

**NON-GRADED CURRICULUM INFLUENCE ON SUSPENSIONS OF
AMERICAN MALES: A QUANTITATIVE STUDY**

by

Matthew D. Endsley

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of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

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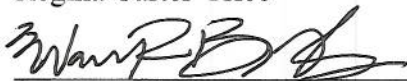
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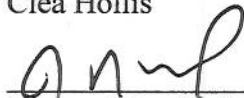
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Abstract

Schools suspend 28.3% of African American males in traditional middle schools using a graded curriculum compared to 11% of all students (Krezmien, Leone, & Achilles, 2006; Losen & Skiba, 2010; Planty et al., 2009). African American males are more than two and half times more likely to receive a suspension than the average middle school student (Losen & Skiba, 2010). Researchers have consistently found that the disproportionate suspension statistics for African American males are not solely attributed to socioeconomic or other demographic factors (Skiba et al., 2002; Wallace et al., 2009; American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008). From 1973 to 2006, a timeframe marked by increased focus on zero tolerance and high-stakes testing, African American suspension rates almost tripled (Losen & Skiba, 2010). The perpetuation of the achievement gap, increased dropout rates, and higher prison rates are all distinct characteristics of the increased use of suspensions of African American males (Advancement Project, 2010; Finkel, 2010; Balfanz, Spirikakis, Neild, & Legters, 2003). There is a direct relationship between failing grades and suspensions (Safer, Heaton, & Parker, 1981). Traditional schools using graded curricula are not increasing achievement levels for African American males. Conversely, research suggests alternative grading practices, including non-graded curricula, can increase intrinsic motivation, student engagement, positive student attitudes, academic achievement, and positive behavior (Butler & Nisan, 1986; Kohn, 1994; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003; Cotton, 2000). The purpose of this quantitative, causal-comparative study is to investigate the extent of disproportionality and elevated rate of suspensions among African American males in middle schools with an alternative, non-graded curriculum. The study attempts to

establish what, if any, statistically significant difference exists between the independent variable, type of school curriculum assessment, and the dependent variables, suspension proportion and suspension rate. The population of the study consists of middle school African American males in alternative schools using a non-graded curriculum from two different regions of America. The results are meaningful because the data suggests that there is no difference in the proportion of African American males suspended in the alternative setting versus the traditional setting. The results of the study are also encouraging because the data suggests there is a difference in the percentage of African American males suspended in the alternative setting versus the traditional setting. It is the researcher's belief that high-stakes testing and utilization of graded curricula attribute to the elevated rate of suspensions among African American males. However, there is a need of further research to clarify the contributing factors to the disproportionality of suspensions.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my God, my wife, my daughters, and my family. Jesus Christ, my Lord and Savior, has inspired me, guided me, and sustained me throughout this personal and professional journey. My wife, Holly, is an angel sent from the Lord above to push me through this process as I pull her into the destination. God's vision for the role of a wife has been evident as we have made this sacrifice during a period of our early marriage and family life together. Thank you for your steadfast love and support! Our daughters, Sy and Calla, deserve a father who is present and engaged in their lives. At times I have felt distant because of all the directions I am pulled, but their love encourages me. To my mother, Faye Currey, and my father, Mike Endsley, your love, provision, and safe home you created provided a comforting boundary within which I could become an individual and young man. You have both always been proud of me but have never pushed me beyond my own ambitions. My brother, Michael Endsley, I have always looked up to you and your support and encouragement with my personal, academic, professional, and athletic pursuits has been greatly appreciated and will never be forgotten.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The desegregation of American public schools after *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) was a victory for African Americans seeking equality in education. The *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) ruling overturned the separate but equal statutes of *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), a momentous decision for education. Despite African American hardships in the years after *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), African American students are free to attend public schools in America. Since desegregation began, African American students have yet to close the academic achievement gap with Caucasian students (Planty, Hussar, Snyder, Kena, KewalRamani, Kemp, Bianco, & Dinkes, 2009). Behavior, as a relation, is significantly different among racial groups (Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, & Bachman, 2008). African American youth comprise 17% of the American school population yet account for 32% of suspensions, a finding referred to by previous research and in the study as racial disproportionality (Losen & Gillespie, 2012; Raffaele Mendez, Knoff, & Ferron, 2002). The suspension rate gap between African American and Caucasian students has more than tripled over the last three decades (Losen & Skiba, 2010). Specifically, African American males account for the highest suspension rate of all racial and gender groups (Losen & Skiba, 2010). Included in Chapter 1 are the background, statement of problem, statement of purpose, research questions, hypotheses, significance of the study, nature of the study, theoretical framework, definition of terms, assumptions, scope and limitations, and delimitations.

Background of the Problem

Two major contributors linked by research to the racial disproportionality of suspensions are the increase in popularity of zero tolerance policies used in school

discipline and high-stakes testing (Advancement Project, 2010; Hanson, 2005). From 1973 to 2006, a timeframe marked by increased focus on zero tolerance and high-stakes testing, African American suspension rates almost tripled (Losen & Skiba, 2010). More recently, African American suspension rates have increased 8% from 2003 to 2007 (Advancement Project, 2010). The high suspension rate of African American males increases the risk for future delinquent behavior. According to Balfanz, Spiridakis, Neild, and Legters (2003), two-thirds of eighth graders suspended became prisoners. African American males in middle school are the most suspended group among all grade levels and population groups (Losen & Skiba, 2010). African American males are becoming increasingly detached from the American public school system despite the history of desegregation policies.

There is a decrease in self-efficacy as students transition from elementary school to middle school, especially among African American students (Moely, 1995; Burchinal, Roberts, Zeisel, & Rowley, 2008). In a longitudinal study on the transition from elementary school to middle school by Grigsby (2005), African American males reported a belief that their schools did not provide a positive school climate, teachers did not respect them, they did not believe to be equal to their peers, and cited declining grades as a barrier to a successful transition. Beginning in middle school, African Americans males experience academic disidentification (Steele, 1992). Steele explains that most students start out liking school and correlate academic achievement with self-concept, but as time progresses African American males begin forming a disconnect for several reasons. Steele and Aronson (1995) posit that negative experiences in school, such as teacher bias, lack of culturally relevant material, and negative societal assumptions, attribute to a

heightened awareness and sensitivity of negative stereotypes. The consequence is that African American males fear their poor academic performance will verify the stereotype. According to Steele, African American males disidentify with academics to protect their self-esteem.

Academic disidentification contributes to the disconcerting statistic: 58% of African American male students fail a grade level or subject, which decreases self-efficacy and increases problem behaviors (Holzman, 2004; Wiggins & Schatz, 1994). There is a direct relationship between failing grades and suspensions (Safer, Heaton, & Parker, 1981). Safer et al. (1981) found that 52% of all students suspended in middle school also had failing grades. Academic disidentification results in expected adverse behaviors (Griffin, 2002). Traditional schools using graded curricula are not increasing achievement levels for African American males. Conversely, research suggests alternative grading practices, including non-graded curricula, can increase intrinsic motivation, student engagement, positive student attitudes, academic achievement, and positive behavior (Butler & Nisan, 1986; Kohn, 1994; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003; Cotton, 2000).

The study will attempt to establish what, if any, statistically significant difference exists in the proportion and rate of suspensions among African American males between traditional middle schools utilizing a graded curriculum and alternative middle schools utilizing a non-graded curriculum.

Statement of the Problem

The general problem is that African American males struggle academically and behaviorally in traditional middle schools. The specific problem is that schools suspend

African American males at a disproportionate and elevated rate in traditional middle schools utilizing a graded curriculum (Losen & Skiba, 2010). African American males account for 8.7% of the American middle school student population yet account for 22% of all suspensions. Schools suspend 28.3% of African American males in traditional middle schools using a graded curriculum compared to 11% of all students (Krezmien, Leone, & Achilles, 2006; Losen & Skiba, 2010; Planty et al., 2009). African American males are more than two and half times more likely to receive a suspension than the average middle school student (Losen & Skiba, 2010). African American males struggle academically, and as a consequence, are susceptible to decreased self-efficacy and an increased propensity for misbehavior (Holzman, 2004; Wiggins & Schatz, 1994). Creating a learning environment where students are not compared to their peers but instead focus on their individual learning satisfies an essential need for at-risk students (Ormrod, 2004). Alternative schools have shown to be beneficial for at-risk populations, in particular African American males (Pavan, 1992). The current quantitative, causal-comparative research will investigate the extent of disproportionality and elevated rates of suspensions among African American males in alternative middle schools with a non-graded curriculum.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this quantitative, causal-comparative study is to investigate the extent of disproportionality and elevated rate of suspensions among African American males in middle schools with a non-graded curriculum. The study attempts to establish what, if any, statistically significant difference exists between the independent variable, type of school curriculum assessment, and the dependent variables, suspension proportion

and suspension rate. A quantitative study is most appropriate because of the need to record numerical comparison data (Black, 1999). The study involves collecting data from samples of the population groups. Investigating if grading practices influence suspension proportions and suspension rates of African American males in middle school is a significant pursuit. According to Black, the first research design considered, correlational, involves comparing two quantitative variables without a control. However, the study does not have two quantitative variables and does include a control. One part of the independent variable, schools with a graded curriculum, establishes the control of the study based on comparison and the extensive archival suspension data across the nation from the last decade. With only one quantitative variable, part of the independent variable serving as a control, no manipulation of variables, and the use of archival data, a causal-comparative research design is most appropriate (Salkind, 2003).

The suspension data for schools with a non-graded curriculum will come from one public and one private middle school in America between the years of 2008 and 2013. Both schools apply a non-graded curriculum to assess student achievement. Suspension proportion and suspension rate data for African American males from alternative middle schools utilizing a non-graded curriculum will compare with the known suspension proportion and suspension rate data from traditional middle schools utilizing a graded curriculum. The comparison of suspension proportions and suspension rates among African American males in middle school between alternative schools with a non-graded curriculum and traditional schools with a graded curriculum will produce levels of significance through two-sample two tailed z -tests of population proportions.

Significance of the Problem

African American males are the population subgroup most removed from learning opportunities (Losen & Skiba, 2010). There is a relationship between instructional time and academic achievement, marking the concern for disproportionate suspension referrals (Greenwood, Horton, & Utley, 2002). The concern of disproportionate suspension data should rival the concerns of low academic scores, poor attendance, and high dropout rates, but schools with high levels of suspensions do not receive the same attention as schools with low test scores (Losen & Skiba, 2010). Researchers have consistently found that the disproportionate suspension statistics for African American males are not solely attributed to socioeconomic or other demographic factors (Skiba et al., 2002; Wallace et al., 2009; American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008). The perpetuation of the achievement gap, increased dropout rates, and higher prison rates are all distinct characteristics of the increased use of suspensions of African American males (Advancement Project, 2010; Finkel, 2010; Balfanz, Spirikakis, Neild, & Legters, 2003). African American males have the highest suspension rate among any population subgroup in middle school (Losen & Skiba, 2010). Losen and Skiba's conclusion is that racial and gender bias still exists at the school level. The issue is a civil and human rights issue.

Significance of the study. The proposed study addresses a specific segment of education that has no known research. There is research regarding the suspension rate of African American male students, effects of schools with a non-graded curriculum, and the relationship between grades and behavior, but there is no known research identifying the extent of disproportionality and elevated rate of suspensions, if any, between method

of school curriculum assessment and suspension disproportionality of any race. Given the reality that the African American male population of students is underperforming in education, there is a need for more research to examine what is influencing as well as debunking this trend. Determining the extent of disproportionality and elevated rate of suspensions in regard to assessment methods of African American males in middle school will be a significant contributor to the current field of knowledge. The study will establish a foundation for future research of classroom assessment methods and disciplinary measures in regard to African American male students in middle school who have become disengaged. The study will also contribute essential data necessary to develop and implement appropriate interventions, assessments, and acceptable learning environments for African American male students in middle schools.

Significance of the study to leadership. Leadership includes philosophy and policy. The current philosophy and policy of education concerning African American male students is negligent. One method to remediate this problem is to investigate the philosophies and policies that positively and negatively influence the educational success of African American male students. Gaining insight into what type or types of assessment, if any, influence suspension data of middle school African American males is a considerable addition to the realm of leadership and policy matters.

Research Questions

According to Salkind (2003), the answer to current research questions provides the foundation for future research questions. The area of interest drives the research question and should be significant to guide the collection of data for the study. Research questions arise from professional experience and link to existing theories (Black, 1999).

Designing a unique research question that will expand the current field of knowledge is critical in the formation of a relevant dissertation (Salkind, 2003). Black postulates that a quantitative research question should be testable and of sufficient scope to be resolvable with available resources; a precisely refined research question can provide much needed clarification of relationships between variables. The following are research questions of the study:

R1: What, if any, statistically significant difference exists in the proportion of suspensions among African American males between traditional middle schools utilizing a graded curriculum and alternative middle schools utilizing a non-graded curriculum?

R2: What, if any, statistically significant difference exists in the rate of suspensions among African American males between traditional middle schools utilizing a graded curriculum and alternative middle schools utilizing a non-graded curriculum?

Hypotheses

The research question influences the hypothesis, or educated conjecture. A hypothesis defines variables while generating an investigation of relationship (Black, 1999). Hypotheses include the null hypothesis and alternative hypothesis. The tested hypothesis, also known as the null hypothesis, is a statement of equality or true state of affairs based on current knowledge (Salkind, 2003). The following are hypotheses of the study:

H1₀: The null hypothesis is the proportion of suspensions is not statistically significantly different for African American males attending alternative middle schools utilizing a non-graded curriculum compared to African American males attending traditional middle schools utilizing a graded curriculum.

H1_a: The alternative hypothesis is the proportion of suspensions is statistically significantly different for African American males attending alternative middle schools utilizing a non-graded curriculum compared to African American males attending traditional middle schools utilizing a graded curriculum.

H2₀: The null hypothesis is the suspension rate is not statistically significantly different for African American males attending alternative middle schools utilizing a non-graded curriculum compared to African American males attending traditional middle schools utilizing a graded curriculum.

H2_a: The alternative hypothesis is the suspension rate is statistically significantly different for African American males attending alternative middle schools utilizing a non-graded curriculum compared to African American males attending traditional middle schools utilizing a graded curriculum.

