

## ABSTRACT

Assistant Principals: The Disruptors of Oppressive Discipline Practices

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The assistant principal is the gatekeeper of student discipline and is the key to closing the disproportionate discipline gap between Black and White students. Assistant principals can help close the gap by engaging in Culturally Responsive School Leadership professional development that allows them to become self-aware of their implicit bias, utilize an intervention tool that can serve as a guardrail between their implicit bias and discretionary discipline decision-making, and engage in the practice of critical self-reflection. Black students will stand a chance to be heard in discipline conversations and receive more inclusive consequences, allowing them more seat-time to access their education.

Assistant Principals: The Disruptors of Oppressive Discipline Practices

by

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## DEDICATION

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

The school discipline system nationwide disproportionately excludes African-American students compared to White peers (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights [OCR], 2021). This exclusion drastically impacts the academic success of African-American students and increases their likelihood of having experiences with the criminal justice system (Chu & Ready, 2018; Ghandnoosh, 2014; Skiba et al., 2011; Skiba & Losen, 2016). This phenomenon can be disrupted by providing assistant principals (AP), who serve as the gatekeepers of student discipline, with professional development that addresses how their implicit bias impacts the discretionary disciplinary decision-making of African-American students (Banaji & Greenwald, 2016; Girvan et al., 2017; J. A. Williams et al., 2020).

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to provide APs with professional development that allows them to transition into becoming culturally responsive school leaders who will utilize the behavior of critical self-reflection as a guardrail between their implicit bias and their discretionary disciplinary decision-making of African-American students (Banaji & Greenwald, 2016; Girvan et al., 2017; Khalifa et al., 2016). This professional development intervention for APs is essential to help decrease the disproportionate discipline African Americans experience and to slow down the discretionary disciplinary decision-making process of APs through critical self-reflection.

### *Background of the Problem*

APs across America have been tasked with being the gatekeepers of student discipline (J. A. Williams et al., 2020). As gatekeepers, they have two primary responsibilities: maintaining the safety of the adults and students within the building and creating an “environment conducive to learning” (Skiba et al., 2009, p. 1074). As the gatekeepers of student discipline, APs are responsible for making discipline decisions that impact African-American students’ academic and social well-being. School districts create policies to address student behaviors, and APs have the discretion to determine the level of punishment each student receives (Skiba et al., 2009). For instance, if a student gets a discipline referral for a subjective behavior, such as being disrespectful to the teacher. An AP has the discretion can decide to handle this discipline referral using an inclusive discipline practice such as restorative justice for the student to learn how their behavior impacted them, the teacher, and the whole classroom and send the student back to class. Or the AP could choose to use an exclusionary discipline practice such as in-school discipline, which removes a student from the classroom and does not help to correct the behavior.

There is no argument that APs have the right to address student discipline, as this is their primary responsibility (J. A. Williams et al., 2020). The concern is managing the process APs engage in when making a discretionary discipline decision and the discrepancies between races of students, practically African-American students (Skiba et al., 2009; Girvan et al., 2017). Research suggests that African-American students are perceived more negatively than their peers, contributing to the overrepresentation of African-American students in the school discipline system (Downey & Pribesh, 2004;

Skiba et al., 2002; Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007). The AP's implicit bias shapes the negative perception of African-American students; these negative associations can be unconsciously shaped by history and their experiences with different social groups (Banaji & Greenwald, 2016).

*United States History of Disciplining and African-Americans Post-Slavery*

Racial differences in the use of suspensions of African-American students compared to their White peers can be attributed to the AP's perspectives and bias (Banaji & Greenwald, 2016; Downey & Pribesh, 2004; Skiba et al., 2002; Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007). There is limited evidence to suggest African-American students engage in more severe discipline disruptions that can explain the higher rates of punishment, such as suspensions (Cruz & Rodl, 2018; Girvan et al., 2017; Gopalan & Nelson, 2019; Skiba & Losen, 2016). A common hypothesis for the differences in discipline between African-American-White students has been socioeconomic status, but researchers have found that African-American students are over-represented in suspensions (Cruz & Rodl, 2018; Girvan et al., 2017; Gopalan & Nelson, 2019; Skiba & Losen, 2016). Therefore, according to Skiba and Losen (2016), race contributes to African-American disproportionality in discipline. This stark reality suggests African-American students are more severely punished for their actions simply because of their skin color, which is a problem because it results in adverse student academic outcomes (Bell & Puckett, 2020). There is limited evidence to suggest African-American students engage in more severe discipline disruptions that can explain the higher rates of punishment, such as suspensions (Cruz & Rodl, 2018; Girvan et al., 2017; Gopalan & Nelson, 2019; Skiba & Losen, 2016). The over-punishment of African Americans has a history rooted in fear and

control that can serve as background knowledge that can impact an AP's subconscious negative bias toward African-American students (Banaji & Greenwald, 2016).

The American government is responsible for maintaining order within society, which includes the administration of justice. There are two general theories of discipline that governments intertwine into laws. These include utilitarian and retributive.

According to JRank (2019), "the utilitarian theory of punishment seeks to punish offenders for discouraging future wrongdoing. The retributive theory seeks to punish offenders because they deserve to be punished" (para. 2). When considering the history of discipline and African Americans in America, one cannot skip over slavery, and the discretion slaveholders had when punished enslaved Africans (August 1619–December 1865). Enslavers heavily relied on the utilitarian theory of punishment to force enslaved Africans to conform to the rules and make them too afraid to rebel (Paton, 2001).

It was common practice for enslaved Africans to receive harsh punishments for punitive actions, and there were no protections for them because slaveholders had the discretionary power to choose the discipline (Paton, 2001). According to Paton (2001), "the 1664 slave code explicitly delegated state sovereign claims to the slaveholder, requiring that 'all small...misdemeanors shall be heard and determined by the master of the Slave or Slaves'" (p. 927). The 1664 slave code gave slaveholders the discretionary power to choose how enslaved people would be punished; historians have noted how slaveholders chose harsher punishment for punitive actions.

Paton (2001) recounts how a slaveholder decided to punish an enslaved African woman.

A 1709 pamphlet describes the whipping of a woman who “had stolen a Silver Cup, or some such small thing, from her Master.” The writer notes that the master “might either correct her in his own House or order her to be chastised in the open Market, by the hands of the common Whipman.” In this case, “He chose the latter.” (p. 927)

It has been approximately 156 years since the Civil War ended slavery in America. Even though the chains wrapped around African Americans have been unlocked, the implicit bias association that African Americans need to be punished more harshly than their White counterparts is still locked in the minds of lawmakers in America (Losen & Gillespie, 2012). Researchers Losen and Gillespie (2012) suggested policies such as zero tolerance have led to African-American students being disproportionately suspended for punitive actions that their White peers are not. This subconscious association between African-American = strict punishment and White = lax punishment is a lens of racial discipline differences that needs to be addressed (Skiba & Losen, 2016).

#### *United States History of the Criminal Systems Perception and African-Americans*

The history of the United States of America's criminal system perceptions is riddled with a fear-based lens for viewing African-Americans. The ushering in of the post-slavery era of Jim Crow, statistical data was published to explain African American criminality and birthed the idea of the Negro Problem (Muhammad, 2019). The Negro Problem was a concept backed by statistical data that African Americans had self-destructive tendencies of crime, pauperism, and sexual immorality that were innate and the causation of crime (Muhammad, 2019). The notion that African Americans were innately bad provided a mental schema to justify their overcriminalization and why they



were negatively perceived because they were seen as inhumane and uncivilized by White society (Muhammad, 2019).

As The United States of America transitioned into the Civil Rights Era, landmark Supreme Court Cases such as *Brown v. the Board of Education* impacted how people perceived each other (Allen, 2004). With the desegregation of schools, there was a rhetoric that African Americans were inferior to whites, which created bad habits of how African American people were perceived that transformed into societal distrust between the two races (Allen, 2004; Leverenz, 1996). The inferiority of African American rhetoric influenced the public discourse that African-Americans “were more likely to commit crimes” (hooks, 1996, p. 6). This justified them to be feared and overly surveilled by police.

The criminal link between the idea that African Americans have innate self-destructive tendencies, social distrust and over-surveillance by white police officers has led to the United States of America having the world’s highest incarceration rates for African-Americans (Muhammad, 2019; Skiba & Losen, 2016). Ghandnoosh (2014) highlighted the racial perceptions of crime and the support for punitive policies. The report highlighted that “skewed racial perceptions of crime-particularly, White Americans’ strong associations of crime with racial minorities have bolstered harsh and biased criminal justice policies” (Ghandnoosh, 2014, p. 3). With the dominant perception of African Americans being criminals and having these perceptions reinforced by media and policymakers, it is unsurprising to see a connection between school discipline and the criminal justice system disproportionately harsher for African Americans (Gregory et al., 2010). Unfortunately, this perception typecasts African-American students as

troublemakers who must be watched and punished to correct misbehavior (Peterson et al., 2016).

### *Structural Racism and the Assistant Principal*

The history of how African Americans have been overly disciplined in the United States of America has birthed the invisible harm of structural racism. Structural racism is “a system of hierarchy and inequity, primarily characterized by white supremacy—the preferential treatment, privilege, and power for white people at the expense of Black people” (Keleher & Lawrence, 2004, p. 1). Structural racism has negatively impacted how African American students are disciplined in schools. The student code of conduct governs the discipline framework for school districts nationwide. Without careful consideration of the verbiage of the rules, it can invisibly riddle with white supremacy philosophies that guide the assistant principal's discretionary discipline decision-making. (Gillborn\*, 2005). Structural racism leads to a potentially negative outcome for African American students.

### *School-to-Prison Pipeline*

The school-to-prison pipeline is a prime example of the negative connection that school discipline and the criminal justice system have on African-American students. Suspension is usually the first link in adverse events that impact African-American students in the short- and long-term, such as decreased academic achievement, increased dropout rates, and early connections with the criminal justice system (Pearman et al., 2019; Skiba & Losen, 2016). B. L. Perry and Morris (2014) found a correlation between high out-of-school suspension rates and low academic achievement. Balfanz et al. (2012)

also highlighted a 20% increase in dropout rates when ninth graders were suspended at least once. Suspension is an early connection to the criminal justice system for students. Shollenberger (2015) found that 32% of males suspended at 12 for ten or more days had been imprisoned in jail by their late 20s. The school-to-prison pipeline data is startling for African-American students, disproportionately numbered in both locations. Disrupting this system will require APs to understand their biases' unintended consequences on their discipline decision-making and create a system that will curbe their biases' impact on African-American students.

### *School Discipline System*

The school discipline system is rooted in the belief that schools must ensure safety and maintain order for students to learn (Skiba & Peterson, 2000). In 1910, when public school became mandatory, the teacher took on more of a parent's role of disciplinarian ("School Discipline History," para. 5). Then, with the hiring of school administrators, the disciplinarian role shifted to them. The shift in the disciplinarian position from parents to the school brought corporal punishment for student misbehaviors into the classroom. Due to this shift, teachers and school leaders had the power and discretion to hit students for misbehaving in the classroom. In the '70s and '80s, corporal punishment was replaced with the help of "time outs." Now, whenever a student misbehaved, the teacher would send them to time out, which was meant to "interrupt and prevent aggressive behavior, protect the rights and safety of the other students" (Rodd, 1996). While the sentiments of school discipline were to protect students, it inconsequently led to students being removed from the classroom space.

Then, with the introduction of zero-tolerance policies in 1994, schools could use harsher and punitive disciplinary punishments to address students' misbehavior. Individual school districts have the autonomy to create discipline policies that vary in harshness. This gives the school administrator discretion to choose which discipline intervention to use for each student's misbehavior. This has meant students, especially students of color, became more vulnerable to being overly punished for minor infractions behaviors such as excessive talking, disrespect, and noise (Blake et al., 2011; Skiba et al., 2002). These various disciplinary interventions have included out-of-school suspension, expulsion, and positive behavioral interventions and supports (Skiba & Rausch, 2006). Using out-of-school suspension and expulsion for minor infractions across races has been unfair and inconsistent because it is based on the school administration, particularly the AP's discretion. This has made African-American students more harshly punished for misbehavior (Skiba & Peterson, 2000).

### *School Discipline and African-Americans*

With school districts having the authority to create the discipline systems used, they have the power to change the corrective interventions. Still, one of the constants has been the over-representation of African-American students with exclusionary and punitive consequences for subjective misbehavior. The Children's Defense Fund (1975) pioneered exploring the school discipline data provided by the OCR and reported that more African-American students were suspended, and African-American students were twice as likely to be suspended as their White peers (Skiba et al., 2002).

APs' utilization of suspensions is not a new discipline disposition in response to student behavior (Chu & Ready, 2018; Pearman et al., 2019). The number of students

suspended from school has increased since 1974. According to Wald (2001), school leaders in 1974 stopped approximately 1.7 million students from attending school. This number climbed to about 3.1 million students by 1998 (Martinez, 2009). Today, the number of students suspended a year is still exceedingly astronomical.

The OCR (2021) reported the student suspension data snapshot for student enrollment in 2017-2018 that continues to support the idea that school leaders such as APs need to be trained to be culturally responsive school leaders to disrupt the disproportionality of subjective discipline outcomes for African-American students compared to White students. The OCR (2021) reported there were 50.9 million students enrolled in public schools; 7.4 million (15.1%; 7.7% boys and 7.4% girls) students were African-American, and 24 million (47.3%; 24.4% boys and 22.9% girls) students were White students.

According to the OCR (2021), data revealed the most significant suspension disparities impacted both African-American girls, who were two times more likely to be suspended (24.5%) compared to their total student body population (7.4%). African-American boys were arrested thrice (45%) compared to their total student body population (7.7%). This suspension data validates the need for APs to be trained to shift their discretionary discipline decision-making from purely exclusionary for subjective behaviors of African-American students to become aware of how their implicit bias is impacting their discretionary discipline decisions as their role is heavily connected to student discipline (Glanz, 1994; Martin & Smith, 2017; Oleszewski et al., 2012; Scoggins & Bishop, 1993; J. A. Williams et al., 2020). When APs overuse the punishment of suspension, they are “automatically excluding students from educational instruction...

[which] is contradictory to the mission of education” (Christle et al., 2007, p. 521). The AP’s implicit biases impact the discretionary discipline decision-making regarding African-American students (Girvan et al., 2017; C. Lee, 2017).

Forty-seven years after the publication of The Children’s Defense Fund (1975) report, African-American students being disproportionality suspended from school has been a consistent practice. Studies have suggested that African-American students are more frequently exposed to harsher disciplinary procedures, including in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, and expulsion (T. Lee et al., 2011; Skiba et al., 2002; Shaw & Braden, 1990). The racial disparity in discipline is problematic for the academic success of African-American students (Skiba et al., 2011). The research needs to shift from repeating the numbers to understanding how to disrupt this pattern. The disruption of this oppressive system can include APs becoming more self-aware of their biases, engaging in the culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) behavior of critical self-reflection, and creating a system that serves as a guardrail between their bias and their discretionary discipline decision-making of African-American students (Banaji & Greenwald, 2016; Girvan et al., 2017; Khalifa et al., 2016).

### *False Narrative of Student Discipline*

With a data-driven culture, it is understandable why removing a misbehaving student is a decision many APs feel is necessary to ensure the other students have the academic space to learn. The *alternative* to this idea is the students excluded from the classroom spaces are still a part of the campus accountability data and need access to the academic area. Skiba et al. (2009) echoed this claim in their study by stating, “the strongest predictor of academic achievement is active academic engagement, strategies

such as suspension and expulsion pose a dilemma for administrators by removing students from the opportunity to learn” (pp. 1073–1074). Therefore, APs must consider how their discipline decisions affect African-American students’ academic success.

The research over the years has continued to support the narrative that exclusionary discipline is the most effective solution to correct student misbehavior and positively impact the campus. Advocates for using exclusionary discipline have two presumptions about the impact on the campus. First, Ewing’s (2000) belief was a harsh consequence such as suspension would serve as a deterrent, either upon a possible repeat infraction from the student or the other students in the classroom. Second, removing the misbehaving student will improve the other students’ overall classroom culture and academic environment (Skiba et al., 2009). These presumptions are aligned with the punishment philosophies used during slavery and by policymakers to shape the criminal system. Unsurprisingly, these practices did not correct African-American students’ behavior but were used as a basis to control and exclude them and explain why they receive harsher punishments than their White peers (Skiba, 2008; Skiba & Losen, 2016).

Unfortunately, this harsh approach has created a false narrative that suspension is the magic pill to curb student misbehavior. Skiba’s (2008) research revealed no empirical data to support the presumptions of the advocates for the use of exclusionary discipline for subjective behaviors. There is also no data to help the narrative that suspensions will reduce the likelihood of future student discipline (Skiba et al., 2009). Instead, these discipline practices have been linked to high dropout rates for students, particularly African-Americans, and have been a driving force behind the pushout phenomenon

(Skiba et al., 2009). This means the APs' discretionary discipline decision can contribute to African-American students dropping out of school.

### *Modern Discipline Approach*

Positive discipline is one of the modern student discipline approaches APs can leverage on their campuses. Positive discipline can be a transformational practice that provides students with teachable moments and allows them to reflect to understand the impact of their behaviors on the learning communities (Somayeh et al., 2013). Through this approach, the AP can become a Culturally Responsive School Leader who builds positive relationships with students, which can help them make more positive associations with their African-American students and help to curb how their implicit bias impacts their discipline decision-making (Banaji & Greenwald, 2016; Khalifa et al., 2016).

Research has shown that positive discipline approaches can benefit the classroom experience, campus, and individual students. Haji Hoseynnejhad and Majdfar (2011) indicated some benefits of positive discipline, including locating a solution to the problem rather than strictly punishing the behavior, cultivating communication skills, and problem-solving steps. Positive discipline approaches can also help students increase their self-acceptance and sense of belonging on campus by amplifying their self-confidence (Somayeh et al., 2013). Positive discipline will allow students the opportunity to learn from their mistakes and be able to reenter the classroom space.

With APs shifting their discipline approaches, these practices can help the campus achieve the goal of education. Campuses will be able to cultivate an atmosphere where students have a learning process and where students feel included and successful



(Somayeh et al., 2013). Somayeh et al.'s (2013) descriptive survey study highlighted a significant positive relationship between positive behavior approaches and students' learning motivation, self-control, and commitment. These positive connections can help close the achievement gap for African-American students because they have more opportunities to be in the classroom.

The traditional way discipline has been used to correct African-American students' behavior has harmed their academic experience. They have been overly disciplined for minor infractions since slavery, and the patterns have continued in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. To disrupt these patterns, APs must become culturally responsive school leaders. Through this transformation, APs can use critical self-reflection and build relationships to ensure their implicit biases are not driving their disciplinary decision-making.

#### *Statement of the Problem*

African-American students are disproportionately disciplined for their behaviors compared to White peers (Chu & Ready, 2018; Skiba et al., 2011; Skiba & Losen, 2016). Across America, one has seen this phenomenon occurring, and the research has continually highlighted these discipline disparities. However, what has not been addressed heavily in studies is how an AP's implicit biases impact their disciplinary decision-making. One intervention that can handle the discipline disparities is having APs receive practical professional development that allows them to become self-aware of their implicit bias, critically self-reflect, and select a discipline disposition that addresses the behavior and the color of the student's skin (Banaji & Greenwald, 2016; Khalifa, 2020; Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015).

Researchers have expressed inconsistency in how the disciplinary practices of suspension and expulsion are based on the school leader's characteristics regarding student behaviors. Schools whose administrators, including APs, have a penal philosophy favoring the use of school exclusion tend to have higher rates of out-of-school suspension and expulsion (Skiba et al., 2009). African-American students' behavior is considered more problematic and warrants punishment than their White peers (Skiba et al., 2011; Skiba & Losen, 2016). This reality has contributed to the achievement gap because African-American students are likelier to have less seat time in the classroom (Greenwood et al., 2002).

The AP's discretionary disciplinary philosophy has been shaped by its cultural competency, bias, and classroom experience when addressing student discipline. Once in the role, they have little access to professional development centered on student discipline that is not operational (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). This means the AP's discretionary discipline decision-making is guided by a narrative rooted in the history that African-American students need to be punished more severely in order for them to change (Skiba & Losen, 2016).

A shift is imperative in addressing how APs become self-aware of their own biases, engage in the CRSL behavior of critical self-reflection, and create a system that serves as a guardrail between their biases and their discretionary discipline decision-making of African-American students (Banaji & Greenwald, 2016; Girvan et al., 2017; Khalifa et al., 2016). Therefore, this research will shed light on the need for APs to engage in practical professional development that causes them to pause and consider their

biases' impact on discretionary disciplinary decision-making on the African-American students they serve.

### *Research Questions*

The research questions guiding this study are as follows:

RQ1: What degree of racial implicit bias was present in assistant principals before the intervention?

RQ2: Are African-American students disproportionately represented in discretionary disciplinary decisions before and after intervention?

