

Decoding Discipline: The Impact of Restorative Justice Practices on Reducing the
Discipline Gap for African American Students

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DEDICATION

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In memory of father-in-law, Carmelo Fallo (July 16, 1940 – March 2, 2019)... You should be here.

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Abstract

African American students continue to be suspended at rates disproportionate to same-aged peers. Exclusionary practices in America's public schools lead to a decrease in a positive school climate, an increase in suspension rates, an increase in drop-out rates, and an increase in interactions with juvenile and criminal justice systems. Supported by decades of research, entities from the American Academy of Pediatrics (2003) to the United States Department of Education (DOE) Office of Civil Rights (2014) have called for a reduction in overall suspensions and expulsions, and an eradication of the discipline gap between African American students and Caucasian students. Thus far, schools have struggled to implement programs and interventions to successfully reduce the discipline gap. Restorative Justice (RJ) or Restorative Practices (RP) have been utilized, with success, in Native American cultures, in countries such as Australia and New Zealand, and in juvenile and criminal justice systems. Within K-12 public schools, the use of RJ and its impact is beginning to be examined for efficacy. The purpose of this study is to use statistical analysis to determine the impact of RJ on a large urban district by studying discipline gap data for the four years prior to implementation and four years after implementation. This is the first known study of the impact of RJ in the San Francisco United School District (SFUSD). Results of the study indicate that the implementation of RJ in the SFUSD resulted in a significant decrease in expulsions, but not in suspensions. Current data confirms that a discipline gap between African American students and Caucasian students is still prevalent. A surprising result of the study, when compared to other recent research in the area, is the indication that RJ in the SFUSD had the greatest

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positive correlation with the reduction of exclusionary practices at the middle school level. A final look at the demographics of both the SFUSD certificated staff and the SFUSD students provides evidence that the Representative Bureaucracy Theory may be a reasonable way in which to interpret the discipline gap between African American students and Caucasian students.

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Chapter 1

Laws such as the Gun-Free Schools Act ([GFSA], 1994) have led to the exclusion of students of color from school, due to expulsions or suspensions, at a rate disproportionate to same-aged peers (DOE, 2014). Guided by the principle of “zero-tolerance” and the threat of losing federal funding, many districts responded to the GFSA (1994, p. 294) by enacting district policies requiring a one-year suspension for any student bringing a weapon to school. This policy snowballed into mandatory expulsions for drug offenses, fighting offenses, nail files, pocket knives, aspirin, and in some cases even attendance breaches (McNeal & Dunbar, 2010). These exclusions led to poor attendance, low test scores, reductions in graduation rates, and an increase in interactions with law enforcement (Fowler, 2011; Nocella, Parmar, & Stovall, 2014). As a result, our most fragile populations of students are attending school less, dropping out of school more, and ending up in the criminal justice system.

A 2014 Dear Colleague letter issued by the United States Department of Justice (DOJ) and DOE, Office for Civil Rights (2014) sought to remedy the exclusion of students with disabilities and students of color by urging districts to immediately work to reduce the disparities in data. Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), Social Emotional Learning (SEL), and trauma training are a few of the interventions utilized by school districts to reduce the discipline gaps in public schools (Lewis & Sugai, 1999; Coldren, Haring, Luecke, & Sintic, 2011; Bradshaw, Waasdorp, & Leaf, 2015).

The use of RJ practices to navigate conflict has long been a part of Native American culture. Unlike progressive discipline procedures and zero-tolerance discipline policies, RJ focuses on the healing of relationships and the reintegration of offenders into the community, rather than their exclusion (Mirsky, 2004). Practitioners of RJ focus on the uniting of victims and offenders to restore harmony and balance to the community. Currently, the use of RJ practices to reduce suspensions and expulsions has proven promising in Australia and Queensland, as well as in juvenile and criminal justice systems in the United States (Cameron & Thorsborne, 1999; Fields, 2003; Burke, 2013; Evans, Lester, & Anfara, 2013). Despite federal initiatives requiring the reduction of exclusionary practices, African American students continue to be suspended at a rate disproportionate to that of same-aged peers (Gonzalez, 2012).

Problem Statement

Culturally responsive leadership practices, federal mandates, and the obligation for school districts to provide a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) for all students, demand that schools in the United States reduce the discipline gap for students of color. Existing research confirms that students of color, specifically African American students, are suspended twice as much as same-aged peers (Zhang, Katsiyannis, & Herbst, 2004, p. 340); Gowdey, 2015). The American Psychological Association (APA) Zero-Tolerance Task Force (2008) also found that students with disabilities were suspended and expelled at rates greater than their population's representation, especially African American males. A study conducted by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) determined that, while African American students made up only 15.5% of the population studied, they constituted 23.2% of

suspensions during the 2013-14 school year (2018). Although research on the effectiveness of restorative practices in public schools is beginning to emerge, there is a gap in knowledge regarding the impact of these practices on reducing the gap for African American students. This research will provide additional literature to the information gap by examining the effectiveness of restorative practices in reducing suspensions and expulsions for African American students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of RJ practices on reducing the discipline gap for African American students. More specifically, it will also examine the exclusion of African American males. Despite decades of research outlining the school-to-prison pipeline for students of poverty, students of color, and students with disabilities, little has changed when it comes to reducing suspensions and expulsions for the aforementioned subgroups (Nocella et al., 2014, p. 4). Current literature regarding the impact of RJ in other countries and the impact of RJ in the criminal justice is promising; Its impact on African American students, specifically, especially males, has yet to be thoroughly vetted. Reducing suspensions for vulnerable subgroups is an ongoing concern for public education throughout the United States. As a result, this study hopes to provide relevant and meaningful research to the field of education by shedding more light on best practices for reducing the discipline gap for African American students.

Research Design

The current investigation is a quantitative study using statistical analysis to compare expulsion and suspension data for African American students in the San

Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD). The data for this investigation are driven by information from the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), Strategic Entrepreneurial Economic Development (SEEDS), and other RJ facilitators to identify school districts that had been practicing RJ for one to three years. Anchorage, Alaska, Atlanta, Georgia, Austin, Texas, Chicago, Illinois, Cleveland, Ohio, El Paso, Texas, Nashville, Tennessee, Oakland, California, Sacramento, California, San Francisco, California, and Washoe County, Nevada were all options in determining which district to examine specifically.

Research Questions

This study will focus on the following research questions:

1. Does the use of restorative justice practices reduce suspensions and expulsions for African American students?
2. Does the use of restorative justice practices reduce the discipline gap between African American students and Caucasian students?
3. Is the use of restorative justice practices more effective in elementary schools than middle schools or high schools?
4. Does the Representative Bureaucracy Theory hold true for San Francisco Unified School District?

Procedures

This study will examine pre-existing public discipline data from the SFUSD. The SFUSD began fully implementing restorative practices four years ago during the 2014-15 school year. In order to acquire accurate and balanced results using statistical analysis, suspensions and expulsions for African American students from the 2010-11 school year

through the 2017-18 school year will be examined. This allows for examination of data from the four years prior to the implementation of RJ and the four years after the implementation of RJ. In addition to comparing information for African American students, the study will also determine whether total suspensions and expulsions were reduced for the district, whether the discipline gap for African American students and Caucasian students was reduced, and whether the use of RJ was successful in reducing the discipline for other subgroups of students.

Significance of the Study

Determining the effectiveness of RJ on the reduction of suspensions and expulsions for students with disabilities is significant because African American students continue to be excluded at a rate disproportionate to their overall population (Zhang et al., 2004; APA Zero-Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Gowdey, 2015; American U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2018). Ongoing research has also linked this disproportionality to the school-to-prison pipeline (Wald & Losen, 2003). Currently, there is little research regarding the specific impact of RJ on reducing the discipline gap between African American students and Caucasian students. This gap in information could lead to the use of more effective strategies in dealing with the misbehavior of African American students, especially African American males. Ultimately, the goal of this study is to provide public-school practitioners with information that will lead to an increase in participation for African American students through the reduction of exclusionary practices.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

One assumption inherent to this research is the assumption that the public data acquired and utilized are being correctly reported by the participating districts. In other words, the legitimacy of this study could be affected by the accuracy of the self-reporting conducted by SFUSD.

Also, current research has defined RJ, but does not provide a specific, methodical guide for its implementation. Therefore, each district utilizing RJ may be using different components of it. This limitation is somewhat reduced due to SFUSD publishing their RJ implementation plan on the district website. This would theoretically allow other districts to mimic the approach taken by SFUSD, if needed.

A final limitation of this study is that some forms of RJ are reactive in nature; by definition, RJ is a method of consequence that seeks to repair harm after an infraction occurs. Therefore, this research will not be useful for practitioners interested in proactive interventions to behaviors.

Operational Definitions

Varying definitions of RJ have been used in educational and criminal justice literature. For the purposes of this work, Goodstein's and Aquino's (2010) definition of "an alternative to traditional justice systems emphasizing retribution or rehabilitation which views wrongdoings as the violation of relationships between people as well as the violation of rules or laws," will be used (p. 625). In application, the authors went on to highlight the three behaviors at the heart of RJ practices. These behaviors include offenders making amends, victims offering forgiveness, and organizations fostering reintegration (Goodstein & Aquino, 2010, p. 625). In public-school settings, RJ is often

synonymous with the term RP, which stands for Restorative Practices. Therefore, the terms will be utilized interchangeably throughout this study.

The term school-to-prison pipeline became popular in the years following the GFSA of 1994 due to the increase of suspensions and expulsions that followed. The school-to-prison pipeline is a term used to define the policies and procedures within schools that “disproportionately target and criminalize children and youth of color and those who are socially marginalized because of disability, poverty, and sexuality” (Nocella et al., 2014, p. 4).

In 2008, the APA created a Zero-Tolerance Task Force to analyze the impact of the aforementioned policies on students. While conducting research and determining recommendations, the task force utilized Skiba’s and Rausch’s (2006) definition of zero-tolerance, categorizing it as “a philosophy or policy that mandates the application of predetermined consequences, most often severe and punitive in nature, that are intended to be applied regardless of the gravity of behavior, mitigating circumstances, or situational context” (p. 852). The definition of zero-tolerance policy adopted by the APA will be used for the duration of this work.

Expected Outcomes

RJ Practices have been researched throughout Native American communities, criminal justice systems, juvenile justice systems, and public schools with promising results (Cameron & Thorsborne, 2001; Morrison, 2002 Schiff & Bazemore, 2008; Gonzalez, 2012; Long, 2015). Therefore, the expectation would be for RJ to decrease suspensions and expulsions in the school districts chosen. There would also be an expectation that the overall suspensions and expulsions of African American students

and other subgroups would decrease. If suspensions and expulsions for all students decrease as a result of the usage of RJ, it will be interesting to see if the actual discipline gap between African American students and Caucasian students is reduced. It is possible that although the overall amount of suspensions and expulsions decrease, the discipline gap remains intact.

Summary

African American students, especially males, continue to be suspended at a disproportional rate (Zhang et al., 2004; APA Zero-Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Gowdey, 2015; U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2018). Research examining the impact of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), and other interventions on reducing exclusionary practices in K-12 public schools in the United State has been conducted. RJ Practices, based on the Reintegrative Shaming Theory (Braithwaite, 1989), have shown promising results in Native American cultures, criminal justice, and juvenile justice systems, as well as in public and private schools in both the United States and abroad. However there is little research examining the impact of RJ on reducing the discipline gap between African American students and their Caucasian peers. The success of RJ in other arenas with other populations makes it worthwhile research in determining whether it is successful for reducing the discipline gap between various subgroups.

The following chapter will review the history of discipline in schools and its impact on students. In addition, it will explore how the war on drugs influenced the GFSA of 1994 and how it led to the exclusion students of color and students with disabilities. The Representative Bureaucracy Theory will be reviewed as a possible

reason while students with disabilities and students of color are suspended and expelled as a rate disproportionate to their peers. The impact of exclusion on academics and attendance, and its connection to the school-to-prison pipeline will be reviewed. The concept of RJ practices and their usage throughout schools and juvenile justice systems will be introduced and provided as a possible solution to reducing the discipline gap.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Over the past several decades, the national rise in suspensions and expulsions has prompted a laser focus on school-wide discipline practices and procedures, as well as their subsequent impact on students. Legislation such as the GFSA of 1994 led to zero-tolerance policies that have disproportionately impacted students of poverty, students of color, and students with disabilities (Gowdey, 2015). Achievement rates, truancy rates, graduation rates, college readiness, and involvement with the juvenile justice system are a few of the effects examined in conjunction with different philosophies on discipline. Current research on the impact of exclusion from school acted as a catalyst to the 2014 “Dear Colleague” letter issued by the DOJ (2014) and DOE, Office for Civil Rights (2014). In it, schools were urged to take immediate and effective measures to reduce disparities in suspension rates.

