

**BLACK GIRLS AND SCHOOL DISCIPLINE:  
SHIFTING FROM THE NARROW ZONE OF ZERO TOLERANCE TO A  
WIDE REGION OF RESTORATIVE PRACTICES AND  
CULTURALLY PROFICIENT PARTNERSHIPS**

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**ABSTRACT**

Nationally, Black girls experience disproportionate discipline consequences more than any other group of students, starting in preschool with Black girls making up 20% of girls enrolled, but 54% of girls suspended from preschool (Camera, 2017). Inequitable, exclusionary discipline practices occur because there are many forms of institutionalized racism, including the invisibility, intersectionality, and stereotyping of Black girls. Implicit biases held by some school officials transform into practices, (supported by policies such as Zero Tolerance), which translate into suspensions and expulsions, and further contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline. Two scenarios of Black female high school students are examined to compare the implications of Zero Tolerance policies versus Restorative Practices and creating equity through Culturally Proficient Partnerships. The recommendations to reduce the number of suspensions is to not only use Restorative Practices, but also continue to educate and equip teachers and administrators in Culturally Proficient strategies that promote family and community partnerships, which insist on equity and fairness.

*Keywords:* Black girls, school-to-prison pipeline, restorative practices, cultural proficiency, inequitable discipline, exclusionary discipline practice, intersectionality

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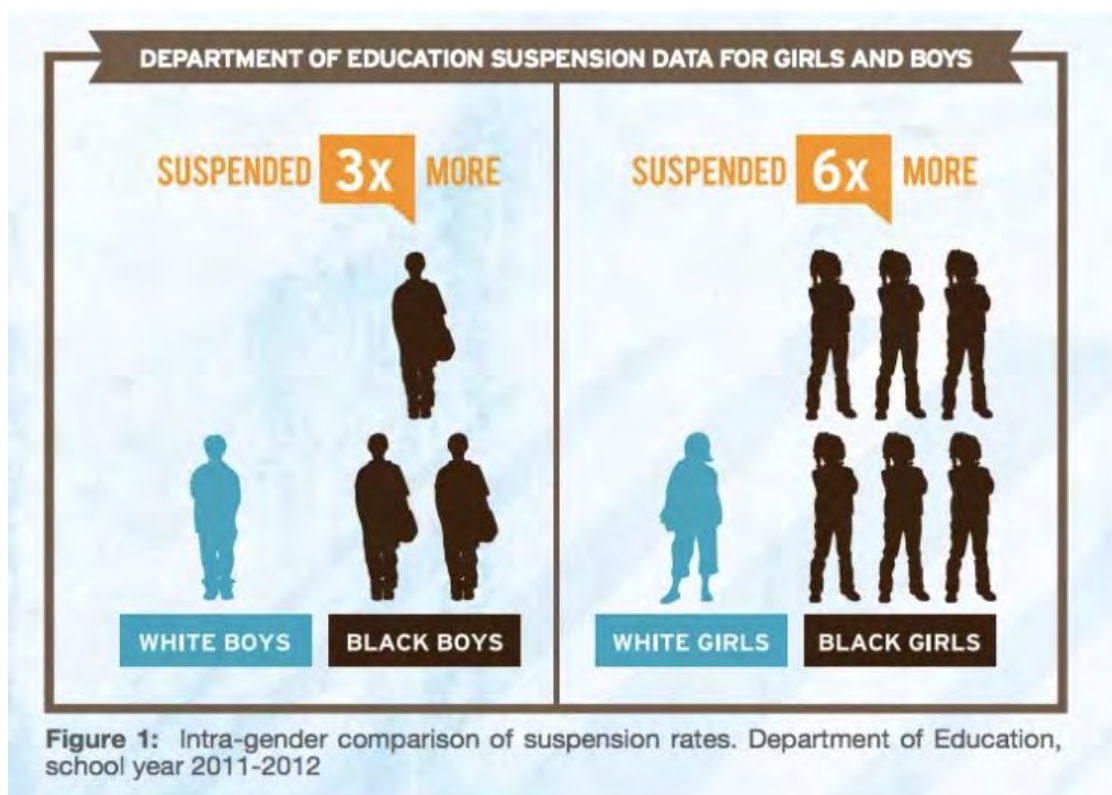
**Introduction**

Disproportionality based on race in the discipline of students has long been identified as a possible indicator of practices that cause inequity in schools (Balfanz, Byrnes, and Fox, 2015). It is not a new revelation that Black students face greater risks of suspension and expulsion than non-Black students. According to recent data, Black girls experience disproportionate discipline more than any other group of students. Sometimes this information is overshadowed by mainstream discourse (Blake, Butler, Lewis, & Darenbourg, 2010), but the evidence is staggering and cannot be ignored. Black females' stories of their experiences are being brought to the forefront because

of the unsettling incidents and alarming statistics regarding their plights and schooling experiences.

In the Department of Education’s findings on suspension data for the 2011-2012 school year (U. S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights (OCR), 2014), Black girls were suspended six (6) times more than their White counterparts (Figure 1), with the latest trends indicating that Black girls now have the fastest growing number of suspension rates. Kimberlé Crenshaw, the lead author of the renowned report, *Black Girls Matter: Pushed Out, Overpoliced and Underprotected* (2015) emphasizes that, “the suspension and expulsion rates for Black girls far outpace the rates for other girls—and in some places, they outpace the rates of most boys” (p. 14). That same report clearly indicated that of all girls expelled from school in New York from 2011-2012, approximately 90% were Black. At the same time, “no White girls were expelled during that time” (p. 60). The study additionally indicates that only 2% of White females were subjected to exclusionary suspensions in comparison to 12% of Black girls. Ashley Morris, the Founder of the National Black Women’s Justice Institute, (Anderson, 2016) asserts that “Black girls are 16 percent of girls in schools, but 42 percent of girls receiving corporal punishment, 42 percent of girls expelled with or without educational services, 45 percent of girls with at least one out-of-school suspension, 31 percent of girls referred to law enforcement, and 34 percent of girls arrested on campus” (n.p). With these disturbing latest trends effecting the disciplinary aspect of schools, the need to study Black girls and school discipline has become even more essential to provide a safe learning environment for them, give better insight to school and community officials who create and enforce disciplinary policies, and to partner with families and communities in addressing these issues (Clark-Louque, et al., 2019; Losen & Skiba, 2010).