RQ3: What were the assistant principal's experiences after utilizing the Culturally Responsive School Leadership Checklist to make discretionary disciplinary decisions?

### *Definitions of Key Terms*

For this study, the definitions of key terms are provided.

*African American/Black*-A person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa (*U.S. Census Bureau quickfacts: United States 2022*).

*Asian*-A person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent (*U.S. Census Bureau quickfacts: United States 2022*).

*Assistant principal (AP)*-The Oregon Department of Education defines an AP as a principal license holder. They can serve as an AP of a public school in prekindergarten through Grade 12 Oregon public service district (OCR, 2021).

*Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL)*-A framework that provides a valuable guardrail with which to analyze APs' discretionary discipline decision-making

practices (Khalifa, 2020). CRSL has four main foci to help guide the AP: (a) critical self-reflection, (b) developing culturally responsive teachers, (c) promoting a culturally responsive/inclusive school environment, and (4) engaging students, parents, and indigenous context.

*Discretionary discipline decision-making*-For the purposes of this study, the freedom APs have to decide what should be done in a particular discipline situation.

*Disproportionate discipline*-According to the National Clearinghouse on Supportive School Discipline project, students who belong to specific demographic groups (e.g., race/ethnicity, sex, disability status) are subjected to particular disciplinary actions disproportionately—at a greater rate than students who belong to other demographic groups (American Institutes for Research, 2022).

*Implicit bias*-According to Staats (2016), implicit bias is “the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner” (p. 29).

*Multiple Races*-People may choose to provide two or more races either by checking two or more race response check boxes, by providing multiple responses, or by some combination of check boxes and other responses (*U.S. Census Bureau quickfacts: United States 2022*).

*Native American*-A person having origins in any of the original peoples of North and South America (including Central America) and who maintains tribal affiliation or community attachment (*U.S. Census Bureau quickfacts: United States 2022*).

*Pacific Islander*-A person originating from any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands (*U.S. Census Bureau quickfacts: United States 2022*).

*Subjective behaviors are behaviors*- seen as negative based on the person's implicit bias toward the student (Martin & Smith, 2017).

*White*-A person originating from any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa (*U.S. Census Bureau quickfacts: United States 2022*).

### *Summary*

Transforming the professional development experience of APs can help to decrease the disproportionate discipline African American students experience. Providing an intervention that allows APs to become self-aware of their implicit bias and critically self-reflect on their impact on their discretionary disciplinarian decision-making of African American students.

Many researchers have focused on how the disproportionate discipline gate has negatively impacted African-American students' academic success and their experience with the criminal justice system. However, there is little research focusing on the APs' implicit bias role in African American students' disciplinarian decision-making for subjective behaviors and how to create a guardrail between their implicit biases and their discretionary disciplinarian decision-making.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Review of Literature

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, education is one of the single driving forces for African-American students to have access to opportunities that transform the trajectory of their lives. These opportunities are severely limited by the disproportionality of subjective discipline African Americans face compared to their White peers (Martin & Smith, 2017). Over the last 3 decades, African American students have been more likely to receive the exclusionary discipline consequence of suspension for subjective actions rooted in cultural differences between the teacher and student (Martin & Smith, 2017; Skiba & Peterson, 2000; Skiba & Rausch, 2006). This means that African American students' behavior does not fit the traditional model of conduct established by the dominant culture rooted in implicit bias (Casella, 2003; González & Szecsy, 2004; Martin & Smith, 2017; Skiba & Peterson, 2000; Skiba & Rausch, 2006).

African American students' exclusions from the educational setting due to suspensions hurt African American students' academic achievement (Cartledge et al., 2001; Scott et al., 2001). With a constant shift in educational policies that continue to increase accountability measures, students, mainly African American students, must be in the classroom more than they are not. The assistant principal (AP) can serve as the bridge between the African American students increasing their classroom seat time and being excluded from the classroom with their discipline decision-making. This bridge can be formed by transforming the professional development APs receive to bring awareness to

the role their implicit biases influence in their discipline decision-making of African American students.

The reality is that when these students are sent out of the classroom, they are sent to the AP, who is seen as the gatekeeper of student discipline. As the gatekeeper, the AP must choose between exclusive or culturally responsive disciplinary practices that allow African American students to have teachable and reflective moments. Unfortunately, the current professional development APs receive is inadequate to curve the disproportionality of subjective discipline African American students experience because discipline practices are not explicitly taught or practiced (Kowalski & Casper, 2007; Martin & Smith, 2017).

This is why APs need professional development that will allow them to morph into culturally responsive school leaders with a system to ensure their implicit bias is not driving their discretionary discipline decision-making of African American students. As culturally responsive school leaders, they will become the bridge to decrease subjective student discipline and increase African Americans' opportunities inside and outside the classroom (Gay, 2018; Martin & Smith, 2017; Khalifa et al., 2016).

This shift in approach can be done as APs gain culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) skills to become self-aware of how their implicit biases impact their discipline decision-making for African American students, utilize critical self-reflection practices to ensure they pause to think through their decisions, and create a discipline decision-making checklist to ensure they have a guardrail between their implicit biases and their discipline decision-making (Fiarman, 2016; Khalifa et al., 2016). The following literature review dives into the AP's need to become a Culturally Responsive School

Leader, the AP's need for Culturally Responsive School Leader professional development, and the components needed for the AP to become a Culturally Responsive School Leader.

*Assistant Principals Need to Become Culturally Responsive School Leaders*

Historically, the principal assistant role has been known as the unsung education hero, yet the research has neglected the position (Austin & Brown, 1970; J. A. Williams et al., 2020). As the educational landscape continues to evolve, APs' duties have not changed over the last four decades (Hausman et al., 2002; Oleszewski et al., 2012; Reed & Himmler, 1985; Scoggins & Bishop, 1993). However, this position is filled with men and women who have one of the most challenging jobs in education, as student discipline remains their primary responsibility (Hausman et al., 2002; Oleszewski et al., 2012; Reed & Himmler, 1985; Scoggins & Bishop, 1993). These sentiments were echoed by Richard (2000) as he stated the top assistant job is one of the most challenging roles in American education; the responsibilities undertaken are often thankless, and decisions are speedily selected. Therefore, there needs to be more focus on an AP's decision-making process.

The AP is expected to be the gatekeeper of school climate, with their primary role keeping a pulse on the students' behavior, but where and when do they build their competency in this arena (J. A. Williams et al., 2020)? By unpacking the disciplinary role of the AP, one can understand the magnitude of their discretionary decision-making can have on the disproportionately subjective student discipline infractions for African American students receive (Martin & Smith, 2017). The impact an AP's implicit biases have on their discretionary disciplinary decision-making is why APs need to shift into becoming culturally responsive school leaders and need professional development that



allows them to become self-aware of their implicit bias to create guardrails between their implicit biases and discretionary discipline decision-making.

This section of the literature review examines the AP as the disciplinarian, the AP's discretionary power to make discipline decisions, race, and teacher-student classroom dynamics, the disproportional student discipline gap, and the AP's implicit bias. These items raise the need for APs to gain professional development to become culturally responsive school leaders who are aware of how their implicit biases impact their discretionary decision-making of African-American students.

#### *Assistant Principals as Disciplinarians*

In 1970, Austin and Brown conducted a study for the National Association of Secondary School Principals to investigate the role of the AP and the responsibility they have in handling student discipline. From the pilot shadow study, 18 APs were observed first-hand. Through the observations, the researchers uncovered that the number one duty of all APs was student discipline (Austin & Brown, 1970). Conversely, researchers have identified that APs spend a substantial amount of their day responding to disciplinary interactions such as student-student and teacher-student conflicts (Barnett et al., 2012; Glanz, 2004; Kennedy & Haydon, 2021; Kwan, 2008).

AP disciplinary decisions are guided by their district's policy (Camacho & Krezmien, 2020). Even though APs are bound by their district policy, they have discretion when selecting student discipline outcomes, which can vary from AP to AP. For instance, researchers found the APs' handling of student discipline was not constant among all the campuses shadowed (Austin & Brown, 1970).

The discipline disposition the AP selects is based on their discretion, which can be influenced by their implicit biases, which is what makes student discipline challenging and sparks the disproportionate exclusionary discipline African American students face for subjective behaviors (Beachum & Gullo, 2020; DeMatthews, 2015; Findlay, 2012; Staats, 2016; Martin & Smith, 2017). Therefore, APs need to shift into becoming culturally responsive school leaders who have access to practical professional development that exposes the role their implicit biases play in their discretionary discipline decision-making to ensure they are not intentionally contributing to the disproportionate exclusionary discipline African American students experience (Bryan, 2017; Losen & Gillespie, 2012; Martin & Smith, 2017).

With the APs becoming culturally responsive school leaders, they will be more equipped to handle what researcher Marshall's (1992) study uncovered as the "culture shock" APs experience when managing student discipline (p. 40). This culture shock includes understanding how one's implicit bias subconsciously impacts their and their teacher's discretionary discipline decisions (Beachum & Gullo, 2020; Staats, 2014). APs are also expected to make decisions on how students should be disciplined which will cause them to "create their interpretations of policy to fit school needs and develop related political skills for presenting explanations of their school's needs" (Marshall, 1992, p. 42). This means APs must be equipped with culturally responsive school leader skills that allow them to

learn to (a) accept that teachers will have bad days which can cause them to take their frustrations out on a student, (b) master the bluffing (c) create individualized

discipline plans for students, and (d) to create preventive systems of discipline.

(Marshall, 1992, p. 42)

In reality, the discretionary disciplinary decisions APs make will either positively or negatively impact the opportunities of the African-American students across from them (Goldring et al., 2021). This is why APs must access professional development that exposes their implicit bias blind spots and begin creating a guardrail system that ensures their discretionary discipline decision-making is not subconsciously contributing to the disproportionate exclusionary discipline of African American students' experience for subjective behaviors (Banaji & Greenwald, 2016; Camacho & Krezmien, 2022; Fiarman, 2016; Martin & Smith, 2017; Skiba et al., 2002; Sukhera & Watling, 2018; Sukhera et al., 2020).

#### *Assistant Principals' Discretionary Power*

APs exercise discretion when deciding how to handle student discipline and must have the proper professional development to make sure these decisions do not negatively impact African-American student achievement engagement and are helping to close the opportunity gap (Galligan, 1986; Hawkins, 1997; Theobald et al., 2020; J. A. Williams et al., 2020). Paquette and Allison (1997) noted discretion employed during discipline decision-making is at the "heart of administrative action" (p.165). Lunenburg and Ornstein (2021) confirmed school leaders such as APs "are granted wide discretion in disciplining students" (p. 384). When deciding the student discipline, the AP's discretion creates a variance in disciplinary action and how the subjective field is addressed.

The AP's discipline discretion is heavily influenced by their implicit bias, which causes the disproportionate exclusionary discipline African American students experience

for subjective behaviors (Martin & Smith, 2017; Skiba et al., 2002; Sorensen et al., 2022; J. A. Williams et al., 2020). A study conducted by Hall (1999) highlighted how discipline discretion could “yield consistency or disparity in decision depending on administrative values and ideologies, social constraints, decision context, and ambiguous student discipline objectives” (p. 159). This is because APs’ discretion is heavily influenced by their implicit biases, which are more likely to favor their White students over their African American students, impacting how they view those students’ actions (Banaji & Greenwald, 2016; Girvan et al., 2017; Sorensen et al., 2022; J. A. Williams et al., 2020). Thus, discretion appears to place ultimate power in the hands of APs whose implicit bias subconsciously influences their discipline decision-making (Banaji & Greenwald, 2016; Girvan et al., 2017; Sorensen et al., 2022; J. A. Williams et al., 2020). Therefore, APs need to receive CRSL professional development, which will give them the skills to engage in critical self-reflection to ensure they have guardrails around their implicit bias and their discretionary discipline decision-making.

As the gatekeepers of student discipline, APs need to understand their implicit biases and make discretionary discipline decisions that do not place African American students at a disadvantage (J. A. Williams et al., 2020). Stefkovich (2006) claims it “behooves school officials to use their discretion wisely” (p. 499). When APs learn how their implicit biases influence their discipline discretion, they are more likely to contribute to decreasing the disproportionate exclusionary discipline for subjective behaviors African American students experience (Martin & Smith, 2017). Findlay (2012) noted that,

while discretion allows for the individualizing of student disciplinary issues and for creativity in dealing with them, there is also much opportunity for flaws in

individual judgment, which could result in disciplinary decisions that are too lenient and not preventive or proactive, or those that are too harsh for particular circumstances. (p. 499)

Therefore, APs need access to professional development that exposes and provides a guardrail for their implicit bias to ensure their discretionary discipline decisions are aligned with the student's behavior and not their skin color.

### *The Disproportionality of African-American Students*

Disproportionality can define the phenomenon in which students, compared to their percentage of the total population, experience underrepresentation or overrepresentation concerning a targeted data point such as discipline, which can have a negative academic impact on the students impacted (Bryan, 2017; Vincent et al., 2012). Research has shown that African-American students are more likely to be suspended than their White counterparts (Losen & Gillespie, 2012). The overrepresentation of African Americans in discipline data is of particular concern, especially regarding subjective behaviors (Camacho & Krezmien, 2020; Martin & Smith, 2017; Sorensen et al., 2022; Stefkovich, 2006). For instance, Skiba et al. (2002) found African American students were suspended more frequently for disrespect and excessive noise than their White peers. The student behaviors of disrespect and excessive noise are subjective behaviors that APs have the discretionary power to select the discipline outcome that is exclusionary or inclusionary (Camacho & Krezmien, 2020; Martin & Smith, 2017; Sorensen et al., 2022; Stefkovich, 2006). The disproportion of African Americans students disciplined for subjective behaviors compared to their White peers significantly decreased African American instructional seat time (Martin & Smith, 2017; Vincent et al., 2012).

As the classroom teachers write subjective discipline referrals, APs have the discretionary power to issue the discipline disposition (Martin & Smith, 2017). It is vitally essential that APs tip the scale of these exclusionary practices for subjective behaviors by gaining CRSL skills to be more aware of their implicit biases' role in their discretionary discipline decision-making.

### *Race and Teacher-Student Classroom Dynamics*

The student and teacher demographic differences create cultural conflict that increases student discipline for African-American students (Monroe, 2005). Across the United States of America, 7.4 million are African-American students, and approximately 79% of all teachers are White (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). Furthermore, the State of Oregon has seen its students of color enrollment continue to rise. However, White educators still heavily dominate the teaching profession, with approximately 28,000 (Oregon Department of Education, 2021). APs must consider the behavioral expectations between the student and teacher as they handle the referrals that cross their desks. Research highlights that middle-class and White community behavioral norms differ from African-American behavioral norms, which causes a cultural conflict (Monroe, 2005). These behavioral norm differences contribute to the discipline gap across the United States of America and Oregon.

The cultural differences between the African American students and their White teachers set the tone for classroom behavioral expectations that are not aligned. This contributes to their implicit bias being triggered and African American students experiencing disproportionate exclusionary discipline for subjective behaviors (Gregory et al., 2010; Martin & Smith, 2017). The reality is the classroom culture and rules are

shaped by norms aligned with White privilege and hidden from African-American students (Gregory et al., 2010). A social structure that creates this gap includes verbal exchanges and discourse differences. Kochman (1983) and Smitherman (1986) describe African-American verbal exchanges as participatory-interactive, consisting of call and response, tonal semantics, signification, and narrative sequencing. With this communication style, it is customary for African-American students to talk over each other and be more expressive (Kochman, 1983). In contrast, the White teacher may be more accustomed to a passive-receptive verbal exchange, which is more linear (Kochman, 1985; Monroe, 2005). It is customary with this communication style for the adult to be the sole dispenser of knowledge, and the listeners are expected to respond when the speaker is done (Gay, 2018).

The verbal exchange expectations differing between African American students and their White teachers causes a clash in communication. While African American students feel they communicate well with their teachers when they talk over them, their White teachers may feel their speech is inappropriate, and discipline is needed to correct this behavior. For instance, Bowers and Flinders (1990), Irvine (1990), and Kochman (1983) found when White teachers thought African American students talking overlapped with the teacher or their peers, they were rude, disrespectful, and offensive and that the conduct required disciplinary action.

Communication differences is a subjective behavior that can cause African-American students to be disproportionately disciplined because they are misunderstood (Vavrus & Cole, 2002). This is why it is critical when an AP receives this type of referral; they have a Culturally Responsive School Leader discipline system in place to

ensure they have a guardrail between their implicit biases and their discretionary discipline-making power to ensure they are listening to the student's preceptive to understand that the student may not have intended to be disrespectful. Rather, the student may be communicating in a way that is different than their teachers. By having this level of understanding, the AP discretionary discipline decision-making will be able to address the behavior in a culturally sensitive manner instead of simply disciplining the African-American student, which does not yield a change in behavior (Sorensen et al., 2022).

#### *Assistant Principals' Implicit bias*

As disciplinarians, APs need to understand and unpack how their implicit bias impacts their discretionary decision-making of African-American students (Beachum & Gullo, 2020); implicit bias refers to “the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner” (Staats, 2014, p. 29). An AP’s preferences can be triggered without their awareness or control (Staats, 2014). No one AP is insusceptible to activating their implicit biases; they are both ubiquitous and vigorous (Kang & Lane, 2010; Lane et al., 2007; Staats, 2014). The implicit biases APs hold about race/ethnicity, gender, and religion, among others, began to develop at a young age through exposure to direct or indirect media and impact their discretionary discipline decision-making (Staats, 2014).

An AP’s implicit bias can be triggered by various interactions and produce significant consequences for African American students (Okonofua et al., 2016; Staats, 2014). Researchers have identified a link between a leader’s implicit bias and the disproportionality of minority students in exclusionary discipline selections for subjective behaviors (Gilliam et al., 2016; Martin & Smith, 2017; Jacoby-Senghor et al., 2016). In



2017, Gullo conducted a non-experimental, cross-sectional study that included 43 administrators. This generated the findings that administrators' implicit biases were connected to more severe discipline for minority students, including African Americans, for subjective discipline.

Even though the APs may have a positive intent, implicit bias remains a vital contributor to the widening discipline gap for African Americans (Fabelo et al., 2011; Gullo & Beachum, 2020; Okonofua et al., 2016). According to Banaji and Greenwald (2016), all individuals, including APs, carry hidden implicit biases developed from a lifetime of experiences with various social groups that shape one's perception of a group of people. These hidden implicit biases are "items that commonly go together and logically expect them to inevitably co-exist in other settings" (Irwin & Real, 2010, p. 3). These familiar associations based on media portrayals can include black equals bad and white equals innocent. AP's implicit biases can be particularly problematic when making discretionary discipline decisions because "they can produce behavior that diverges from a person's avowed or endorsed beliefs or principles" (Irwin & Real, 2010, p. 3). The cultural difference between the AP and the African American student can trigger the AP's implicit biases, leading the student to be unconsciously disciplined more harshly than their White peers.

An AP's implicit bias can shape their attitudes and stereotypes towards their African American students, which can unconsciously impact their discretionary discipline decision-making ability. To test one's implicit attitude, Banaji and Greenwald (2016) introduced the experimental tool Race Implicit Association Test (IAT), which has subjects rapidly make split-second "good/bad" association decisions between words like

'pleasing,' 'beautiful,' 'abuse,' and 'hate' and sort images of faces that are African American or European American (Irwin & Real, 2010, p. 3). The data collected from Race IAT suggested that "implicit attitudes produce discriminatory behavior" (p. 4). Associations of "good/bad" behaviors that an AP has attributed to White and African American students influence their discipline decision-making. According to Marks (2017), these associations can be problematic based on the AP's impact on the campus.

To help reduce the AP's contribution to the discipline gap between African American and White students, the training and education framework APs receive needs to be revamped so they can become consciously aware of how their implicit biases influence their discretionary discipline decision-making (Gullo & Beachum, 2020). In 2014, President Barack Obama signed an executive order establishing the Task Force on 21<sup>st</sup> Century Policing that provided a framework for effectively reducing criminal disproportions between racial groups (Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2015). The task force identified best practices and provided six action recommendations called "pillars." These pillars included "building trust and legitimacy, policy and oversight, technology and social media, community policing and crime reduction, training and education, and officer wellness and safety" (p. 1). When considering an action recommendation that would benefit AP's ability to reduce the discipline gap, Pillar Five: training and education have a strong correlation. Within this pillar, the task force identified the need to expand and have more practical training is critical to meet law enforcement's needs and responsibilities (Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2015). The training and education recommendations included incorporating

implicit bias and cultural responsiveness training and using technology to improve access to and quality of movement.

