

CULTURALLY PROFICIENT LEADERSHIP: A STUDY IN THE CORRELATION OF
SCHOOL LEADERS' PERCEIVED LEVELS OF CULTURAL PROFICIENCY
AND DISCIPLINE RATES OF BLACK STUDENTS IN 5A and 6A
HIGH SCHOOLS IN NORTH TEXAS
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The aim of this quantitative study was to explore the connection between self-perceived cultural proficiency among school leaders and the discipline gap for Black students in high schools in North Texas. The study sought to achieve this by (a) identifying the level of cultural proficiency perceived by school leaders, (b) examining the disciplinary rates of Black students in each participating high school, and (c) exploring how school administrators' beliefs regarding cultural proficiency impacted the disciplinary rates of Black students on their campuses. To assess their implementation of cultural proficiency practices, Hine's cultural proficiency leadership framework was utilized. The study found a significant positive correlation between the total cultural proficiency score and the number of out-of-school suspensions for Black students, while a negative correlation was observed for White students. Additionally, a positive correlation was observed between the total cultural proficiency score and the number of in-school suspensions for Black students, while no statistically significant correlation was found for White students. The participants in the study met three criteria: (a) working at a 5A or 6A UIL-identified campus in North Texas, (b) having at least 9% of the student population identified as Black and African American, and (c) serving as school leaders responsible for assigning exclusionary discipline.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Historically, public schools in the United States have been identified as a pathway to a better life and the key to economic success in American society (Brooker, 2022). The belief is that individuals can gain more opportunities to obtain a better quality of life with higher levels of education. However, this has not been the experience for all students, especially Black students in America. From the late period of slavery, the emancipation proclamation, *Brown vs. Board of Education*, the Civil Rights Movement, and present-day, the American educational system has failed to achieve better education for every student, specifically for Black students (Fairclough, 2004; R. B. Lindsey et al., 2018; Lynn, 2006; Stevenson, 2015).

Black students were not the targeted demographic for early American schools; therefore, there has been little reform to meet the needs of Black students (Allen, 2008). According to Howard (2008), the National Center for Education Statistics revealed most African American males did not meet the grade level expectation in the core subjects during the fourth, eighth, and 12th grades. In addition, Bloom and Cohen (2002) identified several barriers, such as economic, political, and cultural obstacles, that plague Black student' likelihood of access to a nondiscriminatory educational system. These barriers prevent the current educational system from providing all students equal and equitable educational opportunities. As a result, about 63% of Black students perform below White students in American schools (Ornstein, 2010). The National Center for Education Statistics (2020) developed a congressionally mandated report, *Condition of Education 2020*. The Center for Public Education selected data from this report to inspire school leaders to monitor and rethink how public schools can do better for Black students (Cai, 2020). The eight points of the *Condition of Education 2020* reveal the national

educational conditions for Black students lack significant progression in achievement and experience.

- The poverty rate is still the highest for Black students.
- A lack of internet access at home has become a barrier for Black students to learn.
- A high percentage of Black students attend high-poverty schools.
- More Black students with disabilities receive services for emotional disturbances.
- The disproportion between Black students and Black teachers has not been improved.
- The achievement gap between Black and White students has not been closed.
- School dropout rate keeps high among Black students.
- Graduation rates and college enrollment rates remain low among Black students. (Cai, 2020, para. 20)

Kinsler (2011) provided a meaningful discourse about the connection between the achievement gap and student discipline identifying a strong correlation between exclusionary discipline practices and the lack of student achievement. However, Kinsler needed more insight or evidence for the causation of correlation. The researcher believed the ongoing disciplinary exclusion from the educational environment negatively impacted student performance due to the limited learning opportunities and broken relationships between the school and students. The outcomes of exclusionary discipline include but are not limited to lower achievement, higher dropout rates, and delinquency outside of the school environment (DeMatthews, 2016; Gopalan & Nelson, 2019; Kinsler, 2011).

The achievement gap is often cited as the primary imbalance between White and Black students. However, research has exposed a correlation between the achievement gap and the disproportionate discipline of Black and White students. For example, Blankstein and Noguera (2015) expressed educational policymakers, who desired to increase academic performance,

chose to only focus on raising academic standards and increasing educator accountability. Despite this, researchers provided evidence that the achievement gap is a byproduct of the disproportionate discipline practices (DeMatthews et al., 2017; Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Gregory et al., 2010; Kinsler, 2011). The negative correlation between student achievement and discipline has been emphasized in multiple studies. However, in this study I focused on the cultural beliefs and administrative decisions that lead to the disciplinary gap.

Gopalan and Nelson (2019) and Kinsler (2011) defined the discipline gap as the disproportionate disciplinary actions of schools against students of color. The disproportionate data that leads to the disciplinary gap explains how educators perceive Black students. Williams (2017) defines these perceptions as “the images, assumptions, and stories that we carry in our minds of ourselves and others” (p. 43). The author said mental models could be hazardous as an individual identifies the mental model as truth (Williams, 2017). For example, a group of White students displaying rowdy and disorderly behavior is sanctioned as normalized as part of kid behavior. On the other hand, the behavior exhibited by Black students is endorsed as negative and misguided (Hines, 2014). This negative view of Black students has caused them to be punished for small or subjective things like being rude, not following rules, having a bad attitude, making threats, or repeatedly misbehaving (DeMatthews et al., 2017).

The gap between White and Black students grew from 3% in the 1970s to over 10% in the early 2000s (Irby, 2014b). From 1972 to 2000, Black students who received at least 1 day of suspension increased by 120% compared to White students, that only increased by 64% in the same time frame (Kinsler, 2011). By 2010, Black students were more than three times more likely to be suspended than White students (Irby, 2014b). According to the Office for Civil Rights of the U.S. Department of Education (2021), in 2017–18, there were 50.9 million students

enrolled in American public schools, of which about 15% were identified as Black students. Although Black students only account for about 15% of the national K–12 student enrollment, they make up about 35% of all school expulsions, 31% of all in-school suspensions, 38% of all out-of-school suspensions, and 43% of all transfers to alternative schools.

Background to the Study

According to Gregory and Weinstein (2008), discipline that results in suspension or expulsion impedes a student's instructional time, academic identity, and overall school attendance. Due to exclusionary discipline, Black students are often excluded from instructional time, experience academic failure, and engage in an attitude of disengagement. Black students who experience suspensions before learning the educational content experience a significant negative impact on their school grades. Students are suspended for behavior identified as inappropriate, according to Davis and Jordan (1994), many students cannot differentiate the correction of the behavior from the punitive measure of themselves. Bloom and Cohen (2002) concluded that contemporary interventions, educational reforms, or equitable solutions are insufficient to overcome these barriers.

Leithwood et al. (2010) identified school leaders as essential to student achievement. While some educational reformers believe ineffective personnel are the primary rationale for low academic performance in schools, others believe effective teachers and leadership collaboration are critical for school improvement (Jones et al., 2020; Pazey et al., 2017). The logic of teachers and school leaders aligns with Leithwood et al. (2010). These researchers expressed the performance and effectiveness of a school leader are almost as important as the quality of teachers and instruction in the classroom.

Vanblaere and Devos (2016) believe it is the sole responsibility of school leaders to

develop a learning environment that promotes student achievement. They believe school leaders significantly influence the creation of learning environments in which teachers and students are exposed to working conditions that promote student learning (Vanblaere & Devos, 2016).

The research on school leadership and improvement has proven that campus principals have a substantial yet secondary influence on student achievement (Sebastian et al., 2016; Siccone, 2020). Siccone (2020) stated effective leadership is the most impactful factor in turning ineffective schools around. In contrast, culturally proficient leadership is responsible for establishing an environment that promotes diversity and equity and meets the needs of all students (DeMatthews et al., 2017; D. B. Lindsey & Lindsey, 2014).

Villegas and Lucas (2002) characterized a culturally proficient leader as devoted to knowing, valuing, and using a student's cultural background, languages, and learning style to establish an inclusive educational environment. Ezzani (2021) discussed the need for culturally proficient school leadership to respond to the differences between most educators and their students in the United States. Most educators are European American, middle-class females. The differences in beliefs, personal experiences, and cultures of school leaders in contrast to students often lead to misconceptions of student behavior, resulting in inequitable disciplinary practices. The academic and disciplinary gap that exists on the national level is mirrored within Texas.

The state of Texas identifies second grade as the end of early childhood education and begins to evaluate students' academic performance in third grade. The assessment utilized to assess the state standards is The State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR; Texas Education Agency, 2022c). The STAAR tests are based on state curriculum standards in reading, writing, mathematics, science, and social studies. According to the Texas Education Agency (2022c), the assessment design was to ensure students learn what was needed to advance

to the next grade level in the core subjects.

The 2020-2021 Texas Academic Performance Report (TAPR) described the overall performance on the STAAR assessment for students in Grades 3–11 as below 70% (Texas Education Agency, 2021). The TAPR disclosed that 67% of all students approached the grade-level expectations in the 2020-2021 school year. During this same school year, 81% of White students approached expectations. Of the overall percentage, 57% of the students met the grade level expectations, and 29% mastered the grade level expectation. The TAPR revealed White students performed at a higher level of student achievement than Black students. Overall, 55% of all Black students approached the grade level expectations. Of the overall percentage, 29% of the students met the grade expectations, and 10% mastered the grade level expectation as shown in Table 1 (Texas Education Agency, 2021).

Texas Education Agency reported during the 2019–2020 school year, there were 5.4 million students enrolled in Texas public schools. Of the 5.4 million students, Black students represent about 13% of the total number of students in Texas. However, Black students make up about 19% of state expulsions, 23% of alternative school placements, 25% of in-school suspensions, and 32% of out-of-school suspensions (Texas Education Agency, 2022a).

In this study, I examined principals' self-perceived beliefs about their cultural proficiency levels to determine if there was a relationship between their beliefs and the discipline rates of their schools. Chapter 1 includes a background of the study, a description of the problem, communication of the overall significance of the study, and establishes the methodology. Finally, the chapter concludes by identifying the study's delimitations, the definition of terms, and a chapter summary.

Table 1

Texas Academic Performance Report 2020–2021

Grade Level Expectations	Overall Performance for Students in Grades 3–11		
	All%	White%	Black%
Approaches	67	81	55
Meets	41	57	29
Masters	18	29	10

Conceptual Framework

Educational leadership must frame this study in terms of cultural proficiency. According to Terrell et al. (2018), culturally proficient leaders clearly understand how their leadership is influenced by their assumptions, beliefs, and values of people and cultures different from their own. Cultural proficiency is characterized as the interaction between the guiding principles of cultural proficiency, barriers to cultural proficiency, the cultural proficiency continuum, and the essential elements of cultural competence (CampbellJones et al., 2010; Terrell et al., 2018).

