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Attendance and Restorative Practices

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Attendance and Restorative Practices

A thesis submitted to
The Department of Psychology
College of Theology, Arts, & Sciences

In partial fulfillment of the requirements
for a Master of Arts degree in Psychology

by,

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Abstract

Attendance and Restorative Practices examines the attendance and discipline policies of Portland Public Schools (PPS) as a means to understand the discipline gap. The lead investigator is a former PPS employee that worked directly with chronically absent and truant students. The hypothesis of the study is that there is a link between students with high incidents of school exclusions and those who have chronic attendance issues. The School Refusal Assessment Scale by Kearney (2002) is used to evaluate the function school refusal has for individual students, and in this study aggregated as a whole for three targeted middle schools within PPS. The survey participant numbers were hampered by the lack of parental consent; however, interesting deductions are made based on observations and school climate information. Overall, there was not a positive correlation between school refusal functions (1) avoidance, (2) escapism, (3) attention seeking and (4) tangible rewards with the three schools. Four one way ANOVAs were performed to compare student responses on the SRAS-R functions of school refusal behavior in schools A, B and C. None of these ANOVAs reached statistical significance at the $p < .05$ level. Ultimately, a plan for prevention and intervention is recommended using restorative practices derived from the Restorative Justice movement.

Keywords: Attendance, truancy, restorative justice, restorative practices, school-to-prison-pipeline, discipline gap, School Refusal Assessment Scale

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Attendance and Restorative Practices

Chapter One: Introduction

Attendance is considered a behavior by most public schools: consistent attendance is a positive behavior while inconsistent or negative attendance is the opposite. Interestingly, negative attendance is one of the most penalized behaviors in public schools (Sheldon & Epstein, 2002). Understanding why students miss school is just as important as addressing the truant and tardy behaviors themselves. As behaviors escalate, the level of disciplinary action often increases as well. For example, it is not uncommon for students who are habitually tardy or truant to receive exclusionary discipline such as removal from class, suspension, or even expulsion.

All negative behaviors have the potential to bring out systemic norms which may or may not improve student experience. In looking at one particular behavioral issue and applying thoughtful strategies to address that behavior, it is possible that a student may improve in other areas as well. To take the inquest even further, I pose the following question: if attendance disciplinary actions were to shift to a more restorative practice, would other deviant behaviors subside as well and consequently begin closing the racial discipline gap?

School attendance and the racial discipline gap have been an interest of mine for over nine years, ever since I first began greeting late students as a staff member of a Portland public middle school in northeast Portland, Oregon. From the very beginning I found the punishments used to address tardy and truant students to be counterproductive and overly punitive for those whose lateness was not excused based on district attendance policies or parental release (PPS, 2014). Lunch-time detention was once the normative consequence for students with an

unexcused tardy at this school, and rarely cured anyone of their chronic lateness. More often than not, offenders were students of color.

This research looks at the ecological structures that come into play for students in public middle and high schools within the Portland Public Schools system, and what barriers students may face in the process of going to and staying at school. The analysis of norms and standards from both micro and macro levels (e.g., individuals, families, schools, neighborhoods, communities, and beyond) will provide unique views of where intervention is needed and how to prevent truancy and tardiness.

In the past decade, supportive structures within schools have improved for children of color, but much still needs to be addressed, especially in the area of discipline. The most common offense for which students receive referrals is truancy, with other infractions occurring at much lower rates (PPS, 2014). Truancy includes all absences that occur without school or guardian permission (Bell et al., as cited by Jacobs & Kritsonis, 2007), whereas absenteeism is often referred to as an excused period of time not attending school, which includes suspensions and expulsions (Strickland, 1998). In analyzing chronic absenteeism on the whole, themes are bound to come forward and true analysis of the behavior can be formed.

When looking closely at the data across the United States, students of color receive far more school exclusions than their White counterparts (Noguera & Wing, 2006). The fact that White students are far less represented in the data is evidence of the discipline gap. The discipline gap has been the focus of a plethora of research over the past two decades. Its presence became apparent soon after the birth of "zero tolerance" discipline policies in 1999 (Martinez, 2009; Richart, Brooks & Soler, 2003; Skiba et al., 2002; Skiba & Peterson, 2003).

"Zero tolerance" is a hardline discipline policy that often does not allow for the consideration of contextual reasoning behind offending behaviors. When assigning a consequence, an administrator must analyze the action itself rather than the precipitating events or social-emotional contexts, regardless of whether those contexts explain the behavior and regardless of whether other, more appropriate strategies may result in a positive change for the student and community. Attendance is one behavior that may benefit from the inclusion of contextual information before consequences are dispensed.

Consider this fictional, but all too common, scenario of a student who had been chronically late or absent during most of her grade school years, who then enters middle school and ultimately high school. Mary is a student who was frequently absent from elementary school, often because of her mother's work schedule. Her mother worked two jobs and rarely saw Mary, so on her days off, she would regularly keep Mary home to spend time with her and her younger siblings. When Mary arrived at school late, the office staff typically grilled her about why she was late and marked her unexcused before sending her to class where her teachers commonly greeted her with sarcastic responses such as, "Glad you could find the time to join us." These negative responses to her attendance began to take a toll on her self-image.

By the time Mary started middle school, her mother had given her the responsibility of preparing her siblings for school and she was often late, once again marked unexcused. At her middle school, unexcused tardy arrivals result in lunch-time detention, which is held in the cafeteria in chairs facing a wall. Mary quickly figured out that if she came to school between classes, or not at all, she would not have to face the humiliation of detention. No one asked her why she was late, or even why it was hard to get to school.

When high school started, Mary rarely went to school at all. When she did, she regularly had confrontations with staff. She was often sent out of class and occasionally suspended for disorderly conduct. It was no surprise to the school when Mary dropped out. She was pumped and primed for the school-to-prison pipeline, and she landed in prison at the age of seventeen.

In Mary's story, it is clear that her experiences with absenteeism and school exclusion from a very young age were impacted by both her environment and the institutionalized policies at her schools. Her negative attendance patterns began years before they received official attention. All schools had historic information on Mary and knew there was a likelihood that her negative attendance behavior would continue. That her attendance was only addressed by micro-aggressions from office staff, classroom teachers, and other students was never acknowledged. Had school staff sought interventions for Mary and her mother, it is possible that Mary may have learned new strategies to get to and stay at school, as well as to help Mary's mother understand the importance of getting Mary to school during her days off. Yet in this case, prevention was hindered by the lack of follow-up, and intervention was not considered until Mary's negative attendance affected her learning, which may have significantly contributed to her deviant behaviors in high school.

The study of individual behaviors in an effort to close the discipline gap has not previously been done. The specific choice to look at attendance is not arbitrary. Attendance is an ideal behavior to examine, as problems with attendance often become apparent long before a student shows other unacceptable behaviors, as in the vignette about Mary. If negative attendance issues can be addressed even by as late as middle school, it is possible other problem behaviors may diminish.

There are many levels of negative attendance, and all are important to consider in this analysis. School exclusion is the process by which a student is removed from the learning environment as a means of discipline, which includes being removed from class, even if the student is only sent to another classroom (Fallis & Opotow, 2003). Unfortunately, it is not uncommon for school districts to exclude these lower-level exclusions, such as classroom removals, from their discipline data.

The behavior of absenteeism is described as a period of time when a student is not attending school, which often leads to the loss of academic success (Strickland, 1998). Truancy is a type of absenteeism that can cause even more negative consequences. Bell, Rosen, and Dynlacht define truancy as "unexcused and unlawful absence from schools without parental knowledge" (1994, p. 204). Although not all students with chronic absenteeism are considered truant, the absenteeism itself can be detrimental to students. Strickland makes the point that while perfect attendance does not determine grade point average, lack of attendance does (1998).

This study analyzes existing student attendance and discipline data and includes the administration of a survey to evaluate the function of student chronic absenteeism among middle school students throughout the PPS District. The hypothesis is that schools with a more equitable disbursement of discipline and attendance practices across racial categories will score lower on the School Refusal Assessment Scale – Revised (SRAS-R, to be discussed in detail in later chapters) (Kearny & Silverman, 1999), whereas schools with less equitable disbursement of discipline and attendance practices across racial categories will provide data that may be used to create a prevention and intervention for chronic absenteeism. This hypothesis is expected based on my firsthand experience working in a middle school in PPS. Over the years, it has appeared that students who experience inequitable discipline from the school community were less likely

to be motivated to go to and stay at school due to perceived discrimination based on race. I hope

to make the link between truancy and perceived discrimination using the SRAS-R and data

analysis. For purposes of clarity, race and ethnicity are used interchangeably throughout this

thesis.

Three out of the ten PPS middle schools were part of the SRAS-R school-wide survey

designed to measure school refusal behavior, with all students in the three schools offered

participation in the study. The SRAS-R was originally designed by Kearney and Silverman

(1999) and has been reviewed and revised to capture different forms of school refusal behavior

found in the research literature. This study uses the version of the survey based on the

recommendations of Lyon (2009) to establish a more culturally sensitive questionnaire, while

still including Kearney and Silverman's four functions of school refusal behavior measurement

(see Figure 1).

