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Leadership in Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs and the School to Prison Pipeline

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This dissertation, directed and approved by the candidate's committee, has been accepted by the College of Graduate and Professional Studies of Abilene Christian University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

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School of Educational Leadership

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A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

by

April Michele Smith

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to every child, then and now, who has been excluded from the right to an equitable and just public education and to every educator committed to inclusive school communities where relationships are the priority, student and family voices are heard, and needs are met. I persist because you matter.

Acknowledgments

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Abstract

Current research about the school to prison pipeline has focused on the impact of zero-tolerance policies in public education on historically marginalized student populations, especially school exclusionary practices of minority and learning-disabled students. This transcendental phenomenological study extended the understanding of disciplinary alternative education programs' place in the school to prison pipeline trajectory. According to critical race and social justice leadership theories, the investigation and exposure of the public education components leading students into the school to prison pipeline are violations of student civil rights that require scrutiny and actionable public education reform focused on equity and inclusion. The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the experiences and perspectives of five teachers and six leaders in Colorado who have served students placed in disciplinary alternative education programs to provide suggestions for improvements that will address the school to prison pipeline. Study findings reaffirmed previous research about subjective discipline referrals as the catalyst to the school to prison pipeline yet indicated that disciplinary alternative education programs currently act as expulsion education opportunities in response to the school to prison pipeline data. Consequently, public education district leadership needs to create and implement progress monitoring for bias and discrimination in their discipline matrices and referral processes, as well as provide effective staff training around multitiered support systems for the intervention of high-risk students' needs and behaviors, culturally responsive instructional practice, and restorative justice in exchange for punitive discipline.

Keywords: disciplinary alternative education programs, school to prison pipeline, equity, inclusion, public education leadership, critical race theory, social justice leadership

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Public education leadership practices perpetuate the attributes of institutionalized racism and ableism by instituting zero-tolerance policies and disciplinary alternative education programs (DAEPs) because the alternative placements are disproportionately represented by minority students and students with special learning needs (Moody, 2016). Moreover, this disproportionality connects subjective and oppressive educational systems and practices to the school to prison pipeline (STPP) trajectory through punitive discipline practices and school exclusion (Love, 2019).

The STPP is a public education pathway enabled by office referrals and discipline practices targeting historically marginalized students. As early as elementary school, disproportionate discipline histories disrupt marginalized students' seat time in academic settings resulting in the achievement gap (Annamma et al., 2014). Later, in students' secondary educational experiences, the relationship between the achievement and discipline gaps widens and is justified by zero-tolerance discipline policies in middle and high schools, further supported by exclusionary school placements, suspensions, expulsions, or the juvenile justice system (Fasching-Varner et al., 2017; Selman, 2017). As a result, historically marginalized students are pushed out of public school as opposed to gaining equal access to inclusive and just education opportunities, further perpetuating racism and ableism in public education (Love, 2019). It is between leadership-driven racist and ableist discipline policies and exclusionary schooling practices that the discipline and achievement gaps develop, are sustained, and historically marginalized student populations are further ostracized from equal opportunities under the guise of school safety (Darby & Rury, 2018).

Miguel and Gargano (2017) showed that public education leadership policies and practices have successfully created a direct path into STPP for Black and Latino students. According to Mallet (2017), the most vulnerable student groups disproportionately involved in the STPP are the impoverished, those of color, maltreatment victims, students with special education disabilities, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender; the students most represented in the public school to juvenile justice system dyad are Black and Latino males. Not only that, but the path to the STPP is a deliberate and racist tactic that maintains the oppressive status quo permeating the national public education system (Darby & Rury, 2018; Fasching-Varner et al., 2014; Love, 2019). These vulnerable student populations are referred to DAEPs and pushed into the juvenile justice system, illustrating the limited access to public education for historically marginalized students. Public school inequities lie within discipline practices, such as zero-tolerance policies and exclusionary schooling directly impacting student achievement.

Most current researchers have confirmed that school exclusionary practices fail to meet students' educational needs and increases the lower academic expectations of marginalized student populations, further contributing to the achievement gap and concluding that suspension, expulsion, and DAEP placements serve as temporary placeholders for minority students in the STPP trajectory of the discipline gap (Annamma, 2014; Annamma et al., 2014; Fasching-Varner et al., 2017). Some researchers have also identified civil rights violations in the disciplinary and exclusionary practices within public education (Alexander, 2012; Darby & Rury, 2018; Fasching-Varner et al., 2014; Love, 2019). What is unclear is whether DAEPs are a specific exclusionary schooling practice that violates students' civil rights due to institutionalized racism.

A relationship between current leadership practices and institutionalized racism lies directly within the public education discipline matrix. This relationship is sustained by school

leaders and supported by the juvenile justice system. The creation and implementation of DAEPs were justified as a necessary safeguard against school violence but acted as placeholders into the STPP for marginalized student populations (Darby & Rury, 2018). These are leadership-designed school systems that contribute and perpetuate marginalization, disenfranchisement, and the STPP.

This study desired to contribute to the research community and public education reform initiatives around public school equity. Research exploring leadership practices that impact disciplinary procedures resulting in DAEP placement requires an initial revelation as to why DAEPs exist, how they continue to be a result of systemic racism, and how they act as placeholders in the STPP. Moreover, empirical critical race theory (CRT) studies investigate inequities that cause student discipline and achievement gaps and criticize that historically marginalized student populations feed the STPP by public education systemic design. For example, Gooden (2012) asserted that critical race theorists examined the subtle ways white supremacy norms were veiled in systems and policies society has accepted as social norms, making white racism challenging to name and address. Critical race theory allows for the investigation and challenge of public education representations of "alternatives" to public schools for "those" students who have been excluded from traditional public education settings. Ultimately, research from the CRT lens acts as a methodological tool that expands on the current understanding of racism in public education and demonstrates how leaders can resist implementing the systems and programs of power and privilege to disrupt the STPP. More importantly, CRT allows the investigation and exposure of the public education components leading students into the STPP to be violations of student civil rights (Fasching-Varner et al., 2017).

Social justice leadership in education is a theoretical framework centered on the fundamental supposition that all students have an inalienable right to access equitable and just public education opportunities, and it is the public education sectors' responsibility for ensuring those rights are preserved and instituted (DeMatthews, 2016). Socially responsible school leaders serving marginalized, at-risk students utilize culturally relevant strategies to promote inclusion in their schools, especially for students of color and students with specific learning needs who traditionally have been segregated. Khalifa (2013) explained that social justice leaders or leadership enlist all social justice leaders to collaborate with all stakeholders to eliminate marginalization in school and society.

Statement of the Problem

The problem examined in this study was the STPP in public education. There are direct links between the STPP and inequitable discipline policies, such as zero-tolerance, that contribute to the discipline and student achievement gaps. Additionally, research has overtly argued a direct link between the STPP and the disproportionate representation of marginalized students entering the juvenile justice system via the public school system. According to Miguel and Gargano (2017), public education policies and practices have successfully created the STPP as a direct path for Black, Latino, and special education students.

School to prison pipeline research examines how public education contributes to the facilitation of institutionalized racism (discrimination based on race) and ableism (discrimination based on academic ability) through exclusionary practices serving as safeguards, which frequently get overlooked in reform measures (Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Fedders, 2018; Geronimo, 2011; Horsford et al., 2016; Selman, 2017).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study using a critical phenomenological approach was to investigate the experiences and perspectives of five teachers and six leaders who have served students placed in a DAEP to provide suggestions for improvements that will address the STPP. The study's goal was to gain a precise analysis of the standards and morphology within DAEP structures amid a group of participants. Through the allowance of the critical race and social justice leadership theories, this study focused on (a) identifying the academic, social, and institutional themes and trends in staff experiences with students in a DAEP placement; (b) illustrate, through staff experiences and perspectives, the relationship between school systems and DAEP experiences; and aspired to (c) contribute to educational leadership and social science research to better inform educational reform movements around dismantling the STPP.

Research Question

To understand better the perspectives and experiences, the research question utilized in this study was:

RQ1. How do leaders and teachers serving in DAEPs describe the relationship between DAEPs and the STPP?

Significance of the Study

A more thorough investigation into the STPP via the members within DAEP systems and structures in public education was conducted via this study. This research is significant because it provides teachers' and leaders' perspectives and lived experiences inside the DAEP structures, offering unique insights and understandings. Moreover, what was limited in the research studies regarding the STPP was a more focused investigation into DAEPs and their enablement of the institutionalized racism and ableism perpetuated within public education. Previous research has

shown exclusionary schooling to facilitate both the achievement and discipline gaps for minority and disabled students. In that case, the existence of DAEPs theoretically contributed to the STPP trajectory for marginalized student populations. Data needed to determine the functions and effectiveness of DAEPs in public school districts regarding student achievement was limited. This study's findings provide insight that increases the research community's empirical knowledge around social justice and public education reform.

Definition of Key Terms

The following terms were used throughout the study. For consistency and clarity, the words are defined as follows:

Disciplinary alternative education placement (DAEP). Alternative high schools in the United States established DAEPs in response to disruptive and criminal student behaviors for students identified as not responding to the traditional school setting and scheduling design (Selman, 2017).

Discipline gap. The discipline gap between students of color and their white counterparts correlate with historical disadvantages for marginalized populations in public education systems (Bryan, 2017).

Institutionalized racism. This term references the inequitable and systematic distribution of resources, power, and opportunity in our society to benefit people who are white with the deliberate exclusion of people of color (Darby & Rury, 2018).

School to prison pipeline (STPP). The STPP is described as the collective systems of local, state, and federal policies and procedures that siphons children out of school and into prison (Swain & Noblit, 2011).

Zero-tolerance policies. This term refers to the national public education disciplinary systems that began as a reaction to the increase in drug use and circulation in the 1980s; by the 1990s, the zero-tolerance policies expanded to include security cameras, metal detectors, security resource officers, and exclusionary school practices, such as suspension, expulsion, or DAEPs, which are a response to national school safety concerns (Swain & Noblit, 2011).

Chapter Summary

The STPP prevents specific students from equal access to educational opportunities otherwise afforded to their peers (Annamma et al., 2014; Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Fasching-Varner et al., 2014). Moreover, this disproportionality connects subjective and oppressive educational systems and practices to the STPP trajectory through punitive discipline practices and school exclusion (Love, 2019). The catalysts for this research were the previous empirical studies showing why and how vulnerable student populations have been pushed into the juvenile justice system through punitive public education systems, such as DAEP placements, under the guise of school safety (Alexander, 2012; Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Curtis, 2014; DeMatthews et al., 2017; Fasching-Varner et al., 2014). The literature review in Chapter 2 provides a deeper understanding of the STPP complexities and its relationship with DAEPs.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review's primary purpose was to provide an authentic and comprehensive understanding of the most relevant and recent literature around the school to prison pipeline (STPP) and its relationship with disciplinary alternative education programs (DAEPs). The research question addressed in this study was:

RQ1. How do leaders and teachers serving in DAEPs describe the relationship between DAEPs and the STPP?

This systemic comparative literature review began with examining conceptual frameworks that informed and led this investigation (Machi & McEvoy, 2016). These frameworks were critical race theory (CRT) and the social justice leadership theory (SJLT). The included literature clarified the historical and current contexts of the STPP in which race, academic ability, marginalization, oppression, inequitable access in public education, and systemic racism were persistent themes. The chapter also contains evidence of how oppressive and unfair discipline practices, such as zero-tolerance policies and school exclusion, intersects race, academic ability, and the discipline gap with the student achievement gap in the STTP (Annamma, 2014; Annamma et al., 2014; Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Castillo, 2013; Kohli et al., 2017; Mallett, 2017; Moody, 2016). Also, this review examined studies that provided evidence that the STPP was deliberately created in public education systems with alternative disciplinary education and school exclusion serving as the next steps into the STPP trajectory (Alexander, 2012; Curtis, 2014; Darby & Rury, 2018; Desai & Abeita, 2017; Elias; 2013; Fasching-Varner et al., 2014; Knox, 2013; Love, 2019; Mallett, 2016).

This literature review was organized into the following categories: literature that (a) described both the achievement and discipline gaps concerning the STPP, (b) detailed the

racially motivated establishment of disciplinary alternative educational placements, (c) defined and characterized institutionalized racism, ableism, and the STPP phenomenon, (d) explained how zero-tolerance policies perpetuate the STPP cycle rather than reinforce school safety, (e) explained educational leadership's impact and contributions to the STPP, and (f) clarified leadership characteristics necessary for establishing and maintaining educational equity.

Literature Search Methods

Disciplinary alternative education programs typically house students with a history of juvenile delinquency within a public education system. Behaviors and actions defined as delinquent in public education discipline policies versus those definitions in the juvenile justice system appear to have room for subjectivity and manipulation (Selman, 2017). The existence of subjectivity and manipulation in public school discipline policies propelled this investigation concerning DAEPs and the STPP phenomenon predominately using the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), Education Research Complete (ERC), ProQuest, and Research Gate search engines and databases. Peer-reviewed journals were limited to research conducted within the past 10 years to provide the most relevant studies responding to the STPP.

Conceptual Framework Discussion

According to Ravitch and Riggan (2012), the role that conceptual frameworks play in research is layered and repetitive. Researchers have used conceptual frameworks to make critical connections between the attributes within the theories and methods in the study. A carefully conceptualized and well-articulated framework should affirm arguments that:

(1) The research questions are an outgrowth of the argument for relevance, (2) the data to be collected provide the researcher with the raw material needed to explore the research

questions, and (3) the analytic approach allows the researcher to effectively respond to (if not always answer) those questions. (Ravitch & Riggan, 2012, p. 7)

Research exploring leadership practices that impact disciplinary procedures resulting in DAEP placement requires an initial revelation to why DAEPs exist, how they contribute to systemic racism, and how they act as placeholders in the STPP. Moreover, the presented empirical CRT studies involving inequities causing student discipline and achievement gaps investigate and verify that historically marginalized student populations feed the STPP by public education systemic design.

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) is a framework in the social sciences that cross-examines the interrelationships of power and privilege concerning race. According to Curry (2018), CRT explains how racial inequality emerges from the social, economic, and legal differences that the dominant Eurocentric culture creates between "races" to maintain white supremacy. According to Annamma (2014), CRT disrupts the societal ideals of singular identities, which exclude and minimize the counternarratives and experiences of marginalized populations. Current CRT research also makes it evident that public education experiences and opportunities are limited to both students of color and those with special learning needs (Annamma, 2014; Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Mallett, 2017). In revealing and addressing these students' experiences, CRT research aims to call out the leadership practices, which put extreme limits and punishments on children simply because of their race or ability.

Through the CRT lens, Heitzeg (2009) explained that the public education system had been criminalized, and the targeted minority populations, confirmed by documented racial disparity, are pushed out of school through excessive and misrepresented suspensions,

expulsions, arrests, and DAEP placements. Additional studies provided by Fasching-Varner et al. (2017) and Alexander (2012) support claims of a deliberate criminal justice system design proscribing incarceration for people of color to maintain the white supremacy culture that has historically disallowed the economic advancement of marginalized populations. The overrepresentation of the criminalization of youth of color is subjective to the juvenile justice system selectively choosing what offenses deserve prosecution; this reality is mirrored by the adult criminal justice system and supported by public school leadership's implementation of zero-tolerance policies and exclusionary school practices (Alexander, 2012; Darby & Rury, 2018; Fasching-Varner et al., 2017; Heitzeg, 2009).

When current CRT research reveals the systemic injustices in public education, generational truths regarding racism are sadly revisited. According to Love (2019), CRT critiques how Eurocentric, white power, and privilege is sustained generation after generation via capitalism, racism, and ableism even though the elite's standard rhetoric is equity and inclusion. Moreover, multiple legal scholars revealed that regardless of the legal solutions intended to address racism while communicating the movement toward equality, the fundamental U.S. institutions, including public education, continuously perpetuate discriminatory and racist practices against people of color, the poor, and the disabled (Love, 2019). For example, Anderson and Anderson (2017) explained that the American inner-city high school had regressed over the past century from educational opportunities for equitable progress and social betterment of Black and Brown communities to an institution severely challenged by structural poverty and racial inequality. These inequities flow into the workforce at all levels; therefore, CRT studies in education force a paradigm shift that addresses the white status quo in public education and its

failure to include Black students in the track of success into the dominant white workforce (Anderson & Anderson, 2017).

Young et al. (2018) asserted that public education systems were responsible for deliberately designing and implementing the STPP, thereby violating Black children's civil rights by preventing equitable access to public education due to unjust disciplinary practices. Bryan's (2017) research echoed Young et al.'s (2018) and expanded, "White preservice teachers enter and leave in-service teaching with deficit thinking about Black boys … they sustain a cycle of intergenerational legacies of negative view and disproportionate disciplining of Black boys, which perpetuate the STPP (p. 338). In effect, CRT challenges America's convention of promoting white supremacy culture by reexamining institutionalized racism as a social construct to dismantle historical systems of white dominance, power, and privilege. Finally, DeMatthews (2016) explained that an effective leader in education has a CRT call to social justice and realizes their normative assumptions and biases about effective school leadership practices, discipline policies, classroom management techniques, deficit perspectives, and school rapport with communities and how these aspects of schooling might be experienced and understood differently by students and families of color (p. 8).

Social Justice Leadership Theory

School leaders serving marginalized, at-risk students must enact culturally relevant ways to promote inclusion in their schools, especially for students of color and students with specific learning needs who have traditionally been segregated in schools. According to Theoharis (2007), social justice leaders (SJL) in education made issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalizing conditions in the United States central to their advocacy, leadership practice, and vision to eliminating marginalization in

schools (Theoharis, 2007, p. 223). Also, SJL in education advocate for student rights and collaborate with community stakeholders to challenge policies and practices around equal access to resources and opportunities (DeMatthews, 2016; Khalifa, 2013).

Social justice leadership practices are inherently linked to critical race theory and expand on humanitarian awareness and empathetic approaches. Therefore, the shift in power dynamics is crucial in public school collaborative relationships. Greenleaf (2002) contended that power is three-fold but only useful in terms of persuasion; otherwise, it is coercive and manipulative. Finally, DeMatthews' research (2016) pointed out that responding to social injustice in public school is not a passive influence; instead, it requires leadership action beyond identifying inequities and transferring identification into systems and procedures with proactive involvement (p. 9).

Darby and Rury (2018) asserted that SJL in public education is necessary due to the sorting of Black children into low-track classes, disproportional discipline practices against Black children, and the disparate placement of Black children into special education due to inequities in race-based social hierarchical structures. The change in education reform must begin with SJL because historically, perpetrators of racist systems are defiant against structural reform measures (Darby & Rury, 2018). For example, Alexander (2012) explained how public schools have both historically and currently associated young, Black males with disruption, suspicion, and interrogation, thereby justifiably denying them equal access to educational opportunities due to their criminalized profile. As a result, conventional leadership approaches sustain the STPP by broadening the already large achievement and discipline gaps giving historically marginalized students fewer opportunities upon graduation (Barnes & Motz, 2018).

DeMatthews (2016) pushed for public education leaders to combat injustices by adopting SJL practices that promote reform, such as integrated humanistic approaches, critical theories, social activism, and democratic practices that acknowledge racism, build authentic family connections, and critically review systemic inequities in policies, procedures, and beliefs. In contrast, traditional top-down leadership practices continue to foster inequitable access to equal education opportunities for vulnerable and minority student populations. By including marginalized communities in collaborative problem-solving agendas that give voice and dignity to all children's lived experiences served in public education, school leaders can address culturally relevant reform measures such as the racial inequities in discipline policies (DeMatthews, 2016).

An SJL as a servant exemplifies characteristics necessary for the desperate need for alternative public education program reform. Of those characteristics, understanding the necessity that all organizational stakeholders be involved in system designs is paramount to the success of alternative high schools serving at-risk youth. Moreover, the premise of Greenleaf's (2002) leadership perspective was that the successful leader is servant first, making sure the highest priority needs were met first. Greenleaf's (2002) fundamental questions for leaders to ponder are:

> Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society? Will they benefit or at least not be further deprived? (p. 27)

Research conducted by DeMatthews (2016) and Willey et al. (2017) echoed and extended Greenleaf's (2002) servant leadership characteristics and specified that effective leadership practices in schools serving at-risk youth were both social-justice and servant oriented. First,

building culturally responsive and collaborative relationships with all stakeholders is concluded as the foundation for overall school success (Willey et al., 2017). Additionally, inclusive community involvement is a concept that needs to be a serious facet for school leadership to develop per the growing research around education equity and closing the gaps in both discipline and achievement (DeMatthews, 2016). Moreover, the influence of a persuasive SJL accepts that the generated power garnered from multiple perspectives opens the doors for mutual criticism, critical scrutiny, and discourse necessary for creative problem-solving resulting in significant and sustainable change (DeMatthews, 2016; Willey et al., 2017).

Nichols (2011) showed that with the glaring achievement and discipline gaps linked to inequities associated with standardized testing and top-down disciplinarian leadership practices, current education reform misses the mark in addressing the injustices persisting in public education. Finally, Curtis (2014) defined SJL as those who view and act on opposing injustice and inequity while enhancing liberty, freedom, and equal access and opportunity for everyone in juvenile justice and public education systems.

Achievement and Discipline Gaps

According to Darby and Rury (2018), the achievement gap between students of color and White students must be viewed from a historical lens to understand that educational practices in the United States have always intentionally served White students and created educational injustices for Black students. According to Love (2019), the achievement gap does not refer to White students outperforming students of color; instead, it is a historical injustice of oppressive educational systems aligned to racism, classism, and ableism yet never named as such, denying the educational experiences of Black and Brown students living in poverty or with disabilities. Darby and Rury (2018) further explained that even when school systems showed students of

color in college preparatory classes, there is clear evidence that Black students are much less likely to be enrolled in higher-level courses, such as advanced mathematics courses. This more subtle form of tracking ensures persisting disparities in equal access to educational resources and contributes to the black-white achievement gap.

Moreover, Black students are much more likely than Whites to be referred to special education on the grounds of inability or disruptive behavior (Annamma, 2014; Annamma et al., 2014; Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Love, 2019; Mallett, 2017; National Council on Disability, 2015). The disproportionate rates of Black students having the special education label contribute to the racial achievement gap because unfair labeling creates additional restrictions on the accessibility to fair and equitable public education opportunities (Moody, 2016). Finally, the racial achievement gap is directly associated with the discipline gap because exclusion from classroom instruction directly affects student achievement (Gregory et al., 2010). According to Darby and Rury (2018), Black students are 10 times more likely to be referred to the office on disciplinary grounds, more likely to be disengaged and excluded from educational instruction, have increased odds of dropping out, placed in DAEPs, or incarcerated.

According to Bryan (2017), educational scholarship has delivered consistent evidence of the disproportionate ways that Black males are overrepresented in K–12 school discipline and propelled into the criminal justice system. Young et al. (2018) and DeMatthews (2016) explained the racial discipline gap and the overrepresentation of African American students on indices of school discipline had been well-documented since evidence of the discipline gap was first recorded by the Children's Defense Fund (CDF) in 1975. The discipline gap between students of color and their White counterparts correlate with historical disadvantages for marginalized

populations in public education systems. Schiff (2018) substantiated that the racial disparity in the discipline gap is seen as early as preschool:

> Black children represent 18% of preschool enrollment but 42% of those suspended once, and 48% of preschool children suspended more than once. Black students are more harshly sanctioned for comparable or lesser infractions than White students or are more often punished for subjective offenses, like insubordination, disrespect, noncompliance, or disruptive behavior that is overlooked for White students. (Schiff, 2018, p. 124)

Curtis (2014) compared the connection between abusive disciplinary practices in schools and the dispositional processes that occur in juvenile justice systems. Furthermore, the discipline policies defined within the discipline gap that continue to feed the STPP, such as zero-tolerance, and one of the final placeholders into the STPP is student placement into DAEPs.

Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs

Research has well-documented the gaps in achievement and discipline and their relationships to the overrepresentation of students of color and special needs students placed in DAEPs (Fedders, 2018; Horsford et al., 2016; Selman, 2017). Alternative educative programs, including DAEPs, were established in response to adjudicated students, disruptive students, and students identified as not responding to the traditional school setting and scheduling designs. Moreover, the alternative schooling approach promised to provide more streamlined and personalized learning opportunities for those nontraditional learners with learning needs that do not respond well in traditional academic settings; but, troubling questions arise and must be confronted when the alternative education data reflects a trend in socially unjust and racist practices fixed within program designs (Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Bryan, 2017; Owens, 2017; Selman, 2017; Young et al., 2018).

One case study that stands as a model of a typical DAEP highlighted Second Chances Academy in Jefferson County, just south of Washington, D.C. It is noted to house one of the most diverse student populations historically. According to Horsford et al. (2016), the district made headlines when the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights exposed to the public the school's overrepresentation of punitive practices on boys of color and a surge in enrollment at its alternative high school, Second Chances Academy.