With the rapid speed at which APs need to make discretionary disciplinary decisions and the impact on African American students' outcomes, they must receive professional development that addresses their implicit biases and discipline decision-making. A leadership framework that can expose and serve as a guardrail between the AP's decision-making and their implicit bias is CRSL. CRSL proposes when APs practice the skills of critical consciousness, critical self-reflection, and building positive relationships, they will continually pursue, locate, and begin to dismantle oppressive systems (Khalifa, 2018). By practicing the CRSL's skill of critical consciousness, the AP will be able to discover the cultural differences between their African American student's classroom interactions compared to the dominant culture's classroom interactions (Sukhera & Watling, 2018; Sukhera et al., 2020). This will allow the AP to create space to pause to ensure their implicit biases are not the single driving force behind their discretionary discipline decision-making.

In conjunction with practicing the skill of critical consciousness, the CRSL framework will help the AP build their ability to self-reflect critically, which will positively impact the outcomes for African American students. Critical self-reflection will give the AP tools to challenge their implicit biased behaviors: (a) provide them with a system that checks their implicit biases at the door before making a discretionary disciplinary decision, (b) separate their cultural values from their African American students' cultural values to ensure these students are not being excluded for subjective discipline based on the association between "good/bad," and (c) disrupt the oppressive

disciplinary systems and create a more inclusive school environment (Khalifa, 2018). This skill builder will allow the AP to become more conscious of when or how their implicit bias has been activated, to create a system to ensure their implicit biases are in check, and to make a discretionary disciplinary decision that addresses the behavior of the student, not the color of their skin.

Another competence to enhance the training and education for APs that correlates with the 21st Century Task Force pillar could be to infuse the use of technology to improve access to and quality training. Using technology such as simulations, a form of professional development, will provide APs with a safe space to practically see their implicit biases. Through this level of exposure, the APs can create a system that continuously checks their associations between race, behavior, and discretionary discipline decision-making for African-American students.

### *Culturally Responsive School Leadership and Assistant Principals*

Over the last few decades, U.S. schools have experienced a dramatic race/ethnic shift in student demographics. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2022), “between fall 2009 and fall 2018, the percentage of public-school students who were White decreased from 54 to 47 percent, and the percentage of African American students decreased from 17 to 15 percent” (para. 1). Even though the student demographics in schools are fluctuating, there is a disproportionate number of White (78%) and African American (11%) administrators serving the national student body, which represents 58% of students of color. With these cultural shifts in student demographics and the disparity between White and minority school leaders, pursuing a leadership shift that includes CRSL is necessary.

When considering the upsurge in the diversity of the student body, this means most APs will be responsible for issuing discipline for students who do not come “from the same cultural backgrounds” (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012, p. 178). The disconnect between the APs and the students’ cultures increases the necessity for implementing disciplinary systems that will serve as a guardrail between the APs’ discretionary decision-making and their implicit biases. These systems will ensure that current and new administrators will better meet the diverse needs of students and serve as disruptors of an oppressive system (Bustamante et al., 2009; Khalifa, 2018). Recent research has “indicated that students’ school performance may be linked to lack of congruence between the students’ cultures and the norms, values, expectations, and practices of schools” (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012, p. 178). As a result, it is essential to explore how APs can enhance their cultural awareness and continuously critically self-reflect as an avenue to monitor their implicit racial implicit bias and help to close the subjective discipline infractions African American students face (Khalifa, 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016; Martin & Smith, 2017; Nishioka et al., 2017; Staats, 2014). As campus leaders, APs influence “the school context and address the cultural needs of the students, parents, and teachers” (Khalifa et al., 2016, p. 1274). This means the AP has CRSL discipline practices that foster an inclusive environment for African American students, and they engage in critical self-reflection to ensure their implicit biases are decreasing and not increasing the subjective discipline disparity (Khalifa, 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016).

Traditionally, APs are tasked with making quick student discipline decisions to eliminate a problem with limited guidance from the district provided by the student code of conduct (Fenning et al., 2008). The issue with this approach is that APs have hidden

implicit biases that have associations such as Black = bad; White = good (Banaji & Greenwald, 2016). Having to make quick decisions, the AP is likelier to have hidden implicit biases influence their discretionary discipline decision-making. As the gatekeepers of student discipline, APs can transform into Culturally Responsive School Leaders who learn and embrace the skills of critical self-reflection, developing culturally responsive teachers, creating an inclusive school environment, and engaging all voices can help reduce the impact their implicit biases have on the disciplining of African American students (Khalifa, 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016).

If, as an educational system, one wants different outcomes for the African American students to improve, then one must transform the behaviors of the student discipline gatekeepers (APs) into CRSLs who know how their implicit biases influence their discretionary discipline decision-making of African American students. Khalifa et al. (2016) noted how CRSL could assist the APs with their actions and behaviors to dismantle the oppressive system that has created the disproportion discipline African American students experience. CRSL has a core set of unique leadership behaviors that are important for the AP to acquire. They can serve as a guardrail for not allowing APs' implicit biases to drive their discipline decision-making of African American students.

### *Self-Reflection*

APs must utilize the practice of critical self-reflection to reduce the impact their implicit biases have on their discretionary discipline decision-making when it comes to African-American students. Khalifa (2018) identified three skills that can lead to APs applying the essential practice of self-reflection:

- a. The ability to identify and understand the oppressive contexts that students and their communities face;
- b. The willingness and humility to identify and vocalize one's background and privilege, which allows leaders to see how they are directly involved or complicit in oppressive contexts; and
- c. The courage to push colleagues and staff to critically self-reflect upon their personal and professional roles in oppression and anti-oppression works and to develop responsive school structures. (p. 61)

According to Khalifa (2018), AP must not allow themselves to be restricted when it comes to the practice of critically self-reflecting on discipline matters. Instead, critically self-reflecting must be an ongoing practice to ensure their hidden implicit bias is not driving their discipline decision-making. This is why APs need critical self-reflection embedded in their professional development experience and as part of their discretionary discipline decision-making procedures to serve as a guardrail between their hidden implicit bias and discipline decision-making (Ispa-Landa, 2018). Harris et al. (2013) echoed the importance of APs understanding their implicit biases as a “habit of mind” (p. 1508) that can be exposed through deliberate self-reflection practices (Ispa-Landa, 2018). With this exposure, APs can activate behavioral changes that can positively impact their discretionary discipline decision-making because they will have the tools to self-reflect and follow a precise procedure rather than responding emotionally (Banaji & Greenwald, 2016; Ispa-Landa, 2018; Khalifa, 2018; Staat, 2014).

### *Develop Culturally Responsive Teachers*

As culturally responsive school leaders, APs can develop culturally responsive teachers (Gay, 2018, 2002; Khalifa, 2018). Culturally responsive teaching is a practice that includes “using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively” (Gay, 2002, p. 106). This teaching practice allows the content to be aligned with the student’s lived experience, which invites them into the classroom experience (Gay, 2018). As teachers become culturally responsive, they can build positive and trusting relationships with students and establish classroom expectations considering students’ cultures (Tanase, 2021). This shift in practice will help teachers decrease their use of subjective disciplinary decisions as they understand African American students’ culture (Carter Andrews & Gutwein, 2020). Researcher Bentley-Edwards et al. (2020) found minority students will experience fewer discipline encounters when they build a positive and trusting relationship with a teacher who understands their culture.

Effective APs will be able to promote school culture where they can coach classroom educators to become culturally responsive teachers who understand their student’s culture and create a learning environment that includes the student’s culture (Gay, 2018; Martin & Smith, 2017; Khalifa, 2018). This practice will allow teachers’ and APs’ implicit biases to be addressed and reshaped (Banaji & Greenwald, 2016). Even though this study does not focus on this theme, it is an essential element that cannot be overlooked by future research.



### *Create Inclusive School*

As culturally responsive school leaders, APs can create a school environment that is inclusive and responsive to African American students, which can reduce how their implicit bias impacts their discipline decision-making (Khalifa et al., 2016). Khalifa et al. (2016) designated a school environment that focuses on inclusivity centered on identifying and leveraging cultural resources focused on African American students that can shift how they are disciplined. For instance, “Racialized suspension gaps, for example, would call for a culturally responsive leader who challenges the status quo by interrogating such exclusionary and marginalizing behaviors” (Khalifa et al., 2016, p. 1282). To challenge the status quo, the AP must first address the role one’s implicit bias plays in how African American students are viewed and disciplined (Banaji & Greenwald, 2016). By debunking the negative associations attached to African American students, the disproportionate subjective discipline these students experience can decrease.

Caring for others is a CRSL behavior that will allow the AP to create an inclusive school environment for African American students that reduces their subconscious implicit bias. Madhlangobe and Gordon’s (2012) study highlighted how AP Faith’s cultural responsiveness demonstrated care for all school community stakeholders. Faith’s actions of showing respect to her school community included her expressing four subthemes of caring: “(a) supportive and nurturing behaviors, (b) sharing information, (c) a passion for working with youth, and (d) caring for parent’s perspectives” (p. 184). The AP’s ability to care for their African American students’ lived experiences and embrace their identities allows AP Faith to respond to discipline infractions differently by

reducing implicit bias (Fiarman, 2016; Khalifa, 2018). Khalifa (2018) also stated culturally responsive APs take the time to honor, protect, and understand their African American students' cultural identities and humanize them. This will help deconstruct the implicit biases APs have acquired over the years due to media priming of African American people (Banaji & Greenwald, 2016).

Building positive relationships with African American students is another CRSL behavior that can help APs reduce their implicit bias. In Madhlangobe and Gordon's (2012) study, AP Faith stated as a culturally responsive school leader, she believed the success of African American students depends on the leader's ability to build strong relationships. Building a relationship with African American students allows relational equity with the AP, which can help decrease their implicit bias (Banaji & Greenwald, 2016). According to Madhlangobe and Gordon (2012), "the only way you teach them is to get to their hearts. If you do not have a relationship, you have nothing" (p. 186). Having a relationship with the African American student that has received a discipline referral will allow the culturally responsive AP to take the time to uncover the antecedent of the student's behavior and to apply a more appropriate discipline intervention instead of simply using exclusory practices (DeMatthews et al., 2017).

### *Engage all Voices*

As culturally responsive school leaders, APs can incorporate and engage the community and student voices in an indigenous context that reduces their implicit bias (Khalifa et al., 2016; Fiarman, 2016). Khalifa (2018) requires that APs actively engage marginalized communities, such as the African American communities, and facilitate authentic dialogue and exchanges between the two parties. This partnership will help

shift the negative associations that subconsciously impact their discipline decision-making and create more positive associations (Banaji & Greenwald, 2016). This shift will cause a change in AP's disciplined decision-making because they will have a procedure to slow time and consider the student's side of the story.

Being present and communicating with African American students will also allow AP to learn about their students, shift their implicit biases and loosen their negative subconscious racial associations (Banaji & Greenwald, 2016; DeMatthews et al., 2016; Minkos et al., 2017; Nishioka et al., 2017). Madhlangobe and Gordon's (2012) study highlighted that when an AP engages in activities such as visiting classrooms and walking hallways, they increase their visibility on campus and the ability to hear different students' perceptions, which ultimately allows them to reduce their implicit bias by making more positive associations with their African American students. Also, engaging all students' voices enables an AP to validate the African American students' culture instead of being colorblind because they are more engaged in active conversation with them (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Weinstein et al., 2004). When APs communicate with African-American students in a culturally appropriate way, they create a space where students feel safe.

### *Discipline Conversations*

As APs transform into culturally responsive school leaders who seek to understand African American students, being perceptive will help them to address their implicit bias and will positively impact their discretionary discipline decision-making (Evans & Lester, 2012). Communicating with African-American students through the discipline decision-making process must become a daily choice for APs (Evans & Lester,

2012). Through these discipline conversations, the AP can view the African American students' behaviors as an opportunity for teaching by noticing the African American student's behavior as a form of communication (Morrison, 2007; Stinchcomb et al., 2006). Understanding that behavior is a form of communication and taking the time to communicate with the African American students will help the AP interpret the behaviors and the role of their implicit bias in their discretionary discipline decision-making (Evans & Lester, 2012).

Gibson and Decker (2019) conducted a case narrative to analyze how discipline policies harm African American girls and how a school leader's implicit bias impacts their interaction with African American students. Principal Shaffer recounted when students intervened on behalf of an African American student; she chose to listen to the student's side of the story instead of dismissing her feelings due to their behavior (Gibson & Decker, 2019). Through Principal Shaffer's discipline conversations with the African American students, the principal "thinks about what it would be like be an African American girl [student] in this school" (p. 84). These discipline conversations increased Principal Shaffer's awareness by allowing her to pause and note the "tinge of implicit bias and stereotyping evident in the referral" (p. 84). Principal Shaffer chose to address the differential treatment African American students experience by becoming "more aware of how implicit bias may play a role in how we discipline our [African American] students" (Gibson & Decker, 2019, p. 87). Discipline conversations can help the AP become more aware of their implicit bias and then help them acknowledge when they need to utilize the CRSL Checklist to ensure their implicit bias is not driving the discipline decision of the African American student.

Clayton and Goodwin (2015) conducted a descriptive case study with two APs that sought to answer the research question, “How do school assistant principals working at a school with a demonstrated record of success in student achievement lead schools in culturally competent ways through intentional and enhanced relationships with students” (p. 135)? The findings showed the most predominant opportunity for APs to “make a difference” for students was through discipline conversations (p. 138). AP Jeremy mentioned, “that he saw his role as that of a counselor in discipline situations and viewed discipline conversations as an opening to identify the deeper issues being experienced by the student” (p. 139). AP Sue stated, “each conversation I have with a child is a learning opportunity for them, which is essential to me” (Clayton & Goodwin, 2015). Through discipline conversations, the culturally responsive AP has a chance to create a culturally responsive climate that includes African American students and understands their culture in a manner that will reduce the AP’s implicit biases (DeMatthews, 2016; Khalifa, 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016; Nishioka et al., 2017). Shifting APs’ professional development experiences will be critical to them becoming more aware of their implicit bias’s role in their disciplinary decision-making.

#### *Assistant Principals Need for Professional Development*

It is customary for APs to attend principal certification programs that prepare them to lead their campuses effectively. Researchers have debated if traditional principal certification programs prepare APs for real situations and the cultural dynamics they will be expected to address (Khalifa et al., 2016; Kowalski & Casper, 2007). While in principal certification programs, APs take courses on instructional leadership, school finances, and school law that align with their managerial responsibilities. The elements

lacking in these traditional programs are CRSL and courses addressing student discipline. This reality places APs at a disadvantage in decreasing the overuse of exclusionary discipline for subjective behaviors because they are not culturally equipped.

To dismantle the disproportionate number of subjective behaviors African American students face, APs will need CRSL professional development (Barnett et al., 2012; Ricciardi & Petrosko, 2000; Petrides et al., 2014). This level of professional development will equip APs with the culturally responsive behaviors needed not to repeat the overuse of exclusory discipline on African American students and begin to utilize inclusionary discipline practices. This next part of the literature review examines the AP's current professional development, the AP's level of competency and the need for professional development, and the AP's need for CRSL.

#### *Assistant Principal's Current Professional Development*

APs are entrusted with African-American students' lives, meaning they need professional development that is culturally aligned with this reality. APs must be aware of their own implicit biases and understand the cultural differences when addressing African American students' discipline to ensure they are not perpetuating the overuse of exclusory practices. Unfortunately, the research on professional development for APs lacks the cultural components to handle student discipline and focuses on their managerial responsibilities. This supports the need for CRSL professional development, so APs can better address their role as disciplinarians and dismantle the disproportionate use of exclusionary discipline for subjective behaviors of African American students.

Since the AP's primary role on campus is to maintain student discipline, they are equipped with minimal training provided by their principal certification programs

(Marshall & Hooley, 2006). This reality can be problematic for APs as they might experience challenges with having the confidence to make discipline decisions that are not heavily focused on exclusionary practices for subjective behaviors of African American students (Craft et al., 2016; Martin & Smith, 2017). S. Williams (2012) utilized the Delphi Method and a two-hour focus group with current APs to identify the skills needed to be an effective disciplinarian. The skills identified as required to be an effective disciplinarian included fairness and consistency, fostering relationships, and building a positive school climate (S. Williams, 2012). Identifying these skills can help transform the professional development APs receive to help become culturally responsive school leaders whose behaviors reduce the impact of their implicit bias on the discipline of African American students (Banaji & Greenwald, 2016; DeMatthews et al., 2016; Fiarman 2016; Khalifa, 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016).

Even though the AP has been assigned the role of disciplinarian, researchers have shown they do not receive professional development in student discipline because the focus is primarily managerial (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). In 2014, researchers Allen and Weaver examined the professional development needs of APs in Northern Kentucky. The study involved 66 APs who completed a Likert scale survey and open-ended questions. The findings from this study support the conclusion that APs need to be targeted for professional development in areas such as school culture that is outside the scope of the traditional professional development they currently receive (Allen & Weaver, 2014).

The AP's role in addressing student discipline continues to evolve and directly impacts African American students' academic experience more than the professional

development that reflects this need. Oliver (2005) conducted a longitudinal study to examine the professional development needs of elementary and secondary APs. The results from this study support the reality that APs' need for professional development is changing. Oliver found from 2000 to 2002, managerial skills dominated professional development activities. This means APs are enhancing their skills with legal updates, personal procedures, and assessment procedures and not spending time building their student discipline competency. This is why it is essential to provide APs with professional development opportunities to grow their competency to become culturally responsive school leaders who can handle student discipline by having the opportunity to become self-aware of their implicit bias, self-reflect on how their implicit bias is impacting their decision-making, and to create a CRSL checklist to serve as a guardrail between their implicit bias and their discretionary discipline decision-making of African American students.

#### *Assistant Principals' Student Discipline Competency and Need for Professional Development*

APs are human beings driven by a moral compass shaped by their cultural upbringings, life experiences, and classroom experiences that influence their competency as leaders. With this moral compass, APs are expected to lead in a way that promotes African-American students instead of causing them harm due to subjective discipline exclusion (Moore & Gino, 2013). This is why APs must have access to professional development that builds their competency to be leaders who can handle student discipline in a manner that does not continue the disproportionate number of subjective behaviors African American students are disciplined for.



The effectiveness of the school's discipline climate is predicated on the competency of the AP (Leithwood et al., 2008; Robinson et al., 2008; Stoll et al., 2006). With the principal certification programs not explicitly training APs as culturally responsive school leaders with student discipline, their competency in this area is of primary concern (Kwan, 2009). Ricciardi and Petrosko (2000) reported that 84% of APs stated their prior work experience as a teacher prepared them to handle student discipline. With this level of expertise, these APs only know one way of handling student discipline, which is exclusionary for subjective behaviors of African American students because of how they are addressed in district handbooks. For instance, Fenning et al. (2008) analyzed discipline handbooks and found exclusionary practices such as expulsion and suspension were the most common consequences listed by school handbooks across all discipline categories, from mild to severe behaviors.

Making culturally responsive student discretionary discipline decisions will require the AP to "continually expand their knowledge and skills to implement the best educational practices" (Mizell, 2010, p. 3). Grogan and Andrew (2002) echoed the need for the AP professional development to be redesigned for them to have the competency to decrease the disproportionate subjective behaviors African American students face. Building up the AP's competency to respond to discipline can lead to a professional development shift from managerial to CRSL.

### *Professional Development Structure*

With the disproportioned number of African American students receiving exclusionary discipline for subjective behaviors, there is a demand for APs to explore their implicit bias in discretionary discipline decision-making. For APs to decrease the

number of exclusionary discipline infractions African American students receive for subjective behaviors, they need access to professional development that brings awareness to their implicit bias, acknowledges and accepts their implicit bias impacts their student discretionary discipline decision-making, and self-reflect on their implicit bias and create a CRSL discipline checklist. A professional development structure shift from theory-based to experiential will allow the AP to become more aware of their implicit bias. The intervention will serve as a guardrail to reduce the disproportioned discipline African American students experience.

### *Self-Awareness*

Self-awareness of one's implicit bias is a critical component of the professional development structure because APs must become aware of their implicit bias (C. Lee, 2017). Professional development is "those processes and activities designed to enhance the professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes of educators so that they might, in turn, improve students' learning" (Guskey, 2000, p. 16). Providing APs with professional development experience centered on gaining awareness of one's implicit bias will serve as the first step to taking action to address it (C. Lee, 2017; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Thomas & Booth-McCoy, 2020). The medical field has highlighted how doctors who have become more self-aware of their implicit bias have become a vehicle for change (Thomas & Booth-McCoy, 2020).

The medical and educational fields share a commonality with the unnecessary historical treatment of African Americans compared to Whites. Over the past two decades, African American patients have experienced excessive health disparities, resulting in poorer health outcomes than White patients (Thomas & Booth-McCoy,

2020). To address these concerns, the Institute of Medicine's 2003 Report on *Unequal Treatment* provided ideas for systems changes that can directly address the healthcare disparities, which consider the doctor's implicit bias (Thomas & Booth-McCoy, 2020). One of the significant system changes was creating professional development opportunities for doctors to become aware of how their implicit bias impacts their decision-making and changes their behaviors. The Race Implicit Association Test (IAT) is an intervention that can be utilized to increase implicit bias self-awareness. The Race IAT allowed doctors to become more aware of their implicit biases and more willing to engage in activities that reduce implicit biased decision-making (Gonzalez et al., 2014; Thomas & Booth-McCoy, 2020).

