

**FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE DIFFERENCES IN SUSPENSIONS AND  
EXPULSIONS IN RURAL VERSUS METROPOLITAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

By

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August 2021

## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife, Kelly, for her untiring support of my educational journey. This is dedicated to my children and grandchildren to serve as inspiration for their continued education. This is dedicated to my mother, Dollie, for providing me a life filled with hope, faith, and belief. This is dedicated to my brother and sister, who always encourage me to reach higher.

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## **Abstract**

The problems addressed in this dissertation were about the differences in the number of suspensions and expulsions across secondary schools in the Commonwealth of Kentucky. The purpose of this quantitative study was to investigate a large sample of rural, independent, metropolitan, and micropolitan schools to see how exclusionary discipline differed between ethnicity/race, gender, school classification, and school diversity groups. The questions were addressed through an analysis of discipline data from the Kentucky Department of Education Safe Schools Report for the academic years 2017-18 and 2018-19. Critical race theory (CRT) and racialized organization theory served as theoretical frameworks for this study. The findings from the examination of the sampling of suspensions and expulsions data revealed that European American students were suspended and expelled at higher averages than any other ethnic/racial group. Once extreme outlier schools were excluded, European American students averaged 130 suspensions and expulsions. In addition, the results found that an average of 115 male students were suspended and expelled which is 2.5 times higher than the rate for female students. When analyzing exclusionary discipline according to the school classification, results revealed, on average, more students are suspended and expelled from metropolitan schools. Finally, an analysis of diverse schools versus schools that lack diversity found that diverse school have higher averages of suspensions and expulsions. This study confirms and highlights that male students are subjected to exclusionary discipline at greater rates than female students. In addition, metropolitan and diverse schools have more suspensions and expulsions than other comparable groups.

Keywords: exclusionary discipline, disciplinary practices, disciplinary policies, zero-tolerance, discipline gap, critical race theory, racialized organization theory

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## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction**

Research and implementation of effective school practices suggest that a safe school environment promotes student achievement (Bear, 2008; Kutsyruba et al., 2015). Schools have an obligation to alleviate physical harm and other disruptive behaviors that hinder student learning. Successful school discipline improves instructional practices and ensures school safety. Creating a successful and productive educational environment depends upon the ability to sustain a safe school (The Wallace Foundation, 2013). To achieve this, school districts must establish and enforce discipline policies that promote structure and safety. Kentucky Department of Education (2019a, 2019b) described out-of-school suspensions and expulsions as exclusionary discipline actions that are reserved for acts of incorrigible conduct on school property or at school-sponsored activities.

Disruptive behaviors such as fighting, possession of deadly weapons, and sexual assault are considered safety violations. Behaviors such as insubordination, cheating, and offensive language violate the school order; thus, they are considered disorderly conduct. The punishments for safety violations and disorderly conduct should not be handled in the same manner. Nonetheless, many school systems often punish these two types of behaviors with the same approach causing suspension and expulsion rates to dramatically increase (Losen & Gillespie, 2012). Research suggests that suspensions and expulsions do not effectively discourage inappropriate behavior nor encourage appropriate behavior (Massar et al., 2015). In most cases, during the time a student is suspended or expelled from school, there are no implemented procedures to teach corrective behavior, which leads to future misbehavior.

Punishing students with the exclusionary practices of out-of-school suspensions and expulsions lead to other adverse outcomes for the student and the school culture (Fernandez-Suarez et al., 2016; Monahan et al., 2014; National Center for Education Statistics, 2019; Noltemeyer et al., 2015; United States Commission on Civil Rights, 2019). It is critical for schools to reduce the need and use of these punishments. More importantly, schools should improve their discipline policies to mitigate disproportionate rates among students in marginalized groups. Although these policies are intended to respond to threatening situations considered detrimental to student safety, marginalized students are often suspended for behaviors that are considered disruptive (Gregory et al., 2015). Losen and Skiba (2010) referred to the increased racial gap in student suspensions more than doubled over the last 33 years. Further research indicated a continued disparity in these forms of punishment for students of color, although they are less likely to engage in behaviors that require removal from school, as compared to their European American counterparts (Englehart, 2014; Kalogrides & Loeb, 2013; Lynn et al., 2010).

The present study expands upon a growing body of research on exclusionary discipline practices and their adverse effects on education. This study employs archival data to investigate factors that are important in determining the likelihood of students being suspended or expelled in Kentucky's rural, independent, metropolitan, and micropolitan secondary schools. This study also investigates disproportionality in severe student punishment across ethnic and racial groups as opposed to focusing on African American students. Additionally, this study investigates the comparison of male and female students being suspended or expelled from school. The need for educational reform to improve school curriculum, school budget, and school personnel have led to the implementation of decision-making at the school level. All stakeholders in education are

affected by the decisions that are made. A primary goal of decision-making is that individuals who are directly affected and have the responsibility of implementing these decisions become a part of making the decisions. Based on this concept, decision-making shifted from the district-level to the school-level. The Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990 mandated the implementation of School-Based Decision-Making (SBDM) Councils as a part of the Kentucky Revised Statutes §160.345. The SBDM Councils are tasked with establishing the schools discipline policy (Kentucky Department of Education, 2015). The primary theoretical framework that guides this study is the critical race theory (CRT).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Monahan et al. (2014) concluded that there has been a continuous increase in suspensions and expulsions as a punishment due to school policies. Schools often cite suspension and expulsion as a means of maintaining safe learning environments (Rafa, 2018). These forms of discipline have severe consequences, as research suggests suspensions and expulsions reduce student achievement while increasing the probability of student dropout and criminal activity (Rafa, 2018). These policies tend to affect students of color and students with disabilities more than European American students. A review of data shows that it is more probable for minority students to be suspended from school (Morris & Perry, 2016). According to the recent Civil Rights Data Collection, African American students accounted for the highest percentage of out-of-school suspensions and expulsions (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). As in national data, African Americans are overrepresented in the frequency and duration of suspension and expulsions in Kentucky (Kentucky Department of Education, 2019a, 2019b).

### **Purpose of the Study**

While much research has been conducted encompassing the disproportionality of discipline, the purpose of this study was to determine the factors that were important in predicting the suspensions and expulsions of high school students in rural, independent, metropolitan, and micropolitan schools in Kentucky. The study used data pertaining to gender and ethnicity. Due to the rising numbers of Hispanic students, research suggests broadening the focus to other subgroups other than African Americans to examine disparities (Welsh & Little, 2018).

### **Significance of the Study**

The use of suspensions and expulsions has been disproportionately applied to specific groups of students (Noltemeyer et al., 2015). These forms of discipline have severe consequences, as research suggested suspensions and expulsions reduce student achievement while increasing the probability of student dropout and criminal activity (Rafa, 2018). If research can provide evidence that there is a direct relationship between the punitive process of underrepresented students and the factors that initiate the punishment, then school systems should be obligated to review and change the disciplinary strategies that highlight these factors.

The theories being used to guide the investigation in this study will be CRT and racialized organization theory (ROT). The disciplinary actions of suspensions and expulsions are components of school policies that seek to maintain good behavior. However, these policies continue to be enforced disproportionately based on the formation of social categories (Allen, 2015; Neal, 2017; Ray, 2019; Simpson, 2014). Several factors that lead to exclusionary punishment, such as suspensions and expulsions from school, fall under the concept of the social construction of race (Crenshaw et al., 2015; DeMatthews, 2016; Nguyen et al., 2019). This

concept outlines a basic assumption of CRT and tenets of ROT (Ray, 2019; Sleeter, 2016; Tichavakunda, 2019).

### **Research Population**

This study examined student factors and school factors that were likely to lead to a student being suspended or expelled from school. The study will use archival data from 196 high schools in the Commonwealth of Kentucky. The schools were from different areas of population, socioeconomic backgrounds, and levels of diversity. All data was retrieved from the Kentucky Department of Education's Safe Schools Report Cards.

### **Delimitations**

The research data were delimited to schools in the Commonwealth of Kentucky. Because of the population, policies, and setting, the study results cannot be readily generalized to schools and school districts in other states. However, the population sample allowed results to be generalized to similar secondary schools in the Commonwealth of Kentucky. Any school that had an 8% or more collective student enrollment rate for underrepresented student groups was considered a diverse school. The diversity rate was based on the mandate by the Kentucky Department of Education (2015) that all schools with an enrollment for minority students that meets or exceeds 8% must have a minority representative on the SBDM Council.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Research shows that many factors, including gender, environmental issues, criminal activity, academic success or failure, and teacher cultural understanding, are essential in determining the level of punishment administered to students (Daly, 2013; Losen et al., 2014; Lynn et al., 2010; Morris & Perry, 2016; Neal, 2017). However, graduation rates, student achievement, criminal activity, teacher responsiveness, or student dropout rates were not

analyzed in this study. Although the excluded factors are essential to analyze the adverse effects of exclusionary discipline practices, the identified limitations to this study helped recognize some predictors of exclusionary discipline. This study analyzed ethnicity/race, gender, and school diversity with respect to student suspension and expulsion rates in rural, independent, metropolitan, and micropolitan Kentucky schools.

Another limitation to this study is the type of high school selected. To show exclusion, this study only compared rural, independent, metropolitan, and micropolitan district schools while excluding alternative, Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM), charter, and academy schools. This study included students who were enrolled in such schools within the Commonwealth of Kentucky during the 2017-18 and 2018-19 school years.

Native American, Alaska Native, and Hawaiian/Pacific Islander ethnic/racial groups were excluded in the analysis. The sample sizes for these groups were too small to ensure a representative distribution of the population, thereby making it difficult to generalize results for these ethnic/racial groups. Finally, this study analyzed the data by conducting three separate ANOVAs instead of one and the Welch's *t*-test. Conducting three analyses as opposed to one will only somewhat increase the experiment-wise error rate (alpha).

### **Definition of Key Terms**

1. Suspension: removal of a student from school for a set period (Kentucky Department of Education, 2020). Suspension refers to out-of-school suspension only.
2. Expulsion: punishment that prohibits a student from attending school for the remainder of the school year (Kentucky Department of Education, 2020).
3. High School (Secondary): a school that contains grades nine through twelve.
4. Underrepresented groups: racial groups that include African American, Hispanic/Latinx,

Asian, American Indian/Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and biracial students as identified by the Commonwealth of Kentucky (Kentucky Department of Education, 2020).

5. Discipline: a system of management tools schools uses through policies and rules to manage student behavior (Girvan et al., 2017). The Kentucky Department of Education (2020) refers to discipline as a student behavior resolution for a student behavior event.
6. Metropolitan: a Kentucky school district that contains a core urban area of 50,000 or more in population as defined by the United States Office of Management and Budget (Harrah, 2012).
7. Micropolitan: a Kentucky school district that contains a core urban area of at least 10,000 but less than 50,000 in population as defined by the United States Office of Management and Budget (Harrah, 2012).
8. Rural: a Kentucky school district that contains a core urban area of less than 10,000 in population as defined by the United States Office of Management and Budget (Harrah, 2012).
9. Independent: A Kentucky school district that is defined by historic boundaries within the county. Kentucky Independent School Districts are based on legislation that was passed in 1934 (Kentucky Legislative Research Commission, 2015).
10. School-Based Decision Making (SBDM) Council: A local school council consisting of one administrator, three teachers, and two parents that are responsible for developing and adopting school policies that align with the school district (Kentucky Department of Education, 2015). If the population of minority students are at least 8% of the school's total enrollment, the SBDM Council must have at least one minority member. In the

event the council exceeds the minimum value of 8% and does not have a minority representative, a minority teacher can be selected by the teachers within the school to serve on the council. If there are no minority teachers in the faculty, an additional teacher can be selected by the teachers within the school.

11. Minority: Kentucky Department of Education SBDM Council's classification for students and teachers that are American Indian, Alaskan Native, African American, Pacific Islander, Hispanic (Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, and Central or South American origin), and any other underrepresented ethnic group within the school (Kentucky Department of Education, 2015).
12. School Typology: a school that has a minority student enrollment of 8% or more is defined as a school with a diverse student body, any school that does not meet this criterion is considered a school that lacks diversity (Kentucky Department of Education, 2015).

## **Chapter II**

### **Review of Literature**

Suspensions and expulsions are actions used by schools to reduce or prohibit student behavior ensuring school safety (Boccanfuso & Kuhfeld, 2011; Chiariello, 2013; Hemphill et al., 2012). An abundance of research indicated that these exclusionary practices do not work for their intended use. Instead, students are removed from the educational environment, ranging from a few days to an entire school year. These forms of discipline tend to limit or exclude students from learning (Kang-Brown et al., 2013; Kinsler, 2013). Other discipline options will address the issues and allow the student to remain in their learning environment. The use of suspensions and expulsions should be reserved for the most extreme student behaviors that pose an immediate threat (Anderson & Ritter, 2017; Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2016). Evidence has not shown that removing students from instruction with exclusionary discipline will improve student behavior nor school safety (Skiba, 2013; United States Department of Education; Office of Civil Rights, 2018). Finally, research suggested that certain groups of students continue to receive these levels of punishments even though their infractions were similar to other students who were not suspended or expelled (Anyon et al., 2017; Artiles et al., 2010; DeMatthews et al., 2017).

The purpose of this study was to explore factors that contribute to the exclusionary discipline practices of rural, independent, metropolitan, and micropolitan school districts in the Commonwealth of Kentucky. This chapter focuses on literature related to student suspension and expulsion trends, zero-tolerance policies, and disparities in rates of exclusionary discipline according to gender, racial group, and district demographics.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The disciplinary actions of suspension and expulsion are components of school policies that seek to maintain good behavior. However, these policies continue to be enforced disproportionately based on the formation of social categories (Anyon et al., 2017; Omi & Winant, 2015; Simpson, 2014). These social categories are often aligned with racial group designations in which the cultural standards that are set for marginalized groups are compared against European American standards giving the impression of having an inferior aptitude (Graham et al., 2011). This process tends to produce a dominant group with societal privilege (Graham et al., 2011; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Urban public schools in the United States continue to have underrepresented or non-dominant groups being left out when considering access to resources, power, and socioeconomic status (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) also argued that African Americans' low economic levels, school conditions, and achievement levels are caused by institutional and structural racism. Historically the construction of race has not been socially or legally neutral (Crenshaw, 1988; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Tate, 1997). Race was constructed as a tool to produce European American privilege and make people of color inferior (Omi & Winant, 2015; Rollock & Gillborn, 2011; Simpson, 2014). The application of these tenets has been connected to the social construction of race at the organizational level creating rules that govern social and material resources (Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Ray, 2019). These tenets serve as a representation of the CRT and ROT in education.

## **Critical Race Theory**

This study is framed through the lens of CRT to place focus on the experiences of underrepresented groups as it pertains to exclusionary discipline in education. The development

of CRT began in the 1970s with legal scholars responding to the slow progress of equality. Critical race scholars such as Derrick Bell, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Richard Delgado, and others challenged the Critical Legal Studies view of systemic racism. Critical Legal Studies (CLS) viewed racism as generalized oppression developed through hierarchical structures (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Tate, 1997). Racism was considered the same as other forms of class-based oppression by CLS. Critical race scholars argued that this ideology does not address the concept of racism as it pertains to the structure of American life for people of color (Crenshaw, 1988; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Tate, 1997). The theory of critical race materialized from this adverse view to CLS ideology. Ladson-Billings (1998) described how racial reform in the United States had shown a slow progression. In her article, she also outlines how critical race theorists address the areas of citizenship and education. However, she suggests that researchers should study and learn about the legal literature of CRT before employing the theory to address issues of racism in education.