> Ninety-six percent of students qualify for free and reduced lunch, 74% are male, 60% are Black, and 37% are Latino; 48% receive special education services, and nearly two-thirds of its Latino population are English learner; school administrators have emphasized school discipline and behavior management over student learning and engagement and have failed to provide their teachers with adequate training. (Horsford et al., 2016, pp. 20–21)

Additionally, Selman's (2017) study concluded that DAEPs act as a placeholder for students on the path to the STPP and overtly stated, "despite a perceived retrenchment of exclusionary school punishment, the disciplinary alternative school has emerged as a space in which to enforce upon marginalized students the logics of neoliberal carcerality" (p. 213). This "prison culture" creates a demand for school leadership in America to reconsider new paths of thinking and to act to dismantle these systems that marginalize urban culture and communities. Booker and Mitchell's (2011) results indicated institutionalized racism in that disciplinary alternative education programs act as containment and entry into the STPP via the juvenile justice system.

Another student population showing an overrepresentation in DAEP placement due to bias, prejudice, and a lack of appropriate responsiveness to specific needs are students with

disabilities (Annamma et al., 2014; Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Mallett, 2017; Moody, 2016). Studies concluded that "racial and ethnic disparities in suspensions and expulsions suggest the presence of unconscious or implicit biases that combine with discrimination on the basis of disability to contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline crisis" (National Council on Disability, 2015, p. 8). Finally, Fedders (2018) asserted that alternative education programs fail to provide an equitable and appropriate education, and education reform should remove alternative disciplinary education placements altogether.

Institutionalized Racism in Public Education

Historically, Jim Crow schooling engineered black-white inequities in student outcomes due to the white supremacist foundation of American public education systems, believing that Blacks were not equal to Whites (Alexander, 2012; Darby & Rury, 2018). As a result, the achievement and opportunity gaps continue to sustain systemic isolating practices, such as tracking, zero-tolerance disciplinary measures, special education practices, and racial exclusionary practices, limiting minority students' access to equitable educational opportunities (Darby & Rury, 2018).

Kohli et al. (2017) asserted that contemporary systemic racism within public education is more hidden than it has been in the past and is sustained within institutionalized conditions that conflict with the livelihoods and humanity of minority students (p. 182). For example, institutionalized mandates, such as academic tracking, public school disciplinary and exclusionary policies, and practices with a history of disproportionate representation of marginalized students, have slowly become less discreet as the STPP research community continues expanding its studies (Annamma et al., 2014; Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Castillo, 2013; Fasching-Varner et al., 2017; Knox, 2013; Pesta, 2018; Selman, 2017; Young et al., 2018).

Kohli et al. (2017) extended the arguments about institutionalized racism in public school to be both subtle and veiled acceptances within social norms, such as lowered expectations of minority students resulting in lower achievement scores, while still being passed on to the next grade levels without continuing efforts to correct learning gaps. Additionally, racial microaggressions toward student appearance and behavior that are culturally relevant to student experiences but in contrast to the white status quo are viewed and treated with subtle negative responses that have social-emotional ramifications that hinder academic progress and increase behavioral resistance from Black and Brown students (Darby & Rury, 2018; Fergus, 2017; Kohli et al., 2017; Love, 2019). In turn, this resistance becomes perceived as just cause for office referrals that lead to the STPP cycle. For example, the achievement and discipline gaps begin with subjective office referrals for behaviors that are a result of bias, academic tracking, racial microaggressions, and inappropriate discipline policies that exclude historically marginalized students from academic learning environments ironically perpetrated by the adults in charge of protecting and educating students (Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Bryan, 2017; Darby & Rury, 2018; Fergus, 2017; Love, 2019).

According to the research conducted by Fergus (2017), there was a prevalent pattern of hyper segregation in public schools stemming from biased-based beliefs around race-based and deficit thinking from White teachers about Black student achievement, colorblindness, and racial discomfort. Moreover, according to Booker and Mitchell's (2011) study, passive lowered expectations result in active exclusion, where researchers found that minority students were significantly more likely than White students to be placed in DAEPs and criminalized for discretionary reasons.

School to Prison Pipeline Reality

The process of pushing students out of public school and into the juvenile or criminal justice systems has come to be known as the school to prison pipeline because public education is unjustly responsible for the criminalization of students of color at disproportionate rates compared to their other peer groups affording them nothing more than a one-way ticket to incarceration (Curtis, 2014). Researchers acknowledge that while public schools have attempted to combat school violence, the war on drugs, and other behavioral problems, the institutionalized zero-tolerance policies in public education are far from student-friendly or restorative (Curtis, 2014; Elias, 2013).

The necessity for addressing the STPP with reformative action has created growing advocacy in public education due to increases in disparate data. According to Schiff (2018), research revealed the racial and ableist disparity in school discipline data in that Black students experience school exclusion, such as suspension and expulsion, at three times the rate of their White peers, and students with learning disabilities are twice as likely to be excluded. What is worse is that Fasching-Varner et al. (2014) drew from CRT and asserted that the educational system and criminal justice system were functioning on intentional system designs that disenfranchise people of color and feeds the school to prison pipeline in our national public education system. Public school disciplinary policies have evolved into mirroring those of the adult criminal justice system, leaving a stark cognitive dissonance between common student behaviors that do not correspond to the adult consequences students receive (Alexander, 2012; Darby & Rury, 2018; Love, 2019).

Also, civil rights advocates argued that zero-tolerance policies push-out a disproportionate number of minority students and students with disabilities from education into

the juvenile justice system, followed by incarceration (Alexander, 2012; Curtis, 2014; Darby &

Rury, 2018; Horsford et al., 2016; Love, 2019).

Zero-Tolerance Policies

Zero-tolerance policies feed the STPP because they are modeled after correctional

sentencing guidelines and mandatory minimum sentencing in criminal justice systems. This

school discipline model promotes the punitive justice system policies made for adults and shifts

responsibility for school violations to the juvenile justice system, where students become victims

of criminalization and injustice. One key component in zero-tolerance is the mandatory

exclusion from public schools shown through school suspension, expulsion, and placements into

DAEPs, which are practices aimed more at correcting behavior and promoting compliance than

providing equitable access to fair and rigorous public education experiences. The discipline

policies also encourage police presence at schools such as school resource officers (SROs),

physical restraint, and automatic punishments that result in suspensions, expulsions, and out-of-

class time due to subjective teacher office referrals which oppressive policies and procedures

supported by zero-tolerance and contributing to the pipeline (Fasching-Varner et al., 2014;

Fasching-Varner et al., 2017; Love, 2019; Mallett, 2017; Selman, 2017).

Alexander (2012) has named the political stances against drugs, violence, crime, poverty,

et cetera as a "comprehensive system of racialized control" that permeates every facet of the

United States governing and social systems, which unduly target racial minorities (p. 175).

Coined "The New Jim Crow Laws," mass incarceration of Black males beginning with the 1980s

war on drugs offered "Whites opposed to racial reform a unique opportunity to express their

hostility toward Blacks and Black progress without being exposed to the charge of racism"

(Alexander, 2012, p. 54). This sentiment is evident in the disproportionate numbers of Black

males entering the juvenile justice system via school referrals and violations of zero-tolerance policies. According to Swain and Noblit (2011), the suspension rates for Black students were more than three times as likely to be suspended as White or Asian/Pacific Islander students and more than twice as likely as Hispanic students (Swain & Noblit, 2011, p. 470). Also, Berlowitz et al. (2017) asserted that zero-tolerance policies were also promoted to combat bullying in schools, but the discretionary implementation of anti-bullying via zero-tolerance has demonstrated an additional racist measure serving as a cog in the STPP. As a result, zero-tolerance has heavily influenced youth's criminalization, especially youth of color, who are punished with criminal records and school exclusion becoming more likely to be placed in DAEPs, arrested again, and imprisoned (Swain & Noblit, 2011). According to Darby and Rury (2018), within the public school disciplinary policies, students of color were more likely to become more prepared for prison than they were for successful postgraduation life opportunities.

Literature Review

The strengths and weaknesses of the different research approaches involving studies about the STPP, CRT, and SJLT carry weighted implications into analyzing, criticizing, and reforming leadership practices that persist in institutionalized racism in public education. The studies are both feasible and have substantial impacts on both research communities and public education reform measures that directly influence millions of marginalized student populations' trajectory. The analyses include qualitative research designs involving intense critical review of existing research to explore and expand research problems using narrative research, phenomenology, ethnographies, grounded theory studies, and case studies. Equally noted are the quantitative designs that further contribute empirical evidence in both experimental and nonexperimental surveys and mixed-methods methods that are sequential, concurrent, and

transformative in promoting equitable access to educational and positive life opportunities for all students. Research within the last 10 years has made several attempts to address the national problem of the STPP and its relationship with public schools and the criminal justice system and attempt to provide solutions towards education reform measures, especially regarding leadership practices.

Qualitative Research Designs

Fasching-Varner et al. (2014) used a qualitative research design to examine the STPP as both a public education system failure yet an intentional and functioning system in a complicated relationship between the public education and the criminal justice systems. The research reviewed over 31 sources to inform the research community of new perspectives when addressing education reform, the STPP, school discipline, and equitable access to education. Fasching-Varner et al. (2014) led current research around the STPP with evidence that the system is not an accident, rather an intentional economic design to extend the disenfranchisement of people of color in America for the benefit of the White population based on free-market economic principles also known in the CRT research arena as racial and penal realism. The research was inclusive of data sets from comparative prison populations between people of color and Whites, data sets proving economic benefits of growing prison populations, disproportionality in the numbers of students of color punished in the criminal justice system as compared to their White counterparts, and both the achievement and discipline gaps in public education. The authors concluded that racial and ethnic disparities in public education mirror those in the criminal justice system and in a society where the societal expectations are low for marginalized populations, and schools and prisons determine who has equitable access to education and freedom.

Khalifa (2013) expanded on Theoharis's (2007) SJL concepts for principals in a longitudinal ethnographic study to assist parents and students in advocating for school inclusion as a direct push against public school exclusionary practices that target minority students and violate students' civil rights to equal access to education. According to Theoharis (2007), students of color were not served well in public education due to subjective discipline policies and a lack of culturally sensitive and relevant pedagogy. Both Khalifa (2013) and Theoharis (2007) extended the school reform argument advocating for culturally sensitive pedagogy to incorporate culturally responsive leadership via the support of social justice leadership theory. The conceptual frameworks for guiding their ethnographic study included Spradley's characteristics for ethnography and Babbie's coding for field notes (Khalifa, 2013). The interview questions included in the study were designed by the researcher based on the study's exploration of school culture related to educational leadership and at-risk students. Coded data from unstructured interviews centered around four themes: inclusion/exclusion, principal advocacy, self-advocacy, and cultural behaviors. The study's results supported the researcher's hypothesis that the school leader played a central part in developing self-advocacy skills in students and their parents necessary to combat the racial disparities in school exclusionary practices. Moreover, Khalifa (2013) asserted that public education reform desperately needs strong SJL displaying four specific behaviors: administrative structures, strong student-principal relationship, school-community overlap, and acceptance of indigenous student identities.

DeMatthews et al. (2017) contributed extensively to qualitative research involving CRT and SJLT. The purpose of their study was to understand how the relationships between race and school context contribute to the way school leaders choose to structure and implement discipline policies. The researchers asserted that few empirical studies focused on whether race is a primary

influencer in how principals enforce discipline policies and procedures in their schools. Building upon both CRT and SJLT, the research investigated practices related to the racial discipline gap directly correlated to the STPP. The study results illustrated how implicit and explicit biases of school leaders contributed to unjust disciplinary measures that both failed to improve student behavior and school safety, which further expands the discipline gap continuum. Current STPP literature justifies the necessity for educational reform in the name of student rights, emphasizing the impact school leadership has on all stakeholders because leaders act as the instrumental agents for determining change that impacts both the operating order and everyone involved in the system (DeMatthews et al., 2017).

Quantitative Research Designs

Most of the trending research within the last 10 years conducted around social justice leadership in public education has been quantitative research using a nonexperimental design, such as the survey method from existing tools that gauge the impact of leadership practices on school performance. For example, Brown's (2010) case study compared several empirical studies about leadership characteristics to the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards (now known as the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders) to examine the perceptions of urban and rural teachers' about their high school principals' abilities to display critical leadership attributes. Of the 12 factors grouped in the 48-item research tool, the results validated that teachers in urban settings believed the essential characteristics of leadership principals should display were building community, communicating a vision to everyone involved, and empowering people.

Mallett's (2016) quantitative STPP research used a systematic review of literature focusing on four empirical questions:

(1) What is the history of school discipline?; (2) Is the school to prison pipeline real, and

if so, who is impacted?; (3) What are the outcomes of school discipline policies across

stakeholders?; and (4) Do these policies make schools safer? (Mallett, 2016, p. 15)

The review investigated evidence of the STPP and validated that public school safety measures

did not restore school safety; rather, the zero-tolerance mandates enabled a dysfunctional and

racially charged relationship between the public education and juvenile justice systems. The

critical literature review provided data from school system disciplinary policies contributing to

the criminalization of typical adolescent behaviors connected to the abuse of the zero-tolerance

policies instituted in response to a call for increased school safety measures. The evidence

answering the empirical investigation revealed an analysis of a four-part inquiry scaffolded

toward the researcher's conclusion that school safety measures should not supersede a students'

right to equitable access to education.

The four parts are (a) historical background of education and juvenile justice systems, (b)

impact of school safety policies across stakeholders, (c) validation of the existence of the

school to prison pipeline and the vulnerable student populations involved, and (d) a call

for action for social workers. (Mallett, 2016, p. 16)

The researcher made a purposeful statement in the study's conclusion explaining the importance

of refocusing on school inclusion and rehabilitation of young people caught in the STPP.

Mixed-Methods Research Designs

Pesta's (2018) research used a correlational mixed-methods design measuring and

evaluating the relationship between two variables (relationships between school discipline and

the STPP assessing ethno-racial outcome variance). This mixed-methods study addressed the gap

in racial disproportionality in public education exclusionary discipline practices to reveal the

devastating impacts on behavioral and life outcomes across race and ethnicity. Pesta's (2018) research hypotheses involved the presumptions that school exclusion and criminal offending behaviors serve as catalysts for juvenile delinquency and drop-out rates with minority students, specifically Black and Latino students, experiencing more school exclusionary consequences than their White peers. During this study, the attributes investigated were the means or proportions and standard deviations across ethno-racial groups regarding criminal activity in adulthood, delinquency, drop-out rates, exclusionary discipline, parental education, parental income, and prior delinquency. The data was collected from long-term behavior investigations and questionnaires. The study results found a substantial increase in the use of exclusionary discipline practices (out-of-school suspension, expulsion, and DAEP placement) in schools that had not been equally distributed across all student populations and directly correlated to student involvement in the criminal justice system. Moreover, as the number of exclusionary discipline practices increased, so did racial disparities illustrating that people of color have become increasingly overrepresented in all stages of the juvenile and criminal justice systems. The research challenged school exclusionary discipline practices that feed the STPP.

Using a mixed-methods approach, Lorraine (2011) researched whether there was a relationship between teachers' views of school culture and leadership practices related to school performance scores (SPS). The research also sought to determine if teachers' perceptions of leadership practices were at all correlated to school culture and if the relationship between leadership practices and culture differed by SPS. By examining how teachers perceived leadership practices and their potential impacts on student achievement, this study allowed an investigation to determine if any isolated leadership practices improved overall school performance measures. The instrument used to survey teachers' perceptions of leadership

practices was the Principal Leadership Questionnaire (PLQ), and the Revised School Culture Elements Questionnaire (RSCEQ) was the survey used to assess teachers' perceptions of their school's culture. Two open-ended questions were included in the study allowing teachers to elaborate on their perceptions of leadership attributes they perceived as impacting school culture, student achievement, and school performance. While the quantitative data did not reveal a significant relationship between teacher perceptions of leadership practices' impact on the SPS or school culture, there were essential relationships that contributed to the qualitative data collected about teachers' views of leadership practices that mirror SJL and a culture supporting inclusion on the SPS.

Synthesis of Research Findings

The investigation into the STPP has called attention to the discipline gap caused by exclusionary zero-tolerance policies, which disproportionately isolates minority students and students with disabilities from receiving equitable educational opportunities and pushing them out of school and into jail. Moreover, the discipline inequities in public education omit minorities and students with disabilities from the instructional time and educational opportunities necessary for student achievement and access to positive future outcomes. When classroom management is a primary focus in public education and evolves into zero-tolerance approaches, the evidence shows minority and disabled students are incapable of achieving in academics at the same rate as their White peer groups as they are excluded from necessary instruction per being removed from learning spaces because they are more likely determined to be disruptive by culturally unresponsive school policy. The essential changes required for reform rests with school leadership.

Connecting the Discipline Gap and the STPP

The discipline gap has a direct association with the STPP. School safety measures that criminalize children are exacerbated by zero-tolerance policies, police presence in the form of SROs, and school exclusionary practices. The STPP is a direct result of school leadership decisions disregarding the disproportionality for minority students' access to equitable public school opportunities (Annamma et al., 2014; Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Castillo, 2013; DeMatthews et al., 2017; Fasching-Varner et al., 2017; Fedders, 2018; Geronimo, 2011; Horsford et al., 2016; Mallett, 2016; Selman, 2017).

According to the National Council on Disability (2015), a disproportionate percentage of historically marginalized youth is contained within school exclusionary practices such as suspensions, expulsions, and DAEPs, or held within juvenile justice and criminal justice systems without access to appropriate education that could have prevented their STPP entry. The report also revealed both an overrepresentation and underrepresentation of students of color in special education, which suggests that the public school special education referral and assessment systems are discriminatory (National Council on Disability, 2015). Barnes and Motz (2018) assert the extensive scholarly evidence of racial inequalities in adult criminal justice outcomes becomes related to the predetermining factors associated with racial disparities in school-based punishment. Moreover, current research asserts that discipline determinations made during students' public education determine the correlation between race and criminalization and entry into the STPP (Barnes & Motz, 2018). Additionally, Owens (2017) explained that students involved with the criminal justice system at a young age are more likely to recidivate, continue to be criminally involved, and suffer from persistent negative consequences of that criminal record.

Zero-Tolerance Causes Racial Discipline Disparity

Zero-tolerance policies in public education magnified the discipline gap (Annamma et al., 2014; Booker & Mitchell, 2011; DeMatthews et al., 2017; Fasching-Varner et al., 2017; Mallett, 2016). While zero-tolerance policies were instituted in public education in response to the drug wars of the 1980s and school safety concerns, the systems became the catalyst for the widening discipline gap for minorities. Curtis (2014) explained the response to the prevalence of school violence, such as the school shooting at Columbine High School, and increasing concerns about drug and gang activity in public schools, spurred the zero-tolerance policies mandating a set of systemic consequences for specific violations. As such, the policies institute the removal of disruptive students from classrooms to restore peace and order in the learning environment but have transformed into policies targeting historically marginalized students resulting in disparate discipline data and the STPP (Bryan, 2017).

Considerable social science research has provided revealing data showing marginalized youth, especially students of color, being victims of harsher disciplinary measures justified by zero-tolerance policies compared to their White peers (Bryan, 2017; Curtis, 2014; González, 2012; Owens, 2017). Social science research around the STPP and the zero-tolerance relationship has even garnered the attention of government officials. According to Elias (2013), Illinois Senator Richard Durbin held the first federal hearing addressing the STPP and told the subcommittee of the Senate Judiciary Committee,

> For many young people, our schools are increasingly a gateway to the criminal justice system. This phenomenon is a consequence of a culture of zero tolerance that is widespread in our schools and is depriving many children of their fundamental right to an education. (Elias, 2013, p. 2)

Moody (2016) claimed the relationship between the achievement and discipline gaps is two-fold: zero-tolerance policies perpetuate institutionalized racism because Black children's behaviors are misinterpreted by school leaders and teachers, causing a disproportionate amount of office referrals and exclusionary school policies, and these ill-perceived behaviors are treated punitively rather than assessed for learning needs or culturally responsive approaches. Gregory et al. (2010) echoed that minority and disabled students hold a higher representation in the STPP because there is a clash between subjective perspectives of student behavior and school systems that justify zero-tolerance policies in the name of school safety. According to Elias (2013), racial minorities and children with disabilities are disproportionately represented in the school to prison pipeline:

> African American students are 3.5 times more likely than their White classmates to be suspended or expelled … 8.6% of public school children have been identified as having disabilities that affect their ability to learn; these students make up 32% of youth in juvenile detention centers … 1 in 4 Black children with disabilities were suspended at least once, versus 1 in 11 White students. (paras. 9–11)

As opposed to public school messaging and practices supporting an equitable education for all students, Winn and Behizadeh (2011) articulated that zero-tolerance policies are promoting exclusion and drop-out, thereby enabling the STPP for minority and disabled students who "learn that their lives are disposable and that detention centers, jails, and prisons have somehow become an expected part of their life cycle" (p. 167).

Young et al. (2018) asserted that there was no denying the STPP was synonymous with both the public education discipline and achievement gaps, and the overwhelming data overtly correlated to the disproportionate representation of Black students. Furthermore, Black students

are statistically shown to be disciplined more frequently and severely even after research

revealed minority students were no more likely to display more significant levels of disruptive

behavior in comparison to their nonethnic peer groups (Alexander, 2012; Barnes & Motz, 2018;

Bryan, 2017; DeMatthews et al., 2017; Elias, 2013; Grace & Nelson, 2018; Love, 2019; Moody,

2016; Young et al., 2018). Finally, when students are removed from the learning environment for

any length of time, whether for an office referral, suspension, expulsion, or DAEP placement,

adverse outcomes ensue. For marginalized student populations targeted by no tolerance policies,

the ramifications from school exclusionary practices begin with low grades and self-esteem and

progress into the juvenile justice system and STPP trajectory where the odds place them in a

place of hopeless statistics (Gregory et al., 2010; Mallett, 2017; Pesta, 2018).

Disciplinary Alternative Education Placements are STPP Placeholders

While DAEPs were intentionally designed as temporary placements where students were

placed to serve their exclusionary time from their home school suspension or expulsion, they

have emerged as a placeholder in the STPP. According to Selman (2017), DAEPs did nothing

more than to promote a juvenile justice message that criminalization and unemployment were the

only future options for minority students. Not only that, but Mills et al. (2013) and Geronimo

(2011) explained that DAEPs house unwanted students who were transferred out of mainstream

education into external spaces due to supposed problematic behaviors and academic failure in the

classroom. Geronimo (2011) further elaborated on how the structural inequality in public

education justifies DAEPs as relieving administrator fatigue and educational accountability of

problem students because of the extension of zero-tolerance into the juvenile justice system. For

example, administrators can pawn off low-performing and noncompliant students to DAEPs via

the juvenile justice routes in the name of zero-tolerance and delinquency, which reserves

allocation of resources to others and superficially projects higher test scores (Geronimo, 2011).

    According to Booker and Mitchell (2011), a student's placement in a DAEP was

considered mandatory per zero-tolerance discipline policies, and minority students were

documented to have been disproportionately represented over White students in DAEPs for both

mandatory and discretionary referral processes. The discretionary data was directly correlated to

bias leadership practices because White students were typically referred to the office for

deliberately breaking the rules, such as smoking and leaving campus without permission, while

Black students were more likely referred for subjective observations, such as disrespect or loud

disruptions (Booker & Mitchell, 2011). Also, Knox (2013) explained that many administrators

use zero-tolerance policies to justify segregation via DAEP placement for many minority

students because every district has the autonomy to create their responses to zero-tolerance

infractions, which further enables leadership subjectivity resulting in achievement and discipline

gaps supporting the STPP.

The Responsibility Rests in Educational Leadership

    The investigations into the STPP have sought to develop a social construct explaining the

criminalization of minority and disabled youth, revealing a disturbing relationship between

public education zero-tolerance policies and the criminal justice system as the root cause.

Alexander (2012) named the social construct as mass incarceration masking a new caste system

in America mirroring the past's Jim Crow laws. The new face of racial discrimination in

America has been concealed as a response to the war on drugs where Black males are targeted

through school discipline systems where schools began perceiving children as criminals or

suspicious potential violators as reflected in the police and policing presence allowed in learning

communities (Alexander, 2012; Darby & Rury, 2018; Love, 2019). The racist origins of public schooling and student achievement must be further investigated before real education reform can fully materialize because both racial achievement and discipline gaps in public education are socially and institutionally constructed (Darby & Rury, 2018). School leaders seeking to reform public education with an aim to drive a universal school culture and climate of justice and dignity must address the racist systemic manifestations such as zero-tolerance, SROs, and subjective school exclusionary practices disguised as school safety protocols (Barnes & Motz, 2018; Castillo, 2013; Curtis, 2014; Fasching-Varner et al., 2017; Miguel & Gargano, 2017). School leaders are also challenged to address the injustices associated with school tracking and cultural bias that reinforce fixed racist and ableist methods using specific SJL methods, such as restorative practices (Bryan, 2017; Castillo, 2013; Coggshall et al., 2013; DeMatthews, 2016; Fergus, 2017; González, 212; Hunter-Heaston, 2010; Kline, 2016; Miguel & Gargano, 2017; Schiff, 2018; Theoharis, 2007; Yerace, 2014).

