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A Review of Disciplinary Interventions in K12 Public Education

Rachel Levy
Virginia Commonwealth University, ralevy@vcu.edu

David Naff
Virginia Commonwealth University, naffdb@vcu.edu

Marcie Terry
Chesterfield County Public Schools, marcie_terry@ccpsnet.net

Mariah Coffee
Virginia Commonwealth University, coffeemk@mymail.vcu.edu

A Review of Disciplinary Interventions in K12 Public Education

a research brief

METROPOLITAN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH CONSORTIUM

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ACHIEVING RACIAL EQUITY IN SCHOOL DISCIPLINARY POLICIES AND PRACTICES

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A REVIEW of DISCIPLINARY INTERVENTIONS in K12 PUBLIC EDUCATION

Rachel Levy, Virginia Commonwealth University
David Naff, Virginia Commonwealth University
Marcie Terry, Chesterfield County Public Schools
Kestrel Coffee, Virginia Commonwealth University
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Throughout the history of K-12 public education, schools have used a range of discipline approaches to manage student behavior. Traditionally, these models have focused on addressing misbehavior through a structured series of consequences, initially in the form of corporal punishment[1] and eventually in the form of exclusionary practices like suspensions (in and out of school) and in more extreme circumstances, expulsion.[2] A 2014 joint letter by the US Department of Justice and Department of Education called for a restructuring of discipline in American schools, advocating that they include elements like conflict resolution, restorative practice, and positive interventions to promote a safe learning environment.[3] Part of this charge came from recognition that highly punitive and exclusionary approaches have, over time, led to racial minority students disproportionately being subject to disciplinary action in schools.[4] Increasing recognition of racial disproportionality in discipline and its potential long-term consequences for minority student groups has led to efforts to adjust models of school discipline to be more responsive to the needs and experiences of diverse learners and mindful of context when intervening with apparent behavioral issues. African-American and Latinx students are more likely to be suspended or expelled from school than their White peers.[5]

For researchers, policymakers, and practitioners to address racial disproportionality in school disciplinary outcomes, it is important to understand the history,

theory of action, and practice of various interventions and approaches to discipline. Additionally, evidence of models' effectiveness should include overall reductions in disciplinary outcomes like suspensions or expulsions, and how they may specifically reduce exclusionary discipline for African-American and/or Latinx students. Thus, the purpose of this research brief is to examine different disciplinary interventions employed in K-12 public education, with a primary focus on those designed to address issues of racial disproportionality. Specifically, we ask three questions:

1. What is the history and theory of action of prominent approaches to school discipline?
2. How effective are they in reducing racial disproportionality in disciplinary outcomes?
3. What are the implications for Virginia?

The goal of this brief is to offer information about how schools approach discipline with their students, particularly students of color, and interrogate how the theory of action for these approaches helps to address issues of disproportionality. It will first offer an overview of prominent discipline models historically used in America, including corporal punishment and zero-tolerance policies, and how they have contributed to disproportionately high rates of exclusionary discipline outcomes for students of color. It will then discuss alternative approaches that seek to address issues of disproportionality, including Trauma-Informed Care (TIC), Restorative Practices (RP), Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), and Culturally Responsive PBIS. Each approach will include examples of implementation in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The conclusion offers an overview of common elements of implementing alternative discipline models.

This research brief comes out of a study by the Metropolitan Educational Research Consortium (MERC) at Virginia Commonwealth University titled "Achieving Racial Equity in School Disciplinary Policies and Practices." Superintendents and other leaders from seven school divisions in the metropolitan Richmond region identified this topic as one of critical interest in 2016. There have been two phases to the study. The first quantitatively explored perceptions of disproportionality in MERC division schools and included collection of survey data from

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1 The use of physical punishment (e.g. spanking) to deter behavior in schools (US Office of Civil Rights)

2 Simson, 2014

3 https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-201401-title-vi.html

4 Artiles, Kozleski, Trent, Osher, & Ortiz, 2010; Smith & Harper, 2015

5 Losen, 2013; Skiba, Trachok, Chung, Baker, & Huges, 2012

school leaders. Results of that survey, along with Virginia Department of Education data, informed the selection of three schools, with varying degrees of racial diversity in the student body, to serve as case study sites for the second phase. This qualitative phase included the collection of observational, interview, and focus group data that explored perceived efficacy of and fidelity to disciplinary approaches at the schools. The two overarching goals of the study are to: 1) understand the landscape and impact of disciplinary interventions in the Richmond metropolitan area, and 2) offer recommendations for best practices. In short, MERC wants to know the nature of racial disproportionality in school discipline, why it exists, and what can be done about it. A 2017 MERC research brief titled "Why do racial disparities in school discipline exist? The role of policies, processes, people, and places" aligns with the first goal of the study. This overview of common approaches to school discipline helps address the second goal.