Harvard University researchers developed the Race IAT, a series of tests designed to investigate implicit bias related to various variables such as race, sexuality, gender, weight, age, religion, and ethnicity (Thomas & Booth-McCoy, 2020). The Race IAT tests the strength of associations between two variables (good-bad and African American-White). The part response and response times will be significant factors in identifying the type and extent of implicit bias (Thomas & Booth-McCoy, 2020). Upon completing the Race IAT, the doctors learned if they prefer one race (White) over the other (African American). The scores from the Race IAT predicted various race-based behaviors (Green et al., 2007).

Green et al. (2007) from Harvard Medical School found a connection between a doctor's Race IAT scores and their attitudes toward White and African American heart patients and their treatment decision. Green et al. (2007) found that the Race IAT "revealed implicit preference favoring White Americans...and implicit stereotypes of

African Americans as less cooperative with medical procedures...and less cooperative generally” (p. 1231). When considering the educational world, APs must be aware of their implicit bias in addressing their race-based discipline decisions. The Race IAT could be a positive tool for self-awareness (Green et al., 2007; C. Lee, 2017).

### *Self-Reflection*

The second component of the professional development structure is self-reflection. Once the APs become self-aware of their implicit bias, it is essential to take the next step to self-reflect on how they will use this information to decrease disparities in discipline. The Society of Hospital Medicine’s Practice Management Committee provided the medical field with the 5Rs of Cultural Humility, a concise framework to address implicit bias (Masters et al., 2019). The 5Rs of the Cultural Humility framework serve as a tool to stimulate self-reflection by asking various questions during an interaction with a patient. During the reflection phase of the 5Rs of Cultural Humility, the doctor practices pausing to consider what they have learned from the interaction with the patient and to make connections to those interactions (Masters et al., 2019).

Doctors learned new ways to address and manage their implicit biases by having the tools for self-reflection. Sherman et al. (2019) conducted an implicit bias training study where doctors in residency programs saw the value of self-reflecting on their individual preferences, revealing a positive impact on their decision-making. The focus group residents shared how they learned to identify when they feel triggered and to take the extra time to ask the question, “Why do I feel this way,” and pause to explore the answer to ensure their implicit bias was not driving their emotions (Sherman et al., 2019,

p. 680). Also, they shared how breaking to self-reflect allowed them to challenge their decision-making to ensure they were not choosing the patient based on their implicit bias.

The medical field has set a positive example of the power of implementing self-reflection into professional development that can have APs asking self-reflection questions and pausing to ask why they are making this particular discipline decision, which can yield positive results for African American students. Self-reflection will also lessen implicit biases APs may be blinded by (Thompson et al., 1997). This is because APs will constantly reflect on why they made a specific decision and its impact on African-American students.

#### *Culturally Responsive School Leaders Checklist*

The third component of the professional development structure is creating a culturally responsive school leader's discretionary discipline decision-making checklist for reducing the impact of an AP's implicit bias on their discretionary discipline decision-making. APs can only partially depend on increased self-awareness and reflection to make a difference in their discipline decisions. APs need to design a self-check system that will serve as a guardrail between their implicit bias and their decision-making.

Forty years ago, males dominated orchestras, with less than "10 percent of American instrumentalists being women" (Banaji & Greenwald, 2016, p. 146). During this time, feminist noticed and question the disparities between the number of men and women instrumentalists. Traditionally orchestra applicants would perform in front of an audience that would select the newest instrumentalist. This selection process included components of implicit bias that needed to be addressed. The solution to this implicit bias was to develop a system that included blind auditions. Instead of having the

instrumentalist audition in the open, they would audition from behind a screen. The adoption of this system allowed for the hiring of women to “increase from 6 percent in 1970 to 21 percent in 1993” (Fiarman, 2016, p. 4). This increase in female instrumentalists hired showed that this system worked as a guardrail for decision-making driven by implicit bias.

APs can take on a similar systems approach and “create a structure that ensures our intentions-not, our implicit biases” drive their discretionary discipline decision-making (Fiarman, 2016, p. 4). APs needs a system to serve as a guardrail for their implicit bias and ensure they are making fair discipline decisions for their African American students—creating a checklist for determining disciplinary decision-making to help ensure consistency regardless of the student’s skin color. Creating a system will also help the APs interrupt their unconscious implicit bias as they are encouraged to slow down their initial response to the student. The system should also include checkpoints that serve as reminders to listen to all parties involved, refer to district policies, manage one’s emotions, collaborate with team members, think through the behavior the student needs to change, attach the correct discipline measure, and communicate the outcome to all stakeholders (Fiarman, 2016).

### *Conceptual Framework*

APs are the gatekeepers of student discipline (J. A. Williams et al., 2020). Their decision-making is connected to the disproportionate number of African-American students impacted by implicit bias-driven discretionary discipline decision-making. APs have discretionary power to handle student discipline aligned to their cultural beliefs that may differ from the students they serve. This can unintentionally mean APs’ implicit biases

influence the discipline selection for African-American students. To decrease the disproportionate subjective discipline African American students experience, APs need the opportunity to adopt culturally responsive school leader behaviors in their discretionary discipline decision-making. An intervention to facilitate the practice of CRSL behaviors is shifting professional development from operational to practical. This professional development structure is designed to reduce the impact of an AP's implicit bias on their discretionary discipline decision-making. The professional development structure must include the opportunity for the AP to become self-aware of their implicit bias, self-reflect on their implicit bias, and create a culturally responsive school leader discretionary discipline decision-making checklist to serve as a guardrail between their implicit bias and their discretionary discipline decision-making of subjective behaviors of African American students (see Figure 2.1).

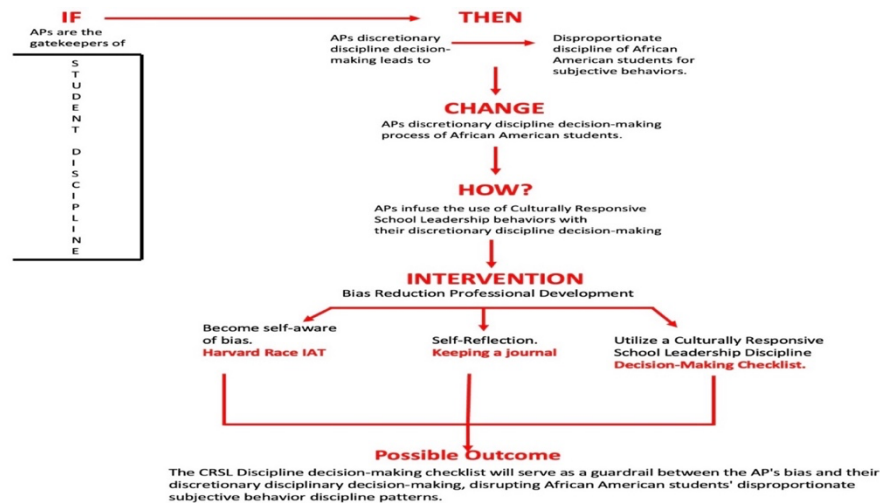


Figure 2.1. Conceptual framework

### *Conclusion*

Discipline data collected from the OCR (2021) has shown the disproportionality of suspensions between White and African-American students. The research has suggested the lack of cultural awareness on behalf of the AP contributes to the overuse of exclusionary discipline practices for subjective behaviors (DeMatthews, 2015; Khalifa, 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016; Nishioka et al., 2017; Skiba et al., 2002). It became evident that APs' discretionary discipline decision-making practices must be enhanced to ensure they make culturally relevant decisions. Researchers have noted APs need a professional development shift that focuses less on operational skills and includes practice skills that can help with their day-to-day decision-making (Craft et al., 2016; Marshall & Hooley, 2006). As a result, for there to be a decrease in the disproportionality of subjective discipline African American students experience, the AP needs professional development to gain the skills to become a culturally responsive school leader who is consciously aware of how their implicit bias is influencing their discretionary discipline decision-making of African American students (DeMatthews, 2016; Khalifa, 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016; Nishioka et al., 2017



## CHAPTER THREE

### Methodology

In this study, the researcher will analyze the influence of professional development on reducing assistant principals' (APs) implicit bias toward their discipline. This change in implicit bias might shift decision-making to decrease the disproportionate discipline African-American students experience. As the gatekeepers of discipline, APs need practical and not just operational professional development in handling discipline that provides self-awareness of their implicit bias and allows for self-reflection of the impact of their implicit bias (Banaji & Greenwald, 2016; J. A. Williams et al., 2020). Next, APs can follow and create a self-checklist rooted in CRSL behaviors that will serve as a guardrail that reduces their implicit bias's effect on their discretionary discipline decision-making. The main research questions that will be addressed in this study are:

1. What degree of racial implicit bias was present in assistant principals prior to the intervention?
2. Are African-American students disproportionately represented in discretionary disciplinary decisions before and after intervention?
3. What were the assistant principal's experiences after utilizing the Culturally Responsive School Leadership Checklist to make discretionary disciplinary decisions?

To address these research questions, the improvement science research method will be used to plan, do, act, and study the role of the prescribed interventions of

professional development that provide awareness of one implicit bias, time to self-reflect, and time to create a CRSL discretionary discipline decision-making checklist to reduce the impact the APs implicit bias has on African-American students.

### *Research Design*

#### *Improvement Science*

This study follows the improvement science approach. Improvement science is a relatively new phenomenon within the educational sphere (J. A. Perry et al., 2020). Traditionally, academic researchers discovered the gap within the research, whereas improvement science researchers address the problem of practice through an inquiry model based on the data (J. A. Perry et al., 2020).

Within the inquiry, model researchers explore three foundational questions identifying the changes needed within the system: (1) What are we trying to accomplish? (2) How will we know that a change is an improvement? (3) What change can we make that will result in improvement?

Once the researcher identifies a change needed within the system, the PDSA (Plan, Do, Study, and Act) model can be enacted. The PDSA includes the researcher's "planning," which is the accumulating of data and designing the intervention of change; "doing," which is implementing the intervention within the system and collecting data based upon the selected research method; "study," which is synthesizing the data and making connections; and "acting" which involves the researcher adjusting the intervention and preparing for another PDSA cycle to commence.

This study follows the improvement science model because a problem of practice has been identified within a district based on the disproportionate number of African-

American students facing exclusionary discipline compared to their enrollment numbers. Based on the role and responsibility of the AP within the community, the intervention must address how their implicit bias impacts African-American students' discretionary discipline decision-making. One 90-day cycle will be utilized. Within the first 90 days, APs will have an opportunity to review their previous discipline decisions, complete the Harvard Implicit Bias Test to become self-aware of their implicit bias, self-reflect on their Harvard Implicit Bias data, and be trained to use the CRSL discipline decision-making checklist, use the CRSL Discipline Decision-Making checklist when handling student discipline and self-reflect on their overall professional development experience. After the first 90-day cycle, the researcher will collect and analyze the discipline data to identify if the APs discretionary discipline decisions changed between the pre-and post-intervention data and what change within the AP happened when they became self-aware of their implicit bias and the impact it had on their discretionary discipline decision-making.

The study will focus on reducing AP implicit bias through practical professional development that transforms APs' discretionary discipline decision-making of African-American students. The intervention will allow the AP to become self-aware of how their implicit biases impact the AP's discretionary discipline decision-making of African-American students and the need to utilize the CRSL discretionary discipline decision-making checklist. This study is significant considering research on the professional development APs receive is theory-based; researchers have acknowledged the disproportionate discipline of African-American students. Still, there is limited research on the role of implicit bias that impacts the APs' discretionary discipline decision-making

(Gray, 2016). Having access to professional development that allows APs to become self-aware of their implicit bias, self-reflect on the impact of their implicit bias, and utilize a CRSL discretionary discipline decision-making checklist will possibly disrupt the discipline gap for African-American students.

### *Site of Data Collection*

The site selected for the study was an urban school district located in Northern Oregon. This district has a bold mission statement that includes disrupting racial inequities. The Oregon Department of Education data accounted for the 2020-2021 school year. This district consists of 81 schools serving PK through 12<sup>th</sup> grade, 47,314 students, and 175 licensed school-based administrators.

Current 2020-2021 data reports 4,069 African-American students, 8.6% of the total students, and 26,448 White students, 55.9% of the entire students. The current information shows that African-American students comprise 13% of out-of-school suspensions within the district. At the same time, White students comprised 9% of out-of-school breaks within the community.

When it comes to interacting with students, APs, according to the district's website, are expected to

support and implement the District's Racial Equity Policy; create a safe, welcoming environment that reflects the racial and ethnic diversity of student populations; support school and district initiatives to implement multi-tiered systems of support and restorative practices; use data to inform planning for a reduction in exclusionary discipline and elimination of any discipline practices gaps that may exist for historically underserved students, and partner with the Dean or SMS/SCS to investigate and address discipline issues in line with RESJ policies and principles.

The district has taken progressive policies to shift practices from exclusionary for subjective behaviors of African Americans to inclusionary to ensure that historically underserved students, such as African-American students, are protected. The professional development for APs in this district aligns with the district's expectations for serving African-American students. Unfortunately, the professional development APs receive for handling student discipline happens during onboarding. It tends to be more operational, such as accessing the student handbook and importing referrals into the information management system. APs must have opportunities to expose their implicit racial biases in a safe space and create plans to address their preferences during disciplinary decision-making.

#### *Participants*

Thirty-five APs from the district will be invited to participate in the study. APs will be defined as holding a valid Oregon Administration license and working under a principal on a campus. Teachers and principals will not be included in this study. APs will be asked to self-select on their participation in an implicit bias reduction professional development intervention. APs participating in the initial survey will be in a non-random comparison group. Participating APs who self-select to participate in the intervention will undergo implicit bias reduction professional development. The APs who do not self-select for the intervention will be invited to complete a post-survey as the study group.

#### *Positionality*

It is important to note that the researcher is a current school administrator within the district where the study is being conducted. The researcher has collegial relationships

with the APs who opted into the study, and one of the APs within the study is the researcher's AP.

### *Intervention*

This project will involve the use of two interventions: the APs attending an implicit bias awareness professional development and the APs using and revising a CRSL Discretionary Discipline Decision-Making checklist that will serve as a guardrail for reducing the impact their implicit bias has on their discretionary discipline decision-making of African-American students. See the driver diagram in Figure 3.1.

### *Primary Drivers*

Within the Improvement Science Dissertation of Practice model, the primary drivers represent which is where in the system the highest leverage points for improvement (J. A. Perry et al., 2020). For this study, the highest leverage point for decreasing the disproportionate discipline of African-American students is for APs to create a system for reflection on their discretionary discipline decision-making for all students and to become aware of how their implicit bias is impacting their discretionary discipline decision-making.

### *Secondary Drivers*

Within the Improvement Science Dissertation of the Practice model, the secondary drivers represent the changes required to achieve the intended outcomes (J. A. Perry et al., 2020). For this study, the secondary drivers include (a) APs using a CRSL Discretionary Discipline Decision-Making Checklist (see Appendix A) for each

discipline interaction and (b) APs attending implicit bias awareness professional development to become aware of their implicit bias toward their African-American students.

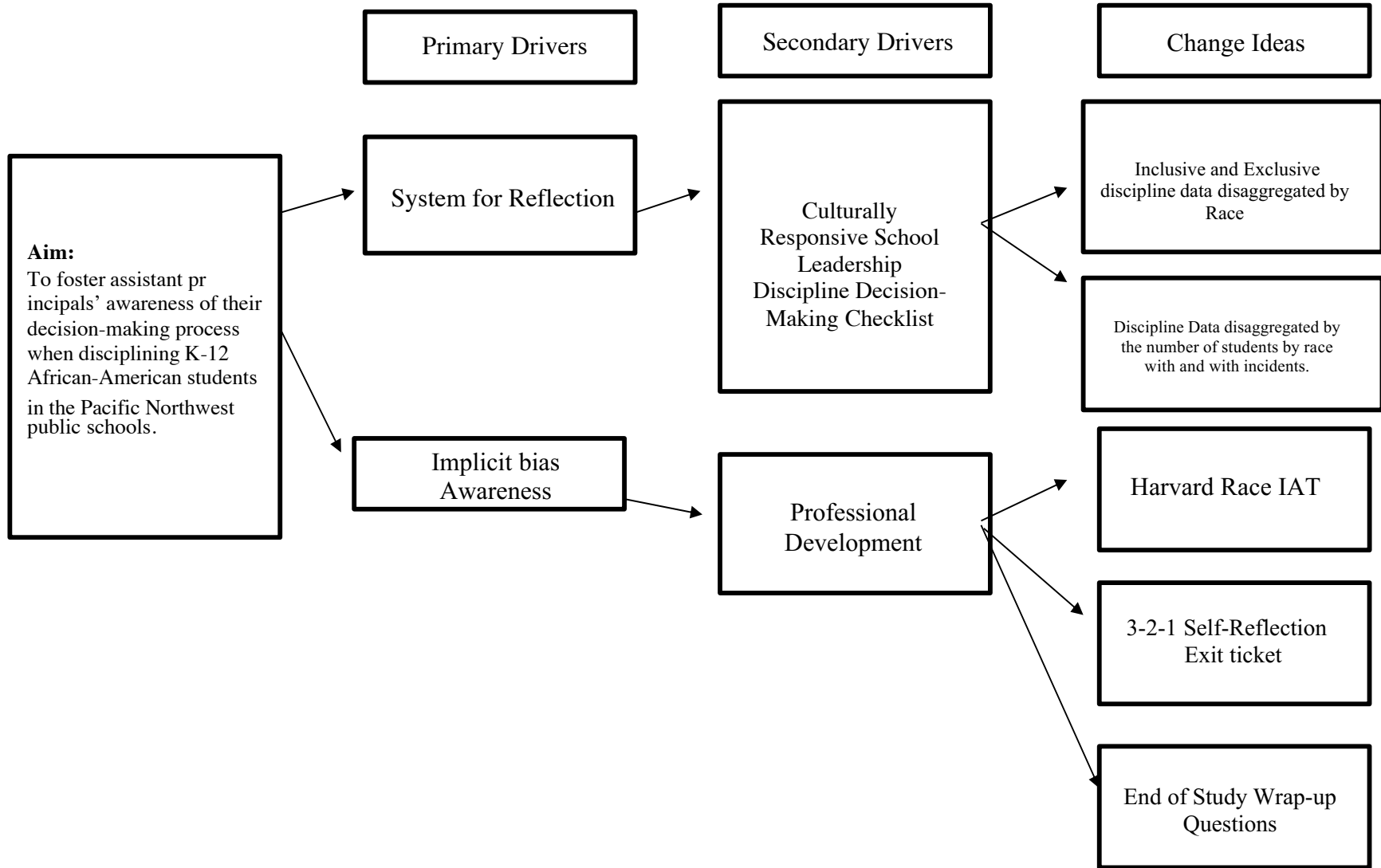


Figure 3.1. Driver diagram



### *Change Idea*

Within the Improvement Science Dissertation of Practice model, the change ideas represent how to create the intended changes to the system using the PDSA cycle (J. A. Perry et al., 2020). For this study, five change ideas will help decrease the disproportionate discipline African-American students experience and create a guardrail between the AP's discretionary decision-making and their implicit bias by increasing their critical self-reflection practices. Through engaging in the implicit bias awareness professional development module and having a system for essential APs of self-reflection will become more aware of their own racial implicit bias and understand the power of critical self-reflection for APs to slow down and think about the type of disposition (inclusive or exclusive) would be best to address the student's behavioral concern.

### *Data Collection*

Table 3.1. shows the timeline for data collection and the subsequent analysis of the data that will drive this study.

Table 3.1. *Timeline for Data Collection and Analysis*

Dates	AP Task	Measure of Task	Analysis
March 2023- April 2023	Assistant Principals provide researcher with Student Discipline Data	Collection of pre intervention student discipline data for the level of consequence assigned exclusive or inclusive by race.	Disaggregate level of consequences by race and compare pre-intervention data using Chi-square
March 2023- April 2023	Assistant Principals attend implicit bias reduction professional development	Assistant Principals become self-aware of their implicit bias by taking and reflecting an assessment using a 3-2-1 Self-Reflection Exit Tool Exit Tool Harvard Race IAT	Conduct a narrative analysis on the 3-2-1 Self-Reflection Exit Tool to understand the AP's personal assessment of their racial implicit bias.
April 2023- June 2023	Assistant Principals are trained to use the Culturally Responsive School Leadership Discipline Discretionary Decision-Making Checklist Assistant Principals provide researcher with Student Discipline Data	Collection of post intervention student discipline data for the level of consequence assigned exclusive or inclusive by race. Collection of the number students disciplined by race.	Disaggregate level of consequences by race and compare post-intervention data using Chi-square. Disaggregate the number of students with and without incidents by race.
June 2023- July 2023	Assistant Principals complete the End-of Study Wrap focus questions via Google Forms	Collect post self-reflection data on professional development interventions	Conduct a narrative analysis of the AP's responses to the end of study focus questions

## *90-Day Cycle*

Between March 2023–April 2023, the AP’s first task will be to provide the researcher with their campus’s pre-intervention student discipline data. The measure of study is the pre-intervention student discipline data for the level of consequence assigned exclusive or inclusive to each stage II/III referral by racial group. The analysis will include a disaggregate level of consequences by race and compare pre-intervention data using Chi-square.