Figure 1. Department of Education Suspension Data for Girls and Boys.



Source: Department of Education Office of Civil Rights: (2014).

To further expose the disturbing incidents that occur to Black girls, the *Black Girls Matter: Pushed out, Overpoliced and Underprotected* report (Crenshaw, Ocen, & Nanda, 2015), lists explicit accounts of Black girls ranging from early elementary school to high school seniors being suspended and expelled for offenses that should be handled in less punitive methods. Consider these incidents and compare the infractions with the disciplinary actions proposed or taken:

- 2007
  - 6-year-old girl was arrested in a Florida classroom for having a tantrum.
  - 16-year-old girl was arrested in a California school for dropping cake on the floor and failing to pick it up to a school officer's satisfaction.
  
- 2013
  - 8-year-old girl in Illinois was arrested for acting out.
  - 16-year-old girl in Alabama who suffers from diabetes, asthma, and sleep apnea was hit with a book by her teacher after she fell asleep in class. The student was later arrested and hospitalized due to injuries she sustained in her interaction with the police.
  - 16-year-old girl in Florida was arrested when an experiment she tried on school grounds caused a small explosion.
  - 12-year-old girl was threatened with expulsion from an Orlando private school unless she changed the look of her natural hair.
  
- 2014
  - 12-year-old girl faced expulsion and criminal charges after writing "hi" on a locker room wall of her Georgia middle school.
  - Detroit honors student was suspended for her entire senior year for accidentally bringing a pocket knife to a football game.

Rohr (2019), in her article, *Pushed out and punished: One woman's story how systems are failing Black girls* adds the following recent incidents to the list:

- 2017
  - Black female students at a charter high school in Malden (outside of Boston) were put in detention and threatened with suspension for wearing braids.
  - Four 12-year-old middle school students in Binghamton, New York were strip searched because they seemed giddy during lunch hour.

All of the aforementioned incidents are examples of how Black girls are disciplined in schools across our nation. These examples of disciplinary actions may seem unfair and extreme, but nevertheless, Black girls have been on the receiving end of these actions by school officials.

School discipline continues to be an active part of administrators' and school officials' responsibilities. As a part of school discipline, administrators make decisions based on perceptions, practices, and policies. Oftentimes, not all of the decisions regarding school discipline are implemented equitably (Clark-Louque & Latunde, 2019). Sometimes, punitive

school discipline practices demonstrate patterns of racialized inequities. Recent statistics indicate that school officials evaluate Black girls more critically than other females (Annamma et al., 2016). According to Morris & Perry (2017), school officials are more likely to cite Black girls for less serious but more ambiguous behavior than White girls who are disciplined for more serious offenses. In their research, Annamma et al., found that Black girls were disciplined more for dress code, defiance, and using inappropriate language. “Black girls experience many forms of institutionalized racism, including a disproportionate likelihood of being punished in school, being funneled into the criminal justice system, having contact with the foster care system, and experiencing physical and sexual abuse” (Scholars Strategy Network, (SSN) 2020, n.p.). This should be no surprise considering that schools contribute to the inequities and challenges Black girls face in their early schooling experiences (SSN).

Why are Black girls systemically treated this way in schools across the nation? Researchers studying this concern weigh in by analyzing several facets of this problem. Inequities occur because there are many forms of institutionalized racism, including the invisibility, intersectionality, and stereotyping of Black girls that occur from school officials (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1989). Their attitudes, beliefs, and implicit bias are transformed into behaviors and practices, undergirded by policies such as Zero Tolerance, which transcend into suspensions and expulsions, thereby feeding into the school-to-prison pipeline. The glaring statistics further illuminate this debilitating cycle when it comes to disciplinary outcomes for Black girls (Annamma, et al., 2016; Caton, 2012).

Therefore, this paper’s purpose is two-fold. First, its focus is to heighten the awareness of Black girls and the inequitable disciplinary outcomes that occur in schools. Second, in order to assist school administrators, policymakers, and educators as a whole, this article looks to examine options such as Restorative Practices and Cultural Proficiency Partnerships by creating equity partnerships with families in lieu of punitive disciplinary actions. Training in these areas is crucial to address implicit and explicit biases, as well as building equity capacity to restore family and community relationships. In order to address the issues, this article is organized into four sections. The first section discusses the perceptions and assumptions about Black girls. Invisibility, intersectionality, and stereotyping of Black girls play a significant role in how they are perceived by school administrators. The second section provides an account of the exclusionary processes. To examine the literature in these areas provides a foundation that demonstrates how school administrators, based on Zero Tolerance policies, use suspensions and expulsions to create and contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline. The third section introduces two scenarios. One is to demonstrate a situation with Black female high school students where Zero Tolerance is applied, and the second one is a comparative scenario modeling Restorative Practices from an equity-focused, Culturally Proficient Partnership manner. Lastly, the paper concludes with a discussion of the challenges and benefits of using these practices and strategies to combat the increasing number of suspensions and expulsions through systemic educational and community changes.

