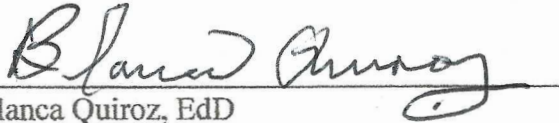# ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, THE ROLE OF SAFETY TRANSFERS AND SCHOOL-WIDE POSITIVE BEHAVIORAL INTERVENTIONS AND SUPPORTS (SWPBIS) ON THE LEARNING EXPERERIENCE OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in the School of Education, Concordia University Irvine.

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THE ROLE OF SAFETY TRANSFERS AND SCHOOL-WIDE POSITIVE BEHAVIORAL
INTERVENTIONS AND SUPPORTS (SWPBIS) ON THE LEARNING EXPERIENCE OF
AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

by

Luca Tirapelle

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ABSTRACT

Historically students of color are historically disproportionately represented in the public-school systems' special education and school discipline processes.

In particular, African American students are more likely to become eligible to receive special education services, especially under the emotional disturbance diagnostic label, and be disciplined than students from other races. In the past decades, many studies have investigated the dynamics of students' disproportional representation in major systems and structures such as special education and disciplinary practices. However, there is a lack of research investigating how disproportionality is emerging in other minor processes that can affect students and families' learning experiences in the public school system.

This mixed-method study investigated how the safety transfer mechanism, a process in which African American students are also disproportionally represented, impacted the students' academic performance in a major urban school district with a small African American student population. The study's qualitative component examined the perspectives of the school personnel who supported students and families through this process, which were also triangulated with the African American parents' perspectives on students' overall disproportionality in the special education and disciplinary processes.

The data analysis revealed that African American parents and school personnel shared common themes and views on improving students' academic experience by focusing on building a positive relationship with students and families and addressing the systemic racism present in the educational institutions. While the quantitative data analysis showed that the students' academic performance going through a safety transfer process was not positively impacted by the characteristics of the school of attendance. Moreover, their attendance rates decreased

significantly across the three years part of the study.

Overall, the data have unveiled that merely moving a student from one school to another without focusing on investing resources in changing educators' mindset and attitudes towards African American students' does not benefit the students' academic performance.

Keywords: disproportionality, African American, safety transfer

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CHAPTER 1

In many public-school districts across the nation, African American (AA) students are disproportionately represented in the disciplinary and special education system (Tajalli & Garba, 2014). However, we do not really know what is the path that leads to students of color being disproportionately disciplined or referred to receive special education in our public-school districts. This study will investigate the antecedents and precursors that are fueling the overrepresentation of some of our most vulnerable students in a specific school district process, the safety transfer process, that might profoundly impact and define the academic and socio-emotional experience of students of color while going through the K-12 public school system.

Safety transfers are defined as a change of placement outside the regular enrollment school district period. Safety transfers are prompted by guardians and supported by school personnel when there is a concern that a student's physical and psychological well-being is compromised at their current school. A higher level of school transfers throughout the students' academic career might disrupts the students learning experience, which can lead to lower academic performance and a higher risk of incurring in the school's disciplinary system due to behavior challenges or being referred to receive a special education assessment. This study investigates if the school system's safety transfer process is an effective mechanism or is a distraction. African American students are disproportionately represented in the safety transfers performed in the school district, with many students already receiving special education services.

Safety transfer could be linked to the disproportional representation of African American students in the disciplinary and special education systems. In the public-school system, the disproportionality continuum begins with African American students receiving a higher number of suspensions. Then, to address underlying behavioral challenges, a school transfer is suggested,

which further disrupts the students' learning. The continuum often proceeds with some students being further suspended, expelled, or with a request for a special education assessment.

The research design is a mixed methods combining quantitative and a qualitative data to answer the proposed research questions. The study will explore how a school district safety transfer process that allows students to transfer outside the regular mid- and end-of-the-year impacts students' disciplinary and academic experience in an inner-city school district. Furthermore, the study will try to define the precursors that are more likely to be associated with the disproportional representation of African American students in the safety transfer process. The quantitative analysis will examine the contrast across pre-and-post transfer years for African American students for the following academic performance measures to investigate the outcome of transferring: office discipline referrals (ODR), attendance rate, safety transfer referrals (ST), and grade point average (GPA). The contrast of these school district's indexes between AA students with approved vs. not approved safety transfer referrals will depict the impact of transferring as well. It is difficult to observe and interpret behavior directly. However, discipline referrals, attendance rate, and GPA are an excellent proxy to measure the systemic challenges that students are experiencing at their schools and are measures that directly impacts the educational outcomes for students. In addition, the role of sending and receiving schools' characteristics (the proportion of African American students and students receiving special education services) and the role of Tiered Fidelity Index (TFI) Tier 1 scale will be investigated.

I will also interview a group of school staff members who have been supporting students and families in navigating the school district safety transfer process. These interviews are the qualitative component of the study will explore the experiences and perceptions of the school personnel supporting African American students who are going through the safety transfer

process, and their motivation behind the request of safety transfers. Secondary qualitative data collected from African American parents' meetings at the school district office and related to the root causes of disproportionality of African American students in the school district will also be analyzed. Parents' feedback will be collected by reviewing narrative and qualitative data retrieved from parents' meetings minutes available at the school district.

Statement of the Problem

Students of color (most of whom are African American) are systemically overrepresented in the public-school disciplinary and special education referral system. Defining the mechanisms that contribute to this systematic discrimination in the safety transfer process will help us understand their relationship with educators' biases, beliefs, and attitudes towards their students. Describing this dynamic will uncover the embedded systemic racism in our educational institutions and how it impacts students' learning experiences. Increasing our understanding of this phenomenon will help us develop better training and coaching opportunities for educators to address the impact of systemic racism present in our school settings. Tajalli and Garba (2014) have expressed this concern also, "What are the underlying factors contributing to the overrepresentation of minorities in school discipline programs?" (p. 620).

This study focuses in only one of the mechanisms used by families or schools to cope with systemic challenges that arise at their schools, that is, the safety transfer request or a request to change schools. An unintended consequence of constant biases in the interpretations of the behavior of students of color, especially boys, is that they end up experiencing more transfers than other students, which might hurt their academic performance rather than help. Correcting the perceptions of teachers and helping them understand the challenges that students are experiencing in their learning environment may diminish the over utilization of transfer petitions

and school placement stability concurrently with a learning environment geared to meet the students' needs may help students to improve academic performance.

Stability and inclusion in schools have the potential to enhance the academic performance of the most vulnerable populations. Other researchers are striving to identify patterns in how school systems approach students' discipline and to study the correlation between disciplinary practices and students' and school districts' characteristics (Gagnon et al., 2017).

African American students have a higher probability than students from other races of entering the special education system also and becoming labeled under the emotional disturbance eligibility (Bean, 2013). Mainly, research on disproportionality in students diagnosed with Emotional Disturbance (ED) has focused on African American boys. "Although a large body of research has examined characteristics and outcomes for children and youth with ED, a paucity of research has examined characteristic variations by gender" (Cullinan et al., 2004, as cited in Gage et al., 2012, p. 603). It is unclear if boys are more likely to exhibit more extreme behavioral symptoms than girls or is it that the interpretation of boy's behaviors tend to be more unforgiving and threatening to teachers. Gage et al., (2012) conducted a mix-methods study to understand if boys and girls with a diagnosis of ED show the same behavioral precursors, demographics, and characteristics. To answer their research questions, these researchers conducted quantitative data analysis by comparing demographic and disciplinary data gathered from the U.S. Department of Education database. The qualitative component of the study involved a series of follow up interviews with a selected group of parents and guardians of female students diagnosed with ED combined with a teacher survey (Gage et al., 2012).

The study found that young girls exhibiting hyperactive behavioral characteristics in classrooms were more likely to be arrested in middle and high school. These findings evident

after controlling for ethnicity, socio-economic-status, and urbanicity. These preliminary findings, in tandem with the findings for boys, indicate that predictive behaviors leading to later arrests differ between boys' and girls' behaviors are more likely to lead to later arrest.

Another area in which education of African Americans (AA) are overrepresented is the likelihood of receiving a diagnosis for special education services, and the stigmatization that comes with it. Banks and Hughes (2013)" investigated the academic experiences and perspectives of undergraduate African American male students labeled with disabilities" (p. 368).

Most of the studies about the over-representation of AA in the disciplinary and Special Education systems have concentrated on the students' characteristics. Even when no cause-and-effect relationship could be concluded from these studies, that is, being a Black boy is unlikely to be the cause of being at higher risk for disabilities, we insist on focusing on the students rather than the social environment in which this stereotype is reinforced. We know that their educational outcome cannot be directly related to their race. However, there is plenty of evidence to show that being African American in some environments is correlated to differentiated educational opportunities (Tajalli & Garba2014; Gagnon, Gurel, & Barber, 2017). We could only infer that behaviors from AA boys are more likely to be interpreted as an attribute of race than with other groups. This predisposition perhaps results in the higher likelihood of African American boys to receive an ED label as well as more and harsher disciplinary referrals. Looking at race as a social construct would help us understand the factors that contribute to this pattern of association and those factors might not be an attribute of the student, but rather the social environment where these students are situated. Banks and Hughes (2013) utilized a phenomenological approach to conduct a qualitative study and interviewed 12 African American

male students by engaging the individuals in semi-structured conversations. After analyzing the data, the researchers found that "disability labels" often lead educators to lower their academic expectations, and students are also subject to negative stigmatization. Moreover, they also found that students are able to develop counternarratives to prevent the internalization of negative stereotypes. Finally, for the sample in this study it was clear that their attendance at a historically Black university has supported them to develop self-identities that counter the ideologies of African American as intellectually inferior (Bank & Hughes, 2013). This supports the hypothesis that these educational outcomes for AA boys might be related to the schools' climate and the predisposition of educators rather than the characteristics of the students themselves.

Because of stereotypes and discrimination, students of color are being disproportionally disciplined and referred to receive special education services; their academic output reflects our failure to provide optimal opportunities in their learning environment. School districts across the nation have been trying to address students' behavioral and academic needs by implementing evidence-based interventions, such as, the Academic and Behavioral Response to Intervention frameworks (Noltemeyer & Sansosti, 2012). One conjecture behind the disproportional presence of students of color in the disciplinary system is that students who experience traumatic experiences in their lives might be heavily impacted by these adverse life events, which might negatively affect their disciplinary and academic trajectories. On the other hand, many students who experience trauma are capable of overcoming unfavorable events and become successful learners and members of our society. In their multi-case qualitative study, Williams and Bryan (2013) identify some of the factors that contribute to the resiliency of AA students, "the home, school, and community factors and processes that contributed to the academic success of 8 urban, African American high school graduates from low-income, single-parent families" (p.

291). First, they identified the participants with the help of deans, educators, and counselors who worked with the students. Then they conducted multiple interviews with the selected participants to collect data. Williams and Bryan (2013) found that a combination of positive home, school, and community factors supported the students to become successful learners. Some of the factors that the researchers discovered to have a positive impact in the students' lives include social support networks, out-of-school time activities, good teaching, extracurricular school activities, supportive school-based relationships, positive mother-child relationships, etc. (Williams & Bryan, 2013).

To positively address students' discipline, it is vital to foster a learning environment in which families and schools deeply engage in collaboration and communication. When it comes to out-of-school suspensions, it is crucial to gather families' understanding of school's disciplinary systems. In their qualitative study, Gibson and Haight (2013), "examined the nuanced cultural meanings of out-of-school suspensions for 30 lower-income caregivers of African American children suspended from school" (p. 263). Participants of this study were interviewed by using semi-structured interviews in the participants' homes to investigate the caregivers' perceptions surrounding their children's out-of-school suspensions. Gibson and Haight (2013) found that "caregivers generally valued their children's school success, recognized their children had misbehaved, and supported educators' imposition of appropriate consequences. Out-of-school suspensions, however, were rarely seen as appropriate consequences" (p. 263).

Parents-school collaboration is an essential key for students' academic success (Epstein & Sheldon, 2006, as cited in Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2008). On the other hand, "Research suggests that typically African American parents are less engaged in their children's academic experiences than their White counterparts" (Abdul-Adil & Farmer, 2006, as cited in

Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2008, p. 143). Archer-Banks and Behar-Horenstein (2008) attempted to identify the circumstances that influence African American parents' active participation and collaboration with the school personnel of their middle school-aged children. In their qualitative study, the researchers interviewed nine parents to understand what motivates parents to be more actively involved with their children's schools. After analyzing the data, Archer-Banks and Behar-Horenstein (2008) determined that "Setting higher expectations for African American students, establishing flexible meeting locations, offering workshops for homework help at home, and creating cultures that believe parents care would likely increase African American parent involvement" (p. 143).

In order to improve our educational system and make it more equitable, it is necessary to understand how the disciplinary mechanism function and what are the systemic challenges that are maintaining this unequal educational opportunities system. Given the over-representation of AA students in the disciplinary system we must start with the office of discipline referrals, the safety transfer requests, and expulsion referrals process. A second component that needs to be further investigated is how staff members and families perceive and understand this phenomenon and their level of awareness about the punitive system that targets AA students.

Finally, given that the challenges that AA students encounter in their learning environment might lay in the school climate and not on the students, researchers need to investigate and assess the role of evidence-based practices of behavioral interventions in the schools. We need to learn if implementations grounded in the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), such as the School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (SWPBIS) framework, can address and decrease the disproportional representation of students of color in the disciplinary system. The implementation of the SWPBIS framework, anchored in the Multi-

Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), is intended to promote the development of school environments that are more conducive to learning. When the SWPBIS is implemented with fidelity, it can decrease the disproportionate number of students of discipline-based referrals, most of which are for AA students.

> A Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) is a data-driven, problem-solving framework to improve outcomes for all students. MTSS relies on a continuum of evidence-based practices matched to student needs. Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is an example of MTSS centered on social behavior (Multi-Tiered Framework, 2020, p.1).

The school district participating in this study has adopted the SWPBIS practices and strategies to address the disproportionality of referrals, thus, creating stability for African American students in the school system.

Improving the school climate creates a learning environment that is more conducive to learning for everyone, which could decrease the educators' demand to utilize disciplinary measures to address students' behavior. Addressing the root causes of students' systemic challenges can impact their sense of belonging in school and decrease the need for a school transfer. Providing more stability in an improved school climate that nurtures authentic relationships with students, which has the possibility of improving academic success of AA students. The qualitative component of the study examines the experiences and perspectives staff members supporting students and families encounter while engaging in the school district safety transfer process and their motives for submitting the request.

Purpose of the Study

Overall, this research will help identify challenges or benefits students find when transferring across multiple school sites through their academic careers. Helping educators to better support students who are experiencing the same challenges to avoid unnecessary changes that consequently disrupt their learning experiences will improve their academic outcomes. Understanding this phenomenon will help us understand how public-school educators and officials can improve marginalized students' learning experiences by dismantling the underlying systemic challenges in the educational systems that perpetuate discrimination against AA students. Stability and inclusion in their schools has the potential to improve the academic performance of the most vulnerable populations. Finally, discerning how students from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds are disciplined and understanding how that correlates with their academic achievement can raise awareness in educators and administrators about their role in this phenomenon. This level of awareness can motivate educators to work on dismantling school district's policies and processes that are rooted in systemic racism and to foster learning environments that are more conducive to learning for our most vulnerable students.

The purpose of the quantitative component of this mixed methods study is to investigate the factors that mediate the overrepresentation of African American students in the safety transfers process and their impact on academic performance (output). Moreover, by utilizing narrative data collected in meetings held at the school district office, this study also investigates African American parents' perspectives on what drives the school district's disproportionality of African American students in the safety transfer process. Furthermore, the impact of the fidelity of the implementation of the SWPBIS of the sending and receiving schools on the same sample of students will be investigated, as these behavioral interventions are used in this district. The

role of the Tiered Fidelity Inventory (TFI) Tier 1 scale, which is the official measure collected by the school district will be investigated to learn about the role of the fidelity of implementing the SWPBIS framework on the transition outcomes. Its association with change in the number of referrals, attendance rate, and GPA of the African American students who went through the transfer process will be compared with change observed in students who did not receive the transfer. Secondary data on office discipline referrals (ODRs), attendance rates, and GPA retrieved from an urban school district will be compared before and after transfer as well to learn about the impact of the transfer. Finally, the factors that contributed to the referrals across environments will be analyzed using qualitative data from school staff and AA parents.

Research Questions

Safety transfers are prompted by physical and emotional challenges that students encounter in their learning environments, which are perceived as no longer conducive to fostering a safe learning environment for the student. It is important that we understand the factors that contribute to request this transfers as they seem to be closely related to the overrepresentation of AA in this system. In this study I will be seeking the answer to these specific research questions:

RQ 1: What factors contribute to having so many African American students experiencing an aversive learning environment and requesting safety transfers?

RQ2. How do students' characteristics of the sending and receiving schools (e.g., ethnicity, Special Education) impact the outcome of their disciplinary and academic performance after their transfer? Does the students' academic, disciplinary, and attendance performance change in the receiving school?

RQ3. Is the academic and behavioral outcome of an experimental group (students who received a transfer) and a control group (similar students who did not receive a transfer) different, and what is the role SWPBIS in this relationship?

Theoretical Framework

Villegas (1988) analyzed the school failure of minority students in the United States in association with the cultural mismatch between school and home environments. Villegas studied how teachers and students often can misinterpret each other's behavior due to different culturally driven assumptions on the appropriate verbal behavior that a student had to display in the classroom. Moreover, Villegas (1988) emphasized the importance of educators implementing culturally sensitive practices that support the most vulnerable students in their classroom by addressing the political aspect of an education system that favors middle-class students.

Students' perception about their social persona in educational settings is relevant in how they act and react in interactions with others, their persona or identity is influenced by the perceptions of others. In his study, using Villegas' theory of cultural mismatch, Bean (2013) attempted to understand what precursors or antecedents can influence how learning communities perceive students of color. Bean (2013) states, "The cultural mismatch hypothesis posits that disproportionality is due to a cultural mismatch between primarily White and middle-class teachers and African American Students" (p. 488). Subjectivity can play a significant role in why students of color are more likely than other students to receive discipline referrals that are included in categories such as defiance, insubordination, and disobedience (Van Dyke, 2016). Also, the continuous delivery of discipline measures as a means to address students' behavior problems has a sizable and negative impact on the quality of the relationship between schools and families. It has been noted that a compromised school-family relationship has a negative

impact on how caregivers collaborate with school representatives in order to ensure the students' active engagement in the learning process. The more negative experiences families encounter while interacting with the school system, the less active caregivers become in their children's academic engagement (Gibson & Haight, 2013).

Researchers have also studied the process of how educators assess students of color. Notably, scientists have studied how subjectivity and personal biases can influence the assessment of African American students. Maydsoz (2014) states, "The process and procedure for identifying students for special education is amazingly a subjective one, considering the implications for the student, the family, and the school" (p. 81). Other researchers have suggested that the disproportional representation of students of color in special education can be attributed to two factors: biases towards a specific group or the excessive exposure of specific groups to poverty (Wiley, et al., 2013).

This theoretical frame seems appropriate to understand the subjectivity involved in the disciplinary system. In environments where the social norms represent one culture and there is intolerance for cultural differences, it is more likely that students exhibiting different behaviors and embodying the characteristics of the "other" culture will be misunderstood and threatening to the status quo. Overall, our educational system is set to serve students who come from "standard, mainstream family environment (families from White middle-upper class background) but tends to overlook the challenges of students who experience aversive events in their lives (Williams & Bryan 2013), and these are more likely to be also students of color.

Significance of Study

Tajalli and Garba (2014) attempted to study the factors that contribute to the overrepresentation of African American students in disciplinary and special education processes.

This study tries to identify the factors that fuel the overrepresentation of African American students in an urban school district's minor process, the safety transfer mechanism, and to investigate how mid-year transfers impact the academic output of the students who are requesting them. Stability, nurturing settings, and inclusion in schools can enhance the most vulnerable population's academic performance. However, multiple school transfers can undermine some of our students' learning stability and negatively impact their academic performance.

Also, Archer-Banks and Behar-Horenstein (2008) highlighted the importance of fostering positive relationships between educators and parents to promote students' learning. Specifically, the researchers emphasized how a higher level of parents' engagement with their children's learning environment and teachers was a predictor of the students' academic success. This study sought to identify crucial factors related to parents-school interactions that lead to students' academic success in the classroom and foster a safer learning environment for our children.

Definition of Terms

Disproportionality: A group's representation in a particular category that exceeds expectations for that group or differs substantially from the representation of others in that category. In this case, it refers to African American students compared to other populations (NASP, 2020)

Emotional disturbance: A diagnostic label utilized during Special Education assessments, and it refers a condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child's educational performance: A) An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors. B) An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers. C)

Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances. D) A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression. E) A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.

Expulsion Referrals (ER): Students might be referred for expulsion if they broke a specific rule on school grounds or at a school activity, which might include engaging in dangerous behavior that puts someone in danger. The Education Code defines expellable behaviors.

Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS): A Multi-Tiered System of Supports is a systemic, continuous-improvement framework in which data-based problem solving and decision-making is practiced across all levels of the educational system for supporting students.

School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (SW-PBIS): Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports is an evidence-based three-tiered framework to improve and integrate all of the data, systems, and practices affecting student outcomes every day. SWPBIS creates schools where all students succeed.

Office discipline referrals (ODR): A school discipline referral is when a teacher refers students for discipline purposes to receive out of class support. To access out-of-class support, teachers complete a form and turn it into the office with information about the incident and what steps the teacher has taken to correct the problem.

Out of school suspension rates (OOS): When a student is temporarily excluded from any school activity. A typical out-of-school suspension lasts anywhere from 1 to 5 days in the state of California.

Response to Intervention (RTI): A multi-tier approach to the early identification and support of students with learning (Academic RTI) and behavior (Behavior RTI) needs. The RTI

process begins with high-quality instruction and universal screening of all children in the general education classroom.

Safety transfer referrals (ST): A change of placement outside the regular enrollment school district period. Safety transfers are prompted by guardians and supported by school personnel when there is a concern that a student's physical and psychological well-being is compromised at their current school.

TFI Tiered Fidelity Inventory (TFI): A measure that assesses the fidelity of implementation of the School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In the U.S., zero-tolerance policies in the public-school systems have been widely utilized to address students' challenging behaviors. Overall, findings from multiple researchers have shown that zero-tolerance policies are not effective in addressing nor modifying students' behaviors. "Specifically, zero tolerance can be defined as school-wide or district-wide policies that mandate typically harsh consequences or punishments such as suspensions and expulsions for a wide range of violations (Bear et al., 2002; Cohn & Canter, 2004, as cited in Evenson et al., 2009, p. 2). Studies have identified that out-of-school suspensions and other forms of punishment that public schools are delivering as consequences to deter undesirable behavior and increase a sense of safety in public school settings are not effective and that they might cause adversary effects in the students' behavior in the long term (Evenson et al., 2009).

Some of the undesirable side effects of this policy include limiting students' access to continued instruction, which is necessary for students to learn and graduate from high school and undermining the students' socio-emotional well-being (Evenson et al.,2009). One of the significant consequences of disciplining students (e.g., suspension) is negating their access to an education, which is negatively impacting the students' learning and academic achievement. Bean (2013) states, "African American children with diagnoses associated with externalizing behaviors had the highest rates of removal to an alternative educational setting by school personnel, such as special education (p. 488)." Externalizing behaviors were defined such as making too much noise/talking too much or making verbal threats. Removing students from their natural learning environment for multiple and prolonged periods of time can disrupt their learning outcomes and negatively impact their academic success.

Students of color receive harsher consequences for similar behaviors than other students receive, "Racial disproportionality refers to when minority students receive harsher punitive measures than their nonminority counterparts for the same violation (Evenson et al., 2009, p. 6)."