Educational leadership systems and practices determine the achievement and discipline gaps, and their use of DAEPs facilitates the discriminatory practices enabling the STPP. Educational leadership decisions in public education are the root causes for both the achievement and discipline gaps and STPP; therefore, public education leaders are responsible for facilitating institutionalized racism within school system design and implementation. According to Owens (2017), the zero-tolerance policies enforced by school leaders allow for zero-tolerance SROs to create an environment where student misbehavior becomes criminal behavior; "While few juvenile arrests directly result in incarceration, this is a key entry point into the School-to-Prison Pipeline [sic]; becoming 'known to police' may increase the severity of the criminal justice system response to future deviant behavior" (p. 13). Not only that, but it is within a principal's

discretion to choose to have SRO involvement in disciplinary practices or to use a more personal and restorative discipline approach to address student misbehavior. In effect, school leadership sets the tone and creates the campus systems, which enables or disables the need for a police presence.

Schools promoting exclusionary practices supported by zero-tolerance promote a climate where policing students push marginalized populations into the streets, DAEPs, or into the STPP where incarceration is their future reality. Overall, today's school leaders must exhibit the behaviors and courage to challenge and dismantle systems of power and privilege to change the life trajectory of student outcomes for historically marginalized populations, and public education reform employing SJL is necessary for the dismantling of the STPP ((Bryan, 2017; Castillo, 2013; Coggshall et al., 2013; DeMatthews, 2016; Fergus, 2017; González, 2012; Hunter-Heaston, 2010; Kline, 2016; Miguel & Gargano, 2017; Schiff, 2018; Theoharis, 2007; Yerace, 2014).

Velasco (2011) asserted that the fundamental component to both school improvement and student achievement is the school culture and climate a school leader establishes. The positive attributes of school leaders who develop a positive culture and environment are those who demonstrate leadership characteristics of both social servant and activism (Black, 2010; Coggshall et al., 2013; Curtis, 2014; Hunter-Heaston, 2010; Rhoden, 2012; Velasco, 2011; Yerace, 2014). Additionally, the school leaders who implement systemic change that levels the academic playing field for all students exhibit the characteristics of a social justice leader who combats the public school inequities contributing to the discipline gap using restorative approaches as opposed to punitive zero-tolerance policies (Curtis, 2014; Fasching-Varner et al., 2017; Fergus, 2017; González, 2012; Kline, 2016; Love, 2018; Mallett, 2016). Equally cited are

research designs measuring the attributes of social justice leaders that positively influence school climate and student outcomes while also demanding school leaders to question the discipline systems in public education that feed the STPP (Coggshall et al., 2013; DeMatthews, 2016; Fasching-Varner et al., 2014; Heitzeg, 2009; Mallett, 2016, 2017).

Critique of Previous Research

Because this study explored the STPP, it was safe to argue that previous SJL studies involving teachers and school leaders were critiqued. Moreover, researchers who have studied the outcomes of exclusionary school policies and practices were essential when considering perspectives within DAEPs since they were systemic designs that removed students from traditional educational settings.

The conceptual frameworks presented in this review generally used CRT studies when researching the STPP and examined how and why relationships developed between the achievement and discipline gaps and the impacted student populations. Recent qualitative STPP studies have typically used case studies or phenomenological research designs proving the existence of the STPP, defining the factors involved in the history of the STPP, and illustrating the disproportionality of race and student ability engaged in the STPP. The most thorough qualitative studies referenced historical institutionalized racism that has permeated America since its founding but falls short in indirectly naming a reform measure that goes beyond addressing STPP symptoms, such as zero-tolerance policies and restorative practices. The study findings fail to assert that for the STPP to end, education reform must directly address racism and ableism in specific education reform initiatives.

Current quantitative and mixed-method research approaches to the STPP have studied the impact the achievement and discipline gaps have on school performance outcomes, which is

consistent with national public education concerns involving increasingly declining assessment scores of disabled students and students of color. Researchers have also studied the public school safety efforts and racial disproportionality resulting from those efforts, which is aligned to growing concerns resulting from violent and deadly criminal acts in public schools across the nation. Those studies resulted in research studying leadership strategies to counter increasing student safety and achievement concerns, which led to research identifying and scrutinizing the relationship between the public education system and the juvenile justice system. Most of these studies support reforming educator preparation programs to be inclusive of culturally responsive pedagogy and restorative justice practices and strategies leaders can implement for interrupting students' pathways into the STPP.

Trending STPP research presented in this review has also married the CRT with SJLT to develop upon previous research in proving civil rights violations of historically marginalized student populations involved in the STPP trajectory. In addition, this trending research claims penal realism in proposing action to disrupt and dismantle the systems of power and privilege that contribute to the growth and sustainability of the STPP in public education. Most of those studies concluded that zero-tolerance policies are subjective, oppressive, and racist and should be replaced with restorative practices. What the research community studying the STPP has struggled to do in number is to address and name blatant and illegal racist leadership practices aligned to civil rights violations and laws protecting children from discrimination and abuse of power via public education exclusion. Future investigations could determine whether the institution of DAEPs violates traditional public education systemic design.

Limitations of Previous Research

What is limited in the research studies regarding the STPP is a more focused investigation into DAEPs and their potential enablement of the institutionalized racism and ableism perpetuated within public education. If research has verified exclusionary schooling to facilitate both the achievement and discipline gaps for minority and disabled students, then the existence of DAEPs theoretically contributes to the STPP trajectory for marginalized student populations. Data needed to determine the functions and effectiveness of DAEPs in public school districts regarding student achievement is limited. The findings could provide insight that increases the empirical knowledge in the research community around social justice and the public education reform community. One way to gather data to determine the purpose and effectiveness of DAEPs is from the lived experiences of educators and leaders working inside DAEPs.

According to the critical review by Gonsoulin et al. (2012), the ineffectiveness and damaging effects of zero-tolerance policies founded in their study in a large school district prompted the researchers' advocacy for effective staff development procedures and evidence-based research around professional learning communities in the design of a three-tiered staff development strategy aimed at mitigating students within the STPP. Bailey (2016) conducted one-on-one interviews in the same school district with a sample of African American teachers and administrators about contributing factors in the STPP and found "persistent disparities in achievement and opportunity for African American students, an at-times hostile work environment for African American educators, and a perceived disconnect with Denver's African American community [which] have all raised the level of concern" (p. 1). The vital data missing from Gonsoulin et al.'s (2012) and Bailey's (2016) research is the lived experiences in their

district of staff who work in DAEP placements and the perspectives about serving students in a

DAEP system. Moreover, DAEPs have been argued to undeniably function as a cog in the STPP

phenomenon; yet this noticing has been overlooked in education reform initiatives regarding

equity and inclusion (Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Bryan, 2017; Curtis, 2014; DeMatthews et al.,

2017; Fasching-Varner et al., 2014; Geronimo, 2011; Horsford et al., 2016; Knox, 2013).

Another limitation of research around SJL is the focus and attention given to a leader's

impact on the school climate. While a positive school climate is confirmed to affect student

achievement positively, the subjectivity from perspective and implications does not address the

actions necessary for leaders to create inclusion and equity. According to Rhoden (2012),

principals' leadership behaviors directly impact school climate and student achievement but

asserts that more research is needed to determine whether school climate is associated with

student achievement. Not only that, but trending research regarding social justice leadership's

impact on the STPP has been limited to exchanging punitive discipline policies for vague

restorative practices. Even though this research is reliable and valid, it does not name exact

methods for dismantling the STPP.

Velasco (2011) conducted studies around school leadership behaviors because there are

limitations in research identifying authoritative behaviors and school improvement. For example,

the principal sets the school's tone and climate, which is necessary for how others perceive them

in response to a schools' needs and concerns. Of the possible 12 correlations that were examined

by Velasco (2011), only one yielded results indicating that there was a strong correlation that

was statistically significant between principals' (authority usual) behaviors and the

communication climate dimension (communication adequacy): communication adequacy is

extremely important for a leader to communicate the vision, the goals, and the objectives that

must be considered a priority by all faculty and staff members. While this research is beneficial

in leaders' understandings around building rapport with staff, it does not call out what is

necessary for a school leader to be a change agent on behalf of all students. Hunter-Heaston

(2010) and Black (2010) identified three leadership criteria of effective leadership impacting

overall school performance: understanding self and others, organizational life, and building

bridges through relationships. While the thematic characteristics directly and positively correlate

effective leadership mindsets with school improvement, it fails to address the specific SJL

actions necessary to institute equity that would mitigate marginalized students from oppressive

exclusionary practices.

The trending research addressing the STPP over the past 10 years and the variables

contributing to its malice provide valid and reliable conclusions consistent with the aligned

themes in educational leadership that continue to emerge. These themes include but are not

limited to addressing the types of leadership mindsets and strategies required to challenge the

systems contributing to the disenfranchisement of marginalized student populations regarding

education equity, access, and dismantling of the STPP. The validity of the instruments used in

STPP and school leadership research designs to dismantle oppressive discipline policies has been

empirically substantiated in conceptual accuracy and replicability across numerous studies. Data

collection and analysis have been consistently evidenced both logical and relative to research

communities and public education reform. Much of the research reported in this study were

secondary sources reporting or expanding on previously conducted studies and published in and

by professional journals or professional education organizations. Also, most of the studies

addressed the leadership traits and practices necessary to negate the trending injustices and racial

disparities associated with the STPP. Therefore, this study continues to ask the following research question:

RQ1. How do leaders and teachers serving in DAEPs describe the relationship between DAEPs and the STPP?

Chapter Summary

This chapter aimed to establish the specific attributes of the STPP and present the analytical and leadership theories supporting the arguments for critical review necessary for education reform. The literature review was conducted to outline the discriminatory practices involving the STPP and their impacts on historically marginalized populations and the leadership characteristics capable of dismantling the STPP trajectory. School leadership's challenge is to establish real equity in public education as it is not a current reality for historically marginalized students.

Definitions of achievement and discipline gaps, zero-tolerance, racist, ableist exclusionary practices in public education, and the leadership types necessary for rectifying the STPP social construct were examined. In addition, the chapter revealed the dysfunctional relationship between public education and the juvenile justice system. Moreover, this chapter expanded on the critical race analysis of penal realism infiltrating the walls of public education in a deliberate, systematic trajectory that criminalizes marginalized youth and prepares them for prison instead of providing equitable access to just public education.

Yerace (2014) made a fundamental argument addressing school safety and education reform by asserting that public education is in desperate need of SJL with a servant mindset that rejects zero-tolerance policies by instituting restorative practices in place of punitive discipline. Multiple studies have suggested that while leadership training could help school districts

promote inclusion and tolerance, the leadership mindset must shift into social justice action to challenge the status quo regarding school safety and stop school exclusionary systems and practices altogether.

Chapter 3: Research Method

This research addressed the school to prison pipeline (STPP) phenomenon through DAEP experiences concerning the STPP trajectory. The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate, identify, and interpret the experiences and perspectives of educators serving students referred to a DAEP. The catalysts for this study were the previous empirical studies establishing why and how vulnerable student populations have been pushed into the juvenile justice system through punitive public education systems, such as DAEP placements, in the guise of school safety. The following research question drove this study:

RQ1. How do leaders and teachers serving in DAEPs describe the relationship between DAEPs and the STPP?

The personal accounts of DAEP experiences allowed for examining the participants' meanings from their experiences resulting in familiar patterns, themes, and trends. Additionally, this study's data revealed the internalized cultural presuppositions perpetuating the external discriminatory school systems affecting the staff perspectives and lived experiences.

Research Design and Method

This qualitative study used a critical phenomenological approach designed to investigate the STPP through the experiences and perspectives of DAEP staff who have served students placed in DAEPs. According to Creswell (2013) and McMillan (2012), qualitative research with a phenomenological approach aims to describe the essence of lived experiences to understand meanings attributed to specific life events that guide and impact individuals' future outcomes. Also, I chose a phenomenological design because the documented ableist and racist ideologies influencing school policies promote and create discriminatory language, messaging, and systems fed by the educational and political continuum affecting the lived experiences of historically

marginalized students, as well as the adults who serve them in school settings (Bryan, 2017; Darby & Rury, 2018; Fasching-Varner et al., 2014; Love, 2019). Finally, fundamental principles of both CRT and SJLT are aligned with empathetic understanding and active advocacy, forcing a change in systems and structures where lived experiences of marginalized populations have been inequitable and unjust regarding a specific phenomenon.

Qualitative researchers support in-depth semistructured interviews in a phenomenological approach as they allow for common issues and trends to surface from participant experiences, which provides an appropriate opportunity for an active call for change (Creswell, 2013; McMillan, 2012; Moustakas, 1994). According to Creswell (2013) and McMillan (2012), it is appropriate for the interview process to examine the staff's experiences inside a DAEP to determine if the DAEP holds a position in the STPP phenomenon's trajectory. Also, McMillan (2012) explained that qualitative, critical phenomenological studies using documented data such as stories of individuals, written records, and archival sources (e.g., attendance records, discipline or incident reports, student files) was appropriate because it increases validity through triangulation when establishing relationships within the emergent themes that arise from personal interviews (p. 23).

As addressed in Chapter 2, the most recent qualitative STPP studies were critical literature reviews and case studies researched through a CRT or an SJLT lens and determined the evidence of existence and historical context of the STPP phenomenon (war on drugs and school safety concerns); the definition and validated existence of the STPP phenomenon as a dysfunctional relationship between the juvenile justice and public education systems; defined and verified the contributing variables to the STPP continuum (zero-tolerance policies, school exclusionary practices, such as suspension, expulsion and DAEP placements); confirmed,

through decades of documented disparities, the public education discipline policies and procedures are subjective, biased and abusive processes targeting students of specific races, genders and abilities (racism, sexism, and ableism) that violate students' fundamental civil rights on grounds of access to an equitable and just public education; and reviewed supportive reform measures to include social-emotional best practices in staff development in context of changing school management and discipline practices in an effort to recommend alternative ways, mainly restorative practices, in which schools respond to severe violations of school behavioral codes (Annamma et al., 2014; Bailey, 2016; Desai & Abeita, 2017; Gonsoulin et al., 2012; Mallet, 2016).

Trending qualitative studies of the STPP using phenomenological and ethnographic approaches propose change via the CRT and SJLT lenses to suspend the STPP continuum variables. Common themes addressed in this type of research have been investigating alternatives to zero-tolerance policies; addressing teacher preparation programs to shift from punitive discipline to restorative practice utilizing social-emotional learning strategies; addressing leaderships' authority over school culture and climate; and the promotion of adapting traditional school practices to social justice school practices (Coggshall et al., 2013; DeMatthews et al., 2017).

Qualitative researchers begin with assumptions and the use of theoretical and conceptual frameworks to inform the study and question regarding a social or human issue by which they are expected to deliver rich, thick, complex descriptions from lived experiences of the participants within the specified subject (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, the shared issues were the experiences and staff perspectives who worked in the alternative education DAEP settings and their DAEP's relationship to the STPP phenomenon in public education. In pursuing

this qualitative study, a phenomenological approach was appropriate. Moreover, this study required a critical phenomenological approach to allow for a potential proposed change, which will be addressed later in Chapter 5. Finally, phenomenology was preferred over a case study in this qualitative research design because a case study focuses on a single entity that is characterized by a time and place while phenomenology allows for a phenomenon (e.g., STPP) to be investigated through multiple interpretations of the same experiences (e.g., working in a DAEP), and the meaning of the experiences serves as the primary data in the investigation (McMillan, 2012).

According to Moustakas (1994), the transcendental phenomenological approach relies upon the participants' descriptive experiences, while hermeneutical phenomenology relies on the researcher's interpretation of descriptions. Still, both methodologies seek to understand the essence of the human experience. According to Scott's (2017) qualitative research using the CRT lens and the interviewing strategy investigating experiences of at-risk African American male students, a critical phenomenological study allowed for the description, analysis, and interpretation of how politics, ideologies, systems, language, and messaging impact the lived experiences of research participants. When investigating the STPP phenomenon through the staffs' lived experiences in a DAEP placement, these influences cannot be overlooked as it minimizes the participants' lived experiences and ignores the impact of those influences on the adults' practices and perspectives. Moreover, Grace and Nelson's (2018) phenomenological study examined the effects of institutionalized racism on students' lived experiences in school systems via educators' perspectives. This study illustrated how racist political and societal ideologies permeated and facilitated racist systemic structures through oppressive adult leadership practices that were causally related to their mindset. The study's findings showed that

a complete paradigm shift in public education was necessary to create real equity in public education.

Creswell (2013) explained that qualitative research designs allow the participants to assign meaning to the topic being studied instead of the researcher giving sense to the topical experiences. This research's goals continued to follow Moustakas's (1994) approach to phenomenology due to the procedures required to collect, analyze, and code data. This study focused on (a) identifying the academic, social, and institutional themes and trends in staff experiences with students in a DAEP placement; (b) illustrating, through everyday staff experiences and perspectives, the relationship between school systems and juvenile justice systems via disciplinary referral processes; and (c) contributing to educational leadership and social science research to better inform educational reform movements around dismantling the STPP. Finally, as addressed in Chapter 2, significant and shared principles of CRT and SJLT are acknowledging, empathizing, understanding, and empowering those who have observed and lived oppressive or abusive systemic experiences.

Study Setting

This study's five DAEPs represent some of the most diverse school districts in Colorado, including urban and suburban regions throughout the state, and are coded District 1, District 2, etc. The aggregate demographic data from the five districts where my samples were collected serve over 200,000 pre-K–12 students with an approximate average demographic breakdown as follows: 40% Hispanic; 30% White; 15% Black or African American; 10% Multiracial; 3% Asian; 1% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander; and 1% American Indian/Alaska Native, with 55% of the student population free or reduced lunch eligible, and 15% identified as students with disabilities (Colorado Department of Education, 2020). This study referenced the DAEPs,

participants, and research locations where data was collected with pseudonyms to preserve anonymity.

Population

The adult staff participants in this study currently serve or have served within the 2017–present school years in either an instructional or leadership role in a DAEP within the study's setting with at least two years of experience in a DAEP. Disciplinary alternative education programs in the setting are a part of the districts' alternative education networks. According to the Colorado Department of Education (2015), "in 2012, Colorado House Bill 12-1345 was passed and eliminated zero-tolerance policies in the state; the bill eliminated mandatory expulsions for drugs, weapons (except firearms), assaults, and robbery" (p. 3). Yet this study revealed through participants' experiences that DAEPs in Colorado are still housing expelled students for zero-tolerance violations.

According to Griffiths et al. (2019), there has been an increase in the number of alternative education programs, as the number of students in such programs has increased from approximately 130,000 in 1990 to almost 550,000 in 2014 (p. 149). Not only that, but Geronimo (2011) asserted that DAEPs showed trends of warehousing students who were unjustly criminalized, specifically minority and students with special learning needs, and "the education provided at alternative education programs are often inferior" (p. 435). Moreover, Geronimo (2011) found that for a large majority of DAEPs not only warehoused problematic students but also served as "dumping grounds" where "the teachers at these programs are less qualified than teachers in mainstream programs, and alternative education can be used to 'discipline' teachers that are not performing well" (Geronimo, 2011, p. 435). Finally, Kennedy and Soutullo (2018) found that most staff serving DAEPs operated with deficit thinking about the students placed in

their alternative settings, which directly impacts students' educational trajectories into the STTP. This study obtained data about Colorado DAEP systems and students from teachers and leaders serving in DAEPs in urban and suburban area school districts to get insights from their experiences and perspectives.

Study Sample

A purposive, criterion sampling strategy was implemented involving participants meeting specific criteria (those who shared common experiences) and utilized to select research participants for extracted data to reflect experiences associated with the studied STPP phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). The DAEP leaders and teachers included in the study serve or have served in a DAEP placement within the last three to four years to ensure their understanding of the current DAEP job and system expectations. More specifically, for either teachers or leaders to be included in the study, participants had to have served in a DAEP for at least two years within the 2017 to current school years to ensure relevance and recent connections between district and site expectations at DAEPs.

Recruitment of five teachers and six leaders within the study's setting began upon Abilene Christian University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval in December 2020 (see Appendix A). According to Young and Casey (2019), rich and dense identification of themes, patterns, and codes giving near code saturation is achieved at six to nine interviews within a homogenous population. In this study, the DAEP microcosm within several of the largest public school districts in the state of Colorado provided the homogenous participant sample (DAEP teachers and leaders) and the desired qualitative data saturation representative of a larger, diverse population of DAEP experiences (Young & Casey, 2019).

Adult participants were pseudonymized as L1, L2, etc. for leaders and T1, T2, etc. for teachers in an effort to protect their identities. Participants were notified of their pseudonym designation during their interviews and during personal transcript review to validate the information they provided and locate themselves in the study. Also, information disclosed from participants' special designations or statuses were revealed if the information impacted the participants' experiences.

I emailed the districts to explain the study, the recruitment process for adult participants, and the participation criterion. I solicited through email to interested participants the research purpose, design, expectations, confidentiality parameters and addressed all safety concerns regarding the research process to ensure an appropriate anonymity level. The district review boards and participants were sent the recruitment email, consent form (see Appendix B), and interview questions (see Appendix C).

Materials and Instruments

According to Creswell (2013), data collection is highly involved and goes beyond the types of data and procedures for gathering the data; the researcher must "gain permission, conduct a good qualitative sampling strategy, develop means for recording information both digitally and on paper, storing the data, and anticipate ethical issues that may arise" (p. 145). One-on-one interviews in the natural setting are commonly used in current CRT investigations to collect personal experiences in critical phenomenological research (Barrett, 2017; Grace & Nelson, 2018; Modesto, 2018; Scott, 2017; Wyatt, 2019). After receiving the participants' written consent, the interviews were conducted via recorded Google Meets video-conferencing due to COVID restrictions; participants gave verbal consent to the recording of the meeting, and participant cameras were off during the interviews. Recorded sessions were downloaded into an

mp4 file, and all data was stored in a password-protected electronic file on my laptop. Recorded meetings were uploaded and stored into Otter.ai and converted into exported Microsoft Word transcriptions. According to McMillan (2012), the researcher will gain rich information by avoiding questions that can be "dichotomously" answered. I did not include items that could be answered yes or no; furthermore, the respondents controlled the interview by driving the discussion after the interviewer asked questions. Additionally, flexibility in the flow of the conversation was determined by the respondents. All data collected for the study will be securely stored for five years after the study's completion and then destroyed.

To deeply explore the perceptions of DAEP experiences, an interview protocol for adult participants was used as the primary instrumentation for data collection. McMillan (2012) explained that interviews are an in-depth and semistructured or unstructured method using open-response, general questions with select probes to obtain specific information. Bevan's (2014) phenomenological structure of the interview process followed six concepts:

> Description, natural attitude, lifeworld, modes of appearing, phenomenological reduction [bracketing], and imaginative variation, and three main domains, which compartmentalize and align the six concepts: contextualization (natural attitude and lifeworld), apprehending the phenomenon (modes of appearing, natural attitude), and clarifying the phenomenon (imaginative variation and meaning; p. 139)

Before beginning the interviews, I read and reviewed the brief description of the study in the protocol, explained the interview length and format, addressed participant confidentiality, and asked if they had any initial questions for me. During the interview, I wrote first impression observations of participants' responses to each question. After interviews were completed, I addressed the next steps involved in transcription, the release of transcripts to participants within

a 24-hour window for participant review and revisions. I also established deadlines for scheduling subsequent meetings if participants' wanted to follow-up on their transcripts.

Following a critical phenomenological approach, additional data, such as DAEP expulsion data and school performance reports, were collected from the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) website and were analyzed and reported to support and triangulate themes and trends that emerged from interview data (Colorado Department of Education, 2021a, 2021b; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007; McMillan, 2012). The CDE public online records provided a deeper understanding of the primary data that aligned and supported emergent themes from interviews. Denzin (1973) proposed that "methodological triangulation involves using more than one option to gather data, such as interviews, observations, questionnaires, and documents" (p. 301). The instrumentation for documenting the analysis was designed in simple columns under headings provided by the reports as illustrated in the data charts in Appendix D. Triangulation between this data and developments that arose from interviews is thoroughly explained in Chapter 4.