Between March 2023–April 2023, the AP’s second task will be to engage in implicit bias reduction professional development. This will include the AP individually taking the Harvard Race IAT assessment and completing the 3-2-1 Self-Reflection Exit Tool via Google Forms. To maintain confidentiality, APs are not expected to share their assessment scores with the researcher. The measure of the task will be the Harvard Race IAT and 3-2-1 Self-Reflection Exit Tool. The analysis will include conducting a narrative analysis on the 3-2-1 Self-Reflection Exit Tool responses to understand the AP’s personal assessment of their racial implicit bias.

For the third task between April 2023-June 2023, APs will be trained to use the CRSL Discretionary Discipline Decision-Making Checklist (see Appendix A) and provide the researcher with their post-intervention discipline data. APs are expected to use the CRSL checklist for each discipline interaction. The measuring task will include collecting post-intervention student discipline data for the level of consequence assigned exclusively or inclusive by race and the collection of the number of students disciplined by race. The analysis will consist of disaggregating the group of consequences by race

and comparing post-intervention data using Chi-square, disaggregating the number of students with and without incidents by race.

The final task takes place between June 2023 and July 2023 and will include the APs completing the end-of-study focus questions via Google Forms. The measure of functions will consist of collecting the AP's post-self-reflection data using the CRSL checklist and implicit bias awareness professional development. The analysis will include a narrative analysis of the AP's responses to the end-of-study focus questions.

### *Data Sources*

#### *Discipline Data*

The student disciplinary data will be drawn from the information management system for collecting disciplinary contacts within the district. The researcher will analyze each assistant principal's campus disciplinary incidents/referrals by student reports. These reports include Stage I and Stage II/III incidents/referrals frequency counts per student. The researcher will also analyze each assistant principal's campus disciplinary actions. These reports include disciplinary actions (exclusionary or inclusionary) the associate principal took on Stage II/III incidents/referrals pre and post the use of the intervention.

APs are expected to use the district's student code of conduct to make discipline decisions for student infractions. There were 58 reasons for Stage 2/3 referrals; referrals were categorized as exclusionary or inclusionary (Skiba et al., 1997). The exclusionary discipline decision-making included the APs assigning a student a consequence of out-of-school suspension, in-school suspension, class exclusion, detention, loss of privilege, or

time out. The inclusionary discipline decision-making included the APs assigning a student a consequence of conference, restorative practice, apology, or community service.

The researcher will also analyze each assistant principal's campus disciplinary incidents by student report. These reports identify individual students by race who have at least one or more Stage I or Stage II/III referrals. The Stage I referrals are written and handled by the staff member who wrote the referral. Anyone on staff can write a stage II/III discipline referral, and the school's leadership team, especially the assistant principal, determines if a student will receive an exclusive or inclusive consequence based on their discipline discretion. Each discipline data report will be downloaded, sorted, and maintained in a centralized database.

### *3-2-1 Self-Reflection Exit Tool*

After taking the Harvard IAT test APs will be asked to participate in a 3-2-1 Self-Reflection Exit Tool on their experience via Google Forms. 3–What are your three key takeaways from uncovering your implicit bias? 2–What are two ideas you have to reduce your implicit bias while making discretionary discipline decision-making? 1–What is one commitment you can make moving forward that will reduce the impact your implicit bias will have on your discretionary discipline decision-making? (See Appendix B).

### *End of Study Focus Questions*

APs will also be asked to complete the End of Study Focus Questions via Google Forms. These questions will help the AP self-reflect on the CRLS process and allow the AP to share how the experience of using the CRSL discretionary discipline decision-

making checklist impacted their students and served as a guardrail between their racial implicit bias and discretionary discipline decision-making.

1. What were the deltas (-) from using the CRSL checklist?
2. What were the pluses (+) of using the CRSL checklist?
3. What changes do you think need to be made to the CRSL checklist?
4. Do you feel as if the CRSL checklist served as a guardrail between you and your implicit bias? If so, why? If not, why not?
5. What impact do you think the CRSL checklist has on your discipline conversations?
6. What impact, if any, do you think the CRSL checklist has on your discipline data when comparing Black and White students?
7. What parts of the implicit bias reduction professional development experience do you think can be used on your campus?
8. What role did critical self-reflection play in helping you understand your African-American students? (See Appendix C)

### *Data Analysis*

Qualitative and quantitative measures will be used to collect and interpret the data. The data collected from the AP's pre- and post-intervention discipline data will be analyzed using Excel for Mac.

APs will take the Harvard Race IAT individually and are not asked to share their individual results, only their self-reflections using the 3-2-1 Self-Reflection Exit Tool via Google Forms. Once completed, the researcher will introduce and provide APs with a digital copy of the Culturally Responsive Checklist to the APs via email with detailed

instructions on how to use the tool as they make discretionary disciplinary decisions during the study and self-reflect after their decision-making.

### *Qualitative Data Analysis*

The qualitative component of this study will include analyzing the critical self-reflection practices of APs during the discipline decision-making process. In the APs' 3-2-1 Exit tickets, the narrative analysis will allow the researcher to understand the AP's first-person experience with critical self-reflection and its impact on their discretionary disciplinary decision-making (Creswell et al., 2003; Khalifa, 2018).

The end-of-study focus question data will be analyzed using a framework analysis (Creswell et al., 2003). The primary codes will be based on the code framework of the leadership qualities outlined in the Culturally Responsive School Leadership Framework (Creswell et al., 2003; Khalifa, 2018). The emerging codes will be analyzed using content analysis to identify the themes in the AP's answers to the end-of-study focus questions. (Creswell et al., 2003).

### *Quantitative Data Analysis*

*Chi-square.* The discipline referral data collected before and after the intervention will be analyzed using the quantitative chi-square measure to compare expected and observed results (Ravid, 2019). Chi-square will allow the researcher to identify the African-American student's representation in discretionary disciplinary decisions before using the intervention. Then, the researcher will re-assess African-American students' representation in discretionary disciplinary decisions after using the intervention (Ravid, 2019).

*Frequency.* The discipline incidents by students will be analyzed using the quantitative measure of frequency to compare the number of students with and without one or more Stage I or Stage II/III discipline referrals by race (Ravid, 2019). This measure will also allow the researcher to capture the total number and percentage of students by race with and without one or more Stage I or Stage II/III discipline referrals. Then, the researcher will determine if African-American students' representation in discretionary disciplinary decisions was disproportionate compared to their peers.

### *Summary*

As the gatekeepers of discipline, APs need professional development that addresses the role one's implicit bias plays in their decision-making and ensures a system of critical self-reflection that checks that their implicit bias is not driving their decision-making. The overall professional development experience revealed to APs that they have an implicit bias that is subconsciously impacting their decision-making, provided a safe place to self-reflect, and provided them with a guardrail, the CRSL Discipline Check-list, between their implicit bias and their discretionary discipline decision-making to help reduce the disproportionate discipline African-American students receive for subjective behaviors. Upon reflecting on this experience, APs will be more open to the notion that a system for critical self-reflection needs to be created to ensure their implicit bias is not driving their disciplined decision-making.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### Results

The study was conducted to test the impact of the intervention on APs receiving practical professional development that allows them to become self-aware of their implicit bias, critically self-reflect, and select a discipline disposition that addresses the behavior and the color of the student's skin (Banaji & Greenwald, 2016; Khalifa, 2020; Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015). This chapter includes a description of the analysis of each individual AP and their campus demographic, the research findings for each research question by AP, and a summary of results across the APs.

This research study follows an Improvement Science Design where quantitative and qualitative data were mixed to practically measure and assess the outcome of a professional development experience (See Table 1). The researcher sent 35 assistant principals a welcome email in the Pacific Northwest district, with six APs willing to participate in the Culturally Responsive School Leadership professional development experience. The researcher used Google Forms to collect the 3-2-1 critical self-reflection and results from the Harvard IAT. The study's research questions were analyzed using thematic analysis from open questions, descriptive analysis of survey responses, and comparative analysis of school discipline data. Microsoft Excel collected and analyzed the assistant principals' discipline disposition data. Chapter Four contains the formal reporting of the achieved findings in this study.

### *Research Questions*

The research questions framing this study are as follows:

RQ1: What degree of racial implicit bias was present in assistant principals prior to the intervention?

The data used to answer RQ 1 was a narrative analysis of the AP's personal reflections on their Harvard IAT results. APs were asked to reflect using the 3-2-1 self-reflection exit tool. This data collected the AP's personal baseline around their racial implicit bias.

RQ 2: Are Black students disproportionately represented in discretionary disciplinary decisions before and after intervention?

There were two different data reports used to answer RQ 2. The first data report was a discipline report on the number of students with incidents. The second data point was the number of exclusive and inclusive dispositions pre- and post-use of the intervention tool. The first data report analyzed whether Black students were disproportionately represented in stage I and II/III referrals. The second data report was used to analyze using Chi-square.

RQ 3: What were the assistant principal's experiences after utilizing the Culturally Responsive School Leadership Checklist to make discretionary disciplinary decisions?

The data to answer RQ 3 was a narrative analysis of the AP's end-of-study focus questions. This data was used to analyze the Culturally Responsive School Leadership framework's role in the assistant principal's discretionary disciplinary decisions.

The data will be presented as a narrative about the profile of participating assistant principals and their respective campuses, followed by each AP's research findings.

### *Profiles of Participating Assistant Principals*

Each assistant principal who agreed to participate in this study represents their background and a school context where discipline decisions are made. The professional development provided to the assistant principals was assumed to spill over from individual decisions (implicit bias) into discipline decisions since they were asked to apply checklists (see Appendix A) when assigning consequences. Before understanding the experience of each assistant principal within their school, below I outline profiles of the participant's background and school context.

#### *Participant 1: Mary*

Mary is a multiracial female who has worked at Stonecreek K-8; this is her first year. Before becoming an assistant principal at Stonecreek, she was an equity coach and elementary school teacher for twelve years at an elementary building in the same district. Mary has a bachelor's and master's degree in the educational field. Mary's educational philosophy is centered around believing every student can learn, and it is our job as educators to help them think that and achieve greatness.

Stonecreek K-8 school is located in a Northern neighborhood of the district. This neighborhood is more diverse compared to other areas in the district. In addition, the principal has been at this school for the last seven years. The teaching and administration staff have been revolving, creating space for this school to try a new practice. Stonecreek

K-8 is unique because they are a DLI campus. See Table 4.1. for the campus demographics.

Table 4.1. School Characteristics of Stonecreek K-8

Campus Demographics	# of Students	% of Students
Total	465	100.0%
Female	228	49.0%
Male	229	49.2%
Non-Binary	8	1.7%
Asian	6	1.3%
Black	61	13.1%
Latino	275	59.1%
Multiple Races	24	5.2%
Native American	1	0.2%
Pacific Islander	5	1.1%
White	93	20.0%
English Language Learners	195	41.9%

*Participant 2: Trey*

Trey is a Hispanic male who has worked at Creekstone Elementary. This is his first year at this campus, his fourth year as an AP, and he has twenty-two years of total educational experience. Before becoming an assistant principal at Creekstone Elementary, he was a tutor, educational assistant, teacher, and school counselor. Trey has a bachelor’s and master’s degree in the academic field. Trey’s educational philosophy believes students can be pushed to achieve more and connects with Zaretta Hammond’s philosophy of being a warm demander.

Creekstone Elementary School is located in a Northern neighborhood of the district. This school demographics mixed with low and high socioeconomic status students. In addition, the principal has been at this school for the last eight years. With the change in campus demographics, the teaching and administration staff are open to

expanding their toolkits to meet students’ needs, creating space for this school to try a new practice. Creekstone Elementary is unique because they are an evolving community open to change. See Table 4.2. for the campus demographics.

Table 4.2. School Characteristics of Creekstone Elementary

Campus Demographics	# of Students	% of Students
Total	347	100.0%
Female	171	49.3%
Male	169	48.7%
Non Binary	7	2.0%
Asian	15	4.3%
Black	18	5.2%
Latino	57	16.4%
Multiple Races	58	16.7%
Native American	6	1.7%
Pacific Islander	1	0.3%
White	192	55.3%
English Language Learners	32	9.2%
Special Education	52	15.0%

*Participant 3: Monica*

Monica is a white female who worked as an AP at River Lake Elementary; this is her second year as an AP and her second year at the campus, and she has twenty-eight years of total experience. Before becoming an assistant principal at River Lake Elementary, she was an educator and new educator mentor. Monica has a bachelor’s and master’s degree in the educational field. Monica’s educational philosophy is that all students can learn, achieve at high levels, and bring significant assets to school.

River Lake Elementary School is located in a Northeast neighborhood of the district. This neighborhood has a high population of Latino students that outnumber the other racial groups. In addition, the principal has been at this school for the last two

years. Before him, the principal turnover rate was high. With the consistency and strong leadership from the current principal, this created space for this school to try a new practice. River Lake Elementary is unique because they are the first schoolwide Spanish Dual Language program in the district. See Table 4.3. for the campus demographics.

Table 4.3. School Characteristics of River Lake Elementary

Campus Demographics	# of Students	% of Students
Total	216	100.0%
Female	128	59.3%
Male	87	40.3%
Non-Binary	1	0.5%
Asian	2	0.9%
Black	7	3.2%
Latino	131	60.6%
Multiple Races	8	3.7%
Pacific Islander	1	0.5%
White	67	31.0%
English Language Learners	92	42.6%
Special Education	38	17.6%

*Participant 4: Maya*

Maya is a white female who has worked at Lake River Elementary, and this is her first year at the school. Before being an assistant principal at Lake River Elementary, she was a twenty-two-year-old classroom teacher at a graduate school facility for five years and a former principal for two years. Maya has a bachelor’s, master’s degree, and doctorate in the educational field. Maya’s educational philosophy is centered around believing every student can learn, and our educators' job is to help them believe that and achieve greatness.

Lake River Elementary School is located in the Southwest neighborhood of the district. This neighborhood is more diverse compared to other areas in the district. In

addition, this is the principal's first year in her career and campus. The teaching and administration staff have been revolving, creating space for this school to try a new practice. Lake River Elementary is unique because it is the most diverse Southwest campus serving refugee families. See Table 4.4. for the campus demographics.

Table 4.4. School Characteristics of Lake River Elementary

Campus Demographics	# of Students	% of Students
Total	416	100.0%
Female	172	41.3%
Male	241	57.9%
Non Binary	3	0.7%
Asian	19	4.6%
Black	62	14.9%
Latino	44	10.6%
Multiple Races	45	10.8%
Native American	2	0.5%
Pacific Islander	9	2.2%
White	235	56.5%
English Language Learners	71	17.1%
Special Education	81	19.5%

*Participant 5: Nichole*

Nichole is a white female who has worked at Willow Flame Elementary, and this is her second year as an assistant principal, five years total at this school and nineteen years total in education. She was a teacher before her role as an assistant principal at Willow Flame Elementary. Nichole has a bachelor's and master's degree in the educational field. Nichole's educational philosophy is every student can learn; we must first demonstrate love and care for their whole person while consistently maintaining high expectations and celebrating differences.

Willow Flame Elementary School is located in a Northern neighborhood of the district. This neighborhood is more diverse compared to other areas in the district. In addition, the principal at this school for the last two years and a total of seven years in the building. The teaching and administration staff have been committed to serving all students, making implementing this tool doable for the campus leader. Willow Flame Elementary is unique because they are a Spanish DLI campus that is also departmentalized. See Table 4.5. for the campus demographics.

Table 4.5. School Characteristics of Willow Flame Elementary

Campus Demographics	# of Students	% of Students
Total	481	100.0%
Female	257	53.4%
Male	223	46.4%
Non-Binary	1	0.2%
Asian	27	5.6%
Black	55	11.4%
Latino	174	36.2%
Multiple Races	40	8.3%
Native American	17	3.5%
Pacific Islander	7	1.5%
White	161	33.5%
English Language Learners	152	31.6%
Special Education	95	19.8%

*Participant 6: Kristen*

Kristen is a white female who has worked at Flame Dance Elementary, and this is her second year as an assistant principal, two years total at this school and sixteen years total in education. Before becoming an assistant principal at Flame Dance Elementary, she was a teacher and a special education administrator. Kristen has a bachelor's and



master’s degree in the educational field. Kristen’s educational philosophy is we must be student-centered and make data-driven decisions that reflect a whole child perspective.

Flame Dance Elementary School is located in the Southwest part of the district. This neighborhood is relatively diverse compared to other district campus areas. In addition, the principal has been at this school for the last four years. The teaching and administration staff have been committed to serving all students, making implementing this tool doable for the campus leader. Flame Dance Elementary is unique because its hidden diversity promotes inclusion and support. See Table 4.6. for the campus demographics.

Table 4.6. School Characteristics of Flame Dance Elementary

Campus Demographics	# of Students	% of Students
Total	350	100.0%
Female	141	40.4%
Male	207	59%
Non Binary	2	0.6%
Asian	6	1.7%
Black	24	6.9%
Latino	29	8.3%
Multiple Races	46	13.2%
Native American	3	0.6%
Pacific Islander	0	0%
White	242	69.3%
English Language Learners	24	6.9%
Special Education	64	18.3%

### *Summary of Participant Characteristics*

Based on the profiles above, the assistant principals who agreed to participate in this study had distinct characteristics. All APs had the role and responsibility of handling student discipline concerns and entering of referrals into the district's information system. For an overview of the participants' backgrounds, see Table 4.7. summarizes their demographics, school placement, and years of AP experience. Of note, they mainly identify as female, lead within K-5 elementary schools, and have # years of experience.

Table 4.7. Descriptive Statistics: Participants' Background

	(n)	%
Gender		
Female	5	83%
Male	1	17%
Race		
Hispanic	1	17%
Multiracial	1	17%
White	4	67%
Grade-Band		
K-5	5	83%
K-8	1	17%
Years of AP Experience		
0-3	4	68%
3-5	1	16%
5-10	1	16%

### *Research Findings for AP Mary*

#### *RQ: 1 Assessment of Racial Implicit Bias*

After receiving her personal results from the Harvard Race IAT 3-2-1 Self-Reflection Exit Tool, AP Mary reflected and shared her key takeaways: she had a "Slight automatic preference for European Americans and \*doubted if this was true." AP Mary

shared two ideas they had to reduce their implicit bias while making discretionary discipline decision-making to Continue to surround themselves with people of color and educate themselves. The one commitment AP Mary shared was to “Ensure I think about my decisions through the lens of equity.”

*RQ 2: Racial Representation in Disciplinary Decisions*

*Discipline incidents by students.* Racial representation within the data tells a story regarding how one’s implicit bias impacts how students are disciplined on a campus.

Table 4.8. Discipline incidents by student’s representations of the number of students with and without Stage I and Stage II/III incidents. Stage I incidents are written and handled by the student’s teacher. The teacher writes stage II/III incidents, and the leadership team handles the discipline dispositions, particularly the AP.

Table 4.8. AP Mary Discipline Incidents by Students

Race	Total # of students	% Students without discipline incidents	#Students without discipline incidents	#Students with discipline incidents	% Students with discipline incidents
White	93	22%	65	28	16%
Pacific Islander	5	1%	4	1	1%
Asian	6	1%	4	2	1%
Multiple Races	24	5%	14	10	6%
Black	61	7%	19	42	24%
Latino	275	64%	186	89	51%
Native American	1	0%	0	1	1%
Total	465	100%	291	173	100%

Out of the total student body, 20% are white; out of the total number of students with discipline, 16% are white. The entire student body is 13% Black, and the total number of students with discipline is 24% Black. Table 4.8. showed a disproportionate number of Black students with at least one Stage I or Stage II/III referral compared to their white counterparts.

*Racial Discipline Data Pre- and Post-Intervention*

AP Mary's pre-intervention data showed Black students on their campus were not disproportionately represented in discretionary disciplinary decisions. According to Table 4.10., Black students were expected to have 18.30 exclusionary discipline infractions, and they actually had 16 infractions (Table 4.9.). Also, Black students were expected to have 39.70 inclusionary discipline infractions (Table 4.10.), and they had 42 infractions (Table 4.10.).

