EXPLORATION OF CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS IN A SUBURBAN SCHOOL DISTRICT: EXAMINING RACIAL DISPARITIES IN DISCIPLINE-RELATED METRICS

by

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The overrepresentation of African American students in exclusionary discipline such as out-of-school suspensions and Alternative Education for Disruptive Youth (AEDY) programs is well documented; however, there continues to be a gap in the disciplinary response between the ways African American students are disciplined compared to students of other races (Gregory and Weinstein, 2007). District policies and practices such as zero tolerance mandates hold implications for the racial inequity that still exists in education (Triplett, Allen & Lewis, 2014). The inequitable distribution of disciplinary consequences became evident in Wildcat Pride School District (WPSD) when the district was audited by the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) during the 2013-2014 school year. The findings of the audit were that WPSD had an overrepresentation of African American students placed out of school for the purpose of suspensions and AEDY placements. This case study chronicles the suspension rates and placements into AEDY programs of African American students in WPSD from 2000-2015. This exploration of the changing demographics examines the racial disparities that arise through the lens of discipline-related metrics and offers a comparison to similar districts in Southwestern Pennsylvania. In researching the suspension rates and AEDY placement data, specific factors that were thought to have an impact on WPSD's demographic make-up were considered. These factors include the incorporation of the Ward Home, the merger with Duquesne City School

District, and the audit conducted by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. To test this theory, this study used secondary data analysis from documents and archives related to district and community demographics as well as data that is consistent with the discipline-related metrics. Data relating to suspension rates and AEDY placements were collected from WPSD's student database system and PDE's Safe Schools Reports. Other data sources include 2000 and 2010 census data as well as documents and artifacts relating to the audit conducted by PDE. Recommendations have been made that are specific to Wildcat Pride School District and address the changing demographic needs of all stakeholders.

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PREFACE

Education has always been an important aspect of my life. From a young age, my parents instilled in me the importance of higher education as well as setting goals that are challenging but obtainable. For as long as I can remember, I have had a personal goal to achieve a doctorate in education. My educational journey began when I was just a little girl. I always loved to play school and pretend to be the teacher. I would use the basement steps as my classroom and write on the wall as if it was my chalkboard. This educational journey is just an extension of that little girl playing school. Although this educational journey is coming to an end, it has provided me with knowledge that will serve as the foundation of my future endeavors.

Because I have always had a passion for learning, I decided that I wanted to continue my education and earn an educational doctorate from the University of Pittsburgh. Although there have been challenges along the way, this experience has been extremely rewarding. Not only did it provide me the opportunity to grow as a practitioner by immersing me in literature that is relevant to my practice, it helped me to grow on a personal level by teaching me persistency and fortitude when faced with challenges and the importance of forging ahead especially when I was ready to give up. Most importantly, this experience has given me the opportunity to build relationships with other practitioners who share the same passion for education. The network of individuals that has been established through this program has created a professional community

that will continue to grow and evolve as we look to each other throughout our professional careers.

There are many people who contributed to my educational success that I would like to thank. First and foremost, I would like to thank my parents. They have always instilled in me the importance of a quality education and encouraged me to pursue my goals. Mom and dad, thank you from the bottom of my heart for your unwavering love and support. I could not have become the woman I am today without your guidance and I will be forever grateful for all that you have done for me. You have been there for me through thick and thin every step of the way. To my sisters, Tiffany and Melissa, although you thought I was crazy for going back to school, you both have offered continuous words of encouragement, especially when I needed it the most. Most importantly, I would like to dedicate this dissertation to two very special people, Camilla and Salvatore. Thank you for bringing so much joy to my life. I dedicate this to you because I want you to know that you can do anything as long as you set your mind to it.

There are many others that I would be remiss in not thanking. I would like to extend a special thank you to my advisor, Dr. Cynthia Tananis, who has guided me through this entire program, and my dissertation committee members, Dr. Carol Wooten and Dr. Jill Perry. I would also like to thank Wildcat Pride School District, and especially Mr. Donald Mac Fann, for agreeing to the framework of this study. Also from Wildcat Pride School District, I would like to thank Mrs. Cynthia McCoy for always helping me to find the information that I needed to ensure the fidelity of this study. Last but not least, I would like to thank my Pitt cohort colleagues Ken Bissell, Frank Hernandez, Ashley Nestor and Chris Shattuck. We have been each other's support system from day one of this program. Thank you for your continued support and friendship. I could not have made it through this program without you!

1.0   INTRODUCTION

Suspension rates are increasing across the United States as is the concern for the distribution of equitable education opportunities for African American students, who are at a disproportionate risk of suspension ("Schott Foundation," 2008). For the purpose of this research, students at disproportionate risk are defined as students who are more likely to fail academically due to variables that include students from low-socioeconomic groups, minority groups, and students with a lack of parental involvement (Hemphill, Plenty, Herrenkohl, Toumbourou & Catalano, 2014). Included in this concern for at-risk students is the understanding that students who are repeatedly suspended from school have an increased risk of academic failure and school dropout (Hemphill et al., 2014). There are many factors such as district policies, poverty levels, and the school environment that contribute to the increased suspension rates of African American students, that begin to negatively impact youth in early adolescence with a significant academic decline between grades five and six (Gutman, Sameroff, & Eccles, 2002). Because school districts are governed by federal, state, and local policies that determine the rules and regulations by which schools must abide, the policies are subject to interpretation by the individual implementing the policies. This can create an inequitable distribution of consequences that can hinder students and compromise their ability to advance in society (Taylor & Foster, 1986). Policies can also be interpreted differently by individual teachers and administrators, which may lead to a subjective approach to disciplinary practices. Many discipline problems arise in the

classroom because of an inability for students and teachers to relate to one another on a personal level (Sheets & Gay, 1996). Adding multiculturalism into the mix creates an even bigger challenge due to a lack of cultural understanding that exacerbates the effectiveness of classroom management for both novice and experienced teachers (Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke & Curran, 2004). This lack of understanding can cause an inequitable response to misunderstood student behaviors (Weinstein et al., 2004).

High suspension rates among African American students have become an area of great concern, not only in Wildcat Pride School District but also across the United States. According to the Schott Foundation (2008),

> The crisis of the education of Black males sits squarely in the middle of the crisis America faces as we work to create a world-class public education system that will support and maintain the values of a fair and equitable democratic society. (p. 3)

Some students reach high numbers of out-of-school suspensions due to repeated negative behavioral patterns. As a final response to the negative behaviors, students are removed from schools and placed in alternative educational programs as a means of discipline. Conflict arises when trying to balance being fair and consistent when addressing behavioral concerns in the classroom as well as implementing the policies of the district. Students who are removed from the class for disciplinary reasons miss valuable instructional time, which results in a lack of academic achievement (Hemphill et al., 2013). Studies have found that out-of-school suspensions have "a negative impact on self-respect, creates a stigma among peers, and increases the suspended student's contact with the delinquent subculture" (Costenbader & Markson, 1998, p. 59). Strategies for reducing or eliminating suspension rates must consider the causes of the behaviors (Hernandez & Gay, 1996).

Challenging behaviors are nothing new to the educational system; however, there are times when educators and educational leaders may assume that the problem lies within the individual child or place blame on their families. The true problem becomes the reaction to the student behaviors and identifying what is most appropriate based on the irreconcilable tensions exhibited by the student (Wearmouth, McKinney & Glynn, 2007). The interventions used to address these challenging behaviors tend to be harsh and punitive in nature (Wearmouth et al., 2007). Although students' "thinking and behavior are shaped by the social contexts in which they live and learn" (Wearmouth et al., 2007, p. 38), educational systems do not always identify the social contexts related to the challenging behavioral patterns when responding to negative student behaviors. Although educators and educational leaders recognize that behavior affects the learning process, the relationship between learning and the educational environment is not always considered. The learning environment may not be conducive, and it may actually be a contributing factor of negative student behavior (Vaandering, 2010). Due to the lack of consideration to the relationship between behavior and social contexts, student behaviors may be more negatively viewed, resulting in punitive consequences which lead to increased suspension rates, especially among African American students. Eitle and Eitle (2004) suggested that research indicates that Black students are suspended at a higher rate than their White peers. This overrepresentation presented by the disproportionate suspension rates is a form of re-segregation (Eitle & Eitle, 2004). In order to address the broader environmental impact of punitive disciplinary actions, strategies for reducing or eliminating suspension rates should consider the causes of the behaviors (Hernandez & Gay, 1996).

For the purpose of this dissertation, the terms suspension and out-of-school suspension hold the same meaning and Black and African American will be used interchangeably. This

study focuses on African American students. Students of other racial backgrounds as well as multiracial backgrounds have not been included in this study because the audit that was conducted by the Pennsylvania Department of Education during the 2013-2014 school year was specific to African American students.

1.1   INQUIRY QUESTIONS

Wildcat Pride School District has a unique demographic history that includes several communities and key events that have affected the overall school community. This problem of practice looks to explore the demographic changes that have had an effect on racial disparities and disciplinary outcomes in the Wildcat Pride School District over a span of fifteen years. The key events that are considered are the inclusion of the Ward Home into Wildcat Pride School District in school year 2000-2001, the consolidation and merger of the Duquesne City School District with the Wildcat Pride School District in school year 2007-2008, and the audit[1] that was conducted by the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) during the 2013-2014 school year.

The inquiry questions identified for this problem of practice have been established to paint a picture of the Wildcat Pride School District's demographic history and to relate those changes across time with key events that have happened within the communities that make up

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[1] A formal inquiry of students assigned to disciplinary placements in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania was conducted by the United States Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division. This inquiry prompted the Pennsylvania Department of Education to conduct an audit of school districts that showed disproportionate percentages of African American students in disciplinary placements outside of the normal school settings.

Wildcat Pride School District. The inquiry questions also address the relationship between the changes in history to the changes in suspension rates and how these changes relate to surrounding school districts in Southwestern Pennsylvania. The following questions guided this research:

Q1.   What is the demographic history of Wildcat Pride School District

(WPSD) from 2000-2015? How do the changes across time relate to key events

within WPSD?

Q2.   Are the changes in WPSD from 2000-2015 similar to school districts in

Southwestern Pennsylvania?

Q3.   How do the rates of suspension change in relation to the changing racial

demographics in WPSD?

Q4.   What were the rates of suspension and AEDY placements overall and by race,

before and after the state audit?

2.0   REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this chapter, I review literature related to factors that identify students at disproportionate risk of suspension and other disciplinary responses that remove students from the normal school setting. The effect of federal, state, and local policies on suspension rates is also reviewed. Literature relating to culturally responsive teaching strategies and professional development has also been included in order to address a proactive means of intervention for negative student behavior instead of punitive consequences that result in lost instructional time and risk the academic success of the student.

Addressing student behavior that has a negative impact on the instructional process can be a challenging task. When implementing district policies, consideration should be given to the factors that contribute to the behaviors, especially factors such as teacher/student interactions and a teacher's response to challenging student behaviors (Fenning & Rose, 2007). The ways in which district policies are written contribute to increased rates of out-of-school suspensions because they do not specifically address the underlying issue (Fenning & Rose, 2007). Discipline policies focus on punitive consequences, such as suspension, and fail to address proactive measures that teach students alternative behaviors (Fenning & Rose, 2007). These punitive measures used in response to student behavior tend to disproportionately affect minority students (Fenning & Rose, 2007).

It benefits the educational process when educators are able to recognize the advantages of culturally responsive interactions with students and how it affects their behavior (Milner, 2013). In recognizing their biases, teachers are more likely to reflect on how their biases affect their interactions with students (Metropolitan Center for Urban Education, 2008). Their adapted expectations influence student behaviors and expectations for learning (Metropolitan Center for Urban Education, 2008). By providing a culturally responsive teaching environment, students are provided with optimized learning opportunities that are tailored to fit their individual needs through instructional practices that address their cultural differences (Milner, 2013).

2.1   STUDENTS AT DISPROPORTIONATE RISK

Sullivan, Van Norman, and Klingbeil's (2014) findings showed that suspending students at disproportionate risk is ineffective for reducing inappropriate behavior. The outcomes of suspending students who are at disproportionate risk can be detrimental to the social, emotional and academic success of the student. Exclusionary discipline can lead to disengagement, academic failure, and increased dropout rates (Sullivan et al., 2014). By reflecting on the cultural and societal norms within their classrooms, teachers can adapt rules and expectations to align with the needs of their students. In doing so, students can be provided a free and appropriate public education guided by teachers, administrators, and all stakeholders who ensure equity within the constructs of the district. Furthermore, education should not be standardized with a one-size-fits-all approach. Milner (2013) addressed this gap in educational practices through a comparison of White students and other racial groups of students. Through this comparison, Milner (2013) posed that standardization suggests that all students are provided with

equal opportunity and live in similar environments, which is contrary to the diverse backgrounds students bring to their educational efforts.

Contributing factors can be used to identify and help recognize students who are at-risk through a tiered process that does not ignore race (Ganao, Silvestre & Glenn, 2013). Implementing meaningful and effective strategies within schools can address the loss of instruction due to the disproportionate rate of African American suspensions (Ganao et al., 2013). Through the examination of district policies and the incorporation of effective professional development that empowers educators to confidently and efficiently implement culturally responsive educational strategies, we can begin to address the overrepresentation of African American students in exclusionary discipline programs.