As a result of positive behavior intervention and support frameworks, RJ practices and comprehensive threat assessment procedures have begun to emerge in an effort to reduce not only the disparities in discipline data, but the exclusion of any student from his or her educational setting. More recently, research has begun to examine differences between states, districts, and schools that have succeeded in reducing exclusionary discipline practices and subgroup disparities, and those who have not. Despite this research, there is little information on the impact of RJ in reducing the discipline gap for students of color in K-12 public school settings in the United States. In order to take seriously the need to reduce exclusionary discipline practices, especially for our most

fragile of subgroups, more research needs to examine impact RJ has on reducing the discipline gap for African American students.

Theoretical Framework

Although retributive justice and deterrence justice theories can be used to elucidate and support rationale for traditional methods of discipline within public schools, they fail to clarify why a discipline gap occurs between White students and students of color. Research surrounding the discipline gap for African American students and other minority subgroups is just beginning to be examined through theoretical frameworks (Skiba et al., 2011). One such framework used to scrutinize the disproportionate suspensions and expulsions of students of color is representative bureaucracy theory (Skiba et al.). Kingsley first coined this term in 1944 by maintaining that bureaucracies were characteristically representative of whatever class in society was considered the dominant class. He explained that a lack of public outcry was entrenched in the powerful class's representation within the bureaucracy. Kingsley (1944) went on to assert that in order for our republic to be truly democratic, individuals in power had to be representative of the groups they serve. Representative bureaucracy theory maintains that the more representative a group in power is of its constituency, the more consideration it will give to minority interests.

Van Riper (1958) expanded on Kingsley's (1944) theory by elaborating on the benefits representative bureaucracy has on society including its commitment to an open and competitive nature of our democracy and an opportunity for upward mobility for minorities. Primarily used in the public administration arena, since then, the theory surmised that the more diverse a group of leaders was, the greater their ability would be

to create policies, procedures, laws, and outcomes that represented individuals from varied backgrounds. Since then, representative bureaucracy theory has been used to explain and examine how a demographically diverse governing body impacts the policies and interests of all groups represented (Meier & Stewart, 1992; Keiser, Wilkins, Meier, & Holland, 2002). One study confirming Kingsley's (1944) theory was conducted utilizing data from The Farmer's Home Administration. Data from the aforementioned study correlated public administrators active in minority representation with effects more reflective of minority interests (Sowa & Coleman Selden, 2003).

In terms of K-12 public education, representative bureaucracy theory suggests that the more that administrators and teachers have in common with the groups they serve, the more likely they are to share similar norms and values leading to more favorable disciplinary outcomes (Skiba et al., 2011). Research conducted by Rocha and Hawes in 2009 indicated a negative correlation between the amount of African American teachers in a district and the rates of suspensions for African American and Latino students, thus supporting the hypothesis that the more minority representation in schools, the better students of color fare when it comes to exclusionary discipline practices. Further research by Rocha, Pitts, and Navarro (2010) concluded that the more diverse a teaching staff was, the lower the rates of severe discipline consequences such as suspensions and expulsions. Unfortunately, teachers of color are also underrepresented in our public schools. According to a 2016 DOE report, teachers of color comprise only 18% of the work force, while students of color represent 49% of the student population. In addition, a lack of administrators of color continues to be a trend, with only 20% of public-school administrators identified as individuals of color. These statistics, when

looked at through the lens of representative bureaucracy theory, may explain the disproportionate exclusion of students of color through suspension and expulsion practices. And with students of color predicted to comprise 54% of all public-school students by the year 2024, one can only surmise that unless a drastic change occurs, students of color will continue to be disciplined at a rate greater than that of their White peers. This study seeks to provide more information regarding strategies effective in reducing the discipline gap for African American students through examining the use of restorative practices.

Negative Discipline in Schools

The Puritan influence. The use of negative discipline in public schools was entrenched into the fabric of K-12 education long before legislation like The GFSA of 1994 came into existence, or terms like zero-tolerance became catch phrases.

Schools in the United States were largely founded by the Puritans (Bamberger, 1934; Lowry, 1936; Ladd, 1973; Travers, 1980; Moran & Vinovskis, 1985). Puritan society saw children as inherently evil and schools as necessary in ensuring that children were able to read. The ability to read would allow children to access the Bible, which would lead them to salvation (Hyman et al., 1979). Children in this society were not shielded from life's hardships, but were forced to endure them in a manner similar to adults. Misbehavior or inattentiveness to instruction in Puritan society was seen as detrimental to one's overall salvation, often resulting in strict and forceful adherence to schools' rules and order. As a result of the Puritan influence, early schools relied heavily on the use of corporal punishment for indiscretions (Lowry, 1936). The use of hickory sticks, rubber hoses, and even thimbles were called upon to restore and maintain

order in classrooms well into the 20th century. Schools, wherein students were engaged, and pupils worked side by side with teachers, were said to have “no discipline,” reinforcing the Puritan ideals that “anything pleasant or agreeable is harmful to one’s immortal soul” (Bamberger, 1934, p. 3).

While the philosophy that children were innately evil and needed to be saved began to wane in the early 1900s, the use of corporal punishment practices continued well into the 20th century (Travers, 1980). The DOJ Office of Civil Rights (2014), of the DOE, estimated, in a 1980 report, that over a million students were physically hit by their teachers. This information was consistent with a Columbus Dispatch report just a year later indicating that 42% of students enrolled in the Columbus City School District had been hit with a wooden board during the 1980-1981 school year. And as late as 1987, a report out of Nashville, Tennessee stated that 215% of their students had been hit, including 176% percent of their handicapped students (Ryan, 1994, p. 71). Unfortunately, the 20th-century philosophy of using the infliction of pain as a means to acquiring an ends of behavior modification was replaced by a method just as detrimental: the threat of negative punishment in order to elicit a change in behavior (Hyman et al., 1979).

Retributive practices. Following the rule of corporal punishment, discipline procedures in public schools throughout the United States have traditionally relied on retributive justice practices. Retributive justice practices can be traced back to the works of various philosophers. Immanuel Kant, for example, explained this in *Universal Principle of Right* (UPR) in Part I of *Metaphysik der Sitten*, in which he contended that any action one takes that does not infringe upon the freedoms and the wellbeing of

someone else, should be considered right (Koritansky, 2005). Violators of this principle, he argued, should be punished, not to gain a positive outcome for the criminal, but because the universal principle of right was violated (Koritansky, 2005). More modern definitions of retributive justice define it as a sort of social agreement in which a violator is punished for violating societal norms and rules through the infliction of some sort of suffering or negative consequence (Heller, 1987). The result of the suffering, or consequence, is the restoration of social justice and the reinforcement of norms and rules (Heller, 1987). In public education, retributive justice practices manifest as the loss of recess, field trips, and other classroom privileges, as well as the distribution of detentions, in-school suspensions, and out-of-school suspensions. Although the aforementioned punishments were alive and well in the latter part of the 20th century, they intensified with the passage of legislation in the mid-90s (Sughrue, 2003).

The concept of zero tolerance began in the mid 1980's during the Reagan Administration's expansion of President Nixon's "War on Drugs" (Lacques-Zapfen, & Mendoza, 2014). The campaign was originally intended as a way to decrease drug trafficking in large, often urban cities. Terms like "super predator" and "Drug Czar" were utilized freely and instilled a fear in homes throughout America of young, often minority males, and fueled support for seizures and mandatory sentencing (Fuentes, 2014, p.41; Moore, 2010). The designation gained traction throughout the United States and by the early to mid-90's, major cities like New York and Newark, New Jersey were declaring "zero tolerance" for "nuisance crimes" including littering and graffiti (Moore, 2010, p. 9). The mentality behind the aforementioned laws was that the deterrence of nuisance crimes would stop or lead to a decrease in more severe offences such as drug

trafficking or weapon use (Moore, 2010). By 1994, the zero-tolerance phenomenon had reached public education with the passage of the GFSA. Determined to keep schools safe, improve school climate, and eliminate favoritism while administering consequences, the intrusion of legislatures into the realm of school discipline was seen by most as well-intended.

The Impact of Zero-Tolerance Policies in Schools

The use of retributive justice practices in America's schools was exacerbated by zero-tolerance policies dating back to the late 1980s, as well as the passage of the GFSA of 1994. Prompted by President Clinton and the threat of losing federal funding, America's public schools were forced to create and implement policies requiring mandatory expulsions for students bringing weapons to school (Robbins, 2005). Despite provisions within the legislation also calling for conflict resolution, mediation, and counseling, the primary result of the GFSA of 1994 was an increase in the suspension and expulsion of students; especially students of color and students with disabilities (Gowdey, 2015). Many of the unintended consequences of the GFSA of 1994 were due in part to its subsequent amendments. In 1995 for example, the GFSA of 1994 was amended to change the word firearm to the word weapon, thus opening the door for mandatory expulsions in incidents not involving guns (Casella, 2003). Two years later, another amendment permitted expulsions for students having drugs and/or drug paraphernalia (Casella, 2003). As a result, a law meant to protect students and staff members from the dangers of guns was utilized to expel students for being caught with nail files, pocket knives, aspirin, fighting, and truancy, and, in the state of Michigan, for wearing stilettos (McNeal & Dunbar, 2010). The result of zero-tolerance

policies was devastating for some of education's most fragile subgroups; students of color, students of poverty and students with disabilities.

The Exclusion of Students with Disabilities

Research has specifically indicated that students with disabilities are suspended twice as often as same-aged peers, and that poor, non-White students with disabilities (especially males) are more likely to be suspended for over 10 days than students without disabilities (Gowdey, 2015). Zhang et al. (2004) corroborated this connection with their four-year analysis of disciplinary exclusions in special education. In their research, it was noted that although students with disabilities comprised approximately 11% of students nationwide, they equate to 20% of the students suspended in schools (Zhang et al.). The analysis also determined that there was a universal increase in suspensions for students with disabilities in all five racial groups studied, that African-American students with disabilities were suspended most often in comparison to other disabled peers, and that the most commonly utilized form of exclusion for students with disabilities was a short-term suspension (Zhang et al.).

Much of the data surrounding the impact of zero-tolerance policies on students with disabilities indicate the largest exclusion discrepancies for students with emotional disturbances. Students identified with emotional or behavioral disorders have encountered the highest rates of suspension when compared to students in other disability categories, despite the fact that often their disabilities manifest as problem behaviors (Wiley, Siperstein, Buntress, Forness, & Brigham, 2008; Zhang et al., 2004).

The Exclusion of African American Students

In May of 1954, the United States Supreme Court handed down a landmark decision denouncing the segregation of African American students from K-12 public schools in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*. The rendering of *Brown v. Board* constituted a vote of no confidence to the earlier decision of *Plessy v. Ferguson, 1896*, which upheld “separate but equal” facilities for African-American students (Bishop, 1977, p. 125). Not only did *Brown v. Board* outline that segregation was constitutionally illegal, it contended that the implementation of the “separate but equal doctrine” was detrimental to the self-esteem and well-being of African-American students (Townsend Walker, 2014). In the 65 years since the decision, many authors have examined the impact of court-ordered desegregation to determine if it benefited African American students, or, if it has done more harm than good.

Academically, there is a well-documented pattern of African American students scoring lower than their Caucasian peers on standardized reading and math tests since the 1970s (Townsend Walker, 2014; Hemphill, Vanneman, & Rahman, 2011; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Slavin & Madden, 2006). This trend continues today. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), Caucasian students scored higher than African American students by an average of 20 points in reading and math in both 2009 and 2011. A more recent report analyzing 12th-grade math and reading assessment scores indicated a 30-point difference in math scores and a 29-point difference in reading scores between Caucasian students and African-American students (NCES, 2015). A 2016 report analyzing nationwide Science scores highlighted a 33-point gap in achievement among 4th graders, a 34-point gap among 8th graders, and 35-

point gap among 12th graders (NCES, 2016). Perhaps most interesting is an NCES report that looked at the achievement gap in both “high density” schools and “low density” schools. Results of the study indicated that the achievement gap between African American students and Caucasian students remained the same no matter the density of the school. Therefore, African American students who attend primarily Caucasian schools still lag significantly behind in both reading and math (Bohrnstedt, Kitmitto, Ogut, Sherman, & Chan, 2015, p. 1).