Various studies have revealed that students of color are more likely to be disciplined than their White counterparts. For example, African American students are up to four times more likely to be disciplined than White students for comparable infractions, while LatinX students are twice as likely to be suspended than White students (Skiba et al., 2002, as cited in Evenson et al., 2009, p. 6). LatinX refers to a person of Latin American origin or descent, and it is used as a gender-neutral or nonbinary alternative to Latino or Latina. Other researchers have shown that "In the 2009–2010 academic year, African American students were more likely to be suspended than White students (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights 2014, as cited in Bal, 2016)."

Researchers have also determined that the location of the school district, urban versus rural, affects the overall suspension rate. Evenson et. al (2009) states, "It is generally established that schools in urban locations have significantly higher rates of suspension in comparison to more rural or suburban areas (p. 6)." Even within the same district, the level of distribution and suspension rates might vary considerably due to various factors. For example, the specific school climate, school discipline policies, and administrative practices can profoundly influence the suspension rates and the students who are affected by these disciplinary practices (Evenson et al., 2009).

Furthermore, disproportional disciplinary practices are increasing the risk for minority students who are subjected to these practices to enter the juvenile justice system, which is feeding and perpetuating the so-called "school-to-prison pipeline" (Krezmien et al., 2015, as

cited in Bal, 2016, p. 41). Overall, racial disproportionality in the disciplinary system is a systemic challenge that permeates our society and culture, and its consequences go beyond the single, individual student. Disproportionality stems not only from the individual, but from multiple factors, such as institutional and interpersonal factors. For example, one major factor that is fueling disproportionality can be found in institutionalized racism (Bal, 2016).

Achievement Gap and Risk Factors

"Diversity remains a heartbeat of the U.S. way of life. Perhaps no place reflects the manner in which racial, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity is manifested better than the nation's public schools (Banks 2015, as cited in Howard, 2018, p. 24)." The U.S. society is becoming increasingly diverse and is being enriched and transformed by the merging of different cultural backgrounds. Researchers have been trying to understand how mainstream North American society is responding to ever-changing and diverse communities and how cultural biases might be at the root of the disproportional representation of African American students in the disciplinary system.

The Office of Civil Rights (OCR) has highlighted the disparities in the disciplinary rates between African American students and White students. The OCR has also pointed out how African American students are being disciplined at an increasingly younger age, including pre-school age pupils (U.S. ED OCR 2014, as cited in Howard, 2018, p. 25). As exposed by the OCR report, exclusionary disciplinary practices for African American students, which mainly involve out-of-school suspensions, begin at an alarmingly young age. As a result, these exclusionary disciplinary practices are negatively affecting the learning curve of African American students even at an earlier age, which can increase their achievement gap.

Researchers have hypothesized that disproportionality in the disciplinary practices across the U.S. public school system can be related to the cultural mismatch between the White, Eurocentric cultural background that public school embodies and the actual, diverse composition of the public schools' student bodies in the North American public school system (Howard, 2018). A way to address this cultural mismatch aspect of the disproportionality issue is for educators to re-think their pedagogic practices by understanding how the diverse student body that they serve thinks, processes information, and makes meaning of events that happen to them (Howard, 2018). Furthermore, amongst African American students, African American male student behaviors are disciplined at a higher and harsher rate compared with their non-Black peers (Nasir et al., 2013).

The implications of disproportionality have been the subject of many studies. Many studies have found that African American Students who are disproportionately disciplined in public schools are more likely to have lower academic achievement and a higher probability of being involved with the criminal justice system (Gregory et al., 2010; Monroe, 2005; Noguera, 2003; Wlad & Lose, 2003; as cited in Nasir et al., 2013, p. 489). Overall, the disproportional rate in which African American students are being disciplined across the U.S. is pervasive. The Office of Civil Rights reported that in the school year 2009-2010, 46% of students who received multiple suspensions, 39% of children expelled from school and 42% of minors who were referred to law enforcement agencies outside of their schools were African American (CRDC, 2012, as cited in Nasir et al., 2013, p. 490).

While there is no empirical evidence that African American male students misbehave at higher rates than other students, they are still being disciplined at higher rates and receiving harsher discipline than their non-African American male counterparts (Gregory et al., 2010, as

cited in Nasir et al., 2013, p. 491). Studies conducted with elementary level students have also identified that students are being labeled with vague terms when disciplined, such as being disruptive, defiant, and disrespectful (Noguera, 1996; Ferguson, 2000; as cited in Nasir et al., 2013, p. 491). Also, "Black male students are often perceived as having a bad attitude, and their body language is perceived as threatening, (Nasir et al., 2013, p. 491)."

In recent years, the mainstream culture has constructed and emphasized the idea that we are in a color-blind society, but there are also institutionalized practices in our culture that still reinforce and normalize stereotypical, criminalized views of African American males (Alexander, 2012, as cited in Nasir et al., 2013, p. 491).

General to Specific: School District's Data

The school district part of this study is an urban school district located in California with 53,855 students as of 2018. The school district comprises a diverse group of students, and the student demographics are depicted in Table 1. 1 below.

Table 1. 1

School District Students' Demographics

African American	American Indian	Asian	Filipino	LatinX	Pacific Islander	White	Multiracial	Declined to State
7%	>1%	35%	5%	27%	1%	15%	5%	5%

Furthermore, district data shows that 28% of the students are English Language Learners (ELL), 12% receive special education services, and 55% are socioeconomically disadvantaged

Academic Achievement

Regarding the achievement of the school district part of this study students, 12% of African American students are proficient in Mathematics, and 20% are proficient in English and Language-Arts compared to the district average of 51% and 55%, respectively. As of 2018, the graduation rate for African American students was recorded at 77% while the district average was 86%, and the drop-out rate was 9%, slightly higher than the 7% district average. Finally, 28% of African American students received special education services, which was significantly higher than the 12% district average. When looking at the district data, African American students perform academically well below the district averages. Further, African American students in the school district part of this study are also overrepresented in special education services.

Chronic Absenteeism and Discipline

In the State of California, a student is considered chronically absent when the student misses more than 10% of the school year for any reason (excused or unexcused absences or suspensions). In the school year 2018-2019, 13% of students attending the school district part of the study were chronically absent while 36% of African American students were chronically absent in the same school year.

Moreover, in the school year 2018-2019, the school district recorded that an average of 53 office discipline referrals (ODR) were delivered per each 100 students. When looking at the rate for African American students, the average was 300 ODRs per 100 students. Finally, in the school year 2018-2019, a total of 1,706 suspensions were delivered; of those, 594 were for African American students. Despite representing only 7% of the student body, African American students accounted for 34.8% of the total days of suspension issued in the school year.

A visual analysis of the school district's data on achievement, attendance, and discipline shows that African American students are disproportionally represented in special education and the disciplinary system. African American rates regarding the indices, as mentioned above, are well above the district averages. African American students are two and a half times more likely to qualify for special education service or to be chronically absent than the district average. Even more accentuated are the discipline referrals and suspensions. African American students are five times more likely to be suspended and are six times more likely to receive an office discipline referral than the average in this school district.

Risk Factors That Impact Discipline Referrals

Researchers have attempted to study and identify risk factors that are associated with an increased probability for students incurring school discipline. The home and family environment have been identified as a factor that influences the behavior of juveniles (Ganao et al., 2013). Specifically, an active role of parents in monitoring and supporting their children's behavior is a predictor of the students' likelihood of being disciplined at school and these children are less likely to be involved in antisocial behaviors than children in homes with less active parental monitoring and support (Ganao et al., 2013).

A study by Ganao et al. (2013) investigated the contextual factors that impact school suspension at a national level. Secondary data from 3318 adolescents residing in urban areas of the United States were utilized in Ganao et al. (2013) study. The study included African American and White students; they respectively represented 17% and 83% of the sample. Students' data were retrieved from a central data bank. Data included indices at the individual, family, and community level. The individual level indices included the students' demographics, friend's delinquency, and experiences of physical abuse. The family level indices consisted of the

family's use of alcoholic drinks and drugs and the presence of other life disruptions. Finally, factors at the community level included neighborhood safety, community problems, and exposure to crime. Some of the contextual factors that were significant in predicting students' school discipline for African American Students include student delinquency, family disruptions, neighborhood lack of safety, and exposure to crime. This pattern was very different for White students, for whom the other factors showed significance in predicting school discipline problems. Ganao et al. (2013) findings suggest that their findings should help school administrations to recalibrate their policies on discipline and programs to support students according to their different needs (Ganao et al., 2013).

In the U.S., low-income students encounter challenges associated with their family situations, such as financial hardship, stable housing, and food instability. By not considering these challenges, the educational system is favoring students who come from what is considered a standard/mainstream family environment, such as families from a middle-upper class background. In doing this we fail to consider the impact of these issues in the educational achievements for students who are experiencing aversive events in their lives (Williams & Bryan, 2013). Williams and Bryan's (2013) study analyzed the educational outcomes of African American students who have experienced traumatic events at home, school, and/or in their communities. They conducted a qualitative research in which eight successful, high achieving African American adults were interviewed. Williams and Bryan (2013) attempted to identify the factors that contributed to the participants' academic success while overcoming the adversities that they had experienced in their lives. Some of the factors that were identified included school-related parenting practices and parental involvement, a positive mother-child relationship, and an extended and supportive family network. The researchers also listed school factors that

contributed to the participants' abilities to overcome personal adversities such as supportive school-based relationships, school-oriented peer culture, good teaching, and extracurricular school activities.

Parents' active engagement in their children's educational career is considered a predictor in the students' academic and behavioral success. Effective parent-school collaboration is necessary to ensure that caregivers maintain their level of engagement with their children's school; adverse events such as out-of-school suspensions reduce the level of caregivers' involvement with their children's education (Gibson & Haight, 2013). Students of color are overrepresented when it comes to the use of out-of-school suspensions as a method to discipline students' misconduct in school. Out-of-school suspensions are also affecting the relationship between school and families and their collaboration in ensuring that our students are actively participating in their learning. To examine the cultural meanings associated with an out-of-school suspension, Gibson and Haight (2013) interviewed 30 low-income African American parents of 34 children who received out-of-school suspensions.

Moreover, the authors attempted to understand how caregivers perceive out-of-school suspensions and how suspensions affect the school-family relationships. Gibson and Haight (2013) found that parents valued school success, recognized their children's misbehavior, and supported appropriate consequences. Conversely, the caregivers expressed concerns about out of school suspensions, which they do not consider to be appropriate consequences for their children's behavior. More specifically, they pointed out that suspensions do not help children with their underlying problems, they are unjust, and they harm children. Additionally, they undermine caregivers' racial socialization and are racially biased. Most importantly, it was found

that suspensions are an emotionally laden event for caregivers, which can negatively contribute to the disengagement of African American families from school (Gibson & Haight, 2013).

Risk Factor: Schools

School-related factors can influence how African American students are disciplined at school. Bottiani et al., (2018) studied how contextual factors such as students' perceptions of school equity, sense of school belonging, and adjustment problems impact students' behavior. The researchers utilized secondary data to analyze and identify school-related contextual factors. The study sample was comprised of 19,726 African American and White students from 58 schools in Maryland who had completed the School Climate survey as mandated by the State Safe and Supportive Resolution. Then the schools participating research study sample was divided into subgroups. Half of the schools were randomly assigned to receive training in Positive Behavior Support Strategies and Interventions (PBIS), while the other half did not receive any other training. Later the School Climate Surveys were administered to both sub-groups, and the researchers analyzed their results. The researchers found that there was a significant negative association between the Black versus White out-of-school suspension gap and perceived equity and school belonging. The study determined that African American students were more likely to perceive that the gap in the Black versus White out-of-school suspensions was the product of a school's lower equity (i.e., fair and inclusive treatment of students by schools regardless of race, gender, socio-economic status, and cultural background). The data revealed that African American students reported a significantly lower sense of school belonging compared to White students, which suggests that when African American students are consistently removed from their learning environment, the message conveyed to all students is that African American students are not welcomed and accepted in the school environment

(Bottiani et al., 2018). Finally, the study findings supported that a more positive school environment increases the students' trust in their teachers and enhances their learning experience.

Other school variables that might influence the overrepresentation of African American students in the disciplinary system might be associated with teachers' behavior. Researchers hypothesized that the cultural mismatch between faculty members, mainly White women, and the increasingly diverse student body in our public schools, which is also referred to as "diversity gap," could be a contributing factor in the overrepresentation of minorities in school discipline (Simmons-Reed & Cartledge, 2014).

Bottiani et al., (2018) defined schools as complex ecological systems in which multiple drivers, such as zero-tolerance policies, biases, and positive behavior interventions, might coexist, and that might contradict each other. Also, Bottiani et al., (2018) describe how school discipline that produces out-of-school suspension is the result of these complex interactions between many different school-based factors that might be interfering with each other. Some of these school-based factors are zero-tolerance policies, cultural mismatches between students and educators, unpreparedness of some teachers in addressing behavioral challenges in their classrooms, continuous interactions between the many and different professionals working in the school environment that can give contradictory responses on how to address students' challenging behaviors, and lack of resources and inequalities that might be affecting the school's ecology (Bottiani et al., 2018).

Interventions Literature

Many studies have been focusing on practices and interventions that educators can implement at the classroom or school-wide level. In some cases, in the past two decades,

students' academic outcomes have been decreasing due to students' behavioral challenges and school districts' inadequacies in meeting their students' needs.

Academic and Behavior Response to Intervention (ARTI & BRTI)

School districts across the nation have addressed students' behavioral challenges by disjointedly implementing evidence-based interventions based on the Academic and Behavioral Response to intervention (ARTI & BRTI) frameworks without significant success. Academic and Behavioral Response to interventions (ARTI & BRTI) are evidence-based frameworks that school districts nationwide are attempting to implement to foster learning environments that are positive, more inclusive, less punitive, and more conducive to learning than zero tolerance policies in order to meet students' unique needs. Overall, school districts have primarily focused on implementing ARTI and BRTI disjointedly, but to serve our students holistically, school districts must integrate the two systems (Noltemeyer & Sansosti, 2012).

Noltemeyer and Sansosti (2012) examined the Integrated System Model (ISM) and the effect of the implementation of academic and behavioral components in an integrated system on student academic outcomes. Noltemeyer and Sansosti, (2012) compared the results of the implementation of the Tiered Models of Integrated Academic and Behavioral supports in elementary schools in the suburban Midwest across two academic years. Noltemeyer and Sansosti's (2012) research provided scientific evidence that students highly benefit from the concurrent implementation of ARTI and BRTI.

Furthermore, most recently, Kent McIntosh and Steve Goodman (2016) published a book in which they report on an investigation about the benefit of an "Integrated Multi-Tiered Systems of Support by Blending RTI and PBIS." This field of research is relatively new, and more studies on the integrated implementation of ARTI and BRTI in inner-city school districts are needed.

As Noltemeyer and Sansosti (2012) pointed out, "Although the differences between models were not statistically significant, the results suggest that integrated models may produce larger improvements in reading skills than academic or behavioral models in isolation" (p. 119)

Moreover, the researchers pointed out that the significant improvements in the indexes analyzed in the study were also recorded in the non-White student's category.

School-Wide Positive Behavioral Supports and Interventions (SWPBIS)

Tobin and Vincent (2011) analyzed how School-Wide Positive Behavioral Supports and Interventions (SWPBIS) is a system of interventions that could prevent the disproportionate exclusion of African American students from their learning environment due to out of class suspensions for discipline practices. Tobin and Vincent (2011) analyzed the data on the implementation of SWPBS and the impact of exclusionary practices for African American students in a sample of 46 schools across the United States. The data were retrieved from the National Center for Education Statistics. The data of a subgroup of eight schools that had increased their level of implementation of SWPBS and simultaneously decreased their relative ratio of African American students referred for exclusionary discipline practices were further analyzed.

Tobin and Vincent (2012) utilized three indices to compare the effect of SWPBS in relation to the disproportionality of African American students in the schools' disciplinary practices, which included (a) exclusion through suspension and expulsion data collected with the Schoolwide Information System; (b) Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support implementation through the Effective Behavior Support Survey completed by staff members; and (c) disproportionality with the relative rate index. Tobin and Vincent's study found that when there is an increase in the level of implementation of SWPBIS, there is a corresponding decrease in the

ratio of exclusionary discipline practices that African American students receive. The researchers showed that this effect is more prominent in a subgroup of eight schools that presented a higher level of implementation of SWPBIS.

Baule (2020) reviewed the implementation of SWPBIS and its impact on middle school and high school suspensions in a mid-sized Midwest urban school district in Muncie, Indiana. The district had been experiencing a drop in overall enrollment and a surge in students' behavior challenges and discipline referrals. A middle school in the district started to implement the SWPBIS framework in an attempt to reduce the high number of disciplinary challenges that the district was facing and to improve the overall learning climate. In the school year 2015-2016, the district implemented the SWPBIS framework districtwide after the initial implementation of the SWPBIS framework at the middle school level.

Baule (2020) analyzed the school enrollment and disciplinary district data from 2014 to 2017 to assess how the implementation of the SWPBIS framework had affected the school district's learning environment. Baule (2020) concluded that the implementation of SWPBIS had a positive effect on the overall school district's climate by reducing the number and nature of discipline incidents recorded across the district. The researcher also reported that one main factor that accounted for the successful implementation with the fidelity of the PBIS framework was in the buy-in of the building leadership teams in all schools that participated in the PBIS implementation. Moreover, Baule (2020) pointed out that, even though a significant racial disparity continued between Black, multiracial, and White students, the disparity decreased. The school district recorded a decrease in their overall number of out of school suspensions, while there they registered an increase in the students' attendance and academic achievement.

The correlation between the fidelity of implementation of SWPBIS and the decrease in the number of office discipline referrals (ODR) has been analyzed by many studies (Freeman et al., 2019). Overall, less attention has been given to the relationship between SWPBIS implementation fidelity and student-level behavior (ODR, suspension), attendance (days absent, tardiest), and academic (GPA) outcomes. Freeman et al. (2019) attempted to study the correlation between the implementation of SWPBIS and students' outcomes. Freeman et al.'s (2019) study utilized a large sample of 12,127 students from 15 Midwestern urban high schools implementing SWPBIS.

The results of Freeman et al.'s study suggests that high schools that are implementing SWPBIS with fidelity can register improvements in student outcomes beyond reductions in ODRs. Overall, the data analysis showed that in the high schools that participated in the study, there was a decrease in the number of unexcused tardiness, unexcused absences, office discipline referrals, and suspensions correlated with an increase in the fidelity of implementation of the SWPBIS framework. These results support a strengthening of the connection between improving the climate of the learning environments and an increase in the overall academic engagement of the students through the decrease of out of class time directly due to office discipline referrals and suspensions.

School-Wide Positive Behavioral Supports and Interventions (SWPBIS) and Tiered Fidelity Inventory (TFI)

SWPBIS relies on evidence-based strategies to foster prosocial behaviors in students while improving the school climate. Further research should study the relationship between the implementation with fidelity of School-Wide PBIS systems and the students' academic and behavioral output (Noltemeyer et al., 2019). Noltemeyer's et al. (2019) study focused on the

students' outcomes related to the implementation of Tier 1 SWPBIS structures. The study consisted of 153 Ohio schools. The research confirmed that when there was a higher level of implementation with fidelity of the SWPBIS framework, there was a significantly lower number of out-of-school suspensions while schools with a lower level of fidelity of SWPBIS implementation scored a higher level of discipline data, such as office discipline referral and suspensions. The researcher utilized the Tiered Fidelity Inventory (TFI) to measure the fidelity of implementation of the SWPBIS framework across the 153 schools participating in this study. The TFI is a self-assessment tool that school teams complete at least twice a year, in the Fall and Spring, to assess the level of implementation of the PBIS framework. The TFI Tier 1 scale consists of 15 questions completed by school-based teams that cover 15 areas related to the implementation of SWPBIS. Each question is answered in a scale of 0, 1, or 2, which measure the level of implementation that is reached by the school in that specific area. If the overall score is higher than 70% of the possible total number of points available in the scale, the school should expect a decrease in the number of discipline-related referrals; if a school achieves a score lower than 70%, the school discipline remains unaffected. When this occurs, the school team has to create a plan to address the areas of implementation that are deficient in order to reach an overall TFI score higher than 70% (Algozzine et al., 2014).

Jorgensen and Boezio (2012) have also analyzed the relationship between the fidelity of implementation of SWPBIS and students' academic outcomes in Colorado's public schools. Jorgensen and Boezio (2012) analyzed the PBIS implementation data from 566 educational facilities in the state of Colorado. All schools that are implementing the SWPBIS framework and are supported by the Colorado Department of Education are required to complete a Fidelity of Implementation (FOI) tool annually that includes Benchmarks of Quality (BoQ) and the school-

wide Evaluation Tool (SET), whose data were analyzed by Jorgensen and Boezio. The threshold for the BoQ and SET to assess the full implementation of the SWPBIS framework is set at 70% of the points obtained on the overall measures. Jorgensen and Boezio (2012) confirmed that there was a correlation between fidelity of implementation of PBIS and school discipline; the higher the level of implementation of the SWPBIS framework, the lower the school discipline indices were. Moreover, even though the SWPBIS is not expected to affect students' academic achievement directly, the study findings indicated that at the elementary and middle school level the data analysis showed there was a slight positive correlation between the students' achievement and the fidelity of implementation of the SWPBIS framework. The strength of the correlations between students' achievement and implementation with fidelity of SWPBIS was marginal but still significantly positive (Jorgensen & Boezio, 2012).

The implementation of schoolwide structures and interventions based on the SWPBIS framework benefits all students, but this is even more important in high school settings. That is the learning environment which prepares young adults to enter the workforce or to transition into the next phase of their lives. High school is also a time in which students face emotional and behavioral challenges. Flannery et al., (2014) examined the effect of the implementation of the schoolwide PBIS across three years in high school settings. The participants in the study were the students in eight high schools that implemented PBIS compared to four school sites that did not implement the SWPBIS framework. A total of 36,653 students who attended the 12 high schools were part of the research. The results of the study confirmed that there was a significant decrease in the number of office discipline referrals in the schools that implemented the SWPBIS. Moreover, the study also confirmed that an increase in the fidelity of implementation of SWPBIS corresponded to a significant decrease in school discipline referrals.

School-Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS): Why is this

Framework so Extensively Utilized in Public School Settings?

Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports framework has been widely utilized by

school districts to create a learning environment that is more positive and conducive to students'

learning while increasing students' academic engagement and decreasing disciplinary measures

to address students' behavior. As of 2014, 21,600 schools had implemented SWPBIS, which

represented about 20% of the schools in the United States (Horner & Sugai, 2015).

As we reviewed in the previous section, SWPBIS is a framework that is based on the

development of preventive measures and structures that are founded on evidence-based

behavioral technologies and supported by a system of implementation (Sugai & Horner, 2006).

The three tenets that were mentioned previously provide the SWPBIS theoretical framework

with flexibility as to how it is implemented and a high level of adaptability on the characteristics

of the specific settings in which it is executed, which allows the framework to be suitable to

enhance the climate and culture of a wide variety of school environments. Specifically, the

SWPBIS framework provides core features and examples that each school can utilize to create its

own set of SWPBIS behavioral structures, "but includes the flexibility needed to match those

features, and the process for establishing those features, to the local culture and context" (Horner

et al., 2017, p. 27). Furthermore, SWPBIS focuses on socially appropriate behaviors to be taught,

practiced, and reinforced in a variety of contexts and settings by students and adults, and its core

features are built on practices that are empirically validated and replicated by studies across the

nation (Horner et al., 2017). Finally, since SWPBIS heavily relies on empirical evidence to

validate its structure, collection, evaluation, and analysis of data is another essential feature of

this framework. A continuous cycle of data collection and analysis can drive the school, district,

and state-level teams decision making progress in how to adapt the PBIS framework to better suit the needs of their learning communities and to systematically monitor the impacts of the implementation of the SWPBIS core features on the school indices (discipline, attendance, academics).