In order to ensure the success of all students, it is important to diagnose the cause of their negative behavior (Sheets & Gay, 1996). Once contributing factors have identified students who may be disproportionately at risk of high suspension rates and potential failure, strategies for intervention can be put in place. Implementing these strategies early in the student's academic career and monitoring them often ensures a response to the problem that does not focus on punitive measures (Sheets & Gay, 1996). Professional development is a useful tool to help teachers recognize these factors. Educating teachers on how to identify contributing factors is a proactive way to address disparities which arise in classrooms with culturally diverse students (Echevarria, Powers & Elliott, 2004).

For many students, the behaviors that are expected within the classroom setting differ from the behaviors they are used to within their personal culture (Richards, Brown & Forde, 2007). Professional development, which includes classroom management strategies specific to the cultural and academic needs of the students, addresses this barrier and provides an

educational setting that is responsive to the needs of all learners. By encouraging teachers to respond to student behavior in a way that is responsive to their cultural norms, students will be more likely to respond in a positive manner. When implementing professional development, it is important to recognize that it should withhold the cultural integrity of all students while respecting the professionalism of the teachers (Rashid, 2000).

2.2   FEDERAL, STATE AND LOCAL POLICIES

Although culturally responsive teaching and effective classroom management play key roles in curtailing negative student behaviors, it should be noted that school districts are governed by federal, state, and local policies that determine the rules and regulations by which schools must abide. Federal and state policies require school districts to implement certain policies. Even if the policies do not fit the needs of the district, they are mandates, and schools are expected to incorporate them and follow them with fidelity. In doing so, students and staff are affected both positively and negatively. Policies are meant to ensure the welfare and safety of students and staff within an educational organization. By informing policies with data that is representative of the needs of the students and staff who comprise the educational organization, the policies can be more effective (Tobin and Sprague, 2000).

Oftentimes, policies are put in place by people who have no direct connection to or knowledge of the needs of an organization. Without this knowledge or connection, policies can inadvertently have a negative effect on students causing inequity which can damage the educational success of students, especially African Americans (Tobin and Sprague, 2000). Current district policies and practices also lend themselves to a "monocultural" society which

leads to cultural inequality (Paris, 2012, p. 93). Such policies rely heavily on cultural practices that represent White, middle-class norms (Paris, 2012). Without resistance to such policies, certain cultures begin to lose their cultural identity (Paris, 2012). Policies are subject to interpretation by the individual implementing the policy which can create an inequitable distribution of consequences that can hinder students and compromise their ability to advance in society (Taylor & Foster, 1986). Regularly examining district policies helps to ensure institutional discrimination is not being reinforced, especially through classroom management practices (Weinstein et al., 2004). Tobin and Sprague (2000) state that zero-tolerance policies, increased violence, and school failure are expanding the need for alternative education programs which cause antisocial behavior that affects the development of students. According to radical vanguard theorists, these minority students have a power disadvantage set by society, or in this case, the policies of the educational system (Watson, 1973).

Failed educational policies contribute to high rates of unemployment, drug and alcohol abuse, and incarceration (Taylor & Foster, 1986). Oftentimes, schools adopt zero-tolerance policies for behaviors such as bullying, drug and alcohol use, or violence, which results in increased suspensions and even expulsion (Hemphill et al., 2013). Although the intent of these policies is to deter these behaviors, unintended results occur that drastically affect the educational outcomes for students already at disproportionate risk. School districts are faced with challenges every day. Policies are put into place to address these challenges with the intention of providing a safe and educationally sound environment, but implementation of these policies is not always effective. By examining ineffective policies, strategies can be identified to address the underlying issues that result in the inception of the policy (Noguera and Wells, 2011).

The role of federal policies in the contribution to racial disproportionality caused by the overrepresentation of African American students being suspended out of school is unclear; however, guidelines set forth through federal mandates such as the *Gun Free Schools Act of 1994* encourage zero-tolerance policies that leave little room for negotiation (Irby, 2013). Federal policies in the field of education can be difficult to regulate and largely rely on state and local governances to implement these policies in a manner that is consistent and uniform (Vergari, 2012). Noguera and Wells (2011) suggested that federal policies have kept districts from improving because they fail to address poverty and inequality (Milner, 2013). Educational policies at the federal level reflect the interests of agencies and stakeholders at all three levels of government (Vergari, 2012). The *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA) is a federal policy that has great implications for African American students who are disproportionally at risk (Harris, 2012). This law provides funding for schools to implement change for underperforming, low-socioeconomic students, which helps districts provide programs that target the needs that specifically relate to underprivileged students (Harris, 2012). The *Gun Free Schools Act of 1994* has impacted students who are at disproportionate risk. This act was implemented as a response to the heightened awareness of violence in schools and mandates the expulsion of any student found to be in possession of a weapon on school grounds (McNeal & Dunbar Jr., 2010). The *Gun Free Schools Act of 1994* then prompted the adoption of the zero-tolerance policies in many school districts across the United States. The original law enacted by Congress was meant to address criminal acts of violence by students; however, over time, the zero-tolerance policies adopted by local agencies began to extend the punishable behaviors to include less severe infractions, such as insubordination and disruptive behaviors (McNeal & Dunbar Jr., 2010). Zero-tolerance policies and the interpretation of school policies have been

credited for contributing to high suspension rates among African American students (Arcia, 2007). Although zero-tolerance policies were originally implemented as a response to violence in schools caused predominantly by White males, the racial overtones observed in the implementation of these policies affect African American males the most (Caton, 2012).

Disciplinary approaches are also affected by the perceived safety of the school community and the crime rates related to the neighborhoods (Arcia, 2007). It has become commonplace for schools to incorporate the use of law enforcement officers, surveillance cameras, metal detectors, and personal searches into their daily procedures (Caton, 2012). The degree to which these policies have been enforced has created an environment that looks less like an educational system and more closely resembles a criminal justice institution (Caton, 2012).

Since the authorization of the *No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001*, there has been a push for accountability in schools that has increased the pressure on states and districts to develop and implement effective evaluation systems for teachers and principals (Welsh, 2011). Because of NCLB and the push from the federal government, many states have adopted policies that address accountability and teacher effectiveness, which has caused a trickle-down effect in Pennsylvania that has resulted in the state mandating the implementation of the *Teacher Effectiveness System in Act 82 of 2012* in all public schools across the state (Educator Effectiveness Systems in Pennsylvania, 2015). This act requires classroom teachers to be rated based on extensive criteria and can be beneficial for the implementation of adaptive education procedures that incorporate culturally responsive teaching practices through the evaluated domains related to classroom environment and instruction (Educator Effectiveness Systems in Pennsylvania, 2015). There is also an accountability factor when it comes to incorporating policies relating to culturally responsive teaching which can be challenging because of the

political nature and the diverse educational system (Rychly & Graves, 2012). In order to create a truly culturally responsive environment, school leaders have to be eager to implement change and continuously assess and offer suggestions for improvement (Rychly & Graves, 2012).

Rychly and Graves (2012) suggest that local disciplinary policies are a representation of a district's tolerance and response to student behaviors, which can be tailored to fit the views and mission of individual organizations. Although they are put in place to positively influence a school's environment, they do not necessarily solve the problem behaviors. Policies are a response to the actions, but they do not address the underlying cause of the problem. Too often, the response to these actions provides an inequitable distribution of consequences. The disproportionate implementation of school policies based on race threatens the opportunity for advancement for certain students (Taylor & Foster, 1986). Students who continuously have problems in school are more likely to drop out because policies focus more on punitive consequences instead of resolving the problems within the school environment (Taylor & Foster, 1986). Suspension policies do not eradicate poor behavior, but they do reduce the educational opportunities in which students participate. Out-of-school suspensions cause students to lose instruction within the school setting and encourage students to engage in activities that are not educational, and potentially harmful (Taylor & Foster, 1986). When students are not in school, they are likely to be in less desirable areas, such as the streets (Taylor & Foster, 1986).

Local policies are instituted at the district level and can vary across neighboring local education associations and throughout the state. The flexibility with local policies provides districts the ability to address areas of need or concern that are specific to the district. This flexibility lends itself to a greater role in the contribution of policies that bear the most weight on student outcomes. Discipline policies are meant to support a proactive form of discipline that is

understood and implemented in a way that does not impede the educational process (Irby, 2012).

Policies are put into place to create a positive environment for learning to occur; however, what may seem to be beneficial on paper can have an unexpected negative outcome for some students (Irby, 2012). The enforcing of rules, at times, overshadows teaching and learning, therefore, hindering educational success (Irby, 2013). It has also been argued that North American schools use "militaristic philosophies" of discipline that weigh too heavily on ungrounded educational philosophies (Irby, 2013, p. 198). Federal mandates such as zero-tolerance policies rely on state and local governance for implementation (Vergari, 2012). This can cause an inconsistent and inequitable distribution of the policies that negatively affect students at disproportionate risk (Harris, 2012).

2.3   RISK FACTORS

Sociodemographic characteristics such as race, socioeconomic status, gender, previous suspension history, and enrollment in special education have all been identified as having a relationship to suspension rates (Sullivan et al., 2014). It is not one risk factor in particular that contributes to this disparity but a combination of the factors that leads to student challenges (Gutman et al., 2002). By identifying the risk factors of students for unequitable disciplinary actions, interventions can be put in place to address the underlying issues that ultimately lead to punitive disciplinary action. This proactive response allows for both formal and informal interventions to be used that build on the practices that have already been developed within the school (Hopkins, 2002).

2.3.1 Violence and poverty

African American youth are exposed to risk factors such as higher rates of violence and poverty, which can be detrimental to their adjustment to the school setting (Li, Nussbaum & Richards, 2007). Economic conditions and high poverty levels relate to the family stress theory, which postulates that these factors contribute to stressful parent-child relationships causing the child to have a difficult time adjusting (Li et al., 2007). Poverty is a risk factor that can be seen on two different levels: low-income families and impoverished neighborhoods or communities (Li et al., 2007). Children living in low-income households are at a higher risk of negative outcomes, such as behavioral and emotional difficulties, and academic failure (Li et al., 2007). In addition to poverty, violence plays a large role in determining students at disproportionate risk. Community violence, and especially violence in the form of victimization, contributes to the damaging effects of urban youth (Li et al., 2007). It is suggested that students living in poverty need instructional practices that address their complex needs with an understanding of poverty and diverse backgrounds (Milner, 2013).

2.3.2 School environment

Challenging behaviors are nothing new to the educational system; however, there are times when these challenging behaviors can be viewed as a result of the individual child or their families and the contributing factors and the interventions are punitive and harsh (Wearmouth, McKinney & Glynn, 2007). Unfortunately, educational systems do not always incorporate the social context of challenging behavioral patterns into the response to these behaviors. As stated by Wearmouth, et al. (2007), "Young people's thinking and behavior are shaped by the social

contexts in which they live and learn" (p. 38). When determining risk factors, the school environment is also considered. In general, school characteristics include the percentage of students who are eligible to receive free and reduced lunches, mobility rates, and academic achievement levels (Sullivan et al., 2014). Teachers and classroom instructional practices have the most influence on student success within the school (Milner, 2013). Experience levels of the instructional staff have also been found to contribute to disparities (Sullivan et al., 2014). More research is necessary to determine the effects of disparate treatment within the school environment in relation to problem behaviors (Sullivan et al., 2014). Peer interaction is also a determining factor of school dropout and suspension rates (Ganao et al, 2013). Schools are a place where friendships are built and behaviors are reinforced, and oftentimes, students are influenced by the behaviors of their peers, both positively and negatively (Ganao et al., 2013). The way students learn from others can have a great impact on their academic and social success (Ganao et al., 2013).

2.3.3 Parental involvement

Parental involvement is another identifying factor of students at disproportionate risk for suspension. When behaviors are monitored closely by parents and there is a strong support system in place, children are less likely to become involved in negative behaviors that can result in increased suspension rates (Ganao et al., 2013). Parental involvement within the school system is a critical factor of student achievement, but it varies greatly by ethnicity and income level (Gutman et al., 2002). Parental expectations also indicate behavioral and achievement levels. Children tend to know the expectations that have been set by their parents. Parents who set higher expectations for their children are more likely to achieve greater academic

achievement and social success (Ganao et al., 2013). The family structure also contributes to negative behavioral patterns. In relation to parental involvement, students who come from single parent homes or have a weakened family structure are more likely to engage in behaviors that can result in punitive consequences in school (Ganao et al., 2013). Although parental influence is a very important variable that contributes to student risk factors, sometimes parents lose control due to conditions such as living in high crime areas, which compromises the family structure and leads to a disproportionate rate of suspension (Ganao et al., 2013).

2.4   CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING

Culturally responsive teaching focuses on developing highly effective teachers who address the variation of students' social, cultural, and economic situations through equitable educational opportunities without lowering expectations and rigor (Gay, 2002). Attention is focused on the processes of teaching and learning through adaptive educational practices that are viewed through a culturally responsive lens. Culturally responsive teaching uses cultural knowledge "to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them" (Gay, 2010, p. 31). In tailoring learning opportunities, high expectations are set for teachers as well as all students while eliminating the mindset that minority students are incapable of learning (Milner, 2013). By eliminating that mindset, teachers become more effective through reflective practices, which positively affect their interactions with students as well as their methods of teaching (Echevarria, Powers & Elliott, 2004). If teachers do not have an understanding of the obstacles that students face, they cannot appropriately intervene (Gay, 2010).