The exclusion of African American students from school through the use of suspension has been noted since The Children’s Defense Fund (1975) reported their over representation in a 1975 report. At that time, African American students were overrepresented in discipline data by two to three times than that of White peers. A longitudinal study conducted by Elliott, Ageton, and Huizinga (1978; 1979; 1980), around the same time, measured the number of self-reported delinquent acts by sex, race, class, and age. Results of the study indicated no significant difference in the amount of delinquent acts within the past year between Whites and African Americans, yet suspension rates for African Americans were double that of their White peers.

The pattern of disproportionate discipline for African American students continued well into the 21st century (Long, 2015; Losen, Hodson, Keith II, Morrison, & Belway, 2015; Vincent, Tobin, Hawken, & Frank, 2012; Skiba et al., 2011; Gregory et al., 2010; Welch & Payne, 2010; Monroe, 2006). While suspension and expulsion rates for other racial and ethnic subgroups remained steady in the era of zero-tolerance, African American students saw an increase in exclusionary practices from 1991 to 2005 (Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, & Bachman, 2008). The National Association for the

Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) Legal Defense and Education Fund indicated, in 2005 that, although African American students accounted for 17.1% of public-school students, they comprised 37.4% of total suspensions and 37.9% of total expulsions. The disparate suspension data are supported by a 2008 nationally representative survey of 10th-grade students in which 50% of African American students and 20% of White students reported having been suspended at some point during their educational career (Wallace et al.). One possible explanation for this phenomenon was that minority students are suspended more often for subjective behaviors or behaviors that require discretionary judgment from teachers and administrators (i.e. threatening behavior, excessive noise, and disrespect), while White students are suspended more for objective school rule violations such as smoking and fighting (Gowdey, 2015; Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002; Skiba & Knesting, 2001; Dupper & Bosch, 1996). The impact of disproportionate discipline lasts well beyond the length of one's educational career.

The Impact of Exclusion

Recent research from Gowdey (2015) connected the suspension and expulsion practices of the mid-to-late nineties to the school-to-prison pipeline through the proliferation of interactions between students and the criminal justice system. These interactions correlated with a plethora of negative outcomes including a decrease in the school climate, an increase in the school drop-out and failure to graduate rate, disproportionate rates of discipline for students of colors, students with disabilities and a possible acceleration effect on “negative mental health outcomes” for youth (APA, 2008, p. 856).

Positive school climate has long been positively associated with school success and school achievement (Norton, 2008; Loukas & Robinson, 2004; Kober, 2001; Hoy & Hannum, 1997; Freiberg et al., 1997). In schools with significant discipline gaps, however, African American students reported feelings of less school equity and less school belonging (Bottiani, Bradshaw, & Mendelson, 2016). These negative feelings manifest into concerns surrounding trust and lead to an unwillingness on the part of African American students to seek help from teachers, furthering decreasing the odds of school success (Shirley & Cornell, 2012).

Another consequence of disproportionate discipline for African American students is an increase in drop-out rates. The National Association of School Psychologists (2013) directly correlated drop-out rates with the repeated use of suspensions and expulsions in 2006. Research conducted by the Advancement Project (2010) supported this claim by correlating high rates of suspensions and expulsions with poor rates of academic performance, eventually leading to dropping out. The most recent National Center for NCEs data on high school graduation rates from the 2015-2016 school year boost the highest overall rates of graduation since it was first measured in 2010-2011. The overall graduation rate was 84%, however, the graduation rate for African American students was 76%, a full 12% lower than White students' (2017).

Perhaps the most detrimental consequence of school exclusion is its association with the school-to-prison-pipeline. From 1974 to 2000, the number of students suspended yearly from a school had risen from 1.7 million students to 3.1 million students (Wald & Losen, 2003, p. 10). By 2006, the Advancement Project calculated that 1 in 14 students had been suspended at least one time over the previous school year,

with approximately one-third of those suspended being African American (NAACP, 2006).

One theory for the increase in suspension rates is that it is an “unintended consequence” of the implementation of zero-tolerance policies throughout the United States (Dupper & Bosch, 1996; Skiba & Knesting, 2001; Gowdey, 2015). These policies, coupled with an increased fear of school shootings gave rise to an increase in the use of School Resource Officers (SROs) throughout the United States during the 1990s (Bleakley, & Bleakley, 2018). In 2015, a study determined that over 20,000 SROs were employed in schools in the United States with a primary purpose of building enough rapport and trust with students that open lines of communication would be established (Merkwae, 2015; Mulqueen, 1999). These lines of communication, proponents contended, would be essential in ensuring that students felt safe telling SROs if they were in trouble or if they had information about a fellow student planning to harm themselves or others (Mulqueen, 1999, p. 17). Myrstol (2011), however, contends that despite one’s best intentions, many rely on SROs to maintain order rather than ensure safety. This philosophy was supported by a 2009 community survey conducted in Anchorage, Alaska that used a Likert Scale to determine public opinion on the use SROs (Bleakley, & Bleakley, 2018). Results of the study confirmed that many members of the community viewed the role of the resource officers as one of “establishing order” (Bleakley, & Bleakley, 2018, p. 250). Due to the fact that legislation on what constitutes “disturbing school” varies from state to state, SROs have been called to deal with student situations ranging from violent outbursts to repeatedly burping during instruction (Bleakley & Bleakley, 2018; Eckholm, 2016). Despite the

discrepancies in state law, one statistic remains salient throughout public schools: students who attend a school with an SRO are five times more likely to be arrested for disorderly conduct than schools that do not employ SROs (Bleakley, & Bleakley, 2018, p. 251).

An implication of the aforementioned policy is that students, whose behavior would have been dealt with by administrators in previous decades, were now referred to law enforcement (Castella, 2003). In addition, the policy led to students as young as five years old referred to the juvenile justice system for engaging in behaviors such as making play guns out of Legos and pretending to shoot them or having “temper tantrums” and knocking principals’ files off their desks (Heitzeg, 2014, p. 22). These numbers, combined with research suggesting that students with one or more discipline incidents are 23.4 times more likely to be referred to the juvenile justice system, make it hard to deny the long-term impact of systematic school removal (Carmichael, Whitten, & Voloudakis (2005).

The result of disproportionate discipline is undeniable when looking at the demographics of our current criminal justice system. According to a report produced by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2.5% of African American males were in state or federal prisons in the year 2016 (Carson, 2018). In addition, demographics from the report indicated that African American males ages 18 and 19 were 11.8 times more likely to be imprisoned than the same-aged White cohort, while African American females ages 18 and 19 were 3.1 times more likely to be imprisoned than White females of the same age (Carson, 2018). Despite this information, some still advocate for the use of zero-tolerance policies.

The Cost of Exclusion

In addition to the moral and ethical implications involved in the disproportionate discipline of African Americans, there are financial implications for taxpayers as well. According to Henrichson and Delaney (2012), \$39 billion dollars required by prisons in the United States fell outside of their correctional budgets; eventually falling on the backs of taxpayers (p. 69). Depending on individual states, the per-inmate cost can range from approximately \$15, 000 to approximately \$60,000 (Henrichson, & Delaney, 2012, p. 70). This figure, calculated by VERA Institute of Justice, included only direct costs to taxpayers such as retiree healthcare, employee benefits and taxes, health and hospital care for inmates, and pension contributions. Of the 40 states that participated in the study, California taxpayers incur the greatest cost of prisons: \$7,932,388. They are followed by New York (\$3,588,711), Texas (\$3,306,358), and Florida (\$2,082,531) (Henrichson, & Delaney, p. 72). Collateral or indirect costs to communities such as the cost of social services, child welfare, and education were not calculated, but also have a significant impact on taxpayers (Henrichson & Delaney, 2012).

Despite the negative impact zero-tolerance policies have on African Americans and the cost to taxpayers throughout the country, some are still proponents of this method of discipline.

Proponents of Zero-Tolerance Policies

Burke and Herbert (1996) held an opposing view regarding the use of zero-tolerance policies in schools. The authors cited a zero-tolerance policy implemented in a high school in Tacoma, Washington, that helped reduced the number of aggressive and violent tendencies between the 1990-1991 school year and the 1992-1993 school year.

During these time periods, the amount of fights and violent incidents decreased from 195 to three. This decrease in incidents could be attributed to the deterrent impact of zero-tolerance policies, or, it could be related to the effective use of a systematic threat-assessment procedure and process also implemented at the same time.

The perspective held by Burke and Herbert (1996) is not surprising to some researchers. A study conducted by Dunbar and Villarruel (2004) examined whether principals felt there was a need for zero-tolerance policies in their respective schools. They determined that the perceived need for the aforementioned policy often depended on the typology of the schools and communities in which they served (Dunbar & Villarruel, 2004). Results of the research found that principals in urban districts were more likely to be proponents of zero-tolerance policies than principals in rural districts who saw the policies as an intrusion on the fabric of the community (Dunbar & Villarruel, 2004).

History of Restorative Justice

RJ has been defined, in both criminal justice and educational literature, as an approach to punishment that differs from most traditional systems of justice that focus primarily on either rehabilitation, retribution, or both (Goodstein & Aquino, 2010). In contrast, RJ views wrongdoings as the violation of relationships between people as well as the violation of rules or laws (Goodstein & Aquino, 2010).

The history of RJ can be linked back to the practices of Native American, First Nation, and other Indigenous People of North America. In the aforementioned societies, the focus of justice was one of healing and reintegration into the community through the bringing together of victims, offenders, and their respective supporters to resolve a

problem and restore harmony and balance (Mirsky, 2004). One of the basic principles of RJ as it has been defined and carried out by indigenous peoples, is the idea that communities should come together to create their own laws and find collective agreement on what happens when those laws are violated. Louise Thompson, Justice Coordinator for the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne, elaborated on this idea by saying, "... But we don't force things on people. Our custom is to ask the people what they want to do—to come to a community collective agreement" (Mirsky, 2004, p. 2). This practice has been so successful that the Justice Department of Canada not only recognizes the rights of Native people to create their own laws, but also provided \$72 million to help The First Nations create their own justice systems (Mirsky, 2004).

Other research on the idea of RJ defined the idea as being two dimensional and encompassing both support and control (Braithwaite, 2002). The dimension of control is defined as limit-setting or discipline, while the second dimension, support, is defined as encouragement or nurturing (Braithwaite, 2002). When restorative justice includes both control and support, the focus can move from the rules being broken to a way to help offenders learn social skills, positive values, empathy, and anticipation of consequences (Halstead, 1999). In the school setting, this leads to offenses treated as teachable moments rather than actions requiring punishment and retribution.

In order to successfully implement a system of RJ, however, all stakeholders must be given an opportunity to be heard and participate in the decision-making process. Otherwise, it fails to prevent domination or the silencing of one group or person by a more vocal or dominate group (Braithwaite, 2002). One form of domination that must be managed in order for restorative justice to work effectively in schools is the idea of

an imbalance of power. In other words, adults must advocate for students and student voices must not be drowned out by adults or adult policies (Braithwaite, 2002; Hantzopoulos, 2013). Halstead (1999) outlined seven guidelines for moving from a punitive justice system in schools to a RJ system in schools. Those guidelines include:

- including students in a democratic decision-making process;
- using a “family group conference” response (a meeting set up as soon as possible between the offender, the victim, supporters of both, and a mediator);
- inclusion of staff in the process;
- creation of an environment where change can happen;
- avoidance of threats of punishment;
- use of the least amount of authority as possible; and
- reinforcement of all attitude changes (Halstead, 1999, p. 43)

When implemented effectively, some theorists contend that the use of RJ practices helps address “power and status imbalances” that shape students’ perceptions on the fairness and legitimacy of discipline in schools (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012, p. 146). This legitimacy can then lead to a reduction in future infractions (Sherman, 1993).

Thus far, most of the studies regarding RJ in education have focused on correctional and alternative educational settings. However, the results of these studies and of the implementation of RJ practices in correctional and alternative settings are promising. In New Zealand, for example, the use of RJ practices led to a 75% decrease in court cases in four years, and an 18 to 2 reduction in New Zealand’s Juvenile Court institutions (Cameron & Thorsborne, 2001). When it comes to the use of RJ in school

settings, most researchers agree that Queensland, Australia, utilized the practice as far back as 1994. Due to the results of its use, and the pilot studies that followed indicating that despite some tensions between those with a traditional philosophy on discipline and those advocating for RJ, participants felt it was fair and were satisfied overall with the experience (Cameron & Thorsborne, 2001). As of 2005, approximately 773 RJ programs have been identified across the United States leading to increased collaboration and coordination between schools and juvenile justice systems (Schiff & Bazemore, 2008). This collaboration between schools practicing RJ and juvenile justice systems has led to a decrease in the amount of students referred to centers.