HISTORY OF PREVIOUSLY USED DISCIPLINE MODELS

Historically, approaches to school discipline have focused primarily on a system of punishments meant to deter behavior in a school setting deemed to be inappropriate, dangerous, or otherwise unacceptable. This approach is grounded in behaviorism, a foundational theory of human development purporting that people tend to engage in behaviors to either pursue rewards or avoid punishments.[6] Corporal punishment was a widely accepted form of discipline in American public schools throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[7] The widespread departure of corporal punishment in the late twentieth century required a replacement disciplinary practice, which took the form of zero-tolerance policies in the late 1900s.[8] However, a zero-tolerance approach comes with persistent challenges,[9] and corporal punishment remains a fixture in several states (primarily in the south).[10]

6 Gershoff, 2013

7 Middleton, 2008

8 Atkinson, 2005
9 Ibid.
10 Sparks & Harwin, 2016

Corporal Punishment

Corporal punishment is the use of physical harm, such as spanking or paddling to deter unwanted behavior in children.[11] Advocates of this method often refer to it as an extension of "traditional values" for discipline, citing how common the practice still is in people's homes.[12] Opponents argue that it is a human rights violation that can sometimes lead to increased misbehavior by contributing to a hostile attribution bias (perceiving that the enforcer of the punishment is threatening) in children.[13] According to Sparks and Harwin (2016), corporal punishment has rapidly declined in the U.S. over the past 15 years. However, federal civil rights data from the 2013-2014 school year revealed that it was still used in 21 states, in more than 4,000 schools, and on more than 109,000 students.[14]

Civil rights data also indicated that corporal punishment is especially prevalent in southern states such as Alabama, Arkansas, Mississippi, Oklahoma, and Texas, with disproportionate impact on Black students. In Mississippi, more than half of students attended a school that used corporal punishment during the 2013-2014 school year. Nationwide, in schools using corporal punishment, Black students made up 22% of enrollment, but experienced 38% of physical discipline. Comparatively, White students made up 60% of the enrollment, but experienced 50% of physical discipline.[15] Nationally, Black students made up 16% of total public school enrollment in 2014,[16] suggesting that schools with higher percentages of Black students were more likely to use corporal punishment. Virginia prohibited the use of corporal punishment in 1989 via § 22.1-279.1. However, according to the statute, educators can use "incidental, minor, reasonable, or necessary force" to maintain order, for self-defense, or to diffuse disturbances or dangerous situations.[17] Some states have banned the use of corporal punishment more recently, such as Ohio in 2009 and New Mexico in

11 Gershoff & Bitensky, 2007
12 Clark, 2017
13 Gershoff & Bitensky, 2007
14 Sparks & Harwin, 2016
15 Civil Rights Data Collection, Data Snapshot: School Discipline, 2014
16 Percentage distribution of students enrolled in public schools (https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cge.asp)
17 US Department of Education, 2016

2011, but similar attempts in Louisiana and Texas failed in those same years.[18] While corporal punishment has declined in most states, zero tolerance policies that mandate strict punishments for misbehavior and further perpetuate racial disproportionality have persisted.[19]

Zero-Tolerance Policies

A "zero-tolerance" approach mandates consequences (typically exclusionary) for certain student behaviors.[20] Advocates of this approach argue that it is "neutral" by mandating the same consequences for the same infractions, regardless of the student.[21] Proponents also believe that such policies send a clear message for behavioral expectations and that they protect students from dangers like drugs and violence.[22] The zero-tolerance concept is based on deterrence theory which suggests that the existence of strong punishments discourages potential violators from committing infractions.[23] Opponents argue that such policies are overly harsh or punitive,[24] disproportionately harm Black and Latinx students,[25] and run counter to the developmental needs of students for authoritative rather than authoritarian structure.[26]

Atkinson (2005) dates zero-tolerance policies back to the 1980s with the federal enforcement of "zero-tolerance" when addressing issues related to drug use and abuse. By the end of the decade, these policies had made their way into education with school districts in California, Kentucky, and New York mandating expulsion for fighting, drug use, and any gang-related activity. According to Curran (2016), zero-tolerance policies became more popular in the 1990s partly in response to the federal Gun-Free Schools Act (GFSA) of 1994. GFSA mandated that in order to qualify for federal funding, states had to enact laws requiring that students be expelled if they brought firearms to schools. Virginia was one of the

first states to enact a mandatory expulsion law.[27] As of 2013, all states except for Massachusetts and Hawaii mandate expulsion for bringing a weapon to school. Zero tolerance policies often also set minimum suspension requirements for assault and drug-related offenses.[28]

Curran (2016) showed that such laws often increased the rate of exclusionary discipline (suspension and expulsion) without consistent evidence of the reduction of the unwanted behaviors. A fixed-effect model using a national sample found that the presence of state-mandated expulsion laws, especially those that mandate expulsion for assault- and weapons-related infractions, were predictive of increased use of exclusionary discipline. Furthermore, even though more students were being suspended under those policies, principals did not perceive a decrease in the presence of problem behaviors. Additionally, the more Black students there were in a district under state zero tolerance laws, the greater the proportion of suspensions there were. In the meantime, higher numbers of White students in a school district was associated with fewer suspensions for White students relative to Black or Latinx students. However, as the proportion of Latinx students increased, the number of suspensions decreased. The presence of zero-tolerance policies only impacted a small percentage of the Black-White suspension gap, but that they nevertheless exacerbated an already pervasive problem.