Culturally responsive teaching can be defined as, "using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively" (Gay, 2002, p. 106). This style of teaching more meaningfully connects learning with life experiences that are reflective of culturally diverse students and results in increased academic achievement (Gay, 2002). Through the use of culturally responsive teaching, educators implement culturally relevant curricula and communication processes that reflect the values held by the students (Brown, 2004). Culturally responsive teaching is more of a frame of mind than an implementation of practices or procedures and "emphasizes the importance of self-regulation, community building, and social decision making" (Weinstein et al., 2004, p. 28). In order to create a culturally responsive classroom environment, Rychly and Graves (2012) suggested four practices for teachers to follow: 1) show empathy and care for students, 2) reflect on personal beliefs, 3) reflect on cultural frames of reference, and 4) become knowledgeable about other cultures. Behaviors are culturally influenced and conflict is more likely to occur when the cultural backgrounds of teachers and students differ; therefore, in keeping with these practices, teachers gain a better understanding of their students which aids in a more positive response to student behavior (Weinstein et al., 2004). Milner (2013) wrote, "Normal classroom behavior can be informed by different cultural frames, such as race, socioeconomics, language, or even geography" (p. 25). Training educators to recognize cultural differences and how these differences relate to student behaviors can help educators to better understand how to reduce conflict caused by differing cultural norms (Milner, 2013). In relation, Milner also suggested that the classroom can be an environment that encourages a culture of power where the teacher has power over the students. This environment can cause students to have difficulty finding meaning with their classroom experience and ultimately determine that it is irrelevant (Milner,

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2013).   Classroom management impacts student achievement, and, by recognizing personal biases, teachers create a learning environment that provides equitable opportunities for all students (Weinstein et al., 2004). Understanding cultural diversity can pose some challenges. In order to overcome these challenges, Weinstein et al. (2004) suggested that teachers consider the following three questions: Is the monitoring of student behavior equitable? Are conventional classroom management strategies only being used? When should a teacher accommodate a student's cultural background and when should a student accommodate the teacher? (p. 32). "Teachers, as culturally responsive classroom managers, recognize their biases and values and reflect on how these influence their expectations for behavior and their interactions with students as well as what learning looks like" (Metropolitan Center for Urban Education, 2008, p. 2).

Creating caring and nurturing relationships with students is an important component of culturally responsive teaching. Characteristics of teachers who show a sense of care for students exhibit qualities of patience, persistence, validation, and empowerment of students as opposed to uncaring teachers who are intolerant and controlling (Gay, 2010). Educators who are culturally responsive ensure that expectations for student behavior are established, communication with students is representative of their needs, a sense of caring is displayed, and strong relationships with families are built (Milner & Tenore, 2010). Teachers who express a sense of caring toward students tend to have higher levels of student success (Gay, 2010). One factor in determining a student's response to a teacher's directive has been found to relate to the student's perception of how much the teacher cares (Weinstein et al., 2004).

Teacher-student relationships are important, because most disciplinary infractions occur within the classroom (Milner & Tenore, 2010). Therefore, effective teaching is an essential component to student success. There are differences in educational outcomes which lead to

racial implications, especially when addressing patterns relating to discipline referrals and suspension rates (Milner, 2013). Inadequacies in instruction and classroom management ultimately lead to poor student performance. This concern is intensified for culturally diverse students who are being instructed by ill-prepared educators. In addition to their academic needs, educators are encouraged to become aware of students' cultural needs in order to be effective (Brown, 2004). Behavioral norms vary from culture to culture and can cause misunderstandings when cultures are mixed within the classroom setting (Rychly & Graves, 2012). It is important that teachers understand that some non-dominant cultures express their communication through behavioral norms that are more active and engaging, whereas the dominant cultural norm is to take turns while speaking (Rychly & Graves, 2012). If there is a lack of understanding of non-dominant cultures, this may create tension within the classroom setting and invoke negative reactions to the behaviors (Rychly & Graves, 2012).

In order to incorporate culturally responsive practices into the classroom, it is necessary for teachers to gain awareness of the cultural backgrounds of students. This knowledge helps to develop cross-cultural skills to interact with students more effectively and in an equitable manner (Weinstein et al., 2004). Reflecting through a cultural lens on classroom tasks such as, "creating a physical setting that supports academic and social goals, establishing and maintaining expectations for behavior, enhancing students' motivation, organizing and managing instructional formats, working with families, and using appropriate interventions to assist students with behavior problems," promotes equal access for student learning to occur (Weinstein et al., 2004, p. 32).

Although most educators have good intentions by not addressing diversity within the classroom, in doing so, teachers fail to acknowledge the needs of their students (Milner &

Tenore, 2010). Misconceptions are made in response to conflicts due to cultural, racial, or ethnic misunderstandings of students, which results in inequitable classroom management practices that are often unintended (Milner & Tenore, 2010). Arguably, ignoring race becomes a strategy of power evasion (Rosenblum & Travis, 2008). Educators who exhibit knowledge of students' cultural diversity are more apt to engage students through the use of multicultural content in their subject area (Gay, 2002). Actively involving students in the educational process by incorporating relevant content increases student understanding and decreases time off task (Ware, 2006). Oftentimes, students feel that their opinions are not taken seriously, and in turn, they argue to have their viewpoints heard, which can be viewed as disrespectful behavior (Sheets & Gay, 1996). Personal student and teacher relationships are credited with having a large impact on conflicts within the classroom and the resulting disciplinary actions (Sheets & Gay, 1996). Although challenging a teacher's authority can be viewed negatively, African American students are less likely to follow a teacher's directive if they feel unjustly accused and have not been given the opportunity to state their case (Sheets & Gay, 1996).

Along with being culturally responsive, effective classroom management is a necessary aspect of any classroom. It is especially important to utilize effective classroom management to curtail behaviors that emerge in a culturally diverse environment. Classroom behavior can be influenced by cultural variations, such as race, socioeconomic status, environment, or language (Milner, 2013). Training educators to recognize cultural differences and how these differences relate to student behaviors can help educators to better understand how to reduce conflict caused by cultural norms. Culturally sensitive and developmentally appropriate rules are present in culturally responsive classroom management procedures and strategies (Milner, 2013). Teachers should also be aware that African American students relate doing well in school to being White

(Rosenblum & Travis, 2009). This thought is common amongst Black peer groups and can lead to conflict or alienation from other African American students (Rosenblum & Travis, 2008). The oppositional identity found among this culture can be detrimental to African American students' academic achievement (Rosenblum & Travis, 2008).

Reflecting through a cultural lens on classroom tasks such as, "creating a physical setting that supports academic and social goals, establishing and maintaining expectations for behavior, enhancing students' motivation, organizing and managing instructional formats, working with families, and using appropriate interventions to assist students with behavior problems," promotes equal access for student learning to occur (Weinstein et al., 2004, p. 32). Teachers who are willing to embrace the method of culturally responsive teaching are more likely to use a student's culture as an effective teaching tool to enhance student achievement both socially and academically (Bassey, 2016). According to Bassey (2016), teachers who are culturally responsive are successful because they show a level of respect for the culture of students as well as their parents and they understand that Black students are subjected to varying communities between home and school. Because of this understanding, culturally responsive teachers tend to have less disciplinary problems within their classrooms (Bassey, 2016).

2.5   PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Professional development also plays a key role in ensuring that educators are trained to lead a culturally responsive classroom, but in order to be effective, professional development should be specific to the needs of the district. When implementing new approaches to discipline or educational strategies, professional development has to become imbedded in the district's

practices through a continuous process of growth (Brown & Militello, 2016). By incorporating effective professional development into a school district's overall plan of action, stakeholders can be ensured that educators are provided with the knowledge to successfully integrate culturally responsive teaching and effective classroom management strategies into their daily procedures (Echevarria et al, 2004). Through improved teacher preparation, teachers become more knowledgeable about the incorporation of diverse teaching methods which relate to the social and cultural needs of their students (Echevarria et al, 2004). If districts do not effectively prepare teachers, ultimately, districts will fail to prepare their students (Echevarria et al, 2004). It is also important to note that administrators often are the most influential variable in the implementation of effective teaching strategies because they hold a high significance in regards to a school's performance (Brown & Militello, 2016). Strong leadership is the foundation of effective professional development and implementation of strategies that are positive to the development of strong school communities (Brown & Militello, 2016).

3.0 METHODS AND APPLIED INQUIRY PLAN

This case study outlines the changes in racial make-up, suspension rates, and AEDY placements in Wildcat Pride School District and the surrounding communities from 2000-2015 and focuses on the demographic history of the district and how the changes relate to key events that impacted Wildcat Pride School District during this time span. Documents and archives were analyzed using secondary data analysis and focused on the key events that influenced the demographics of Wildcat Pride School District. These key events include: 1) the implementation of the Ward Home, 2) the Duquesne City School District merger, and 3) the 2013-2014 audit conducted by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. Consideration was given to specified discipline-related metrics such as demographics, enrollment, suspension rates, and Alternative Education for Disruptive Youth (AEDY) placements. Table 1 is an overview of the applied inquiry plan that was used to design and conduct this research.

Table 1. Alignment of research questions, evidence, research design, and data analysis

Research Questions	Evidence	Research Design	Data Analysis
What is the demographic history of Wildcat Pride School District (WPSD) from 2000-2015? How do the changes across time relate to key events within WPSD?	Description of WPSD and communities as well as the key events influencing the demographic history of WPSD including Ward Home, Duquesne merger, and PDE audit.	Secondary analysis of documents and archives related to Ward Home, Duquesne merger, PDE audit, district demographics, and community demographics.	Summary of the history of WPSD with key factors included, summary of the history of the communities, and a timeline of key events in the district.
Are the changes in WPSD from 2000-2015 similar to school districts in Southwestern PA?	Changes over time in demographics, enrollment, suspension rates and AEDY placements for WPSD and similar districts in Southwestern PA, and a description of key events relating to the Ward Home, Duquesne merger, and PDE audit.	Secondary analysis of documents, reports and archives related to community/district demographics, enrollment, suspension rates, AEDY placements, Ward Home, Duquesne merger, and PDE audit.	Plot the changes of WPSD and similar districts in Southwestern PA from 2000-2015 based on key event times and specified discipline-related metrics.
How do the rates of suspension change in relation to the changing racial demographics in Wildcat Pride School District?	Changes from 2000-2015 in demographics and suspension rates.	Secondary analysis of documents and reports relating to demographics and suspension rates.	Plot the rates of suspension in relation to the changes in demographics.
What were the rates of suspension and AEDY placements overall and by race, before and after the state audit?	Changes in suspension rates and AEDY placements after the audit.	Secondary analysis of documents and reports relating to the audit, suspension rates, and AEDY placements.	Summary of the changes in suspension rates and AEDY placements, and representation of the changes in suspension rates and AEDY placements pre-audit and post-audit.

3.1   INQUIRY SETTING

Wildcat Pride School District is a small public school district located east of Pittsburgh that is comprised of five small communities.   These communities include the boroughs of North Versailles, East McKeesport, Wall, Wilmerding, and most recently, Duquesne.   Over the past several years, the socio-economic conditions of these communities, as well as the school district, have declined, and transiency rates have increased. Through the *Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010*, the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) allows for 100% of the students across the district to qualify for the free and reduced lunch program due to high levels of poverty ("School Meals: Community Eligibility," 2015).   Currently, the district is comprised of approximately 63% White, 28% African American, and 7% multi-racial students ("Wildcat Pride SD (2013-2014)," 2015).   Over 68% of students are classified as economically disadvantaged ("Wildcat Pride SD (2013-2014)," 2015). During the 2013-2014 school year, African American students accounted for 62.6% of out-of-school suspension days, and out of 29 students who were placed in AEDY programs, 21 students were African American ("Wildcat Pride School District," n.d.). Wildcat Pride School District has a rich history that envelops the diversity found within each borough that makes up the school community. None of these communities are affluent, and, at the time of the study, the district was in distress. The school population often reflects the traits of its communities. With the inclusion of Duquesne as part of the school community, the district has been faced with adapting to differences which have challenged their ways of thinking and responding to students in an educational setting.

Wildcat Pride School District functions on limited resources. Because of the lack of funds, the district must be creative in its approach to the educational concerns addressed within this dissertation.   This deficit restricts the district's ability to provide needed professional

development and intervention programs that could educate the staff and students on how to address the behavioral concerns that result in increased suspension rates and outside placements. While researching this problem of practice, attention was focused on stakeholders who include the five boroughs which make up Wildcat Pride School District, past and present students including those from the Ward Home as well as those residing in Duquesne, and Wildcat Pride School District.

3.2   INQUIRY APPROACH

Prior to this study, the 2013-2014 audit found Wildcat Pride School District to have a high rate of suspension among African American students that ultimately led to placements in alternative education settings. It was suggested by the Pennsylvania Department of Education that Wildcat Pride School District implement meaningful and effective strategies within the schools in order to address the lost instructional time due to the disproportionate rate of African American student suspension. Over the past several years, changes such as the implementation of an in-house alternative education program, guidance intervention procedures, and the reduction of punitive consequences to disciplinary policies have been made to decrease the amount of lost instructional time due to suspension rates with the hope of increasing students' academic success. The purpose of this inquiry was to explore the history of the Wildcat Pride School District in relation to the district's rate of suspensions and the changing racial demographics within the communities that comprise WPSD and how adjustments to district policies and procedures within WPSD affected the rates of suspension and placements into AEDY programs.