Expected Findings

The expected findings of the study relate to the research of literature. A review of previous research suggests that traditional schools are not conducive to the success of African American males whereas alternative schools are beneficial. Despite an effort to provide evidence to the contrary, insurmountable research exists to support alternative strategies to education African American males at all levels, including middle school. The expectation of the study is that African American males will comprise a smaller proportion of student suspensions and experience a decreased rate of suspension in alternative schools with a non-graded curriculum when compared to African American males in traditional schools with a graded curriculum.

Theoretical Framework

One goal of education is accountability. A combination of federal, state, and local funds provide revenue for education, making policy and accountability standards very complex. The 1983 government report, *A Nation at Risk*, called for increased precision and objectivity (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). The best description of the period of education since *A Nation at Risk* is a system driven by high-stakes testing and empirical evidence. As high-stakes testing reaches the classrooms, much of the curriculum aligns with the test; principals, teachers, and students' futures depend on test scores. Classroom curriculum and assessment tend to reflect this trend to prepare students for the end of the year high-stakes tests.

Traditional styles of curriculum and assessment, criterion-referenced and norm-referenced, can have a negative impact on underperforming students' self-efficacy (Wiggins & Schatz, 1994). Combining below average performance with low self-efficacy at a transitional age is a significant behavioral challenge education must address. The middle school African American male student population is not responding positively, either academically or behaviorally, to the current traditional assessment system. Finding the most appropriate method or methods of classroom assessment for African American male students in middle school will lessen the burden this particular group of students experience. The theoretical framework establishes a need for the study and places everything in perspective concerning assessment, academic achievement, self-efficacy, and their relationship. A thorough understanding of the context of each variable is imperative to the study.

The study will determine what, if any, statistically significant difference exists between the suspension proportions and suspension rates of African American male students in traditional middle schools utilizing a graded curriculum and alternative middle schools utilizing a non-graded curriculum. The theoretical framework of the study entails a comprehensive review of classroom assessment methods grounded in theory, the achievement and discipline gap, and the relationship between academics and behavior. The role of theory in a quantitative study is the ability to explain or predict outcomes albeit imperfectly (Black, 1999). Useful theories should not be too restrictive and should guide the research questions, design, data, and conclusions (Gilbert, 1993). The study attempts to test the theory of academic achievement as a behavior predictor and racial profiling in suspension referrals while building a theory for disproportionate suspension referrals in middle school. The method of classroom assessment has ramifications that extend beyond the classroom and involve a history of theoretical assumptions.

Assessment.

School assessment and classroom grading is a relatively recent phenomenon. A few examples of grading exist in early 19th century records and those are primarily from the university level. After the demise of the one room schoolhouse in the early 20th century, larger urban centers of education began instituting administrative bureaucracies. One of the new implementations was the uniform report card. Despite early studies citing the inaccuracy and subjectivity of grading, public education fully embraced grades via criterion-referenced and norm-referenced assessments of students (Moll, 1998). Through a century of experimentation with grading systems, current traditional schools

predominantly use either criterion-referenced or norm-referenced classroom assessments to measure student success.

The theory supporting modern classroom assessment is scientific and positivistic (McKellar, 2002). McKellar cites that student grades have implications for the corporate community, professional bodies, and government entities. Implications of grades supply a reason schools revert to measuring success of theoretical, universal truths. Assessment determines the degree of success by grading and ranking according to achievement, designed to align with stakeholder views of education's purpose: preparing youth to contribute positively to society. The premise behind the traditional grading system is to ensure equal opportunity and fairness (McKellar, 2002). Given the achievement gap among races is still significant and the suspension gap among races is increasing, traditional grading is not safeguarding equal opportunity and fairness (Planty et al., 2009; Losen & Skiba, 2010). There have been efforts to abandon student grades in favor of alternative grading methods, but organizational bureaucracy and tradition have deterred the process.

Progressive education resists conformity and standardization (Kohn, 2008). Several definitions of progressive education reveal variations that may seem paradoxical. Kohn, a progressive educator, recommends a non-graded approach. Kohn (2008) characterizes progressive education by using reflections of the values, such as attending to the whole child, community, collaboration, social justice, intrinsic motivation, deep understanding, active learning, and taking children seriously. Progressive educators embolden alternative assessments in schools. Through Kohn's (1999a) research, grades are found to reduce student interest in the act of learning itself, reduce student preference

for challenging tasks, and reduces the quality of student thinking (Kohn, 1999a). Kohn (1999a) argues for a de-grading approach that emphasizes formative assessments such as narratives, portfolios, student-led conferences, and student exhibitions. Kohn (1999a) challenges competitive credentialing to ensure everyone learns. Alternative assessments are the cornerstone of the de-grading method. In addition to Kohn's de-grading theory, there are alternative explanations about how to assess students. Teachers can use alternative methods other than criterion-referenced and norm-referenced assessment to evaluate students.

A moderate approach to alternative assessment is the use of formative evaluation tools. Individual assessment through use of student portfolios and self-assessment rubrics provide students with increased ownership of their learning. Peer-assessment and teacher observation techniques, though subjective, offer a substitute to traditional assessment. Value-added assessment takes individual growth into consideration, giving each student an individualized grading scale. Applying traditional and alternative classroom assessment methods to dependent students will further clarify or dispute historical educational philosophies in context of 21st Century educational dilemmas.

Suspension disproportionality.

Existing theories offer intriguing explanatory frameworks to the disproportionality of suspensions experienced by African American males. Academic disidentification begins in middle school and continues into high school (Steele, 1992; Osborne, 1997). Steele (1992) explains that most students start out liking school but begin disengaging by middle school. Steele and Aronson (1995) communicate that teacher bias, lack of culturally relevant material, and negative societal assumptions

attribute to a heightened awareness and sensitivity of negative stereotypes by African American males. The consequence is stereotype threat; stereotype threat is an experience African American males endure, fearing their poor academic performance will verify social stereotypes. According to Steele, African American males disidentify with academics to protect their self-esteem. Osborne (1997) reports that African American males are particularly vulnerable to academic disidentification well into high school. Disengaging with academic success does not align with appropriate school behavioral expectations.

Apart from disengaging academically, a percentage of African Americans culturally oppose the behaviors conducive to making good grades. The negative perception of behaviors contributory to making good grades by an evocative faction of the African American community is considered acting White. Ogbu's (2004) cultural opposition theory posits that African American students will purposely avoid successful academic behaviors, not to avoid making good grades, but to avoid the perception that they are acting White.

A framework for the study's problem develops from an understanding of the theoretical perspective of assessment, suspension disproportionality, policy, and archival context. Positivism, progressivism, academic disidentification, and cultural opposition guide the study's development. The evolution of assessment and achievement gap theories will continue. The conclusions and recommendations made in Chapter 5, based on research and data findings, will articulate the connection between theories in a logical modus.

Definition of Terms

An operational definition specifies the uniqueness and measurement of terms in a study (Creswell, 2005). The following terms are operational definitions for the study.

Alternative school is not a term that has a common definition (Lange & Sletten, 2002). For the study, an alternative school is defined as a public or private middle school that utilizes qualitative classroom assessments and a qualitative cumulative grading system. There is no traditional numerical grading. Classroom grading methods consist of student portfolios, parent/student/teacher conferences, and written teacher reports to assess student progress. Alternative schools in the study do not include schools labeled as free schools or open schools.

Middle school is a public or private school setting serving students in grades six through eight (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 2012).

Suspension is a disciplinary action removing a student to a separate environment in-school or out-of-school for one day or longer because of inappropriate behavior. The student is absent from the general education classroom or the school (Morrison & Skiba, 2001). Suspension data do not include expulsions or alternative school placement. Suspension percentage data does not include multiple suspensions of individual students.

Suspension disproportionality is the disproportionate percentage of African Americans or African American males suspended compared to other races and subgroups of students (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2000).

Traditional school is a public or private middle school that utilizes quantitative classroom assessments and a quantitative cumulative grading system. For the study, it is

the antithesis of an alternative school, which has no common definition (Lange & Sletten, 2002).

Assumptions

Understanding and applying basic assumptions are normal statistical occurrences for data research (Salkind, 2003). There are two distinct assumptions concerning data critical to the study. The first assumption is school suspension rates are equally as disproportionate for in-school suspensions as out-of-school suspensions for African American male students in middle school. There is little research on this topic; however, the limited number of studies indicate that in-school suspensions are as disproportionate as out-of-school suspensions for African American students (U.S. Department of Education, 2012; Texas Appleseed, 2007; Prior & Tuller 1991). Another data assumption is that suspension rates of African American males in middle school are similarly disproportionate for private schools as public schools. This assumption is important because the alternative schools used for data collection in the study are public and private. One study identifies the suspension rates of private schools and public schools as similarly disproportionate in regard to African American students (Mayer, Peterson, Myers, Tuttle, & Howell, 2002). The data used to establish reliability of using in-school suspension and private school data include African American male and female students in elementary and secondary schools, different populaces than the target population of the study. Data support the assurance that the suspension rate for elementary and secondary African American students, both male and female, will translate to the specific study population of African American males in middle school (Mendez, Knoff, & Ferron, 2002; Losen & Skiba, 2010; Skiba, Horner, Choong-Geun, Rausch, May, & Tobin,

2011). Careful consideration of data assumptions is necessary to ensure the accuracy of data for the study.

For the study there is an assumption that the students from the alternative sample group have a consistent background with the African American males from the traditional sample group. Another factor in consideration is the consistency of disciplinary actions resulting in suspensions. An assumption used in the study is that similar disciplinary infractions will result in suspensions for the students from alternative schools and traditional schools. One additional key assumption to the study is the supposition that the majority of students in alternative schools have experience with alternative schooling, which would increase validity.

Scope and Limitations

The target population of the study consists of middle school African American males in alternative schools using a non-graded curriculum from different regions of America. In particular, the sample group of students is from two alternative schools utilizing a non-graded curriculum. The study will examine the extent of disproportionality of suspensions among African American males in alternative middle schools with a non-graded curriculum. Free schools and open schools were not considered for the study because of their extreme difference from traditional schools in structure and vision; this division would create a lack of generalizability of data. Collection of archival data concerning student rosters and suspension data will occur between the 2008 and 2013 academic school years.

Limitations are flaws or problems in the real-world application of quantitative research realized by the researcher (Salkind, 2003); the study has limitations. There are

additional factors present in an alternative school that could influence the suspension proportion of students by race as compared to a traditional school. The second limitation present is the low number of students in the sample group of African American males in alternative middle schools. As a result of the low number of students in the sample group of African American males in alternative middle schools, the confidence level of the study must be set at the .10 alpha level, the lowest level conventionally considered (Bartlett, Kotrlik, & Higgins, 2001; Salkind, 2003). An additional limitation is the demographic representation of African American males in the alternative sample group is not representative of the demographic representation for the traditional sample group. The percentage of African American males in the alternative sample group is 1.2% compared to the control percentage of 8.7% nationally. The sample group will represent the highest percentage of the total student population of the study available and derive from a diverse group of schools and students, thus increasing the validity of the data. Data analysis will help decipher among the disproportionate representations of African American males between the two groups. The study is in the realm of education, which indicates many plausible confounding variables out of the researcher's control. Results of the study may not be transferrable between all grade levels; there is a limitation to generalizing findings applicable to African American males in traditional schools. Equitable research and effective management of the variables under researcher control will help offset the extraneous variables. Ultimately, the explanatory power of the data in regard to the effect on suspension disproportionality may be of question.

Delimitations

Data collection will involve students in the sixth through eighth grades in two selected middle schools utilizing a non-graded curriculum in America. Although only two schools and 19 total participants contribute to the study, this is a significant representative sample of the total population, thereby decreasing the effect of limiting factors. Collected data will include student rosters by race and suspensions. The relationship of these data will compare with the suspension proportion and suspension rates of traditional schools. The study will focus only on middle school African American males to reduce the risk of confounding variable influence. Results will emanate from an analysis of the collected data.

Summary

The goal of the study is to add pertinent literature to the problem of disproportionate suspension rates among African American males. The focus of Chapter 1 is the problem of suspension overrepresentation among African American males in middle school (Krezmien, Leone, & Achilles, 2006; Losen & Skiba, 2010; Planty et al., 2009). The chapter provides the background, statement of problem; statement of purpose; research questions; hypotheses; significance of the study; theoretical framework, including traditional and alternative classroom assessments; definition of terms; assumptions; scope; limitations; and delimitations. Chapter 1 also includes several key points relevant to the need for the study.

Chapter 1 provides the historical context to the problem of suspension disproportionality in the education system. Despite increased attention and focus on the achievement gap and behavior of African American male students, the suspension gap is

widening (Losen & Skiba, 2010). With such a marked relationship between academic grades, self-efficacy, and the behavior of students, the study attempts to establish the level of statistical significance grades have on the suspension proportion and suspension rate of African American male students in alternative middle schools.

Chapter 2 provides a literature review and a historic overview of suspensions among African American males in education. Included in Chapter 2 are current local, state, and federal regulations and policies influencing the use of suspensions in middle schools. Within the chapter discussion are grading theory, behavior, and their relationship. Additionally, there will be a conclusion and summary section.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Chapter 1 provided the contextual evidence of suspension disproportionality in the education system. The problem and purpose prompting the need for the study were introduced. An overview and theoretical basis of the study indicates the significance of the study and relevance to educational leadership. An inquisitive review of literature supports the introduction to the study.

The purpose of the current quantitative, causal-comparative study is to investigate the extent of disproportionality and elevated rate of suspensions among African American males in middle schools with a non-graded curriculum. The independent variable is the type of school curriculum assessment and the dependent variable is the disproportionality of suspensions. The population and sample groups of the study consist of middle school African American males from different regions of America. Prior research and literature influence the study topic and format.

Chapter 2 will begin with an overview of the search process for pertinent literature followed by the introduction of germinal research of the study. The remainder of the chapter focuses on specific topics of research literature. The history of African American education, assessment and theory, school discipline, and the relationship between grades and behavior are the topics of interest as related to the problem and purpose statement of the study. Relating the germinal and current research on multiple topics to each other and the study supports the hypothesis of the study.