Kearney and Silverman's **Functions of School Refusal Behavior**
Function 1 – Avoidance of school stimulation
Function 2 – Escape from social or evaluative situations
Function 3 – Seeking parental attention, or lack thereof
Function 4 – Tangible positive reinforcement from forces outside of school

Figure 1. Four functions of school refusal behavior as described by Kearney and Silverman, 1999.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Absenteeism as a behavior

Psychologists and ethologists have debated what constitutes a behavior for decades. The

aggregate of definitions was analyzed by Levitis, Lidicker, and Freund by surveying 174

members of various professional societies (2009). Their findings were as diverse as the multiple

disciplines themselves. Three main theories are explored throughout the literature: Tinbernen's

definition is all-encompassing of an individual ("the total movements made by the intact

animal") yet it does not specify individual choice (as cited by Dugatkin, 2012) or more simply

put "what an animal does" (Raven & Johnson, 1993, as cited by Levitis, Lidicker, & Freund,

2009). Beck and Frankel's more specific interpretation includes the external variables that may

affect an individual, which allows the influence of context (1981; as cited by Levitis et al., 2009).

Others believe behavior is preset in the genetic base, not allowing context or individual choice to

factor into an individual's reactions to external stimuli (Wallace et al., 1991; as cited by Levitis

et al., 2009).

The concept of behavior as "the total movements made by the intact animal" may be

construed as true through the lens of an observer without the knowledge of context. When an

individual projects a specific behavior, such as missing school, this can be viewed as a choice of

actions which led to the behavior. There is no accounting for what may have promoted or

provoked a student to come to school late or not at all; the student simply was not present,

therefore the behavior is negative attendance. School policies often reflect this paradigm of

thought, leaving many students misunderstood.

The less popular theory about behavior is that behavior is determined by nature, not

individual circumstance. This theory does not take into the account the multitude of external

factors that can lead a person or animal to react to specific provocations. Levitis et al. reference

how Starr and Taggart argue that it is not up to the individual how they will behave; all behavior

is set before birth (2009). It is challenging to comprehend the implications of such a theory, as it

suggests the non-accountability of individual actions. Were this theory true, when an individual

exhibits negative behavior that is harmful to others, they may argue they are truly not at fault, as this negative behavior is their nature.

Following the school of thought that behavior has influences, it is possible to view individual behaviors through a more restorative lens by looking at the contexts that prompt actions. When identifying contexts that prompt or enable specific behaviors, positive or negative, it is possible to understand how an individual may process the stimuli and respond with an appropriate behavior. This is not to suggest that, with the understanding of personal context, all behavior becomes justifiable; rather, it creates the space to understand and possibly redirect behavior in the manner most effective for the individual.

Of all these various definitions of behavior, it is logical to view public schools' discipline policies on behavior as being reflective of Tinbernen's interpretation. If behavior is just what an animal does, attendance has to be seen as viewed through the lens of discipline. If behavior is viewed more like Starr and Tagart's interpretation, students and families would not be personally responsible for their positive or negative attendance patterns, as they simply come to school as nature expects, relieving the individual of personal accountability. As a consequence of viewing attendance as what one does rather than why one does it (context), schools limit their ability to restore a student's positive attendance and positive behavior (Jacobs & Kritsonis, 2007; Teasley, 2004). This research supports the view that behavior is a result of external stimuli, to which an individual responds by what they do – a combination of both Tinbernen's and Beck's definitions.

Context associations

The reasons students miss school are as varied as the students themselves. Literature suggests a lack of engagement as a main component of the absentee problems that currently plague the U.S. public school system (Fairbanks et al., 2007; Kearney, 2006; Sheldon & Epstein,2002;

Teasley, 2004). The process of student disengagement can be the result of many different contexts. The most common factors of disengagement are poverty, family discontent, and unengaging educators. Each of these change a student's outlook, and their ability to attend school and be successful. It is not unusual for students to disengage in response to these associations (Sheldon & Epstein, 2004).

Poverty can hamper a student's ability to attend school on a regular basis for a variety of reasons. Students may miss school to care for younger siblings, like Mary did in the introduction. Without the funds to afford appropriate childcare, some families choose to have older siblings take on this role to provide food and shelter for the family (Sheldon & Epstein, 2004). Other times poverty is a factor that causes shame and creates a barriers which are challenging for adolescents to overcome: hunger, dirty clothes, and a lack of bathing options. All these issues add negative social and emotional contexts that contribute to student disengagement.

Family discontent is another factor that may affect the attendance of students from all socioeconomic groups. This discontent can lead to lack of sleep, low opportunity to do adequate schoolwork at home, environmental chaos, and depression. All of these conditions may contribute to a student's absenteeism. This particular context is challenging to assess, as some families will enable students to stay home in order to make up for the chaos or abuse. Literature suggests that more needs to be done to address this particular factor of disengagement as it puts students at high risk of drop-out and even suicide.

Finally, the disengaged educator is likely the most discouraging factor for students attending school today (Jacobs & Kritsonis, 2007). Understanding why teachers are disengaged is as imperative as understanding students. Teachers are given a great deal of power to influence the youth in this country; however, with the lack of resources and time for their skills, it is

becoming more common for teachers to perform at the bare minimum (National Council on TeacherQuality, 2014).

Many researchers have placed much investment and study into the social and emotional concerns of students (Fairbanks et. al, 2007). Sheldon and Epstein recommend evaluating the whole student from all areas of the ecological context, looking at the individual, their experience, the community, and beyond (2004). Research indicates that addressing external contexts can re-engage students, and also occasionally teachers (Jacobs & Kritsonis, 2007). Teasley writes about the need to evaluate students' risk factors before addressing the behavior, as punishment often leads to more missed school and makes brushes with the justice system more likely (2004).

School discipline

School administrators use discipline matrices to determine what penalties will be applied for specific infractions (see Figure 2). There is a practicality to using a matrix to apply punishment to students, but a recipe for discipline does not take into account the various contexts with which students come to school. The literature is littered with anecdotal vignettes of students with an external context that was not observed and yet was ultimately the cause of negative behaviors. Matrices like the one in this report ignore the "pre-existing conditions" that may need to be addressed in order to redirect the behaviors that cause school disruption.

Examples of conduct which violates expectation	Definition	Occurrence	Disciplinary action min— max
ATTENDANCE & PUNCTUALITY			
Class Cutting/ Leaving Without Permission	Failure to attend assigned class without permission or excuse; leaving the building, classroom or assigned area without prior approval of the teacher and/or administrator.	Minor/First Serious/Rep	1 — 2 2 — 4
Loitering	Remaining around the school building without permission and staff supervision for purposes other than an educational assignment.	Minor/First Serious/Rep	1 — 2 2 — 3
Off Limits	Entering a location in a building or any school property which has been restricted from student use or entering a location which has been restricted from student use during certain times of the day.	Minor/First Serious/Rep	1 — 2 2 — 4
Tardiness	Failure to be in a place of instruction at the assigned time.	Minor/First Serious/Rep	1 — 1 2 — 3
Trespassing	Entering any school property or into school facilities without proper authority; during school hours; includes any school entry during a period of suspension or expulsion.	Minor/First Serious/Rep	1 — 3 3 — 4
Truancy	Failure to report to school without permission or excuse.	Minor/First Serious/Rep	1 — 2 2 — 4
Other Similar Offenses	Any other prohibited actions involving attendance and punctuality or the location of students on school property.	Minor/First Serious/Rep	Same as related offenses
PROTECTION OF PROPERTY			
Arson	Action which may cause a fire, but none results, such as throwing a lighted match in a trash container which fails to ignite or intentionally starting any fire or combustion on school property regardless of whether any damage occurs.	Minor/First Serious/Rep	3 — 4 5
Bomb Threat	Reporting to school, police or fire officials the presence of a bomb on or near school property without a reasonable belief that a bomb is present on school property.	Minor/First Serious/Rep	3 — 4 4
Burglary	Unauthorized entry into a School District building for the purpose of committing a crime when the building is closed to students and the public.	Minor/First Serious/Rep	3 — 4 5
Deliberate Misuse of Property	The intentional use without proper permission of property belonging to the school or an individual for a purpose other than that for which it was intended or in a manner likely to damage the property.	Minor/First Serious/Rep	1 — 2 2 — 3
False Fire Alarm	Reporting a fire to school or fire officials or setting off a fire alarm without a reasonable belief that a fire exists.	Minor/First Serious/Rep	3 — 4 4
Gambling	Playing any game of skill or chance for money or anything of value.	Minor/First Serious/Rep	1 — 2 2 — 4
Possession Of Stolen Property	Having in one's possession or under one's control property which has been stolen when the person possessing it has reasonable cause to believe the property has been stolen, or possession without permission of property belonging to another.	Minor/First Serious/Rep	1 — 3 3 — 4

Level 1 Conferences	Level 4 Expulsion/Delayed Expulsion/Reassignment/ Referral	24
Level 2 Interventions	Level 5 Mandatory Expulsion	
Level 3 Suspension/Temporary Exclusion/Reassignment /Referral	Level 6 Mandatory one-year Expulsion (weapons/firearms)	
See Discipline of Students with Disabilities for special procedures that apply to students on IEPs and Formal Section 504 Plans		

Figure 2. Sample Discipline Matrix. This figure explains the level at which behaviors are rated within the public schools' discipline policy.