Besides its use in Native American cultures, it is a common belief among researchers that the use of RJ practices in school settings began in Queensland, Australia before eventually spreading to New Zealand, The United Kingdom, European nations, Canada, and, then, The United States (Fronius, Persson, Guckenbug, Hurley, & Petrosino, 2016). In Australia, two pilot studies across 100 schools determined that individuals who participated in RJ felt it was fair, were engaged in the process, and were generally satisfied with the experiences (Cameron & Thorsborne, 2001). A perceived increase in safety was another result of the use of RJ in Australian schools (Morrison, 2002).

In the United States, the use of RJ practices is still relatively new. As a result, new research and information are continually emerging. Much of the literature focuses on individual descriptions of RJ programs, rather than evaluative studies. One reason for this could be the broad definition of RJ as a framework. RJ practices can include mediation conferences, restorative conferences, group conferences, restorative circles,

and other circles, while restorative sanctions usually encompass community service, restitution, apologies, and various behavioral agreements (Fronius et al., 2016). Many schools using RJ apply a combination of the previously mentioned strategies.

Initial research completed regarding RJ practices in public schools in the United States has been promising. A study of RJ practices in Illinois schools resulted in a decrease in detention rates and in second-time offenses (Gonzalez, 2012., p. 309). In Oregon, a three-year pilot of RJ practices in schools led to the avoidance of 179 days of out-of-school suspension (p. 310), while in Maryland, RJ was applauded as the key to an 88% decrease in the suspension rate (Gonzalez, 2012, p. 312). Lansing, Michigan, schools reported a 15% decrease in suspensions during RJ's pilot year and over 1600 days of out-of-school suspensions avoided to date (Gonzalez, 2012, p. 313). Decreases in physical aggression, suspensions, and expulsions were evident in four districts in Minnesota, after they applied for a \$300,000, three-year grant for initiatives dedicated to finding alternatives to exclusionary disciplinary practices (Gonzalez, 2012, p. 313). Promising results from RJ frameworks were also noted in New Mexico, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Missouri (Gonzalez, 2012).

More recent research regarding RJ in public schools in the United States all concluded that the use of RJ led to better relationships and better communications between staffs and students resulting in more positive feelings about school climate (Augustine et al., 2018; Crowe, 2018; Waggoner, 2018). A study focusing on four high schools in Chicago reported that out-of-school suspensions were 30% less for students who used the "Peace Room" wherein RJ was practiced, when compared to students who did not (Rich, Mader, & Pacheco-Applegate, 2017, p. 25). An examination of RJ in the

Los Angeles Unified School District found a reduction in suspension gaps between frequently disciplined students and less disciplined students, but noted that disciplined gaps still existed between African-American students and Caucasian students as well as between students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers (Hashim, Strunk, & Dhaliwal, 2018). A 2018 study focusing on students with disabilities in urban high schools on the west coast noted that the use of RJ resulted in a decline in the use of zero-tolerance, in addition to improved student-staff relationships and improved perceptions of school climate. In Pittsburgh, a two-year study conducted by the RAND Corporation found that suspensions were significantly reduced and the discipline gap between African-American and Caucasian students improved in the elementary schools studied (Augustine et al.). Somewhat surprising, however, was that the use of RJ was determined to have no significant impact on the middle-school students studied in Pittsburgh, nor did it have an effect on academic achievement (Augustine et al.). Feelings of improved relationships with students were noted by 63% of teachers, administrators, and other school personnel at all grade levels involved in the study climate

The use of RJ practices throughout public schools, in the United States, needs to be examined more thoroughly to determine which subgroups, district types, and grade levels will benefit from the intervention.

Summary

From the Puritan influence of corporal punishment to the retributive and exclusionary practices that followed, the United State has always been a country reliant on punitive discipline. For the past half-century, the impact of these practices has continually affected students of color, students of poverty, and students with disabilities

at a rate disproportionate to their Caucasian peers. One theory that may help explain the discipline gap between African American and Caucasian students is the Representative Bureaucracy Theory (Van Riper, 1958), which contends that the more individuals in power have in common with those they serve, they more likely they will be to have common norms, and values, leading to more favorable outcomes for that particular group. Despite calls for action to lower the discipline, interventions such as School-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS) and SEL have been promising in reducing suspensions and expulsions but have failed to eradicate the discipline gap between African American students and Caucasian students. The use of RJ practices are relatively new in K-12 schools in the United States but have been used with promising results in other countries, in Native American cultures, and in the criminal justice system. More research is needed to determine how effective RJ practices are, over time, in reducing the discipline gap for students in our most fragile subgroups.

Chapter 3 will focus on the goals of the study, which include adding to the growing body of literature surrounding the impact of RJ policies and practices in K-12 public schools in the United States. The use of statistical analysis to aggregate discipline data for SFUSD during the three years before, and the three years after the use of RJ will be outlined. SFUD's reasoning and rationale for the implementation as well as their vision for success will be reviewed. Finally, issues of validity, reliability and possible limitations will be explored.

Chapter 3

Methods

Exploring the impact of RJ on African American students will offer meaningful information to the education community and, possibly, the criminal justice system. Since the denunciation of the “separate but equal” doctrine through the 1954 *Brown v. Board* decision, African American students have had access to the same facilities as Caucasian students. Their access to the same education as Caucasian students is debatable. A gap in the test scores of African American and Caucasian students, as well as disproportionate exclusion, was evident in research since the 1970s (Townsend Walker, 2014; Hemphill et al., 2011; Gregory et al., 2010; Slavin & Madden, 2006). While the GFSA (1994) intended to maintain the safety and well-being of students by creating an “atmosphere of learning, engagement, and opportunity,” it, too, negatively impacted African American students (Heitzeg, 2014, p. 12; Skiba et al., 2002). Suspensions and expulsions, especially for students with disabilities, minority students, and students of poverty have steadily risen since that time (Fowler, 2011).

The results of this study aim to provide school districts with data on how to decrease the exclusion of African American students from instruction. Decreases in suspensions and expulsions not only allow districts to become compliant with the “Dear Colleague” Letter (DOJ, 2014), but can also increase attendance, improve graduation rates, and help boost test scores. Fowler (2011) contended that a history of disciplinary exclusions throughout schooling is the greatest predictor of student involvement in the juvenile justice system. Interactions with the juvenile justice system, in turn, predict involvement in the criminal justice system (Heitzeg, 2014; Fowler, 2011). Therefore,

reducing the amount of suspensions and expulsions should lead to fewer students referred to juvenile justice systems, which, in turn, could lead to fewer individuals becoming involved in the adult system.

The most important goal of this study, however, is to add to a body of literature that may help to create a more equitable and enriching educational experience for African American students. Researchers have long contended that African American students who perceive their teachers to be caring, trustworthy, approachable, and fair are less likely to receive in-school suspensions and more likely to perceive a more positive school climate (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Hinojosa, 2008; Shirley & Cornell, 2012). Therefore, the outcome of this research may help districts determine interventions, programs, curriculum, and philosophies that support the development and continuance of student-teacher relationships, and eventually a better school experience for African American students.

This quantitative study utilized statistical analysis to compare expulsion and suspension data for African American students in the SFUSD. Statistical analysis was chosen due to the large sample size (over 54,000 total students) and due to its ability to compare suspensions and expulsions for African American students before and after the implementation of RJ. In addition to its ability to further develop and understand the impact of RJ on the exclusion of African American students, statistical analysis can also be utilized to explore the impact of RJ on other subgroups such as Latino students, students with disabilities, and students of poverty (Larwin, 2007).

Research Design

This quantitative study compared expulsion and suspension data for the San Francisco Unified School district during the four years prior to the use of RJ practices, and the four years after utilizing RJ practices. Public record information regarding discipline data was utilized to determine the effectiveness of RJ programs.

This approach was chosen over a qualitative study due to the lack of quantitative research on the effectiveness of RJ on students with disabilities in public schools in the United States. The majority of existing research focuses on RJ in other countries, RJ in the criminal justice system, and the use of RJ in Native American culture (Braithwaite, 2002; Cameron & Thorsborne, 2001; Mirsky, 2004; Morrison, 2002.) Although some studies have focused on the use of RJ in public schools in the United States, none have focused, primarily, on the impact of RJ on African American students, especially African American males (Gonzalez, 2012).

Research Questions

This study will focus on the following research questions:

1. Does the use of restorative justice practices reduce suspensions and expulsions for African American students?
2. Does the use of restorative justice practices reduce the discipline gap between African American students and Caucasian students?
3. Is the use of restorative justice practices more effective in elementary schools than middle schools or high schools?
4. Does the Representative Bureaucracy Theory hold true for the San Francisco Unified School District?

Sampling, Setting, and Participants

The SFUSD is home to 48,194 K-12 students in 100 schools. This does not include students in Pre-K, students in county units, students in continuation schools, or students in charter schools. The district employs over 10,000 individuals, about 3,500 of which are teachers. Student demographics include: 35% Asian, 27% Latino, 15% White, 7% African American, 5% Filipino, 5% Multi-Racial, 5% declined to respond, 1% Pacific Islander, and <1% American Indian. Over half of the students in the SFUSD are economically disadvantaged and nearly 30% are English Language Learners (ELL). Despite making up only 7% of the district's population, African American students have a 10% drop out rate. The dropout rate for Latino students is 15%, while the dropout rate for Caucasian students (11%).

Demographics for SFUSD certified staff was obtained from the California Department of Education's website. According to the site, Caucasian staff members constituted the largest group encompassing 46.5% of total certificated staff. Asian staff members were the second most represented group of certificated staff constituting 18.5% of the membership, followed by Hispanic (13.8%) staff members, and African-American (5.9%) staff members. Other races and ethnicities represented include Filipino (3.5%), multi-racial (1.9%), American Indian (0.6%), and Pacific Islander (0.2%).

In February 2014, the SFUSD passed a board resolution supporting full implementation of both restorative practices and SWPBIS. As a basis for the enactment, the district cited information from various studies regarding the link between exclusionary practices and drop-out rates as well as interactions with the criminal justice system. The district also cited the American Academy of Pediatrics (2013) report that

called suspensions and expulsions counter-productive to the overall goal of reducing problematic behaviors. Within the resolution, it was noted that although African American students comprised only 10% of the district's population in 2012-2013, they comprised almost 50% of all suspensions and expulsions. In addition, the resolution noted that African American high school students in the SFUSD missed "an average of 19 more instructional days than their peers annually." Other interesting notations within the resolution addressed the fact that the category of "willful defiance" was the justification of 81% of all SFUSD suspensions for Latino and African American students for the 2012-2013 school year (SFUSD, 2014; SFUSD 2014 Meeting Archives. P. 2).

This information acquired from the SFUSD website confirmed that the full implementation of RJ, in addition to SWPBIS during the 2014-2015 school year, was aimed at specifically reducing suspensions and expulsions for African American and Latino students.

The implementation process at SFUSD focused on "a response to and prevention of harm,' equitable decision-making, positive school culture, and building a sense of safety and belonging (p.7). A continuum of RP was utilized in the district ranging from informal, Tier I practices such as affective statements and restorative questions to more formal Tier III practices like responsive circles and restorative meetings and conferences. According to the district website, the more formal the restorative practice the more time, planning and people are needed to facilitate its implementation. More formal practices also require a more structured set up that allows for conferencing and re-entry.

The implementation of RP occurred at every building simultaneously according to the district's "Restorative Practices Whole School Implementation Guide." Each site created a RP team that consisted of a School Site Administrator, two RP site leaders, a RP parent leader, an after-school program coordinator, a classroom teacher, a non-teaching staff member and representation from any other major school-wide stakeholder. Members of the team met multiple times per month and helped to lead building-wide professional development on RP. The professional development was delivered in two stages, each of which had four steps. The first stage involved introducing staff to the concept of RP, collecting information regarding individualized school climate and school needs, and determining preferred building-wide outcomes. The second stage involved professional development on restorative questions, restorative circles, determining systems of support within the practices and determining progress checks for RP implementation.

Data Collection Methods and Tools

After approval by the Youngstown State University (YSU) Institutional Review Board (IRB), pre-existing public data were downloaded from California state databases and/or the DOE Office of Civil Rights (2014) that are public and openly accessible. Data were collected from the four years prior to the full implementation of RJ: school years 2010-11 through 2013-14. Data were also were downloaded from the four years after the full implementation of RJ: schools years 2014-15 through 2017-18. Data were downloaded in a timely fashion, and then manipulated to acquire aggregate results. Statistical analysis was utilized to determine what relationship, if any, existed between the use of RJ and the exclusion of African American students. In addition, statistical

analysis was employed to determine what relationship, if any, existed between the use of RJ and the academic level.