### **Invisibility, Intersectionality, and Stereotypes**

For decades, data and studies on racial inequality focused primarily on Blacks in general, and more specifically on Black boys, and studies on gender inequity seem to highlight girls in general, and White girls specifically. These overt and covert examples of highlighting the needs of Black males and White girls, yet ignoring Black girls’ needs is a recurring reality of invisibility (Collins, 2000; Mowatt, French, & Malebranche, 2013). In a 2015 blog, Crenshaw stated “As

public concern mounts for the needs of men and boys of color through initiatives like the White House's *My Brother's Keeper*, we must challenge the assumption that the lives of girls and women—who are often left out of the national conversation—are not also at risk”(n.p.). In essence, studies and initiatives regarding Black girls were not as prevalent as those regarding Black boys or girls in general. Black girls' school experiences seemed invisible and overlooked, not generating public concern. Noting that Black females encompass both gender and race, Professor Crenshaw's work asserts that disproportionate discipline is not simply a compound of race and gender, but rather the intersection of race and gender. The simple fact of being Black and female seems to be considered a double-edged sword at times because of the intersection of the two constructs. Crenshaw, in her 1989 paper, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” wrote about and coined the term “intersectionality” – the intersection of being Black and female. Later, in 1994, she explained that her objective was to “illustrate that many of the experiences Black women face are not subsumed within the traditional boundaries of race or gender discrimination as these boundaries are currently understood, and that the intersection of racism and sexism factors into Black women's lives in ways that cannot be captured wholly by looking at the women race or gender dimensions of those experiences separately” (p.94). The intersectionality of being Black and female, Professor Crenshaw surmises, can result in double discrimination: sometimes the discrimination is shared with females, and sometimes with Blacks. It's the combined effect of discrimination that causes the double discourse. Thus, Black females receive the brunt of overlapping systems of oppression through disciplinary actions in schools.

The National Women's Law Center (2014) emphasize that the main reason that Black girls are disciplined disproportionately is because of “racist and sexist stereotypes that educators and school officials sometimes harbour about Black girls” (Camera, 2017, n.p). The study reports that Black girls, more than any other group, receive multiple suspensions, usually based on implicit and explicit bias based on stereotypes. These stereotypes can implicitly form school officials' views of Black girls in negative ways. Implicit bias and other culturally biased factors may play a role as school officials' perceptions are formed, which influence actions taken. Ashley Morris, author of *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools* and executive producer of *School Matters*, suggests that Black girls who were disproportionately targeted experienced race and gender bias-based oppression which included sexual victimization, violence, poor student-teacher relationships, and other biases that impede how discipline policies are enforced (Morris, 2016 ). She asserts that Black feminine expression is often interpreted through the context of “stereotypes about black women and girls as hypersexual, sassy, conniving, or loud” (n.p.).

In their article, *Too Many Black Girls in Preschool Disciplined and Pushed Out*, Patrick and Schulman (2018) suggest that society has a false perception of Black girls. These false concepts readily play into the implicit biases that permeate the educational system. This is not to insinuate that disciplinary actions aren't warranted for some of the alleged infractions, but the data does not support that disciplinary actions are given equitably to Whites, males, and other girls (Balfanz, Byrnes, & Fox, 2015; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010).

### **The Zone of Zero Tolerance**

In an effort to make schools safer and to support discipline policies, Zero Tolerance was introduced in public schools. This was in response to drug control legislation and a series of tragic school shootings in the 1980s and 1990s. Zero Tolerance was specifically federally mandated for

gun possession; however, schools and districts included offenses as a result of drug possession and use, tobacco and alcohol use, disrespect, disruption and truancy (Jones, 2013).

Zero Tolerance operates under two core assumptions: 1) harsh sanctions will deter student misconduct, and 2) removal of the most serious offenders from the school will improve the school (Skiba et al., 2006). Principals who operate under the Zero Tolerance policy are likely to operate under these same core assumptions. This is problematic because principals' attitudes are subjective, thus, they may judge infractions based on their values and opinions, which may differ from values and opinions of students who do not look like them (Lindsey, et al., 2019).

Several studies (Brown Center Report on American Education: Race and School Suspensions, 2017; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010) strongly suggest that the Zero Tolerance policies adopted by districts over the past two decades have contributed tremendously to the disproportionately high percentage of discipline for marginalized student groups, such as Blacks, Latinx, and Native American students (Fergus, 2015). Recently, Zero Tolerance policies have expanded to include behaviors such as dress code, disrespect and willful defiance, which are behaviors that can and should be addressed using strategies that can help students reflect, while restoring relationships (Jones, 2013). Likewise, according to the results of the Advancement Project (2010), Black students are significantly more likely to be suspended for disruptive offenses, which is subjective and White students more likely to be suspended for alcohol- and drug-related offenses (Jones, 2013). Interestingly enough, Mendez and Knoff, (2003) reported that out of the 15 most common infractions in which students were suspended, Black girls were more likely to be referred for defiance, disruptive behavior, disrespect, profanity, and fighting. Coincidence?

### **Black Girls' Suspension Rates and Disproportionality**

Suspensions continue to be one of the most common forms of discipline used in schools with more than 3.3 million students being suspended from school each year. Lacoé and Steinberg (2018) suggest that suspensions are often misused as tools to manage classroom behavior by K-12 teachers and administrators. They conclude that, while most agree that suspensions are necessary for serious infractions such as violent behavior, many districts still use suspensions for smaller less serious offenses involving defiance.

Obviously, suspensions add to the disproportionate discipline that Black girls experience. Data from the article, *Breakthrough on Discipline* (Fergus, 2015), support claims of disproportionality in the suspensions of Black preschool students in 2011-12, as well as the disproportionality of suspensions of Black students in K-12 grades. A few years later, a more recent report by the Office of Civil Rights (2014), noted an overall decrease in the number of disciplinary actions, yet Black students were still suspended and expelled at a rate of three times more than their White counterparts.

For Black students, the literature has focused on an overrepresentation of referrals, and a disproportionate number of suspensions and expulsions (Clark Louque & Latunde, 2019). The 2015 U.S. Department of Education's OCR reported that Black female students were 3 times more likely to be referred to law enforcement and 2 times more likely to be physically restrained compared to their White counterparts. Likewise, Black female students represented 8% of the enrollment and accounted for 14% of students who received an out-of-school suspension, while 24% of White female students were enrolled with an 8% suspension rate, and a 13% enrollment for Latina girls with a 6% suspension rate. The disproportionate percentage of Black girls being suspended compared to their White and Latina counterparts account for Black girls being excluded from school and exposed to the school-to-prison pipeline.

