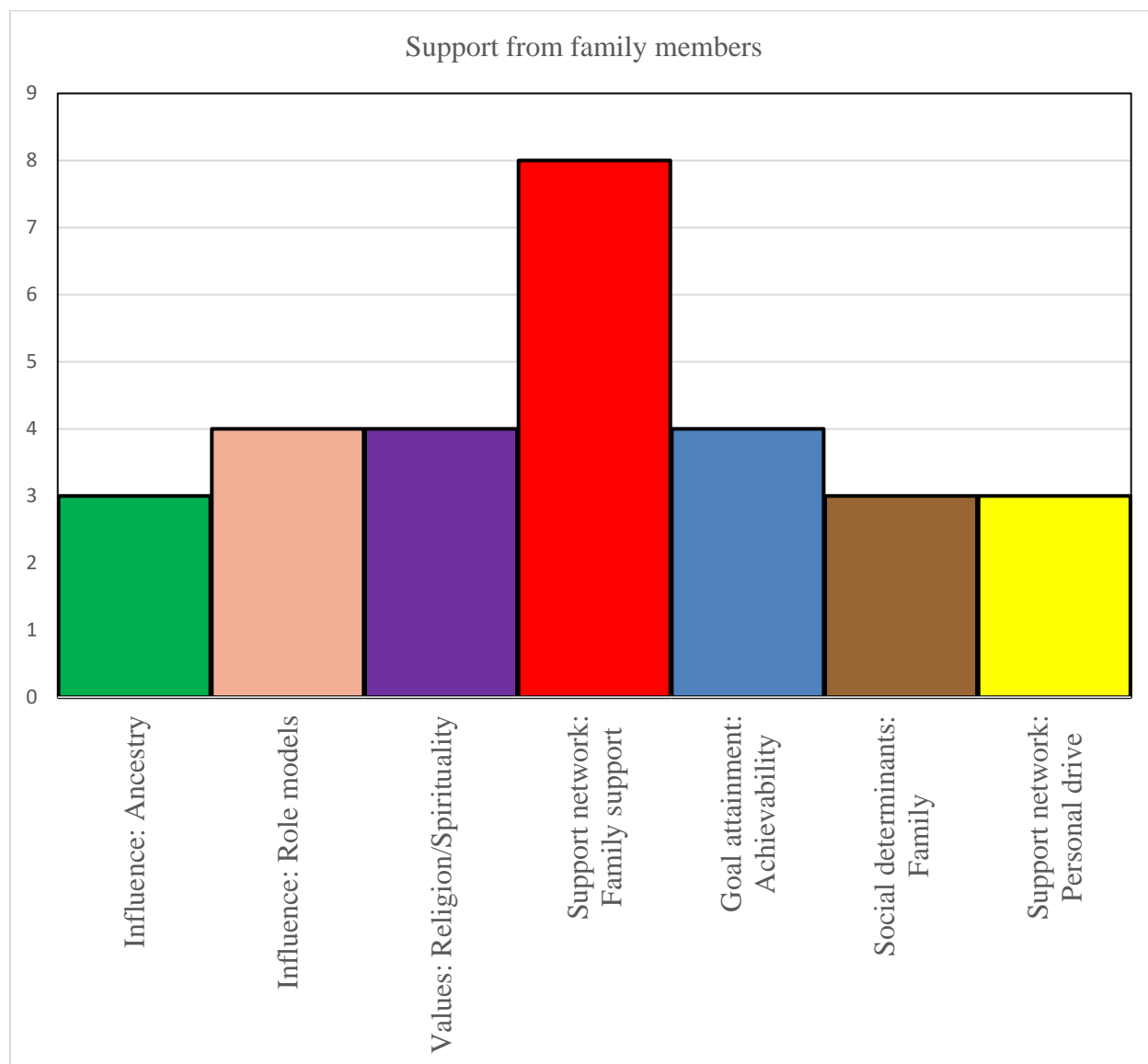*No support from teachers and counselors in transition*