Noltemeyer et al. (2019) studied the implementation of SWPBIS on a large scale by analyzing data collected across 153 schools in Ohio. The study revealed that schools that were implementing the SWPBIS framework with fidelity, which is determined by scoring 70% or above in the Tiered Fidelity Inventory (TFI), recorded a significantly lower ratio of out-of-school suspensions per 100 students than the schools that did not utilize the SWPBIS framework.

Grasley-Boy et al., (2019) also compared discipline data collected from 544 schools that were trained in SWPBIS with 544 schools that were never trained in the behavioral framework. Their study results confirmed that students attending schools that were trained in SWPBIS were significantly less likely to receive an out-of-school suspension and that, overall, students missed fewer days of school due to out-of-school suspensions (Grasley-Boy et al., 2019). Most importantly, Grasley-Boy et al. highlighted that students with disabilities in schools that were implementing SWPBIS with fidelity were also less likely to be sent to an alternative and more restrictive setting due to behavioral challenges. This study further supports how SWPBIS can affect a variety of different environments on a large scale, and, at the same time, it can also affect the educational outcomes of different student populations. Many studies, like the one conducted by Noltemeyer et al. and Grasley-Boy et al., focus on analyzing the implementation of SWPBIS in more traditional general education school settings. However, the SWPBIS framework is adaptable to fulfill the needs of students or young adults attending a non-traditional school setting.

For example, Simonsen and Sugai (2013) investigated the implementation of SWPBIS in alternative and more restrictive school settings. Simonsen and Sugai suggested that to fit the students' individual needs in alternative and special education settings, the SWPBIS framework has to be intensified within each tier of SWPBIS. Simonsen and Sugai recommended that some of the adaptations for the Tier 1 structures might include

> more explicit and frequent social skills instruction; positively stated prompts for occasioning appropriate social skills; active and frequent monitoring to promote engagement in programming across settings and contexts; frequent, systematic, and functionally-relevant reinforcement for appropriate behavior (e.g., using a point card or a modified check-in/check-out approach across all students); and functionally-appropriate responses to problem behavior (2013 p. 7). As the students move across Tier 2 and Tier 3 structures, the practitioners would also have to intensify and personalize the interventions even further to suit the specific students' social-emotional and behavioral needs (Simonsen & Sugai, 2013).

Johnson et al., (2013) scrutinized the implementation of SWPBIS in a secure juvenile facility in Texas. In 2009, the State of Texas passed a law to introduce the implementation of SWPBIS in its secure juvenile facilities to improve the behavior of the students in these learning environments. The Texas initiative was implemented in ten facilities, but the Johnson et al. study focused on analyzing data from one of them. The researchers examined two consecutive years' worth of data and determined that there had been an overall decrease (46%) in the number of incidents documented and an increase (21%) in the students' daily attendance. More importantly, there was an increase in the industry certifications that students earned in the program, which enabled them to find a job upon being released from the facility. Researchers highlighted that the

positive changes in the facility climate could not have been related to other variables due to the fact the no other changes in the juvenile facility (policy, staff, leadership) were recorded throughout the time of the study.

It is crucial for educational settings that are utilizing the SWPBIS framework to evaluate and assess its implementation by collecting data and generating cycles of data analysis that can guide their decision-making process (Simonsen & Sugai., 2013). School and leadership teams are highly advised to collect data and generate cycles of data analysis and inquiry to support the implementation of the SWPBIS framework at their school and maximize outcomes for educators and students. More specifically, Simonsen and Sugai (2013) state that,

> Collecting data allow PBIS teams to monitor the fidelity of implementation of core practice and system features, to monitor progress toward relevant outcomes, to use data to screen for students and educators who require more support and engage in problem-solving process to 'diagnose' or precisely identify problems, to develop an action plan to enhance implementation of key practice or system features, and monitor implementation fidelity of the enhanced features (p. 278-279).

Restorative Practices, Restorative Justice, and Disproportionality

In recent years, the State of California has attempted to address disproportionality in school discipline by passing new Education Codes to regulate how schools respond to students' discipline. One significant measure was to ban suspensions and expulsions solely based on students' willful defiance. The ban started for grades K through 3 in 2013, and it was expanded to grades 4 through 8 for the school year 2020-2021. Urban school districts like Los Angeles Unified School District, San Francisco Unified School District, and Oakland Unified School

district have been allocating resources to implement the restorative justice framework to move away from a more punitive school discipline mindset (Daramola, et al., 2020).

Restorative Justice is a systematic approach that originated from the juvenile justice system. It embeds practices that aim to involve the broader community to repair the harm and the wrongdoing that one individual has committed. In a school setting, restorative Justice helps build community and find ways and agreements to repair the harm that was caused or to resolve disputes. One essential feature of the restorative justice framework begins with the consistent implementation of community-building circles in the classroom, which will help and support the restorative circles' future implementation when the need for them arises. The framework as a whole requires a switch in the school community mindset in how its members perceive discipline, school climate, and the school community as a whole (Daramola et al.,2020).

Kreger and Sargent-Cairoli (2019) attempted to analyze the implementation of the restorative justice framework in California public schools by reviewing the perspectives of 174 California restorative justice practitioners and stakeholders. Overall, California suspension rates have declined by 42% from the school year 2011-2012 to the school year 2016-2017. However, the suspension rate by race/ethnicity is still disproportional, and African American students recorded a 9,8% rate of suspension in 2017 compared to the 3.2% of White students (CDE, 2017, as cited in Kreger & Sargent-Cairoli's, 2019).

Some of the areas reviewed in Kreger and Sargent-Cairoli's study include successful implementation, facilitating factors, and barriers of implementation of the restorative justice framework .

Kreger and Sargent-Cairoli's study highlighted that one of the essential factors for the successful implementation of the framework of Restorative Justice (RJ) is how trainings are

tailored to specifically suit the needs of a school community to enable its community members to participate in the process entirely. Moreover, they identified how the RJ framework requires an ongoing professional and learning community to allow space for continuous interactions, feedback, and reflection among trainees and trainers. Overall, the paradigm shift in the staff members' mindset requires time and patience, and the consistent collection and evaluation of data to evaluate RJ's implementation.

On the other end, Kreger and Sargent-Cairoli highlighted that stability in how the RJ implementation is funded is also a critical feature in the successful implementation of the RJ framework, and also a challenge. Without stable resources, the RJ implementation would be doomed to failure. Another barrier was identified in high staff turnover, which can lead to the continuous need for retraining people or an influx of new staff members with a different mindset regarding discipline matters (Kreger & Sargent-Cairoli, 2019).

Payne and Welch (2013) analyzed the influence of race in the implementation of restorative discipline. In a previous study, Payne and Welch (2010) determined that "A higher proportion of Black students in schools is related to the use of general types of harsh disciplinary policies" (p. 543). But no study had analyzed if schools with a higher percentage of African American students were less likely to use restorative justice techniques (Payne & Welch, 2013). Payne and Welch's study are based on the racial threat perspective: "Racial threat is a critical macro-level explanation for greater social control, which predicts that the spatial presence of a high ratio of Blacks will intensify public punitiveness because of the perceived political, economic, or criminal threat that a relatively large minority population presents to the White majority" (Blalock, 1967; Crawford et al., 1998; Liska, 1992, as cited in Payne & Each, 2013, p. 543). In their study, Payne and Welch identified a pool of schools to which was administered a

survey. In phase one of the research, 1287 school principals were selected, and 848 responded. In phase two, 848 school principals were selected, and 635 responded. In phase two, also a students' and teachers' questionnaire were administered, and the response rate was respectively 310 and 403 schools participating in the research. The survey analyzed what type of restorative justice practices were implemented at their school site, and the possible answers were: not used, used, or used often.

Payne and Welch's data analysis confirmed that,

A greater percentage of Black students decreased a school's odds of using

student conferences, peer mediation, restitution, or community service in

response to student violations. In addition, a greater percentage of Black

students decreased the likelihood that a school would use an overall

restorative justice model of discipline (p. 555).

Legal Challenges: Resolutions and Policies

"According to a 2014 report from the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights, African American students represent 15% of students, but 44% of students suspended more than once and 36% of expelled students" (Anderson & Ritter, 2016, p. 1). Since students of color are being disproportionally disciplined across the United States, the Office of Civil Rights is constantly monitoring the annual data report of nationwide disproportionality that are released by the Federal Department of Education, by closely surveying the data obtained from school districts and States that are found disproportional (Anderson & Ritter, 2016).

Local and national education agencies are attempting to address the challenge of the disproportionality of students in the school discipline systems by passing resolutions and policies that bind schools to implement strategies and structures to decrease their disproportionality.

Chicago Public schools passed a policy in 2012 that aimed to reduce the length of students' suspensions. California has been a pioneer state in enacting state-level education laws that limit behaviors that are suspend able, such as willful defiance. The Miami-Dade school district eliminated out-of-school suspensions prior to the 2015-2016 school year (Anderson & Ritter 2016). States, County Offices of Education, and School Districts are acknowledging that Zero Tolerance policies are not effective instruments in instilling prosocial behavior in students and that different approaches have to be taken in order to improve the learning experience and the overall school climate for each student.

The SWPBIS framework is one of the main evidence-based systems of interventions that have been widely implemented by education agencies across the United States to address the school climate and student discipline. As of 2018, over 25,000 schools across the nation have adopted the SWPBIS framework (Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2018).

In 2009, the school district part of this research study was audited by the Office of Civil Right because of the disproportionality of African American students in the disciplinary and special education students. The final report of the audit required for the school district to change its disciplinary policies and practices in order to avoid being sanctioned. The school district's Board of Education passed its first resolution in 2011 in which zero tolerance practices were eliminated from the school district discipline practices, and it mandated the implementation of the Restorative Practices framework to address students: conflicts with peers and adults.

In 2013, the school district's Board of Education passed an improved resolution regarding students' discipline and disproportionality. The board resolution limited the school sites' discipline practices by eliminating "willful defiance" as a suspend able student's offense. It

also mandated the implementation of Schoolwide Positive Behavior Supports and Interventions (PBIS) as a framework to improve the school climate and decrease the level of discipline referrals that deeply affect the African American students.

The Board of Education's resolution mandated that twice a year the school district produce a Safe and Supportive School Resolution report to be presented to the Board of Education to assess the stage of implementation of the Safe and Supportive School Resolution and to make schools accountable and active agents in the implementation of the overall resolution. The data collected are reported to the California Department of Education and the Office of Civil Rights to monitor the district's disproportionality and to assess the progress in the goals identified by the Office of Civil Rights based on their 2009 audit.

Special Education: Disproportionality for Students Receiving Special Education Services

Disproportionality in Special Education: Data

Nationwide, students of color are more likely to be disciplined than White students, and data have shown how students of color are also more likely to qualify for special education services than White and Asian students. In their 2018 report, the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs highlighted that

> In 2016, American Indian or Alaska Native, Black or African American, and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander students ages 6 through 21 had a higher risk of qualifying for Special Education services than other students. Respectively their risk ratios were 1:7, 1:4, and 1:5 compared to the general population (OSEP, 2018).

Furthermore, African American students are more likely to qualify for specific diagnostic categories increasing the disproportionality on the kind of services that African American students receive compared to other students. The OSEP (2018) report revealed that African

American Students have a higher risk of being classified under the categories of Intellectual Disabilities, Emotional Disturbance, Developmental Delay, and Specific Learning Disabilities than their White counterparts. The risk ratios compared to White students were 2:2, 2:0, 1:6, and 1:5.

Finally, another index that is disproportional in the African American student population is the students' retention rates. African American students have a 1.5 risk ratio to be retained when compared with White students (Muse-Gillette et al., 2017). Retention is commonly utilized by educators to offer students an opportunity to bridge their learning gap by giving them more time to access and master grade-level curricula, but little research is supporting this assumption. Many researchers have determined that retention causes an increase in the student's challenging behaviors, dropout rates and negative attitudes toward school while showing a decrease in the students' academic achievement and attendance (Jimerson & Kaufman, 2003; Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007; Jimerson et al., 2006; U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2006, as cited in Ou & Reynolds, 2010).

Overrepresentation of African American students is still a widespread challenge across the United States. In the school year 2018-2019, 22% of African American students attending Milwaukee Public Schools were receiving special education services compared to the national average for all student bodies of 14% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). In Texas in 2011, African American students accounted for 12% of the student body, but 17.1% of the overall number of students receiving special education services in the State (Texas Education Agency, 2020).

Factors Contributing to the Disproportionality of African American

Children in Special Education

"African American children are more likely to be diagnosed with behavioral disorders and are overrepresented in special education" (Bean, 2013, p. 487). Bean (2013) investigates how teachers, parents, and African American students receiving special education services rate externalizing behaviors and what are the contributing factors that make a student more likely to engage in such behaviors. Furthermore, Bean's study is designed to test the hypothesis that states, "The cultural mismatch hypothesis posits that disproportionality is due to a cultural mismatch between primarily White and middle-class teachers and African American students" (Bean, 2013, p. 488). The study consisted of a sample (*n*=126) of African American students who received special education services, their parents, and their teachers, and each participant completed externalizing behavior rating scales (The Child Behavior Checklist). The participants of the study were chosen on a voluntary basis, were unmarried parents, and came from households with incomes at or below the poverty level. Data analysis comprised descriptive statistics, bivariate analyses, and multivariate analysis. The data analysis found that teachers' scores were similar to mothers' scores of externalizing behaviors and that mothers' ratings of their children's acting-out behavior were significantly higher than children's self-reports. Moreover, African American boys are more likely to experience acting-out behaviors than girls (Bean, 2013).

In the past decades, many school districts have adopted reactive systems as a response to federal level agency reports (i.e., reports on disproportionality from the Office of Civil Rights) that highlight how students are disproportionately represented in the discipline and special education system. Some school districts have adopted more stringent measures and processes to

address the overrepresentation of students of color in special education. Some of the tools utilized to support students' learning might include the development and implementation with fidelity of multiple Student Success Team plans, 504 plans, and/or behavior intervention plans before assessing a student for special education services. On the other hand, at times, these processes do not thoroughly investigate the roots and multiple complex environmental variables that surround our students' lives, and, as a consequence, it might delay the delivery of services that are essential to meet the unique educational needs of each of our students. "This study suggests that more prevention and intervention are needed for African American boys", Bean (2013, p. 501). Overall, Bean (2013) suggests that educational organizations must focus their resources on creating early intervention programs to address students' behavioral needs as early as possible. Behavioral programs equip students with the necessary tools to cope with the surrounding environments and are beneficial for students attending general education as well as special education programs, so they are beneficial for all of our students. Finally, the study's results do not fully explain the "mismatch theory" due to the various limitations present in this research. Some of this study's limitations were a small sample size of participants, lack of information provided regarding the teachers' background, lack of control over the teachers' specific cultural background, and an inability of the specific background of the parents' participating in the study not being generalized to the larger African American population due to the uniqueness of the sample. The study required that the mothers participating in the research, had no previous live births, no specific chronic illnesses potentially contributing to fetal delayed growth or preterm delivery, and two of the following characteristics: unmarried, unemployed, or had less than 12 years of education (Bean, 2013).

Maydosz (2014) conducted an extensive literature review on the disproportional representation of African American students in the special education system. This review's findings indicate that, "The process and procedure for identifying students for special education is an amazingly subjective one, considering the implications for the student, the family, and the school" (Maydosz, 2014, p. 81). The author focused on a literature review to investigate how consistent the association between racial biases and the special education assessment process was across multiple studies. This inquiry was conducted through a search of data and extant literature on school-level interventions to address the problem of disproportionate representation, particularly bias in the process of special education identification (Maydosz, 2014, p. 81). Maydosz's study is an example of qualitative research and provides a rich review of the most current literature available in the area of disproportionality of minorities in special education. "Students are identified for special education services through a process that is despite federal guidelines, a subjective one" (Losen & Orfield, 2002, as cited in Maydosz, 2014, p. 82). "Teachers may make biased decisions regarding African American students for a variety of reasons. Teachers, as a group, are mostly White middle-class females" (Sorrells et al., 2004, as cited in Maydosz, 2014, p. 84). Even if many studies list racial biases as contributing factors in the process of assessing African American students for special education services, "racial bias in any process remains difficult to expose" (Maydosz, 2014, p. 81).

"The disproportional representation of African American students in special education is a national problem worthy of mention in federal law" (Maydsoz, 2014, p. 86). Overrepresentation of students of color is a nationwide challenge that has not been adequately addressed by school districts across the nation. School districts have implemented reactive approaches (i.e., overuse of disciplinary procedures) or disjointed and isolated systems of

proactive interventions (i.e., Restorative Practices, Behavior Response to Intervention, and Academic Response to Intervention). To adequately address the disproportionality of students of color in the special education systems, school districts must implement a comprehensive approach in which Restorative Practices, Behavior Response to Intervention, and Academic Response to Intervention are integrated to support every aspect of our children's learning experience. Behavior challenges and academic behavior are deeply intertwined, and we cannot focus on one and ignore the other in our complex learning environments. In conclusion, more quantitative studies are needed to investigate the role of racial biases and the effectiveness of alternative and integrated systems of interventions in determining the students' eligibility to access special education services (Algozzine et al., 2014; Bean, 2013; Jorgensen & Boezio, 2012; Maydosz, 2014; Noltemeyer et al., 2019).

Morrier, et al., (2008) attempted to determine if the ethnic background and socioeconomic status of students were significant characteristics in determining students' eligibility under the autism spectrum disorder (ASD) diagnosis.

> The issue of ethnic disproportionality in children with ASD has important implications for diagnosis and provision of intervention since prognosis for children with ASD improves with early identification (McGee et al., 2001, as cited in Morrier, et al., 2008, p. 31).

If students of color are underrepresented in the ASD category or are diagnosed at a later time, this event might delay their access to essential services that are crucial for them to be successful in school. The study collected demographic data from 226 students and 185 teachers from a school district in Georgia in order to analyze ASD diagnostic patterns. The researchers determined that "Students from the ethnically diverse background are under-represented within

the autism eligibility category, while Caucasian students are overrepresented" (Morrier et al., 2008, p. 35).

The Morrier et al. study is an example of a quantitative study in which 185 teachers completed a survey that included the gender, age, ethnicity, classroom placement, and socioeconomic status of the students that they serve. Also, demographic data of the teachers completing the survey were collected and compared with data gathered from their students. Overall, the study analyzed data obtained from 226 students diagnosed with ASD. Statistical methods like ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) and MANOVA (Multivariate Analysis of Variance) were utilized to determine if there was a significant difference between the students' ethnicity and their classroom placement (from the least to the most restrictive environment) and if the socioeconomic status of the students was a factor in diagnosing ASD.

Consistent with previous studies findings from other disability categories, current results indicate disproportionate representation of children with ASD from ethnically diverse backgrounds. Specifically, present results indicate that students from ethnically diverse backgrounds (minorities) are under-represented within the autism eligibility category" (Morrier, et al., 2008, p. 35).

The socioeconomic status of the children was not found to be a potent factor influencing the ASD diagnosis.

Students of color are commonly overrepresented within the emotional disturbance diagnostic category (ED), while White males seem to be overrepresented in the special education system under the ASD diagnosis. The Morrier et al. (2008) study analyzed this aspect of the special education system, and the result confirmed that students of color are underrepresented in the ASD diagnosis. More studies need to be conducted to determine the role of students'

ethnicity in the ASD diagnostic process. Some of the questions that still need to be answered include: Are special education assessors influenced by their unconscious biases while assessing students of color, or are the instruments utilized during the assessment process geared to assess only a specific subgroup of students? These questions must be answered by future research because if we misdiagnose and consequently misplace students, we also deny them access to crucial services that could improve their life outcomes, and we are doing a disservice to the students and communities.

"In explaining the overrepresentation of minority students in special education, a recent report from the National Research Council (NRC, 2002) emphasizes the effect of poverty" (O'Connor & DeLuca-Fernandez 2006, p. 6). O'Connor and DeLuca-Fernandez's (2006) study are a review of studies on how race and socioeconomic status affect disproportionality in special education. The study mainly reviewed the report from the National Research Council that states, "That minority students are more likely to be poor and that 'being' poor heightens their exposure to risk factors that compromise human development and increase the need of special education services" (O'Connor & DeLuca-Fernandez, 2006, p. 6). The authors argued that this theory is "simplistic," which does not adequately consider and analyze specific cultural and educational organizations variables.

Upon completion of their literature review, the authors concluded that "We elucidate how this theory oversimplifies the concept of 'development' and consequently under-analyzes how the culture and organization of schools situates minority youths as academically and behaviorally deficient and places them at risk for special education placement" (O'Connor & DeLuca-Fernandez, 2006, p. 6).

Another area of research covers the over-representation of males and minorities in special education. Piechura-Couture, et al., (2011) analyzed the proposal that having single-gender classes might reduce the number of special education referrals of male students. "The rationale for single-gender education is based on the belief that there are inherent biological differences between males and females, and these differences may manifest themselves in classroom behavior having implication for pedagogical practices" (Piechura-Couture, Heins, &Tichenor, 2011, p. 235). The authors determined that the results of their study provide preliminary evidence that single-gender classrooms might be an option worth exploring in reducing the overrepresentation of males and minorities, such as AA, in special education.

The authors collected data on the perceptions of students, parents, and teachers regarding the idea of introducing single-gender classrooms through surveys. Approximately 2220 students, 178 parents, and 181 teachers completed the survey for this study. First, the items in the survey were rated on a 7-point Likert scale, then the total percentage of agreement versus disagreement for each survey item was calculated, and the different percentages were compared. "The study results showed preliminary evidence that a single-gender format is an option that should be explored to reduce the overrepresentation of males and minorities in special education', as reported by the students, teachers and parents participating in the study (Piechura-Couture, et al., 2011, p. 241).

Reid and Knight (2006) reviewed multiple pieces of research to "analyze how the historical conflation of disability with other factors and the ideology of normalcy contribute to the disproportionality problem in K-12 special education" (Reid & Knight, 2006, p. 18). Primarily, Reid and Knight focused on analyzing the impact that labels such as Learning Disabled (LD), Mentally R. (MR), and Emotionally Disturbed (ED) have in how the general

population perceives students receiving special education services and their level of segregation in the educational organizations, such as being assigned to Special Day Classes (SDCs).

Reid & Knight's main research question is how minority students are overrepresented in specific special education diagnostic labels such as Mental R. (MR), Emotionally Disturbed (ED), and Learning Disabilities (LD), which profoundly impacts the level and quality of services that these students receive and the likelihood of their enrollment in postsecondary educational organizations for students carrying these diagnostic labels. The authors concluded that

> The overrepresentation of minorities in special education in elementary and high school and their underrepresentation at the postsecondary level demonstrate clearly how the historical legacies of racism, classism, sexism, and ableism continue to influence educational practices (Reid & Knight, 2006, p. 21).

> Applying a critical view grounded in Disability Studies has provided insights into the ways that disability has served historically as an instrument of institutionalized systems of disadvantage for ethnic minorities and poor, largely because of definitional loopholes and assumptions associated with the technical-rational understanding of disability (Reid & Knight, 2006, p. 21).

Disproportionality is the product of biases and assumptions that are part of the "dominant culture" in a particular society. Biases lead our day-to-day practices and can push us to misread social constructs and behaviors that are part of a culture that differs from ours. The first step that enables us to recognize the existence of "systemic oppression" is awareness. We need to be aware that we are part of a system that negatively targets sub-groups, this acknowledgement could start a chain of reactions that will help us to dismantle racism to create more equitable outcomes for our students.

Furthermore, in regard to how our special education system assesses and diagnoses students' disabilities, we must investigate if assessors' personal biases are a contributing factor in the disproportional diagnosis of minority students in the ED, LD, and MR categories or if the instruments that we utilize in the assessment process incorporate the dominant culture biases. Our educational system must address these questions because the current diagnostic system is limiting the access to needed and critical resources for some of our most vulnerable students, which profoundly impact the likelihood of them becoming successful members of our society (Reid & Knight, 2006).