This inquiry also addresses how these changes over time relate to similar school districts in Southwestern Pennsylvania.

3.3   DESIGN, METHOD AND EVIDENCE

This study used a case study approach and gathered both qualitative and quantitative data through the use of documentation/artifact analysis and secondary data analysis. This exploratory case study is centered on Wildcat Pride School District and focuses on the demographic history that has changed over time and how those changes relate to key events that have taken place within Wildcat Pride School District communities. Culture is influenced by many factors; therefore, these concepts were measured through the determination of the behaviors that result in suspensions as well as the causal factors that drive the disparities (Jaccard & Jacoby, 2010).

By analyzing the audit findings, I gained a clear understanding of the deficits in Wildcat Pride School District that caused concern for the Pennsylvania Department of Education. Once these deficits were identified, I identified the changes that have been made to the district's policies and procedures in order to correct the concerns. By analyzing the audit findings, I wanted to gain an understanding of the social and educational context of the district prior to my arrival as the Head Principal/Assistant Superintendent in the district. This process provided information that guided a comparison of the district's past and present history in regards to suspension rates, alternative placements, and district policies and procedures. Oftentimes, students who receive an excessive amount of discipline referrals are referred to Alternative Education for Disruptive Youth (AEDY) programs.

4.0   DATA AND ANALYSIS

The purpose of this study was to determine if there is a relationship among key factors that take place within a school community and out-of-school suspension rates. The key events that were analyzed for this study focused on specific events that were thought to have had a changing effect on the demographics within Wildcat Pride School District.   The following inquiry questions guided this study.

Q1:   What is the demographic history of Wildcat Pride School District

(WPSD) from 2000-2015? How do the changes across time relate to key events

within WPSD?

Q2:   Are the changes in WPSD from 2000-2015 similar to school districts in

Southwestern Pennsylvania?

Q3:   How do the rates of suspension change in relation to the changing racial

demographics in WPSD?

Q4:   What were the rates of suspension and AEDY placements overall and by race,

before and after the state audit?

This chapter outlines each research question based on the demographic history of Wildcat Pride School District as well as the key events that influenced the district from 2000-2015. Each

research question identifies information that is specific to or is in relation to Wildcat Pride School District. Data collection and analysis are organized by research question and include a conclusive summary of the findings.

4.1   RESEARCH QUESTION #1

Q1:   What is the demographic history of Wildcat Pride School District

(WPSD) from 2000-2015? How do the changes across time relate to key events

within WPSD?

The demographic history of Wildcat Pride School District is one of gradual but continual change. Between the years 2000-2015, the racial makeup of the district has changed significantly. These changes were determined by analyzing data specific to Wildcat Pride School District. The data used to inform this inquiry question was collected through Wildcat Pride School District's unpublished student database system. In the 2000-2001 school year, the district was composed of 85% White and 13.8% African American students. In the 2014-2015 school year, the percentage of White students decreased to 60.7% while the percentage of African American students increased to 28.7%. Just as the demographics of Wildcat Pride School District continue to shift, so do the demographics of each community within the district. Concurrently, the population has been decreasing, with the exception of Wilmerding, and the percentage of people living in poverty has risen at an average of 10.5% across the five communities within the school district. The transient population is reflected in the declining enrollment of the district. Wildcat Pride School District's enrollment decreased 18.2% from 2000-2015. Because of the decrease in

enrollment, the district closed two buildings in that time span. In 2015, Wildcat Pride School District went from a total of three buildings to only two.

4.1.1   The demographic history of WPSD

Wildcat Pride School District (WPSD) is made up of five communities: North Versailles, East McKeesport, Wilmerding, Wall and Duquesne. Each of these boroughs is vastly different and saw some extensive changes in terms of population, race, percentage living in poverty, and average income between the years 2000 and 2015. Many of these changes have had an impact on the demographic makeup of Wildcat Pride School District. The following sections outline these changes using census data from 2000 and 2010 specific to each of the communities that serve as feeders for Wildcat Pride School District.

4.1.1.1 Population and race

The overall population of Wildcat Pride School District community feeders decreased from a total population of 23,672 to 20,690, which is a 12.6% decrease in the overall population. Each community's population decreased with the exception of Wilmerding which had a slight increase of 2.1%. Duquesne proved to be the most significant change with a decrease in population of 24.1%. Each of the five communities in Wildcat Pride School District has also shifted in racial makeup. With the exception of Duquesne, each community has a higher percentage of White population than African American. Each community, including Duquesne, has shown a significant increase in the percentage of the African American population. Wilmerding's racial demographics have shown the greatest amount of change with a decrease in White population of 16.1% and an increase in the African American population of 11.7%. Table 2 provides census

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data from 2000 and 2010 that outlines the changes that have taken place within the WPSD communities according to population and race.

Table 2. Population by race for each community that acts as a feeder to WPSD according to 2000 and 2010 census data

Communities of WPSD	2000 Population (White/Black)	2010 Population (White/Black)	Change Rate of Total Population
North Versailles	11,125 (87.8%/9.8%)	10,229 (82.9%/13.8%)	-12.6% (-4.9%/+4.0%)
East McKeesport	2,343 (95.6%/2.9%)	2,126 (89.1%/7.0%)	-8.1% (-6.5%/+4.1%)
Wall	727 (97.2%/2.1%)	580 (89.8%/7.1%)	-9.3% (-7.4%/+5.0%)
Wilmerding	2,145 (91.3%/6.3%)	2,190 (75.2%/18.0%)	+2.1% (-16.1%/+11.7%)
Duquesne	7,332 (48.9%/47.7%)	5,565 (39.6%/55.3%)	-24.1% (-9.3%/+7.6%)

4.1.1.2 Median income and poverty levels

All five communities that act as feeders for Wildcat Pride School District are located in Allegheny County. According to the United States Census Bureau data, the median income for Allegheny County in 2000 was $38,329. From 2000 to 2010, the median income levels of each community in WPSD fluctuated greatly. North Versailles, East McKeesport and Wall all increased in income levels in comparison to the county average. Wall, which is the smallest of the communities, showed significant growth in income levels with an increase of 35.5%, even though there was a 9.3% decrease in total population. In relation to the county average, Wilmerding and Duquesne both decreased in the median income level. Wilmerding's 14.7% decrease in level of median income was the most significant of the communities. Duquesne followed with a decrease of 10.0%. The median income for Duquesne remained nearly the same

from 2000-2010 with only a very slight increase of 0.1%. Table 3 identifies the percent of income for the five WPSD communities in comparison to the median income for Allegheny County as well as the increase or decrease from 2000 to 2010.

Table 3. Median income levels by community compared to the median income level in Allegheny County according to 2000 and 2010 census data

Communities of WPSD	% of county average in 2000	% of county average in 2010	% Change Rate
North Versailles	79.9	88.1	+8.2
East McKeesport	74.2	81.3	+7.1
Wall	69.4	104.4	+35.5
Wilmerding	64.7	50.0	-14.7
Duquesne	51.6	41.6	-10.0

Although data show that the median income levels have increased for three of the five communities in this study, the poverty rates have increased significantly across the board. North Versailles, East McKeesport, Wall, Wilmerding and Duquesne have all been negatively impacted by increased rates of poverty. Each community has seen an increase in poverty levels with the highest rates of poverty being in Wilmerding. Over this ten year period, Wilmerding had an astounding increase in poverty levels of 20.1%. Table 4 indicates the increases in poverty levels for each community of WPSD over a span of ten years.

Table 4. Poverty levels for each community that acts as a feeder for WPSD according to 2000 and 2010 census data

Communities of WPSD	% population living in poverty in 2000	% population living in poverty in 2010	% Change Rate
North Versailles	8.5	19.0	+10.5
East McKeesport	4.8	11.6	+6.8
Wall	10.7	17.0	+6.3
Wilmerding	12.2	32.3	+20.1
Duquesne	31.3	40.2	+8.9

4.1.1.3 WPSD enrollment

Wildcat Pride School District has a changing history when it comes to the school culture and demographics. There has been a consistent decline in enrollment of nearly 22.2% from school year 2000-2001 until school year 2014-2015. Of the students enrolled in the school year 2000-2001, 13.8% were African American and 85% were White. During the 2007-2008 school year, Duquesne City School District merged with Wildcat Pride School District. During this time, the percentage of African American students increased by nearly 6.0% from the previous school year. Aside from a slight decrease from 2008-2011, there has been a consistent increase of African American students from the time of the merger through the school year 2014-2015. Although the percent of African American students increased upon the incorporation of the Duquesne City School District students, data show that there was a gradual increase in the percentage of African American student enrollment prior to their arrival; however, the most significant increase can be seen during the 2007-2008 school year which is when Duquesne merged with Wildcat Pride. From 2000-2015, the enrollment percentage of White students decreased by 24.3%. Table 5 provides an overview of the total enrollment for Wildcat Pride

School District across the time span included in this study. Enrollment has been broken down by the percentages of African American and White students enrolled in the district.

Table 5. Total enrollment by race for Wildcat Pride School District from school year 2000-2001 to school year 2014-2015

School Year	% of African American Students	% of White Students	Total District Enrollment
2000-2001	13.8	85.0	1949
2001-2002	15.3	83.3	1895
2002-2003	16.0	83.4	1969
2003-2004	17.5	80.8	1932
2004-2005	18.4	80.0	1873
2005-2006	19.8	78.0	1827
2006-2007	20.7	76.7	1784
2007-2008	26.6	70.0	1870
2008-2009	25.6	70.1	1718
2009-2010	25.9	68.5	1738
2010-2011	25.4	68.2	1675
2011-2012	26.4	65.7	1788
2012-2013	27.0	64.3	1693
2013-2014	28.8	61.3	1668
2014-2015	28.7	60.7	1595

Between 2000 and 2015, Wildcat Pride School District opened and closed buildings in order to accommodate the changes in student population. From the school year 2000-2001 until school year 2006-2007, Wildcat Pride School District was composed of three buildings: 1) Green Valley Primary, 2) Westinghouse Elementary, and 3) Wildcat Pride Junior/Senior High School. During the 2007-2008 school year, Logan Elementary was opened which housed students in grades K-8. That same year, Westinghouse Elementary was permanently closed. Due to the continued decrease in enrollment, in 2015, Green Valley Primary was also permanently closed. This left the district with two buildings for all students in grades K-12 that served approximately 800 students in each building. Currently, Logan Elementary houses grades K-6 and Wildcat

Pride Junior/Senior High School houses grades 7-12. Although the total enrollment of students in the Wildcat Pride School District has had a steady decline between the years 2000 and 2015, the student-to-teacher ratio remained quite steady. During that time period, the ratios never exceeded 16:1. Over the fifteen year time span analyzed in this study, the lowest ratio was 12:1 during the 2008-2009, 2010-2011, and 2014-2015 school years. As of 2014, the state average was a ratio of 22:1 ("Teacher:Student Ratios," 2014).

4.1.2   Key events within WPSD

Key events took place between 2000-2015 within Wildcat Pride School District that have been analyzed to determine the effect that the events may have had on the district in regards to the demographic makeup and out-of-school suspension rates. The following sections outline the key events as they relate to Wildcat Pride School District. The key events that were analyzed were chosen based on the professional communication in which I engaged with staff and community members over the course of my employment in Wildcat Pride School District. The chosen key events were consistently mentioned during the professional communication and viewed as catalysts for the changes which took place within WPSD.

4.1.2.1 Duquesne City school district merger

Duquesne City School District is a small suburban public school district located in the eastern part of Allegheny County. According to the 2010 census data, the median family income is just under $20,000 ("American Fact Finder," 2010). Due to high poverty levels, 100% of Duquesne students are entitled to federally free or reduced breakfast and lunch ("Duquesne City," 2008). The demographics of Duquesne City School District are vastly different than other surrounding

districts. Approximately 70% of students from Duquesne are African American in contrast to the average of less than 15% in other Pennsylvania public schools ("Duquesne City," n.d.). In 2012, the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) deemed Duquesne City School District to be one of the lowest academically achieving school districts in math and reading in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania ("Duquesne City," 2008). According to the former state Education Secretary, Gerald Zahorchak, Duquesne City School District was failing to educate its students in part because the district lacked advanced placement courses and extracurricular opportunities (Niederberger, 2007).

In 2007, Duquesne City School District closed its doors to all students in grades 9-12. During the 2012-2013 school year, this closure was extended to grades 7 and 8. Because of these closures, students were forced to move from their community school and merge with the school districts of West Mifflin and Wildcat Pride. The agreement that was made in 2007 was that Wildcat Pride High School would take 35% of all Duquesne City students in grades 9-12 at a tuition payment rate of $8,811.22 ("Duquesne City," 2008). Between 2007 and 2015, Wildcat Pride educated approximately 521 students from Duquesne.