Figure 4

Support from family members
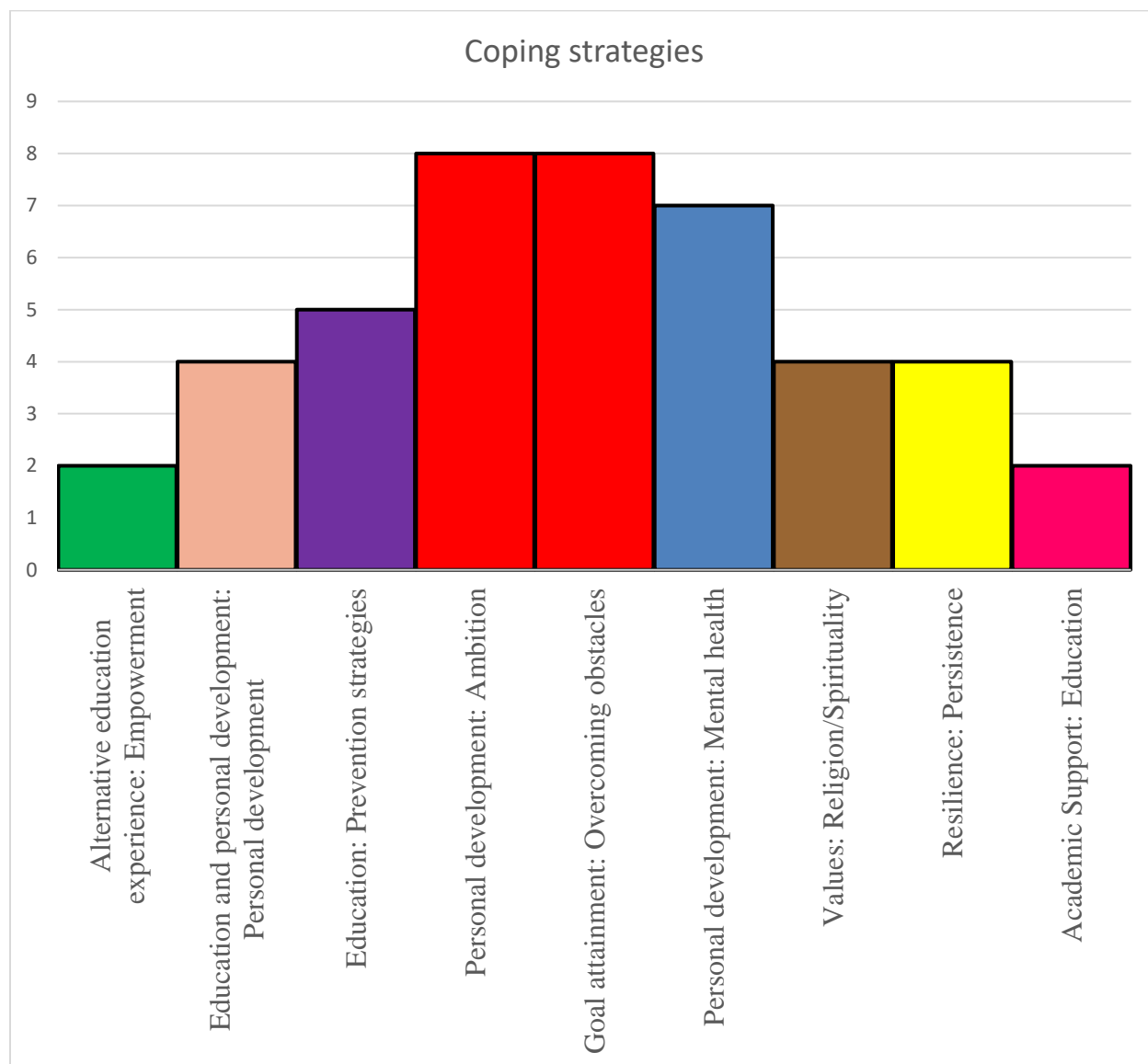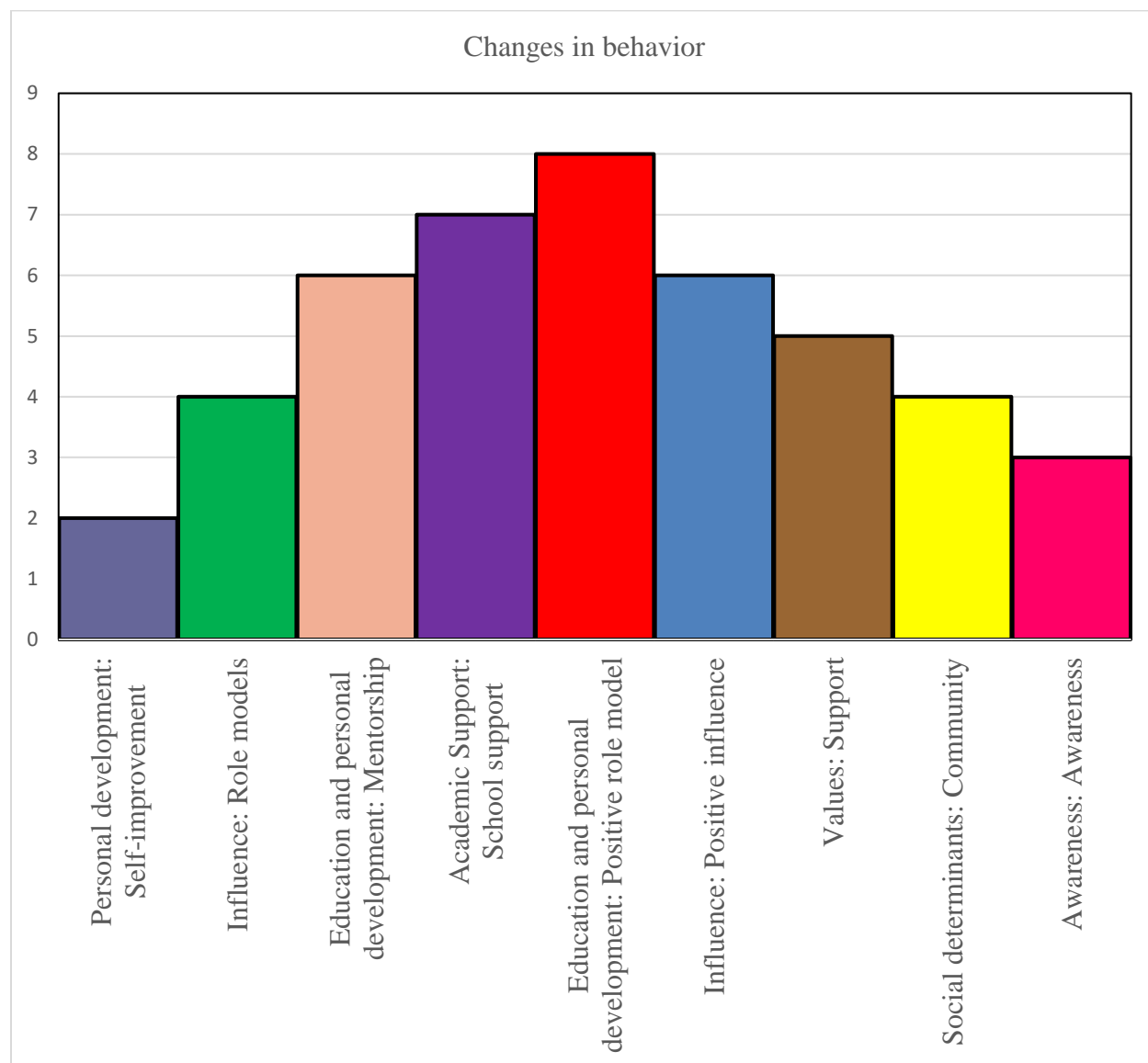
Figure 5