Marzano et al. (2005) identified the leadership of a practical principal as an essential element in establishing and maintaining an effective school climate. The authors utilized the 1977 U.S. Senate Committee Report on Equal Educational Opportunity to illustrate the importance of a school principal as the most influential person in a school:

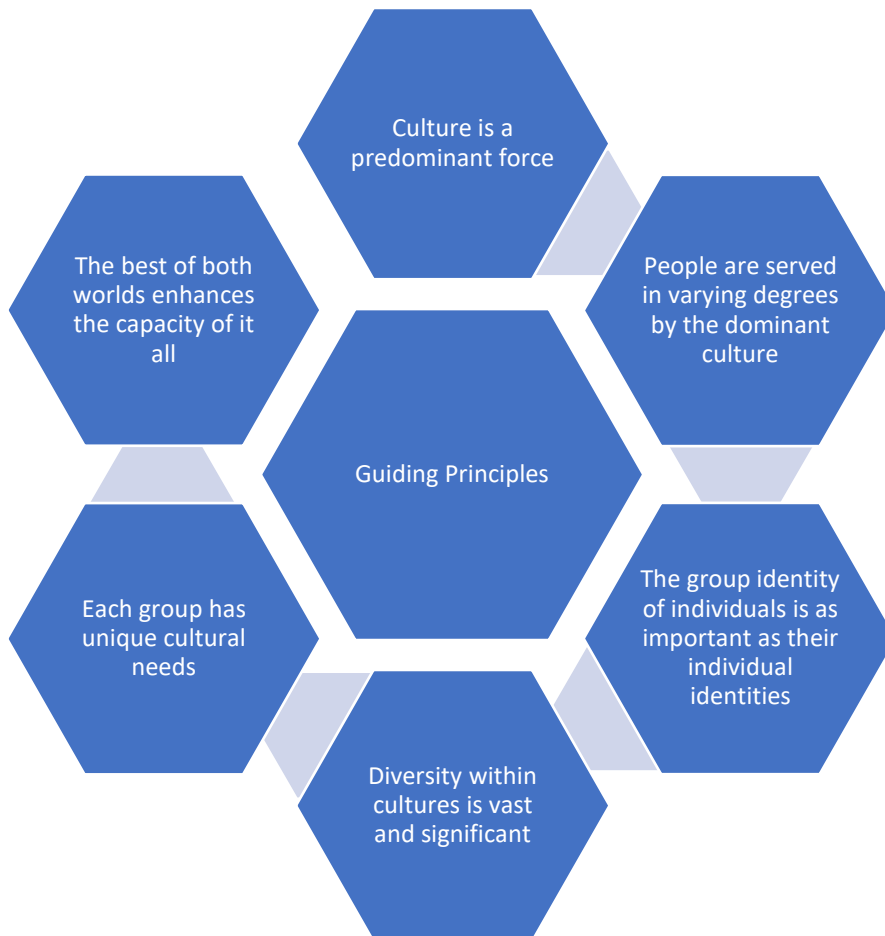
The school principal is the most important and influential individual in many ways. They are responsible for all activities in and around the school building. The principal’s leadership sets the school’s tone, the climate for teaching, the level of professionalism and morale of teachers, and the degree of concern for what students may or may not become. In addition, the principal is the main link between the community and the school. How they perform in this capacity largely determines the attitudes of parents and students about the school. If a school is a vibrant, innovative, child-centered place with a reputation for excellence in teaching, and if students perform to the best of their ability, one can point to the principal’s leadership as the key to success. (Marzano et al., 2005, pp. 5–6)

CampbellJones et al. (2010) expressed the four tools for cultural proficiency are the infrastructure for school reform by providing “an interactive, interdependent framework that conceptualizes personal and organizational practices (p. 18).

CampbellJones et al. (2010) and Terrell et al. (2018) identify the tools needed to create an equitable educational environment as the cultural proficiency toolkit. CampbellJones et al. (2010) identify the cultural proficiency toolkit as the interdependent framework for conceptualizing personal and organizational practices. The cultural proficiency toolkit includes the guiding principles as shown in Figure 1 (CampbellJones et al., 2010; Terrell et al., 2018):

Figure 1

Cultural Proficiency Toolkit–Guiding Principles

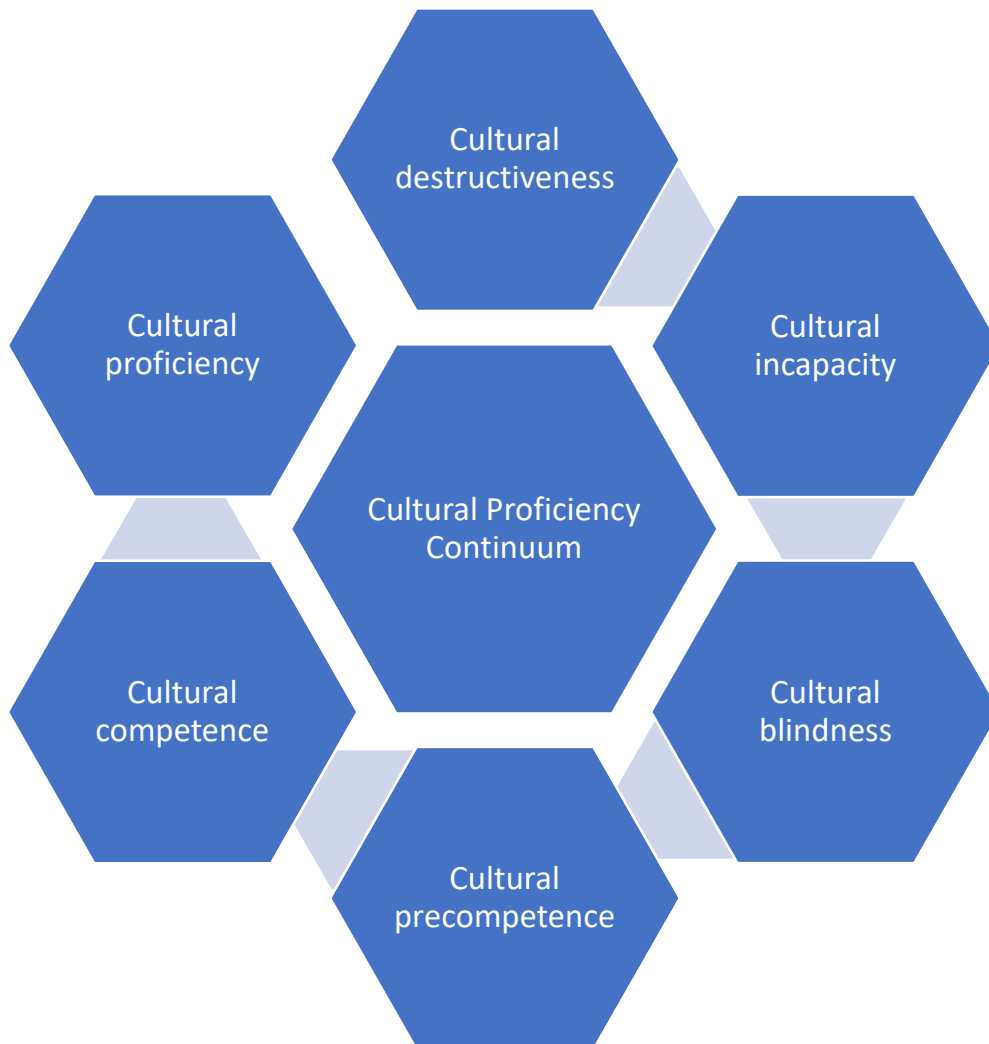


CampbellJones et al. (2010) defined the guiding principles of cultural proficiency as the core beliefs and guiding force that leads to the development of equitable academic student achievement.

The cultural proficiency continuum provides descriptions of healthy and unhealthy behaviors of individuals and organizations as shown in Figure 2 (CampbellJones et al., 2010; Terrell et al., 2018). The continuum helps to distinguish the beliefs and values that align with educators' behaviors and the schools' practices (CampbellJones et al., 2010).

Figure 2

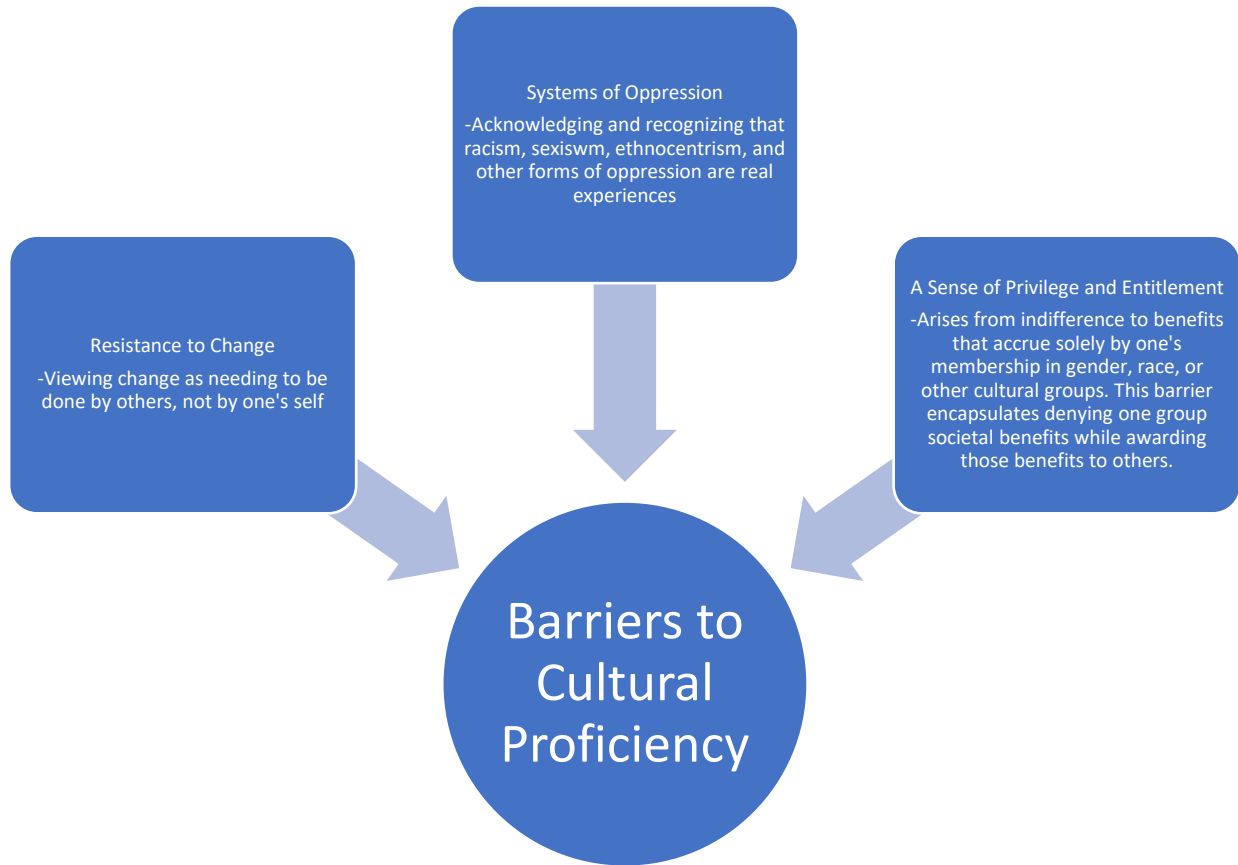
Cultural Proficiency Continuum



CampbellJones et al. (2010) and Terrell et al. (2018) describe the barriers to cultural proficiency as systems of oppression; they exist in resistance to change and a sense of privilege and entitlement as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Barriers to Cultural Proficiency



CampbellJones et al. (2010) and Terrell (2018) describe the essential elements of cultural proficiency standards for organization policies and practices as shown in Figure 4. The criteria “measure the efficacy of curriculum, the effectiveness of instructional strategies, the relevance of professional development, the utility of system of assessment and accountability and the intent of parent and community communication and outreach” (CampbellJones et al., 2010, p. 28).