The increased number of suspensions and expulsions under zero-tolerance and corporal punishment models appears to undermine their goal of deterring student misbehavior. Although many American schools continue to implement zero-tolerance policies and other disciplinary approaches grounded in escalating punishment for misbehavior,[29] there is increasing evidence that such approaches tend to not reduce disciplinary infractions overall,[30] and that they exacerbate issues of racial disproportionality.[31] An earlier MERC research brief explores this further.[32]

18 Anderson, 2015

19 Atkinson, 2005

20 Curran, 2016

21 Atkinson, 2005

22 Curran, 2016

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

25 Hoffman, 2014

26 Gregory & Cornell, 2009

27 Curran, 2016

28 Atkinson, 2005

29 Evans & Lester, 2012

30 Curran, 2016

31 Eitle & Eitle, 2004

32 Tefera, Siegel-Hawley, & Levy, 2017

CURRENT ALTERNATIVE DISCIPLINE MODELS

School systems across the country are rethinking their approaches to discipline and shifting away from deterrent theory-based punitive approaches to recognizing a need to consider contextual elements in students' backgrounds when navigating behavioral interventions and reinforce positive student behavior. This includes considerations of students' cultures and potential exposure to trauma, particularly in areas of concentrated poverty.[33] These approaches tend to be more holistic, educational, and proactive. Four are profiled in this brief: Trauma-Informed Care (TIC), Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), Restorative Practices (RPs) and Culturally Relevant Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (CRPBIS).

Trauma-Informed Care (TIC)

Exposure to stress and trauma often impairs students' emotional regulation and executive functioning, and tends to be more prevalent in low-income, urban communities.[34] Nearly half of U.S. children have had at least one adverse traumatic childhood experience, including economic hardship, parental divorce, witnessing or being the victim of violence, and living with someone suffering from drug or alcohol addiction.[35] Bath (2008) describes the two types of trauma commonly described in the literature: type 1 (acute), which involves exposure to one traumatizing event; and type 2 (complex, developmental, or relationship), which occurs after long-term exposure to traumatizing events.

According to Nelson and Sheridan (2011) trauma can alter the cognitive functioning of students exposed to it, with implications for amygdala and hippocampal functioning and the production of glucocorticoids, a form of cortisol associated with the brain's reaction to stress. After being exposed to violence or dangerous situations, some children will develop symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which include experiencing anew feelings of terror and helplessness, avoidance of reminders of the

event, hyperarousal, hypervigilance, difficulties concentrating, and startling easily. The cognitive systems that students use to respond to stress can be permanently changed by exposure to trauma, requiring them to focus their immediate attention and energy on safety rather than on activities like school work. Complex trauma impacts children's trust of adults, attachment systems, affect regulation, dissociation, behavioral control, cognition, and self-concept.

Trauma Informed Care in Virginia

The Greater Richmond Trauma Informed Community Network (TICN) brings together professionals from schools, government and civic agencies, businesses, and nonprofits to support trauma-informed care for youth in metropolitan Richmond. The group provides resources and training from the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) Connection Network for local schools and agencies to help advocate for trauma-informed practices. They accomplish this through presentations and education sessions on TIC for practitioners working with youth, administering surveys to staff and clients exploring the promotion of resilience, and providing evaluation support for assessing the incorporation of TIC into practice, among other services. Ultimately, TICN seeks to ensure that youth in central Virginia who experience trauma receive support from professionals versed in trauma-informed care, in and out of school. Additional information about ACES and TICN is available at **www.acesconnection.com.**

Trauma-informed care (TIC) takes into account experiences with trauma when addressing incidents of student misbehavior, with the intervening adult recognizing that some reactions may be coping mechanisms that students have developed.[36] The approach begins with listening to the needs of students adversely reacting to stressful events in school before moving immediately to imposing a consequence for their misbehavior.[37]

33 Nelson & Sheridan, 2011
34 Mendelson, Tandon, O'Brennan, Leaf, & Ialongo, 2015
35 Bethell, Newacheck, Hawes, & Halfon, 2014

36 Withers, 2017
37 e.g. Kolodner, 2015

The three main components of healing from trauma that educators can help facilitate are the development of feelings of safety, strong and healthy relationships, and self-regulation and coping skills.[38] Bath (2008) explained that traumatized children often have learned to distrust adults and avoid them or exhibit hostility towards them. Using a TIC approach, teachers and other care providers work to change this pattern so that children learn to make a distinction between threatening adults and non-threatening adults, and to associate positive emotions with at least some of those adults. Because so many children who have been exposed to trauma feel unsafe and have a compromised sense of trust, the first step in healing is the creation of a space that is consistent, reliable, predictable, available, honest, transparent, and where the child has some sense of autonomy. Many students express their pain by acting out, and many potential care providers in schools may respond punitively, which can lead to more pain. Hence, finding an appropriate non-punitive response is important. A common consequence of complex trauma is the inability to regulate emotions and impulses. The orbitofrontal cortex in the brain is the most vital to this function. It is also the most plastic, so it is possible to teach children who have been traumatized how to cope. Adults can help students calm themselves down and talk about what to do when they are experiencing an adverse reaction to stress. Although schools are not designated mental health facilities, they still contain adults in a position of providing care to youth who may come to school with issues related to trauma.[39]