Coping strategies

Coping strategies

Figure 6

Changes in behavior

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of expelled students concerning the support or lack of, that they receive when returning to their home campus, after attending an alternative high school program. The support received during the transition from alternative school is critical for students' successful reintegration back to their home school. Education is key to eliminating the school-to-prison-pipeline, decreasing student dropout rate, and reducing disciplinary problems. Students returning from a prolonged absence is not easy. They must readjust to larger class size, rigors of the curriculum, and to freely move throughout the school. The reintegration plan must include an individualized transition plan developed with the student's parent/guardian, academic support, and mentorship. This knowledge gained from this study was useful for administrators to provide clear expectations for students through the transition process. Chapter Five consists of five discussion subsections: (a) interpretation of findings, (b) implications for policy and practice, (c) theoretical and methodological implications, (d) limitations and delimitations, and (e) recommendations for future research.

Discussion

The purpose of my research study was to understand the lived experience of students disdainfully affected by attending an alternative school. The intent of my research was to help school administrators, counselors, and teachers better understand the negative impact of students who have faced expulsion. This research provided a deep and rich description of the perception of support students received when returning to their home campus, exclusionary discipline, and the reentry process to understand the essence of the lived experience. Present and future

administrators, counselors, and teachers we have the awareness of the type of support all 10 research participants received following their expulsion. I trust that administrators, counselors, and teachers learn from the participants' lived experience and welcome each student back into the school and the classrooms. Students returning to school from expulsion are faced with academic rigor uncertainty, students' perceptions, and teachers' biases. The information collected in this study allowed administrators, counselors, and teachers to look through the lens of returning students to gain an understanding of the challenges they faced.

Interpretation of Findings

The thematic finding in this study revealed that the alternative school caused them to enter survival mode by practicing self-defense to maintain their protection. One student compared his experience at the alternative school to living in a jungle. He viewed himself as the lion and wanted the other students to fear him. Another student stated that he saw more police officers at school than in the community. Students were sent to the alternative school for the consequences of their actions; however, many felt that the alternative school connected them with more students who made bad choices. Data collected showed that the lived experience of the students placed them in a challenging environment where they felt as if they were being judged by their peers and teachers. Literature supports the idea that students need a safe and orderly environment conducive to learning. However, there is a lack of research providing the necessary safety at an alternative school for at-risk students. Schools should provide a safe environment of learning for all students (Tadros & Vlach, 2022). Instead, school districts harsh discipline policies punish students through suspension and expulsion, making them susceptible to entering the school-to-prison pipeline (Tadros & Vlach, 2022).

Conversely, students found refuge in family members. Some of the family members were their role models, providing the spiritual support necessary to contend with the challenges of being viewed as a bad student. Parental involvement in students' educational goals helps to increase academic success (Serpell et al., 2020). Establishing and maintaining communications with the parents of students who exhibit disruptive behavior helps to decrease suspensions and increase academic success (Serpell et al., 2020). The findings may encourage teachers and administrators to consider alternative discipline methods to help all students succeed. By extending effective communication with both students and parents, school officials can create a safe learning environment for all students.

Summary of Thematic Findings

Lack of academic support. The curriculum not being aligned with their home school was the theme that some of the students mentioned. The level of rigor at an alternative school is different from their home school. This caused several students to struggle after returning to their home school. Furthermore, some students are given worksheets with no instructions to complete them as graded assignments. The students mentioned that the worksheet was busy work with no value related to their academic growth. Other students were allowed to complete previous coursework to get back on track. As students returned to their home school, many were behind their classmates. Several of them had teachers who made the transition difficult by not offering academic support. A few had counselors who saw their potential and placed them in classes where the teachers provided them with the support necessary to succeed. An empowering program such as positive student-teacher relationships is evidently having a positive effect on students' academic success (Giraldo-García et al., 2019).

Community support. Having the necessary support in the community is critical for helping suspended or expelled students reintegrate back into their home school. Students being removed from school due to suspension or expulsion have negative effects on them mentally and emotionally. Students who have access to counseling through community programs are provided with the support necessary to transition to their home school and the community. Students stated that a community center offered them a safe place to hang out after school. The students would benefit if the center offered a place where they could fellowship, tutoring services, and receive mentorship.