Researchers have suggested that the disproportional representation of students of color in special education can be attributed to two factors: biases towards a specific group or specific groups' excessive exposure to poverty. Wiley et al. (2013) attempted to discriminate which one of these two hypotheses was more likely to be the cause of this kind of disproportionality in our public-school settings. In particular, this study addressed the disproportionality of African American and Hispanic students in regard to the Emotional Disturbance (ED) diagnostic category. The authors determined that disproportionate poverty was the stronger factor in determining the overrepresentation of these two groups of students in the Emotional Disturbance (ED) classification.

Data of ethnic representation in the special education category of ED, measures of ethnic representation in child poverty, conservatism, and percentage of K-12 students who were Caucasian were obtained from a national database that collects data from all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Descriptive statistical methods (Mean, Range, bivariate correlations) were utilized to analyze the data (Wiley et al., 2013).

Overrepresentation of students of color in special education has been investigated in the past decades, but research has mainly focused on determining if and which biases were the primary causes affecting the students' learning curves in our public-school settings. However, less attention has been given to the effect of poverty on disproportionality. Wiley's et al. (2013) study is attempting to clarify which factor, poverty, or biases has a stronger correlation in detecting these groups of students' overrepresentation in special education. These authors determined that disproportionate poverty was a strong factor in determining the group of students' overrepresentation in special education under the ED classification. In conclusion, determining which factor is more likely to be affecting the students' overrepresentation in special education could guide our schools in understanding how to address these long-standing issues and which interventions should be prioritized to disrupt disproportionality in our classrooms.

Recent Disproportionality Data

The most recent report from the U.S Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights was published in 2016. It summarizes the disciplinary data for students attending public schools in the United States for the 2015-2016 school year. Data are summarized in the Table 2. 1 below.

Table 2. 1

Disciplinary Data for Students Attending Public Schools in the United States for the 2015-2016 School Year

Measures	African Americans	White	U.S Average
At least one in-school suspension (% = in-school suspension student count/student enrollment count)	11.2%	4.2%	5.3%
At least one out-of-school suspension (one and multiple suspensions combined) (% = at least one out-of-school suspension student count/student enrollment count)	17.7%	4.4%	4.4%
Expulsions (with and without educational services combined) (% = expulsions student count/student enrollment count)	0.45%	0.15%	0.2%

Referrals to law enforcement (% = referrals to law enforcement student count/student enrollment count)	0.81%	0.31%	0.41%
School-related arrests (% = school-related arrests student count/student enrollment count)	0.24%	0.07%	0.10%

As summarized in the Office of Civil Rights report, African American Students are shown to be disproportional in all of the disciplinary measures examined in the report compared to White students. In particular, African American students are four times more likely to receive an out of school suspension and three times more likely to be expelled than White students (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights Report 2016).

Summary

Many variables play a strategic role in creating this disproportional system in our educational organizations, such as ethnic background, socioeconomic status, gender, sexual orientation, implicit bias, etc. All these variables combined are producing the "systemic oppression" present in our daily lives. To address "systemic oppression," further quantitative and qualitative research should examine (top-down approach) how the dominant culture is perpetuating "systemic oppression" and how single individuals (bottom-up approach) can disrupt this cycle by implementing simple strategies and interventions that encourage us to create more equitable learning and working environments. The school district defines "systemic oppression" as

> The condition of rules, beliefs, policies, practices, and laws that work in concert to maintain the privileges and advantages of those who pertain to dominant culture, namely the culture of White, male, middle- and upper- class, heterosexual, able-bodied and -minded, Christian, English-speaking America, while simultaneously restricting access to those who have been historically underrepresented in positions of power, government, jobs, and other areas of society, namely people of color, women, people from

backgrounds of poverty, LGBT people, differently-abled people, people of faiths other than Christianity, and speakers of languages other than English" (School District, 2018). This is a vibrant and sophisticated definition, and we must equip our educators with the right instruments in order to break it down into its smaller components, to digest it, and to start to deconstruct it.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This study includes a mixed-method design using qualitative data from nine direct interviews and secondary data collected at African American parents during meetings held at the school district office as well as outcomes data from the school district data bases. The purpose of the study is to illustrate staff members' perspectives on students' and families' experience surrounding safety transfer requests, and African American parents' perspectives on the disproportionality that are embedded in some of the school district's processes and structures and the role of this process on students' outcomes.

The quantitative data consists of a correlational analysis to learn about the relationship between transferring schools and the academic and behavioral outcomes of the African American students who have been referred to the safety transfer process across three academic years. Outcome data from the year preceding the transfer request, the year of the transfer request, and the year after the transfer request will be compared as well as the sending and receiving schools' characteristics (proportion of number of African American students and students receiving special education services). Finally, an experimental design is used to compare two variables (school transfer and SWPBIS access) across an experimental group (students who received school transfers) versus a matched control group (similar students who requested but did not receive transfers) and the interaction between these variables will be tested. The interaction between transferring and SWPBIS fidelity of implementation (threshold set at 70%) will be compared across the control and experimental groups.

This study will take place in the urban school district located in California, which is located in an urban area that has gone under pervasive gentrification in the past two decades, and the rising cost of living has pushed many poor families who are more likely to be also people of

color to relocate to more affordable communities as far away as 50 to 60 miles outside the city limits.

The economic change has been so abrupt in the past few years that the cost of living has risen to the highest level in the entire country. As a result, these substantial changes have influenced the demographics of the student population and the social and emotional difficulties that lower-income students are experiencing daily in their communities and their schools of attendance have multiplied.

Moreover, many families still residing in the city have been displaced and are homeless, live in single occupancy rooms, or share small living spaces with multiple relatives or other families. These life events are profoundly impacting the social-emotional well-being of these families and their children, which might impact the students' behavior while in school. Given these community challenges the district faces equally significant problems in providing equal educational opportunity for students in their classroom. Parents often interpret these challenges as the problem of the school and seek transfer petitions as a solution to their frustrations. Data analysis has demonstrated that transfer might not be the solution to the problem and this study is a systematic investigation of that issue.

Instrumentation: Sample and Sampling Procedure

This is a mixed method study using qualitative data from nine direct interviews of school personnel involved in supporting students and families in the safety transfer process, and secondary data collected at African American parents during meetings held at the school district office. The purpose of the study is to illustrate staff members' perspectives on students' and families' experience surrounding safety transfer requests, and African American parents' perspectives on the disproportionality that are embedded in some of the school district's

processes and structures. The quantitative data consists of a correlational study to learn about the relationship between transferring students and academic and behavioral outcomes. Finally, an experimental design is used to compare an experimental versus a matched control group across two variables and their interaction. The interaction between transferring and SWPBIS fidelity of implementation (threshold set at 70%) will be compared across the control and experimental groups.

For the quantitative section of the study the transferring records over the past five years will be analyzed to study the relationship between transfers and academic and behavioral outcomes of students attending grades six through 11. SES, and ethnicity of the district students is available through secondary data. These secondary data will be retrieved from district-wide databases.

The qualitative component of the research analyzes nine interviews of staff members who were involved in the past five years in safety transfer requests of students enrolled in grades six through 11. The African American parents' perspectives on the roots of the African American students' disproportionality present in some school districts will also be investigated. The researcher will also triangulate data from the two groups, school personnel, and parents, to investigate commonalities in the two samples' themes. The safety transfers that will be selected will include African American students. This criterion to select the participants to this study is chosen because the purpose of the study is to investigate factors that lead to the disproportionately of African American students in the safety transfer process at the district level. To select the quantitative sample in the study, the researcher will review the safety transfer requests completed between school year 2017-2018 and school year 2019-2020. To select the participants in the interview, the researcher will review the list of staff members who had been

supporting the African American students and families in completing the safety transfer process at the school sites. After determining the pool of candidates, potential participants will be contacted via email and phone, the purpose of the study will be explained to them, and they will be asked if they would like to participate in the research project and sign a consent form. If not, enough participants accept to participate in the study, the researcher with the support of the schools site administrators/educators will contact more potential participants via phone or during school until the number of cases is reached.

Data and Instruments

The data and instrument that the researcher will utilize in the study are summarized in Table 3. 1 below.

Table 3. 1

Visual Representation of the Research Questions, Variables, Constructs and Instruments Used in the Data Collection Process

Research Question	Variables/concepts	Constructs	Instruments/Implementation
RQ 1: What factors contribute to having so many African American students experiencing an aversive learning environment and requesting safety transfers?	Environmental factors to measure cultural match between students of color and schools Experiences and perceptions of parents about the school district's disproportionality, and school personnel perspectives about the safety transfer process.	Experiences that lead to transfer requests, factors that contribute to granting requests, experience of transferring and accepting transfer students.	Staff personnel' interviews African American Parents Advisory Committee perspectives on school district's disproportionality in special education and disciplinary systems as obtained by the committee meeting minutes
RQ2. How do students' characteristics of the sending and receiving schools (e.g., ethnicity, Special Education) impact the outcome of their disciplinary and academic performance after their transfer? Does the students' academic, disciplinary, and attendance performance change in the receiving school?	• Safety transfer requests granted to students of color. • Disciplinary referrals for students of color • Schools • Schools' characteristics • Referred students' academic performance scores (subjects) • Environmental factors to measure cultural match between students of color and schools	• Parameters defined by the school district • Schools AA students receiving special education services enrollment • Number of discipline referrals (comparing before and after each transfer) • Performance scores from the records Secondary data and attendance from school district databases (BASIS, Synergy, Illuminate)	• The process and factors analyzed obtained as secondary data from the school district records • Obtained as secondary data from district-wide databases (BASIS, Synergy, Illuminate) and records • Secondary data from the process of the transfer as documented during the transfer process

Table 3 (continued)

RQ3. Is the academic and behavioral outcome of an experimental group (students who received a transfer) and a control group (similar students who did not receive a transfer) different, and what is the role SWPBIS in this relationship?	• Fidelity of implementation of evidence-based interventions SWPBIS • Demographics • of students in the two groups • Referred students' academic performance scores (subjects)	• Number of discipline referrals (comparing before and after each transfer) • Performance scores from the records • Secondary data and attendance from school district databases (BASIS, Synergy, Illuminate) • Teachers' Level of fidelity of implementation of SWPBIS. • Performance scores from the records (two time periods). • Tiered Fidelity Inventory Index.	• The process and factors analyzed obtained as secondary data from the school district records • Obtained as secondary data from district-wide databases (BASIS, Synergy, Illuminate) and records • Obtained as secondary from Tiered Fidelity Inventory Index

The researcher will have access to the quantitative data including the fidelity of implementation of the School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (SW-PBIS) and the academic and disciplinary history of the students participating in the study. The instruments utilized for this study include the Tiered Fidelity Index (TFI) Tier-1 scale, the analysis of data retrieved from the school district's' databases (BASIS, Illuminate, and Synergy); sending and receiving schools characteristics (proportion of African American students and students receiving special education services); interviews to measure the school personnel's' perception regarding the safety students' experiences and challenges with their learning environment; and finally, secondary qualitative data of parents' perspectives regarding the root causes of the overrepresentation of African American students in the school district's' processes and structures. The district-wide databases allow the researcher to quickly and efficiently access

up to five years of students' data divided by socio-economic status and ethnicity across the K-12 system.

Finally, for the qualitative component of the study, due to the ongoing COVID-19 global pandemic, interviews will be conducted virtually via Zoom and Google Meet virtual meetings. The interviews will deepen the understanding of the factors that are involved in the students' safety transfer process, which involves students being transferred to another school site by collecting data from school personnel involved in the transfer requests. The qualitative component of the study will also illustrate how school personnel, families and students perceive the process, school environment, as well as the participants in the process (teachers, administrators, parents, and students). These open-ended questions and the transfer records will help us understand if the transfer is welcomed by the school community, and the extent to which the school personnel accommodate the students' learning and social-emotional needs. The interviews will consider the staff members' point of view in the safety transfer process by identifying the school response in reaching out to the families and accommodating the students' needs. The researcher is using interviews to conduct the qualitative part of the study because they are a valuable tool to obtain in depth information about personal feelings, perceptions, and opinions, and they enable the researcher to investigate sensitive topics that people may feel uncomfortable discussing in a focus group. Moreover, interviews allow more detailed questions to be asked, they investigate issues in an in-depth way, and they can explain the meaning of statistical patterns identified through quantitative data analysis. The quantitative data will guide the qualitative interview process by determining potential patterns in how African American students are overrepresented in the school district safety transfer process and determining the inclusion criteria for the subsample of the qualitative data. The qualitative secondary data

collected from the African American parents investigated in the study will allow the researcher to review the parents' perspectives on the disproportionality of African American students in the school district's processes and to triangulate them with the results from the school personnel's interviews to identify common themes and patterns in their responses.

Plan for Data Collection

Regarding the quantitative component of the study, the researcher will review the safety transfers requests that were submitted by schools and will analyze the requests that included African American students in the past five academic years, from school year 2016 to school year 2020. About nine of the school staff members who supported the students and families in navigating the safety transfer process at the sending schools will be contacted for an interview to collect the qualitative data. Due to the ongoing global pandemic, the interviews will be held on Zoom or Google Hangout. The participants will choose the time that is more convenient for them. The researcher will collect proper informed consent and ask a set of five open-ended questions to each one of the participants. Interviews will be conducted online, and, if consent is given, the interviews will be recorded. The interviewer will also record the responses in a notepad. Each meeting will last between 30 minutes to 60 minutes.

The open-ended questions in the interview cover three main areas:

1. Student's' history in the disciplinary process, and systemic challenges that students face at their school site.

2. Interventions attempted to address the behaviors of concerns, and the relationship building process between school and families at the sending and receiving schools.

3. Barriers and challenges encountered by the staff and family members throughout their experience at the designated school site.

The quantitative date of the study will involve students' disciplinary and academic data from school year 2016 to school year 2020 from the district-wide databases (BASIS, Illuminate, and Synergy). The academics, behavioral, and disciplinary data of the students considered in the study will include data before, the year of the safety transfer request, and after the safety transfer requests, along with the school context to text the cultural mismatch between students and school personnel and sending and receiving schools' specific characteristics (African American students and students receiving special education services enrollment). Finally, the quality of implementation of SWPBIS and its relationship with the number of disciplinary referrals will be analyzed.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity are two critical elements to consider when conducting research. "Validity is the strength and reliability are the consistency of a study." (B. Karge, personal communication, 2019). In qualitative research, experts in the field are continuously debating the concept of validity, and this construct is still evolving (Maxwell, 2013). While describing the concept of validity in qualitative research, Maxwell (2013) states, "I use validity in what I think is a fairly straightforward way, to refer to correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or sort of account." (p. 122). Differently, reliability is connected with the consistency in which data are collected, interpreted, and analyzed by different researchers (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

It is crucial to highlight that the concept of validity is treated in different ways by quantitative and qualitative researchers. Quantitative researchers plan in advance to control threats to the validity of their studies. In this study, for example, we are collecting data on variables that could be alternative explanations and we are comparing a control group that is

matched to the experimental group. We are also using data from standardized measures, such as the Tiered Fidelity Inventory (TFI) Tier-1 scale, which have shown to be reliable measures of the constructs studied. On the other hand, qualitative researchers rarely benefit from planning in advance strategies to approach threats to the validity of their study, and they mostly address them after the research has begun (Maxwell, 2012).

In this study regarding the validity of a qualitative study, I would utilize a peer review or debriefing of the data and research process. With these methods, "The researcher seeks external check by 'someone' who is familiar with the research, or the phenomenon explored"'" (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 129, as cited in Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 263). A peer-review process can assist researchers in discovering patterns that were not previously recognized; can reveal underlined researchers' biases and can identify inconsistencies or procedural errors that were overlooked by the researcher during the development of the study. It is imperative to be aware that, at times, researchers might be prone to see things differently because they are looking for something, in particular, that is supporting their study (Gibbs, 2012). A peer-review process ensures that a neutral reader checks the researchers' biases.

Another strategy that I would implement to ensure the validity of a study would be clarifying the researcher bias or engaging in reflexivity. Creswell and Poth (2018) state, "For this validation strategy, we embed opportunities throughout a study for writing and discussing connections that emerge with our past experiences and perspectives" (p. 261). Our past and current experiences shape our behavior and attitudes, and all people bear, to some degrees, biases. The most significant action that people can take about their biases is to be aware of and acknowledge them. Conclusively, awareness, and acknowledgment of the researchers' biases allow readers to deeper understand the nature of a study.

Conversely, in a research study, I would be careful in extensively collaborating with the participants. Creswell and Poth (2018) state, "The researchers embed opportunities for the participant to be involved throughout the research process in varying ways and degrees" (p. 262). Researchers need to be cautious that, while interacting or interviewing the experimental subjects, their presence or attitudes might be influencing the subjects' responses (Gibbs, 2012). Also, when subjects are extensively collaborating, they might influence each other or the researcher with their own biases. Ultimately, these biases could compromise how data are collected and interpreted, which can drift the final study conclusions away from the original purpose of the study.

To protect the reliability of the qualitative data coding, I used NVIVO-12 to create codes by wording and then reviewing by color coding checking for agreement. A second check on agreement will be performed by cross tabulating the themes between parents and staff members. I will follow a time-consuming process of coding by steps (open codes, axial codes, and selective coding) before generating a final theory that can be used to explain the data collected in the studies.

"Validity is a judgment of the appropriateness of a measure for specific inferences or decisions that result from scores generated" (McMillan, & Schumacher, 2006, p. 179). As regarding the validity of the quantitative component of the study, one strategy to increase the validity of the instruments utilized in this research is to use the evidence-based on contrasted groups approach, which establishes validity by comparing data gathered from groups that should be different and whose results are distinctive as predicted (McMillan, & Schumacher, 2006).

"Reliability refers to the consistency of measurement – the extent to which the results are similar over different forms of the same instrument or occasions of data collection" (McMillian,

& Schumacher, 2006, p. 183). Two reliability methods will be utilized to ensure that the tools utilized in this study are reliable: stability (test-retest) and agreement. The stability method ensures that the characteristics of the instruments are stable across different observations (McMillan, & Schumacher, 2006). In this study, observations will be conducted multiple times for the same group of individuals who are part of the research. Agreement ensures that there is the consistency of ratings or observations amongst observers, and it involves two or more persons that rate or observe the experimental groups (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006).

Plan for Data Analysis

The qualitative component of the study, which will be used to answer RQ 1 and validate quantitative finding, will be analyzed using a phenomenological research approach. The researcher will interview school staff members to obtain information regarding their perspectives surrounding the safety transfer process in an inner-city school district. Based on the Creswell and Poth (2018) phenomenological analysis, the researcher will proceed by analyzing and coding the data that he has gathered from the interview process as follows (see Figure 1 below):

- The researcher will find a list of "significant statements" that describe how participants feel about the topic investigated in the study.

- The researcher will group the "significant statements" into "themes."

- The researcher will describe "what" the participants in the study experienced in the "phenomenon."

- The researcher will create a "structural description" of "how" the experiences happened.

- Finally, he will create a "composite" description of the phenomenon by merging "what" and "how" the participants experienced the phenomenon.

Figure 1

Phenomenological Research Approach Coding Process

Phenomenological Research Approach: Coding Process
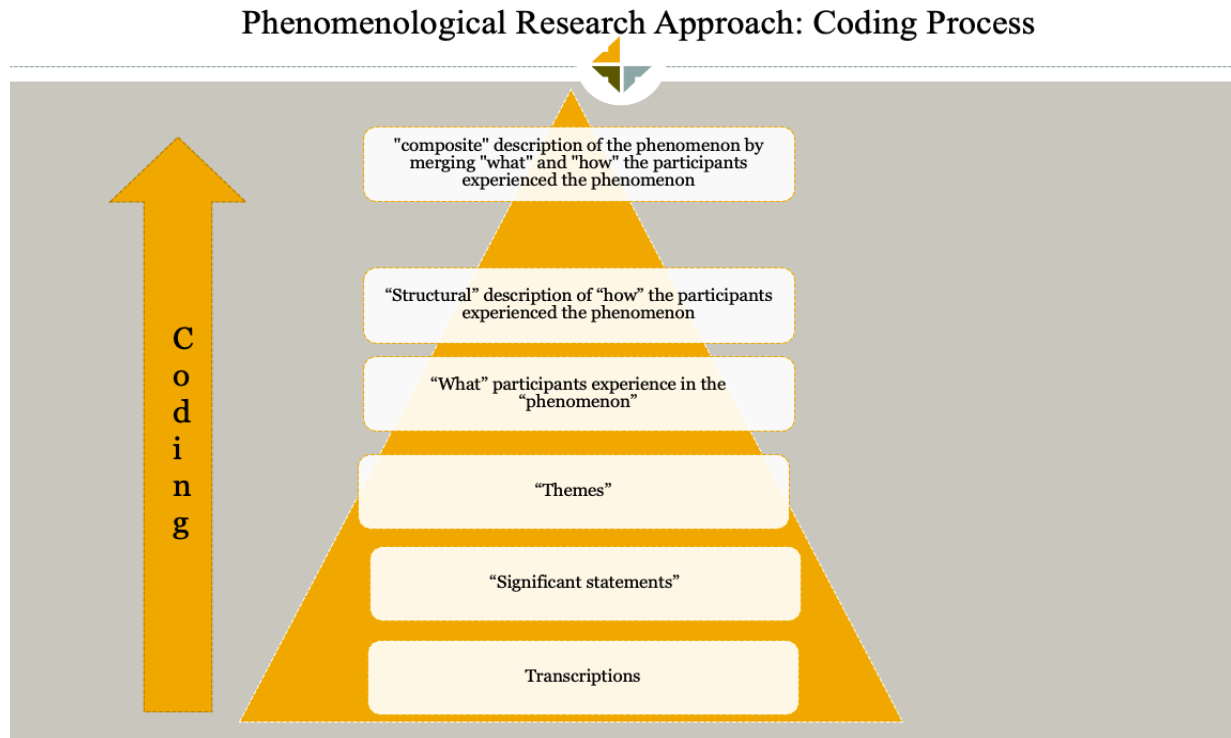
The study will analyze and compare quantitative data to answer RQ 2 collected from the district-wide databases in the past five years to determine patterns and changes in students' academic performance in relation to the safety transfer process by conducting a one-way ANOVA. This component of the study will be comparing data across variables representing students' characteristics compared to sending and receiving schools' specific characteristics (African American students and students receiving special education services enrollment).

The purpose of comparative studies is to investigate the relationship of one variable to

another by simply examining whether the value of the dependent variable in one group

is different from the value of the dependent variable in the other group" (McMillan &

Schumacher, 2008, p. 219).

The researcher will also conduct a t-test to determine if the overall means of the office discipline

referrals, attendance rate, and GPA changed across the three years part of the study.

The researcher will investigate the role of SWPBIS on the relationship between transfers

and behavioral and academic change as stated on RQ 3 by conducting a Pearson Linear

Correlation controlling for the role of SWPBIS using the fidelity score of each school as

recorded on the Tiered Fidelity Inventory Index (TFI) in the change of office discipline referrals,

attendance rates, and GPA of each student across the three academic years included in the study.

The Tiered Fidelity Inventory (TFI) measures the fidelity of implementation of the

School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports. The SWPBIS team at each school

takes the measure twice a year (Fall and Spring), then the year's mean is calculated with the two

collected measurements.

Finally, to answer RQ 3, a one-way ANOVA will be conducted to investigate the

interaction between transfer versus non-transfer and fidelity of implementation of the SWPBIS

framework (70% or above) versus low fidelity of implementation (below 70%). This threshold is

chosen because it has been validated by previous research (McIntosh et al., 2016).