The implementation of trauma-informed care has myriad demonstrated benefits for youth. Deblinger, Pollio, Runyun, and Steer (2017) found that participation in behavioral therapy focused on trauma was associated with significant improvements in resiliency, fewer symptoms of hypervigilance, and lower self-reported depression in children who had experienced sexual abuse. In a 2015 study, Azeem, Aujla, Rammerth, Binsfield, and Jones found that using such care with children and adolescents in a psychiatric facility led to a significant reduction in the number of behavioral episodes requiring restraint or seclusion. A 2015 pilot study by Mendelson and colleagues explored the impact of a trauma-informed, school-based intervention program with seventh and

eighth grade students in two low-income middle schools in urban settings. Researchers randomly assigned 49 students to either a treatment group receiving the intervention of cognitive behavioral therapy and mindfulness training or a control group receiving regular academic programming. Students in the intervention group demonstrated higher teacher-reported emotional regulation, better classroom behavior, and social and academic competence.

Weist-Stevenson and Lee (2016) outlined the components of an effective trauma-informed school model (TISM). In a TISM, administrators establish a school-wide plan for working with students struggling with trauma, including identification of key personnel to assist in counseling, security, and ongoing professional development (PD) for staff related to TIC. Additionally, administrators model how to interact with students impacted by trauma and continue to communicate the details of why and how the school takes this approach to discipline. Teachers in a TISM build coping techniques into their curriculum, including deep breathing and taking time out to regroup, and set up a warm and welcoming classroom environment. Working with students exposed to trauma includes maintaining a sense of normalcy and routine, providing time and space for students to process their trauma, paying attention to signs of adverse behaviors that may require referral to counselors and other supports in the school (if available). While the trauma informed approach to student intervention is still developing, evidence thus far of its effectiveness in and outside of school settings appears promising for better supporting students exposed to trauma, many of whom are low income and students of color.[40]

Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS)

Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is a tiered model of behavioral support that focuses on the organization and culture of the school as well as on the behavior of students.[41] PBIS has been implemented in over 20,000 schools since the year 2000, and was the only behavioral intervention

38 Bath (2008)
39 Resler, 2017

40 Mendelson et al., 2015
41 Bal, Thorius, & Kosleski,2012; Bal, Kosleski, Schrader, Ro-driguez, & Pelton, 2014

approach specifically mentioned in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) of 2004.[42] According to the Technical Assistance Center on PBIS supports, funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), the intention of PBIS is to improve social, emotional, and academic outcomes for all students.[43] School communities, including parents, students, and educators, are meant to come up with a shared understanding of expected behaviors that students will be explicitly taught, and then practice with consistent reminders from supporting adults. Tier one supports are for the entire school population. Tier two supports, which include Functional Behavioral Analysis (FBA), are small-group interventions. Tier three is for individual students who are not responsive to tier two supports and include more highly specialized interventions undertaken by a team of educators, including teachers, school psychologists, and counselors. The interventions are in part informed by data, such as rates of office discipline referrals (ODRs), the locations of incidents, students and staff members involved, attendance records, suspensions, and academic outcomes.

School-wide implementation (SWPBIS) involves teaching behavioral expectations just as students may learn any other core subject in school. When implemented at the school-district level, district leaders take part in a training designed to orient them to the philosophy and approach of PBIS. Those leaders then provide PD for representatives from each school who train staff and prepare to work with students using this intervention. Typically, schools begin by setting expectations for positive behavior that are related and easy for students to remember, such as "Respect Yourself, Respect Others, and Respect Property."[44] PBIS leadership teams within each school, comprised of teachers, administrators, counselors, and other school employees, develop a list of examples for how these expectations may look in different settings within the school.[45] For example, it may be a school-wide expectation for students to clean up after themselves in the cafeteria, keep their hands and feet to themselves on the bus, and throw away all used paper towels in bathrooms. Teachers then work with their students to develop lists of specific behavioral expectations within their own classrooms. SWPBIS teams develop a structure for what behaviors merit ODRs and which should be handled within the classroom. What distinguishes PBIS from discipline approaches that focus primarily on consequences for misbehavior is the emphasis on rewarding positive behavior in students. This includes "catching" students engaging in positive behavior and offering praise or some sort of reward, including sending home positive or drawings at school for prizes.