Feeling of being an outcast. Having to attend an alternative school, students do not want to make new friends because their goal is to finish the program and return to their home school. Some students felt as if the punishment was too harsh and as if the teachers and administration team gave up on them. When students feel, they do not belong to the school, it lowers their academic plight (Ray, 2020), thus increasing students' chances of dropping out of school or entering the juvenile system (Morgan, 2021). Some students that were placed at the alternative school felt the environment was hostile. They were constantly on guard protecting themselves from possible harm or danger. Students' behavior had to match the environment at the alternative school for personal safety. Several students returning to their home school was not pleasant. They had to walk lightly because they knew that some of the teachers did not want them in their class. As one student described how his teacher provoked him, leading to receiving an office referral. Another student was not allowed to leave the classroom without being chaperoned. For one student, the feeling of abandonment was more than he could handle. The isolation from classmates, and the negative comments from an administrator caused him to drop out of school.

Implications for Policy or Practice

   The participants' lived experience allowed me to gain an understanding of the perceptions, feelings, and emotions of those who were negatively impacted by being expelled and sent to an alternative school. This research hopefully allowed students to return to school whereas their past behavior would not affect their future progress. This research does not remove student's perception or teacher biases. While it was clear that communication needs to exist between the students and school leaders, it may also be an indication to leaders of how expelled students could face the challenges of reconnecting back to school.

Implications for Practice

   The practical application of this research provides administrators, counselors, and teachers with awareness of students returning from expulsion. The literature review and research revealed students "lived day-to-day, their focus on survival rather than flourishing" (Robert, 2015, p. 378). The implication for policy and practice gave administrators, counselors, and teachers the understanding of the negative impact of students short and long term physical and emotional well-being thus providing a safe environment conducive for all students to learn.

   Students living in poverty may experience health problems, repeat a grade, and are likely to be suspended and/or expelled from school (Mallet, 2017). Students living below the poverty level at times it was hard for him or her to compete with their peers academically. The area where Taafeef's family lived "it was primarily black" filled with "section eight homes." The high school where he was zoned to attend "necessarily wasn't a great area" however, many "of my cousins went there" and knowing he would be safe at school where he could concentrate on his education. His mother moved in with her mother. There were "about 6-7 people" living in a "a 2-bedroom house." Taafeef's family lived with his grandmother for two years before moving

to an "uppity" neighborhood prior to attending the high school where he was originally zoned to attend. Attending the new school Taafeef wanted to "kept my grades up" he surrounded himself with positive classmates "because these guys didn't necessarily try to amount to anything inside the classroom." He had attended "summer school just do one year" knowing "I would graduate from high school."

There were several regular tracked African American and honors Caucasian students placed in the same class where they were not treated equally hence, the teacher viewed the African American students as "potentially dangerous" (Kennedy et al., 2019, p. 143). The African American students noticed they were receiving office referrals for low level offenses which would eventually have them sent to an alternative school (Kennedy et al., 2019). Sadiki's principal knew her as a "kind and gentle person" and her teachers knew her "as a hard worker." Yet, when she faced expulsion, her character was a small factor in her hearing. Taafeef's assistant principal praised him for persevering "through the adversity." An administrator placed his younger brother who received no referrals or a discipline action and was not a problem student in a mentoring program based off "the reputation" of his brother for "getting expelled at one year."

According to Steinberg and Lacoe (2017), schools serving students who live in neighborhoods that have low poverty and have a crime rate typically have safer schools when there are social resources available within the neighborhood. Menes stated the community could help provide a "support program to help get jobs while in school." Gamila, Chisisi, and Sadiki noted the expulsion traumatized them because they were sent to a new environment and had to deal with teachers that were not friendly. Taafeef receives on-going counseling for his explosive attitude so he would not "get upset at my peers and I may go off." Sadiki could benefit from

community services "I could have had access to a counselor" that she "could talk with for moral support."

Theoretical and Empirical Implications

This section examines the theoretical and empirical implications of the findings. The theoretical explanation was guided by the Critical Race Theory (Ladson-Billings, 2014). More importantly, this study considered the interpretation of the findings through the insight of students to gain personal and emotional understanding. The empirical implications were examined from the lived experiences of expelled students in the virtual setting.

Theoretical

The theoretical aspect of this research adds to the literature of expelled students returning to school by hearing the voices of previously expelled students and how they faced hardship as they attended an alternative school. This research used the Critical Race Theory to examine the racial disparities of students suspended/expelled. This research was not designed to prove or disprove racial disparities. However, this research was designed to shed light on previous study, of expelled students support they receive when returning to school. The essence of each participant's lived experience contributed to the theory. Students returning from a discipline alternative school should be allowed to receive mentoring and counseling support services (Thomas, 2014) to ensure he or she can mentally accept the changing of their transition back to school.

Schools that have an overuse of referrals for minor offenses over time will cause serious discipline action throughout the student school year (Steinberg & Lacoe, 2017). Although institutional racism causes disparity in education, some school administrators may have unintentionally contributed to it (Henry et al., 2022). The essence of the lived experience of

students adversely impacted by expulsion has created learning gaps in their educational obtainment. Nonetheless, the consequences can be catastrophic for many students (Henry et al., 2022). Students struggled to reconnect to their home school due to not having the support necessary to be free from past mistakes.