Title Searches, Articles, Research Documents, and Journals

The literature review for the study includes information collected from a variety of sources. University of Phoenix's online library provided the majority of resources used

for the literature review. The EBSCOhost database was the primary search engine for scholarly, peer-reviewed material. Repeated Boolean topic searches of phrases included African American education, suspension data by race, non-graded curriculum, alternative grading, and the relationship between academics and behavior. References from sources discovered through EBSCOhost searches identified additional research material.

Government documents and Google Scholar searches were responsible for the additional material used for the literature review. The use of government documents was limited to critical court cases. Google Scholar searches were instrumental for detecting research concerning alternative education practices not available through University of Phoenix's online library. There was careful consideration of the use of Google Scholar research and evaluation of historic court cases germane to the study.

The quality selection of material useful for the literature review is fundamental to the integrity of the study. The controlled, calculated use of secondary sources was a result of inaccessible primary sources. It was important to include more established germinal studies as well as current studies in the literature review. The core concern for the literature review was to obtain objective research and multiple perspectives. This combination provides the most comprehensive overview of the study's topics.

Germinal works of this literature review include several from Kohn. Kohn's (1994; 1999; 2000) *The Case Against Standardized Testing: Raising the Scores, Ruining the Schools* is an expansion of his articles "Grading: The issue is not how but why" and "The cost of overemphasizing achievement." Kohn's works scrutinize the culture of high-stakes testing and offer alternative curriculum practices proven effective in education. Another germinal work is Ogbu's (2004) work, "Collective identity and the burden of

‘acting White’ in Black history, community, and education.” Ogbu’s study reinforced and supplemented earlier works of African American oppositional culture permeating education. The impact of the most current research study by Losen and Skiba (2010), “Suspended education: Urban middle schools in crisis” prompted the need and direction of the study. The implications of “Suspended education: Urban middle schools in crisis” are uncertain. The formative works in this literature review establish a theoretical impetus for the study’s hypothesis.

The documents retrieved for the literature review are peer-reviewed journals, research documents, books, government documents, and legal documents. Germinal and current material were priorities of the research. There was minimum access to current research concerning areas of central importance to the study. Table 1 provides a synopsis of the types of works used in support of the research question.

TABLE 1

Literature Reviewed in Support of the Research Questions

	Number Used	Recent Works (2007- current)	Assessment Works	Student Discipline Works	Assessment and Student Discipline Works	Supporting Works
Peer- Reviewed Journals	54	23	22	24	5	3
Research Documents	4	2	2	2	0	0
Books	2	0	1	1	0	0
Government and Legal Documents	11	0	2	3	0	6
Magazines	1	1	0	0	0	1
Total	72	26	27	30	5	10

Literature Review

Chapter 2 is a review of the literature with significant relevance to the study. This literature review provides a historic context for the study, focusing on prior research concerning school curriculum and disciplinary actions. Understanding the research, data, and contributing factors for disproportionate suspension rates for African American males relates to the study's problem statement: The specific problem is that schools suspend African American males at a disproportionate rate in traditional middle schools utilizing a graded curriculum (Krezmien, Leone, & Achilles, 2006; Losen & Skiba, 2010; Planty et al., 2009). The study's purpose, to investigate the extent of disproportionality and elevated rate of suspensions among African American males in middle schools with a non-graded curriculum, requires extensive research about school curriculum, school suspensions, and African American males. The exclusion of literature about African American males' non-suspension disciplinary action from Chapter 2 was purposeful to more intently focus on the disciplinary technique of suspension, which is a significant predictor of academic performance and future delinquent behavior (Brown, 2007; Losen & Skiba, 2010; Balfanz, Spiridakis, Neild, & Legters, 2003). The literature review is a thorough overview of the research related to the study's problem and purpose.

History of African American Education

An understanding of the tragedy and suffering endured through transatlantic slave trade initiates the analysis of the historical perspective of African American education. African American's socialization in American began within a plantation context, a controlling tool of the formative ruling class (Malott, 2010). The plantation context was instrumental to the foundation for industrial capitalism in American (Malott, 2010).

Focusing on this initial controlling method of socialization enables an archival understanding of the justification for African American's foundation in America pre-Civil War.

African Americans began to form their sense of collective identity during the slavery period. This collective experience of oppression prompted a developmental sense of community. Racial identity became more important than class or gender because slaves could be punished or rewarded for the action of one slave. Ogbu (2004) claims the racial identities formed during slavery continue to influence the African American perception of Caucasian and social institutions' treatment of their race to this day. The expressive response of African Americans was instrumental in the construction of oppositional collective identity.

Significant changes transpired post-Civil War. The emancipation of African Americans by the works of many stakeholders produced much uncertainty. Malott (2010) discusses the impact of Northern corporate industrialists emergent post-Civil War as the main power figures of the time. They became interested in education for social stability and control. This interest aided the creation of the first significant legislation post-Civil War in regard to African American education: The Freedmen's Bureau Act of 1865.

The Freedmen's Bureau Act of 1865 provided rudimentary education and social services to African Americans. The goal of this act was to integrate African Americans into the wage labor society (Malott, 2010). The educational goal for African Americans and poor Whites, under the leadership and direction of General Oliver Howard, was to emphasize discipline, behavior, taking orders, and role memorization. Malott argues that the goal of capitalistic education is twofold: First, to train community leaders and second,

to mold those slated to be wage earners as accepting of the law of the capitalistic class. The Freedmen's Bureau Act of 1865 introduced the incorporation of the hierarchical, unequal educational practices endured by African Americans in America.

Prior to the Freedmen's Bureau, most states had no provisions for educating slaves. Some states passed compulsory laws prohibiting the education of African Americans until 1868, when a declaration made this practice illegal (Malott, 2010). During the Reconstruction period following the Civil War, humanistic missionaries attempted to educate African Americans. The segregation against the attempted education of African Americans from poor Caucasians was to safeguard against a unified working class, which would disable the undisputed capitalistic social and racial relations (Malott, 2010). The segregation of education was official in 1896.

Plessy v. Ferguson (1896) gave states the exclusive right to segregate racial minorities into separate schools. During the sanctioned segregation period of 1896-1954, African Americans attended schools influenced by either Northern industrial educators or the Southern African American church. The Northern industrial education system was an amalgamation of behaviorist and mentalist perspectives mimicking the perceived inferiority of African American's intellectual ability and destiny as wage laborers. The Southern African American church provided a subversive and liberating education despite the compulsory ignorance laws. African American education was a pursuit of freedom, cultural heritage, and spiritual tradition (Malott, 2010).

In 1954, the United States Supreme Court ruled that a separate educational entity for African Americans and Caucasians was unconstitutional (*Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954). The Southern states faced an almost universal resistance to

desegregation until 1964, when the federal government considered withholding funding for segregated programs, specifically education. Thus, between the years of 1964 and 1970, Southern states became the least segregated schools in the country. Under the leadership of the Richard Nixon, Jimmy Carter, and Ronald Reagan, shifts in educational policies instigated a remission of desegregation among American schools in the North and South (Malott, 2010). As a result, there is evidence that American schools are becoming more segregated because of de facto segregation (Richmond, 2012; Kozol, 2005). The apparent re-segregation trend of American schools is closely concomitant with the current achievement gap trend experienced by African American students.

African American students have yet to close the achievement gap with other races (Planty, Hussar, Snyder, Kena, KewalRamani, Kemp, Bianco, & Dinkes, 2009). African American males, in particular, have the widest achievement gap (Kirp, 2010). African American males fare worst on almost every measure of academic attainment despite a sundry of reforms over the last 30 years (Kirp, 2010). Kirp proposes two prevailing theories about why the achievement gap exists. The first theory assumes that African American males have lower IQs so even the most aspiring educational interventions are futile because of their low cognitive potential. The other predominant theory posits that the gap exists because of lower socioeconomic status and lack of opportunity for African American male students. Both theories infer that the achievement gap is primarily contingent on external factors uncontrollable by the school, which is educational policy fatalism. A growing body of evidence suggests several methods of remediation for students that do help close the achievement gap, including intense individual attention for students, support for parents, age-appropriate skill remediation, and alternative grading

practices (Kirp, 2010; Butler & Nisan, 1986; Kohn, 1994; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003; Cotton, 2000).

The review of literature concerning the historical context of African American education is woeful. Speculations drawn from literature and research attest that traditional education is not effective for African American students, especially for African American males. The majority culture of middle-class Caucasian males influences the legislation, administration, and supervision of the traditional education system (Popham, 2006). The intentional and unintentional effects of this archetype have not proven to be conducive to the success of African American students in American public schools. Data of suspension rates of African American males prior to desegregation would be helpful to determine the current levels of disparity. Without this data, the assumption remains that traditional, integrated public schools suspend African American males at a disproportionate rate.

Assessment

Not all races of students respond satisfactorily to school assessment (Planty et al., 2009). Literature of assessment practices provides a better understanding of what the achievement gap is and why it exists. Compelling research of anti-grading advocacy, including alternative methods of student assessment, challenges traditional grading in education. The independent variable of the study, type of school curriculum assessment, has a noteworthy background and influences the academics and behavior of students across all races.

History.

In pre-Renaissance Western Europe the ideal education system was an apprentice model (Tocci, 2008). Post-Renaissance Western Europe replaced the apprentice model

with a model of oral and written examinations. Tocci explains that this shift was away from the teacher as the scholastic model to the curriculum as the scholastic model. Consequently, assessments moved from imitation of the teacher to content mastery. No evidence exists that these examinations were graded. Instead, these examinations were most likely approved or rebuked, evaluated and deliberated, and responded orally or in writing (Tocci, 2008). There was an introduction and implementation of this model to the first educational institutions in America (Cureton, 1971).

Regardless of the absence of grades, Smallwood (1935) argues that rankings existed at the first American institutions, a practice concurrently held at Oxford and Cambridge in Britain (as cited by Tocci, 2008). The initial rankings of American colleges, emulated by schools in the North American colonies, considered familial status and gentlemanly behavior (Tocci, 2008). A substantial percentage of students ranked by this model scorned the practice. In 1767, violent student protests to the system of student ranking caused physical harm to the Yale university campus and president Thomas Clap (Smallwood, 1935 as cited by Tocci, 2008). The student protest marked the end of the familial and behavior method of ranking students at Yale and stimulated the first archival system of numerical grading.

Tocci (2008) describes the unique numerical grading system begun at Yale in 1785 by the college president and tutors. The first numerical grading system made notations of attendance and levels of mastery. This grading system was exclusive to Yale for 28 years according to known literature. Development of a simplified scale from one to four began in 1813 at Yale. By the 1830s, Harvard had a similar system eventually modifying the one to four scale to a one to 100 scale. In 1869, the faculty at Harvard

voted to eliminate behavior from student grades and create a separate system to evaluate gentlemanly behavior.

The transition of the grading system from the university system to the public school system occurred in 1845 in Boston through a review of the school system records. A standardized examination was a supplemental means of ranking students in combination with student merit. The practice of grading spread and varied across the country. Other systems of grading began to replace the initial one to four and one to 100 scale, including a quartile system, pass or no pass system, one to three scale, one to five scale, A-E scale, A-F scale, and the introduction of the grading curve method (Tocci, 2008). Tocci argues that the grading system rapidly expanded because of the increase in public schooling and the rise in pedagogical knowledge. The corresponding grading techniques became a tool of efficiency for a mass population. Educational research conducted during the first two decades of the 20th century influenced debates about the most effective methods of grading. The first widespread critique of grades as a method of student evaluation transpired in the late 1960s.

Questioning the purpose and rationale for grades contributed to a supposition by Atkinson (1975) that grades are devices of social control (as cited by Tocci, 2008); social control can lead to a perpetuation of discrimination. This transitory phase of ambiguity about the future or existence of grades directed a number of schools to introduce non-graded curricula. Pass-fail systems and complete non-graded systems debuted at elementary, secondary, and post-secondary institutions across the country. The 1983 government report, *A Nation at Risk*, dispelled efforts toward non-graded schools. *A Nation at Risk* called for increased precision and objectivity (National Commission on

Excellence in Education, 1983). High-stakes testing and empirical evidence mark the period of education since *A Nation at Risk*.

High-stakes standardized testing.

The use of standardized tests is increasing as are the stakes related to the outcomes (Advancement Project, 2010). The resulting product is the high-stakes testing era. The impact of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 is incontestable. This legislation increased the use of testing and sanctions applied to testing results. From 2001 to 2008, the number of states using test results to sanction schools rose from 14 to 32 (Advancement Project, 2010). There are strong opponents and proponents of high-stakes testing. Bowers (1989) cites three points on how standardized tests are successful. Standardized tests allow correct placement based on examination scores, demonstrate the strengths and weaknesses of students, and help districts determine the effectiveness of the learning processes. Deubal (2008) suggests tests help teachers and school districts to study and align their curriculum. Subsequently, teachers and school districts could use the results of the tests to determine what they need to teach students. Proponents of high-stakes testing allude to increased test scores as evidence of increased rigor and competency of students; however, affirmative high-stakes test results are independent to states and often fail to show similar gains in academic achievement when compared to national low-stakes tests such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Incidentally, NAEP reading and math test scores dropped between 2004 and 2008, indicating the increased focus on high-stakes testing is not effective (Advancement Project, 2010).

Opponents of high-stakes testing avow that this model leads to a regimented curriculum, which results in less opportunity for differentiation, in-depth instruction, cultural connections, and community activities (American Federation of Teachers, 2003). According to the Advancement Project (2010), high-stakes testing negatively impacts the student experience and adds hostility to the educational environment by taking away many of the engaging activities students enjoy in school. The increased emphasis placed on tests and test results can dehumanize students by associating self-worth with test scores. The accumulated effects are particularly austere for students of color. In a system that promotes educator self-interest over student interest, the message is sent that education is not for everyone (Advancement Project, 2010).

Achievement gap.