Ethical Issues

Some of the ethical considerations include the protection of the identification of the

participants and the fact that different participants might know each other. For example, parents

might have previous experiences with the staff members that will be interviewed. Also, the

researcher might have previous relationships with the interviewees. Adjustments should be made to ensure that alternative interviewers are available upon participants' request. Moreover, confidentiality agreements should be reviewed with the participants, and the possible biases caused by this familiarity should be considered in the analysis of the experiences of each interviewee.

Finally, in order to avoid that previous relationship might compromise the data collection process and confidentiality of the participants, alternative, private settings where the interviews are conducted will be identified by the researcher.

Limitations and Delimitations

The generalization of the findings of this research to a broader population might be limited by the peculiarity of the composition of the student body of the school district under examination and by the social-economic changes that the school district has been undergoing in the past two decades.

The findings do not represent all of the students in the class, but it does represent other students who are at the same risk. However, the value of learning about this specific population is of greater importance. Some of the risk factors of the target population might involve recent trauma a youth may have experienced, such as the death of a loved one or a severe upset of their typical life. Welfare dependence, family dysfunction, and parental substance abuse, single parenthood, and their parents having low-education levels themselves. Other risk factors might be at the community level because of a low-income neighborhood with a high crime rate, toxins in the environment, low language proficiency, or a low graduation rate at their school.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The purpose of the study was to learn about the factors that contribute to the overrepresentation of African American students in the safety transfer. The outcome of the safety transfers was studied in two conditions with different levels, racial and special Education composition of the sending and receiving schools. This quantitative component of this mixed-methods study is to investigate the association between the students of color safety transfers and their disciplinary trajectory and academic proficiency (output). By better understanding the transitions in school environments, we could learn about the benefits of receiving a safety transfer as the impact on students' behavioral (discipline referrals and attendance) and academic (GPA) change. The impact of a behavioral intervention (quality of implementation) was also investigated by looking at the correlation between change on students' outcome and the quality of implementation in the receiving school. This chapter contains the results of the analysis conducted in, both, quantitative and qualitative data to answer the research questions:

RQ 1: What factors contribute to having so many African American students experiencing an aversive learning environment and requesting safety transfers?

RQ2. How do students' characteristics of the sending and receiving schools (e.g., ethnicity, Special Education) impact the outcome of their disciplinary and academic performance after their transfer? Does the students' academic, disciplinary, and attendance performance change in the receiving school?

RQ3. Is the academic and behavioral outcome of an experimental group (students who received a transfer) and a control group (similar students who did not receive a transfer) different, and what is the role SWPBIS in this relationship?

The qualitative component used to answer RQ1 included the analysis of 9 individual interviews with district staff involved in the safety transfer process (See Appendix A) as well as the secondary data from parents' meetings. To uncover themes and patterns identified by these participants, the coding process incorporated three levels of analysis: (a) open coding, (b) selective coding, and (c) theoretical coding.

The secondary qualitative data was collected from the school district's African American Parent Advisory Council (AAPAC). The data were collected during a study conducted by the significant disproportionality Comprehensive Coordinated Early Intervening Service Plan (CSEIS) team by analyzing the minutes of the AAPAC meetings throughout the school year 2019-2020. Stanford University conducted the data analysis on behalf of the school district CCSEIS implementation team, which addresses the disproportionate representation of African American students in special education and discipline. The qualitative data report has analyzed the community's and African American families' perspectives on what causes the school district to disproportionately represent African American students in special education services by identifying specific evidence and root causes.

The quantitative component included a sample of 101 African American students who requested an out of school transfer due to safety concerns. Out of the 101 participants 16 left the school district or dropped out within the three-year period of data that were considered for this study. Therefore, their partial data were not included in the final quantitative analysis, and the sample part of the descriptive analysis included only 85 subjects. The quantitative data is comprised of secondary data retrieved from the school district databases and included demographic, academic, discipline, culture and climate, attendance, and socioeconomic status indexes of the students' sample. This chapter includes graphics, tables, and vignettes from the

individual interviews to accentuate the central theme emerging from the data analysis and the resultant theory.

Participant Demographics

Nine participants were interviewed in this study. The interview participants were school staff personnel who have been involved in the safety transfer process at their school sites. The school staff personnel included out-of-class staff members such as school counselors, school social workers, and school administrators. The interviewees' sample demographics included three African American, three Asian, two LatinX, and two White staff members. six participants were females, and three were males (see Table 4. 1 below). Each interview was conducted via Google Meet or Zoom meetings and lasted approximately 45 minutes to one hour. During the interview, participants were given five structured prompts to guide the conversation.

Table 4. 1

Demographic Data for Participants in the Interviews (N=9)

Categories	Count	Percentage
Race/Ethnicity		
African American	3	33
Asian	2	22
LatinX	2	22
White	2	22
Gender Identity		
Female	6	67
Male	3	33

Quantitative data were collected from a sample of 101 African American students. The sample included students from grades 6 through 11 and was divided into three groups; students who requested the transfer-in school year 2017-2018, the school year 2018-2019, and school year 2019-2020. Of the 101 students, in the sample 52 identified as female and 49 as male. 44 students were enrolled in a middle school, while 57 were in high school. 68 families reported that they came from low-socioeconomic status while 33 declined to state their socioeconomic status (see Table 5. 1 below). The level of education of the students' parents of the sample was collected as follows, one possessed a graduate degree and five a college degree, 11 had some

college or associate degree, 18 were high school graduate, eight were not a high school graduate, 57 declined to state and did not choose any of the given options (see Table 6. 1 below). Out of the 101 cases reviewed by the researcher, 16 were not included in the final data analysis because they had left the district or dropped out by the end of the three-year data period included in the study leaving a sample of 85.

Table 5. 1

Students Sample Demographics (N=101)

Background Categories	Sample A SY 2017- 2018	Sample B SY 2018-2019	Sample C SY 2019-2020	Total
Male	9	15	25	50
Female	7	20	25	41
Middle school	1	21	23	43
High school	15	14	28	57
Low socioeconomic Status	8	24	36	68

Table 6. 1

Parents' Level of Education (N=101)

Parents' Educational Background	Sample A SY 2017-2018	Sample B SY 2018-2019	Sample C SY 2019-2020	Total
Graduate degree or higher	1	0	1	1
College graduate	1	1	3	5
Some college or associate	2	3	6	11
High school graduation	5	4	9	18
Not a high school graduate	0	2	6	8
Decline to state	7	24	26	56
n/a	0	1	0	1
Total	16	35	59	101

Quantitative Data Analysis

The identification of the study sample for the quantitative component of the study included different stages. First, I reviewed three consecutive years of historical data regarding student transfers requested that were performed at the school district Office of Pupil Services.

Distribution of Transfer Requests by Race

Amongst all the referrals, I identified 186 requests that included safety concerns as criteria for referral. Finally, I identified 101 requests whose students identified as African American (see Figure 2 below).

Figure 2

African American Students Safety Transfer Requests vs Other Students
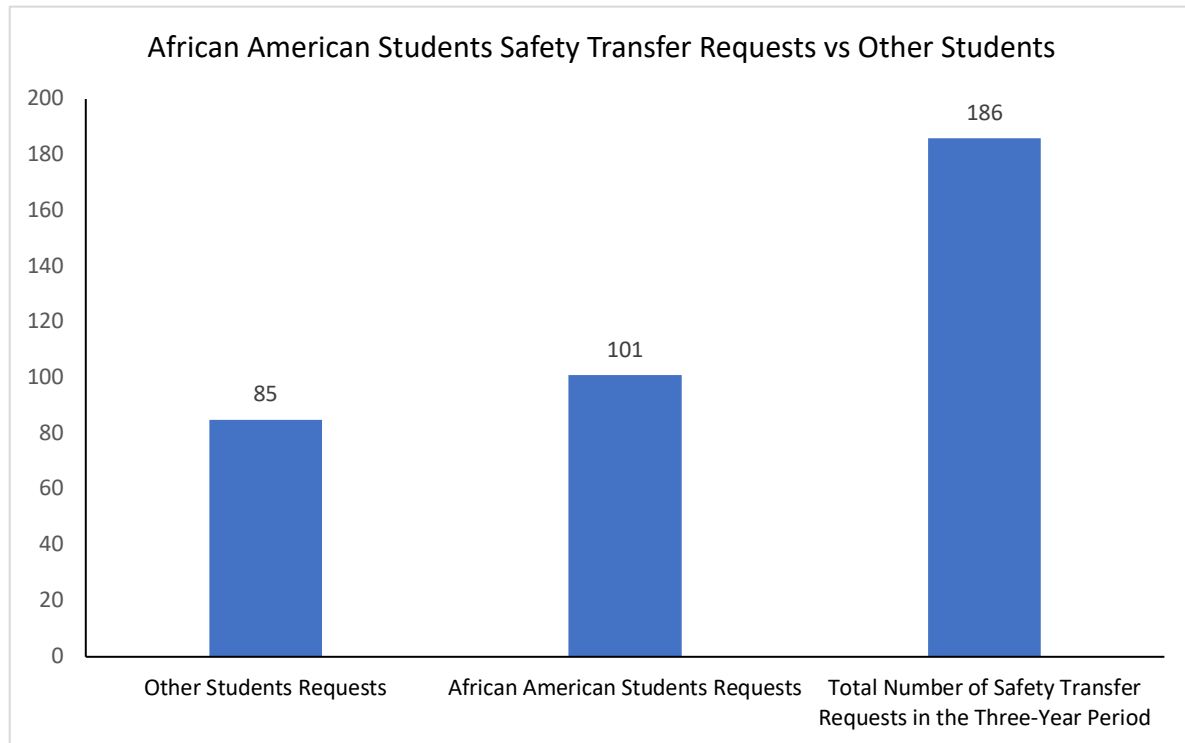
I conducted a descriptive analysis of the quantitative data collected on the sample. On average, African American students represented 54.3% of the requests meeting the research criteria, while the school district's African American students' enrollment has been in constant decline in the past decade. In the school year 2019-2020. the African American population was 6.4% (See Table 7. 1 & 8. 1 below).

Table 7. 1

Percentage per Year of African American Student Request

	2017-2018 Total Requests	2017-2018 AA Students	2018-2019 Total Requests	2018-2019 AA Students	2019-2020 Total Requests	2019-2020 AA Students
Middle School	n/a	n/a	33	21	50	22
High School	24	16	31	14	47	28
District Total	24	16	64	35	97	50
% of AA student Request		66.7		54.7		51.5

Table 8. 1

AA Student Risk Factor in the Safety Transfer Process

Total number of requests reviewed	186
Demographics: African American students represented in the requests	101
Mean percentage of AA students represented in the three school years in the safety transfer process	54.30%
School district AA enrollment as of school year 2019-2020	6.4%
Student risk: ratio AA enrolment and percentage of AA students represented in the safety transfer process	7.7

Based on the data collected, African American students are disproportionately represented in the

transfer process, and the disproportionality index was calculated in 7.7. African American

students are 7.7 times more likely to be represented in a school transfer request that includes

safety reasons in their rationale than other students. Of the 101 referrals analyzed in the study, 52

were approved, and 49 were not approved (See Figure 3 below).

Figure 3

Safety Transfer Requests per School Year

Safety Transfer Requests per School Year
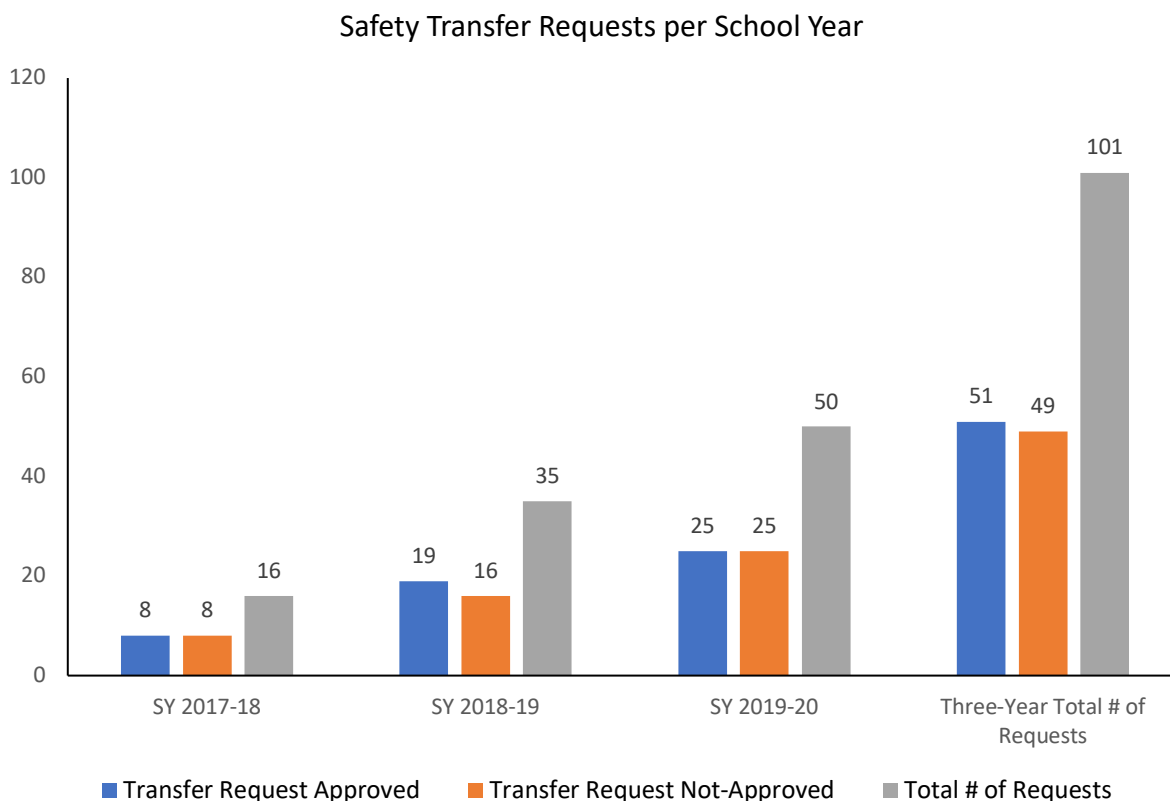
Special Education Services Received by Sample

Fifty-six out of the 101 students in the study were receiving special education services while 45 were enrolled in general education programs without receiving any kind of special education services from the school district (See Figure 4 below). Overall, 14.2% of the school district's student body in school year 2019-2020 receives special education services compared to the 55.45% of students receiving the same services in the study sample. The disproportionality index for the students in the study sample was calculated to be 3.9.

Figure 4

Students Receiving Special Education Services
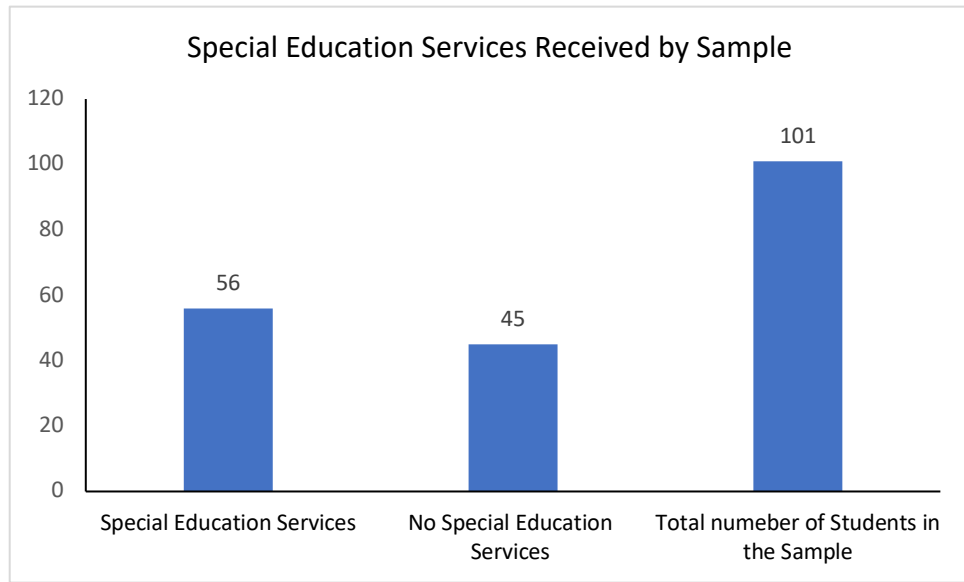
Number of School Placements

Out of the 101 students, it was found that during the year of each transfer request was submitted, 36 attended one school, 55 two, 9 three, and 1 four (See Figure 5 below).

Figure 5

Total Number of Schools Attended by Students in the Sample in the Year of the Safety Transfer
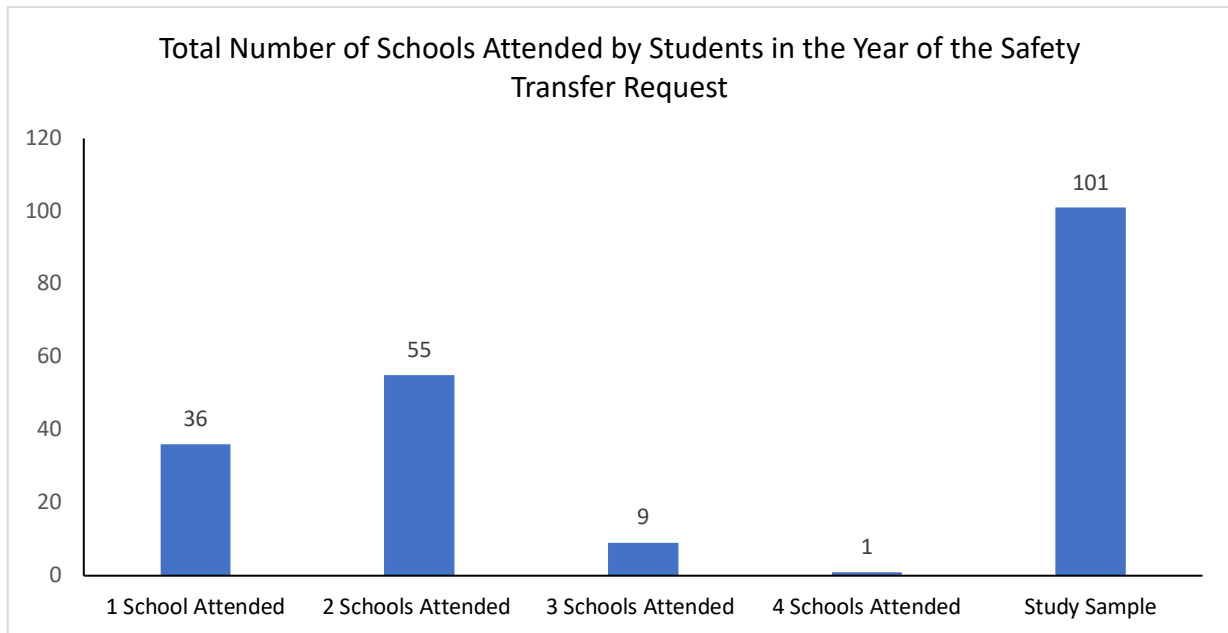
Request

Also, 11 students (22.92%) out of the 48 requests that were not approved were able to transfer to another school during the same school year by utilizing other transfer processes that are available at the school district (i.e., low credit, spring transfer).

Finally, sixteen out of the 101 students (15.8%) considered in the study sample were assigned to a juvenile court school during the period of time considered in this research (see Figure 6 below).

Figure 6

Total Number of Students Assigned to a Court School Compared by School Year
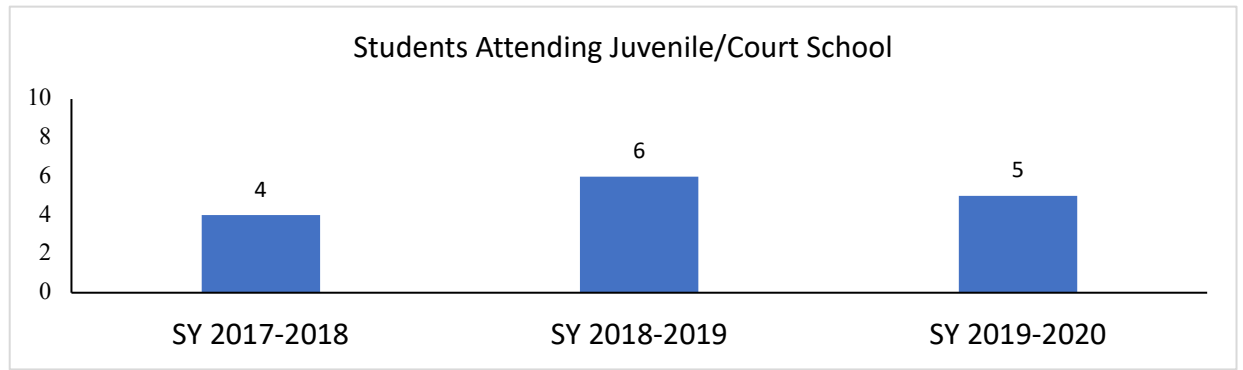
Data following the students after the request indicate that there was a lot of movement for this sample. In addition to the natural transfer of school due to graduation or promotion to a higher grade level, 35 students (34.7% of the total sample) transferred to another educational program within the school district, and 16 students (15.8% of the total sample) left the school district in the year following the safety transfer request (See Figure 7 below). Overall, 49.5% of the student sample part of this research had some kind of transfer in their records in the year following their safety transfer request.

Figure 7

Total Number of Students that Transferred to Another School or Left the School District the Year

Following the Original Safety Transfer Request
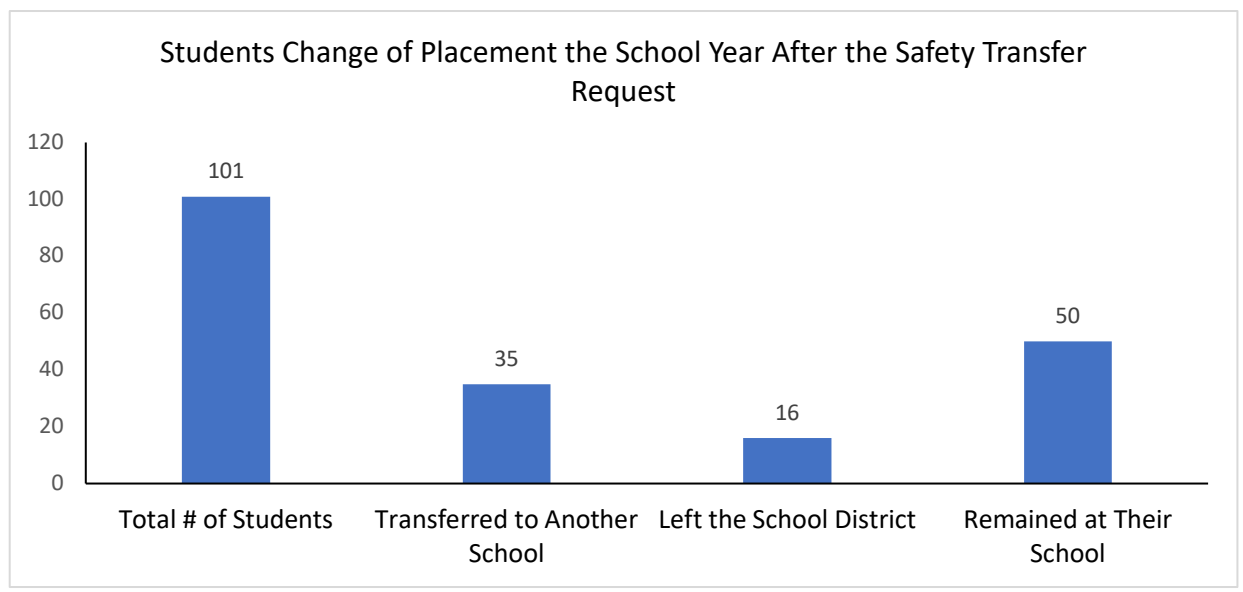
Qualitative Data Analysis

The nine interviews included school staff personnel that worked or are working at an urban school district in California. A pool of school staff members that had been involved in the safety transfer process through the years considered in the study were contacted and asked if they wanted to be part of the interview process. Out of the sixteen potential participants, nine agreed to be interviewed. Each interview lasted approximately between 45 minutes and 1 hour. The interviewees were given five structured prompts that guided the conversation, and the original interview protocol as provided in Appendix A. Due to the on-going Coronavirus Pandemic and consequent restrictions constraints, interviews were conducted via virtual session (Zoom, Google Meet), and each session was recorded. The interviewees' sample included school staff who have been involved in the safety transfer process due to their role at their school sites. Sixteen people were contacted for a potential interview, and nine accepted to participate in the study.