Behavior policies had been stagnant for many years until the early 1990s, when the United States began experiencing the horrific violence of school shootings. Since then, school districts have implemented zero-tolerance policies (to be discussed further in another section) and fire arms restrictions (Martinez, 2009). Fear of loss of control and the possibility of further violence have inspired stricter school discipline distribution and the use of more criminally themed language when describing school offences (Richart, Brooks & Soler, 2003). Research has indicated these policies do not work; in fact, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, which first initiated zero-tolerance policies to combat drug crime, declared it an ineffective way to find and penalize criminals (Force & others, 2008). By 1990, they discontinued its use altogether.

It is challenging to find research that supports attendance as part of the behavior matrix alongside arson and burglary, and with similar forms of punishment. When researching the history of attendance as a behavior in the United States, literature was hard to find. More research needs to be conducted on this particular factor of school discipline and behavior.

Attendance is a serious issue in the United States. Increasingly, students are missing more school than they attend (NCTQ, 2014). Applying negative attendance issues to a discipline matrix has archaic implications, including possible misuse of power by school administrators. If attendance is only looked at as a behavior, students with personal contexts that mitigate their ability to come to school are not likely to gain the education they have a right to. If a student is chronically absent or truant, suspending them from school only sets them back.

Attendance in connection with school success

How much is too much to miss? Evidenced-based research has determined that missing of more than 10% of a school year is an indicator toward the likelihood of school dropout (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). The National Center for Children in Poverty continues to study the effects of students missing school more than an average of once a month from kindergarten through high school (Banfanz & Chang, 2013). The research found that if a student is chronically absent from kindergarten, they will be lower-performing in first grade (pg. 20). The evidence suggests that this lower performance extends through fifth grade with no difference in variables of sex, race, and socio-economic status.

Addressing the problem. In a report published in the magazine *Principal Leadership* in 2013, Balfanz and Chang recommend the using "Three Rs" to approach the challenges of chronic absenteeism: Reach down, Reach out, and Reach up. They suggest that use of the Three Rs holds principals ultimately responsible for the attendance of students in their buildings.

First, "Reach down" directs administrators to know students' attendance patterns for the prior school year and tracking them again on the first day of the new school year. Students who have missed more than 8% of the previous school year are identified and monitored, and administrators connect with the family on the first absence of the new school year in order to truly start the year with a clean slate. By employing the absence data of schools students previously attended, the school is empowered to be an actor of prevention, rather than a reactor with intervention, in the lives of its students.

"Reaching out" to members of the community and creating family partnerships allows school administrators to create a scaffolding of support for students with the greatest need, especially those who miss school for socioeconomic reasons (babysitting, lack of health or dental care, transportation, etc.). Part of reaching out is having an open dialogue with the community about the needs of the families it supports. Coalitions between community partners can help ensure that families are supported and given access to services they cannot access on their own due to challenges with language, social capital, or any variety of struggles an individual family may contend with.

Finally, "Reaching up" encourages principals to go to their district and state offices to request support. With the power and backing of a larger body, schools are more likely to band together to create a culture of school attendance as a community, rather than as islands in the sea of schools. Balfanz and Chang indicate that simply requesting a report from the district office about the specifics of attendance is an effective way to garner district and state support of attendance initiatives (2013).

The Three Rs encourage principals to monitor and address chronic absenteeism, with a heavy emphasis on relying on community. It is unclear at this time whether the process of

reaching down, out, and up will correct schools' chronic absenteeism issues. Not all

administrators are willing to address absenteeism at this level, as it has the potential to point

blame at the school for students' lack of attendance. However, it is possible that the increased

awareness of student and family contexts will change the school climate such that students are

more likely to attend.

       Teacher/student disengagement. The literature in this area suggests more research needs

to be done in deciphering the motivation for students to attend school, and that understanding why

students are truant or chronically absent with parental consent is imperative to understanding the

problem (Corville-Smith, 1995). Fallis and Opotow suggest that "cutting school" (purposeful

truancy) is not only a behavioral concern for schools; these behaviors may also be signifiers which

could point toward an appropriate intervention for the betterment of an institution (2003). Students

who exhibit such antisocial behavior may be suggesting boredom, which can be attributed to

teacher burn-out or top-down teaching techniques that are likely less engaging. Fallis and Opotow

suggest looking below the surface of the student's attendance with a lens that views the behavior

as informative rather than deviant. Understanding why a student is not engaged provides the

opportunity for all to grow.

       Truancy does not always occur off-campus. Roderick et al. explain that truancy should be

redefined as more students "cut" or are selectively truant from particular classes and no longer

leave the schoolyard (1997). They suggest the response to this phenomenon is to re-engage

students, especially those with low academic success in the classes they cut.

       One of the leading researchers on school refusal, Kearney, suggests looking at how missing

school functions for a student (2007). One method is the use of the School Refusal Assessment

Scale (SRAS), a Likert-type scaled survey (Kearney & Silverman, 1999). The scale is designed

to measure the four functional conditions that are known causes for school refusal: (1) avoiding

challenging stimulation, (2) escaping social settings or opportunities which may lead to evaluation,

(3) pursuing attention from someone outside the school community, and (4) positive reinforcement

from tangible forces beyond the school setting (Kearney, 2006). Although the SRAS has been

validated in many university settings, its use needs to be explored further on the front lines of

public schools (Kearney & Bates, 2005).

The National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) recommends looking at teacher

attendance as a factor of student disengagement (2014). When teachers are absent more than 10%

of instructional time, the level of success a student may experience can fall disproportionate to that

of their peers whose teachers are present at least 94% of the time (Clotfelter et al., 2007; Miller et

al., 2007, both cited by the NCTQ, 2014). NCTQ's executive summary on teacher attendance

suggests further investigation regarding the reasons teachers miss significant amounts of

instructional time.

Meaningful intervention at the school level needs further research for each individual truant

student (Rodríguez & Conchas, 2009). Rodríguez and Conchas also suggest that when

communities and schools are aware of their most vulnerable students, it is essential that they

explore the students' influences regarding truancy and what structures are in place that typically

lead to truancy.

Fallis and Opotow's data uncovers reasons behind student and teacher absenteeism, and

they suggest using it as a means to uncover institutional ills that may plague a school's climate

(2003). For instance, identifying a student's unaddressed conflicts which contribute to prolonged

absence or cutting increases the student's odds of restoring positive feelings regarding school.

Further studies need to be conducted to have a more universal understanding of this concept, and

Kearney and his many colleagues continue to search for explanations for what has become one of the most challenging behaviors to extinguish from school discipline.

Challenges to the discipline gap. There are studies that question whether the gap in discipline between students of color and their White peers is legitimately due to race or whether there are environmental contributing factors (Skiba et al., 2002). Cross and Donovan created the *composition index* as a means to compare students' discipline data by special education first, then by race (2002). Others suggest the discipline gap may be the result of violence in the communities of students of color; this trauma may affect a student's ability to react appropriately to social situations (Mateu-Gelabert & Lune, 2007). With the knowledge of both special education and violence, and with possible mitigating factors that may lead to poor behavior performance, it is relevant to examine schools with multiple stressors which yet show little or no difference in discipline dissemination across races.

Within the composition index, Black students represented 33% of U.S. students identified as *mentally retarded*, whereas Black students are only 17% of the entire school-age population (Cross, Donovan & others, 2002). The overrepresentation of Black students in the data suggests the need for further examination of the criteria used to identify students in this way. The way students are selected also needs further study in order to understand the validity of some claims that are most likely to receive federally funded special education services.

Students who come from neighborhoods of extreme violence, and who attend a school that reflects a culture of fear, may reject school as a means of survival rather than from a lack of interest in a formal education (Mateu-Gelabert & Lune, 2007). Some schools in high-crime areas are successful in creating a climate of safety while others fail to do so, instead focusing on the behavior of the students rather than the attitudes and actions of school staff toward the behavioral norms of

students (Mateu-Gelabert & Lune, 2007). Anderson (2000) is credited for the concept "code of

the street" which is defined as a set of informal rules governing public behavior, including

violence. The rules prescribe a proper way "to be respected" and proper way to respond if

challenged, often involving threats, violence, and intimidation (p. 68).

     If this is the paradigm from which a student enters school each day, there is a herculean

effort involved in interrupting the inertia of violence in response to a threat. Some schools have

made progress in this area, and have changed climates of fear to climates of safety for students

living in chaotic and violent environments.