The zero-tolerance policy emerged after the Gun-Free School Act of 1994 (GFSA) was established as a rational policy for school safety (Irby & Coney, 2021). However, students of color received harsh punishment for minor offenses under the zero-tolerance policy (Irby & Coney, 2021). Students struggled to learn in a safe and orderly environment when sent to an alternative school. The Critical Race Theory illustrates how race is often used when administering discipline consequences. Some students understood there were consequences for their actions, yet they felt the consequences were unfair and were based on the administration's perception of them as students. Black and brown students face disproportionately harsh punishment due to perceived misbehavior, which is rooted in racial bias embedded in the preventative measures reforms of the GFSA 1994 (Irby & Coney, 2021).

Themes found in this study include frustrating alternative school experiences, no relationship with peers, and coping strategies. Coping strategies support how expulsion negatively affects students social well-being. Some students received counseling to help cope with the pressures of their new environment. Additionally, students did not have any relationships with peers because of the hostile environment. Some of the students at the alternative school created chaos and mayhem to extend their time at the alternative school. Students receiving social support for learning often received negative comments from other students, did not feel safe at school or they were in classes where other students disrupted instruction (Marks, 2020).

Empirical

The empirical aspect of this research has implications for stakeholders in any school system, public or private. This section addresses the empirical implications of the support expelled students receive when returning to school. Students returning to school should receive additional support such as offering a mentor program in the school as well as in the community; school systems may also consider piloting support courses on family mentoring (Thomas, 2014). While there was little research on lived experience of student support returning from expulsion, the theme of students change in behavior supports this study of providing additional support from school staff and providing positive role models.

Historically, exclusionary discipline in education was used to identify problematic students or students' needs for social-emotional, mental, or behavioral support (Bottiani et al., 2022). The results of this study indicated that some of the students needed emotional support and instead received disciplinary consequences for their disruptive behavior. There were gaps in the literature for providing alternative forms of discipline related to the zero-tolerance policy. When students receive office referrals for minor infractions, schools build cases to suspend them later (Webster & Knaus, 2020). Some students felt that teachers and administrators targeted them and did not receive fair treatment before the suspension or expulsion. Throughout this empirical implications section, citations will help demonstrate the importance of this research. Individual interviews, focus groups, and journal questionnaires can provide information for current and future stakeholders to better understand the lived experience phenomenon.

There was no surprises during the empirical research. Students sent to an alternative school explained how teachers treated them like criminals. Most participants explained how their teachers labeled them as troublemakers. They talked about how some of the teachers and

administrators were judgmental and were not supportive. The need for competence is inherent, most students enjoy school (Marks, 2020). When students become alienated their school experience weakens and lose their motivation to learn (Marks, 2020).

The successful transition of alternative school students depends on a rigorous core curriculum which is aligned between both the alternative school and the student's main school (McGee & Lin, 2017). Most of the student at the alternative school were given busy work and they did not follow their home school's curriculum. Students attending the alternative school noted the work was easy as compared to their home school. When they returned from the alternative school, they was behind their peers and at times the pressure made them lash out in anger. The negative impact of exclusionary discipline hinders students ability to perform academically in schools (Irby & Coney, 2021).

Many African American families are raised in single-family homes where the father is noticeably absent therefore, the family support system is key in determining if African American students experience success or failure (Orrock & Clark, 2018). Establishing and maintaining parental support is key in the development of students who exhibit disruptive behavior. When some students receive an office referral for minor infractions, their response may be interpreted as aggressive or disrespectful behavior. As administrators assign consequences for the student's behavior they would remiss the whole student and the negative impact the consequences may have on that student (Bottiani et al., 2023).

Students transitioning back to their home school should receive a transition plan. The plan should be initiated once the student arrives at the alternative school and developed by the counselor, administration team, parents, and student. The plan should include counseling services, a behavioral plan, a learning plan based on the student's strengths and weaknesses, and

a group outlet for the students' thoughts (Serpell et al., 2020). If possible, the counselor should place the returning student in classes where the teacher will provide the necessary emotional and academic support. Research from this study and some of the lived experiences of the participants revealed that some of their teachers made them feel uncomfortable and unwelcome in their class. A few of the participants had targets on their backs. With time, they would get sent back to the alternative school. Being spiritually grounded and supporting family members as role models, most of the participants were able to graduate from high school.

Returning school providing transitional support

Students having a support system is key in helping them get engaged and succeed in class (Kennedy et al., 2019) yet many students receive little if any. Sadiki stated: "Um I didn't receive any support um the only support I received was um, a old um coach that I had and um she tried what she could try." Sadiki felt lost when she returned to school her coach became her mentor "if it wasn't for her, I wouldn't have had any guidance." Menes' return to school had gotten worse because of his mistake "when I transitioned back to my original school, I didn't have much of a support group or um, like uh, a guidance counselor or anything like that. They kind of uh, frowned on me by making the, the choice by smoking weed at school." He became disconnected from school and thought about dropping out. The support came "from my family members like my father. . . telling me. . . you know tighten up in short words." Returning to school following alternative school increases academic demands therefore, it is critical for administrators, counselors, and teachers to provide academic supports, such as tutoring, academic enrichment, and credit recovery to help ease the transition (Wilkins & Bost, 2016).

Getting the community involved for support

Students returning from the alternative school often live in different parts of town in which each community may be structured differently yet when there are positive programs in the community it could be beneficial in the development of each student. The neighborhood where Jabari lives has a community center on the other side of town with no public transportation, he would have to wait for his mother or call an Uber to get to the center. A program that Jabari would benefit from "a little smaller community classes that will offer support on schoolwork." Chisisi could benefit from two programs in the community, one being "a boys and girls club where they have dance" and "a sports program" and the other she mentioned is "therapy" to help develop coping skills. Waaiz stated: "If the community had an afterschool tutoring program with small classes. I could focus more and get my homework done so I could learn what I need to graduate." Gamila knew what she had done was wrong yet her "only expectation of the community and school was to welcome me back free of any bias or judgement." Students that have self-determination, social and life skills (Wilkins & Bost, 2016) increase their engagement in schools therefore having community-based programs are vital to their lifelong learning (Platt et al., 2015).