Figure 4

Five Essential Elements of Cultural Proficiency



Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this quantitative study was to: (a) identify the self-perceived level of cultural proficiency of school leaders, (b) to examine the exclusionary disciplinary rates of Black

students at each participating high school, and (c) to explore administrators' perception level of cultural proficiency and how their beliefs of cultural proficiency impact their campus Black students' disciplinary rates.

Research Questions

To guide this quantitative study, two research questions were designed to examine if there is a significant correlation between a school leader's perceived level of cultural proficiency and the disciplinary incidents and consequences of Black students in Grades 9–12.

1. To what extent do school leaders perceive themselves as culturally proficient leaders?
2. Is there a correlation between school leaders' perceived level of cultural proficiency and the disciplinary rates of Black students in North Texas 5A and 6A high schools?

Significance of the Study

Research is limited in examining how school leaders perceived cultural proficiency impacts Black students' disciplinary incidents resulting in exclusionary disciplinary placements. This study adds to the compilation of research focused on educational leaders as culturally proficient leaders.

In an effort to explore the link between school leaders' cultural proficiency and the reduction of disciplinary disparities, this study draws upon previous research by Owens Luper (2011) and Hendrix (2015). Owens Luper (2015) investigated high school teachers' perceptions of the cultural proficiency of their principals, taking into account various contextual factors that may influence such perceptions. Hendrix (2015), on the other hand, focused on elementary school teachers and examined their ratings of the essential components of cultural proficiency, as well as how these components were associated with different aspects of school functioning.

This study engaged school leaders in self-perceptions of cultural proficiency and

analyzed the disciplinary trends on each campus, the correlation between culturally proficient leaders and closing the disciplinary gap can be identified. As school leaders employ the essential elements of cultural proficiency, the hope is the disproportion of exclusionary discipline will decrease.

Delimitations

Delimitations are the study's limits or boundaries that help narrow the scope (Roberts, 2010). The data in this study was conducted using 48 North Texas high schools identified as 5A and 6A by the University Interscholastic League (UIL). The demographics of each high school include a student enrollment of 1,300 or more students and an overall Black student population of 9% or more. The small and controlled sample size limits the feedback of current administrators responsible for discipline, leading to exclusionary discipline placements. The chosen schools and districts were focused on size, student population, and geographical location. The campus disciplinary data collected were limited to the timeframe of the school years ranging from 2017–2021. The data collected focuses on the self-perception of high school administrators in terms of cultural proficiency and competence.

Assumptions

It was assumed that participants surveyed about cultural proficiency and competence answered the questions honestly and truthfully. According to CampbellJones et al. (2010) and Terrell et al. (2018), the survey can only accurately assess cultural proficiency if leaders clearly understand their assumptions, beliefs, and values about individuals from different experiences or cultures. The surveys and instruments used during this study will accurately identify trends and patterns. There were baseline criteria for selecting the schools and individual participants of the study.

Definitions of Key Terms

The following section contains definitions of terms used to clarify this study's meaning.

- *Black or African American.* “A person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa” (Cai, 2020, para. 1).
- *Cultural proficiency.* “A mindset for how we interact with all people, irrespective of their or our cultural membership” (Terrell et al., 2018, p. 27). Cultural proficiency comprises an interrelated set of four tools that prompt reflection and provide the opportunity to improve leadership practices in the service of others.
- *Discipline gap.* Racial disparities in disciplinary referrals, suspensions, and expulsions toward minoritized students (Khalifa et al., 2016).
- *Exclusionary discipline.* A disciplinary outcome that results in suspensions or expulsions (Office for Civil Rights, 2021).
- *School leadership.* An individual that works primarily with and through interaction with other adults. School leaders use adults' influence and manage school culture to improve student learning (Myran & Sutherland, 2019; Owens & Valesky, 2022; Vanblaere & Devos, 2016).

Organization of the Study

This quantitative study is organized into five chapters. This chapter introduced the research and context in which the study occurs. Chapter 2 is an in-depth review of the current literature related to the Black student experience in American education, the disproportionality of discipline of Black students, culturally proficient leadership, cultural proficiency toolkit, and the essential elements of cultural proficiency. Chapter 3 reviews the quantitative methods used to complete this study, such as the instrument used to gather the data, the procedures, and how the

data were analyzed. Chapter 4 provides the study results and a detailed analysis of the data. Chapter 5 concludes the study with a summary of the findings and recommendations for future research. Finally, the study is concluded with references used in this study and appendixes.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this quantitative study was to: (a) identify the self-perceived level of cultural proficiency of school leaders, (b) to examine the exclusionary disciplinary rates of Black students at each participating high school, and (c) to explore administrators' perception level of cultural proficiency and how their beliefs of cultural proficiency impact their campus Black students' disciplinary rates. In this review of the literature, the discussion of the effects of culturally proficient leadership on exclusionary disciplinary decisions was investigated utilizing books, electronic databases, educational periodicals, journals, dissertations, and reports. The historical experiences of Black students in the American education system will be summarized in the first section and Chapter 1.

The literature review is divided into five segments. The first section summarizes the conceptual framework for cultural proficiency. The next two sections include a review of the historical background of the educational experience of Black students in America as well as the disproportionately exclusionary discipline of Black students. The final sections of the review of literature focus on cultural proficiency and leadership and how they interact.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is grounded in cultural proficiency. Cultural proficiency is an organizational culture established to describe how individuals interact with others within schools and districts (D. B. Lindsey & Lindsey, 2014; Terrell et al., 2018). Terrell et al. (2018) identified the paradigm shift of cultural proficiency as the interactions of individuals with culture, not just a series of activities or strategies. Cross et al. (1989) and R. B. Lindsey et

al. (2018) stated a culture is a group of shared thoughts, customs, beliefs, values, and characteristics of human descriptions.

Researchers agree both infrastructures of cultural competence and cultural proficiency provide a framework for developing an organizational culture (D. B. Lindsey & Lindsey, 2014; Minkos et al., 2017). Brown (2004) defines organizational culture as “a set of common values, attitudes, beliefs, and norms, some of which are explicit and some of which are not” (p. 4). Organizational culture can be identified as the educational institution’s norms, values, underlying assumptions, beliefs, rules, and philosophy (Owens & Valesky, 2022). The organizational culture creates the identity, expectations of achievement, and how the school handles operational tasks (Teasley, 2017). The elements of the culture are developed over time by the people involved in the organization. Teasley (2017) explained implementing organizational culture could have positive and negative functions. The organization learns how to solve internal and external problems, and it becomes the organization’s culture (Schein, 1990). The study conducted by Cross et al. (1989) brought to light the concept of cultural competence in an organizational setting, where shared beliefs, behaviors, and needs influenced individuals and organizations alike. This research laid the groundwork for the development of cultural competence frameworks in the field of education and served as the foundation for the cultural proficiency model.

CampbellJones et al. (2010) and Terrell et al. (2018) describe how the framework of cultural proficiency provides school leaders with the tools to work with and lead culturally diverse schools effectively. The toolkit of cultural proficiency includes the guiding principles of cultural proficiency, the cultural proficiency continuum, a plan to overcome the barriers of cultural proficiency, and the essential elements of cultural competence. As a culturally proficient leader attempts to meet all students’ academic and social needs, the toolkit helps to develop a

vision and establish a plan of action.

Black Students' Experiences in American Education

In the 17th and 18th early centuries, the belief was Black people had the primary function of slave labor (Smiley & Fakunle, 2016). Enslaved Black people were viewed as blissfully ignorant and docile during this period. The portrayal of Black people as submissive and easy to control reinforced the belief that it was possible to dominate their minds and bodies, leading to the notion that slavery was the most suitable condition for Black people. As a result, Black people only were allowed to engage in labor-based training that benefited the plantation or enslavers (Smiley & Fakunle, 2016). Slave children had no opportunity for formal schooling unless the enslavers' wives or daughters taught the students (Levine & Levine, 2014). From 1800 to 1835, teaching enslaved people to read and write in most southern states was illegal. In contrast, between 1830 and 1860, America was working to develop a system for states to provide public education for all White Americans (Anderson, 1988). Levine and Levine (2014) expressed that most educational institutions for Blacks in the late 18th and early 19th centuries were not public but privately funded. According to Bertocchi and Dimico (2012),

The legacy of slavery still looms over American society, but debate arose over whether this legacy can still exert a measurable influence on Blacks' economic and social achievement. The contemporaneous degree of racial inequality in education is indeed affected by slavery through its effect on the level of the gap on the eve of World War Two. However, we also find that income growth is negatively affected by the initial educational disparities between Blacks and Whites, which uncovers a negative influence of slavery on development that runs through human capital accumulation. (pp. 592–593)

Pre-Civil War, White children were 27 times more likely than Black children to attend school (Willie et al., 1991). As a result, Black students have not had the same educational opportunities as White students dating back to the Reconstruction Era (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2012). During this era, researchers used multiple methodologies to justify the relationship between race and intelligence.

One methodology was identified as craniometry, the science of measuring skulls. This scientific theory determined that pure racial types existed, and the measurement of the skull was aligned with the heredity of individual races. During this period, people of color, including African Americans and Blacks, were the lowest individuals in the racial hierarchy. Whites were considered superior intelligence and therefore identified as the preferable race (Banks, 1995).

At the University of Chicago, Park and his colleagues developed and supported a theory that biological characteristics contributed to racial differences in individuals (Banks, 1995). Park found Black people lacked intellect, introspection, and focus on expression rather than action (Banks, 1995). In addition to the theory of genetic or biological deficiency, the inadequacy of Black parents and the community were blamed for the lack of achievement of Black students (Lynn, 2006). These were some rationales that White society utilized to justify the prohibition of teaching Black students (Fairclough, 2004). Bertocchi and Dimico (2012) discussed the lasting effects of slavery on Black students' ability to acquire formal education. They described how some of the inequalities lasted until the beginning of World War II (Bertocchi & Dimico, 2012).

In 1896, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case that states could segregate public places based on race (Hoffer, 2014). The decision led to fear that drastically changed how Black people were viewed. The depiction of Black people transformed from being compliant and submissive servants to being viewed as savages and brute monsters (Smiley & Fakunle, 2016). The *Plessy v. Ferguson* case was the cornerstone of the "separate but equal facilities" educational movement (Birzer & Ellis, 2006; Hoffer, 2014). Unfortunately, this Supreme Court decision reinforced the educational ideology that stereotyped Whites as the superior race compared to the Black population. This ideology led to a system of racial separation that perpetuated inferior educational opportunities and facilities, resulting in

considerably disadvantaged Black students' in schools (Birzer & Ellis, 2006; Hoffer, 2014; Levine & Levine, 2014). In addition, Black students' schools lacked proper resources, they consisted of old buildings, outdated textbooks, and obsolete equipment (Fowler, 2013; Hoffer, 2014).

