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THE IMPACT SCHOOL DISCIPLINE POLICIES HAVE ON DISABLED, MINORITIZED  
STUDENTS' DROP OUT RATES

by

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B.S. University of Central Florida, 2017  
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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Education  
in the Department of Educational Leadership and Higher Education  
in the College of Community Innovation and Education  
at the University of Central Florida  
Orlando, Florida

Summer Term  
2024

Major Professor: Larry J. Walker

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## **ABSTRACT**

Despite progress in recent years, the K–12 education system still grapples with pervasive discriminatory and inequitable practices that hinder students’ learning experiences and future success. Such practices can have far-reaching consequences, threatening students’ long-term outcomes and putting their well-being at risk. This study delved into the effects of exclusionary practices on academic performance and student withdrawal, with a particular focus on minority students with disabilities.

By examining archived data, this research analyzed various exclusionary practices, including in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, Baker Acts, and law enforcement referrals. To uncover correlations and determine hypothesis acceptance, the study employed sophisticated statistical techniques such as logistic regression. Results of the study show exclusionary discipline practices significantly correlate with dropout rates for minoritized students with disabilities. In other words, students of this study who are subject to these practices are not more likely to drop out of school.

The study recommends implementing diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives and providing training to educators on how to instruct students with disabilities. Further study is needed to explore the quantitative impact of specific discipline practices on learning and detrimental effects of instructional loss on student engagement. Nonetheless, this research underscores the urgency of using professional development to identify and address discriminatory and inequitable practices in the K–12 education system to ensure all students have the opportunity to succeed.

First and foremost, I would like to thank God, my Lord and Savior, for giving me the strength and opportunity to pursue my academic and professional endeavors. From a kid who was informed the likelihood of completing high school was low, now on the cusp of earning my doctorate, I can say I am truly blessed.

To my biggest fan, provider, and protector, I want to thank my mother, Iditta Blake. You have motivated me through some of the hardest times in my life, and your hard work and determination have inspired me to pursue my dreams to the fullest. Your love is forever lasting. I love you, Mommy.

I am ever so grateful for my siblings Derron, Talisa, and Heather for their guidance in my life. To my nieces and nephews, Ashley, Yaseem, Caley, Chloe, Liam, Landon, and Kylie, I wish you will also pursue your dreams to the fullest and let no one tell you what you can and cannot accomplish, especially Riley, who is my greatest motivation in selecting this topic. I hope the world sees you for you and gives you and other black boys and girls a chance to shine. I love you all.

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to all educators who serve K–12 students around the world. You are a guiding light for young people, a sanctuary of hope, and essential to their future success. From personal experience, I know we are truly nothing without you. Thank you.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

I would like to express my gratitude to my committee chair, Dr. Larry Walker, and the other committee members - Dr. Sheila Moore, Dr. Thomas Vitale, and Dr. David Maddock, for serving on my dissertation committee. I also want to acknowledge all the faculty members in the College of Community Innovation and Education's Educational Leadership Department who contributed to my preparation for this dissertation.

I am also grateful to the University of Central Florida's Castle Lab for their valuable assistance and education in multiple facets that contributed to the preparation of this dissertation. I would like to acknowledge the school district's Research, Evaluation, and Accountability Department, for allowing me to use the school district as the focus of my study. I am also thankful to Dr. Marsha Riggio, Dr. Cheryl Taylor, and especially Dr. Don Trahan for inspiring me to pursue a terminal degree in education. I would like to give a special shout-out to Mr. Kyle Schicker, Mrs. Danielle McMann, and Dr. Vicky Banks, who have been my supervisors and have given me the opportunity to focus on my studies while supporting me in my professional practice.

Lastly, I want to express my gratitude towards Cohort 12, including Brittney, Shakeila, Kat, Danielle, JoAnn, Michael, Matt, Janette, Bailey, Tonny, Meredith, Stephanie, Courtney, Ismail, and Paul. Your compassion and support have been invaluable to me, and I have learned so much from each of you. Together, we have achieved an extraordinary feat, and I believe we can inspire others to do the same. You will always be my family, and I wish you success, prosperity, and good fortune in all your future endeavors.

Without each and every one of you, I firmly believe none of this would have been possible. I will be forever grateful for your influence and faith in me, which will carry me through my life.

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **Background of the Study**

In 2018, the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) investigated a local Florida public school district regarding a complaint filed on behalf of 11 students, nine of whom were diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. According to the complaint, the school district was accused of discriminating against students through disciplinary measures for behaviors seen as a result of their disabilities (United States Department of Justice, 2021b). These behaviors are typically caused by a student's disability (Walker & Brigham, 2016). These practices included (a) informal removals that included parents picking up their child without a formal suspension that resulted in loss of instruction, (b) formal removals like suspensions that resulted in loss of instruction, (c) law enforcement being contacted, and (d) use of the Baker Act.

During their investigation, the DOJ collected information from 45 of the 85 schools that received complaints from students with autism spectrum disorder. The DOJ interviewed parents, guardians, advocates, service providers, community stakeholders, school district employees, exceptional student education (ESE) staff, general education teachers, and school administration. The DOJ investigation substantiated the allegations that the school district had violated the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990.

According to the settlement with the DOJ, the school district committed to ensuring equal treatment for qualified individuals with disabilities and agreed not to engage in any form of discrimination. This commitment extended to providing equal access to the school district's benefits, services, and programs. Furthermore, the school district would not retaliate, coerce, or intimidate individuals protected by the ADA and involved in any investigation.

To prevent discrimination based on disabilities, the school district would refrain from employing methods that could result in unequal treatment when administering its programs and services. Additionally, the school district recognized the importance of reasonably modifying practices and procedures to eliminate discriminatory practices. However, these modifications would only be implemented if they did not negatively impact school district policies and procedures.

### Statement of the Problem

Historically, people with disabilities have encountered discrimination in education settings (Hurwitz et al., 2021). This issue has occurred for years, which has contributed to feeling marginalized. Despite some progress in recent years, ensuring all students have equal access to a quality education is essential. Unfortunately, using exclusionary policies can impact students' academic performance and future success.

Furthermore, these practices have been associated with the school-to-prison pipeline and criminalization of young people (Wilson, 2014). Reevaluating disciplinary policies in K–12 education is crucial to ensure students are prepared for success. This issue has negatively impacted individuals who face challenges related to their learning disabilities. These individuals have demonstrated resiliency despite the obstacles they have encountered (Johnson et al., 2007). Ignoring this issue has had long-term ramifications for society.

For example, a 2016 U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics self-reported survey found that 4 in 10 state prisoners (40%) and 3 in 10 federal prisoners (29%) reported having a disability. However, because most prison inmates come from underserved backgrounds, they have limited access to healthcare and education. For instance, researchers asserted that 68% of state prisoners do not have a high school diploma; however, Dr. Frank Wood, a professor of neurology at Wake



Forest University, claimed that 50%–75% of inmates were functionally illiterate (Robinson, 2018; Herrick, 1991). According to the U.S. Bureau of Justice (2016), African Americans accounted for only 13.8% of the U.S. population yet represented 38% of the prison population. Similarly, although Hispanics comprised approximately 19% of the population, this group represented 31% of the prison population. The statistics highlighted the disproportionate rates at which different racial and ethnic groups have been impacted.

Miller and Meyers (2015) explored the use of exclusionary discipline practices for students with disabilities, students with emotional disturbances, learning disabilities, and students with autism. Their study posed four questions: “Are students with disabilities (1) suspended (both in and out-of-school), (2) expelled, (3) referred to law enforcement, and (4) dropping out at significantly different rates compared with students without disabilities?” (Miller & Meyers, 2015, p. 257). According to the DOJ, individuals with emotional and behavioral disorders who drop out of school are arrested 3–5 years after high school, and 35% of youth with emotional and behavioral disorders who graduate are detained.

### Purpose of Study

This study examined disciplinary practices in a Florida school district and their impact on students. Extant literature has suggested individuals with disabilities were more likely to be subjected to disciplinary measures than their nondisabled peers (Chirwa et al., 2021). This disparity highlights the need for a more equitable and inclusive approach to addressing disciplinary issues in the education system. Moreover, discipline rates were even higher when the data were disaggregated based on subgroups. For this reason, investigating whether these disciplinary practices in Florida cause students to drop out is essential.

### Significance of the Study

Understanding the challenges minoritized students with disabilities encounter in K–12 settings is critical. Specifically, it is vital to examine how a school district addresses racism and ableism (Annamarra et al., 2022). Issues, including the school-to-prison pipeline, have highlighted the need for policies that transform education. Regrettably, challenges relating to race and disability have disproportionately impacted minoritized students (Cook et al., 2000; Ali et al., 2021).

Thus, the study considered the role legislation, such as the Individual Freedom Law and the ban on critical race theory, has had on Florida's diversity programs. These actions may have undermined efforts to raise awareness of how racism and ableism have shaped the lives of students (Herbert, 2023). For this reason, this study used Disability Critical Race Theory as a theoretical framework. Determining whether punitive actions like suspensions and police referrals lead to dropout rates among minoritized students is important in a diverse society. An inclusive educational system could create a just society where individuals are treated fairly. According to Ustymenko et al. (2022):

The principle of social justice is a part of the category of justice and is the ideological basis for the principle of the Rule of Law. It is substantiated that the principle of social justice plays an important system-forming role in the formation of the law-governed state and in directing the mechanism of legal regulation to achieve the balance of public and private interests, to ensure human rights and freedoms, and the decent living standards.  
(p. 3)

The findings from this study can provide researchers and policymakers with a roadmap to address issues relating to justice. Developing policies that support underserved students is

imperative (Kutscher & Tuckwiller, 2019). Using an intersectional approach, researchers and practitioners can address issues excluding students with disabilities (Bešić, 2020). Moreover, these policies should prioritize nonexclusionary measures (Carastathis, 2014; Maynard & Weinstein, 2019; Mayworm et al., 2016; Weiher, 2000).

### Definition of Terms

In this research undertaking, the researcher must explicitly clarify various terms. The following terms were defined to ensure a clear understanding of the subject matter:

#### Exceptional Student Education

The exceptional student education (ESE) program is the term used to define special education in Florida. This program is tailored to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities that hinder their learning. Through this program, students receive personalized instruction and support services to help them achieve their academic and personal goals. These services may include accommodations, modifications, and specialized instruction, which enable students to access and engage in the general education curriculum (Lewis et al., 2021).

#### Exclusionary Discipline Practices in K–12 Education

Exclusionary disciplinary measures used in K–12 education are actions taken to remove students from the classroom environment, including in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, and expulsions. These measures are generally employed in response to unfavorable behavior. Nevertheless, research has shown some groups of students, notably African American and economically disadvantaged students, are more frequently affected by these measures (Rose, 1988).

### Loss of Instruction

Loss of instruction is a student's absence from the classroom, whether due to disciplinary measures such as suspension or expulsion, illness, or other factors that prevent them from attending school or participating in activities. Various studies have demonstrated this loss of instruction can have a considerable effect on a student's academic advancement, accomplishments, and social and emotional growth (Rumberger, 2011).

### Withdrawal Codes

In K–12 education, withdrawal codes serve as a crucial tool in identifying the underlying reasons behind a student leaving school (see Figures 1 and 2). These codes are pivotal in monitoring student attendance, recognizing enrollment patterns, and coding promotions and retentions. Withdrawal codes can encompass a range of reasons, including transferring to a different school, graduating, and achieving promotion/retention (i.e., positive withdrawal codes), or dropping out or being expelled (i.e., negative withdrawal codes). It is imperative for school administrators and policymakers to fully comprehend the reasons behind student departures to formulate effective strategies to enhance student retention and overall academic success (Firestone et al., 2023).

**Use of Additional School Year, Grade Promotion Status and Withdrawal Codes\*  
For Students Remaining in School Beyond Initial Year of Completion**

**Nondisabled Students**

Outcome	Initial Year of Completion			Additional School Year Permitted by s. 1003.4282(6)(c), F.S.		
	Additional School Year	Grade Promotion Status	Withdrawal Code	Additional School Year	Grade Promotion Status	Withdrawal Code
Standard Diploma (W06, W10, WFT, WGA, WXL, WXT or WXW) or State of Florida Diploma (must be enrolled in a Performance-Based Exit Option Program) (WGD)	Z	P	W06, W10, WFT, WGA, WGD, WXL, WXT or WXW,			
Certificate of Completion (W08 or W8B)**	Z	P	W08, or W8B	S	P	W06, W10, WFT, WGA, WGD or WPO***
Student who has met completion requirements but opts not to accept Certificate of Completion (W01, W02 or W3A)	Z	D	W01, W02 or W3A	S	P	W06, W08, W10, WFT, WGA, or WGD
Student who has been retained (W01, W02 or W3A)****						

In all of above cases, use Grade 12 for reporting and FTE.

\* Please reference data elements for Additional School Year and Grade Promotion Status, and Appendix A for Withdrawal Codes.

\*\* A nondisabled student awarded a certificate of completion may elect to remain in the secondary school either as a full-time student or a part-time student for up to 1 additional year and receive special instruction designed to remedy his or her identified deficiencies.

\*\*\* WPO (nondisabled) - Any student who is withdrawn from school in a year subsequent to receiving a W08 or W8B.

\*\*\*\* Students who have not met completion requirements are retained.

See *Notes* tab for Summer School Entry and other details.

Figure 1: Use of additional school year, grade promotion status and withdrawal codes for nondisabled students.

Source: Retrieved from Automated Student Information by Florida Department of Education (p. 2).

**Use of Additional School Year, Grade Promotion Status and Withdrawal Codes\*  
For Students Remaining in School Beyond Initial Year of Completion**

**Students with Disabilities**

Outcome	Initial Year of Completion			Additional Year One (Not Last Year of Attendance)			Additional Years Two and Higher (Not Last Year of Attendance)			Last Year of Attendance		
	Additional School Year	Grade Promotion Status	Withdrawal Code	Additional School Year	Grade Promotion Status	Withdrawal Code	Additional School Year	Grade Promotion Status	Withdrawal Code	Additional School Year**	Grade Promotion Status	Withdrawal Code
Standard Diploma (W06, W10, WD1, WFT, WFW, WGA, WRW, WXL, WXT or WXW)	Z	P	W06, W10, WD1, WFT, WFW, WGA, WRW, WXL, WXT or WXW	WD1 code only:			WD1 code only:			WD1 code only:		
				D	D	WD1	D	D	WD1	S** or D	P	W06
State of Florida Diploma (WGD)	Z	P	WGD	F	D	W01, W02 or W3A	F	D	W01, W02 or W3A	F	P	W06, W10, WFT, WFW, WGA, WRW or WPO***
Special Diploma (W07 or W27)	Z	P	W07 or W27	S or F	D	W01, W02 or W3A	F	D	W01, W02 or W3A	S** or F	P	W06, W10, WFT, WFW, WGA, WGD, WRW or WPO***
Certificate of Completion (W08 or W8B)	Z	P	W08 or W8B	S or F	D	W01, W02 or W3A	F	D	W01, W02 or W3A	S** or F	P	W06, W07, W10, W27, WFT, WFW, WGA, WGD, WRW or WPO***
Special Certificate of Completion (W09)	Z	P	W09	S or F	D	W01, W02 or W3A	F	D	W01, W02 or W3A	S** or F	P	W06, W07, W08, W10, W27, WFT, WFW, WGA, WGD, WRW or WPO***
Student who has met completion requirements for W07, W08, W09 or W27 but opts not to accept completion.	Z	D	W01, W02 or W3A	S or F	D	W01, W02 or W3A	F	D	W01, W02 or W3A	S** or F	P	W06, W07, W08, W09, W10, W27, WFT, WFW, WGA, WGD or WRW
Student who has been retained (W01, W02 or W3A)****										Z	R	W23

In all of the above cases, use Grade Level 12 for reporting and FTE.

\* Please reference data elements for Additional School Year and Grade Promotion Status; and Appendix A for Withdrawal Codes.

\*\* S is valid only if this is the student's first additional school year.

\*\*\* WPO (disabled) - Any student who is withdrawn from school in a year subsequent to receiving a W07, W08, W09, W27 or WGD.

\*\*\*\* Students who have not met completion requirements are retained. Their year of completion is marked by a W06, W07, W08, W09, W10, W27, WFT, WFW, WGA, WGD, WRW, WXL, WXT or WXW. If none of these withdrawal code requirements are met, a W23 is assigned at the end of the school year in which the student turns 22, or the student's last year of attendance.

See Notes tab for Summer School Entry and other details.

**Figure 2. Use of additional school year, grade promotion status and withdrawal codes for students with disabilities.**

Source: Retrieved from Automated Student Information by Florida Department of Education (p. 3)

## Dropping Out

Leaving school before completing a level of education or obtaining a degree (e.g., high school or college) has been recognized widely as dropping out. This decision can have negative consequences, including restricted job opportunities, reduced income, and unfavorable health outcomes. A student's probability of dropping out is influenced by factors such as past academic accomplishments, individual and familial circumstances, and school-related aspects like atmosphere and level of involvement (Deskin et al., 2009).

## Minoritized Students

The term minoritized describes students who belong to cultural groups historically marginalized and discriminated against in a particular society or educational system. These groups are often categorized by ethnicity or race, such as Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian, and other non-White students, and collectively referred to as Black Indigenous people of color (BIPOC). The concept of minoritization emphasizes systemic inequalities and power dynamics that have created limited access to resources, opportunities, and representation for these students due to societal issues. This study underscored the pressing need for equitable educational practices and policies that can effectively address and redress historical and ongoing disparities faced by BIPOC students (Park, 2009).

## Student Engagement

In this study, student engagement refers explicitly to the extent of a student's emotional and psychological involvement in the learning process. Specifically, in K–12 schools, this concept is broken down into three distinct components. First, behavioral engagement meets or surpasses the institution's expectations of conduct and participation in the learning environment. Second, emotional engagement is characterized by a positive absorption of the school climate. Finally, cognitive engagement involves putting in satisfactory effort, leading to academic achievement (Bond, 2020).

## Theoretical Framework

In this study's theoretical framework, Disability Critical Race Theory emerged as a combination of critical race theory and disability studies in education. Critical theory seeks to understand the underlying systems and social constructs, carefully examining their cultural implications to initiate meaningful change (Annamma et al., 2013). Using this comprehensive

and rigorous process provided a powerful lens to scrutinize and challenge the prevailing norms and attitudes that govern the current social landscape.

### Disability Critical Race Theory

Disability Critical Race Theory (DisCrit) recognizes how disability and race intersect. The theory has allowed scholars to analyze issues including ableism and racism (Annamma et al., 2013). DisCrit is a tool for critiquing how these issues impact the lives of students. DisCrit is a framework that operates on three fundamental principles. The first principle considers how race and disability intersect, recognizing individuals can encounter multiple challenges simultaneously. This approach is critical as DisCrit prioritizes the experiences of disabled people of color; Annamma et al. (2013) stated, “DisCrit explores ways in which both race and ability are socially constructed and interdependent” (p. 5). It challenges traditional approaches to disability research, which is centered on the experiences of White, abled individuals. DisCrit aims to provide a nuanced understanding of disability that includes all individuals, regardless of their race or ethnicity (Annamma et al., 2013).

The second principle of DisCrit is counterstorytelling (Annamma et al., 2013). This principle involves amplifying voices of individuals that have been marginalized to disrupt dominant narratives. By providing a platform for the lived experiences of disabled individuals of color, counterstorytelling can challenge perspectives that perpetuate stereotypes.

Overall, DisCrit is an analytical process examining structures and institutions that perpetuate ableism and racism in society. This analysis involves looking closely at policies, laws, educational systems, and other societal structures that contribute to the marginalization and oppression of individuals who identify as disabled people of color. The aim of DisCrit is to transform systems (Annamma et al., 2018).



Using DisCrit as a framework included an examination of disciplinary practices, curriculum, and student accessibility. By following this approach, academic institutions can provide a safe learning environment for all students, regardless of their abilities or background (Annamma et al., 2018; Love & Beneke, 2021). Additionally, DisCrit can inform decision making and support advocacy efforts. Studies based on DisCrit principles are instrumental in driving social justice movements. These studies provide research-based insights, help amplify the voices of historically marginalized communities, and critically examine unjust systems that contribute to inequalities.

The primary focus of this study was to investigate the intersection between racism and ability in the K–12 education in a Florida school district (Clark et al., 2022). Therefore, the primary objective of this study was to apply DisCrit as a theoretical framework. DisCrit is a relatively new theoretical framework rooted in critical theory. This concept is comparable to Crenshaw’s intersectionality theory, which acknowledges how various social identities such as race, gender, class, and sexuality intersect. DisCrit examines how racism and ableism operate in K–12 education systems. The frameworks were aligned to their respective research question. (See Table 1)

**Table 1***Research Questions Matrix*

Research question	Data source	Variable	Data analysis
<u>Disability Critical Race Theory</u> Is there a relationship between school discipline practices and minoritized students with disabilities dropout rates?	Dataset A: FOCUS student demographics, enrollment, discipline data.	IV: Minoritized ESE students Exclusionary discipline practices DV: W/D codes MV: ELL status, gender, socioeconomic level, 504 eligibility.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Descriptive statistics</li> <li>• Chi-square</li> <li>• Binomial logistic regression</li> </ul>
<u>Disability Studies in Education</u> Is there a relationship between school discipline practices and students with disabilities dropout rates?	Dataset B: FOCUS student demographics, enrollment, discipline data.	IV: ESE students Exclusionary discipline practices DV: W/D codes MV: ELL status, gender, socioeconomic level, 504 eligibility.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Descriptive statistics</li> <li>• Chi-square</li> <li>• Binomial logistic regression</li> </ul>
<u>Critical Race Theory</u> Is there a relationship between school discipline practices and minoritized students dropout rates?	Dataset C: FOCUS Student demographics, Enrollment, Discipline Data.	IV: Minoritized students Exclusionary discipline practices DV: W/D codes MV: ELL status, gender, socioeconomic level, 504 eligibility.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Descriptive statistics</li> <li>• Chi-square</li> <li>• Binomial logistic regression</li> </ul>

Research Questions

This study considered the following research question:

Research Question 1: Is there a relationship between school discipline practices and minoritized students with disabilities dropout rates?

## Null Hypothesis

Null Hypothesis (H<sub>0</sub>): No, there is no relationship between school discipline practices and minoritized students with disabilities dropout rates.

## Hypothesis

Hypothesis ( $H_A$ ): Yes, there a relationship between school discipline practices and minoritized students with disabilities dropout rates.

## Additional Questions

Research Question 1a: Is there a relationship between school discipline practices and students with disabilities dropout rates?

Null Hypothesis ( $H_0$ ): No, there is no relationship between school discipline practices and students with disabilities dropout rates.

Hypothesis ( $H_A$ ): Yes, there Is a relationship between school discipline practices and students with disabilities dropout rates.

Research Question 1b: Is there a relationship between school discipline practices and students' dropout rates?

Null Hypothesis ( $H_0$ ): No, there is no relationship between school discipline practices and minoritized students' dropout rates.

Hypothesis ( $H_A$ ): Yes, there is a relationship between school discipline practices and minoritized students' dropout rates.

## Delimitations

The study included an analysis of students in Florida, with a focus on one public high school. Both primary and secondary exceptionalities were considered in this study when selecting students. The study employed disaggregated descriptive statistics, providing valuable insights into educational practices and outcomes.

The analysis was centered on four specific school years (i.e., 2016–2017, 2017–2018, 2019–2020, and 2020–2021). The study relied solely on post hoc data for investigation and

concentrated solely on specific disciplinary practices, examining nuances of how these practices were implemented. The research considered both general education and special education students, with a particular emphasis on the school district as the chosen school district.

The study investigated disciplinary practices in the chosen district. The study provided an understanding of the educational practices and outcomes in this particular school district. The study also sought to determine whether there were any disparities in disciplinary practices between general education and special education students. The study's findings will be valuable for policymakers, educators, and researchers to improving educational practices and outcomes for all students. This research contributes to the literature focused on educational practices and outcomes for minoritized students.

#### Limitations

Due to variations in policy and data, results obtained from this study in Florida cannot be generalized to other states. Students enrolled in high school during the 4-year window of the analysis were included to ensure the findings accurately represented the educational outcomes for this group.

Students' racial backgrounds were provided by parents or guardians. Individuals who identified with multiple racial categories, such as both White and Black, were categorized as multicultural.

In alignment with Florida's educational framework, students identified as ESE were defined based on the comprehensive guidelines set forth by the Florida Department of Education. ESE adheres to the principles outlined in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This includes a range of disabilities and learning challenges.

It is important to note the study used withdrawal codes from the Florida Department of Education. Using official and standardized data sources ensured the integrity and accuracy of the research.

### Assumptions

In this study, the local school district's departments, including school services, research, evaluation and assessment, student services, safety, and security, followed all the guidelines set by the Florida Department of Education and the local school district. The data were examined through various research methods to determine the relationship between the dependent and independent variables. The study includes recommendations for further research.

### Organization of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 includes the background of the study, problem statement, purpose and significance, definition of terms, conceptual framework, research questions, limitations, delimitations, and assumptions. Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature, which includes the following areas: school discipline, intersectionality, restorative justice, discrimination in education, loss of instructional time, positive behavior interventions and supports, social-emotional learning, special education/exceptional student education, school climate and student achievement. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology used for this research study. This chapter includes the selection of data and statistical analysis procedures used to analyze the data. Chapter 4 presents the study's findings, including results of statistical analyses. Chapter 5 summarizes the findings of the research and offers a discussion of the implications of the findings for theory and practice, and ongoing discussions and recommendations for further research for policy and conclusions.

### Summary

This study was based on extant literature on the school-to-prison pipeline and analysis of DisCrit. The study explored the relationship between discipline practices and minoritized students with disabilities (e.g., in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, the Baker Act, and law enforcement referrals) and their dropout rates.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Introduction**

In the context of a school environment, the maintenance of discipline has been significantly influenced by the prevailing climate on campus. Therefore, it is imperative to consider various factors when instituting disciplinary measures in K–12 educational institutions (Huang & Anyon, 2020). To comprehend the practical application and effects of school discipline, it is essential to address the intricate framework and underlying principles operating within the school system (Larson et al., 2016). This study encompassed exploration themes such as school discipline, intersectionality, restorative justice, discrimination in education, loss of instructional time, positive behavior interventions and supports, social–emotional learning, special education/exceptional student education, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004, Americans with Disabilities Act Amendment Act of 2008, school climate, and student achievement. The aforementioned themes contributed significantly to a comprehensive understanding of the foundational principles of school discipline and its potential consequences. An exploration of these research themes provides readers with insight into how disciplinary practices directly affect students with disabilities from marginalized communities. As this behavior has been a historical problem, this topic has remained a relevant issue that requires further examination and policy changes. Therefore, this chapter provides an overarching analysis of the literature recommendations for future studies.

Disability Critical Race Theory (DisCrit) as the theoretical framework examines the impact of racism and ableism on student achievement (Gillborn, 2015). Originating from the critical theory school of thought, this approach aims to critically evaluate and analyze society and culture with the goal of instigating positive change. Within the realm of education, this

theory takes precedence, playing a pivotal role in shaping its discourse and practices (Campbell, 2008).

When implementing discipline practices in K–12 schools, several factors naturally play a role or need to be considered. These research themes frequently arise when examining how punitive discipline practices can affect students’ ability to succeed. This study examined the barriers to student achievement, highlighting factors influencing academic success, such as student characteristics, learning environment, teacher-related factors, socioeconomic status, and gender. By analyzing these research themes, the reader can better understand the study’s outcomes.

### Critical Theory

In 1923, critical theory was developed in Germany and has taken many forms since its inception. Critical theory seeks to understand and critique society and culture to change it. Most notably, Edmondson (2002) illustrated critical theory as a “critique of positivism and a concern for the relationship between theory and society” (p. 114). Critical theory has been used to identify societal inequities and the origin of these inequities. Critical theory has created the framework for solving societal issues regarding identity and politics.

In pre-World War II Germany, critical theory was used to combat Nazi totalitarianism (Edmondson, 2002). In the 21st century, theorists argued using critical theory could aid the decolonization of Western society (McArthur, 2022). The application of this theory represents “to better social justice . . . use this to magnify better understandings of race, racism and colonialism” (McArthur, 2022, p. 1687). Understanding the underlying causes of a problem empowers society to develop effective solutions aimed at improving the treatment of individuals. Adaptions to theory is due to “a broad approach to critical theory that is prompted today by a



range of contemporary social, political, economic, and ecological crises and struggles” (Celikates & Flynn, 2023, p. 1). Advocates of critical theory, including T. W. Adorno and Habermas, contended that the theory demonstrates a high degree of adaptability and dynamism, continually evolving to depict societal structures more accurately through ongoing modifications and additions over time (Lara, 2008).

### Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) is rooted in social and racial justice and recognizes how structural racism impacts various societal structures, including health and education (Ledesma & Calderón, 2015). Ledesma and Calderón (2015) stated, “CRT . . . recognizes that oppression and racism are not unidirectional, but rather that oppression and racism can be experienced within and across divergent intersectional planes, such as classism, sexism, ableism, and so on” (p. 207). The theory highlights the presence of classism, ableism, and other forms of prejudice inherent in social constructs. Meanwhile, CRT is aimed at gaining a more profound understanding of prevailing racial issues, as well as confronting and deconstructing racial hierarchies. Furthermore, CRT seeks to expand the terminology available for discussing the complexities inherent in racial concepts (Campbell, 2008). CRT further advocates for the implementation of measures aimed at eradicating racial injustices and fostering societal advancement. This theory acknowledges the influence of race-neutral institutions and practices in perpetuating racial oppression (Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010).

A recent study by Simimi et al. (2023) examined the intersection of critical race to explore how social constructs of identities (e.g., race and disability) impact school disciplinary practices. Findings revealed African American students with learning disabilities were often labeled as emotionally disturbed/behaviorally disturbed instead of diagnosed with autism,

resulting in disproportionate disciplinary outcomes (Simimi et al., 2023). Researchers concluded there exists a racial disparity attributed to the perception that Black students are expected to possess the ability to regulate their conduct.

There are five tenants or components of CRT: (a) racism is ordinary and is commonplace in the United States, making racism difficult to combat (Delgado & Stefanie, 2001); (b) changes in a society essentially favor the dominant group or majority group and acts an interest convergence (Lopez, 2003); (c) race is nothing more than a social construct that been in place to identify and differentiate the treatment of individuals (Marable, 1992; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002); (d) in the social hierarchy created for minorities, there is an uptick in the competition which promotes inequities (Winant, 2004); and (e) minorities tend to communicate their experiences through storytelling in the system they live (Delgado & Stefanie, 2001).

The current study aimed to study the intersections of these social constructs of race and disabilities and how these intersections create even bigger inequities. Simimi et al. (2023) determined the identification of these intersections exposes a recurring practice across all levels. It is imperative to acknowledge that although CRT initiates discussions concerning the perception of race in the United States, it is essential to prioritize the identification of each factor and their interconnectedness in shaping an individual's identity and society's perception thereof.

### Intersectionality

Crenshaw (1991) explained how individuals have different experiences when combining social and political identities. Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality in her 1989 article *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics*. In the article, Crenshaw

described intersectionality as the multidimensional concept of Black women's negative experiences in employment.

Historically, Black people in the United States have been marginalized and barred from certain employment opportunities. Black men have been twice as likely to be unemployed compared to their white counterparts and have been often subjected to jobs that offer lower income, wages, and promotion opportunities (Mong & Roscigno, 2009). This fact has been attributed to the process of social culture, a process in which “blacks are often sorted or queued into jobs that require lower credentials, offer less on-the-job training, or that may be ‘racialized’ personnel jobs intended to serve other minorities” (Mong & Roscigno, 2009, p. 2) Additionally, women have also been banned from particular employment opportunities (Crenshaw, 2018). By being both Black and a woman, commonly referred to as misogynoir, both identities experience exclusion and prejudice discrimination. Together or known as intersectionality, Black women face even more significant hardship in employment opportunities than in comparison to White men (Rosette, 2018).

Individuals who are members of these have historically experienced marginalization within the societal framework (Crenshaw, 1991). In this study, the researcher presented instances illustrating the heightened use of punitive disciplinary measures among students belonging to intersectional categories as compared to their nonintersectional counterparts. The K–12 system has used punitive discipline practices that specifically target historically marginalized groups, as documented in abundant literature (Gagnon et al., 2017). The literature explores the culture of vulnerable individuals influences their behavior and how this may be misinterpreted by school officials, leading to a lack of representation and mentorship. This lack of understanding and misinterpretation can have a profound impact on the guidance and direction available to these

individuals within the educational system. However, there have been alternatives to promote equitable approaches, such as restorative justice and positive behavior interventions.

### Exceptional Student Education

This study referred to special education as exceptional student education (ESE). The ESE program was specifically designed to meet the educational needs of students with disabilities, which may impact their learning potential (IDEA, 2004). Disabilities range from autism spectrum disorder and specific learning disability to intellectual impairment and other health impairments, including cognitive and physical impairments affecting a student's ability to learn. After students are identified for ESE, students are given individual educational plans (IEP) that entail information on a student's exceptionality, structured curriculum plans, goals and measurable outcomes, and history on evaluations and other interventions (IDEA, 2004).

In the 19th century, individuals with disabilities had limited educational opportunities and were excluded from mainstream education due to limited understanding and awareness of disabilities. This led to their marginalization and restricted access to the same opportunities as their nondisabled peers (Earnshaw & Chaudoir, 2009). Lack of understanding and awareness also led to negative stereotypes and discrimination against people with disabilities. Progress toward greater inclusion and acceptance of people with disabilities has happened in education and society (Earnshaw & Chaudoir, 2009).

A popular belief existed that individuals with disabilities lacked ability to learn and therefore were deemed undeserving of being educated (Lo & Grady, 2013). This belief played a major role in limiting access to education for students with special needs. Consequently, many students with disabilities were not given the opportunity to receive an education, which had a negative impact on their ability to succeed in life. This belief was not only inaccurate, but also

unjust. Thankfully, strides have been made to improve access to education for individuals with disabilities in recent years (Lo & Grady, 2013; Vickerman, 2012). Historically, disabilities were often accompanied by social stigma, leading to individuals with disabilities being viewed as burdens or objects of pity, rather than individuals with potential and the right to education.

According to a recent study by Earnshaw et al. (2022), stigma and discrimination against people with disabilities further marginalized special education students and made it difficult for these students to be included in mainstream educational settings. As a result, many students with disabilities were unable to access the same educational opportunities as their nondisabled peers, perpetuating inequalities that have persisted for decades. Consequences of this marginalization have been significant, as students with disabilities often faced significant barriers to success and social integration (Earnshaw et al., 2022).

### Reforms of Special Education

During the mid-19th century, society underwent a period of significant reform that encompassed a broad range of issues. This reform marked a turning point in history as new ideas and movements emerged, aiming to tackle social, political, and educational challenges. Among the most notable movements were those that sought to address issues related to women's rights, abolition of slavery, and improvement of working conditions. A strong sense of activism and a desire to bring about lasting change characterized these movements. Overall, the mid-19th century was a transformative period in history that had a profound impact on society and paved the way for a more just and equitable future, especially in education (Givens & Ison, 2022).

Emergence of compulsory education laws during this time highlighted the growing recognition of the importance of education for all individuals.

The 1950s and 1960s were a crucial period for both the Civil Rights Movement and legal progress in special education (Dunlap & Johnson, 1992). During this time, the Civil Rights Movement aimed to tackle legal and civil disparities, and poverty and hopelessness faced by Black and other minority communities. The Civil Rights Movement gained momentum following landmark Supreme Court cases such as *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 which overturned the “separate but equal” doctrine established in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (Fives et al., 2016).

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) of 1975, also known as Public Law 94-142, was a significant milestone in special education legislation (Zettel & Ballard, 1979; Zirkel, 2019). This act mandated all school-aged children with disabilities in the United States have access to a free and appropriate public education. The law introduced the concept of IEPs, which these plans are legally required for students who have been identified with disabilities that impede their learning (Christle & Yell, 2010).

IEPs are personalized plans that outline the educational goals, services, and accommodations necessary to meet the needs of each student (Zirkel, 2019). The EAHCA was revised and reauthorized in 1990 as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA; Zirkel, 2019). The IDEA has continued to shape special education policies and practices, ensuring students with disabilities have access to a quality education and necessary support for academic and social success (Yell et al., 1998).

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 was a landmark legislation aimed to protect the civil rights of individuals with disabilities (Agaronnik et al., 2019). ADA is one of the

most important civil rights laws in the United States. This act prohibited discrimination against individuals with disabilities in all areas of public life, including employment, education, transportation, and access to public places such as restaurants, hotels, and parks. ADA was a crucial step toward ensuring individuals with disabilities have equal opportunities and access to participate fully in society. This act also helped to increase awareness and understanding of the needs and rights of people with disabilities and has led to improvements in the design of buildings, products, and services to make them more accessible to everyone (Iezzoni, 2011).

ADA was a significant milestone in the journey toward not only providing equal opportunities but also protected accessibility for individuals with disabilities. ADA has played a significant role in promoting equal access and opportunities for students with disabilities in education. This act along with other laws like Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the IDEA Act help safeguard the rights of students with disabilities (Zirkel, 2019). ADA requires educational institutions provide reasonable accommodations and support to ensure the participation and success of students with disabilities (Barnard-Brak et al., 2009). The ADA has influenced policies and practices supporting postsecondary education for students with disabilities (Plotner & Marshall, 2014).

## IDEA

IDEA is a federal law that has reauthorized and expanded what was constructed through the EAHCA (Sullivan et al., 2014). Eligible students with disabilities are entitled to special education services that emphasize IEPs and provide various protections. IDEA is a law that ensures schools receiving federal money must follow federal laws that support and protect students with disabilities (IDEA, 2004). To ensure education for all students, several protections are in place. Local state education agencies are required to offer services in school students and

must evaluate students who may have disabilities. These services are offered at no cost to the student and must meet standards set by the exceptional education agency and the IEP for the student. Disabled students are to be educated alongside their nondisabled peers to the greatest extent possible.

Procedural safeguards require both local and state education agencies to adhere to the requirements of IDEA (Lewis et al., 2021). Parents are included in the IEP team and have the opportunity to influence decisions regarding their child's education. Assistive technology devices must be used in accordance with the free and appropriate education provided. Teachers and related personnel who provide direct service to students must be certified and meet state requirements (Lewis et al., 2021).

Punitive exclusionary practices violate IDEA by not allowing students with disabilities to make progress according to their circumstances (Lewis et al., 2021). This includes understanding there might be behavior that is a direct result of the student's disability or a manifestation of their disability and should not be the reason a student must be excluded from their education (Walker & Brigham, 2016).

#### ADA Amendment Act of 2008

Americans with Disabilities Act Amendment of 2008 (ADAAA) amended particular language in the ADA of 1990 that was deemed limiting. ADAAA describes a person who is disabled and how their disability significantly determines their abilities. Original criteria described a disability as a condition that substantially impedes a person's way of life. However, ADAAA broadened the requirements and determined the severity of a person's condition on a case-by-case basis. Especially in the school system, the broader term allows institutions to



consider reasonable accommodations that meet the individual student's needs (Keenan et al., 2018). These accommodations ensure equal access to free and appropriate public education.

ADAAA has greatly impacted K–12 students with IEPs or qualifying for Section 504 as they transition into postsecondary education and work accommodations. Under the ADA, scientific, medical, and statistical data are required to establish eligibility in high school for those students who did not meet college requirements eligibility. High school documentation would transition to college; there would be a process to determine accommodations were appropriate for the individual students' needs and their courses (Keenan et al., 2018), making the transition seamless.

Efforts have been made to improve the quality of ECE that could lower the cost of services for ESE and create lower demand for these services (Young et al., 2019). Improving ECE quality could mean earlier interventions for students from lower socioeconomic status who need adequate access to healthcare, nutrition, and participation in ECE programs (e.g., voluntary prekindergarten) especially for students from diverse backgrounds. Again, this programming is different from ESE services. However, ECE might reduce the burden of such services to meet the needs of students early on, especially once these students reach testing levels and secondary school (Young et al., 2019).

### Special Education in Florida

In Florida, special education is referred to as ESE. Students are given a modified curriculum to meet their special needs equitably. For example, students who have significant cognitive disabilities or multiple exceptionalities that drastically affect their ability to learn might be given significantly modified curriculums to meet their learning capabilities. These students are placed into classrooms with students who share the same learning capabilities and are

excluded from general education. In these general education classes, ESE students typically receive support from additional teachers in the classroom, testing accommodations like extended time and text-to-speech, and by showing proficiency in specific standards, might receive waivers for state assessments (Hornby, 2021).

Critics of inclusion believed including ESE students does not hold the best possible outcomes for students after their K–12 education (Hornby, 2021). These critics believed students with disabilities were better suited for settings specifically designed to meet their needs, like unique educational settings. Yet, these settings were far more likely to identify specific behavior patterns as manifestations of a disability than trying to equate the behavior to their general education peers (Walker & Bingham, 2016). This brings into question the placement practices for ESE students.

Placements for identified exceptionalities students have been effective for academic success and help students understand the social impact of these placements, especially inclusion in the general education setting. The adequacy of the standard education system in the United States in equipping individuals for their postsecondary endeavors is a subject of inquiry (Hocutt, 1996). Moreover, Hocutt's (1996) work did not solely focus on discipline practices. The research focused on many components of general education where discipline plays a huge role and to understand if placement in special education is a critical factor for individual student success.

#### Every Student Succeeds Act

The No Child Left Behind Act and Every Student Succeed Act (ESSA) pushed for accountability from schools nationwide. ESSA (2015) expanded upon the role the federal government played in K–12 education. This accountability measure aimed to ensure high student standards and give equitable support to groups to close the opportunity gap (Darrow, 2016).

Along with IDEA in 2004, ESSA created many provisions for protecting and supporting students with disabilities, including inclusion classrooms, emphasizing evidence-based practices, encouraging the use of multi-tiered supports systems, and promoting college and career readiness. Teachers and other stakeholders can improve ESSA's impact by assisting accountability systems for the positive educational outcomes of students with disabilities (McCabe & Nye-Lengerman, 2021).

Setting up student success, ESSA also promoted guidelines for school discipline patterns for students with disabilities. Literature has shown students with disabilities have been disproportionately disciplined more than their nondisabled peers (Blake et al., 2020; Sullivan et al., 2014). In 2013–2014, at least 70,000 students with disabilities were subjected to seclusion and restraint due to disciplinary infractions, and students with disabilities had more than double the suspension rate of students without disabilities (National Council on Disability, 2018). Because the right of students with disabilities to receive a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment is guaranteed under equal protection in the U.S. Constitution, ESSA recommended the implementation of positive supports and alternate means of disciplining students with disabilities. Despite recent plans for the ESSA performance, exclusionary discipline practices have continued to persist, particularly among students with disabilities and in multiple subgroups.

### Disability Studies in Education

Disability studies in education (DSE) is a multidisciplinary field that incorporates disability studies, critical pedagogy, sociology, and related disciplines to analyze and understand experiences of students with disabilities in educational systems (Slee et al., 2019). Unlike conventional medical or deficit-based approaches, DSE concentrates on environmental and

cultural factors that shape educational opportunities and outcomes for students with disabilities. DSE acknowledges that a disability is not an inherent flaw of an individual but rather a construct of a society prioritizing some ways of living over others (Slee et al., 2019).

DSE challenges ableist assumptions and practices perpetuating discrimination and exclusion of people with disabilities in educational environments (Love & Beneke, 2021; Sullivan et al., 2014). The DSE field aims to foster inclusive educational environments that value diversity and guarantee equitable access for all learners. By examining the complex interplay between disability and education, DSE provides a critical lens where educators can understand and address educational needs of students with disabilities.

Principles and applications of DSE have far-reaching implications for educational policy, research, and practice. DSE offers a transformative vision of education centering on equity, social justice, and human rights. Through its interdisciplinary approach, DSE encourages collaboration among diverse stakeholders, fosters critical thinking, and promotes social change (Carastathis, 2014). In short, DSE is an essential framework for advancing inclusive and equitable education for all students, regardless of their abilities or disabilities.

DSE offers a critical framework to examine school disciplinary practices and their impact on students with disabilities. Researchers can explore how disciplinary policies disproportionately target disabled students, perpetuating exclusion and marginalization (Emong & Eron, 2016). By analyzing the social construction of disability and challenging ableist assumptions in disciplinary practices, DSE can inform efforts to promote alternative approaches that foster inclusivity, restorative justice, and supportive interventions.

DSE allows researchers to identify systemic barriers and inequities contributing to the school-to-prison pipeline. By examining the intersectionality of disability, race, and other

marginalized identities, researchers can uncover how multiple forms of oppression compound the risk of students being funneled into the criminal justice system (Allen & White-Smith, 2014; Kohli et al., 2017; Miller, 2022; Skiba et al., 2014). This analysis can inform policy reform and highlight the need for targeted interventions to disrupt the pipeline and promote equitable educational opportunities.

### Minoritized Students in Education

Research has shown many factors tend to influence minorities' ability to attain an education. Historically, minoritized students have been generally less successful than their nonminoritized peers. The literature has described many aspects of the conundrum. Most notable is the need for more representation in K–12 faculty. Across the United States, minoritized people comprised around 41% of the population but were generally educated by White female teachers. White teachers represent 79% of educators in the United States (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). Research has indicated students belonging to minority groups tended to perform better on standardized tests when they were taught by educators from similar minority backgrounds. This suggests that there is a positive correlation between the academic achievement of minoritized students and the representation of their own ethnic or racial group among teachers within their educational institutions (Weiher, 2000). Black students tend to perform better when Black teachers educate them. This finding was seen in the 1990s after the integration of U.S. schools in the 1970s. Research has indicated the presence of a same-race teacher during the early stages of education was correlated with a reduction in high school dropout rates and an increase in college matriculation among Black students (Gershenson et al., 2022; Hart & Lindsay, 2024).

Furthermore, the integration of schools has been instrumental in fostering equity within the educational realm. Nonetheless, research has indicated this integration has had adverse effects on minoritized students, as schools tended to disproportionately focus on the needs and preferences of the majority (Hwang et al., 2024). This miscommunication becomes apparent when student discipline affects their education. Behaviors that are considered normal or a result of their culture are viewed as very undesirable within educational norms. The outcome has resulted in a need for greater awareness of the cultural norms of minority students. This lack of awareness has led to a misunderstanding of what is expected of student behavior. Hwang et al. (2024) stated, “Having a teacher of the same race/ethnicity leads to a lower likelihood of a student receiving suspensions and expulsions because teachers are less likely to have biased perceptions about students of the same race/ethnicity” (p. 2).

Minoritized students, specifically from African American, Latino American, and Native American backgrounds, have been subjected to exclusionary disciplinary practices (Bal et al., 2017). First, these students are also more than likely to be labeled as emotionally behavior disturbed. Second, the implementation of these exclusionary practices results in the removal of students from the classroom, consequently increasing the likelihood of these students discontinuing their education. As illustrated in Table 2, African American students are almost 3 times more likely to be suspended for more than 10 days in comparison to their White peers; Native American students are nearly 5 times more likely to be suspended for 10 days or more in comparison to their White peers.

**Table 2**

*Discipline Risk Ratios by Race/Ethnicity, Ages 3–21 (SPP 4B)*

Race/ethnicity	SEA
White	0.95
Black	2.30
Hispanic	0.63
Asian	0.19
American Indian/Alaskan Native	4.68
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	
Two or more races	1.53

*Note.* Reprinted from 2020 SEA Profile by Florida Department of Education, 2020 (p. 5).

At the time of this study, approximately 14% of students in Florida had an IEP or were diagnosed with a disability that impeded their learning ability (Florida Department of Education, 2020). Additionally, African American and Native American students were 2 times more likely to be placed in special education programs that were identified as emotionally disturbed students.

#### Discrimination in Education

Ethnic studies has been defined as the interdisciplinary study of race, culture, and power and the dynamic it has on society (Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2014). Implementing ethnic studies is a way to rid the world of racism and force decolonization. The implementation has strong community support and has been recommended culturally for educating the youth of the past and present. School districts would have a say in the curriculum by collaborating with educational professionals, and involving the community would foster innovation in the educational system. A societal push to implement this plan is vital for engaging youth.

African American students have been subject to differential treatment compared to their non-African American counterparts within the educational environment. This discrepancy has

been evident in the interpretation of their conduct, the insufficiency of representation, and the application of disciplinary measures (Townsend, 2000). Townsend (2000) explained the historical analysis of how African American culture has influenced their behaviors and how school officials might misinterpret African American students' behavior. The lack of representation of African American culture has resulted in a lack of mentorship and direction, affecting how African American students are treated compared to their non-African American peers.

### Opportunity Gap

The achievement gap examines the disparity in academic performance between different groups of students (Gregory et al., 2010). The term “achievement gap,” as criticized by critical theorists Welner and Carter (2013), has failed to account for the social structures that contribute to this disparity. These theorists posited that success is not solely contingent upon ability but is also influenced by the presence of equitable opportunities to succeed. Welner and Carter (2013) argued that achievement gaps are actually derived from opportunity gaps. Ladson-Billings (2013) stated:

The ‘opportunity gap’ frame, in contrast, shifts our attention from outcomes to inputs—to the deficiencies in the foundational components of societies, schools, and communities that produce significant differences in educational—and ultimately socioeconomic—outcomes. Thinking in terms of ‘achievement gaps’ emphasizes the symptoms; thinking about unequal opportunity highlights the causes. (p. 90)

Outcomes for students diagnosed as emotionally/behavioral disturbed have been perceived as poor. Only 51% of these students graduate from high school (Florida Department of Education, 2020). As seen in Table 3, although the number has slightly increased, students with



exceptional emotional disturbance have dropped out more than students enrolled in special education programs nationwide. Like many other subgroups, these students have been at significant risk of not succeeding in postsecondary education. Though performance matters, these students tended to have lower socioeconomic status (Chmielewski, 2019), parental education, and school quality and experience other internal and external factors students cannot control. Because of these impediments, these students enter the educational setting already at a deficit compared to their peers exposed to different factors. These impediments have been notably dubbed as the opportunity gap, which these students are less likely to achieve due to their limited opportunities (Chmielewski, 2019).

**Table 3**

*Federal Dropout Rate (SPP 2)*

Students	2016–2017	2017–2018	2018–2019
SWD	16	13	10
EBD Students	34	31	27
SLD Students	18	15	11

*Note.* Reprinted from 2020 SEA Profile by Florida Department of Education, 2020, p. 3.

### School Discipline

Discipline has been defined as training people to obey rules and regulations using punishments in the school system (Gahungu, 2021). However, a movement exists to implement discipline alternatives in the school setting, such as restorative practices, positive behavior interventions and supports, and social–emotional learning (SEL), due to realization of how exclusionary practices were ineffective and coupled with implicit racial bias (Gahungu, 2021).

Exclusionary school discipline practices have heavily contributed to incarceration rates in the United States.

Often students, especially those students who belong to a vulnerable subgroup (e.g., low socioeconomic status, race, students with disabilities), have been subjected more to these disciplinary practices than their peers. Students with a history of disciplinary issues typically lack quality development in early childhood years, which is derived from access to equitable education and lack of support at home (Gahungu, 2021). This issues have been coupled with a poor socioeconomic foundation, “incited recidivism and alienated families and communities from involvement in school climate initiatives” (Gahungu, 2021, p. 380).

Though these students face higher rates of disciplinary interventions, these students are hypercriminalized when they reach age 18. Students of vulnerable groups also face even higher rates of criminalization when there are intersections between groups (e.g., Black students who are also diagnosed with autism behavior disorder). Research has shown exclusionary discipline practices have “failed to make school safer; they only pushed minority students and students with disabilities into prison systems. They were counter-effective and could not guarantee the well-being and safety of students and educators” (Gahungu, 2021, p. 380). Rodriguez Ruiz (2017) argued such exclusionary practices that remove children from the classroom “have failed to create more consistency in punishments and have not served as effective deterrents either. Instead, research shows that these practices push students into our prison systems, strengthening the school-to-prison pipeline” (p. 36).

## SEL

Although SEL does not appear on a school’s report card or directly influence a school’s grade in determining its proficiency, SEL has been directly linked to student academic

achievement (McCormick et al. 2015). Regarding alternative practices to discipline, SEL is not an equivalent alternative. However, SEL can be used as a proactive preventative measure. SEL, equipped to be culturally sensitive, provides a different and transparent perspective of a student's background and factors that can impact their academics and behavior (Yeh et al., 2022). SEL allows educators to consider possible issues and challenges plaguing certain groups and why these factors impeding these students from succeeding.

For example, a culturally responsive school serving a Title 1 low socioeconomic area might understand student tardiness that regularly occurs with this population. Instead of resorting to drastic measures like law enforcement to address truancy, a school could implement incentives or positive behavior interventions to motivate students and parents to comply with regulations. Common issues like truancy and chronic tardiness have never been properly addressed (Yeh et al., 2022). By understanding this phenomenon, educators attempt to see the action as a result of environmental or common challenges faced by vulnerable groups instead of a complete disregard for compliance. Thus, SEL has been practiced heavily in K–12 curriculum and carried out by school-based counselors.

### Restorative Justice

Restorative justice has been a mainstream, innovative alternative method for punitive punishments. Healthy academic practices help reduce crime and violence, improve human behavior, strengthen civil society, provide effective leadership, restore relationships, and repair harm (Mayworm et al., 2016). Originally conceived within the criminal justice system, school-based restorative justice advocates for an equitable approach to addressing disproportionality in school discipline. This method has been categorized as a learning opportunity to build rapport

and relationships in contrast to exclusionary practices like suspensions and expulsions. The courses aim to hold students accountable and provide support.

This approach goes deeper than just focusing on a student's negative behavior. Restorative practices aim to understand and address each unique situation by allowing all participants to share their perspectives (McStravick, 2018). Restorative practices enable students to connect with the messenger to interpret the message. It is likely an individual will interpret remarks as well-intended and positively received due to the positive relationship with the messenger. Restorative justice involves interpreting remarks through effective communication. The speaker must be credible, the message clear and concise, and the recipient willing to interpret it to the best of their ability. This process involves active listening, stating expectations, building rapport, and addressing behavior management (Maynard & Weinstein, 2019). It is important to use culturally responsive approaches for vulnerable individuals. Putting in the effort will lead to great results and address the unequal treatment in disciplinary actions by reviewing and adopting fair procedures (Maynard & Weinstein, 2019).

### Student Achievement

Regardless of the district or local educational agency, the main objective for educators is to graduate students. However, communities have resorted to measuring student success with state assessments (Cimipian et al., 2016). The ideal goal for education agencies is to have students make significant learning gains and meet expectations regarding state standards. Students who have not succeeded historically have been considered in the lowest quartile—the bottom 25% of academic scorers. These students are generally in intervention programs that provide educational support (Cimipian et al., 2016). These support programs can be directly linked to their assessment scores (e.g., specialized academic instruction) or a combination of

assessments and demographic (e.g., English language learning programs). The most significant component to success is familial support (Haug & Wasonga, 2021). However, in schools, academic support must fill that void for students to be successful. Both personal and vicarious positive experiences are the sources of positive connections. All of these factors contribute to the school climate.

A positive school climate promotes a positive learning environment where students have better chances of academic success. Blue-collar communities tend to have lower expectations of a supportive environment for students than white-collar communities (Kim et al. 2014). Kim et al. (2014) stated, “Children living in impoverished neighborhoods are more likely to have a lower level of school performance and experience more academic and behavioral problems than their counterparts in neighborhoods with higher average incomes and social stability” (p. 836). As a result, this foundation could lead to students dropping out of school. Garner and Raudenbush (1991) reported a negative association between the deprivation of economic resources in communities and educational attainment. An incentive exists to promote a positive school climate heavily dependent on student behavior. Proactive interventions (e.g., restorative justice, positive behavior interventions and supports) promote a positive school environment.

### Student Engagement

When a student is effectively engaged in their schooling, they achieve higher grade point averages and test scores, as well as lower attendance concerns and discipline rates (Suldo et al., 2008). Student engagement refers to a student’s psychological investment in learning, which can manifest behaviorally, cognitively, and psychologically. In contrast, in instances where students are not effectively engaged in the learning environment, they have a tendency for diminished motivation, reduced self-regulation, and lower academic achievement. Additionally, their

perception of the school climate is not positive (May et al. 2022). Research has suggested a strong association between student engagement and academic success. Therefore, student engagement is the highest component implemented in dropout prevention programs (Fraysier et al., 2020) as it can be the leading component in what is lacking for students who dropout.

### Loss of Instructional Time

Loss of instructional time can occur when a student is formally or informally removed from the classroom and, as a result, cannot receive an education (Kolbe et al., 2020). Regardless of a student's educational status, when a student faces disciplinary action, whether through an interview with a discipline administrator to discuss a referral or through an out-of-school suspension, both actions result in a loss of instructional time. Even when a student is in the classroom, anything that can shift a student from on-task to distracted can result in a student missing valuable instructional time (Flippin et al., 2021). These practices are magnified when a student is outside the classroom or needs help to reach traditional instruction. The effect of the lost instructional time is magnified as it disproportionately affects marginalized groups (Kennedy-Lewis & Murphy, 2016)

When students are subjected to discipline practices that exclude them from traditional classroom instruction, the student is exposed to the risk of lower student engagement (Liu, 2022). Loss of instructional time can hinder high-quality education (Vattøy & Gamlem, 2019). As a result, impeding student engagement will lead to a lack of academic achievement. In the current study, the loss of instruction was illustrated by how long a student served a disciplinary consequence. This value was compared to the total full-time equivalent membership of a student over 180 days. For example, if a student served an entire seventh-period school day of in-school suspension, the 7 periods was the time the student was not in the classroom and not receiving

instruction. For example, 1 day out of the 180 days is 7 periods (i.e., 1 school day), out of the total 1,260 periods (i.e., 180 days x 7 periods) of the school year.

Furthermore, although more research is needed to investigate patterns of loss of instruction and root cause of the growing trend in developing nations, there is enough research to conclude loss of instruction directly impacts student achievement and need for interventions to reduce it as much as possible. Keeping a student in the classroom supports their ability to engage as a student (Liu, 2022). In contrast, as loss of instruction is highly detrimental, researchers have enacted ways to encourage positive behavior and promote high student achievement.

### Dropping Out

For the current study, dropping out referred to leaving school before completing a level of education or graduating, such as high school or college. Students who drop out in Florida are coded with DNE, W05, W13, W15, W18, W21, W22, and W23 withdrawal codes (see Table 4). In this study, W26, a code for students who enter an adult learning program pursuing a GED, were also included and treated as a penalizing withdrawal code.

**Table 4**

*Exhibit 2: Dropout Withdrawal Codes and Definitions*

Dropout code	Definition
DNE	Any KG–12 student who was expected to attend a school but did not enter as expected for unknown reasons
W05	Any student aged 16 or older who leaves school voluntarily with no intention of returning
W13	Any KG–12 student withdrawn from school due to court action
W15	Any KG–12 student who is withdrawn from school due to nonattendance
W18	Any KG–12 student who withdraws from school due to medical reasons
W21	Any KG–12 student who is withdrawn from school due to being expelled
W22	Any KG–12 student whose whereabouts is unknown
W23	Any KG–12 student who withdraws from school for any reason other than W01 – W22 or W24 – W27

*Note.* Reprinted from Florida’s High School Cohort 2020–21 Dropout Rate by Florida Department of Education, 2022, p. 2.

Penalizing withdrawal codes are defined as inability of a school to graduate a student. Withdrawal codes WBA and WBB are linked to students who have completed all graduation requirements of credits but still need to satisfy other conditions that qualify them as graduates (e.g., testing, grade point average; Florida Department of Education, 1992). These students are awarded a certificate of completion and are not considered dropouts.

In Florida, a student who has dropped out is “a student who withdraws from school for several reasons without transferring to another school, home education program, or adult education program” (Florida Department of Education, 2020, p. 1). Dropping out of school can have significant negative consequences, including reduced employment opportunities, lower earnings, and poorer health outcomes. The outcome of dropping out is associated with prior academic achievement, family and personal factors, and school-related factors such as school climate and engagement. There are many reasons why students choose to dropout of K–12 schools. A negative perspective toward school, substance abuse, mental health issues, teenage pregnancy, and low parent–school involvement have been some of the highest noted external factors for why a student might dropout (Gubbels et al., 2019).

Internal factors such as low socioeconomic backgrounds, community detachment, grade retentions, learning difficulties, and low academic achievement have also been identified. These factors are conceived by being a part of school and student performance (Gubbels et al., 2019). Linked to poor student performance and other internal and external factors, lack of student engagement strongly influences the risk of students dropping out, which can come from poor



social experiences in school. Lack of student engagement can result from lack of positive attention from faculty members such as teachers and administrators. Identifying these factors has been the foundation for academic transition and dropout prevention programs.

Social and economic impact exists for students who dropout. Socially, dropping out has been a critical indicator for long-term consequences for individuals, including reductions in potential lifetime earnings, limited employment opportunities, growth in career trajectory, and lower quality of life (Permatasari & Artha, 2023). Dropping out also impacts society and extends far beyond the actual individual. Students who dropout perpetuate social inequalities, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Students with both high rates of internal and external factors have a higher risk of dropping out. These students have higher prevalence toward unemployment and poverty, which can result in increased reliance on social welfare programs and higher healthcare costs (Permatasari & Artha, 2023). The impact of dropping out can also lead to increased levels of distress, reduced professional opportunities, and with those limited opportunities to make an honest income, higher levels of criminality.

### Dropout Prevention

Tackling the issue of students dropping out of school demands a comprehensive and nuanced strategy. This approach should encompass an understanding of the social dynamics at play, fostering positive and supportive student–teacher relationships, engaging the community in the effort to support students, and assessing and improving the effectiveness of educational programs (Eysenbach, 2005; Gubbles, 2019). High school dropout rates can be influenced by a variety of factors, with variations according to grade level and age pointing to the complexity of the issue (Stearns & Glennie, 2006). These factors encompass academic struggles (e.g., difficulties with coursework), nonacademic challenges (e.g., familial or social issues), and

personal circumstances, including health or financial concerns. Understanding the interplay of these factors is crucial for developing effective interventions to reduce high school dropout rates. By taking these factors into account, efforts can be made toward creating an environment that encourages students to stay in school and thrive academically (Lan & Lanthier, 2003; Pierrakeas et al., 2004).

Dropout prevention programs based in schools and specifically tailored to support students at risk of dropping out are essential in reducing dropout rates and promoting academic success (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004). These programs encompass targeted interventions aimed at identifying and assisting struggling students, promoting student engagement through various means such as mentorship programs or extracurricular activities, and addressing diverse needs within the school environment, including those related to socioeconomic status, cultural background, and learning abilities (Charmaraman & Hall, 2011). By implementing such comprehensive programs, schools can create a supportive and inclusive environment that ensures the success of all students. In contrast, the lack of these interventions leaves students who eventually drop out of high school facing challenges such as unemployment, lower earnings, and a higher probability of being involved in criminal activities.

#### School-to-Prison Pipeline

The school-to-prison pipeline refers to the traditional education system's influence, leading to exclusionary practices pushing students into the justice system, especially those with poor high school outcomes (Butler, 2022; Gardner et al. 2022; Winn & Behzadeh, 2011). This element connects one's lack of academic success to criminality in the United States. Research has highlighted students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, particularly students from Black and Latinx backgrounds, have been disproportionately impacted by the pipeline (Clark,

2020). The pipeline has three components: (a) a lack of academic success, which leads to (b) limited economic resources and financial opportunities, and results in (c) criminality (Saidi, 2010).

### Mass Incarceration

At the supposed tail end of the pathway, the school-to-prison pipeline has guided individuals to the correctional system. However, in concentrated areas with large representations of marginalized individuals, it is a perpetual cycle (Sampson & Loeffler, 2010; see Figure 3). Sampson and Loeffler (2010) stated, “Hot spots for incarceration are hardly random; instead, they are systematically predicted by key social characteristics” (p. 21). Dropping out of high school significantly predicts negative outcomes, including increased unemployment rates, financial struggles, and mortality (Wood et al., 2017). Researchers have stated disciplinary policies in K–12 education impede students from learning opportunities that will lead to disenfranchisement (Wood, 2017). At the intersection of minoritized individuals with disabilities, 4 in 10 state prisoners (40%) and 3 in 10 federal prisoners (29%) reported having a disability (U.S. Department of Justice, 2016). Despite African Americans comprising only 13.8% of the population of the United States, they made up almost 38% of prison population racially in 2021 (U.S. Department of Justice, 2021a). Coincidentally, Hispanic individuals comprised around 19% of the population in the United States but comprised almost 31% of the prison population. This element has led to mass incarceration in the United States. However, due to the nature of the foundation and systems that perpetuate in society, like education, a seemingly never-ending cycle has promoted a correction system dominated by the number of vulnerable populations.



Figure 3. School-to-prison cycle.

### Summary

Research has stated due to exclusionary discipline practices, two subgroups share the most significant risk of dropping out—Black boys and students with disabilities that impede their learning ability. Student engagement has been the foundation of all dropout prevention programs, as a student who drops out lacks engagement the most (Fraysier et al., 2020). No current research

has supported the idea these subgroups of students act out more than their White or able peers, respectively (Skiba et al., 2002).

However, these subgroups have been subjected to harsher consequences as responses (e.g., out-of-school and in-school suspensions) that take them out of the classroom and result in a loss of instructional time. Historically, students of low socioeconomic backgrounds tended to be in the lower quartile or the lowest-performing students at a school. Typically, minoritized students and students with disabilities come from these backgrounds.

In summary, students who have performed the worst at a school site were generally the same students who are subjected to these disciplinary practices. Throughout the literature review, several themes emerged, including school discipline, CRT, discrimination in education, loss of instructional time, learning, special education/ESE, student achievement, and the school-to-prison pipeline. These themes helped identify the internal factors that lead students to drop out of school and become involved in criminality, ultimately leading to mass incarceration. Next, Chapter 3 specifies the process of looking at a school district to compare whether these practices directly influence whether students drop out.

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

### **Introduction**

Chapter 3 explains the methodology used in the research. This study provided insights into why students with disabilities who belong to minority groups dropout of school. The literature has indicated these students are more likely to dropout than their nondisabled and nonminority peers (Miller & Myers, 2015). This study focused on internal and exclusionary discipline factors, and the findings and recommendations are presented in a way that is easy to understand and apply to future research.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Chapter 2 highlighted a concerning cycle from school to mass incarceration. This cycle involves several stages. First, disciplinary practices remove vulnerable students from the instructional environment. Second, these removals promote a loss of instruction, leading to a lack of student engagement (Liu, 2022). This lack of engagement hinders students' academic performance, ultimately becoming the greatest factor in students dropping out.

As a result, dropping out leads to lowering future economic opportunities, promoting poverty and, in turn, facing criminality. This study aimed to focus on an overview of the first three prongs of this cycle, more specifically, use of exclusionary discipline practices that push students out of the K–12 school system (Pierre, 2019). Findings of this study serve as data-driven evidence that system provides limited options for vulnerable populations.

### **Population**

The target population for this study was K–12 students in a large school district in the United States. This district was located in Central Florida, and served 16 municipalities with Port Orange, Daytona Beach, Deltona, Deland, and Ormond Beach as the largest metropolitan areas.

At the time of this study, the school district employed approximately 7,600 employees, the largest employer in the county. In the district, there were a total of 87 schools: 45 elementary schools, 12 middle schools, nine high schools, 11 special center/alternative schools, seven charter schools, two combination schools (K–8/8–12), and one district virtual instruction program. Almost half of the instructional personnel held an advanced college degree (e.g., masters, educational specialist, and doctoral). Of the 7,750 employees in the district, 4,088 were instructors, 3,395 were support staff, and 267 were school/district administrators.

The school district had approximately 60,000 students, making it the 14th largest school district in the state of Florida. The sample obtained from individuals comprised four graduating 4-year cohorts, 2016–2017, 2017–2018, 2019–2020, and 2020–2021. These cohorts were organized by the year students entered ninth grade. For example, in the 2020–2021 graduation cohort, these students entered ninth grade in 2017–2018, which started that 4-year window. Early graduates, or students who graduated in 2020–2021 but entered high school in 2018–2019, would be coded in the 2021–2022 cohort.

### Variables

This study focused on specific demographics such as gender, age, exceptionalities, positive and negative W/D codes relevant to dropping out, neutral W/D codes, entry codes, transfer codes, English language learner status, socioeconomic status, grade, and 504 eligibility. These variables were referred to as moderate variables. Additionally, independent variables examined are exceptional student education (ESE), minoritized students, minoritized ESE students and exclusionary disciplinary practices (e.g., in-school and out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, Baker Act detentions, and referrals to law enforcement).

To better define this term, exclusionary discipline practices are consequences to unfavorable behaviors that remove students from learning in their regular classroom which include referrals to law enforcement, expulsion, involuntary discipline transfers, out-of-school suspension, in-school suspension, class suspension, and other informal short-term removals. Exclusionary does not refer to short-term consequences or interventions teachers use to address misconduct, including brief time-outs or other interventions, and generally keeping the student in the classroom environment. Such “exclusionary consequences also do not include other consequences or interventions that do not remove students from learning in their regular classroom, such as contact with parent(s)/guardian(s), lunch or after-school detention, Saturday school, or counseling” (School District Redacted 2022, p. 11).

In this study, in-school suspension was defined as, “Temporary removal of a student from a program not exceeding 10 days” (School District Redacted, 2022, p. 1). An out-of-school suspension was defined as, “When a student is temporarily removed from the school and the program not exceeding 10 days” (School District Redacted, 2022, p. 2). Any suspension exceeding 10 days was considered a change in placement and must be viewed as an extended suspension. The local school board must review to determine the next action (Florida Department of Education, 2016). For the term Baker Act, the study referred to Florida Statute 394.455(18) classification as the “Impairment of the mental or emotional processes that exercise conscious control of one’s actions or the ability to perceive or understand reality. An impairment substantially interferes with a person’s ability to meet the ordinary demands of living” (Florida Mental Health Act, 2023; Florida Statute 394.455(18))

Per the Florida Mental Health Act (2023), for a student to undergo an involuntary examination, they must fulfill certain criteria:



1. Reason to believe a person has a mental illness and because of mental illness, a person has refused or is unable to determine if the examination is necessary, and either:
2. Without care or treatment, one is likely to suffer from neglect or refuses care to self, and such neglect or refusal poses a real and present threat of substantial harm to one's well-being, and it is not apparent that such damage may be avoided through the help of willing family members, friends, or the provision of other services: or
3. There is a substantial likelihood that without treatment, the person will cause serious bodily harm to self or others shortly, as evidenced by recent behavior" (Florida Senate, Mental Health Act, 2023, pp. 394–210).

In this study, referrals to law enforcement occurred during a discipline proceeding; law enforcement had to intervene when there was a question of a matter of law. The student did not have to be arrested, and school resource deputies would consult with the student, parents, and faculty on potential legal actions in the future (School District Redacted, 2022b).

The dependent variable was the W/D code. The dependent variable was simplified dichotomously when measured. For example, W/Ds coded as dropout codes (e.g., W05, W13, W15, W18, W21, W22, W23, and W26) were referred to as yes, identifying the student as a dropout. Every other code will be simplified as no. These variables were based on the enrollment of school years 2016–2017, 2017–2018, 2018–2019, and 2020–2021, following the graduation cohorts in the sample.

### Instrumentation

The data were archived and extracted from multiple sources. The study's methodological foundation was built under the influence of two studies. First, in *Disparities in School Discipline*

*Practices for Students with Emotional and Learning Disabilities and Autism*, a study was conducted to answer the research questions of “Are students with disabilities (1) suspended (both in- and out-of-school), (2) expelled, (3) referred to law enforcement, and (4) dropping out at significantly different rates compared with students without disabilities?” (Miller & Myers, 2015, p. 257). To determine whether students with disabilities were suspended at disproportionate rates compared to students without the specified disabilities, researchers used numerous chi-squares to differentiate the two independent variables. Even after disaggregating the data to limited English proficiency status, gender, and race, researchers used chi-squares to determine the relationships of all the variables.

To successfully run a chi-square of independence, three assumptions must be met for accurate results:

1. The purpose of the test is to analyze and assess the relationship between different categorical variables.
  - a. Chi-square test is primarily used for categorical data, which can be either nominal or ordinal.
  - b. Levels/categories are mutually exclusive.
2. Use random sampling methods to obtain a sample from the population.
  - a. No repeatable data.
3. The sample size is sufficient to obtain reliable and representative results.
  - a. A sufficiently large sample size is crucial for the reliability and validity of the chi-square test.
  - b. A larger sample size ensures that the expected frequencies in each cell are high enough to meet the assumptions of the chi-square distribution.

The other statistical test was grounded in the research from *Factors Potentially Influencing Discipline Referral and Suspensions at an Affiliated Charter High School*, with the researchers wanting to determine what predictors influence certain high school disciplinary outcomes (Bryant & Wilson, 2020). In the correlational explanatory study, researchers used logistic regressions to predict the likelihood of a student being “suspended given additional factors such as their ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status” and to “predict the likelihood of a student receiving a discipline referral based on ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status” (Bryant & Wilson, 2020, p. 123). Upon confirming the variables are independent, the research determined if there is a significant relationship between independent and dependent variables.

To successfully run a chi-square of independence, three assumptions must be met for accurate results:

1. The response variable is binary
  - a. The outcome variable should have two possible values, often coded as 0 and 1 (i.e. yes/no, success/failure, or presence/absence).
2. Observations are independent of each other
  - a. Each observation in the dataset should be independent, meaning the value of the response variable for one observation should not influence or be influenced by the value for another observation.
3. Little to no multicollinearity
  - a. Multicollinearity occurs when two or more predictor variables are highly correlated, meaning they provide redundant information about the response variable.
4. No extreme outliers

- a. Outliers are data points that are significantly different from others in the dataset.
5. Assume linearity (model fit)
- a. Assume a linear relationship between the log odds of the response variable and the predictor variables. This means that the logit transformation of the response variable should have a linear relationship with the predictors.
6. Large sample size
- a. A reasonably large sample size to produce reliable and stable estimates of the coefficients. A common rule of thumb is to have at least 10 events per predictor variable in the model.

#### Data Collection

The data were requested from the research, evaluation, and accounting department of a local school district that contained records for enrollment, graduation, and dropout data. Also, data were extracted from the local school district FOCUS database that archived student grades, attendance, discipline records, enrollment records, and student demographics. FOCUS is a student information system used to store student data. The school district chosen for this study used this system to store student data. The data were compounded into one dataset.

These data were pulled from FOCUS for the local school district. FOCUS contained enrollment, discipline data, student demographics, and attendance records. Dataset A had the data required for in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, suspensions of 11 days or more needed for review, or pending expulsions; enrollment data that included entry, transfer, and withdrawal codes; and student demographic data that provided race, gender, age, exceptionalities, English language learner status, socioeconomic status, grade, and 504

eligibility. The data were then specified to the student groups for analysis: Dataset A included minoritized students with disabilities, Dataset B included students with disabilities, and Dataset C included minoritized students.

### Data Analysis

The study was quantitative in nature. First, the researcher used IBM SPSS Version 29 to administer descriptive statistics to summarize the collected datasets. IBM SPSS Version 29 is a software used to analyze statistical gathered data. With the use of SPSS, the researcher confirmed the sample collected from the targeted population was adequate to run the statistical tests. Descriptive statistics summarized the discipline data, enrollment, student demographic, and attendance records from the local school district school years' 2016–2017, 2017–2018, 2018–2019, and 2020–2021 cohorts.

To select the appropriate statistical test, the researcher concluded on two assumptions. First, it was determined both the independent variables (e.g., Students Ever Having ISS, Having OSS, Been Under Baker Act, Had Law Enforcement Intervention) and dependent variables (e.g., W06, WBA, W22) were on a categorical level. The researcher assumed variables being studied were categorical data and came from two independent groups. The variables considered were discipline practices, race, and ESE status.

The study examined multiple races and multiple ESE exceptionalities (e.g., autism spectrum disorder, specific learning disorder, and emotional/behavioral disorder) and classified them as minoritized and ESE student respectively. These variables were simplified to only consider whether the student was ESE or not. Also, various forms of discipline practices (e.g., in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, Baker Act detention) were translated to Students

Ever Having ISS, Ever Having OSS, Been Under Baker Act, Had Law Enforcement Intervention.

Finally, the dependent variable or outcome analyzed was the student withdrawal code based on their most recent enrollment record (e.g., W06, WBA, W22). This code was used to determine whether the student should be considered a dropout or not. Under these assumptions, the researcher ran chi-square tests for independence to determine whether the variables' association was significant. This study consisted of a principal inquiry, accompanied by additional questions that aimed to offer a comprehensive comprehension of the crucial interconnected frameworks:

#### Disability Critical Race Theory

Research Question 1: Is there a relationship between school discipline practices and minoritized students with disabilities dropout rates?

Null Hypothesis ( $H_0$ ): No, there is no relationship between school discipline practices and minoritized students with disabilities dropout rates.

Hypothesis ( $H_A$ ): Yes, there a relationship between school discipline practices and minoritized students with disabilities dropout rates.

Additional Questions

#### Disability Studies in Education

Research Question 1a: Is there a relationship between school discipline practices and students with disabilities dropout rates?

Null Hypothesis ( $H_0$ ): No, there is no relationship between school discipline practices and students with disabilities dropout rates.

Hypothesis ( $H_A$ ): Yes, there Is a relationship between school discipline practices and students with disabilities dropout rates.

### Critical Race Theory

Research Question 1b: Is there a relationship between school discipline practices and students' dropout rates?

Null Hypothesis ( $H_0$ ): No, there is no relationship between school discipline practices and minoritized students' dropout rates.

Hypothesis ( $H_A$ ): Yes, there is a relationship between school discipline practices and minoritized students' dropout rates.

If the  $p$ -values determined after the regression test were less than or equal to the significance level specified, the researcher answered whether the relationship between the independent and dependent variables was statistically significant, to which the researcher rejected the null hypothesis. If the  $p$ -values were greater, the researcher answered the research question(s) by accepting the null hypothesis.

### Validity and Reliability

To ensure the reliability of the tools used in the study, to establish a correlation between school discipline practices and dropout rates of minoritized students with disabilities. The study was framed using the Disability Critical Race Theory theoretical framework, which served as a guiding principle throughout the research process. To establish a causal relationship between the independent and dependent variables, the researcher extensively reviewed the literature and research findings to ensure internal validity. Using descriptive statistics, the researcher established external validity by comparing the model with national averages, making the findings applicable beyond the study population.

## Summary

Chapter 3 outlined the aim of this study to investigate the reasons behind the high dropout rates among minoritized students with disabilities. The study focused on the first three prongs of the school-to-mass incarceration cycle, which includes the use of exclusionary discipline practices in K–12 schools. The survey targeted K–12 students in a large school district with approximately 60,000 students. The sample consisted of five graduating 4-year cohorts. The study examined various factors, including demographics (e.g., gender, age, exceptionalities), as desired variables and independent variables, such as ESE students, minoritized students, and exclusionary disciplinary practices. The dependent variable was the withdrawal (W/D) code, which simplified dichotomously as either dropout or no dropout.

The study relied on archived data from a local school district, which included information on discipline, student demographics, enrollment, graduation, and dropout data. The data analysis was quantitative, using SPSS to conduct descriptive statistics and chi-square tests for independence to determine the relationship between independent and dependent variables. Logistic regression determined likelihood of dropout outcomes on minoritized ESE students, and their data were also disaggregated by ethnicity, English language learner, gender, socioeconomic status, and other variables. The study examined the experiences of these students as they faced exclusionary discipline practices.

Overall, the study aimed to provide data-driven evidence of the oppressive system's limited options for vulnerable populations and make recommendations for further research based on the findings that are discussed in Chapter 4.



## **CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS**

This study investigated the correlation between discipline practices that exclude marginalized students with disabilities and their dropout rates. The literature review covered various topics, such as school culture, discipline, intersectionality, restorative justice, and social-emotional learning. The study aimed to address the disproportionate impact of disciplinary practices on marginalized students with disabilities. Disability Critical Race Theory provided the theoretical framework for driving positive change. This study aimed to assess disciplinary practices in a Florida school district. Inequitable practices and exclusionary methods in the K–12 system have affected the prediction of unfavorable life outcomes for future students.

The purpose of this study was to show individuals with disabilities are significantly more likely to be subjected to disciplinary measures than their nondisabled peers (Chirwa et al., 2021). This disparity highlights the need for a more equitable and inclusive approach to addressing discipline issues in the education system. Moreover, students who belong to multiple subgroups face even higher discipline rates. Therefore, it is crucial to investigate whether these discipline practices cause students to leave the K–12 school system, resulting in increased school dropout rates in Florida.

Chapter 4 of the study involves a detailed examination of data collected from 27,986 students with diverse backgrounds. These students all received at least one referral during their time in the school district, which led to an in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, intervention by law enforcement, or being put under a Baker Act.

### **Descriptive Statistics**

The research study divided the sample into three datasets to address the research questions. Dataset A comprised 1,995 students who belonged to the minoritized exceptional

student education (ESE) groups. This subgroup was selected to answer the primary research question: is there a relationship between school discipline practices and minoritized students with disabilities dropout rates? Dataset A was further segmented into two different datasets to reflect the relationship of 11,648 minoritized students who received at least one referral during their time in the school district, which led to an in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, intervention by law enforcement, or being put under a Baker Act program. These two datasets were labeled as Dataset B and Dataset C, respectively.

Dataset B collected student data of 4,354 ESE students who had received at least one referral during their time in the school district, which led to an in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, intervention by law enforcement, or being put under a Baker Act program. This dataset was created to investigate whether there was a correlation between exclusionary discipline practices and the academic achievement of ESE students.

Dataset C focused on the relationship between exclusionary discipline practices and the racial achievement gap in the school district of 11,648 minoritized students who had received at least one referral during their time in the school district, which led to an in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, intervention by law enforcement, or being put under a Baker Act program

Overall, the study aimed to understand the extent to which exclusionary discipline practices affect the academic achievement and retention rates of minoritized ESE students in the school district.

Dataset A encompassed a comprehensive study of 1,995 students, revealing some critical insights into the student population's demographics and disciplinary actions (see Table 5). Out of these 1,995 students, 727 were identified as female, and 1,268 were identified as male, making

up 36.2% and 63.1% of the entire student population, respectively. Additionally, two students, or 0.1% of the minoritized EC student population, were identified as 504 students. Title 1 status was identified for 366 students, equivalent to 18.2% of the dataset. Moreover, 24.1% or 483 students of the 1,995 population were identified as ELL or English language learning students. This information reveals that there is a diverse range of students in the school population with different backgrounds and learning needs.

**Table 5**

*Dataset A Descriptive Statistics*

	Frequency		Percentage	
Gender	727 females	1268 males	36.2 females	63.1 males
504 student	2 students		.1	
Title I student	366 students		18.2	
ELL student	483 students		24.1	
Ever had ISS?	1242 students		61.9	
Ever had OSS?	963 students		48.0	
Ever had law enforcement intervention?	47 students		2.3	
Ever been under Baker Act?	14 students		.7	
Dropout?	186 students		9.3	

As per the study, minoritized students with disabilities received disciplinary consequences, including removal from the classroom. In Dataset A, 1,242 students, or 61.9% of minoritized ESE students, received in-school suspension, and 963 students, or 48%, received out-of-school suspension. These data indicated that students with disabilities were more likely to face disciplinary consequences than other students in the school. Furthermore, only 47 students, or 2.3% of the ESC minoritized student population, had law enforcement intervention. Moreover,

14 students, or 0.7% of the 1,995 students, were placed under the Baker Act due to disciplinary actions. These numbers are relatively small, suggesting that law enforcement intervention and Baker Act placement are not common disciplinary actions in the school.

Out of the 1,995 students, 186 students, or 9.3% of students that had received a disciplinary action resulting in an exclusionary disciplinary consequence, were considered as dropouts. This information shows that disciplinary actions can have significant consequences for students and their academic progress.

Dataset B contained a comprehensive record of 4,354 ESE students, including 1,599 female students and 2,755 male students (see Table 6). In terms of gender distribution, the number of male students was higher than that of female students, with males representing 63.6% of the student population, and females made up 36.1%. A small fraction of 0.3% of the total student population consisted of 504 students who have been identified as such. Additionally, 634 students, or 14.5% of the total student population, represented the student population for Title I students. Moreover, 515 students, or 11.8%, were identified as English language learners.

**Table 6**

*Dataset B Descriptive Statistics*

Question	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	1599 females    2755 males	36.1females    63.6males
504 student	15 students	.3
Title I student	634 students	14.5
ELL student	515 students	11.8
Ever had ISS?	2489 students	57.0
Ever had OSS?	1829 students	41.9
Ever had law enforcement intervention?	85 students	1.9
Ever been under Baker Act?	28 students	.6
Considered a dropout?	467 students	10.7

The disciplinary practices in the dataset were consistent with previous datasets for offenses resulting in exclusionary discipline. Specifically, 2,489 students, or 57% of students who received a referral, were listed in the dataset. Furthermore, 1,829 students, or 41.9% of the total ESE student population, had received an out-of-school suspension. Among disciplinary infractions, 85 students, or 1.9% of the ESE student population, underwent law enforcement intervention, and 28 students, or 0.6% of the ESE student population, were put under the Baker Act.

Finally, the dataset revealed 467 students, or 10.7% of the total student population, were classified as dropouts. The dataset provided a detailed account of the ESE student population, including their demographic profile, disciplinary practices, and dropout rates, which can be used for further research and analysis.

Dataset C included a collection of data including information on 11,648 minority students who had received disciplinary practices that resulted in exclusion from school (see Table 7). This dataset provide detailed information on the demographic characteristics of these students, including their gender and academic status.

**Table 7***Dataset C Descriptive Statistics*

Question	Frequency		Percentage	
Gender	5876 females	5772 males	50.4 females	49.5 males
504 student	227 students		1.9	
Title I student	1635 students		14.0	
ELL student	2689 students		23.1	
Ever had ISS?	5809 students		49.8	
Ever had OSS?	3949 students		33.9	
Ever had law enforcement intervention?	126 students		1.1	
Ever been under Baker Act?	15 students		.1	
Considered a dropout?	685 students		5.9	

Out of the 11,648 minority students in the dataset, 5,876 were identified as females and 5,772 were identified as males. This means females made up 50.4% of the minority student population, and males made up 49.5% of the population. Furthermore, in the minority student population, 227 students (1.9%) were identified as 504 students, 1,635 (14%) as Title 1 students, and 2,689 (23.1%) as English language learners.

The dataset also provided information on the disciplinary actions taken against these minority students. For example, out of the minority student population, 5,809 students (49.8%) received in-school suspension, and 3,949 students (33.9%) received out-of-school suspension. Only 126 students (i.e., 1.1% of the minority student population) faced law enforcement intervention due to disciplinary action, and 15 students (i.e., 0.1% of the minority student population) were placed under the Baker Act as a result of disciplinary actions.

Additionally, this dataset provided information on the academic status of these minority students. For instance, 685 students (i.e., 5.19% of the minority student population) were considered dropouts.

### Research Question 1

Research Question 1 asked, is there a relationship between school discipline practices and minoritized students with disabilities dropout rates? The first research question examined use of exclusionary discipline practices against minority students with disabilities and their effects on whether they dropout or not. Dataset A examined 1,995 ESE minoritized students who had received some sort of exclusionary discipline practice (i.e., in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, law enforcement intervention, and/or Baker Act). To answer the question, the researcher decided to administer a binary logistic regression to examine the relationship.

#### Assumptions of Research Question 1

The aim of the binary logistic regression analysis in this study was to evaluate the adherence to key assumptions essential for ensuring the validity and reliability of the model. The dataset comprised 1,995 individual student cases, with each variable being categorical, thus fulfilling the requirements for conducting a chi-square analysis that overlaps the assumptions for binary logistic regression analysis.

The initial condition that the response variable must be binary has been satisfied. The dataset consisted of 1,995 cases, with 186 instances marked as “Yes” and 1,809 instances marked as “No.” This binary classification is essential for logistic regression, as it enables the model to calculate the probability of one outcome relative to the other.

The second condition, which required observations must be independent of one another, was also met. The dataset consisted of 1,995 individual students, ensuring that each observation was independent and not affected by other data points.

The analysis confirmed that there were no significant issues with multicollinearity. The predictor variables offer distinct and valuable contributions to the model without redundancy or

inflated standard errors that could compromise the results. This fulfills the third assumption and ensures the reliability of the model.

However, the fourth assumption, which necessitates the absence of extreme outliers, was not satisfied. There were 52 cases identified as outliers, in which students were categorized as dropouts despite not experiencing exclusionary disciplinary actions. These outliers were included in the analysis to ensure a more thorough understanding of the study's results, although their presence could potentially impact the model's estimates.

The fifth assumption, which involves the linearity of the logit with respect to the predictor variables, was met. The model showed a good fit, as confirmed by the chi-square test (chi-square = 1.838,  $df = 3$ , Sig. = .607). With a high p-value ( $p > .05$ ), there is no significant difference between observed and predicted values, indicating that the linearity assumption is valid.

Finally, it should be noted the assumption of a sufficiently large sample size was only partially met. Although most predictor variables had at least 40 events and 40 nonevents, the Baker Act variable had only 14 events. This inadequate sample size for the Baker Acts predictor may have impacted the reliability and generalizability of the model's results for this particular variable.

### Chi-Squares

For each dataset, chi-squares were implemented to compare the independent variables. These variables included whether a student had ever been subjected to in-school suspension (ISS), out-of-school suspension (OSS), law enforcement intervention, and/or been placed under Baker Act. These variables were compared with the dependent variable, which was whether the



student was considered a dropout or not. The crosstabulation for the dataset illustrates how these variables interact (see Table 8).

**Table 8**

*Dataset A ESE Minority Crosstabulation*

Question	Yes/No	Considered a dropout?		Total
		No	Yes	
Ever had an ISS?	No	731	22	753
	Yes	1078	164	1242
Total		1809	186	1995
Ever had an OSS?	No	982	50	1032
	Yes	827	136	963
Total		1809	186	1995
Ever under Baker Act?	No	1799	182	1981
	Yes	10	4	14
Total		1809	186	1995
Ever had law enforcement intervention?	No	1777	171	1948
	Yes	32	15	47
Total		1809	186	1995

Chi-square tests for independence were conducted to determine whether the independent variables and dependent variable were independent of each other. This analysis was done by examining the association between the independent and dependent variables.

A chi-square test of independence was conducted to determine whether minoritized ESE students had ever received ISS as a disciplinary consequence and whether they were considered dropouts or not (see Table 9). The Pearson chi-square value of 58.632 ( $df = 1$ ,  $p < .001$ ), the continuity correction value of 57.422 ( $df = 1$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and the likelihood ratio of 68.520 ( $df = 1$ ,  $p < .001$ ) all indicate highly significant results. The Fisher's Exact Test confirms these findings, while the Phi and Cramer's V values of .171 suggest a moderate effect size. The analysis includes 1,995 valid cases.

**Table 9***Ever Had ISS? Chi-Square Test Results*

Test	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson chi-square	58.632 <sup>a</sup>	1	< .001	-	-
Continuity correction <sup>b</sup>	57.422	1	< .001	-	-
Likelihood ratio	68.520	1	< .001	-	-
Fisher's Exact Test	-	-	-	< .001	< .001
Phi	.171	-	< .001	-	-
Cramer's V	.171	-	< .001	-	-
n of valid cases	1995	-	-	-	-

*Note.* a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 70.20.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table.

A chi-square test of independence was conducted between whether minoritized ESE students who had ever received OSS as a disciplinary consequence and if they were considered a dropout or not (see Table 10). The Pearson chi-square value of 50.718 ( $df = 1$ ,  $p < .001$ ), the continuity correction value of 49.627 ( $df = 1$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and the likelihood ratio of 52.228 ( $df = 1$ ,  $p < .001$ ) all demonstrate strong statistical significance. Additionally, the Fisher's Exact Test supports these findings, while the Phi and Cramer's V values of .159 suggest a moderate effect size. The analysis was conducted on 1,995 valid cases.

**Table 10***Ever Had OSS? Chi-Square Test Results*

Test	Value	df	Asymptotic significance (2-sided)	Exact sig. (2- sided)	Exact sig. (1-sided)
Pearson chi-square	50.718 <sup>a</sup>	1	<.001	-	-
Continuity correction <sup>b</sup>	49.627	1	<.001	-	-
Likelihood ratio	52.228	1	<.001	-	-
Fisher's Exact Test	-	-	-	<.001	<.001
Phi	.159	-	< .001	-	-
Cramer's V	.159	-	< .001	-	-
<i>n</i> of valid cases	1995	-	-	-	-

*Note.* a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 89.78.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table.

A chi-square test of independence was conducted between whether minoritized ESE students had ever had a law enforcement intervention as a disciplinary consequence and if they were considered a dropout or not (see Table 11). The Pearson chi-square value of 29.059 ( $df = 1$ ,  $p < .001$ ), the continuity correction value of 26.387 ( $df = 1$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and the likelihood ratio of 19.275 ( $df = 1$ ,  $p < .001$ ) all indicate strong significance. Additionally, the Fisher's Exact Test confirms these results, while the Phi and Cramer's V values of .121 suggest a mild effect size. The analysis includes 1,995 valid cases.

**Table 11***Ever Had Law Enforcement Intervention? Chi-Square Test Results*

Test	Value	<i>df</i>	Asymptotic significance (2-sided)	Exact sig. (2-sided)	Exact sig. (1-sided)
Pearson chi-square	29.059 <sup>a</sup>	1	< .001	-	-
Continuity correction <sup>b</sup>	26.387	1	< .001	-	-
Likelihood ratio	19.275	1	< .001	-	-
Fisher's Exact Test	-	-	-	< .001	< .001
Phi	.121	-	< .001	-	-
Cramer's V	.121	-	< .001	-	-
<i>n</i> of valid cases	1995	-	-	-	-

*Note.* a. 1 cells (25.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 4.38.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table.

A chi-square test of independence was conducted between whether minoritized ESE students had ever been placed under a Baker Act as a disciplinary consequence and if they were considered a dropout or not (see Table 12). The Pearson chi-square value of 6.179 ( $df = 1$ ,  $p = .013$ ), the continuity correction value of 4.099 ( $df = 1$ ,  $p = .043$ ), and the likelihood ratio of 4.231 ( $df = 1$ ,  $p = .040$ ) all show notable significance. The Phi and Cramer's V values of .056 suggest a small effect size. The analysis was conducted on 1,995 valid cases.

**Table 12***Ever Been Placed Under Baker Act? Chi-Square Test Results*

Test	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson chi-square	6.179 <sup>a</sup>	1	.013	-	-
Continuity correction <sup>b</sup>	4.099	1	.043	-	-
Likelihood ratio	4.231	1	.040	-	-
Fisher's Exact Test	-	-	-	.035	.035
Phi	.056	-	.013	-	-
Cramer's V	.056	-	.013	-	-
n of valid cases	1995	-	-	-	-

*Note.* a. 1 cells (25.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.31.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table.

### Logistic Regression

For ISS, the coefficient was -1.241 and the *p*-value was less than 0.001, meaning it was significantly associated with a decrease in the log odds of being considered a dropout (see Table 13). As stated before, the odds ratio (Exp[B]) was 0.289, indicating individuals who had ISS were about 0.289 times as likely to be considered dropouts compared to those who had not, holding other variables constant.

**Table 13***Dataset A ESE Minority Logistic Regression*

Question	B	SE	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% CI for Exp(B)
							Lower
Ever had ISS?(1)	-1.241	.260	22.836	1	<.001	.289	.174
Ever had OSS?(1)	-.545	.196	7.741	1	.005	.580	.395
Ever had law enforcement intervention?(1)	-.999	.337	8.759	1	.003	.368	.190
Ever under Baker Act?(1)	-.608	.641	.900	1	.343	.544	.155
Constant	-.200	.644	.097	1	.756	.818	

For OSS, the coefficient was -0.545 with a significant  $p$ -value of 0.005, implying having OSS was significantly associated with a decrease in the log odds of being considered a dropout. The odds ratio was 0.580, suggesting individuals who had OSS were about 0.580 times as likely to be considered dropouts compared to those who had not, holding other variables constant.

For ISS, the coefficient was -1.241 and  $p$ -value was less than 0.001, meaning it was significantly associated with a decrease in the log odds of being considered a dropout. As stated before, the odds ratio was 0.289, indicating individuals who had ISS were about 0.289 times as likely to be considered dropouts compared to those who had not, holding other variables constant.

For OSS, the coefficient was -0.545 with a significant  $p$ -value of 0.005, implying having OSS was significantly associated with a decrease in the log odds of being considered a dropout. The odds ratio was 0.580, suggesting individuals who had OSS were about 0.580 times as likely to be considered dropouts compared to those who had not, holding other variables constant.

For law enforcement intervention, the coefficient was -0.999, with a significant  $p$ -value of 0.003, indicating having law enforcement intervention was significantly associated with a

decrease in the log odds of being considered a dropout. The odds ratio was 0.368, implying individuals who had law enforcement intervention were about 0.368 times as likely to be considered dropouts compared to those who had not, holding other variables constant.

As for being under the Baker Act, the coefficient was -0.608, with a nonsignificant  $p$ -value of 0.343, meaning it was not significantly associated with the likelihood of being considered a dropout. The odds ratio was 0.544; however, as the  $p$ -value was not significant, one cannot conclude a meaningful interpretation of this predictor's effect on dropout likelihood.

Lastly, the constant term represented the log odds of being considered a dropout when all predictor variables were zero. Its coefficient was -0.200, with a nonsignificant  $p$ -value of 0.756, indicating the constant term was not significantly different from zero.

#### Research Question 1a

This study consisted of a principal inquiry, accompanied by additional questions that aimed to comprehend the crucial interconnected frameworks. Research Question 1a asked, Is there a relationship between school discipline practices and students with disabilities dropout rates? The first research question examined the use of exclusionary discipline practices against minority students with disabilities and their effects on whether students drop out or not. Dataset B examined 4,354 ESE students who had received some sort of exclusionary discipline practice (i.e., ISS, OSS, law enforcement intervention, and/or Baker Act). To answer the question, the researcher decided to administer a binary logistic regression to examine the relationship.

#### Assumptions of Research Question 1a

The aim of the binary logistic regression analysis in this study was to evaluate the adherence to key assumptions essential for ensuring the validity and reliability of the model. The dataset comprised 4,354 individual student cases, with each variable being categorical, thus

fulfilling the requirements for conducting a chi-square analysis that overlaps the assumptions for binary logistic regression analysis.

The initial condition that the response variable must be binary has been satisfied. The dataset consisted of 4,354 cases, with 467 instances marked as "Yes" and 3,887 instances marked as "No." This binary classification is essential for logistic regression, as it enables the model to calculate the probability of one outcome relative to the other.

The second condition, which requires that observations must be independent of one another, was also met. The dataset consisted of 4,354 individual students, ensuring that each observation was independent and not affected by other data points.

The analysis confirmed that there were no significant issues with multicollinearity. The predictor variables offer distinct and valuable contributions to the model without redundancy or inflated standard errors that could compromise the results. This fulfills the third assumption and ensures the reliability of the model.

However, the fourth assumption, which necessitates the absence of extreme outliers, was not satisfied. There were 156 cases identified as outliers, in which students were categorized as dropouts despite not experiencing exclusionary disciplinary actions. These outliers were included in the analysis to ensure a more thorough understanding of the study's results, although their presence could potentially impact the model's estimates.

The fifth assumption, which involves the linearity of the logit with respect to the predictor variables, was met. The model showed a good fit, as confirmed by the chi-square test (chi-square = 1.149,  $df = 3$ , Sig. = .765). With a high p-value ( $p > .05$ ), there is no significant difference between observed and predicted values, indicating that the linearity assumption is valid.



Finally, it should be noted the assumption of a sufficiently large sample size was only partially met. Although most predictor variables had at least 40 events and 40 nonevents, the Baker Acts variable had only 28 events. This inadequate sample size for the Baker Acts predictor may have impacted the reliability and generalizability of the model's results for this particular variable.

### Chi-Squares

The crosstabulation within the dataset offers a comprehensive visual depiction of how the variables within the data set interact with each other (see Table 14).

**Table 14**

*Dataset B ESE Student Crosstabulation*

Question	Yes/No	Considered a dropout?		Total
		No	Yes	
Ever had an ISS?	No	731	22	753
	Yes	1078	164	1242
Total	-	1809	186	1995
Ever had an OSS?	No	892	50	1032
	Yes	827	136	963
Total	-	1809	186	1995
Ever under Baker Act?	No	1799	182	1981
	Yes	10	4	14
Total	-	1809	186	1995
Ever had law enforcement intervention?	No	1777	171	1948
	Yes	32	15	47
Total	-	1809	186	1995

A chi-square test of independence was conducted between whether ESE students who had ever received ISS as a disciplinary consequence and if these students were considered a dropout or not (see Table 15). The Pearson chi-square value of 158.081 ( $df = 1$ ,  $p < .001$ ), the

continuity correction value of 156.840 ( $df = 1, p < .001$ ), and the likelihood ratio of 176.405 ( $df = 1, p < .001$ ) all demonstrate strong significance. The Fisher's Exact Test supports these findings, while the Phi and Cramer's V values of .191 suggest a moderate effect size. The analysis was conducted on 4,354 valid cases.

**Table 15**

*Ever Had ISS? Chi-Square Test Results*

Test	Value	$df$	Asymptotic significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson chi-square	158.081 <sup>a</sup>	1	<.001	-	-
Continuity correction <sup>b</sup>	156.840	1	<.001	-	-
Likelihood ratio	176.405	1	<.001	-	-
Fisher's Exact Test	-	-	-	<.001	<.001
Phi	.191	-	<.001	-	-
Cramer's V	.191	-	<.001	-	-
$n$ of valid cases	4354	-	-	-	-

*Note.* a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 341.62.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table.

A chi-square test of independence was conducted between whether ESE students who had ever received OSS as a disciplinary consequence and if they were considered a dropout or not see Table 16). The Pearson chi-square value of 155.882 ( $df = 1, p < .001$ ), the continuity correction value of 154.646 ( $df = 1, p < .001$ ), and the likelihood ratio of 154.809 ( $df = 1, p < .001$ ) all indicate strong statistical significance. The Fisher's Exact Test confirms these results, with Phi and Cramer's V values of .189 suggesting a moderate effect size. The analysis includes 4,354 valid cases.

**Table 16***Ever Had OSS? Chi-Square Results*

Test	Value	df	Asymptotic significance (2-sided)	Exact sig. (2- sided)	Exact sig. (1-sided)
Pearson chi-square	155.882 <sup>a</sup>	1	< .001	-	-
Continuity correction <sup>b</sup>	154.646	1	< .001	-	-
Likelihood ratio	154.809	1	< .001	-	-
Fisher's Exact Test	-	-	-	< .001	< .001
Phi	.189	-	< .001	-	-
Cramer's V	.189	-	< .001	-	-
n of valid cases	4354	-	-	-	-

*Note.* a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 196.17.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table.

A chi-square test of independence was conducted between whether ESE students had ever had a law enforcement intervention as a disciplinary consequence and if they were considered a dropout or not (see Table 17). The Pearson chi-square value of 44.682 ( $df = 1$ ,  $p < .001$ ), the continuity correction value of 42.347 ( $df = 1$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and the likelihood ratio of 31.099 ( $df = 1$ ,  $p < .001$ ) all demonstrate strong significance. The Fisher's Exact Test supports these findings, with Phi and Cramer's V values of .101 suggesting a small to moderate effect size. The analysis was conducted on 4,354 valid cases.

**Table 17***Ever Had Law Enforcement Intervention? Chi-Square Test Results*

Test	Value	<i>df</i>	Asymptotic Significance (2- sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson chi-square	44.682 <sup>a</sup>	1	< .001	-	-
Continuity correction <sup>b</sup>	42.347	1	< .001	-	-
Likelihood ratio	31.099	1	< .001	-	-
Fisher's Exact Test	-	-	-	< .001	< .001
Phi	.101	-	< .001	-	-
Cramer's V	.101	-	< .001	-	-
<i>n</i> of valid cases	4354	-	-	-	-

*Note.* a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 9.12.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table.

A chi-square test of independence was conducted between whether ESE students had ever been placed under a Baker Act as a disciplinary consequence and if they were considered a dropout or not (see Table 18). The Pearson chi-square value of 3.371 ( $df = 1$ ,  $p = .066$ ), the continuity correction value of 2.340 ( $df = 1$ ,  $p = .126$ ), and the likelihood ratio of 2.708 ( $df = 1$ ,  $p = .100$ ) all show non-significance. The Fisher's Exact Test results further support this, with Phi and Cramer's V values of .028 suggesting a very small effect size. The analysis was conducted on 4,354 valid cases.

**Table 18***Ever Been Placed Under Baker Act? Chi-Square Test Results*

Test	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2- sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson chi-square	3.371 <sup>a</sup>	1	.066	-	-
Continuity correction <sup>b</sup>	2.340	1	.126	-	-
Likelihood ratio	2.708	1	.100	-	-
Fisher's Exact Test	-	-	-	.113	.072
Phi	.028	-	< .001	-	-
Cramer's V	.028	-	< .001	-	-
n of valid cases	4354	-	-	-	-

*Note.* a. 1 cells (25.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.00.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table.

Individuals who experienced ISS had a coefficient of 1.103 with a standard error of 0.150. The Wald statistic was 54.133 with 1 degree of freedom, indicating a *p*-value of less than .001. The odds ratio was 3.012, which suggests those who had ISS were 3 times more likely to have the outcome than those who had not. The 95% confidence interval for the odds ratio was 2.246 to lower (see Table 19).

**Table 19***Dataset B ESE Regression Variables*

Question	B	SE	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% CI for Exp(B) Lower
Ever had ISS?(1)	1.103	.150	54.133	1	<.001	3.012	2.246
Ever had OSS?(1)	.680	.122	31.082	1	<.001	1.973	1.554
Ever had law enforcement intervention?(1)	.843	.244	11.946	1	<.001	2.324	1.441
Ever under Baker Act?(1)	.005	.482	.000	1	.992	1.005	.391
Constant	-3.296	.121	736.749	1	<.001	.037	

Those students who experienced OSS had a coefficient of 0.680 with a standard error of 0.122. The Wald statistic was 31.082 with 1 degree of freedom and a significant  $p$ -value of less than .001. The odds ratio was 1.973, indicating those who had OSS were almost 2 times more likely to have the outcome than those who had not. The 95% confidence interval for the odds ratio ranged from 1.554 to lower.

Individuals who had law enforcement intervention had a coefficient of 0.843 with a standard error of 0.244. The Wald statistic was 11.946 with 1 degree of freedom and a significant  $p$ -value of less than .001. The odds ratio was 2.324, suggesting those who had law enforcement intervention were over 2 times more likely to have the outcome than those who had not. The 95% confidence interval for the odds ratio ranged from 1.441 to lower.

Being under the Baker Act had a coefficient of 0.005 with a standard error of 0.482. The Wald statistic was 0.000 with 1 degree of freedom and a nonsignificant  $p$ -value of 0.992. The odds ratio was 1.005, indicating it did not have a significant effect on the outcome. The 95% confidence interval for the odds ratio ranged from 0.391 to lower.

### Research Question 1b

This study consisted of a principal inquiry, accompanied by additional questions that aimed to comprehend the crucial interconnected frameworks. Research Question 1b asked, is there a relationship between school discipline practices and minoritized students with disabilities dropout rates? The first research question examined the practice of exclusionary discipline practices and minority students with disabilities and their effects on whether they dropout or not. Dataset B examined 11,648 minority students who had received some sort of exclusionary discipline practice (i.e., ISS, OSS, law enforcement intervention, and/or Baker Act). To answer the question, the researcher decided to administer a binary logistic regression to examine the relationship.

### Assumptions of Research Question 1b

The aim of the binary logistic regression analysis in this study was to evaluate the adherence to key assumptions essential for ensuring the validity and reliability of the model. The dataset comprised 11,648 individual student cases, with each variable being categorical, thus fulfilling the requirements for conducting a chi-square analysis that overlaps the assumptions for binary logistic regression analysis.

The initial condition that the response variable must be binary has been satisfied. The dataset consisted of 11,648 cases, with 685 instances marked as *Yes* and 10,963 instances marked as *No*. This binary classification is essential for logistic regression, as it enables the model to calculate the probability of one outcome relative to the other.

The second condition, which requires that observations must be independent of one another, was also met. The dataset consisted of 11,648 individual students, ensuring that each observation was independent and not affected by other data points.

The analysis confirmed that there were no significant issues with multicollinearity. The predictor variables offer distinct and valuable contributions to the model without redundancy or inflated standard errors that could compromise the results. This fulfills the third assumption and ensures the reliability of the model.

However, the fourth assumption, which necessitates the absence of extreme outliers, was not satisfied. There were 652 cases identified as outliers, in which students were categorized as dropouts despite not experiencing exclusionary disciplinary actions. These outliers were included in the analysis to ensure a more thorough understanding of the study's results, although their presence could potentially impact the model's estimates.

The fifth assumption, which involves the linearity of the logit with respect to the predictor variables, was met. The model showed a good fit, as confirmed by the chi-square test (chi-square = 4.323,  $df = 3$ , Sig. = .229. With a high  $p$ -value ( $p > .05$ ), there is no significant difference between observed and predicted values, indicating that the linearity assumption is valid.

Finally, it should be noted that the assumption of a sufficiently large sample size was only partially met. Although most predictor variables had at least 40 events and 40 nonevents, the Baker Acts variable had only 15 events. This inadequate sample size for the Baker Acts predictor may have impacted the reliability and generalizability of the model's results for this particular variable.

### Chi-Squares

The crosstabulation within the dataset offers a comprehensive visual depiction of how the variables within the data set interact with each other (see Table 20).



**Table 20***Dataset C ESE Student Crosstabulation*

Question	Yes/no	Considered a dropout?		Total
		No	Yes	
Ever had an ISS?	No	5724	115	5839
	Yes	5239	570	5809
Total	-	10963	685	11648
Ever had an OSS?	No	7477	222	7699
	Yes	3486	463	3949
Total	-	10963	685	11648
Ever under Baker Act?	No	10952	681	11633
	Yes	11	4	15
Total	-	10963	685	11648
Ever had law enforcement intervention?	No	10869	653	11522
	Yes	94	32	126
Total	-	10963	685	11648

A chi-square test of independence was conducted between whether minoritized students who had ever received ISS as a disciplinary consequence and if they were considered a dropout or not. All expected cell frequencies were greater than five (see Table 21). The Pearson chi-square value of 323.607 ( $df = 1, p < .001$ ), the continuity correction value of 322.192 ( $df = 1, p < .001$ ), and the likelihood ratio of 351.054 ( $df = 1, p < .001$ ) all demonstrate strong statistical significance. The Fisher's Exact Test confirms these results, and the Phi and Cramer's V values of .167 indicate a moderate effect size. The analysis was conducted on 11,648 valid cases.

**Table 21***Ever Had ISS? Chi-Square Test Results*

Test	Value	df	Asymptotic significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson chi-square	323.607 <sup>a</sup>	1	<.001	-	-
Continuity correction <sup>b</sup>	322.192	1	<.001	-	-
Likelihood ratio	351.054	1	<.001	-	-
Fisher's Exact Test	-	-	-	<.001	<.001
Phi	.167	-	<.001	-	-
Cramer's V	.167	-	<.001	-	-
<i>n</i> of valid cases	11648	-	-	-	-

*Note.* a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 341.62.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table.

A chi-square test of independence was conducted between whether minoritized students who had ever received OSS as a disciplinary consequence and if they were considered a dropout or not (see Table 22). The statistical tests indicate very strong associations between the variables analyzed. The Pearson chi-square value of 368.600 ( $df = 1$ ,  $p < .001$ ), the continuity correction value of 367.004 ( $df = 1$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and the likelihood ratio of 344.390 ( $df = 1$ ,  $p < .001$ ) all show highly significant results. The Fisher's Exact Test corroborates these findings, and the Phi and Cramer's V values of .178 suggest a moderate effect size. The analysis was based on 11,648 valid cases.

**Table 22***Ever Had OSS? Chi-Square Test Results*

Test	Value	<i>df</i>	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson chi-square	368.600 <sup>a</sup>	1	<.001	-	-
Continuity correction <sup>b</sup>	367.004	1	<.001	-	-
Likelihood ratio	344.390	1	<.001	-	-
Fisher's Exact Test	-	-	-	<.001	<.001
Phi	.178	-	< .001	-	-
Cramer's V	.187	-	< .001	-	-
<i>n</i> of valid cases	11648	-	-	-	-

*Note.* a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 232.23.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table.

A chi-square test of independence was conducted between whether minoritized students had ever had a law enforcement intervention as a disciplinary consequence and if they were considered a dropout or not (see Table 23). The Pearson chi-square value of 87.651 ( $df = 1$ ,  $p < .001$ ), the continuity correction value of 84.123 ( $df = 1$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and the likelihood ratio of 50.899 ( $df = 1$ ,  $p < .001$ ) all indicate strong statistical significance. The Fisher's Exact Test supports these findings, and the Phi and Cramer's V values of .087 suggest a small to moderate effect size. The analysis was conducted on 11,648 valid cases.

**Table 23***Ever Had Law Enforcement Intervention? Chi-Square Test Results*

Test	Value	<i>df</i>	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson chi-square	87.651 <sup>a</sup>	1	<.001	-	-
Continuity correction <sup>b</sup>	84.123	1	<.001	-	-
Likelihood ratio	50.899	1	<.001	-	-
Fisher's Exact Test	-.087	-	<.001	<.001	<.001
Phi	.087	-	<.001	-	-
Cramer's V	.087	-	<.001	-	-
<i>n</i> of valid cases	11648	-	-	-	-

*Note.* a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 7.41.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table.

A chi-square test of independence was conducted between whether minoritized students had ever been placed under a Baker Act as a disciplinary consequence and if they were considered a dropout or not (see Table 24). The Pearson chi-square value of 11.724 ( $df = 1$ ,  $p < .001$ ), the continuity correction value of 8.265 ( $df = 1$ ,  $p = .004$ ), and the likelihood ratio of 6.619 ( $df = 1$ ,  $p = .010$ ) all show statistically significant results. The Fisher's Exact Test further supports these findings. The Phi and Cramer's V values of .032 suggest a small effect size. The analysis was conducted on 11,648 valid cases.

**Table 24***Ever Been Placed Under Baker Act? Chi-Square Test Results*

Test	Value	<i>df</i>	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson chi-square	11.724 <sup>a</sup>	1	<.001	-	-
Continuity correction <sup>b</sup>	8.265	1	.004	-	-
Likelihood ratio	6.619	1	.010	-	-
Fisher's Exact Test	-	-	-	.010	.010
Phi	.032	-	<.001	-	-
Cramer's V	.032	-	<.001	-	-
<i>n</i> of valid cases	11648	-	-	-	-

*Note.* a. 1 cells (25.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .88.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table.

For ISS, the analysis showed the probability of dropout was 0.313, with a coefficient of -1.162 and a *p*-value of less than .001, after accounting for other variables in the model (see Table 25). Similarly, students who received OSS were also less likely to be considered a dropout. The analysis showed the probability of dropout was 0.412, with a coefficient of -0.888 and a *p*-value of less than .001, after accounting for other variables in the model.

**Table 25***Dataset C Minority Logistic Regression*

Question	B	SE	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% CI for Exp (B)
							Lower
Ever had ISS?(1)	-1.162	.119	95.672	1	<.001	.313	.248
Ever had OSS?(1)	-.888	.097	83.748	1	<.001	.412	.340
Ever had law enforcement intervention? (1)	-.888	.214	17.221	1	<.001	.412	.271
Ever under Baker Act? (1)	-.736	.614	1.440	1	.230	.479	.144
Constant	-.344	.617	.311	1	.577	.709	

For students who had an encounter with law enforcement that resulted in an intervention, the statistical analysis indicated students were less likely to be considered a dropout. The probability of dropout was 0.412, with a coefficient of -0.888 and a  $p$ -value of less than .001, after accounting for other variables in the model.

In contrast, under the Baker Act, the analysis suggested there was no significant association between being under the Baker Act and being considered a dropout. The coefficient was -0.736, and the  $p$ -value was 0.230. Other variables in the model were also considered. The constant term did not have a significant effect on the likelihood of being considered a dropout.

#### Outcomes of Research Questions

Research Question 1: Is there a relationship between school discipline practices and minoritized students with disabilities dropout rates?

Thus, the purpose of the study was to determine whether exclusionary discipline practices used against minoritized students with disabilities were associated with their dropout rates. For this analysis, a logistic regression was conducted, which involved the independent variables of the discipline practices (i.e., ISS, OSS, Baker Acts, and referrals to law enforcement) and minoritized ESE students, and the dependent variable was whether the student would dropout or not.

The study was conducted on a sample of 1,995 minoritized ESE students who were subjected to exclusionary discipline practices. The term exclusionary discipline refers to the disciplinary actions that involve removing students from their regular classes due to behavioral problems. These students were from varying backgrounds and had various disabilities.

The results of logistic regression analysis indicated an inverse relationship between exclusionary discipline and probability of a student dropping out. The question was whether a student had undergone exclusionary discipline, and possible answers were yes or no. The outcome of the study was whether they were classified as a dropout, and possible answers were yes or no. For example, students who were subjected to ISS were less likely to be classified as dropouts. In general, though exclusionary disciplinary practices were linked to dropout rates, they did not have a significant impact.

This study suggested use of exclusionary discipline practices may not be an effective approach to address disciplinary issues faced by minoritized ESE students with disabilities. Further research is needed to identify alternative approaches that can help these students overcome their behavioral problems without being removed from their regular classes. This could involve adopting a more restorative approach that focuses on addressing the root causes of the behavioral problems and promoting positive behavior.

Research Question 1b: Is there a relationship between school discipline practices and students with disabilities dropout rates?

To investigate the relationship between exclusionary discipline practices and dropout rates among minoritized students with disabilities, a logistic regression was administered. The independent variables considered were discipline practices used (i.e., ISS, OSS, Baker Act, or Law Enforcement intervention) and status of the students being ESE. The dependent variable was whether the student was considered a dropout or not.

This study analyzed a group of 4,354 ESE students who had been subjected to disciplinary actions at some point in their academic career. Results showed exclusionary discipline practices used did not reliably predict whether a student would dropout or not. Results of logistic regression analysis indicated an inverse relationship between exclusionary discipline and probability of a student dropping out. The question was whether a student had undergone exclusionary discipline, and possible answers were yes or no. The outcome of the study was whether they were classified as a dropout, and possible answers were no or yes. For example, students who were subjected to ISS were less likely to be classified as dropouts. In general, though exclusionary disciplinary practices were linked to dropout rates, they did not have a significant impact.

The study suggested exclusionary discipline may not be the most effective approach to address disciplinary issues faced by ESE students with disabilities. Instead, more research is needed to identify alternative approaches that can help these students overcome their behavioral problems without being removed from their regular classes. This may include a more restorative approach that addresses the root causes of the behavioral problems and promotes positive behavior.



Research Question 1b: Is there a relationship between school discipline practices and minoritized students' dropout rates?

To answer this question, a logistic regression analysis was conducted, with minoritized students and discipline practices used (i.e., ISS, OSS, Baker Acts, or law enforcement intervention) as independent variables, and dropout rates of the students as the dependent variable.

The study included 11,648 minoritized students who received exclusionary discipline consequences. Results of the statistical test revealed discipline practices used did not provide predictable outcomes for determining whether a student would dropout. Results showed exclusionary discipline practices used did not reliably predict whether a student would dropout or not.

Results of logistic regression analysis showed a negative constant that indicated an inverse relationship between exclusionary discipline and probability of a student dropping out. The question was whether a student had undergone exclusionary discipline, and possible answers were yes or no. The outcome of the study was whether they were classified as a dropout, and the possible answers were no or yes. For example, students who were subjected to ISS were less likely to be classified as dropouts. In general, though exclusionary disciplinary practices were linked to dropout rates, they did not have a significant impact.

The study suggested exclusionary discipline may not be the most effective approach to address disciplinary issues faced by minoritized students. Instead, more research is needed to identify alternative approaches that can help these students overcome their behavioral problems without being removed from their regular classes. This may include a more restorative approach that addresses the root causes of the behavioral problems and promotes positive behavior.

### Summary of Chapter 4

This study aimed to investigate the correlation between disciplinary practices that exclude marginalized students with disabilities and their dropout rates. The goal was to improve quality of education and impact policy. The literature review covered topics such as school culture, discipline, and restorative justice. Disability Critical Race Theory guided the study, which assessed disciplinary practices in a Florida school district to address disproportionate impacts on marginalized students.

Chapter 4 examined data from 27,986 students who were disciplined, aiming to understand how exclusionary practices affect academic achievement and retention rates for these students. Dataset A, which focused on minoritized ESE students, was further segmented into Datasets B and C to investigate the relationship between exclusionary practices, academic achievement, and racial achievement gap. The study used logistic regression to examine the relationship between exclusionary practices and dropout rates for minoritized ESE students.

To enhance student retention and academic success, it may be essential to implement targeted interventions and supportive initiatives. For instance, educators can introduce alternative disciplinary approaches that focus on restorative justice and prioritize positive reinforcement to create a more supportive and inclusive learning environment. These measures can play a crucial role in addressing student concerns and fostering a more positive educational experience. Additionally, schools can provide counseling and mental health services to help students cope with various mental and emotional issues that could affect their academic performance.

This information can be used by educators, policymakers, and parents to develop and implement strategies that can enhance student retention and academic success. By using these strategies, students can be provided with necessary resources and support to overcome

challenges and succeed academically. Findings suggest discipline practices used may not be effective in preventing students from dropping out of school. Further research is needed to investigate alternative approaches to discipline that may be more effective in promoting positive student outcomes, particularly for minoritized students with disabilities.

Findings of the study suggest current disciplinary practices used in schools may be effective in preventing students from leaving school early. However, the existing literature has stated students dropping out of school is a significant problem that has far-reaching consequences for both individuals and society. Therefore, it is crucial to find ways to prevent students dropping out of school. The study provides recommendations for further research to be conducted to explore alternative approaches that may be more effective in promoting positive student outcomes. Such approaches should be designed to support students in their academic and personal development.

Moreover, this study highlights the need for educators to pay special attention to the needs of students who belong to marginalized communities, students with disabilities, and students who are a part of both these groups. These students are often more likely to face disciplinary action and be punished more harshly than their peers. It is crucial to address this issue and design disciplinary practices that are fair and equitable for all students. By doing so, educators can create a more inclusive and supportive learning environment that benefits all students.

In Chapter 5, the researcher describes the interpretations of the results and uses literature to suggest further research that can be added to the body of literature, and future implications. The study's results can provide valuable insights into the best practices that can be used to

improve student retention and academic success and can serve as a foundation for future research in this area.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION**

Chapter 4 of this study provided a comprehensive overview of all the necessary statistical methods and data analysis used throughout the research process. Chapter 5 offers a detailed summary of the study's findings, along with an interpretation of the results from Chapter 4. This chapter also explores potential implications for policy and practice, highlighting the impact of exclusionary discipline practices on minority students with disabilities and their academic outcomes. One of the key insights presented in this chapter is the measure of the impact of exclusionary discipline practices on students. Findings of this study show how detrimental these practices can be on students, particularly those students who belong to underrepresented groups and those with disabilities. This information could contribute to a global awareness of the harmful effects of such practices on students.

Moreover, though exclusionary discipline practices may be necessary in some cases, it is important to identify which disciplinary practices can be used in conjunction with inclusionary methods such as multitiered support systems and restorative practices to restore students who display unfavorable behavior. This study can help educators and policymakers identify the right combination of disciplinary practices and inclusionary methods to ensure all students receive the support they need to succeed. Overall, the recommendations from this study can be used to improve policies and practices in the education system, ensuring students receive the support they need to thrive academically and socially.

### Summary of Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between using exclusionary discipline practices against minorities students with disabilities and conclusion of the odds of these students dropping out or not. The body of literature concluded students with disabilities are

more likely to be disciplined as a result of unfavorable behavior than their nondisabled, nonminoritized peers. Using the Disability Critical Race Theory (DisCrit) framework to understand the disconnect between educational practitioners' understanding of their students' complex cultures and upbringings and their lack of awareness of how their students' behaviors can be manifestations of the students' disabilities. Although these practices have continued to be seen throughout K–12 education, the purpose of this study was to analyze just how detrimental these practices can be to a student's academic success.

In Chapter 2, the literature review provided a foundation for the study. The study also explored DisCrit as the theoretical framework to analyze the complexities of minoritized disabled individuals. Research has shown teachers and other stakeholders can improve the impact of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) by providing accountability systems for positive educational outcomes of students with disabilities (McCabe & Nye-Lengerman, 2021).

To promote student success, ESSA also established guidelines for school discipline patterns for students with disabilities. However, studies have shown students with disabilities were disciplined more frequently than their nondisabled peers (Blake et al., 2020; Sullivan et al., 2014). In fact, during the 2013–2014 school year, over 70,000 students with disabilities were subjected to seclusion and restraint as a result of disciplinary infractions, and students with disabilities had a suspension rate more than double of students without disabilities (National Council on Disability, 2018).

Students with disabilities have the right to a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment, guaranteed under equal protection in the United States. Rates of student discipline have remained disproportionately high for students with disabilities and in multiple subgroups. Disability studies in education (DSE) is a multidisciplinary field that

incorporates disability studies, critical pedagogy, sociology, and related disciplines to analyze and understand the experiences of students with disabilities in educational systems (Slee et al., 2019). Unlike conventional medical or deficit-based approaches, DSE concentrates on environmental and cultural factors that shape educational opportunities and outcomes for students with disabilities. DSE acknowledges a disability is not an individual's inherent flaw, but rather a product of a society that values certain ways of being over others (Slee et al., 2019).

DSE challenges ableist assumptions and practices that perpetuate discrimination and exclusion of people with disabilities in educational environments (Love & Beneke, 2021; Sullivan et al., 2014). The field aims to foster inclusive educational environments that value diversity and guarantee equitable access for all learners. By examining the complex interplay between disability and education, DSE provides a critical lens through which educators can understand and address educational needs of students with disabilities.

The principles and applications of DSE have far-reaching implications for educational policy, research, and practice. DSE offers a transformative vision of education centered on equity, social justice, and human rights. DSE encourages collaboration among diverse stakeholders, fosters critical thinking, and promotes social change (Carastathis, 2014). In short, DSE is an essential framework for advancing inclusive and equitable education for all students, regardless of their abilities or disabilities.

DSE offers a critical framework to examine school disciplinary practices and their impact on students with disabilities. Researchers can explore how disciplinary policies target disabled students disproportionately, thereby perpetuating exclusion and marginalization (Emong & Eron, 2016). By analyzing the social construction of disability and challenging ableist assumptions in

disciplinary practices, DSE can inform efforts to promote alternative approaches that foster inclusivity, restorative justice, and supportive interventions.

DSE allows researchers to identify systemic barriers and inequities contributing to the school-to-prison pipeline. By examining the intersectionality of disability, race, and other marginalized identities, researchers can uncover how multiple forms of oppression compound the risk of students being funneled into the criminal justice system (Allen & White-Smith, 2014; Kohli et al., 2017; Miller, 2022; Skiba et al., 2014). This analysis can inform policy reform and highlight the need for targeted interventions to disrupt the pipeline and promote equitable educational opportunities.

Researchers have extensively studied the factors that affect the ability of minorities to attain education. Their findings have indicated historically, minoritized students have been less successful in education than their nonminoritized peers( Skiba et al., 2014). The reasons for this disparity are multifaceted, but one of the critical factors identified is the need for more representation in faculty. Representation of diverse educators can have a significant impact on the academic performance and success of minority students.

In the United States, minoritized people have comprised 41% of the population; yet, they have been educated generally by White female teachers. The National Center for Education Statistics (2021) reported White teachers represented 79% of educators in the United States. The underrepresentation of diverse educators can lead to a lack of cultural competence, which further perpetuates marginalization of minority students. Additionally, research has shown teacher diversity can foster a sense of belonging and inspire students to pursue higher education.

Studies have shown minoritized students who attend schools with a higher representation of themselves tend to perform better on standardized tests than those who do not (Townsend,



2000) For instance, Black students tend to perform better when Black teachers educate them, as seen in the 1990s following the integration of U.S. schools in the 1970s. This finding emphasizes the importance of diverse representation among educators.

In conclusion, increased representation of diverse educators to foster academic success and equity among minoritized students is needed. With more representation among teachers, students can benefit from a more inclusive and culturally competent learning environment, leading to better outcomes in education.

The aim of this study was to investigate reasons behind the high dropout rates among minoritized students with disabilities. The survey targeted K–12 students in a large school district with approximately 60,000 students. The population consisted of five graduating 4-year cohorts. The study examined various factors, including demographics (e.g., gender, age, exceptionalities), as desired variables and independent variables, such as exceptional student education (ESE) students, minoritized students, and exclusionary disciplinary practices. The dependent variable was the withdrawal (W/D) code, which was simplified dichotomously as either dropout or no dropout.

The study relied on archived data from a local school district, which included information on discipline, student demographics, and enrollment data. The data analysis was quantitative, using SPSS to conduct descriptive statistics and chi-square tests for independence to determine the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. Logistic regression determined the likelihood of dropout outcomes on minoritized ESE students, and their data were disaggregated by ethnicity, English language learner, gender, socioeconomic status, and other variables. The study also examined the experiences of these students as they faced exclusionary discipline practices.

### Discussion of Findings

This discussion of the findings presents an in-depth analysis of the data collected through the research process. The primary research question and any additional research questions were answered using the data. The discussion provides a detailed explanation of the findings and how they relate to the theoretical frameworks used in the study. Additionally, the discussion thoroughly explores the quantitative findings, examining any patterns or trends that emerged from the data. Overall, the discussion provides a comprehensive understanding of the research findings and their implications for the research question and theoretical frameworks.

#### Research Question 1

Research Question 1 asked, is there a relationship between school discipline practices and minoritized students with disabilities dropout rates? To answer this question, relevant data were collected and compared with the existing body of literature. The study used statistical analyses to further disaggregate posthoc data using descriptive statistics, which provided a detailed overview of individual variables. Chi-squares were also used to examine the relationships between these variables and how they impact the dependent variable or outcomes. Furthermore, the multiple independent variables were analyzed to determine their impact on the dependent variable, leading to a better understanding of the research question at hand.