Limitations and Delimitations

Initially when I began my research, I wanted to include students from elementary, middle, and high school to gain their perspective on how the reentry process helped them to get reengaged back into school and back into learning. I wanted to understand the essence of lived experience at all levels of school. For several years, I looked at school systems which had a higher population of Caucasian students in comparison to the other minorities for that reason, I reached out to those school districts trying to obtain permission to conduct my research. The

nation was crippled by COVID-19, schools were shut down then transformed to remote learning, quarantining, social distancing, and unforeseen health risk prompted me to conduct this study remotely over the internet. The research participants' individual interviews and focus group was conducted on Microsoft Teams the journal questionnaire was conducted electronically. I was able to capture the essence of the lived experience through voice inflections, silent pauses, in-depth answers, and journal questionnaire.

There were several limitations in the current research study. Glesne (2016) reported that limitations are consistent with the partial state of knowledge in social research. Clarifying the limitations helps readers know how they should read and interpret the data. The current study was limited to a small sample size of high school students in the state of Georgia. Also, the study was limited to 10 students who attended an alternative school and was transitioned back to their home school. Consequently, the research study may have limited generalizability to other settings of high school students at one alternative school across the United States because of the small sample size used.

The delimitation for this study was that the participants were selected through purposeful sampling strategies (Creswell, 2018). Also, the high school students who participated in this study were selected based on their willingness to participate in this research study. Another delimitation inherent in this study included the ability of the research questions to capture all possible categories and themes incorporating by the high school students who attended the alternative school and was transitioned back to their home school.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the findings from this study, I recommend the following recommendations for future research. Future research studies should be conducted to understand the lived experience

of students may affected by attending an alternative school. The intent of my research was to help school administrators, counselors, and teachers better understand the negative impact of students who have faced expulsion due to the use of a small sample size on 10 participants. Future research could be conducted with other populations such as students at elementary, middle, and high school level from other areas across the United States. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand the lived experience of students disdainfully affected by attending an alternative school. Future research studies should be conducted to include teachers, counselors, and administrators from other academic subjects such as science and history. Research on understanding the lived experience of students disdainfully affected by attending an alternative school need further research to design different research based strategies to reduce the large number of these students being placed in an alternative setting.

The current study used a qualitative case study method. Future research studies should include conducting quantitative research studies to understand the lived experience of students disdainfully affected by attending an alternative school. Studies could be conducted on the relationship between alternative schools versus traditional schools and student achievement. By conducting quantitative studies, I could provide statistical proof on understanding the lived experience of students disdainfully affected by attending an alternative school. This could also provide insight into whether the current themes garnered from this study should be changed or expanded with additional sub-themes from the research study. Some of these themes include supporting students in learning academics and how teachers are integrating different technology for teaching and student achievement.

Conclusion

The purpose of my research study was to understand the lived experience of students disdainfully affected by attending an alternative school. The intent of my research was to help school administrators, counselors, and teachers better understand the negative impact of students which have faced expulsion. This research provided a deep and rich description of the perception of support students received when returning to their home campus, exclusionary discipline, and the reentry process to understand the essence of the lived experience. Present and future administrators, counselors, and teachers will have the awareness of the type of support all 10 research participants received following their expulsion. I trust that administrators, counselors, and teachers learn from the participants' lived experience and welcome each student back into the school and the classrooms. Students returning to school from expulsion are faced with academic rigor uncertainty, students' perceptions, and teachers' biases. The information collected in this study allowed administrators, counselors, and teachers to look through the lens of returning students to gain an understanding of the challenges they faced.

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APPENDIX A

IRB Approval

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

April 19, 2021

Michael Zellous Russell Yocum

Re: IRB Approval - IRB-FY20-21-635 HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS REINTEGRATION FOLLOWING ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY
Dear Michael Zellous, Russell Yocum:

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University Institutional
Review Board (IRB). This approval is extended to you for one year from the following date: April 19, 2021. If you need to make changes to the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit a modification to the IRB. Modifications can be completed through your Cayuse IRB account.
Your study falls under the expedited review category (45 CFR 46.1 10), which is applicable to specific, minimal risk studies and minor changes to approved studies for the following reason(s):

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) 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(s) should be made available without alteration. Thank you for your cooperation with the IRBJ and we wish you well with your research project.
Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

APPENDIX B

IRB Renewal

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

August 10, 2022

Michael Zellous
Russell Yocum

Re: Renewal - IRB-FY20-21-635 HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS REINTEGRATION
FOLLOWING ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

Dear Michael Zellous, Russell Yocum:

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has rendered the decision below for
IRB-FY2021-635 HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS REINTEGRATION FOLLOWING
ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY.