Unequal education systems was the primary explanation of the achievement gap post-*Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). As educational access became more widespread, the achievement gap between African Americans and other races persisted (Advancement Project, 2010). Results of the high-stakes testing era include evidence of decreased graduation rates and increased disciplinary concerns (Finkel, 2010). One prevailing theory is that NCLB (2001), the culmination of the high-stakes testing era, increases pressure on schools to boost test scores, thereby inequitably tracking African American males into special education, alternative schools, and dropping out of school (Finkel, 2010). The high-stakes testing era has not shown to close the achievement gap for African Americans (Advancement Project, 2010).

Historically, African American males have struggled academically, which includes poor performance associated with achievement tests and school grade point

average (GPA) (Planty et al., 2009). The resulting achievement gap is a quandary of intense attention. One peculiar characteristic of the achievement gap is African American students and Caucasian students start kindergarten at similar achievement levels, yet the longer each group remains in school the larger the achievement gap becomes (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 1995; Steele, 1992). Remarkably, the increasing achievement gap does not result in diminished self-esteem among African Americans. African Americans are generally found to have a higher self-esteem than Caucasian students (van Laar, 2000).

Steele's (1992) theory of academic disidentification provides an explanation for this phenomenon. Most students exhibit a positive correlation between academic self-concept and academic performance (Steele, 1992). However, Steele reports that African Americans males are the only studied population who have a negative correlation between academic self-concept and academic performance, a theory identified as academic disidentification. Academic disidentification specifically begins in the late middle school years (Steele, 1992). Steele explains that although all students start out enjoying school and correlate academic achievement with self-concept, as time progresses African American males begin forming a disconnect for several reasons. Steele and Aronson (1995) posit that negative experiences in school such as teacher bias, lack of culturally relevant material, and negative societal assumptions attribute to a heightened awareness and sensitivity of negative stereotypes. The consequence is that African American males fear their poor academic performance will verify the stereotype. According to Steele, African American males disidentify with academics to protect their self-esteem. As a result, African American males do not place considerable emphasis on

academic performance as related to self-concept, thereby maintaining high levels of self-esteem.

Extending upon Steele's (1992) work, Gray-Litte and Hafdahl (2000) propose that there are additional factors to consider. Caucasians outperform African Americans academically; a normative assumption is that Caucasians should have a higher academic self-concept. Paradoxically, Caucasian students and African American students share equal academic self-concepts. Gray-Little and Hafdahl articulate that academic disidentification is operating; something other than grades affect the academic self-concept of African American males. Cokley (2010) concludes that African American males' academic self-concept is not related to graded performance but through self-reflection of self-perceived performance.

Alternative approach.

Kohn's focus on non-graded curriculum adds merit to the value that alternative methods of curriculum assessment can have on disengaged student populations. Kohn (1999, 2012) cites three robust conclusions concerning the use of grades for assessment of students: First, grades diminish student interest in whatever they are learning. Second, grades create a preference for the easiest task. Third, grades tend to decrease higher level thinking. Kohn's (2012) first conclusion, grades diminish student interest in whatever they are learning, juxtaposes grading orientation with learning orientation. Kohn (2012) states that all known research negatively associates grading orientation with intrinsic motivation. The second conclusion, grades create a preference for the easiest task, is a rational choice by students (Kohn, 2012). Instead of choosing intellectually challenging work, students are prone to select assignments that minimize the chance of doing poorly.

Kohn's last conclusion, grades tend to decrease higher level thinking, associates student's quality of thinking to perception of testable material, which tends to be lower level of cognition. It is noted that there is no known research contradicting Kohn's three conclusions (Kohn, 2012).

Kohn (2012) delves into the reason that grading is problematical: motivation, achievement, quantification, and curriculum. There are studies that positively associate grading with motivation. The studies refer to motivation as an entity in contempt of its duality. The motivation for grades is extrinsic, which undermines the desired intrinsic motivation (Kohn, 2012). Extrinsic motivation influences students to focus more on their achievement than what they are doing. Shifting student's attention away from learning and toward performance creates a valid concern for educational psychologists (Kohn, 2012). The assessment process becomes oversimplified and counterproductive by quantifying student performance (Kohn, 2012). Conceded cognition is a result of disconnected assessments used to evaluate misguided curriculum.

Kohn (1999b) recommends alternatives to numerical grading. Kohn suggests teacher narratives, portfolios, student-led teacher-parent conferences, and student exhibitions to gather data about students for assessment purposes. Kohn argues that block scheduling, team teaching, and interdisciplinary courses are more conducive to implementing the alternative strategies. Rather than relying on an archaic system in which grades function as an instrument of control, Kohn emphasizes that students rely on mindful, intrinsic engagement toward success.

Proponents of grading solicit the idea of competition and motivation (Guskey, 2011; Haladyna, 1999). Guskey explains that grading, when predominantly based on

students' standing among peers, makes student learning highly competitive. A highly competitive grading system discourages cooperation between students and also discourages individualized attention from teachers in fear of creating biases (Gray, 1993). Grades and other reporting methods in a competitive environment impact student effort (Haladyna, 1999). The impact is positive for successful students with high grades but distressing for students who struggle academically; there is no known research that relates low grades to increased effort (Haladyna, 1999; Guskey, 2011).

There is adequate research on the effects of non-graded curricula in regard to academic achievement and self-efficacy. Limited research specifically explores the correlation between non-graded curricula and various races and population subgroups. Minimal research exists relating non-graded curricula to behavior, and no known research exists relating non-graded curricula to the behavior of diverse races and population subgroups. There is a need for more broad and narrow-scoped pilot studies examining the relationship between non-graded curricula and behavior.

School Discipline

The focus of the study is the discipline of African American males in middle school. Skiba, Eckes, and Brown (2011) cite discipline as the third most important legal issue for educators. Student behavior and discipline are exceptionally noteworthy in middle school. Middle school student misbehavior and discipline is reasonably predictive of future incarceration (Balfanz et al., 2003). Given the significance of issues related to behavior, research literature must be methodical and unambiguous. There was careful consideration of contemporary research literature content and relevancy.

History.

The origin of school discipline in America derives from the English common law term, *in loco parentis*. *In loco parentis* allows educators to act as guardians when parents are not present in regard to student's harm to self or others. The majority of discipline intervention techniques before the 1960s involved corporal punishment. Physical punishment of students began to lose favor in the 1960s. Subsequently, suspensions and expulsions became more popular as methods of student discipline. As of 2011, only 22 states permitted corporal punishment in school. The majority of serious disciplinary actions taken by school administrators include suspension or expulsion, a trend rapidly increasing since the 1970s at the state and local level (Skiba, Eckes, & Brown, 2011). The constitutionality of school discipline confronts educators to make decisions rationally related to government interest.

Case law concerning due process and zero tolerance are of particular importance to school discipline and the research study. Skiba, Eckes, and Brown (2011) review case law pertinent to exclusionary disciplinary practices affecting African Americans. The 1975 decision of *Goss v. Lopez* set minimum constitutional standards for student suspensions of 10 days or less. The court decided that students must receive procedural due process, albeit nominal, to ensure Fourteenth Amendment rights. Guidance for suspensions of more than 10 days and expulsions can be found from a different court ruling, the Fifth Circuit *Dixon v. Alabama State Board of Education* (1961).

In *Dixon*, the court imposes increased due process procedures for suspensions or expulsions of more than 10 days. More extensive due process includes students' opportunity to know the names of the accuser, statements against them, and an

opportunity to provide their own defense (Skiba, Eckes, & Brown, 2011). Students and parents have a vested interest in safeguards against wrongful punishment.

The Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment and Title XI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 protect individuals from discrimination. The Equal Protection Clause does not allow states to deny an individual equal protection of the law. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination on the basis of ethnicity. Both legal protections are ineffective and sparsely used in cases involving disciplinary action because of the subjectivity of intent (Civil Rights Project, 2000).

The increasing percentage and disproportionality of African American suspensions is a consequence of school characteristics, leadership, and race, not historical case law or legislation (Losen & Gillespie, 2012). The erroneous predictors of suspensions, literature supporting that suspensions increase the probability of dropping out of school, and involvement with the criminal justice system creates difficulty justifying the use of suspensions (Losen & Gillespie, 2012). African American suspension rates are increasing since the 1970s and are the highest of all racial subgroups. African American females experience the second highest suspension rate of all racial and gender groups, only surpassed by African American males. African Americans are a significantly overrepresented group of suspended students (Losen & Skiba, 2010).

Zero tolerance.

As a result of American discontent with increased violence in schools and the booming drug trade, a stricter school discipline model of zero tolerance manifested in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Advancement Project, 2010; Henault, 2001). Schools' misinterpretation of the Gun-Free School Act of 1994 jeopardized federal funding

guaranteed by the Elementary and Secondary School Act of 1965 (Stader, 2004). In 1995, the terminology of the law changed from firearm to weapon, and in 1997, drugs were added (Casella, 2003). Changes to the law enabled schools to comply with questionable practices that jeopardized funding. Accordingly, broadening the terminology led schools to over-implement zero tolerance policies, allowing educational administrators to more easily bar students from an education (Martinez, 2009). Research suggests that zero tolerance policies influence the disproportionate suspension rates encountered by African American males (Advancement Project, 2010). Zero tolerance policies make it easier to mandate harsher punishments for major and minor infractions, such as suspension and expulsion, which negatively impact school-wide academic performance (Advancement Project, 2010). Despite evidence that suspensions and expulsions are ineffective at improving academics, safety, and reducing disruption, courts tend to permit schools to utilize these disciplinary techniques because of court-perceived good intentions of the school (Skiba, Eckes, & Brown, 2011). In 2001, The American Bar Association recommended discontinuation of zero tolerance policies in schools (Henault, 2001). The Advancement Project declares that zero tolerance is educationally unreasonable and economically unsound. Money spent on expensive security infrastructure could be more wisely used for staff and intervention programs. Zero tolerance is unsustainable for students and communities (Advancement Project, 2010).

The use of zero tolerance policies represents a fundamental error of judgment; school-aged students will make mistakes (Advancement Project, 2010). Questioning authority, susceptibility to peer influence, and inconsiderate actions are typical of childhood and adolescent psychology (APA, 2008). Zero tolerance policies send the

message that children are threats, undeserving of tolerance. Preschool expulsion rates are three times as high as elevated K-12 expulsion rates, evidence of zero tolerance absurdity (Advancement Project, 2010). The effect of zero tolerance policies is most noticeable in the African American population. Disparate suspension and expulsion rates for African Americans are intolerable and worsening (Advancement Project, 2010). There is no peer-reviewed, empirical research that provides evidence that zero tolerance policy makes schools safer or increases academic achievement (Martinez, 2009).

Kozol (as cited in Advancement Project, 2010) makes the allusion that zero tolerance policies are a direct result of the high-stakes testing era. High-stakes testing creates a monotonous curriculum and contributes to a tedious classroom. An unengaging learning environment increases classroom disruption (Rubin, 2007). Because schools have such high standards based on high-stakes test scores, there is incentive to push out inattentive, misbehaved students (Advancement Project, 2010). The practice of suspending and expelling students to boost individual and school test scores is quite common. There is a need for additional research on the relationship between high-stakes testing and zero tolerance, but it is clear that these two policies are working to over-value test scores and exclude students from school (Advancement Project, 2010).

Disproportionality theories.

Quantitative and qualitative data support the evident concern for disproportionality of suspensions among races (Krezmien, Leone, & Achilles, 2006; Losen & Skiba, 2010; Planty et al., 2009; McCadden, 1998). Quantitative data explicate a fragment of the dilemma; there is a disproportionate suspension rate among African Americans. The remaining inquest concerns the causes of the disproportionate suspension

rate among African Americans. Some qualitative evidence suggests that educational staff reprimand African American students for certain behaviors that other students are not reprimanded (McCadden, 1998). Skiba et al. (2000) further validate this claim with evidence that African Americans receive harsher punishments than their peers. The perception is that African American behavior is more hostile than other races, and this observation leads to an African American sentiment of exclusion, ultimately compounding the problem of educational disengagement (Rocques & Paternoster, 2011). Ferguson's (2000) research postulates a more pronounced distinctiveness for males, making African Americans males an increased target for disciplinary measures in the traditional American education system. Monroe (2005) asserts that disproportionality in school discipline is a function of macro-level archival and societal factors based on a synopsis of disproportionality research. Supporting theories provide sustenance for this enigma.

Cultural opposition theory.

Ogbu's (1986, 2004) germinal works of cultural opposition offer valid theoretical explanations for the disproportionality of suspensions among African Americans. Cultural opposition theory focuses on the observable behaviors of African Americans not the perceived behaviors. Ogbu's thesis for research of cultural opposition theory stems from the conclusion that societal discrimination and discriminatory responses were not enough to explain the totality of disproportionate educational achievement (Ogbu, 2004). Cultural opposition theory is a combination of two factors, oppositional collective identity and cultural frame of reference. According to Fordham and Ogbu (1986), African Americans experience a burden of acting White because of their oppositional collective

identity and cultural frame of reference. African Americans aspire to succeed and are aware of the obstacles they face because of their race. One obstacle is the burden of acting White.

Caucasian Americans created a subordinate group of African Americans through enslavement. Subordinate groups experience status complications through four major collective problems: involuntary incorporation into society, instrumental discrimination, social subordination, and expressive mistreatment (Ogbu, 2004). Ogbu argues that the majority group uses these four collective mechanisms to create and maintain the collective identity of the minority. As long as these mechanisms remain, a distinct collective identity among minorities remains. Minorities, both individually and as a group, respond to status problems in ways that reinforce separate existence and collective identity (Ogbu, 2004).

After emancipation, African Americans accepted the dialect and behaviors of White people as a model for academic and social success. The adoption created a dilemma for African Americans who still held their oppositional culture in high esteem. Ogbu (2004) cites five categorical responses to the perceived burden of acting White. Of Ogbu's five categories used by African Americans to oppose acting White, cultural opposition is the most provocative to the study. Some African Americans opposed adopting White culture because they believed this would cause them to lose cultural identity; it would also mean acceptance of White interpretation of African American culture and dialect. Opposing the substitution of White-identified inferior culture with superior culture is the motive for oppositional reactions to the burden of acting White.