Before the 1950s, the United States had several laws that justified the discrimination of cultural and racial groups in schools and other public places. The regulations included legal forms of segregation that limited the opportunities for Black people (Hoffer, 2014). Jim Crow laws were used to guide how individuals were treated based on ethnicity and deemed as the engine of educational failure for Black schools (Fairclough, 2004).

In 1954, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People submitted a brief to the Supreme Court to convey the feelings of inferiority of students who attended a segregated school. This brief was fundamental to the judgment of *Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka* (Fairclough, 2004). As a result, *Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka* overturned *Plessy v. Ferguson*, ruling racially segregated public schools are inherently unconstitutional (Fowler, 2013).

The U.S. Supreme Court decision passed a ruling that ended de jure (by law) segregation and made segregation illegal (Chemerinsky, 2003). Although the *Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka* decision gave legal and political leverage to dismantle any policies or laws that promoted segregation, it did not exhaust de facto segregation or the non-legal practices of segregation (R. B. Lindsey et al., 2018). De facto segregation led to states creating segregation practices often inconsistent with the Supreme Court decision. School districts in the northern and southern states were unwilling to lead the charge to dismantle segregation (Fowler, 2013). For example, some school districts closed public schools rather than desegregating them. Other

school districts created “choice of school” programs in which families could choose the school they attended, resulting in segregated schools (Chemerinsky, 2003).

The 1960s was a time of change, moving from separating people based on race to bringing them together. This decade was characterized by activism for equal rights and justice (R. B. Lindsey et al., 2018). The Civil Rights movement during the 1960s sparked a nationwide conversation about ending segregation and achieving racial equality (Irby, 2014a). As a result, by 1964, 2.3% of Black students attended majority White schools. By 1967, the number of Black students attending majority White schools increased from 13.9% to 23.4% (Chemerinsky, 2003). As a result of the changes in laws, many institutions became desegregated but needed to be integrated. Horsford (2009) expressed while schools and school districts were mixing bodies into the same building, integration and desegregation were not synonyms.

After over 60 years since the Supreme Court ruling on *Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka*, schools are less integrated and more segregated than in 1954 (Fergus, 2017; Smiley & Fakunle, 2016). Clark-Louque and Latunde (2019) exposed and defined this lack of progression post- *Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka* as re-segregation. Horsford (2009) described schools and school districts that are not providing meaningful learning opportunities for all students by utilizing the tracking of students’ ability, specialized programs, and “school within a school” programs as the “quiet reversal of Brown” or “re-segregation” (p. 174). The process of re-segregation can be seen in Black students disproportionately over/underrepresented in special education, advanced placement courses or gifted and talented programs, and attending schools composed of 90% to 100% enrollment of people of color (Clark-Louque & Latunde, 2019).

Irvine and Irvine (2007) discussed the average Black student attends a school with 67% Black students and about a 75% low-socioeconomic population, while the average White student

attends a school with at least 80% White students. The 2000 census revealed the average White person lives in a neighborhood that is 89% White and only 7% Black, compared to the typical Black person who lives in a community that is composed of 33% White people and 51% Black people (Irvine & Irvine, 2007). Chemerinsky (2003) expressed:

The percentage of African-American students attending majority White schools has steadily decreased since 1986. In 1954, at *Brown v. Board of Education*, only 0.001% of African-American students in the South attended majority White schools. In 1964, a decade after *Brown*, this number increased to just 2.3%. From 1964 to 1988, there was significant progress: 1.9% in 1967; 23.4% in 1968; 37.6% in 1976; 42.9% in 1986; and 43.5% in 1988. Since 1988, the percentage of African-American students attending majority White schools has declined. By 1991, the rate of African-American students attending a majority White school in the South had decreased to 39.2%, and throughout the 1990s, the number dropped to 36.4% in 1994, to 34.7% in 1996, and 32.7% in 1998. (p. 1598)

As a result, school organizations throughout the nation focused on the academic outcomes of Black students that contribute to the achievement gap as the primary racial disparity in education (Gregory et al., 2010). However, many researchers have disagreed that only racial disparity is strictly academic and believe the disproportionate discipline of Black students is a significant contributor to educational inequity. For example, Pearman et al. (2019) discovered a correlation between the achievement gap and the disciplinary gap between Black and White students.

Disproportionality of Discipline of Black Students

Discipline disproportionality has become an extensive and controversial topic in public education. Educational researchers have attempted to understand the contributions to the disciplinary gap. Some researchers believe the lack of understanding of the contributing factors to the disciplinary gap is why public education has failed to close the gap. Heyneman (2005) stated “schools are characterized as inefficient and ineffective, requiring radical policy changes” (p. 2). As the population of the United States is changing, so are the expectations and practices of educators in schools. School systems are believed to be biased against people of color and the

poor, and public investments in education have reinforced rather than challenged established social classes (Carnoy, 1974).

According to Spector (2019), researchers found a 10% increase in the discipline gap predicts a 17% increase in the average achievement gap. Over the last 30 years, there has been a consistently disproportionate representation of Black students in the exclusionary discipline at the national and state level. School exclusionary discipline practices display similarities to how society punishes adults. The belief is the organization maintains safety and order by removing “bad” (Milner & Tenore, 2010). Irby (2014a) explained Black males are often disciplined through removal and harsh punishment. The data support Black students are overrepresented in discipline two to three times compared to their enrollment (Gregory et al., 2010).

In the 2000 school year, Black students accounted for 34% of the national out-of-school suspensions but only represented 17% of the student population (Office for Civil Rights, 2021). Between 2003 and 2016, the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights reported about one in five Black students were suspended compared to one in 10 White students (Gopalan & Nelson, 2019; Gregory et al., 2010). In addition, the Civil Rights Data Collection agency found in 2013–2014 Black students made up 30–40% of all K–12 exclusionary disciplines while only making up 15% of the student population (Gullo & Beachum, 2020). The overwhelming disproportion of exclusionary discipline is present in the Black preschool population. Wood et al. (2017) illustrated although Black students represent 18% of the overall preschool population, they contribute to 42% of all preschool suspensions that lasted a least 1 day and 48% of preschool students that were suspended more than once.

Discipline is one task of a school leader that an educational organization highly values. Marzano et al. (2005) identified discipline as a vehicle for protecting teachers from any internal

and external distractions that take away from the focus on instructional time. Irby (2014b) expressed school discipline addresses students who break school rules by “establishing strategies to stop rule violations or repeat offenses, punishing wrongdoers for their offenses” (p. 513). School leaders play a critical role in discipline, and often school leaders’ approaches and attitudes toward discipline are impacted by accountability pressures and racial segregation. These factors lead to discipline decisions that can be identified as inequitable (DeMatthews et al., 2017; Gopalan & Nelson, 2019). The decision-making of school leaders is often aligned with district or state discipline policies. The policies themselves may not be punitive. Implementing these policies may reflect the school personnel’s attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of Black students. They, therefore, can be enforced in ways that reflect systematic racial disparities in disciplinary practices (DeMatthews et al., 2017).

Many educators and school administrators perceive Black students as intimidating, boisterous, unruly, discourteous, and inherently more prone to violence and other hostile behavior (Smiley & Fakunle, 2016). In contrast, White students are often considered innocent and respectable (DeMatthews et al., 2017). As a result, Black students are often punished for exhibiting behaviors that align with their cultural norms and expectations associated with being male. When teachers misunderstand cultural behaviors as problematic, it can lead to the perception of conflict even when none exists (Wood et al., 2017). For example, Black students are less likely to engage in behavior that does not require discretion or judgment, such as bringing a gun, drugs, or alcohol to school, but are more likely to receive exclusionary discipline for misconduct that requires subjective judgments for the misconduct (DeMatthews et al., 2017). Often Black males are disproportionately likely to be viewed as having behavioral issues and being less intelligent at a young age. They also face harsher punishments for school rule

violations, even minor infractions (Noguera, 2003). The data has shown Black students are likelier to be suspended for subjective behaviors such as disrespect, dress code violations, and excessive noise.

In contrast, White students are more likely to be suspended for objective behaviors such as obscene language and vandalism (Little & Welsh, 2022). In addition, Young and Laible (2000) described examples of teachers unconsciously treating racial groups differently. An example of this bias is students of Asian descent were viewed as high-performing and well-behaved. In contrast, other minoritized students were considered low-performing and had behavioral issues, regardless of their abilities and behaviors.

Cultural Proficient Leadership

School leaders have been identified as the primary contributors to developing an effectively functioning organization and school climate (Marzano et al., 2005; Perkins, 2020). Williams (2017) described successful leaders as individuals who can impact and disrupt educational systems in a way that benefits and cultivates the success of all students, staff, and the design. Clark-Louque and Latunde (2019) expressed a culturally proficient leader can influence the climate of a school only second to a classroom teacher.

Villegas and Lucas (2002) characterized an education culturally proficient leader as devoted to knowing, valuing, and using a student's cultural background, languages, and learning styles to establish an inclusive educational environment. Ezzani (2021) discussed the need for culturally proficient school leadership to respond to the differences between most educators and their students in the United States. Most educators are European American, middle-class females. The differences in beliefs, personal experiences, and culture of school leaders in

contrast to students often lead to misconceptions of student behavior, resulting in inequitable disciplinary practices.

Culturally proficient leaders develop a shared vision and action plan to establish a system of equity (D. B. Lindsey & Lindsey, 2014). Culturally proficient leaders work to develop an educational environment that meets the needs of all students. In addition, they work to review policies and practices that promote indirect discrimination, which leads to the stereotypes and negative beliefs of students of color (R. B. Lindsey et al., 2018; Smith, 2005). Clark-Louque and Latunde (2019) described the focus of culturally proficient educational leaders to enhance campus climates, implement equitable opportunities, and diminish the disproportionality of disciplinary rates of Black students.

As educational leaders become more culturally proficient, they are more aware of their assumptions, beliefs, and values about people and cultures other than their own (Williams, 2017). As the system of cultural proficiency develops, students and leaders not only understand their own culture better but begin to value the cultures of others. Hines (2014) indicated most school principals are White and lack racialized experiences that adversely impact their lives. This lack of racial experiences makes it difficult for principals to acknowledge that school and leadership's structural and historical norms are based on White culture. The contrast of experiences of students and school leaders can lead to the potential for implicit bias in policies and practices. The role of a culturally proficient leader is to foster policies and procedures that display values to engage their school communities but may not be valued in other schools or other organizations (R. B. Lindsey et al., 2018). R. B. Lindsey et al. (2018) said culturally proficient leaders evaluate the climate of the organization and what is needed to make the necessary changes, such as:

- Culturally proficient leaders help the school's faculty, and staff assess its culture and determine how the school affects the students and its community.
- Culturally proficient leaders develop strategies for resolving conflict effectively and addressing the dynamics of difference within the school.
- Culturally proficient leaders shape the school's formal and non-formal curricula to include information about the heritages, lifestyles, and values of all people in society. (p. 54)

Cultural Proficiency Toolkit

The tools of cultural proficiency are actionable steps that assist school leaders in identifying the inequities that exist in serving the needs of all students. The four tools of cultural proficiency are an interactive, interdependent framework that provides a guide for schools and school leaders (CampbellJones et al., 2010). In addition, school leaders can utilize the tools of cultural proficiency to influence ethical behaviors and guide personal values and organizational policies (R. B. Lindsey et al., 2018). The four tools of cultural proficiency are included in the sections that follow.