Carvalho and White (1997) proposed four reasons for undertaking triangulation: enriching, refuting, confirming, and explaining data sets and their findings. Moreover, triangulation of data helps minimize biases that can arise in qualitative research. For example, measurement and confirmation bias is caused during data collection, and triangulation allows for the combination of research options to ensure that peer pressure or interviewing technique did not interfere with findings (Denzin, 1973). Finally, according to Denzin (1973), procedural bias occurs when participants are placed under pressure, such as perceived interviewer influence or expectation or time pressures to hurry up and provide information.

To further prevent bias and increase trustworthiness in participants' experiences, after I conducted one-on-one interviews with the participants, I emailed them a copy of their transcript with participant and district identifiers omitted and included pseudonym designation. The follow-up allowed for clarification, participant review, and deeper dives into participant responses when warranted. Three of the 11 participants met for a brief 10-minute follow-up virtual meeting to add information to previous statements. The other eight participants opted out of a second virtual meeting and relayed approval of their transcriptions via email correspondence, including three of the eight participants who submitted transcript additions and revisions via email.

Data Collection

This study's data was collected through one-on-one semistructured virtual interviews and a follow-up transcript review with six DAEP leaders and five DAEP teachers serving in DAEPs between 2017 to the present. The school years between 2017 to the present were purposefully chosen for relevance. Interviews with adults in the DAEP setting allowed the study to explore the systems, policies, procedures, and relationships involved through personal lived experiences and perspectives. Creswell (2013) asserted the aspects that make a good qualitative study involved "rigorous data collection and analysis, the use of a qualitative approach (e.g., phenomenology); a single focus; a persuasive account; a reflection on the researcher's own history, culture, personal experiences, and politics; and ethical practices" (Creswell, 2013, p. 65).

Data Analysis

Data analysis in qualitative research begins with preparing and organizing the collected data for analysis that produces dependable and accurate summaries, leading to investigation findings. Analysis for a critical phenomenological study requires the researcher to transcribe descriptive explanations of a given phenomenon. In this study, the phenomenon being studied is

the STPP from individuals' lived experiences within a DAEP placement. Data derived from the interviews was reduced, and the information was grouped and coded into significant statements, themes, trends, and commonalities to develop a "textural description" of what the participants experienced; this process included a "structural description" of how the participants experienced "conditions, situations or context," and a combination of both descriptions conveyed "an overall essence of the experiences" (Creswell, 2013, p. 60). The goal of the data collected in the study was to answer the following research question:

RQ1. How do leaders and teachers serving in DAEPs describe the relationship between DAEPs and the STPP?

According to Ponterotto (2006), qualitative research depends on "thick descriptions" derived by a specific set of guidelines for nonethnographic studies. The characteristics of "thick description," as proposed by Ponterotto (2006), follow the American Psychological Association's organization of recommended manuscript structure in a formal interview study. According to Ponterotto's (2006, pp. 546–547) guidelines for obtaining thick description, the researcher must protect the anonymity of participants and include relevant demographic and psychological characteristics. In addition, research procedures must include a fully detailed description of the setting and processes. The results must present adequate "voice" of the participants and their cognitive and emotive states. Finally, the researcher must provide a discussion that merges the lived experiences with the researcher's interpretations while digesting simple elements and discerning interpretive conclusions.

Creswell (2013) asserted that research questions should begin with *what* or *how*, focusing on a single phenomenon or concept, using exploratory verbs conveying emerging design, such as *describe* (in phenomenological research), and expect the questions to evolve as the system

emerges. This critical phenomenological study incorporated both Bevan's (2014) and Creswell's (2013) interview question designs, including Ponterotto's thick description prescriptive for reporting the interview transcript data. The research protocol questions for adult participants can be seen in Appendix C.

Wyatt's (2019) phenomenological study of the lived experiences of African American males in special education successfully implemented Creswell's (2013) data analysis strategy, which mirrors Ponterotto's (2006) "thick description" process. The procedure includes "sketching ideas, taking notes, working with words, identifying codes, reducing codes to themes, relating categories, creating a point of view and displaying data" (Creswell, 2013, p. 181).

Coding

According to Saldaña (2013), the coding process involves inquiring and interpreting words and phrases that "symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or [sic] evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (p. 3). Also, Manning (2017) explained that "in vivo coding is a form of qualitative data analysis that emphasizes the actual spoken words of participants" (para. 1). All transcriptions were manually coded in the first pass using in vivo inductive coding analysis based on "first impression" reoccurring words and phrases (Saldaña, 2013). During the first pass of the coding process, I abstracted descriptive codes once concept, theme, and pattern development processes were derived. According to Creswell (2013), interpretation involves abstracting the data into broader conceptual meanings garnering more understanding of the data.

In the second pass, I implemented process coding (action codes), which applies principles in a systemic approach that can help determine which codes are dominant, which allowed me to clarify codes while identifying a more specific set of axial codes (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2016;

Saldaña, 2013). During this process, I determined which sets of codes could be combined from initial inductive coding, noting where similarities and differences in data sets could merge and connect to specific trends that arose during data collection.

In a final pass, CRT priori codes, such as evidence of experiences or perspectives that are indicative of bias, racism, ableism, etc., were sorted and analyzed for thematic relationships. According to Malagon et al. (2009), this deductive form of analysis is supported by qualitative studies grounded in CRT methodology because it informs the research questions and analyzes sensitive data while acknowledging the lived experiences of those within oppressive systems. During this process, codes merged into three thematic trends that established the relationships I sought to answer my research question.

The codes were categorized using the computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) program NVivo. Qualitative researchers commonly use NVivo because it can record, store, index, sort, and code qualitative data and efficiently compare categories and codes while assisting a researcher with theory and relationship analysis (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). Coding validation occurred by having the study reviewed by independent researchers to validate the key terms, phrases, patterns, similarities, and differences I derived from the interview data (Grace & Nelson, 2018, p. 672). Therefore, this study provided codes, themes, direct quotes from interviews, DAEP school performance reports (Colorado Department of Education, 2021a), and district expulsion data from the Colorado Department of Education (2021b).

Methods for Establishing Trustworthiness

According to Shenton (2004), by implementing the practice of bracketing my biases during the data analysis processes and employing the triangulation process, I am assuming the

responsibilities of attempting objectivity. Confirmability via objectivity is a way to ensure

intentional methods are being used in the study that displays the findings were derived from the

data and not from my implicit biases or leanings. According to Bevan (2014), one of the most

critical processes in establishing validity in qualitative research is the practice of bracketing.

Bracketing

Bracketing (also called phenomenological reduction) is a term in phenomenology

describing the researcher's act of setting aside the personal judgment, opinion, preconceived

notions, previous research, findings, and understanding about the research topic to solely focus

on the analysis of how others experience the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018; McMillan,

2012; Moustakas, 1994; Usher & Jackson, 2017). Bracketing is a researcher's deliberate

abstinence from using his or her personal understanding and experiences about the phenomenon

being studied. By accepting phenomenological reduction, I made every effort to remain faithful

to the participants' descriptive experiences and accepted how they received and perceived their

world.

This study incorporated journaling, bracketing, and coding to mitigate researcher bias and

promote participant safety because transcendental phenomenology centers on participants'

descriptions of the experiences and derives meaning from those experiences. Among other vital

concepts to effective interviewing, bracketing is essential in crafting a qualitative

phenomenological research interview that maintains methodological consistency and

trustworthiness (Bevan, 2014). Additionally, my views and prejudices of the STPP phenomenon

being studied were bracketed by researcher acknowledgment and pursuit of the issues, themes,

and trends that arise and are essential from the participants' experiences by following

Moustakas's (1994) processes for bracketing throughout the data-analysis process. This can be achieved by:

> Manually coding the transcriptions using the open-coding method, [consisting] of a line by line analysis of each transcription and focusing on patterns that yielded codes. Next, [I will] place each code into categories and subcategories in search of larger themes or a structural description of the phenomenon. (Moustakas, 1994, p. 672)

Credibility

To establish credibility in my study, I obtained participant consent and member validation of interview transcripts to develop the credibility and reliability of the data I collected. The process for member validation incorporated in my study was to be open for potential follow-up meetings to summarize the themes and specific statements from participants to confirm the details of the data as well as allow for participants to elaborate or add anything that may not have come up for them during the interview discussions. According to McMillan (2012), prolonged engagement with participants, such as my plan for both initial interview and transcription review for member validation, results in "saturation—where additional observations or interviews or document review would not add new findings" (p. 34). Lincoln and Guba (1985) explained that member validation contributes to qualitative research's trustworthiness and validity. Finally, whether follow-up meetings were conducted or not, I utilized artificial intelligence to transcribe the audio content for all participants into discernable transcriptions of the interviews and emailed the transcripts to participants to allow them an opportunity to review, revise and approve the interpretation to ensure interview accounts were reported accurately.

Transferability

According to Shenton (2004), transferability is one way a researcher can establish trustworthiness; transferability refers to how a study's findings can be generalized to other studies. This study included large metro areas and suburban regions in Colorado to garner rich, thick, descriptive accounts of the DAEP microcosm existing within diverse public school systems so that future researchers can interpret and connect meaning in similar contexts. Within the confines of qualitative research and its dependence on personal perspectives and experiences, this study aimed to narrow down the scope with the study of the STPP phenomenon so that future researchers using similar research designs and methods can compare and contrast generalizable data that expands the STPP research community and public education reform measures.

Dependability

While replicating qualitative research is difficult due to its foundations in interpersonal communication and researcher interpretation, this study's other goal was to report complete transparency of all the study's dimensions and nuances. According to Shenton (2004), one dependable research design attribute I have already established is that my research provides an extension to previous and exhaustive STPP research. This study already established a baseline for proposing the research question to fill gaps in previous studies and offer reform in public education's disciplinary systems.

RQ1. How do leaders and teachers serving in DAEPs describe the relationship between DAEPs and the STPP?

Likewise, this qualitative study's methods were modeled after existing studies and are concise and specific for future replicability in like settings and contexts.

Researcher's Role

I am a seasoned educator of 16 years and have served as both a teacher and dean in a DAEP in Colorado. My role in the study is that of an outsider but who has a background in both personal and professional contexts. According to McMillan (2012), researchers have an advantage when participation with participants in natural research settings have been allowed as those experiences will have established relaxed daily interactions and shared common interests allowing for trust to have developed; trust between the researcher and participants is paramount in qualitative research using interviews.

I was an at-risk student with a history of excellent grades but disruptive adolescent behavior who became a teen mother placed in a DAEP when I was 15. Before I completed one semester upon my maternity leave return, I had failed out of school due to the lack of instructional support in the DAEP. I was treated with disrespect and disdain by teachers and school leaders. When I transitioned back into my traditional school, counselors and teachers did not treat me fairly. I observed other students with difficult life circumstances also being treated poorly; thus, I failed and dropped out of high school. I was 16 when I received my general education diploma (GED) and learned my daughter was a child with special needs. Throughout my daughter's public schooling, I had to forcefully advocate for equity and inclusion within her rights as a child on a federal individualized education plan (IEP). These personal experiences, coupled with 16 years as a teacher and administrator witnessing systemic racism and ableism, especially toward impoverished youth, were the catalysts that propelled me to advocate for historically marginalized students in schools I served in Oklahoma, Texas, and Colorado.

My current role alleviates potential participant data influence as I currently do not work in a DAEP or with any study participants. The key was to avoid selecting "favorites" to ensure

authentic conversation exchanges do not open opportunities for data to be skewed by bias or

personal agendas (McMillan, 2012). I provided neutral pseudonyms for the settings and

participants to protect their identities. When interviewing and analyzing data sets, I

acknowledged and bracketed any personal biases that arose within this study's confines with

instinctive and voluntary comments regarding personal feelings, thoughts, and views of

participant responses (Moustakas, 1994). I also provided feedback opportunities from

participants on the interview transcriptions to ensure accuracy and impartiality.

Ethical Considerations

Due to the nature of the study eliciting personal experiences in the STTP via DAEP

placements and the implications of previous research regarding racist and ableist practices in

public education, I have included in the interview protocol specific language regarding the STPP

subject to avoid deceptive intentions and ensured questions were open-ended. This ensures the

data is reflective solely upon the participants' experiences and perspectives of the STPP. Given

the controversial topics that arise within STPP studies, such as disproportionality, race, ableism,

etc., pseudonyms for both participants and districts were imperative. This is particularly

important when drawing information from school leaders and teachers working in similar

communities and sites.

Efforts to protect participant privacy, such as pseudonyms and the removal of participant

identifiers in transcripts, were made to prevent potential harm, such as job security if participants

were to reveal unflattering insights about the districts they serve. For example, because DAEPs

have a history of housing predominantly Black and Brown students and those with extreme

learning gaps, participants may have blind spots about their implicit personal biases that may be

revealed during interviews. In such cases, anonymity was paramount as the data showed trends

and themes, but specific people and locations were not exposed to ensure there would be no backlash from their employers who may not share the same perspectives. All data were stored in a secured, digital location only accessible to me and not located at any research site.

This study's desired outcome was to determine whether DAEP lived experiences are additional evidence of the DAEPs position and degree in the STPP. Data from the participants illuminated whose needs are being served and by which system response. Implications arose, and a call for action is warranted and discussed in Chapter 5 from themes, patterns, and trends revealed in interview data.

Assumptions

I assumed the data collected from interviews was credible and valid since I used a set criterion for selecting my subjects within the specific confines of the DAEP context as revealed in the STPP construct; therefore, the interviews provided data that is reliable as the participants are experts in the field of the system I was studying (Creswell, 2013). I assumed the participants were honest and transparent in their discussions, and the thick and rich contextual descriptions provided in this study are accurate portrayals of participants' responses, perspectives, and experiences (Bevan, 2014). As previously addressed, triangulation with CDE reported data and bracketing further established validity, reliability, and credibility with readers (Shenton, 2004).

Limitations

The planning and communication necessary for effective outcomes lend to research limitations. For example, qualitative data requires a level of sensitivity and awareness of ethical issues, bias, and philosophical undercurrents during the interviewing process. The output from participants was as predictable as the questions allowed. This required the study to be acutely focused with careful consideration of what questions should always be asked, considering why

they were being asked. According to Moustakas (1994), interviews in qualitative studies can easily get off-topic or easily take an unexpected direction, assuming that the lived experiences are being relived and emotionally charged. This awareness requires a researcher to predict how they will respond without cutting off the flow of details necessary for detailed and complex descriptions. I anticipated some of the experiences to carry negative feelings and potential trauma due to adults who have experienced the loss of students; as such, I planned for pauses and breaks in the conversation to ensure psychological and emotional regulation time and safety for all participants by providing flexibility in the time allotted for each interview. The average interview took 45 minutes to an hour, while three interview discussions exceeded an hour.

Also, as an educator who has served at-risk youth and at a DAEP, there is room for personal bias. I recorded interviews and bracketed all personal biases as they arose to increase the probability of capturing all participants' experiences and perceptions. Another limitation was that the data gathered from this study was specific to DAEPs within public school systems, which does not warrant comparison to other public-school models. Also, participant experiences and perspectives were inclusive of working within the parameters of DAEPS serving student populations who have been labeled "at-risk" or "high-risk"; therefore, the educator opinions, thoughts, feelings, experiences, and views cannot be compared or measured to other educators' experiences in a traditional education model.

Delimitations

Due to this and previous STPP studies' investigative nature and the theoretical frameworks guiding this inquiry, race, ability, social justice, school policies, discipline and achievement gaps, law, and authority are critical attributes in this critical phenomenological qualitative study. This study explored the experiences and perspectives of both DAEP leaders

and the adults who teach students in DAEPs. Due to the personal nature of participants' lived

experiences, qualitative attribute data can appear subjective; therefore, intentionality in

developing interview questions that do not lead the participants to any conclusions is vital to

eliminate researcher bias, as well as to stay aware of the limited control the researcher has in

avoiding biases participants bring to the study. It was anticipated that some participants would

have negative feelings about discrimination and school policies considering STPP research

trends. Also, the participants were fully aware that students had been excluded from their

traditional education environment, criminalized, and adjudicated through the juvenile courts,

where a judge assigned or reduced access to education to an alternative education environment as

part of the punitive disciplinary process. According to Creswell (2013), the aspects of an

"individual's experiences, culture, politics, and ethical practices add to the rich and descriptive

nature of the interview process" (p. 65) when presented in the context of the investigation;

therefore, even personal opinions within the context of inference garnered from any given

experience is allowed as part of the natural human condition and lived experience in a specific

setting as opposed to being scrutinized as bias. Moreover, racism and ableism experiences are

causally linked to bias; therefore, it was expected that many participants would reveal relevant

and potentially justifiable biases related to firsthand personal experiences.

Chapter Summary

This chapter explained how this qualitative study was conducted. This phenomenological

research design's core data points were the personal perspectives derived from six leaders and

five teachers' professional experiences in DAEPs. The semistructured interview method for

collecting data from the lived experiences of the professionals assigned to serve in DAEP

systems allowed me to study relationships between coded patterns, themes, and trends derived

from the participants' experiences and the meanings given from their perceptions. Bracketed and triangulated with CDE reports, this data provided a focused study of the DAEP systems, processes, programs, relationships, successes, and failures, which gave additional insight into the DAEP's place in the STPP. Moreover, the study addressed the research question by directly asking participants to describe the relationship between DAEPs and the STPP. This study's data revealed the internalized cultural presuppositions perpetuating both the internal and external discriminatory school systems resulting in the STPP.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative study using a critical phenomenological approach was to investigate the STPP through the experiences and perspectives of DAEP staff who served students placed in DAEPs. Data were collected from interviews with DAEP teachers and leaders in five Colorado school districts and reports from the Colorado Department of Education that depicted the contributing factors to the relationship between the DAEP system and the STPP. Participants were asked to describe their perceptions and experiences working in DAEP systems and with DAEP staff and students.

This chapter summarizes the data collection process and analysis of acquired data from 11 semistructured interviews and CDE public reports about school performance and district expulsion data. The emergent themes from the coding process are discussed, and tables charting participant comments aligned to themes and district data charts are presented.

Summary of the Data Collection Process

Collecting data began with conducting semistructured and virtual one-on-one interviews with six leaders and five teachers at five DAEPs in Colorado. Leaders are defined in an administrative role as those who created, implemented, enforced, and monitored overarching school systems for at least two years within a DAEP during the 2017–present school years, such as principals, assistant principals, and deans. Teachers are defined as certified educators in any content area who delivered instruction, such as general education teacher, special education specialist, or English language learner specialist for at least two years during the 2017–present school years in a DAEP. The interview questions were designed following McMillan's (2012) semistructured method using open response with select probes to obtain specific information and Bevan's (2014) phenomenological structure.

The interview protocol (see Appendix C) was designed to garner specific, thick, rich, and descriptive accounts of teachers' and leaders' encounters and perceptions of working in DAEP systems. An expert panel reviewed and revised the questions before IRB approval. Recorded interviews were transcribed after the interviews were conducted. Inductive analysis by in vivo identified initial codes during the interview process mainly via repetition of participants' words and phrases. Once transcripts were uploaded into the NVivo software, initial codes were further analyzed and merged into axial codes or specific themes during the second pass. In the third pass of coding, priori codes aligned to critical race theory (CRT) were isolated from the data, and final themes were determined from those findings. The following research question guided this process:

RQ1. How do leaders and teachers serving in DAEPs describe the relationship between DAEPs and the STPP?

District Profiles

Five of Colorado's most diverse districts were represented in this study through the participants' experiences and CDE data reports. Each district in the study had at least one expulsion program. Three of the five DAEPs were programs within alternative education schools housing multiple alternative programs. Two of the five DAEPs were expulsion schools, but students could "choice in" the school postexpulsion, so the student populations were mixed with students serving their expulsion and with students who finished their expulsion criteria and stayed to take advantage of accelerated credit recovery or graduate. Overall, DAEPs in Colorado work in tandem with their districts' alternative school networks. Data from DAEP school performance reports for 2017–2019 and the most recent district expulsion data (2019–2020) was extracted from online public reports provided by the Colorado Department of Education (2021a,

2021b) website and charted to illustrate and corroborate with participant interviews the most

current performance and disciplinary data trends within alternative education (see Appendix D).

Participant Profiles and Interview Summaries

This chapter includes an aggregate compilation of participant attributes to illustrate the

diversity and breadth of experience without revealing the DAEP participants' personal identifiers

and the districts they serve. The Colorado leaders and teachers who participated in the study

were as diverse as their districts' student populations: 50% male, 50% female; 50% identified

with the minority demographic, and 50% were White. Ninety percent of the participant leaders

had taught in the classroom at least five years before transitioning into their leadership roles with

nine to 26 years of public education experience. Participant teachers have served public

education classrooms for seven to 25 years. Eight participants had core content teaching

experiences (English, math, science, and social studies/history), and two participants had

experience as physical education teachers. Three participants had working experience as special

education specialists, and two participants had working experience as English language learner

(ELL) specialists. Eight participants had overlapping experiences in multiple areas in education,

including social-emotional learning (SEL) specialists and library sciences, and all leader

participants had been classroom teachers or specialists before assuming their leadership roles.

All participants served in their leadership or teaching positions in a DAEP for at least two years

between the 2017–present school years. Fifty percent of the participants had served in multiple

DAEPs in alternative education settings within their careers.

This chapter also provides synopses of each participant's interviews to provide a deeper

understanding of lived experiences in DAEP settings. Some participants recognized they did not

have a fully articulated definition of the relationship between the DAEP and STPP but

acknowledged its existence and reiterated variables that they believed contributed to the relationship. While a few participant perspectives diverged from the popular opinions and experiences regarding systemic racism and ableism, all participants acknowledged disproportionality regarding race and ability in their DAEP experiences.

Leader 1 (L1)

Leader 1 has served in public education for 23 years as a teacher and leader, with 15 years devoted to alternative education. The DAEP that L1 leads is housed within an alternative school serving both middle and high school students. While L1 interacted with many teachers in the alternative education setting, her primary interactions were with five teachers and the expelled students placed in the DAEP.

When asked to explain the purpose of the DAEP, L1 identified it was to give a temporary educational option for expelled middle schoolers to stay engaged with direct instruction of content and skills necessary to be successful in school and allow expelled high schoolers to recover credits in online courses. Leader 1 explained that the DAEP served approximately 80–100 students a year until they met their expulsion criteria, by which students then returned to their traditional school setting or enrolled in the alternative education campus where the DAEP is located. Leader 1 stated that postexpulsion, most students stayed on the alternative campus. Additionally, L1 explained the DAEP had a shorter schedule and smaller class sizes where students attended four classes with one course focused on social-emotional learning (SEL) and life skills.

When I asked L1 to elaborate on the needs being served in the DAEP, L1 emphasized relationships as the foundational element of the program. According to L1, DAEP-placed students have a history of disengagement from traditional school frameworks. Also, the shorter

schedule, emphasis on relationship building, and social skills foci, such as conflict resolution and emotional regulation, provided a "safe" learning environment where students develop "trust" in school systems and staff. As a result, L1 explained that many students are satisfied with the program. Leader 1 described the standard attendance rate of expelled students at 60%. Moreover, L1 explained that most students placed in DAEPs have traumatic backgrounds, mental health issues, and SEL needs due to their experienced trauma, and 90%–95% of students are "very behind in grade level."

According to L1, most students at the DAEP have been expelled for habitual defiant and disruptive behaviors and drug charges. While the DAEP does get students placed on weapons charges, they are rare cases. The most challenging students in L1's experience have been with students who have "zero buy-in" to school and are socially withdrawn. The typical interactions L1 has experienced are with students needing consistency and a place where they feel someone cares for them. When asked if race played a part in students' DAEP placement, L1 said most students placed at the DAEP were Hispanic males with low socioeconomic status (SES).

Leader 1's general understanding of the STPP was that kids who "get off track" and do not make it in school get into trouble repeatedly and end up in prison. Leader 1 attributed students who get off track were students influenced by outside factors, such as gangs or disruptive home environments. Leader 1 explained that because traditional schools are too big and troubled students go unnoticed until their behavior gets attention from teachers or administration.

Leader 2 (L2)

Leader 2 has served in public education for 18 years and felt prepared to lead a DAEP due to having previous experiences working with special education students and at-risk student

populations who have engaged in high-risk behaviors. The DAEP program L2 leads is one of

many programs L2 oversees within an alternative education network. When asked to describe the

purpose of the DAEP, L2 explained that English language arts and math are the foci, specifically

for high school students, providing them the opportunity during their expulsion to obtain and

retrieve missed credits toward graduation requirements. Leader 2's program also addresses

social-emotional needs, as well as IEP related conditions if a student is in special education or a

student is on a section 504 plan. According to L2, many students on IEPs and English language

learners are placed in the DAEP.

Working with two teachers, a substance abuse counselor, and a social worker, L2

believes the students being served benefit from having a lot more one-on-one attention due to the

smaller class settings and attentive staff relationships with students. According to L2, the DAEP

provides an opportunity for expelled students to maintain a connection to teachers and have

someone advocate for them; L2 believes advocacy is imperative in students' reengagement in

school and successfully transitioning back to their traditional school settings when they complete

their expulsion criteria. Leader 2 believes the advocacy relationships between teachers and

students and the program and receiving schools have produced more recent early readmissions

back to students' home schools.

Due to the high populations of Hispanic students and students on IEPs placed at the

DAEP, L2 believes education systems need to question the expulsion referral system. While L2

believes certain offenses that impact school safety are justifiable expulsion violations, L2

questions preventative measures and whether systems can do a better job at preventing student

incidences. Moreover, L2 knows that inquiry into subjective disciplinary referrals takes a lot of

work involving multiple stakeholders but believes more effective, equitable, and sustainable

outcomes for students are worth the hard work. Leader 2 explained the necessary partnerships for dismantling systemic inequities would include teachers, administrators, families, and community partners who would have to work together in rebuilding relationships with students and families while providing resources, preventative measures within schools, and a continuum of services within schools. L2 hopes for a change in disciplinary systems that would decrease the number of students that are expelled.

In L2's experiences, there is a direct relationship between the DAEP system and the STPP based on the discipline data that shows Black and Brown students being the student populations disproportionally represented in the criminal justice system and DAEP placements. Moreover, L2 attributed implicit bias to minority students being forced to experience institutionalized criminalization in public education.

Leader 3 (L3)

Leader 3's public education experiences span 18 years as a dean, interventionist, specialist, and educator. Within L3's vast experiences, a key takeaway is that schools need to get to know their students by connecting and building relationships, especially for at-risk youth.

The DAEP program L3 served in was a temporary placement for students to serve their expulsion and was housed within the district's secondary alternative education network. The DAEP provided shorter and flexible scheduling options, smaller class sizes, and multiple opportunities for students to engage in curriculum based on academic needs, such as credit recovery and interest (e.g., construction and nursing). The program also provided child care assistance to teen parents.

According to L3, keys to student success at the DAEP were authentic relationships between staff and students and building individualized student success plan criteria. Leader 3

explained that this process allowed stakeholders to understand what students needed to be successful, what supports the school could provide for them, and what supports the student or family could or could not provide to determine if additional resources were needed to support the student's goals. Leader 3 explained that relationships were the "absolute strength" in the DAEP.

Leader 3 explained that while there were no noticeable disproportionate numbers of minority students placed at the DAEP, most students of color placed were at a socioeconomic disadvantage with apparent academic gaps in literacy and math. Leader 3 attributed the gaps to comprehensive schools moving through the curriculum simply too fast a rate for some students. In addressing the gaps, L3 explained the program tried to fill the gaps with relevant content and real-life skills, such as food science and construction math.

When asked about the relationship between the DAEP and the STPP, L3 explained that today's DAEP is providing layers of alternative education opportunities that integrate learning with relative experiences while also incorporating social skill development to transfer into a real-world application so that students who have been in the juvenile justice system can see a future beyond their criminalization.

Leader 4 (L4)

Leader 4's experiences as both a teacher in one DAEP and a leader in another DAEP spans almost a decade. Within those experiences, L4 explained most expelled students express overall disengagement in public education and feel excluded as people. Leader 4 identified typical DAEP placed students as being Black or Brown and displaying measurable academic gaps, low-grade level abilities, and severe social-emotional and mental health needs due to trauma. Leader 4 explained that most expelled students had experienced both personal and school trauma. Leader 4 described school trauma in association with students' interactions with

discriminatory public education policies and practices and experiences in the juvenile justice system. In contrast, personal trauma was described as challenging home and community environments due to low SES. According to L4, both types of trauma produce high-risk behaviors seen coming from expelled students.

Leader 4 has served a DAEP with inconsistent systems and expectations and a DAEP with measurable success. Leader 4 attributed successes in DAEPs to close relationships between staff, students, and their families. Besides, L4 expressed that shorter schedules, smaller classes, rigorous but relevant curriculum, and wraparound services truly focused on the whole child. Leader 4 described the unique opportunities in the DAEP, such as study hall, social-emotional strategies, restorative practices, trauma-informed care, therapy, and partnerships with community stakeholders to help families experiencing low SES hardships. Moreover, L4 stated that developing relationships with students who have trust issues and behavioral needs due to trauma is difficult but building a family-like atmosphere at school where everyone is on the same page and the student feels cared for and loved proves to work with high-risk students.

When asked about the relationship between the DAEP and the STPP, L4 was adamant that it stemmed from an evident dysfunction between the juvenile justice system and the public education system. Leader 4 explained that students placed in DAEPs frequently have disciplinary records for habitual behaviors going as far back as early elementary school that developed into a label that followed the student into middle school. Leader 4 said the bias from teachers and leaders preclude systemic racism and feed a self-fulfilling prophecy of student failure; at that point, students give in to the "bad kid" label, and defiance coupled with rejection creates a student profile that eventually stands before a judge. Leader 4 attests to visiting a neighboring

high school where hallways were lined with Black and Brown students, typically male, who were pushed out for perceived disruptive behavior and later became DAEP-placed students.

Leader 4 asserted that the referral system is racist and can be proven by the class rosters at DAEPs, where the population is disproportionally Black and Brown male students, typically of low SES and carrying a history of trauma. Leader 4 believes DAEPs are trying to mitigate the dysfunctional relationship between school systems and the penal system by reengaging students with more tailored plans geared toward a prosperous future rather than a stay in prison. According to L4, he has sadly seen many expelled students end up in jail, prison, or deceased due to overdose, suicide, or violence and believes school systems have the ability and resources to give high-risk students hope. Leader 4 explained the caveat to change is it has to start at the top, and schools have to be held accountable for pushing out students with multiple needs instead of meeting their needs.

Leader 5 (L5)

Leader 5's education experiences span 26 years working with predominantly minority and at-risk youth as a teacher in multiple diverse districts and a leader in a highly diverse DAEP. As a leader, L5 believes he is a lead dreamer and equity designer who believes in "no rules without relationships." Leader 5's school follows a traditional six- to seven-period schedule with multiple learning opportunities and resources serving expelled middle and high schoolers. The school also allows students to "choice in" after they finish their expulsions if they prefer the setting or if their receiving school refuses readmittance.

Leader 5 recognizes systemic racism in public education by the disproportionate numbers of Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) being placed in the DAEP with questionable disciplinary records and referrals. Leader 5 explained that the relationship between the DAEP

and the STPP begins with low-level disciplinary infractions that escalate into defiance,

perpetuating a criminalized label that creates a red flag in students' records, which creates the

trajectory into the juvenile justice system. Leader 5 attested to seeing a 60-page disciplinary

record of a student that included elementary school documentation through high school and, like

many students in DAEPs, became recognized as a threat rather than a student.

While the DAEP L5 leads formerly was a place where students were held with low

expectations and no educational opportunities, it has transitioned into a school where dismantling

the STPP became a part of its mission and vision. Leader 5 acknowledged the school is still

developing academic programming, and the work remains grounded in equity and inclusion.

Critical conversations being held at L5's DAEP center around the importance of rigorous

and relevant instructional practice, social-emotional supports, social justice, and love for all

students by meeting their needs where they are and viewing students as assets, not deficits.

Leader 6 (L6)

Leader 6 has worked in multiple education settings and as a leader in a DAEP. Leader 6

described the daily interactions with staff and students began with checking in with a caseload of

highfliers. These are students who struggle to stay in class, typically have been caught using or

abusing substances during the school day, and students who have high trauma or high social-

emotional issues. The program L6 leads rests within an alternative education network and

predominantly serves expelled Hispanic male students referred for a history of truancy, drug use,

fighting, and disruptive school behaviors. Leader 6 described the purpose of the DAEP to serve

the underserved and connect them with equitable education opportunities, social-emotional

learning supports, food, and housing resources. Leader 6 explained that most DAEP-placed

students have a history of being kicked out of school, are reserved, quiet, antisocial, and exhibit multiple behavioral issues, learning disabilities, and English language learning needs.

Leader 6 described a previous DAEP placement as a "dumping ground" for "bad kids" and expressed that punitive discipline in public education has connected kids to the criminal justice system. Leader 6's experiences with police in a prior setting were negative, having witnessed a program where many minority students were targeted and systemic racism prevailed.

Leader 6 detailed the DAEP he leads now is part of a paradigm shift many DAEPs are experiencing from being a placeholder in the STPP trajectory to alternative and inclusive school options. Leader 6 said that the DAEP he serves offers a shorter schedule, smaller class sizes, social-emotional and mental health learning supports, relevant content, and a focus on helping students develop academic and life skills that transfer into their plans after high school. These skills include goal setting, discerning sources of information, digital literacy, self-advocacy, and altruism. Moreover, L6 stated the DAEP moved away from punitive discipline in exchange for restorative practices to teach students critical thinking, problem-solving, and restoring relationships. Leader 6 believes working through issues in-house, when possible, helps ensure students' psychological and emotional safety and secures trust in relationships by building an acceptance that everyone makes mistakes and people can still be good people after a mistake has been made. Leader 6's basic philosophy is that no one should be penalized for a mistake forever.

Teacher 1 (T1)

The majority of T1's seven years of teaching experience occurred in a DAEP. Having experienced frequent leadership and teacher turnover, T1 explained not everyone is cut out for the work involved in working in an expulsion school. Having undergone several systemic changes involved with leadership transitions, T1 attested to what works and does not work in

DAEPs. Teacher 1 explained that the desire to build connections, consistency, and open-mindedness are vital attributes for working with expelled youth.

Teacher 1 explained that connection is essential, whether it is building relevant links for students to their academic content or relationships between staff, students, and peer groups. Also, T1 emphasized the importance of having clear and consistent systems to support staff and students. And finally, T1 said many teachers burned out and suffered because they could not relate to their students and superimposed their values and beliefs onto students without really sharing any decision-making with students in the classroom, which resulted in a lot of classroom management issues.

The unique opportunity presented to students at the DAEP T1 served was the small setting because it gave the school a family feel. This family-feel allowed for students to experience intimate cultural traditions and celebrations that T1 said students appreciated. Also, T1 said the key to maintaining healthy relationships with students involved creating safe learning environments where students felt included, regardless of background or violation. Teaching students soft skills, as well as academic skills, proved successful as well. Furthermore, T1 described most students to have experienced traumatic life events that caused socialization and behavior challenges, which were addressed using social-emotional strategies, such as teaching conflict resolution and emotional regulation skills.

When asked about the relationship between the DAEP and the STPP, T1 said the DAEP perpetuates the STPP because many students are in jail or are dead due to crimes or overdose. According to T1, "so it [DAEP placement] is not helping them in their success after school; there are still very many falling through the cracks, and basically, the kids with the highest needs are not getting served."

Teacher 2 (T2)

Teacher 2 has taught in public education for 16 years and has served students in two DAEPs. Teacher 2 described the level of preparedness for working in an expulsion program when initially hired was at "zero." In both placements, T2 narrated the typical interactions with DAEP students as initially slow to motivate. Still, motivation would increase sporadically, and students were positively impacted by engaging content and strong relationships with staff members. Besides, T2 recounted that most students had a history of inconsistent school attendance, lower literacy and math skills, and various mental health needs due to impacts of traumatic life experiences.

Both DAEPs in T2's experiences provided educational opportunities for expelled students and mainly credit recovery because most expelled students were behind in obtaining credits for graduation. Additional options for students at the DAEPs were smaller class sizes, more individualized help and support, a lot more mental health support or counseling, and food assistance. One concern T2 had was whether some teachers were engaging students in grade-level content because they appeared to have low expectations of student ability and performance. Teacher 2 also described a lack of alignment between professional development and teacher needs for meeting the unique needs of expelled students.

When asked to describe the relationship between the DAEP and the STPP, T2 explained that DAEPs were trying to stop the STPP trajectory for students who had been caught in a system that had excluded them for equitable access, but T2 felt that DAEPs get them too late. Teacher 2 further discussed that even in providing multiple and unique learning opportunities such as tech school, nursing, and construction, it is hard work, and students do not always see the

value in school work this late in their academic experiences because they have been trying so hard since they were little and have not seen success with anything.

Teacher 3 (T3)

Teacher 3 has served public education for 23 years, with over 10 years serving DAEP students. The DAEP that T3 teaches resides within an alternative school serving both middle and high school students. Part of T3's responsibilities in the DAEP is to conduct the intake process consisting of an interview with the student and their respective guardian. Once that interview is done, the student and family decide whether they intend to commit to the expulsion program. According to T3, students who are under the age of 16 are mandated to attend some sort of educational option. Due to that mandate and program satisfaction, T3 guessed student attendance to hover around 80%–85%. Teacher 3 said the smaller class sizes, shorter schedule (four classes), and close relationships between most students and teachers contributed to both student attendance and satisfaction with the program.

When asked to explain the purpose of the DAEP, T3 explained that at the high school level, the program gives students an educational option while expelled and a chance at regaining credits quarterly, which is exceptionally purposeful because, at their traditional schools, students have to wait 18 weeks to get their credit, which does not sustain their engagement. Teacher 3 also explained that DAEP students at the middle school level obtain an opportunity to have a school to associate with instead of sitting out and receive direct instruction in both content and social-emotional skills.

According to T3, the typically placed DAEP students are those with drugs and weapon violations, and their primary demographic tends to be a higher percentage of Hispanic males

with low SES who tend to be fighters with a history of trauma, social-emotional challenges, and lower than average academic ability levels.

Teacher 3's general understanding of the STPP is that if schools do not do something to intervene or help students who are at risk of not graduating or are at risk of disengaging from school, they end up making delinquent decisions that place them in a legal system. Moreover, T3 recognizes questionable discipline practices that show up in the disproportionate numbers of Hispanic males referred to the DAEP and has observed discriminatory treatment of deans toward students when students return to their traditional school settings.

Teacher 4 (T4)

Teacher 4 has served public education for 16 years, with five of those years serving DAEP students. The DAEP that T4 teaches at is located within an alternative school serving both middle and high school students. Part of T4's responsibilities in the DAEP is to provide direct language arts instruction following district curriculum units to expelled middle school students. Teacher 4 also supports expelled high schoolers with online courses to recover lost credits toward graduation. Teacher 4 explained most students placed at the DAEP are below grade level and require remediation and learning supports, and T4 must limit direct instruction to prevent disruptive behaviors from occurring due to students' lack of overall school engagement.

Teacher 4 perceived the DAEP placement as a consequence for students who did not follow the rules in their traditional school and an offered education option for expelled students to stay connected to learning opportunities during their expulsion. Teacher 4 expressed concern about the significant gap between the time students are expelled to when they enter the DAEP program as it proves problematic due to the already existing student achievement gaps. Teacher 4 explained that the DAEP schedule is shorter than traditional schools in the district, and class

sizes are usually no larger than 20 students. Additionally, T4 described unique opportunities for students in the DAEP, such as service-learning, incentivized programs, field trip rewards, and an emphasis on relationship and SEL skills development.

Teacher 4 narrated that some DAEP students feel like it is another family and other students do not buy-in, but part of that is due to the amount of time they are in attendance at the DAEP since some placements do not last long. Teacher 4 noted it takes longer to build trust and relationships that convince students that the staff is there to help them while also holding them accountable to follow the rules. Not only that, but T4 said that because the DAEP staff is small and dealing with traumatized students, they rely on one another to problem-solve and support one another since the district does not provide a lot of professional development aligned to the unique needs and challenges they face with expelled students and their family's needs. Finally, T4 explained that DAEP students quickly disengage if they do not feel that their environment is psychologically or emotionally safe and can become disruptive.

When asked to describe the relationship between the DAEP and the STPP, T4 explained that the DAEP system is not working to prevent the trajectory, even though the teachers feel like they try to reach kids. Teacher 4 said part of it is students do not get to stay with the DAEP program once their expulsion criteria are served, and they get lost in a system again and dropout or continue on a path that gets them arrested again and placed in jail. Teacher 4 added that some students have the defeatist mindset and have said, "it's just the way it is, it's what happens in their families, and that's just the way things are."

Teacher 5 (T5)

Teacher 5's public education experience spans 25 years, and 17 years have been in a DAEP. Teacher 5 said the program provides mathematics and English education for expelled

students, and it is an option for expelled students to attend the school's expulsion program. If they opt not to, then the parents, on their own, have to find some means for their child to get an education. Also, during their expulsion period, which typically is a calendar year, the program provides mental health support to students.

The typical expelled students in T5's DAEP are Hispanic males from single-parent homes with low SES and lower-achieving school attendance; they are often expelled for the destruction of property, weapons, and drug and alcohol charges. Teacher 5 does not believe race plays a part in a student placement at the DAEP as the student files provided have shown "99.9% expulsion is fully justified in removing disruptions." On the other hand, T5 described the student demographics in the DAEP as predominantly students of color. Also, T5 said there had been a recent "uptick in expulsions over the last few years with students with IEPs and 504s."

Teacher 5 believes the critical component to success at the DAEP, first and foremost, is to build relationships with students and parents and then to teach people how to be accountable, which has been a significant cornerstone of the program. Teacher 5 explained that among the staff, the first thing is being consistent on how they apply rules and expectations to make sure the kids hear the same thing from the staff members. Teacher 5 described another consistent practice at the DAEP as the collaboration and embedment of teaching social skills to students, such as dealing with confrontation when it does arise and learning how to have difficult one-on-one conversations with students while maintaining composure. According to T5, teachers are proud of their work with students, and students are in a much better social-emotional place when they finish their time in the program.

When T5 was asked to describe an understanding of the STPP, T5 attributed it to

Weak statistics, I would say it's something that sounds good politically … I just think to

me that [STPP] is something that sounds good to people who believe that you know that

for whatever reason school discipline is either insufficient, it's biased, and it's

ineffective.

Besides, T5 described the DAEP and STPP relationship as "a handful of students who have

ended up in prison, who ended up dead."

Discussion of Findings

From interview data, participants discussed the factors that contribute to the relationship

between the DAEP and the STPP; participants also revealed the transition DAEPs are trying to

make in response to systemic racism and ableism, which is rooted in subjective discipline

referrals from traditional school systems (see Appendix E). During data analysis, I wanted to

capture the essence of participants' DAEP experiences and perceptions. During the first coding

pass, I identified words and phrases participants emphasized throughout the interview process;

those became the initial nodes into NVivo. In the second pass, I linked statements made by

participants to those nodes. I began merging nodes into coded themes, creating a thematic cross-

sectional analysis where a conceptual design emerged to my coding system. I continued to refine

relationships between codes and themes until I began interpreting connections into a code matrix

I could envision aiding in my translation of the data. Finally, I extracted priori codes from the

data to refine themes and relationships aligned with answering the research question. This third

pass involved isolating both interview and CDE performance and expulsion data and verifying

triangulated patterns and relationships within the data in an effort to synthesize a coding

hierarchy.

Through the analysis of three coding passes, in vivo, process or action coding, and priori coding, I was able to identify fundamental themes from the discussions of participants' lived experiences that correlated with data from CDE reports that aligned to the research question guiding this study. The main themes are explained as they pertain to the research question's context in the subsequent discussion findings, and an analysis of each theme is presented. Tables for each theme contain narrative statements illustrating participants' perceptions from DAEP leaders' and teachers' lived experiences aligned to the theme.

Theme 1: DAEP Purpose and Needs Served

Historically, the purpose of DAEPs was to serve as placeholders in the STPP trajectory for students who had been pushed out of public education due to repeated school suspensions and expulsion. According to Geronimo (2011), DAEPs have perpetuated the STPP by providing school districts "dumping grounds" to hold students with a history of problematic behaviors or academic failure. In analyzing data from leaders and teachers who have served in DAEPs between 2017–2020, and the Colorado Department of Education (2021a) school performance framework (SPF) reports, DAEPS are options for students under expulsion with a specific purpose serving specific student needs. According to both participants' experiences and perspectives and the CDE data, DAEPs serve expelled students' academic needs. Also, participant interviews revealed that DAEPs also serve students' mental health and social-emotional needs and provide school safety needs for both districts and students.

Academic Needs. Analysis of interviews with six DAEP leaders and five DAEP teachers indicated that DAEPs provide district curriculum and online programming for students to maintain access to grade-level content and credit recovery for high schoolers. In addition, three of the five DAEPs included in the study offer extracurricular opportunities through programs

connected to career pathways. Notable trends in the interviews and CDE school performance data for DAEP students' academic needs are that students are performing below grade level, some with extreme learning gaps in literacy and math skills that require a lot of 1:1 teacher attention for remediation, accommodations, and many times, modifications to reduce grade-level curricular expectations (see Table 1). Finally, the CDE school performance reports (2021a) for four of the five DAEPs in the study corroborate interview data showing students, especially the at-risk student indicators (minority; English language learners [ELL]; special education or SPED; and free-reduced lunch or low SES), are not meeting academic achievement expectations. The most current three-year academic data trends are reported from the state-administered exams measuring literacy and mathematics for both middle and high schoolers enrolled in the DAEP or enrolled in the alternative education site the DAEP is affiliated (see Appendix D). Besides, the reports show graduation trends for the majority of DAEPs in the study not meeting expectations for any of the at-risk student indicators from 2017–2019 (no testing reported for 2020 due to COVID restrictions).

Table 1

Significant Statements for Theme 1:DAEP Purpose and Academic Needs

Statement	Participant
Yeah, so we have to go backward. So we have to go backward in order to move forward. And see, that's the beauty of being in a smaller environment, right? Because we don't have as many kids, we can go backward.	L1
So I think of the academic needs specifically for kids that have learning gaps. If you are on an IEP or a 504, you might get some more individualized attention, or modifications and accommodations, whereas maybe you wouldn't if you were considered the typical or average student.	L2
We talked about those gaps, clear literacy and math gaps; those challenges haven't changed. We see it on standardized assessments. Our students are getting better with evidence-based reading and writing, but they are lacking in math. And so we tried to fill in those gaps with like I said, some relevant content.	L3

Statement	Participant
So, we have a study hall; we have two dedicated teachers that help out in this process. One is very math- and science-heavy, the other one is reading, history, and English.	L4
Some are on grade level; most have gaps. I mean, we have been blue for our graduation rate for my entire six years at the school. We have been distinguished on a school performance framework, every single year for completion rate that the issue becomes our mission is not to just simply graduate students.	L5
I would say about 35% to 40% of our students need a lot more intervention. So I think you know a lot of the students that are not performing at the level that they should be. I will say with the right amounts of supports, more one-on-one supports, they do eventually turn it around and are very capable of performing at a grade level or beyond. But I do think that it takes a lot more support than traditional schools are willing to give or able to give. But also I think that a lot of our students being that English is their second language, that they get underserved in a traditional school and then they typically, basically just end up with us.	L6
I was able to create a system of support that the student could still access [content] and feel successful. But that was me, and that's not the case for all teachers because they would perceive that the students were struggling and then would like, remediate to a level that was not appropriate. I just stuck with the grade-level curriculum.	T1
Okay, there is a struggle on grade level, but I don't think they can't do it. So, I think a lot of the kids could do the coursework. Yeah, like a bell curve, like a lot of kids could do grade-level work, but some couldn't. So teachers would modify it as they saw fit. I think as a science teacher, I was allowed to do that more than other teachers. So, I didn't feel a lot of pressure in any way from any level. You know, like, there was not a lot of guidance for science. They just said take the curriculum and teach whatever parts you want to teach. Generally, I would say they have lower reading and writing and math skills across the board.	T2
You know, typically, their ability level lies [at] low average. We would define success criteria as a student leaving our program with at least a quarter credit earned. But that means that each class is a quarter credit. So, they have the privilege the opportunity to earn up to at least one credit while they're with us each quarter.	T3
So we definitely ended up going slower than the regular district and sometimes focus on the standards, primarily.	T4
The program is providing a math education to all expelled students who attend or who voluntarily attend our program in grades 6 through 12. High school students will mostly enter at least a semester behind. So typically, a kid will come in having already failed a high school math and English course. So, when that's the case, we'll enroll that student in an online credit retrieval program for that respective course.	T5

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Needs. According to DAEP leaders and teachers, relationships were said to be the foundation of their work and the fundamental component for student success in their respective programs. Participants also reported that both the typical and most challenging DAEP placed students suffered traumatic life experiences, which impacted their behavior and social skills contributing to a variety of daily classroom disruptions. Still, there were always fewer disruptions in classes where the teachers had good relationships with students.

Participants also agreed that expelled students entered their programs with trust issues. If students did not respect a teacher or any person in a position of authority, they would not open up, may shut down, disrupt the learning environment, refuse to work, or attend at all. Most participants attributed students' lack of respect for school systems to having had a history of being pushed out of classrooms as early as elementary school, impacting their self-esteem and belief in themselves as failures (see Table 2).

Table 2

Significant Statements for Theme 1:DAEP Purpose and SEL Needs

Statement	Participant
A lot of the struggles are outside the DAEP, and teachers are having to sometimes throw content out the door, you know, because if that kid is not emotionally okay they're not going to learn anything.	L1
These kids that probably have experienced more trauma than most people, and they have lived more lives than probably most; it's not your average kid.	
Lately, I would say I've seen a lot more on the drug and alcohol and substance abuse.	
A lot of time was spent on attendance and teaching kids social-emotional life skills, how to get along with people, how to behave appropriately in a classroom, how to engage rather than just show up.	L3
They feel like they have a community.	L5
Here the needs that are being served are one we connect them to resources. And that's everything from housing, to food, to social emotional supports, we provide health screens, we	L6

Statement	Participant
give them a place where they can come in and learn. We support them mentally and physically, and you know, on some levels, like on a spiritual level.	
Typically our students are quiet; they tend to come off as like antisocial. We see a wide variety of behavioral issues.	
They won't go to class; they are hanging out in the halls in the bathroom. They're disruptive. They tend to struggle with substance abuse. They tend to have a hard time feeling a part of our overall school culture. I think they tend to kind of feel like they're an outsider. They tell me repeatedly that they don't belong. And they usually are the students that are sent out of class like usually kicked out.	
And their behavior basically was a result of lack of support or lack of guidance	
Listening to students and getting to know their cultural differences, and showing that I care and acknowledging that yes, I may not look like you and I may not have the background like you, but maybe I do have some experiences that we can empathize with or find some common ground on. And even if I don't, I'm still going to listen with intention and care that shows respect.	T1
Relationships are exactly what run the program. It is the cog that runs our machine. If we don't have relationships with our students, we simply don't make any headway.	T3
But if we didn't have the expulsion program, like some of the skills that I see these kids come in not having, and then leaving with, like, the ability to take a compliment, to be able to have the opportunity and an ability to be able to problem-solve using words, to sit down in a room and have a conversation with an adult.	
We do have this social-emotional learning aspect. And now we're getting more and more support, we just got an alcohol and drug counselor from a grant. And we have a therapist in our school that works with all of our programs.	T4
And then just educationally building skills and trying to work on behavior in a school setting to return and function appropriately.	

Safety Needs. According to participants' experiences and perspectives, DAEPs serve

districts by increasing a sense of school safety when students are expelled for weapons charges,

assaultive behaviors, and drug distribution. Nine out of the 11 participants believed schools were

justified in removing threats to school and student safety; these participants acknowledged that a

students' removal allowed for problem-solving at both sides of the situation. Some examples

provided were that all schools or programs involved could critically think through creative ways

they can address high-risk behaviors that arise while expelled students can get access to resources that may help a student get to the root of the problem that resulted in the expulsion.

Curiously, current CDE expulsion data and most participants' reported experiences did not reflect the safety concerns most perceived as justifiable causes for student expulsion. In fact, most participants reported habitual behavior contributing to classroom disruptions and student drug or alcohol use and not drug or alcohol distribution as the leading attributes of expulsion referrals. Finally, many participants correlated mental health contributors, such as extensive trauma, anxiety, and depression, to the reported student behaviors that dissipated over time once addressed with specific strategies and resources in their DAEPs (see Table 3).

Table 3

Significant Statements for Theme 1:DAEP Purpose and Safety Needs

Statement	Participant
Um, I guess my biggest concern would be the safety of other kids.	L1
And I think sometimes it's just, if let's pause for a second, let's figure out what's going on. Let's try to stop the behavior, the behavior is happening for reasons. Now let's try to figure out, so let's just take this kid and put them over here, where it's a smaller environment, and we can work on skills, and we can build relationships. Because there are a few things that might need to be restored, you know, and probably a relationship and engagement in school are probably the biggest ones.	
And if it [expulsion] has had that type of impact, where more than one student feels unsafe to be in the school building that to me, I would think about, but I do question the multiple things that get a kid expelled.	L2
I know there used to be, you know, habitual student behaviors where people felt it [expulsion] was justified. And it's like, have we really examined the whole child and everything that goes with that child that determines why they may be at risk? And have we put in true interventions? I think that's something I would question in public education whether there really is a true continuum of services or interventions? Or is it [expulsion] just putting a Band-Aid on it to say we've tried.	
I think if you're looking at expulsion, where a student came in threatening somebody with like a weapon, which would be an expulsion process, but like for the justice, I honestly, I guess,	L6

Statement	Participant

my only time that I think is if they've like made physical threats to a teacher, or anyone in the school community, that wouldn't allow them to be able to be in that school community. Beyond that, I think that we fail them by pushing them out. If they leave, because they feel that this isn't a good fit for them. That's different. But if we're just basically saying, "Hey, this is your home school, but you don't belong here, because you, you're not performing the way we want you to perform, or you're not behaving the way we want you to behave, and you have to get out."

Schools today are a dangerous places to be. I mean, we've seen school shootings that keep happening, we've seen a lot of school violence within schools, and we have to get that to stop, we have to make schools a safe place for all students to go. Physically and social-emotionally safe.

So if a student is a threat to themselves, or to a peer, or to a staff member, and that threat would be like, a weapon, or if there is documented physical aggression. I think that would be when a school is justified from removing them from a school setting. I want to put a caveat on this because I guess if you're gonna say student fighting, like students fighting other students, like I don't feel like that's the justification for expulsion. When I'm talking about like threat like something in the sense that it would be like if you would want to put a restraining order or something like that if we think an adult world like something that's at a much higher level of aggression than just a student fight.   T1

I think that home schools are justified in the fact that if a kid violates the school rules, and it's   T3
not, you know, and it's not part of their disability if they are a disabled student, um, then I feel
like it's okay for the school to justify we take an expulsion hearing.

Theme 2: DAEP Systems

Schedule, Class Size, and Attendance. Two DAEPs in this study operate on a standard six- to seven-period traditional school schedules. In comparison, the other three DAEPs in the study operate on shorter schedules providing students two to four periods to do coursework. While most participants believe shorter schedules help students who already exhibit high disengagement levels from school systems, some questions arise regarding school systems, staff, and students' expectations.

The vast majority of participants agree that class size matters with at-risk youth. The smaller class sizes afforded students in DAEPs and their alternative school partnerships to provide additional opportunities for struggling students to get more teacher attention with fewer

distractions. Also, teacher participants emphasized that smaller class size allows for the intimacy required to get students to open up about their SEL and academic needs. Furthermore, smaller class sizes prevent students from slipping further through the cracks as the teacher notices students' academic and SEL needs easier and quicker.

Attendance systems varied across the five DAEPs in the study, but a common denominator was most expelled students enter their programs with a history of predominantly low attendance, and attendance remains an issue for many expelled students. Not only that, but most leaders and teachers in the study reported employee burnout due to fatigue working with students displaying high-risk and disruptive behaviors four to six hours a day, which impacts staff attendance during certain times of the year. Another common denominator regarding attendance in participants' experiences is the overall system does not seem to be concerned with truancy; if a student is on probation and school attendance is linked to students' probation criteria, then accountability is monitored at the juvenile justice level (see Table 4). Otherwise, most DAEPs remove students from their program if a capped number of missed days occur and rarely follow-up with truancy.

Table 4

Significant Statements for Theme 2: DAEP Systems–Schedule, Class Size, and Attendance

Statement	Participant
A majority of 90% of our kids are boys, and attendance is really hit and miss, that's if they buy into the program, attendance is great.	L1
I would say between probably 50% to 60% would be kids coming, and the other percent would be those not wanting to attend.	
The majority of the students attend full-time with some sporadic attendance issues. Middle school students attend school from 8 am to 10 am in the morning for two content areas. And a high school student attends from 11:30 am to 1:30 pm.	L2

Statement	Participant

But I would say about the shorter schedule; I wouldn't say it is a benefit. That's just what it is right now. They get two hours a day in their content areas five days a week, and I would not say that's a benefit. I think that's a disadvantage.

So most students who attended that program had jobs in the afternoon that they had to get to by like two. And so it [shorter schedule] gave students an opportunity to work and go to school.   L3

So the students who would come in at 9 am did three classes a day, and the fourth was the credit recovery or credit acceleration class. And so those kids would, I mean, do the same three or four classes for four and a half weeks at a time with the same teacher, the same students to earn a quarter credit, we did incremental credits.

We had social-emotional learning life skills on smaller class sizes, flexible schedule on-site, childcare, online content, the adult program, acceleration for credit recovery.

We also offered a construction program, and we offered a nursing program. And we had a psychology program.

Teachers had a really unique opportunity with, let's say, at most, I don't know, 15 students in a class at a time to really get to know students and who they were and where they were coming from.

Our students come in between 8:15 to 8:30 when the morning council starts. And we have shortened our schedule to where they only come four days a week, at four hours a day. And we have seen a higher rate of student attendance, and we have a higher rate of teacher attendance, we have a higher success rate out of our students, they don't feel like it's too much work because they get to concentrate on four in-person classes and one online class. So they're doing five classes a day. And we also, again, have a chance for credit recovery.   L4

In my previous DAEP experience, it was five days a week. And the schedule changed a lot. It was a typical day, for the most part, I think a seven-hour day, half an hour lunch, they had a couple of breaks here and there throughout the day. The classroom sizes were small. Um, however, I think there are 55-minute classes. And it was a lot of like six or seven classes they had to deal with.

Attendance for our middle school population, which is very small, is about anywhere from 15 to 20 students and typically is around 85% daily. We tip on the high school side; we typically see 60 to 70 students, depending on the year, our average attendance rates the last five years and somewhere around 70% to 72%.   L5

I think we are giving the students a lot more autonomy to be able to pick and choose how you know which learning style meets their needs. I also think with a smaller student body, we're able to make decisions that meet our students' needs a lot quicker. And so the systems that we put in place, the supports that we have available, because of the size of our school, we're able to make a lot of bigger decisions, we can make them quicker, it doesn't take as long.   L6

Statement	Participant

It [attendance] varies. We have students who we've never seen, and then we have students who are here every day. But I would say compared to my, you know, like other roles or other teaching jobs outside of a DAEP, I would say I make a lot more truancy calls and a lot more home visits because we have a lot more students who are not here not attending.

Middle school always seems to have a high attendance rate when I first started at my school, and we would average around 85 to 90% for attendance, which is really great. But over the years, that tended to drop, I think, around 75%, toward my last year at that school, but high school was always more of a challenge. I feel like, you know, never really got past 70% to 75% [attendance rate], it was always really low, like in the 60s or 50s. So there are a lot of reasons why attendance at this type of school can be a challenge to work with. And it's not always or it's rarely ever within that student's control.

T1

But then at the same time, there really wasn't like a system that, like, if you were absent, that showed that it mattered that they [students] were gone, there wasn't a system really to say like, "Oh, no, I should be afraid that I have so many days missing."

There's a lot of teacher burnout in a school like this because it is a challenging job. And a lot of people come in not knowing like what the true work looks like. And some people are able to work through that and overcome. And some people struggle with that. And, you know, taking a personal day tends to help like, if you're struggling, and you just need like, one personal day, but sometimes those personal days start to keep getting more regular, and more frequent.

Student attendance, I felt, was terrible. There is a lot of tardiness and loads of kids that would leave at lunch or in between classes and not come back at all. My [personal] attendance was pretty good. I think I took a few, maybe two or three mental health days, but some other coworkers' attendance was terrible like worse than student attendance.

T2

Systems at my first DAEP experience were not always established, and they weren't very clear. They weren't supported by the administration, or the faculty as a whole wasn't on the same board with the rules or the systems that were put in place.

I feel like our attendance policy works well for our kids because it is structured. It is very black and white. Students know from intake exactly how many absences, which they can use before they are held against them. How many absences and they are, so if they start with us at the beginning of the quarter, and a nine-week session, they are provided three excused absences.

T3

Middle school [attendance] tended to be high, but then you also have some that weren't. And we would have trouble with that. So yeah, I would say, but it seems, I think, mostly consistent. Parents were dropping off kids, and they were coming in. I think for them, I'd probably say it's high for probably about 75%, maybe.

T4

So for student attendance, on average, we would estimate that it's pretty much around 80% a day that the attendance in our program will mirror what the kids, what their attendance was prior to entering our program.

T5

Statement	Participant

Expectations. According to most teacher participants, most coursework and assessments were delivered in direct instruction content classes at grade-level from the district, but expectations were not always high from all staff members, and student ability is typically below grade level. Participants discussed that students enter the programs at various times of the year with preexisting academic gaps in their educational development and experiences, especially in reading, writing, and math. Other coursework, especially for high schoolers recovering credit, is offered online in most of the DAEP programs, and students work independently but have access to a content teacher for support. Many teachers in the study expressed concern for the surprisingly low literacy skills and math levels at-risk students graduate with because most programs pass students along to maintain graduation rates.

During interviews, many participants expressed concern about the overall expectations of DAEP students after their placement. Most agreed that if success meant passing students to the next grade level or graduating them, then expelled students are successful for the most part. Most participants explained that it is hard for the majority of DAEP-placed students to return to their comprehensive school or be successful in job placement other than basic minimum wage or college mainly because they received them too late in their academic struggle and then made school too easy in DAEPs. Most agreed it is challenging to balance supporting students' life skills and academic skills with social skills required to being successful outside an alternative education placement. Sure, most participants agreed that their respective programs do great things with kids. Many students continue their existing struggles, return to their criminal behaviors, and several students return to jail. One contributor observed by several leaders and teachers was that people are sometimes too afraid of setting realistic and high expectations for

kids who have a lot of trauma, but pity and making things easier for them does them a huge disservice (see Table 5).

Table 5

Significant Statements for Theme 2: DAEP Systems–Expectations

Statement	Participant
Our coursework in my first DAEP location was not at satisfactory because I believe that the rigor was dumbing down to help fit our students to make them feel successful. There was a lack of diversity in teaching, and a lot of the teachers at that time did not scale. And so it was really just, you know, either you knew it, or you didn't know it, and they [teachers] kind of moved them [students] on.	L4
As leaders, we should be asking, are we setting systems up in place that check up on our students three months after they graduate, six months after they graduate, nine months, in a year? Are our systems set up to where we are self-checking ourselves on the rigor? Are we self-checking ourselves on the content that's being taught? Are we self-checking ourselves on essential skills that the students need to learn?	
Some teachers at our school actually see our students. And those interactions tend to be positive, healthy, affirming, where students are heard. And those relationships are great. Some other interactions and settings with our students, there is still this stereotype of reading students just for history and file a record in our in our student information system. And then adults start making assumptions and judgments about who the student is. And then responding accordingly out of fear and interacting with that student. So it could show up in a very small way, like not wanting to take students on field trips or outside the building. Not trusting students to be with independent learning how it could look like students giving the lack of rigor in the instructional tasks or performance assessments they are given tend to be below grade level.	L5
I think that what I've noticed as far as our coursework, in the last, you know, three to four years. I would say we really tried to make the subject matter applicable to their experience. And we had to make a lot of changes. I think previous to like, even 2017, there was so much focus on test scores and testing, and not as on actual content of skills and of knowledge. And I think there was a shift had been made in the last like two or three years where there's a lot more focus on helping our students learn skills and kind of moving away from helping them to be good test-takers, and helping them to learn the skills that are needed to help them to be successful outside of school.	L6
The high school diploma is a great, you know, like benchmark, but we have to see beyond that. What can we do to give them the skills to be successful in society, to be highly functioning, to be able to provide for themselves for their families, and who you know, whoever it is that they're responsible for.	

Statement	Participant
Yeah, and consequences should have been clear to students and teachers and admin like nobody was ever on the same page. And then they tried to introduce restorative justice, but we never really used it. It seemed like a waste of training.	T2
There just doesn't seem to be, and I don't have the data for it. I wish I did. But there doesn't seem to be near the percentage of [DAEP] students that are successful if they leave the alternative campus. I think it goes back to relationships; I think they don't have a person. And they're just a pea on an eight-lane highway when they go back to those big old schools.	T3
So right now, I would say our rule system is basically show up and behave. And if they can't, we contact the dean, and they take it from there. But we do make clear that once they show up to school, we do school.	T5
And I think what's frustrating a lot of teachers is [are] that the problems that we're dealing with, the students that we're dealing with, do not match the messages coming from above, does not match the professional development being delivered. So, if you just get concerned about these things, because we're being, we're having our bosses and the administrators telling us to do A, B, and C, yet X, Y, and Z is happening, and these things are not being addressed. There's no alignment. And I don't think that's ever going to change.	

Staff Preparedness. As noted by participants' experiences, consistency has been a struggle in managing and interacting within DAEP systems. Also, the low level of staff preparedness is a common attribute that surfaced in the data (see Table 6). Considering the student populations' high-risk natures placed in DAEPs, not one participant has ever engaged in a district professional onboarding training upon hire. While many of the participants had some background interacting with at-risk youth before their DAEP roles, 60% of participants perceived their level of preparedness for working in a DAEP as low or nonexistent. Most participants acknowledged that the limited level of preparedness for working with the expelled student population contributed to high turnover and teacher burnout in DAEPs.

Not only that, but participants agreed that once in their roles, most professional development they received came from the district and was not aligned to the needs of alternative education students or teachers. Ninety percent of the DAEP participants believed they needed

more training and support with trauma-informed care, culturally responsive practices, social-emotional strategies and curriculum, emotion management and regulation skills, conflict resolution strategies, restorative justice practices, and specific training on how to meet the needs of kids with significant mental health issues due to trauma.

Table 6

Significant Statements for Theme 2: DAEP Systems–Staff Preparedness

Statement	Participant
So individually, during one-on-one discussions with teachers, we talk about race, we talk about how it shows up. Based on the student population we have, I just had a conversation the other day talking about implicit bias. And so we talked about that individually when it comes to culturally responsive teaching. How do you provide, you know, all students that you believe that all students can learn, regardless of the color of their skin? So we talk about some of the standards talk about, you know, providing a safe and inclusive environment, meeting the needs of diverse populations, that that can include our students in special education, we talk about the whole child.	L2
It's easier to walk away for a lot of people. And so training staff to walk toward conflict respectfully is something that we have to do.	L3
So what we really needed were sound and consistent instructional strategies that were providing equitable access to content for all of our students. And what we got instead was mission vision work. And it seemed like the mission work superseded instruction and behavior and restorative practices PD [professional development].	
Because of the constant changes of leadership, so there were six years where we had three different leaders. And so kind of remission vision work over that course took precedence for PD.	
In terms of the staff, I mean, I think that we had some challenges with relatability. You know you get a pool of applicants who have a lot of knowledge and a lot of pedagogy and a lot of education and have a very narrow, I'm going to try and say this the most politically correct way that I can, they have a narrow lens of the world around them, really, because the world was mostly White, mostly privileged. And, you know, the typical students in our school weren't White and privileged. And so in terms of being able to, like, talk authentically about biases and perspective and integrate, you know, culturally relevant content.	
My first location, I felt that the professional development wasn't as sustainable or as effective as it could have been because there is such a division in the teacher's view on how to work with students that are in an alternative setting, whether it has to be through different viewpoints on biases, or on systemic racism, or, you know, things that are going on in education, that systemic racism within education, so there's a complete division in my first	L4

Statement	Participant

school, to where that professional development could not be as effective as it should have been.

I think about this; during my education, my undergrad, I was never taught how to deal with behaviors. I was never taught how to deal with a behavior issue. So when I went to my observation or my student teaching, I have behaviors that I had no idea what the hell to do. So why are we missing this in our undergrad, and maybe in some of our master's programs, of how to work on encompassing every child.

We always talk about falling forward. And right now I see, you know, a lot of systems that are still home at zero tolerance that doesn't allow for that to happen.

And a large part of that work is not thinking about instructional practices or a new curriculum or scope and sequence that we're going to put out is largely a function of how do we shift mindsets of adults, who are still sitting in a place of comfort, where how they went to school and their experiences in school. Very traditional, very binary, very inflexible.   L5

I have found that most people come to the school they say I like the vision and mission of the school. I want to work with this population of students. But when they actually get into the space, and connect with the young folk, they come in with either a savior complex or they come in with this one size fits all approach from their education in their learning.

They don't see their dreams, and they don't see their aspirations. They don't see their assets. They see them as deficits. And those beliefs heavily influenced their practices.

I would say over the six years I've been there, and let's just you know, say 70 people have been in and out of that building over the last six years. And including the folks who stayed, I would say 10% are prepared and comfortable with our students. So they say six to seven people that I can identify, who can, who come with empathy, instructional expertise, a humbleness, and who took a learner's stance in approach to the work and didn't see themselves as sort of experts or finished products.

I was not prepared. I was like a complete mess. And I had like almost a severe mental   L6
breakdown. And it was one of the hardest things that I had ever done. At the end of the school year I vowed I was never going to go back, and I can't do this. But then jump ahead 10 years. I am way more prepared. I stayed in, you know I never really left. I keep coming back, and I kept doing the work with this population. And I feel like I was underprepared initially because nobody was there to kind of like, give me any advice or any guidance.

I don't think that they [staff] are prepared. I think that a lot of them come in very naive. I think that they come in feeling like I'm going to change the world. I'm going to do all these amazing things, and I'm going to fix these kids. And I think that they quickly realize like, "Oh, I'm not in the business of fixing people. I'm in the business of just being there to help and to guide people." I think that it takes them a while. I've seen a lot of teachers leave. I've seen a lot of teachers get either fired or just don't come back after winter break or spring break. I've seen a lot of them just take different careers. I've had a lot of coworkers that started off saying that

Statement	Participant

they were going into teaching because they want to save the world and make big changes and do all these amazing things in their content. And I would just say a lot of my coworkers in the past are not nearly as focused or as prepared as they should be because relationships have to come before content.

There's a lot of teacher burnout in a school like this, because it is a challenging job. And a lot of people come in not knowing like what the true work looks like. And some people are able to work through that and overcome. And some people struggle with that. And, you know, taking a personal day tends to help like, if you're struggling, and you just need like, one personal day, but sometimes those personal days start to keep getting more regular, and more frequent.

T1

We also got sent to district trainings. And the ones that we were sent to were not very effective, because it never reflected the needs at a DAEP school. It was more content-based. But sometimes that didn't reflect like the needs that we had for scheduling are the needs that we had to address for like building relationships with students or the needs that we had to address regarding like English language learners, or students that might be having other restrictions either due to like court issues or other trauma-related issues that they're dealing with. So like a lot of the district, professional development wasn't helpful.

I was not prepared for working with students at a DAEP. Professional development rarely related to our schools, especially on the district side. Professional development, they didn't relate to our schools, the ones that we did inside the school, I guess they related more, but they weren't very directed. They weren't enough, in my opinion.
Just having some training on like substance abuse courses, or what other types of students were we going to teach and strategies for sex offenders, or traumatized children, like more training on that might have been useful.

T2

I would say that my focus would need to be around finding a more appropriate curriculum for the fidelity of SEL. Meaning I need something with the scope and sequence from the beginning of the quarter to the end of the quarter or something consistent, where I can use it as a curriculum, and add my pieces to it when necessary based on my individual students. So it is curriculum fidelity.

T3

And for teachers, I would say there's a ton of autonomy. Like I said, people are assumed to know the content and be masters of their content. And so there's not a lot of questioning or accountability, there's not a lot of collaboration, which for some is dissatisfactory. Because people feel like they're on an island.

T4

But the first year or two, at the end of the year, I was ready to quit because it's just such an emotional roller coaster sometimes, you know, when things went wrong, it just seems very draining that way. And you just kind of get burnt out and exhausted, but I feel like I'm at a place where I'm, I'm better able to handle it. And not wear it and carry it so much.

I would say, generally speaking, I was unprepared.

T5

Statement	Participant

So it was through my staff interactions that I was able to be coached by those two women and a man that, you know, walked me through, here's how you want to work with these students. After 17 years, I let everybody know that I am the expert in expulsion.

[District name omitted] has never offered any formal training. But it's one of those you'll learn through an intake. And by reading, typically, for these kids in their historical records. The deans will make a note of possible gang affiliation. And once you develop a relationship with these kids, you're going to find your gang members, one-on-one will answer anything asked.

You know, as long as you show these kids their perceived level of respect, and you're not there to lecture that kid about being in a gang, it's pretty remarkable how these kids, the veracity of these students and what they'll share with you, obviously in confidence, but um, it's a pretty unique environment. I think I would love to see, actually more teachers become more knowledgeable in this work because, unfortunately, it's growing in our in [omitted area name].

Theme 3: DAEPs and the STPP Relationship

While participants believe DAEPs have transitioned from student warehouses to alternative learning opportunities for expelled students, it does not negate the fact that public school systems in Colorado have not transitioned from exclusion to inclusion of specific student populations that ultimately created the need for DAEPs and continue the STPP trajectory for many historically marginalized student populations.

Subjective Referrals. Many participants viewed the root cause of the STPP began with subjective office referrals in students' traditional schools that removed students from their learning environments, thereby starting the criminalization path. Students with learning disabilities, both defined and undefined, are reported by all DAEPs in this study. Still, a couple of participants in this study claimed to not see many students on IEPs but did claim students performed well below grade level. In addition, many participants noted and questioned that by the time most students get to DAEPs, they have a history of subjective disciplinary referrals in

their student files, which negates their opportunity to equal access to content and resources

through exclusion (see Table 7).

Table 7

Significant Statements for Theme 3: DAEPs and the STPP Relationship

Statement	Participant
We're [DAEP] like a steppingstone for kids that can go one way or the other. They buy-in, and they do well, and they become engaged again. And we may be able to send them off back to, I guess traditional [school], if that's where they've got to go and hope that they can be successful there. Or if they're not going to buy into the program. Then we're just like a steppingstone to the next, you know, placement, which is possibly the school to the prison system.	L1
So there are conversations that I've had with my parents and the kid, like, they'll say, I don't want to go, I'm not going back to that school. I don't want to go back to that school because I'm going to be a target. So then we talk about what are some alternatives. And then that's usually when they ask, "Can't they just stay here with you?" And, you know, it's like, unfortunately, they can't. But we have those conversations because it doesn't make sense to put somebody back in a situation that wasn't working.	
And how do we define what student behavior is, even in our referrals? At one point, I would say, how are we referring students because of, you know, who is referred, let's just say, when it comes to behaviors versus our White students. And you'll probably see sometimes I think implicit bias plays a part on how students are getting the referral, even going to our dean's in our program.	L2
I don't believe that they should be allowed to push them out. I believe they're pushing out these kids because they stopped believing in those students.	L4
And so, um, when a lot of our students come to us, we have often heard that they have just been kicked out, they were never listened to. And never were [they] able to say their side of the story. Once they were put in a system, they were there in the system, and they can never get out. And so they're always kind of being beat up on. They're the first ones blamed for everything. And, you know, I think it's just from years and years of trauma, and a lot of it probably started all the way back from, you know, elementary school all the way to high school. And so that's why I feel like a lot of the behaviors come from is the lack of education that the students have received because they've been out of the classroom for so many years. And so you get these behaviors when they don't know something, or when they're asked to do something, and they don't want to feel stupid, they don't want to feel dumb.	
Without DAEPs, I think we continue with the same status quo system that we have both students will be pushed out and have nowhere to go. And they end up dropping out and find themselves ultimately in the juvenile justice system and then in the penal system for adults.	L5

Statement	Participant

Some teachers at our school actually see our students. And those interactions tend to be positive, healthy, affirming, still students are heard. And those relationships are great. Some other interactions and settings with our students, there is still this stereotype of reading students just for history and file a record in our student information system. And then adults start making assumptions and judgments about who the student is. And then responding accordingly out of fear and interacting with that student. So it could show up in a very small way, like not wanting to take students on field trips or outside the building. Not trusting students to do independent learning. And it could look like giving the lack of rigor in the instructional tasks or performance assessments they are given tend to be below grade level.

And so they [teachers] aren't necessarily prepared to see another perspective. They're also not even prepared to really unpack their biases, and a lot of [it] is sort of confirmation bias. And so [teachers] start working at an alternative education campus. There are students here who have been expelled from other schools. I have read discipline records. I see everything from assaulted behaviors to drug possession, drug use to drug dealing, to you know, possession of a weapon, right, or a student who was coming out of a juvenile detention facility. So out of those details, biases and fears show up. The deficit thinking is confirmed for them. And they interact with the students from that place of fear.

The typical DAEP student is a Black or Brown student that didn't conform to behavior that the school preferred. And so usually, they had a lot of behaved small behavior, incidences, maybe they had an argument, or maybe they said something to the teacher that wasn't so nice. And then those behavior instances, you know, kept increasing over the years, as they were not supported in that school properly. Until there was a culminating event that they got in a fight, or they got in the fight, and they happen to have a knife, the knife was in their backpack because they were afraid of something else outside of school, or they were selling drugs or had drugs on them that [they] weren't necessarily selling them.   T1

We have taken students over the years, who have, for example, who have been pains in the rears at their particular home schools, but yet, maybe haven't gone through the remedial discipline plan process fully. And all of a sudden, they're an admin transfer over at our program, not necessarily even with a victim issue at their school. So that's a little curious.   T3

At least six students were admin transferred from the alternative middle school to our expulsion program for a timeout, you know, a little break. And, you know, they weren't expelled.

The deans at these [traditional] schools, you know, they have a tough job. It is a thankless gig, you are there doing nothing but doling out discipline. And how do you befriend that kid when you don't have discipline? Right? So I get it, it's tough. However, I really feel like, especially in those reentry meetings, when these [expelled] kids haven't even stepped foot on that campus yet, or it's been nine weeks at a minimum since they've been on that campus, those dean's, why don't they practice amnesia?

Um, it just is beyond me that these deans don't feel the importance of trying to figure out how they could make a better relationship somehow.

Statement	Participant
I think there's got to be some subjectiveness in their referrals, right. If you have a student who is a little more educated and, you know, can talk their way out of something or justify it or has parents support that gets involved. I think there probably is some of that. So the other ones sometimes where I feel like it's more subjective is when they've had multiple referrals, you know, and the school is just done with a student. So and it's a lot more of minor things. But how many minor things justify an expulsion? Some of that's not clear.	T4

Race. According to both participants' experiences and CDE expulsion data, Black and Brown students, especially males, were disproportionally represented in Colorado's DAEPs. While three of the five DAEPs' enrollments reflect the overall district population's diversity, many participants question why BIPOC students end up expelled more than their disruptive White counterparts (see Table 8).

Table 8

Significant Statements for Theme 3: DAEPs and the STPP Relationship and Race

Statement	Participant
I would say that there is probably a lot, we do have a certain population of kids that I get more than others, such as Hispanic.	L1
I see a type, a student population of our Latino, Latina, and our Black students. And so, I think, you know, you're going to see that as well, in an overrepresentation of students of color in DAEPs. That I think is to me a significant issue. When we think of, you know, of students that are sent to us.	L2
I mean, look at the student numbers of students of color coming into our expulsion school that will just tell you, if you look at race as color, you're going to see our Latinx and our Black and Brown students basically, have been placed here. So I think race has everything to do with, you know, how it plays into, I think, education as an institution.	
I would say we need to look at the referral process, probably looking at why they were expelled would be really important on how race plays a part in that you're probably going to see it in, in the demographic data, as we all see it in referrals, just referrals in general and how student referrals play out in looking at the high referral data on Black and Brown students. You're seeing more and more students that are on IEPs sent to me, that could still also be an overrepresentation of our students of color that, you know, they are, they're putting down meeting social, emotional, you know, significant emotional disability criteria. And to me, I	

Statement	Participant

think sometimes we're overrepresenting our students of color in that process as well. As well as I would say, our English language learners when it comes to an IEP because there's a high Latinx population too.

I think we were about 40%, not White. So I think it's really a resource disadvantage, and an economic disadvantage, more than I do, specifically race that brought them to, you know, our school. I think it's other challenges. You know, they're in specific areas because they can only afford specific areas. I mean, I do think that there certainly are race issues. But I don't know that I've had students attend our school say, I got pushed out because those people are racist. I think they acknowledge that race is an issue, but it's not something that they felt personally.   L3

In my current location, high Hispanic population, and looking like at 90 to 95% Hispanic, and my first site is heavily populated in [the] African American population. And, gosh, 90% of the boys were African American, and the few girls mostly African American.   L4

And yeah, to me, this is what bias is, huge bias. And from whether it's a teacher lens, an administrator lens, a district lens, bias is what is contributing to that gap. Population bias is the bias on how they view students of color. And whether it's because they talk different, they socialize differently you know, or he's poor social economics.

Students who come to our school typically are marginalized. The demographics we typically see are more of Black and Latino male students.   L5

Well, demographics, you're typically, we see more of Black and Latino male students placement into a DAEP, and it is 100% a race issue. It's called institutional racism and individual racism. Because if you see Black boys and Latino children, students, as inherently criminal, as threatening, you then start to build a case or incidents to confirm your bias and then remove them from the school to put them into an alternative placement setting or to put them into a juvenile detention setting.

We have a higher amount of Hispanic and Latino populations, a lot fewer White and African American students. I think primarily probably because of the demographics of the neighborhoods.   L6

I don't know where the race thing happens. I just know that the race of my student population is that are predominantly people of color. And I don't know where it's coming from, I don't know if that's coming from higher up. If it's coming, you know, as a result of the school to prison pipeline. I don't know if it's the social stigma, the deep-rooted racial issues that we have in our society, where it comes from, I don't know, but I will say that every DAEP that I've worked in, it's predominantly students of color placed there.

When I first started working at the school, it was about I would say about 85% Black, the rest, mostly Latino, and then maybe a couple of White kids. And that, that doesn't really match. I don't know, it just doesn't seem right. You know, there's much more cultural diversity in the area, and it's still Black and Brown kids. It's ridiculous.   T1

Statement	Participant
Typically tends to be a higher percentage of Hispanic males, we oftentimes will get well, rather, the students that come through our program.	T3
I think it [race] plays a part at the expulsion hearing because that is when the decision is made as to whether or not that student is officially expelled.	
And I feel like particular races are scrutinized more because of their family circumstances that they may or may not control. Um, but I mean, it's just it's very apparent, you know when you walk into my program, you see 50% White, 50% Hispanic on a given day, and then next quarter you get 80% Hispanic and 20% White. And, you know, it's disconcerting, but the high percentage of Hispanics appears to be common.	
It's probably, you know, any given time, it's probably moving 60% Latino, 40% White, and every once in a while, we will have an African American student. So I don't know, but you know, I definitely see some of the issues with the Latino population that again, with the difficulties in communication and support and things like that, sometimes I feel like it [expulsion] could have been prevented.	T4
I don't see race playing a role whatsoever. Now with that said, I am not privy to arbitrary expulsions I, we don't see those. So that's obviously handled, you know, at the high school or middle school admin level. What I see in my program based on race, when I look through each student's file as they come in, these are kids again, they've clearly committed an expellable offense. So I don't see there being any bias at all. However, I know by talking to deans and assistant principals off the record, there have been incidences where you know, this kid didn't get an expulsion whereas this kid did but, and so far what I see on my end, I don't see it being an issue.	T5
Ah, well, now it certainly doesn't reflect [district name omitted] overall demographics right. I think our district is still roughly 63 to 62% Caucasian and our [DAEP] numbers are a little more heavily slanted toward, you know, Hispanic and Black students.	

Ability. According to participants, they reported most students' ability as performing below grade level or low academic performance with both identified and unidentified learning needs. All but three participants saw high incidents of students on IEPs. Most participants recalled that most DAEP students had a history of classroom exclusion, which they believed contributed to some form of learning need that involved tailored academic support, especially accommodations such as remediation, differentiation, scaffolding, and extended time to process and complete tasks. Another note from the interview data was some participants expressed

concern for the overrepresentation of minority students on IEPs and whether the indicators

matched students' real ability levels (see Table 9).

Table 9

Significant Statements for Theme 3: DAEPs and the STPP Relationship and Ability

Statement	Participant
I'm going to say they have the ability, and I'll tell you, the reason is because teachers differentiate the instruction, and my teachers are very aware of where they are in their abilities.	L1
So their skill level, a lot of times they will come in, under grade level, meaning they should be at the grade-level reading and they're probably a couple of grade levels below and same with math and English. I would say probably 90% to 95% of the time they are not on grade level.	
I would say we get a lot of students on IEPs and more 504s in the expulsion program. I just think that's an overrepresentation of more and more students of color that are being put on an IEP. And so I wonder if they're referred because we see behaviors, they're like, oh, maybe we need to open up consent for evaluation because maybe they meet the significant emotional disability criteria under the IEP and in so they think behavior sometimes meets that process. But then you know, then you get that an overrepresentation of what we called maladjustment, right socially maladjusted, which to me is, then sometimes they think that "Oh, so they have behaviors, that they have an emotional disability?" Well, I don't believe that's the case. I think you need to look at medical diagnoses that play into maybe going into, you know, some of that criteria when we go through it, to see if a student qualifies. But it could be external factors that play into that, you know, and people want to think that they should be on an IEP for it.	L2
I would say that most were not able to access content that was grade level.	L3
I would say we had a decent number of students who were underidentified. So when they came to us, they were already behind in content.	
Well, for many of our students, I think that content and curriculum were covered at a rate that was too much too fast for students who are struggling learners to process anyways.	
I feel like a lot of minority students wouldn't be placed on IEPs but just an added criteria to their placement into the DAEP placement because it's another reason for a traditional school to say they cant serve the students behavior and learning needs. I found it over the years now to see how many more students, especially students of color that are put on that [IEP]. And especially when we go to retest them, like there's no reason for you to be here, and a lot of them have advocated for themselves, like, when students are advocating I don't need to be in this class or I don't need to be in the system and nobody listens to them. And we're, again, we're doing a disservice to our kids. We need to change that and make sure that they're tested fairly and equitably. And maybe we do that in front of a committee. Maybe we don't have the schools meeting it by themselves.	L4

Statement	Participant
Maybe we have a special committee that does that to ensure equity and equality for every single student that is placed on those programs.	
The majority of our students, when they arrive at school, have the ability to be successful academically and socially in school and community settings.	L5
I know they don't test well at all. Some of our students tend to test well; most do not. But I don't place a heavy emphasis on testing because mostly standardized assessments are racist anyway.	
We see a lot of learning disabilities. I think ability is a big part of it. If a kid can do well, he will. And if you give him all the tools and support that he needs, that student will do well, but if we neglect that student or if we basically just label them as underperforming or lower performing, and they see themselves as that, the cycle will continue.	L6
I think that the students that others have perceived with little ability in that they're like, passed over and placed into these schools. But I don't think I see it that way. So half of the students I have worked with had had the ability, and the other half didn't have the ability and needed modifications or accommodations.	T2
We don't see students on IEPs. But, you know, typically, their ability level lies low-average. And yes, we have had borderline kids in here as well and wondered immensely what is that borderline child doing in an expulsion program?	T3
Sixty to 70% of students do not have the ability to be independent learners. So, we definitely ended up going slower than the regular district does and focus on the standards, primarily.	T4
And they actually try on the test, and they do better. Now, is it probably grade level? No, but it's interesting to see such low scores on their last tests, and they'll take it to get 20 points higher, but we have had success and seeing growth, but not tremendous growth, a lot of times, they're still behind grade level, according to the test.	
We've had an uptick over the last few years with students with IEPs and 504s, more IEPs.	T5

Mental Health. From this study's participants' experiences, everyone synonymously

named mental health with students' social-emotional needs placed in DAEPs as a large red flag.

According to participants, DAEP students enter the program with unresolved trauma that

manifests in various ways, typically behavior, resulting in multiple student needs. Most of those

needs are somewhere on a mental health spectrum, and participants address the most common

needs seen, such as depression, anxiety, anger management or emotional regulation, and social isolation with social-emotional strategies, smaller class sizes, and on-site resources. According to participants, this can be the most challenging aspect of the job and has led to high turnover and teacher burnout in DAEPs. While most classes are much smaller than traditional school settings, participants agreed that a room full of triggered students displaying triggered behavior causes care fatigue (see Table 10).

Table 10

Significant Statements for Theme 3: DAEPs and the STPP Relationship and Mental Health

Statement	Participant
Most kids are expelled and in the program because of defiance, basically, mostly defiance, um, disruption, and drug usage. So when I say these kids, I mean, these kids that probably have experienced more trauma than most people. They have lived more lives than probably most; it's not your average kid.	L1
I would say I've seen a lot more on the drug and alcohol, substance abuse, side than weapons charges, but I feel like there are underlying reasons that these kids have I guess, gained access to that, where I think there's other things going on. I think there's, you know, anxiety, depression, I think kids are resorting to, to some of these things and behaviors because of other things they have going on. But I've seen that's a high need.	L2
Most of the time, students came pretty defensive. Somewhat withdrawn, unwilling to you know, create friendships with peers, little less willing to have relationships with the adults in the building. So our kids who I'm thinking about had serious trauma, childhood trauma have serious apathy. And interestingly enough, really great attendance.	L3
And so the behavior needs can range from, you know, high anger, to disconnect, ADHD, you know, whatever the case may be, or just the fact that like, they've had trauma within the school system, where they've been kicked out on a regular basis, and do not know how to communicate, do not know how to just socialize with within the normal setting, or how to deal with conflict.	L4
And so they're in this sort of middle space of tension and not really sure how to operate within that space. Do not have the social-emotional skills to self regulate to be more self-aware.	L5
I described that the challenging student who has been marginalized and their trauma, the historical trauma, and in most cases, the trauma they've received, going through the education system.	

Statement	Participant
And then something else that we haven't talked a lot about is trauma, and like how much trauma a lot of our students have experienced, that has led them to put them in situations where they have a really hard time being able to, you know, their attendance is jeopardized because of the amount of issues that are going on outside of school.	L6
Working at a DAEP is not an easy job. It's very rewarding. Don't get me wrong. But conflict is going to happen.	T1
If we didn't have DAEPS, we would have this huge population of students that have no place to access to school. And so sometimes those schools are effective or are trying to be effective at providing those mental health and safe places for those students.	
The most challenging students at a DAEP are ones that have had trauma throughout their lives in the sense of they've been in and out of foster care, their parents' parental rights have been removed, they've been sexually abused. And then now they are a sex offender themselves. So those are the most challenging. Also, the ones that would have been the most challenging. And I don't want to group every student in this option, but because it gets kind of tricky, but when associated with the gang, there are some students that say that they're associated. There are some students that are associated but maybe at a very fringe level.	
And they may have a mental illness attached to their issues, so they really just struggled being in a regular school. Okay, so in one setting, they seem not to be interested in being at the school. Maybe they have a drug problem or a mental illness or a criminal record. The most challenging can be rude, defiant, on drugs, tired, hungry, angry, not motivated. And then I put like 90% of the time, they're probably going through something that's not even related to school, but they can't separate those situations.	T2
It's those kids that come to us with such low EQ [emotional intelligence]. Super emotional, super traumatized. Few emotional regulation skills are the ones from unstable homes. Whether that is unstable due to poverty, due to family dynamics. I feel like that we continue to see more children of teen parents. Like I can't tell you in my 20 some odd years of how many teen parents I've had. And now, after all these years, I got kids of the kids that I had, and it's not decreasing.	T3
Well, there's we do have this social-emotional learning aspect. And now we're getting more and more support; we just got an alcohol and drug counselor from a grant. And we have a therapist in our school that works with all of our programs. So she's not exclusive to us, but she does serve our students. So some of those needs are being met. And then just educationally building skills and trying to work on behavior in a school setting to return and function appropriately.	T4
Primarily drug and alcohol counseling. That's a main reason why these kids get expelled. Also, we do have certain levels of from what I'm told from the social worker and our psychologist on anxiety and depression.	T5

Statement	Participant
We coach kids on when they're feeling the inability to really integrate with the group that day, we teach kids ways on how to manage emotions and how to communicate with us and how we're going to work with them.	

Socioeconomic Status. A gray area contributor to the DAEP and STPP relationship that was revealed in the participants' interviews and CDE data (free or reduced lunch) is the low socioeconomic status (SES) of the typical DAEP-placed student (see Table 11). Most participants naming the SES attribute explained that expelled students oftentimes did not come from traditional home environments where parents or guardians were unavailable to assist with students' education needs; factors impeding parental involvement were said to include single-parent income, incarcerated parent, parents with limited education or language barriers, or students with a history of family dysfunction including but not limited to criminal activity, violence, and abuse.

Table 11

Significant Statements for Theme 3: DAEPs and the STPP Relationship and SES

Statement	Participant
Lower socioeconomic in the family history, trauma, the environment that they're living in, the lack of, um, what's the word I'm looking for, the lack of importance of school in the family. Um, they tend to have larger families, parents tend to not have gone very far in school, work becomes a priority. Gangs. School is not, so it kind of kind of flows over from the parent to the student where school is not as important. Okay. Sometimes they don't see it as a necessity.	L1
What I think is probably more relevant is the kind of economic disadvantage that our kids have, who are of color, and barriers put in place, or a lack of understanding from parents and guardians about school systems. We've had a lot of these conversations of late. Because I've heard people say, "Well, that student is Hispanic, and then not coming to school and choosing work is cultural." And that I think is a lie. Because I hear first-generation, Mexican Americans coming or immigrating to our country, they come because they want better opportunities and options for their kids. And so they know that school is an opportunity that's better for them and America.	L3
But when you look at, you know, the students that we serve, especially like inner-city schools, where there's a lot of like crime, a lot of gang violence, we need to create a safe haven for kids to go get them out of like, you know, broken homes, where there's a lot of abuse and neglect.	L6

Statement	Participant
Get them off the streets and give them a place where they can come where they can get the resources that they need. A place where they can get supports from teachers, from staff from social-emotional support people, get food, get clothing, get a place where they can come and that they can be safe, and then help them to learn those skills that they need to be successful beyond our schools, beyond the high school diploma.	
A lot of the students actually have very high academic skills, it's just life impedes that stuff's going on in their life, that that [school] is not their focus. They definitely have the skill. Some of them are gifted. Some of them are very brilliant, actually, most of them are very brilliant. It's just when you're struggling to eat, or have food on the table, like that's not your focus. And that comes up during the school hours. But there are students that also you know, would have a language barrier.	T1
Yeah, I would say that most of our population is in the lower SES, not always, but I would say the majority needs support.	T4

Chapter Summary

This study's purpose was to define the factors contributing to the relationship between the DAEP system and the STPP. This chapter provided personal and rich descriptions of personal data collected from semistructured interviews and district reports from the CDE. Six DAEP leaders and five DAEP teachers in five of Colorado's most diverse districts were interviewed. Postinterview transcription, data analysis processes including in vivo coding, theme coding, and priori coding were used. Data coding aided in the identification, organization, and analysis of leaders' and teachers' DAEP lived experiences and perceptions of the relationship between DAEPs and the STPP. Corroboration between interview data and CDE data aided in triangulating themes for validation and for reducing bias.

The themes and attributes to those themes that emerged from the study were:

1. DAEP Purpose and Needs Being Served

   - Academic, SEL, and safety

2. DAEP Systems

   - Schedule, class size, and attendance; expectations; and staff preparedness

3. DAEP and STPP Relationship

- Subjective referrals, race, ability, mental health, and SES

Leader and teacher participants shared many similar perceptions about the relationship between the DAEP and the STPP. Moreover, both their diverse and shared experiences provided useful insights into the current state of the DAEP systems within the STPP. In Chapter 5, I discuss how the study's findings answer this study's research question.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Leaders' and teachers' experiences with disciplinary alternative education program (DAEP) systems and students can reveal essential contributors to the relationship between the DAEP and the school to prison pipeline (STPP). According to Heitzeg (2009), "there has been a growing convergence between schools and legal systems" (p. 1) and school exclusion, to include suspension and expulsion, does not appear to improve matters attributed to solving school-related problems, rather expedites a clear transition of students from schools into the criminal justice system for students who misbehave. This critical phenomenological study allowed for the description, analysis, and interpretation of how student needs, education systems, expectations, and messaging impact research participants' lived experiences.

The research question that guided this study focused on identifying the attributes that contributed to DAEP's relationship with the STPP through the experiences and perceptions of Colorado public school leaders and teachers working in DAEPs. Analyzing data from both participant interviews and Colorado Department of Education (2021a) school performance framework reports and expulsion records (CDE, 2021b), insights were provided to answer the following research question:

RQ1. How do leaders and teachers serving in DAEPs describe the relationship between DAEPs and the STPP?

In this chapter, I discuss the study findings as related to the research question. I also discuss study implications, recommendations for public education practices, and address additional questions that arose from participant interview data that require further investigation.

Discussion of Findings

In discussing their experiences and perceptions in DAEPs, the study participants revealed the transformation DAEP systems have undergone and addressed what works and does not work within DAEP systems as they pertain to meeting student and staff needs. Findings from this study identified vital contributors to the relationship between the DAEP and the STPP. Moreover, data from participants' experiences and perceptions suggest that current DAEP systems attempt to rectify systemic errors in districts' discipline systems which have caused historically marginalized students to fall through the cracks by providing an alternative placement that exhibits more tolerance and accommodations for students who have struggled to comply with comprehensive education programming due to high at-risk needs.

From both interview and CDE data, DAEP student enrollment predominantly reflects minority populations, mainly Black and Hispanic males who exhibit low SES, extreme gaps in academic achievement, and attendance with a history of performing below grade level in the classroom and on standardized assessments. Also, participants report above-average incidents of students with exceptional learning and mental health needs to include students on IEPs, 504s, and those displaying behaviors associated with a history of traumatic life experiences. Due to the high levels of needs present in student populations in DAEPs, participants experienced little systemic support or aligned training at the district levels resulting in high leader and teacher turnover and burnout rates.