Decision: Approved

Your study approval has been extended for an additional year from the date listed above.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker. MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office
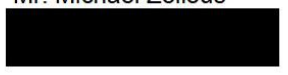
APPENDIX C

District Approval

███████████████████   **Superintendent**   **Board of Education**
███████████████████   ███████████
███████████████████   **General Counsel**   ███████████
███████████████████   ███████████
                                                           ███████████
                                                           ███████████

February 12, 2021

Mr. Michael Zellous
███████████████

Dear Mr. Zellous:

I have reviewed your research proposal: ***"High School Students Reintegration Following Alternative School: A Phenomenological Study"*** and have approved it with the following conditions:

- All participation must be on a voluntary basis during ***non-duty hours*** only.

- All resources and/or supplies will be provided by the applicant. (District resources will not be used.)

- Written authorization is required from the principal before conducting surveys.

- No individual participant(s) or school(s) will be identifiable through the research project.

- Due to the system's comprehensive academic program, research activities will be conducted during the following months unless special arrangements have been approved: **September - November** AND **February-April**

I wish you every success as you begin this very important project. I would appreciate a copy of the final report along with any recommendations that your research may offer Rockdale County Public Schools.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

███████████████

██████████
Director of Assessment & Accountability

C: ███████████, Director of Human Resources

████████ | ██████ Georgia ███ | Phone: ██████████ | ████████████

APPENDIX D

SCHOOL LEADERS CONSENT FORM

Dear Principal,

My name is Michael Zellous, and I am a teacher at Rockdale Open Campus School and a Liberty University doctoral candidate. This semester I am requesting the permission to video interview certain students as part of a qualitative research study for my Doctoral Degree requirements in Educational Leadership. The study will specifically focus on the transitional support for students returning from alternative school. The interview will be focused on students who have been selected to be a part of the study and have signed a consent/assent form agreeing to participate in the study.

Upon receipt of the consent forms, I will conduct individual Microsoft Teams interviews with the participants. The interview should take approximately 45-60 minutes. The interviews will take place from September 2022 – November 2022 after school hours. Secondly, the participants will be emailed an electronic journal to be completed two-weeks after receipt of email. Finally, four participants will be selected to participate in a focus group openly sharing their experiences on the transitional process.

During this time, I will ask the participants for their permission to video, and audio record each session. The purpose is to understand the transitional strategies to help all students reintegrate back to their home school to be successful and graduate.

I will take the necessary steps to protect the district, the school and the students' privacy and confidentiality by providing aliases for the district, the school, and the students. All the notes from the journal questions will be kept secure and locked in a file cabinet in my home office.

This research has been reviewed and approved by an Institutional Review Board (IRB). An IRB reviews research projects to ensure that steps are taken to protect the rights and welfare of human subjects taking part in research.

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please contact the following investigators:

Michael Zellous (Co-investigator/Doctoral Candidate)
Liberty University
School of Education
███████████████
███████████████████

Dr. Russell Yocum (Primary Investigator/Faculty Supervisor)
Liberty University
School of Education
███████████████
███████████████████

APPENDIX E

RECRUITMENT LETTER
High School Students Reintegration Following Alternative School:
A Phenomenological Study

Dear Parents/Guardians and Potential Participants,

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to better support each student as they return to their home school as they transition back to their home school from alternative school. The information received will be used to strengthen a rehabilitation plan to ensure that all students successfully graduate from their home campus, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants selected for this study must have recently returned from expulsion after attending a disciplined alternative school, be between 15 – 18 years of age (or older), and in grades nine – twelve. I will select 12 – 15 participants, if willing, will be asked to participate in an individual interview session, complete an electronic journal, and, if they are interested. I will select five participates to participate in a focus group. The first four participants to email me expressing interest in the focus group will be selected to participate. The interview sessions as well as the focus group will take place on Microsoft Teams after school hours and will last from 45 minutes to one hour in length. I will ask the participants for their permission to video, and audio record the interview sessions and focus group session. The transcript will be transcribed verbatim all participants will have the opportunity to review their the transcript for accuracy. The electronic journal will be emailed to all participants selected for the study and each participant will have two weeks from the date of receipt to complete the journal. Participants will be assigned pseudonyms to conceal their information and all information will remain confidential.

In order to participate and schedule an interview, please contact me at ▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇. If your child is under 18 years of age, parents/legal guardians will need to sign (and have your child sign) and return the attached parental consent document to me at ▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇. If you are 18 years of age, please sign and return the adult consent document. Participants will receive no payment or compensation for participation in this study.

Sincerely,

Michael Zellous
Rockdale Open Campus Math Teacher
▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇

APPENDIX F

ADULT CONSENT FORM

Title of the Project: High School Students Reintegration Following Alternative School:
A Phenomenological Study

Principal Investigator: Michael Zellous, Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study: You are invited to participate in a research study. Participants must be between the age of 15 – 18 years of age (or older), and in grades nine – twelve, and who has transitioned back to his/her home school who have recently returned from expulsion after attending a disciplinary alternative school which they attended for at least one semester. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

Purpose: The purpose of the study is to better support each student as they return to their home school. The information received will be used to strengthen a rehabilitation plan to ensure that all students successfully graduate from their home school.

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:
1. First, participate in a Microsoft Teams interview. The interview will be video/audio recorded. You can select a time slot Monday – Thursday from 3:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m. The interview will be approximately 45-60 minutes.
2. Second, all participants you will be emailed an electronic journal questionnaire that needs to be completed within two weeks of receipt of the email.
3. Third, participate in a Microsoft Teams focus group if you choose to do so. The focus group will be video/audio recorded. The first 4 participants to email me expressing interest will be selected to participate. The focus group will take place on Microsoft Teams and will last from 45 minutes to one hour in length. The transcripts will be transcribed verbatim all participants will have the opportunity to review their transcripts for accuracy.