The Guiding Principles

An inclusive set of core values that identify the centrality of culture in one's life and society. These principles provide a philosophical underpinning for educators providing the compass points to inform action in a culturally competent manner (CampbellJones et al., 2010).

Barriers to Cultural Proficiency

The recognition that systems of historical oppression continue to exist and, in many cases, keep broad-based school reform from equitably educating historically underrepresented groups. People and organizations can overcome these barriers by adapting their values, behaviors, policies, and practices to meet the needs of underserved cultural groups through

democratic means (CampbellJones et al., 2010).

The Cultural Proficiency Continuum

Six points along a continuum use language, such as healthy or unhealthy, to describe policies and practices used by educators (CampbellJones et al., 2010).

Supportive Conditions

Five standards guide a person's values and behaviors and school/district policies and practices in meeting the needs of culture (CampbellJones et al., 2010).

The Essential Elements of Cultural Proficiency

The five essential elements of cultural competencies are one of the four tools in the cultural proficiency toolkit. The essential elements include standards by which leaders can “measure the efficacy of curriculum, the effectiveness of instructional strategies, the relevance of professional development, the utility of systems of assessment and accountability and the intent of parent and community communications and outreach” (CampbellJones et al., 2010, p. 125). In addition, R. B. Lindsey et al. (2018) identified the essential elements as a guide of behaviors and practices aligned with culturally proficient values. R. B. Lindsey et al. listed the essential elements of cultural competencies as follows:

- Assess Culture: Claim Your Differences
 - Recognize how your culture affects others.
 - Describe your own culture and the cultural norms of your organization.
 - Understand how the culture of your organization affects those with different cultures.
- Value Diversity
 - Celebrate and encourage the presence of a variety of people in all activities.

- Recognize differences as diversity rather than as inappropriate responses to the environment.
- Accept that each culture finds some values and behaviors more important than others.
- Manage the Dynamics of Difference
 - Learn effective strategies for resolving conflict, particularly among people whose cultural backgrounds and values differ.
 - Understand the effect that historic distrust has on present-day interactions.
 - Realize that you may misjudge others' actions based on learned expectations.
- Adapt to Diversity
 - Change the way things are done to acknowledge the differences that are present in the staff, clients, and community.
 - Develop skills for intercultural communication.
 - Institutionalize cultural interventions for conflicts and confusion caused by the dynamics of differences.
- Institutionalize Cultural Knowledge
 - Incorporate cultural knowledge into the mainstream of the organization.
 - Teach the origins of stereotypes and prejudices.
 - For staff development and education, integrate into your systems information and skills that enable all to interact effectively in a variety of intercultural situations.

Summary

In this literature review, I investigated the conceptual framework background and a historical literature review on Black students' experiences in school, the review of literature of the disciplinary experiences, the practices related to Black students, and current literature related to the study of culturally proficient leadership. I reviewed journal articles and books to support the study's focus and background. According to the research, educational leadership is the ability to change, reform, and impact school climate (Whitworth & Chiu, 2015). As a result, this study

can be utilized to plan and improve the educational practices that impact disciplinary practices by school administrators. The literature reviewed refers to cultural proficiency being an “inside-out process” for individuals (CampbellJones et al., 2010, p. 4). The literature reviewed displays studies in which others evaluated school leaders’ cultural proficiency. However, the literature does not provide a wealth of research on how leaders perceive themselves as culturally proficient. In Chapter 3, the methodology and procedures of the study are discussed. In Chapter 4, the findings of the study and data analysis are reported. Chapter 5 summarizes the findings and discusses the conclusions from the research.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents rationale for the research design, data collection methods, and data analysis. In addition, this chapter includes identifying instrumentation, participants, and the sample group.

This quantitative study is a response to the disproportionality of exclusionary discipline practices of school leaders that leads to the disciplinary gap. This study exposed the inequities of disciplinary practices that have been charged with creating what is identified as the discipline gap in the educational system. In addition, with this study, I examined school leaders' self-perceived perception of cultural proficiency and the exclusionary disciplinary rates of Black students in 5A and 6A high schools in North Texas.

The participants were identified based on three qualifiers: (a) working on a campus that is identified as 5A or 6A by the UIL, (b) having at least 9% of the student population identified as Black, and (c) serving as school leaders responsible for assigning exclusionary discipline. Participants were surveyed to identify their level of cultural proficiency. DeMatthews (2016) explained school disciplinary consequences have the potential to target specific student groups because of the misinterpretation and misuse of disciplinary policies due to adult bias. Therefore, the following research questions guided this study:

1. To what extent do school leaders perceive themselves as culturally proficient leaders?
2. Is there a correlation between school leaders' perceived level of cultural proficiency and the disciplinary rates of Black students in North Texas 5A and 6A high schools?

Research Design

I chose a correlated quantitative design for this study to determine if there was a relationship between school leaders' perceived level of cultural proficiency and the exclusionary

discipline rate of Black students on their campuses. Privitera and Ahlgrim-Delzell (2019) defined a correlational research design as “the measurement of two or more factors to determine or estimate to the extent to which the values for the factors are related or change in the identifiable pattern” (p. 354). As the correlational study is conducted, researchers do not try to regulate or alter the variables in the experiment. Instead, a relationship is established between two or more scores for each individual using the correlation statistic (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

Researchers expressed different types of correlational designs are classified by the number of variables interacting in the study (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Privitera & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2019). Creswell and Guetterman (2019) classified correlational research as the attempt to rationalize the relationship between variables, which can also be identified as an explanatory design.

This study consists of three significant parts, moving from Research Question 1, driven by a cross-sectional survey, to Research Question 2, driven by linear regression or simple correlation. In Part 1, data were collected by cross-sectional survey. A cross-sectional survey is a survey the researcher issues to a cohort or sample of individuals at one point in time (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Privitera & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2019). This part of the study established the cultural proficiency level of individual school leaders.

In Part 2, each campus’s disciplinary data were analyzed for the percentage of exclusionary placements that Black students received, including in-school and out-of-school suspensions. The data were accessed from the Texas Education Agency and reflected discipline data from the school years between 2020 and 2022.

In Part 3, I investigated the relationship between school leaders’ self-perceived cultural proficiency and exclusionary disciplinary rates. This relationship was established using linear

regression or simple correlation design, in which one independent variable and one dependent variable are examined simultaneously (Privitera & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2019).

Population and Sample Selection

The targeted population for this study included high school leadership that serves on campuses identified as 5A and 6A high schools. Schools were determined using the 2020-2022 school reclassification and realignment on the UIL (2020) website. Districts were selected based on the geographical regions and school districts in North Texas. The targeted area was focused on the Dallas-Fort Worth area and surrounding areas.

The UIL classifies a high school as 5A if the school has an enrollment of students between 1,300 and 2,224 and classifies a 6A high school as a school with an enrollment of 2,225 students or above. According to the 2022–2023 UIL alignment, 253 schools met the 5A classification, and 249 schools met the 6A classification in Texas. In North Texas, a total of 48 schools met the criteria of 5A and 6A high schools. As depicted in Table 2, the student enrollment of the participating campuses ranged from 1,321 to 3,119 students. The campuses selected had a student population of Black students that represented 9% or greater of the overall student population. The Black student population of the identified campuses ranged from 9.0% to 47.0%. The campuses range from 4 to 14 in the number of school leaders represented on each campus.

To select the participants for this study, I utilized a purposeful sampling of individuals that met specific criteria, including experience and characteristics (Privitera & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2019). The school leaders selected for this study currently work in the identified schools and are responsible for assigning disciplinary actions that result in exclusionary discipline.

Table 2

Campus Demographics of Study

High School ID	No. of Respondents	Campus Enrollment	Black Students		White Students	
			<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
1	1	2,696	1,000	37	887	33
2	1	2,286	390	17	739	32
3	1	2,023	246	12	853	42
4	3	2,621	223	9	1,491	57
5	2	2,833	285	10	618	22
6	1	3,098	1,092	35	292	9
7	1	2,622	1,112	42	608	23
8	1	2,378	383	17	1,011	43
9	1	2,527	496	20	1,171	46
10	2	2,560	725	28	311	12
11	1	2,397	389	16	239	10
12	2	3,119	349	11	798	26
13	1	2,515	344	14	1,038	41
14	2	1,745	481	28	311	18
15	1	2,189	213	10	995	45
16	1	1,350	264	20	461	34
17	2	1,999	826	41	367	18
18	1	1,890	897	47	221	12
19	1	2,268	452	20	174	8

I sent an electronic survey to 164 school administrators in six North Texas school districts. Out of these, 26 administrators completed the survey. Half of the participants were male, and half were female. The largest age group of participants was 40-44 (30.8%), followed by the 50-54-year-old group (26.9%) and the 45-49-year-old group (19.2%). The smallest age group represented was 30-34 at 7.7%. The majority of participants (34.6%) had 6-15 years of experience, while 11.5% had 25 or more years of experience (see Table 3). The survey data may

be potentially skewed due to the variances in respondents in each school. For example, most schools had one or two respondents, but School 4 had three respondents.

Instrumentation

To identify school leaders' level of cultural proficiency, a survey developed by Dr. Camille Smith and modified by Dr. Mack T. Hines was utilized to determine the self-perceived cultural proficiency of school leaders. The Culturally Proficiency Leadership Scale survey served as the quantitative element of the study. The survey focuses on identifying the essential elements of school leadership, including assessing culture, valuing diversity, managing the dynamics of differences, adapting to diversity, institutionalizing cultural knowledge, and inclusiveness.

Table 3

Demographic Information of Survey Participants

Demographics		Freq	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Min	Max
Gender	Male	13	130.46	17.424	108	163
	Female	13	119.08	17.476	93	146
Age Groups (in years)	30-34	2	131.50	6.364	127	136
	35-39	3	131.00	20.421	115	154
	40-44	8	124.25	19.812	94	153
	45-49	5	119.20	18.606	93	139
	50-54	7	125.00	21.510	105	163
	Prefer not to disclose	1	123.00			
Administrative Years of Experience	0-2	2	119.50	10.607	112	127
	3-5	6	130.67	14.989	115	154
	6-10	5	117.20	18.377	94	140
	11-15	4	124.75	9.946	117	139
	16-20	3	142.00	28.160	110	163
	21-24	3	111.00	21.633	93	135
	25+	3	125.67	19.140	108	146

The first section of the survey consists of demographic information about the school leaders, such as gender, years in education, years as a school administrator, and years at the current school. The second section of the survey consists of 35 items measuring the school leaders' self-perception of cultural proficiency in conjunction with the essential elements.

The survey consists of six constructs, including valuing diversity (12 items), assessing the culture (seven items), managing the dynamics of differences (four items), institutionalizing cultural knowledge and resources (four items), adapting to diversity (three items), and inclusiveness (five items). Participants responded to the 35 items using a 5-point Likert scale of their perception of using culturally proficient practices. The scale ranged from *not at all* = 1, *rarely* = 2, *sometimes* = 3, *frequently* = 4, and *almost always* = 5.