Validity and Reliability Tests

The use of statistical analysis ensured internal validity of the results by examining the available data three years before and after the implementation of RJ, and by also examining the association with the race of the students and the academic level. As a result, the use of statistical analysis enhances the confidence that the impact of RJ on the subgroup of students being examined in each research question. External reliability was more difficult to acquire due to the setting of the schools being used. The study can only be generalized to the schools with similar populations with similar demographics.

Currently, the schools who have utilized RJ for one or more years have been large, urban schools, many of which are located in the west. As a result, this study may only generalize to urban districts with similar demographics and geographies.

Data Analysis

A systematic random sample of the available elementary school data was conducted for selecting which elementary schools in the SFUSD would be incorporated into the current study, so that the number of elementary schools represented was reasonably equivalent to the total number of middle and high school data available. Basic descriptive analysis is used to report the frequencies of school cases providing the expulsion and suspension data within the SFUSD, by year, by academic level, and by racial group (African American, Caucasian, and Hispanic).

The data were provided as total number of expulsions and suspensions for each school, however the data for each school were presented so that each subgroup was

aggregated separately. Specifically, the total number of expulsions and suspensions for the African American students was given separately from the data for all male students, all female students, and all economically disadvantage students. Therefore, the number of male African American students could not be extracted. As such, data were analyzed within the reported subgroups in order to ensure the assumption of independence was not violated.

General linear modeling using a fixed-factor analysis was used to answer the first three. The criterion variable for the analysis was the reported number of expulsions or suspensions; the predictor variables were race of the students (African American, Caucasian, and Hispanic), academic level (elementary, middle school, and high school), and time. Time, which indicated the years before and after the implementation of RJ, was centered so that the first year began at zero. Centering was accomplished by subtracting the reported year from 2015. Therefore, the 2015 school year is indicated with a zero value. The assumptions of the general linear model analyses are determined tenable for all models due to the large sample size (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Variables were included in separate general linear models to specifically address each research question independently, as described in Chapter 4. The last research question was answered by computing the proportions of students and faculty represented in each racial group identified in the reported data.

Limitations

One limitation of this study is that it relies on the authenticity of SFUSD's self-reporting. Therefore, the results may compromise the internal validity of the study because of participants' self-assessing and self-reporting. As previously mentioned,

another limitation of this study is that many of the districts currently practicing RJ are larger, urban districts. This factor will make it difficult to generalize results to other areas of the country or to schools with a rural or suburban typology. A final limitation is that SWPBIS were mandated by the SFUSD at the same time that RPs were mandated. As a result, it may be difficult to correlate results directly to RJ. School-wide, positive behavior interventions and supports may be a confounding variable in this study. A remedy to this limitation would include conducting further research with districts similar in demographics that practice only SWPBIS. This comparison may show whether the RJ or SWPBIS had a greater impact on the results in the SFUSD.

Summary

Public education is at a pivotal crossroads concerning discipline philosophies and procedures. The pressure to, both, keep schools safe while decreasing suspensions and expulsions is proving to be a daunting task for districts around the country. This study may provide more information on the relatively novel use of RJ practices in K-12 public school settings. The impacts of the use of RJ in classrooms may well have effects that reach beyond the walls of the school and into the criminal justice system. For that reason, research in the area of RJ is worthwhile.

Chapter four of this document will review the research questions surrounding the impact of RJ on reducing the discipline gap for African American students. The results of statistical analysis in relation to the questions asked will be presented as well as the demographic information for both students and staff members in the SFUSD.

Chapter 4

RESULTS

The purpose of this quantitative study was to determine whether the use of restorative justice practices in the San Francisco Unified Schools District resulted in a reduction of suspensions and expulsions for African American students. The study also sought to determine if the use of RJ had an impact on reducing the discipline gap between African American students and White students. The impact of RJ on elementary schools as opposed to middle schools or high schools was also an area of interest due to recent literature and research indicating more positive results in elementary schools and stagnant results in the middle schools age band. Finally, the study aimed to determine if the Representative Bureaucracy Theory held true for the San Francisco Unified School District by comparing the demographic data of certified staff members to the student demographics. Publicly available data from the California Department of Education was acquired for the years preceding and succeeding the use of RJ, and general linear analysis was utilized to answer the following areas of inquiry.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study were as follows:

1. Did the use of restorative justice practices in the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) reduce suspensions and expulsions for African American student?
2. Did the use of restorative justice practices in the San Francisco Unified School District reduce the discipline gap between African American students and Caucasian students?

3. Is the use of restorative justice practices more effective in elementary schools than middle schools or high schools?
4. Does the Representative Bureaucracy Theory hold true for the San Francisco Unified School District?

The data was extracted from California Department of Education’s website. All non-San Francisco Unified School District data was deleted. After a systematic random sample of elementary schools was performed, schools were coded by level with 2 indicating high schools, 1 indicating middle schools, and 0 indicating elementary schools. School year data was then centered so that data could be examined for the three year prior to the implementation of RJ and the three years following the use of RJ. Table 1. presents the frequency of schools within the SFUSC that reported suspensions and expulsion data from the 2011-2012 school year through the 2017-2018 school year.

Table 1.

Schools Reporting Exclusionary Data

Year	Suspension	Expulsions
12	359	357
13	371	371
14	376	375
15	460	460
16	503	502
17	498	498
18	498	499

As indicated above, $n=3,062$ schools provided expulsion and $n=3,065$ schools reported suspension data. Table 2. provides the frequency of schools represented across the three varying academic levels.

Table 2.

Number of Schools by Level

Level	Suspension	Expulsions
Elementary	770	770
Middle	1042	1038
High School	1253	1254

As indicated above, the greatest numbers of schools represented were at the high school level, followed by the middle school level, and then the elementary school level. Table 3. provides the frequency of school level cases that also provided data by race.

Table 3.

Demographic Frequency and Percentage

Race	Frequency	Percent
African American	221	7.2
Hispanic	252	8.2
Caucasian	228	7.4

While Hispanic students were not a focus of this study, they were a focus of the SFUSD’s effort to reduce suspensions and expulsions according to information published by the district at the time of implementation. Figure 1. provides a graphical depiction of suspension rates by race from years 2012 through 2018.

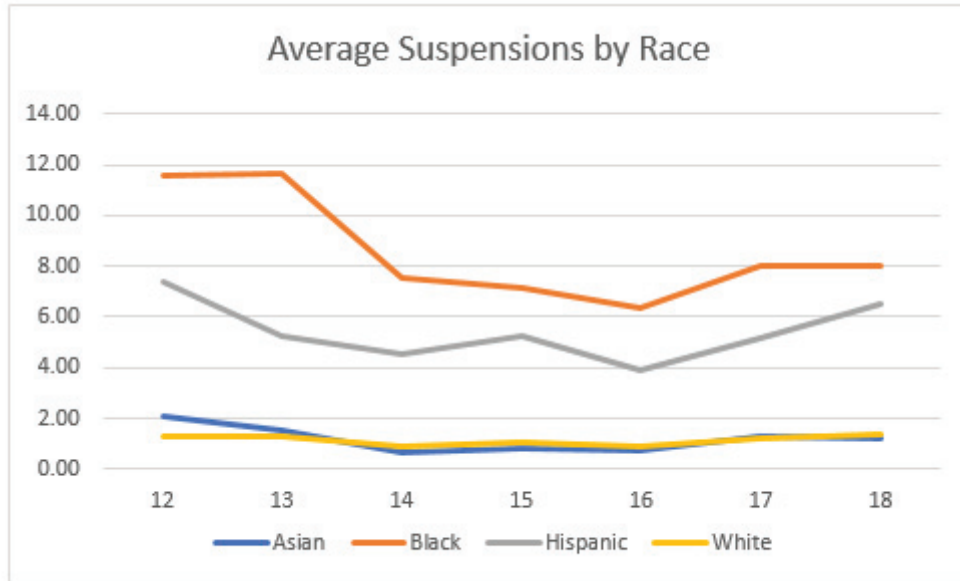


Figure 1. Suspension by Race

As indicated above, African American students averaged the highest suspensions from 2012 through 2018. However, there is a slight downward trend in the average suspensions for African American students. Average suspensions for Hispanic, Asian, and Caucasian students have remained consistent pre to post implementation. Figure 2 provides expulsions rates by race from 2012 through 2018.

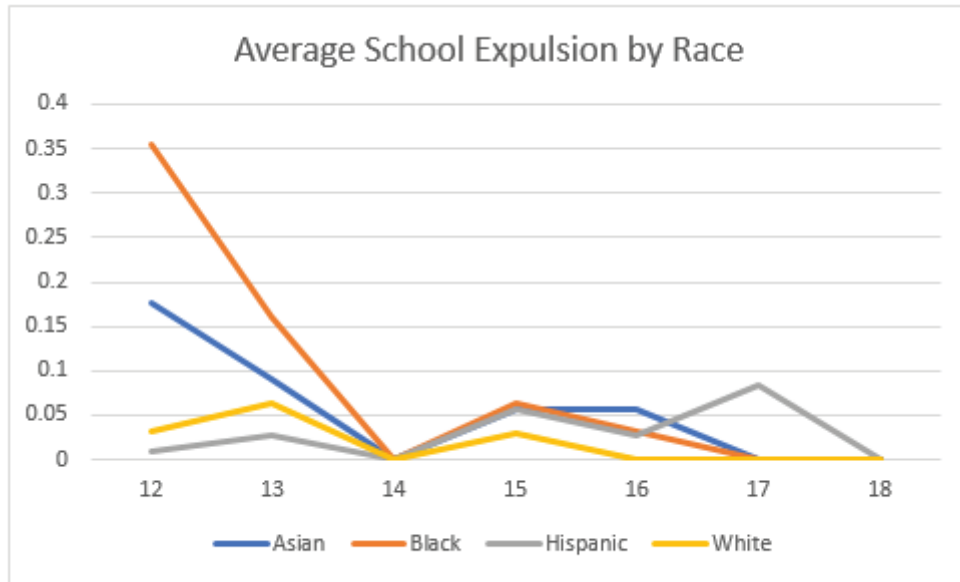


Figure 2. Expulsion by Race

As indicated above, average expulsions for all demographic groups decreased pre to post implementation of RJ.

Research Question 1

Research question one asked if the use of RJ reduced suspensions and expulsions for African American students. Figure 1 provides a visual representation of expulsion data for African American students at all levels during the three years prior to the implementation of RJ and the three years after the implementation of RJ.

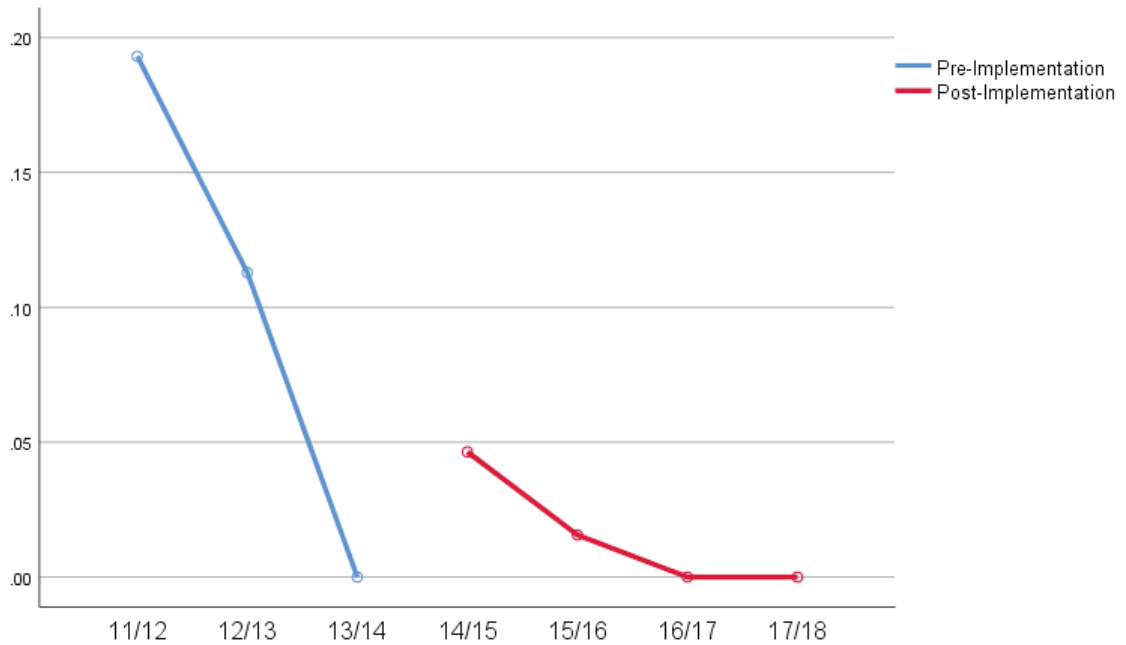


Figure 3. Expulsion Data

As seen in Figure 3, prior to the implementation of RJ (blue line) the trend in expulsions was dropping. While post -RJ implementation reveals a small increase in the frequency, this increase is not practically significant. Results of the general linear modeling analyses indicate that the frequency of expulsions did significantly change when examining data reported for all African American students in grades K-12, $F(5, 200)=2.84, p = .017$. Figure 4. represents suspension data for African American students in the three years prior to the implementation of RJ and the three years after the implementation of RJ.