### **Fueling the School-to-Prison Pipeline**

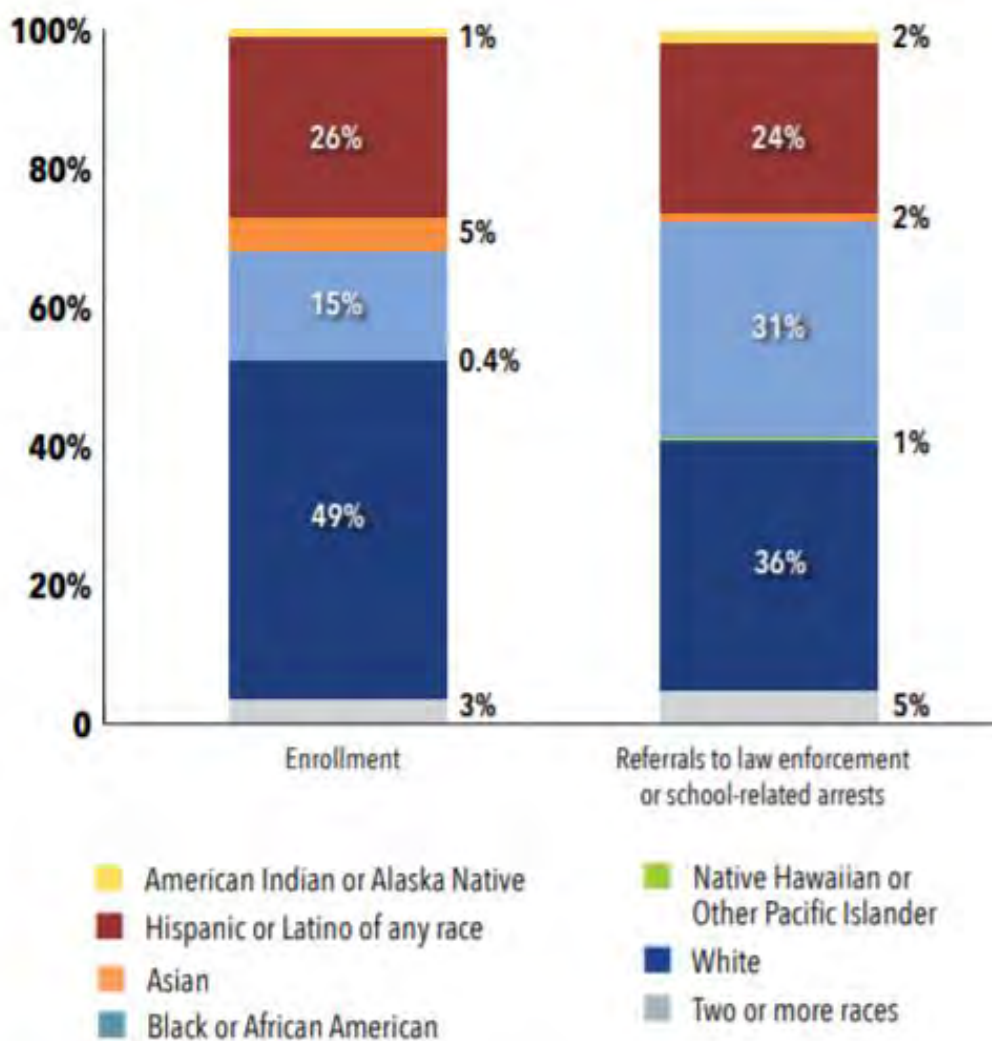
In the article, *Zero Tolerance Policies and the School to Prison Pipeline*, Farnel Maxime (2018) describes in detail the link between discipline and the likelihood of students being incarcerated. This pathway is now commonly referred to as the school-to-prison pipeline. He posits that students who endure punitive forms of discipline are more likely to be included in the school-to-prison pipeline. Additionally, the 2014 National Women's Law Center found that Black girls make up 31% of girls referred to law enforcement by school officials and 43% of girls in general who are arrested on school campuses, but are only 17% of the overall student population. These numbers continue to unveil the underlying perceptions that permeate our schools' discipline systems.

Starting even in preschool, discipline practices throughout the nation lead to a pattern of racial disparities for Black girls, resulting in high suspension rates. Patrick and Schulman (2018) posit that Black girls, even as young as toddlers, are seen as being less innocent than their White peers of the same age. According to the 2013-14 data from the U.S. Department of Education's OCR (2014), Black preschool children are 3.6 times more likely to receive one or more out-of-school suspensions as White preschool children. Black girls make up approximately 20% of the nation's preschool students, however, 54% of Black female preschool students receive more than one out-of-school suspension (Patrick & Schulman). Districts and schools that use suspensions for small infractions fail to realize the impact this form of discipline has on Black girls beginning as early as preschool.

Several other reports (Davis & Pfeifer, 2015; Henry, 2015; Miller et al., 2011; Nelson, Leung, & Cobb, 2016; Nittle, 2016) have drawn attention to even more dangerous implications related to excessive reliance on punitive forms of discipline. Besides missing out on instruction, and not having adult supervision, "exclusionary discipline is associated with lower student achievement, drop-out, and involvement in the juvenile justice system" (Anderson, 2019, p. 435). Furthermore, according to Fergus (2015), "suspensions link directly to grade-level retention, dropping out of high school, and youth encounters with the criminal justice system" (p. 16). In essence, these early experiences of racial disparities contribute to the early criminalization of Black students (Owens & McLanahan, 2019).

In 1986, Taylor and Foster's research found that Black girls received higher suspension rates than their White counterparts in K-12 grades. Approximately 20 years later, Mendez and Knoff (2003) completed a similar study, which suggested that, as previously cited, Black girls continued to receive suspensions at higher rates in comparison to their White and Hispanic counterparts in K-12 grades.

**FIGURE 2: Percentage distribution of students referred to law enforcement or subjected to school-related arrests, by race**



NOTE: Data may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection, 2015-16.