Dr. Hines utilized a Cronbach's alpha test to measure the reliability and validity of his modified survey. Table 4 presents the constructs of the cultural proficiency survey and the alpha scores.

Table 4

Cultural Proficiency Survey Constructs, Reliability, and Validity

Indicator	Survey Question	Cronbach's Alpha
Valuing diversity	1, 5, 10, 12, 13, 16, 22, 25, 29, 30, 31, 34	0.84
Assessing the culture	2, 3, 4, 7, 9, 19, 20, 24	0.86
Managing the dynamics of differences	14, 21, 32	0.86
Institutionalizing cultural knowledge and resources	6, 8, 15, 18	0.80
Adapting to diversity	17, 28, 33	0.83
Inclusiveness	11, 23, 26, 27, 35	0.91

For Dr. Hines to validate his modified version of Dr. Smith's survey, it was presented to a panel of professors who were researchers and instructors of cultural proficiency courses (Hines

& Kritsonis, 2008). As a result of the panel review, Hines surveyed 34 teachers, resulting in an overall alpha coefficient of 0.74. According to Hines and Kritsonis (2008), “the overall .74 Alpha coefficient showed the instrument’s internal consistency” (p. 7).

Data Collection

An email seeking permission to conduct this study was sent to 29 school districts. Twelve of the 29 districts responded to the initial communication and provided the application requirements to obtain school district approval. The district applications required the submission of documents including:

- A research proposal
- Access to confidential data
- Assurances to the school districts
- Survey for primary data collection
- Informed consent letters
- Time requirements

Six of the 29 school districts recruited granted approval to conduct research. After gaining approval from the school districts, an application was submitted to the University of North Texas Institutional Review Board. The University of North Texas Institutional Review Board reviewed the application and granted approval to collect data.

Following the approval of school districts, the email addresses of eligible school leaders were obtained from school and school district websites. Electronic communication was sent to 164 school leaders, including principals and assistant principals. The communication included the purpose and explanation of the study, a clear definition of cultural proficiency, and a link to the survey that was uploaded into Qualtrics. There was also a consent notice that included

confidentiality statements and an explanation of how the survey data would be collected, secured, maintained, and conveyed.

School leaders were asked to indicate their consent to volunteer and participate in the survey by clicking “I Consent.” If the individual chose “I DO NOT CONSENT” or I am not responsible for making disciplinary decisions, a message was sent thanking them for their participation in the survey. They were also provided a link to exit the survey. Those who chose to participate and were responsible for making disciplinary decisions advanced to the cultural proficiency section of the survey.

With the survey, I aimed to measure participants’ self-perceived cultural proficiency level. Identifiable information was collected through Qualtrics. To protect the identity of participants and their school districts, pseudonyms were assigned. The survey was given a 4-week deadline. Two reminders were sent due to the initial low response rate. Of the 164 possible administrators, 26 responded with a response rate of 15%.

Discipline reports for the period of August 2021 through August 2022 were collected from the Texas Education Agency website (<https://tea.texas.gov>). The website provided public access to discipline records for the identified schools. The discipline reports examined the total number of in-school suspensions and out-of-school suspension placements.

Data Analysis Plan

SPSS was used to analyze quantitative survey data. In addition, the descriptive statistics provided an overview of the study’s sample size and variables.

Research Question 1 was answered by analyzing descriptive statistics. First, I calculated the means and standard deviations for each survey question ($n = 35$). Next, the data were presented by construct, question, and total cultural proficiency scores to examine each school

leader's self-perceived cultural proficiency thoroughly. Finally, I calculated the total cultural proficiency score by totaling the mean rating of the questions on the survey and averaging the responses.

Research Question 2 was answered using a Pearson correlation to examine the significant differences in the total cultural proficiency between in-school and out-of-school suspensions.

Limitations

Roberts (2010) defined limitations as “any portion of the study that will negatively affect the results or the ability to generalize. Limitations include sample size, methodology constraints, length of the study, and response rate” (p. 162). The study's primary limitation is the relatively small sample size, which may affect the generalizability of the issue as a whole. There was a baseline criterion for selecting the study's districts, schools, and individual participants. The designated population of the study was limited to 5A and 6A high schools in nine north Texas counties. The generalizations of the findings in the study were limited to schools with student populations of at least 1,300 or more and a Black student population of 9% or more.

It was assumed participants identified to be surveyed about their self-perceived level of cultural proficiency answered the questions honestly. Also, the assumption was the survey used during this study maintained validity and reliability in identifying trends and patterns. Access and voluntary participation limited the ability to gain respondents to the survey. In addition, because of staffing and retention, school leaders may need more time on a particular campus to directly impact the disciplinary rates. The data collected for the disciplinary actions from the Texas Education Agency included exclusionary discipline rates from August 2021 to August 2022.

Summary

The purpose of this quantitative study was to: (a) identify the self-perceived level of cultural proficiency of school leaders, (b) to examine the exclusionary disciplinary rates of Black students at each participating high school, and (c) to explore administrators' perception level of cultural proficiency and how their beliefs of cultural proficiency impact their campus Black students' disciplinary rates.

With this study, I produced descriptive and comparative statistics for school leaders serving in 5A and 6A high schools across multiple districts in north Texas counties. The first section of the survey collected the demographic data of the school leaders, including age, gender, and years of administrative experience. The second section of the survey measured the school leaders' perceptions of their demonstration of culturally proficient practices. These perceptions were measured using a Likert scale rating (1–5) based on the six essential elements of cultural proficiency. The findings from the study are in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

The purpose of this quantitative study was to: (a) identify the self-perceived level of cultural proficiency of school leaders, (b) to examine the exclusionary disciplinary rates of Black students at each participating high school, and (c) to explore administrators' perception level of cultural proficiency and how their beliefs of cultural proficiency impact their campus Black students' disciplinary rates. In this research, I aimed to investigate school leaders' self-perception regarding their demonstration of the essential elements of cultural proficiency. In addition, I investigated school leaders' perception of their demonstration of cultural proficiency in the following areas: valuing diversity, assessing their own culture, managing the dynamics caused by differences, institutionalizing cultural knowledge, adapting to diversity, and inclusiveness.

Results from the study supported the two research questions posed to assess the correlation that differing cultural proficiency levels have on Black students' discipline decisions that result in exclusionary discipline.

1. To what extent do school leaders perceive themselves as culturally proficient leaders?
2. Is there a correlation between school leaders' perceived level of cultural proficiency and the disciplinary rates of Black students in North Texas 5A and 6A high schools?

In this study, I applied descriptive and comparative statistics to present the quantitative data in a comprehensible manner. Twenty-six campus administrators completed a 35-item Qualtrics survey within nineteen 5A or 6A high schools in North Texas. Out of the 164 administrators recruited, the participant group comprised 26 administrators who completed the survey.

Following the survey, survey data were disaggregated according to the identified cultural proficiency score, campus discipline data, gender, age, and years of experience. In this analysis, I summarized individual responses to the 35 questions in the cultural proficiency survey.

Moreover, an overall proficiency score was calculated for each survey respondent by summing up the scores of the 35 questions. Finally, the reliability of the items grouped in each construct was confirmed using Cronbach’s alpha.

A description of the findings based on the quantitative analysis provided in this chapter includes (a) campus administrator demographics, (b) findings of data collected from the survey of campus administrators, (c) identified administrator cultural proficiency scores, (d) the exclusionary disciplinary rates for Black students at each participating high school, and (e) findings of data collected, analyzed, and coded. Findings are reported in reference to the research questions.

Research Question 1 Analysis

To what extent do school leaders perceive themselves as culturally proficient leaders?

School leaders were asked to self-assess their frequency of exhibiting the essential elements of cultural proficiency. They were asked to evaluate 35 items related to these essential elements using a 5-point Likert scale. Table 5 illustrates a breakdown of each of the mean scores by essential elements. The school leaders received the highest mean in the area of inclusiveness and the lowest mean in the area of valuing diversity.

Table 5

Average Mean Construct Scores Given by All School Leaders

Essential Element	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Institutionalizing cultural knowledge	3.63	.701
Assessing the culture	3.55	.500
Valuing diversity	3.49	.606
Inclusiveness	3.70	.575
Adapting	3.60	.712
Managing the dynamics of differences	3.54	.784

Table 6 displays the mean score and standard deviation of each survey question. The overall mean score for school leaders across the 19 campuses was 3.85. Question 6 had the highest mean score of 4.46, while Question 1 had the lowest mean score of 2.85.

Table 6

Mean Distribution of the Survey Items

No.	Survey Question	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1	Designating funding and human resources to address issues that relate to cultural diversity.	2.85	.925
2	Exposing faculty to staff development on addressing diverse student populations.	3.50	.812
3	Handling formalities to ensure that faculty and visitors are welcome to the school.	4.00	.938
4	Disseminating demographic information to enhance faculty members' awareness of the relevance of cultural diversity.	3.35	1.018
5	Using language in documents and statements that acknowledge cultural diversity of students.	3.62	.898
6	Creating a climate that has high academic expectations for all students.	4.46	.811
7	Encouraging staff to obtain certification in specifically designed academic instruction.	3.85	.784
8	Making provisions for teachers to receive training on making curriculum modifications in accordance to the cultural and linguistic makeup of students.	3.19	1.096
9	Creating academic intervention programs that meet the needs of diverse students.	3.58	.945
10	Providing instruction that addresses the background of diverse students.	3.35	.977
11	Providing inclusive environment that acknowledges the diversity of students.	4.19	.801
12	Ensuring that school policies are sensitive to the cultural makeup of the school.	3.81	1.132
13	Making decisions that are inclusive of diverse perspectives.	4.12	.952
14	Providing faculty and staff members with conflict resolution training.	3.23	.992
15	Ensuring that all groups of students and teachers are aware of how their cultural norms and behaviors influence the climate of the school.	3.38	1.061
16	Communicating ability to function effectively in cross-cultural situations.	3.69	1.050

(table continues)

No.	Survey Question	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
17	Evaluating faculty members' ability to display culturally proficient behaviors.	3.19	1.059
18	Maintaining school activities conducive to effectively working with and learning in cross-cultural situations.	3.50	1.068
19	Assessing barriers to core curriculum for culturally diverse students.	3.19	.749
20	Showing sensitivity to cultural differences during performance evaluations of faculty members.	3.81	1.059
21	Developing complaint resolution processes that have been communicated to parents.	3.65	1.355
22	Evaluating the extent to which curricular and institutional practices address the linguistic and cultural differences of students.	3.15	.925
23	Organizing diverse members into interview panels for hiring new faculty/staff members.	3.31	1.050
24	Developing programs with opportunities for consultation with a diverse parent group.	3.12	1.033
25	Developing policies with stakeholders who represent the cultural makeup of students.	3.42	1.027
26	Creating a school environment that inspires students and teachers to acknowledge other cultures while retaining the uniqueness of their ethnic identity.	4.04	.774
27	Ensuring that extracurricular activities are inclusive of community members are from ethnic groups.	3.81	1.021
28	Accommodating diverse cultural norms that may exist in the school.	3.85	1.008
29	Creating school activities that appeal to demographically mixed groups of students.	3.88	.864
30	Providing training that develops faculty and staff members' confidence to function in cross-cultural situations.	3.12	1.033
31	Providing leadership in creating policy statements that are inclusive of diversity.	3.38	.898
32	Creating conflict resolution services for students.	3.73	.778
33	Ensuring that school policies promote and advocate for culturally proficient behaviors among faculty and staff members.	3.77	.951
34	Establishing diverse advisory groups.	3.58	1.027
35	Connecting students and staff to external organizations and resources that represent cultural diversity.	3.15	.925
Overall mean score for school leaders.		3.85	

Table 7 shows the 26 school leaders in the study sample rated themselves with an overall

proficiency of 124.77 out of 175 possible cultural proficiency points. The lowest cultural proficiency rating was 94 points, while the highest was 163 points.