Most participants identified subjective and discriminatory practices in their districts' disciplinary referral processes as the root of the DAEP and STPP relationship. Participants' identifiable attributes contributing to the dysfunctional disciplinary referral processes were race, ability, mental health, and low SES. In response to their engagement with systemic errors and

their students' neglected needs in public education, participants named the adult needs in DAEPs that would enable them to serve their students better: consistent training in trauma-informed care, culturally responsive practices, anti-bias and equity work, SEL strategies and curriculum, restorative justice, and training in special education and behavioral plans. Finally, all participants agreed that the foundational work with their students and staff began with building healthy interpersonal relationships first.

Findings for the Research Question

The research question for this study asked participants to describe the relationship between the DAEP and the STPP. According to CDE data (2021a, 2021b) and participants' experiences, all DAEPs in this study have disproportionate numbers of minority students referred into their expulsion programs; data from participant interviews and CDE (2021b) expulsion reports align to racial bias (see Table 8 and Appendix D). While DAEPs try to close the discipline and academic gaps and create new opportunities for students to invest in, DAEPs cannot impact the biased perceptions and exclusive systems in the traditional schools that push out at-risk students with high-risk needs.

More than half of the participants believe schools are responsible for adding a stigma to troubled students and never repairing the harm with sustainable rehabilitation, which simply results in a systemic vacuum of criminalization. Furthermore, most participants viewed adjudicated students as being trapped because they made a mistake in school or in their community, which escalated into a criminal institution placement with a criminal record, labeled and monitored as a criminal, and kids should not have to have bad decisions follow them; it creates a self-fulfilling prophecy that punishes them for a lifetime. These findings are congruent with Evans-Cuellar and Markowitz (2015), who articulated the correlation between disciplinary

policies in schools promoting exclusion as a solution to addressing at-risk student behavior resulting in increasing numbers of minority students referred to the juvenile justice system.

The attributes most participants identified as contributors to the relationship between the DAEP and the STPP were students' race, ability, mental health, and SES. All participants noted they saw more minority students placed in DAEPs than White students. Besides, the CDE data confirmed the disproportionate numbers of minority students represented in their expulsion data. Sadly, this information is not new to the STPP research community. According to Castillo (2013), "minority students are far more likely than their White peers to face suspension, expulsion, or arrests for the same school-based infraction" (p. 44). Moreover, the CDE (2015) addressed the STPP data, specifically the disproportionality of minorities represented in discipline data across the state in their Alternatives to Zero-Tolerance: Best Practice Summary.

Half the teachers in the study reported that the gaps in students' education stemmed from a lack of classroom or content exposure than a lack of ability. Simultaneously, the other half stated their DAEPs saw more students with special needs being kicked out of schools, perpetuating a cycle of academic failure for at-risk youth, which frequently results in behaviors stemming from low academic confidence and frustration. Besides, most participants connected low-level ability to students' mental health or social-emotional state and how those needs manifest into dysfunctional behaviors. As a matter of fact, most participants asserted that students' neglected mental health needs combined with low academic ability was the most common reason why students misbehaved. Moreover, participants stated that when students' mental health or social-emotional needs were met, overall student performance, including behavior and academic growth, was measurable. Most participants reported they were not adequately trained or prepared when initially hired for working with "these kids" and had to rely

on previous experiences, personal walks with trauma, and their more experienced colleagues. Ironically, participants stated their districts still failed to provide adequately aligned and consistent professional development to meet their students' unique needs, yet still expect their schools to produce assessment data to measure student achievement and school performance. These findings are congruent to the CDE data reported in Appendix D.

Finally, participants unanimously asserted students' SES as a contributing factor in DAEP placements. Participants explained that many students' families were unavailable to support their students' academic needs due to various factors. Some factors participants shared were parents had limited education, communication barriers, parents being unavailable because they worked a lot to support the family, or single-parent families due to incarceration. The research community corroborates these findings. For example, Mizel et al. (2016) examined how SES contributed to disparities in in-school discipline referrals and suspension or expulsion referrals and found male students of color whose parents had less education and availability to communicate with schools more likely to be suspended or expelled. Colorado Department of Education data sets in Appendix D also show low performance and high incidents of multiple suspensions and expulsions from students with low SES.

As my literature review explained in Chapter 2, trending qualitative studies of the STPP using phenomenological and ethnographic approaches propose change via CRT and SJLT lenses to suspend the STPP continuum variables. Common themes addressed in this type of research have been:

1. Recommending discipline reform to implement restorative practices in place of zero-tolerance and exclusionary schooling practices.

2. Addressing mindset around cultural intelligence and responsiveness and social-

emotional instructional practices via professional development or higher education

preparation courses for school leaders and teachers.

3. Addressing school culture and climate from both leadership and instructional lenses

(whole school and classroom culture and climate).

4. Promoting antiracism and antibias awareness and training via public education

professional development opportunities (Bailey, 2016; Coggshall et al., 2013;

DeMatthews et al., 2017).

This study's findings color previous research with experiences that address each theme

and provide deeper insight that may help future education reform move closer toward real school

equity and inclusion for all students, not just some students. According to this study, previous

studies were on the mark in their recommendations but did not include the most recent voices

and experiences from within the public education disciplinary systems, such as DAEPs. This

study adds additional specificity regarding preexisting trends in school exclusionary practices

and the impacted student populations and adds to the growing body of evidence of historically

marginalized students' mental health and SEL needs in public education and the effective

resources for meeting their needs.

While there was little evidence of the current DAEP system acting as a direct cog in the

STPP trajectory, this study illuminates the necessity for state governance and school districts'

leadership to pay closer attention to accountability regarding subjective discipline referrals,

especially the lack of a bias screener when excluding historically marginalized student

populations. According to these findings, the conversation must continue about the continued

disproportionate representation of minority and special needs students being excluded from equal

access to public education. In addition, systems cannot justify providing an opportunity to

transform educational opportunities in DAEPs and call it equal access because DAEPs are currently acting as a response to intervention when traditional models failed to meets student needs sooner. Until states and school districts begin forcing the difficult accountability conversations and evaluations around racism and ableism on all leaders designing school systems, especially within their discipline matrices, then all students and their families will not be included in the conversations. As this study's findings illustrate through participants' experiences serving the most at-risk needs in public education, these difficult accountability conversations and reform measures are long overdue. The result is continued student failure at the hands of continued systemic failure, and that failure is still rooted in discriminatory disciplinary practices.

Implications

Colorado Department of Education (2012) has done a thorough job of addressing on paper the STPP research in Colorado House Bill 12-1345; Alternatives to Zero-Tolerance: Best Practice Summary (CDE, 2015); and the Colorado Compilation of School Discipline Laws and Regulations (United States Department of Education, 2020), but public schools fail to act on the state's data at a rate that reflects equity and inclusion in their schools' disciplinary matrices. Moreover, even though the state of Colorado addressed the STPP data, specifically the disproportionality of minorities represented in discipline data across the state in their Alternatives to Zero-Tolerance: Best Practice Summary (CDE, 2015), districts' response to detailed alternatives has not addressed the root of the problem: Black and Brown students are more likely to be excluded from classrooms and schools due to a culturally biased referral process supported by traditional school leaders.

While Colorado DAEPs in five of the state's large regions with diverse student populations appear to be making systemic decisions to dismantle the STPP, they are still receiving students who have been subjected to bias and inequitable access in their traditional schools' discipline matrices, thereby continuing the historical marginalization of minority students with learning gaps, learning disabilities, mental health needs, and low SES. While the CDE's expelled and at-risk student services (EARSS) funds grants for programs to address at-risk student needs, the state Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) fail at monitoring school districts' autonomous interpretations and dissemination of their discipline matrices which allows for thousands of students to fall through the cracks at the hands of biased leadership decisions and cultural intolerance. As the participants' experiences and CDE (2021b) data reported, most kids placed in DAEPs were chronically suspended or expelled for repeatedly disrupting learning environments or who were found under the influence of an illegal substance yet were removed under the same provisions that placed them in DAEPs as students expelled for weapon charges. So, how do public education leaders in traditional schools strengthen public school's tolerance for students who have social-emotional disturbances or trauma that need drug and alcohol or mental health support that DAEPs have been tasked to provide? Moreover, the overrepresentation of students on IEPs in DAEPs garners questions about Colorado's schools' accountability meeting the least restrictive environment federal protections for students with identified learning disabilities. Also, why does it appear that traditional public education penalizes children needing the education to advance from their low SES home lives struggling to survive?

Recommendations for Public Education Practice

Interview data revealed that DAEPs are no longer acting as warehouses for troubled youth; rather, they are trying to respond to student needs, especially trauma-related needs, by providing students SEL structures and strategies, trauma-informed care, restorative practices, more access to counselors, on-site access to a psychologist or therapist, drug and alcohol specialists, and social workers. Also, many DAEP participants reported their efforts aligned to existing STPP research trends by implementing programming that utilizes various degrees of cultural responsiveness by addressing school culture and climate from both leadership and instructional lenses and emphasizing building relationships with students and their families (Fergus, 2017).

What is missing is large-scale consistency in leader and teacher preparation, including but not limited to addressing the types of leadership mindsets and strategies required to challenge the systems contributing to the disenfranchisement of marginalized student populations regarding education equity, access, and dismantling of the STPP.

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are provided for Colorado schools:

- School districts need to formulate a sustainable progress-monitoring system to filter bias from their discipline referral processes using the CDE (2015) recommendations from Alternatives to Zero-Tolerance: Best Practice Summary.

- School leaders need to be trained and train their staff on culturally responsive practices and restorative justice that promotes empathy and relationships in school settings in place of archaic discipline mindsets and practices (Fergus, 2017; Maynard & Weinstein, 2020).

- Formal and informal, school-wide initiatives for achieving equity and SEL in all classrooms must be implemented as a nonnegotiable requirement in everyday instructional practices (Durlack et al., 2017; Hammond, 2015).

- School leaders must be and tasked to design and implement an effective multitiered systems of support (MTSS) framework to understand and ensure targeted and effective implementation of tiered supports are effectively using their allocated resources to meet the needs of their most vulnerable student populations (Higgins-Averill & Rinaldi, 2013).

- School leaders must address supporting the mental health of all students with a trauma-informed framework at the tier 1 level that helps all staff in managing student needs and behaviors with research-based strategies. This will require an overall school system mindset shift that has historically placed the expectations for meeting all students' mental health needs with the few counselors and mental health support staff schools are provided. A whole-school approach at the tier 1 level would allow mental health teams in schools to spend the majority of their time on high-risk needs (Sporleder & Forbes, 2019).

Recommendations for Future Research

This study's findings suggest some areas for future research. While the study's findings are only generalizable to DAEPs, future quantitative or qualitative studies involving student participants may provide further insights into the relationship between the DAEP and STPP. In addition, many participants mentioned there was no data tracking of students exiting DAEPs to determine whether their targeted strategies had significant impacts on student success after their

placements; the only observable data participants could describe was when they received random contacts through social media or visits from their former students.

Another recommendation is to investigate alternative education networks because many DAEPs are part of a districts' overall alternative education network, inclusive of several schools or programs that serve students who have not responded to traditional school settings. Participants in this study whose DAEPs provided an option to "choice in" asserted that many students stay in their alternative placement rather than returning to their traditional school. The participants' perspectives per student feedback are that more of their needs are met in alternative education placements, but little to no data is available to support those claims.

Conclusion

This study focused on identifying the academic, social, and institutional themes and trends in adults' lived experiences serving students in a DAEP placement. The relationship between DAEPs and the STPP was revealed via the school system's disciplinary referral processes by illustrating everyday staff experiences and perspectives.

Historically, DAEPs have been a stopping point between traditional school systems and the criminal justice system for many marginalized students. Today, DAEPs are transitioning to be inclusive options in alternative school networks providing tailored scheduling, curriculum, and life-sustaining resources at-risk students respond to. In an attempt to reengage expelled students into school systems, DAEPs have found themselves overcompensating for comprehensive schooling failures to meet at-risk student needs facing low SES, high-risk behaviors due to mental health and social-emotional learning needs, and vast academic gaps associated with school exclusion and learning disabilities. While traditional school systems measure student achievement in the academic results from state testing benchmarks, alternative

education shows growth in closing the academic gaps and reengaging students in the school community. A lot of this growth is determined by relationships students are able to establish in much smaller classroom settings where inclusion of student voice and choice and differentiation provide the support at-risk students need to develop academic and social skills. In addition, trauma-informed practices, SEL strategies, and restorative justice approaches to conflict resolution prove promising results in students' social skills, academic performance, and general well-being as they transition from being labeled "those kids" that were pushed out of school to believing in themselves to be valuable in their school communities.

Finally, this study's results contribute to the growing body of research about the STPP by providing an understanding of the relationship between DAEPs and the STPP to inform better educational leadership practices and social science research toward educational reform movements around dismantling the STPP.

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Appendix A: Institutional Review Board Approval

ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY
Educating Students for Christian Service and Leadership Throughout the World

Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
320 Hardin Administration Building, ACU Box 29103, Abilene, Texas 79699-9103
325-674-2885

December 22, 2020

April Smith
Department of Graduate and Professional Studies
Abilene Christian University

Dear April,

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board, I am pleased to inform you that your project titled "Leadership in Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs and The School to Prison Pipeline",

(IRB# 20-216   )is exempt from review under Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects.

If at any time the details of this project change, please resubmit to the IRB so the committee can determine whether or not the exempt status is still applicable.

I wish you well with your work.

Sincerely,

Megan Roth

Megan Roth, Ph.D.
Director of Research and Sponsored Programs

Appendix B: Letter to Participants

Date:
Dear _____,

      I am completing a research study for my EdD in Organizational Leadership from Abilene Christian University. I would like to request your participation in my research study about the school to prison pipeline (STPP). The purpose of this research study is to identify secondary educators' perceptions and experiences in a disciplinary alternative education program (DAEP). Through my research, I want to examine staff (with at least two years experience from 2016 to the present) perceptions and experiences serving students who have been excluded from their home school site due to a discipline referral process.

      As part of the data collection process, I would like to conduct a semistructured interview with you to gain your insight and experiences about DAEPs. The length of the interview will be between one hour and one and a half hours. Your confidentiality will be maintained in this study. Your name and location will be changed to a pseudonym, and virtual meeting recordings and interview transcriptions will be destroyed no later than one month after the completion of the dissertation. Also, all participants will be asked to provide verbal and written consent prior to the interview. Please see a copy of the enclosed written consent form. You may withdraw from this study at any time without any repercussions. If you would like to participate in this study, I will ask you to respond from your personal email or phone number with a few select times and dates that are most convenient for an interview. I have provided my contact information below if you have any further questions.

Kindest regards,
April Smith
Doctoral Candidate, Abilene Christian University
Email: xxxxx@yahoo.com
Phone: (xxx) xxx-xxxx

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Date of interview: Time of interview:
Participant's name: Position of participant:
Years experience teaching or leading in a DAEP:
Total years experience in teaching or leading in public education:

Brief description of the study: This research study is examining staff experiences and perceptions serving students in disciplinary alternative education program (DAEP) settings.

Questions:

1. Tell me how you would describe your role at your DAEP job?

2. Tell me how you would describe your working experiences in your DAEP job?
   a. Attendance?
   b. Coursework
   c. Professional Development?
   d. Rules and Systems?
   e. Relationships?
   f. Level of Satisfaction?

3. What is the purpose of the DAEP in your district?
   a. What needs are being served in your DAEP?

4. Tell me how you would describe the typical DAEP placed student?

5. What is the referral process for entrance into your DAEP (leaders)?

6. What is the process for exiting your DAEP (leaders)?

7. Tell me how you would describe the systems in your DAEP?
   a. How would you describe a typical day at your DAEP?

8. Tell me how you would describe the typical daily interactions you experience with DAEP students?

9. Tell me how you would describe the most challenging DAEP students in your experience?

10. Tell me how you would describe your level of preparedness for working at a DAEP when you were hired?

11. Tell me how you would describe your current level of preparedness for working at a DAEP?

12. How would you describe the level of success you believe the average DAEP student can or will be successful in life post DAEP placement?
    a. How do you know?

13. Beyond school suspension, under what circumstances do you believe a school is justified in removing a student from their home or traditional school setting?

14. Explain how you think the school would change for students if DAEPs were not an option for student placement?

15. What is your understanding of the school to prison pipeline?

16. How does race play a part in student placement at your DAEP?

17. Tell me how you perceive student ability playing a part in student placement at your DAEP.

18. What opportunities are present at your DAEP that are not present at your students' traditional school settings?

19. Please describe the relationship between the DAEP and the STPP.

Appendix D: Data Trends

D1: DAEP Data Chart

School Performance Academic Achievement	English Language Learners (ELL)	Free or Reduced Lunch	Minority Students	Students with Disabilities (SPED)
Reading & Writing CMAS & COPSAT				
2017	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Approaching	Does Not Meet
2018	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet
2019	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet
Math CMAS & COPSAT				
2017	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet
2018	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet
2019	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet
Science CMAS				
2017	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet
2018	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet
2019	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet
Reading & Writing COSAT				
2017	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet
2018	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet
2019	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet
Math COSAT				
2017	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet
2018	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet
2019	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet
*Notes	The DAEP is approaching in academic growth but did not meet academic achievement benchmark goals for state assessments per the School Performance Framework rubric. No 2020 testing data per COVID response and restrictions.			
Graduation Rate	ELL	Free or Reduced Lunch	Minority Students	SPED
2017	52.4%	57.3%	64.7%	29.4%
2018	55.0%	57.3%	65.7%	11.1%
2019	55.6%	59.0%	63.3%	16.0%
Graduation Totals	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet

Dropout Rate 2017 (reported overall 8.6%)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
2018	7.7%	10.5%	8.3%	3.0%
2019	4.3%	6.9%	6.0%	2.0%
Dropout Totals	Does Not Meet 2017–2018 Approaching 2019	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Approaching 2018 Meets 2019
District 1 Discipline Data 2019–2020	ELL	White	Minority	SPED/504
Total Expulsions	12	18	27	7/5
Referrals to law enforcement	127	213	357	113/65
Multiple Out of School Suspensions	124	229	357	154/60

D2: DAEP Data Chart

School Performance Academic Achievement	English Language Learners (ELL)	Free or Reduced Lunch	Minority Students	Students with Disabilities (SPED)
Reading & Writing CMAS & COPSAT				
2017-Does Not Meet	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
2018	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet
2019	Approaching	Approaching	Approaching	Does Not Meet
Math CMAS & COPSAT				
2017-Does Not Meet	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
2018	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet
2019	Approaching	Approaching	Approaching	Does Not Meet
Science CMAS				
2017-Does Not Meet	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
2018	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet
2019	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet
Reading & Writing COSAT				
2017-Not Reported	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
2018	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
2019	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet

Math COSAT-Not Reported				
2017	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
2018	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
2019	Does Not Meet	Approaching	Approaching	Does Not Meet

*Notes	The DAEP reports approaching in academic growth but reported they did not meet academic achievement benchmark goals for state assessments per the SPF rubric. Formal CDE SPF report for 2016–2017 not available on CDE; therefore, demographic breakdown is missing from DAEP data report used for the 2016–2017 data sets retrieved from D2 site. No 2020 testing data per COVID response and restrictions.

Graduation Rate	ELL	Free or Reduced Lunch	Minority Students	SPED
2017-Reported Meets	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
2018	n/a	75%	72.7%	n/a
2019	78%	75%	77.3%	63.2%
Graduation Totals	Meets 2017 n<16 2018 Approaching 2019	Meets 2017 Approaching 2018 Approaching 2019	Meets 2017 Does Not Meet 2018 Approaching 2019	Meets 2017 n<16 2018 Does Not Meet 2019
Dropout Rate 2017-Reported Meets	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
2018	13.6%	10.9%	8.1%	20.0%
2019	4.3%	4.1%	4.5%	5.0%
Dropout Totals	Does Not Meet 2018 Approaching 2019	Does Not Meet 2018 Approaching 2019	Does Not Meet 2018 Approaching 2019	Does Not Meet 2018 Approaching 2019

District 2 Discipline Data 2019–2020	ELL	White	Minority	SPED/504
Total Expulsions	9	4	29	6/0
Referrals to Law Enforcement	119	38	362	103/9
Multiple Out of School Suspensions	127	45	417	155/14

D3: DAEP Data Chart

School Performance Academic Achievement	English Language Learners (ELL)	Free or Reduced Lunch	Minority Students	Students with Disabilities (SPED)
Reading & Writing COPSAT 2017	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet

2018	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet
2019	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet
Math COPSAT				
2017	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet
2018	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet
2019	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet
Science CMAS				
2017	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet
2018	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet
2019	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet
Reading & Writing COSAT				
2017	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet
2018	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet
2019	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet
Math COSAT				
2017	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet
2018	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet
2019	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet
*Notes	The DAEP is approaching in academic growth CO PSAT TO SAT. Reading and writing 2017 but did not meet academic achievement benchmark goals for state assessments per the School Performance Framework rubric. No 2020 testing data per COVID response and restrictions.			

Graduation Rate	ELL	Free or Reduced Lunch	Minority Students	SPED
2017	n<16 = n/a	71.1%	71.4%	41.8%
2018	n<16 = n/a	71.1%	71.4%	63.6%
2019	n<16 = n/a	59.8%	64.2%	66.7%
Graduation Totals	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet
Dropout Rate				
2017-11.3% overall	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
2018	23.8%	16.0%	16.1%	14.9%
2019	14.3%	11.0%	10.6%	6.9%
Dropout Totals	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet

District 3 Discipline Data 2019–2020	ELL	White	Minority	SPED/504
Total Expulsions	4	23	28	11/2

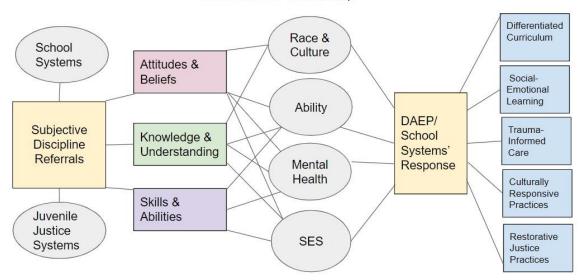|				
Referrals to law enforcement	59	364	403	190/39
Multiple Out of School Suspensions	55	419	451	372/61

D4: DAEP Data Chart

School Performance Academic Achievement	English Language Learners (ELL)	Free or Reduced Lunch	Minority Students	Students with Disabilities (SPED)
Reading & Writing CMAS & COPSAT				
2017	n<16 = n/a	n<16 = n/a	n<16 = n/a	n<16 = n/a
2018	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet
2019	n<16 = n/a	n<16 = n/a	n<16 = n/a	n<16 = n/a
Math CMAS & COPSAT				
2017	n<16 = n/a	n<16 = n/a	n<16 = n/a	n<16 = n/a
2018	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet
2019	n<16 = n/a	n<16 = n/a	n<16 = n/a	n<16 = n/a
Science CMAS				
2017	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet
2018	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet
2019	n<16 = n/a	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	n<16 = n/a
Reading & Writing COSAT				
2017	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet
2018	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet
2019	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet
Math COSAT				
2017	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet
2018	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet
2019	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet
*Notes	No 2020 testing data per COVID response and restrictions. 2017 report has no disaggregated demographic data for dropout rate. Approaching academic growth reported for minority students COSAT reading and writing 2018. Approaching academic growth reported for all students COSAT reading and writing 2019. Meets academic growth reported for low SES students and approaching for minority COSAT math growth 2019.			
Graduation Rate	ELL	Free or Reduced Lunch	Minority Students	SPED
2017	n<16 = n/a	35.1%	34.3%	n<16 = n/a

	ELL	White	Minority	SPED/504
2018	33.3%	41.0%	39.5%	33.3%
2019	40.0%	39.2%	38.7%	53.8%
Graduation Totals	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet
Dropout Rate 2017 (reported 30%)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
2018	19.5%	21.5%	21.1%	6.8%
2019	18.2%	12.1%	21.8%	9.8%
Dropout Totals	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet
District 4 Discipline Data 2019–2020	ELL	White	Minority	SPED/504
Total Expulsions	4	6	15	5/1
Referrals to Law Enforcement	23	52	125	39/7
Multiple Out of School Suspensions	44	112	226	103/23

D5: DAEP Data Chart: No DAEP program SPF reports, only district expulsion reports

District 5 Discipline Data 2019–2020	ELL	White	Minority	SPED/504
Total Expulsions	11	32	57	14/6
Referrals to Law Enforcement	19	143	214	71/25
Multiple Out of School Suspensions	65	174	436	197/45

Appendix E: Code Matrix

DAEP & STPP Relationship