Now, over 30 years later, similarly, the U.S. Department of Education's OCR (2015) indicates that Black students made up only 15% of the K-12 student population, yet they accounted for 31% of students referred to law enforcement or subjected to school-related arrests that year (Figure 2). The statistical data consistently deem that the number of Black students suspended or expelled is not in proportion with the total enrollment of the group. This is a systemic problem, which results in keeping Black students out of classrooms. The excessive discipline Black children



experience from minor infractions such as behavior and tantrums, makes them 10 times more likely to be exposed to discipline, retention, or incarceration (Patrick & Schulman, 2018).

It is vital that we understand the negative effects of disproportionality in school discipline for students of color (Brown & Tillio, 2013; Rausch & Skiba, 2004; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). What's often not acknowledged enough are the far-reaching negative impacts these practices and policies have on Black girls and their social-emotional wellbeing, as well as their academic futures. School suspension and expulsion experiences bring "long-term consequences for educational attainment and other indicators of wellbeing" (Morris & Perry, 2017; Owens & McLanahan, 2019, p.1548). Black girls who receive exclusionary discipline are at significant risk for teenage pregnancy and juvenile delinquency and may become disconnected from school, which is directly related to poor academic outcomes (Clark et al., 2003; Noltmeyer, Ward & Mcloughlin, 2015). It is clear that the consequences of exclusionary discipline last far past the number of days of a suspension.

### Scenarios

The two scenarios include Black female students who were suspected of being under the influence of marijuana. In one scenario, the administration used a Zero Tolerance approach to provide consequences to students, and in the second scenario, the administration used a restorative and equity partnering approach to provide consequences to students. The scenarios represent examples of instances that impact Black girls in education.

The first scenario serves as an example of using Zero Tolerance policy and practice as a guide to disciplinary action taken by school administrators. One of the authors is a Professor of Educational Leadership and the scenario is based upon a former high school classmate's experience with her granddaughter. It also has aspects of real-life experiences of current administrators from her classes. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the school, school officials, and students. The scenario presents two Black female high school students who leave campus and return later with the smell of marijuana in their clothing. In order to examine the actions, the trends, and the consequences, we present the scenario implementing a Zero Tolerance approach.

#### **Scenario 1 *Stonewall High School***

*In the state of Tennessee, the Shelby County Schools (formerly Memphis City Schools) holds the number one spot for the highest percentage of Black students suspended (21.9%) and expulsions overall (0.8%) in the state. In a report by the Center for Civil Rights Remedies of the US Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (2014), which compares districts' student suspension rates nationally, Shelby County Schools was listed as one with an "egregious record", with over 40% of Black secondary students being suspended at least once during 2011-2012.*

*According to an article by Grace Tatter and the Memphis Daily News report (Tatter, 2016) on suspensions in Memphis, Tennessee, Black students are five times as likely as White students to be suspended, which is more than the national average. As with the national suspension rate, Memphis' suspension rate has somewhat declined, but even with the decline, the high rate for Black students is still disturbing, because that means students are losing instruction time and not learning in classes. According to Tennessee's state data (Tennessee Department of Education, 2015), Black students accounted for 45.2% of the suspensions and 100% of the expulsions. Kebede (2018) states, "And while Tennessee law and district policies mandate expulsions for some*

offenses, 83 percent of the expulsions came at school leaders' discretion. A third were for violations of relatively minor rules" (n.p.).

Stonewall High School, a school in Memphis, consists of a student population of 89% Black, 9% Hispanic, 1% White, 1% two + races, and 90% who qualify for free and reduced lunch. One hundred percent (100%) of the teachers are considered inexperienced teachers and 58% of them are considered to be chronically absent. There are 24.2 students for every teacher. Of the out-of-school suspensions and expulsions, 94% and 95% respectively, are Black students. A comparison between Black students and White student suspension is not available for this site. Stonewall High School has been known for its disciplinary practices and the principal at Stonewall High School, Dr. AnneMarie Martin (White female), is proud of the way her administration team has handled potentially volatile situations with the enforcement of Zero Tolerance policies.

In February, two Black female students, KiAnn, an 11th grade student in advanced placement and Chelsea, an 11th grade student in general education courses, were dropped off at school at approximately 7:45am., five minutes before school officially began. The two girls left the campus before the bell rang. A White teacher who identified the students, saw them walk by her classroom, and called the principal's office to report the students' departure from the campus. She called the office and described the students as "loud, out of control, dark skinned girls with braids." Several minutes later, the students walked back to the school buildings.

The assistant principal, Dr. Henry Thornton (White), called both girls' parents to let them know that their daughters were unaccounted for at school. When KiAnn and Chelsea walked into the school office, Dr. Thornton informed KiAnn that he had called her grandmother (who was her legal guardian), but did not reach her. He had also tried to make contact with Chelsea's father and mother with no success. KiAnn was considered to be "more aggressive" and more talkative than Chelsea. Last year, KiAnn had been sent to the office three times for "behavior" challenges. She had been labeled as "disrespectful and defiant" at times. In the past year, KiAnn had been suspended from school four times. She had also received several on campus suspensions, where teachers sent her to a room where they housed "troublemakers."

KiAnn, now in the school office, called her grandmother, Ms. Tonika Stillman, and after a few minutes of conversation, Dr. Thornton asked to speak with Ms. Stillman, although he had a conversation with her prior to the girls returning to campus. KiAnn reached out to give Dr. Thornton her cellular phone. When Dr. Thornton reached for the phone from KiAnn, he sensed the distinct odor of marijuana. He spoke to Ms. Stillman and then returned the phone to KiAnn. He then walked the students to the Student Resource Officer's (SRO) Office. While they were all in the office, Dr. Thornton smelled both students' hands. He insisted that he got a strong "whiff" of marijuana from both of the students' hands; KiAnn's left and Chelsea's right. Also, Dr. Thornton insisted that both students' eyes appeared to be bloodshot. He further suggested that the black jacket that KiAnn wore smelled of marijuana. During the SRO's simple and routine investigation of asking the young ladies to empty their pockets, no paraphernalia was found on the girls. When questioned, the girls admitted to leaving the campus, but did not admit to arriving back to campus under the influence. The students were immediately suspended by Dr. Thornton for being under the influence for 45 days and were informed that they could appeal the process by calling the district and asking for a hearing. Chelsea's parents came to pick her up and KiAnn was left waiting for her grandmother.