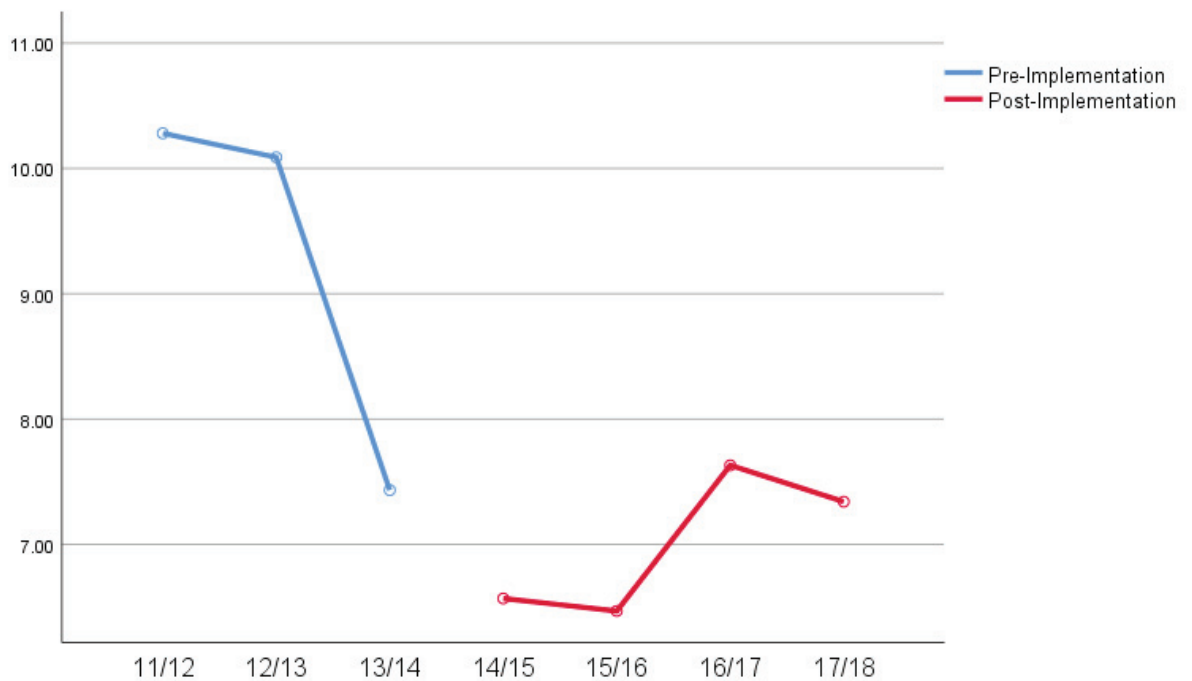


Figure 4. Suspension Data

As indicated above, there was a sharp decline in the reported suspensions (blue) prior to RJ implementation, and the rates remained lower after post-RJ implementation (red).

Results of the general linear modeling analyses indicate that the frequency of suspensions did not significantly decrease when examining data reported for all African American Students in grades K-12, $F(5, 200)=.273, p = .928$. Practically speaking, the average number of suspensions from the year prior to implementation and the years following implementation were neither meaningful nor significant.

Research Question 2

Research questions two asked whether the discipline gap between African American students and Caucasian students was reduced after the implementation of RJ. Figure 5. provides a graphical image of the reported expulsions for African American and Caucasian student pre- to post-RJ implementation.

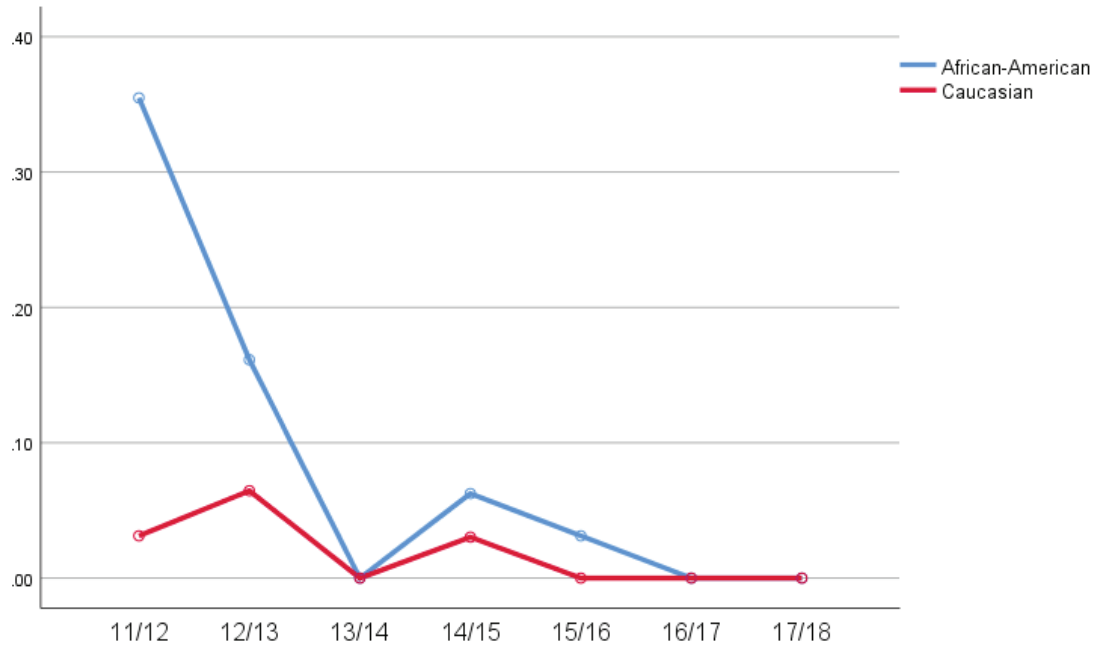


Figure 5. Expulsion Data for African American/Caucasian Students

As indicated above, there is a drop in the reported expulsions for the African American students (blue line) prior to the implementation of RJ, while the rate for Caucasian students remains relatively consistent, although on a slight downward trend pre- to post-implementation. Results of the general linear modeling analyses indicate that the frequency gap between African American and Caucasian students expulsions, pre- to post-RJ implementation is significant, $F(5, 435)=3.89, p = .002$. Specifically, the implementation of RJ significantly reduced the expulsion data of African American students, therefore minimizing the gap.

Figure 6. provides a graphical image of the reported suspensions for African American and Caucasian student pre- to post-RJ implementation.

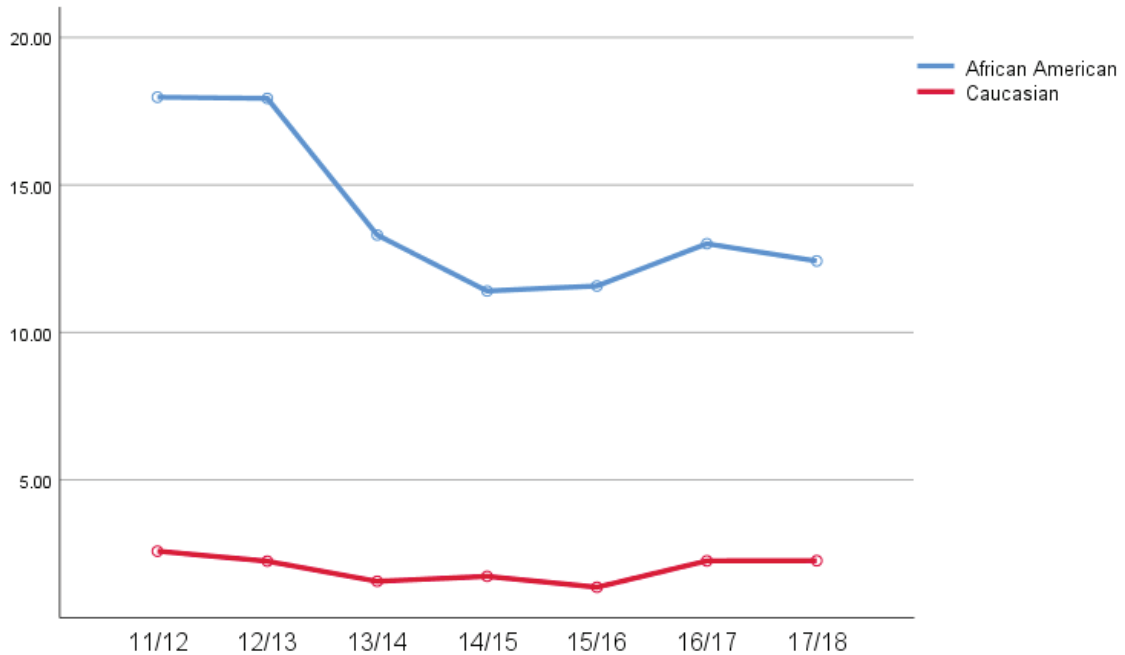


Figure 6. Suspension Data for African American/Caucasian Students

As seen above, the rate of suspensions for the African American students (blue line) trends higher than the rate of suspension for the Caucasian students (red line).

Results of the general linear modeling analyses indicate that the gap between African American and White students frequency of suspensions, pre- to post-RJ implementation, is not significant, $F(5, 407) = .191, p = .966$. While there is a small reduction in the gap, the differences between the frequencies of suspensions is statistically significant for African American students relative to Caucasian students across all years $F(5, 407) = 96.46, p < .001$. Although a reduction in the suspension gap is not statistically significant, the pre to post implementation data does show a significant decline in suspensions for African American students.

Research Question 3

Research question three examined whether the use of RJ was more effective in elementary schools than in middle schools or high schools. Figure 7. provides a graphical representation of these trends.

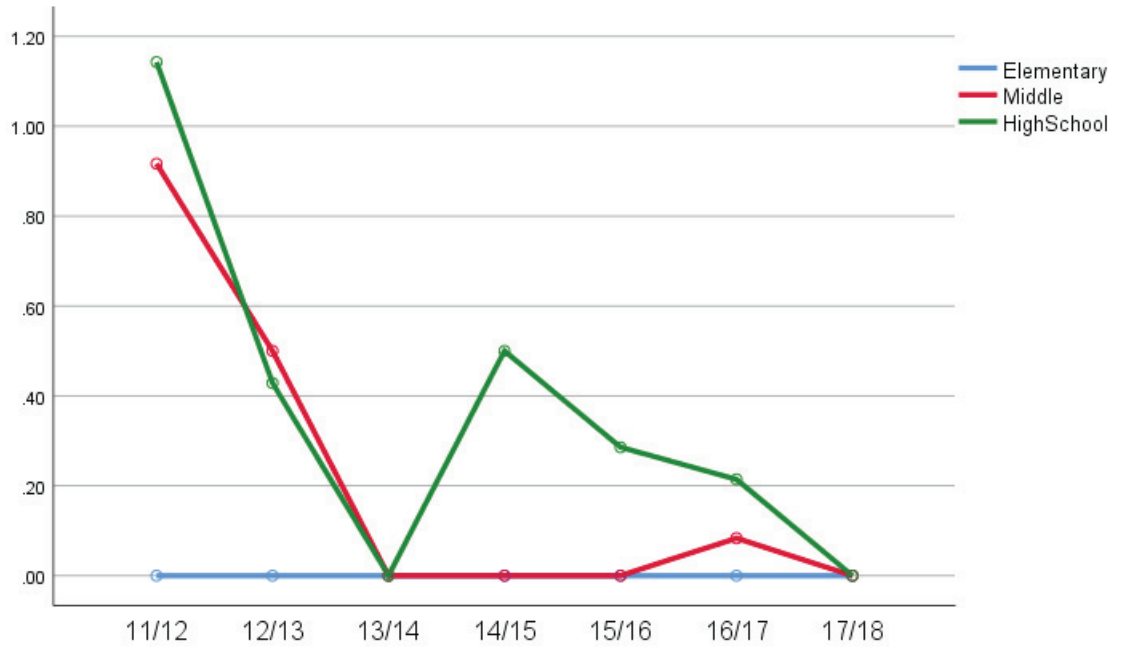


Figure 7. Expulsion Data by School Level

Results of the general linear modeling analyses indicate that the effectiveness of the RJ across the different academic levels is significantly different when examining the data pre- to post-RJ implementation on expulsions, $F(10, 3401)=6.54, p <.001$.