     Researchers Gregory, Skiba and Noguera, are some of the most prolific authors of literature

regarding the discipline gap— they identify and suggest many characteristics schools look to when

analyzing risks that may contribute to widening the discipline gap (2010). They acknowledge the

part violence in a community may contribute the rates of disciplinary action in schools; however,

they also look to schools in high-crime areas that are decreasing rates of exclusion with more

restorative disciplinary practices. Instead of viewing these schools as limited in their scope to

change, they challenge officials to recognize the increased educational challenge. Learning from

schools that have been identified as resilient and gaining from those strengths by sharing

knowledge, other schools may have the capacity to become resilient to disciplinary issues that have

previously been out the hands of school administrators.

History of discipline disparity and race

     Zero-tolerance. Early in the 1980s, the federal government started enforcing policies

known as "zero-tolerance" at U.S. Customs and Border Control locations along the Florida coast

to combat illegal drug trafficking (Skiba & Peterson, 1999). Although it provided no positive

outcome for the federal government, it was thought to dissipate into other areas of the law. Zero-

tolerance policies did not disperse into U.S. public schools until 1989; however, in 1989, zero-tolerance took on a new brand of uncompromising enforcement in school rules in places like Orange County, California; Louisville, Kentucky; and New York City. Today, schools continue to use zero-tolerance policies without research-based results to support their continuation (Force & others, 2008).

In 1990, U.S. Customs and Border Protection discontinued the use of zero-tolerance policies after the seizure of many vessels and individuals carrying a small amount of drugs, creating the embarrassing image of an agency taking down only small-time criminals rather than the big crime bosses the law set out to penalize (Force & others, 2008; Heitzeg, 2009; Richart, Brooks & Soler, 2003). The federal government supported this decision. It recommended other departments and institutions follow this lead and encouraged the discovery of new and more effective alternatives. Ultimately, the policy became an embarrassing relic of U.S. drug policy.

When New York Public Schools Superintendent Donald Bautista incorporated sweeping and widespread measures throughout the district, including zero-tolerance policies, districts around the country took notice (Skiba & Peterson, 1999). Bautista's zero-tolerance policy stated that any school disruption would lead to immediate suspension, including the carrying of a small knife or sharp object that could be viewed as a weapon. By 1993, zero-tolerance policies became commonplace in public schools across the country (Force & others, 2008; Heitzeg, 2009; Richart, Brooks & Soler, 2003). In response to the rise in school gun violence, many schools felt justified in applying policies such as the guidelines in the 1994 Gun Free School Act and the federal zero-tolerance policies of the Clinton administration.

However, the literature suggests all schools are now less safe, and students are less likely to receive the education they have a right to, due to the increasing rates of exclusions in

American public schools as a result of zero-tolerance policies (Martinez, 2009). Suspension rates have more than doubled since 1974, rising from 1.5 million to 3.1 million (U.S. Department of Education, 2000).

The U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights (2000) began collecting data on exclusionary practices against Black students in over 3,000 school districts nationwide, and as early as 1999 it was evident in this data that students of color were more likely to be recipients of punishment related to zero-tolerance policies in schools. The assumption that zero-tolerance policies would enhance school safety was not only unrealistic, it was utterly erroneous. The use of these policies is particularly unjust as no school or administrator is held to a strict standard or definition of the infractions accountable to zero-tolerance (Skiba & Peterson, 2003; Martinez, 2009; Skiba & Knesting, 2001; Richart, Brooks & Soler 2003). It is widely accepted among researchers that the discipline gap between students of color, predominantly Black males and their White counterparts, has taken place since the early 1990s, when zero-tolerance methods of dealing with discipline became part of mainstream America (Wald & Losen, 2003).

Why schools still implement zero-tolerance policies is debatable, especially since similar policies were deemed ineffective by U.S. Customs and Border Protection, and the National Bar Association suggested their discontinuation in 2001. Monroe explores many statistics around racial disparity and discipline, one being that students of color are two to five times more likely to be excluded from school than all other students, including removal from class, suspensions, and expulsions (2005). It is widely understood that students of color experience exclusion from public school at a disproportionate rate, but what is less clear is why this phenomenon is difficult to reverse. Over time, although this pattern has become less apparent in some schools, the national rate of students of color enduring suspensions and expulsions persists.

School-to-prison pipeline. An unfortunately prevalent outcome of zero-tolerance policies is the preponderance of students of color following a path toward prison, a phenomenon known as the school-to-prison pipeline (Heitzig, 2009). This phenomenon creates a divide between the community and the school system in the form of frustration felt by students and families who fail, both socially and academically, while simultaneously experiencing the school-to-prison pipeline (Wald & Losen, 2003; Fenning & Rose, 2007). How schools might reverse these outcomes involves rigorous reconciliation with the entire ecological structure of communities.

Gregory, Cornell, and Fan (2011) conducted a study that included both White students and students of color. They hypothesized "students would be most responsive to academic and behavior demands made in the context of a supportive atmosphere, and as a result would be less likely to receive suspensions from school" (p. 2). Their study included 199 schools and 5,035 students. By the completion of the study, they conclude there is a direct correlation between high rates of exclusion and low student expectations of a schools' academic supports. This result was true for both students of color and their White peers. The evidence for academic support positively affecting outcomes for individuals suggests that when looking at the discipline gap throughout the country, students of color received far less support and care from school communities. Gregory, Cornell, and Fan recommend starting from this perspective when assessing a school system for discipline disparities.

Strategies to combat chronic absenteeism

Positive Behavioral Intervention Supports (PBIS). The exploration of PBIS as an instrument to shift perspective offers groundbreaking options for classroom teachers (Fenning & Rose, 2007). PBIS was originally created for students with disabilities, its aim being to foster a

more inclusive school environment and help move children from self-contained special education classrooms to more traditional settings within a school. Today, PBIS is included in traditional learning classrooms as a response to the negative effects of zero-tolerance policies (Walker & Horner, 1996).

The PBIS framework is most successful when school communities as a whole embrace the philosophy. This viewpoint of discipline focuses on positive rather than punitive outcomes through a three-tiered process: (1) primary prevention, (2) secondary prevention and (3) tertiary prevention (Sugai et al., 2002). In the 1980s, the University of Oregon responded to a need that was identified in many research studies on researched-based discipline interventions (Sugai & Simonson, 2012). The University of Oregon applied demonstrations and evaluations which indicated more attention needed to be focused on prevention rather than a more traditional model of intervention which tends to be reactive rather than proactively promoting positive behavior (Sutphen, Ford & Flaherty, 2010).

There is little research available to evaluate PBIS in the literature and more needs to be conducted to validate its success. Sutphen, Ford and Flaherty did an analysis of sixteen peer-reviewed articles on the subject of truancy interventions and discovered one major finding; relationship building and sustaining is key to reversing chronic absenteeism. Of the sixteen studies they reviewed and analyzed from 1990 to 2007, only eight relied on pre-test and post-test designs to validate findings. All sixteen studies had findings that indicated relationships between students and adults are a significant factor in the success in intervention and prevention; however, they recommend more intensive evaluations beyond the anecdotal to validate that relationship building is key for behavior modification.

Restorative justice. Restorative justice is a method derived from the criminal justice

system that is finding its way to across the country (Varnham, 2005). The purpose of restorative

justice is to provide a means of retribution for offenders with the collaboration of their victims

and the community at large. The ultimate goal of restorative justice is reconciliation, moving

from offensive measures to action-oriented accountability (Zehr, (2002). The use of restorative

justice in schools is possible with the foundation of principles that are found in PBIS.

Restorative justice was unknown until 1974 when two parole officers from Elmira,

Ontario pushed their charges to contact their victims in an attempt to promote victim/offender

mediation (Zehr, 2002). The success of this one incident blazed the trail for progress, which is

now efficacious in ways previously unimaginable, even to the author of the first restorative

justice program, Howard Zehr.

The use of restorative justice in schools will likely require a paradigm shift from a form

of discipline focused on retribution to one focused on restorative actions (Hopkins, 2002). The

process of offenders accessing restorative means and taking responsibility for their actions, both

with and for their victims or members of the community, can have lasting effects in the

establishment of community well-being. Varnham explains why it is necessary for schools to

shift from an authoritarian-based discipline system in order to truly implement a restorative

justice practice model (2005). The ways in which schools manage discipline is typically at the

core of a school's culture. That said, this shift will take time, which is too long for many

students.

School Refusal Assessment Scale

Significance of a functional approach to school refusal behavior. An alternative lens

for viewing school refusal behavior is function: exploring what benefit the student gets from not

going to school. To explore the functional basis for chronic absenteeism, Kearney developed the

SRAS (2002). Kearney considers four overarching functions of school refusal behavior in an

effort to analyze how best to prescribe interventions for individual students. The four functions

are (1) avoidance of challenging stimulation, (2) escaping social settings or opportunities that

may lead to evaluation, (3) pursuit of attention from someone outside the school community, and

(4) positive reinforcement from tangible forces beyond the school setting.

Initially the SRAS was intended for clinical diagnostic purposes, for children who

presented with school refusal behavior and were then sent for an assessment with a mental health

professional. Today, some recommend a revised version of the scale in non-clinical settings as a

means of prevention rather than intervention (Kearney, 2002; Lyon, 2009; Lyon & Sheldon,

2009). Kearney's original survey consisted of sixteen items on a Likert-type scale with four

questions for each of the four of the school refusal functions (2002). The revisions to the scale

were based on the results of an early assessment which questioned the scale's construct validity

with test and retesting models.

The revision included eight additional questions, two per function, the inclusion of which

resulted in an increased test and retest validity in the seven- to fourteen-day period, suggesting

concurrent validity (Kearney, 2002). The functional scores were significant, making the revised

version concurrent with the original version as well. Based on these findings, researchers

identified three new constructs for consideration; (1) combining aspects of the two hypothesized

functions, (2) constructs of negative reinforcement (negative reinforcement, attention seeking,

and tangible reinforcement were delineated), and (3) expected symptoms and diagnosis

(Kearney, 2006). With the additional eight questions, the scale was renamed the School Refusal

Assessment Scale – Revised (SRAS-R), and will be referred to as such for the remainder of this

paper.

              Implications for using the SRAS-R in non-clinical settings. The limitations of using

the scale in a non-clinical setting are not without merit. In a clinical setting, such as the one in

which Kearney administered the scale, both students and parents/caregivers take the survey, one

with language of self, and the other using the language "your child" (2006). Here the survey can

be cross-validated and used most effectively for diagnostic purposes. Lyon and Sheldon explore

its use in a broader setting of students, without parent/caregiver input. Questioning whether the

SRAS-R is culturally sensitive to all students, Lyon studied the survey results from a population

of urban, early-adolescent Black students with low socio-economic status (2009). Participants

included any student who was able to provide a signed parental consent form for the project;

presentation of school refusal behavior was not a consideration for participants. Lyon found that

three questions had little or no merit and possibly contained loaded messages, and makes the

case for not including questions 16, 18 and 19 in future studies based on the similarity and

cultural interpretations of terms like "fun outside of school."

          Lyon and Cotler reviewed multiple interventions for school refusal behavior and

analyzed a cross-discipline approach to intervention (2009). Most notable in the research is

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979, as cited by Lyon & Cotler, 2009). This

multi-symptom approach gives practitioners a visual and concrete map through which to

cultivate an intervention response from one level of context to the others (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Relevant functional dimensions and intervention examples for school refusal

behavior at each systemic level (Lyon & Colter, 2009; pg. 24).

In this study, the SRAS-R is used as a means to identify functions that contribute to

chronic or problem absenteeism that can be addressed along with issues of school climate.

Chapter Three: Methodology

The design of this research was based on a twenty one question Likert like scale survey

and the evaluation data using the grounded theory method (Babbie, 2013). The paradigm, that

was used to interpret the data, is institutional ethnology, focusing on the discovery of unspoken

truths. Additionally, these methods will aid in the assessments of how such structures respond to

intervention, and possibly break through organizational agreement realities concerning issues of

truancy and ultimately race.

Selection of Schools and Participants

In the first phase of the project, the lead investigator gathered data from the ten traditional

middle schools within PPS about ethnicity, number of days students were absent, number of

students with >10% absences, number of students who have experienced school exclusion, and

data on economically disadvantaged students from the Oregon Department of Education (ODE)

public database. Participating schools were selected based on a ranking system, including the variables of disparate rates of exclusion and absenteeism as seen in the tables of Appendix A. Three middle schools were selected based on an analysis of disparity variables: one each from the rankings of highest disparity, mean disparity, and lowest disparity.

School A has an affluent student body, with ODE identifying only 26% of its population as economically disadvantaged, is 74% White, 8% Hispanic, and 18% Black and maintains an 81% attendance rate (Mouw, W., personal communication, Jan. 14, 2016). Unlike most PPS schools, White students are excluded at very similar rates to students of color. Staff distributed the survey consent forms during the last period of the day prior to the survey, posted reminders to turn in the forms on electronic signs throughout the building the day before and the day of the survey, and sent an email home to parents as well. Students returned consent forms at a rate of less than 5%, with all survey questions scoring less than three (3) on all functions, which represents no function for school refusal across student voice. Therefore the survey results were null for School A's participating students.

School B ranked second of the three schools based the average attendance data, rate of racial discipline disparity, and a 34% population of economically disadvantaged students (Mouw, W., personal communication, Jan. 14, 2016). Racial demographics were similar to School A in that 72% of students are White, 10% Hispanic and 5% Black. Here the lead investigator proctored the survey in the school cafeteria during lunch for two consecutive days. Day one did not produce a large set of participants; however, the majority of participants were motivated to return consent forms after they learned about the reward of candy after the completion of the survey. Day two brought the participant numbers up to thirty-eight, which

represents 8.8% of the school's total population. The overall result for School B is similar to

School A, with no function receiving a score above three (3).

School C gave the greatest access to students and classrooms to promote the study, and

the greatest diversity in student population: 24% White, 39% Hispanic and 28% Black (Mouw,

W., personal communication, Jan. 14, 2016). The lead investigator invested several hours

meeting and conversing with students prior to the distribution of consent forms and ultimately

the survey. Even with the added contact, students returned consent forms at a very low rate,

4.5%. However, the rate of enthusiasm for the research among both students and staff was

overwhelming. Of the students who participated in the survey, function four (tangible rewards)

is the most prominent reason for missing school with a score 3.24. This result indicates that half

the time participants miss school, it is for tangible rewards.

Measures and Instrumentation

The lead investigator compiled all data and analysis in tables by school, labeled A, B, and

C (see Appendix A for complete tables). Upon completion of the initial data analysis, the lead

investigator proctored the School Refusal Assessment Scale (SRAS-R) survey created by

Kearney and Silverman (1999) in the selected middle schools during lunch recess (see Appendix

B for sample survey).

In this study, the lead investigator administered the SRAS-R survey with the

recommendations of Lyon (2009), who first used the survey to measure school refusal behavior

with historically underprivileged populations: students with low socio-economic status and urban

African American youth. Lyon recommended the exclusion of three questions that he discovered

did not add to the construct validity of the survey in regards to the fourth function, positive

reinforcement. He suggested the removal of items sixteen ("How often do you refuse to go to

school because you want to have fun outside of school?"), twenty ("Would it be easier for you to

go to school if you could do more things you like to do after school hours [for example, being

with friends]?") and twenty-four ("Would you rather be doing fun things outside of school more

than most kids your age?"). Lyon removed number sixteen due to its non-specificity, as the

choice to have fun rather than go to school appears to be universal of all young adolescents.

Lyon removes questions twenty and twenty-four because of the use of terms deemed most

conditioning, such as beginning with "if" statements. The lead investigator also distributed a

separate survey instrument to collect data on the ethnicity with which students identify (see

Figure 4).

Please **CIRCLE** the ethnicity you identify with **most**:	Black
	Hispanic
	Pacific Islander
	Asian
	White Prefer not to respond

Figure 4. Sample of survey instrument used in conjunction with the SRAS-R. The

empty box on form is for recording the school code, A, B or C.

It is expected schools with higher rates of racially disparate exclusion and absenteeism

would rank higher on school refusal behavior functions than schools with less racially disparate

rates. If a school scores higher than three on one or more of the four functions of school refusal,

the results suggest a need to study school climate and culture, and to explore strategies to prevent

future chronic absenteeism in high school. The reverse is true for schools that score a two or less

on any of the four functions. The importance of including school-wide attendance data in the

assessment of school refusal behavior is due to data from PPS which identifies attendance as one

of the most frequent behaviors resulting in negative disciplinary actions (PPS, 2014).

There are limitations to the SRAS-R survey; however, this acknowledgement does not render the survey futile (Kearney, 2006; Lyon & Colter, 2009). The SRAS-R had not been administered in a broad population before, only with selected individuals based on ethnicity or students currently projecting school refusal behavior. However, several researchers have recommended the use of this survey in a non-clinical setting (Egger, Costello & Angold, 2003; Hugelshofer, 2000 as cited by Lyon & Cotler, 2009; Kearney, 2008a). This study is an opportunity to further demonstrate the survey's validity by administering it to an ethnically and socioeconomically diverse population. Although this study does not intend to use the economically disadvantaged data in the study of attendance and restorative practices, the information gathered may clarify the need for additional research.

Procedure and data collection

Throughout the planning process of the project, the lead investigator anticipated 30% participation; ultimately, participation was much lower. A significant barrier was the requirement that all participants who are minors provide guardian consent forms. The creation of a research project that relies on the working memory of young adolescent brains is a project with significant obstacles for success. Although the return rate of parental consent forms was not high in any of the schools surveyed, it was not for lack of enthusiasm from the student body. An interesting secondary study would be the use of electronic signatures by parents and the use of cell phones to survey rather than traditional paper, pencil, and human proctoring. The results themselves were not surprising for all three schools; however, the participation rate was lower than anticipated, as no school had a participation rate of above 10%.

To gain access to students, the lead investigator met with school administrators to determine the method by which students would first receive consent forms, and where and when

the survey would take place. All schools decided that the lead investigator should administer

surveys during lunch time, and two of the schools distributed the forms via traditional

distribution (e.g., homeroom). School C allowed the lead investigator to distribute consent forms

during an advisory course conducted one day prior to the first survey.

The survey process was consistent throughout the study, however the context was not.

The lead investigator administered the survey during the lunch break in a common areas at both

Schools B and C, and School A provided a classroom, to students who returned the required

consent form (Appendix C). Students were asked to read and respond to all questions while

thinking of the last few times they were absent. In addition to the verbal instructions, written

instructions were also available (see Figure 5). During the survey, the only question that

provoked confusion was number eight: "When you are not in school during the week (Monday to

Friday), how often do you talk to or see other people (other than your family)?" Most students

wanted clarification of whether this included non-school days which sometimes occur during this

time frame. Once students completed the survey, participants were given three small candy bars.

This survey asks questions about why students don't want to go to school when missing school.
For each question, pick one number that describes you best for the last days missed.   After
you answer one question, go on to the next. Don't skip any questions.

There are no right or wrong answers. Just pick the number that best fits the way you feel
about going to school. Circle the number.

Here is an example:
                        How often do you like to go shopping when asked?

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Half of the Time	Usually	Almost Always	Always
0	1	2	3	4	5	6

Figure 5. Written instructions for students while taking the survey.

Chapter Four: Results

The IBM statistical software, SPSS, and Microsoft data processing application, Excel, were used in the analysis of survey data. Upon completion of the survey, all data were aggregated by school (Appendix D) based on the 0-6 scale of the four functions (F1, F2, F3 and F4) of school refusal behavior, with zero (0) representing "Never" and six (6) representing "Always:"

(1) F1 - Avoidance of stimuli provoking negativity (e.g., social anxiety or fighting)

(2) F2 - Escape from adverse social and evaluative situations (e.g., peer pressure or test taking)

(3) F3 - Attention seeking, (e.g., skipping school to be noticed by parents or possibly school staff, which may lead to positive reinforcement)

(4) F4 - Tangible rewards, (e.g., time alone with parents or friends or other activity) (Kearney, 2002)

Hypothesis

The hypothesis of this study—that schools with a more equitable disbursement of discipline and attendance practices across racial categories will score lower on the School Refusal Assessment Scale – Revised (SRAS-R) (Kearny & Silverman, 1999)—was not supported. Schools with a more equitable disbursement of discipline and attendance practices across racial categories did not have significant differences in the four functions of the SRAS-R. Similarly, schools with less equitable disbursement of discipline and attendance practices across racial categories provided data that was also statistically insignificant, demonstrating that regardless of how equitable the disbursement of discipline and attendance practices, school refusal behavior is not correlated to negative attendance or discipline disparity among race

variables. Specifics on the data will be discussed further in the next section. The data

demonstrates that participants from Schools A (low disparity and negative attendance), B

(medium disparity and negative attendance) and C (high disparity and negative attendance) share

similarities based on the responses to the survey questions in correspondence with Kearney and

Silverman's four functions of school refusal behavior (see Figure 6).
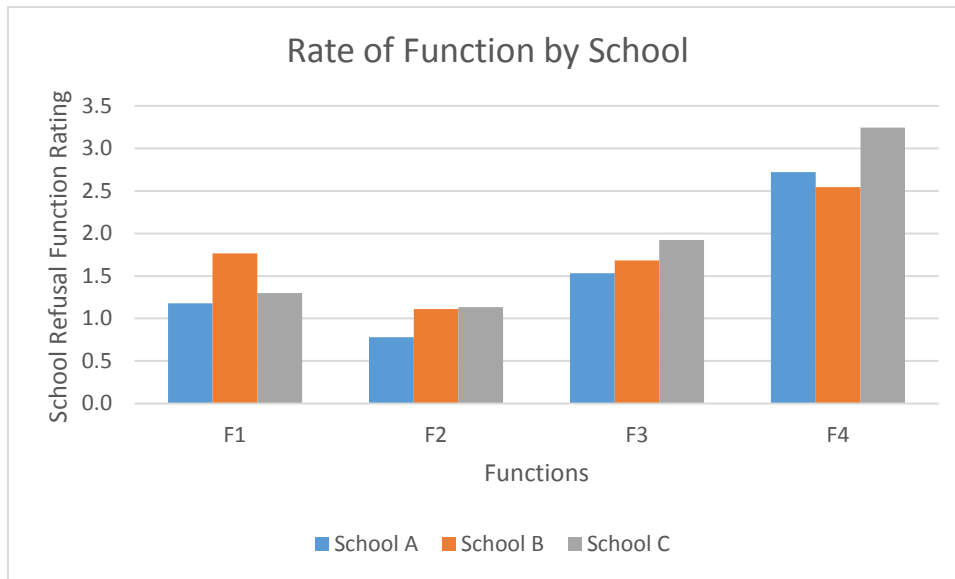
Figure 6. The ranking of Schools A, B, and C on the SRAS-R survey functions.

Data analysis

In the SPSS analysis, descriptive statistics for all schools were consistent throughout: all

schools' mean scores were between one and two for school refusal functions one, two and three.

Standard deviations had more variability, with some questions ranking higher by two or more

points (questions sixteen for Schools B and C, and question seventeen for School C). Function

four had the largest variation, giving School C a SRAS-R rating of 3.24. Survey data do not

support the hypothesis that schools with a higher rate of attendance (90% of attend school >10%

of the time) will score lower on the SRAS-R compared with schools with low attendance rates

and high disparity in regards to race and discipline. When all survey data are aggregated (*n =*

76) the results were relatively similar ((F1) *M* = 1.42, *SD* .296; (F2) *M* = 1.01, *SD* .197; (F3) *M* =

1.71, *SD* .198; (F4) *M* = 2.98, *SD* .26).

Four one way ANOVAs were performed to compare student responses on the SRAS-R

functions of school refusal behavior in schools A, B and C climate conditions: (1) avoidance, (2)

escapism, (3) attention seeking and (4) tangible rewards; in schools A, B and C climate

conditions. None of these ANOVAs reached statistical significance at the p < .05 level.

Hypothesis 1, the assumption that schools with the greatest disparities in absenteeism and racial

disparity in school exclusions would score higher on function 1, avoidance of challenging

stimulation, could not be confirmed [$F(2,72) = 2.216$, p = .116]; thus, the null is not rejected.

Hypothesis 2, that schools with the greatest disparities in absenteeism and racial disparity in

school exclusions would score higher on function 2, escaping social settings or opportunities that

may lead to evaluation, was also not confirmed [$F(2,70) = 1.053$, p = .354]; again, the null is not

rejected. Hypothesis 3 had the same expectation with attendance and discipline disparity for

function 3, the pursuit of attention from someone outsite the school community, and this was not

confirmed [$F(2,72) = .667$, p = .516]; thus, the null is not rejected. Finally, hypothesis 4, that

positive reinforcements from tangible forces beyond the school setting contributed to disparity in

discipline and attendance behavior, continued the pattern of supporting the null hypothesis

[$F(2,71) = .379$, p = .686].

Participant demographics were analyzed using the Pearson correlations co-efficient to

validate that participation rates were consistent with school demographics for students who

identify as Black, Hispanic, Asian and White, the ethnicities represented in the dataset. No

correlation was found. The validity of the demographic data is not reliable due to 30% of

participant's non-response (*n* = 16) to racial identification on the supplemental survey (see

Figure 4, pg. 34). A one sample comparison demonstrates similar findings, and the tables below (Figure 7) contrast the percentages of racial categories of study participants to that of school wide demographics.
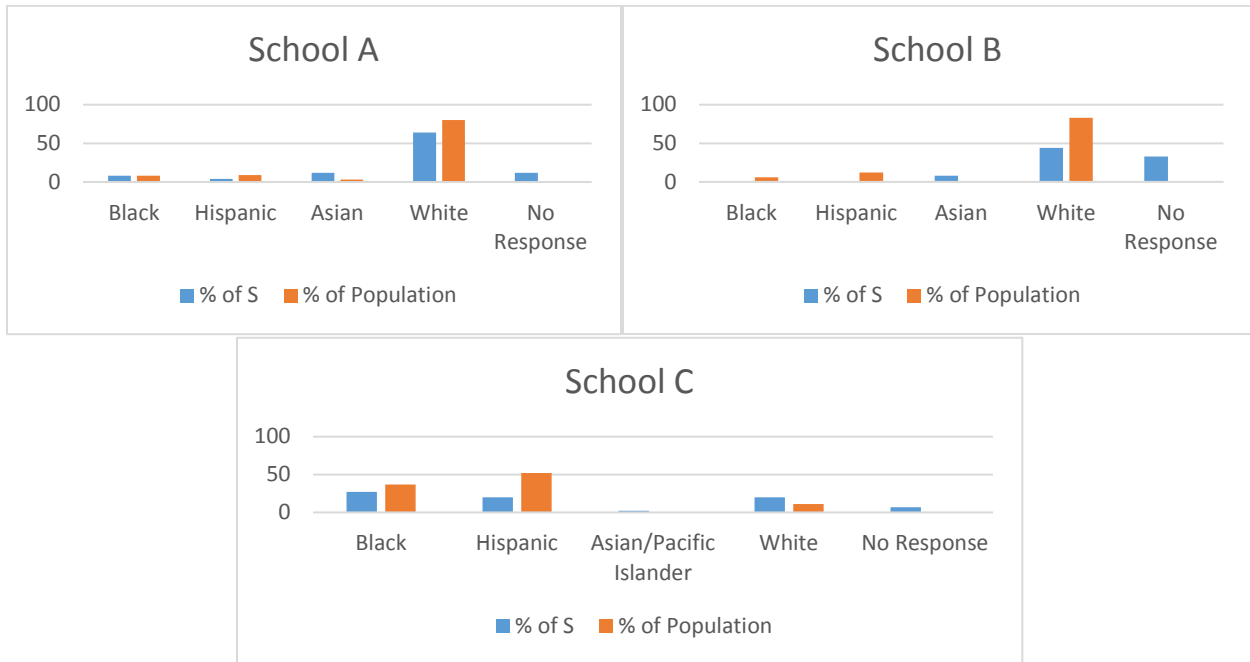
Figure 7. Demographics of participants as compared to school population for Schools A, B and C.

Chapter Five: Discussion

Although no direct correlation between discipline disparity and functions reasons for school refusal were found, schools have an opportunity - perhaps an obligation - to monitor and understand why students do not attend school so they can intervene effectively to reverse the trend. Researching this topic provided much observational material in the schools, particularly related to school climate and culture. School C provided a rich and interesting representation of school climate and culture. Upon walking into School C, staff and students greet one another with either warm smiles and curiosity or concern. Students expect to be loved and cared for, and educators expect the same in return, with respect coming as a by-product of the love and care. This culture of respect appears to be present despite the school's 17% exclusion rate among all

students, with a disparity rate of over 10% between Black students who receive exclusionary

action compared with their White and Hispanic peers. The data show that Hispanic students are

the least likely students to receive exclusionary discipline, yet they have the highest rate of non-

attendance, with 21.6% missing 10% or more school days. Although White students are 6%

more likely than Black students to be absent, White students are 10% less likely to be excluded

than Black students.

Having worked in public schools for a number of years, grown up attending public

schools, and been raised by a public school teacher, in my experience School C presents as the

antithesis of traditional public school culture. Historically, students must first respect school

staff before they receive love and care; however, these comforts are not a guarantee. In School

C, love and care is expected, and respect comes naturally as a by-product of the school climate.

The students at School C are no different from students at schools A and B; however, their

expectations are different. School C is a Title 1 school, which is a designation for schools in

which the majority of students live near or under the poverty line (>50% economically

disadvantaged) (PPS, 2016). Further study into why and how some schools are able to create

school climates which promote a culture of trust and safety could prove useful to schools or

school districts attempting to improve cultural climate work across the district and beyond.

The Multnomah County Commission on Children, Families and Community (CCFC)

provided a thought-provoking report on exclusionary discipline (Multnomah County CCFC,

2012) and how students of color are facing disparate rates of school exclusion compared to their

White peers. The report explores the types of exclusion, including in-school suspension, out-of-

school suspension, and expulsion. The current data provides a more specific point from which to

view the county and school district data on exclusionary practices within PPS middle schools.

Chronic absenteeism has a direct correlation with financial costs that may enable PPS to justify additional funding for services that will aid in keeping students in school while saving funds in the long term.

> … [B]y isolating only exclusions [administered] for tardies or skipping school, we find that over $2.2 million in ADM (Average Daily Membership, the amount schools receive per student) is attributed to youth with these incidents … [If] half of those students excluded for tardies/skipping school end up dropping out. Districts then lose roughly $1 million. That would mean an additional 10-15 [full-time employees] devoted to keeping students connected to school (Multnomah County CCFC, 2012, p. 14).

If PPS examined students' chronic absenteeism with a restorative approach and provided funding to schools linked with chronically absent students, it is possible to counteract the forecast of excessive dropouts and ultimately incarceration rates. This paradigm of thought could meaningfully lower the disparate rates at which students of color experience school exclusion while providing a supportive educational environment.

Currently, PPS is promoting further exploration of PBIS systems of support in conjunction with restorative justice practices within some schools. The PPS Department of Equity and Partnership's effort to promote and train staff and students in the practice of restorative justice is gaining momentum with some members of the community; however, buy-in is not largely acknowledged. The implementation of restorative practices is a process, not an initiative. Promoting process and time consumption is a hard sell and will take patience and fidelity by those who specialize in its practices.

Participating in restorative justice trainings and researching restorative practices are two major factors in making a shift away from punitive discipline. A person who is accountable for

restoring school climate from ill to well must make it a priority to engage the community: staff, students, and families. A few schools within PPS appear to have done this, and School C seems to be on its way. School C provides an excellent opportunity for PPS to perform a longitudinal study on restorative practices using Participatory Action Research methods, because the staff welcomes the input and interest of the greater community, students are engaged with one another and appear to have supportive adults in the school whom they both trust and feel respected by, and because the community at large is actively involved in the school's success.

Based on the results of this study, it is clear that further research with practical application of restorative practice is necessary. This is the first step in better understanding school refusal behavior and how the discipline gap may or may not impact it. This study is not intended to be published for many years to come, or until a more widespread distribution of the SRAS-R can be administered and measured with fidelity and validity. Perhaps PPS will use this study as a means to measure school climate in a new way and add the SRAS-R to the restorative practices toolbox for administrators working with students and families challenged with school refusal or chronic absenteeism. The promotion of a study by the district, as a means to support students and families, could bring empirical evidence to support the need for positive relationships and shared trust as the standard expectation of all PPS students, staff, and families.

I recommended that PPS use this study as a catalyst for a pilot program that consists of one on-site, full-time employee (FTE) who monitors both attendance and restorative practices within the school. This FTE would not replace current employees of the school system, but rather, the current staff member responsible for responsible for school climate, likely the Student Management Specialist (SMS), or Dean of Students. This will require evaluating all job duties which do not directly impact students and school climate, and redistribute these tasks or

illiminate should the tasks be obsolete. This person will be the hub of all student services and advocate restorative practices with families at times when restorative action outside classroom activities is needed.

This redesigned position should be monitored by administrators or building leadership and have assessment mechanisms for quantitative and qualitative review, and accountability measures in place. There are people currently tasked with the responsibility to assure student success which includes monitoring attendance; promoting awareness and accountability of an entire community on the importance of school attendance is imperative to closing the discipline gap and the school-to-prison pipeline. The lead investigator estimates that three school years would be needed to truly determine the effectiveness of this restorative program with reliable results.

- Year One: Implementation

- Year Two: Address year one issues

- Year Three: Evaluate progress compared to years prior to year one.

This pilot program should follow the guidelines set forth in the APA's definition of a Participatory Action Research model, with the goal of unveiling evidence-based practices in the final phase and research report (Babbie, 2013,). It is also recommended that Balfanz and Chang's "Three Rs" program be included in the implementation: Reach down, Reach up, and Reach out (2013). Throughout this study, administrators often complained that there is little to no communication between transferring schools regarding student attendance patterns. It should be the responsibility of all schools to "reach down" to previous schools as well as "reach up" to the next. When and where the community needs to be involved, schools may "reach out" for added support for students and families.

Based on the data, personal observation, and inductive reasoning alongside PPS employees and students, the anecdotal evidence supports the concept of relationship building along all the ecological levels of the school community (student, staff, family and community) as a means to prevent and intervene in chronic absenteeism. In addition to the absenteeism rate lowering as a result of positive student and adult relationship fostering, it is suspected that school exclusions would lessen as well. To empirically demonstrate this hypothesis, a large scale tertiary program, as suggested above, would need to be implemented, alongside a replication of this study with a more modern and innovative tool for collecting informed consent for minor participants.