While waiting for her grandmother, KiAnn began to get restless. She mumbled under her breath and Dr. Thornton asked her to keep her comments to herself. KiAnn used a few curse words

*and Dr. Thornton informed her that she would be adding time to her suspension if she continued to use that tone and language. KiAnn called her grandmother again and said, "This stupid guy keeps testing me!" KiAnn walked out of the office to calm down and Dr. Thornton followed her out and told her to calm down. KiAnn said, "Man, stop following me!" Dr. Thornton informed KiAnn that she was going to receive more time on her suspension. KiAnn informed Dr. Thornton that she did not care. He contacted her grandmother again and informed her that KiAnn was unruly and used profanity towards him and that her behavior and being under the influence would cause her to receive a longer suspension.*

*Two weeks later, a hearing had been scheduled for both girls at separate times. Chelsea and her parents attended her meeting and her suspension was upheld, but the time was reduced to fewer days. KiAnn and her grandmother attended her hearing and the decision was upheld because of her extensive discipline record. KiAnn was referred to attend another school out of the area and would not be placed in Advanced Placement courses at the school referral. She would not be allowed to return to the home school.*

Zero Tolerance policies like in the case of KiAnn and Chelsea are not equitably applied across different student groups. Research indicates that suspension and expulsion are not effective strategies for disciplining students or for correcting behaviors, but schools like Stonewall High continue to use these practices, and as a result, students of color who are more likely to be suspended or expelled miss out on a quality education (Skiba, 2014). The added offenses to Zero Tolerance of disrespect and willful defiance are typically subjective in nature. The subjectivity of these behaviors and even suspected drug use like the case presented above can be racially underlined, causing students of color, and Black girls specifically, to be more frequently targeted and suspended or expelled. Thus, Zero Tolerance has led to the disproportionate punishment for marginalized groups. This is likely the case because students of color are often suspended for disruptive behavior (Advancement Project, 2010; Fergus, 2015; Jones, 2013).

The second scenario, Mountain Range High School, is a compilation of scenarios experienced by several high school administrators with diverse student populations. The scenario features four high school students who were caught off campus during school hours. There were three female students, two White and one Black; and one Black male student. The students were all brought back to campus by a school police officer. The school police officer indicated that she smelled a distinct odor, which was suspected to be marijuana. In order to examine the actions, the trends, and the consequences, we present the scenario using Restorative Practices and Culturally Proficient equity partnerships including conferencing and questions.

### **Scenario 2 Mountain Range High School**

*Mountain Range High School is a school in a small town in Ohio, consisting of a student population of 49% Black, 23% Hispanic 15% White, 8% two + races, 2% Asian, 3% other and 10% who qualify for free and reduced lunch. One hundred percent (100%) of the teachers are considered as highly qualified, there are 20 students for every teacher, and 63% of teachers have been teaching at Mountain Range for 10 or more years. Of the 49% of Black student population, 28% are female and 21% are male. Fifteen percent of the Black student population report having been suspended at least once for drug possession and 10% have been suspended two or more times for the same offense. White students make up 15% of the students. 8% of the White students are female and 7% are male. Ten percent of the White students report being suspended at least once for drug possession. None of the White students reported being suspended more than once;*

however, some admitted to being in possession more than once. Mountain Range High School has been known for its Restorative Practices. Ms. Lacy, a White assistant principal at Mountain Range High School brags about the discipline office because of their attention to detail with suspensions as it relates to drug possession and repeat offenders. Although the school personnel have all been trained in Restorative Practices, it has been a while since they have had a follow-up training.

In the fall, four students, three females: Jennifer (White), Ashley, (White), and Savannah, (Black) and one male, Nick (Black), were seen by a Latinx school police officer off campus during school hours and suspected of being in possession of marijuana. Ms. Lacy was immediately notified and the students were brought back to campus by school police approximately one hour after school began. The school police notified the dean that when bringing the students back to campus there was a faint smell of marijuana. Mrs. Sanderson (White), the Dean of Students, emailed all parents to let them know that their students were brought to school approximately an hour after school was already in session. Mrs. Sanderson informed parents that the students would be searched, and an investigation would be done. Mrs. Sanderson asked each student individually if they were in possession of anything that should not be on a school campus. The students admitted to being off campus but stated that they were just running late and were not in possession. The school police searched all students. Savannah had a black lighter in her backpack, which she indicated had been there from the weekend. None of the other students were found to be in possession of anything. Savannah and Ashley had both been involved in altercations at school on a few different occasions. Their student records indicated the type of infraction and the consequence received by the students. Mrs. Sanderson grabbed four cards out of her top drawer. She gave each student a card and asked them to prepare to have a dialogue using the Restorative questions on the card. The questions were:

- What happened?
- What were you thinking of at the time?
- What have you thought about since?
- Who has been affected by what you have done?
- In what way have they been affected?
- What do you think you need to do to make things right?