#### *Descriptive Statistics*

These data, called Dataset A, included information about 1,995 students. The data provided important information about the student population, including demographics and disciplinary actions. Out of the total number of students, 727 were female, and 1,268 were male. Therefore, females comprised 36.2% of the student population and males comprised 63.1%. Additionally, the data showed there was a diverse range of students in the school population with

different backgrounds and learning needs. For instance, 483 students were English language learners, or 24.1% of the population.

Data also showed students with disabilities who belonged to minority groups often received disciplinary consequences (e.g., being removed from the classroom). Specifically, 1,242 students (i.e., 61.9% of minoritized ESE students) received in-school suspension, and 963 students, or 48%, received other disciplinary actions. This information is important because it highlights the need for schools to address disparities in discipline and support students with disabilities who belong to minority groups.

### *Chi-Squares*

Logistic regression tests are widely used in various fields to predict the probability of an event occurring, such as a student dropping out of school. In this study, several chi-square tests were conducted to compare independent variables (e.g., in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, law enforcement intervention, and Baker Act placement) with the dependent variable, which was the dropout status of minoritized ESE students. These chi-square tests aimed to establish whether there was a relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable. The results indicated a statistically significant association existed between all of the independent variables and the dependent variable among minoritized ESE students. As a result, there was evidence to reject the null hypothesis.

### *Logistic Regression*

This analysis aimed to explore various factors that can contribute to individuals being considered as dropouts or not. The factors that were studied in this research included in-school suspension (ISS), out-of-school suspension (OSS), law enforcement intervention, and being detained under the Baker Act.

ISS, in particular, was found to be significantly associated with dropout status, with 71% (Sig. = 1-.289) likely of being considered not a dropout. This indicates individuals who had ISS in the past were less likely to be dropouts. Similarly, OSS and law enforcement intervention were also found to be significantly associated with dropout status, with 42% and 64%, respectively. The use of the Baker Act was not a predictive factor for students being considered a dropout based on the failed assumption and small effect size identified by the Phi and Cramer's V tests.

Moreover, logistic regression coefficients and *p*-values were also calculated for each factor to determine their impact on dropout likelihood. ISS, OSS, and law enforcement intervention showed significant negative coefficients, which suggested a decrease in the log odds of being a dropout. However, being detained under the Baker Act had a nonsignificant coefficient, indicating no meaningful effect on dropout likelihood

In conclusion, ISS, OSS, law enforcement intervention, and being detained under the Baker Act are all important factors that can affect dropout status in students. Although there was a significant relationship between the use of discipline practices and dropout rates of students, according to this study, they did not specifically influence students dropping out. Findings of this research can guide the development of interventions and strategies aimed at reducing dropout rates.

#### Research Question 1a

Research Question 1a asked, is there a relationship between school discipline practices and students with disabilities dropout rates? To answer this research question, relevant data were gathered and compared with the existing literature. Statistical analyses were employed to further examine posthoc data using descriptive statistics, which provided a detailed overview of

individual variables. Chi-squares were also used to explore the relationships between these variables and their impact on the dependent variable or outcomes. Additionally, multiple independent variables were analyzed to determine their influence on the dependent variable, resulting in a better understanding of the research question.

### *Descriptive Statistics*

Dataset B was a comprehensive dataset that provided detailed information on 11,661 minority students who faced disciplinary actions resulting in school exclusion. The dataset presented a clear picture of the demographics of the students, with 50.4% being females and 49.5% being males. Additionally, 1.9% of the students were identified as 504 students, 14% as Title 1 students, and 23.1% as English language learners.

The dataset also shed light on the disciplinary actions that were taken against the students. ISS was the most common disciplinary action, with 49.8% of the students receiving ISS. OSS was the second most common disciplinary action, with 33.9% of the students receiving OSS. A small percentage of students, 1.1%, faced law enforcement intervention, and only 0.1% were placed under the Baker Act; 5.19% of the students were considered dropouts, indicating disciplinary actions may have played a role in their disengagement from the educational system.

### *Chi-Squares*

Logistic regression tests are widely used in various fields to predict the probability of an event occurring, such as a student dropping out of school. In this study, several chi-square tests were conducted to compare independent variables such as ISS, OSS, law enforcement intervention, and Baker Act placement with the dependent variable, which was the dropout status of ESE students. These chi-square tests aimed to establish whether there was a relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable. The results indicated a

statistically significant association existed between all of the independent variables and the dependent variable among ESE students. As a result, there was evidence to reject the null hypothesis.

### *Logistic Regression*

This analysis aimed to explore various factors that can contribute to individuals being considered as dropouts or not. The factors that have been studied in this research include ISS, OSS, law enforcement intervention, and being placed under the Baker Act.

ISS, in particular, was found to be significantly associated with dropout status, with 68% ( $\text{Exp}[B] = 1-.332$ ) likely of being considered not a dropout. This indicates individuals who had ISS in the past were less likely to be dropouts. Similarly, OSS and law enforcement intervention were also found to be significantly associated with dropout status, with 42% and 64%, respectively. The use of the Baker Act was not a predictive factor for students being considered a dropout based on the failed assumption and small effect size identified by the Phi and Cramer's V tests.

Moreover, logistic regression coefficients and  $p$ -values were also calculated for each factor to determine their impact on dropout likelihood. ISS, OSS, and law enforcement intervention showed significant negative coefficients, which suggested a decrease in the log odds of being a dropout. However, being placed under the Baker Act had a nonsignificant coefficient, indicating no meaningful effect on dropout likelihood.

In conclusion, ISS, OSS, law enforcement intervention, and being placed under the Baker Act are all important factors that can affect dropout status in students. Although there was a significant relationship between the use of discipline practices and dropout rates of students, according to this study, they do not specifically influence students dropping out. Findings of this

research can guide the development of interventions and strategies aimed at reducing dropout rates.

### Research Question 1b

Research Question 1b asked, is there a relationship between school discipline practices and minoritized student dropout rates?

#### *Descriptive Statistics*

The dataset named Dataset C was a comprehensive source of information that shed light on the experiences of 11,661 minority students who faced disciplinary actions that resulted in their exclusion from school. This dataset provide a detailed breakdown of the demographics of excluded students, revealing 50.4% were female and 49.5% were male. Additionally, 1.9% of the students were identified as 504 students, 14% as Title 1 students, and 23.1% as English language learners.

The dataset also provided a detailed account of the disciplinary actions that were taken against these students. The data indicated 49.8% of the students received an ISS, and 33.9% received an OSS. Furthermore, 1.1% of the students had to face law enforcement intervention, and 0.1% were placed under the Baker Act. Moreover, the dataset revealed 5.19% of the students were considered dropouts. This information is crucial for understanding the impact of disciplinary actions on the academic outcomes of excluded students.

#### *Chi-Squares*

Logistic regression tests are widely used in various fields to predict the probability of an event occurring, such as a student dropping out of school. In this study, several chi-square tests were conducted to compare independent variables such as ISS, OSS, law enforcement intervention, and Baker Act placement with the dependent variable, which was the dropout status

of minoritized students. These chi-square tests aimed to establish whether there was a relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable. The results indicated a statistically significant association existed between all of the independent variables and the dependent variable among minoritized students. As a result, there was evidence to reject the null hypothesis.

### *Logistic Regression*

This analysis aimed to explore various factors that can contribute to individuals being considered as dropouts or not. The factors that have been studied in this research include ISS, OSS, law enforcement intervention, and being placed under the Baker Act.

ISS, in particular, was found to be significantly associated with dropout status, with 69% ( $\text{Exp}[B] = 1-.313$ ) likely being considered not a dropout. This indicates individuals who had had ISS in the past were less likely to be dropouts. Similarly, OSS and law enforcement interventions were also found to be significantly associated with dropout status, with both being 59%. The use of the Baker Act was not a predictive factor for students being considered a dropout based on the failed assumption and small effect size identified by the Phi and Cramer's V tests.

Moreover, logistic regression coefficients and  $p$ -values were also calculated for each factor to determine their impact on dropout likelihood. ISS, OSS, and law enforcement intervention showed significant negative coefficients, which suggested a decrease in the log odds of being a dropout. However, being placed under the Baker Act had a nonsignificant coefficient, indicating no meaningful effect on dropout likelihood.

In conclusion, ISS, OSS, law enforcement intervention, and being placed under the Baker Act are all important factors that can affect dropout status in students. Although there was a significant relationship between the use of discipline practices and dropout rates of students,



according to this study, they do not specifically influence students dropping out. Findings of this research can guide the development of interventions and strategies aimed at reducing dropout rates.

### Discussion of Findings

The research findings suggest a link between school discipline methods and dropout rates among minoritized students with disabilities, students with disabilities, and minoritized students. The results indicate exclusionary disciplinary practices might contribute to higher dropout rates for these students. However, this conclusion contradicts existing literature, which generally claims strict discipline does not help in retaining students. It is important to recognize school discipline is just one of many factors that influence a student's decision to drop out. The study's final conclusion underscores the importance of considering other contributing factors, as outlined in the literature, before making definitive conclusions about the impact of exclusionary discipline practices.

### Connection of Findings to Other Studies

Gubbels et al. (2019) conducted a meta-analytic review of school absenteeism and dropout risk factors. The study identified various factors contributing to these issues, including internal factors such as academic performance, learning disabilities, behavioral issues, mental health challenges, and lack of student engagement. External factors like socioeconomic status, family dynamics, school environment, and community factors also play a significant role. Policy and systemic factors such as inequitable education policies and exclusionary discipline practices should also be considered.

In connection to this study, school discipline is just one of the internal factors that are a part of the complex formula as to why students drop out or remain in school. The results suggest

using exclusionary discipline practices may help minoritized students with disabilities remain in school; it is important to note this study did not consider several other factors that may have contributed to the conclusion, as indicated by existing literature.

### Implications for Practice and Policy

The study was conducted with the aim of obtaining deeper insights into the existing gaps within the K–12 education system. The conclusions drawn from the study were based on an analysis of established practices and the identification of areas necessitating improvement. The study suggested effective identification of gaps could be carried out by identifying holes in the system, making informed decisions, and creating transparency for stakeholders.

Additionally, the study recommended creating an environment of transparency to allow stakeholders to have a better understanding of the education system. This environment could be achieved by providing regular updates on student progress, sharing best practices, and seeking feedback from stakeholders. The study concluded creating transparency would foster better relationships between stakeholders and contribute to the overall success of the education system, establishing practices, making informed decisions, and creating transparency for stakeholders to effectively identify and address gaps.

At the time of this study, the Florida Department of Education did not recognize W26 as a withdrawal code. W26 is used when a student decides to leave a K–12 program to pursue adult education or a high school equivalency program. Unlike W02 and W3A, which indicate a student is transferring to another school or school district, respectively, there is no accountability measure in place for W26 (Florida Department of Education, 1992). This means if a student receives a high school equivalency, they are still considered nongraduates who have terminated their intention to receive a high school diploma. On the other hand, W05 is a negative

withdrawal code indicating a student has dropped out of a K–12 program with no intention of pursuing their high school diploma, especially a K–12 program. Therefore, W26 should be considered a dropout withdrawal code.

The school district also defines the Baker Act as a consequence of disciplinary actions and an intervention regarding mental health. However, the Baker Act is intended to help individuals going through a mental health crisis and who may pose a danger to themselves or others. Baker Act placements are typically not a result of a disciplinary infraction, hence their limited use in the current study. Students are subjected to Baker Act placements following evaluation by law enforcement, who are not certified mental health professionals, especially when they are considered harmful to others. As a result, a student who is experiencing mental health issues could be seen as exhibiting unfavorable behavior.

ISS is often considered a form of exclusion because it removes a student from their regular educational environment. However, school districts should approach it as part of a multitiered support system. Many districts have replaced ISS with positive alternatives to school suspension programs. These programs provide students with a temporary, smaller learning environment with certified instructors who follow a curriculum based on social-emotional learning (Cimipian et al., 2016). As it may seem like a punishment, this approach can serve as a more intensive intervention program that helps students with problem solving and facilitates collaboration among instructional, support, and resource staff to improve their behavior or academic success. This study found that the use of ISS was the most common disciplinary action. The wide use of this consequence could give educators better insight and information about the student if they treated ISS more as an intervention. These alternatives can gather

responses to intervention data that can be interpreted and used in the multitiered support services process.

### Implications for Further Study

It is worth noting limitations were considered in this study; yet, this researcher aimed to provide recommendations based on these limitations and its objectives. The study's ambitions were to shed light on the topic and provide a starting point for further research, given the gaps and limitations identified. Proposed recommendations highlight the need for more research to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the subject. The study's limitations were not ignored, and recommendations were based on these limitations, providing a clear path for future research.

The study aimed to analyze the likelihood of students from vulnerable populations dropping out of the education system. These populations include students of color and students with disabilities. The study aimed to determine the factors that contribute to these students dropping out of school and provide insights into how to prevent it from happening. However, the study encountered both over and underestimations of the results. For example, the study analyzed perspectives of students who had dropped out of school; however, students who did not dropout were not necessarily graduates.

The study found students who completed high school or received a certificate of completion were not considered dropouts but were not considered graduates. As a result, these students were still deemed not academically successful. Disciplinary practices could play a significant role in a student's ability to be academically successful. Therefore, studies that analyze graduation rates among these cohorts can determine whether disciplinary practices affect a student's ability to be academically successful, which is highly recommended.

The impact on discipline varies among students, impacting their academics differently. In Chapter 2, a detailed analysis was conducted on the use of student engagement to measure the level of investment students have in their education. Research showed discipline practices can have adverse effects on how students perceive themselves in an educational environment and may even lead to decreased student engagement. However, the current study found students who experienced these exclusionary discipline practices were more likely to stay in school. To gain a deeper understanding of the impact of discipline practices on minoritized students with disabilities, a qualitative study is recommended. This qualitative study should survey seniors at the beginning and end of their senior year to gain a comprehensive perspective on the impact of discipline practices on their education and how discipline affects them on an individual level. Additionally, a quantitative portion of the study could be conducted to compare the number of students who face such practices with those who do not and their respective graduation rates and dropout rates, which could inform future policies and practices geared toward improving the learning experience and outcomes of students.

To answer Research Questions 1, 1A, and 1B, the datasets showed 186, 467, and 685 students were considered dropouts, respectively. Based on these data, school discipline practices were associated with these students dropping out. According to Gubbels et al. (2019), chronic absenteeism is one of the first indicators of a student dropping out and can also be a sign of a lack of student engagement. To gain a greater understanding of this issue, a suggested study would be to analyze these groups of students and conduct a quantitative analysis comparing attendance records to understand how the lack of student engagement influenced the students dropping out.

## Conclusion

This research study focused on the relationship between exclusionary discipline practices and dropout rates among minoritized students with disabilities. The discussion of the findings included a detailed analysis of the data collected, addressing various research questions and using statistical analyses such as chi-square tests and logistic regression to examine the relationships between disciplinary actions and dropout status.

The study also drew connections to previous research on disparities in school discipline practices for students with disabilities and cited literature that supported the findings. Recommendations were made for addressing the study's limitations, such as conducting further research to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the topic. Although there is a significant relationship between the use of discipline practices and dropout rates of students, according to this study, these practices do not specifically influence students dropping out.

Furthermore, implications for practice and policy were discussed, emphasizing the need for interventions to reduce exclusionary disciplinary practices and improve educational outcomes for vulnerable student populations. Suggestions were made for future studies to delve deeper into the impact of disciplinary practices on academic success and postsecondary outcomes among diverse student groups.

Furthermore, the study highlighted issues with withdrawal codes, the interpretation of the Baker Act, and alternative disciplinary practices such as positive alternatives to school suspension programs. It suggested improvements in these areas to better support students' well-being and educational success. The study also recommended further research to investigate graduation rates among vulnerable student populations and explore the impact of disciplinary

practices on student engagement, to understand the potential adverse or beneficial effects of exclusionary practices.

## **APPENDIX A: UCF IRB APPROVAL LETTER**





UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

**Institutional Review Board**

FWA00000351  
IRB00001138, IRB00012110  
Office of Research  
12201 Research Parkway  
Orlando, FL 32826-3246

**NOT HUMAN RESEARCH DETERMINATION**

December 20, 2023

Dear Christopher Langley:

On 12/20/2023, the IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title of Study:	EXAMINING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCHOOL DISCIPLINE PRACTICES AND MINORITIZED STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES' DROPOUT RATES IN A FLORIDA SCHOOL DISTRICT
Investigator:	Christopher Langley
IRB ID:	STUDY00006148
Funding:	None
Documents Reviewed:	• HRP-251 - FORM - Faculty Advisor Scientific-Scholarly Review (1).pdf, Category: Faculty Research Approval; • HRP-250 - FORM - Request for NHR.docx, Category: IRB Protocol;

The IRB determined that the proposed activity is not research involving human subjects as defined by DHHS and FDA regulations.

IRB review and approval by this organization is not required. This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should changes outside of administrative ones (study personnel, timelines, etc.) be made. If non-administrative changes are made (design, information collected, instrumentation, funding, etc.) and there are questions about whether these activities are research involving human in which the organization is engaged, please submit a new request to the IRB for a determination by **clicking Create Modification / CR** within the study.

If you have any questions, please contact the UCF IRB at 407-823-2901 or [irb@ucf.edu](mailto:irb@ucf.edu). Please include your project title and IRB number in all correspondence with this office.

Sincerely,

Tamiko Fukuda  
UCF IRB

## **APPENDIX B: SCHOOL DISTRICT RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER**

**Superintendent of Schools**

January 9, 2024

Christopher Langley

This letter serves as approval to conduct your research, Examining the Relationship between School Discipline Practices and Minoritized Students with Disabilities' Dropout Rates in a Florida School District. The study is part of a doctoral dissertation at the University of Central Florida under the advisement of Dr. Larry Walker. The study will use deidentified archived data and falls under IRB exemption. Reviewed by UCF IRB (Study ID: STUDY 00006148). The purpose of this correlational study is to explore the relationship between student discipline and student learning outcomes.

Per information in your request, please note and adhere to the following:

- All procedures set forth in the approved research request must be followed as approved by County Schools.
- Any variations to the approved protocol must be cleared through the Department of Research, Evaluation and Accountability.
- The study includes deidentified and archived data from (10) high schools:
- Participation in this study is strictly voluntary on the part of the district. This study will cause no disruption to the educational process.
- Confidentiality of the district, school, administrators, teachers, staff, students, and parents will be maintained at all times.
- All Florida statutes, district policies and district procedures must be followed at all times. In particular, all requirements of the Jessica Lunsford Act must be met when visiting school campuses.
- A copy of the results must be provided to the Department of Research, Evaluation and Accountability,

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the Department of Research, Evaluation and Accountability. We wish you much success with this study.

Educationally,

Coordinator of Research, Evaluation and Accountability

**An Equal Opportunity Employer**

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