Implementation of PBIS in schools is increasingly prevalent and has been associated with positive outcomes for staff and students.[46] Bradshaw, Waadsorp, and Leaf (2015) conducted a randomized control trial of 37 elementary schools, in which 21 were assigned to a SWPBIS intervention and the other 16 served as a comparison group. Researchers collected social-emotional data on students within each school and then conducted a latent profile analysis (LPA) to determine which classrooms were most "at-risk" for behavioral issues based on the mean scores of students compared across classrooms. Students in the higher risk SWBIS classrooms received the most apparent behavioral benefit, as they had significantly fewer disciplinary referrals over time than students did in higher risk classrooms in the comparison schools. Additional research has shown that implementation of PBIS has also shown to be effective in reducing incidences of bullying,[47] and that following a SWPBIS program with high fidelity is associated with increased standardized test scores and perceptions of safety by students.[48]

Historically, the majority of evidence about the effectiveness of PBIS has come from elementary and middle schools, but recent research by Bradshaw, Debnam, and Johnson (2015) explored its implementation at the high school level. They studied 58 high schools with 31 randomly assigned to implement SWPBIS, and found that increasing fidelity in implementation was associated with fewer incidents of bullying. Rewards for good behavior were decided upon locally at each school. These were often simple reinforcement through words of encouragement or high fives. The authors plan to further explore their

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42 Bal et al., 2014

43 www.PBIS.org, 2018
44 "SWPBIS for Beginners," www.PBIS.org, 2018
45 Everett, Sugai, Fallon, Simonsen, & O'Keeffe, 2011

46 Bradshaw, Koth, Thornton, & Leaf, 2009
47 Waasdorp, Bradshaw, & Leaf, 2012
48 Horner et al., 2009

data to better understand the relationship between SWPBIS implementation and academic and other behavioral student outcomes. More studies are needed exploring the effectiveness of PBIS, particularly at the high school level.

PBIS in Virginia

Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS) is a "framework that promotes school improvement through research-based academic and behavioral practices."[1] It is a tiered approach combining PBIS with Response to Intervention (RTI) – a framework for identifying and supporting students with learning and behavioral needs.[2] This team-based approach includes PD, evidence-based strategies, culturally relevant implementation, frequent and continuous progress monitoring, and data-based decision making.[3] Locally, this approach is applied via the **Virginia Tiered Systems of Supports (VTSS),** a framework for making decisions about how to best support students in their academic, behavioral, and social-emotional needs.[4] According to the VTSS website, 397 schools in 40 divisions currently are implementing the program. It emphasizes an aligned organizational structure, data-driven decision making, evidence-based practice, family, school, and community partnership, monitoring student proress, and evaluating outcomes. In 2017, VTSS provided 35 statewide professional learning events for more than 2,900 educators, as well as ongoing PD and technical assistance for participating school divisions.[5] To date, Virginia schools that implement VTSS have seen an average 37% decrease in referrals, a 46% decrease in in-school suspensions, and a 21% decrease in out-of-school suspensions, and the greater fidelity to PBIS implementation, the fewer disciplinary referrals there are.[6]

1 Langberg & Colfi, 2016, p. 3
2 Langberg & Colfi, 2016
3 www.pbis.org
4 www.vtss-ric.org
5 VTSS Annual Report, 2018
6 Langberg & Colfi, 2016

Culturally Relevant Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (CRPBIS)

While PBIS has been successful in reducing exclusionary discipline practices and disciplinary incidents and referrals overall, some concerns about racial disproportionality remain. As explained in Bal et al. (2014), PBIS was originally developed in suburban "dominant culture" (majority White and affluent) schools; hence, its cultural context is often narrowly defined and excludes the culture of non-dominant groups. PBIS literature generally does not offer guidance on how to include the culture and context of the schools where it is being implemented, or how to include families and community members. Furthermore, PBIS is not culture-free or culturally neutral because educators and students will bring their different perspectives to bear in interactions. Although all stakeholders are supposed to be involved in the PBIS process, families of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students, who are often overrepresented in ODRs at schools implementing PBIS, are not often part of implementation. The 2017 Condition of Education report from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) emphasized how American public schools are growing increasingly racially and culturally diverse, with White students dropping from 58% of the total public school population in 2004 to 50% in 2014. During that same time, the Latinx student population increased from 19% to 25%. Culturally Relevant Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (CRPBIS) developed in consideration of this trend and the aforementioned limitations of PBIS.

The CRPBIS process first specifies examining the "long-lasting cultural assumptions in the U.S. education system that are reproduced, shaping school climate, rituals, and routines" and then seek to engage students, families, and community members of non-dominant groups.[49] According to Bal et al. (2012), there are four principal components of CRPBIS. The first involves a shift from teaching desired behaviors to creating opportunities to learn, which includes finding out and then teaching to students' strengths, interests, and preferences. Second is a focus on treating students' cultural backgrounds as contextual mediators which means finding patterns

49 Bal et al., 2012, p. 6

in data that tell members of school communities more about how students and educators are interacting. Studying those interactions may uncover different perspectives on what constitutes desirable and undesirable behavior. Third is an emphasis on building from local fairness to global justice, which involves "mobilization and maintenance of grassroots and justice-oriented social movements to support systemic transformation efforts in schools."[50] Finally, there is a focus on student, family, and community empowerment rather than cultural assimilation. This means expectations of behavior do not come solely from educators, but also from families and the community that the school serves. The five stages in the CRPBIS framework include: 1) forming CRPBIS "Learning Labs," where all school community members and stakeholders come together to reflect on current patterns and to take action towards making changes; 2) determining desired outcomes of CRPBIS, which involves a shared defining among all students of expectations, consequences, and support procedures for behavior; 3) understanding cultural mediation and implementing culturally responsive practices; 4) using data for continuous improvement and innovation; and, 5) ongoing systemic transformation.