Table 7

Descriptive Statistics for Total Proficiency Score

Descriptive Statistics	Total Proficiency Score
Valid	26
Mean	124.77
Median	122.50
Standard deviation	18.056
Variance	326.025
Skewness	0.278
Kurtosis	-0.428

Tables 8 and 9 provide information on individual school’s suspensions, categorized by out-of-school (OSS) and in-school suspensions (ISS). The tables include the following:

- Individual schools
- Percentage of student population
- Total number and percentage of out-of-school suspensions: This column provides the total number of out-of-school suspensions that occurred at each school.
 - Number and percentage of out-of-school suspensions for Black students
 - Number and percentage of out-of-school suspensions for White students
- Total number and percentage of in-school suspensions: This column provides the total number of in-school suspensions that occurred at each school.
 - Number and percentage of in-school suspensions for Black students
 - Number and percentage of in-school suspensions for White students

Together, this information provides insights into how suspensions are being used in each school, and how they may disproportionately impact Black students.

Table 8

In-School Suspension and Out-of-School Suspension Incidents of Responding Campuses

School	Freq of Resp.	OSS Students			ISS Students		
		Total	Black	White	Total	Black	White
1	1	189	135	17	464	281	106
2	1	504	177	143	490	140	154
3	1	145	53	33	506	134	137
4	3	177	30	64	195	26	64
5	2	298	49	77	1,298	167	290
6	1	479	308	35	977	591	61
7	1	109	87	10	346	220	39
8	1	189	66	56	757	191	222
9	1	102	40	27	602	234	182
10	2	218	124	19	1,081	528	90
11	1	138	69	9	807	294	59
12	2	109	25	32	196	28	59
13	1	115	51	22	102	38	26
14	2	70	34	10	508	285	35
15	1	218	39	94	393	55	167
16	1	179	87	25	274	160	53
17	2	201	150	27	416	359	97
18	1	299	208	28	571	362	72
19	1	319	134	26	1,008	347	86

Table 9

Percentages of Black and White Student Population and Black and White Discipline Rates

School	School Survey (M)	% Student Population		% OSS Students		% ISS Students	
		Black	White	Black	White	Black	White
1	140	37.09	32.90	71.43	8.99	60.56	22.84
2	110	17.06	32.33	35.12	28.37	28.57	31.43
3	124	12.16	42.17	36.55	22.76	26.48	27.08
4	115	8.51	56.89	16.95	36.16	13.33	32.82
5	100.5	10.06	21.81	16.44	25.84	12.87	22.34

(table continues)

School	School Survey (M)	% Student Population		% OSS Students		% ISS Students	
		Black	White	Black	White	Black	White
6	94	35.25	9.43	64.30	7.31	60.49	6.24
7	154	42.41	23.19	79.82	9.17	63.58	11.27
8	115	16.53	42.51	34.92	29.63	25.23	29.33
9	112	19.30	46.34	39.22	26.47	38.87	30.23
10	124	28.32	12.15	56.88	8.72	48.84	8.33
11	136	16.23	9.97	50.00	6.52	36.43	7.31
12	118	11.19	22.59	22.94	29.36	14.29	30.10
13	163	13.68	41.27	44.35	19.13	37.25	25.49
14	127	27.56	17.82	48.57	14.29	56.10	6.89
15	146	9.73	45.45	17.89	43.12	13.99	42.49
16	108	19.56	34.15	48.60	15.64	58.39	19.34
17	133	41.32	18.36	74.63	13.43	86.30	23.32
18	139	47.46	11.69	9.57	9.36	63.40	12.61
19	153	19.93	7.67	42.01	8.15	34.42	8.53

Research Question 2 Analysis

Is there a correlation between school leaders' perceived level of cultural proficiency and the disciplinary rates of Black students in North Texas 5A and 6A high schools?

To answer the second research question, the disciplinary data of each campus were studied to determine the percentage of Black students who received exclusionary placements, such as in-school suspensions and out-of-school suspensions. The campus discipline information from the Texas Education Agency covered the discipline records from 2021–2022. Part 3 explored a Pearson correlation between the cultural proficiency of school leaders as perceived by themselves and the rates of disciplinary exclusion.

Valuing Diversity

The results of the Pearson correlation analysis exhibited a significant positive relationship between the score of the essential element “valuing diversity” and the discipline rates of Black

students, as reflected by out-of-school suspensions ($r = .478, p = 0.013, 2\text{-tailed}$), in-school suspensions ($r = .402, p = 0.042, 2\text{-tailed}$), and total suspensions ($r = .367, p = 0.065, 2\text{-tailed}$). The analysis indicated an increase in the valuing diversity score was linked to a rise in disciplinary actions against Black students. The correlation between the essential element of valuing diversity, out-of-school suspensions, and in-school suspensions was statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

The results of the Pearson correlation analysis indicated a significant association between the score of the essential element valuing diversity and the discipline rates of White students as reflected by out-of-school suspensions ($r = -.419, p = 0.033, 2\text{-tailed}$), in-school suspensions ($r = -0.310, p = 0.123, 2\text{-tailed}$), and total suspensions ($r = -0.244, p = 0.230, 2\text{-tailed}$). In addition, the analysis revealed as the score of valuing diversity increased, the disciplinary actions against White students declined. However, only the relationship between the score of valuing diversity and out-of-school suspensions was statistically significant. Table 10 presents the correlation between the score of the valuing diversity essential element and the discipline rates of both Black and White students.

Table 10

Pearson Correlation: Valuing Diversity

	Student -OSS		Student-ISS		Student – Total Suspension	
	Black	White	Black	White	Black	White
Pearson correlation	.478*	-.419*	.402*	-0.310	0.367	-0.244
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.013	0.033	0.042	0.123	0.065	0.230

Note. * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Assessing the Culture

The results of the Pearson correlation analysis showed there is a positive association

between the score of the essential element “assessing the culture” and discipline rates for Black students, as indicated by out-of-school suspensions ($r = .294, p = 0.145, 2\text{-tailed}$), in-school suspensions ($r = .249, p = 0.220, 2\text{-tailed}$), and total suspensions ($r = .228, p = 0.263, 2\text{-tailed}$). This suggests an increase in the score for assessing the culture is related to increased disciplinary actions against Black students. However, the correlation between the score of assessing the culture, out-of-school suspensions, and in-school suspensions was not statistically significant at a 0.05 level of significance.

The results of the Pearson correlation analysis showed a significant relationship between the essential element assessing the culture and the discipline rates for White students, as measured by out-of-school suspensions ($r = -0.212, p = 0.298, 2\text{-tailed}$), in-school suspensions ($r = -0.133, p = 0.518, 2\text{-tailed}$), and total suspensions ($r = -0.096, p = 0.639, 2\text{-tailed}$). The analysis indicates an increase in the score of assessing the culture is linked to a decrease in disciplinary actions against White students. However, none of these relationships were statistically significant at the 0.05 level. The correlation between the discipline rates of both Black and White students and the score of assessing the culture essential element is presented in Table 11.

Table 11

Pearson Correlation: Assessing the Culture

	Student -OSS		Student-ISS		Student – Total Suspension	
	Black	White	Black	White	Black	White
Pearson correlation	0.294	-0.212	0.249	-0.133	0.228	-0.096
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.145	0.298	0.220	0.518	0.263	0.639

Institutionalizing Cultural Knowledge

The results of the Pearson correlation analysis indicated a significant positive relationship between the score of the essential element “Institutionalizing Cultural Knowledge” and

discipline rates for Black students, as measured by out-of-school suspensions ($r = .412, p = 0.037, 2\text{-tailed}$); in-school suspensions ($r = .0345, p = 0.084, 2\text{-tailed}$), and total suspensions ($r = .0298, p = 0.139, 2\text{-tailed}$). This suggests as the score of institutionalizing cultural knowledge increases, the disciplinary actions against Black students also increase. The correlation between the institutionalizing cultural knowledge score and out-of-school suspensions was statistically significant at the 0.05 level. However, the correlation between the score and in-school suspensions was not statistically significant at the same significance level.

The results of the Pearson correlation analysis indicated there is a negative association between the score of the essential element institutionalizing cultural knowledge and discipline rates for White students, as indicated by out-of-school suspensions ($r = -0.202, p = 0.322, 2\text{-tailed}$), in-school suspensions ($r = -0.104, p = 0.612, 2\text{-tailed}$), and total suspensions ($r = -0.041, p = 0.843, 2\text{-tailed}$). This suggests as the score of institutionalizing cultural knowledge increased, disciplinary actions against White students decreased. However, none of these relationships were statistically significant at the 0.05 level. The results of the Pearson correlation for institutionalizing cultural knowledge and discipline rates of Black and White students are displayed in Table 12.

Table 12

Pearson Correlation: Institutionalizing Cultural Knowledge

	Student -OSS		Student-ISS		Student – Total Suspension	
	Black	White	Black	White	Black	White
Pearson correlation	.412*	-0.202	0.345	-0.104	0.298	-0.041
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.037	0.322	0.084	0.612	0.139	0.843

Note. * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Managing the Dynamics of Differences

The results from the Pearson correlation analysis showed a significant positive relationship between the score of the essential element “managing the dynamics of differences” and the discipline rates for Black students, as measured by out-of-school suspensions ($r = .293, p = .147, 2\text{-tailed}$), in school suspensions ($r = .0301, p = 0.134, 2\text{-tailed}$), and total suspensions ($r = .298, p = 0.139, 2\text{-tailed}$). This implies an increase in the managing the dynamics of differences score leads to a corresponding increase in disciplinary actions against Black students. Even though there is a relationship, it was not found to be statistically significant at the 0.05 level for out-of-school suspensions, in school suspensions, or total suspensions.

The Pearson correlation analysis showed there is a negative correlation between the score of the essential element managing the dynamics of differences and discipline rates for White students as measured by out-of-school suspensions ($r = -0.153, p = 0.147, 2\text{-tailed}$); in-school suspensions ($r = -0.112, p = 0.456, 2\text{-tailed}$), and total suspensions ($r = -0.070, p = 0.734, 2\text{-tailed}$). This means an increase in the managing the dynamics of differences score is associated with a decrease in disciplinary actions against White students. However, none of these correlations were statistically significant at a 0.05 level of significance. Table 13 presents the results of the Pearson correlation analysis conducted to examine the relationship between managing the dynamics of differences and the discipline rates of both Black and White students.