Tate (1997) composed an outline that reviewed elements of CRT as it relates to educational research and legal structures. Although not a comprehensive review of CRT, the review outlines how CRT tenets are connected to the existing systems of belief through educational research, legal structures, social frameworks, and policies that contribute to educational unjustness for underrepresented student groups. Tate (1997) described racism as a condition that is regularly found in American society. Yosso (2005) wrote an article that utilizes CRT as an approach to community cultural wealth in education. The article capitalizes on CRT scholars' plea for understanding and acknowledging different sources of knowledge. Acknowledging the strengths of all ethnic/racial communities is essential in improving racial and social justice. Yosso (2005) stated that "racism overly shaped the U.S. social institutions at the

beginning of the twentieth century and continues, although more subtly, to impact U.S. institutions of socialization at the beginning of the twenty-first century" (p. 70). Educational scholars of CRT highlight the continued existence of racism related to education (Ledesma & Calderón, 2015; Tichavakunda, 2019). Critical race scholars in education have extended the ideas to other marginalized groups such as Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, Native Americans, and Latinx/Chicano/a in response to their continued effort to fight racism and oppression (Yosso, 2005). For example, CRT tenets and ideology has been extended into the Latinx/Chicano/a racial experience (Arriola, 1996; Iglesias, 1996; Stefancic, 1997). Stefancic (1997) wrote an annotated bibliography evaluating the Latino/a perspective of American society stemming from the 1960s and 1970s Chicano movement. Stefancic (1997) examined many books and articles by Latino/a critical theory (LatCrit) scholars. She mailed the completed bibliography to the authors to make corrections and additions according to seventeen themes critical of LatCrit scholarship. One of the themes critical to LatCrit scholars is the need for more educational representation at every level. The LatCrit Theory scholars employ the tenets of CRT to address their experiences with racism and oppression based on their language, accents, immigration status, culture, and surname, among other identifiers (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Stefancic, 1997).

The tenets of CRT have also been incorporated into the racialization of women. Feminists advocated for equality based on racism and classism towards women. This movement brought about the Feminist critical theory (FemCrit) to address these concerns (Naranch, 2018; Sharma, 2019). Finally, Critical Whiteness theory (WhiteCrit) developed as an extension of CRT. A common characteristic of European Americans and people of color is that both groups' lives are

racially structured (Frankenberg, 1993). WhiteCrit highlights the European Americans' use of white privilege to gain a racial and structural advantage (Frankenberg, 1993).

The manifestation of race and racism through deficit thinking are critical factors in the use of CRT (Ledesma & Calderón, 2015; Sleeter, 2016; Yosso, 2005). Issues in classroom behavior, community involvement, school policy, and curriculum are affected (Ledesma & Calderón, 2015; Yosso, 2005). Yosso (2005) critiqued the assumption that students of color enter the classroom with some form of cultural deficiency. Yosso (2005) used the CRT framework in community cultural wealth to question how cultural capital is traditionally interpreted. The critique focused on the cultural attributes of knowledge, abilities, skills, and contacts that the socially marginalized groups possessed. Yosso (2005) found that the most ubiquitous form of racism in education was deficit thinking.

### **Racialized Organization Theory**

Organizational theorists tend to associate race with personal identity, thus causing organizations to operate under the assumption that they are race-neutral (Burke, 2016; Gans, 2016; Ray, 2019). Selznick (1996) described the negative connotation given to the structure of organizations:

Although organization theory has its roots in the study of bureaucracy, our democracy remains troubled by some basic questions. Can bureaucrats be trusted to carry out their duties without gross self-seeking, without oppressive or insensitive rulemaking, without arbitrary decisions? After many years of research and much earnest theorizing, the ideal of an effective, fair, and responsive bureaucracy remains elusive. (p. 276)

The CRT focuses on racial injustice about society and social structures (Burke 2016; Ray, 2019). The theory of racialized organizations ties the two ideologies together under the concept

that organizations are racial structures (Ray, 2019). The ROT in education stresses the importance of understanding the organizations' role in racializing across classroom-based, school-based, and district-based social levels (Ray, 2019). This theory proposes four tenets: (a) racialized organizations enhance or diminish the agency of racial groups; (b) racialized organizations legitimate the unequal distribution of resources; (c) Whiteness is a credential; and (d) decoupling is racialized (Ray, 2019). These tenets connect material and social resources to racial schemas (Ray, 2019). The ROT changes the perspective of organizations being race-neutral and highlights their role in shaping policies that affect racial structures.

The majority of research on the impact of race and racial structure in education suggests that institutional policies and practices cause people of color to be disadvantaged. From the perspective of CRT, schools lack equality when taking race or ethnicity into consideration. Taking the ideology of critical theorists and race theorists together, schools are shown as racialized institutions in their practices and policy-making. These practices and policies are forming disciplinary disparities. While examining exclusionary discipline in schools, these two frameworks give interdependent lenses by which the data is analyzed.

### **Suspensions and Expulsions Overview**

#### **National and Current Trends**

Prior to exclusionary discipline, schools used corporal punishment as a way of controlling student behavior. However, corporal punishment was deemed emotionally and physically harmful to the students (Bear, 2008; Gershoff & Font, 2016). Decreasing the use of corporal punishment and increasing the use of exclusionary discipline came about as an alternate means to control student behavior while maintaining school safety (Anyon et al., 2016; Bal et al., 2018; Boccanfuso & Kuhfeld, 2011; Carter et al. 2014; Harper et al. 2019; Schiff, 2013).

The use of suspensions and expulsions as exclusionary practices removes students from their typical learning environment from short periods to long periods (Kang-Brown et al., 2013; Kutsyuruba et al., 2015; Losen & Skiba, 2010; Welsh & Little, 2018). Through the years, the demand for safer schools increased, this caused schools to rely more on suspensions and expulsions as a preferred punishment (Brown & Di Tillio, 2013; Harper et al., 2019; Losen & Gillespie, 2012; Losen et al., 2015; Welch & Payne, 2010). In recent years, exclusionary discipline has declined because of new policies and guidelines (Anyon et al., 2016; Bal et al., 2018; Holt & Gershenson, 2017; Rafa, 2018; Sartain et al., 2015).

In a study conducted by Anyon et al. (2016) in a large urban school district during the 2012-2013 school year in Denver, they found that although the district's population increased by 14%, there were reductions in the number of suspensions and expulsions. The reduction in these punishments was related to the states discipline policy reform targeting exclusionary discipline practices. When analyzing the data to predict the probability of a repeat violation, they found that students that were given a restorative intervention during the first semester of school were less likely to have a repeat offense during the second semester.

Presently, the use of these disciplinary practices differs in terms of when they are employed. Suspensions are used for behaviors that threaten order, while expulsions are used for behaviors that threaten safety (DeMatthews et al., 2017; Kang-Brown et al., 2014). New policies and strict guidelines have made expulsions more challenging to administer (Brown & Di Tillio, 2013). However, zero-tolerance policies have penalties for automatic expulsion from infractions that were once punishable by corporal punishment (Boccanfuso & Kuhfeld, 2011; Carothers, 2018; Morris & Perry, 2016).

Over three million students were suspended from school at least once during the 2011-12 school year (Losen et al., 2015). Recent estimations suggest that one in every three students will be suspended from school between kindergarten and twelfth grade (Losen et al., 2015). Although this is true, nationally, more schools are on the lower end of the suspension curve than on the higher end (Losen et al., 2015).

The subjective decision-making and frequency of use cause the suspension rates to vary nationally (DeMatthews et al., 2017; Skiba et al., 2011). The subjectivity allows administrators and teachers to interpret the appropriateness of student behaviors. The belief that suspensions serve as a deterrent to unacceptable behaviors continues to hold (Harper et al., 2019; Kinsler, 2013; Skiba et al., 2011). Losen et al. (2015) noted that "suspending a child out of school should be a measure of last resort" (p. 31). Since suspensions are commonly used to address behaviors that do not threaten the safety of the faculty, staff, or students, alternate non-exclusionary forms of punishment should be used (Anderson & Ritter, 2017; Carter et al., 2014; Cavendish et al., 2014; Schiff, 2013; Welsh & Little, 2018).

If student behavior and school safety improved because of expulsions, then the use of this punishment would be justified. According to research, exclusionary discipline fails to discourage misconduct and has negative consequences for students (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2013; Beck & Muschkin, 2012; Skiba et al., 2011, 2014). Kang-Brown (2013) examined how zero-tolerance policies affect the school environment, the students, and the school-to-prison pipeline. Kang-Brown (2013) found that zero-tolerance policies do not make the schools safer, and they cause the students to have life-long adverse effects. Some consequences related to exclusionary discipline include, but are not limited to, loss of instruction time, repeated behaviors, and school disengagement (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Gregory et al., 2010; Kang-Brown et al., 2013). Many of

the students that are losing instruction time are already below grade level in their core subject areas (Freeman & Steidl, 2016; Skiba et al., 2011). Although removing what is perceived to be a distraction from the classroom should produce a more conducive learning environment, research suggests that graduation rates and assessment scores for students that are not disciplined do not increase when this occurs (Losen & Martinez, 2013). Anyon et al. (2017) found that schools having low discipline referrals also have low numbers for repeat offenders, but schools with a high number of discipline referrals have high numbers of repeat offenders.

School disengagement is another consequence of exclusionary discipline (Boccanfuso & Kuhfeld, 2011; Kutsyruba et al., 2015). The process by which suspensions and expulsions are administered does not give students the skills and support they need to correct their behavior (Allen, 2015; Daly, 2013; Jiang, 2017). They are merely punitive in nature (Ganao et al., 2013; Goran & Cage, 2011). Kutsyruba et al. (2015) explored the relationship among school climate, school safety, student academic achievement, and student well-being using a systematic review approach. The findings suggests that a positive school climate, a safe school environment, and the well-being of students are the most significant factors in meeting the students' emotional, social, and academic needs. The lack of student support and the punitive nature of these disciplinary actions increase rather than decrease inappropriate behavior (Monahan et al., 2014; Skiba, 2013; Skiba et al., 2011, 2014). Some students look to avoid being in school by misbehaving in order to receive a suspension or expulsion (Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2016). They consider not having to attend school a reward (Sheryl et al., 2014). As a result, these students become disengaged from school.

Finally, an abundance of research has found that one of the most significant flaws in the use of suspensions and expulsions is the disproportionate rates of these punishments on specific

groups of students (Anderson & Ritter, 2017; Bal et al., 2018; Children's Defense Fund, 1974; Morris & Perry, 2016; Nguyen et al., 2019; Riddle & Sinclair, 2019; Skiba, 2013; Skiba et al., 2011, 2014). A majority of the research focused on racial disparities with African American, Chicano/a/Latinx, and Native American students being suspended and expelled at a higher rate than other racial groups (Anyon et al., 2016; Brown & Di Tillio, 2013; Fernandez-Suarez et al., 2016; Losen & Gillespie, 2012; Neri et al., 2019, Peguero & Shekarkhar, 2011).

Anderson and Ritter (2017) conducted a descriptive analysis of public schools in Arkansas for seven years from the 2008-09 school year through the 2014-15 school year. The researchers used logistic regression to predict the likelihood that a group of students will receive a punishment of exclusionary discipline instead of other forms of discipline based on their ethnicity/race. The researchers also used residual analyses to determine if school typology predicts the likelihood of extreme exclusionary discipline lengths for similar infractions based on ethnicity/race. Results showed that marginalized students are more likely to receive exclusionary discipline across schools. Schools with more significant percentages of underrepresented students tend to administer longer punishments. Results also found that ethnic/racial makeup is the main factor of discipline disparities across schools and socioeconomic status and special education status are the significant factors of discipline disparities within schools.

Brown and Di Tillio (2013) conducted a study to analyze the discipline disproportionality among American Indian and Latino students in Arizona during the 2010-11 school year. The study population was 116 school districts with 886,998 students, with 5.4% of the student enrollment being American Indian and 41.4% being Latino. Risk ratios and proportions were calculated to determine the relative risk of a disciplinary infraction for American Indian and Latino students. The researchers employed logistic regression to examine the relationship

between the discipline violation and punishment severity. Results showed that American Indian students and African American students receive discipline referrals at equivalent rates of disproportionality. Likewise, the relationship between discipline violation and punishment severity for American Indian students was comparable to the rates for African American students. However, discipline rates for Latino students were proportional to their enrollment.

The use of suspensions and expulsions as a form of discipline to control student behavior should be a last resort or not used at all. The consequences of disproportionality towards certain racial groups, interruption of student learning, and repeat behavior outweigh any positive results.

### **Discipline Gap**

The phenomenon known as the discipline gap (Gregory et al., 2010) came about as decades of research on school discipline showed the disproportionate rates for African American students receiving office referrals, suspensions, and expulsions (Losen et al., 2015, Morris & Perry, 2016). The first official report for students' lack of attendance in school was given in 1974 by the Children's Defense Fund (CDF). The CDF analyzed federal and state data to determine the number of students not in school (Children's Defense Fund, 1974). The CDF (1974) reported that African American students were suspended from school twice the rate of other racial groups. Their data also showed that 42.3% of African American students were suspended, even though they only accounted for 27.1% of the enrollment (Children's Defense Fund, 1974). This disproportionate use of exclusionary discipline that the CDF first reported in 1974 still exists today (Carothers, 2018; Freeman & Steidl, 2016; Gopalan & Nelson, 2019).

Researchers have frequently found that students of color are more likely to receive a more severe punishment for behaviors that are comparable to their European American peers (Losen et al., 2014; Losen & Martinez, 2013; Losen et al., 2015; Losen & Skiba, 2010;

McLoughlin & Noltemeyer, 2010; Neal, 2017; Skiba, 2013). McLoughlin and Noltemeyer (2010) used a multiple regression analysis to examine what school demographic variables predicted the use of exclusionary discipline in the state of Ohio during the 2007-08 school year. The study population consisted of 433 urban schools considered high poverty within 12 central urban school districts. McLoughlin and Noltemeyer (2010) found that the proportion of office discipline referrals, the proportion of African American teachers in the school, and the proportion of African American and economically disadvantaged students in the school were predictors of suspension. However, discipline disproportionality was only predicted by the proportion of economically disadvantaged students in the school. Edelman (2014) found that school discipline policies that discriminated based on race are the major contributors of the school-to-prison pipeline. African American males had a ratio of 1:3, and Latino males had a ratio of 1:6 chance of going to prison in their lifetime (Edelman, 2014).

According to the United States Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (2018), there were approximately 2.7 million students suspended from school during the 2015-16 school year. This number accounted for nearly 6% of all K-12 students. The Office for Civil Rights (2018) also reported that African American students represented 16% of the total enrollment but accounted for 39% of the school suspensions. Hispanic or Latinx of any race represented 26% of the total enrollment and accounted for 21% of the school suspensions. The suspension rates for these two racial groups far exceeded the suspension rates for all other underrepresented groups collectively (United States Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2018).

Like suspension rates, the Office of Civil Rights (2018) reported that there were 120,800 students expelled from school during the 2015-16 school year. Of the students expelled from school, African Americans accounted for 33%, even though they only represented 16% of the

total enrollment (United States Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2018). Hispanic or Latinx of any race accounted for 22% expelled, while they represented 26% of the student enrollment and all other underrepresented groups accounted for 6% of the students expelled while representing only 11% of the student enrollment.

After a review of literature about the discipline gap (DeMatthews, 2016; Losen et al., 2015; United States Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2018), school policies, school practices, and school leadership contributed the most to disproportionate rates in the exclusionary discipline (DeMatthews et al., 2017; Kinsler, 2013; United States Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2018). Knowing this, school and district-level leaders have an opportunity to reduce or even eliminate the excessive disciplinary exclusion practices that lead to these significant disparities.

### **Zero Tolerance Policies**

The Department of Education defines a zero-tolerance policy as "a school or district policy that mandates predetermined consequences or punishments for specific offenses" (Kaufman et al., 1999). Zero-tolerance policies are maximized disciplinary responses to threatening or dangerous behaviors that disrupt the educational environment (Hoffman, 2014). These policies are intended to provide school safety by removing disruptive students (Losinski et al., 2014; Teske, 2011; United States Commission on Civil Rights, 2019). These policies also intended to send a message that violence will not be tolerated (American Psychological Association [APA] Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; DeMitchell & Hambacher, 2016; Skiba, 2014).

During the 1980s, the United States enforced federal drug policies and orders that prosecuted drug offenders. If caught, the offenders were considered in violation of the drug

enforcement orders, and they were given the harshest penalty allowed no matter the type or amount of narcotics they possessed (Boccanfuso & Kuhfeld, 2011). The policies establishing this firm stance on the possession and sale of narcotics became known as zero-tolerance policies.

The rise of school violence such as school shootings and bomb threats created an uproar in the communities they serve. The public uproar for school safety caused the government to enact the federal Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994, which began the concept of zero tolerance in the educational system. The Gun-Free Schools Act required that a student who was found in possession of a firearm on school property would be expelled from school (McNeal & Dunbar, 2010). However, through the years, the zero-tolerance philosophy expanded to include other behaviors deemed disruptive, dangerous, or threatening to the school or its personnel (Kang-Brown et al., 2013; Mallett, 2017; United States Commission on Civil Rights, 2019). Monahan et al. (2014) found that although zero-tolerance policies originated in education to address firearm possession, they have since been used to punish a broad range of behavior problems. For example, the Kentucky Department of Education (2020) includes defiance of authority, use of profanity or vulgar language, assault or abuse of other students, alcohol or drug possession, theft or destruction of school property, and any other conduct that is deemed incorrigible as behaviors that constitute cause for suspension or expulsion from school. McNeal and Dunbar (2010) conducted a qualitative study about the student's perception of Michigan's zero-tolerance policy. The researchers' methodology included face-to-face interviews and focus groups. The study population was made up of 90 high school juniors and seniors from 15 different urban schools. Results showed that the urban high school students felt as if there was a difference between what the policies profess to accomplish and the actual outcomes.

The Kentucky Department of Education Safe Schools Report suggested that school leadership favored out-of-school suspension when administering exclusionary discipline (Kentucky Department of Education 2019a, 2019b). During the 2017-18 school year, 22.3% of the behavior resolutions reported were out-of-school suspensions and expulsions. However, less than .01% were students being expelled from school, and out-of-school suspension made up the other 22.3%. During the 2018-19 school year, expulsions represented .1% of reported behavior resolutions, and out-of-school suspensions accounted for 20.4% (Kentucky Department of Education, 2019a, 2019b).

Despite the expansion of these zero-tolerance policies, the National Center for Education Statistics (2019) found that applying the zero-tolerance philosophy for discipline does not make a school safer, nor does it increase academic achievement (APA Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Crenshaw et al., 2015; Curran, 2016; Peguero & Shekarkhar, 2011; Skiba, 2014). However, what has been occurring is that underrepresented groups are being disproportionately disciplined with zero-tolerance policies (Boccanfuso & Kuhfeld, 2011; Crenshaw et al., 2015; Kutsyruba et al., 2015; Welsh & Little, 2018). Research has shown that people of color, particularly males, are being suspended at disproportionate rates (Losen & Gillespie, 2012; Losen & Martinez, 2013; Losen & Skiba, 2010; Lynn et al., 2010;), which in turn create more behavioral problems and contribute to the academic failure for the student (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Harper et al., 2019; Massar et al., 2015).

School leadership is faced with difficult decisions when dealing with certain student behaviors. These decisions have the potential to produce harmful effects on the students that are long-lasting. Exercising critical judgment through rational thinking will help protect students from the unpredicted consequences of the zero-tolerance policies. Teske (2011) suggested that

zero-tolerance policies are intended to be race-neutral; however, they are administered disproportionately against certain groups of students.

### **School-Based Decision Making**

#### **Formation and Implementation**

The Commonwealth of Kentucky established a task force in 1989 to reform the Kentucky educational system. One of the systematic principles they adopted was SBDM Councils (Kannapel et al., 1995; Kentucky Department of Education, 2015, 2019; Lindle 1995, 2001). The SBDM Councils gave schools the authority to create and implement accountability and achievement policies (Lindle, 1995, 2001). The Kentucky School-Based Decision-Making Handbook (2015) states the primary responsibility of every school council as:

the school council shall have the responsibility to set school policy consistent with district board policy which shall provide an environment to enhance the students' achievement and help the school meet the goals established in Kentucky Revised Statutes (KRS) §158.645 and §158.6451. (p. 2)

The mandate of SBDM became a part of the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) of 1990. This part of the KERA became Kentucky Revised Statute §160.345. According to KERA, discipline is one of the eight policy areas that SBDM councils are responsible for (Kentucky Department of Education 2015, 2019; Lindle, 1995). Only schools that are accountable under the Commonwealth of Kentucky's assessment and accountability system are required by law to implement an SBDM (Justia US Law, 2019; Kannapel et al., 1995; Kentucky Department of Education, 2015, 2019). However, the Kentucky Board of Education could exempt a school from implementing SBDM if they are the only school in the district and are performing above the school improvement goal (Justia US Law, 2019; Kentucky Department of Education, 2015).

Under KERA, the members of the school-based councils were specified according to their category and number. Kentucky Revised Statute §160.345 paragraph 2a describes the composition of the school council as having one administrator, three teachers, and two parents (Justia US Law, 2019; Klecker et al., 2000). Kentucky Revised Statute §160.345 also gives guidance to the restrictions of members according to employment and family relationship and the inclusion of members of color according to the school's ethnic/racial makeup (Justia US Law, 2019; Kentucky Department of Education, 2019). A school with a minority student population that meets or exceeds 8% must have at least one minority member on the SBDM Council.

### **SBDM Council Discipline Policies for Schools Represented in this Study**

All schools represented in this study have SBDM councils. The SBDM councils for the schools in this study have established discipline policies that align with their respective district discipline policy (Crittenden County High School, 2019; Greenwood High School, 2020; Logan County High School, 2020; Marshall County High School, 2019; Paducah Tilghman High School, 2020; Russellville High School, 2018; South Warren High School, 2020; Todd County Central High School, 2020; Warren Central High School, 2020; Warren East High School, 2020). Schools represented in this study have discipline infractions labeled as levels, tiers, or classes and categorized as I, II, III, and IV, where I, II, and III are discipline infractions punishable by detention, in-school suspension, alternative classroom setting, or some form of a behavior support program. Level, tier, or class IV discipline infractions include, but are not limited to, drug and alcohol violations, weapon violations, assault violations, and sexual misconduct violations. Many of the schools have implemented alternative discipline methods in order to minimize out-of-school suspensions. Marshall County High School (2019) provides an Alternate Classroom program for students that continuously violate discipline policies. Logan

County High School (2020) and Paducah Tilghman High School (2020) have implemented the Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS) initiative.

Additionally, the Warren County Public Schools have the Alternative to Suspension Program that allows students to remain in a learning environment during the allocated time of punishment. All schools in the study follow the same guidelines for administering student suspensions and expulsions. The principal can suspend a student for no more than ten days, and only the local Board of Education can expel a student from school. The researched schools use out-of-school suspensions and expulsions as a last resort.

### **Disparities According to Gender**

The gender disparities for exclusionary discipline are evident in the research. Rafa (2018) reported that boys accounted for 79% of the student suspensions but represented only 54% of the national pre-school enrollment during the 2013-14 school year. Losen and Gillespie (2010) reported that the suspension rates of African American girls are increasing faster than all other female racial groups. A study conducted in Boston and New York during the 2011-12 school year revealed that African American boys are disciplined more than any other group, and African American girls are disciplined more than any other female group (Crenshaw et al., 2015). The same study showed that in Boston, African American boys and girls were disciplined at rates of eight and eleven times more, respectively, than European American boys and girls (Crenshaw et al., 2015). While in New York, the discipline disparity rates were six and ten times more than European American boys and girls, respectively (Crenshaw et al., 2015). In Boston, 63% of girls expelled from school were African American, and in New York, 90% of girls expelled were African American (Crenshaw et al., 2015).

Comparing discipline outcomes for African American girls to other racial groups shows the most significant disparity (Blake et al., 2011). Blake et al. (2011) found that African American girls were twice as likely as their female peers to receive punishments of in-school and out-of-school suspensions. Compared to Latina female students, African American females were twice as likely to receive an in-school suspension for their infraction. The most considerable disparity for African American females was in comparison to European American female students. African American girls were four times and two times, respectively, more likely to receive in-school suspensions and out-of-school suspensions than European American girls. The rate at which student discipline, more especially exclusionary discipline, is administered on African American boys and girls is substantially higher than any other racial group. The discipline rates for African American males and females far exceed their statistical representation (Gopalan & Nelson, 2019; Losen & Skiba, 2010; National Center for Education Statistics, 2019).

A national report of suspension rates during the 2011-12 academic year showed that African American males typically have the highest suspension rate at any grade level, followed by African American females and Latino males (Losen et al., 2015). If you take students with disabilities into account, African American males and Latino males were at the highest risk for suspension (Losen et al., 2015). Also, African American females with disabilities have a higher rate of suspensions than European American males with disabilities at all grade levels (Losen et al., 2015).

### **Disparities According to Ethnic/Racial Groups**

An ethnic/racial group is considered to be at risk of disproportional discipline if they have been found to receive exclusionary discipline rates higher than the rates of representation within the school or school district (Skiba et al., 2011). Since suspensions are the most used form of

exclusionary discipline (Losen & Gillespie, 2012; Losen et al., 2015), some school districts show a high rate of suspensions for all student groups (Losen et al., 2015). For example, the Kansas City school district had a suspension rate of 38.4% for European American students enrolled during the 2011-12 school year (Losen et al., 2015). However, most of the research suggested a greater risk of suspensions and expulsions for certain racial groups (Anyon et al., 2016; Losen et al., 2015; Rafa, 2018). A national study on disproportional discipline has discovered that the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) student groups are also overrepresented in suspensions and expulsions (Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network, 2016). The Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (2016) reported that 15.1% of LGBTQ students received some form of suspension, and 1.3% were expelled during the 2012-13 school year.

Losen and Skiba (2010) examined the 2006 Civil Rights Data Collection for school and district level suspensions of 9,220 middle schools from 18 of the nation's largest school districts. The researchers calculated the risk index to identify the percent of each student group based on race and gender that are suspended in a given school year. Losen and Skiba (2010) results showed that the average suspension rate at the school level was 11.2%. Findings at the school level also showed that middle school African American students had suspension rates of 28.3% for males and 18% for females. The school-level comparison of race and gender found that suspension rates for African American males were 26.2% greater than suspension rates for Asian American/Pacific Islander females. Losen and Skiba (2010) found that 11 of the 18 school districts suspended African American males at a one-to-three ratio. Although the finding showed high suspensions for African American students, some schools and school districts were suspending European American and Hispanic females at rates that exceeded 50%.

The national suspension rates during the 2013-14 school year showed 13.7% of African American students receiving suspensions, 6.7% of American Indian and Alaska Native, 5.3% of biracial students, 4.5% of Latinx and Pacific Islander, 3.4% of European American students, and 1.1% of Asian students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019).

### **African American Disparities**

Countless studies that have been conducted over the last few decades show African American students being continuously overrepresented by exclusionary discipline practices (Butler et al., 2012; Children's Defense Fund, 1974; Crenshaw, 1988; Noltemeyer & McLoughlin, 2010). Other research has also found that African American students receive more discipline referrals than any other racial group (Rocque, 2010; Losen et al., 2014). There is a pattern of African American students receiving harsher punishments even though their behaviors are collinear to the behaviors of European American students (Lewis et al., 2010; Rocque, 2010).

Smith and Harper (2015) reported that 9,656 African American students were suspended in Kentucky public schools in one academic year. In the same school year, African American students represented 11% of the student population but accounted for 26% and 13% of the state's suspensions and expulsions, respectively (Smith & Harper, 2015). In a study investigating the disproportionate application of school discipline on underrepresented groups in the state of Georgia, Freeman and Steidl (2016) found that 54% of African Americans students were suspended, although they represented only 46% of the school population. However, 29% of European American students were suspended, but they represented 37% of the school population (Freeman & Steidl, 2016).

Finally, while conducting a study on how suspensions and expulsions impact student achievement, Morris and Perry (2016) reported that African American students were seven times more likely than European American students to be suspended from school.

### **Latinx/Hispanic, Native American, Pacific Islander, and Asian Disparities**

Disparities in the rates of discipline for African American students are thoroughly documented; however, the limited research of other underrepresented groups' disciplinary rates also shows a risk of disproportionality. Recent studies (Brown & Di Tillio, 2013; Freeman & Steidl, 2016; Harper et al., 2019; Losen et al., 2015; Morris & Perry, 2016; Nguyen et al., 2019; Peguero & Shekarkhar, 2011; Skiba et al., 2011; Welsh & Little, 2018) on other underrepresented racial groups find these racial groups more likely to receive a harsher punishment than European American students (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2019). Although some school districts have shown a slight decrease in suspension rates for Latinx students over the last few years (Harper et al., 2019), Latinx students still have higher rates than European American students.

During the 2005-06 school year, Skiba et al. (2011) conducted a study to investigate the patterns of discipline referrals in 364 elementary and middle schools. The study researched the disproportionality of discipline based on two factors; the number of discipline referrals received by the administration office and the administrative decision made. At the kindergarten through the sixth-grade level, Latinx students were underrepresented in discipline referrals relative to their student population. At the sixth through the ninth-grade level, Latinx students showed a proportional relationship between discipline referrals and their student enrollment.

The investigation of the administrative decisions in the previous study revealed that Latinx students are overrepresented when it comes to suspensions and expulsions as compared to

European American students at both levels (Skiba et al., 2011). Latinx students were underrepresented when administrative decisions involved a moderate consequence (i.e., inappropriate/abusive language, fighting, cheating, and bullying), but they are overrepresented in administrative detention at both levels.

The study also concluded that it was more likely for elementary and middle school Latinx students to be suspended or expelled for any level infraction except disruption as opposed to European American elementary and middle school students. Finally, Skiba et al. (2011) reported that elementary Latinx students were more likely than elementary European American students to be given a punishment of detention or in-school suspension for minor and moderate misbehaviors.

Peguero and Shekarkhar (2011) conducted a linear analysis of Latinx discipline factors based on the Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002. The analysis included 7,250 Latinx and European American students. The level of student misbehaviors was found to be the same for Latinx and European American students. When accounting for gender, there were no differences in misbehavior for Latinx students than European American male students. European American female students were less likely to misbehave in school (Peguero & Shekarkhar, 2011). Taking generational status into account, first-generation Latinx students were less likely to misbehave in school; however, there were no differences in student misbehavior found between the second and third-generation Latinx students compared to European American students.

Similar patterns emerged when Peguero and Shekarkhar (2011) examined school punishment. There was no difference found in the likelihood of Latinx students being disciplined when compared to European American students. However, when accounting for gender, the analysis indicated that Latinx students are more likely to be punished than European American

males and females. Finally, Peguero and Shekarkhar (2011) reported that no difference was found in the likelihood of first-generation and second-generation Latinx students receiving a school punishment. The likelihood that third-generation Latinx students received a school punishment was increased.

Brown and Di Tillio (2013) researched data in Arizona to investigate the proportionality of discipline practices for Native American and Latinx students. Results showed that the disproportionate rates for the discipline of Native American students were at the same level as African American students. Native American students were found to have excessive discipline rates in office referrals, in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, and expulsions (Brown & Di Tillio, 2013). Native Americans represented 4.8% of the student population, yet they accounted for 10.2% of the office discipline referrals. Similarly, Native American students' composite index for expulsions was higher than all other racial and ethnic groups except African American. Their out-of-school suspension rate was slightly higher than all other racial groups. Brown and Di Tillio (2013) also found that Native American students were three times more likely to receive an office referral than their European American peers. In a similar study investigating the ethnic discipline gap, Nguyen et al. (2019) found that Native American students received more disciplinary punishment than Latinx students, and the likelihood of African American, Latinx, and Native American students being disciplined in school is more significant than European American students.

Since the discipline rates of African American students have been emphasized in ethnic studies, some ethnic-racial groups have been overlooked. Past research on discipline disparities that have included Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders collected and reported the data under the two ethnic categories (Anyon et al., 2016; Morris & Perry, 2016; Losen et al., 2015). Studies

reporting results in this manner tend to find that Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders do not have disproportionate discipline rates when compared to European Americans or other ethnic/racial minorities (United States Government Accountability Office, 2018). However, when Asian American and Pacific Islander categories are separated into subgroups, the disparities can be seen (Miller et al., 2011; Nelson et al., 2016; Terriquez et al., 2013). For example, some Asian American and Pacific Islander subgroups would consist of but are not limited to Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, Hawaiian, Native Hawaiian, Fijian, and Samoan (National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education, 2013).

Nguyen et al. (2019) conducted a study in Washington State on the unseen dimensions of the discipline gap and its impact on Asian American and Pacific Islander student subgroups. The study results showed that when data from Asian American subgroups are analyzed across the racial group, it does not appear to show a disproportionate rate of discipline compared to European American students. However, Nguyen et al. (2019) did find that Pacific Islanders were twice as likely as European American students to be disciplined.

When the ethnic/racial groups are separated into ethnic subgroups, every Asian American subgroup displayed a lower risk of discipline than European American students. A comparison between Asian American subgroups found Southeast Asian subgroups were more likely to be disciplined than East Asian subgroups (Nguyen et al., 2019). Pacific Islander student subgroups were either more likely or equally likely to be disciplined as European American students. Melanesian students were over four times more disciplined than Guamanian students when the comparison was made between Pacific Islander subgroups.

The findings show that when Asian American and Pacific Islander student's data is analyzed across the ethnic-racial group, the results mirrored past studies. When analyzed between subgroups, the disparities were more apparent.

### **Disparities According to School and District Level Classification and Location**

Research suggested that specific characteristics for schools and school districts are associated with higher levels of misbehavior by students, which in turn, increased the discipline rates (Anyon et al., 2016; Welch & Payne, 2010). Socioeconomic status, school size, the ratio of students receiving free and reduced lunch, and demographic location are some school-level factors that usually contribute to discipline rates (Freeman & Steidl, 2016; Holt & Gershenson, 2017; Riddle & Sinclair, 2019). Riddle & Sinclair (2019) conducted a study of the 2015-16 school discipline report from the Civil Rights Data Collection. The study examined data from 95,827 educational institutions having approximately 50.5 million students. The researchers calculated the estimated level of bias for each county in the sample population using a hierarchical linear regression and poststratification test. The research found a pro-European American implicit and explicit bias being associated with discipline disparities.

Skiba et al. (2014) suggested that disparities in discipline are impacted more by school-level characteristics than they are by student characteristics. Skiba et al. (2014) studied 1,720 public schools in a Midwestern state during the 2007-2008 school year. The study examined the data of the state on student suspensions and expulsions. The researchers conducted a multi-level analysis to examine the influence of school characteristics, student characteristics, and behavioral characteristics on suspensions and expulsions. Male students represented 68.8% of the student population suspended or expelled, and 53.4% of the students who received free-or-reduced lunch were suspended or expelled from school. Skiba et al. (2014) concluded that the

proportion of African American students enrolled in a school was the single most significant predictor for suspensions and expulsions.

Losen and Martinez (2013) analyzed student suspension data from the U. S. Department of Education for over 26,000 middle and high schools during the 2009-2010 school year. Losen and Martinez (2013) found that school policies and culture contributed more than student misbehavior to disproportionate discipline practices.

The typology (school and community characteristics) of a school is associated with student suspension rates (Noltemeyer & Mcloughlin, 2010; Sheryl et al., 2014). Urban schools show a tendency to administer a punishment of exclusionary discipline far more than rural or suburban schools (Theriot et al., 2010). Since underrepresented groups of students make up a large portion of the enrollment in urban school districts, they have a higher risk of receiving a punishment of suspension or expulsion (Blake et al., 2011).

A study was conducted over seven years on the use of exclusionary discipline in Arkansas public schools. The research found that schools with a more significant proportion of African American students enrolled administered longer and harsher punishments, and schools with more significant percentages of Latinx students administered the typical punishment length and severity (Anderson & Ritter, 2017). However, Anderson & Ritter (2017) found that schools with a large percentage of students in poverty are more hesitant to administer a punishment. The finding suggested that racial characteristics associated with the poverty rates cause differences in disciplinary actions (Anderson & Ritter, 2017). The researchers also reported that schools with a larger enrollment of underrepresented groups regardless of income level tend to give harsher punishments. The punishments were more severe than schools with larger ratios of European American students. When looking at socioeconomic status, there was no difference in the

punishments administered by the schools, with at least 65% European American students (Anderson & Ritter, 2017). According to Anderson & Ritter (2017), these results show that racial factors contribute more than income factors in predicting the level of punishment. Therefore, the disparities are across schools and tied to the types of schools students of color attend.

Another study conducted by Freeman & Steidl (2016) on school segregation's impact on disciplinary patterns in Georgia found that African American students have low disparities in schools located within highly segregated school districts. The results also showed that discipline disparities were higher in larger schools but lower in schools with a large percent of low-socioeconomic students. Overall, the research suggests that when levels of segregation are increased, the discipline disparity is decreased (Freeman & Steidl, 2016).

### **Summary**

Research on school discipline over the last few decades has demonstrated the disproportionate rates of underrepresented groups. Most studies showed a combination of teacher factors, student factors, and school factors as contributors to the disparities in discipline for certain racial-ethnic student groups. While underrepresented groups of students continue to receive exclusionary punishment at rates greater than their representation, new initiatives are being researched and implemented to combat this issue.

It is evident in the literature that administrative policies and practices have formed the discipline disparities that created a discipline gap. Zero tolerance policies that are meant to maintain safe school environments where students can succeed have failed to help at-risk students. The zero-tolerance policies allow students to be removed from the school for behaviors that do not interrupt the learning environment. Research shows that males students are subjected to exclusionary punishment at rates that exceed female students. Also, African American males,

Latino males, and Native American males have suspension or expulsion rates more significant than other student groups. Some literature lists the school's typology as a factor for exclusionary discipline. Urban schools tend to suspend or expel students more than rural schools. Regardless of the factors causing disproportionate rates in discipline, institutional agents must implement policies and interventions that will better service at-risk students.

The discipline policies are created and implemented by SBDM councils in the Commonwealth of Kentucky. Many schools in this study have implemented some form of behavioral initiative or alternative to exclusionary discipline. Using alternative programs or behavioral initiatives will expose students to methods of corrective behavior that will assist them in avoiding long-term consequences and provide support for at-risk students.

## **Chapter III**

### **Research Methodology**

The causal-comparative analysis in this study used archival data collected by the Kentucky Department of Education as a part of the 2017-18 and 2018-19 school years' Safe Schools Annual Statistical Report. Data from the 2017-18 and 2018-19 school years were used since the Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic caused schools to close and conduct learning remotely during the 2019-2020 school year. The purpose of this study was to identify the important factors that lead to student suspensions and expulsions in rural, independent, metropolitan, and micropolitan schools in Kentucky. Discipline policies for schools in this study are established by SBDM Councils. Discipline variables and variables related to the discipline through hypothesis were used. Student suspensions and expulsions rates are the dependent variables. Gender and ethnicity are independent variables. Other predictors are identified as rural or independent schools, metropolitan or micropolitan schools, and the level of diversity of the schools. A diverse school was defined as any school that has an enrollment for students of color groups that is 8% or greater collectively.

### **Research Questions**

RQ1: Are there differences in the number of suspensions and expulsions across race in rural, independent, metropolitan, or micropolitan schools?

RQ2: Are there differences in the number of suspensions and expulsions across gender in rural, independent, metropolitan, or micropolitan schools?

RQ3: Are there differences in the number of suspensions and expulsions according to school classification?

RQ4: Does the number of suspensions and expulsions differ in schools that lack diversity versus schools that do not lack diversity?

### **Alternative Hypotheses**

H1: There is significant differences in the number of suspensions and expulsions across race in rural, independent, metropolitan, or micropolitan schools.

H2: There is significant differences in the number of suspensions and expulsions across gender in rural, independent, metropolitan, or micropolitan schools.

H3: There is significant differences in the number and suspensions and expulsions according to school classification.

H4: There is a significant difference in the number of suspensions and expulsions in schools that lack diversity versus schools that do not lack diversity.

### **Participants**

The participants of this study consisted of high schools ( $N=196$ ) in Kentucky. There are 64 schools classified as rural, 47 schools classified as independent, 54 schools classified as metropolitan, and 31 schools classified as micropolitan. This study included discipline data from 153,126 students during the 2017-18 school year and 153,499 students during the 2018-19 school year. The demographics of students included in this study as reported by the 2017-18 Safe Schools Annual Statistical Report are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1***Student Demographics of the 2017-18 Kentucky Department of Education*

Variable	Rural		Independent		Metropolitan		Micropolitan		Full Sample	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Gender										
Female	20,118	48	11,584	48	28,190	49	14,470	49	74,362	49
Male	21,675	52	12,405	52	29,677	51	15,007	51	78,764	51
Ethnicity										
European American	39,293	94	18,821	78	48,054	83	26,500	90	132,668	87
African American	820	2	2,321	10	3,512	6	962	3	7,615	5
Hispanic/Latinx	980	2	1,311	5	3,334	6	1,003	3	6,628	4
Asian	151	<1	371	2	1,027	2	250	1	1799	1
Native American/Alaska Native	33	<1	24	<1	86	<1	46	<1	189	<1
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	9	<1	27	<1	106	<1	19	<1	161	<1
Two or More Races	507	1	1,114	5	1,748	3	697	2	4066	3

*Note.* *N* = 153,126.

The demographics of students included in this study as reported by the 2018-19 Safe Schools Annual Statistical Report are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2***Student Demographics of the 2018-19 Kentucky Department of Education*

Variable	Rural		Independent		Metropolitan		Micropolitan		Full Sample	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Gender										
Female	19,912	48	11,606	48	28,696	49	14,293	49	74,507	49
Male	21,587	52	12,358	52	30,168	51	14,879	51	78,992	51
Ethnicity										
European American	38,862	94	18,662	78	48,303	82	26,084	89	131,911	86
African American	772	2	2,240	9	3,563	6	954	3	7,529	5
Hispanic/Latinx	1,124	3	1,440	6	3,721	6	1,074	4	7,359	5
Asian	164	<1	381	2	1,140	2	256	1	1,941	1
Native American/Alaska Native	32	<1	14	<1	97	<1	43	<1	186	<1
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	8	<1	35	<1	123	<1	16	<1	182	<1
Two or More Races	537	1	1,192	5	1,917	3	745	3	4,391	3

*Note.* *N* = 153,499.

### Instrumentation

Archival data about schools in the study were collected by examining the Kentucky Department of Education Safe Schools Data Collection and Reporting Agency. The Kentucky Department of Education uses the Infinite Campus Programs' Behavior Management Tool to document student behavior incidents, events, resolutions, and responses (Kentucky Department

of Education, 2019a, 2019b). The Kentucky Department of Education analyzes the rates of student suspensions and expulsions at all educational levels within the Commonwealth of Kentucky. Fixed data for the demographics of the population (ethnicity, gender, and geographical location) and student behavior was collected. The demographic and disciplinary data will accurately describe the schools within the study. The reason for using archival data is due to the fact the data were accessible and easily attainable. Infinite Campus collects the information in a secure database. Data were retrieved after approval was granted by the Institutional Review Board. The overall purpose of this study did not require additional research tools.

### **Procedure**

Approval to conduct this study was obtained from the Institutional Review Board of Austin Peay State University. Approval was obtained from the Kentucky Department of Education to conduct this study using Archival Data. Data were retrieved on school demographics and discipline from the 2017-18 and 2018-19 Kentucky Department of Education Safe Schools Report.

### **Data Analysis**

This study researched factors that contribute to exclusionary discipline in some Kentucky rural, independent, metropolitan, and micropolitan schools. It also researched the comparison of suspension and expulsion rates between races, gender, and school classification.

### **Research Question 1**

When exploring data to determine if there were differences in the number of suspensions and expulsions across race a one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted. The ANOVA was used to evaluate whether the group means on the dependent variable differed

significantly from each other. The dependent variable was the number of suspensions and expulsions. The independent variable was ethnicity/race, and the categories were European American, African American, Latinx/Hispanic, Asian, and two or more races. The number of suspensions and expulsions was statistically significant for ethnicity/race. Data is presented as mean  $\pm$  standard deviation. The number of suspensions and expulsions increased from Asian ( $n = 185$ ,  $.1 \pm .5$ ), to two or more races ( $n = 180$ ,  $5.8 \pm 8.8$ ), to Latinx/Hispanic ( $n = 189$ ,  $5.8 \pm 9.5$ ), to African American ( $n = 181$ ,  $9.2 \pm 16.3$ ), to European American ( $n = 195$ ,  $130.4 \pm 107.9$ ) ethnicity/race, in that order.

### **Research Question 2**

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine if there were differences in the number of suspensions and expulsions across gender. Suspensions and expulsions were the dependent variable. The independent variable was gender, and the categories were male and female. The number of suspensions and expulsions was statistically significant for gender. Data are presented as mean  $\pm$  standard deviation. The number of suspensions and expulsions were higher for male ( $n = 195$ ,  $115.1 \pm 98.1$ ) than for female ( $n = 191$ ,  $44.9 \pm 40.3$ ) students.

### **Research Question 3**

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine if there was a difference in the number of suspensions and expulsions in schools according to the classification. The number of suspensions and expulsions was the dependent variable. The independent variable was school typology, and the categories were rural, independent, metropolitan, and micropolitan. The number of suspensions and expulsions was statistically significant for school typology. Data is presented as mean  $\pm$  standard deviation. The number of suspensions and expulsions increased from independent ( $n = 309$ ,  $26.3 \pm 43.9$ ), to rural ( $n = 429$ ,  $35.8 \pm 57.7$ ), to micropolitan

( $n = 210$ ,  $51.9 \pm 81.3$ ), to metropolitan ( $n = 368$ ,  $70.3 \pm 107.9$ ) schools, in that order.

#### **Research Question 4**

Finally, a Welch  $t$ -test was run to determine if there were differences in the number of suspensions and expulsions between diverse schools and schools that lack diversity due to the assumption of homogeneity of variances being violated, as assessed by Levene's Test for Equality of Variances ( $p = .014$ ). Extreme outliers were removed from the data. The number of suspensions and expulsions was the dependent variable. The independent variables were diverse schools and schools that lack diversity. The number of suspensions and expulsions were greater for diverse schools ( $M = 160.53$ ,  $SD = 107.23$ ) than for schools that lack diversity ( $M = 113.15$ ,  $SD = 79.39$ ), a statistically significant difference  $M = 47.38$ , 95% CI [20.19, 74.57],  $t(177.462) = 3.439$ ,  $p = .001$ .

#### **Post Hoc Test Research Questions 1 and 3**

Because there was a statistically significant difference between the group means for each category within the dependent variables, a Tamhane T2 Post Hoc test was conducted to determine how each dependent variable category differed from the other. The Tamhane T2 Post Hoc test was utilized because there was no assumption of equal variances. Tamhane T2 test is a conservative parametric post hoc test that is appropriate to use when variances are unequal, and it can be applied to any linear contrast (Olejnik & Lee, 1990).

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 27, was utilized for all statistical analyses. Hypotheses were tested for statistical significance at the  $p < .05$  level. The summary matrix for the data analysis is presented in Table 3.

**Table 3***Summary Matrix for the Data Analysis*

<b>Research Question(s)</b>	<b>Constructs or Variables</b>	<b>Instruments</b>	<b>Data Collection (e.g., timing, frequency)</b>	<b>Data Analysis Method</b>
<b>RQ 1:</b> Are there differences in the number of suspensions and expulsions across race in rural, independent, metropolitan, or micropolitan schools?	<b>Independent Variable(s):</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ethnicity/Race</li> </ul> <b>Categories:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• European American</li> <li>• African American</li> <li>• Latinx/Hispanic</li> <li>• Asian</li> <li>• Two or More Races</li> </ul> <b>Dependent Variable(s):</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suspensions</li> <li>• Expulsions</li> </ul>	Archival Data (Kentucky Department of Education, 2019a, 2019b)	Once	ANOVA using SPSS  Tamhane T2 Post Hoc Test
<b>RQ 2:</b> Are there differences in the number of suspensions and expulsions across gender in rural, independent, metropolitan, or micropolitan schools?	<b>Independent Variable(s):</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gender</li> </ul> <b>Categories:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Male</li> <li>• Female</li> </ul> <b>Dependent Variable(s):</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suspensions</li> <li>• Expulsions</li> </ul>	Archival Data (Kentucky Department of Education, 2019a, 2019b)	Once	ANOVA using SPSS

Research Question(s)	Constructs or Variables	Instruments	Data Collection (e.g., timing, frequency)	Data Analysis Method
<b>RQ 3:</b> Are there differences in the number of suspensions and expulsions according to school classification?	<b>Independent Variables(s):</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>School typology</li> </ul> <b>Categories:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Diverse</li> <li>Non-diverse</li> </ul> <b>Dependent Variable(s):</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Suspensions</li> <li>Expulsions</li> </ul>	Archival Data (Kentucky Department of Education, 2019a, 2019b)	Once	ANOVA using SPSS  Tamhane T2 Post Hoc Test
<b>RQ 4:</b> Does the number of suspensions and expulsions differ in schools that lack diversity versus schools that do not lack diversity?	<b>Independent Variable(s):</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Diverse schools</li> <li>Lack of diversity</li> </ul> <b>Dependent Variable(s):</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Suspensions</li> <li>Expulsions</li> </ul>	Archival Data (Kentucky Department of Education, 2019a, 2019b)	Once	Welch <i>t</i> -test using SPSS

### Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

#### ANOVA and Welch's *t*-Test

The Welch's *t*-test and ANOVA assumptions include independent samples, normality, and homogeneity of variance. Independent samples and ANOVA require the observations to be random and independent from the population. The assumption of independent observations was met based on the data and design used for this study. Likewise, the assumptions of a continuous dependent variable and one independent variable with two groups were met. Normality refers to the dependent variable having a normal distribution for the population. Normality of the ANOVA's were tested; however, the one-way ANOVA is robust and tolerates violations of

normality. Assumptions of normality for the independent samples  $t$ -test were violated ( $p < .05$ ) according to Shapiro-Wilk Test for Normality. Homogeneity of variance requires the distributions in the populations have equal variance. Homogeneity of variance were tested using the Levene's Test of Equality of Variances in SPSS. Assumptions of homogeneity of variance were violated. Extreme outliers were removed from the data.

The exclusion of alternative, STEM, charter, and academy schools was a primary limitation of this study. Additionally, this study was limited to analyzing exclusionary discipline factors that include ethnicity/race, gender, school classification, and school diversity. Other factors such as graduation rates, student achievement, dropout rates, criminal activity, and teacher responsiveness were not analyzed. The exclusionary discipline rates for Native American/Native Alaska and Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students were not significant, therefore, these ethnicities/races were excluded. Finally, three separate ANOVAs as opposed to a three-way ANOVA were used to analyze ethnic/race, gender, and school classification.

## Chapter IV

### Results

The following section reports the results for the multiple ANOVAs statistical tests and Tamhane T2 post hoc tests and the Welch's *t*-test used to analyze the data in this study. The descriptive statistics for student enrollment and exclusionary discipline are shown in Table 4. The descriptive statistics for study measures is displayed in Table 5.

### Descriptive Statistics

**Table 4**

*Student Enrollment and Exclusionary Discipline Representation for 2017 – 2019 School Years*

Variable	Number and Percent of Enrollment		Number and Percent of Suspensions and Expulsions	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Ethnicity/Race				
European American	264,599	86	26,161	79
African American	15,144	5	3,411	10
Latinx/Hispanic	13,987	5	1,419	4
Asian	3,740	1	49	<1
Native American/Alaska Native	375	<1	3	<1
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	343	<1	7	<1
Two or More Races	8,457	3	1,705	5
Gender				
Male	157,756	51	23,269	70
Female	148,869	49	9,869	30

*Note.* Total student enrollment for school years 2017-18 and 2018-19 (*N* = 306,625). Total number of suspensions and expulsions for school years 2017-18 and 2018-19 (*N* = 32,755).

**Table 5***Descriptive Statistics for Study Measures*

Variable	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Ethnicity/Race					
European American	195	130.4	107.9	115.2	145.7
African American	181	9.2	16.3	6.8	11.6
Latinx/Hispanic	189	5.84	9.5	4.5	7.2
Asian	185	0.1	0.5	0.1	0.2
Two or More Races	180	5.8	8.8	4.5	7.1
Gender					
Male	195	115.1	98.1	101.2	128.9
Female	191	44.9	40.3	39.1	50.6
School Typology					
Rural	429	35.8	57.7	30.4	41.3
Independent	309	26.3	43.9	21.4	31.2
Metropolitan	368	70.3	107.9	59.3	81.4
Micropolitan	210	51.9	81.3	40.9	62.9

*Note.* *N* = number of participants in the group; *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation.

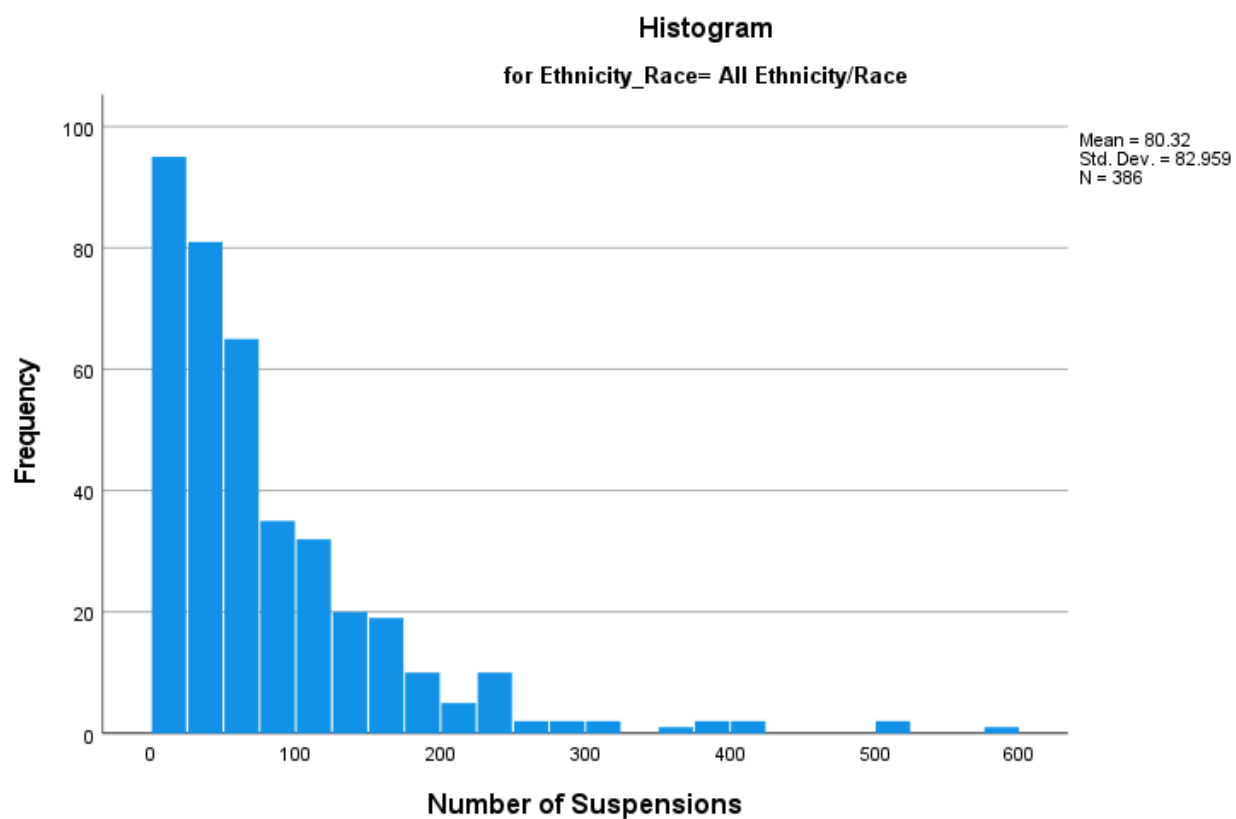
**Research Question 1**

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine if the number of suspensions and expulsions was different for ethnic/racial groups. Participants were classified into five groups: European American ( $n = 195$ ), African American ( $n = 181$ ), Latinx/Hispanic ( $n = 189$ ), Asian ( $n = 185$ ) and two or more races ( $n = 180$ ). Extreme outliers were removed from the data. Graphical representation through a histogram (see Figure 1) showed a positive skewness and the statistical representation from the Shapiro-Wilk Test of Normality ( $p < .05$ ; Table 6) both concluded that the assumption of normality was not met for suspensions and expulsions according to ethnicity/race, but these data were relevant to the study and had to be included.

Removing the exclusionary discipline count from the data would invalidate average number of suspensions and expulsions between groups. The data were included and the failure to meet the normality assumption as a limitation of the study. Homogeneity of variances was violated, as assessed by Levene's Test of Homogeneity of Variance ( $p < .001$ ; Table 7).

**Figure 1**

*Histogram for the Number of Suspensions and Expulsions Across Ethnicity/Races*



**Table 6***Shapiro-Wilk Test of Normality for the Number of Suspensions and Expulsions Across**Ethnicity/Race*

	Ethnicity/Race	Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	<i>df</i>	<i>P</i>
Number of Suspensions and Expulsions				
	European American	.862	195	<.0005*
	African American	.628	181	<.0005*
	Latinx/Hispanic	.646	189	<.0005*
	Asian	.268	185	<.0005*
	Two or More Races	.702	180	<.0005*

\*  $p < .05$ .**Table 7***Levene's Test of Homogeneity of Variances for the Number of Suspensions and Expulsions**Across Ethnicity/Race*

Test of Homogeneity of Variances			
Number of Suspensions and Expulsions			
Levene Statistic	<i>df</i> one	<i>df</i> two	<i>p</i>
136.698	4	1310	<.0005**

\*\*  $p < .001$ .

The difference in the number of suspensions and expulsions was measured, and ethnicity/race represented the categories. There was a statistically significant difference between ethnic/racial groups as determined by one-way ANOVA [ $F(4, 1310) = 161.572, p < .001$ ; see Table 8]. The number of suspensions and expulsions increased from the Asian group

( $M = 0.13$ ,  $SD = 0.53$ ) to two or more races ( $M = 5.76$ ,  $SD = 8.81$ ), Latinx/Hispanic ( $M = 5.84$ ,  $SD = 9.48$ ), African American ( $M = 9.22$ ,  $SD = 16.26$ ) and European American ( $M = 130.41$ ,  $SD = 107.88$ ) ethnic/racial group, in that order (see Table 5). Tamhane T2 post hoc analysis revealed that the mean increase from African American to European American ( $-121.19$ , 95% CI  $[-144.36, -98.03]$ ) was statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ), as well as the increase from Latinx/Hispanic to European American ( $-124.57$ , 95% CI  $[-147.56, 101.59]$ ,  $p < .001$ ), Asian to European American ( $-130.28$ , 95% CI  $[-153.18, -107.38]$ ,  $p < .001$ ), Asian to African American ( $-9.09$ , 95% CI  $[-12.67, -5.50]$ ,  $p < .001$ ), Asian to Latinx/Hispanic ( $-5.71$ , 95% CI  $[-7.75, -3.66]$ ,  $p < .001$ ), Asian to two or more races ( $-5.63$ , 95% CI  $[-7.58, -3.67]$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and two or more races to European Americans ( $-124.66$ , 95% CI  $[-147.63, -101.68]$ ,  $p < .001$ ; see Table 9).

Results revealed in terms of suspensions and expulsions European American was the highest followed by African American, Latinx/Hispanic, two or more races, and Asian being the lowest.

**Table 8**

*One-Way ANOVA Results for the Number of Suspensions and Expulsions Across Ethnicity/Race <sup>a</sup>*

	Sum of Squares	<i>df</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>
Between Groups	3074607.21	4	614921.44	161.57	<.0005**
Within Groups	4985681.99	1310	3805.86		
Total	8060289.19	1315			

*Note.*  $N = 1316$ .

<sup>a</sup> Dependent Variable: Number of Suspensions and Expulsions.

\*\*  $p < .001$ .

**Table 9***Tamhane T2 Post Hoc Test for the Number of Suspensions and Expulsions Across**Ethnicity/Race*<sup>a</sup>

Ethnicity/Race	Mean Difference	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	<i>P</i>
African American to European American	-121.19*	-144.36	-98.03	<.0005**
Latinx/Hispanic to European American	-124.57*	-147.56	-101.59	<.0005**
Asian to European American	-130.28*	-153.18	-107.38	<.0005**
Asian to African American	-9.09*	-12.67	-5.50	<.0005**
Asian to Latinx/Hispanic	-5.71*	-7.75	-3.66	<.0005**
Asian to Two or More Races	-5.63*	-7.58	-3.67	<.0005**
Two or More Races to European American	-124.66*	-147.63	-101.68	<.0005**

*Note.* *N* = 1316.<sup>a</sup> Dependent Variable: Number of Suspensions and Expulsions.

\*The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

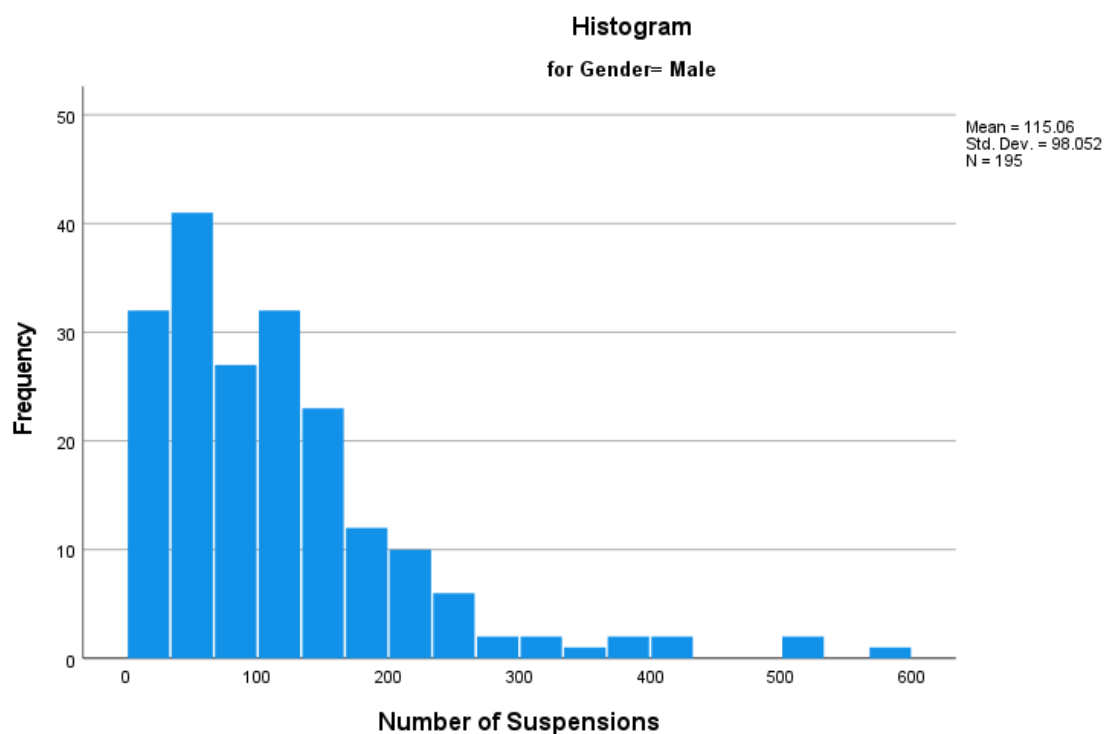
\*\**p* < .001.**Research Question 2**

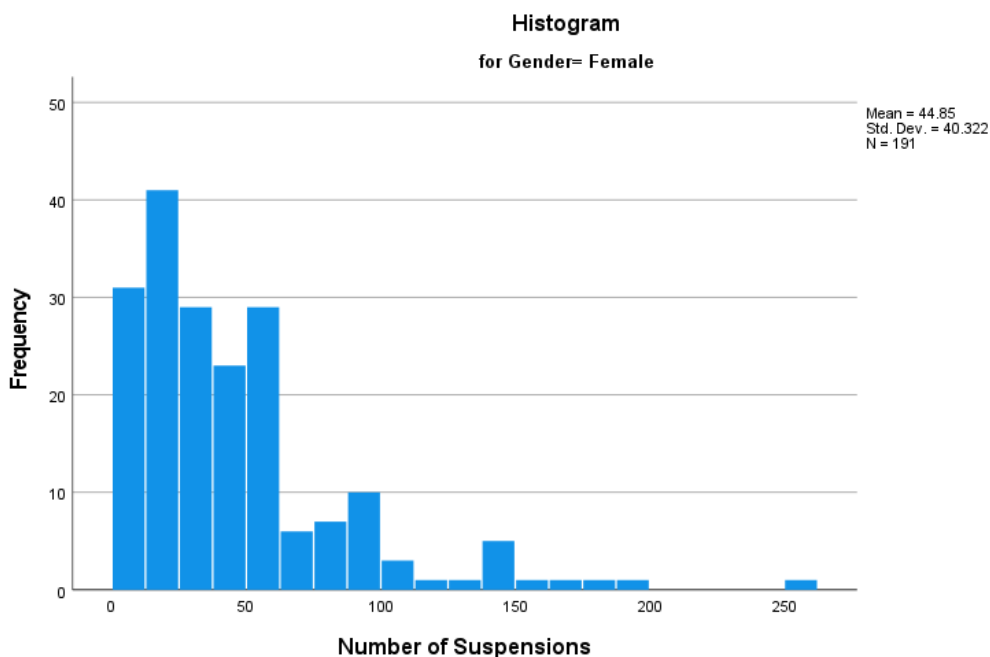
A one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine if the number of suspensions and expulsions was different for gender groups. Participants were classified into two groups: male (*n* = 195) and female (*n* = 191). Extreme outliers were removed from the data. Graphical representation through a histogram (see Figure 2) showed a positive skewness and the statistical

representation from the Shapiro-Wilk Test of Normality ( $p < .05$ ; Table 10) both concluded that the assumption of normality was not met for suspensions and expulsions according to gender, but these data were relevant to the study and had to be included. The difference in the number of suspensions and expulsions was measured, and gender represented the categories. Removing the exclusionary discipline count from the data would invalidate average number of suspensions and expulsions between groups. The data were included and the failure to meet the normality assumption as a limitation of the study. Homogeneity of variances was violated, as assessed by Levene's Test of Homogeneity of Variance ( $p = <.001$ ; Table 11).

**Figure 2**

*Histograms for the Number of Suspensions and Expulsions Across Gender*



**Table 10**

*Shapiro-Wilk Test of Normality for the Number of Suspensions and Expulsions Across Gender*

		Shapiro-Wilk		
	Gender	Statistic	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Number of Suspensions and Expulsions				
	Male	.839	195	<.0005*
	Female	.834	191	<.0005*

\*  $p < .05$ .

**Table 11**

*Levene's Test of Homogeneity of Variances for the Number of Suspensions and Expulsions Across Gender*

Test of Homogeneity of Variances			
Number of Suspensions and Expulsions			
Levene Statistic	df one	df two	p
28.619	1	1313	<.0005**

\*\*  $p < .001$ .

There was a statistically significant difference between gender groups as determined by one-way ANOVA [ $F(1, 1313) = 106.688, p < .001$ ; see Table 12]. The number of suspensions and expulsions increased from the female group ( $M = 44.85, SD = 40.32$ ) to the male group ( $M = 115.06, SD = 98.05$ ; see Table 5).

**Table 12**

*One-Way ANOVA Results for the Number of Suspensions and Expulsions Across Gender<sup>a</sup>*

	Sum of Squares	<i>df</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Between Groups	1126766.78	1	563383.39	106.69	<.0005 <sup>**</sup>
Within Groups	6933522.41	1313	5280.67		
Total	8060289.19	1315			

*Note.*  $N = 1316$ .

<sup>a</sup> Dependent Variable: Number of Suspensions and Expulsions.

<sup>\*\*</sup>  $p < .001$ .

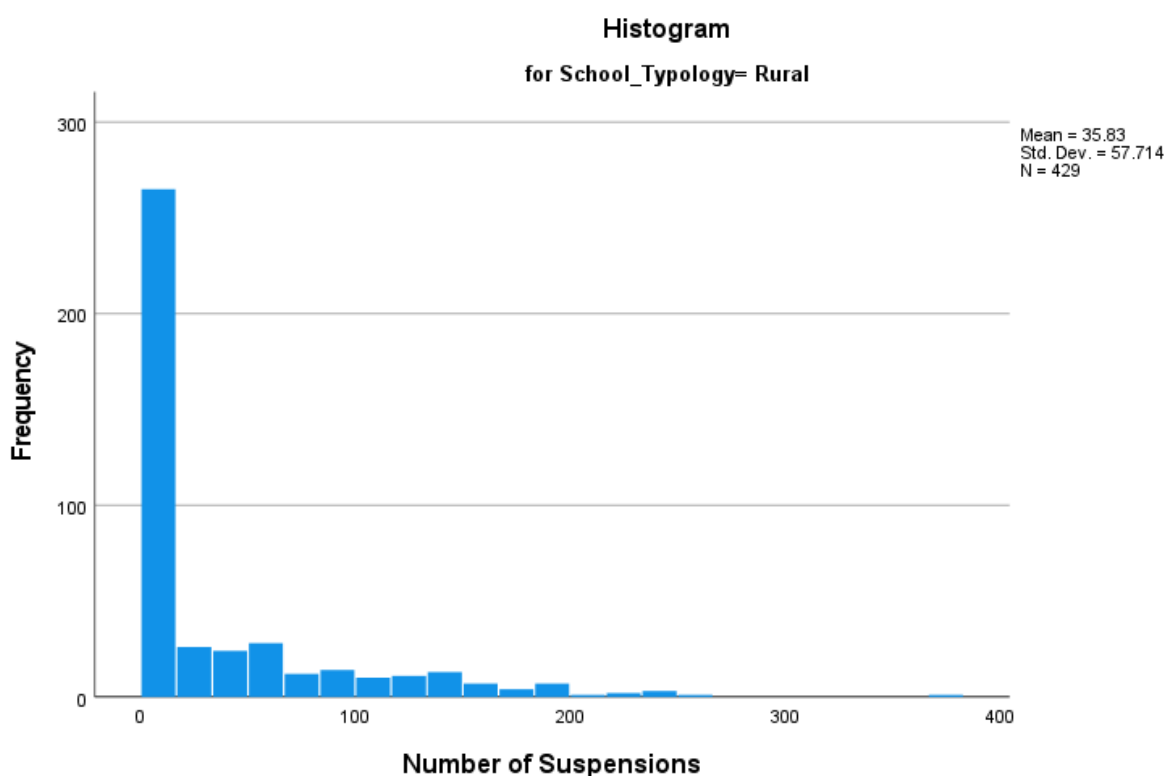
### Research Question 3

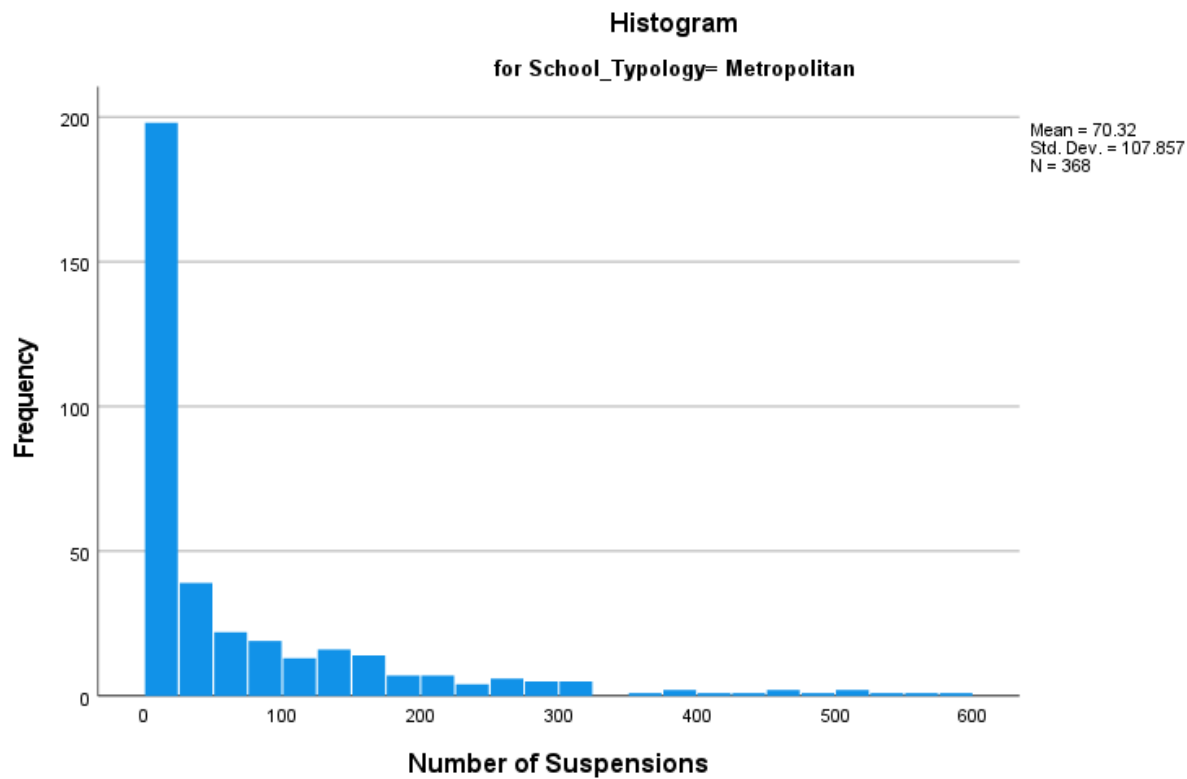
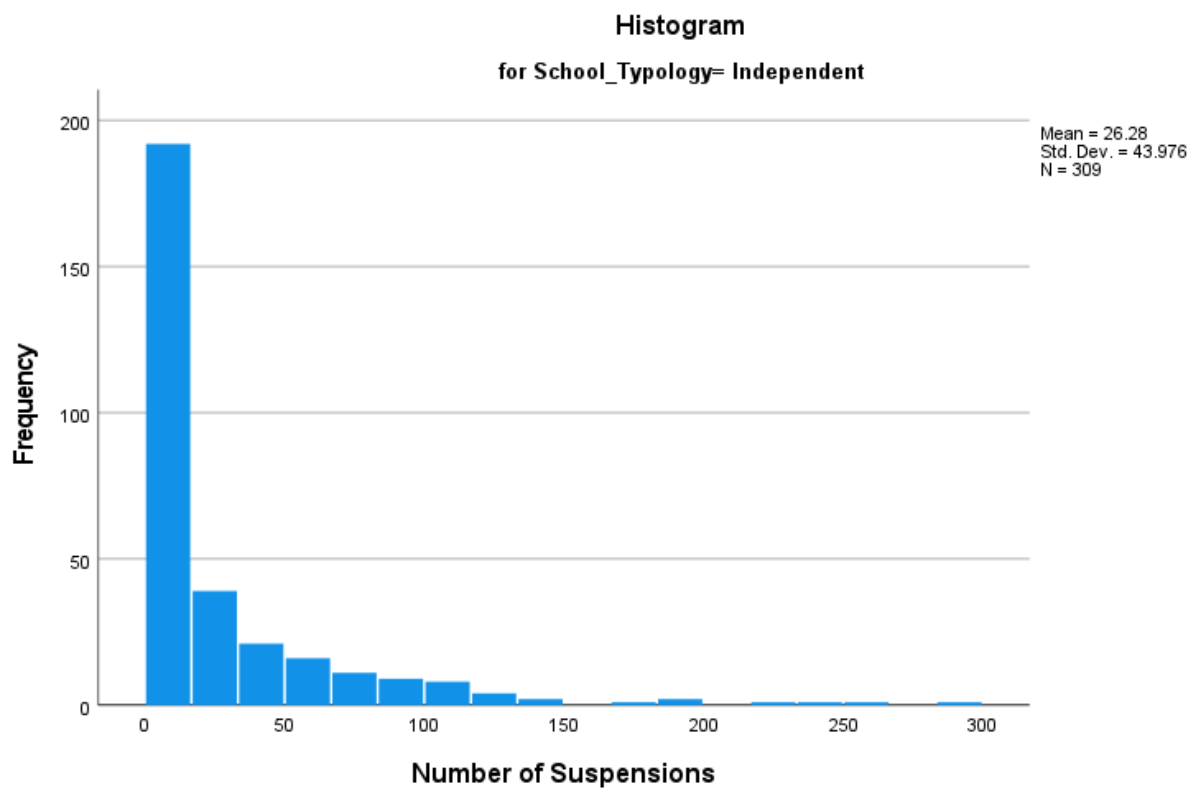
A one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine if the number of suspensions and expulsions was different for school typology as defined by the classification. Schools were classified into four groups: rural schools ( $n = 429$ ), independent schools ( $n = 309$ ), metropolitan schools ( $n = 368$ ), and micropolitan schools ( $n = 210$ ). Extreme outliers were removed from the data. Graphical representation through a histogram (see Figure 3) showed a positive skewness and the statistical representation from the Shapiro-Wilk Test of Normality ( $p < .05$ ; Table 13) both concluded that the assumption of normality was not met for suspensions and expulsions according to school classification, but these data were relevant to the study and had to be included. The difference in the number of suspensions and expulsions was measured, and the

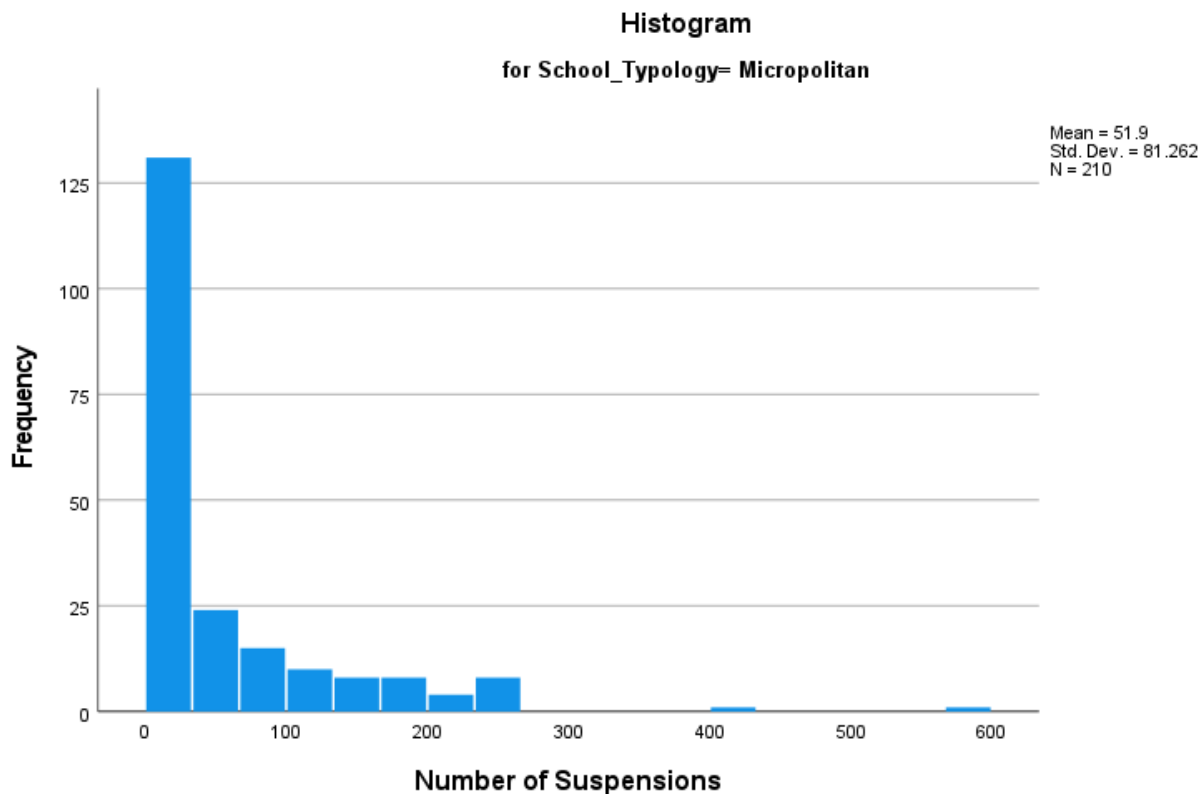
school's classification represented the categories. Removing the exclusionary discipline count from the data would invalidate average number of suspensions and expulsions between groups. The data were included and the failure to meet the normality assumption as a limitation of the study. Homogeneity of variances was violated, as assessed by Levene's Test of Homogeneity of Variance ( $p = <.001$ ; Table 14).

**Figure 3**

*Histograms for the Number of Suspensions and Expulsions According to School Classification*





**Table 13**

*Shapiro-Wilk Test of Normality for the Number of Suspensions and Expulsions According to School Classification*

		Shapiro-Wilk		
School Classification		Statistic	df	p
Number of Suspensions and Expulsions				
	Rural	.685	429	<.0005*
	Independent	.642	309	<.0005*
	Metropolitan	.686	368	<.0005*
	Micropolitan	.677	210	<.0005*

\*  $p < .05$ .

**Table 14**

*Levene's Test of Homogeneity of Variances for the Number of Suspensions and Expulsions*

*According to School Classification*

Test of Homogeneity of Variances			
Number of Suspensions and Expulsions			
Levene Statistic	df one	df two	p
49.839	3	1312	<.0005**

\*\*  $p < .001$ .

There was a statistically significant difference between school classification groups as determined by one-way ANOVA [ $F(3, 1312) = 22.210, p < .001$ ; see Table 15]. The number of suspensions and expulsions increased from the independent schools ( $M = 26.28, SD = 43.98$ ) to rural schools ( $M = 35.83, SD = 57.71$ ), micropolitan schools ( $M = 51.90, SD = 81.26$ ), and metropolitan schools ( $M = 70.32, SD = 107.86$ ), in that order (see Table 5). Tamhane T2 post hoc analysis revealed that the mean increase from rural schools to metropolitan schools (-34.49, 95% CI [-51.07, -17.93]) was statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ), as well as the increase from independent schools to metropolitan schools (-44.05, 95% CI [-60.30, -27.79],  $p < .001$ ), and independent schools to micropolitan schools (-25.63, 95% CI [-41.89, -9.36],  $p < .001$ ; see Table 16). However, multiple comparisons revealed no significant differences between rural and independent, rural and micropolitan, and micropolitan and metropolitan schools.

**Table 15***One-Way ANOVA Results for the Number of Suspensions and Expulsions According to School**Classification<sup>a</sup>*

	Sum of Squares	<i>df</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Between Groups	389560.62	3	129853.54	22.21	<.0005**
Within Groups	7670728.57	1312	5846.59		
Total	8060289.19	1315			

*Note.* *N* = 1316.<sup>a</sup> Dependent Variable: Number of Suspensions and Expulsions.\*\* *p* < .001.**Table 16***Tamhane T2 Post Hoc Test for the Number of Suspensions and Expulsions According to School**Classification<sup>a</sup>*

School Typology	Mean Difference	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	<i>p</i>
Rural schools to Metropolitan schools	-34.49*	-51.07	-17.93	<.0005**
Independent schools to Metropolitan schools	-44.05*	-60.30	-27.79	<.0005**
Independent schools to Micropolitan schools	-25.63*	-41.89	-9.36	<.0005**

*Note.* *N* = 1316.<sup>a</sup> Dependent Variable: Number of Suspensions and Expulsions.

\*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

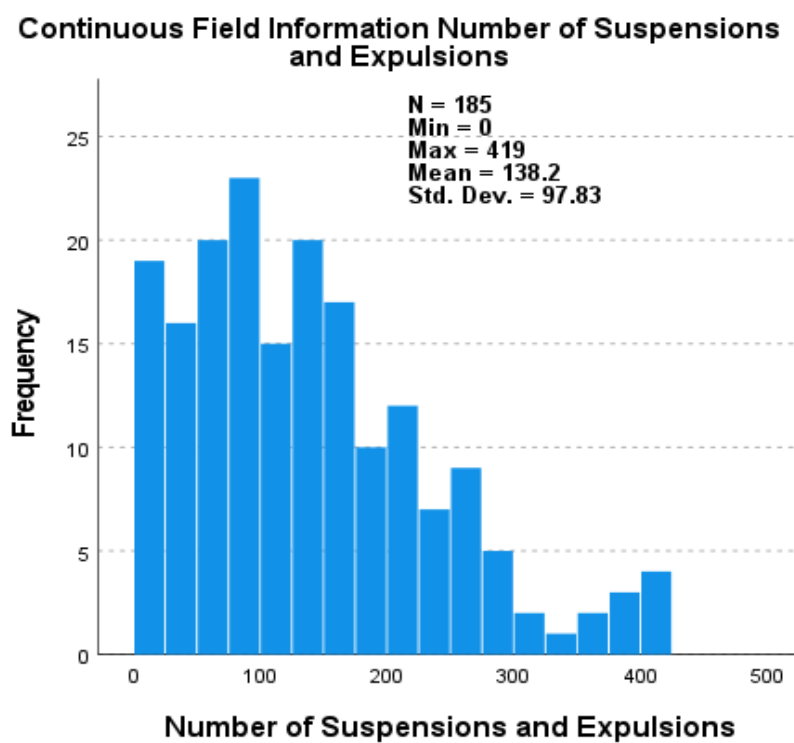
\*\* *p* < .001.

#### Research Question 4

There were 98 schools considered diverse and 87 schools that lack diversity. Extreme outliers were removed from the data. Graphical representation through a histogram (see Figure 4) showed a positive skewness and the statistical representation from the Shapiro-Wilk Test of Normality ( $p < .05$ ; Table 17) both concluded that the assumption of normality was not met for suspensions and expulsions according to school diversity, but these data were relevant to the study and had to be included. The difference in the number of suspensions and expulsions was measured, and level of diversity represented the categories. Removing the exclusionary discipline count from the data would invalidate average number of suspensions and expulsions between groups. The data were included and the failure to meet the normality assumption as a limitation of the study. A Welch's  $t$ -test was run to determine if there were differences in the number of suspensions and expulsions between diverse schools and schools that lack diversity due to the assumption of homogeneity of variances being violated, as assessed by Levene's Test for Equality of Variances ( $p = .014$ ; Table 18). Outliers were removed from the data, and the number of suspensions and expulsions for each level of diversity violated the assumption of normality, as assessed by Shapiro-Wilk's test ( $p < .05$ ).

**Figure 4**

*Histogram for the Number of Suspensions and Expulsions According to School Diversity*

**Table 17**

*Shapiro-Wilk Test of Normality for the Number of Suspensions and Expulsions According to School Diversity*

		Shapiro-Wilk		
School Diversity		Statistic	df	p
Number of Suspensions and Expulsions				
	Diverse	.938	98	<.0005*
	Lack Diversity	.938	87	<.0005*

\*  $p < .05$ .

**Table 18**

*Levene's Test of Equal Variances for the Number of Suspensions and Expulsions According to School Diversity*

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances			
Number of Suspensions and Expulsions		<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
	Equal variances assumed	6.158	.014 <sup>*</sup>
	Equal variances not assumed		

<sup>\*</sup>  $p < .05$ .

The number of suspensions and expulsions were greater for diverse schools ( $M = 160.53$ ,  $SD = 107.23$ ) than schools that lack diversity ( $M = 113.15$ ,  $SD = 79.39$ ), a statistically significant difference,  $M = 47.38$ , 95% CI [20.19, 74.57], [ $t(177.462) = 3.439$ ,  $p = .001$ ; see Table 19]. Results revealed that the number of suspensions and expulsions are greater for schools that are considered diverse as opposed to schools that lack diversity.

**Table 19**

*Welch's t-Test Results for the Number of Suspensions and Expulsions According to School Diversity*

School Diversity	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Mean Difference	SE Difference	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	183	3.380 <sup>a</sup>	.001	47.38	14.02	19.72	75.04
Welch's <i>t</i>	177.462	3.439	.001	47.38	13.78	20.19	74.57

<sup>a</sup> Levene's is significant ( $p < .05$ ), suggesting a violation of the assumption of equal variances.

### **Summary**

This study examined the number of suspensions and expulsions for rural, independent, metropolitan, and micropolitan schools in the Commonwealth of Kentucky. The findings among ethnicity/race, gender, school classification, and school diversity showed differences in the number of suspensions and expulsions between each group. Testing for ethnic/racial groups found that European American students were suspended and expelled more than any other ethnic/racial group. Male students were suspended and expelled at a greater rate than female students when testing for gender. Results found that metropolitan schools were the highest in terms of suspensions and expulsions. Finally, an analysis of data showed a higher number of suspensions and expulsions for schools defined as diverse. All tests showed differences for the dependent variable between groups.

## **Chapter V**

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to determine factors contributing to the difference in the number of suspensions and expulsions according to (1) ethnic/racial groups: European American, African American, Latinx/Hispanic, Asian, and two or more races; (2) gender: male and female; (3) school classification: rural, independent, metropolitan, micropolitan; and (4) school diversity: diverse and lack of diversity. The following is a discussion of the conclusions drawn from the results, implications, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research

### **Conclusions**

This study adds to the growing body of research related to exclusionary discipline in secondary schools with varying typologies. Most of the previous research on discipline disparities has analyzed local or national school data retrieved from the Civil Rights Data Collection database and not directly from the state's reporting agency. Also, much of the previous research has not sufficiently addressed exclusionary discipline, focusing on the different classifications of schools and other disadvantaged ethnic/racial groups.

When addressing school classification, most research has focused on one category or collective categories instead of an individual categorical focus. For example, Morris and Perry (2016) conducted a study on discipline disparities by analyzing data from the Kentucky School Discipline Study of one large urban (metropolitan) school district. Losen and Martinez (2013) analyzed the data from 26,000 middle and high schools with no focus on individual school classification. Likewise, much of the previous studies focused on investigating African American students' discipline rates compared to European American students. Even though some research consists of varying ethnic/racial student groups, the focus of disparity is highlighted by the

African American discipline gap unless the scholarship is centered around a particular ethnic/racial student group. For example, Brown and Di Tillio (2013) investigated discipline proportionality focusing on Native American and Latinx students, and Nguyen et al. (2019) studied Asian American and Pacific Islander subgroups disciplinary actions.

From a CRT and racialized ROT perspective, choices made by decision-makers, whether intended or not, add to the differences in discipline for underrepresented groups. Most policies and procedures that regulate student discipline are developed, implemented, or enforced by a higher number of European American policymakers than other ethnic/racial groups. Likewise, a higher percentage of teachers making discipline referrals are European American. The policymaker and teacher perceptions of appropriate behavior lend to how a student's behavior will be evaluated, thus causing the disciplinary action to fall within the social meaning framework of the evaluator. These perceptions also contribute to the racialization of social structures within the schools. According to school classification, differences in rates of exclusionary discipline rely on the tenant that implicit and explicit racism is embedded in school practices and policies. This tenant is more evident when viewing the racial composition of an institution.

The current study aimed to address these by examining ethnic/racial differences in exclusionary discipline for five groups across the Commonwealth of Kentucky. Additionally, the study extended the focus to differences in gender, school classification, and school diversity. Research has found that school factors and student factors are significant predictors of exclusionary discipline (Noltemeyer & McLoughlin, 2010). The findings from this study indicate that European American students were suspended and expelled more than any other ethnic/racial group during the 2017-18 and 2018-19 school years. Previous research has shown that African

American and Latinx/Hispanic students are subjected to exclusionary discipline at greater rates than European American students. Thus, the current study shows a contradiction to previous findings. The following is a discussion of the major findings related to each research question.