Figure 8. Illustrates suspension data by school level.

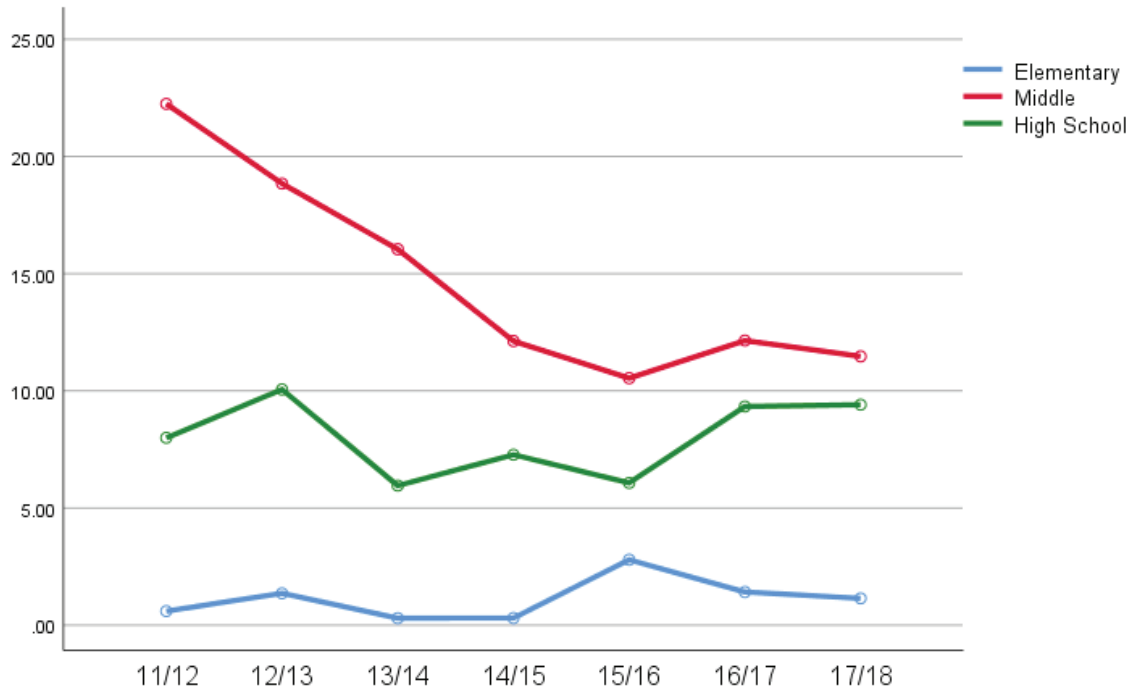


Figure 8. Suspension Data by School Level

As indicated above, the rate of suspensions is highest for the middle school students, followed by the High School level students. Results of the general linear modeling analyses indicate that the effectiveness of the RJ across academic levels is significantly different when examining the data pre- to post-RJ implementation on suspensions, $F(10, 3404)=1.81, p =.053$. However, the suspensions frequency for each academic level is statistically significant, $F (10, 3404) =197.01, p <.001$.

Research Question 4

Research question four asked whether the Representative Bureaucracy Theory held true for the demographics of the SFUSD.

Table 4.

Certificated Staff Demographic Information

Race/Ethnicity	Frequency	Percent
Not Reported	508	9.2
American Indian	31	0.6
Asian	1026	18.5
Pacific Islander	10	0.2
Filipino	195	3.5
Hispanic	767	13.8
African American	325	5.9
White	2579	46.5
Two or More	107	1.9

As indicated above, almost half of the staff of SFUSD is Caucasian followed by Asian, Hispanic, and African American. The “not reported” Race/Ethnicity category was relatively large at nearly 10%.

Figure 9 provides a graphical depiction of the student to staff racial differences.

Staff and Student Demographic Comparison

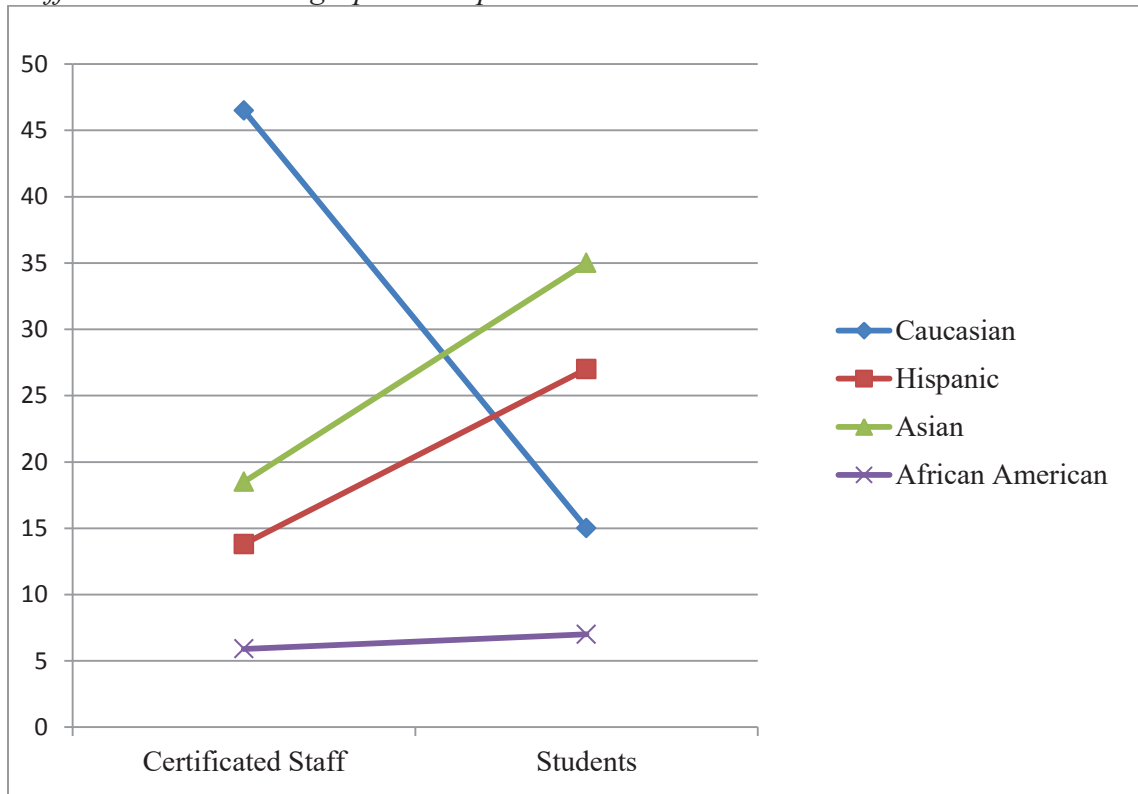


Figure 9. Staff to Student Racial Proportions

As indicated above, Caucasian certificated staff members make up almost 50% of the total staff at SFUSD. Only 15% of the student demographic is Caucasian. Asian educators and Hispanic educators are also greatly underrepresented when compared to the student population they serve. African American teachers make up 5.9% of the certificated population while African American students make up 7% of the student population. A Fisher's Exact Test of this data indicates that significant differences exist, $p=.04.$, when examining the differences between Caucasian and African American

students. This table indicates that the Representative Bureaucracy Theory may hold true in SFUSD as the greatest population of certificated staff members are members of the dominant culture.

Summary

The use of RJ practices in the SFUSD was successful in reducing expulsions for African American students. When examining the use of RJ in reducing suspensions after the implementation of RJ, however, data indicated that the intervention did not yield significant results. After examining the result of RJ on reducing the discipline gap for African American students, the results were similar; the expulsions gap for African American student was significantly reduced, but the suspension gap remained virtually unchanged. When running the data from the perspective of grade levels, RJ was more effective in the SFUSD at the middle school level than at the high school or elementary school level. The last research question explored was whether the Representative Bureaucracy Theory could explain the discrepancy in data in the SFUSD. A review of student demographics and certificated staff demographics confirmed that Caucasian staff members comprised nearly 50% of the staff despite the fact that the student body was 85% Non-Caucasian.

The final chapter of this study will provide a summary of the findings outlined in chapter 4. It will also offer an interpretation of findings from the viewpoint of the practitioner and an attempt to put them in context with other recent research in the area of RJ. The implications of the study in regard to future research and future implementation will be addressed along with the study's limitations relative to the perceived limitations

outlined in Chapter 3. Finally, the chapter will provide suggestions for the direction of future research in the area.

Chapter 5

Summary of Findings

The primary purpose of this research was to determine what impact, if any, RJ had on reducing suspensions and expulsions for African American students in the SFUSD. The hypothesis of the study anticipated that the use of RJ would correlate in a reduction in expulsions and suspensions for African American students. The results of this investigation revealed that during its three-year implementation, RJ was effective in reducing expulsions for African American students with the average expulsion rate for African Americans at the end of the three years averaging zero. The use of RJ did not, however, correlate with a significant reduction in suspensions for African American students. Suspensions for African Americans at the end of the three year implementation period mirrored the suspension rate reported the year before implementation. The research hypothesis held true for expulsions, while the research hypothesis for suspensions did not hold true.

A second research question asked if the use of RJ would reduce the discipline gap for African American students. The study hypothesized that the discipline gap would not be reduced by the use of RJ. An interesting finding was that data indicated that although it was minimal, there was a reduction in the discipline gap between African American and Caucasian students.

This study also examined whether the use of RJ would reveal more positive outcomes in the elementary, middle, or high school level. The hypothesis predicted that the positive outcomes would be more prevalent at the elementary and high school levels based on emerging research (Augustine et al., 2018). Again, the results were somewhat

surprising in that the most significant association between RJ and a reduction of suspensions and expulsions occurred at the middle school level. Suspensions and expulsions for the elementary and the high school levels after the implementation period remained relatively the same as before implementation.

The final research question considered whether the Representative Bureaucracy Theory could hold true for SFUSD. After analyzing staff and student demographics, it was determined that nearly 50% of the certificated teaching staff identified as Caucasian, while only 15% of the student body identified as the same. This confirmed that almost half of those in positions of authority were members of the dominant class responsible for decision-making.

A final observation regarding the implementation of RJ in SFUSD should note that the sharpest decrease in suspensions was actually seen in the 1-2 years leading up to the implementation of RJ.

Interpretation of Findings

Results of the study were not promising in comparison to other research on RJ in criminal justice system, juvenile justice system, and other public school settings (Fronius, Persson, Guckenburg, Hurley, & Petrosino, 2016; Mirsky, 2004; Cameron & Thorsborne, 2001). Although RJ in SFUSD is associated with a reduction in expulsions, it did not reveal the same trend with a reduction in suspensions, a reduction in the discipline gap between African American students and Caucasian students, or a reduction in suspensions at the elementary and high school levels.

One explanation for the reduction of expulsions could be that in lieu of long-term expulsions, administrators utilized shorter periods of out of school suspension as a

disciplinary measure. Hence, expulsions would decrease, but suspensions would remain steady or increase. The aforementioned possibility is supported by the data examined from SFUSD.

A lack of success at the high school and elementary levels may be the result of differences in implementation. According to the implementation plans posted on the SFUSD website, each building was afforded the opportunity to create their own RJ implementation team. The team, in turn, was responsible for following the framework provided to order to introduce, develop, train, and maintain staff in the practices of RJ. If the plans were followed with fidelity at the building level, then RJ simply did not work in the SFUSD.

Context of Findings

The use of RJ in K-12 public settings is relatively new in the United States. As a result, research examining its impact over long periods of time has just begun to emerge over the past five to 10 years. According to Gonzalez, RJ in Oregon, Maryland, and Michigan led to reductions in suspensions, specifically (2012). In Oregon, the Department of Community Justice joined with Parkrose School District in Portland, Oregon to implement RJ. The three-year study was a pilot program that was measured by both qualitative and quantitative data. Data from the third year of implementation determined that 108 days of suspensions were saved due to the program (Gonzalez, 2012). It should be noted, however, that current membership data from Parkrose School District estimates their enrollment to be 3,000 students, while the enrollment of SFUSD is approximately 54,000. In addition, the literature regarding the Parkrose School District

was not reported as percentages, but as days avoided which was different than the way in which this study presented findings.