In a 2014 study, Bal et al. (2014) explored the implementation of a "Learning Lab" in a Wisconsin elementary school with a student body that was 85% White, 6% Black, and 4% Latinx. Participants in the lab included the school principal, 16 school staff members, 13 family members of students, a non-profit representative from the community, and five researchers. School personnel and researchers intentionally recruited a racially diverse cross-section of parents to participate. The group met monthly for a year to identify and discuss issues related to racial disproportionality in discipline at their school. At first they struggled with adhering to the power dynamics reflected in the school, but as the Learning Lab developed, they began to trust one another and be more receptive to one another's perspectives. Providing stakeholders with data demonstrating racial disproportionality at the school, district, and state levels shifted the conversations to addressing the larger historical and political context. By the end, members of the group said they found the experience helpful and productive and that they wished to

continue with it in the future. Prioritizing diverse perspectives and cultural responsiveness through learning labs can help maximize the demonstrated potential benefits of PBIS.

Restorative Practices (RPs)

Restorative Practices (RPs) involve the coming together of those affected by an incident to discuss their experiences as well as how to address the harm with an emphasis on mending relationships.[51] The International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP) cites its origins in restorative justice, which originated in the 1970s as a method of reconciliation between victims and offenders.[52] Offenders are held accountable for their actions through face-to-face reconciliation, promoting restoration rather than simply punishing behavior.[53] Over time, the approach evolved into an intentional effort in criminal justice to keep youth out of the court system by mediating conflict through conferences, often involving the families of both victims and offenders to help maintain a balance of power in the conversation and set the stage for collaborative effort toward addressing problematic behavior. The IIRP was established in 1999 and seeks to promote RPs in contexts beyond the criminal justice system. Restorative practices are now commonly adopted in social work, counseling, youth services, and educational settings.

According to Anyon (2016), restorative practices came out of a recognition that purely punitive school discipline is often not very effective and tends to disproportionately impact students of color. As explained by Gregory, Clawson, Davis, and Gerewitz (2016), RPs in schools similarly focus on preventative action, community building, strengthening social connections, shared ownership of learning spaces, student engagement, providing explanations, and developing shared understandings of expectations and consequences for behaviors. Proponents of the approach tout its capacity for addressing issues initially too minor to merit suspension that may compound into more severe infractions in the future. Minor infractions are addressed in circles of school community members while more serious infractions are addressed using conferences with the goal of

50 (p. 7)

51 Gregory, Clawson, Davis, & Gerewitz, 2016
52 Watchell, 2016
53 Costello, Watchel, & Watchell (2009)

reintegrating the offender into the school community. While educators are still "authorities," their authoritative position centers on fairness and trust. RPs provide an alternative that centers on dialogue with the goal of getting to the underlying causes for student behavior, with students and adults developing a plan for learning from mistakes.

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Restorative Practices in Virginia

Alexandria City Public Schools use restorative practices as a method of addressing student behavior. They accomplish this through "community circles," where students process grievances and use conflict as an opportunity for learning and connection between students and faculty. According to the school system website, this approach has contributed to a reduction in out-of-school suspensions while also offering students an opportunity to develop social skills like listening and collaborative problem solving.[1] **Fairfax County** established a similar RP program in 2011 in response to Fairfax Zero Tolerance Reform, a group of parents, educators, and students who were concerned about the disparate outcomes experienced by students of color.[2] The program focuses on holding students accountable to those they have harmed through direct conversations, helping student to develop social skills and decision-making strategies, and ensuring school and community safety by promoting personal responsibility rather than just punishment for wrongdoing.[3]

1 https://www.acps.k12.va.us/Page/2140
2 Wachtel, 2013
3 https://www.fcps.edu/resources/student-safety-wellness/restorative-justice

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Implementation of RPs has proven effective in reducing suspensions, expulsions, and disciplinary referrals while increasing academic achievement in a variety of settings.[54] Results of a 2016 study by Gregory et al. of two high schools implementing RPs indicated that this approach works to reduce disproportionate discipline rates. Collectively, these schools served student bodies that were approximately 54% White, 21% Latinx, and 11%

54 Losen, Hewitt, and Toldson, 2014

Black. Student reports of higher levels of RP implementation were associated with lower numbers of misconduct or defiance referrals for Latinx and Black students. When students (of all racial/ethnic groups) reported greater implementation of RP elements, they were more likely to see those teachers as more respectful. Higher implementation of RPs, as reported by students, was also associated with lower issuance of misconduct/ defiance referrals. The International Institute of Restorative Practices advocates that the benefits seen by RPs in schools tend to come from students feeling like authority figures are doing things "*with* them, rather than *to* them or *for* them" (original emphasis).[55]

EFFECTIVELY IMPLEMENTING ALTERNATIVE DISCIPLINE APPROACHES

Alternative disciplinary approaches present opportunities to improve school climate, reduce the frequency of overall disciplinary infractions, and address racial gaps in suspensions and expulsions. Although shifting to an alternative discipline program comes with challenges, the literature presents common elements that should facilitate successful transition and implementation. These include re-examination of existing discipline codes, providing adequate support at the district level, targeted and ongoing professional development, increasing diversity in the teaching workforce, and cultivation of strong relationships in the school community.