Table 4.9. AP Mary Actual Discipline Data Pre-Intervention

Race	Exclusive	Inclusive	Total	%
White	26	33	59	24%
Pacific Islander	-	-	-	-
Asian	-	-	-	-
Multiple Races	5	14	19	8%
Black	16	42	58	24%
Latino	29	77	106	43%
Native American	-	-	-	-
Totals	77	167	244	100%

- \*These categories were not included because of 0 in the cells.

Table 4.10. AP Mary Expected Discipline Data Pre-Intervention

Race	Exclusive	Inclusive	Total	%
White	18	40	59	24%
Pacific Islander	-	-	-	-
Asian	-	-	-	-
Multiple Races	6	13	19	8%
Black	18	40	58	24%
Latino	33	73	106	43%

P value was 0.12, which was not significant

- \*These categories were not included because of 0 in the cells

AP Mary’s post-intervention data showed Black students on their campus were not disproportionately represented in discretionary disciplinary decisions. According to Table 4.12., Black students were expected to have 7.28 exclusionary discipline infractions, and they actually had 9 infractions (Table 4.11.). Also, Black students were expected to have 15.72 inclusionary discipline infractions (Table 4.12.), and they actually had 14 infractions (Table 4.11.).

Table 4.11. AP Mary Actual Discipline Data Post-Intervention

Race	Exclusive	Inclusive
White	5	13
Pacific Islander	-	-
Asian	-	-
Multiple Races	2	1
Black	9	14
Latino	14	37
Native American	1	1
Totals	31	67

- \*These categories were not included because of 0 in the cells

Table 4.12. AP Mary’s Expected Discipline Data Post-Intervention

Race	Exclusive	Inclusive
White	5.75	12.25
Pacific Islander	-	-
Asian	-	-
Multiple Races	0.96	2.04
Black	7.35	15.60
Latino	16.3	34.70
Native American	-	-

P value was 0.42, which was not significant

- \*These categories were not included because of 0 in the cells

*AP Mary Discipline Data Summary*

The chi-square p-values for the pre-and post-intervention data were not statistically significant. There were a few study limitations that could have attributed to the lack of significance in the post-intervention results. These limitations included decreased discipline referrals the AP was responsible for handling. Based on this reality, it was important that no student's race category was deleted from the data sets because each student's race matters. Also, there was a decreased amount of time the AP had to engage with the professional development cycle.

According to Table 4.8., Black students were disproportionately represented in the number of students who have at least one or more stage I and/or 1 or more stage II/III incidents, with 42 of the 61 total Black students. Whereas white students were not disproportionately represented in the number of students with at least one or more stage I and/or 1 or more stage II/III incidents, with 28 of the 93 total white students.

### *RQ 3: Culturally Responsive School Leadership in Disciplinary Decisions*

The Culturally Responsive School Leadership framework has four main components (1) Self-reflection, (2) Culturally Responsive Teachers, (3) Create Inclusive School, and (4) Engage All Voices that should be considered when APs engage in discretionary discipline decision-making for Black students (Khalifa, 2018).

*Self-reflection.* The practice of self-reflection can help the AP “identify and vocalize one’s background and privilege” better to understand their students, in particular their Black students. (Khalifa, 2018). AP Mary said she saw “that she may be harder on her Black students because of her upbringing.” AP Mary also shared that the practice of self-reflection “caused for her to stop and reflect on why she may have responded the way she did.”

The need for school leaders to engage in the practice of self-reflection, is also critical for the assistant principal to challenge the oppressive systems that create inequitable conditions for Black students (Khalifa, 2018). One of these oppressive systems is discipline, and AP Mary shared, “Practicing critical self-reflection allowed me to center the needs of the students and not allow my feelings or experiences to cloud my final decision.” Engaging in the practice of critical self-reflection allowed AP Mary to have “more empathy, especially when I could remember how I was at that age.” These components helped AP Mary become “more self-aware impacted my final decision.” They also “appreciated remembering certain parts of myself that may influence my decision making.”

*Develop culturally responsive teachers.* While it is important for the AP to become aware of their implicit bias and its role in their decision-making, it is also important for APs to coach their teachers to understand how their implicit bias impacts their referral writing. AP Mary shared what she thought she could use on her campus to coach teachers by sharing the CRSL checklist and “model how to use it.”

*Create an inclusive school.* To debunk the negative associations attached to Black students, APs need to have a systemic process for addressing student discipline that is constant across all races of students. AP Mary shared that utilizing the CRSL checklist made her “more aware of their implicit bias, and it caused her to stop and think more.” It also caused her to “stop and reflect on why they may have the response they had.”

*Engage all voices.* By the AP taking the time to be present and communicate with Black students will also allow the AP to learn about their students, shift their implicit biases, and loosen their negative subconscious racial associations (Banaji & Greenwald, 2013; DeMatthews et al., 2016; Minkos et al., 2017; Nishioka, 2021). AP Mary shared the CRSL checklist allowed her discipline conversations “to center the student and be more aware of her implicit bias.”

### *Research Findings for AP Trey*

#### *RQ 1: Assessment of Racial Implicit Bias*

After receiving his personal results from the Harvard Race IAT 3-2-1 Self-Reflection Exit Tool Exit Tool, AP Trey reflected and shared his key takeaways were they thought they would have a more positive implicit bias towards Black people, but the



results were neutral.” AP Trey shared two ideas they had to reduce their implicit bias while making discretionary discipline decision-making: always think twice before making a discipline decision, consult with the principal, and compare previous discipline decisions between white and Black students. The one commitment AP Trey shared was to “to be consistent with the dispositions discipline decisions.”

*RQ 2: Racial Representation in Disciplinary Decisions*

*Discipline incidents by students.* Racial representation within the data tells a story regarding how one’s implicit bias impacts how students are disciplined on a campus.

Table 4.13. Discipline incidents by student’s representations of the number of students with and without Stage I and Stage II/III incidents. Stage I incidents are written and handled by the student’s teacher. The teacher writes stage II/III incidents, and the leadership team handles the discipline dispositions, specifically the assistant principal.

Table 4.13. AP Trey Discipline Incidents by Students

Race	Total # of Students	#Students without discipline incidents	% Students without discipline incidents	#Students with discipline incidents	% Students with discipline incidents
White	192	154	56%	38	53%
Pacific Islander	1	1	0%	0	0%
Asian	15	14	5%	1	1%
Multiple Races	58	50	18%	8	11%
Black	18	8	3%	10	14%
Latino	57	43	16%	14	19%
Native American	6	5	2%	1	1%
Total	347	275	100%	72	100%

Out of the total student body, 55% are white, and out of the total number of students with discipline, 53% are white. Whereas the total student body is .05% Black, and out of all, the total number of students with discipline is 14% Black. Table 4.13. showed a disproportionate number of Black students with at least one Stage I or Stage II/III referral compared to their white counterparts.

*Racial Discipline Data Pre- and Post-Intervention*

AP Trey's pre-intervention data show Black students on their campus were not disproportionately represented in discretionary disciplinary decisions. According to Table 4.15., Black students were expected to have 11.85 exclusionary discipline infractions, and they had 9 infractions (see Table 4.14.). Also, Black students were expected to have 26.15 inclusionary discipline infractions (see Table 4.15.), and they had 29 infractions (see Table 4.14.).

Table 4.14. AP Trey Actual Discipline Data Pre-Intervention

Race	Exclusive	Inclusive	Total
White	27	69	96
Pacific Islander	5	7	12
Asian	-	-	-
Multiple Races	2	2	4
Black	9	29	38
Latino	8	8	16
Native American	2	1	3
Totals	53	117	169

- \*These categories were not included because of 0 in the cells

Table 4.15: AP Trey Expected Discipline Data Pre-Intervention

Race	Exclusive	Inclusive
White	30	66
Pacific Islander	4	8
Asian	-	-
Multiple Races	1	2
Black	12	26
Latino	5	11
Native American	1	2

P value was .216, which was not significant

- \*These categories were not included because of 0 in the cells

AP Trey’s post-intervention data show Black students on their campus were not disproportionately represented in discretionary disciplinary decisions. According to Table 4.17, Black students were expected to have 6 exclusionary discipline infractions; in Table 4.16, they had 5 infractions. Also, Black students were expected to have 18 inclusionary discipline infractions (see Table 4.17), and they actually had 17 infractions (see Table 4.16.).

Table 4.16. AP Trey Actual Discipline Data Post-Intervention

Race	Exclusive	Inclusive	Total
White	7	19	18
Pacific Islander	5	7	12
Asian	-	-	-
Multiple Races	1	12	3
Black	5	17	23
Latino	8	8	51
Native American	-	-	-
Totals	26	63	89

- \*These categories were not included because of 0 in the cells

Table 4.17. AP Trey Expected Discipline Data Post-Intervention

Race	Exclusive	Inclusive
White	8	18
Pacific Islander	4	8
Asian	-	-
Multiple Races	4	9
Black	6	16
Latino	5	11
Native American	-	-

P value was 0.10, which is not significant

- \*These categories were not included because of 0 in the cells

*RQ: 3 Culturally Responsive School Leadership in Disciplinary Decisions*

The Culturally Responsive School Leadership framework has four main components: (1) Self-reflection, (2) Culturally Responsive Teachers, (3) create inclusive School, and (4) Engage All Voices that should be considered when APs engage in discretionary discipline decision-making for Black students (Khalifa, 2018).

*Self-reflection.* The practice of self-reflection can help the AP “identify and vocalize one’s background and privilege” better to understand their students, in particularly their Black students. (Khalifa, 2018). AP Trey shared the role self-reflection played in helping him understand his Black student's perspective and upbringing: “By taking the time to hear their side and including families in consequence, the campus was able to align the student’s family practices and the school's expectations. He learned through this process that everyone believed in accountability and taking responsibility; it was just a matter of creating a conversation that could lead to correction and more appropriate behaviors.

The need for school leaders to engage in the practice of self-reflection is also critical for the assistant principal to challenge the oppressive systems that create inequitable conditions for Black students (Khalifa, 2018). One of these oppressive systems is discipline, and AP Trey shared, “He was able to give balanced decisions (equitable decisions) by engaging in the practice of critical self-reflection because it allowed AP Trey to “provide more restorative responses to otherwise excludable behaviors.” The components of the CRSL checklist helped AP Trey to continue to take pride in hearing everyone and giving responses that are restorative as opposed to punitive.

*Develop culturally responsive teachers.* While it is important for the AP to become aware of their implicit bias and the role it plays in their decision-making, it is important for the AP also to coach their teachers to understand the role their implicit bias impacts their referral writing. AP Trey shared it is important to help teachers who are not in a place to understand they have an implicit bias.

*Create an inclusive school.* To debunk the negative associations attached to Black students it is important for APs to have a systemic process for addressing student discipline that is constant across all races of students. AP Trey shared that by utilizing the CRSL checklist, he “moved slower through the process and checked to see what implicit biases are playing a role. He stayed fair while still holding students accountable if a behavior merits it. He also allowed students to tell him what the consequence should be while they reflect.”

*Engage all voices.* The AP taking the time to be present and communicating with Black students will also allow AP to learn about their students, shift their implicit biases, and loosen their negative subconscious racial associations (Banaji & Greenwald, 2013; DeMatthews et al., 2016; Minkos et al., 2017; Nishioka, 2021). AP Trey shared that the CRSL checklist allowed discipline conversations where students could “own and give him ways to repair; they came up with their own consequences, sometimes extreme, so he toned them down, but mostly good ones.

#### *AP Trey's Discipline Data Summary*

The chi-square p-values for the pre- and post-intervention data were not statistically significant. There were a few study limitations that could have attributed to the lack of significance in the post-intervention results. These limitations included decreased discipline referrals the AP was responsible for handling. Based on this reality, it was important that no student's race category was deleted from the data sets because each student's race matters. Also, there was a decreased amount of time the AP had to engage with the professional development cycle.

According to Table 4.13., Black students were disproportionately represented in the number of students with at least one or more stage 1 and/or 1 or more stage 2/3 incidents, with 10 of the 18 total Black students. Whereas white students were not disproportionately represented in the number of students with at least one or more stage 1 and/or 1 or more stage 2/3 incidents, with 38 of the 138 total white students.

## *Research Findings for AP Monica*

### *RQ 1: Assessment of Racial Implicit Bias*

After receiving her personal results from the Harvard Race IAT 3-2-1 Self-Reflection Exit Tool, AP Monica reflected and shared her key takeaways: “While they would like to think in their conscious brain that the test results were not true, the IAT suggested a moderate automatic preference for European Americans over Blacks.” She also shared, “This is a reminder that I must continually critically analyze ways an unconscious racial implicit bias may play in my actions and decisions. AP Monica shared two ideas they had to reduce their implicit bias while making discretionary discipline decision-making was to (1) pause before making a disciplinary decision and (2) reflect on the race(s) of students involved and reflect on the role race might play in my decision. The one commitment AP Monica shared was to “share responses considered for students of color, before making a disciplinary decision, with the building principal for a second opinion.”

### *RQ 2: Racial Representation in Disciplinary Decisions*

*Discipline incidents by students.* Racial representation within the data tells a story regarding how one’s implicit bias impacts how students are disciplined on a campus. Table 4.18. shows discipline incidents by student’s representations of the number of students with and without Stage I and Stage II/III incidents. Stage 1 incidents are written and handled by the student’s teacher. Stage II/III incidents are written by any staff member, and the discipline dispositions are handled by the leadership team, specifically the AP.

Table 4.18. AP Monica Discipline Incidents by Students

Race	Total # of students	#Students without discipline incidents	% Students without discipline incidents	#Students with discipline incidents	% Students with discipline incidents
White	67	55	35%	12	20%
Pacific Islander	1	1	1%	0	0%
Asian	2	1	1%	1	2%
Multiple Races	8	5	3%	3	5%
Black	7	4	3%	3	5%
Latino	131	91	58%	40	68%
Native American	0	0	0%	0	0%
Total	216	157	100%	59	100%

Out of the total student body, 31% are white, and out of the total number of students with discipline, 20% are white. Whereas the total student body is .03% Black, and out of all, the total number of students with discipline is 5% Black. Table 4.20. showed a disproportionate number of Black students with at least one Stage I or Stage II/III referral compared to their white counterparts.

*Racial Discipline Data Pre- and Post-Intervention*

AP Monica's pre-intervention data showed Black students on their campus were not disproportionately represented in discretionary disciplinary decisions. According to Table 4.20., Black students were expected to have 0 exclusionary discipline infractions, and they actually had 0 infractions (Table 4.19.). Also, Black students were expected to have 0 inclusionary discipline infractions (Table 4.20.), and they actually had 0



infractions (Table 4.19.). This is because Black students at this campus had no stage II/III written.

The chi-square was significant with a P value of  $P < .001$ . The P value was significant because the Native American students received 2 exclusive discipline dispositions when they were expected to have less than 1 exclusive discipline dispositions (Table 4.19.). It is important to note the small sample size of 3 total discipline dispositions (Table 4.19.).

Table 4.19. AP Monica Actual Discipline Data Pre-Intervention

Race	Exclusive	Inclusive	Total
White	-	-	-
Pacific Islander	-	-	-
Asian	-	-	-
Multiple Races	1	14	15
Black	-	-	-
Latino	1	78	79
Native American	2	1	3
Totals	4	93	97

- \*These categories were not included because of 0 in the cells

Table 4.20. AP Monica Expected Discipline Data Pre-Intervention

Race	Exclusive	Inclusive
White	-	-
Pacific Islander	-	-
Asian	-	-
Multiple Races	1	14
Black	-	-
Latino	33.45	72.55
Native America	0.12	3

$P < .001$ , which was significant.

- \*These categories were not included because of 0 in the cells

AP Monica’s post-intervention data show Black students on their campus were not disproportionately represented in discretionary disciplinary decisions. According to Table 4.22., Black students were expected to have 0 exclusionary discipline infractions, and according to Table 21, they actually had 0 infractions. Also, Black students were expected to have 0 inclusionary discipline infractions (see Table 4.22.), and they actually had 0 infractions (see Table 4.21.). This is because zero of the Black students were issued a stage II/III discipline referral.

The chi-square was significant with a P value of  $P < .001$ . The P value was significant because the Native American students received 2 exclusive discipline dispositions when they were expected to have less than 1 exclusive discipline dispositions (Table 4.22.). It is important to note the small sample size of 3 total discipline dispositions (Table 4.21.).

Table 4.21. AP Monica Actual Discipline Data Post-Intervention

Race	Exclusive	Inclusive	Total
White	1	6	7
Pacific Islander	-	-	-
Asian	-	-	-
Multiple Races	-	-	-
Black	-	-	-
Latino	2	28	30
Native American	2	1	
Totals	5	39	44

- \*These categories were not included because of 0 in the cells

Table 4.22. AP Monica Expected Discipline Data Post-Intervention

Race	Exclusive	Inclusive	Total
White	1	6	59
Pacific Islander	-	-	-
Asian	-	-	-
Multiple Races	-	-	-
Black	-	-	-
Latino	3.41	27	106
Native American	0	3	-

P value was 0.01, which was significant

- \*These categories were not included because of 0 in the cells

### RQ 3: *Culturally Responsive School Leadership in Disciplinary Decisions*

The Culturally Responsive School Leadership framework has four main components (1) Self-reflection, (2) Culturally Responsive Teachers, (3) Create Inclusive School, and (4) Engage All Voices that should be considered when APs engage in discretionary discipline decision-making for Black students (Khalifa, 2018).

*Self-reflection.* The practice of self-reflection can help the AP “identify and vocalize one’s background and privilege” to better understand their students in particular their Black students. (Khalifa, 2018). AP Monica shared “slowed me down, encouraging me to gather more information before determining actions to take.” Engaging in the practice of critical self-reflection allowed AP Monica to have “valuable time dedicated to reflection on what students were sharing, through both body and verbal language, and the impact I, my identities (including race) and actions/inactions may be having on their experience and our interactions.”

The need for school leaders to engage in the practice of self-reflection, is also critical for the assistant principal to challenge the oppressive systems that create

inequitable conditions for Black students (Khalifa, 2018). One of these oppressive systems is discipline and AP Monica shared “slowing down to intentionally reflect has had an impact on my discipline decision-making, leading to more thoughtful documentation and intentional response.” Engaging in the practice of critical self-reflection allowed AP Monica to see the value in reflecting with English Language Learner sow members of the school community to help process information and impact. By reflecting with her peers, the benefit was they were able to identify the frequency of behaviors, previous interventions, and cumulative impact before making a decision or responding. The components of the tool helped AP Monica listen and reflect on one student's feedback about how responses to behaviors had not felt consistent and may have resulted in what some adults perceived as misbehaviors.

*Develop culturally responsive teachers.* While it is important for the AP to become aware of their implicit bias and the role it plays in their decision-making, it is important for the AP also to coach their teachers to understand the role their implicit bias impacts their referral writing. AP Monica shared it is important to help teachers who are not in a place to understand they have an implicit bias.

*Create an inclusive school.* To debunk the negative associations attached to Black student's it is important for APs to have a systemic process for addressing student discipline that is constant across all races of students. AP Monica shared by utilizing the CRSL checklist she saw the need to take a closer look at the campus-wide systems through the lens of racial implicit bias to ensure they were not overly targeting one group of students over another.

*Engage all voices.* The AP taking the time to be present and communicating with Black students will also allow AP to learn about their students, shift their implicit biases, and loosen their negative subconscious racial associations (Banaji & Greenwald, 2013; DeMatthews et al., 2016; Minkos et al., 2017; Nishioka, 2021). AP Monica shared the CRSL checklist allowed discipline conversations that had a “greater sense of inquiry.”

#### *AP Monica Discipline Data Summary*

The chi-square p-value for the pre and post-intervention data was statistically significant because the number of exclusionary discipline Native American students actually received was higher than the expected amount. There were a few study limitations that could have attributed to the lack of significance for African-American students in the post-intervention results. These limitations included decreased discipline referrals the AP was responsible for handling. Based on this reality, it was important that no student's race category was deleted from the data sets because each student's race matters. Also, there was a decreased amount of time the AP had to engage with the professional development cycle.

According to Table 4.18., Black students were disproportionately represented in the number of students with at least one or more stage I and/or 1 or more stage II/III incidents with 3 of the 7 students. Whereas white students were not disproportionately represented in the number of students who have at least one or more stage I and/or 1 or more stage II/III incidents with 12 of the 67 students.

## *Research Findings for AP Maya*

### *RQ 1: Assessment of Racial Implicit Bias*

After receiving her personal results from the Harvard Race IAT 3-2-1 Self-Reflection Exit Tool, AP Maya reflected and shared her key takeaways were they had a "Slight automatic preference for Black people over white people." She also stated, "no matter what her results are, she still needs to continue to be anti-racist." AP Maya shared two ideas they had to reduce their implicit bias while making discretionary discipline decision-making was to "pause when making decisions to consider if they are allowing their implicit bias to impact what they are doing regarding discipline and to ask for another person's opinion when deciding what to do about a discipline decision where she might be inclined to be implicit biased". The one commitment AP Maya shared was to "consult with a child's parent/family member before settling on a disciplinary decision."