4.1.2.2 The Ward Home

The Ward Home is a community-based Supervised Independent Living program (SIL) that houses adjudicated and delinquent at-risk teens between the ages of 16 and 21. The SIL program helps teens to develop social and life skills, complete their education, and achieve employment. Many of these teens are in the child welfare system and have been referred to the Ward Home by caseworkers at the Allegheny Department of Human Services, Children Youth and Family Division (CYF) or Juvenile Probation Office (JPO) ("Supervised Independent," n.d.).

During the 2000-2001 school year, the Ward Home moved into East McKeesport and became a part of Wildcat Pride School District and one of three Ward Homes in the Pittsburgh area. When the Ward Home moved into East McKeesport, the fear of the unknown also moved into the minds of the faculty and staff of Wildcat Pride School District. There was great uncertainty as to how these students would adapt to the school culture and community. There was concern for the lack of parental involvement and how this would affect the academic and behavioral success of the students.

Until its closure in 2016, the Ward Home located in East McKeesport housed various amounts of teen boys at a time. During the time span that the Ward Home was located in East McKeesport, Wildcat Pride School District educated approximately 184 Ward Home teens. From the time of inception until its closure in 2016, Wildcat Pride educated between 5-15 Ward Home teens per school year. These teens were in grade levels ranging from 9-12. The Ward Home that was once located in East McKeesport now resides in the community of Swissvale, which is outside of Wildcat Pride School District.

During the period of time that I have been an administrator in Wildcat Pride School District, I have had conversations with members of the school community about the negative impact the Ward Home had on the district. The conversations were used as a guide for this study in order to gain an understanding of the effects the students from the Ward Home had on out-of-school suspension rates and AEDY placements. The effect of the Ward Home on Wildcat Pride School District during the years reviewed in this study remains unclear. Because this study focused on data from 2000-2015, there was a lack of sufficient data to reflect the changes that the Ward Home may have had on Wildcat Pride School District prior to its inception in 2000. In order to gain a better understanding of the effects of the Ward Home on Wildcat Pride School

District, future research that includes a review of several years prior to the inception of the Ward Home is necessary. This research should also include data on individual students including their disciplinary history.

4.1.3   Conclusions

The demographic history of Wildcat Pride School District is one of gradual but continual change. Between the years 2000-2015, the racial makeup of the district has changed significantly. In the 2000-2001 school year, the district was composed of 85% white and 13.8% black students. Looking at the 2014-2015 school year, the percentage of White students has decreased to 60.7% while the percentage of African American students has increased to 28.7%. Just as the demographics of Wildcat Pride School District continue to shift, so do the demographics of each community that acts as a feeder for the district. As the demographics change, the population consistently decreases with the exception of Wilmerding, and the poverty levels continue to rise at an average of 10.5% across the five communities within the school district. With the changing community demographics, community members continue to leave the area. The transient population is reflected in the declining enrollment of the district. Wildcat Pride School District's enrollment has decreased 18.2% during the fifteen years included in this study. Because of the decrease in enrollment, the district has closed two buildings within the fifteen year time span.

When Duquesne City School District merged with Wildcat Pride School District during the 2007-2008 school year, there was a significant increase in the number of African American students; however, it should be noted that, starting in the 2000-2001 school year, there has been a gradual increase of African American students in Wildcat Pride School District which carried through subsequent school years included in this study. The most significant increase was

during the 2007-2008 school year, which is consistent with the incorporation of Duquesne City School District.

4.2   RESEARCH QUESTION #2

Q2:   Are the changes in WPSD from 2000-2015 similar to school districts in Southwestern Pennsylvania?

Data from fifteen school districts in Southwestern Pennsylvania were analyzed to see if there were similar changes as those that occurred in Wildcat Pride School District. The fifteen districts were chosen from the 42 school districts that are active members of the Allegheny Intermediate Unit (AIU). The school districts were also chosen based on similarities in enrollment, demographics, or proximity to Wildcat Pride School District. Data was collected from school years 2001-2002 and 2014-2015. School year 2001-2002 was the earliest school year that could be used due to a lack of 2000-2001 school year data for several of the districts included in the study. All data used to compare these districts were collected from the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) Safe Schools Report, which each district is required to submit to the state each year. These reports outline district information in relation to enrollment, race, and discipline. Districts have been coded in the following sections in order to protect the identities of the districts compared in this study.

4.2.1 Enrollment

Of the fifteen school districts analyzed, all but one had a trend of declining enrollment from school years 2001-2002 to 2014-2015. The average decrease in enrollment during this time span is 22.8%. District 15 showed the most significant decrease of 48.7%, while District 12 increased by 3.9%. The change in enrollment among the fifteen districts does correlate with the decrease in enrollment in Wildcat Pride School District; however, WPSD shows slightly less of a decrease in enrollment than the majority of the school districts included in this study. The average decrease of 22.8% in overall enrollment for the school districts representing Southwestern Pennsylvania correlates with the decrease of 16.2% in enrollment in Wildcat Pride School District from 2001-2002 to 2014-2015 and a decrease of 22.2% in enrollment from school years 2000-2001 to 2014-2015. Table 6 shows the fifteen school districts included in this study in rank order according to the greatest percentage of declining enrollment. Wildcat Pride School District is highlighted to show where the district stands in relation to other school districts in Southwestern Pennsylvania.

Table 6. Total district enrollment of comparable school districts in Southwestern Pennsylvania during the 2001-2002 and 2014-2015 school years

School Districts	Total Enrollment 2001-2002	Total Enrollment 2014-2015	% Increase/Decrease
1	1746	896	-48.7
2	6090	3828	-37.1
3	6046	3986	-34.1
4	2307	1535	-33.5
5	4949	3530	-28.7
6	1316	943	-28.3
7	3005	2346	-21.9
8	1010	794	-21.4
9	4329	3430	-20.8
10	3064	2481	-19.0
11	1670	1379	-17.4
WPSD	1950	1635	-16.2
12	3313	2904	-12.3
13	4329	3863	-10.8
14	2094	1988	-5.1
15	1285	1335	+3.9

4.2.2   AEDY and suspension rates

Alternative Education for Disruptive Youth (AEDY) programs are educational programs, typically outside of a school district, that are used as an intervention for students with disruptive behaviors that interfere with the educational process (2013-2015 Alternative, 2013).   While analyzing AEDY placement data, I found that the recorded information may not be comparable across districts, because the provided AEDY placement data do not take into consideration alternative education programs that may be used by school districts.   Other programs used for alternative education placements are not necessarily labeled an AEDY program, but they may be serving the same purpose.   This may cause an inaccurate reflection of the number of students placed in AEDY programs in some of the school districts that have been used to represent

Southwestern Pennsylvania. Because of this probable inconsistency, AEDY data could not be

compared between the placements of WPSD students in AEDY programs to those students in

other school districts in Southwestern Pennsylvania. Data on out-of-school suspension rates

show that approximately 66% of the districts analyzed reduced their rates of out-of-school

suspensions from 2001-2002 to 2014-2015 by no less than 20%. This does correlate with

findings in relation to WPSD. According to the Safe Schools Report, WPSD showed a decrease

in the number of out-of-school suspension sanctions of 68.2%. It must be mentioned that the

data in the Safe Schools reports differ from the data analyzed in the WPSD student database

system and do not take into consideration the number of out-of-school suspension days. The

differences in these numbers cause limitations to the research and make the comparison of data

to other districts relative.   A more accurate comparison would have to consider data from each

school district's personal student database system and not the Safe Schools Report that is

submitted to the Pennsylvania Department of Education. Table 7 outlines the number of out-of-

school suspension sanctions that were issued by each of the fifteen school districts analyzed in

this study as well as the change rate for school years 2001-2002 and 2014-2015.

Table 7. Total number of out-of-school suspension sanctions issued from comparable school districts in South

Western Pennsylvania during the 2001-2002 and 2014-2015 school years

School Districts	OSS Sanctions in 2001-2002	OSS Sanctions in 2014-2015	% Increase/Decrease
8	228	8	-96.5
5	172	8	-95.3
14	68	9	-86.8
WPSD	239	76	-68.2
13	99	37	-62.6
11	43	18	-58.1
3	542	231	-57.4
7	60	30	-50.0
2	195	103	-47.2
9	91	52	-42.9
6	27	21	-22.2
10	43	58	+34.9
1	0	128	+128.0
12	15	47	+213.3
15	18	105	+483.3
4	54	551	+920.4

4.2.3   Conclusions

Although Wildcat Pride School District shows signs of declining enrollment, this is consistent among the other school districts that were analyzed for this study. This may not necessarily be due to changes within the district but may be more of a reflection of the changes happening within this particular region of Allegheny County. Other districts in Allegheny County are flourishing and enrollment continues to increase from year to year. In order to gain a more accurate representation of the changing enrollment of the school districts in Southwestern Pennsylvania, additional school districts with varying demographics or all school districts within Southwestern Pennsylvania should be compared.

Although similarities in AEDY placements could not be identified due to the limitations of the data, out-of-school suspension rates show a declining trend among the majority of school districts analyzed in this study. It should be noted that there may also be limitations with the out-of-school suspension data that were analyzed for this study. There may be a margin of error in the increases or decreases due to data being retrieved from the Safe Schools Report and not from each school district's student information database system. The Safe Schools Report provides an overview of district information whereas the student information database system provides specific information in relation to individual students. The lack of specific information makes the comparison between WPSD and other districts in Southwestern Pennsylvania relative to the data used for the inquiry.

4.3   RESEARCH QUESTION #3

Q3:   How do the rates of suspension change in relation to the changing racial

demographics in WPSD?

Between 2000 and 2015, there was an ebb and flow in the rates of suspension in Wildcat Pride School District ranging between 524 total days of out-of-school suspension in school year 2001-2002 and 1,786 total days of out-of-school suspension in school year 2003-2004 across all students in grades K-12. There does not seem to be a consistent pattern with the increase and decrease of the out-of-school suspension rates when looking at the data provided for this particular study. Using the 2000-2001 school year as the baseline, 57% of the school years during the time span used for this study showed increases in the out-of-school suspension rates of African American students. When the students from Duquesne City School District entered

Wildcat Pride School District, the total rates of out-of-school suspension days dropped by 6.8%; however, the number of suspensions accrued by African American students increased by 18.1%. This increase is not specific to the students from the Duquesne City School District. The data represent an increased racial gap in the amount of out-of-school suspensions issued to all students in Wildcat Pride School District in grades K-12.

The number of suspensions of African American students consistently increased from 13.8% in school year 2000-2001 to 29% in school year 2014-2015. This consistent increase does prove to be significant when analyzing the data for the 2007-2008 school year when the students from Duquesne arrived at Wildcat Pride. Although there was a steady increase of suspensions between 2000 and 2015, the most significant increase of 18.1% was in school year 2007-2008 at the same time the Duquesne students arrived. After the Pennsylvania Department of Education conducted the audit during the 2013-2014 school year, the total rates of out-of-school suspension dropped by 20%; however, the rates of out-of-school suspension for the African American students increased by 2.8%. The overall rates dropped again during the 2013-2014 school year by another 20.3%, but there was a slight increase of 0.1% in out-of-school suspension rates for African American students. Table 8 shows the difference in out-of-school suspension days for African American and White students from 2000-2015. The change rates represent the increase or decrease in suspension rates from the previous school year for African American students.

Table 8. WPSD out-of-school suspension days for students in grades K-12 according to race

School Year	Total Days OSS	OSS Days for Black Students	OSS Days for White Students	Total District Enrollment
2000-2001	955	20.0%	25.3%	1949
2001-2002	524	19.3%	24.5%	1895
2002-2003	888	27.4%	71.0%	1969
2003-2004	1786	32.8%	63.7%	1932
2004-2005	886	28.7%	68.5%	1873
2005-2006	760	32.9%	49.7%	1827
2006-2007	912	34.8%	55.5%	1784
2007-2008	850	52.8%	45.7%	1870
2008-2009	953	50.7%	46.2%	1718
2009-2010	1094	50.5%	43.6%	1738
2010-2011	1497	59.3%	35.2%	1675
2011-2012	1208	57.3%	34.9%	1788
2012-2013	1065	59.8%	30.8%	1693
2013-2014	852	62.6%	27.4%	1668
2014-2015	679	62.4%	28.4%	1595

Table 9 provides a description of the impact the inclusion of the students from Duquesne City School District had on the overall enrollment of Wildcat Pride School District population. When the Duquesne City School District students merged with Wildcat Pride School District during the 2007-2008 school year, they accounted for 2.7% of the total student population. From 2000-2015, the percentage of Duquesne City School District students on the overall Wildcat Pride School District total enrollment never exceeded 4.8%. The data analyzed for this study do not show a relationship between the number of out-of-school suspensions and the incorporation of Duquesne City School District students. Although the data from this study do not show a relationship, the probability of a relationship cannot be eliminated until data that are specific to the individual students from Duquesne who merged with Wildcat Pride have been analyzed in order to gain a clear understanding of their impact on the rates of out-of-school suspensions issued by WPSD. These data are available through the WPSD student database system but were

not included because this study focused on the overall effect of identified factors that were examined for the purpose of determining racial disparities in discipline-related metrics.

Table 9. The number of Duquesne City School District students who merged with Wildcat Pride School District and the percent of impact they had on the district's total enrollment

School Year	Total District Enrollment	Number of Students from Duquesne	% of Total District Enrollment
2000-2001	1949	0	0.0
2001-2002	1895	0	0.0
2002-2003	1969	0	0.0
2003-2004	1932	0	0.0
2004-2005	1873	0	0.0
2005-2006	1827	0	0.0
2006-2007	1784	0	0.0
2007-2008	1870	51	2.7
2008-2009	1718	70	4.1
2009-2010	1738	76	4.4
2010-2011	1675	79	4.7
2011-2012	1788	68	3.8
2012-2013	1693	81	4.8
2013-2014	1668	58	3.5
2014-2015	1595	38	2.4

4.3.1   Conclusions

Although there is little consistency in the overall increase or decrease of out-of-school suspension rates, there is consistency in the increase of out-of-school suspension rates of African American students across the board from 2000-2015; however, a comparison of the change in racial demographics and out-of-school suspension rates cannot be determined because of the inconsistency of the changing rates of suspension. Even though there is no notable consistency in the changing rates of out-of-school suspension, attention should be focused on the changing demographics of Wildcat Pride School District. This study addresses the increased racial gap

that is seen through the continual rise of suspension rates of African American students; however, it does not address the possibility of a geographic gap created with the inclusion of the students from Duquesne City School District. In order to understand the geographic gap, future research may analyze data specific to individual students including those who were incorporated into Wildcat Pride School District from Duquesne City School District. Although the percentage of students who reside in Duquesne accounted for a very small portion of the overall student population, the impact those students had on the out-of-school suspension rates is unclear. This study focused on the overall suspension rates of Wildcat Pride School District; however, a comparison of suspension rates between the two distinct groups of students is necessary in order to understand the impact that the students from Duquesne City School District had on the suspension rates of Wildcat Pride School District.

Although it is a gradual change over time, data have shown that there is a significant change in the racial makeup of the district. From my professional perspective, there has not been a significant approach to addressing the needs of the newfound culture of the school community. Suspension rates of African American students may show an increase due to a lack of understanding of cultural norms or disproportionate expectations among the faculty and staff in the district. Due to this lack of understanding, African American students may be receiving punitive consequences instead of interventions that may address their underlying behavioral concerns. Additional research may study faculty and staff responses to the behaviors of African American students which typically result in the issuance of discipline referrals. Included in this future research, the rate in which culturally responsive pedagogy and restorative justice practices are implemented within classroom practices and procedures may be analyzed.

4.4   RESEARCH QUESTION #4

Q4:   What were the rates of suspension and AEDY placements overall and by race,

before and after the state audit?

4.4.1   Alternative Education for Disruptive Youth (AEDY)

The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) defines an Alternative Education for Disruptive Youth (AEDY) Program as:

> A program approved by the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) that is designed to support a school's efforts to provide a temporary placement for disruptive students in grades 6 through 12. Students enrolled in a program will continue to make academic progress and work to remedy disruptive behavior through counseling and other behavioral interventions. (2013-2015 Alternative, 2013, p. 2)

Behaviors that are considered disruptive can be subjective depending on the individual making the determination. PDE defines a disruptive student as:

> A student who poses a clear threat to the safety and welfare of other students or the school staff, who creates an unsafe school environment or whose behavior materially interferes with the learning of other students or disrupts the overall educational process. (Alternative Education, 2014, p. 2)

Based on Wildcat Pride School District policies, students who reach high rates of out-of-school suspensions or students who exhibit certain negative behaviors can be placed into Alternative Education for Disruptive Youth (AEDY) placements. These placements act as a final step for a response to negative student behavior. Placing students into AEDY programs reduces the

amount of out-of-school suspension days and helps to keep students from missing classroom instruction; however, it removes the students from the traditional public school classroom setting.

AEDY programs are in place to address students who exhibit extreme behavior difficulties that cannot be accommodated within the public school setting (2013-2015 Alternative, 2013). According to the Pennsylvania Department of Education 2013-15 Alternative education for Disruptive Youth Program Guidelines, "Every effort must be made to provide students appropriate services in the least restrictive setting possible" (2013-2015 Alternative, 2013). AEDY programs are meant to be temporary and a means to provide more intense behavioral interventions in order for students to return to the regular school environment (2013-2015 Alternative, 2013).

4.4.2   AEDY in Wildcat Pride School District

When Wildcat Pride School District was audited by the Pennsylvania Department of Education, one conclusion was that the district was placing too many African American students into AEDY programs. In response to audit findings, Wildcat Pride School District implemented changes to district programs and procedures in order to help reduce these placements. During the 2013-2014 school year, the district began an internal AEDY program that is housed within East Allegheny Junior/Senior High School. The purpose of the Wildcat Pride AEDY program is to provide an opportunity for students to continue to work on their education after removal from Wildcat Pride's traditional educational setting. The program provides a safe and stimulating environment in which students may grow academically and develop social skills and positive attitudes in order to successfully return back to their regularly scheduled classes in the general

education population within Wildcat Pride School District. There are five main goals in this program: 1) Increase academic skills, 2) Improve poor attendance patterns, 3) Earn credits toward a high school diploma or promotion to a higher grade, 4) Increase socially desirable behavior and positive attitudes, and 5) Increase self-image. Students remain in the alternative program as required by school district policy; however, the school principal has the discretion to determine the length of time a student is required to remain in the program within the requirements of school law and district policy. Upon recommendation of the alternative education teacher and review by the principal, students return to their regularly scheduled classes. In order to be recommended back to the general education population, students must satisfactorily complete their academic coursework, be in accordance with the district's attendance policy, and meet the required levels for behavior. This program aims to reduce placement time and also provides a guidance component which acts as an intervention to the negative student behaviors. Another change that was implemented in response to the audit was the incorporation of guidance intervention. This is used as an intervention for students who have a pattern of repeated negative behaviors. Guidance intervention is used to address the behavior prior to punitive disciplinary measures.

With the increase of African American students to the district, there was an increase in suspension rates of African American students as well as placements into AEDY programs. As the numbers of African American students in these placements increased, the district was prompted to address this concern. With the implementation of an in-house alternative education program, the numbers of AEDY placements, especially for African American students, decreased by 47.6%. The changes made after the PDE audit improved the overall suspension rates by 55.9%. At the time of the audit, there were approximately 30 students placed in external

AEDY programs according to the WPSD student database system. Of those 30 students, 27 were African American. After the audit, AEDY placements increased to approximately 34 students, 21 of which were African American. Although there was an increase following the audit, there was a significant decrease of 55.9% of overall AEDY placements in the 2014-2015 school year. Table 10 illustrates the changing rates of AEDY placements for African American and White students in WPSD from 2000-2015.

Table 10. Alternative Education for Disruptive Youth (AEDY) placements by race compared to the number Black and White students enrolled in WPSD in grades K-12

School Year	# Black Students in AEDY Placements	# Black Students Enrolled in WPSD	# White Students in AEDY Placements	# White Students Enrolled inWPSD
2000-2001	N/A	269	N/A	1657
2001-2002	N/A	289	N/A	1579
2002-2003	1	314	2	1622
2003-2004	4	338	13	1561
2004-2005	5	344	14	1497
2005-2006	9	361	11	1425
2006-2007	12	370	11	1368
2007-2008	12	498	10	1308
2008-2009	13	440	7	1205
2009-2010	13	450	6	1190
2010-2011	27	425	6	1143
2011-2012	18	472	7	1175
2012-2013	27	456	2	1089
2013-2014	21	480	8	1023
2014-2015	11	458	4	968

4.4.3 Out-of-school suspension in Wildcat Pride School District

Refer to Table 8 for an overview of the WPSD percentages out-of-school suspension days according to race as well as the change rates from the previous year's percentages for African American students. Table 11 shows the percentages of out-of-school suspension days according

to race for WPSD. The year that the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) conducted the audit has been highlighted. Prior to the audit, rates of out-of-school suspension of African American students showed a gradual increase of 39.8% from 2000-2013. In reviewing the out-of-school suspension rates post-audit, it can be seen that there was not a significant change in the rates of suspension after the audit. Although not significant, it should be noted that there was a slight increase of 2.8% in the percentage of African American students who received out-of-school suspensions after the audit.

Table 11. WPSD percentages out-of-school suspension days according to race and change rates from the previous year's percentages for African American students

School Year	% OSS for Black Students	% OSS for White Students	Total Days OSS	Change Rates
2000-2001	20.0	25.3	955	Baseline
2001-2002	19.3	24.5	524	-0.7%
2002-2003	27.4	71.0	888	+8.1%
2003-2004	32.8	63.7	1786	+5.4%
2004-2005	28.7	68.5	886	-4.1%
2005-2006	32.9	49.7	760	+4.2%
2006-2007	34.8	55.5	912	+1.9%
2007-2008	52.8	45.7	850	+18.1%
2008-2009	50.7	46.2	953	-2.1%
2009-2010	50.5	43.6	1094	-0.2%
2010-2011	59.3	35.2	1497	+8.8%
2011-2012	57.3	34.9	1208	-2.0%
2012-2013	59.8	30.8	1065	+2.5%
2013-2014	62.6	27.4	852	+2.8%
2014-2015	62.4	28.4	679	-0.1%

4.4.4 Conclusions

Just as there has been a gradual change in the racial makeup of Wildcat Pride School District, there has also been a gradual shift in the district's response to the needs of the students.

Although the district has made significant changes since the audit, policies and procedures should still be reviewed to identify other areas that are in need of change in order to show a more significant decrease in the suspension rates and AEDY placements of students. Although there does not appear to be consistency in the AEDY placement data, in school years 2008-2009 and 2010-2011, 6.4% of the African American student population in WPSD was placed in an AEDY program and nearly 6% in school year 2012-2013. This is a significant increase in comparison to school year 2000-2001which shows 0.3% of the African American student population that was placed in AEDY programs. As discussed in Chapter 4, there is a lack of consistency in the overall out-of-school suspension rates from 2000-2015; however, the out-of-school suspension rates for African American students stayed relatively the same after the audit showing a slight increase of 2.8%. Although AEDY placements had an overall drop of 55.9% in 2014-2015, continued research is necessary in order to determine if the decrease in placements continued in subsequent school years.

5.0   RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are suggested to address the increased suspension rates and AEDY placements that were seen while analyzing the data from Wildcat Pride School District from 2000-2015. Recommendations are specific to Wildcat Pride School District and focus on the correction of lost instructional time due to out-of-school suspensions as well as implications imposed by the enforcement of district policies and procedures. Although there are many approaches to alternatives to suspension that can be considered for implementation into schools, the following sections outline alternatives measures as well as alternative procedures for addressing disciplinary issues more proactively. From my professional experience with Wildcat Pride School District, these alternatives should be considered to address the immediate concerns of the students who are disproportionately at risk.   These alternatives help to reduce time spent out of school and they focus on positive contributions that students can make in response to negative actions.

5.1   COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP

Wildcat Pride School District is unique in that the district has become a melting pot of various communities that are all varied in terms of their demographic make-up as well as their social and cultural norms. Each community has their own ways of doing things based on their beliefs and

life experiences. Although these communities are in close proximity to one another, the daily challenges among each of these communities vary greatly. Because there is a lack of knowledge about these differences, the diversity found within each community that acts as a feeder for Wildcat Pride School District has not been supported in a way that advances the district in terms of the social and cultural needs of the students, parents, community members, and other district stakeholders. In order to understand these needs, it is necessary to open up a platform for discussion that provides all stakeholders the opportunity to be heard. By hearing from individuals who do not usually have a voice when it comes to district policies and procedures, we can become better informed about the needs and situations of others.

In order to bring all of the communities together in a way that respects the beliefs and needs of all stakeholders, it is important to include collective leadership initiatives in the overall plan of the district. Collective leadership is defined as a leadership processes that use the skills and knowledge of various individuals included in a network in order to gain trust and shared responsibility in the decision making process (Friedrich, Griffith, & Mumford, 2015). This style of leadership acknowledges the thoughts and opinions of those not in formal positional leadership roles through effective communication that provides the opportunity for others to emerge as leaders and act as catalysts for change within the network (Friedrich et al., 2015). According to the Community Learning Exchange (n.d.), collective leadership is, "a way for diverse groups of people in our communities to hold purpose, direction, and action cooperatively" ("Community Learning," n.d., p. 4). The framework for collective leadership used by the Community Learning Exchange focuses on a four stage process that helps to build trust by acting together to develop a strategic plan based on the individual needs of the community ("Community Learning," n.d.).

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Given the shift in demographics over the past fifteen years in the Wildcat Pride School District, collective leadership might serve as an appropriate response to the changing needs of the school community. By incorporating collective leadership, the school community may develop a greater commitment to district-wide initiatives and goals that has the potential to enhance the individual strengths of all stakeholders involved (Leithwood & Mascall, 2008). Collective leadership could be used to create a strategic plan that is responsive to the needs of all Wildcat Pride School District stakeholders and addresses the changing demographic make-up of the district. That strategic plan would likely incorporate other large scale recommendations that will take time and collaboration in order to be successful. Collective leadership can act as the foundation for the cultural shift to further serve change efforts moving forward by including a collective group of individuals in the reform process ("Community Learning," n.d.). An outline of these large scale recommendations is provided in the following sections.

5.2   DISTRICT POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Tobin and Sprague (2000) argued that zero-tolerance policies, increased violence, and school failure are expanding the need for alternative education programs which cause antisocial behavior that affects the development of students. According to radical vanguard theorists, these minority students have a power disadvantage set by society, or in this case, the policies of the educational system (Watson, 1973). Disciplinary approaches are also affected by the perceived safety of the school community and the crime rates related to the neighborhoods (Arcia, 2007). It has become commonplace for schools to incorporate the use of law enforcement officers, surveillance cameras, metal detectors, and personal searches into their daily procedures (Caton,

2012). The length to which these policies have been enforced has created an environment that looks less like an educational system and more closely resembles a criminal justice institution (Caton, 2012). Policies are a response to actions, but they do not address the underlying cause of the problem. Too often, the response to these actions provides an inequitable distribution of consequences. The disproportionate implementation of school policies based on race threatens the opportunity for advancement for certain students (Taylor & Foster, 1986). Students who continuously have problems in school are more likely to drop out, because policies focus more on punitive consequences instead of resolving the problems within the school environment (Taylor & Foster, 1986). The enforcing of rules, at times, overshadows teaching and learning, therefore, hindering educational success (Irby, 2013).   It has also been argued that North American schools use "militaristic philosophies" of discipline that weigh too heavily on ungrounded educational philosophies (Irby, 2013).

According to PDE, "Schools that have discipline policies or codes of conduct with clear, appropriate, and consistently applied expectations and consequences will help students improve behavior, increase engagement, and boost achievement" (Alternative Education, 2014). PDE also suggests that discipline policies should continuously be evaluated in order to ensure fairness and equity (Alternative Education, 2014). In making recommendations for Wildcat Pride School District, it is important to first determine the meaning of appropriate in terms of consequences. It has been determined that punitive consequences such as suspension and expulsion are not effective and could cause more harm than good (Skiba, Bear, Browning Wright, Wrobel & Cohn, 2002). Students who are removed from school due to negative behavior are at a greater risk of becoming delinquent and engaging in acts of crime (Skiba et al., 2002). The National Association of School Psychologists suggest that positive discipline strategies that focus on

desirable behaviors should be used such as, "positive reinforcement, modeling, supportive teacher-student relations, family support and assistance from a variety of educational and mental health specialists (Skiba et al., 2002). Proactive behavioral supports are also effective in responding to negative student behaviors especially when the support is culturally competent, provides early access to prevention, has sufficient intensity, and it includes a functional behavior assessment to help identify the problem behaviors (Skiba et al., 2002).

Due to the high rates of out-of-school suspensions and AEDY placements during the timeframe analyzed for this study, it is recommended that district policies and procedures be analyzed in order to ensure that the demographic variables that may have a confounding effect on students are considered (Gregory, Cornell & Fan, 2011). Research suggests that issuing out-of-school suspensions does not reduce the negative behavior exhibited by the students receiving the punitive consequences; therefore, alternatives to suspensions should be considered and reflected in district policies and procedures (Curran, 2016). Future research may be considered to review the district's policies and the effect they have on the rates of suspension. With the incorporation on zero-tolerance policies, suspension rates have increased due to the inability to address students on an individual basis when it comes to issuing consequences (Baltimore District, 2007). By adapting the punitive nature of the policies and incorporating alternative measures, disciplinary actions can be handled on a case-by-case basis based on the needs of each individual student (Baltimore District, 2007).

5.3   RESTORATIVE JUSTICE PRACTICES

The next recommendation is to move away from exclusionary discipline procedures and incorporate restorative justice practice. Davis (2014) defines restorative justice in schools as, "An effective alternative to punitive responses to wrongdoing…it brings together persons harmed with persons responsible for harm in a safe and respectful space, promoting dialogue, accountability, and a stronger sense of community" (p. 1). Restorative justice focuses on restoring relationships through non-punitive measures which helps to restore a safe school community (Vaandering, 2010). Oftentimes, schools implement zero-tolerance policies that are based on fear and focus on a short-term fix (Davis, 2014). This has proven to be ineffective in preventing recurrence and can actually cause additional harm. In response, Davis (2014) feels that it "has a disproportionately negative impact on students of color" (p.). School-based restorative justice is a proactive strategy that provides an equitable and respectful alternative to punitive discipline and it provides the opportunity for all members of the school community to thrive through a culture of connectivity and care (Davis, 2014).

Restorative justice holds three core principles: 1) repairing harm, 2) reducing risk, and 3) empowering community (Pavelka, 2013). Restorative justice aims to repair the harm that has been caused by the wrongdoing (Pavelka, 2013). Individuals who have done wrong are held accountable and encouraged to positively change their behavior (Pavelka, 2013). By preventing and controlling wrongful behavior, safety risks can be reduced. This creates a sense of peace and security within the community (Pavelka, 2013). It is also the role of restorative justice practices to empower the community. Schools, students and community should be empowered to actively take part in the process of resolution (Pavelka, 2013). According to Pavelka (2013), there are four main restorative justice practices that should be considered when adopting restorative justice

in schools. The first and most common practice is peer mediation. Peer mediation practices utilize conflict resolution and social competencies to create a school environment of mutual respect which helps to reduce the threat of violence (Pavelka, 2013). Peer/accountability boards are the second practice. These boards are made up of students, victims and wrongdoers. Consequences and accountability are tailored to the needs of the participants and a case plan is created (Pavelka, 2013). Case plans may include but are not limited to accountability measures such as restitution, letters of apology, counseling, and community service (Pavelka, 2013). Conferencing is the third practice identified by Pavelka (2013). In relation to peer/accountability boards, conferencing is used for larger groups of participants. Conferencing focuses on the individuals who were most affected by the wrongdoing. Discussion is guided by a trained facilitator who seeks to resolve the wrongdoing (Pavelka, 2013). The final practice addressed is circles. The circle process uses a talking piece which is passed around the circle for discussion (Pavelka, 2013).

In order to be successful and remain a long-term goal, it is suggested that restorative justice practices be reflected in district policies (Pavelka, 2013). By doing so, this adds a level of commitment to the cause and accountability for all stakeholders (Pavelka, 2013). Incorporating restorative justice practices in schools takes a commitment from all stakeholders and cannot be accomplished overnight. Restorative justice concepts must be taught first and bought into by teachers, administrators, parents and community members. Restorative justice takes strong leadership to incorporate and cannot be seen as a short-term solution to long held problems. By implementing restorative justice practices into disciplinary policies and procedures, discipline becomes an individualized response to student misbehavior based on their specific needs as opposed to a one-size-fits-all solution to a seemingly basic problem. It is important to note that

restorative justice is not just a set of rules that are implemented for the purpose of behavior modification but more so a philosophy that must be embraced on all levels of the educational system (Payne & Welch, 2013).

Implementing restorative justice practices into Wildcat Pride School District policies and procedures can help to repair the school community that has been damaged over the past decade. According to Payne and Welch (2013), punitive approaches to discipline are associated with the racial composition of schools. In relation, schools with higher percentages of African American students tend to implement harsher disciplinary policies (Welch & Payne, 2010). As an administrator in the district, I have witnessed a disconnect among staff and students, and on several occasions, African American students have expressed their concerns about the issuance of punitive consequences because they are Black. Although this may not be the case, many of the African American students feel that they are viewed differently and the response to their behaviors is unwarranted or inequitable. Restorative justice practices can begin to address the harm that the exclusionary discipline has caused to our students.

5.4   CREATING A CULTURE OF RESPONSIBILITY AND LEARNING

As school leaders, it becomes our responsibility to ensure that faculty and staff is prepared to meet the needs of all students, including those with varying cultural backgrounds. The next recommendation is to implement effective strategies into our everyday teaching practices to begin to make the changes that are necessary for the success of all students. Two important components of this work are culturally responsive teaching and communities of practice.

5.4.1 Culturally responsive teaching strategies

Culturally responsive teaching allows students to become engaged in social justice initiatives as well as focus on their development of social justice ideals, which encourages them balance social responsibility with classroom instruction while being aware of the need for community change (Bassey, 2016). In order to incorporate culturally responsive practices into the classroom, it is necessary for teachers to gain awareness of the cultural backgrounds of students. This knowledge helps to develop cross-cultural skills to interact with students more effectively and in an equitable manner (Weinstein et al., 2004).

Because of the gradual increase of African American students in Wildcat Pride School District from 2000-2015, it is recommended that the faculty be trained on the meaning of culturally responsive teaching strategies. Once the faculty has been familiarized with the meaning and importance of culturally responsive teaching, a district-wide initiative should be implemented in order to ensure that the strategies are being used within every classroom. By accommodating the needs of our students through a cultural lens, classroom instruction will continue to be the focus and negative student behaviors will subside.

5.4.2 Communities of practice

Professional development can be defined as, "a comprehensive, sustained, and intensive approach to improving the effectiveness of teachers and principals in raising student achievement (National Staff Development Council, 2009)" (as cited in Brown and Militello, 2016). Federal, state, and local policies that govern the public school system continue to advance and shift with the needs of our society. As society continues to change, it is important for educators and

educational leaders to advance our thinking and ways of responding to these changes. Professional development is an important aspect of most educational settings and is commonly used as a prescription for ailments of the educational system (Brown and Militello, 2016). Professional development plays a key role in the continuous growth of educators which implements new ideas that promote methods for improving student learning (Brown and Militello, 2016). By incorporating effective professional development into a school district's overall plan of action, stakeholders can be ensured that educators are provided with the knowledge to successfully integrate culturally responsive teaching and effective classroom management strategies into their daily procedures (Echevarria et al, 2004). Through improved teacher preparation, teachers become more knowledgeable about the incorporation of diverse teaching methods which relate to the social and cultural needs of their students (Echevarria et al, 2004). In doing so, teachers will be better prepared to address the conflicts which tend to result in punitive consequences. If districts do not effectively prepare teachers, ultimately, districts will fail to prepare their students (Echevarria et al, 2004). Training educators to recognize cultural differences and how these differences relate to student behaviors can help educators to better understand how to reduce conflict caused by cultural norms (Milner, 2013). When creating professional development plans, it is important to keep in mind the changes that have taken place within the school community as well as the communities that act as feeders for the school district. With a clear understanding of the district's needs for professional development, communities of practice can be put into place to address those common needs.

Through social interactions in practice, we build an identity that becomes who we are within a professional community (Wenger, 1998). In Wildcat Pride School District, there has been a shift in the identity of the school community over the past fifteen years that has been

noticed but has not been fully addressed. Although there has been a gradual increase of African American students in the overall student population, the practices used within the school community seem to be relatively the same even though the needs of the students have changed. The shift in the identity of the school community and the need for continued change in district practices and procedures lends itself to the need for a district-wide systemic change; however, this change must be implemented by all stakeholders of the school community and ongoing commitment must be made to ensure the success of these changes. The community of practice theory introduced by Wenger (1998) suggested that like-minded professional groups who share a concern or passion about a topic should collaborate on an ongoing basis to advance the learning and professional identity of those within the group. This deep-rooted socialization between "old timers" and "newcomers" provides an opportunity to develop collaborative participation within the organization (Morley, 2016, p. 161). Wenger's (1998) vision of communities of practice is one that develops learning as a longitudinal journey based on the needs of the present as well as future goals. By creating a community of practice within Wildcat Pride School District that addresses the changing demographics of the school community, all stakeholders can create a common goal that addresses the concerns that have been uncovered through this study as well as any future concerns that may affect the success of all students within Wildcat Pride School District.

6.0   IMPLICATIONS

As educators and educational leaders, it is our responsibility to ensure the success of each and every student who walks into our schools. All students deserve an equal opportunity and it is up to us to provide that opportunity in an educational environment that is appropriate for their needs. In being responsible educators and educational leaders, we are tasked with identifying problems and finding solutions to address these problems. Addressing student behavior that has a negative impact on the instructional process can be a challenging task. When implementing district policies, consideration should be given to the factors that contribute to the behaviors, especially factors such as teacher/student interactions and a teacher's response to challenging student behaviors (Fenning & Rose, 2007). The ways in which district policies are written contribute to increased rates of out-of-school suspensions because they do not specifically address the underlying issue (Fenning & Rose, 2007). Discipline policies focus on punitive consequences, such as out-of-school suspensions, and fail to address proactive measures that teach students alternative behaviors (Fenning & Rose, 2007). These punitive measures used in response to student behavior tend to disproportionately affect minority students (Fenning & Rose, 2007). The following sections of this chapter outline the implications that district policies and educational practices have on the students in Wildcat Pride School District as well as questions that should be considered for future research that may help to address the implications that have been discovered through this research.

6.1   EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES

It benefits the educational process when educators are able to recognize the advantages of culturally responsive interactions with students and how it affects their behavior (Milner, 2013). In recognizing their biases, teachers are more likely to reflect on how their biases affect their interactions with students (Metropolitan Center for Urban Education, 2008). Their adapted expectations influence student behaviors and expectations for learning (Metropolitan Center for Urban Education, 2008). By providing a culturally responsive teaching environment, students are provided with optimized learning opportunities that are tailored to fit their individual needs through instructional practices that address their cultural differences (Milner, 2013).

Over the past fifteen years that were analyzed in this study, educational practices in Wildcat Pride School District did not overtly address the needs of our students. In order to meet the needs of all students, a shift in educational practices must be made. Culturally responsive teaching practices and restorative justice concepts have to be incorporated into the overall district goals and must be considered as long-term commitments. As discussed previously, cultural diversity within the classroom can pose challenges that may have a negative effect on disciplinary patterns and educational outcomes (Milner, 2013). A recommendation has been made to incorporate culturally responsive teaching strategies into the classrooms in Wildcat Pride School District in order to address the challenges that arise that may trigger an overrepresentation of African American students being suspended out-of-school and placed in AEDY programs. Once these strategies have been implemented, future research may focus on analyzing the effects of these teaching strategies on the overall rates of suspension and placements into AEDY programs. This 'before and after' inquiry will serve to address the

effects of the development of cross-cultural skills which are meant to create a more effective and equitable classroom environment (Weinstein et al., 2004).

Gaining a solid understanding of the social and cultural context of those we serve can serve to address the needs of the district and create an equitable educational environment. Prior to the incorporation of culturally responsive teaching strategies in the programs and procedures of Wildcat Pride School District, data collected from the implementation of a collective leadership initiative should be reviewed in order to determine more specific prioritized needs of community and district stakeholders. The Community Learning Exchange stated that, "No one person alone can heal a community" (n.d., p. 3). This sentiment speaks to the needs of the communities that act as feeders for Wildcat Pride School District. It is only by working together that the school community can move forward in a direction that encompasses the unique needs of each community in order to overcome challenges through a collective approach to leadership ("Community Learning," n.d.).

Future research foci could be responsive to the specific needs of those communities who make up the school community. By interviewing and surveying community members, students, parents, and teachers, district leaders can gain a greater insight into the needs of their stakeholders. This qualitative inquiry can be used to create a district-wide plan that focuses on building community relationships through the use of a Community Learning Exchange framework. The framework encourages equality and works to build trust, respect, and unity among all members of the network ("Community Learning," n.d.). In doing so, collective leadership can be implemented in a way that incorporates the views and opinions of all of the school community's stakeholders collectively. By cultivating this leadership strategy through the incorporation of each of the diverse communities into the planning process, the district's

capacity to realize social change can be strengthened ("Community Learning," n.d.). This may begin the process to help bridge the gap that currently exists within the school community.

6.2   DISTRICT POLICIES

Discipline is a necessary component of all school systems; however, some discipline approaches have shown to have a negative effect on students and schools (Curran, 2016). It is suggested that racial disparities are made in the "differential use of disciplinary procedures and policies on the part of school personnel" causing disparities in the issuance of disciplinary consequences (Curran, 2016, p. 647). Zero-tolerance policies have already proven to be ineffective and should not be considered as a viable means of disciplinary response to student misbehavior (Teske, 2011). They predefine disciplinary consequences which may exacerbate racial disparities and contribute to the racial discipline gap (Curran, 2016). Although there are many federal and state policies that are mandated for school districts, there is a great deal of control on the part of the district when it comes to the implementation of local policies.   School districts have the ability to revise ineffective policies as well as adopt new policies and procedures that are beneficial to their students, and, in relation to Wildcat Pride School District, meet their changing needs. In order to ensure that these cultural differences are addressed in a manner that is equitable, changes to policies and procedures must be considered by Wildcat Pride School District.

As school leaders, it is our responsibility to ensure that changes to district policies and procedures are equitable and reflective of the needs of all students. The significant change in the demographic history of Wildcat Pride School District warrants an overhaul in our thinking and response to disciplinary issues. The implementation of restorative justice in schools helps all

stakeholders to realign their philosophies on discipline and response to negative behaviors. It is time to move away from the old way of thinking that negative student behavior must be punished. There must now be a paradigm shift that addresses the management of behavior along restorative lines as opposed to punitive consequences (Hopkins, 2002). By incorporating restorative justice practices in schools, we can begin to address the gradual shift in the changing demographic school community that has become our present day Wildcat Pride School District.

6.3   FUTURE RESEARCH

Several areas of concern were uncovered while researching and analyzing the data associated with this study. In order to have a greater understanding of the implications of this research study, future research should be conducted to address the underlying issues that were discovered that justify a more in-depth inquiry. The suggested research topics in the following section of this document may help to gather a greater insight into the fundamental workings of Wildcat Pride School District. By diving deeper into the following topics, a more comprehensive picture of the foundation of the relationship between student behavior and discipline may be uncovered.

6.3.1   Turnover in leadership

A link has been made that connects the quality of school leadership with school climate and student achievement (Jacob, Goddard, Kim, Miller & Goddard, 2015). Principals play an important role in implementing and maintaining various programs and initiatives within schools and can have a great impact on school reform efforts (Miller, 2013). While analyzing the data

relative to the district of study, it was apparent that there has been significant turnover in leadership between 2000 and 2015. In relation to this study, principals may have a potentially substantial influence over organizational culture and student disciplinary outcomes that may affect students' overall success (Coelli & Green, 2011). Each principal has their own style of leadership as well as varying philosophies on discipline. What is unclear is the effect that the changes in leadership have on the implementation of disciplinary policies and procedures and whether or not there have been increases or decreases in rates of suspension in relation to the individual who is issuing the sanctions. Very little literature exists that discusses the effect of turnover in leadership on the enforcement of disciplinary policies and procedures. Future research may address the effects of this change in leadership on the suspension rates and AEDY placements and whether or not the consequences vary depending on the individual implementing the disciplinary actions.

6.3.2 Equity in education

There is a lack of cultural diversity in the educational system in the United States. According to Talbert-Johnson and Tillman (1999), most educators are White and female even when the student population is culturally diverse. Because of this lack of equity, educational success is at risk for these diverse students (McClung, Ott & Mat Som, 2008). McClung, Ott and Mat Som (2008) go as far as to say that 40% of schools in the United States do not have any teachers of color. This study found that this lack of faculty and staff diversity also holds true for Wildcat Pride School District across the district. According to Terhune (2006), actively including minority groups helps to promote long term educational equality.

Although the hiring of additional staff members has been very limited due to financial constraints on the district, when possible, hiring practices should include strategies to ensure cultural inclusion. By incorporating a culturally inclusive faculty and staff, the school community can begin to promote acceptance of differing cultures and backgrounds (McClung et al., 2008). This also provides students with the opportunity to have role models to which they can relate (McClung et al., 2008). Implications for future research should address the ratio of diversity between the faculty, staff, and students and consider an initiative to recruit a more diverse staff to reflect the changing demographics of the district. Barron and D'Annunzio-Green (2009) posed that student expectations are based on a teacher's personal life and cultural experiences. By implementing a more diverse environment within the school community, students may be more apt to relate to the varied cultural experiences associated with the faculty and staff (Valiente, 2008).

6.3.3 Questions for consideration

Because this has not been a conclusive study, there is a need for additional research in order to gain a full understanding of the changes that have taken place in Wildcat Pride School District from 2000-2015. There is also a need to look at data that goes beyond 2015 in order to see if the changes that have taken place during that time period have continued or remained the same. Based on the implications that have been addressed in Chapter 6, I have generated questions that may be considered for future research that can further inform this research and that should be viewed as an extension of the current research. The following questions are wonderings that have emerged while reviewing literature and analyzing data related to this study:

1. How does the change in leadership from 2000-2015 affect the overall out-of-school

   suspension rates and AEDY placements? Is there a pattern in the rates of suspension and

   AEDY placements based on who is in the leadership position?

2. How does the lack of diversity among faculty and staff affect the educational success of

   culturally diverse students in Wildcat Pride School District?

3. How does the implementation of restorative justice practices into district policies and

   procedures affect the rates of suspension and AEDY placements?

4. With the incorporation of culturally responsive teaching strategies and restorative justice

   practices into classrooms, how have the teachers' responses to challenging student

   behaviors changed?

5. How do suspension rates and AEDY placements for students residing in Duquesne

   compare to those residing in other communities within Wildcat Pride School District?

7.0   AFTERWORD: A PRACTITIONER'S REFLECTION

The process of this research study has been one of great enlightenment in many ways. At its inception, I had many thoughts in relation to the foundation of Wildcat Pride School District in regards to its demographics within the school district as well the surrounding communities. In reflecting back on this process, I have learned a tremendous amount about the importance of race and what that means for students and communities and how the acceptance of racial differences affects the overall climate of the school community. Culture is at the core of every community. It makes us who we are and culture is how we identify with others. This is an important concept to consider when you begin to address the concerns within a school community. Without an understanding of culture, there can be misunderstandings that lead to conflict that can be difficult to overcome. If we take the time to understand the differences in the cultures we share, we will be more likely to accept the differences between us. Over the past fifteen plus years, the overall culture of the East Allegheny School District has changed, but there has been little acceptance to this change due to a lack of understanding. At one point in time, Wildcat Pride was a predominately White middle class school district with a small percentage of African American students. Over time, this has changed. Although still fewer than White students, African American students have become a more integral part of the school community. As the percentage of African American students gradually increased each year and the students from

Duquesne City School District merged with Wildcat Pride School District, it brought on a sense of fear among the school community. It was a fear of the unknown.

I think it becomes the responsibility of the school leaders to address this change and help the school community to understand the cultural shift that has been created from the inclusion of a more diverse group of individuals. In addressing this shift, it is important to also consider the needs of the faculty and staff. Not only are the students entering a school community that does not understand their cultural differences, the faculty and staff, which are almost entirely White, do not necessarily have the skills to relate to these students. It is up to the administrators to educate them on how to be culturally responsive in their approach to teaching as well as responding to student behavior. We cannot expect them to have these tools on their own without our guidance, and we must show them how to remove the blinders to the inequity that arises from simply ignoring racial differences. It is no longer acceptable for educators and educational leaders to ignore the importance of race within the classroom as well as within district policies and procedures. We have a responsibility to our students to educate them in a manner that provides them with an appropriate education that addresses their academic, social, and cultural needs in a way that does not ignore race. There are still people out there with the mindset that addressing race causes racism. This is far from the case. It is our responsibility to address racial tensions and inequities in our schools. If we do not, we fail to provide our students with what they need to be successful.

During my time as an administrator in Wildcat Pride School District, I have heard many educators say that all they want to do is teach. Only in perfect situations can a teacher simply 'just teach'. The role of educators has changed over time and has grown to encompass much more than teaching the core fundamentals of instructional standards. With each passing year,

the needs of our students grow and we have to be creative in our approach to address those needs. We have become more than just educators. On any given day, we can act as counselors, mediators, mothers and fathers, and even nurses. We have to be prepared to address misbehavior that inevitably disrupts the classroom. It is a challenge, but how we respond to those disruptions can make all the difference in what happens next. By educating ourselves on how to respond, we can diffuse situations and help students to make better choices. We have to be willing to accept that every day brings on new challenges; challenges that influence our minds, hearts, core beliefs, and most importantly, our decisions. We hold the future of these children in our hands and we have to be confident that the decisions we make on a daily basis are in their best interest and will help them to become successful members of society.

This research process has helped me grow both professionally and personally. On a personal level, I have begun to look at people differently, regardless of race, in a way that acknowledges their past experiences and personal needs. By nature, I am a rule follower. I like order and consistency, especially when there is a level of accountability. Although I am still a creature of habit, this process has helped me to address situations more on an individual basis as opposed to 'by the rules'. As an administrator, it has helped me to understand the importance of embracing cultural differences in order to understand the needs of our students and to accept that there is not a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to discipline. I continue to strive toward letting go of the rule book and embracing the alternative solutions to discipline, but I have accepted the importance of this change and am willing to do whatever it takes to provide the students of Wildcat Pride School District with an equitable educational experience.

In my opinion, this topic was too important to wait to address at Wildcat Pride. Although it has been a long process, along the way I began to implement strategies that I learned into my

daily practices and yearly goals. Even small changes made here and there are better than ignoring the responsibility that I have to the students whom I serve. I began this study with the intention of gaining an understanding of the audit findings, but during the process, I uncovered so many other factors that have become significant to the core of this study; factors that were not apparent on the surface but hold significant meaning when looking at the influence they have on our school community. They have led me to think more deeply about this study and have caused me to think about how I can continue research as an extension of this case study in order to continue on this journey of cultural awareness.

This study provided an overview of what took place in Wildcat Pride School District over the past fifteen years that affected the culture of the school community as well as the suspension rates and AEDY placements. There are still many questions that need to be answered in order to do justice for our students in relation to this topic; however, it is time to look forward. Although we should not forget the past and what has made us what we are today, we must begin to focus on how to implement change in order to create an environment of cultural acceptance through the use of culturally responsive teaching strategies as well as incorporating restorative justice practices into our policies and procedures. Having knowledge of the needs of our students and all stakeholders of the district, I believe it is necessary to incorporate these practices with fidelity and ensure that they represent the core foundation of Wildcat Pride School District. By acknowledging the needs of all stakeholders, we can begin to create a school community that embraces the cultural differences of all students in a way that is responsive to their needs and ensures an equitable education for all students regardless of color.

SECONDARY ANALYSIS PROTOCOL

Betsy D'Emidio   University of Pittsburgh   2016/17

SECONDARY ANALYSIS PROTOCOL
Exploration of changing demographics in a suburban school district:
Examining racial disparities in discipline-related metrics

TYPE OF DOCUMENT:	NAME OF DOCUMENT:
DATE:	AUTHOR/CREATOR:

HIGH FREQUENCY WORDS/PHRASES:

THEMES:

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OTHER PERTINENT INFORMATION:

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