Appendix A
Oregon Department of Education Descriptive Statistics of Attendance by Race

School A						*Min 1	*Max 5	Mean	
Race Identity	N	% of Population	# Who have >10% absent		# With exclusionary discipline (ExD)	% Resv. Exclusion	% Resv. Exclusion		# of Economically Disadvantaged w/ >10% absent
AK/Native Am.	*	*			0	0.00%			
Asian	16	2.97%	1	6.3%	0	0.00%			
Black	37	6.88%	4	10.8%	*	2.70%	13.51%	9.46%	
Hispanic	43	7.99%	9	20.9%	*	2.33%	11.63%	8.14%	
Multi Racial	46	8.55%	8	17.4%	*	2.17%	10.87%	7.61%	
Pacific Islander	*	*			0	0.00%			
White	396	73.61%	24	6.1%	6	1.52%			
TOTAL	538	100.00%	46	8.6%	15	2.79%			53 of 189
dividing by N = 100			9%		33%				

School B						*Min 1	*Max 5	Mean	
Race Identity	N	% of Population	# Who have >10% absent		# With exclusionary discipline (ExD)	% Resv. Exclusion	% Resv. Exclusion		# of Economically Disadvantaged w/ >10% absent
AK/Native Am.	*	*	0		0	0.00%			
Asian	*	*	0		0	0.00%			
Black	23	5.04%	8	34.8%	*	4.35%	21.74%	15.22%	
Hispanic	46	10.09%	15	32.6%	*	2.17%	10.87%	7.61%	
Multi Racial	58	12.72%	16	27.6%	*	1.72%	8.62%	6.03%	
Pacific Islander	*	*	0		0	0.00%			
White	329	72.15%	61	18.5%	*	0.30%	1.52%	1.06%	
TOTAL	456	100.00%	100	21.9%	11	2.41%			53 of 189
% dividing by N = 100			22%		11%				

Appendix (Continued)

School C						*Min 1	*Max 5	Mean	
Race Identity	N	% of Population	# Who have >10% absent		# With exclusionary discipline (ExD)	% Resv. Exclusion	% Resv. Exclusion		# of Economically Disadvantaged w/ >10% absent
AK/Native Am.	*	*	*		*	20.00%	100.00%	70.00%	
Asian	*	*	*		*	20.00%	100.00%	70.00%	
Black	91	27.74%	13	14.3%	24	26.37%			
Hispanic	128	39.02%	27	21.1%	13	10.16%			
Multi Racial	21	6.40%	5	23.8%	*	4.76%	23.81%	16.67%	
Pacific Islander	10	3.05%	1	10.0%	0	0.00%			
White	78	23.78%	16	20.5%	13	16.67%			
TOTAL	328	100.00%	62	18.9%	56	17.07%			50 of 328 (255)**
% dividing by N = 100			19%		90%				

Appendix B
Sample SRAS-R Survey

Please **circle the answer that best fits** the following questions:

1. How often do you have bad feelings about going to school because you are afraid of something related to school (for example, tests, school bus, teacher, fire alarm)?

Never	**Seldom**	**Sometimes**	**Half of the Time**	**Usually**	**Almost Always**	**Always**
0	1	2	3	4	5	6

2. How often do you stay away from school because it is hard to speak with the other kids at school?

Never	**Seldom**	**Sometimes**	**Half of the Time**	**Usually**	**Almost Always**	**Always**
0	1	2	3	4	5	6

3. How often do you feel you would rather be with your parents than go to school?

Never	**Seldom**	**Sometimes**	**Half of the Time**	**Usually**	**Almost Always**	**Always**
0	1	2	3	4	5	6

4. When you are not in school during the week (Monday to Friday), how often do you leave the house and do something fun?

Never	**Seldom**	**Sometimes**	**Half of the Time**	**Usually**	**Almost Always**	**Always**
0	1	2	3	4	5	6

5. How often do you stay away from school because you will feel sad or depressed if you go?

Never	**Seldom**	**Sometimes**	**Half of the Time**	**Usually**	**Almost Always**	**Always**
0	1	2	3	4	5	6

6. How often do you stay away from school because you feel embarrassed in front of other people at school?

Never	**Seldom**	**Sometimes**	**Half of the Time**	**Usually**	**Almost Always**	**Always**
0	1	2	3	4	5	6

7. How often do you think about your parents or family when in school?

Never	**Seldom**	**Sometimes**	**Half of the Time**	**Usually**	**Almost Always**	**Always**
0	1	2	3	4	5	6

Appendix B (Continued)

8. When you are not in school during the week (Monday to Friday), how often do you talk to or see other people (other than your family)?

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Half of the Time	Usually	Almost Always	Always
0	1	2	3	4	5	6

9. How often do you feel worse at school (for example, scared, nervous, or sad) compared to how you feel at home with friends?

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Half of the Time	Usually	Almost Always	Always
0	1	2	3	4	5	6

10. How often do you stay away from school because you do not have many friends there?

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Half of the Time	Usually	Almost Always	Always
0	1	2	3	4	5	6

11. How much would you rather be with your family than go to school?

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Half of the Time	Usually	Almost Always	Always
0	1	2	3	4	5	6

12. When you are not in school during the week (Monday to Friday), how much do you enjoy doing different things (for example, being with friends, going places)?

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Half of the Time	Usually	Almost Always	Always
0	1	2	3	4	5	6

13. How often do you have bad feelings about school (for example, scared, nervous, or sad) when you think about school on Saturday and Sunday?

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Half of the Time	Usually	Almost Always	Always
0	1	2	3	4	5	6

14. How often do you stay away from certain places in school (e.g., hallways, places where certain groups of people are) where you would have to talk to someone?

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Half of the Time	Usually	Almost Always	Always
0	1	2	3	4	5	6

Appendix B (Continued)

15. How much would you rather be taught by your parents at home than by your teacher at school?

Never	**Seldom**	**Sometimes**	**Half of the Time**	**Usually**	**Almost Always**	**Always**
0	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**

16. If you had less bad feelings (for example, scared, nervous, sad) about school, would it be easier for you to go to school?

Never	**Seldom**	**Sometimes**	**Half of the Time**	**Usually**	**Almost Always**	**Always**
0	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**

17. If it were easier for you to make new friends, would it be easier for you to go to school?

Never	**Seldom**	**Sometimes**	**Half of the Time**	**Usually**	**Almost Always**	**Always**
0	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**

18. Would it be easier for you to go to school if your parents went with you?

Never	**Seldom**	**Sometimes**	**Half of the Time**	**Usually**	**Almost Always**	**Always**
0	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**

19. How much more do you have bad feelings about school (for example, scared, nervous, or sad) compared to other kids your age?

Never	**Seldom**	**Sometimes**	**Half of the Time**	**Usually**	**Almost Always**	**Always**
0	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**

20. How often do you stay away from people at school compared to other kids your age?

Never	**Seldom**	**Sometimes**	**Half of the Time**	**Usually**	**Almost Always**	**Always**
0	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**

21. Would you like to be home with your parents more than other kids your age would?

Never	**Seldom**	**Sometimes**	**Half of the Time**	**Usually**	**Almost Always**	**Always**
0	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**

Appendix C
CONSENT FORM

Parental Letter Requesting Participation in Study of
Restorative Practices and Attendance

Dear Parents/Guardians of *NAME OF SCHOOL* Students,

Your student has been invited to join a research study to look at how attendance affects student success. The study will be led by the investigator, Annie W. Scott, a student at Concordia University – Portland and her faculty advisor is Dr. Bryant Carlson. Contact information is given below. Please discuss the study with your family and friends, or anyone else you wish to. The decision to join, or not to join, is up to you.

WHAT IS INVOLVED IN THE STUDY?
If you give your student permission to participate in this study he/she will be asked to answer some questions on a survey that your student can answer in private. We think this will take about twenty minutes of your student's (your child's) time. Questions are centered on reasons why students may choose to not attend school.

All students are illegible for this survey, participation is voluntary upon parental approval. No school records will be retrieved to identify students. No face to face interview will be conducted, and the survey is expected to take no more than twenty minutes of class time.

BENEFITS TO TAKING PART IN THE STUDY?
It is reasonable to expect the following benefits from this research: better understanding of chronic absenteeism in the Portland Public School district, and what barriers may be in place that enable the practice of truancy as well. However, we can't guarantee that you will personally experience benefits from participating in this study. Others may benefit in the future from the information we find in this study.

RISKS TO TAKING PART IN THE STUDY?
We do not anticipate any risk other than the sharing of information to the study. We will take steps to protect this information. It is not anticipated, but if your student feels stress in or after the study a counseling session with a trained counselor would be provided at no cost to you or your student. The counselor's name and contact number is as follow:

Bryant Carlson, MS, MDiv
Assistant Professor of Psychology
Concordia University – Portland
503-280-8533
bcarlson@cu-portland.edu

Appendix C (Continued)

CONFIDENTIALITY

We will take the following steps to keep information about you confidential, and to protect it from unauthorized disclosure, tampering, or damage: All survey data will be recorded as an aggregate of individual schools, not the student. If follow-up information is necessary, all survey contributors will be invited to participate in an additional survey.

YOUR RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT?

Participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right not to allow your student to participate at all or leave the study at any time. Deciding not to participate or choosing to leave the study will not result in any penalty to the student.

CONTACTS FOR QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS?

Call Annie W. Scott at 503-706-1750 or email Annie at anniewscott@gmail.com if you have questions about the study, any problems, or think that something unusual or unexpected is happening. If you want to speak with an advocate for participants, you can email or call Dr. OraLee Branch, IRB Director, Concordia University – Portland at obranch@cu-portland.edu, 360-493-6920.

Consent of Subject (or Legally Authorized Representative)

_____

Signature of Parent or Guardian   Student Name   Date

Appendix D
SPSS ANOVA Data Set

ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
funtion1	Between Groups	177.570	2	88.785	2.216	.116
	Within Groups	2885.310	72	40.074		
	Total	3062.880	74			
function2	Between Groups	57.029	2	28.514	1.053	.354
	Within Groups	1894.999	70	27.071		
	Total	1952.027	72			
function3	Between Groups	64.183	2	32.092	.667	.516
	Within Groups	3461.603	72	48.078		
	Total	3525.787	74			
function4	Between Groups	24.091	2	12.046	.379	.686
	Within Groups	2255.260	71	31.764		
	Total	2279.351	73			

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