Re-examining Existing Discipline Codes

An important step in instituting alternative discipline approaches that may help to decrease disparate discipline rates is a re-examination of existing discipline codes that determine how schools administer consequences for misbehavior.[56] Thoughtful revision of discipline systems and codes is crucial, as is involving school stakeholders in the process to produce shared definitions and then communicating the changes and expectations along with modeling them.[57] Since Black students are more

55 www.iirp.edu, 2018
56 Bal et al., 2012
57 Ibid.

often disciplined—and then given harsher exclusionary consequences—for milder infractions such as dress code violations and disrespect, it is important when revising codes to draw distinctions between minor and major infractions.[58] Finally, following training, PD, and collaboration with stakeholders, it is vital to implement a system for documenting and monitoring interventions so that codes and practices can then be studied and modified with a mind towards improvement.[59] Care should be taken so that information entered into data collection systems does not result in future stigmatization of students.[60]

Anyon (2016) looked at three schools in Denver with diverse student populations serving different grade levels that had been selected by the Denver School-Based Restorative Practices Partnership (DSBRPP) as models for implementing restorative practices. In the schools where alternative discipline models were successfully implemented, minor infractions that were repeated several times and not resolved by classroom-based interventions were eventually referred to administration.[61] Automatic out of school suspensions were made only for major infractions such as drug possession, serious assault, weapons possession, and highly disruptive behaviors that interfered with instruction. Even when a disciplinary referral was made to the school office, administrators "first attempted to engage the student in a restorative dialogue to understand the context of the discipline incident and the young person's willingness to accept responsibility."[62] The philosophy of this approach is that out-of-school suspensions should be used only as a last resort; however, viable alternatives to them need to be created.[63]

Providing Adequate Support

Support from districts and school leaders for alternative discipline approaches is just as important as choosing to change the approach in the first place. It is critical that district leaders receive sufficient training in the new approach and that they clearly

communicate their endorsement of the program to help elicit buy in from faculty and staff who will ultimately implement it.[64] Educators can be caught in a "double bind" scenario when they have to deal immediately with discipline issues and might lean on previous approaches but still want to address disproportionality through alternative programs like PBIS.[65] Receiving clear and adequate support can help reduce such a conflict if the educator knows the rationale for the program and the impact district leaders expect it to have. This may be particularly true when the new approach to discipline contrasts greatly with a previous one, like zero tolerance.[66]

Challenges with implementation may precipitate a response to get stricter about fidelity. However, this often means overlooking the unique contexts of individual schools.[67] According to Anyon (2016), school leaders must solicit feedback, listen to staff, and target PD accordingly. Additionally, it is key to staff schools with full-time alternative discipline coordinators who build relationships with all students, facilitate mediations, follow up on repair agreements, and provide training and coaching to staff. If teachers or staff members need an exception to processes like restorative practices, for example when a student's disciplinary infraction feels particularly severe, it is important that they receive the desired support. Finally, students need support; forming interdisciplinary student behavior teams that meet regularly to discuss their school's approach to discipline could prove a beneficial starting place.[68]

Intensive, Continual, Hands-on Professional Development

Intensive, continual, hands-on professional development for administrators, teachers, and staff that includes training in alternative discipline models and that is coupled with coaching in the classroom are vital to implementing these alternative models with fidelity and to sustain their use.[69] In the schools Anyon (2016) studied, PD sessions were usually hands on and included time for reflection and feedback,

58 Gregory et al., 2016

59 Bal et al., 2012; Bal et al., 2014; Gregory et al., 2016

60 Anyon, 2016

61 Ibid.

62 p. 6

63 Anyon, 2016

64 www.pbis.org

65 Bal et al., 2014

66 Gregory et al., 2014

67 Bal et al., 2014

68 Anyon, 2016

69 Gregory et al., 2010; Gregory et al., 2016; Townsend, 2000

case studies, modeling of strategies, and role-playing. In these sessions, participants had an opportunity to explore their own practices for potential evidence of biases and were also provided with tools to implement what they learned in their schools. Individuals who led the PD sessions often had experience working with high-need student populations and remained available for consultation after the sessions ended. Gregory et al. (2016) found that intensive training on RPs followed up with feedback around implementation was crucial to ensuring that the PD was useful.

It is vital that professional development should include sessions on culturally competent teaching that address the racial dynamics and bias that often underlie racially disparate disciplinary outcomes.[70] In a 2011 mixed-method study, Savage and colleagues evaluated the impact of professional development for teachers centered on culturally-responsive pedagogy and teaching to the cultural strengths of diverse student groups. The PD focused on sharing narratives from students who explained how they experienced school and teachers were asked to critically reflect on their own practice in light of these perspectives. Researchers conducted systematic observations in over 400 classrooms at 32 schools and found that the majority of participating teachers demonstrated increased cultural responsiveness in their practice, and that their students tended to profess a higher sense of feeling cared for by their teachers.