All interviews were recorded via Google Meet and Zoom recordings. I reviewed the

recordings and transcribed each interview. Each transcription was reviewed three times for

accuracy. After transcription was completed, the interview was coded by utilizing the electronic

program NVIVO 12. Subsequently, I coded the transcriptions manually to identify themes in

patterns in the participants' interviews.

I also utilized secondary data collected from the school district African American Parent

Advisory Council (AAPAC) meeting minutes that identified root causes and evidence in the

disproportional representation of African American students in special education and discipline

in the district. I was part of the team developing the plan to address the disproportionality of

African American students that utilized the AAPAC data. The secondary data were utilized to

triangulate the result from the staff personnel interviews to determine if there were similar

patterns and themes in the two populations.

Research Question #1 Parents' Findings

RQ 1: What factors contribute to having so many African American students

experiencing an aversive learning environment and requesting safety transfers?

Since there were challenges in recruiting parents who were available to participate in the

study interviews, I analyzed secondary qualitative data collected throughout the school year

2019-2020 at the African American Parent Advisory Committee meetings. The data were

analyzed by Stanford Graduate School researcher Annamma (2020) as part of the data review for

a school district workgroup developing a plan to be submitted to the California Department of

Education to address the overrepresentation of African American students in special education

and disciplinary systems. I am also part of the CSEIS district workgroup. Annamma (2020)

summarized the findings of the analysis of the African American family and community

perspectives on what causes the district to disproportionately represent African American students in special education services in a research memo presented to the school district workgroup in October 2020. The comments of the parents recorded in the AAPAC meeting minutes were a response to questions regarding the root causes of the disproportionality of African American Students in the school district's special education and disciplinary systems. The parents' findings were triangulated with the school staff personnel's findings to determine similar patterns and themes across the two samples (parents and staff). The themes, root causes, and evidence from CSEIS study are summarized here (see Table 9. 1 below).

Table 9. 1

AAPAC Data: Findings, Root Causes and Evidence

Findings	Root Causes	Evidence
Black students feel disconnected & disenfranchised from school	Discipline Policies and Practices	● Missing student voice Students feel disenfranchised ● African American kids in majority White schools are made to feel on their own ● Black kids feel disenfranchised and struggled to communicate/ articulate to staff ● Black students and families have no sense of community especially if they are coming on the other side of the city ● Having a positive principal or teacher can make all the difference
Educators are punitively responding to behavior which results in over-identification of Black youth for special education and disproportionate suspensions	Intervention and referrals	● Staff response to student behavioral issues is very reactive ● Misunderstanding of language and behavior of Black students lead to overidentifying ● Teachers have given up on our Black kids Behavior sometime occurs when students don't want to show what they didn't know ● Reactive responses to behavior do not support learning ● Black students in the office too often ● Who actually cares about these Black youth?

Special education instruction is often poor quality	Instruction and assessment	● Observations are problematic-very brief & not enough time or environments ● Black youth should not be identified because educators do not understand their learning or behavior or want them out of their classroom ● Segregating Black kids because of their disability is not ok ● Teachers not in a position to diagnose ● Students are labelled inappropriately and incorrectly by teachers ● Special education is a dumping ground ● What is happening in special ed with culturally responsive teaching? ● No one is addressing the real concerns around Black children with IEPs ● Sometimes IEP does not match what the student presents in the classroom ● Educators do not breakdown language & next steps per IEPs ● Teachers feel unequipped and see sped as an avenue to push students out ● Once Black kids get the label, the label impacts instruction and behavioral response

Table 9. 1 (continued)

The district has engendered distrust through ignoring, labeling, and disrespecting parents, along with promising and not delivering	Family and community partnership	● Families should have information that helps them understand what kids should know at each grade level ● Lacking partnership with families ● Wants educators to sit and talk ● Families need Access to tools to support student learning ● Need to involve parents ● Parent participation is contingent on work schedule ● Navigating the system is hard - training parents ● Lack of trust for the school district ● We feel unheard by their school and district ● Promises by schools and the district to AA families have been made and broken ● Educators labeling black parents as the problem ● Stop caring about how I look & instead listen to what I say ● Labels about parents form quickly & "filling" stereotypes ● If I come in angry, it is because I know I need to protect my child ● Missing connection with parents & community ● They don't have to be afraid of us, parents, black people ● Staff Ignoring families ● Lack of due diligence to know child or family ● Negative interactions about their children, often in the form of judgment about their children's behavior ● Parents feeling isolated Parents feel judged when wanting what is best for their kids ● Black families/parents feeling like they have to fight an uphill battle to get their children educated. ● Fear of Black people hinders communication and collaboration ● Parents feeling disrespected by their child's teacher ● Breakdown in communication/ relationships with a school

		● Not feeling connected to their child's school ● The feeling of disrespect from so many schools & the district ● Parents are scared, not being able to trust that a school would actually treat their children right ● Parents have the right to meet more than 1x/yr. ● System is broken, distrust ● If it's hard to connect with the parents, teachers give up instead of working hard or accessing a different resource ● Non-Black people have a fear about going to black families and ask for help with students ● Families told by school sites they do not have the resources to help support the student academically ● Families have a hard time accessing services ● Families should have information that helps them understand what kids should know at each grade level ● Lacking partnership with families ● Wants educators to sit and talk, ● Families need Access to tools to support student learning ● Need to involve parents ● Parent participation is contingent on work schedule ● Navigating the system is hard - training parents

Table 9. 1 (continued)

*Specific educators (e.g., teachers, Deans, security, other school staff) are over-referring	Teacher expectations & misconceptions	n/a
Educators are not equipped or engaged in conversations around race, Black culture, and/or racism with parents and students.	Educator expectations & misconceptions	● The students need an outlet from someone who looks like them ● Continued to be told by staff and other parents that race does not always have to be talked about ● Educators not knowledgeable or respectful of others culture ● There is NO cultural humility offered within schools ● No Black teachers ● Not enough support on school sites to advocate for African American students ● What are the resources to intervene on school sites in scenarios of macro aggression?

School leaders have not addressed parental concerns about race and racism in instruction & behavior.	Educator expectations and misconception-ions	● Principals are insensitive and do not know how to address issues of race especially when race is involved ● Issues are swept under the rug ● Staff at school sit r, including principal does not take my concerns about my son's academics seriously ● Unfair disciplinary decisions by principals ● Administration feels like they need to have control ● If there is no leadership on site what do the Black students do or who do they turn to? ● Called administration board about the use of the N word by a high school teacher and nothing was addressed ● Principal meetings have been denied

Table 9. 1 (continued)

Lack of culturally responsive, anti-racist teaching, ethnic studies curriculum, cultural humility	Cultural dissonance	● Culturally responsive teaching is not happening ● Lack of training or teacher's demonstrate resistance, or do they not have the systems/support to provide culturally responsive teaching ● Lack of cultural understanding, ● No instruction during Black History Month ● Lack of Black History Month celebrations ● Do our students really receive ethnic studies? ● Need culturally relevant curriculum ● No celebration of Black History Month within school site ● It is important for students to _see themselves in their education ● Implementation strategies for Culturally responsive curriculum ● Black History should be incorporated in the curriculum year around ● Have Ethnic Studies be taught by ethnic people starting freshman year of high school ● Continued need to cultural humility training for staff ● Lack of books, events, units, experiences, and curricula that represented their children in consistently positive ways ● Children's/community's history & experience is not taught generally, or acknowledged with respect, across many schools ● The lack of celebration of Black History month outside of Bayview schools. ● Decline in recognizing Black history month ● Missing proper training and tools Culturally responsive ● How is Black culture connected in the lessons? ● Lack of inclusivity in immersion programs
Bias and systemic racism in the school district must be acknowledged & dismantled	Cultural dissonance	● Bias and systemic racism ● Continue work on implicit bias ● Addressing bias ● Address macro/micro aggressions towards AA students at school sites via trainings ● Hard to navigate the system and it isn't equitable. ● Students and families are greatly impacted by implicit and explicit bias ● Implicit Bias: unconsciously aware—hardwire

The loss of Black families and communities in city has resulted in Black youth experiencing cultural isolation within school sites	District socio-demographic	● Cultural isolation within school sites ● Very little support for African American students at predominantly White schools ● Need 100% safe sanctuaries for Black students at school sites

Research Question 1: School Personnel Findings

RQ 1: What factors contribute to having so many African American students experiencing an aversive learning environment and requesting safety transfers?

I interviewed nine school staff personnel who were asked five questions regarding African American students with whom they work and had gone through the school district safety transfer process. The full interview prompts are summarized in the attached interview protocol in Appendix A and in Table 10. 1 below.

Table 10. 1

School Personnel Interview Prompts

School Personnel Interview Prompts

1. Can you please describe the disciplinary history/main challenges that students who have been referred to a school safety transfer face?
   a. Can you describe the primary concerns/challenges that the students had while at your school?
   b. When were the families informed about your concerns and how was the school-family collaboration/relationship?

2. Can you describe the type of interventions that your school team developed and implemented to address the team's or families' (behavioral, socio-emotional, academic, other) concerns?
   a. How were the students 'caregivers involved in developing and supporting the academic, behavioral, and socioemotional interventions of their child?
   b. Was the family input utilized for the development of the plan?

3. Overall. how was the school/home communication structured? Who was mainly communicating with the family?
   a. How were the follow-ups to review the efficacy of the interventions structured? How were the day-to-day signs of progress communicated to the family?
   b. How did you/the school plan to build trust and enhance the relationship between school and family? How were the families involved in the school community activities?

4. What are the main challenges and barriers that you have encountered in collaborating and interacting with families, students, and colleagues/other school staff members while supporting students who were referred for a school safety transfer?
   a. How was your relationship with the students and families?
   b. How is systemic racism/oppression affecting or showing up in this process?

5. What are the main reasons that have prompted you as an educator to consider/ask/submit a safety transfer/transfer referral?   a. Based on your experience, what do you think about the outcome of a transfer, do they work? Do they work under specific circumstances?

     Upon completion of the coding process, I identified nine principal themes and 21 sub-themes. All participants talked about students' safety challenges in the school environment, school support, trustworthy relationships between families and educators, and factors that contribute to students' success after a safety transfer is processed. Eight out of nine participants spoke about systemic oppression and racism in our systems and relationships with students. Six out of nine participants reflected on the school district bureaucracy (see Table 11. 1 below). Themes and subthemes are summarized by frequency and cluster.

Table 11. 1

Interviews Themes and Sub-Themes

Themes	Frequency	Interview's Sub-themes
Students' safety challenges in the school environment	9	● Factors out of the school control ● Factors that are outside the school control
Trustworthy relationships between families and educators	9	● Families Involvement: communication and partnership ● Broken trust with families ● Fear of parents ● Partnership: Meet Families Schedule and Needs ● Drop in communication ● Communication with families: more teacher's involvement
School supports	9	● Restorative Practices ● Supports and services available to students and families ● Implementation of school support: out of class staff
What contribute to students Success after a safety transfer is processed	9	● Factors that are not under school control ● Factors that are under school control
Systemic oppression and racism in our systems	8	● City Factors, systemic racism ● Students' differential treatment based on race ● Implicit bias ● Cultural dissonance ● Staff limited resources
Relationship with students	8	● Fostering a positive relationship with students
School district bureaucracy	6	● Broken relationship with families

Themes Overview: Trustworthy Relationship between Families and Educators Families

All participants spoke at length concerning the importance of building a trustworthy relationship between families and educators to allow students to thrive and reach their full potential. On the other hand, the lack of a collaborative relationship can lead to distrust, broken relationships, and a loss of students' educational opportunities.

Families Involvement

Communication and partnership. Involving families in the students' learning process and community is pivotal in creating an optimal learning environment. As stated by participant SP2,

> We always keep our parents in the loop immediately. It is one of my pet peeves. I
> try to, you know, enforce that amongst the teams that I work with. it is essential to
> keep the families abreast of what is going on. So yes, I will say the person who
> communicates with the family will be with the teacher who has the best relationship
> with the student or with the teachers may have the best relationship with the family.
> We just have to meet the families where they are. We have to meet them where they
> are, and sometimes that makes me have to work outside of our work hours.

Participant SP3 also elaborated about the importance of an ongoing open communication between educators and patents, which ensure that challenges that are arising in the learning environments are being address promptly by educators and parents. This approach ensures that students feel safe and included in their classroom settings. More specifically, SP3 states,

> I think an area that is an area of growth for every school, but I do not know how just
> to make more hours in the day. There were many times where we could have
> communicated earlier. Like that was a big complaint of a parent who shared, do not

call me to tell me something small has been off, and then three days later it is still

grouping, and now it is significant, and I did not even know it was small.

Broken Trust with Families

The interview participants also reflected on how lack of partnerships and relationships

might lead to a broken relationship between school staff members and parents, which further

raises barriers between the stakeholders involved in the students' education and that is not

beneficial to the students' learning environment. SP2 states, "Of the many challenges that I've

experienced is actually getting the family to trust that we have their students' best interests at

stake." Once the trust between families and school staff has been broken, it can be difficult for

educators to regain it.

Adverse experiences that parents' experience while interacting with their children's

educational caretakers can easily strain their relationship with the school system. When the trust

is broken between educators and parents, parents lose confidence in the schools' ability to keep

their children safe. SP7 shared that,

> A very negative experience can make the families feel like the school is not safe for
>
> their kids and that the school and staff are not doing their job. I think it can kind of
>
> quickly turn the situation a little bit. As a counselor, I was not involved in the
>
> disciplinary stuff, so I might have, like, a good relationship with the family on a level
>
> in which we communicated about how the kids were doing in school, their grades,
>
> and their academics.

Fear of Parents

During the interview, participants speculated on the root causes that lead to interruption

of the communication between school staff and parents' interrupts. One of the main topics that

interviewees shared is the possibility that some educators might have a fear of parents, which will cause them to stop, or not to initiate any communication with their students' families. SP6 shared that,

> I do think that there have been times where I've noticed someone saying like, well, I think, maybe it would be better for the kid and for the family that I do not call them right now because I think maybe this other person can do a better job. Then maybe I can learn something from that and apply it the next time, but what ends up happening with that as some families do not want to beat around the bush like just tell me what. Many times, I think that the issues get danced around, and parents do not like that. They feel like they are hiding something from them, and I have seen that when a teacher might call a parent, and you know that parent gets a little curious of why you are not telling me right away what is going on and why you are dancing around the issue.

> While speaking about the relationships of teachers with parents, SP3 also shared that,

> I do not know what it is. It is like, it is like Kryptonite. Some teachers are like, oh, I have to call the mom. I have to call him like yes because you are saying that you want to suspend their child from your class. You are doing the suspension, so by law, you have to call them. Then like, oh, well the never mind, they can come back to my class, and I am like, okay, you know.

Drop in Communication

Communication between families and educators is essential in helping students to be successful. A drop in communication line is the beginning of undermining the relationship between students, families, and educators. As SP2 explains,

So, we are all of that to say communication is critical and is so vital. Even if you do not know what you can do right now, I think people would rather hear. You know what? I do not know where we are going to do right now or how we will do this. Let me put my thinking cap on and get back to you instead of not responding at all because you will never be able to build a relationship with anyone when you do not communicate or do not respond.

Partnership: Meet Families Schedule and Their Needs

The participants in the interviews shared the importance of meeting the families' need in the best interest of the students that they serve. The participants in the interviews acknowledged that parents have jobs on their own and other commitments that might be in the way of being fully involved in their children's school communities. For the reasons previously mentioned, educators need to be mindful of parents' specific needs and availability by being flexible on how the school-home communication line is being established to further estrange parents from their kids' schools. On the opposite side, not meeting the families' needs can raise barriers and impact the students' learning environment. SP2 shared that

> Because a lot of times parents are working parents too and they're at work during the daytime just like we are, and they may not have the flexibility to be able to come in for a conference or talk on the phone during their work hours. So, we have to find a means to be able to meet them where they are. What does that look like? They meant that may mean that we may have to host parent conferences, you know one Saturday a month or something some kind a way to be able to build that partnership with the family. So, I'm kind of way because not everybody is a good communicator through email, not everybody is able to talk on the phone when I call the families right now.

Other participants stated,

You know, the first intervention is always building the relationship because I think

many times we might jump to an intervention and then you know, it might fall flat

on its face or might not be quite right for the family, but sometimes it might just need

to be heard and they might just need to be listened to her. They might just, you know,

need to vent about something and we might be able to offer some sort of advice. But

I think it's important for them to know that as much as we're not a part of their like

blood family that we are a family in a community, and I try to say that every time I

either write an email or I call. We know this because we're doing this together. That's

our job is that we're there to listen and there to support.

Families and school personnel both agree that family involvement is essential. They also

acknowledge that this is a challenge for schools to achieve, and much need for improvement is

recognized. Also, both study groups admitted that when school staff members do not nurture a

positive relationship with families in which schools are able to meet the families' needs, their

trust in the educational system is broken. The two groups agreed that the common root causes of

families' distrust in their children's school are fear of parents that some educators display and

drops or lack of efficient home-school communication.

Themes Overview: Systemic Racism

Eight out of nine participants also discussed how systemic racism impacts students' and

parents' school experience. Participants in the interviews see systemic racism heavily at play in

how the educational system treats students and families of color, especially African Americans.

Systemic racism poses obstacles for students to access services, support, and an appropriate

education, impacting the students' future in our society. As part of this system, educators become

a critical part in perpetuating these unequal systems unless they take active action in dismantling them. Upon more in-depth analysis of the transcripts, I identified five main sub-themes: systemic racism in the communities, students' differential treatment based on race, implicit bias, cultural dissonance, and limited staff resources.

Systemic Racism in the Community

One subject highlighted how the systemic racism deeply rooted in our communities at large often intertwines with the biases already present in our educational system. SP1 shared that,

> The more significant issue is rooted in intergenerational and neighborhood racism. You know, that is really the main, main thing that I see as an educator is our kids are making poor choices due to the circumstances they were born into, and I say this just really thinking about the young students.

Students' Differential Treatment Based on Race

Another area discussed during the interviews is the differential treatment that the interviewees observed during their tenure in education, which is the differential treatment that African American students are subjected to in our educational institutions. SP4 shared that,

> I felt that certain students got to access our services a little bit easier than others, which is, you know, related to which section of the section of the City the school is located versus where the students reside. I do not know if people recognize when they're in the system that that is happening; you know it's based on a subconscious thing that's happening.

SP6 highlighted how students' differential treatment based on race is very problematic and undermines the relationship and day-to-day communication with families. SP6 states, "I do

see that a disproportionate number of calls to parents are not made for students of color I would say, it is kind of what I feel like."

Implicit Bias

Implicit biases are mentioned in the interviews, and the participants in the study highlighted how educators' behavior could be complicated in maintaining a system that oppresses and impacts a part of our student population. SP6 elaborated how biases are showing up in schools and said,

> What can happen at times, and what I've observed, even in myself too, because I mean I've made plenty of mistakes, and I've learned from them. It is that I don't know that you are almost behaving in the way where you're, you are part of the problem. You have become what the practices of systemic racism are, and without even realizing it, you are perpetuating it on a daily basis. Either with your actions, your words, or your practices as a teacher.

SP9 also mentioned how biases could surface in school in how staff members interact with students. Especially when the educators come from a cultural background that is different from the background of their students, they are inexperienced educators, or they are new to the public school system in an urban setting. SP9 states,

> I do not think it is always as clear-cut as this person is; you know who is racist because of this color, or they come from this place. I think what ends up happening is that month. As you know, there are practices that they might already come with. Let us say first-year teachers were coming in. They do not even know what they are about to say or what they are about to act how it is going to come off and it being a racist.

Many educators are also unaware that with their practices, assumptions, and behavior, they perpetuate an institution that is systemically oppressing African American students. SP9 further elaborated on how implicit biases affects educators' behavior while interacting with African American student by stating,

> I think most Educators come into this for the right reasons, and they might be jaded or not. They are still in it for the right reasons. There is a lack of recognition that what I am doing is part of the systemic racism that is happening to our students, and unfortunately, it is happening more to our black and brown students.

Cultural Dissonance

The participants in the study attempted to elaborate on how systemic racism can be upheld in our classrooms. Participants stressed out how lack of educators and lack of knowledge about other cultures, especially of the students, could be a factor that fuels systemic racism in educational institutions. Many educators find themselves teaching a student population that they are not familiar with, and their assumptions and attitudes towards their students can create a learning environment that is not conducive to learning for all students. SP6 shared that,

> Some educators rely on their colleagues of color to connect with families because they sometimes find it hard to truly connect, sympathize, or really understand precisely how to connect with our students of color, and it is something that is learned, I think. Especially if sometimes the educators come, for example, from suburbs, and you did not grow up in an urban environment many times. It can be very shocking data to recognize that your school has more black and brown students than that maybe you were raised around.

Staff Limited Resources

Finally, participants in the interviews shared how the lack of resources that educators can access to improve their practices and better support students and families. Interviewees shared how they believed that teachers meant well when interacting with their students, but they also shared that the teaching profession, at times, can require so much from them that they might find themselves exhausted. Furthermore, our school system is not equipped to provide teachers with the right supports and resources to overcome the challenges they face daily in their work environment, which further strains and consumes their energy. SP3 stated,

> Educators experience challenges and trauma themselves. They are giving 150% of what they have, but they are not getting the resources they need to do their job, and the kids they serve are also not getting the resources they need to thrive. So, it is just like you are losing the battle, and so everyone is tired and exhausted and angry, and that is not good either. So that becomes a challenge or a barrier.

The same thoughts were also reiterated in SP6's interview,

> Like I said before, teachers have so much on their plate at any given time. You know it, I do not. I have seen that it is not necessarily that they do not care to call, or they do not care to build a relationship, but they are exhausted at the end of the day, many times.

> Families and school personnel recognized that systemic racism and oppression is a factor that affects students' learning experience. Some of the circumstances that fuel systemic racism are found in the community's historical practices contributing to marginalizing African American families in their city. Educators and parents have also acknowledged that African American students can be subjected to differential treatment based on race in their learning environment

compared to other students. Both groups have named implicit bias and cultural dissonance in school staff members as root causes that negatively impact how African American students perceive their school environment. Finally, staff limited resources in overcoming the previously mentioned challenges is also a contributing factor in maintaining an unequal education system. School staff members and families recognized that schools are lacking in implementing resources that are geared to dismantle systemic racism and this needs to be further addressed by schools.

Themes Overview: School Supports

All participants gave an overview of the school supports that were available at their school sites. They mainly focused on sharing that the mail approach utilized to support conflicts arising at their school sites was rooted in the restorative practice framework. They then talked about the services that were accessible to students and families and how out of class staff might play a more prominent role than in class staff in the implementation of school supports.

Restorative Practices

In the interviews, restorative practices emerged as the most utilized framework to solve conflict and challenges in the school environment. SP3 highlighted that,

> We targeted as needed from self-regulation training, and then she was also working on developing a curriculum for school-wide restorative practices training for all three grade levels. So that all kids could have it, and we did staff training. So, we are trying to do things to be proactive. However, I would say the most significant thing is like meeting with the kids and trying to help them get to the root of their own things that were causing them to feel unsafe.