Lansing, Michigan, in conjunction with the United Way, started an RJ program in 2004. The program began with one pilot elementary school but had expanded to 19 schools in the district by the time of Gonzalez's (2012) report. At that time, the district reported that over 1,600 days of suspension had been avoided from 2004 to 2009 (Gonzalez, 2012). Any potential decrease in the percentage of suspensions from year to year in Lansing, Michigan is unknown based on the way in which the data was presented. Differences between the Lansing School District and the SFUSD include its population and the way in which each district chose to implement RJ. Enrollment information from Lansing indicates that the district serves approximately 11,000 students, which is still only one-fifth of the enrollment in SFUSD. In addition, Lansing began their implementation process with one pilot school and determined to build capacity from there. In SFUSD, the entire district assumed the endeavor at one time despite the fact that it has approximately 130 schools district wide.

One district reported on by Gonzalez in 2012 was similar in size to SFUSD. Baltimore County Schools District had been working since the late 1990's to provide alternatives to suspensions. The Conflict Resolution Center of Baltimore County worked with 32 schools at various levels to offer community mediation and to offer community conferencing. As a result of the RJ support provided, the district noted decreases in suspension rates at participating schools, with one particular school, City Springs School, boasting an 88% decrease in suspensions. Although Baltimore County School District

services over 100,000 students in grades PK-12, RJ was only utilized at a handful of schools, unlike the mandatory systemic roll-out process utilized at SFUSD.

The most recent research in the field of RJ focused on whether it led to stronger relationships, better communication, and a more positive culture (Augustine et al., 2018; Crowe, 2018; Waggoner, 2018). This study, however, was purely quantitative and focused on data reported from SFUSD. Therefore, it is unknown whether the implementation of RJ led to better relationships or better climate in the SFUSD. A 2017 study focusing on four of Chicago's high schools indicated that out-of-school suspensions decreased 30% for students who utilized the "Peace Room" wherein RJ was practiced, when compared to students who did not utilize it (Rich, Mader, & Pacheco-Applegate, 2017, p. 25). Data from the SFUSD was not consistent with the data from Chicago. Restorative Practices did not decrease suspensions at all at the high school level. In fact, the most promising data regarding the use of RJ in the SFUSD came in the reduction of suspensions at the middle school level only.

In 2018, the RAND Corporation reported on a two-year study that examined the impact of RJ in 22 Pittsburgh schools (Augustine et al., 2018). Results of the study concluded that in addition to school staff noting improved relationships with students, suspensions were significantly reduced at the elementary level (Augustine et al., 2018). At the middle school level in Pittsburgh schools, no significant impact from RJ was noted (Augustine et al., 2018). The previously mentioned results out of Pittsburgh also did not align with the data from SFUSD. In the SFUSD, the strongest association between RJ and a reduction in suspensions actually occurred at the middle school level, not the

elementary level. Suspensions at the elementary level remained the same prior to and after the implementation of RJ.

Based on the extant research, it appears as though districts that began implementing RJ at a few targeted schools saw better results than schools like SFUSD that attempted to implement the practices with the entire district. This phenomenon could explain the contradictions in data.

Another possible reason for the contradictory data is SFUSD's desire to implement both RJ and PBIS at the same time. According to the district website, a resolution stating that "Full Implementation of Restorative Practices (RP) and School-Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS) at All Schools" would begin, passed at a board meeting on February 25, 2014. Undertaking the full implementation of two very important and time-consuming behavioral supports may have led to neither intervention being executed with fidelity.

Implications of Findings

The theoretical framework explored throughout this study was the Representative Bureaucracy Theory. This theory was used to explain the discipline gap between African American students and Caucasian students. The theory contends that the more representative those in power are of those they serve, the more they make laws and rules to benefit the whole (Kingsley, 1944; VanRiper, 1958). In the educational arena, theorists surmise that the more representative administrators and those in power are of the students they serve, the more they will relate to their values and norms, thus leading to more favorable disciplinary outcomes (Skiba et al., 2011). Due to the fact that 82% of educators nation-wide are Caucasian, the Representative Bureaucracy Theory is a

reasonable explanation for the discipline gap between Caucasian students and students of color (DOE, 2016). For the theory to hold true in regards to the SFUSD, there would have to be a significant amount of Caucasian teachers and administrators, and a noticeable discipline gap with students of color. Results of this study are consistent with the Representative Bureaucracy Theory in that almost 50% of educators are Caucasian. This information, combined with suspension and expulsion data noting that African American and Hispanic students are suspended at a rate higher than other peers in the SFUSD, provide strong evidence for the Representative Bureaucracy Theory.

The results of the current investigation add to the emergent literature regarding RJ in K-12 public schools in the United States. In addition, it also illuminates the question of how to implement RJ in a district. When compared to other districts outlined that have utilized RJ with more success, SFUSD was one of the only ones that attempted to implement the practice district-wide all at the same time. The exception was Parkrose School District, but this exception could be due to the small size of the district (3,000 students). This information provides support for starting small when implementing RJ in a district.

Other factors that may have contributed to the lack of success in SFUSD include the buy-in of the administration, the type of professional development offered, the implementation of the professional development, and the fidelity of the implementation through the past three years. All of these potential factors were not measurable in this study but may have significantly impacted the way in which RJ was utilized within the district. Confounders outside the district that may have also contributed to the result include the leadership within the district and individual buildings, individual school sizes,

the demographics of specific schools, the transiency of the population served, and the socio-economic make-up of the city of San Francisco (Burke Harris, 2018).

The most profound implication of this data is the knowledge that students in the SFUSD continue to be excluded from school. Exclusionary practices have continually been associated with lower test scores, a decrease in school climate, and increased drop-out rate, and a greater chance of interacting with both the juvenile justice system and the criminal justice system (Gowdey, 2015; Skiba et al., 2011; APA, 2008). Therefore, students in the SFUSD are still at risk for dropping out, for scoring lower on state-wide assessments, and for intersecting with the school-to-prison pipeline. Based on the data examined in this study, RJ is not working in SFUSD and the students of the district will suffer unless exclusionary practices are reduced.

District and building leaders looking for alternatives to suspensions and expulsions, or looking to reduce the discipline gap in their respective schools may be interested in this research. This information would be particularly beneficial to administrators in large urban districts, especially districts on the west coast with a high population of minority students. This material could be used as a blueprint for what not to do if you reduced suspensions are desired. Research like this to lead to helping practitioners develop a more definitive outline for execution based on district size, school size, school location, school demographics etc.

Discussions on Limitations of Study

This study had multiple limitations. One specific limitation includes a lack of qualitative information from staff and students in SFUSD. Although the findings of the current investigation reveal that RJ is not successful in reducing suspensions, no

verifiable information on staff and student perspectives regarding school climate and staff-student relationships is available.

In one regard, Pittsburgh City Schools did not see positive results in regards to suspension reductions at the middle school levels, but the district still contended that 63% of all school personnel involved reported feelings of improved relationships between themselves and students (Augustine et al., 2018). On the other hand, high rates of expulsions and suspensions typically correlate with a reduction in positive school climate and greater feelings of trust between staff members and students (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Hinojosa, 2008; Shirley & Cornell, 2012).

Another limitation includes the way in which the data were presented by the California Department of Education. The data were based on the self-reporting of SFUSD, which could skew the results in their favor should the reporting be incorrect. Since the results for the district were not favorable, there is less concern about data being slanted toward positive outcomes. The publicly accessible data were already disaggregated into varying sub-group components. As a result, this prevents analyzing this data in order to evaluate where RJ is working and what moderators are in play. Because of the large racial and socio-economic divides, a hierarchical analysis may have been able to identify if racial concentration or socioeconomic factors were having any impact on the level of change in discipline pre- to post-RJ implementation.

Furthermore, the fact that the study looked only at the SFUSD is a limitation. SFUSD is a large, urban district on the west coast. In addition to only looking at SFUSD, the study only looked at the district as a whole. The study did not get specific with individual schools based on location, demographic data, transiency rates, etc. In addition,

staff factors such as turnover rates were not available. All of the aforementioned information would make it difficult to apply the results of this study to other schools and school districts practicing RJ.

Another factor deemed as a possible limitation earlier in the study was the district's simultaneous implementation of RJ and PBIS. The concern was that if the data resulted in the reduction of suspensions and expulsions, one would not know the impact RJ had on the reduction versus the impact of PBIS. Again, because the results of the data were not promising, the concern of what intervention helped more becomes null and void.

A final limitation outlined in chapter 1 was that RJ was somewhat reactive in nature and at its most intensive level of implementation sought to right wrongs already committed. The concern in chapter 1 revolved around the hypothesis that RJ in SFUSD would be successful in reducing suspensions and expulsions for African-American students. RJ practices were not correlated with a reduction in suspensions for students; therefore, the limitation of the intervention being reactive is not as important of an issue as determining an effective method for reducing suspensions for African American students and reducing the discipline gap.

Discussion on Future Direction of Research

The contradictory findings outlined in this study confirm the need to continue researching the use of RJ in schools and its impact on reducing expulsions and suspensions, especially for vulnerable sub-groups of students. A more extensive body of literature would provide practitioners with important information on the best methods for training staff, implementing RJ, and ensuring that RJ was sustained.

Much of the research on RJ includes a qualitative component wherein staff and students are asked their feelings on school climate and culture. It also asks whether there was an improvement in feelings of trust between staff and students and whether staff and students perceived that they had a better relationship since the implementation of RJ. This study was strictly quantitative in nature, and as a result did not measure the feelings of staff and students. More research involving the feelings of staff and students would be beneficial in determining if RJ can improve relationships and improve school climate without actually reducing suspensions and expulsions, and without reducing the discipline gap.

When comparing the results of this study with other research in the area, it became clear that many larger districts start small when initiating RJ. Many started with just one school or with just a handful of schools. More research is needed to determine the best method for implementing RJ; full implementation, or staggered implementation. This realization also begs the question of how pilot schools are chosen to begin implementing RJ. If the chosen buildings are the buildings that already have the best climate and culture, or are the buildings with the most willing staff, research will be needed to determine how staff philosophies and attitudes impact the implementation process.

Another concept that is starting to emerge in PK-12 public school settings in the United States is the concept of equity training for staff. Should the overall results of research on RJ be inconclusive, or be determined to rely heavily on staff philosophies and attitudes, districts may turn to equity training as a way to help a field of primarily Caucasian educators better understand and relate to the lives of students of color. This

training could also be used as a method to overcome the Representative Bureaucracy Theory indicating that members of dominate culture often relate more to individuals from their same culture and as a result distribute exclusionary consequences to them less often.

Summary

The use of RJ practices in the SFUSD did not reduce exclusionary practices for African American students and therefore did not significantly reduce the discipline gap. Contrary to other research on RJ, the use of RJ in SFUSD had the most promising data at the middle school level. Factors such as implementation processes, student transiency, administrator and staff philosophies and attitudes, as well as student demographic information by school may have all impacted the use of RJ in this particular study. Future studies in the area of restorative justice are needed to add to the body of literature and to help determine the best path toward implementation based on school size, demographics, and staff attitudes. The emergence of equity training may aid in the potential for success in districts utilizing RJ and could help reduce the biases outlined in the Representative Bureaucracy Theory. Most importantly, researchers and practitioners have an obligation to continue to search for the most powerful and effective method of reducing exclusionary discipline practices for our most at-risk sub-groups.

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APPENDIX A



**YOUNGSTOWN
STATE
UNIVERSITY**

One University Plaza, Youngstown, Ohio 44555

Office of Research
330.941.2377

January 21, 2019

Dr. Karen Larwin, Principal Investigator
Ms. Katie E. Lyell Fallo, Co-investigator
Department of Counseling, School Psychology and Educational Leadership
UNIVERSITY

RE: HSRC PROTOCOL NUMBER: 150-2019
TITLE: Decoding Discipline: The Impact of Restorative Practices on Reducing the
Discipline Gap for African American Students

Dear Dr. Larwin and Ms. Fallo:

The Institutional Review Board has reviewed the abovementioned protocol and determined that it is exempt from full committee review based on a DHHS Category 4 exemption.

Any changes in your research activity should be promptly reported to the Institutional Review Board and may not be initiated without IRB approval except where necessary to eliminate hazard to human subjects. Any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects should also be promptly reported to the IRB.

The IRB would like to extend its best wishes to you in the conduct of this study.

Sincerely,



Dr. Greg Dillon
Interim Associate Vice President for Research
Authorized Institutional Official

GD:cc

c: Dr. Jake Protivnak, Chair
Department of Counseling, School Psychology and Special Education