### *RQ 2: Racial Representation in Disciplinary Decisions*

*Discipline incidents by students.* Racial representation within the data tells a story regarding how one's implicit bias impacts how students are disciplined on a campus. Table 4.23. discipline incidents by student's representations of the number of students with and without Stage I and Stage II/III incidents. Stage 1 incidents are written and handled by the student's teacher. Stage II/III incidents are written by any staff member, and the leadership team handles the discipline dispositions, specifically the assistant principal.

Table 4.23. AP Maya Discipline Incidents by Students

Race	Total # of students	#Students without discipline incidents	% Students without discipline incidents	#Students with discipline incidents	% Students with discipline incidents
White	235	193	57%	42	55%
Pacific Islander	9	8		1	
Asian	19	17	2%	2	1%
Multiple Races	45	36	5%	9	3%
Black	62	51	11%	11	12%
Latino	44	33	15%	11	14%
Native American	2	1	10%	1	14%
Total	416	339	0%	77	1%
			100%		100%

Out of the total student body 56% are white and out of all the total number of students with discipline, 55% are white. Whereas the total student body is 15% Black, and out of all, the total number of students with discipline is 14% Black. Table 4.23. showed a disproportionate number of Black students with at least one Stage I or Stage II/III referral compared to their white counterparts.

*Racial Discipline Data Pre- and Post-Intervention*

AP Maya’s pre-intervention data show Black students on their campus were not disproportionately represented in discretionary disciplinary decisions. According to Table 4.25. Black students were expected to have 7 exclusionary discipline infractions and they actual had 12 infractions (Table 4.24.). Also, Black students were expected to have 14 inclusionary discipline infractions (Table 4.25.) and they actual had 9 infractions (Table 4.24.).

The chi-square was significant with a P value of  $P < .001$ . The P value was significant because there were more inclusion discipline decisions for white students and more exclusive discipline decisions for all other races (see Table 4.24.)

Table 4.24. AP Maya Actual Discipline Data Pre-Intervention

Race	Exclusive	Inclusive	Total
White	41	126	167
Pacific Islander	-	-	-
Asian	-	-	-
Multiple Races	7	1	8
Black	12	9	21
Latino	7	3	10
Native American	7	9	16
Totals	74	148	222

- \*These categories were not included because of 0 in the cells

Table 4.25. AP Maya Expected Discipline Data Pre-Intervention

Race	Exclusive	Inclusive
White	56	111
Pacific Islander	-	-
Asian	-	-
Multiple Races	3	5
Black	7	14
Latino	3	7
Native American	5	11

$P < .001$ , which was significant

\*These categories were not included because of 0 in the cells

AP Maya's post-intervention data show Black students on their campus were disproportionately represented in discretionary disciplinary decisions. According to Table 4.27., Black students were expected to have 1 exclusionary discipline infraction, and they actually had 1 infraction (see Table 4.27.). Also, Black students were expected to have 1



inclusionary discipline infraction (see Table 4.27.), and they actually had 1 infraction (see Table 4.26.).

Table 4.26. AP Maya Actual Discipline Data Post-Intervention

Race	Exclusive	Inclusive	Total
White	19	43	62
Pacific Islander	-	-	-
Asian	-	-	-
Multiple Races	2	5	7
Black	1	1	2
Latino	3	4	7
Native American	-	-	-
Totals	26	53	79

- \*These categories were not included because of 0 in the cells

Table 4.27. AP Maya Expected Discipline Data Post-Intervention

Race	Exclusive	Inclusive
White	20	42
Pacific Islander	-	-
Asian	-	-
Multiple Races	2	5
Black	1	1
Latino	2	5
Native American	-	-

P value was 0.86, which not was significant

- \*These categories were not included because of 0 in the cells

### *RQ 3: Culturally Responsive School Leadership in Disciplinary Decisions*

The Culturally Responsive School Leadership framework has four main components: (1) Self-reflection, (2) Culturally Responsive Teachers, (3) Create Inclusive School, and (4) Engage All Voices that should be considered when APs engage in discretionary discipline decision-making for Black students (Khalifa, 2018).

*Self-reflection.* The practice of self-reflection can help the AP “identify and vocalize one’s background and privilege” better to understand their students in particular their Black students. (Khalifa, 2018). AP Monica shared, “I’ve been engaged in this work since my own doctoral program started about 15 years ago. Taking part in this study brought to the fore much of the learning I’ve experienced over the years. It’s easy for people like me, white, privileged people, to take breaks from their antiracist work. It’s so hard, and we make excuses to allow ourselves to backslide in our efforts. We get lazy and allow our fragility and apathy to take the lead. We must continue to engage in critical self-reflection and work tirelessly to ensure a better future for our Black students. Until white people hold themselves and each other accountable for past and current wrongs, it’s unlikely anything will truly change. The onus is on us.”

The need for school leaders to engage in the practice of self-reflection is also critical for the assistant principal to challenge the oppressive systems that create inequitable conditions for Black students (Khalifa, 2018). One of these oppressive systems is discipline and AP Maya shared “Practicing critical self-reflection helped her to remember to seek consultation with others before making disciplinary decisions. This consultation sometimes validated my inclinations and other times challenged them” Engaging in the practice of critical self-reflection allowed AP Maya to remember “the best decisions are not typically made in a hurry or unilaterally.” The CRSL checklist helped AP Maya “attend more closely to the role their implicit biases when selecting dispositions that likely had the biggest impact.”

*Develop culturally responsive teachers.* While it is important for the AP to become aware of their implicit bias and the role it plays in their decision making it is important the AP to also coach their teachers to understand the role their implicit bias impacts their referral writing. AP Trey shared, “We need to keep conversations open, and we need to continue to challenge both implicit and explicit implicit biases. White fragility still controls how we face or don't face the realities of the impact of systemic racism on our students and their families. Many white people are highly skilled at derailing conversations regarding racism, centering their comfort over the desperate need for us to critically examine what we are doing that is perpetuating unjust outcomes for our students of color. Excuses, defensiveness, distraction, and blame rise to the surface. Unless we keep confronting the countless detours taken to avoid facing the reality of what we have been and continue to do, nothing is going to change. (Evidence abounds that many white people don't WANT things to change.)”

*Create an inclusive school.* To debunk the negative associations attached to Black student it is important for APs to have a systemic process for addressing student discipline that is constant across all races of students. AP Maya shared by utilizing the CRSL checklist gave her pause when making discipline decisions.

*Engage all voices.* By the AP taking the time to be present and communicating with Black students will also allow AP to learn about their students, shift their implicit biases and loosen their negative subconscious racial associations (Banaji & Greenwald, 2013; DeMatthews et al., 2016; Minkos et al., 2017; Nishioka, 2021). AP Maya shared the CRSL checklist gave her pause when making a discipline decision because she

understood her implicit bias and knew she needed to spend time listening to all students involved in the situation. When she felt her implicit bias was triggered, she consulted with her principal to ensure she was meeting the needs of the students.

#### *AP Maya Discipline Data Summary*

The chi-square p-values for the pre-intervention data was statistically significant because more white students received inclusive discipline decisions and all other races received more exclusive discipline decisions. Whereas the post-intervention data was not statistically significant. It is also important that no student's race category was deleted from the data sets because each student's race matters.

According to Table 4.23., Black students were not disproportionately represented in the number of students with at least one or more stage I and/or 1 or more stage II/III incidents, with 11 of the 62 students. Whereas white students were also not disproportionately represented in the number of students who have at least one or more stage I and/or 1 or more stage II/III incidents, with 42 of the 235 students.

#### *Research Findings for AP Nichole*

##### *RQ 1: Assessment of Racial Implicit Bias*

After receiving her personal results from the Harvard Race IAT 3-2-1 Self-Reflection Exit Tool AP, Nichole reflected and shared her three key takeaways were: she “needs to be mindful of how their implicit bias impacts her responses and relationships, she needs to check their implicit bias and pause before she acts or speaks, and she has a implicit bias that need to own.” AP Nichole shared that her two ideas to reduce their

implicit bias while making discretionary discipline decision-making were to thoroughly investigate an incident and actively listen to all who were involved; she needs to consider what role her implicit biases may be impacting her decision-making and pause to reflect before reacting. The one commitment AP Nichole shared was to “pause and listen.”

*RQ 2: Racial Representation in Disciplinary Decisions*

*Discipline incidents by students.* Racial representation within the data tells a story regarding how one’s implicit bias impacts how students are disciplined on a campus.

Table 4.28. Discipline incidents by student’s representations of the number of students with and without Stage I and Stage II/III incidents. Stage 1 incidents are written and handled by the student’s teacher. Anyone on staff can write Stage II/III incidents, and the discipline dispositions are handled by the leadership team, specifically the AP.

Table 4.28. AP Nichole Discipline Incidents by Students

Race	Total # of students	#Students without discipline incidents	% Students without discipline incidents	#Students with discipline incidents	% Students with discipline incidents
White	161	123	34%	38	32%
Pacific Islander	7	6	2%	1	1%
Asian	27	25	7%	2	2%
Multiple Races	40	29	8%	11	9%
Black	55	32	9%	23	19%
Latino	174	134	37%	40	33%
Native American	17	12	3%	5	4%
Total	481	361	100%	120	100%

Out of the total student body, 33% are white, and out of the total number of students with discipline, 32% are white. Whereas the total student body is 11% Black, and out of all, the total number of students with discipline is 19% Black. Table 4.29. showed a disproportionate number of Black students with at least one Stage I or Stage II/III referral compared to their white counterparts.

*Racial Discipline Data Pre- and Post- Intervention*

AP Nichole's pre-intervention data show Black students on their campus were not disproportionately represented in discretionary disciplinary decisions. According to Table 4.30., Black students were expected to have 23 exclusionary discipline infractions, and they actually had 30 infractions (see Table 4.29.). Also, Black students were expected to have 64 inclusionary discipline infractions (see Table 4.30.), and they actually had 57 infractions (see Table 4.29.).

Table 4.29. AP Nichole Actual Discipline Data Pre-Intervention

Race	Exclusive	Inclusive	Total
White	11	29	40
Pacific Islander	-	-	-
Asian	1	8	9
Multiple Races	4	12	16
Black	30	57	87
Latino	18	71	89
Native American	7	22	29
Totals	71	199	270

- \*These categories were not included because of 0 in the cells

Table 4.30. AP Nichole Expected Discipline Data Pre-Intervention

Race	Exclusive	Inclusive
White	11	29
Pacific Islander	-	-
Asian	2	7
Multiple Races	4	12
Black	23	64
Latino	23	66
Native American	8	21

P value was 0.32, which was not significant

- \*These categories were not included because of 0 in the cells

AP Nichole’s post-intervention data show Black students on their campus were not disproportionately represented in discretionary disciplinary decisions. According to Table 4.32., Black students were expected to have 1 exclusionary discipline infraction and they actually had 1 infraction (see Table 4.31.). Also, Black students were expected to have 4 inclusionary discipline infractions (see Table 4.32.), and they actually had 4 infractions (see Table 4.31.).

Table 4.31. AP Nichole Actual Discipline Data Post-Intervention

Race	Exclusive	Inclusive	Total
White	1	4	5
Pacific Islander	-	-	-
Asian	1	8	-
Multiple Races	-	-	-
Black	1	4	5
Latino	3	9	12
Native American	-	-	-
Totals	6	36	42

- \*These categories were not included because of 0 in the cells

Table 4.32. AP Nichole Expected Discipline Data Post-Intervention

Race	Exclusive	Inclusive
White	1	4
Pacific Islander	-	-
Asian	2	7
Multiple Races	-	-
Black	1	4
Latino	2	10
Native American	-	-

P value was 0.89, which was not significant

- \*These categories were not included because of 0 in the cell

*RQ 3: Culturally Responsive School Leadership in Disciplinary Decisions*

The Culturally Responsive School Leadership framework has four main components: (1) Self-reflection, (2) Culturally Responsive Teachers, (3) Create Inclusive School, and (4) Engage All Voices that should be considered when APs engage in discretionary discipline decision-making for Black students (Khalifa, 2018).

*Self-reflection.* The practice of self-reflection can help the AP “identify and vocalize one’s background and privilege” better to understand their students in particular their Black students. (Khalifa, 2018). AP Nichole shared, “The checklist reminds me to slow down and really take the time to listen to students and their perspective on the events that led them to end up in the office. I intend to share the CRSL with our climate team and staff so that we can work more diligently to check and examine all our implicit biases. I have found that I am often examining adult implicit bias along with responding to behaviors that have been referred to the office.” Engaging in the practice of critical self-reflection also allowed AP Nichole “It helped me to learn more



about the ways peers and staff treat them and the impact that has on the way they engage in their learning community”.

The need for school leaders to engage in the practice of self-reflection is also critical for the assistant principal to challenge the oppressive systems that create inequitable conditions for Black students (Khalifa, 2018). One of these oppressive systems is discipline. AP Nichole shared, “Practicing critical self-reflection supported the need to pause and not make reactionary decisions based on the emotions of the referring adult.” Self-reflection supported AP Nichole’s professional goals around listening and being aware of her implicit bias and follow-up communications with educators.

*Develop culturally responsive teachers.* While it is important for the AP to become aware of their implicit bias and the role it plays in their decision-making, it is important for the AP also to coach their teachers to understand the role their implicit bias impacts their referral writing. AP Nichole shared she “intends to share the checklist as part of our climate PD and make sure that our teachers and staff, who are most often the ones to observe and refer students for disciplinary action, are also aware of their implicit bias and are reminded to stop, take a breath and actively listen to all students involved before reacting, writing referrals and sending students to the office”.

*Create an Inclusive school.* To debunk the negative associations attached to Black students, APs need to have a systemic process for addressing student discipline that is constant across all races of students. AP Nichole shared that utilizing the CRSL checklist “provided me a guide and space to think about all the aspects of the behavior of concern and take the time to listen prior to communicating findings and events to

staff and families. It also created more space for repairing harm through restorative practices rather than exclusionary actions”.

*Engage all voices.* By the AP taking the time to be present and communicating with Black students will also allow AP to learn about their students, shift their implicit biases and loosen their negative subconscious racial associations (Banaji & Greenwald, 2013; DeMatthews et al., 2016; Minkos et al., 2017; Nishioka, 2021). AP Nichole shared the CRSL checklist allowed discipline conversations that “requires more time and centers student voice as well as provides reminders to communicate with all stakeholders”.

#### *AP Nichole Discipline Data Summary*

The chi-square p-values for the pre- and post-intervention data were not statistically significant. There were a few study limitations that could have attributed to the lack of significance in the post-intervention results. These limitations included decreased discipline referrals the AP was responsible for handling. Based on this reality, it was important that no student's race category was deleted from the data sets because each student's race matters. Also, there was a decreased amount of time the AP had to engage with the professional development cycle.

According to Table 4.28., Black students were disproportionately represented in the number of students with at least one or more stage I and/or 1 or more stage II/III incidents with 32 of the 55 students. Whereas white students were not disproportionately represented in the number of students with at least one or more stage I and/or 1 or more stage II/III incidents with 38 of the 161 students.

## *Research Findings for AP Kristen*

### *RQ 1: Assessment of Racial Implicit Bias*

After receiving her personal results from the Harvard Race IAT 3-2-1 Self-Reflection Exit Tool AP, Kristen reflected and shared her key takeaways were one's implicit bias changed from the last time she took it two years ago, with training, awareness, and self-reflection one's implicit bias can change." AP Kristen shared two ideas they had to reduce their implicit bias while making discretionary discipline decision-making was to review the current systems and data to identify where the implicit bias is prevalent, then identify a systematic review of observable behavior aligned with appropriate consequences-NOT punishment-but behavioral consequences that corresponds to the observable behavior. The one commitment AP Kristen shared was to "review the data and collaborate with a team- no decision-making is made independently".

### *RQ 2: Racial Representation in Disciplinary Decisions*

*Discipline incidents by students.* Racial representation within the data tells a story regarding how one's implicit bias impacts how students are disciplined on a campus. Table 4.33. Discipline incidents by student's representations of the number of students with and without Stage 1 and Stage 2/3 incidents. Stage 1 incidents are written and handled by the student's teacher. Stage 2/3 incidents are written by the teacher, and the discipline dispositions are handled by the leadership team, specifically the assistant principal.

Table 4.33. AP Kristen Discipline Incidents by Students

Race	Total # of Students	#Students without discipline incidents	% Students without discipline incidents	#Students with discipline incidents	% Students with discipline incidents
White	242	213	70%	29	62%
Pacific Islander	0	0		0	
Asian	6	6	2%	0	0%
Multiple Races	46	37	12%	9	19%
Black	24	20	7%	4	9%
Latino	29	26	9%	3	6%
Native American	3	2		2	
			1%		4%
Total	350	304	100%	47	100%

Out of the total student body, 69% are white, and out of the total number of students with discipline, 62% are white. Whereas the total student body is 0.7% Black, and out of all, the total number of students with discipline is 9% Black. Table 4.33. showed a disproportionate number of Black students with at least one Stage I or Stage II/III referral compared to their white counterparts.

*Racial Discipline Data Pre- and Post-Intervention*

AP Kristen's pre-intervention data showed Black students on their campus were disproportionately represented in discretionary disciplinary decisions. According to Table 35, Black students were expected to have 5 exclusionary discipline infractions, and they actually had 5 infractions (Table 4.34.). Also, Black students were expected to have 2 inclusionary discipline infractions (Table 4.35.), and they actually had 2 infractions (Table 4.34.).

The chi-square was significant with a P value of  $P < .001$ . The P value was significant because white students received 30 exclusion discipline decisions (Table 4.34.) and the expected value was 35 (Table 4.35.) and Asian students received 8 inclusive discipline decisions (Table 4.34.) and the expected value was 3 (Table 4.35.)

Table 4.34. AP Kristen Actual Discipline Data Pre-Intervention

Race	Exclusive	Inclusive	Total
White	35	8	43
Pacific Islander	-	-	-
Asian	1	8	9
Multiple Races	5	3	8
Black	5	2	7
Latino	2	1	3
Native American	4	1	5
Totals	52	23	75

- \*These categories were not included because of 0 in the cells

Table 4.35. AP Kristen Expected Discipline Data Pre-Intervention

Race	Exclusive	Inclusive
White	30	13
Pacific Islander	-	-
Asian	6	3
Multiple Races	5	2
Black	5	2
Latino	2	1

P value was 0.001, which was significant

- \*These categories were not included because of 0 in the cells

AP Kristen's post-intervention data showed Black students on their campus were not disproportionately represented in discretionary disciplinary decisions. According to Table 4.37., Black students were expected to have 0 exclusionary discipline infractions, and they actually had 0 infractions (see Table 4.36.). Also, Black students were expected

to have 0 inclusionary discipline infractions (see Table 4.37.), and they actually had 0 infractions (see Table 4.36.).

Table 4.36. AP Kristen Actual Discipline Data Post-Intervention

Race	Exclusive	Inclusive	Total
White	6	6	12
Pacific Islander	-	-	-
Asian	1	8	9
Multiple Races	-	-	-
Black	-	-	-
Latino	2	1	3
Native American	-	-	-
Totals	11	15	26

- \*These categories were not included because of 0 in the cells

Table 4.37. AP Kristen Expected Discipline Data Post-Intervention

Race	Exclusive	Inclusive
White	5	8
Pacific Islander	-	-
Asian	3	6
Multiple Races	-	-
Black	-	-
Latino	1	2
Native American	-	-

P value was 0.30, which was not significant

- \*These categories were not included because of 0 in the cells

### *RQ 3: Culturally Responsive School Leadership in Disciplinary Decisions*

Khalifa (2018) Culturally Responsive School Leadership framework has four main components: (1) Self-reflection, (2) Culturally Responsive Teachers, (3) Create Inclusive School, and (4) Engage All Voices that should be considered when APs engage in discretionary discipline decision-making for Black students.

*Self-reflection.* The practice of self-reflection can help the AP “identify and vocalize one’s background and privilege” better to understand their students in particular their Black students. (Khalifa, 2018). AP Kristen shared the role self-reflection played in helping her understand her Black students was that she needed to “bring in the families more. She needed to create a “public facing” student-centered disciplinary response protocol so that everyone can understand how we plan to partner with families around student’s needs.”

The need for school leaders to engage in the practice of self-reflection is also critical for the assistant principal to challenge the oppressive systems that create inequitable conditions for Black students (Khalifa, 2018). One of these oppressive systems is discipline, and AP Kristen shared, “Practicing critical self-reflection forced her to pause and ensure she was thinking about her decision-making.” Engaging in the practice of critical self-reflection also allowed AP Kristen to have “more meaningful conversations with students, their families, and the staff involved”.