Benefits: Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from participating in the study.
Benefits to society include helping the school systems improve expelled students' transitional process. This will allow students to become re-engaged in learning, attend school, and increase their earning potential.

Risks: The risks of this study are minimal which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life. The researcher is a mandatory reporter. Should any information about child abuse, child neglect, elder abuse, or intent to harm self or others be disclosed during the course of this research, the researcher is required to report by law.

Data Security: The records of this study will be kept private. In any report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only I will have access to the records.

Participants will be assigned pseudonyms within the focus group setting as well as when conducting the Microsoft Teams interviews. Interviews and focus groups will be recorded. Recorded information will be erased after transcripts are produced and documents with identifying information will be erased 3 years after the completion of the study. . Hard copy data will be shredded after 3 years. Information without any identifying information may be retained indefinitely. Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Rockdale County Public School System or Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Withdrawal Procedure: If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Researcher Contact Information: The researcher conducting this study is Michael E. Zellous. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact me at ▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Russell Yocum, at ▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉

IRB Contact Information: If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Your Consent: By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record and video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

_____   _____
Printed Subject Name   Signature & Date

APPENDIX G

PARENTAL CONSENT FORM

Title of the Project: High School Students Reintegration Following Alternative School:
A Phenomenological Study

Principal Investigator: Mr. Michael Zellous, Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study: Your child is invited to participate in a research study. Participants must be between the age of 15 – 18 years of age (or older) and in grades nine – twelve, and who has transitioned back to his/her home school who have recently returned from expulsion after attending a disciplinary alternative school. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to allow your child to take part in this research project.

Purpose: The purpose of the study is to better support each student as they return to their home school. The information received will be used to strengthen a rehabilitation plan to ensure that all students successfully graduate from their home school.

Procedures: If you agree to allow your child to be in this study, I will ask him or her to do the following things:
1. First, participate in a Microsoft Teams interview. The interview will be video/audio recorded. Your child can select a time slot Monday – Thursday from 3:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m. I will conduct one 45-60 minutes individual Microsoft Teams interview.
2. Second, all participants will be emailed an electronic journal questionnaire that needs to be completed within two weeks of receipt of the email.
3. Third, participate in a Microsoft Teams focus group if your child chooses to do so. The focus group will be video/audio recorded. The first 4 participants to email me expressing interest will be selected to participate. The focus group will take place on Microsoft Teams and will last from 45 minutes to one hour in length. The transcript will be transcribed verbatim all participants will have the opportunity to review their transcript for accuracy.

Benefits:
Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from participating in the study. Benefits to society include helping the school systems improve expelled students' transitional process. The benefits also allow students to become re-engaged in learning, attend school, and increase their earning potential.

Risks: The risks of this study are minimal which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life. The researcher is a mandatory reporter.

Data Security: The records of this study will be kept private. In any report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only I will have access to the records.

Participants will be assigned pseudonyms within the focus group setting as well as when conducting the Microsoft Teams interviews. Interviews and focus groups will be recorded. Recorded information will be erased after transcripts are produced and documents with identifying information will be erased 3 years after the completion of the study. Hard copy data will be shredded after 3 years. Information without any identifying information may be retained indefinitely. Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to allow your child to participate will not affect their current or future relations with Rockdale County Public School System or Liberty University. If you decide to allow your child to participate, he or she is free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Withdrawal Procedure: If you choose to withdraw your child from the study or your child chooses to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address included in the next paragraph. Should a decision to withdraw be made, data collected from your child, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your child's contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw your child.

Researcher Contact Information: The researcher conducting this study is Michael E. Zellous. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact me at ███████████████. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Russell Yocum, at ██████████████.

IRB Contact Information: If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Your Consent: By signing this document, you are agreeing to allow your child to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to allow my child to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record and video-record my child as part of his/her participation in this study.

_____
Printed Child's/Student's Name

_____
Parent's Signature   Date

_____
Minor's Signature   Date

APPENDIX H

JOURNAL QUESTIONS

Question 1

What would you guess the principal, teachers, and counselor respect most about you?

Question 2

How did your expulsion shape what do you care about?

Question 3

What happened that led you to get expelled?

Question 4

Did you participate willingly or were you tricked into expulsion?

Question 5

What effect did the expulsion have on you? On your family?

Question 6

Have you heard of the pipeline-to-prison? Do you personally want to go that way?

Question 7

What might be a goal you might set for yourself after this experience? Is that achievable? What

are the steps you would have to take?

APPENDIX I

MEMBER CHECK FORM

High School Student's Reintegration Following Alternative School: A Phenomenological Study

Debriefing Statement

Thank you for having participated in our study regarding expelled student's returning to their home campus. This debriefing serves to share with you the results of our study. Additionally, this debriefing serves to increase the trustworthiness of our research by allowing you the opportunity to review transcripts of your participation in a one-on-one interview (if applicable) and to indicate your level of agreement with our conclusions based on the research.

Thank you again for your time.

1. If you participated in a one-on-one interview session as part of this research, a transcription of your interview will be provided to you at the time of this debriefing. Please take a moment to review the transcript. You can make a note of any corrections you feel necessary on the margins of the transcript. If you participated in the one-on-one interview, please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement.

The transcript accurately reflects my interview with the researcher.

Strongly Agree/Agree/Disagree/Strongly Disagree

My notes about the theme, if any: