

PREDICTORS OF ZERO TOLERANCE POLICY VIOLATIONS AMONG HIGH SCHOOL
AND MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

by

Anthony Roberson

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Liberty University, School of Education

May, 2019

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Abstract

This study embarked on identifying social and economic variables to predict violations of zero tolerance policies. The objective of this study was to identify a set of variables that may predict circumstance that lead a student to violate zero tolerance policies. This study explored whether a set of five risk factors: (i) grade level, (ii) retention, (iii) suspension, (iv) race, and (v) gender can predict the criterion variable, zero tolerance policies violation. The research design supports the examination of the null hypothesis of no predictive relationship between the predictor variables grade level, suspension, race, and gender and the criterion variable which is the violation of zero tolerance policies for middle and high school students. In this correlation research study, archival data was collected from the greater metro region of a northeastern state public school database for two school years: 2014-2015 and 2017-2018. Students were drawn from three middle schools and one high school in the district. A multiple linear regression was conducted to determine which of the independent variables: grade level, suspension, race, and gender are predictors of the violation of zero tolerance policies for middle school and high school students. The findings of the statistical analysis provided an understanding of which set of risk factor variables can predict zero tolerance policy violations among middle school and high school students.

Keywords: Zero Tolerance Policy, School Resource Officers, school discipline, student suspension, grade level.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my many friends, church family, chair and committee who have supported me.

Acknowledgments

A deep sense of gratitude is offered to family, friends, and academic advisors that have supported me every step along this journey. I recognize without the support of so many well-wishers, this work could not have been completed.

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List of Abbreviations

American Psychological Association (APA)

Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)

International Review Board (IRB)

National Association of School Psychologists (NASP)

School Resource Officers (SROs)

The Gun-Free School Act (GFSA)

Chapter One: Introduction

Overview

Metal detectors, surveillance cameras, and uniformed police officers highlight experiences of many students enrolled in the school systems throughout the United States (U.S.). These aggressive control mechanisms were prompted by several high-profile school violence events in the 1990s. Such highly publicized school violence incidents included the Columbine High School shooting in Colorado. The disturbing images that flashed on live television added to the trauma of students cowering down inside their classrooms. While the Columbine shooting had ushered in a nationwide response to violence in the classroom (O'Toole, 2000; Vossekuil, Fein, Reddy, Borum, & Modzeleski, 2002), the ghost of Columbine has continued to visit violence in the U.S. Schools, as the memory of the school shooting in Marjory Stoneman Douglas School is still vivid in the minds of people (Held, 2018). The Columbine shooting was instrumental at the local level, where school administrators and authorities implemented strict security measures and emphasized zero tolerance for misbehavior by students (ACLU, 2017, p.20), with a view to prevent violence in schools across America. However, the anatomy of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas School shooting points to the stark reality that, SROs may not be able to prevent violence in schools (Held, 2018). This study examined whether zero tolerance policy violations in students could be predicted based on a set of student behavior and demographic variables.

Background of Zero Tolerance Policy

In response to multiple school shootings that took place in the early 1990s, former President Bill Clinton signed the Gun-Free School Act (GFSA), which was passed by Congress

in 1994 (Hitchcock, 2013). Zero tolerance policies have been criticized by the legal community, “... lawyers complain that these officers, referred to as school resource officers, often lack sufficient training, leading to more arrests—sometimes for infractions as minor as flatulence or dress code violations” (Ward, 2014, para. 4; ACLU, 2017). Zero tolerance policies reduced, but did not eliminate, incidents with firearms. As research reveals, more than 30 firearm incidents were reported in schools between 1990 and 1998 (Hitchcock, 2013). According to the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) Fact Sheet (2001), it was the Columbine High School incident which led to the expansion of zero tolerance policies that required, “both minor and major disciplinary events be treated equally” (para. 5). The continuous television airing of mass school shootings may have promoted the erroneous belief that all schools were unsafe and ushered in zero tolerance policies in schools across the nation (Neuman, 2012).

Zero tolerance policies came as part of a unified response from the U.S. Senate, the House of Representatives, and the White House, who held hearings on school violence. Additionally, these hearings were prompted by the fall-out from zero tolerance policies’ impact of increasing the rate at which students’ behavioral issues at school were processed under the punitive rubric of juvenile criminal justice as:

... the number of high school students suspended or expelled over the course of a school year increased roughly 40 percent between 1972 and 2009, while the racial disciplinary gaps also widened. During the 2013–2014 school year, the Department of Education’s Office of Civil Rights reported that black students were 3.8 times more likely than white students to receive an out-of-school suspension. Similar disparities held true even for black preschoolers. Advocates have pressured school officials and policy-makers to end these suspensions, expulsions, and school-based arrests, which they say push too many

students into the criminal justice system—a process commonly referred to as the “school-to-prison pipeline. (Cohen, 2016, para. 7)

Prompted by massive federal funding and backed by escalating concerns regarding campus violence, schools have begun relying on police officers as the on-campus enforcement mechanism. These police officers are often titled as school resource officers (SROs). The reliance on SROs has resulted in school officials and policymakers to institute “...heavy-handed measures to maintain order and control in their buildings” (Nance, 2016, p.152). This approach has led to “...more student suspensions and expulsions” (Nance, 2016, p. 153) and school children being referred to law enforcement system (Nance, 2016, p. 153).

Students are penalized for minor infractions such as, refusing to remove an article of clothing or turning off a digital device. Consider that in 2014, California took the lead in becoming the first state to “...ban “willful defiance” suspensions for its youngest students—a category of misconduct that includes refusing to remove a hat, to wear the school uniform, or to turn off a cell phone” (Cohen, 2016, para. 30). Furthermore, youth are being processed and sentenced to adult correctional facilities at an alarming rate across the U.S. (Redding, 2010). While societal mores demand a heightened protection of students, a critical examination of zero tolerance policies is needed to determine whether these students are truly being protected.

While the scholarly articles mentioned above discuss the negative impact of zero tolerance policies students, research also suggests beneficial impacts to the student and staff at the schools. For example, a recent article argued that zero tolerance polices are necessary because the policies:

yield positive effects of communicating to parents, teachers and students that certain behaviors such as drug possession, fighting or profanity are not allowed in schools.

Students are accountable for the actions and teachers are able to articulate clear expectations about disciplinary consequences and provide a chaos-free climate. Parents are put at ease knowing that strong and consistent procedures are in place for students who have committed major offenses. (Sasser, 2019, para. 1)

Similarly, the American Psychological Association (APA) (2008) reported that parents “overwhelmingly support the implementation of zero tolerance policies” (p.854) based on their perception that these policies create a safer school cimate for all stakeholders: students, teachers, and support staff that daily attend these schools.

In discussing the implementation of the zero tolerance policies, the President of the National School Safety and Security Services, Mr. K. Trump argues,

Contrary to suggestions by the media, politicians, and Ivory-Tower theorists, the real problem is therefore the absence of common sense and questionable implementation of disciplinary policies, not the presence of intentionally harsh actions committed to fuel a master nationwide conspiracy plan called “zero tolerance.” (Trump, n.d., para. 2)

This example by Trump reveales the lack of common sense and wrong application result in students being wrongly penalized and, in some cases, criminalized for petty pranks. Next, it would be relevant to look at some statistics pertaining to how student behavior is criminalized under the implementation of zero tolerance policies.

The Process of Criminalization of Student Misbehavior

As of 2000, nearly 90% of school districts had at least one zero tolerance policy that students could potentially violate (Fader, Lockwood, Schall, & Stokes, 2014, p. 2). But, the increased number of zero tolerance policies required enforcement. Enforcement has typically been mandated by police officers or SROs as evidenced by an example from New York City

school districts.

In the 2005–2006 school year, New York City boasted “...4,625 school safety agents and at least 200 armed police officers in schools, making the New York Police Department’s School Safety Division the 10th largest police force in the country” (Fader, Lockwood, Schall, & Stokes 2014, p. 2). With law enforcement as a primary school behavior management force, the likelihood of students referred to the criminal justice system increased (Cohen, 2016). As Theriot and Cuellar (2016) argue, “placement of these officers at schools raises complex issues and poses new challenges to students’ rights, including the risks of unreasonable search and seizure, the inappropriate sharing of confidential information, and students’ decreased feelings of safety” (para.1).

Lost in the process of criminalization of student misbehavior, zero tolerance policies have muted the contribution of school counselors and teachers in managing student behavior issues while empowering law enforcement personnel. This has opened the door to consider whether schools would better serve students by engaging a full-time “licensed social worker/counselor rather than a police officer” (Fox & Burnstein, 2010, p. 175). This enforcement centric environment creates a negative ambience in schools that is less than conducive to learning because “...schools with high rates of suspension also have lower graduation rates, have lower school climate ratings, have lower test scores” (Fader, Lockwood, Schall, & Stokes 2014, p. 5) and low achievement scores.

While zero tolerance policies can vary from state to state in their scope, context, and implementation across the U.S., a common thread binds all these policies: certain behaviors will not be tolerated, regardless of the impact on students and their communities. Thus, the common binding thread has been encapsulated under a prohibitive framework called zero tolerance policy

or zero tolerance policies. To gain better insight into the varying degrees of zero tolerance policy violations and consequences, consider the following examples.

- New York: In 2010, a 12-year-old girl was handcuffed and arrested for writing on her desk during Spanish class. Police and administrators admitted it was poor judgement in arresting the “girl who’d been caught doodling on her desk with erasable marker” (McDonough, 2010, para.2).
- Maryland: A 7-year-old boy earned a two-day school suspension after biting his pop-tart pastry into the shape of a gun and announcing to the surrounding students around him he had made a gun (Neil, 2014).
- Texas: A 14-year-old girl was given a two-day suspension for refusing to remove her rosary from her neck. The student had informed her school administrators that the rosary was a reminder of her late grandmother (KHOU Staff, 2011).
- New Jersey: A 7-year-old boy was charged by police for possessing a firearm after he was found having a toy Nerf gun that shoots only ping pong balls (Whitehead, 2011).

These examples showcase how misbehaviors like doodling on a desk resulted in criminal action toward students. These examples also reveal how misbehavior in one state earned a simple verbal warning, yet the very same misbehavior in another state, resulted in suspension. The uncertainty associated with whether a misbehavior is a violation has impacted students and communities nationwide.

Thus, designating a behavior as a violation of zero tolerance policies can have real consequence in the lives of many students. It will have immense societal benefit to predict such behaviors before they occur. Therefore, the objective of this research is to identify a set of variables that may be able to predict under what circumstance a child may violate zero tolerance

policies (Petras et al., 2011). It is expected that identifying the risk factors of zero tolerance policy violations would prevent the trickle-down impact of criminalization of school disciplining. This knowledge may help policymakers and school administrators awaken to a public social implosion impacting students and their communities.

Impact on Learning

Increased police presence may not have the deterrent effect to decrease youth violence within school premises. Rather, research highlights the negative impact such increased police presence may have on youth (Dohrn, 2002). Studies reveal that SROs minimally contributed to school safety through their surveillance and enforcement function (Petteruti, 2011). Literature supports the contention that SROs have created an environment that is not conducive to student learning (Jackson, 2002).

As the above nation-wide examples revealed, law enforcement officers on school campuses have added to the disruption in the learning environment of some students that are arrested for mistakenly bringing a butter knife to school, or a toy gun to school, and even suspended or expelled for bringing Advil or acne medication to school (Cauchon, 1999; Dohrn, 2002; Lawyers.com, n.d). It has been reported that students were accosted by the campus SRO and handcuffed for bringing a screwdriver and a small cutting knife from home (Blad, 2015). Enforcement of misbehaviors has resulted in removing students from their much-needed educational support system (Noguera, 2003; Payne & Welch, 2010). Students who had their educational support system removed due to a suspension or were pushed out because of zero tolerance policy violations faced possible “alienation, alcohol and drug use, and future antisocial behavior (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2003).

Mandatory suspensions and school policing created predictable preconditions such as

school drop-outs, especially in the inner cities. By being shunted out of an opportunity to attain public education, these students are exposed to gang recruitment and drug indoctrination.

Research found that between 2002 to 2004, black youth,

...accounted for twenty-eight percent of all juvenile arrests, thirty-seven percent of detained youth, thirty-four percent of youth formally processed by the juvenile court, thirty-five percent of youth judicially waived to criminal court, and fifty-eight percent of youth sent to state adult prison. (Henning, 2012, p. 4)

This research revealed that minority youth, in particular black youth, are overrepresented in the juvenile justice system. Despite the literature revealing that students of color and inner-city youths are disproportionately represented in the justice system, (Snyder, 2011; Henning 2012; Cohen, 2016), there has been a paucity of research in identifying risk factors that can predict violations of zero tolerance policies in students. The risk factors are important to identify as strict enforcement of zero tolerance policies has created a mechanism by which minority and inner-city students have been subjected to a “push out” process (Petteruti, 2011, p. 20) in which many are left academically injured by the strict enforcement of violations.

Criminalization of Student Behavior

In discussing strict rules, locked school gates, and hallway surveillance cameras, researchers noted that, the prison-like environment found too often in the inner-city school system “produce[s] docile prisoners” (Le, 2016, p. 1). Researchers identified many similarities between prisons and schools. “These linkages are physical and grotesquely evident in urban schools with the increased use of surveillance and incarceration tools: metal detectors, surveillance cameras, school uniforms, and armed security guards” (Nance, 2016, p. 153). Fox and Burnstein (2010) cautioned that the current trend toward security in school architectural design of the physical

space, landscape, and playgrounds must “avoid the appearance of a penal colony” (p.137).

Reports reveal that SROs have been aggressive with students for acts of youthful indiscretion (Manning, 2015; Mitchell, 2014; Cohen, 2016). Students have been accosted by the campus SROs, even handcuffed for bringing a kitchen utensil to school (Blad, 2015). These misbehaviors are now commonly enforced by SROs instead of managed by the school principal, school counselor or class monitors. Sanneh and Jacobs (2008) found “when police are present in the schools and work closely with school administrators to enforce discipline, more students are arrested for offenses that would have previously resulted in detention, suspension, expulsion, or an informal disciplinary sanction” (p.4). Zero tolerance policies have failed to distinguish between the severity of offenses and have had a disproportionate impact on minority students of color (Mitchell, 2014, p.273). One scholar compared student expulsion on account of zero tolerance policies violation as somewhat akin to denial of constitutional right to education, while observing:

Even if policy could eventually resolve the problem, courts should not ask students to wait on states and schools to respect their rights. Constitutional rights exist to protect citizens against the whims of local, state, and federal majorities. Each unjustifiably imposed suspension and expulsion is a deprivation of a right that demands a response. Each suspension or expulsion represents a potential educational death sentence and second class citizenship. (Hirji, 2018, para. 3)

Therefore, it would be important to study the possible predictors that could point to the likelihood of a student violating zero tolerance policies. The motivation for such a study is in enabling policy makers and educators to identify the types of student that may be a candidate for violating the zero tolerance policies. Such identification in turn could then be used to prevent

students from coming under the scope of zero tolerance policy violations.

Problem Statement

Current research is limited in assessing student performance and behavior-based variables, such as: truancy, grade level, retention, and suspension in predicting student violation of zero tolerance policies. A study by Hemphill, Plenty, Herrenkohl, Toumbourou, & Catalano (2014) analyzed the variables: student problem behavior, rebelliousness, and academic failure, but did not examine the variable race as a predictor of school suspension. A study by Mendez (2013) indicated that suspension alone could not adequately account for the zero tolerance policy violations in students, and more research should be done. A study by Smith (2015) examined race bias in the implementation of zero tolerance policies and indicated how minorities may be disproportionately affected by the zero tolerance policies. The Smith (2015) study calls for exploring alternative solutions that consider sociological and psychological factors in developing a framework to combat zero tolerance policy violations. A report by the APA Zero Tolerance Task Force (Skiba et al., 2006; APA Task Force, 2008) recommends adopting research-based prevention practice that urge exploring alternative solutions away from punitive focus. Skiba et al. (2006) recommended examining a broader set of risk factors to explore predictor relationship with violations of zero tolerance policies .

The current study examines various student behavior and performance variables along with a set of student demographic variables to identify whether zero tolerance policy violations among students can be predicted by a set of predictor variables. By linking these predictors with violations of zero tolerance policies among students, this study intends to provide a possible framework for prevention of zero tolerance policy violations among students.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this quantitative correlation study was to determine if a relationship exists between the predictor variables: (i) grade level, (ii) retention, (iii) suspension, (iv) race, (v) gender, and the criterion variable zero tolerance policy violation. Thus, the study aimed to identify if there are student performance, behavior, and demographic variables that cause them to violate zero tolerance policies.

Significance of the Study

Existing research focuses on student behavior and performance variables to predict violations of zero tolerance policies (Hemphill, Plenty, Herrenkohl, Toumbourou, & Catalano (2014). By combining demographic variables with variables related to student behavior and performance, this study seeks to add to the existing body of research. Thus, identifying predictor variables that must be measured outside of the school environment will enable the educational and judicial system to view students through a more expanded set of risk factors. This approach will allow zero tolerance policy violations to be predicted by more than the number of suspensions or repetitions of grave level. This current study's nuanced view would consider the linkages between disenfranchisement of the child based on race and gender and the behavioral issues seen through suspension and retention. In viewing the students in this expanded perspective, zero tolerance policies shift from a punitive approach to a rehabilitative and preventive approach.

Finally, a goal of this study is to contribute to the scholarly research that posits a message of hope for the many students impacted by zero tolerance policies. The research findings will disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline and ensure students' pranks or misbehaviors are not criminalized.

Research Question

The following research question will guide the current study:

RQ1: Is there a predictive relationship between the set of variables: grade level, retention, suspension, race, and gender and the incidence of violations of zero tolerance policies for middle and high school students?

Definitions

1. *Zero tolerance policy or zero tolerance policies* - Zero tolerance policies are defined as a school or school district policy that mandates consequences or punishments for violations of the predetermined policy. The violation has specific mandated consequences that must be applied for the violation offense. The policy mandates that each school district must ...have in effect a State law requiring local educational agencies to expel from school for a period of not less than 1 year a student who is determined to have brought a firearm to a school, or to have possessed a firearm at a school... (Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994, para. 1)

The punishments are applied absolute to all violations, regardless of the degree of offense, the mitigating circumstances, or without consideration for the seriousness and context of violations.

2. *School Resource Officers (SROs)* - School Recourse Officers are defined as law enforcement police officers having the sworn authority to enforce the GFSA. These officers are assigned to work at local school campuses and are mandated to arrest students for violations of zero tolerance policies .
3. *Violations of zero tolerance policies* - Violations of zero tolerance policies are defined as an offense. For example, a student being found in possession of a weapon. The GFSA

violation would be a student found in “possession of a gun” or “by finding a student either in possession of a weapon or illegal drugs or involved in fights within the school premises” (Pub. L. 103-382, Title I, § 101, October 20, 1994, 198 Stat. 3907).

4. *Predictor Variables* - Predictor Variables are defined as possible influences that could predict the likelihood of a student violating zero tolerance policies .
5. *Grade level* - Grade level is defined as the education level associated with the school student for the academic year in which the measurement is being done.
6. *Retention* - Retention is defined by the number of times a student has been held over the same grade level.
7. *Suspension* - Suspension is defined as the act of disciplining students by removing them from school premises for either a designated number of days or a designated number of class periods as per the school policy.
8. *Race* - Race is defined as the ethnicity of the student as recorded in the student personal file.
9. *Gender* - While it is understood that gender identity could be more expansive than the traditional male and female identification based on traditional conception of biological sex, however, for this study, variable gender included a binary choice of male and female based on biological sex as applied to the student in question and as recorded in the school database.

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

Overview

According to the NASP, the term zero tolerance was initially defined as “consistently enforced suspension and expulsion policies in response to weapons, drugs and violent acts in the school setting” (NASP, 2013, para. 4). From its focus on prevention of drugs and gun violence in the 1980s, zero tolerance policies have evolved into a much broader area. Zero tolerance policies encompass school district-wide policies that mandate comparatively severe punishments to students for minor infractions. These punishments are mostly predetermined and extremely rigid, most often with severe consequences to the recipients (Kajs, 2006). Punishment may include, suspension and expulsion for a wide degree of rule violations (NASP, 2001). The U.S. Department of Education and the Center for Safe and Responsive Schools have reported that, across the U.S., more than 75% of schools carry zero tolerance policies in their books (NASP, 2012, para.3).

Since the inception of the nation-wide zero tolerance policy mandate, many school districts require students and their caregivers to sign a zero tolerance policy notice each school year. By signing the notice, student and parents are informed about the school’s strict enforcement requirements and consequences resulting from a violation of the zero tolerance policy in their district. The notice often lists the many actions that could result in a violation, such as, “Any object used in dangerous manner will also be considered a weapon” (Pathways Academy, 2018). Additionally, some schools also inform students and their parents that, “In addition to discipline, if you are found to have violated the law you may be arrested and taken to juvenile detention facility” (Pathways Academy, 2018). This backdrop provides an

understanding into the strict enforcement of zero tolerance policies that has permeated school districts nationwide.

Theoretical Framework

Broken Windows Theory. The Broken Windows theory (Wilson & Kelling, 1982) provides support for the implementation of zero tolerance policy violations. The Broken Windows theory posits that isolated instances of infractions seen in a few pieces of broken glass windows should not be taken lightly, rather they should be seen as ominous signs of bigger crimes, and must be handled more decisively and punitively. Thus, by noting the potential dangers of not repairing a few broken windows in a building, the Broken Windows theory warns school administrators of not taking lightly students' pranks or small infractions. Initially the broken windows might not cause any problem. However, if the broken windows are kept unrepaired for a long time, vagrants might enter out of curiosity or as they seek temporary shelter. This could lead to vagrants breaking more windows and becoming squatters. A squatter might decide to light a fire or engage in activities that might cause irreparable damage to the building or bring the whole building down. Proponents of the Broken Window theory compare a few unrepaired broken windows in a building to a few unruly students that could trigger a chain reaction to jeopardize the integrity of the entire school system or bring more students to their ambit of unruly behavioral pattern.

According to the Broken Window theory, a cascading negative effect takes place from a single isolated broken window left unattended. From a single broken window left unrepaired, or student infractions not penalized could escalate into much bigger crimes by students. Researcher Teske (2011) noted various school districts have used this theory of crime prevention in ushering in a new paradigm of harsher punishment for minor infractions within school

compounds (Teske, 2011). Drawing support from the Broken Window theory, many school administrators feel that punishing students early on can prevent them from becoming more violent in the long run (Teske, 2011).

Despite the theoretical robustness of the Broken Window theory and its elegant application to justify zero tolerance policies in schools, it should be evaluated from a comprehensive framework. Literature has highlighted zero tolerance policies' disproportionate implementation and its inability to fully eradicate school violence. Moreover, studies have pointed to many negative consequences of zero tolerance policies which will be highlighted now.

Related Literature

Genesis of Zero Tolerance Policies. Zero tolerance policies were first introduced into public discourse within the context of the U.S. war on drugs. In 1986, U.S. Attorney Peter K. Nunez used zero tolerance to describe a program he started in San Diego, California. The program consisted of impounding shipping vessels carrying any trace of illegal drugs. Again, zero tolerance policies became part of the criminal justice vernacular in 1988 when the U.S. Attorney General Edwin Meese embraced usage of such policies (American Civil Liberties Union, 2015). Skiba and Rausch (2006) noted that these high-ranking officials' approval of the program helped expansion of zero tolerance policies into the arena of the war on drugs program (Rethinking Schools, 2011-2012).

Within the context of school discipline, zero tolerance policies gained traction in the 1990s due to multiple school shootings (Rethinking Schools, 2011-2012), and former President Bill Clinton signed the GFSA into law in 1994 (Hitchcock, 2013). The bill required all local school districts to expel any student, for at least one year, who brought a weapon to school

(NASP, 2013; Hitchcock, 2013). Threatening schools with the possible loss of federal funds on grounds of non-compliance with the mandate, the GFSA gave the school districts options of implementing the policy (NASP, 2013). This resulted in wide-spread compliance for fear of funding curtailment. By the end of the 1996–97 academic year, the clear majority of U.S. public schools had zero tolerance policies in place (NASP, 2013; Kang-Brown, Trone, Fratello & Daftary-Kapur, 2013).

Zero tolerance policies expanded in the aftermath of the 1999 Columbine High School shooting. Panic set in across the country. Fearing that the next gun related calamity would befall more school districts, wide-spread public condemnation of school violence and demand for school safety ensued. The wide-spread condemnation and demand for school safety allowed zero tolerance policies to expand beyond their original intent of drug and gun prevention and encroach into a wide range of student misconduct. Zero tolerance was instituted to maintain order and reduce the occurrence of overall violations.

Researcher Ewing found that such expansion was undertaken under the theory that safer climate for non-disruptive students can be ensured by removing disruptive students from the premises (Ewing, 2000). Thus, removal of disruptive students was a precondition for maintaining order in the schools, as well as decreasing violence and drug use in schools (NASP, 2013; Rethinking Schools, 2011-2012). During this period, it became common across the U.S. public school system to treat “minor and major” disciplinary events ... equally” (NASP, 2013, para. 4).

Against the thread of above discussion, it would be appropriate to consider whether zero tolerance policies have contributed positively in any manner. There is research suggesting that zero tolerance policies are positive to the overall school climate. Supporters of the polices point

out that these policies offer: (i) quick disciplinary consequences, (ii) accountability for actions, (iii) a safe and positive school climate, and (iv) parents some peace of mind because of the belief that their children are safe (Sasser, 2019, p. 1). Similarly, other supporters (Trump, n.d.; APA, 2008) argue that parental support is one of the key drivers for maintaining the policies because parents want to feel assured when sending their children to school. These policies provide the perception of safety in the class room. But, as outlined in the above literature, zero tolerance policies have failed to provide full proof safety, security, and the positive school climate that parents were expecting.

Many now argue for the need to revamp or completely remove zero tolerance policies from the school system. For example, in 2011 North Carolina eliminated zero tolerance policies, save the policies related to guns on campus (HB 736, 2011). In the same approach, school districts in Philadelphia replaced zero tolerance policies with alternative disciplinary codes that included “understanding the student’s behavior” in lieu of immediate and harsh punishment (Hardy, 2014, para.1).

As revealed after the enactment of GFSA, zero tolerance policies’ application were applied to behavior that did not warrant such harsh treatment of students. For example, some studies indicated that protecting and controlling students shifted to a new paradigm as these hard-nosed policies took effect (Ewing, 2000; Public Agenda, 2004). It has been shown that from simple truancy, speaking too loudly in a classroom, to bringing innocuous items such as chewing gum to school, all became the subject of zero tolerance policy violations (NASP, 2013; Rethinking Schools, 2011-2012; Losen, 2001; Ward, 2014). Such expanded applications began to peel away at the wide-support zero tolerance policies initially enjoyed. Parents, teachers, and administrators awoke to the deleterious impact of expanded applications of the policies, as they

began questioning their heavy handed and all-pervasive applications (Blankstein, 1999; Public Agenda, 2004). Despite such ambivalence among the stakeholders, zero tolerance policies became fully enforced in U.S. schools by 1999 (NASP, 2013).

On the other hand, however, studies have shown that there have been some positive outcomes achieved in the implementation of zero tolerance policies (Sasser, 2019; APA, 2018; Trump, n.d.). Some studies also indicated that presence of SROs on school campuses may have some beneficial influence on academic environment and enhancing discipline in students. In their report, Bernard, Canady, and Nease outlined a range of benefits in having SROs on school campuses (Bernard, Canady & Nease, 2012). These authors maintain that by being integrated into the school system as part of a multi-agency, cross-functional team, SROs can provide a safe, supportive, and peaceful environment in the school system. However, this was more of a theoretical study and did not provide any anecdotal evidence. Moreover, the benefits of SROs mentioned in the report was contingent upon selection of SROs and the authors provided some stringent criteria to look for in a successful SRO.

Thus, despite such isolated studies professing the benefits of SROs in schools, the impact of the implementation of zero tolerance policies have to be taken holistically. Studies assessing the impact of zero tolerance policies overwhelmingly point to the net negative impact on the students. Research further suggests that such impact is even more pronounced among minority students. Therefore, this study takes an introspective look at how zero tolerance policies have evolved in schools, research suggests two important trends. First, zero tolerance policies may not have significantly reduced propensity of school violence among students. Second, zero tolerance policies may have affected minorities disproportionately.

Zero Tolerance Policies' Impact on Violence Reduction in Schools

The hype surrounding school policing does not align with the real threat on the ground. For example, a 1996 study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found that between 1992 and 1994, a child had less than one in one million chance of suffering a violent death at school (CDC, 1996). Whereas, during these same years, it was found that students were 40 times more likely to succumb to a violent death while away from the school (National School Safety Center, n.d; CDC, 1996). Similarly, the National School Safety Center estimated more than 27% decrease in school related homicides during 1992 and 1998 (National School Safety Center, n.d.). Lastly, in a survey of principals in schools across the U.S., in 1997, 90% reported having no incidents of serious violent crime in their school (Petteruti, 2011, p.8). Thus, law enforcement activities in school campuses, escalating rates of suspensions, and expulsions for childish pranks and mischief call into question the prudence of zero tolerance policies predicated on harsh punishment of students.

Disproportionate Impact on Minorities

Literature has revealed that students of color and inner-city youths are disproportionately impacted by the heavy-handed police discipline approach to school safety (McFadden, et al., 1992). With law enforcement as the onsite behavioral management entity, students of color routinely face increased suspension or expulsion. This approach has created a pipeline by which minority and inner-city students are quick to be pushed out of school as a policy for handling the troublemaking minority youths of color (Petteruti, 2011). Studies have shown suspension rates in schools vary by ethnicity. Losen (2011) found that, "...data from every state, 28.3% of Black males in middle school were suspended, compared with just 10% of White males. Moreover, 18% of Black females were suspended, compared with just 3.9% of White females," (p. 6) and

“...hundreds of individual schools had extraordinarily high suspension rates— 50% or higher for Black males” (p.6). Such disparity between African American and Caucasian students raises the need to consider the root cause in differing suspension rates.

Research suggests that an increase in suspension rate was not linked to an increase in misbehavior rates, nor, linked to escalation of serious misbehavior (Losen, 2011). Research also points to the observation that the majority of suspensions are not related to guns, drugs, or violence (Losen, 2011), and the trend to suspend “...bad kids, so the good kids can learn violates a commitment to equal educational opportunity for all students” (Losen, 2011, p. 11). This observation has been echoed by sociologists and policymakers concerned about the linkage between suspensions, dropout rates, and unsupervised, suspended students due to zero tolerance policy violations (Mendez, 2003).

Negative Impact of Zero Tolerance Policies

Zero tolerance policies have negative consequences for students, schools, communities, and societies. Many researchers, academic leaders, and policy analysts have criticized the enforcement of zero tolerance punishment mechanisms. These groups have advocated finding alternative mechanisms that provide a holistic and comprehensive approach to punishment and enforcement (Boylan & Weiser, 2002). Considering the negative impact of zero tolerance policy violation is important because violations of zero tolerance policies happen. Students that commit violations are impacted in many ways. Once a student is referred to the judicial system as a violator, a negative descent in the student’s life is initiated as the non-violent student behaviors are criminalized through referral to the criminal justice system (Gottfredson, 1994). This harsh disciplinary approach has created a negative ambience in schools that is not conducive to learning as it puts all students on edge to avoid becoming a violator.

Rise of SRO Culture

The escalating rate at which SROs have been processing behavioral issues within school campuses is high. This should be considered given that youth are processed and sentenced to adult correctional facilities including jail and prisons at an alarming rate across the U.S. (Redding, 2010). More importantly, when societal mores demand a heightened protection of students, it is important to consider why schools are promoting such aggressive techniques by the SROs in managing their student population. However, the issue of SRO deployment is a complex issue, that benefits from understanding the genesis of this issue..

The early arrivals of SROs may date back to the 1960s. But they started becoming a permanent fixture on school campuses at the beginning of the 1990s. Backed by escalating concerns regarding campus violence, schools have now become comfortable with the use of police officers as the SROs. While the approval of using police officers as SROs has set in, more and more schools started increasing their use. Before examining the impact of this growing phenomenon in detail, the U.S. prison system must be considered. The prison system is commercialized in many states and a steady supply to the prison pipeline has become necessary for the viability of the many for-profit businesses that run these prison complexes. Ethical inquiry must be conducted when tracing the linkage between schools, SROs, and the for-profit prison system that requires a certain capacity to be filled for these facilities to ensure high profits. Early arrest of youths by SROs will ensure the jails and prisons remain at full capacity.

By involving police officers as the SROs, there has been a paradigm shift in the way schools address behavioral issues in students. It occurs in two ways. First, involving police officers as the primary behavior management personnel increases referrals to the criminal justice system for non-violent, non-serious infractions within school premises (Gottfredson, 1994).

Second, such infrastructure causes students to become less trusting and more combative while being confronted by SROs. Lastly, this paradigm shift has demoted the roles of school counselors and teachers in managing behavior issues of students. This negative ambience is not conducive to learning.

Data from various school districts (Petteruti, 2011) have revealed that students are being referred to the justice system for minor infractions such as, talking back to the teacher in the classroom. Despite reports of decreasing school violence and juvenile infractions being at its lowest levels since the 1990s, the federal funding for policing the nation's schools has increased (Petteruti, 2011).

Studies have documented the contrast between now and then. Where in the present day, parked police squad cars are visible prominently in front of schools and uniformed police officers stroll the hallways and pathways of schools (Justice Policy Institute, 2011). In this environment of heavy police presence, students are jittery. They are cautious and apprehensive, not knowing when their basic youthful exuberance may get them handcuffed and initiated into the criminal justice system (Justice Policy Institute, 2011).

However, prior to the widespread placement of SROs, schools exercised their own discretion in responding to disruptive students' behavior, predominantly utilizing their own counselors and teachers (Justice Policy Institute, 2011). On occasion, some higher-level administrators would get involved to nurture the unruly student into behaving within acceptable and beneficial societal norms. This nurturing used to take place in the context of imparting lessons on safety, while still within the education context. Only on very serious incidents, or in instances where violent behavior may have been involved, would a school call the police and bring the student to of law enforcement authorities.

Gottfredson (1994) has identified how there has been a significant paradigm shift in basic student behavior management by going from a social work function to a law enforcement function. Instead of mentoring and counseling by school staff, today's student behavior management protocols are taking the students out of the schools' environment by utilizing law enforcement responses (Gottfredson, 1994). The law enforcement punitive response of today is escalating incarceration rates while heightening juvenile delinquencies. By understanding the triggers of such policies through the history of SROs, and examination can uncover how the new SRO framework may be contributing to the criminalization of school discipline (Mongan & Walker, 2012). This study begins by providing a historical perspective of the genesis of SROs by highlighting the conditions and events that prompted their arrival, which is followed by an analysis of how SROs may be criminalizing the disciplinary actions.

History of School Resource Officers

Uniformed police officers patrolling school campuses started in the 1950s, when it was first introduced in the Michigan school system. However, widespread police officer presence did not begin until the 1990s. Some high-profile incidents of school violence in the late 1980s and early 1990s ushered in an era of the zero tolerance policy. The first federal zero tolerance policy connected to schools was introduced under the GFSA. It was the explicit requirement of the GFSA, that jurisdictions receiving money through elementary and secondary education must adopt a policy in which a student must receive a suspension for a minimum of one year for bringing a fire arm to school. All schools require funding to operate, to maintain standards, and to continue improvement. Thus, by linking the schools' much needed funding to a set of strict covenants, including meeting the criteria of no guns in premises, had instantly changed the parameters of student behavioral management within the school premises. In this paradigm shift,

schools began to make law enforcement personnel immediately available to ensure federal policies are implemented for schools to be eligible for federal grants.

Literature has shown how law enforcement at schools have altered the relationship between students and school administrators in many ways. Fallout is manifested in more ways than ever contemplated as students have lost valuable instruction opportunities for silly pranks or even bringing medication in their backpacks. (Cauchon,1999; Dohrn, 2001; Lawyers.com, n.d.). It is important, to briefly capture the triggers of SRO activities in school campuses.

First, high profile shootings such as, Columbine (History.com Staff, 2009), and Sandy Hook incidences (Sandy Hook Advisory Committee, 2015) have enhanced people's anxiety about the safety of students while in school. These shootings obviously focus people's attention to the source – the guns. People have become fearful about the prospects of students bringing guns to school. However, evidence suggests that chances of being injured by a school shooting was 1 in 1 million (CDC, 1996; U.S. Department of Education, 1999). Yet, the combination of zero tolerance policy and the GFSA has seen an upward trend since then in federal funding to support policing schools (Petrosino, Guckenbug, & Fronius, 2012). This has increased the number of SROs across the nation.

Newer initiatives, such as, community orientated policing saw massive funds pouring in to hire SROs in many communities across the U.S. during the late 1990s. Data suggests, the number of SROs have increased from 9,446 in 1997 to over 14,000 in 2003 (Petteruti, 2011). In the process, close to a billion dollars has been pumped into the system by hiring thousands of SROs (Petteruti, 2011). The secondary impact of this policing system is that it has introduced extreme surveillance and security infrastructure to the student population. This has begun to infringe upon rights to privacy and movement (Chongmin & Gottfredson, 2011). Moreover,

even the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) (Pub. L. 111–5), has been utilized to divert funds to increase policing the school system and implementing more restrictive security measures.

Studies have cast doubt on both the actual need and efficacy of active law enforcement at schools. In a study that surveyed school principals across the U.S. in 1997, an overwhelming majority reported having no violent crime in their respective schools (Petteruti, 2011, p.8). This was further supported by the National School Safety Center's Study, which estimated more than a 27% decrease in school related homicides between 1992 and 1998 (National School Safety Center, n.d.). These statistics and surveys prompt the further exploration of the relationship between heavy handed law enforcement in campus and criminalization of students which, in turn, makes it incumbent to consider the SRO culture in schools.

SROs Contribution to the Criminalization of School Discipline

To an unsuspecting visitor, entering the campus of a modern high school may come as a shock. The visitor may encounter an infrastructure that is fortified with locked doors, metal detectors, camera surveillance, and patrolling police officers. Routinely, it is reported that an innocent child has been accosted by the campus police officer, and even handcuffed for bringing a screwdriver or a small cutting knife from home (Blad, 2015). School arrests often result in referral to juvenile justice framework for delinquent and criminal prosecution. The experience of an American middle school and high school student is no longer a simple scuffle between students handled by the school principal or the class counselor. Non-criminal school house pranks and innocuous threats are routinely handled by SROs instead of the school psychologists or class monitors.

With student behavior modification going under the umbrella of law enforcement and juvenile justice administration, there is a real danger lurking for these students. With these heavy-handed strategies to make schools safer, SROs continue to criminalize disruptive student behaviors. This has significantly increased the number of arrests in schools. By criminalizing behavior that, at best, can be considered silly, and at worst, may be recognized as juvenile misbehavior, this law enforcement focused student management is removing students from their much-needed educational immersion. As the number of referrals continues to mount, law enforcement is staying busy by processing the students into juvenile justice system. When a student is taken away from the academic environment into juvenile justice administration, they can be blacklisted among peers. This may cause a chain reaction where stigma and humiliation may continue to follow these students for the remainder of their school life. Therefore, the sight of a student being led from the classroom and being ushered into a police squad car by the SRO for committing a childlike prank does question the very existence of such programs in the first place. The stigma and humiliation a student faces at the hands of the SRO and at the hands of the system may shape the affected student's mental framework (Fabelo et al., 2011).

Furthermore, heavy handed behavioral management protocol at schools may increase criminalization of youths (Department of Justice, 2011). Having a juvenile criminal record at an early age may have many consequences for the student. It prevents access to economic opportunity, it forecloses the student from getting a public education, and it precludes the student from developing important social bonds (Keierleber, 2015). Yet, there is support for these policies. Many feel that there are benefits from having zero tolerance policies enforced. Thus, it is important to consider the benefits gained from the policies.

Positive Impact of SROs and Enforcement of Zero Tolerance Policies

Some studies have supported the position that zero tolerance policies at schools can usher in a lot of benefits to the existing stakeholders, such as students, teachers, and parents via meaningful communications between parents and teachers, between students and teachers, while reducing negative incidents of drug possession, fighting or profanity in schools. (Sasser, 2019, para. 1). The same study extols the many virtues of zero tolerance policies by emphasizing that such policies can convey among students an unambiguous expectation surrounding disciplinary consequences which, in turn, can ensure a stable and disturbance-free learning environment (Sasser, 2019, para. 2).

Similarly, a Canadian study conducted during the 2014-2017 time frame, found that SROs do provide positive benefits to the schools they police. The study indicated that the presence of SROs provides positivity to the school environment by building positive relationships "... between the police, school staff, and students. It builds trust, encourages open communication channels, and provides students with the ability to interact with police officers in situations that are nonconfrontational" (Duxbury & Bennell, 2018, p. 194). The same study found that SROs' enforcement of zero tolerance policies in the school can be a positive experience when it is done in a nonconfrontational manner.

SROs that enforce zero tolerance policy violations in a fair and non-aggressive manner create a school environment that deters violations and keeps the students and staff safe (Duxbury & Bennell, 2018). Moreover, the daily interaction with SROs could be positive because the students are interacting with SROs on a regular basis and may build positive relationships as well as feel comfortable to report crimes or to speak about various zero tolerance policy violations they have witnessed (Duxbury & Bennel, 2018). These researchers also

reported that having SROs at the schools reduces the time to respond to incidents and school administrators do not need to call local police, because the SROs can attend to the matter in a prompt fashion. Duxburry and Bennell (2018) found that having SROs in the school afforded the students the regular opportunity to become informed about their rights, as well as laws that impact their age group such, as cyber-bullying, social media crimes, and illegal possession of drugs and weapons. Some findings reveal that,

School resource officers are well thought of by many stakeholders and generally provide a feeling of safety for many inside the school leading to some increases in crime reporting by students and some school personnel and students report decrease in fighting and bullying; ... (Mallett, 2016, p.21)

Similarly, studies report that parents overwhelmingly support the implementation of zero tolerance policies (APA, 2008) and studies supported positive outcomes arising out of SRO presence on school campuses (James, Candy and Nease, 2012). This study emphasized that in order to be successful, SROs must be both integrated into the broader fabric of the school system comprising of many stakeholders and must be working seamlessly with such stakeholders and multiple agencies.

The integration of SROs into the school system was also noted as an important aspect of extracting benefits from SROs policing the school. In a 2016 study that focused on SROs throughout North Carolina school districts, positive benefits were reported because SROs were viewed not as traditional police within the school, but rather were seen as: law-related educator, law-related counselor, and law enforcement personnel (Barnes, 2016). However, it should be noted that in this same study, SROs reported that they were not being used effectively. In fact, Barnes (2016) reported findings of 12 unstructured, open-ended interviews with SROs, which

included SROs stating they were used as hall monitors, gophers, and used to monitor clothing apparel of students (Barnes, 2016, p. 199). This study reveals that SROs, if used appropriately, can bring positive benefits to the school and stakeholders connected to each school. The appropriate use and mandate given to SROs is key to ensuring positive benefits are gained as:

School resource officers can participate in school-based service teams and meaningfully contribute to a safe and nurturing school climate, but they must be engaged in a trans-disciplinary manner to work with at-risk students, parents, teachers, and community agencies in support of the educational mission of schools. (Thompson & Alvarez, 2013, p. 135)

Scholars Divided Over SRO Phenomenon

Informative surveys have indicated that schools do not really need SROs to feel safe (Petteruti, 2011). There is a difference between feeling safe and being safe. There may be a psychological reason why the schools and some parents feel safe by having SROs patrolling the school campus. But the reality is that school violence and criminal mischief are at the lowest levels since the early 1990s (Petteruti, 2011). Yet the over dramatization by the media and continuous imagery and discussion surrounding isolated instances of school violence give the feeling of a doomsday scenario being perpetrated at school campuses across the nation. Behavior such as yelling across the desks, fighting in the schoolyard, and causing pranks are oftentimes the nature of young students. Characterizing these acts as either disruptive behavior or antisocial conduct for police officers to enforce could be seen as more disruptive.

Several studies have indicated that schools are the safest they have been in the last two decades (Petteruti, 2011). Serious violent events are rare at a national level in schools. Compared to what students face outside the school campus, the risk at school is significantly

lower. Data suggested that school violence per 1000 students has decreased approximately 70% between 1993 and 2008 (Petteruti, 2011). However, data cannot determine whether such a decrease in violence is causally linked to SRO presence in schools. Data may, however, suggest that decreasing the numbers of SRO may not necessarily increase campus crime rate. For example, data suggests, in 2003, there were 3,360 students per SROs nationally. During the same year, there were 73 reported crimes (Petteruti, 2011). In comparison, in 2007, there were fewer SROs nationally, yet the reported crimes did not increase, rather there were diminishing number of crimes reported. This may indicate that SRO presence may not be effective in reducing school violence. However, the current qualitative study has hinted at the possibility that SROs may prove a hindrance towards a disruption free academic environment for all students. More importantly, investing in SROs and law enforcement mechanisms may be shifting much needed funds away from investing in education.

Disproportionate Impact on Minority Students

Literature suggests that minority students may be demoralized by the policing and enforcement mechanisms in the school settings. Researcher Noguera (2003) found that African American males were impacted the most by policy violations which labeled them as troublemakers. Staying true to their self-fulfilling prophecy, these minority males generally stay consistent with their designated troublemaker status. Noguera found that African American males have a hard time overcoming their troublemaker status. The African American males suspended from school or excluded from full participation in academic activities fall behind academically and repeat their prior violations. By removing the African American male from the academic environment, there were no significant changes in student learning for the rest of the class. However, according to authors Payne and Welch (2010), with one student removed,

another set of students transitioned into the role of disruptive troublemakers and policy violators, which increased the prison-like environment of schools.

Payne and Welch (2010) studied the connection between African American students and punitive disciplinary actions. The study analyzed the responses of 294 schools and found a significantly greater proportion of African American students received stricter school punishments. These same schools did not attempt to offer restorative justice to these students of color. The researchers found a connection between the minority student population and the aggressive nature of school punishment. This created an atmosphere of harsh control and enforcement toward students of color, particularly black students.

The issue of race of the student population is important to consider. Research has revealed that school districts in high-poverty areas, which are typically made up of high percentages of black and Hispanic students are disproportionately arrested by SROs for violations of zero tolerance policies. Often times, the SROs are replaced by private police who work as security guards and these schools often use metal detectors on students (Hankin, Hertz,& Simon, 2011). While the issue of whether or not SROs in schools are positive and constantly being evaluated, the data seems to clearly reveal that SROs in school raises the "... likelihood of arrest and referral to court for low-level offenses. This trend is particularly pronounced for offenses calling for some degree of officer interpretation, such as "disorderly conduct" and "disturbing the peace"" (Fedders, 2016, p. 571).

Similarly, the APA found that zero tolerance policies create an environment of inconsistency toward discipline, enforcement, and suspension of the policy violators. These policies also perpetuate an academic environment of negativity for those that are routinely suspended. Such students are more likely to violate the policy and be suspended again, instead

of being rehabilitated and guided towards academic success. The APA found that disenfranchised students, students of color, and students tormented with emotional and behavioral disorders were overrepresented in suspension and expulsion rates. The APA noted that, “the disproportionate discipline of students of color continues to be a concern, ...overrepresentation in suspension and expulsion has been found consistently for African American students” (APA, 2008, p. 854). Often the African American students were “disciplined more severely for less serious or more subjective reasons” (APA, 2008, p.854). Similarly, students with emotional and behavioral disorders were found “to be suspended and expelled at rates disproportionate to their representation in the population” (APA, 2008, p.855). Similar findings were found in a study that analyzed Georgia school districts’ violation rates. In this study, researchers found that, “... districts often imposed Zero tolerance policies beyond what is mandated by the state and that broad discretion is granted to school officials in handling discipline actions in their schools” (Georgia Appleseed Center, 2011, p.11).

These findings reveal that zero tolerance policy enforcement and discipline are subjective, and a harsh response to the immature developing minds of students, especially those with behavioral and neurological impairments. The increased rate of student referrals to the juvenile justice system has ushered in the “school-to-prison pipeline” (Georgia Appleseed Center, 2011, p. 19). This pipeline is choked with students that have violated policy with misbehaviors or infractions that were formerly handled by school principals, counselors or administrators instead of being handed over to the juvenile justice system. This raises concerns about whether the criminalization of student misbehaviors and violations is necessary, and whether the enforcement of zero tolerance policies does more harm than good.

Studies indicated that zero tolerance policies in schools may have caused extreme vigilance and punitive focus of the policies, which is in stark contrast to the youthful exuberance of students' developing minds. For example, research by Harvard University's Civil Rights Project (Harvard) found students need social connection with peers, teachers, and administrators to forge bonds of trust, and create positive attitudes towards justice and equality (Harvard, 2000, p. 10). Harsh enforcement punishment has the opposite effect of teaching justice and fairness. Instead of doing good, it does more harm to students. Additionally, research highlights that developing youthful minds need a combination of structure, flexibility, and support of adults and peers (Gregory & Cornell, 2009). Gregory & Cornell (2009) state that high school students need to be able to assert their autonomy and independence while being guided by supportive leaders. These researchers found schools that are strict and inflexible toward their maturing student population increase the likelihood of creating an authoritarian and restrictive school environment. Gregory & Cornell (2009) found that authoritarian approaches without positive support mechanisms could lead to negative child behaviors, lowered social relationships, and mental fatigue and stress.

As literature reveals, zero tolerance enforcement is arbitrary and has been used to expel and suspend students of all ages and grade levels. Harvard's research found students as young as four years old were suspended for childish misconduct or silly mistakes. This research found that the enforcement of the policy was absurd when compared to the students' age and violation. Some of the violations included, "A six-year-old African American child suspended for ten days for bringing a toenail clipper to school" (Harvard, 2000, p. 3). A Pennsylvania kindergartener was suspended bringing a plastic toy axe to school as part of his Halloween costume (Harvard, 2000, p.3). A 9th grade African American female student was expelled for one-year for carrying

sparklers in her backpack (Harvard, 2000, p.3). An Ohio grade 7 female student was suspended for nine days for “allegedly sniffing white-out that she was using in class” (Harvard, 2000, p. 3). These few examples provide a range and depth of violations, enforcement, and consequences that have been instituted by the mandate of the zero tolerance policies. The impact on the student, whether four years old or fourteen are the same, the child is linked with the juvenile justice system, and an innocuous behavior becomes criminalized. The arbitrariness of enforcement validates the concern that these restrictive zero tolerance policies do more harm than good, especially in minority student populations.

Reducing Economic Opportunities for Minorities

Before the all-pervasive reliance on SROs, it was the teachers and administrators who oversaw managing problematic students. However, federal funding requirements in the aftermath of some high-profile school shootings, as mentioned earlier, has mandated schools to both maintain a threshold of standardized test scores and reduce student truancy rates to get funding. This shifted the job of removing difficult students from the general student pool and managing their behavioral issues from school personnel to the SROs.

Although school administrators wanted to both immunize themselves from repercussions from aggressive disciplining of students and focus on bringing efficiency in managing these students, they ignored the negative consequences of outsourcing their responsibilities to SROs. As more students become part of the criminal justice process, the prospects of them becoming incarcerated as adults also increase (Theriot, 2009). Thus, students could see their prospects vanish because of some middle school prank and could face dwindling economic opportunities when they enter into their adult life due to their criminal history.

According to research in the enforcement of zero tolerance policies, there is "... an absence of due process to interpret the meaning of these provisions. Principals may deem a variety of items, including scissors, knives, sling shots, hockey sticks, and baseball bats, to be weapons..." (Steeves & Marx, 2013, p. 108). The principal or the SRO that deems these items weapons could conclude that the student should be suspended or even arrested. Therefore, the new paradigm of policing the school campus may have inadvertently created a breeding ground for future criminals, while ushering a generation of adolescents into a life of poverty and criminality.

Literature shows that inner cities face the daunting task of economic hardship and significant loss of human capital due to disproportionate incarceration (NAACP, n.d.). Scholars go to great lengths to showcase how students of color and inner-city youths are disproportionately impacted by this framework of policing the campus (McFadden, et al., 1992). Enhanced policing, fast track sentencing, and transfer to the jail systems are even more pronounced in the inner cities (NAACP, n.d.). This both lowers students' economic opportunities and increases the incarceration rates of the community members. SRO policing at inner city schools in which the students are predominantly of color is of grave concern. Instead of illuminating students with education and shaping their lives towards economic betterment, SRO policing at these schools, has become a de facto pathway towards adult criminality and a pipeline to the jail system (NAACP, n.d.).

In discussing legal issues, researchers suggest that SROs have engineered disproportionate arrests of minorities (McFadden, et al., 1992). Considering that regardless of the race of the students, "In the majority of schools where school resource officers are employed, it is often postulated, and found by some researchers, they do more harm than good for students through

increasing the criminalization of school-based, and often minor, problems” (Mallett, 2015, p. 21). Besides evidence-based data, fundamental research has also revealed how this punitive school discipline framework has disproportionately impacted minority students (McFadden, et al., 1992; Petteruti, 2011). SROs are not trained behavioral specialists. They are not given sensitivity training, nor, provided special training to deal with minorities or at-risk students. Students arrive at the school system with a litany of behavioral problems, not all of which require law enforcement mechanisms to deal with. Often, at risk students require specialized counseling - nuanced treatment that only trained behavioral specialists or psychologists can provide. Handing over such delicate behavior management responsibilities to police officers, therefore, places these youths at greater risks (Gottfredson, 1994). Such risks cover a wide range of possibilities: from suspension and dismissal from the school system, to getting fast tracked into juvenile delinquencies. Research has corroborated that zero tolerance policies at schools have disproportionately deprived the right to public education to those who need it the most (Lampinen, & Sexton-Radek, 2010).

Similar studies suggest that schools with SROs reported more arrests for minor offences than schools with no SROs (Petteruti, 2011). A University of Tennessee study indicates that schools with SROs had nearly five times the number of arrests for disorderly conduct than schools without SROs (Petteruti, 2011). The argument that is typically put forward in support of SROs is that SROs help get rid of disruptive students. However, the yardstick through which SROs bring in discipline, engage in arrests and detention, and bring students to criminal justice administration is based on identifying behavior that they deem disruptive. However, what is disruptive to an untrained SRO, may not be disruptive to a trained counselor.

In pre-SRO days, such disruptive students were handled many other ways, including timeouts, not being allowed to participate in sports, not being allowed to participate in extracurricular activities, or being required to spend the school day studying in an isolated classroom (Cauchon, 1999; Dohrn, 2001). Yet research has found that minor impulsive juvenile behaviors at school, such as argument with a teacher, routine schoolyard scuffle, firing spitballs, and overturning books may be considered severely disruptive behavior resulting in students being arrested (Peterutti, 2011; Blad, 2015). Once arrested, these students face the prospect of being processed through the juvenile criminal justice system. They might even be branded as juvenile delinquent (Mongan & Walker, 2012). Once in the juvenile incarceration framework, these students may face many difficulties ranging from, suspension, disruption of studies, repeat incarceration, as well as physical, sexual, and mental abuse which may take place while incarcerated (Department of Justice, 2011). All these factors cause both public stigma and private trauma (Fabelo et. Al, 2011). Because of this, students may become more aloof and distant from the educational system itself. They may also develop antipathy toward law enforcement. All of these are risk factors raise the likelihood of their propensity towards adult criminal life (Keierleber, 2015).

Police or SROs on campus increase the chance of applying criminal justice mechanisms to students without the possibility of any intervening medium by the school administrators (Chongmin & Gottfredson, 2011). Whether acting as an SRO or a city patrolling street police officer, their duty is to effectuate arrests. Research has corroborated the view that, introducing more police in any setting, whether in neighborhoods, communities, or campuses, is likely to increase arrests (Chongmin & Gottfredson, 2011). Once an individual gets arrested, a new dimension begins in that person's life. Once the school administrators and officials decide to

hand over the penalty for infractions like class disruptions and schoolyard fights to law enforcement, the pathway becomes that of referral into the juvenile justice administration. Any arrest for a non-violent act on campus has the potential of being referred to juvenile administration process which in turn has the potential to end up incarcerated. This could cause a student to be either expelled or suspended. Regardless of the pathway, the student is assured of disruption of studies and may be deprived of education. This is contrary to the expected duty of a school to its students, that of ensuring opportunities for betterment via education (Chongmin & Gottfredson, 2011). Therefore, any arrests for a non-violent act within the school system may have a negative impact on students.

Risk Factors of Zero Tolerance Policies

Having outlined the genesis of the zero tolerance policy mandate and the criminalization of youthful misbehaviors, it is time to consider the risk factors that many of these student violators embody. The benefit of compiling a set of risk factors that signal the connection between students that violate the zero tolerance policies would allow concerned stakeholders to create innovative solutions toward a social justice mechanism instead of the criminalization of student mistakes and violations. Thus, it would be beneficial to examine some studies that has highlighted factors that could predict violation of zero tolerance policies in school children.

Research in more than 160 Kentucky middle schools studied variables such as student gender, enrollment size, academic scores, attendance, retention, and dropout rates, as well as school violations and non-school law violations (Christle, Nelson, & Jolivette, 2004, p.3). Leaving out gender and school size, the correlational statistics found all variables linked with increased suspension rates. The researchers found the schools with the highest and lowest suspension rates had significant variance in student attendance rates, academic scores, dropout

rates, school and law violations, as well as the percent of caucasian students (Christle, 2004, p. 4).

Similar studies were conducted to predict sixth grade suspensions from fourth and fifth grade suspensions, along with third grade teachers' feedback of students. The sixth grade study sought any linkage with suspensions in sixth grade and high school suspensions and dropout rates (Mendez, 2003). Mendez found a positive prediction capability between sixth grade suspension rates and dropout rates. Mendez and Knoff (2003) continued this work by studying a high volume, ethnically diverse Florida school districts' demographics, academics, behavior, self-perceptions, and attitudes about school to predict rates of suspension among sixth grade students. Mendez and Knoff (2003) also studied the linkage between sixth graders' suspension rates and high school suspensions and dropout rates. Mendez and Knoff (2003) found that sixth grade suspensions were predicted by fourth and fifth grade suspensions, along with third grade teacher ratings of behavior. Suspensions in sixth grade was statistically relevant to more suspensions and dropping out of school.

Mendez, Knoff, and Ferron (2012) conducted a quantitative and qualitative study to uncover percentage of suspensions based on the students' race, gender, and grade, and the suspensions given based on race, gender, and grade finding African American students were ranked the highest in suspension rates. Based on gender, males were two times more likely to be suspended than females and qualitative results found the highest rates of suspension were among black males suspended for disobedience and insubordination.

The disproportionately large number of minority students, particularly African American students has been a common component studied by researchers. This component has been studied from the teachers' bias, cultural understanding, and perception of minority students.

Research suggests that teachers often hold views that feel minority student do not adjust well in the classroom and add to the disruptive environment in the classroom (Fenning & Rose, 2007). Teachers' perception and personal biases could increase the overrepresentation of minority students' suspension, expulsion, and removal from the classroom. Skiba et al. (2011) support the race component as a critical predictor toward disparities in discipline referral and enforcement.

Skiba et al. (2011) found that race and ethnicity were not neutral. Black students were overrepresented in all types of violations in all grades. Hispanic students were overrepresented in all types of violations at the middle school level. Students of color were more likely than caucasian students to be suspended or expelled regardless of the violation. The authors posited that the organization and arrangement of the classroom is important in positively reducing the disproportionate violations and infractions by African American and Hispanic students. A study by Gregory and Weinstein (2008) in one high school found defiance as the common violation of African American students and that African American males were overrepresented in defiance violations. The authors conducted a second study of 30 students. The subsample revealed a variability in defiance predicated on the teachers' empathetic attitude, care toward students of color, and student's effort to trust and work with their teacher.

Teachers' empathetic attitude is an influential component in the classroom. A teacher's personal attitude to minority students impacts the rate of violation referrals of students of color. Research by Monroe (2005) found that cultural differences and interactions among African Americans and caucasian students and teachers is an important aspect to be considered. Monroe found that most teachers in U.S. classrooms are caucasian, whereas, most students in the classroom are non-caucasian, minority ethnicities. These cultural incongruities could lead to misunderstandings and mistrust among the teachers and students, which result in increased

defiance and violation issues. The same study revealed that teachers that were culturally sensitive and attempted to use positivity, dialogue, and humor in the classroom, proved to reduce student defiance and mistrust, which improved interactions among students and teacher, and reduced violations and disciplinary referrals.

Current research as examined in the preceding paragraphs provides some rationale as to why there may be some push-back in implementing zero tolerance policies from school districts, administrators, parents, students, and the local community as literature reveals that “radical reform” (Berlowitz, Frye, & Jette, 2015, p.1) is needed to end the prison-to-pipeline fallout of the zero tolerance policies. Even if radical reform is not fully implemented, many school districts are considering some modifications to the zero tolerance policies to prevent the negative impact that has resulted under these policies.

Modified Zero Tolerance Policies

Consider the modifications that the state of Michigan implemented as part of the push-back to the strict zero tolerance policies . As of 2017, Michigan legislation provided school districts with more discretion in how students are charged or disciplined under the zero tolerance policies. The Michigan House Bill 4697 states that a school district or school administrators, shall not adopt, implement, or maintain a policy that requires a pupil to be suspended or expelled from school for certain conduct and that does not provide for the exercise of discretion by school officials in the decision of whether or not to impose suspension or expulsion from school. (Michigan House Bill 4697, “The Revised School Code,” 4697, 2017)

Reforms such as these could reduce the high number of students being disciplined under situations that are often viewed as minor infractions and not deserving of a zero tolerance policy referral.

Discretionary empowerment such as these also allow the pertinent stakeholders: school administrators, teachers, parents, and students to work toward resolving the root of the problem – instead of being focused on complying with the zero tolerance policy enforcement. Because the reliance on policy enforcement instead of discretionary implementation has created results in which, “... the policies are not only ineffective but that they are also unjust, harmful, and stigmatizing” (Borgwald & Theixos, 2013, p. 1). But, it is important to note that modifications may only have limited impact as in the case of Philadelphia’s school district. Consider that,

In 2012–2013, Philadelphia reformed its discipline policy to limit suspensions for nonviolent student misconduct and granted principals greater discretion in responding to more serious occurrences of student misconduct...Philadelphia's reform resulted in a modest decline in suspensions for nonviolent infractions in the year of reform...(Lacoe & Steinberg, 2018, p. 1)

In the case of Philadelphia school districts, the reform results were only modest declines, that positively impacted the lives of students. Similarly, Michigan’s modification efforts reveal that modifications in more school districts could limit the fallout of the strict zero tolerance policies. However, questions remain surrounding the fairness of the modifications and whether they positively impact minority students. As data provided by the Ann Arbor Public School (AAPS) district found, “...there's still a disparity in how often low-income students, black students, special education students, and male students are suspended compared to their peers” (MLive, 2017, para. 1).

While the AAPS data reveals that legislation and modifications can have success, literature has been distinct in revealing that issues of arbitrariness must be considered when dealing with the most vulnerable students: minority, low-income, and special education students. Future modifications would likely give extra attention toward the most vulnerable with the focus on educating them and providing discretionary punishments that limit the negative impact on those vulnerable students that have a higher statistical chance of violating the current zero tolerance policies in vogue throughout many school districts.

Summary

Zero tolerance policies originated in the 1980s in conducting the nation's fight against drugs. The restrictive covenants of the policies soon found their way to the school system to combat drug and gun violations in school campuses. Prompted by a few violent school incidents and bolstered by a tough federal law against school gun violence, zero tolerance policies have become all powerful in mandating how school administrators should deal with students' infractions in schools across the nation. As studies noted, heavy handed imposition of zero tolerance policies may not have reduced students' propensity for violence, yet it had negative impacts on students, most notably among minority students.

Despite their paucity in literature, studies have supported positive outcomes due to zero tolerance policies arising out of SRO implementation at schools. According to such studies, the benefits of zero tolerance policies include; meaningful communication between parents and teachers, cordial exchanges between students and teachers, reduction of drug possession, fighting or profanity in schools. This genre of studies further emphasizes the virtues of installing disciplinary framework in schools. Additionally, studies supported benefits of having SROs on school campuses.

On the other hand, more negative impacts were cited than positives in the literature in providing a robust dissection of zero tolerance policies. Among the many negative impacts cited, a few stood out. These included developments of a negative ambience in schools that is not conducive to learning an impacted child's downward spiral from heavy handed punishment for minor infractions. Researchers further explored the disparate impact that zero tolerance policies had on students of color, or on students from the inner cities. Tracing the connection between the disproportionate number of harsh punishments metered out to African American students, researchers cautioned against the creation of an environment of inconsistency toward discipline, enforcement, and suspension. This has prompted researchers to propose alternative punishment mechanisms by supplanting zero tolerance policies.

By tracing the evolutionary landscape of zero tolerance policies, while outlining some of the negative impacts of zero tolerance policies, researchers have been able to dig deeper into assessing risk factors. This literature review highlighted the efforts to make modifications and reforms to the policies which have injured the educational journey of many students, most often the minority, male, and special education student. To this end, studies identified linkages between zero tolerance policies and personal degradation of affected students, pinpointing a specific set of variables for predicting zero tolerance policy violations has become possible. However, research in this area has not pinpointed a specific set of variables that can predict such violations in students. This literature review has identified many sociological, biological, and demographic factors that would help identify the students who may be prone to violate or may have the propensity to be on the receiving end of the zero tolerance policy. By using some of the variables that can predict such violations in students, this research will embark on correlation studies to identify a set of variables to predict violation of zero tolerance policies among

students. The ability to predict violation of zero tolerance policies will aid pertinent stakeholders: policymakers, school administrators, parents, and students alike in considering possible modifications to zero tolerance policy.

Finally, predicting possible violations would assist the school system in offering a “protective factor against delinquent conduct” (Teske, 2011, p. 89). This is important, because the school system, its building, personnel, and curriculum infrastructure provide students an umbrella of support and protection that is often lacking while away from the school environment. As the literature review revealed, zero tolerance policies lack any protective factor for the students punished under their mandate. The policies lack the discretionary function to assess students’ risk levels, which often lead to certain students being harmed by the policies more often than other students. Thus, the current work is dedicated to uncovering a set of variables that would alert to the likelihood of policy violations which could provide an early warning alarm to the factors that are pushing certain students toward violations of the zero tolerance policies instead of flourishing in the academic school environment.

Chapter Three: Methods

Overview

The purpose of this study was to identify a set of predictor variables that correlate with student's violation of zero tolerance policies in school. Based on literature review, (i) grade level, (ii) retention, (iii) suspension frequency, (iv) race, and (v) gender have been identified as predictors of zero tolerance policy violations in students. The research question of the study focused on whether any combination of these risk factors can predict this violation in students. Data for the study was collected from the Rhode Island School district archival data for two school years: 2014-2015 and 2017-2018. This research embarked on identifying which combination of the above five variables can provide a robust prediction model for students' violation of zero tolerance policies in schools.

Design

The research question whether there was a predictive relationship between predictor variables grade level, retention, suspension, race, and gender and the criterion variable of violation of zero tolerance policies for public middle and high school students was examined via an ex post facto correlation research design. By observing the relationships between the set of predictor variables and the criterion variable, this study seeks to identify trends in data and recognize linkages among constructs. This type of correlational design does not include manipulation of variables, rather a set of predictor variables and the criterion variable were identified to study them based on their historical occurrences (Martella, Nelson, Morgan, & Marchand-Martella, 2013, p.217).

Research Question

RQ1: Is there a predictive relationship between predictor variables of grade level, retention, suspension, race, and gender and the incidence of violations of zero tolerance policies for public middle and high school students?

Null Hypothesis

H₀1: There is no statistically significant predictive correlation between the predictor variables of grade levels, retention, suspension, race, and gender as defined and recorded in the school database, and that of the criterion variable, which is the violation of zero tolerance policies for middle and high school students, as shown by the school record, defined by the formal state policy of a student found to be in possession of a weapon, illegal drugs or involved in fights within the school premises.

Participants

In this correlation research study, archival data was collected from the greater metro region of a northeastern state public school database for the school years: 2014-2015 and 2017-2018. The participants of the study were selected from the a northeastern state of the United States. Students were drawn from a convenience sample of more than 200 students enrolled in middle high and high school The number of participants exceeded the minimum requirement of 49 for a medium effect size ($f^2 = 0.30$) with a statistical power of 0.8 at the .05 alpha level (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007, p. 145).

Instrumentation

This study sought to identify the best set of predictor variables to predict the criterion variable from archived data. Variables used in this study were based on archived data that is

publicly available. A multiple linear regression was conducted via step-by-step analysis to identify the best set of predictor variables for the prediction of zero tolerance policy violations.

This study initially consisted of five predictor variables: grade level, retention, suspension, race, gender and the criterion variable zero tolerance policy violations. The predictor variable grade level was defined as the education level of the subject for the academic year 2014-2015 and 2017-2018. Grade level was measured in an ordinal scale and it was associated with each student for whom a school record is maintained. In the school database entry was made against each student record to identify the educational level a student belongs to and the numeric value was designated as grade level for the student in question.

The predictor variable retention is defined by number of times an individual student within the school system has been held over in the same grade level. The variable retention may take on numerical values from 0 through 1, 2, 3, 4, and so forth. In the school database, entry is made against each student record to identify the number of times a particular student failed to advance to the next grade level and such numeric value will be designated as retention for the student in question.

The predictor variable school suspension (Mendez, 2013) is defined as disciplining students by removing them from the school premises for a designated number of days as described in the school district policy handbook. In this study, suspension was defined as the total number of suspensions aggregated from in school and out of school suspensions. For example, if a student accumulated a total of eight in school suspensions and a total of four out of school suspensions at the time of data collection, the total number of suspensions aggregated to have an entry recorded as 12 in the suspension column.

The predictor variable race is defined as the ethnicity of the student as recorded in the student personnel file. The researcher extracted this information related to the student as categorical variable from the school database and coded as numeric values of 1, 2, 3, 4, and so forth. For example, student ethnicity was recorded as: American Indian = 1, Asian American = 2, White = 3, African American = 4, Hispanic = 5. Similarly, the researcher extracted gender information from the school records. The gender data was a dummy binary variable. The dummy variable was coded as female = 1 and male = 0.

The researcher extracted from the school database information related to each violation of the zero tolerance policy. According to published compilation of School discipline laws and Regulation for Rhode Island, “Violation of zero tolerance policy” is defined as a formal state policy and is recognized as such violation when a student is found to be in possession of a weapon or illegal drugs or involved in fights within the school premises (Child Trends, 2016, p. 25). Therefore, violation of zero tolerance policy has been measured for the testing of the Study hypothesis by the frequency of occurrences of such defined infractions of weapon possession, illegal drug possession, illegal drug sale and involvement in fights within school premises. Similarly, “Suspension” is defined per the policy outlined by the school district” (Child Trends, 2016, p. 11).

Procedures

Step 1: Data for the analysis collected from the public schools in the northeastern state of the United States as identified above. All data pertained to the 2014-2015 and 2017-2018 school years. Both school level and individual level student data were collected from public school archives.

Step 2: To initiate the data collection process, relevant school personnel, including the school superintendents and county school board personnel were contacted regarding the data collection. Each of the relevant personnel were initially contacted via email and followed up with phone calls. Appendix A provides details of the archival data that was provided by the school district.

Step 3: The data collection was an interactive process between this researcher and the school officials. Before data collection, the researcher provided instructions for the types of data being sought and data templates to be included as well. The designated school officials tasked with assisting the researcher extracted data from the school database by using the school's computers. Students' confidentiality was maintained strictly by identifying each student with a code number so that at no time during the data collection, compilation and analysis process would a student's identity be disclosed or compromised.

Step 4: The data was collected in two branches. School level data included suspension, retention, and grade level information for the student participants included in the study. This means the total number of suspensions, retention, and grade level for more than 200 students in the study was collected. Individual level data included demographic information, such as student's age and race. All data collection was approved by the IRB (Appendix B).

Step 5: The entire process lasted a total of four weeks with e-mails and phone calls to individuals responsible for assisting in gaining access to the database. The researcher maintained regular contact with the school superintendent before sending out emails. The email included pertinent information including a link to the data collection template.

Step 6: Upon completing data collection, the researcher started the process of aggregating the data. Due to the specific requirements for logistic regression, preprocessing of data was

needed. The researcher collected more data than minimally required for the study to ensure a sufficiently valid statistical power. Once all data was aggregated, the researcher conducted statistical analysis using SPSS v. 24 and Excel.

Data Analysis

Multiple linear regression was conducted to determine which of the independent variables: grade level, retention, suspension, race, and gender were predictors of the violation of zero tolerance policies for middle school and high school students. A multiple linear regression was appropriate for many reasons (Bursac, Gauss, Williams, & Hosmer, 2008). First, it allows for testing any set of predictor variables to determine which set provides the highest significance level of the coefficient of determination. Second, by observing results from multiple correlations, it can establish relative importance of each predictor. Third, it helps in understanding how good the model is by comparing the coefficient of determination and p -values for each of the regression runs. The statistical analysis was performed at 95% confidence. Regression results indicate whether the overall model of five predictors (grade level, retention, suspension, race, and gender) were statistically reliable in predicting violation of zero tolerance policies for middle school and high school students. The level of significance for each statistical test was designated at .05 percent.

Chapter Four: Results

The purpose of Chapter Four is to present the results of the study. The demographic data analyzed included: grade level, gender, and race. The grade level included seven levels: Grade 6, Grade 7, Grade 8, Grade 9, Grade 10, Grade 11, and Grade 12. While it is understood that gender identity could be more expansive than the traditional male and female identification, for this study, variable gender included male and female only. Race included American Indian, Asian American, White, African American, and Hispanic (including multicultural). The data were collected from 3 middle schools and 1 high school from the greater metropolitan area of a northeastern state of the United States. Archival data were collected for school years: 2014-2015 and 2017-2018. Suspension data were based on both in-school and out-school instances and zero tolerance policy violations data were based on the school district's definition of zero tolerance policies violation as obtained from the school district. Therefore, the participants included all students enrolled in those schools for the school year identified. Results from 195 participants include descriptive statistics to describe the data and statistical tests based on the hypothesis used in the study.

Research Question

RQ1: Is there a predictive relationship between predictor variables of grade level, suspension, race, and gender and the incidence of violations of zero tolerance policies for public middle and high school students?

Null Hypothesis

H₀1: There is no statistically significant predictive correlation between the predictor variables of grade levels, retention, suspension, race, and gender as defined and recorded in the

school database, and that of the criterion variable, which is the violation of zero tolerance policies for middle and high school students, as shown by the school record, defined by the formal state policy of a student found to be in possession of a weapon, illegal drugs or involved in fights within the school premises.

Descriptive Statistics

Demographic characteristics of the participants. Variables used in the study were (i) zero tolerance policies violations, (ii) suspension, (iii) grade level, (iv) gender, and (v) race.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of the Variables

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Kurtosis	Skewness
Zero Tolerance Policies Violation	1.18	0.93	-0.21	0.48
Suspension	2.31	1.42	1.19	1.29
Grade Level	8.54	2.02	-1.2	0.31

Table 1 provides descriptive statistics for the three quantitative variables, zero tolerance policy violations, suspension, and grade level. Zero tolerance policy violations had a mean of 1.18 with a standard deviation of 0.93, which means that of the 195 students' data analyzed, on average, students had 1.18 zero tolerance policy violation per year. Suspension had a mean of 2.31 with a standard deviation of 1.42, which means that of the 195 students' data analyzed, on average, students had 2.31 suspensions per year. Grade level showed a mean of 8.54, however, since the data is in ordinal scale, not much meaning is imputed except for the fact that grade

level data is not skewed as can also be seen from the Table 1 values of kurtosis for grade level at -1.20.

Normality Assumption

Table 1 above also provides a summary of kurtosis and skewness values for the variables distribution. The sample size is large at 195, as mentioned earlier, and population from which the sample is obtained is normally distributed. Thus, it was expected that normality assumptions will hold. Typically, kurtosis values falling in the range between -3.0 and +3.0 are considered normal. As can be seen for all variables, kurtosis fell within range (-0.21, +1.19), which is well within the range between -3.0 and +3.0. Similarly, skewness values falling in the range between -0.8 and +0.8 is considered normal. Except for the suspension with a skewness of 1.29, all other variables fell within range (-0.22, +0.48). Even though, the skewness for suspension is slightly outside the range, its kurtosis of 1.19 falling within the normal range makes general normality assumption valid. Grade level, gender, and race were the demographic variables in this study. In the following, participant data were further analyzed by showing how suspension and zero tolerance policy violations were distributed across these demographic variables.

Grade Level, Suspension, and Zero Tolerance Policy Violations

Figures 1 and 2 provides histogram view of frequency distribution of suspension and zero tolerance policy violations across the seven grade levels.

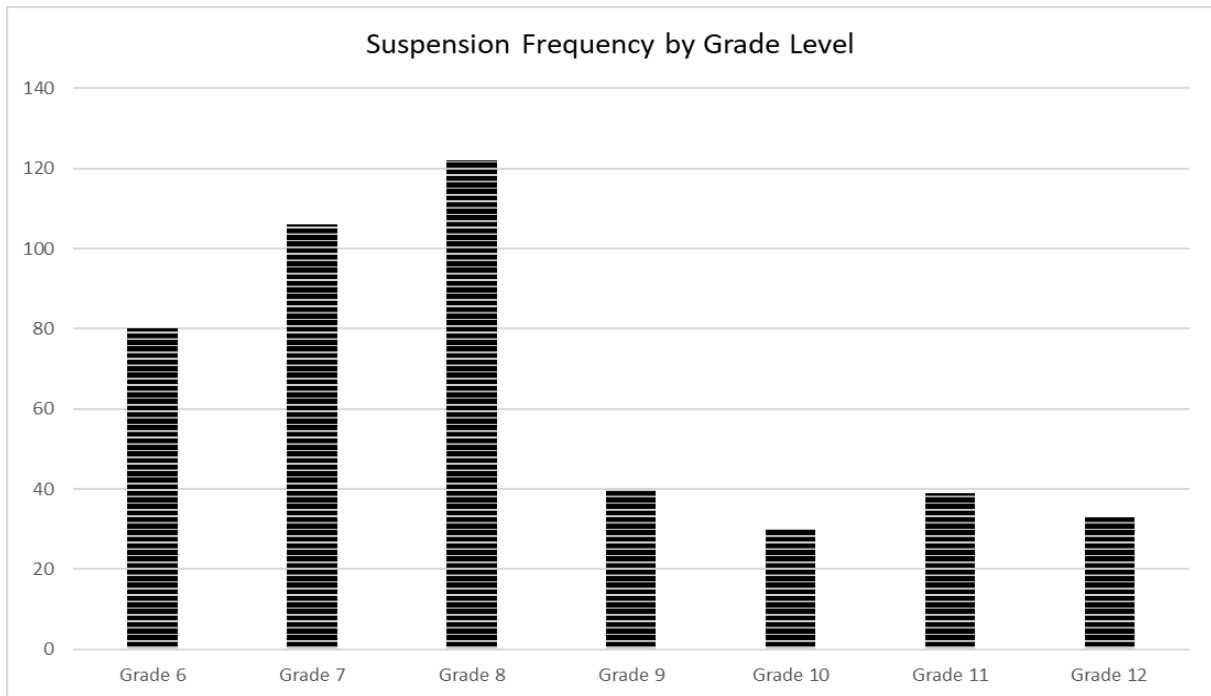


Figure 1. Suspension Frequency by Grade Level

Figure 1 reveals that suspension frequencies increased from grade level 6 through grade level 8, which peaked at the highest frequency in the eighth grade and started decreasing from eighth grade through to the tenth grade. After reaching the lowest frequency of suspension in the tenth grade, it stayed somewhat level until the twelfth grade.

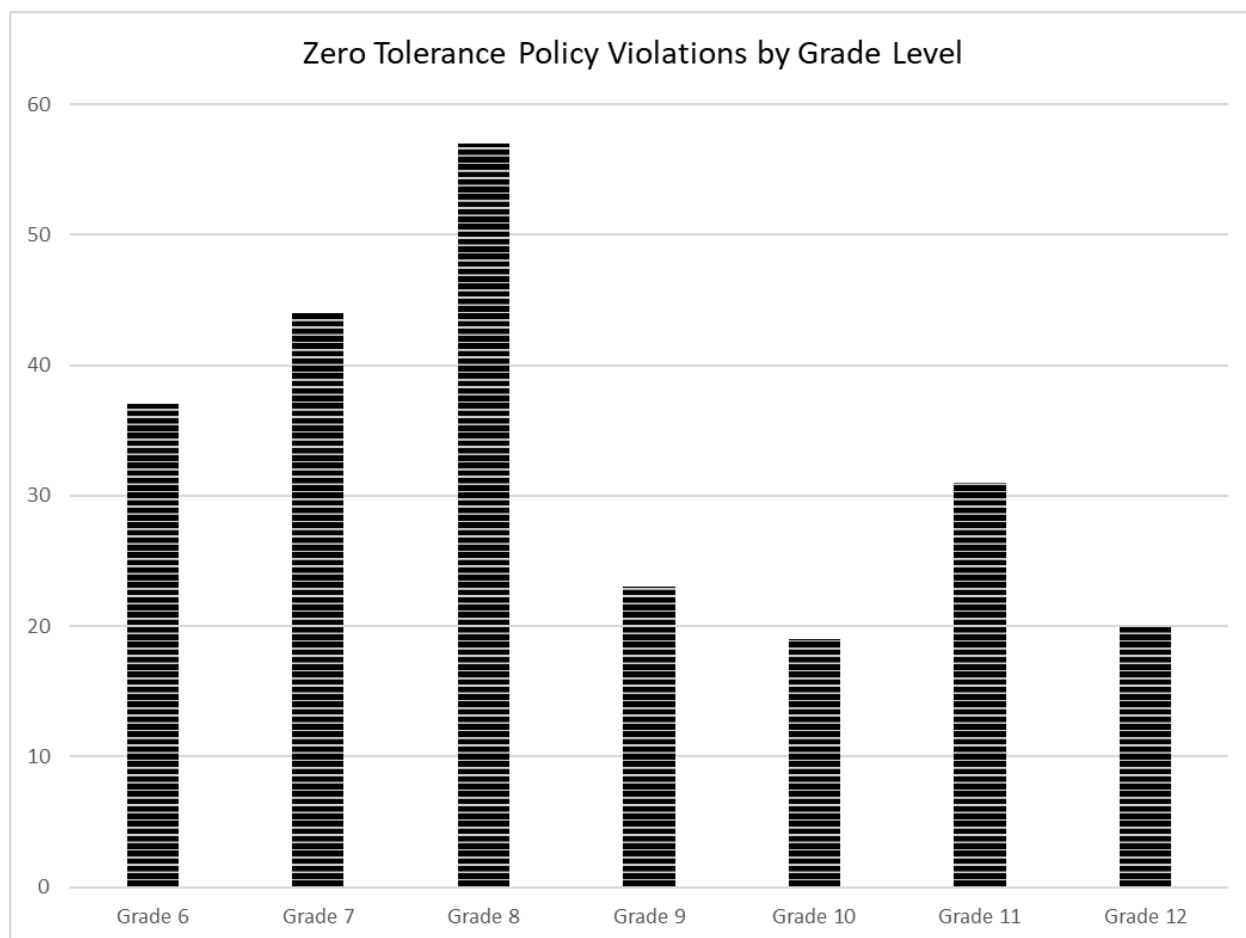


Figure 2. Zero Tolerance Policy Violations by Grade Level

Figure 2 reveals that zero tolerance policy violations frequencies increased from grade level 6 through grade level 8, which peaked at the highest frequency in the eighth grade, and started decreasing from eighth grade through to the tenth grade. After reaching the lowest frequency of suspension in the tenth grade, it went up slightly, but not as much as in the eighth grade.

Gender, Suspension, and Zero Tolerance Policy Violations

Figures 3 and 4 provide histogram views of frequency distribution of suspension and zero tolerance policy violations across the two gender identities shown in this study.

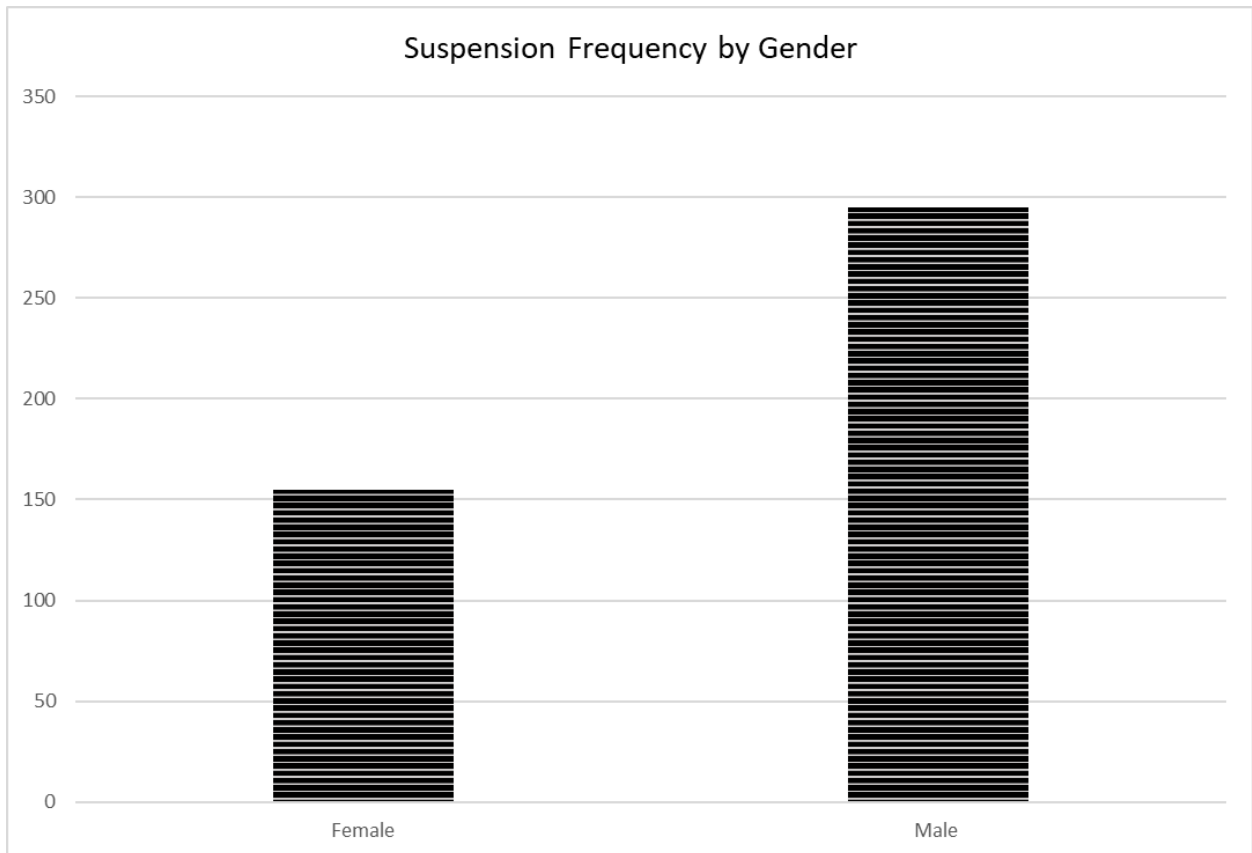


Figure 3. Suspension Frequency by Gender

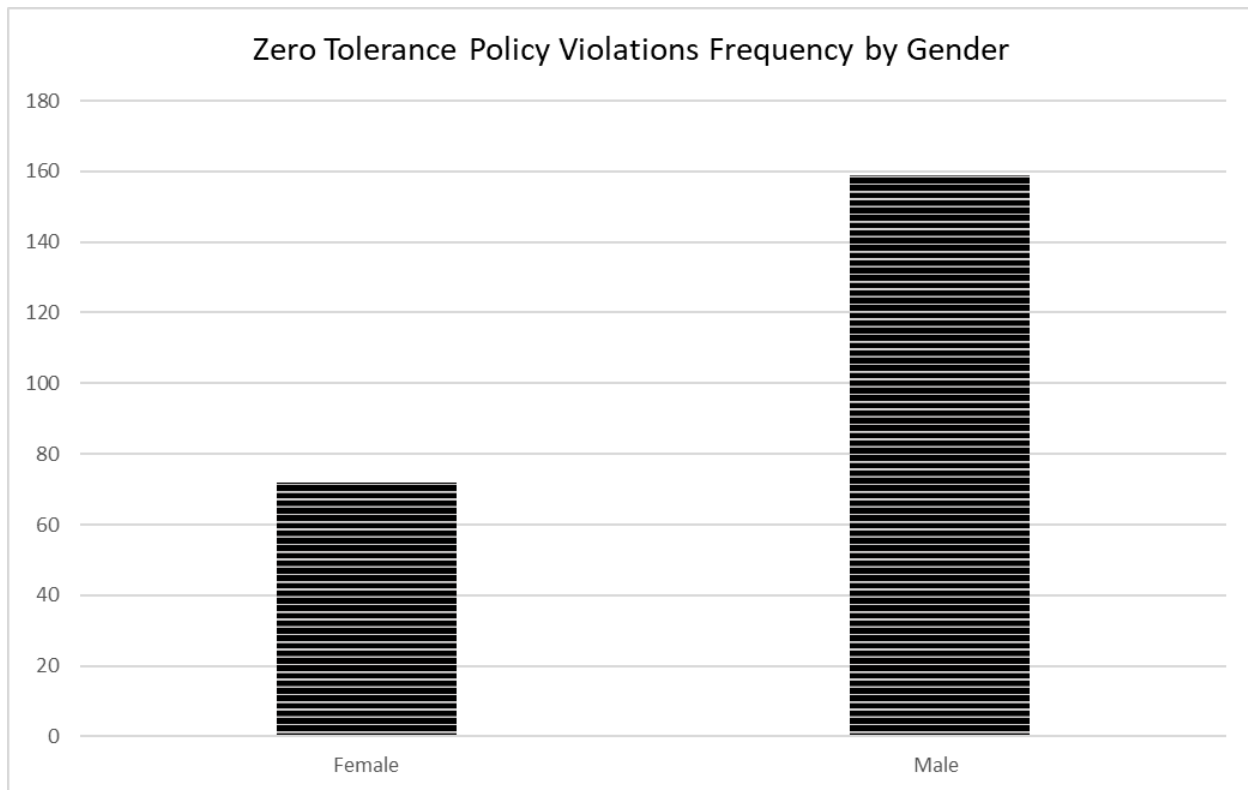


Figure 4. Zero Tolerance Policy Violations by Gender

Figure 3 reveals that suspension frequencies in males is almost two times that in females. Similarly, Figure 4 reveals that zero tolerance policy violations in males are almost 2.5 times that in females. This indicates that for the current study, male students had the propensity to commit zero tolerance policy violations at an increasing rate than their propensity to receive suspension when compared with the female students.

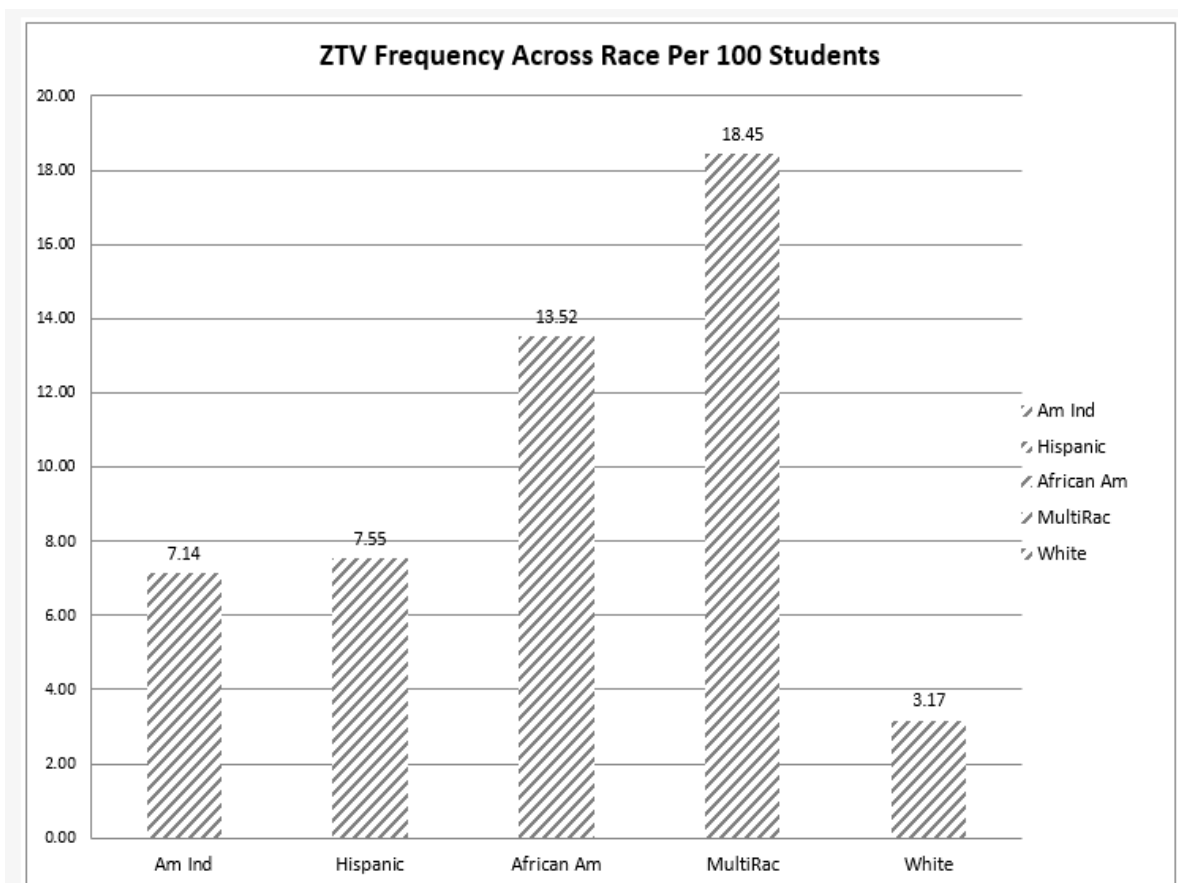


Figure 5. Zero Tolerance Policy Violations at Across Race Per 100 Students

Raw data had shown significant incidences of zero tolerance violations for Hispanic students. However, to understand the phenomenon better, zero tolerance policy violations have been calculated based on per 100 students for the various races. Figure 5 shows per 100 students violations for Hispanic students are much less compared to both African Americans and multiracial students. Zero tolerance policy violations for Hispanic students are at the same level as American Indian students. On the other hand, based on per 100 students, African American students' violations are approximately 1.8 times that of Hispanic students. In addition, zero tolerance policy violations for multiracial students are approximately 2.5 times (2.44) that of Hispanic students. This analysis indicates that significantly high occurrences of zero tolerance

policy violations for the Hispanic students should be understood from the prism of the racial distribution at these schools.

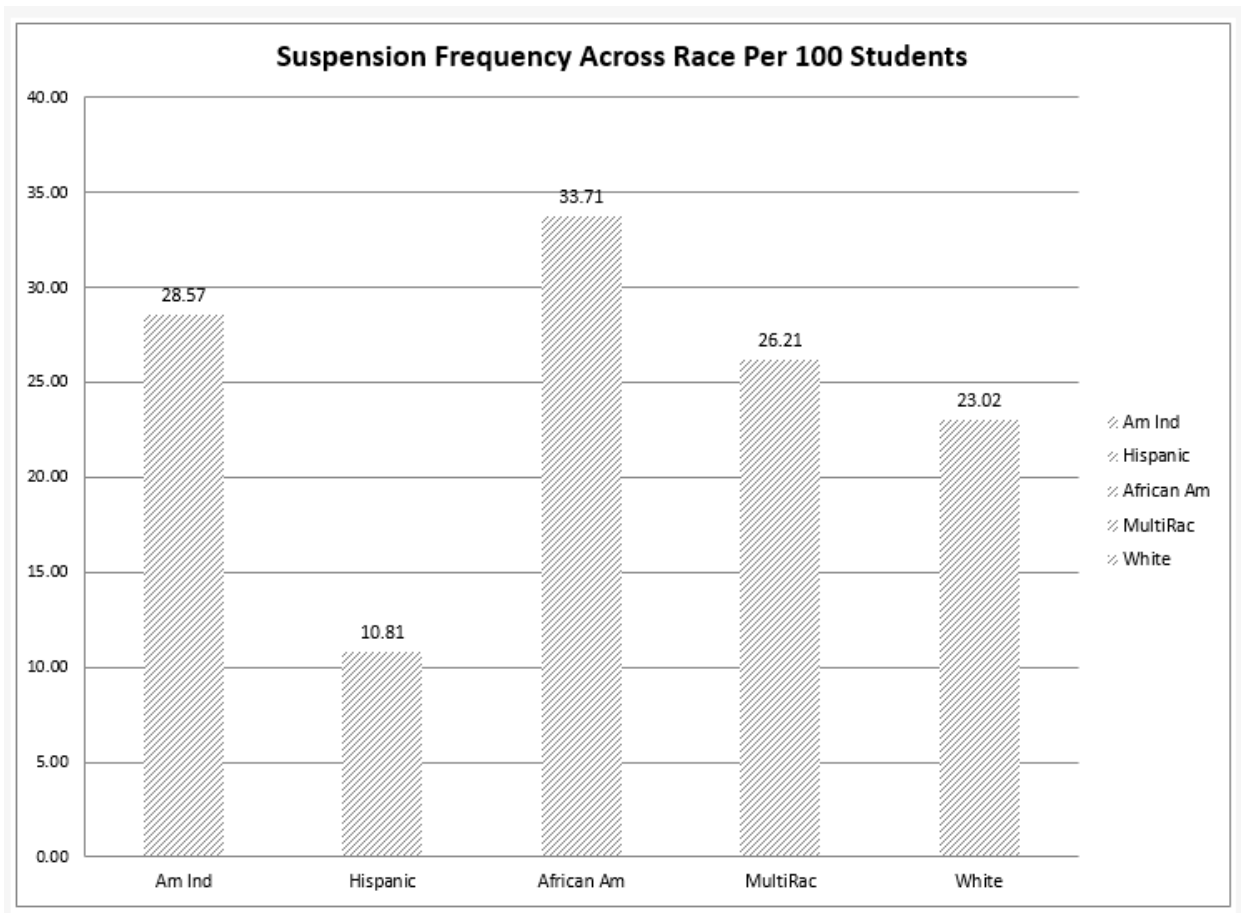


Figure 6. Suspensions Across Race Per 100 Students

Raw data had shown significant incidences of suspensions for Hispanic students. However, to understand the phenomenon better, suspensions have been calculated based on per 100 students for the various races. Figure 6 shows per 100 students suspensions for Hispanic students are much less compared to African Americans, American Indian, and multiracial students. Suspensions for Hispanic students are only 37.8% compared to American Indian students. On the other hand, based on per 100 students, African American students' suspensions are over 3 times (3.12) that of Hispanic students. In addition, suspensions for multiracial students

are approximately 2.5 times (2.44) that of Hispanic students. Suspensions of White students are more than 2 times (2.13) that of Hispanic students. This analysis therefore, indicates that significantly high occurrences of suspensions for Hispanic students should be understood from the prism of the racial distribution at these schools.

Regression Analysis

The objective of the study was to examine whether zero tolerance policies violation for middle and high school students can be predicted from the predictor variables: grade level, suspension, gender, and race.

To test the hypothesis, a multiple linear regression was performed on zero tolerance policies violation as the criterion variable and the four predictor variables, suspension, grade level, gender, and race.

Table 2

Regression Results

<i>Regression Statistics</i>	
Multiple R	0.788
R Square	0.621
Adjusted R Square	0.614
Standard Error	0.577
Observations	195

<i>ANOVA</i>					
	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Significance F</i>
Regression	4	104.0068	26.0017	77.9882	4.97806E-39
Residual	190	63.34705	0.33341		
Total	194	167.35385			

	<i>Coefficients</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	<i>t Stat</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>Lower 95%</i>	<i>Upper 95%</i>	<i>Lower 95.0%</i>	<i>Upper 95.0%</i>
Intercept	-1.399	0.252	-5.556	0.000	-1.895	-0.902	-1.895	-0.902
Suspension	0.343	0.033	10.343	0.000	0.277	0.408	0.277	0.408
Grade level	0.056	0.022	2.581	0.011	0.013	0.098	0.013	0.098
Gender	0.036	0.092	0.387	0.699	-0.146	0.217	-0.146	0.217
Race	0.347	0.038	9.202	0.000	0.272	0.421	0.272	0.421

Table 2 shows the results for the multiple linear regression which was used to test if any of the variables, suspension, grade level, gender, and race significantly predicted violation of zero tolerance policies in middle and high school students. The results of the regression indicated the predictors explained 62.1% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.621$, $F(4, 190) = 77.99$), $p < 0.001$.

For the variables it was found that: (i) Suspension significantly predicted violation of zero tolerance policies ($\beta = 0.343$, $p\text{-value} < 0.001$); (ii) Grade level significantly predicted violation of zero tolerance policies ($\beta = 0.056$, $p\text{-value} < 0.011$); Race significantly predicted violation of zero tolerance policies ($\beta = 0.347$, $p\text{-value} < 0.0001$). Thus, independent variables

suspension, grade level, and race are the three significant predictors of zero tolerance policies violation in this study.

Regression results indicate that suspension, grade level, and race are significant predictors of zero tolerance policy violations in the study conducted. Therefore, the Null hypothesis that there is no statistically significant predictive correlation between the predictor variables of grade levels, retention, suspension, race, and gender and the violation of zero tolerance policies for middle and high school students is rejected at 95 percent confidence level.

Figure 5 provides a pictorial presentation provides a snapshot of the multiple linear regression results.

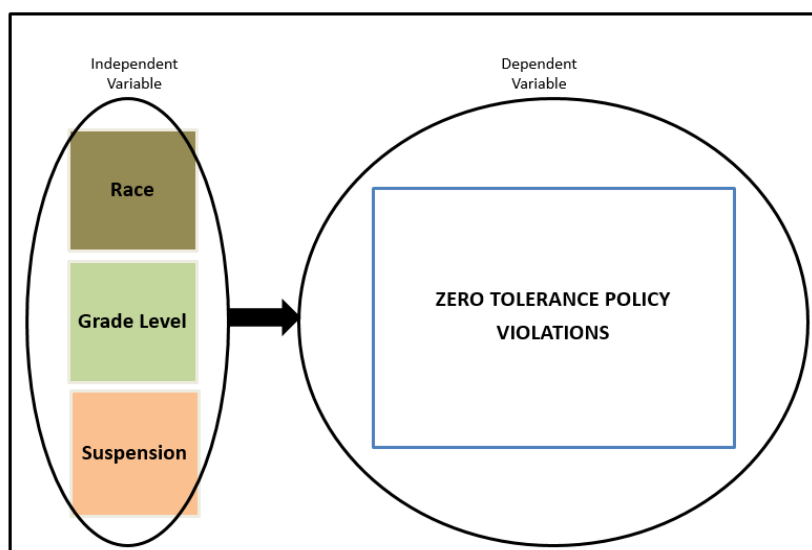


Figure 7. Variable Predictors of Zero Tolerance Policy Violations

Finally, the above statistical analysis indicated that significant predicting power is obtained by all three predictor variables: suspension, grade level, and race. Prior to the multiple regression analysis, the variables involved were tested for normality assumption and no violation was reported.

Chapter Five: Discussion, Recommendations, and Conclusion

Discussion

For this study, archival data from one high school and three middle schools in an urban city in a northeastern state of the United States for the school years: 2014-2015 and 2017-2018 were collected. The goal was to identify whether any risk factors from grade level, suspension frequency, race, and gender can predict violation in students. The study used quantitative correlation methods involving multiple regression to identify which of the above four variables were significant in predicting students' violation of zero tolerance policies in school. Despite being an observational research study, and while identifying a cause and effect relationship was not the explicit focus of the original research design, the regression results provided some insights into a causal understanding of the variables involved in the research. The key demographics in the study were grade level, gender, and race, which were combined with a performance variable suspension to develop a quartet of independent variable set, where the dependent variable or the criterion variable is zero tolerance policies violation in students.

The Research Question and the Hypothesis

The research question for the study examined whether there is a predictive relationship between any set of predictor variable combination of grade level, suspension, race, and gender and the incidence of violations of zero tolerance policies for public middle and high school students. A multiple regression was performed which presented many zero tolerance policy violations in middle and high school students.

Zero Tolerance Policy Violations Under Differing Contexts in Suspensions

At the core, this research study examined whether zero tolerance policy violations in schools can be reliably predicted by a combination of past student behaviors within the school system and their demographic traits. A growing trend in literature in general have criticized the zero tolerance policies in school, generally observing that students of color and those belonging to impoverished neighborhoods suffer more under these policies (Petterutti, 2011; Fabelo et al, 2011; Mongan & Walker, 2012; Brad, 2015; Keierleber, 2015). Prompted by this concern, this study examined whether linkages between the risk factors identified and zero tolerance policy violations in schools can be established. While data was collected from a narrow population base of three middle schools and one high schools in a northeastern state of the United States, the study obtained insight into how demographic characteristics and student behavior at schools can interact to predict occurrences of zero tolerance policy violations.

Besides developing a prediction model for zero tolerance policy violations in students, it was possible to analyze data regarding suspensions and zero tolerance policy violations under various contextual scenarios arising out of three combinations: (i) suspension and zero tolerance policy violations based on gender, (ii) suspension and zero tolerance policy violations based on grade level, and (iii) suspension and zero tolerance policy violations based on race. Besides examining these risk factors' relationships with suspensions, their linkages with zero tolerance policy violations were examined under these three demographic factors: grade level, gender, and race. It has been found that, gender does not impact suspension or zero tolerance policy violations significantly, the way grade level or race do. This was consistent with the literature as studies conducted in more than 160 Kentucky middle schools found no correlational statistics with student gender and school and law violations, but did find them between suspension rates

and school and law violations (Christle, 2004, p. 4).

Results from statistical analyses pointed to distinct threads of discussion.

First, how grade level could predict violations of zero tolerance policies in middle and high schools. Second, how suspension could predict violations of zero tolerance policies in middle and high schools. Third, how race could predict violations of zero tolerance policies in middle and high schools. Thus, this study identified two demographic traits specifically, grade level and race to predict students' propensity for violating zero tolerance policies and discovered how knowing the frequency of suspension could inform the understanding of students' propensity for violating zero tolerance policies.

Zero Tolerance Policy Violations at Various Grade Levels

This investigation began with guidance from literature that suggested that behavioral problems at schools at a certain grade level may be indicative of suspension or zero tolerance policy violations at later grade levels. Prompted by such insight from literature, archival data for the three middle schools and one high school was collected for grade levels 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12. While it was observed that, grade level and suspension could predict zero tolerance policy violations, zero tolerance policy violation was significantly predicted by grade 8. The issues particularly ailing students at this grade level are significant predictor of zero tolerance policy violations and must be understood and studied further.

It has been found that zero tolerance policy violations are the strongest in the eighth grade and second strongest in the tenth grade. On the other hand, suspension occurs more frequently in the eighth grade than the ninth grade. Furthermore, across various grade levels, suspension is moderately correlated with zero tolerance policy violations. This indicates eighth

grade must be considered a significant grade level, where a student's behavioral issues could definitely lead to future instances of zero tolerance policy violations.

In reviewing the linkages between zero tolerance policy violations and grades tenth and eleventh and suspensions at those grade levels, some patterns were noted. First, after steadily increasing from grades sixth through eighth, suspensions dip at the ninth grade and slowly increase from tenth and eleventh grades. On the other hand, zero tolerance policy violations jump significantly in the eighth grade and slowly dip from grades tenth and eleventh. These observations could be significant in policy development as to how schools can provide resources from the seventh grade onwards to prevent heavy suspensions in the eighth grade and reduce and eliminate violations in the ninth grade.

It must be recognized that the results of this study can be corroborated by literature. Studies were conducted to predict sixth grade suspensions from fourth and fifth grade suspensions, along with third grade teachers' feedback of students. Furthermore, when the sixth grade study sought any linkage with suspensions in sixth grade and high school suspensions and dropout rates (Mendez, 2003), suspensions in sixth grade were shown to be statistically relevant to more suspensions and dropping out of school.

It is possible the tapering of zero tolerance policy violations in the ninth and eleventh grade is due to a number of reasons. First, for all those students who have violated zero tolerance policies in the eighth grade, it is not known as to what percentage of those students have returned to school. There must be a strong correlation between zero tolerance policy violation in the eighth grade and school drop-out rate in that particular school district. Second, for all those students who have violated zero tolerance policies in the tenth grade, it is not known what percentage of those students have entered the criminal justice process or the prison pipeline

system. Research strongly indicates the direct linkages between zero tolerance policy violations in middle and high school and interjecting students into the prison pipeline. There must be a strong correlation between zero tolerance policy violations in the tenth grade and students entering the criminal justice process via longer term incarceration or being part of the revolving door of the prison pipeline system. This would be far more evident by reviewing the crime statistics in the neighborhood where the participating schools are located and analyzing the income inequalities that persist in such neighborhoods.

Another phenomenon observed in suspension from grade 6 through grade 12. It begins rising from the sixth grade and peaks at very high in the eighth grade, dips significantly in the tenth grade and increases through the eleventh grade. This sudden dip in zero tolerance policy violations from eighth grade to ninth grade is actually alarming and as such, must not be seen as success of the zero tolerance policies in school system, nor should this be taken as a positive impact of zero tolerance policies in the school system. Undoubtedly, this pattern is indicative of a more calamitous phenomenon unfurling within the inner-city school system that needs to be looked into.

In light of this study, it's important to understand why the pattern of behavior described above falls in line with current literature. As shown in Chapter 2, literature overwhelmingly supports the contention that zero tolerance policies have more negatives than positives in that they create reluctance among affected students who have been severely sanctioned or been treated with heavy handed punitive measures. This negative impact on students of color or minorities is extensively discussed in literature. In explaining why zero tolerance policy violations were consistently higher among students of color, such as Hispanics and African Americans as has been the case in this study. The American Psychological Association (APA)

found that disenfranchised students, students of color and students tormented with emotional and behavioral disorders were overrepresented in suspension and expulsion rates. The APA noted that, “the disproportionate discipline of students of color continues to be a concern, ...overrepresentation in suspension and expulsion has been found consistently for African American students” (APA, 2008, p. 854). Often the student of color were “disciplined more severely for less serious or more subjective reasons” (APA, 2008, p.854).

These students become reluctant towards academics, lose faith in the administrative framework in the school system, and in the process, overwhelmingly get lost in the revolving doors of the criminal justice process, or resigned to perpetual pecuniary distress in a life-long struggle with low-end jobs. As a result, the majority of such students who have been victimized by the harsh end of the zero tolerance policy violations may not come back to school. This study may aid in being a harbinger for either disproving such supposition or digging deeper into such unpalatable reality.

Zero Tolerance Policies Violations Based on Gender

With guidance from literature that suggests that behavioral problems at schools could be the pathway towards zero tolerance policy violations by students when compounded with other demographic characteristics, this study assessed whether a combination of gender and suspension could be indicative of violations. Prompted by such insight from prior works, archival data for the middle schools and high school were collected for gender: male and female and their suspension frequencies and zero tolerance policy violations analyzed statistically. While it was observed that gender and suspension could not predict violations, albeit, the predictability improves slightly when compared with grade level and suspension, such enhanced predictability, however, is not highly significant.

Zero Tolerance Policies Violations Based on Race

The study design for this investigation followed guidance from literature that supported that behavioral problems at schools and zero tolerance policy violations may be predicted from certain demographic and socio-economic factors, or some pre-determined risk factors. In inner cities and neighborhoods across America, race often is indicative of disparity in economic opportunities and differences in socio-economic levels. Prompted by such insight from literature, archival data for the middle schools and high school were collected for students across various races, as broken down by categories of American Indian, African American, Asian American, Hispanic, and White. While it was observed that race and suspension could predict zero tolerance policy violations, the violation was significantly predicted by race itself. When individual races were taken into consideration, both Hispanic and African American were shown to have committed higher incidences of zero tolerance policy violations. This analysis will undoubtedly provide school administrators and policymakers with valuable tools to examine the issues ailing the affected students to be such significant predictor of zero tolerance policy violations.

It has been found that zero tolerance policy violations are stronger for African American and Hispanics students compared to other races. On the other hand, suspension occurs most frequently with these two races also. Furthermore, across various races, suspension is significantly correlated with zero tolerance policy violations. This reveals that for all students when behavioral issues rise to the level of suspension, it could definitely lead to future instances of zero tolerance policy zero tolerance policy violations.

Looking at the three contextual scenarios where suspension is combined with grade level, gender, and race, some pertinent observations are worth noting. First, it now becomes clear that,

suspension across all the races is a significant predictor of zero tolerance policy violations, compared to using suspension with gender. The same applies for grade level. This means grade level, suspension, and race have a higher predictive power than gender.

Second, while suspension could be a significant predictor to provide insight into the potential for violations, this does not hold for differences in gender. At all grade levels, when looking at suspension frequency, it is possible to gain insight into future instances of zero tolerance policy violations. Thirdly, when it comes to gender, looking at suspension frequency for a female student or a male student may not yield meaningful observation regarding potential for zero tolerance policy violations. However, finding suspension frequency for a male student could definitely provide insight into his propensity to violate zero tolerance policies in school.

Implications

This study sought to examine whether zero tolerance policy violations in schools can be reliably predicted by a combination of past student behaviors internally within the school system and externally from some of their demographic traits. This study's outcome has many implications.

First, this study provided a trajectory for understanding some of the contexts and circumstances where student behaviors could be unwelcome, disruptive and damaging to other students, and identifying those contexts and situations could help school administrators to adequately plan for developing a more positive environment for students.

Second, the study provided a newer lens through which to understand students' suspension and zero tolerance policy violations which could be used successfully by school administrators in different school and student contexts.

Third, the study will expand the body of knowledge of interacting dynamics between risk factors and student disruption or unwelcome behaviors by extending the prior multilevel risk factor analysis of student behaviors and their onset into criminality. The study results can give a better understanding of the interactive dynamics between students' background and community affiliation and how such dynamics may be affecting their behavior, while allowing these results to be directly applicable and relevant in preventing and mitigating a student's fast descent into criminality.

Limitations

This study was limited to few schools within the northeast region of the U.S. Not sampling data from a broader set of schools dispersed across different geographical region presented some external threat to validity of the outcomes identified. This may preclude the study to be universally adopted as few schools in one city does not provide any randomness of connections identified in the results section.

This study was also limited to collection of data related to student behavior and demographic traits on an aggregate basis, which may be seen as internal threat to validity. However, careful analysis of data and examination of multiple regression results provide sufficient guidance to discount any internal threat to the study.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study identified a set of risk factors, such as suspension frequency, grade level, and race as significant predictors for zero tolerance policy violations in students of middle and high school. First, suspension at a certain grade level is found to be a significant predictor for zero tolerance policy violations at the same grade level or immediate later grade level. Therefore,

future research could center around identifying the frequencies of suspension across grade level and race, which will enable the school administrators and policymakers to find effective measures to reduce suspension rate, and develop appropriate mitigation strategies to reduce zero tolerance policy violations.

Second, it is common practice to enforce different punishments for different school violations. This study identified linkages between grade level and suspension and that between race and suspension. Future research could focus on identifying causal relationship as to how grade levels can impact suspension rates and how race categories can influence suspension rate, which will provide school administrators to not only be productive but enable them to give due cognizance to the student's grade level, racial identity, socio-economic background, and family composition and craft responses to student infractions.

Third, given the important insights the study has produced, further studies could be undertaken to evaluate what preventive mechanism or ameliorative framework can be instituted at the seventh and eighth grade levels in middle schools in certain socio-economically disadvantaged neighborhoods so that suspension frequencies and zero tolerance policy violations may not rise to alarming proportion. This will enable more students to stay under the protective umbrella of the school system and not go out of the system due to out-of-school suspension.

Fourth, future research should focus on the utilization of schools using restorative practices. Fifth, begin early intervention based on the increase in zero tolerance behaviors at the middle school level. Sixth, for future research to include variables for mental health issues.

Finally, despite the study being limited to only few schools and limited neighborhoods, the broader implications of the study can be extended more generally by focusing on procuring

participants from a wider population, and thus, by changing the population the study can be more universally accepted.

Conclusion

In this correlation research study, archival data was collected from the greater metro region of a northeastern state of the United States public school database between the two school years: 2014-2015 and 2017-2018. The participants were selected from the three middle schools and one high school in the district. By conducting a multiple linear regression, the study identified what combinations of demographic risk factors and student behavior factors from grade level, race, gender, and suspension frequency are predictors of future violations of zero tolerance policies for middle school and high school students. The findings of the statistical analysis provided an understanding of which set of risk factor variables can predict zero tolerance policy violations among middle school and high students.

The study objective was to identify a set of variables that may predict circumstance that lead a child to violate zero tolerance policies. The research design for the study supported the examination of the null hypothesis of no combination of predictor variables grade level, suspension, race, and gender can significantly predict violation of zero tolerance policies for middle and high school students.

While the direct results of the study can be analyzed in three distinct threads, their implications are multi-fold and can be far-reaching. First, the study established that grade level and suspension could predict zero tolerance policy violations where zero tolerance policy violation was significantly predicted by grade 9. Thus, it can be recognized that eighth grade must be considered a significant grade level, where behavioral issues of a student could definitely lead to future instances of violations. Second, while it was observed that gender and

suspension could predict zero tolerance policy violations, results are more consistent to hold that suspension in a male student is more of a significant predictor of such student violating zero tolerance policies. Third, when individual races are taken into consideration, both multicultural and African Americans were shown to be better predictors of zero tolerance policy violations compared to other races. This can provide school administrators with valuable tools to assist the affected students to stay away from situations in which they may violate policies of the schools.

This study can help spot behavioral patterns and behavioral dynamics of students to prevent instances where such students become reluctant towards academics, loses faith in the administrative framework in the school system, and in the process gets lost in the criminal justice process. This study can certainly make inroads to stopping students from being victimized by the harsh zero tolerance policies by delving deeper into related socio-economic issues identified earlier in this chapter.

This study may provide a definitive trajectory for understanding some of the contexts and circumstances where students' behaviors could be unwelcome and damaging to other students, by identifying those contexts and situations that drive a student to behave such ways, and by not overly penalizing under the restrictive covenant of zero tolerance policies, lies the success of original imposition of zero tolerance policies in schools across America. Finally, this study proposed a newer lens through which students' suspension and violations could be understood to expand the body of knowledge surrounding the interacting dynamics between risk factors and student's disruptive behaviors to prevent such behaviors transmogrifying a student's dissent into a life of criminality.

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Appendix A

Correspondence with School Officials

JORGE O. ELORZA
Mayor

CHRISTOPHER N MAHER
Interim Superintendent



Providence Public School District
RPA/Assessment Office
70 Fricker Street
Providence, RI 02903-4045
tel. 401.456-9128
fax 401. 278-2842
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February 11, 2019

TO: School of Education Liberty University
Institutional Review Board

FROM: Anthony Roberson

Anthony Roberson was provided de-identified student data by the Office of Research, Planning & Accountability in the Providence Public School Department. The data was for students in grades 6 through 12 at Del Sesto middle school, Nathanael Greene middle school, Gilbert Stuart middle school and Central high school. The data that was transferred included grades, retentions, suspension frequency, race and gender from school years 2014-2015 through 2017-2018. The data has been stripped of all identifying information and was stripped by

Executive Director of Systemwide Performance

Appendix B

IRB Approval

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

February 13, 2019

Anthony J. Roberson

IRB Application 3640: Predictors of Zero Tolerance Policy Violations Among High School and Middle School Students

Dear Anthony J. Roberson,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study does not classify as human subjects research. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your IRB application.

Your study does not classify as human subjects research because it will not involve the collection of identifiable, private information.

Please note that this decision only applies to your current research application, and any changes to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty IRB for verification of continued non-human subjects research status. You may report these changes by submitting a new application to the IRB and referencing the above IRB Application number.

If you have any questions about this determination or need assistance in identifying whether possible changes to your protocol would change your application's status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

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