*Develop culturally responsive teachers.* While it is important for the AP to become aware of their implicit bias and the role it plays in their decision-making, it is important for the AP also to coach their teachers to understand the role their implicit bias impacts their referral writing. AP Kristen shared she “plans to use the CRSL checklist with the staff and to create clear expectations around dialogue/discussion to support proactive and reactive responses to student behavior- not all misconduct requires a disciplinary response. The CRSL checklist will help staff differentiate between the need for a disciplinary response vs. a humanitarian response to support the whole child.” The components of the CRSL also helped to provide AP Kristen with a framework for her

team involved in reviewing the various student incidents and making decisions that matched the student behavior and other individual needs.

*Create an inclusive school.* To debunk the negative associations attached to Black student's it is important for APs to have a systemic process for addressing student discipline that is constant across all races of students. AP Kristen shared by utilizing the CRSL checklist it helped her to "slow down and ensure that she was asking all the right questions to consider all the perspectives. It also helped her to think about the response and identify if the discipline response needed to be adjusted or if we could follow the PPS/building policy/flow chart."

*Engage all voices.* By the AP taking the time to be present and communicating with Black students and their families allowed AP to learn about their students, shift their implicit biases and loosen their negative subconscious racial associations (Banaji & Greenwald, 2013; DeMatthews et al., 2016; Minkos et al., 2017; Nishioka, 2021). AP Kristen shared the CRSL checklist allowed "her to sit down and ensure she was asking all the right questions to consider all the perspectives. It helped her to think about "the response and identify if the discipline responses needed to be adjusted or if we could follow the PPS/building policy flow chart" during the discipline conversation. Also, Kristen shared she was able to "engage families in the discipline conversation which helped everyone see that one individual's perspectives were not the whole picture of the situation. Most importantly, bringing families into the conversation builds trust to support their child."



### *AP Kristen's Discipline Data Summary*

The chi-square p-values for the pre-intervention data was statistically significant because white students received more exclusive discipline decisions than expected and Asian students received more inclusive discipline decisions than expected. The post-intervention was not statistically significant. There were a few study limitations that could have attributed to the lack of significance in the post-intervention results. These limitations included decreased discipline referrals the AP was responsible for handling. Based on this reality, it was important that no student's race category was deleted from the data sets because each student's race matters. Also, there was a decreased amount of time the AP had to engage with the professional development cycle.

According to Table 4.33., Black students were not disproportionately represented in the number of students who have at least one or more stage I and/or 1 or more stage II/III incidents with 4 of the 24 students. Whereas white students were also not disproportionately represented in the number of students with at least one or more stage I and/or 1 or more stage II/III incidents, with 29 of the 242 students.

### *Findings Across Participants*

#### *RQ 1: Assessment of Racial Implicit Bias*

By engaging in the Harvard Race IAT, each AP had the opportunity to self-reflect on how their racial implicit bias impacted their discipline decision-making of all students, especially Black students. Each AP shared similar sentiments about reducing their implicit bias while making discretionary discipline decision-making, which included pausing to determine their decision-making role and asking for others' opinions. Each

AP's commitment centered around being consistent, listening to students of color, speaking with the student's family, pausing, reviewing data, and collaborating with a team member.

*RQ 2: Racial Representation in Disciplinary Decisions*

The discipline data collected for all six AP's pre- and post-intervention data did not have statistical significance because of the discipline decision-making for Black students. The statistical significance a few APs experienced was due to the discipline decision-making of Asian, Native American, and White students. The lack of statistical significance in the AP's post-intervention data could be because fewer stage 2/3 discipline incidents were reported. What was significant was the number of incidents by students, which included both stage I and stage II/III discipline reports. Across the six APs, White students had more students without discipline incidents compared to their Black counterparts, and Black students had more students with discipline incidents compared to their white counterparts.

*RQ 3: Culturally Responsive School Leadership in Disciplinary Decisions*

The Culturally Responsive School Leadership framework provided APs with tools to decrease the disproportionality in discretionary discipline decision-making for Black students. The six APs shared similar experiences after utilizing the Culturally Responsive School Leadership Checklist to make discretionary disciplinary decisions. Each AP shared first the role self-reflection played in their discretionary disciplinary decisions, which included slowing down to consider the role their implicit bias is playing. Second, they shared it was important to engage in conversations with teachers about the

role their implicit bias played in their referral writing. Third, APs shared how they were able to use the CRSL checklist helped them create systems that allowed them to slow down in their discipline decision-making to ensure all students were treated fairly. Lastly, the APs shared the CRSL checklist allowed them to have discipline conversations that took more time, included student's voices and opinions, and family member's input.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Discussion and Conclusions

The study was conducted to test the impact of the intervention on APs receiving practical professional development that allows them to become self-aware of their implicit bias, critically self-reflect, and select a discipline disposition that addresses the behavior and the color of the student's skin (Banaji & Greenwald, 2016; Khalifa, 2020; Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015). Black students are disproportionately disciplined compared to their White peers. The disproportionately in student discipline negatively impacts Black students' opportunities to thrive in the academic setting.

Three research questions were used to address the student's problem of practice. A 90-day improvement science method of plan-do-study-act was used to collect data. APs were asked to engage in a professional development series during the spring of 2023 that included taking the Harvard Race IAT, self-reflecting on their results, providing their pre- and post-intervention discipline data, being trained to use the CRSL Discretionary Discipline Decision-Making Checklist, and completing an end of study focus questions virtually.

The quantitative descriptive and chi-square statistical techniques were used to analyze the discipline data. The qualitative statistical framework analysis technique was used to analyze the AP's self-reflections. Overall, the pre- and post-intervention student discipline data had a minor statistical significance. However, the qualitative data collected revealed that APs became more aware of how their racial implicit bias impacted

their discretionary disciplinary decision-making and noted the need to slow down when making these decisions. This study provides APs a guardrail between their implicit bias and discretionary disciplinary decision-making. This chapter contains a summary of the findings, future recommendations, implications for the educational field, limitations of the study, and a conclusion.

### *Narrative Explanation*

The disproportionate discipline between Black and White students is a never-ending discussion topic in education. The discipline gap impacts Black students' opportunities to thrive in the classroom because their seat time is limited by being kicked out of class for subjective behaviors their White peers are not similarly being kicked out for. As the gatekeepers of student discipline, APs must be provided with practical professional development to understand how their implicit bias impacts their discretionary discipline decision-making to change the discipline narrative for Black students. The following conclusions were gained from the results of the study.

Overall, the quantitative data for the six APs pre- and post-intervention student discipline data for this study was not statistically significant and aligned with what research says about Black students being disproportionately disciplined (Skiba et al., 2002). Despite this reality, what was powerful about this study was analyzing the AP's qualitative narratives of their self-reflections. The Culturally Responsive School Leadership component of self-reflection has helped APs slow down, process what happened, and ask students their perspective can help to serve as a guardrail between their own implicit bias and their discretionary discipline decision-making. The following section is a narrative of how this study's data connected with previous research.

### *RQ 1: Assessment of Racial Bias*

Having an implicit bias is part of the human experience and is a reality that APs need to become self-aware of how their own implicit bias could negatively impact students. In the overall data for the six APs, according to the Harvard IAT results, five out of the six preferred Whites over Blacks, and they were unaware of this preference. This reality is constant with the research that people have an implicit bias that can be unconscious (Staats, 2014). These implicit biases are developed at a young age, impacted by the media, and one's lived experiences, which can then influence an AP's discretionary discipline decision-making. While APs do not intend to target their Black students without being aware of their implicit bias, they can unintentionally harm them with discretionary discipline decision-making that over-discipline Black students for subjective behaviors.

Researchers Banaji and Greenwald (2016) alluded to the reality that people (APs) must explore their hidden implicit biases because they make decisions based on what they think is true via their associations between people and actions, such as white= good and black=bad. This is why APS need to be aware of their implicit bias associations and have a guardrail between their implicit bias and discretionary discipline decision-making. Through the 3-2-1 Self-Reflection tool, APs shared they “need to be mindful how \*their implicit bias impacts \*their responses,” also they need to “check \*their implicit bias and pause before \*they act or speak,” and they have an “implicit bias that \*they need to own.”

APs becoming self-aware of implicit bias and its impact on their discretionary discipline decision-making of Black students can become a vehicle for change in student discipline (Thomas & Booth-McCoy, 2020). APs in the study committed to pausing, self-

reflecting, and listening before quickly making discretionary discipline decisions because the impact could lead to Black students being overly disciplined for behaviors their White peers are not.

### *RQ 2: Racial Representation in Disciplinary Decisions*

Race has been a strong predictor for the over-disciplining of Black students over others (Skiba et al., 2002). This predictor needs to be explored and corrected to ensure all students have the same access to high-quality education. Even though this study did not statistically support that claim for every AP's student discipline data, not because the intervention tool was not practical but because of the study's limitations. First, the CRSL Discretionary Discipline Decision-Making Checklist was introduced to APs during the spring semester, which is a busy time for APs. Second, many APs shared that they had different discipline issues than the fall semester. This led to some racial groups, such as Black students, having zero discipline infractions post-intervention compared to discipline infractions pre-intervention.

It is essential to note the number of disciplined Latino students compared to the total number of students on campus. For instance, 14/57 of Latino students at Creekstone Elementary had at least one discipline referral, and they only make up 16.4% of the total number of students on that campus compared to White students, who made up 55.3% of the total student population and only 38/192 of those students had at least one discipline referral. It is important to note why more minority students will be more likely to have at least one discipline referral and their White counterparts will not. Is it truly that minority students are more misbehaved than White students, or is an AP's implicit bias impacting

their discretionary discipline decision-making when it comes to other minority groups? Future research on this topic could address an answer to this question.

*RQ 3: Culturally Responsive School Leadership in Disciplinary Decisions*

The qualitative data collected from this study was the most valuable to understanding the power of practical professional development rooted in the self-awareness of one's implicit bias and self-reflection of that implicit bias and discretionary discipline decision-making could have for an AP. The research has highlighted that APs receive minimal discipline and professional development before and after their principal certification programs (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). This becomes problematic because APs rely on their previous classroom experiences and hidden implicit biases to handle discretionary discipline decisions for Black students. Using the CRSL Discretionary Discipline Decision-Making Checklist, APs shared the value of honing their skills in Culturally Responsive School Leadership (Khalifa, 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016).

The end-of-study focus question thematic data showed how the four components of the Culturally Responsive School Leaders framework (self-reflection, developing culturally responsive teachers, creating an inclusive school, and engaging all voices) helped the APs by providing a guardrail between their implicit bias and discretionary discipline decisions for Black students by. Engaging in self-reflection encouraged the APs to reflect on their discretionary discipline decision-making role in the oppressive school discipline system (Khalifa, 2018). This was the most valuable data point collected in this research study. This is because each of the APs shared similar experiences about slowing down to consider the role their implicit bias plays in their discretionary discipline decision-making. By APs becoming self-aware of their implicit bias, they have access to



a guardrail that allows them to slow down and think about the appropriate discipline response that addresses the Black student's behaviors and skin color.

### *Future Study Recommendations*

While this study's quantitative post-intervention data did not significantly show Black students were disproportionately disciplined compared to their White peers, the qualitative data revealed that APs became more aware of how their racial implicit bias impacted their discretionary discipline decision-making. The researcher will continue to pursue further research in APs, engaging in continuous professional development to help them unpack their own implicit biases regarding race and self-reflect on the impact it has on their discretionary discipline decision-making. The researcher believes that by continuing to study this topic, strategies to close the discipline gap between Black and White students will be uncovered, and race will not be a deciding factor between a student receiving an exclusionary or inclusionary discipline consequence for subjective behaviors. Future researchers have an opportunity to expand the need for APs to receive practical professional development that centers the role their bias can impact their discretionary discipline decision-making.

This study could be replicated for the first 90-day PDSA cycle. Options for the second 90-day PDSA could include the AP maintaining a self-reflection journal about their discipline decision-making or consist of the AP coaching willing educators who want to uncover their racial implicit bias and their discipline decision-making. Additionally, a second cycle could consist of the AP conducting perceptive interviews with students and families to uncover how they feel about discipline post-intervention or could have AP looking at discipline data across all racial groups and not Black students.

Either one of these research extensions could help APs become more self-aware of their own bias and have a guardrail between their bias and their discretionary discipline decision-making to ensure Black students are not being overly disciplined.

Another way a future researcher could extend this study is by the AP leading the campus through a 90-day PDSA cycle to help staff uncover how implicit bias is rooted in their rules and rewrite those rules based on the learning, collecting qualitative data from students on how they feel on campus. The work doing this 90-day PDSA could help the staff understand how bias is showing up in the school's rules and set to correct that for all students.

Future researchers can also extend this study by including secondary schools. In secondary school the volume of discipline interactions the AP is handling is larger, and the students' social dispositions about being disciplined is vastly different than in elementary school. This may regular a deeper dive into the role one racial bias is impacting their discretionary discipline decision-making and expand the discipline conversation to include more perceptive than just the APs and the students.

### *Implications*

The improvement science model helped me understand how change can happen over time and be improved to help correct educational practices. While the post-intervention quantitative data did not show significance due to the low number of referrals reported, it was necessary to note that the number of Black students receiving referrals did not drastically increase. It fits the model for improvement science and is a potentially helpful intervention to help APs improve their discretionary discipline decision-making practices and serve as a guardrail between their implicit bias and

decision-making. The professional development model of the APs used in this study filled a gap in the research that showed APs get limited training when making discipline decisions.

The qualitative data collected provided a peek into the need and value of APs having professional development opportunities to explore their implicit bias and have an intervention tool to help with their discretionary discipline decision-making. Analysis of the AP's self-reflection of their implicit bias and the overall study helped the researcher to understand how subtly one's implicit bias can impact one's discretionary discipline decision-making. APs generally wanted to ensure Black students were treated fairly and were surprised when they realized the role implicit bias played in discretionary discipline decision-making. Each AP's self-reflection gave me insight into how important it is for all APs, no matter their racial background, to engage in the practice of knowing their implicit bias, creating a guardrail between their implicit bias and discretionary discipline decision-making, and engaging in the practice of critical self-reflection. All educators have implicit biases that can hurt student outcomes if they go unchecked. Even though the process may be complex, an AP can become emotionally charged when learning about their implicit bias, especially if it differs from what they believed; there is a value in that implicit bias no longer being hidden. Instead, it is exposed to the light so that they can become more aware and have the tools to ensure they are not unintentionally allowing the implicit bias to drive their decisions. Because APs can have an implicit bias with other factors besides race, understanding that we all have implicit biases that can impact one's discretionary discipline decision-making could also help with the gaps between different demographics of students, such as special education students.

### *Limitations*

There were several limitations outside of the researcher's control that bear mentioning. As an improvement science study, the researcher accomplished the objective of designing an intervention to help serve as a guardrail between APs and their discretionary discipline decision-making. Learning from the data collection and analysis process, the researcher knows what to improve for future research opportunities.

Post data-collection, the researcher recognized that the study was conducted during the second semester of the school year, one of the busiest times for an AP. This could have contributed to the engagement of the APs; only six out of the thirty-five APs volunteered to be a part of the study and completed the tasks. This was due to the lack of capacity to take on something new and because APs simply did not have time to meet face-to-face to discuss results. In retrospection, it may have been more convenient for APs to be asked to participate in a study during the first semester when they would have more time to incorporate something new into their day-to-day practice, have more time to self-reflect, as well as have the ability to adjust their discretionary discipline decision-making based on their reflection. This would have also given time for APs to meet face-to-face as a cohort to discuss their Harvard IAT results, use the CRSL Discretionary Discipline Decision-Making Checklist, and the end-of-study wrap-up rather than APs engaging in this practice individually using a Google Form.

Also, the limited time impacted the collection of the quantitative post-intervention data, which caused some racial groups to be zero during the post-data, where they could have been counted during the pre-intervention data. The APs stated they had fewer disciplinary situations during the second semester. With more time, the researcher could

have collected more discipline data and administered a second 90-day cycle that could have included other staff, students, or families based on the data collected in the first 90-day cycle.

Gathering AP discipline data pre- and post-intervention was challenging since the information system does not disaggregate data based on the individual assigning the consequence but rather on the collective. This means the quantitative data collected can include discipline decisions made by other authorized staff, such as the principal and school climate specialist. In retrospection, it would have been essential for APs to have an individual discipline tracker that they could use to mark their discretionary discipline decision-making by race and exclusionary/inclusionary consequence.

With the studies focusing on APs and their discretionary discipline decision-making, this focus was an unfortunate limitation that should have included classroom educators' role in student discipline. With the discipline process starting with a classroom educator writing a student referral for behavior, it would have been essential for the AP to help educators uncover their own racial implicit bias, understand the role it plays in referral writing for students, and collect data to see if there is a difference in their referral writing based on students' race.

The final limitation and research opportunity were the campus grade levels and demographics that participated in the study. Based on APs self-selecting to participate in the study, the researcher needed help controlling the selected school types. Based on this, the study was heavily on elementary campuses with limited numbers of Blacks and other students of color. This impacted the study because elementary student discipline differs from secondary student discipline. In future studies, it will be essential to include a

balanced mix of elementary and secondary campuses to see the impact the pre-and post-intervention could have on those APs' discretionary discipline decision-making and could help diversify the study's student demographics.

### *Conclusion*

This improvement science methods study investigated how the intervention of practical professional development helps APs become self-aware of their implicit bias and ensures a guardrail between their implicit bias. Discretionary discipline decision-making could impact how Black students are disciplined. While the quantitative data collected on the pre-and post-intervention student discipline was not statistically significant for each AP, the qualitative data collected on the AP's self-reflection was rich. It gave insight into the value of practical professional development that helps APs become self-aware of their implicit bias and provides a system to make discretionary discipline decisions valuable.

Research shows APs are the gatekeepers of student discipline with hidden implicit biases; they need self-awareness and more practical professional development to effectively address student discipline (Banaji & Greenwald, 2016; Marshall & Hooley, 2006). This has contributed to Black students being disproportionately disciplined compared to White peers. The Culturally Responsive School Leadership provided a framework to help APs place a guardrail between their implicit bias and their discretionary discipline decision-making. Through this framework, APs had an opportunity to slow down their discretionary discipline decision-making by pausing to self-reflect and listen to their students to ensure they were addressing the student's behaviors, not adequately overly disciplining them because of a hidden implicit bias. By

APs becoming Culturally Responsive School Leaders, they can positively impact a school's whole discipline ecosystem by leading others through professional development that helps staff become aware of their own implicit bias and analyze school rules to address the hidden implicit biases written that exclude Black students from the academic space for subjective behaviors.

Probing deeper into the intervention, there is hope in closing the discipline gap between Black and White students by providing a professional development framework that allows APs and other school staff to become self-aware of their implicit bias and have a guardrail that can be placed between their implicit bias and their discretionary discipline decision-making. The APs must be introduced to the intervention tool prior to the start of the spring semester to give them time to process self-awareness of their implicit bias and practice using the CRSL Discretionary Discipline Decision-Making Checklist to ensure fidelity. Through this, Black students will academically benefit from APs who effectively utilize the components of the Culturally Responsive School Leadership Framework, particularly self-reflection, to ensure they are mindful of disrupting the oppressive discipline practices that Black students' experience.

The post-intervention quantitative student discipline data for Black students was contrary to the student discipline literature on Black students being disproportionately disciplined compared to their White peers. The timing of the professional development being introduced to the APs, the low number of student discipline situations APs had to handle, and the oversaturation of elementary schools versus secondary schools was outside the researcher's locus of control. The qualitative data collected from the AP's self-reflections aligned with the literature on APs needing practical professional development

on addressing student discipline and the value of becoming Culturally Responsive School Leaders.



## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

### Culturally Responsive School Leadership Checklist

- Listen to all sides of the story.
- Pause to process information and impact on the school community.
- Ask questions to get to know students.
- Look at the student code of conduct for how to handle the situation.
- Speak with students about the impact their behavior had on them and the community.
- Allow students time to self-reflect.
- Select an intervention that addresses the concern.
- Call parents/guardians.
- Share outcomes with students, teachers, and the support team.

APPENDIX B

3-2-1 Exit Ticket

<b>3-2-1 Exit Ticket</b>	
<b>3:</b> What are your three key takeaways from uncovering your implicit bias?	
<b>2:</b> What are two ideas you have to reduce your implicit bias while making discretionary discipline decision-making?	
<b>1:</b> What is one commitment you can make moving forward that will reduce the impact your implicit bias will have on your discretionary discipline decision-making?	

## APPENDIX C

### End of Study Focus Questions

1. What were the deltas (-) from using the CRSL checklist?
2. What were the pluses (+) of using the CRSL checklist?
3. What changes do you think need to be made to the CRSL checklist?
4. Do you feel as if the CRSL checklist served as a guardrail between you and your implicit bias? If so, why? If not, why not?
5. What impact do you think the CRSL checklist has on your discipline conversations?
6. What impact, if any, do you think the CRSL checklist has on your discipline data when comparing Black and White students?
7. What parts of the implicit bias reduction professional development experience do you think can be used on your campus?
8. What role did critical self-reflection play in helping you understand your African-American students?

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