According to Lee, Luykx, Buxton, and Shaver (2007), there can be some common challenges associated with implementing this type of PD. First, efforts to address some of the underlying assumptions or biases that school personnel may have about particular student groups in PD may be met with resistance. Second, because of the sensitive nature of the training, it may be necessary to conduct the sessions with smaller groups of faculty rather than as a whole. Third, it can be difficult to find culturally relevant educational materials, as the push for culturally responsive pedagogy is somewhat recent. Finally, it may be easy to elicit buy-in from faculty who already seek to be cognizant of students' cultures, but difficult to reach those who see it as less of a priority. The authors recommend starting with a smaller group of committed faculty and then having them assist with

PD efforts. In a similar study, Wiseman and Fox (2010) found that teachers participating in this type of PD sometimes maintained a deficit orientation when talking about the "values" and "work ethic" of their students, advocating that students needed to adapt to the culture established in the classroom rather than be supported in having their own acknowledged.[71] Many also felt that the training proved cumbersome on top of an already considerable workload, especially if they did not deem it as relevant to their work.

Increasing Diversity of Teachers and Administrators to Match Enrollment

Another strategy for reducing disparate discipline outcomes is to increase diversity of teachers and administrators to match enrollment.[72] The overall K-12 student population in America is rapidly diversifying, yet the teaching force is predominately White and female.[73] This potential for cultural mismatch has led to an increasing need for PD for teachers regarding teaching diverse student groups, as well as for the recruitment of more teachers of color.[74] A study by Wright (2015) examined whether a teacher's race impacts his or her perception of students' disruptive behavior and whether that impacts suspension rates. The author found that African-American students with same-race teachers were rated as less disruptive as those with different-race teachers even though perceptions of White and Latinx students' disruptiveness were not impacted by having a same-race teacher. Furthermore, African-American students with more African-American teachers were suspended less often. A 30 percentage point increase in exposure to African-American teachers was associated with a 10.5-14.0 percentage point reduction in the probability of being suspended by eighth grade. Wright predicted that "doubling the exposure of African American students to African-American teachers (from 30% to 60% of the time) would shrink the black-white suspension gap by 44-59%."[75]

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70 Bal et al., 2012; Anyon, 2016; Gregory et al., 2016; Townsend, 2000

71 p. 34
72 Eitle & Eitle, 2004; Starz, 2016
73 Goldring, R., Gray, L., & Bitterman, A., 2013
74 Brown, 2016
75 p. 4

Cultivating Strong Relationships within the School Community

Underlying successful implementation of alternative discipline practices are strong relationships within the school community, which need to be deliberately cultivated, especially between educators and students.[76] Educators should try to emphasize student successes and foster positive school experiences.[77] While discipline needs to be applied justly and fairly, students committing infractions must be approached as individuals who are part of a particular context and environment.[78] Furthermore, empathetic mindsets on the part of teachers can strengthen these relationships and mitigate exclusionary discipline practices.[79]

In a qualitative study, Warren (2013) explored the interactions of four white female teachers with their black students, and found that an empathetic approach edified and broadened teachers' capacity to take risks and to employ more culturally responsive teaching strategies. This also helped to strengthen trust between teachers and students, giving teachers more tools towards employing positive interventions with those students who were struggling. In a related study, Okonofua, Pauneskua, and Walton (2016) showed that students whose math teachers received an "empathic-mindset intervention" were half as likely to be suspended over the school year (4.8%) as students of control group teachers (9.6%).[80] Suspensions decreased school wide, not just from incidents with math teachers. Students with histories of suspensions were more likely to feel respected by their teachers when they had experienced the empathetic mindset treatment versus when there was no intervention. Taken together, these studies suggest there is a meaningful connection between teacher-student relationships and disciplinary outcomes. An imperative step in developing a culturally responsive and locally relevant discipline approaches is organized collaboration between school personnel, parents, and students.[81]

CONCLUSION

A thoughtful approach to student discipline is vital for any school to thrive. Although outcomes are associated with the students themselves, the successful structuring and implementation of a discipline model requires the contributions of many stakeholders. Moreover, how schools and districts address discipline may exacerbate or reduce issues related to racial disproportionality. The alternative approaches outlined in this literature brief seek to reduce exclusionary practices in school discipline and address disparate outcomes experienced by Black and Latinx students. Effective implementation of these models requires myriad considerations, including the provision of sufficient support at the district and school leadership level, offering relevant professional development and training that explicitly addresses racial bias, and being willing to re-evaluate previous approaches that may have not produced desirable outcomes, particularly for students of color. An authoritative and contextually cognizant school discipline model provides structure and safety while ensuring that the needs of diverse students are taken into consideration. The alternative approaches described here have increasingly proven effective in reducing the overall number of exclusionary discipline outcomes and in addressing corresponding racial disproportionality that tends to accompany more punitive models.

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76 Bath, 2008; Gregory et al., 2010; Gregory et al., 2016; Okono-fua et al., 2016; Warren, 2013

77 Bal et al., 2012; Gregory et al., 2010

78 Anyon, 2016

79 Gregory et al., 2010

80 p. 5223

81 Bal et al., 2012; Bal et al., 2014; Gregory et al., 2016

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