### **Research Question 1**

The first research question focused on the differences in the number of suspensions and expulsions between European American, African American, Latinx/Hispanic, Asian, and two or more race students. Native American/Alaska Native and Hawaiian/Pacific Islander student groups were removed due to the small amount of data available. Data analysis showed statistically significant differences in the number of suspensions and expulsions between all ethnic/racial groups. These findings support the alternative hypothesis that there will be significant differences in the number of suspensions and expulsions across races in rural, independent, metropolitan, or micropolitan schools. A multiple comparison (post hoc) test revealed that European Americans had the highest number of suspensions and expulsions for student groups within the sample of schools used in this study. Suspension and expulsion numbers for other ethnic/racial student groups listed from largest to smallest were African American, Latinx/Hispanic, two or more races, and Asian. This result mirrors Losen et al. (2015) findings from a study of the Kansas City school district where European American students had higher suspension rates than any other ethnic/racial group. The exclusion of schools that were found to be extreme outliers could have contributed to the results. Also, taking into consideration that the 2017-18 and 2018-19 student enrollment represented in this study were almost the same with 87% and 86% European American, 5% and 5% African American, 4% and 5% Latinx/Hispanic, 1% and 1% Asian, and 3% and 3% two or more races, one can assume there would be more suspensions and expulsions for European American students. These results only

analyzed the difference between the average number of suspensions and expulsions for each student group. The results do not address within-group analysis.

### **Research Question 2**

The second research question examined the differences in the number of suspensions and expulsions between male and female students. Native American/Alaska Native and Hawaiian/Pacific Islander student groups were removed due to the small amount of data available. Data analysis showed a statistically significant difference in the number of suspensions and expulsions between male and female student groups. These findings support the alternative hypothesis that there will be significant differences in the number of suspensions and expulsions across gender in rural, independent, metropolitan, or micropolitan schools. The results coincide with previous research (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Edelman, 2014; Losen et al., 2015; Rafa, 2018) that male students are suspended and expelled from school at higher rates than female students. One assumption for this disparity lies in society's perception of causes for female behavior instead of male behavior. These perceptions combined with the gender of the teacher issuing the discipline referral could create bias in disciplining either student group (Gregory et al., 2015). The 2017-18 and 2018-19 student enrollment represented in this study were the same, with 51% male and 49% female students for each school year. These results only analyzed the difference between the average number of suspensions and expulsions for each gender. The results do not address within-group analysis.

### **Research Question 3**

The third research question investigated the differences in the number of suspensions and expulsions between schools classified as rural, independent, metropolitan, and micropolitan according to the Kentucky Department of Education. Native American/Alaska Native and

Hawaiian/Pacific Islander student groups were removed due to the small amount of data available. Data analysis showed statistically significant differences in the number of suspensions and expulsions between all school classifications. These findings support the alternative hypothesis that there will be significant differences in the number of suspensions and expulsions according to school classification. A post hoc analysis revealed significant differences in the average number of suspensions and expulsions when comparing rural schools to metropolitan schools, independent schools to metropolitan schools, and independent schools to micropolitan schools. However, there were no significant differences when comparing rural schools to independent or micropolitan schools, nor were there differences between micropolitan and metropolitan schools. These findings match previous studies relating to school typology and student discipline. Theriot et al. (2010) concluded that urban schools issue more exclusionary punishments than rural or suburban schools. Likewise, Freeman and Steidl (2016) found high discipline disparities in large schools and low discipline disparities in schools with high poverty levels. Finally, Anderson and Ritter (2017) found that schools with large percentages of African American students issue more suspensions and expulsions. The study also inferred that schools with high levels of poverty are hesitant to administer exclusionary discipline. These findings could help to explain the significant differences between the school classifications in this study. According to Harrah (2012), most students of color live in the large Kentucky urban counties, and the highest poverty rates are in the Kentucky rural counties. Urban school districts and poverty levels would explain the increase in the number of suspensions and expulsions from rural to metropolitan schools. The increase in exclusionary discipline numbers from independent to metropolitan and micropolitan schools could be explained by examining the characteristics of the 53 independent school districts across the Commonwealth of Kentucky. When viewing

students of color in the independent school districts across Kentucky, the percentages rank on one of two extremes; some independent schools have a low percentage (2%) of enrolled underrepresented students, and some schools have a high percentage (61%). The location of the independent school determines the rate of enrollment for these student groups (Timmel et al., 2015). Kentucky's Independent School districts normally have fewer students than the other school types and generally meet the extremes for poverty levels across the Commonwealth (Timmel et al., 2015). These results only analyzed the difference between the average number of suspensions and expulsions for each school classification. The results do not address differences within each school classification.

#### **Research Question 4**

The fourth research question analyzed the difference in the number of suspensions and expulsions between schools that lack diversity versus schools that are considered diverse. For this study, a school was considered diverse if the percentage of underrepresented students was 8% or more as defined by school typology. Native American/Alaska Native and Hawaiian/Pacific Islander student groups were removed due to the small amount of data available. Data analysis showed a statistically significant difference in the number of suspensions and expulsions between schools that lack diversity and schools that do not lack diversity. Diverse schools were found to have a higher average of suspensions and expulsions. These findings support the alternative hypothesis that there will be a significant difference in the number of suspensions and expulsions in schools that lack diversity versus schools that do not lack diversity. These findings also match previous studies relating to school typology and student discipline (Anderson & Ritter, 2017; Freeman & Steidl, 2016; Theriot et al., 2010), where more diverse schools administer a punishment of exclusionary discipline at higher rates than smaller

non-diverse schools. These results only analyzed the difference between the average number of suspensions and expulsions for each school group. The results do not address differences within each school category.

### **Implications**

A significant implication of this study is the need to implement more consistent discipline policies on exclusionary practices. The Commonwealth of Kentucky established SBDM Councils to develop and implement policy at the school level (Kentucky Department of Education, 2015). Schools in this study have SBDM Councils, yet the rate of exclusionary discipline varies across school typology and classification. Because the Kentucky Department of Education allows the removal of a student from school to be based on the district-level or school-level policy, the administrative differences in school officials and board members combined with how certain violations are defined allow subjectivity, implicit bias, and explicit bias to have an impact on the individual school discipline practices. In terms of the theoretical frameworks, administrators must work to maintain consistency in discipline practices and policies.

Even though discipline policies are created collaboratively by an established council following the guidelines of the local district, the decision to suspend or expel a student falls on the school's administrators. Variables such as heavy work demands, time restraints, limited opportunities for professional development, and other variables aid in restricting the administration's ability to address student behavior equitably. The development, implementation, and enforcement of discipline policies must be consistent across the Commonwealth, no matter the characteristics of the school. Administrators and SBDM councils should constantly check data to remain informed on the school's use of exclusionary discipline to make effective adjustments to policies. Students must be accountable for their behavior without factors such as

ethnicity/race, gender, school classification, or school diversity level contributing to their inability to remain in school and become productive in society.

Another implication is the need for all schools in the Commonwealth of Kentucky to implement a program that will serve as an alternative to exclusionary discipline. Many of the schools in Kentucky have implemented some form of an alternative method. However, some programs are located within the school building, and others are at another site. The schools that have established alternative programs within the school tend to have lower numbers of suspensions and expulsions. For example, Paducah Tilghman High School has employed the PBIS initiative as an alternative to exclusionary discipline, and they reported no students being suspended or expelled during the 2017-18 and 2018-19 school years. Likewise, Grayson County High School and Ohio County High School have Alternative classes and a Short-term In-School Alternative Program, respectively, and neither school reported suspensions nor expulsions during the research period.

On the other hand, Henderson County High School uses Central Academy as an alternative to out-of-school suspensions, located off-campus. Henderson County High School reported 847 suspensions and expulsions for the two academic years. Administrators and SBDM councils should educate themselves about alternatives to suspension programs and other ways of minimalizing student misbehavior. The establishment and maintenance of on-site alternatives to exclusionary discipline programs can help minimize and eventually alleviate the differences in the rates of suspensions and expulsions based on all factors, more especially, the factors addressed in this study.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study was limited to a sample of secondary schools from across the Commonwealth of Kentucky. Since alternative, STEM, charter, academy, other special schools, and extreme outlier schools were excluded, results cannot be generalized to all schools. However, results can be generalized to schools in the Commonwealth of Kentucky that share the same characteristics as the sample schools. Although removing the extreme outliers increased the chance of analyzing similar schools in terms of discipline rates, the removal also changed the number of schools in each classification (i.e., rural, independent, metropolitan, micropolitan). The exclusion of Native American/Alaska Native and Hawaiian/Pacific Islander ethnic/racial groups, was also a limitation to this study. Both student groups represented less than one percent of the total student enrollment and exclusionary discipline.

Another limitation to this study is the data collection and analysis. Archival data from the Kentucky Department of Education was used to examine the differences in the number of suspensions and expulsions. All behavioral events are reported to the Infinite Campus Programs' Behavior Management Tool by a trained school representative. Because this is self-reported data, the accuracy of this data is based upon the level of experience and training for the person(s) making the reports.

Research Questions 1-3 were investigated by running multiple ANOVAs. The analysis could have been conducted using other statistical tests; however, the one-way ANOVA was chosen for each hypothesis because it is robust against violations of data normality. Because the ANOVA is robust, the tests will still give adequate results even though the assumptions are violated. Likewise, since the independent variable sample numbers are very close in each hypothesis, the test protects against violations. Also, a Tamhane T2 post hoc analysis was

utilized to compare the differences of each group to the other in research questions one and three. The Tamhane T2 was chosen for the multiple comparisons since the data violated the assumptions of normality and homogeneity. For research question four the Welch's *t*-test was utilized since the assumptions of normality and homogeneity were violated. All data were analyzed and reported on the differences between groups. No results were reported within groups.

A final limitation to this study was the limited factors that were examined. This study is limited to factors collected from the Kentucky Department of Education's Safe School Report. According to ethnicity/race, gender, school level, and school type, discipline numbers were reported; however, there are other factors such as graduation rates, student achievement, student dropout, principal-teacher responsiveness, criminal activity, and student-teacher matchup that play important roles in determining exclusionary discipline rates. These factors and others are significant but not included in this analysis.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Factors that were not included in the current study offer opportunities for future research. All factors examined in this study found differences in the number of suspensions and expulsions; however, the Commonwealth of Kentucky would benefit from investigating other factors regarding exclusionary discipline, including but not limited to the student-teacher matchup, principal-teacher training, and the use of alternatives to exclusionary discipline. Kentucky's Safe Schools Report does not report these variables in the database. Identifying the additional factors that contribute to the discipline disparities will allow the Commonwealth of Kentucky to address or reduce the effect of those factors.

Future research could focus on the outlier schools that were excluded from this study. The number of suspensions and expulsions for these schools is different from the normal rates. The Commonwealth of Kentucky could benefit from understanding how the exclusionary discipline rates for the outlier schools are different from comparable schools and have lower numbers of suspensions and expulsions. This information would be valuable for the SBDM councils when considering solutions to decrease student misbehavior and increase student in-school instructional time. A longitudinal study on outlier schools would also benefit the school officials and policymakers in Kentucky. Examining the outlier schools over an extended period will allow the researcher to evaluate how the differences vary (do the schools remain outliers each year or fall within the average some years) from one academic year to the other. The investigation of outlier schools would, in turn, will help to determine if discipline policies or school demographics have a greater influence on discipline use in the schools.

Schools in this study would also benefit from the results of a within-group analysis. Native American/Alaska Native and Hawaiian/Pacific Islander student groups were excluded from this study because the sample sizes were too small when compared between ethnic/racial groups. However, an analysis within ethnic/racial groups might suggest where the intra-group disparity lies. Likewise, the within-group investigation for Latinx/Hispanic and Asian student groups will help determine which ethnic/racial subgroups have the higher rates of exclusionary discipline. The larger the size of the sample, the easier it is for the researcher to find statistical significance at the 0.05 level of significance. Power analysis is recommended to determine the smallest sample size that is suitable to detect the effect of a given test at the desired level of significance while also avoiding a Type II error due to insufficient power.

### **Summary**

Using CRT and ROT as theoretical frameworks, the investigation of the differences in rates of exclusionary discipline between student groups according to their ethnicity/race, gender, school classification, and level of school diversity has produced useful results. An analysis utilizing multiple ANOVAs, Tamhane T2 Post Hoc Tests, and a Welch's *t*-Test revealed that when excluding extreme outlier schools and student groups that represented less than one percent of the total enrollment and discipline infractions, European American students received on average more suspensions and expulsions than any other student group during the 2017-18 and 2018-19 school years. The results also indicated higher rates of exclusionary discipline for male students, metropolitan schools, and more diverse schools. The findings implied a need for consistency in discipline policies and a broad implementation of alternatives to out-of-school punishments. There are opportunities for future researchers to add to the growing body of literature on school discipline that would benefit the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

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## Appendix A

### Approval to Conduct Research from Austin Peay State University



**AUSTIN PEAY STATE UNIVERSITY**  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Date: 5/28/2021

**21-021: Factors Contributing to the Differences in Suspensions and Expulsions in Rural Versus Metropolitan Secondary Schools**

Re: Revised Application IRB 21-026

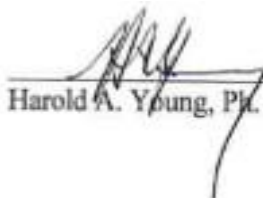
Dear Mr. Edwards,

We appreciate your cooperation with the human research review process. This letter is to inform you that the amendment to study 21-026 was reviewed on an expedited level. It is my pleasure to inform you that your revised study has been approved.

This approval is subject to APSU Policies and Procedures governing human subject research. The IRB reserves the right to withdraw approval if unresolved issues are raised during the review period. Any changes or deviations from the approved protocol must be submitted in writing to the IRB for further review and approval before continuing.

This approval is for one calendar year and a closed study report or request for continuing review is required on or before the expiration date, 5/27/2022. If you have any questions or require further information, please contact me by phone (931-221-7059) or email [youngh@apsu.edu](mailto:youngh@apsu.edu).

Sincerely,



Harold A. Young, Ph. D. Chair, APIRB

## Appendix B

### Approval to Conduct Research from the Kentucky Department of Education

**From:** Conner, Dede - KDE Division Director <[dede.conner@education.ky.gov](mailto:dede.conner@education.ky.gov)>  
**Sent:** Friday, July 16, 2021 8:03 AM  
**To:** Edwards, Reginald <[redwards2@my.apsu.edu](mailto:redwards2@my.apsu.edu)>  
**Subject:** RE: Archival Data Usage

No, there is no need to sign anything when using Kentucky public education data.

The best source for the information you are looking for is the School Report Card (SRC) research data sets. Our SRC site has changed over the years but you can get information on where to find these resources on our [Open House SRC page](#).

I hope this helps.

***DeDe Conner***

Director, Division of School Data Services  
 Office of Education Technology

Kentucky Department of Education  
 300 Sower Blvd.  
 Frankfort, KY 40601  
 (502) 564-2020, ext. 2208 | Cell (859) 421-2766  
 Email: [dede.conner@education.ky.gov](mailto:dede.conner@education.ky.gov)

*This email may contain confidential data or information and is intended solely for the use of the individual or entity to whom it is addressed. If you are not the named addressee you should not disseminate, distribute, or copy this e-mail, and you are requested to notify the sender immediately.*

**From:** Edwards, Reginald <[redwards2@my.apsu.edu](mailto:redwards2@my.apsu.edu)>  
**Sent:** Thursday, July 15, 2021 9:50 PM  
**To:** Conner, Dede - KDE Division Director <[dede.conner@education.ky.gov](mailto:dede.conner@education.ky.gov)>  
**Subject:** Archival Data Usage

**CAUTION:** This email originated from outside of the Kentucky Department of Education, Kentucky K-12 schools, or Kentucky State Government. Do not click links, open attachments or forward unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Thank you for your prompt response.

**Reginald H. Edwards, Ed. S.**  
 Fort Campbell High School  
 Mathematics Department