Contemporary responses to the burden of acting White infiltrate the education system. Ogbu (2004) asserts that African Americans are a product of African American history and contemporary African American culture. The oppositional culture existing in professional organizations is also present in the educational setting. The segment of African Americans embracing oppositional collective identity and cultural frame of reference explicitly opposes adopting White attitudes and behaviors. In Ogbu's study of African American perception of grades, few African Americans reject good grades. Instead, African Americans reject the behaviors that lead to the good grades. Notable White behaviors referenced by African American students are studying, going to the library, speaking standard English, taking honors or AP classes, acting smart during lessons, and reading (Ogbu, 2004). More intolerable behaviors, in an effort to avoid acting White, lead to increased disciplinary actions, including suspensions.

Critical race theory.

Critical Race Theory offers another explanation for the disproportionality of suspensions among African American males. Critical Race Theory is a responsive theory to sluggish efforts in racial reform in the post-civil rights era. Critical Race Theory asserts that racism is prevalent and intertwined with most features of American life. Race is a lens to contest racial oppression. Critical Race theorists challenge the ideas of equity, meritocracy, and objectivity in a society distressed by racial discrimination (Howard, 2008).

According to Howard (2008), Critical Race theorists integrate racism in education through four methods: theorizing about race and other forms of oppression in school curricula, challenging acceptable objectivity in research, offering counterstorytelling as a

methodological examination tool, and applying transdisciplinary studies toward a better understanding of discrimination. The gender and sex nexus of African American males is incomparable as a minority status in education. Critical Race Theory provides a unique analysis for the juxtaposition of gender and race of African American males. Explicit examination via a conceptual framework creates an introspection of what it means to be an African American male, replacing distorted racial and gender norms (Howard, 2008).

Critical Race Theory has the potential to initiate absent dialogue in the educational research community despite evidence of discourse in the African American community. The historical underachievement of African American males presents Critical Race theorists with an argument that Critical Race Theory should be a part of the data sources, methods, and analysis used in educational research, particularly on the topic of minority education and the achievement gap (Howard, 2008). Parker (1998) eloquently contends:

The critical centering of race (together with social class, gender, sexual orientation, and other areas of difference) at the locations where the research is conducted and discussions are held can serve as a major link between fully understanding the archival vestiges of discrimination and the present-day racial manifestations of that discrimination. (p.46)

Grades and Behavior

There is a direct empirical correlation between student grades and school behavior (Casillas, Robbins, Allen, Hanson, Schmeiser, & Yi-Lung, 2012; Wentzel, 1993). Wentzel's research adds clarity to an inconclusive issue. The inquiry of researchers is the directional influence between grades and behavior. Wentzel's study examined the

relationships of prosocial and antisocial behaviors to academic achievement. Academic-oriented classroom behaviors and teacher preference for students helps control the reliability of data. Using a multiple-regression analysis, Wentzel established prosocial and antisocial behaviors as independent predictors of student GPA. Prosocial behavior was also found to be an independent predictor of achievement test scores, even when taking confounding variables into consideration. Casillas et al. (2012) extended comparative research to associate middle school behaviors as predictors of early high school academic achievement. The multiple linear regression model used by Casillas et al. (2012) attributed 33% of variance in high school GPA to middle school behavioral indicators. Behavioral indicators should be a prominent aspect of at-risk intervention programs.

There are several reasonable explanations suggesting that grades affect behavior or vice versa. Proponents of grades directionally affecting behavior assume positive performance results serve as an incentive for students to behave prosocially (Wentzel, 1993). Behavioral interventions often result in higher achievement results, providing evidence to advocates of behavior directionally affecting grades (Wentzel, 1993). Marginal contradictory research projects that behavior plays a limited role in academic success (Duncan et al., 2007). When examining the issue as outcome-based, both factors relate. A retrospective input reveals a disparate relationship between grades and behavior (Algozzine, Wang, & Violette, 2011). Algozzine, Wang, and Violette claim that grades and behavior are and are not related. Their paradoxical, yet imperative conclusion is that considering both factors together targets successful intervention.

Few research studies adequately address the relationship between grades and behavior from a holistic perspective. There are no known studies that specifically address the relationship between grades and behavior as related to African American males despite the historical evidence of underachievement in academics and over-representation in disciplinary statistics; the research that is available is abstruse. There is a need for further quantitative and qualitative research to help understand the phenomenon experienced by African American males in regard to the relationship between underachievement in academics and over-representation in disciplinary statistics.

Conclusions

The literature review provides the context for the study. Assessing the difference in the suspension rates of African American males in middle schools utilizing traditional graded curriculum and alternative schools utilizing non-graded curriculum is complex and grounded in research. The review of research includes the archival plight of African American education, historical context of assessment and discipline, and theoretical explanations for the disproportionate percentage of suspensions. The literature review will serve as a foundation for Chapter 5.

Summary

A literature review familiarizes readers with the necessary terms, theories, and contexts necessary to fully understand the research question and significance of the study (Foss & Waters, 2007). The influences to the study are expansive. Each section of the literature review directly attributes to the implication of the data results. Although expansive, the research pertinent to each section of the literature review is minimal. The nominal research contains the most significant research and theories with an emphasis on

the most current, relevant information. Archival and current germinal research supports the quest to answer the study's research questions. Much of the research aligns and presents marginal opposition undeterred by the relentless pursuit of objective, oppositional evidence.

The literature review identifies the complications of assessment in an era of high-stakes testing and zero tolerance. The effects of high-stakes testing and zero tolerance are partially attributable to the underperformance by African Americans since desegregation (Advancement Project, 2010). Certain behaviors necessary for success in a traditional school with a graded curriculum are counterintuitive to particular aspects of African American culture (Ogbu, 2004). Increasing motivation through alternative strategies to grading has the potential to increase engagement in students who historically struggle academically and behaviorally (Kohn, 2012; Guskey, 2011).

Chapter 3 restates the problem statement, purpose statement, and hypothesis related to the study. Chapter 3 will also define the research method and appropriateness of the research design to the study's problem and purpose. The collection of data, data analysis, and validity of the research findings will help answer the research question and accept the appropriate hypothesis.

Chapter 3: Method

Chapter 2 familiarizes readers with the necessary literature and data to warrant the need for the study. The literature review included the complication of suspension disproportionality in the current educational context marked by high-stakes testing and zero tolerance policies. Chapters 1 and 2 drive the method and design of the study.

The specific research problem is that schools suspend African American males at a disproportionate rate in traditional middle schools. The purpose of this quantitative, causal-comparative study is to investigate the extent of disproportionality and elevated rate of suspensions among African American males in middle schools with a non-graded curriculum. The study attempts to establish what, if any, statistically significant difference exists between the independent variable, type of school curriculum assessment, and the dependent variable, suspension disproportionality. The study involves collecting suspension data from schools employing a non-graded curriculum that will comprise a large sample percentage of the population group. The student population of focus for the study will be African Americans males in middle schools with a non-graded curriculum. Suspension data from the alternative schools will compare with the most recent suspension statistics from traditional schools across the nation to determine the extent of suspension disproportionality.

The quantitative research study is epistemologically positivist. Positivism is a position that holds the goal of research is to describe experienced phenomena (Kraus, 2005). Deductive, empirical observation, and measurement is at the core of this scientific endeavor. Using direct manipulation and data observation is a key approach of the scientific method (Kraus, 2005). The commitment to a positivist approach is a result of

matching the phenomenon of disproportionate suspensions among African American males in middle school to the appropriate quantitative research method. The study objectively isolates the type of curriculum implementation in regard to suspension disproportionality.

Chapter 3 includes the research method, design, and explanation of the data collection process in detail. Within Chapter 3 is the explanation of the selection of population, confidentiality, reliability, and validity of the study. There is discussion of the appropriateness of research method and design. The chapter concludes with a description of the data analysis and discussion about the generalizability of the results.

Research Method and Design Appropriateness

To establish the extent of disproportionality of suspensions among African American males in middle schools with a non-graded curriculum, a quantitative, causal-comparative study is most appropriate. The original area of interest for the study was twofold: the academic and discipline gap experienced by African American males and the effects of a non-graded curriculum. This interest narrowed to the reasons African Americans experience academic and discipline gaps in education and the effects that a non-graded curriculum has on school discipline. The preliminary questions generated two research questions:

R1: What, if any, statistically significant difference exists in the proportion of suspensions among African American males between traditional middle schools utilizing a graded curriculum and alternative middle schools utilizing a non-graded curriculum?

R2: What, if any, statistically significant difference exists in the rate of suspensions among African American males between traditional middle schools utilizing a graded

curriculum and alternative middle schools utilizing a non-graded curriculum? This was an essential step for designing a study (Neuman, 2006). A quantitative method was most appropriate to answer the research questions.

The research questions influence the research method (Neuman, 2006). The study's research questions generated two criteria, which influenced the research method and incited two hypotheses to develop. Either there is or is not a statistically significant difference existent in the proportion of suspensions and rate of suspensions among African American males between traditional middle schools utilizing a graded curriculum and middle schools utilizing a non-graded curriculum.

Distinct variables exist within this research framework. The independent variable is the type of school curriculum assessment. The study distinguishes school curriculum into traditional graded curriculum or alternative non-graded curriculum. The dependent variables are suspension proportion and suspension rate. The level of suspension disproportionality among the sample group of African American males in traditional middle schools with a graded curriculum is known through an investigative study by Losen and Skiba (2010). Research for the study will help determine the extent of disproportionality among African American males in alternative middle schools with a non-graded curriculum. The extraneous variables in the study relate to system structure. Variables such as school size, classroom size, student management philosophy, and pedagogical practices could affect the dependent variable in the study. To increase validity and reduce the amount of error in the statistical findings, the researcher will attempt to sample the total population of African American males in alternative middle

schools. Developing a hypothesis and setting distinctive variables dictates a quantitative research method (Neuman, 2006).

The comparison of suspension proportions and suspension rates among African American males in middle school between alternative schools with a non-graded curriculum and traditional schools with a graded curriculum will produce levels of significance through two-sample two tailed z -tests of population proportions. A z -test is most appropriate when the samples are independent and samples represent a normal sampling distribution (Griff, 2008). The two independent samples create the need for a two-sample test. A two tailed test evaluates if there is any difference in the suspension rate and suspension proportion between alternative and traditional sample groups. There is no standard deviation in the study because the data are proportions. The ideal test to establish correlation for suspension proportion and suspension rate is the two-sample two tailed z -test of population proportion.

Using the significance levels based on one small sample and population size, critical values are set at the .10 alpha level, determining the acceptance or rejection of the null hypotheses (Bartlett, Kotrlik, & Higgins, 2001; Salkind, 2003). The calculated p -values and 90% confidence intervals will define the levels of statistical significance concerning the type of curriculum and the suspension proportion and suspension rate of African American males in middle school (Salkind, 2003).

The quantitative research study will follow Neuman's (2006) seven step, interactive process. First, there is acknowledgement of the social self, which leads to an adopted perspective. Designing the study and collecting data is next. After collecting

data, the data will be analyzed, interpreted, and used to inform others. Theory influences all seven steps of the quantitative process.

The study has one quantitative variable and includes a control. One part of the independent variable, schools with a graded curriculum, establishes the control of the study based on the targeted comparison and extensive archival suspension data across the nation from the last decade. With only one quantitative variable, part of the independent variable serving as a control, no manipulation of variables, and the use of archival data, a causal-comparative research design is most appropriate (Salkind, 2003). The first research design considered, correlational, compares two quantitative variables without a control group (Black, 1999). Correlation and causal-comparative research designs were the two quantitative designs most applicable to the study. Given the aforementioned appropriateness of a causal-comparative design versus a correlational design, causal-comparative is the chosen research design of the study.

The study will compare the proportion of suspensions and suspension rate among African American males in traditional middle schools with a graded curriculum and alternative middle schools with a non-graded curriculum. The proportion of suspensions and suspension rate among African American males in traditional middle schools with a graded curriculum are controls of the study. African American males account for 22% of all suspensions; the African American male suspension rate is 2.53 times higher than the average student (Losen & Skiba, 2010). Schools suspend 28.3% of all African American males in middle school. The suspension proportion number of 22% and the suspension rate number of 28.3% will serve as the controls for the research questions. The comparison of suspension proportion and suspension rate among African American males

in middle school between alternative schools with a non-graded curriculum and traditional schools with a graded curriculum will produce an acceptance or rejection of the null hypotheses and levels of significance through two-sample two tailed z -tests of population proportions. Using the significance levels appropriate for the sample and population sizes, critical values are at the .10 alpha level and will determine the acceptance or rejection of the null hypotheses. The calculated p -values and 90% confidence intervals will define the levels of significance in relation to the type of curriculum and the suspension proportion and suspension rate of African American males in middle school (Salkind, 2003). Ultimately, the causal-comparative study will determine the level of causation the type of curriculum has on the suspension proportion and suspension rate of African American males in middle school. The findings of the study will add pertinent literature to the problem of suspension disproportionality among African American males.

Research Questions

The research questions drive the study. The study has two primary research questions:

- R1: What, if any, statistically significant difference exists in the proportion of suspensions among African American males between traditional middle schools utilizing a graded curriculum and alternative middle schools utilizing a non-graded curriculum?
- R2: What, if any, statistically significant difference exists in the rate of suspensions among African American males between traditional middle schools utilizing a graded curriculum and alternative middle schools utilizing a non-graded curriculum?

The research questions generated two sets of hypotheses. The results of testing the null and alternative hypotheses in Chapter 4 will lead to analysis in Chapter 5. The study has two sets of hypotheses:

$H1_0$: The null hypothesis is the proportion of suspensions is statistically significantly lower for African American males attending alternative middle schools utilizing a non-graded curriculum compared to African American males attending traditional middle schools utilizing a graded curriculum. $H1_a$: The alternative hypothesis is the proportion of suspensions is statistically significantly lower for African American males attending alternative middle schools utilizing a non-graded curriculum compared to African American males attending traditional middle schools utilizing a graded curriculum. $H2_0$: The null hypothesis is the suspension rate is not statistically significantly different for African American males attending alternative middle schools utilizing a non-graded curriculum compared to African American males attending traditional middle schools utilizing a graded curriculum. $H2_a$: The alternative hypothesis is the suspension rate is statistically significantly different for African American males attending alternative middle schools utilizing a non-graded curriculum compared to African American males attending traditional middle schools utilizing a graded curriculum.