Supports and Services Available to Students and Families

Interviewees deepen the conversation by talking about the services offered at school directly available through the school district or with community-based organizations (CBOs) that are partnering with the school district. Those services might include academic and social-emotional support, therapy services, school-based wellness centers, after-school support, and the opportunity to connect with organizations in the students' neighborhood to support students and families' peculiar needs. SP3 stated that,

> We have a CARE team that before was called our wellness team that can connect with the families and students to provide support as needed. We have administrators. We have school counselors. We have a dean. We have a school nurse. We have a school social worker. We have interns. We have Beacon program facilitators. We have case managers who are also licensed therapists. We have our school psychologist. So, we have a pretty large team that can support our students.

Implementation of School Supports: Out of Class Staff

From the conversations with the participants to the study, it also emerged that some school support functions were mainly held by out of classroom staff. In the interviews emerged that mainly out-of-classroom staff (counselors, school social workers, administrators, etc.) were the ones directly supporting students who were encountering barriers and challenges in their classrooms. Meanwhile, the classroom teachers assumed a more passive role and delegated those tasks to other staff members. These practices contribute to distance students from their teachers and undermine their relationship. SP3 stated,

> So, every week, there were weekly circles to build relationships just amongst the students. The counselors and or the social worker and or the beacon person, as well

as our student advisor, would be the people that would have a different relationship with the students would then be the ones, you know, interjecting and talking to the students and making sure that they are, you know, get back on track or that they come.

Families and school personnel highlighted the importance of implementing school-wide practices that foster a positive learning environment in which all students can learn in a safe space. One of the most common frameworks mentioned in the interviews is restorative practices (RP) that staff members attempted to use to solve conflicts to create safe spaces in schools. From the interviews, it emerged that there is still work to be done to ensure that restorative practices and other school supports are implemented with fidelity and easily accessible to students and families. Some participants shared that restorative practices are being used more in a reactive way instead of proactively building community and trust. School personnel and families agreed that this is an area of improvement for schools.

Themes Overviews: Relationships with Students

It is essential for educators to foster and nurture authentic relationships with their students. Positive relationships between students and educators create a learning environment that is intellectually stimulating for our pupils and that is more conducive to learning.

Fostering a Positive Relationship with Students

All participants highlighted the importance of fostering a positive relationship with students to create a positive, conducive learning environment. When the relationship between students and school staff members is broken, students feel disconnected and disenfranchised from school, which leads to a loss of academic achievement. SP9 reflected on how his relationship-building approach leads to deeper relationships and conversations with the students that they worked with,

There is this assumption that students are bad, particularly students of color. This

negative connotation is when these particular groups of students are discussed; that

was not my approach. My approach was that they are teenagers, and they are doing

precisely what they are supposed to do. They are curious. They do not, you know,

they do not know, so that was the lens that I held. Many adults disagreed with my

approach to discipline. You know some students referred to me as their big brother.

I am aware of my background and positionality, being transparent and showing that

I am fragile. Students did not need me to be a dean, but they needed me to be their

big brother or Mr. X. Some adults said, you know, you are perpetuating it; you are

making the situation worse. They do not want to be in class, and you just let them

hang out in your office. I said, oh, okay. So, then what many did not know, you

know, when students were in my office? You know, we would have conversations

on social theory on critical race theory, and the things that they were going through

in real life were not being discussed in class.

Another subject spoke about the importance of creating a trusting environment in which

students can feel safe and learn. SP4 pointed out how students spend most of their day with

adults other than their close family members and about the importance of having a positive

relationship with the students you are working with.

You know, and so I think that that is one of the more significant aspects that you

know, many people do not talk about that. You know, they need to have this in this

world, a place where they can come to trust adults. You know, and then they're with

us for such a massive part of the day in their lives. Sometimes some of our kids

were at school from 8 in the morning till 6 in the evening. You know that's ten

hours, and then they sleep for eight. Hopefully, right, you know, crossing our

fingers. I'm like that's part of the reason why I'm like we become second adults and

second families to our students, you know.

Families and educators recognized that fostering a positive relationship with their

students is critical in keeping students engaged, valued, and welcomed in their learning

environment. When schools are not investing in building an environment geared to foster a

positive, nurturing relationship with their students, especially African Americans, pupils feel

disconnected and disenfranchised from school. Families and staff members acknowledged that

this is an area that schools need to improve.

Themes Overview: School District Bureaucracy

School district bureaucracy can be a barrier for students and families to fully access the services and supports that are available to them. Moreover, across the years, the school district has delivered many promises to our families of color in the form of board resolutions that have not alleviated the many challenges that our students and families encounter when interfacing with our educational system. These previously mentioned barriers have contributed to disenfranchising our families and students of color from the public school system.

Broken Promises to Families

Six of the participants described how school district bureaucracy undermines the trust between families and school staff. The school system's rigidity can lead to distrust by ignoring, labeling, and disrespecting parents, which can break promises to families offering a safe and nurturing learning environment for their children. SP1 shared that,

> I only say this because it sets up the relationship between the school and honesty,
>
> the school district and the students. Families were crushed due to following
>
> protocol and dumb and not having like a human element to it.
>
> While SP4 added, "I did not think it was beneficial when they started requiring the extra

documentation. I felt like that made it very hard for her family to feel like they were being taken seriously."

The school system has historically been failing a specific category of students. Parents come in contact with their children's educational environment with previous experiences that have shaped their trust and relationship with educators. Only moving from one school setting to another one is not changing the assumptions about the educational institutions that parents have

been building throughout their experience while interacting with public schools. Participant SP6 stated,

> I can say, in general, a lot of the students continued to struggle for whatever reason. So, things happen, and people get a bad taste in their mouths, and then they kind of look at the system as the system that's not working. The education system for a parent where the education system has continued to fail their community, family, and children. It's something that's, and then expecting things to be completely different becomes really challenging. I think that happens a lot with our families right, just resentment to the school system.

Families and staff members admitted that the school district's bureaucratic system engendered parents' distrust by promising and not delivering the promised outcomes. The School district's bureaucracy is another factor contributing to a broken relationship between parents and schools; parents feel that their voices and concerns are being dismissed and not heard. School bureaucracy is an area that needs to be addressed to dismantle the systemic racism that the educational system is still bearing.

Themes Overview: Students' Challenges in the School Environment

Participants in the study also spoke about the significant challenges students face at their schools, which can potentially lead to a safety transfer request. When students lack the sense of belonging, safety, and trust in their school environment, they are more likely to feel disenfranchised and disconnected from school. In particular, if they feel that their teachers and school staff are not addressing their concerns. Two main sub-themes were identified in students' challenges: factors that were out-of-the school control that spilled into the school from the

community, and factors that are a product of interactions that happened within the school, such as physical altercations, bullying, and psychological stress.

Factors out of the School Control

Some of the factors that undermine the students' safety might be under the school control and might be associated with safety concerns in the neighborhood where the school is located or because of specific interactions that have happened in the past with people who live in the same area where the school is located. SP3 shared that,

A parent said to me, it was like it's not even about you guys. It's because my kid has these challenges with other kids in the neighborhood, and they all know he goes to the school, and you guys saw he came to the top of the hill, and they were waiting for him.

Another participant shared, "There is a component that hasn't been addressed yet. In the fact that whatever is happening in the community acts in where they live when how that spills into the actual school."

Factors that are Under School Control

Other times, students' challenges stem from conflicts or negative interactions within the school campuses. SP7 said,

So, yeah, I would say like that with my general experience surrounding safety transfers, I see, like, the majority of the time it would be the result of a fight, and occasionally there might be like, a bullying issue or something like that.

Another participant mentioned challenges surrounding harassment and Title IX (sexual harassment) allegations. SP5 stated,

> From my experience, when I think of all of our students that were involved in the safety transfer process, they were associated with some kind of physical violence in the school. Other cases involved title IX (sexual harassment) allegations or online bullying and harassment.

Families and school staff shared that students might not feel safe in the school environment and that they might feel that their voices and concerns are being heard by the schools, which contributes to disenfranchising African American kids from their learning environments and increase their struggle to communicate or articulate to staff their feelings and challenges that they encounter in school. Both groups agreed that is an area of improvement for schools.

Themes Overview: Successful Outcome of a Safety Transfer

In the last theme that I identified; participants reflected on how successful a safety transfer in the students' educational journey is. Participants identified factors that can help students transition from one school to another smoothly and under the school staff's control. If receiving and sending school personnel to communicate, plan, and actively engage with families and students, the transfer can be a more pleasant experience for the students and families, and the outcomes of the transfer are more likely to be positive. On the other hand, lack of collaboration and communication can further strain the relationship between the school system, families, and students. Factors that were also more rooted in the school environment communities were considered out of the school control that could negatively impact the success of a transfer.

Factors That are Under School Control.

Participants in the interviews shared practices that educators can utilize to support students who are transferring from one school to another to ensure that the transition is as smooth as possible and to set up students for success in their new learning environment. When talking about what schools can do to support students' successful transition to a new school, SP2 said,

I try to make sure that I also involve my counterpart at the other schools, so I'm able to partner with them. So that you know, I'll know who to be able to tell the family this is a good contact person to reach out to when they go to this particular school. So, I think that an open line of communication actually really works.

SP4 also mentions open communication between schools and families, "So it really is a case-by-case situation, and it honestly fully works if you're able to also do a warm handoff to the school that's receiving the student."

School personnel acknowledged that open communication and a collaborative approach with students, families, and other school sites are crucial elements in assuring a smooth and successful student transition from one school to another, but some work needs to be done for schools to improve how transitions are performed.

Factors that are Outside the School Control.

Sometimes, factors that are outside the control of the school personnel control can heavily affect a student's successful transition from one school to a new one. Events that happened in the community and that schools are unable to manage by themselves can easily undermine the students' safety in their old and new school of attendance. SP4 shared,

Because ah, there are a lot of complex events that honestly do happen in the community that bleeds into the school. Moreover, sometimes it is not even related

to the kids. However, it trickled down to the kids, you know. So, I think you have to

know the different neighborhoods and routes to go to school to ensure that the

transfer is appropriate.

SP9 also shared an insight about the community's challenges that spill into the school

environment,

There are sometimes where you know even having the resources, some of the

students are so involved with their social life outside of school That even with the

resources at school, they're not at school. They're not there mentally, emotionally,

and spiritually. Many times, it is not. It is what is happening outside the school

that's made its way to the school. Thus, if it is about student safety, then what else

are we doing in the community to support the students to make sure that they're safe

because they get here, where they need to go, you know, wherever they're going.

Triangulation: Parents' and School Personnel Voices Common Themes

Upon triangulating the evidence collected through the analysis of the African American

Parent Advisory Committee voices and the themes that are emerging in the school personnel

interviews, I was able to identify many points of contact between the two pieces of qualitative

evidence. The outcomes of this triangulation confirmed that there are five themes that are shared

in both qualitative data. More specifically, black students feel disconnected & disenfranchised

from school; educators do not know how to reach or teach Black youth; the district has

engendered distrust through ignoring, labeling, and disrespecting parents, along with promising

and not delivering; the district has engendered distrust through ignoring, labeling, and

disrespecting parents, along with promising and not delivering; educators are not equipped or

engaged in conversations around race, Black culture, and/or racism with parent and students;

lack of culturally responsive, anti-racist teaching, cultural humility; and bias and systemic racism

in the school district must be acknowledged dismantled. The detailed results are summarized in

Table 12. 1 below.

Table 12. 1

AAPAC Voices and School Personnel Interview Common Themes

Common Themes with APAAC	APAAC Families Evidence	School Personnel Themes
Black students feel disconnected & disenfranchised from school	• Missing student voice Students feel disenfranchises • Black kids feel disenfranchised and struggled to communicate/ articulate to staff • Black students and families have no sense of community especially if they are coming on the other side of the city	• Building a positive relationship with students • Students' challenges in the school environment that are not addressed by school staff o Physical altercation and psychological stress: fights, bullying
Educators do not know how to reach or teach Black youth	• Limited teacher flexibility when it comes to meeting with black families • Black children labeled problems	• Build a positive e relationship with students • Need to build trustworthy relationship between families and educators Families o Families Involvement: communication and partnership o Broken trust with families o Fear of parents o Partnership: Meet Families Schedule and Needs o Drop in communication • Communication with families: more teacher's involvement
Lack of culturally responsive, anti-racist teaching, cultural humility	• Lack of cultural understanding, • Continued need to cultural humility training for staff. • Missing proper training and tools Culturally responsive	• Systemic Racism o Students' differential treatment based on race o Implicit bias o Cultural dissonance o Staff limited resources

The district has engendered distrust through ignoring, labeling, and disrespecting parents, along with promising and not delivering	• Families should have information that helps them understand what kids should know at each grade level • Lacking partnership with families • Wants educators to sit and talk, • Need to involve parents • Parent participation is contingent on work schedule • Lack of trust for the school district • We feel unheard by their school and district • Promises by schools and the district to African American families have been made and broken • Educators labeling black parents as the problem • Stop caring about how I look & instead listen to what I say • Labels about parents form quickly & "filling" stereotypes • If I come in angry, it is because I know I need to protect my child • Missing connection with parents & community • They don't have to be afraid of us, parents, black people • Staff Ignoring families • Lack of due diligence to know child or family • Fear of Black people hinders communication and collaboration • Breakdown in communication/ relationships with a school. • System is broken, distrust • Non-Black people have a fear about going to black families and ask for help with students • Lacking partnership with families • Need to involve parents • Parent participation is contingent on work schedule	• Need to build trustworthy relationship between families and educators Families o Families Involvement: communication and partnership o Broken trust with families o Fear of parents o Partnership: Meet Families Schedule and Needs o Drop in communication o Communication with families: more teacher's involvement • School district bureaucracy o Broken promises to families

Table 12. 1 (Continued)

Educators are not equipped or engaged in conversations around race, Black culture, and/or racism with parents and students.	• The students need an outlet from someone who looks like them • Educators not knowledgeable or respectful of others culture • There is NO cultural humility offered within schools • No Black teachers • Not enough support on school sites to advocate for African American students	• Systemic Racism o Students' differential treatment based on race o Implicit bias o Cultural dissonance o Staff limited resources

Bias and systemic racism in the school district must be acknowledged & dismantled	• Bias and systemic racism • Students and families are greatly impacted by implicit and explicit bias	• Systemic Racism o Students' differential treatment based on race o Implicit bias o Cultural dissonance o Staff limited resources

The AAPAC qualitative analysis also included six other themes that were not found on the themes of the school staff interviews. That is mainly because those categories were relative to different topics not covered in the school personnel's interviews, such as root causes for the overrepresentation of African American students in special education and disciplinary system, academic instruction, Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs) related challenges and concerns, and principal-parent relationships that parents shared during their meetings.

Research Question 2: School Characteristics Findings

RQ2. How do students' characteristics of the sending and receiving schools (e.g., ethnicity, Special Education) impact the outcome of their disciplinary and academic performance after their transfer? Does the students' academic, disciplinary, and attendance performance change in the receiving school? To answer RQ2, I used the school district's characteristics, such as percentage of African American and students receiving special education services. The sending and receiving schools were assigned a code based on their contrast with the average district enrollment for the same characteristic (race and special education composition). As of the school year 2019-2020, the overall school district enrollment for African American students was 6.4%, and 14.2% of the student body received special education services. If a school was enrolling a lower-than-average percentage of students in the identified category (AA or Special Ed.), the school was identified as a "school with low enrollment" for that characteristic and assigned a dummy code (i.e., 1). If the enrollment was higher than average, it was determined as a "school with high enrollment" in the specific characteristic and it was assigned a different code

(i.e., 4). I was interested in analyzing if the transfer to a school that bore a different characteristic was impacting the students' academic, attendance, and office discipline referrals output. The decision to request a transfer are often impacted by these types of contrast. I identified one possible category based on the school characteristics combined with the students' transfer (See Table 13. 1 below). Dummy codes were used to identify the type of transfer (i.e., from a school with low AA population to one with high AA population and so on).

Table 13. 1

School Characteristics and Students' Possible Transfer Outcomes

Sending School	Receiving School	Or No Transfer
From high AA Enrollment	To low AA enrollment	Stay in high AA enrollment
From low AA Enrollment	To high AA enrollment	Stay in low AA enrollment
From low AA enrollment	To low AA enrollment	
From high AA enrollment	To high AA enrollment	
From high SPED Enrollment	To low SPED enrollment	
From low SPED Enrollment	To high SPED enrollment	
From low SPED enrollment	To low SPED enrollment	

I also determined the mean for the office discipline referrals, GPA, and attendance variable for the year one, year two, and year three group study, and the means were compared with the overall district means as determined in the school year 2018-2019. The mean for each variable is reported in Table 14. 1.

Table 14. 1

Means of the Study Variables for the Study Sample and School District (N=88)

Variable	Study group year 1	Study group year 2	Study group year 3	School district SY 2018-19
Office discipline referrals (ODRs) per student	7.7	6.4	5.6	5.3
Attendance rate	78.4%	67.%	64.5	87%
Fall semester GPA	1.34	0.94	1.13	n/a

I used a paired t-test to compare the means between the year before and after the safety

transfer, which was called study group year 1, and the data collected the year the safety transfer

was performed, which was called study group year two. Due to the ongoing COVID-19 global

pandemic, the data GPA and office discipline referrals data collected the year after the safety

transfers resulted in some of the participants missing data. The three indexes analyzed with the

t-test were the office discipline referrals, attendance rate, and GPA means. The study group year

1 had a mean attendance (n=81) of 78.4%, while the mean attendance recorded in year 2 (n=88)

was 67.%, and the study group year 3 (n=85) had a mean of 64.5%. The t-test revealed a

significant difference in attendance between year 1 and year 2 with a $t = 1.97$ with a two-tail $p \leq$

0.05. The t-test was also significantly different between year 1 and year 3 attendance means with

a $t = 1.97$, $p \leq 0.05$. Unfortunately, the difference is a decrease in attendance. Though the change

in attendance between year 1 and 3 might be impacted by COVID-19 changes, the difference

between year 1 (before transfer) and 2 (after transfer) is also negative.

The means for office discipline referrals per student changed in a positive direction, 7.7

in year 1 ($n = 86$), 6.4 in year 2 ($n = 84$), and 5.6 ($n = 36$) in year 3. However, the t-test revealed

that the difference is not statistically significant. Even the positive direction of the change might

not be interpreted as an improvement because it may be that the decrease in referrals is due to the

absenteeism of the students. If they are not at school, they can't receive disciplinary referrals.

Finally, the mean GPA for year 1 ($n = 28$) was 1.34 and .94 ($n = 30$) in year 2. The t-test also

revealed no statistically significant difference between any of the years. Again, if students are not

attending less days of school and there is attrition through dropout and out of district transfer,

GPA might be impacted as well. These descriptive statistics determined a significant decrease in

the students' attendance in the year the transfer was completed and the year after the safety

transfer. The other two indexes did now show a significant change between the three years

analyzed in the study though these three outcomes might not be independent from each other,

and attendance might be the catalyst for the other two.

The results of the t-test indicate that there is no improvement in any of the indexes of

academic and behavior performance for students who go through the safety transfer process.

However, it is not clear if there is a difference depending on the demographic composition of the

receiving and sending schools. Three one-way between-subjects' ANOVAs were conducted to

compare the effect of the schools' characteristics - African American students and students

receiving special education services – on change on the students' attendance, GPA, and office

discipline referrals between the year preceding the transfer and the year in which the transfer was

performed. The change in the students' GPA, attendance, and office discipline referrals between

the year before the transfer (Year 1) and the year in which the transfer was performed were

analyzed (Year 2) by type of transition as defined by the dummy codes. The ANOVAs did not

find a significant change in either of the students' outcomes (attendance, GPA, and office

discipline referrals) by the transfer types (as coded by sending versus receiving school

characteristics). It did not matter whether the student transferred from a school with high

numbers of AA students to one with low numbers of AA students or vice versa, there was no

significant change in their attendance, discipline referrals, or GPA (see Table 15. 1 below). Thus,

transferring did not yield any benefits for students.

Table 15. 1

ANOVA Results: Year 1 to Year 2 Changes in Office Discipline Referrals, Attendance and GPA

African American students' enrollment to office discipline referrals	$[F (5, 82) = .28, p > .05]$
African American students' enrollment to attendance	$[F (5, 82) = .071, p > .05]$
African American students' enrollment to GPA	$[F (4, 42) = 1.4, p > .05]$
Student receiving special education services to office discipline referrals	$[F (5, 82) = .54, p > .05]$
Student receiving special education services to attendance	$[F (5, 82) = .87, p > .05]$
Student receiving special education services to GPA	$[F (4, 38) = 1.35, p > .05]$

Three one-way between-subjects ANOVAs were also conducted to compare the effect of

the schools' characteristics – percentage of students receiving special education services on the

students' attendance, GPA, and office discipline referrals between the year in which the transfer

was performed (Year 1) and the year after the transfer was performed (Year 2). The change in

the students' GPA, attendance, and office discipline referrals between the year in which the

transfer was performed (ear 2) and the year after the transfer was completed (Year 3) were

analyzed. The results of this analysis determined that there was not a significant effect of the

school characteristics on the change in students' attendance, GPA, and office discipline referrals

at the $p < .05$ level (see Table 16. 1 below).

Table 16. 1

ANOVA Results: Year 2 to Year 3 Change in Office Discipline Referrals, Attendance, and GPA

African American students' enrollment to office discipline referrals	$[F (5, 31) = .40, p > .05]$
African American students' enrollment to attendance	$[F (5, 78) = 1.96, p > .05]$
African American students' enrollment to GPA	$[F (5, 13) = 1.43, p > .05]$
Students receiving special education services enrollment to office discipline referrals	$[F (5, 31) = .19, p > .05]$
Students receiving special education services enrollment to attendance	$[F (5, 78) = 1.96, p > .05]$
Student receiving special education services enrollment to GPA	$[F (5, 13) = 1.72, p > .05]$

The ANOVA results have found that the characteristics of the schools of attendance of the students did not impact the students' attendance, GPA, and office discipline referrals. It did not matter whether the student transferred from a school with high numbers of students receiving special education to one with low numbers of students receiving special education or vice versa, there was no significant change in their attendance, discipline referrals, or GPA.

Research Question 3: PBIS Findings

The academic and behavioral outcome of two control groups (students who stayed in the same school because they do not receive the safety transfer and those who transferred through a different process after being denied the safety transfer) and an experimental group of students who received the safety transfer were contrasted to learn about the impact of safety transfers. Since all of these students were requesting a safety transfer the behavioral and academic issues experienced were similar across groups.

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the academic and behavioral outcome of the students who received a transfer with a group of similar students who did not receive a safety

transfer. This analysis yielded no-significant differences between these groups indicating that regardless of receiving a safety transfer, a different transfer, or staying in the same school their referrals, attendance, and GPA did not change significantly.

The role of TFI was investigated by running Linear Pearson Correlation between the index of fidelity of implementation using (School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports or SW-PBIS) the changes in the office discipline referrals, attendance, and GPA between the year of the transfer (year 2) and the year after (year 3) that a transfer was performed or requested. To determine the correlation significance, a $p \leq 0.05$ was used. The Pearson correlation coefficients were not significant, which indicates that the level of implementation of the SWPBIS as measured by the TFI did not make a difference for the students.

Summary

This chapter presented the analysis and results used in the study for addressing the research questions. The study's qualitative component included staff personnel's interviews regarding their experience supporting students during the safety transfer process and a review of the African American parents' perspectives around the root causes that fuel African American students' disproportionality in the disciplinary and special education processes. The data analysis highlighted that staff personnel and parents shared some perspectives and themes on how the school district is failing its African American students through the lack of parent engagement, lack of communication, inability to develop a positive relationship with students and families, and the continuous upholding of systemic racism in its structures and processes.

One-way ANOVAs were conducted to analyze if the schools' specific characteristics included in the study (high or low enrollment of African American students or students receiving

special education services) impacted the students' academic performance across the three school years that were included in the research. The ANOVAs highlighted that those characteristics did not affect the students' academic output.