All students received cards but when Ashley and Savannah reviewed the cards they threw them across the table. Mrs. Sanderson asked both girls to step outside in the hallway; both girls refused and continued to sit with their arms folded. Savannah informed Mrs. Sanderson that she knew her rights and that she felt like her rights were being violated. Mrs. Sanderson asked the two students who were being compliant to step into the next office with Ms. Lacy and prepare to have a dialogue after reviewing the Restorative questions. Jennifer and Nick left the room with Ms. Lacy. Mrs. Sanderson asked Ashley if she wanted to remain in the room to dialogue with her and Savannah or if she wanted to review the questions with the other students in the next room. Ashley agreed to review the questions in the next room. Mrs. Sanderson asked Savannah why she believed her rights were being violated. Savannah explained that she was brought over in a police car and she had done nothing wrong. She told Mrs. Sanderson that she did not have anything in her possession, and she felt like she should just be allowed to go to class. Mrs. Sanderson informed Savannah that she appreciated her calm demeanor as she responded and told her that as a part of Restorative Practices, they will always allow for students to express themselves. She also reminded her that as a part of her responsibility as the dean of students, she has to be sure that all

*students are safe and understand that there are consequences for not adhering to being on campus when the bell rings. She and Savannah had a one-on-one dialogue where Savannah acknowledged that she understood and that she would review the questions. Mrs. Sanderson gave Savannah the choice to finish reviewing the cards one on one with her or to be reconnected with the other students. All students continued to claim that they were neither under the influence nor in possession of marijuana. Mrs. Sanderson continued dialogue with students and monitored students' behavior for the remainder of the hour. She invited students to sign up for counseling once a week for four weeks to discuss the potential problem of being off campus during school hours as a consequence. All students were given a warning by the school administration and sent to class.*

Both high school scenarios involved students who were suspected of being under the influence. Administration, school police, and parents/guardians were all involved. In the case of KiAnn, at Stonewall High School, she experienced being expelled based on previous infractions that could be considered as subjective. Her discipline record showed that she had several out-of-school suspensions as well as some classroom suspensions for having behavior challenges. Ultimately, KiAnn was expelled, which excluded her from completing her advanced placement course work for the remainder of her junior year. This is an example of how Zero Tolerance policies can impede the success of Black students and other students who experience exclusionary discipline. Although Chelsea did not receive the entire 45-day suspension, she did receive a consequence that caused her to miss instruction.

In the Mountain Range High School scenario, the four students who were suspected of marijuana use were given consequences as well. The assistant principal began the process by ensuring that the parents were notified and informed that a search would take place. All students were not assumed to be in possession. The school police searched all students and Mrs. Sanderson prepared to work with students on responding to restorative questions. Although a few of the students had previous discipline records and were not compliant to begin with, Mrs. Sanderson continued to connect with students and provided only consequences that matched their behavior. Although students were suspected of being under the influence, the school staff did not provide punitive consequences. They monitored students for safety reasons, provided them with an opportunity to meet with the school counselor, and allowed students to go back to class within the hour. An updated notification was sent to the families of the students informing them of what had transpired, including details of the incident and the proposed consequences. Information was also shared with the families regarding safety concerns, counseling opportunities, and future possible engagement strategies to build stronger relationships with the families.

## **Restorative Justice and Culturally Proficient Partnerships**

### **The Wide Region of Restorative Practices**

The International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP) defines Restorative Practices as a social science that studies how to build social capital, and achieve social discipline through participatory learning and decision-making. The concept of using Restorative Justice began in the 1970s as an intervention between offenders and victims (IIRP, n.d.). Restorative Justice and Restorative Practices are ways that schools can begin to shift their practice from punitive discipline, where the blame is placed on individuals, to restorative discipline, which focuses less on individuals and aims to restore relationships. Restorative discipline entails establishing a

collaborative effort to solve problems after a conflict, or preventing problems before they arise. In the article, *A Restorative Approach to School Discipline*, author Jon Eyler (2014) suggests exploring shifts in how we respond to student behavior in order to effectively change school climates. “To effectively change school climates and behavioral outcomes, some fundamental shifts are needed in the way we’ve traditionally responded to student behavior” (p. 12). According to Eyler, contrary to some popular perceptions, Zero Tolerance strategies do not produce safer schools. They do, however, result in higher suspensions and increased dropout rates.

When examining other ways to discipline students, restorative approaches have risen to the top as practical and effective practices. According to Zehr (1990), Restorative Practices derive from Restorative Justice. Restorative Practice is an inclusive, non-punitive alternative to discipline, and it is considered as one response to the disparities in schools (Stewart Kline, 2016). Morrison and Ahmed (2006) suggest that Restorative Justice aims to empower participants through fostering accountability and responsibility between those affected by the behavior. They also conclude that it seeks resolution that contributes to healing, resolution, and reparation and reintegration, which prevents further harm. Restorative Justice focuses more accountability on the harm caused by the offender rather than the act (Fronius et al., 2016). “Restorative Justice in the school setting views misconduct not as a school-rule-breaking, and therefore as a violation of the institution, but as a violation against people and relationships in the school and the wider community” (Cameron, Thorsborne, & Justice, 2001, p. 83).

Restorative Practices can and should be used in lieu of Zero Tolerance practices to ensure equitable opportunities for students who exhibit behaviors that educators view as disruptive, defiant or inappropriate. Restorative Practices contribute to restoring relationships and promote efforts for students who have exhibited behaviors that would typically be punished to remain in school after disciplinary action that has caused harm to others. The strategies used in Restorative Practices aim to build, restore, and create opportunities for students to reflect rather than to remove them from class or school. Therefore, in the case of KiAnn and Chelsea, the following recommended steps using a restorative approach would be to:

1. Meet and conference with KiAnn and Chelsea to inquire about their decision to leave campus. Holding a conference will initiate the restoration of the relationship between KiAnn, Chelsea and the administrator.
2. Allow KiAnn and Chelsea the opportunity to respond to questions about their decision to leave campus. Giving them the opportunity to respond shows students they are valued as a member of the school community.
3. Ask KiAnn and Chelsea if they were aware of the expectations for remaining on campus once they had been dropped off and give them the opportunity to ask clarifying questions.
4. Refer back to school and district policy as KiAnn and Chelsea are included on the possible consequence of leaving campus. Their agreement with the consequence suggests buy in and may likely result in adhering to the consequence.
5. Choose a consequence that matches the behavior of leaving campus (e.g., a written document on the safety concerns of leaving campus without permission and knowledge by an adult). Consequences should be an opportunity to teach, not to punish, therefore, choosing consequences that match the behavior will help with correcting student behavior.