Population

The targeted population of the study consists of middle school African American males enrolled in alternative schools across America. The targeted population of the study is an estimate. There is need for an estimate because not all schools would release data because of their non-participatory role in the study. Calculation for the population estimate includes multiplying the average number of African American males from the

two schools participating in the study by the total number of alternative schools known to use the disciplinary technique of suspension, which are 10 out of the 11 schools. The estimated population for the study is 95. The sample group will come from two alternative schools utilizing a non-graded curriculum from the states of Ohio and Virginia. 19 African American males compose the sample group of the study. The goal of the study is to examine the extent of disproportionality of suspensions among African American males in alternative middle schools with a non-graded curriculum. Collection of archival data concerning student rosters and suspension data will occur between the academic years of 2008 and 2013. The suspension proportion and suspension rate for the sample group of the study will compare with the suspension proportion and suspension rate for all students from the same cluster of schools to establish suspension disproportionality for non-graded schools. The sample group's suspension disproportionality will compare with the study's control, suspension disproportionality data from the last decade for African American males at traditional middle schools. This comparison will determine the level significance that a non-graded curriculum has on the suspension disproportionality of African American males in middle school.

Sampling Frame

The goal of the study is for the sample group size to be as close to the total population of the study as possible. The use of a nonprobability, purposive sampling method was an attempt to conduct a total population study (Black, 1999). Finding all the middle schools utilizing an alternative curriculum was an extensive endeavor. Searching non-graded literature, conducting database and Internet searches, and questioning stakeholders of alternative middle schools were the primary means for creating the initial

school database of alternative middle schools. The researcher consulted all 11 known middle schools utilizing a non-graded curriculum for pre-approval of data collection prior to the proposal submission. Two schools agreed to release archival data pending Institutional Review Board (IRB) acceptance of the proposal. Four schools never responded to communication, including phone messages, certified letters, and e-mails. Three schools did not have enough African American males to protect their anonymity if they were to release data. One school declined to take part in the study because of reconstruction efforts in response to Hurricane Sandy in October 2012. Another school could not offer any suspension data because they do not use suspensions. There were exhaustive measures to include the aggregate population of the known sample group. The number of participants is 19 out of a plausible 95, assuming schools not reporting had similar enrollments of African American males as schools that did report.

Informed Consent and Confidentiality

The study will not require expressed informed consent from participants pending IRB's decision. The use of archival data and gaining permission from institutions to analyze secondary data reduce the need for informed consent from individuals (see Appendixes A, B, C, D, E, F). Participants are not individually enlisted; rather all-inclusive school data requests involve school administration. No student names or organization names will appear in the data sets or in the dissertation. Exclusion of schools with less than five African American males will protect student confidentiality. There will be no potential physical, psychological, or social potential risks to any participants. Obtaining formal written approval to use secondary data involves school administrators (see Appendixes A, B, C, D, E, F). Collected data will not include identifiers and be kept

on the researcher's home computer, which is password-locked. Maintenance of data will consist of three years of electronic and hard copies. The researcher will electronically delete data from the computer and shred physical data at the conclusion of the three-year period. Preserving anonymity and confidentiality by not revealing subject or institutional identity is a core concern for the study (Neuman, 2003).

Geographic Location

The schools and students in the study are from two states. States included are Ohio and Virginia. The schools represented are public and private entities from urban and suburban communities.

Data Collection

Data collection for the study will be from secondary sources provided by individual schools (see Appendix A, B, C, D, E, F). The data needed for the study are the total enrollment of students, the number of total students suspended, the total enrollment of African American males, and the number of African American males suspended. Suspension data only includes the number of students suspended not the cumulative number of suspensions. This exposes a conservative estimate of the use of suspensions. Combining data from both schools will result in the suspension proportion and suspension rate for African American males.

Once the number of students suspended for all students of the sample group is known, the number of African American males suspended will compare to produce the suspension proportion for African American males in alternative middle schools utilizing a non-graded curriculum. A two-sample two tailed z -test will compare the suspension proportion for alternative schools with the known suspension proportions for traditional

schools, resulting in a level of statistical significance associated with alternative schooling curriculum methods. The calculation of the suspension rate of African American males in alternative schools will occur when the number of African American males suspended is known. A two-sample two tailed z -test will compare the suspension proportion for alternative schools with the known suspension proportions for traditional schools, resulting in a level of statistical significance associated with alternative schooling curriculum methods. Preserving anonymity and confidentiality by not revealing subject or institutional identity is necessary (Neuman, 2003). Alternative schools showing a lower percentage of suspension among all students, including African American males, is the expected finding. The expected finding is that alternative schools will have a lower proportion of suspensions and lower suspension rate for African American males.

Instrumentation

The comparison of suspension proportions and suspension rates among African American males in middle school between alternative schools with a non-graded curriculum and traditional schools with a graded curriculum will produce an acceptance or rejection of the null hypotheses and levels of significance through two-sample two tailed z -test instruments. Using the significance levels based on sample and population sizes, critical values are at the .10 alpha levels and will determine the acceptance or rejection of the null hypotheses. The calculated p -values and 90% confidence intervals will define the level of statistical significance concerning the type of curriculum and the suspension proportion and suspension rate of African American males in middle school (Salkind, 2003).

Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability are two important research terms that must be present in a study to increase the significance of the findings. A study can be reliable but not valid, yet, if a study is valid, it must be reliable (Salkind, 2003). Reliability is the ability of a test to repeat outcomes. Validity is the ability of a test to measure what it intends to measure (Salkind, 2003). If the dependent variable changes because of direct attribution to a change in the independent variable, a study is internally valid. If the results of a study are generalizable to a larger population, a study is externally valid. The study is reliable and valid, both internally and externally (Salkind, 2003).

Internal validity. Using identifiable suspension proportions and suspension rates, using a control, and attempting to study the total population of the study increases the internal validity of the study (Salkind, 2003). The experimental mortality is not a factor with the study. The proportion of suspensions and suspension rate will be drawn from a specific group of students at one point for each separate school resulting in an expeditious study, further increasing the internal validity.

External validity. Attempting to include the total population of the study also creates an increased level of external validity. Reducing the amount of external validity is important to the study. Considering the number of exclusions from the population group because of schools declining to release data and plausible unknown schools incorporating an alternative curriculum, there is minimal threat to external validity. The objective of the study is to keep from interfering with the outcome.

Reliability. Ensuring consistency of data results maintain the reliability of the study. The test instrument and the dependent variables safeguard reliability of the study. The two-sample two tailed z -tests of population proportions define the critical value at

the .10 alpha level, determining the acceptance or rejection of both null hypotheses. The calculated p-values and 90% confidence intervals will define the level of significance.

Data Analysis

The pursuit of the study is the level of influence each type of school curriculum has on the suspension proportion and suspension rate of African American males in middle school. The study will allow comparison between suspension proportions and suspension rates of African American males in traditional middle schools and African American males in alternative middle schools. The controls for the study are the levels of suspension proportion and suspension rate among African American males at traditional middle schools. This data originates from a study by Losen and Skiba (2010) who compiled suspension data for middle school students based on the Secondary Education Civil Rights Compliance Survey from the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights. The data will be in the form of percentages. The known control for suspension proportion is 22%. The known control for suspension rate is 28.3%. In an effort to answer the research questions and accept or reject the null hypotheses, the research study requires two-sample two tailed z -tests. Comparing the suspension proportion and suspension rate of the sample group with the suspension proportion and suspension rate of the control group provides the data needed to accept a conclusion.

The comparison of suspension proportions and suspension rates among African American males in middle school between alternative schools with a non-graded curriculum and traditional schools with a graded curriculum will produce levels of significance through two-sample two tailed z -tests of population proportions. Using the significance levels based on sample and population sizes, critical values are at the .10

alpha levels and will determine the acceptance or rejection of the null hypotheses. The calculated p-values and 90% confidence intervals will define the levels of statistical significance concerning the type of curriculum and the suspension proportion and suspension rate of African American males in middle school (Salkind, 2003). Assessing the proportion of suspensions and suspension rate among African American males creates approximately normal data distribution with some assumptions about the parameters. This allows use of the parametric two-sample two tailed z -tests of population proportions, statistically powerful statistical procedures (Hoskin, n.d.)

Summary

The purpose of the quantitative, causal-comparative study is to investigate the extent of disproportionality and elevated rate of suspensions among African American males in middle schools with a non-graded curriculum. To achieve this purpose, suspension disproportionality data from alternative schools will compare with suspension disproportionality data from traditional schools. Two-sample two tailed z -tests will help determine the extent of disproportionality among African American males at alternative middle school. Carefully chosen variables, instruments, and inclusive research create a generalizable and replicable study. The results of the study will establish the statistical significance of curriculum influence on suspension disproportionality. Chapter 4 consists of the presentation and discussion of results and analysis of the quantitative, causal-comparative study.

Chapter 4: Results

African American males experience an achievement gap in traditional education in America. This gap is most evident, behaviorally, at the middle school level (Losen & Skiba, 2010). Schools suspend African American male at a disproportionate rate in traditional middle schools utilizing a graded curriculum (Losen & Skiba, 2010). African American males make up 8.7% of the U.S. middle school student population yet account for 22% of all suspensions. Schools suspend 28.3% of African American males in traditional middle schools using a graded curriculum compared to 11% of all students (Krezmien, Leone, & Achilles, 2006; Losen & Skiba, 2010; Planty et al., 2009). There is minimal research investigating the causes of this phenomenon at the middle school level. One posited theory about the cause involves the relationship between behavior and grades. The researcher investigates the causation, if any, between removing grades from the school experience and the suspension proportion and rate of African American males in middle school.

The purpose of this quantitative, causal-comparative study is to investigate the extent of disproportionality and elevated rate of suspensions among African American males in middle schools with a non-graded curriculum. The study attempts to establish what, if any, statistically significant difference exists between the independent variable, type of school curriculum assessment, and the dependent variables, suspension proportion and suspension rate. For this reason, a quantitative study is most appropriate (Black, 1999). The comparison of suspension proportions and suspension rates among African American males in middle school between alternative schools with a non-graded curriculum and traditional schools with a graded curriculum will produce levels of

significance through two-sample two tailed z -tests of population proportions. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the statistical analyses of African American males' suspension proportion and rate between traditional and alternative middle schools, concluding with a summary of the results.

Research Questions

The research questions and hypotheses of the quantitative, causal-comparative study are:

R1: What, if any, statistically significant difference exists in the proportion of suspensions among African American males between traditional middle schools utilizing a graded curriculum and alternative middle schools utilizing a non-graded curriculum?

R2: What, if any, statistically significant difference exists in the rate of suspensions among African American males between traditional middle schools utilizing a graded curriculum and alternative middle schools utilizing a non-graded curriculum?

Hypotheses

The hypotheses of the study are:

H₁₀: The null hypothesis is the proportion of suspensions is not statistically significantly different for African American males attending alternative middle schools utilizing a non-graded curriculum compared to African American males attending traditional middle schools utilizing a graded curriculum.

H_{1a}: The alternative hypothesis is the proportion of suspensions is statistically significantly different for African American males attending alternative middle schools utilizing a non-graded curriculum compared to African American males attending traditional middle schools utilizing a graded curriculum.

H2₀: The null hypothesis is the suspension rate is not statistically significantly different for African American males attending alternative middle schools utilizing a non-graded curriculum compared to African American males attending traditional middle schools utilizing a graded curriculum.

H2_a: The alternative hypothesis is the suspension rate is statistically significantly different for African American males attending alternative middle schools utilizing a non-graded curriculum compared to African American males attending traditional middle schools utilizing a graded curriculum.

Data Collection

Data collection for the study will be from secondary sources provided by individual schools (see Appendix A, B, C, D, E, F). The data needed for the study are the total enrollment of students, the number of total students suspended, the total enrollment of African American males, and the number of African American males suspended. Suspension data only includes the number of students suspended not the cumulative number of suspensions. Combining data from both schools will result in the suspension proportion and suspension rate for African American males.

The number of students suspended for all students of the targeted sample group compares to the number of African American males suspended, producing the suspension proportion for African American males in alternative middle schools utilizing a non-graded curriculum. A two-sample two tailed z-test compares the suspension proportion for alternative schools with the known suspension proportions for traditional schools, resulting in a level of statistical significance associated with alternative schooling curriculum methods. The number of African American males suspended as compared to

the total student group determines the suspension rate of African American males in alternative schools. A two-sample two tailed z -test will compare the suspension rate for alternative schools with the known suspension rate for traditional schools, resulting in a level of statistical significance associated with alternative schooling curriculum methods. Using the significance levels based on sample and population sizes, critical values are at the .10 alpha levels and will determine the acceptance or rejection of the null hypotheses. The calculated p -values and 90% confidence intervals will define the level of statistical significance concerning the type of curriculum and the suspension proportion and suspension rate of African American males in middle school (Salkind, 2003).

Findings

After collection of the data for both research questions, the researcher performed a two-sample two tailed z -test. The researcher utilized Addinsoft's XLSTAT 2013 statistical analysis Microsoft Excel add-in software program to perform both z -tests. Use of the standard formula for a z -test for comparison of proportions tested both null hypotheses.

Equation
$$z = \frac{(\hat{p}_1 - \hat{p}_2) - (p_1 - p_2)}{\sqrt{\bar{p}\bar{q}\left(\frac{1}{n_1} + \frac{1}{n_2}\right)}}$$

The results of the first z -test revealed an acceptance of the null hypothesis, H_{10} : The null hypothesis is the proportion of suspensions is not statistically significantly different for African American males attending alternative middle schools utilizing a non-graded curriculum compared to African American males attending traditional middle schools utilizing a graded curriculum. The results of the second z -test revealed a rejection

of the null hypothesis, H₂₀: The null hypothesis is the suspension rate is not statistically significantly different for African American males attending alternative middle schools utilizing a non-graded curriculum compared to African American males attending traditional middle schools utilizing a graded curriculum. Table 2 provides a summary of participants and findings. The numbers used for the rows labeled 6-8 All #, 6-8 A. A. Male #, 6-8 All Suspended #, and 6-8 A. A. Male Suspended # are estimates based on the data collection by the U. S. Department of Education (2012). The raw data collected includes total population of all students, including each demographic subgroup from pre-K through 12th grade for a total of 13 different grade levels. The researcher used the total numbers for all students and African American male students and divided it by 13 to produce the individual grade level estimates for the study.