A t-test was also performed to determine if the difference in the overall mean of the office discipline referrals, attendance rates, and GPAs were significantly different in the three school years. All the variations were not statistically significant, except for the change in the attendance rates. Sadly, the attendance rates presented a constant and steady decline across the three school years. The students' part of this research had a considerable decrease in their school participation with a loss of learning opportunities.

Furthermore, a Pearson Linear correlation was performed to analyze the impact of the implementation of the SWPBIS on the students' academic performance. The analysis showed that the fidelity of implementing the SWPBIS did not correlate with the students' sample's academic performance.

Finally, a one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the academic and behavioral outcomes of the students who received a transfer with a group of similar students who did not receive a safety transfer. This analysis yielded no-significant differences between these groups, indicating that regardless of receiving a safety transfer, a different transfer, or staying in the same school, their referrals, attendance, and GPA did not change significantly. The data is presented in various graphs and tables.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Summary of the Study

Gaban and Tajally (2014), in their study that included school across Texas, determined that, students of color, especially African Americans, are overrepresented in the special education and disciplinary processes, and that the "Whiter" the school district was, the more African American students were being disciplined in comparison to other students. This disproportionality is also present at my current school district, and, under the guidelines of the California Department of Education, the school district is in the process of creating a two-year plan to address the disproportionate presence of African American students in disciplinary and special education systems. Disproportionality is usually measured by the ratio of a student's presence in the school district and its proportion in disciplinary or special education processes. I was interested in investigating disproportionality by looking at processes that students can access in a public-school setting that are intrinsically related to the outcome of disproportionality. In studying how what factors affects safety transfer process we could understanding how AA students find themselves overrepresented in this system. Secondary data as indicators of students' outcomes were used to study the effect of the transfer by comparing the outcomes across the pre-and post-transfer years as well as between students who transferred schools and students who did not. The demographic and descriptive statistics indicate that all of these students requesting a safety transfer are experiencing higher than the average (at the school district level) absenteeism, discipline referrals, Special Education services, and maintaining lower than average GPA. Given that these are students that are requesting a transfer this is not surprising. However, it was very surprising that it did not matter what type of school they transferred to (population racial demographics, special education index or level of

implementation of FTI) or if they did not transfer, their academic and behavioral outcomes worsen over the three years. It is also discouraging that about 16% of these students dropped out by the third year and about 15% ended up at the Juvenile Center. Thus, the persistence of these adverse indicators show that the locus of these phenomena is not at the level that this study has focused. It might be that the reasons why the implementation of SW-PBIS and the transferring to different schools are not effective in addressing the challenges these students face may be that these obstacles are ingrained in a larger system. Interviews with school personnel who are well intended and understand the disciplinary system as well as the opinions of parents seem to indicate a much larger problem that might not be perceivably in school based data.

Interpretation RQ1

The data analysis of the staff personnel' interviews and African American parents' depicted the larger nature of the factors that influence the overrepresentation of AA students in the disciplinary and special education systems. Their perspectives illustrate the root causes of the disproportionality and systems that maintain as the central themes that are most frequently represented in both groups. Parents and staff members have highlighted how building a trustworthy relationship with families and students is critical in creating safe and conducive learning environments in which all students thrive. When school staff members invest in building trustworthy, positive relationships with students and families, children feel comfortable with the adults in their learning settings. Students need trustworthy adults to rely on, especially when challenging situations arise. Trust between students and teachers strengthen parents' trust that schools are operating in their children's best interest and that they are there to support them as needed. Although it was clear that for both, parents and staff members trust was perceived as part of the solution, it was clear in their perceptions that currently it was that miss-trust that was

part of the problem. Parents and staff members identified some specific practices that are typical in educational institutions that instill distrust and that push parents and students apart from their school environment, systemic racism and school district bureaucracy. Systemic racism is embedded in our school culture and combined with school personnel challenges to address African American students' needs, contributes to feelings of school disenfranchisement in the African American communities. One of the sub-themes under trust that clearly depicts the way parents feel about school, which was also identified by staff members was their perceptions that some educators fear African American parents, which might cause a drop in communication from the school sites and fosters distrust between families and schools. Ensuring that school personnel is culturally competent is another challenge that public schools face in addressing systemic racism. Most of the educators are White and have not received training in intercultural communication or power inequity. Finally, the school district's bureaucracy affects African American families by engendering distrust through implementing a culture that is ethnocentric which contributes to devaluing AA culture and implementing labeling biases; along with deception through a rhetoric of social justice that does not deliver.

These findings resonate with other studies. Bottiani et al., (2018) studied how students' perceptions of their learning environment and their school sense of belonging can impact their behavior and academic output. A more positive school environment increases the students' trust in their teachers and enhances their learning experience. Through the data collected from the interviews with staff personnel and data from parents' meetings, it is clear that they also perceive the relations between students and teachers to be central to their success and that they see this as one of the major challenges presently faced by this district.

The data analysis of the staff personnel' interviews have highlighted some themes that are crucial in creating safe and conducive learning environments in which all students can learn. Building trustworthy positive relationships with students is vital to ensure that pupils feel safe with the adults in their learning setting, especially when challenges arise, and they need trustworthy adults to advocate for them through challenging situations. SP1 shared during their interview,

> I also do recognize the power in just being present and being a positive force for if and when you do interact with a student, and that is the way I have done that personally. When something happens, they know where to go, and they see in me a warm and welcoming person.

The interviews also showed that when a genuine student-educator relationship is not nurtured, students feel estranged from their learning environment, and their participation in classroom activities decreases drastically. Some of the more common behaviors that students disengaged from their learning include spending more time out of class in the hallways or with supportive adults, other than their teachers, that they trust at the school, such as a school counselor. SP9 described an example of this scenario at their school,

> You know. Teachers said to me, 'students are not in class. They're in your office. They don't want to be in class, and you just let them hang out in your office.' They did not want to be there in class. I could tell them to go to class. They were literally leaving my office and going around the halls and still not going to class.

Interviewees agreed that biases from the school personnel could compromise the relationship between educators and families, especially when biases fuel fear of parents, which leads to a decrease in the quantity and quality of the communication between parents and school.

In other cases, fear of parents can lead educators to defer the communication with parents to other colleagues of color, which is a very problematic behavior for staff members who are engaging in these unequal practices.

Archer-Banks and Behar-Horenstein (2008) highlighted the importance of nurturing a positive relationship and partnership between parents and their children's educators because that enhances the students' academic success. Archer-Banks and Behar-Horenstein (2008) also unveiled that to increase families' involvement in their children's education; schools need to be more flexible in meeting their specific needs. The same topics were discussed by the staff members interviewed in this study. Educators shared that building a positive relationship with their students' families was essential for kids' well-being. Moreover, it emerged from their responses that the school system needs to be more flexible to meet families' needs. It is crucial to be less bureaucratic, and school district bureaucracy was mentioned as a barrier and a burden that contributes to strain the relationship between schools and families. The school system's rigidity can instill distrust in families and make them feel that the district is breaking its promises to keep students safe and create welcoming learning environments.

Staff members discussed the main challenges students face in the school environment that could lead to a safety transfer request, such as physical altercation, bullying, and harassment, which can add to the students' psychological, physical, and emotional distress. Staff shared that families and students might feel that their schools might not be supporting them when challenges arise, primarily if the situations are not appropriately addressed or by providing to the students involved the proper support through the services that are available at the school sites. Interviewees described what kind of supports they have at their schools. However, again, parents'

involvement and engagement since the onset of any challenge that a student might experience at school is pivotal in effectively supporting students. SP3 stated,

> Communication was a big complaint of some parents. They said, 'you do not call me to tell me something small that has been happening, then three days later, it is still happening. Now it is a big thing, and I didn't even know it was small.

One major topic discussed in the interviews was how systemic racism and oppression emerge in the public school system. Howard (2018) hypothesized that disproportionality in disciplinary practices is driven by the power difference between a public school system that embodied a mainly White and Eurocentric background while serving a very diverse student body population. Howard (2018) suggests that educators should change their pedagogical approach toward the diverse student body population they serve to address the existing cultural mismatch.

Okun (2001) defines White supremacy culture as "the idea (ideology) that White people and the ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and actions of White people are superior to People of Color and their ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and actions." In their work, Okun (2001) identified 15 White supremacy culture characteristics that define White supremacy culture, and they highlighted that because White supremacy culture and its characteristics are so entrenched in our institutions that it could be challenging for people to identify, at times. Okun also indicated that these characteristics could appear in any organization because of their pervasiveness. To address the ramifications that White supremacy culture has on our institutions, they have identified specific antidotes that can be utilized to counteract the effects of those characteristics. Antidotes do not eliminate the White supremacy characteristics, but they aim to mitigate their effects on people.

The full list of White supremacy characteristics is listed by Okun (2001) as follows:

Perfectionism; sense of urgency, defensiveness, quantity over quality; worship of the written word; only one right way, paternalism; either/or thinking; power hoarding; fear of open conflict; individualism; I am the only one; progress is bigger, more; objectivity; right to comfort (Okun, 2001).

The staff members participating in the interviews described how systemic racism and oppressions could be driving educators' behavior and choices when interacting with students and families without even being aware of them. SP9 shared,

You know, you cannot take down a master's house with the master's tools. You know, I shared that with a few people, and they are like, 'yeah, you cannot do that.' Then I remind them that we are still in the master's house. So, I ask, who was in the master's house? Their response is, 'what do you mean?' So, I remind them that we're all in this system; we are part of it. Can we actually see the system we are referring to?

As shared by SP9, educators are trying to dismantle the systemic racist structures and processes that are perpetuating the over-representation of African American students in the disciplinary and special education processes by utilizing practices and strategies that are also perpetuating an oppressive system without even being aware of that while they are instead thinking that they are being anti-racist.

The analysis of the parents' secondary qualitative data obtained from the African American Advisory Committee was also compared with the themes that were identified in the school personnel interviews. The comparison showed that half of the themes that were

mentioned by the parents' discussions matched the themes that emerged from the interviews with the school personnel.

More specifically, the themes that overlapped in the two study groups included students' challenges in the school environment, systemic racism, building a trustworthy relationship between families and educators' families, school supports, school district bureaucracy, students' success after a safety transfer is processed, and relationships with students. It is important for us to reflect on these results because they show consistency between school staff' and families' responses and attitudes. Often, there seems to be a disconnection between the two sides, and it might feel that we are set in an "us" versus "them" system. From the analysis of these qualitative data, it is surfacing that there are more commonalities between the two "sides." This is an area of research that should be further investigated to tear down barriers between the school system and families to support learning environments in which our students thrive.

The themes that did not match between the two qualitative sets of data (school staff and parents) were related to the discussion surrounding students' overrepresentation in special education, disciplinary practices, school leadership characteristics, and questions about special education services, which were topics not directly covered in the questions for the school personnel interviews.

Interpretation RQ2

Seeking a safety transfer is often a strategy used for parents to deal with the struggles students are facing at school. It is important to understand whether transfer is an effective solution. Thus, the impact of transferring into another school was investigated by comparing the attendance, disciplinary referrals and GPA before and after the transfer was granted. It is also important to find out if the type of transfer was relevant to the outcomes. The characteristics

(proportion of AA and Special Education Students) of the sending and receiving schools were categorized to study their role in the three outcomes studied.

I was interested in analyzing if the difference in sending and receiving school characteristics would affect their school performance. Multiple one-way ANOVAs were calculated on the students' change in office discipline referrals, GPA, attendance rates, and the results across the three years included in the study. The result showed there are no statistically significant differences in any of the outcomes, with the exception of a negative change in attendance. The type of transfer, that is, the characteristics of the sending and receiving schools did not make a difference either the between group means as determined by one-way ANOVAs were not significantly different.

The results in the data analysis performed on the afore-mentioned parameters suggested that overall, the transfers did not benefit the students' academic and behavioral performance. The specific school characteristics have not impact in the students' performance either, no significant change was found regardless of the sending and receiving schools' comparable or divergent characteristics included in the study. These results imply that systemic issues at a larger level might be affecting the students' lack of success in their academics and behavioral performance. Furthermore, it was determined that there was a significant decrease in the overall students' attendance rate across the three academic years. If students' school attendance is decreasing after transferring a decrease in GPA and discipline referrals is intrinsically related, although these decreases were not statistically significant. These data have significant implications for re-evaluating school district policies, like the safety transfer process and implementing systemic and structural changes geared to benefit the students' school experience.

Interpretation RQ3

A higher score in the TFI has been associated with a decrease in school discipline measures and an increase in the students' academic performance. Schools implementing the SWPBIS with fidelity should expect to reach a TFI score of 70% (Algozzine et al., 2014). The implementation of SWPBIS should be related to a decrease in disciplinary referrals. Thus, hypothetically attending a school that has high fidelity of implementation of SWPBIS should relate to decrease in disciplinary referral and attendance, and an increase on GPA. I conducted a Pearson Linear Correlation to determine if there was such a pattern of association between TFI fidelity of implementation and school's change of attendance rates, office discipline referrals, and GPA from the year before the safety transfer and the year in which the safety transfer was performed (Year 1 to Year 2 change), and the changes in the same indexes between the year in which the safety transfer was performed and the following year (Year 2 to Year 3 change). The Pearson correlation indicated no significant correlation between the TFI level of implementation and the change in the students' outcomes.

The results from the fidelity of implementation of SWPBIS for the sub-group of students' part of this study revealed that a difference in the TFI sub-scale 1 scoring in the students' school of enrollment was not correlated with the changes in the sample's office discipline referrals, attendance rates, and GPA for the years considered in the research. As highlighted by Algozzine et al. (2014), when a school has a higher score in their TFI, a decrease in indexes such as suspension rates and office discipline referrals and an increase in students' attendance and other academic performance indexes should be expected. In this study, these findings were not replicated, which raises some consideration regarding the implementation of the SWPBIS at the school level. Is the framework being implemented with fidelity, but systemic racism affects how

these evidence-based practices are performed when referring to African American students, or are the SWPBIS implementation plans that schools create in need of improvement?

A different way of investigating the role of the transfer on the student's outcomes was to compare the group of students who requested but were not granted a safety transfer and those who transferred. A third group emerged from the data, as some of the students who were not granted a safety transfer were transfer through different processes. This third group of other transfers was also included in this comparison. Moreover, a one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine if the academic and behavioral outcome of the students differ across these three groups. The results showed no statistically significant differences between group means.

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Implications for Practice

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The results study has many implications to consider on how the public school system should interact with students and families in the AA community and reconsider the structural systems and processes of our education system. To overcome the systemic racism embedded in the educational institutions it may take a restructuring of the institution.

Authentic School-Parents Partnership

The results from the staff personnel's interviews have unveiled that educators have many commonalities with how African American families perceive on why their children are disproportionately represented in some of the school district's processes and the practices that should be changed, supported, and revised to serve these students best. Both groups highlighted the importance of building a trustworthy relationship between students, families, and school staff to promote a learning environment in which their children can thrive. School's face one challenge: how to bridge these relationships and repair broken ones to nurture authentic partnerships with families to support the children's learning. One meaningful change would

include the mind-shift in educators' attitudes and beliefs towards students and parents. One way to achieve this is to increase awareness of how systemic racism unfolds in our educational institutions to dismantle that oppressive structure. The school system has to recognize how to counteract the effects of White supremacy characteristics that are embedded in our society. One way to achieve this is to allow educators to pause and analyze how their behavior impacts students and families Okun (2001).

Ibram Kendi (2019) definition of an antiracist, "One who is supporting an antiracist policy through their actions or expressing an antiracist idea" challenges educator to be active participants in dismantling systemic racism structures by redefining and re-constructing learning school environments that use inclusive instructional practices for every student.

Rethink School District Processes: Safety Transfer

The data analysis has unveiled that the safety transfer process which disproportionately affects African American students is not changing the students' school experience or academic performance. Schools and families access the process in the hope of finding a safer, more inclusive, and conducive learning environment, but this is not necessarily for AA students in this sample. The academic and behavioral records of the students in the study did not change significantly after transferring schools. Just like the performance of the students who did not transfer did not change significantly either. Finally, when the sample's academic performance was compared with the level of implementation of the SWPBIS, the two variables were not correlated. The overall attendance rate was the only index that showed a significant steady decrease in the three academic years considered in the study. The results highlight how the gap between the sample study's mean attendance and the overall district mean attendance has been widening.

From the study' results, it appears that moving students from one school to another without investing systemically in changing the policies, structures, and systems that are fueling the overrepresentation of students in some of these processes is not an effective strategy, it does not help students to be successful learners. If public schools put their efforts into dismantling the overarching systemic racism present in their structures, they could proactively avoid the need to utilize the safety transfer process unless it is needed for extreme safety concerns.

SWPBIS and TFI

The data analysis has also shown that the TFI has not positively impacted the students' academic performance, as outlined in other studies, such as Algozzine et al. (2014). These results also raise some questions about the implementation of SWPBIS initiatives in schools. This evidence-based framework has not positively affected the sub-group of students who were part of this study. The results of this study suggest that schools should reconsider how the SWPBIS is being implemented with AA students to ensure that educators are assessing these evidence-based practices with diverse student populations that they serve. We need to assess the implementation of any intervention in the context of the students that need the most support. Oftentimes, we implement interventions with a one size fits all assumption.

<div align="center">

Recommendations for Further Research

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The school district part of the study is an urban district with a small population of African American students, which was 6.4% of the total enrollment for the school year 2019-2020. Further research should be conducted in other districts that have similar school transfer processes with different demographics to investigate how disproportionality affects students in various educational contexts. Researchers should also investigate how disproportionality is surfacing in

other school districts' processes and other safety transfer systems to identify factors that perpetuate systemic racism.

The sample study of the research qualitative component could be expanded by including the direct voice of parents, the voice of the students and adding teachers' and other educational professionals' perspectives. Including also the voices of members of the community-based organizations that collaborate with educational agencies in serving our students could be beneficial in collecting a holistic view of the perspectives surrounding the factors that drive the overrepresentation of African American students in specific processes and structures that are present in our public school systems to proactively address and dismantle the systematic racism and oppression practices that are embedded in such structures.

Finally, a longitudinal study that follows a cohort of students who have accessed the safety transfer process throughout their K-12 experience and beyond if they access college education could provide more insight into the long-term students' experiences.

More information on how school transfers impact the students' academic trajectory can provide more in-depth knowledge of how to proactively address the challenges that some of our students face by implementing structural changes in our educational system. Data collection to achieve this goal should include direct classroom observations, multi-year academic and social-emotional data to examine long-term patterns and data of students from other races who also access the safety transfer process to analyze if they are also experiencing the same challenges that African American students encounter.

Limitations

The study was conducted during the school building closure and the onset of distance learning that began in March 2020 due to the global pandemic caused by COVID-19. The school

building closure has impacted some of the secondary quantitative data of the 2019-2020 cohort of students included in the research, which was the school year 2019-2020. Office discipline referral (ODR) was the index mainly impacted by school building closure and some of the students' sample GPA. Another limitation was the limited or non-availability of parents and students who experienced the safety transfer process to be part of the interviews. The global pandemic limited the direct accessibility of students' and parents' voices, and I utilized secondary qualitative data collected in the school year 2019-2020 that captured the parents' voice.

Delimitations

The study was conducted in the researchers' place of employment. Consequently, a convenience sample was conducted. Despite having a convenience sample and limited generalizability, the researcher gained more knowledge of how disproportionality surfaces in less common processes that students access in public schools that other researchers usually study, such as disciplinary and unique education systems. This information is invaluable in this field because it provides an insight into how disproportionality pervasively infiltrates our school system's minor processes and gives practitioners an insight into common threads that drive disproportionality and systemic racism in processes and systems across the educational system. There is little to no literature regarding how African American students' disproportionality emerges in the educational system other than discipline and special education, and this study served as a basis for further research. Furthermore, the 2020 COVID-19 global pandemic made it so that all interviews were conducted via Zoom or Google Meet video calls. The interviews were conducted at the participants' convenience, and the virtual environment might have facilitated the deep conversations that were shared through the interview process.

Summary

In this chapter, I presented a summary of the study, a discussion of investigation findings, implications for practice, recommendations for further research, limitations, and delimitations.

The qualitative component of the study findings highlighted the importance of building a trustworthy relationship with students and families to create physically and emotionally safe learning spaces in which students can thrive. Another significant theme that emerged throughout the interviews is the presence of systemic racism in our educational institutions and educators' need to engage in actions geared to dismantle this unequal system.

Moreover, when comparing the themes arising from the school personnel interviews with the themes emerging from the analysis of the meeting discussions from a group of African American parents, the themes overlap. The two groups of people have similar views on "what is wrong" in the school system and "what has to happen" instead to better support children. The school district has to take one significant action: to repair the "broken" relationship and "distrust" between schools and families to build an authentic partnership that will benefit the children's learning experience.

The quantitative part of the study revealed that, overall, the safety transfer experience for the student sample part of this study did not lead to a significant change in the students' academic performance. The only significant change across the three years considered in the research was the steady, significant decrease in the students' attendance rate. From the data analysis, it appears that this process is not currently effective and that there is a need to address the underlying systemic challenges embedded in the public school system, and that might ignite the need for a transfer of school in the first place.

Furthermore, the level of fidelity of implementation of the SWPBIS did not impact the students' academic performance part of this study. The changes in the TFI, which measures the level of implementation of the SWPBIS at school sites, did not significantly affect the students' changes in their academic performance. Practitioners should reflect on how the SWPBIS is being measured and implemented and the impact of staff's biases and systemic challenges that might counteract the SWPBIS framework's efficacy for this group of students.

Recommendations for further research included a more prominent group study that includes a variety of school districts with different demographics. Future research should also include longitudinal studies investigating the long-term impact on the academic performance of students who are being transferred multiple times from one school to another to unveil what common factors could be accounted for students' academic success failure. The main limitation included the lack of students' and families' direct voices in this study, mainly due to the ongoing COVID-19 global pandemic that limited access to students and families. The global pandemic and consequent school building closure have also restricted the number of data available for the school year 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 to be included in this study. Delimitations included the sample study of choice that the researcher utilized, limiting the research's generality. I was interested in investigating and gaining more insight into the school district safety transfer process, representing a sub-group of students in the school district.

Moreover, due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, all interviews were conducted via Zoom or Google Meet video calls. The virtual environment and the participants' convenience to connect directly from their home environment might have facilitated and deepened the conversation shared during the interview sessions. Conclusively, all three research questions were addressed through an interpretation of findings from Chapter 4.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Qualitative School Personnel Interview Questions

(These semi-structured questions will be used to prompt school personnel)

Based on your experience in supporting students, families, and colleagues while processing or consulting regarding a safety transfer request, especially thinking of our African American students:

6. Can you please describe the disciplinary history/main challenges that students who have been referred to a school safety transfer face?

    a. Can you describe the primary concerns/challenges that the students had while at your school? When were the families informed about your concerns and how was the school-family collaboration/relationship?

7. Can you describe the type of interventions that your school team developed and implemented to address the team's or families' (behavioral, socio-emotional, academic, other) concerns? How were the students 'caregivers involved in developing and supporting the academic, behavioral, and socioemotional interventions of their child? Was the family input utilized for the development of the plan?

8. Overall. how was the school/home communication structured? Who was mainly communicating with the family?

    a. How were the follow-ups to review the efficacy of the interventions structured? How were the day-to-day signs of progress communicated to the family? How did you/the school plan to build trust and enhance the relationship between school and family? How were the families involved in the school community activities?

9. What are the main challenges and barriers that you have encountered in collaborating and interacting with families, students, and colleagues/other school staff members while supporting students who were referred for a school safety transfer? How was your relationship with the students and families? How is systemic racism/oppression affecting or showing up in this process?

10. What are the main reasons that have prompted you as an educator to consider/ask/submit a safety transfer/transfer referral? Based on your experience, what do you think about the outcome of a transfer, do they work? Do they work under specific circumstances?