6. Contact the parent/guardian/family to discuss the situation and the consequence that was agreed upon between students and the school administration. Offer to follow up with the parent/guardian/family to encourage further interaction with them.
7. In the event KiAnn or Chelsea were found to have been under the influence, it would be appropriate to contact the parent/guardian/family and give them the option of whether to come to campus and sign the students out to ensure their safety or to have them remain on campus until they were sober and capable of conferencing and eventually return back to class.
8. It is important for the school site administrator, the resource officer, and the parents/guardians/families to engage in dialogue to allow students to collaborate on the consequences so that everyone is a part of the decision in regards to next steps. This community gathering would serve as an opportunity for students to reflect, and for the community to support restoration.

Research has proven that Restorative Practices positively impact schools. Studies also indicate there are challenges associated with the implementation of Restorative Practices. In the Research Brief from the Center for Urban Success at the University Rochester in the School of Education, Marsh (2017) spells out four main challenges of implementing Restorative Practices. They are:

- Time for implementation
- Resistant teachers and administrators
- Difficulty in changing school culture
- Sustaining restorative practices

Historically, teachers have been the givers of knowledge and the “sage on the stage” in their classrooms; thus, asking some to relinquish their authority may pose a challenge. Some teachers believe that adopting Restorative Practices takes too much time (Gregory, et al., 2016). Teachers who have a fixed mindset or deficit thinking, and low expectations for students, prefer to remove challenging students. This kind of thinking creates barriers to implementation (Guckenber, et al., 2015). Another challenge found in the implementation of using Restorative Practices is sustainability. Schools often introduce an initiative once during professional learning and may not revisit that topic. In order to sustain Restorative Practices, schools should provide ongoing training and support to teachers and staff over multiple days and throughout the year (Gregory, et al.).

Schools must maintain ongoing support to staff, usually in the form of training. As with teachers and administrators, instead of a one-stop workshop approach, planned workshops given over a period of time are usually preferred and recommended for a sustained and meaningful outcome (Gregory, et al, 2016; Guckenber, et al, 2015). Overcoming challenges of implementing any school-wide initiative can prove to be cumbersome; however, many schools have been successful (Marsh, 2017). McCluskey, et al. (2008) suggest that Restorative Practices have a focus on educational approaches that are preventative. In addition to the preventative approach, Stewart Kline (2016) suggests that Restorative Practices can be used to respond to conflict and repair damaged relationships. This type of collaboration is in sync with the concepts of culturally proficient engagement with students, families, and communities (Clark-Louque, et al., 2019).

### **Culturally Proficient Partnerships**

Partnering with families can benefit schools as they communicate with families about policies, expectations, consequences, and disciplinary programs. Not only should support be offered to administrators, teachers, counselors, and staff, but families and members of the community should also have an opportunity to engage and partner with schools on minimizing these numbers and addressing these issues together as a community. Sharing information with families can assist all involved in learning about and knowing the rules and the consequences of infractions, so that everyone is informed and can expect disciplinary actions to be executed equitably. Training in multiracial/multiethnic/multicultural competency building is key to communities working collaboratively to resolve issues (White & Henderson, 2008). Simultaneously, families can share their funds of knowledge and cultural capital with the schools, educating and collaborating with them in this case, about Black culture and experiences. The 7 Cs model in *Equity Partnerships: A culturally proficient guide to family, school, and community engagement*, focuses on building relationships (Clark-Louque, et al., 2019; Louque & Latunde, 2014). This model is intended to function as support concepts for framing and cultivating strong family-school-community partnerships to co-create policies, procedures, and practices. The 7 Cs - *collaboration, communication, culture, care/compassion, community, connectedness, and collective responsibility* are seven evidenced-based family and community engagement skills and concepts to enhance capacity building toward equitable relationships. Additionally, training should focus on three areas: 1) the policies and practices of the school to assess the appropriateness and whether or not they are effective and implemented equitably; 2) leaders' personal beliefs and values, particularly about Blacks; c) the culture of the Black community, as well as the community and culture of the school/district. This inside-out approach is used to provide common points of content for equity-focused administrators and school leaders, as well as for families of Black youth. It furthermore allows for care and respect of each other demonstrating a collective responsibility to tackle inequitable disciplinary practices. Furthermore, training

The challenges of Culturally Proficient Partnerships are grounded in the historically "strained relationship" Black families have had with schools. Disparities in educational outcomes and inequitable treatment have foundationally been the culprits of mistrust between Black families and schools (Delpit, 2012; Louque & Latunde, 2014). Systems of oppression, the presumption of entitlement and the resistance to change are all barriers that Cultural Proficiency Partnership would encounter in order to adjust to the effects of racism and oppression. Making the commitment to engage families and communities will help to create a "robust collection of policy-and-practice interventions that address the underlying conditions to this phenomenon" (Morris, 2016, n.p.).

### **Conclusions**

While the research on the infractions that cause Black girls to experience exclusionary discipline is scarce, the evidence that is available indicates that implicit bias, stereotypes and other cultural factors impede decisions in regard to discipline (Crenshaw, Ocen, & Nanda, 2015). The *Black Girls Matter* report (2015) gave an explicit account of Black girls' school discipline experiences over the course of 10 years and in different states across the U.S. where exclusionary practices were used resulting in suspension or expulsion for a variety of reasons. In order to reduce the negative consequences and effects of Zero Tolerance for Black girls, and enhance the climate for positive relationships, schools like Stonewall High School are urged to seek training in Culturally Proficient and Equity Partnerships, and Restorative Practices for the students to benefit from the strategies that are used to build and repair relationships when harm has been done.



In addition, unlike Zero Tolerance, studies on discipline and suspension and equity support the use of Restorative Practices in schools and classrooms. Black girls are often at risk for dropping out, referred to alternative education schools and are also more likely to be at risk for the school-to-prison pipeline (Fergus, 2015). Implementing Restorative Practices has improved school climate in many large urban school districts, specifically, in areas where students battle with connectivity to their schools, relationships, bullying and violence (Leras, 2008). Therefore, the recommendations for how to reduce the number of suspensions for Black girls is to not only use Restorative Practices, but to continue to educate and equip teachers and administrators in Culturally Proficient Partnership strategies that promote and insist on equity and fairness.

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