TABLE 2

Participant and Raw Data Summary

Sample Group	Traditional	Alternative
6-8 All #	10,392,378	1451
6-8 A.A. Male #	904,905	19
6-8 All Suspended #	1,143,161	14
6-8 A. A. Male Suspended #	253,373	1
6-8 Proportion of Suspensions by A. A. Males	22%	7.1%
6-8 All Suspension Rate	11%	.96%
6-8 A. A. Male Suspension Rate	28%	5.3%

Proportion of suspensions by African American males.

H_{10} : The null hypothesis is the proportion of suspensions is not statistically significantly different for African American males attending alternative middle schools utilizing a non-graded curriculum compared to African American males attending traditional middle schools utilizing a graded curriculum.

A z -test for difference in proportions was applied to data. The z -score value of 1.353 did not fall within the critical region marked by ± 1.645 . The p -value was 0.176 with alpha 0.10 (see Table 3). If the researcher were to accept the null hypothesis at the 90% confidence level, the risk would be 17.62%. The researcher does not reject the null hypothesis. As a result, the data did not support the alternative hypothesis.

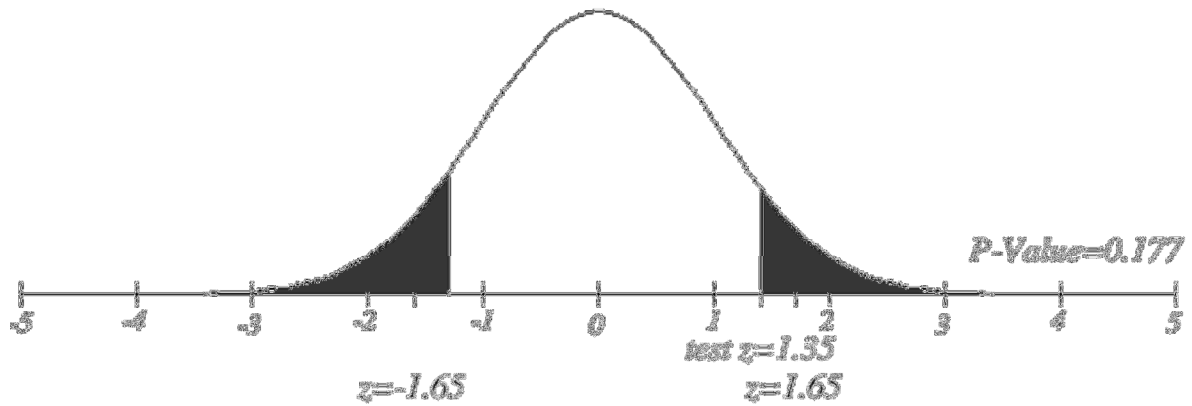
TABLE 3

Z-Test for Comparison of Proportion of Suspensions of African American Males between Traditional and Alternative Middle Schools

	Traditional	Alternative
Observations	1,143,161	14
Proportion	0.221	0.071
Difference	0.150	
Z Observed	1.353	
Z Critical (Two Tailed)	1.645	
P Value (Two Tailed)	0.176	
Alpha	0.10	

FIGURE 1

Z-Score Hypothesis Test Graph for Comparison of Proportion of Suspensions of African American Males between Traditional and Alternative Middle Schools



Percentage of African American males suspended.

H_{20} : The null hypothesis is the suspension rate is not statistically significantly different for African American males attending alternative middle schools utilizing a non-graded curriculum compared to African American males attending traditional middle schools utilizing a graded curriculum.

A z-test for difference in suspension rate was applied to data. The z-score value of 2.207 does fall within the critical region marked by ± 1.645 . The p-value was 0.027, with alpha 0.10 (see Table 4). If the researcher were to accept the null hypothesis at the 90% confidence level, the risk would be less than 2.73%. The researcher rejects the null hypothesis. Therefore, the data supports the alternative hypothesis.

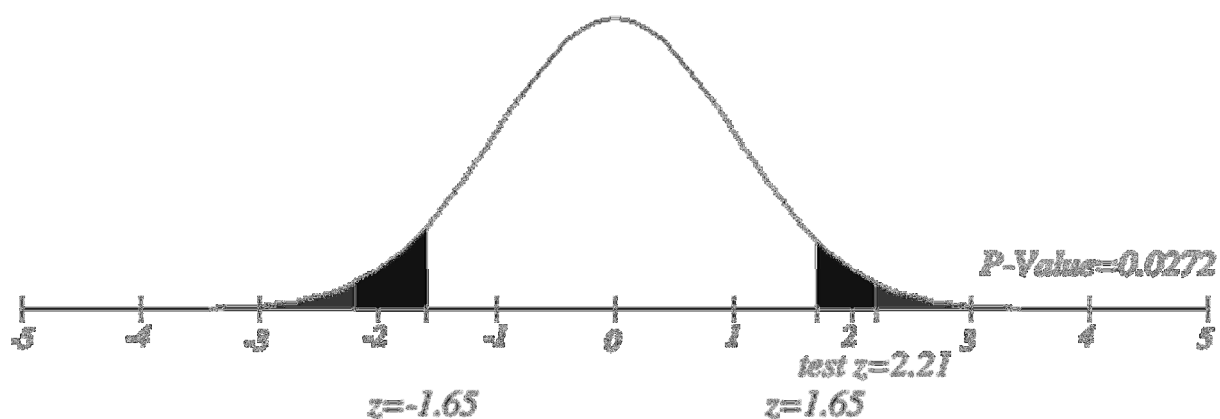
TABLE 4

Z-Test for Percentage of African American Males Suspended between Traditional and Alternative Middle Schools

	Traditional	Alternative
Observations	904,905	19
Frequency	253,373	1
Difference	0.227	
Z Observed	2.207	
Z Critical (Two Tailed)	1.645	
P Value (Two Tailed)	0.027	
Alpha	0.10	

FIGURE 2

Z-Score Hypothesis Test Graph for Percentage of African American Males Suspended between Traditional and Alternative Middle Schools



Summary

Discussion in Chapter 4 included data collection, demographics of the study, and the analysis of data. The researcher did not reject the null hypothesis concerning the comparison of proportion of suspensions ($H1_0$) but did reject the null hypothesis in regard to the comparison of suspension rates ($H2_0$). The difference in the proportion of suspensions among African American males in traditional middle schools versus alternative middle schools was not found to be statistically significant. However, the difference in the rate of suspensions among African American males in traditional middle schools versus alternative middle schools was found to be statistically significant. In Chapter 5 the researcher will further discuss the results and implications of the research, including suggestions and recommendations for further research

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

The purpose of this quantitative, causal-comparative study was to investigate the extent of disproportionality and elevated rate of suspensions among African American males in middle schools with a non-graded curriculum. The substantial achievement gap between African American males and other population subgroups inspired the reasoning for the purpose of the study. In particular, the behavioral achievement gap between African American males and other population subgroups at the middle school level is alarming. The following includes research questions and hypotheses of the study. The research questions of the study are:

R1: What, if any, statistically significant difference exists in the proportion of suspensions among African American males between traditional middle schools utilizing a graded curriculum and alternative middle schools utilizing a non-graded curriculum?

R2: What, if any, statistically significant difference exists in the rate of suspensions among African American males between traditional middle schools utilizing a graded curriculum and alternative middle schools utilizing a non-graded curriculum?

The hypotheses of the study are:

H₁₀: The null hypothesis is the proportion of suspensions is not statistically significantly different for African American males attending alternative middle schools utilizing a non-graded curriculum compared to African American males attending traditional middle schools utilizing a graded curriculum.

H_{1a}: The alternative hypothesis is the proportion of suspensions is statistically

significantly different for African American males attending alternative middle schools utilizing a non-graded curriculum compared to African American males attending traditional middle schools utilizing a graded curriculum.

H₂₀: The null hypothesis is the suspension rate is not statistically significantly different for African American males attending alternative middle schools utilizing a non-graded curriculum compared to African American males attending traditional middle schools utilizing a graded curriculum.

H_{2a}: The alternative hypothesis is the suspension rate is statistically significantly different for African American males attending alternative middle schools utilizing a non-graded curriculum compared to African American males attending traditional middle schools utilizing a graded curriculum.

The research questions of the study required a comparison between independent traditional and alternative samples of proportion. The first comparison made concerned the African American male proportion of suspensions between traditional and alternative middle schools. The second comparison made concerned the suspension rate of African American males between traditional and alternative middle schools. A two-sample two tailed *z*-test of proportions allowed comparison of the traditional sample to the alternative sample for both research questions. A 90% confidence interval was the result of low participant numbers of the alternative sample group, which was an attempted total population sample. This research design method attributed to appropriate levels of significance for both hypotheses tests.

There were three limitations in the study, which could influence the results. The first limitation is the disciplinary techniques could vary widely between a traditional

middle school and an alternative middle school. The second limitation is that the participant numbers were low for the sample group of alternative students. The third limitation is the proportion of African American males in the alternative sample group is not representative of the proportion of African American males in the traditional sample group. The percentage of African American males in the sample group is 1.2% compared to the control percentage of 8.7% nationally. The researcher attempted to conduct a whole population study as a delimitation.

The researcher considers all research, data, limitations, and delimitations when making conclusions, considering implications, and proposing recommendations. Chapter 5 will include conclusions of the research, implications to leadership, and recommendations for future research. Discussion of the importance of the findings, conclusion of the research, implication of the research to leadership in education, and recommendations for future research are central concluding facets of Chapter 5.

Conclusions

The first research question was what, if any, statistically significant difference exists in the proportion of suspensions among African American males between traditional middle schools utilizing a graded curriculum and alternative middle schools utilizing a non-graded curriculum? In traditional middle schools, schools suspend African American males 2.53 times more than any other population subgroup (Losen & Skiba, 2010). Educational theories and previous research suggest that alternative schools are a positive influence for African American males (Pavan, 1992; Ormrod, 2004). The purpose of the study was to determine if an alternative curriculum influenced the proportion of suspensions encountered by African American males in middle school.

R1: What, if any, statistically significant difference exists in the proportion of suspensions among African American males between traditional middle schools utilizing a graded curriculum and alternative middle schools utilizing a non-graded curriculum?

H₁₀: The null hypothesis is the proportion of suspensions is not statistically significantly different for African American males attending alternative middle schools utilizing a non-graded curriculum compared to African American males attending traditional middle schools utilizing a graded curriculum.

A z-test for difference in proportions was applied to data. The z-score value of 1.353 did not fall within the critical region marked by ± 1.645 . The p-value was 0.176, with alpha 0.10 (see Table 3). The researcher fails to reject the null hypothesis.

The results are meaningful because the data suggests that there is no difference in the proportion of African American males suspended in the alternative setting versus the traditional setting. Schools suspend African American males 2.53 times more than any population subgroup in traditional schools and 5.46 times more than any population subgroup in alternative schools. The proportion of suspensions by African American males more than doubled for the targeted sample group of African American students from middle schools utilizing an alternative curriculum. One purpose of the study was to investigate the extent of disproportionality among African American males in middle schools with a non-graded curriculum. The research problem of suspension disproportionality still exists at middle schools with an alternative curriculum.

The second research question was what, if any, statistically significant difference exists in the rate of suspensions among African American males between traditional

middle schools utilizing a graded curriculum and alternative middle schools utilizing a non-graded curriculum? Schools suspend 28.3% of African American males in traditional middle schools utilizing a graded curriculum (Krezmien, Leone, & Achilles, 2006; Losen & Skiba, 2010; Planty et al., 2009). Given the relationship between middle school suspensions and future prison enrollment, this statistic is troublesome (Balfanz, Spiridakis, Neild, & Legters, 2003). The suspension rate of African American males is significantly higher than any population subgroup (Losen & Skiba, 2010).

R2: What, if any, statistically significant difference exists in the rate of suspensions among African American males between traditional middle schools utilizing a graded curriculum and alternative middle schools utilizing a non-graded curriculum?

H₂₀: The null hypothesis is the suspension rate is not statistically significantly different for African American males attending alternative middle schools utilizing a non-graded curriculum compared to African American males attending traditional middle schools utilizing a graded curriculum.

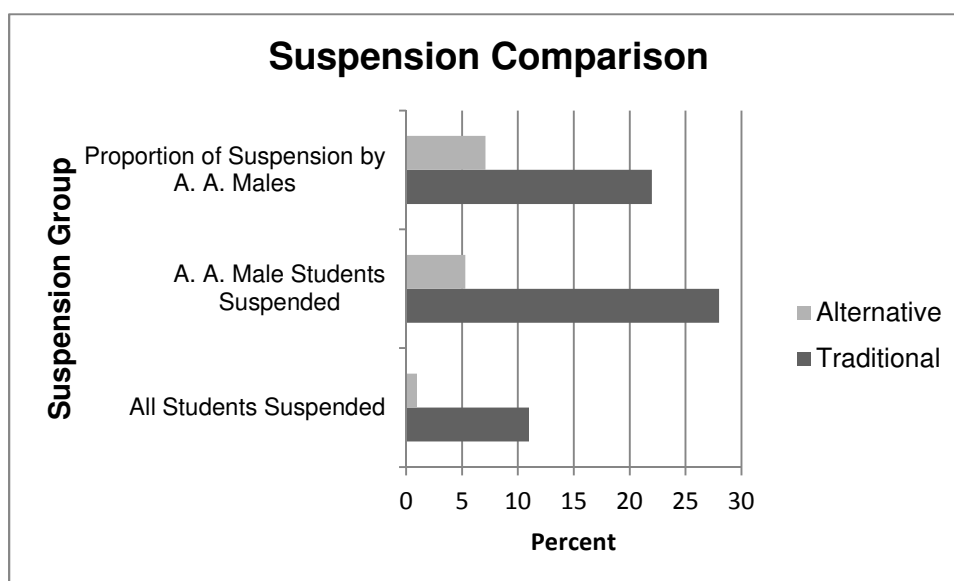
A z-test for difference in suspension rate was applied to data. The z-score value of 2.207 does fall within the critical region marked by ± 1.645 . The p-value was 0.027, with alpha 0.10 (see Table 4). The researcher rejects the null hypothesis.

The results of the study are encouraging because the data suggests there is a difference in the percentage of African American males suspended in the alternative setting versus the traditional setting. The suspension rate of African American males decreased by 528% in alternative schools. Schools suspend 28% of African American males in traditional middle schools compared to 5.3% of African American males in alternative middle schools. The suspension rate of all students decreased from 11% in

traditional middle schools to .96% in alternative middle schools. The decrease of 1145% for all students was more than double the decrease experienced by African American males (see figure 3). Although the suspension rate decreased more dramatically for all students, the suspension rate of African American males did decrease substantially.

FIGURE 3

Suspension Comparison between Traditional and Alternative Schools



The findings of the study are consistent with the theoretical bases and previous research influencing the study. The research results are consistent with theories that alternative schools may be beneficial for African American males (Pavan, 1992; Ormrod, 2004). Suspension rates decreased 528% in the alternative school setting. This finding is a positive result for African American males. The alternative setting was also beneficial for all students. The suspension rate decreased by 1145% for all students. The findings align with the research of Kohn. Kohn (1999, 2012) cites three robust conclusions about using grades for assessment of students: grades diminish student interest in whatever they

are learning, grades create a preference for the easiest task, and grades tend to decrease higher level thinking. Increasing motivation and using innovation curriculum structures decrease problem behaviors, especially at-risk youth (Curwin, 2010).

Despite the findings of reduced suspension rates among African American males in alternative middle schools, a significant suspension disproportionality remains. This is consistent with previous research indicating that African American males receive harsher treatment than other students (McCadden, 1998; Skiba et al., 2000). Suspension disproportionality continues to exist in an environment absent of numerical grading. This is correspondingly consistent with Ogbu's (1986, 2004) theory of cultural opposition. Ogbu claims that African American male misbehavior is not a result of low grades or an acting out in fear of the peer perception of making high grades. Rather, Ogbu posits that African American male misbehavior is a result of defying perception by peers as acting White by exhibiting White behaviors in the classroom. The results of the study should not affect existing theories about the suspension disproportionality of African American males.

The researcher concludes that middle schools with an alternative curriculum are beneficial to all students, including African American males. Although the alternative curriculum sample participant numbers were low, the attempted total population study indicated statistically significant results at the alpha level of 0.10 in regard to the suspension rate of African American males in a middle school with an alternative curriculum. If the researcher were to accept the null hypothesis at the 90% confidence level, the risk would be less than 2.73%.

One alternative explanation of the findings could be that the African American males in the study were of a higher socioeconomic status than the national demographics of African American males. This alternative explanation is unlikely as the participant numbers for all students in middle schools with an alternative curriculum were numerous and their suspension rate decreased radically. The relationship between prominent theories, previous research, and the findings of the study influence the implications of the study and recommendations for future research.

Implications and Recommendations

The implications of the study de-emphasize high-stakes evaluation and encourage innovative solutions. Leaders in education can use the results of the study to evaluate the short-term and long-term effects of high-stakes testing on the achievement of all students, including African American males. The future must consist of innovative solutions to direct education in a more positive direction and reduce the educational achievement gap. Innovative solutions include further research concerning the causes of the achievement gap, the cause of suspension disproportionality, and successful strategies to reduce the achievement gap and suspension disproportionality. Careful consideration of the role of assessment in education is critical. Educational leaders must continue to advocate for pioneering system changes marked by theory and data. Educational leaders must focus on constructive remedies not punitive measures. Global leaders can use the results of the study to support the mission of education and acknowledge the gaps in achievement to partner better with educational institutions. The solution requires universal cooperation.

Recommendations for future research include conducting a study across all grade levels, including socioeconomic status as an additional independent variable. Participant

numbers for African American males may still be low for this recommended study. A qualitative case study about the effects of an alternative curriculum on African American males would be a strong recommendation given low participant numbers.

Focusing on standards-based grading would be an alternative solution to this problem. Standards-based grading removes behavior as a precursor for grades (Marzano, 2009). Removing behavior from grading is consistent with the direction of the study and would offer further clarification about the effect of grading on suspension disproportionality among African American males. The population of participants to sample would be much larger because the number of schools utilizing standards-based grading is substantial and increasing (Marzano, 2009). Increasing the sample group number and increasing the confidence interval will further increase the validity of the research.

The study raised two questions of the researcher. The first question was why there were so few African American males in the sample group. There were only 19 African American male data participants across a four-year span between two schools with a combined population of 1,451 data participants from the states of Ohio and Virginia. African American males accounted for merely 1.3% of the population in the study but 8.7% nationally.

The other question raised was what disciplinary techniques are most successful for alternative schools. The suspension rate of all students decreased by 1145% in middle schools utilizing an alternative curriculum. The significant decrease in suspension rate suggests alternative methods of discipline replace traditional in school or out of school suspensions for major disciplinary infractions.

Lowering suspension rates long-term and nationwide should be a goal of American education. Educational stakeholders must demand a change in philosophy of disciplinary measures used in traditional schools. Schools are not safer, the educational achievement gap continues to grow, and disparate suspension and expulsion rates for African Americans are intolerable and worsening (Martinez, 2009; Kirp, 2010; Advancement Project, 2010).

Summary

The suspension disproportionality of African American males is a problem education and society cannot ignore. The study attempted to establish the relationship, if any, between the type of curriculum and the suspension proportion and suspension rate experienced by African American males in middle school. This causal-comparative study found a statistically significant difference in the suspension rates of African American males between middle schools with a traditional curriculum and alternative curriculum but did not find a statistically significant difference in the proportion of African American males between middle schools utilizing a traditional curriculum and alternative curriculum. The suspension rate of African American males is significantly lower in alternative middle school but their proportion of suspensions is not. Implications to leadership and recommendations for further research were gleaned from the study.

It is the researcher's belief that high-stakes testing and utilization of graded curricula attribute to the elevated rate of suspensions among African American males. There is a need for further research to clarify the contributing factors to the disproportionality of suspensions. African American males are becoming an endangered species in the American education system. The travesty of the achievement gap in

America is assumed by the country's leaders. There is a problem. There is a solution.

There must be action.

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Appendix A: Preliminary Consent E-mail Central Academy

Ms. Dennis:

My name is Matt Endsley and I am a doctoral learner at the University of Phoenix and assistant principal at Clark High School in Plano, TX. I am currently in the process of submitting my dissertation proposal to the Institutional Review Board at the University of Phoenix. I am seeking permission from three to five schools to allow me use of archival data for my research study prior to my proposal submission.

The working title of my dissertation is *Non-Graded Curriculum Influence on Suspensions among African American Males in Middle Schools: A Quantitative Study*. The purpose of this quantitative, causal-comparative study is to investigate the extent of disproportionality of suspensions among African American males in middle schools with a non-graded curriculum. If available, I will use archival suspension data dating back to 2008. If that specific data is not available, I can use the most current data. I would need the following pieces of data from Central Academy:

- Total population of sixth through eighth grade students
- Total population of sixth through eighth grade African American males
- Total number of sixth through eighth grade students suspended (in school or out of school suspensions)
- Total number of sixth through eighth grade African American males suspended (in school or out of school suspensions)

If the aforementioned information is not readily available, I am willing to sort through all the raw records myself to retrieve the data needed for my study. I believe what Central Academy is doing is an amazing pursuit of sagacity for a broad range of students. My mission is to further the cause for non-graded schools and shed light on an issue with a struggling subpopulation of students in traditional schools. Central Academy data, along with two to four other schools serving sixth through eighth grade students, will help add needed data to the current literature base. Your students and school's identity will remain anonymous in the dissertation. Central Academy's data will be compiled with other non-graded schools data to make up the sample population group for the study.

Please call me at your earliest convenience at 817-312-7334. Feel free to also contact my dissertation committee chair, Dr. Regina Carter-Trice, with any further questions:

DrRTrice@email.phoenix.edu

DrRLT@comcast.net

(773) 457-5197

I am attaching my current proposal for your accessibility.

Kindest regards,

Matt Endsley

Doctoral Learner | University of Phoenix

817.312.7334 | endsley_matt@yahoo.com

Appendix B: Preliminary Consent E-mail Community School

Ms. Hirst:

My name is Matt Endsley and I am a doctoral learner at the University of Phoenix and assistant principal at Clark High School in Plano, TX. I am currently in the process of submitting my dissertation proposal to the Institutional Review Board at the University of Phoenix. I am seeking permission from three to five schools to allow me use of archival data for my research study prior to my proposal submission.

The working title of my dissertation is *Non-Graded Curriculum Influence on Suspensions among African American Males in Middle Schools: A Quantitative Study*. The purpose of this quantitative, causal-comparative study is to investigate the extent of disproportionality of suspensions among African American males in middle schools with a non-graded curriculum. If available, I will use archival suspension data dating back to 2008. If that specific data is not available, I can use the most current data. I would need the following pieces of data from Community School:

- Total population of sixth through eighth grade students
- Total population of sixth through eighth grade African American males
- Total number of sixth through eighth grade students suspended (in school or out of school suspensions)
- Total number of sixth through eighth grade African American males suspended (in school or out of school suspensions)

If the aforementioned information is not readily available, I am willing to sort through all the raw records myself to retrieve the data needed for my study. I believe what Community School is doing is an amazing pursuit of sagacity for a broad range of students. My mission is to further the cause for non-graded schools and shed light on an issue with a struggling subpopulation of students in traditional schools. Community School data, along with two to four other schools serving sixth through eighth grade students, will help add needed data to the current literature base. Your students and school's identity will remain anonymous in the dissertation. Community School's data will be compiled with other non-graded schools for the sample group of the study.

Please call me at your earliest convenience at 817-312-7334. Feel free to also contact my dissertation committee chair, Dr. Regina Carter-Trice, with any further questions:

DrRTrice@email.phoenix.edu

DrRLT@comcast.net

(773) 457-5197

I am attaching my current proposal for your accessibility.

Kindest regards,

Matt Endsley

Doctoral Learner | University of Phoenix

817.312.7334 | endsley_matt@yahoo.com

Appendix C: Preliminary Approval E-mail Central Academy

Mr. Endsley,

I have asked my secretary, Mrs. Sherry LeForce, to contact you with the information you have asked for.

Best Wishes,

Jenny

Mrs. Jennifer Dennis
Principal
Central Academy
Middletown City Schools
(513)420-4537

Appendix D: Preliminary Consent E-mail Community School

Mr. Endsley,

Because we are such a small school, there is no need to travel to gather the data. If the previously e-mailed questions are all that you need, it will take me a minimal amount of time to gather and send the data to you.

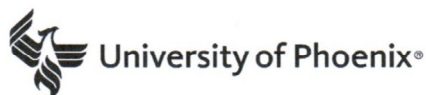
You may mail the form to me at the following address:

Community School
7815 Williamson Rd.
Roanoke, VA 24019

Kind regards,

Holly A. Hirst, M.Ed.
Director
Community School

Appendix E: Data Access and Use Permission Central Academy



DATA ACCESS AND USE PERMISSION

Central Academy

Please check mark any of the following statements that you approve regarding the study and data described below:

- ☒ I hereby authorize Matt Endsley, a student of University of Phoenix who is conducting a research study titled or described as follows, Non-Graded Curriculum Influence on Suspensions of African American Males: A Quantitative Study, access to, and use of, the non-identifiable archival data described as follows: total student population in grades 6-8, total number of students suspended in grades 6-8, total student population of African American males in grades 6-8, and total number of African American males suspended in grades 6-8 for use in the aforementioned research study. In granting this permission, I understand the following (please check mark each of the following as applicable):
- ☒ The data will be maintained in a secure and confidential manner.
 - ☒ The data may be used in the publication of results from this study.
 - ☒ This research study must have IRB approval at the University of Phoenix before access to the data identified here is provided to Matt Endsley.
 - ☒ Access to, and use of, this data will not be transferred to any other person without my/our express written consent.
 - ☐ The source of the data may be identified in the publication of the results of this study.
 - ☒ Relevant information associated with this data will be available to the dissertation chair, dissertation committee, and school as may be needed for educational purposes.

Jennifer Dennis

Print Name

11/15/12

Date

Jennifer Dennis

Signature

[Signature]

Researcher Signature/Acknowledgement

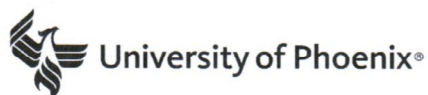
Title Principal, Central Academy

Date 11/8/12

Address 4601 Sophie Ave. Middletown Ohio 45044

Current version 032012

Appendix F: Data Access and Use Permission Community School



DATA ACCESS AND USE PERMISSION

Community School

Please check mark any of the following statements that you approve regarding the study and data described below:

☒ I hereby authorize Matt Endsley, a student of University of Phoenix who is conducting a research study titled or described as follows, Non-Graded Curriculum Influence on Suspensions of African American Males: A Quantitative Study, access to, and use of, the non-identifiable archival data described as follows: total student population in grades 6-8, total number of students suspended in grades 6-8, total student population of African American males in grades 6-8, and total number of African American males suspended in grades 6-8 for use in the aforementioned research study. In granting this permission, I understand the following (please check mark each of the following as applicable):

- ☒ The data will be maintained in a secure and confidential manner.
- ☒ The data may be used in the publication of results from this study.
- ☒ This research study must have IRB approval at the University of Phoenix before access to the data identified here is provided to Matt Endsley.
- ☒ Access to, and use of, this data will not be transferred to any other person without my/our express written consent.
- ☒ The source of the data may be identified in the publication of the results of this study.
- ☒ Relevant information associated with this data will be available to the dissertation chair, dissertation committee, and school as may be needed for educational purposes.

Holly A. Hirst
Print Name

11/15/12
Date

Holly A. Hirst
Signature

Matt Endsley
Researcher Signature/Acknowledgement

Title Executive Director

Date 11/8/12

Address 7815 Williamson Rd. Roanoke, VA 24019
Current version 032012