Table 13

Pearson Correlation: Managing the Dynamics of Differences

	Student -OSS		Student-ISS		Student – Total Suspension	
	Black	White	Black	White	Black	White
Pearson correlation	0.293	-0.153	0.301	-0.112	0.298	-0.070
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.147	0.456	0.134	0.587	0.139	0.734

Adapting to Diversity

The Pearson correlation analysis depicted in Table 14 shows there is a negative correlation between the score of the essential element “adapting to diversity” and discipline rates for Black students as measured by out-of-school suspensions ($r = .105, p = 0.610, 2\text{-tailed}$). This means an increase in the score of adapting to diversity is associated with a decrease in disciplinary actions against White students. On the other hand, the correlation between the score of the essential element adapting to diversity is a positive correlation in the measurement of in-school suspensions ($r = 0.068, p = 0.742, 2\text{-tailed}$) and total suspensions ($r = -0.048, p = 0.815, 2\text{-tailed}$). This means an increase in the score for adapting to diversity is associated with increased disciplinary actions against White students. However, none of these correlations were statistically significant at a 0.05 level of significance.

Table 14

Pearson Correlation: Adapting to Diversity

	Student -OSS		Student-ISS		Student – Total Suspension	
	Black	White	Black	White	Black	White
Pearson correlation	0.105	-0.013	0.068	0.024	0.048	0.058
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.610	0.949	0.742	0.908	0.815	0.777

The Pearson correlation analysis showed a negative correlation between the score of adapting to diversity and discipline rates for White students in out-of-school suspensions ($r = -.013, p = 0.949, 2\text{-tailed}$). This indicates higher scores of adapting to diversity are linked to lower disciplinary actions against White students. On the other hand, the correlation between the score of adapting to diversity and discipline rates were positive in the measurement of in-school suspensions ($r = 0.024, p = 0.908, 2\text{-tailed}$), and total suspensions ($r = -0.058, p = 0.777, 2\text{-tailed}$), meaning that higher scores of adapting to diversity were associated with higher

disciplinary actions against White students. However, none of these correlations were statistically significant at a 0.05 level.

Inclusiveness

The results in Table 15 showed there is a positive association between the score of the essential element “inclusiveness” and discipline rates for Black students, as indicated by out-of-school suspensions ($r = .151, p = 0.462, 2\text{-tailed}$); in-school suspensions ($r = .062, p = 0.776, 2\text{-tailed}$), and total suspensions ($r = .020, p = 0.923, 2\text{-tailed}$). This suggests an increase in the score of inclusiveness is related to a rise in the disciplinary actions taken against Black students. However, the correlation between the score of inclusiveness, out-of-school suspensions, in school suspensions, and total suspensions was not statistically significant at a 0.05 level of significance.

The results of the Pearson correlation analysis showed a significant relationship between the essential element inclusiveness and the discipline rates for White students, as measured by out-of-school suspensions ($r = -0.163, p = 0.426, 2\text{-tailed}$), in school suspensions ($r = -0.059, p = 0.776, 2\text{-tailed}$), and total suspensions ($r = -0.008, p = 0.970, 2\text{-tailed}$). The analysis indicates an increase in the score of inclusiveness is linked to a decrease in disciplinary actions taken against White students. However, none of these relationships were statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 15

Pearson Correlation: Inclusiveness

	Student -OSS		Student-ISS		Student – Total Suspension	
	Black	White	Black	White	Black	White
Pearson correlation	0.151	-0.163	0.062	-0.059	0.020	-0.008
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.462	0.426	0.765	0.776	0.923	0.970

Total Cultural Proficiency Score

The Pearson correlation analysis revealed a significant positive correlation between the total cultural proficiency score and black student discipline rates, specifically with out-of-school suspensions ($r = .403, p = .041, 2\text{-tailed}$), in school suspensions ($r = .301, p = .135, 2\text{-tailed}$), and total suspensions ($r = .336, p = .094, 2\text{-tailed}$). This suggests an increase in cultural proficiency is associated with increased disciplinary actions against Black students. Furthermore, the correlation between the total cultural proficiency score and out-of-school suspensions was found to be significant at the 0.05 level, meaning there is a less than 5% likelihood of the results being due to chance.

The Pearson correlation analysis showed a negative correlation between the total cultural proficiency score and discipline rates for White students, specifically for out-of-school suspensions ($r = -0.302, p = .133, 2\text{-tailed}$), in-school suspensions ($r = -0.139, p = 0.497, 2\text{-tailed}$), and total suspensions ($r = -0.201, p = 0.326, 2\text{-tailed}$). As cultural proficiency increases, the disciplinary actions taken against White students decrease. Nonetheless, the results did not reach statistical significance at a 0.05 level. The results of the correlation between the discipline rates of Black and White students and the total cultural proficiency score are shown in Table 16.

Table 16

Pearson Correlation: Total Cultural Proficiency Score

	Student -OSS		Student-ISS		Student – Total Suspension	
	Black	White	Black	White	Black	White
Pearson correlation	.403*	-0.302	0.301	-0.139	0.336	-0.201
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.041	0.133	0.135	0.497	0.094	0.326

Note. * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Summary

In this chapter, I presented the analysis of the significant relationships between the scores of six essential elements and the discipline rates of Black and White students as reflected by out-of-school suspensions, in-school suspensions, and total suspensions. Chapter 5 is a comprehensive conclusion to the study, providing an overview of the results and a discussion of how they relate to the objectives, previous research, and theoretical framework that formed the basis of the study. The final chapter also includes recommendations for future research based on the conclusions drawn and the implications of these conclusions for the field. This section is crucial as it ties together all the findings and provides a clear picture of the significance of the study and its contribution to the relevant literature.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In Chapter 4, I presented an analysis of the significant correlation between the scores of six essential elements and discipline rates of Black and White students, as reflected by out-of-school suspensions, in-school suspensions, and total suspensions. Chapter 5 is a discussion of the study findings addressing the research questions, drawing conclusions, and providing suggestions for future research. I close the chapter with research conclusions and implications for practice, as well as recommendations for future research.

The purpose of this quantitative study was to: (a) identify the self-perceived level of cultural proficiency of school leaders, (b) to examine the exclusionary disciplinary rates of Black students at each participating high school, and (c) to explore administrators' perception level of cultural proficiency and how their beliefs of cultural proficiency impact their campus Black students' disciplinary rates. The following research questions were explored in this study:

1. To what extent do school leaders perceive themselves as culturally proficient leaders?
2. Is there a correlation between school leaders' perceived level of cultural proficiency and the disciplinary rates of Black students in North Texas 5A and 6A high schools?

This quantitative study was a descriptive comparative analysis using the Culturally Proficient Leadership Scale (Hines & Kritsonis, 2008). It is a survey that includes 35 questions using a Likert scale, assessing school leaders' perceptions of their use of culturally proficient leadership practices. This survey was distributed electronically to 164 school administrators in six North Texas school districts. Twenty-six school administrators responded to the survey.

The research revealed the perceptions school leaders have of their abilities to demonstrate the essential elements of cultural proficiency and how their beliefs of cultural proficiency impact their campus Black students' disciplinary rates. School leaders were measured and rated in the

following constructs: valuing diversity, assessing their own culture, managing the dynamics of differences, institutional cultural knowledge, adapting to diversity, and inclusiveness.

Discussion

The research study analyzed school leaders' perceptions of themselves as culturally proficient leaders and generated several points of discussion. In my research, cultural proficiency encompasses the concept of transforming the culture of an educational organization, which involves both individual and organizational change. R. B. Lindsey et al. (2018) described cultural proficiency as proactive and offering tools that can be applied in various settings. The emphasis of cultural proficiency is on values-based and behavioral aspects and can be applied to both organizational practices and individual conduct.

The purpose of this quantitative study was to: (a) identify the self-perceived level of cultural proficiency of school leaders, (b) to examine the exclusionary disciplinary rates of Black students at each participating high school, and (c) to explore administrators' perception level of cultural proficiency and how their beliefs of cultural proficiency impact their campus Black students' disciplinary rates. The general idea of the research was as school leaders scored higher on the Culturally Proficiency Leadership Scale survey; they would make equitable decisions in terms of assigning discipline to all students. However, the results of the study yielded results providing evidence that there is no statistically significant correlation between the perception of the school leaders and their implementation of the essential elements of cultural proficiency and the disproportion of exclusionary discipline among Black students.

Previous studies by Owens Luper (2011) and Hendrix (2015) found teachers' perceptions of cultural proficiency had limited or no impact on the educational environment. Consistent with these findings, the present study highlights the importance of school leaders being culturally

proficient. However, the results suggest merely perceiving oneself as culturally proficient may not be sufficient to effect change in disciplinary outcomes for Black students.

The average score of how school leaders perceived their own cultural proficiency was found to be 3.85 when taking into account results from all 19 schools. This score, being slightly above the midpoint of 3 on the Likert scale, suggests school leaders see themselves as using culturally proficient practices regularly or occasionally. The mean total proficiency score, calculated by adding the scores of all 35 questions, was 124.77 out of a maximum possible score of 175 cultural proficiency points, which is equivalent to a grade of 71.3% if translated to a school exam.

The findings reveal among Black students, the three schools with the highest rates of out-of-school suspensions were all associated with survey scores of 124 or higher, while two of the three schools with the lowest rates of out-of-school suspensions had similarly high survey scores. For White students, two of the three schools with the highest rates of out-of-school suspensions were associated with high survey scores, while two of the three schools with the lowest rates also had high survey scores. Regarding in-school suspensions, two of the three schools with the highest rates for both Black and White students had high survey scores, while two of the three schools with the lowest rates also had high survey scores. These results suggest there may not be a relationship between the perception of school leaders in the area of cultural proficiency and disciplinary practices, particularly for schools with higher survey scores.

The lowest total cultural proficiency score of 94 was obtained by the participant from School 6. However, despite this low score, the rates of out-of-school suspension and in-school suspension at the campus were surprisingly lower than the overall average for both Black and White students.

This participant could possibly be the result of what is defined as cultural humility. Foronda et al. (2016) identified cultural humility as an approach to intercultural communication and understanding that emphasizes self-reflection, openness to learning, and respect for diverse cultural perspectives. I believe this participant recognizes their need for understanding and learning from the cultural experiences and perspectives of the students on their campus. On the other hand, the participant from School 13 rated themselves the highest, with a score of 163 on the cultural proficiency survey. However, despite the administration scoring the highest on cultural proficiency, the campus had the highest rate of out-of-school suspension for Black students, with a rate of 3.24. In contrast, the rates for White students were below the overall average for both out-of-school suspensions and in-school suspensions. For Black students, the campus had rates above the average by 1.18 or 118% for out-of-school suspensions and by 0.9 or 90% for in-school suspensions.

In the evaluation of the survey results, one could assume the total scores of the survey may be inflated compared to the actual application of the essential elements of school leaders. In the current political climate, as well as with the social pressure being placed on the educational system in the state of Texas and the United States, there are various potential reasons why an individual may rate themselves higher on the survey. One possible explanation for the influence of ratings on the survey is the existence of bias and the level of self-awareness, which refers to the respondents' inclination to provide answers that they believe will be viewed positively by others rather than reflecting their genuine feelings or behaviors (Privitera & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2019). Another possible explanation could be the cultural arrogance of the school leaders, which is the opposite of cultural humility. According to Foronda et al. (2016), cultural arrogance can cause school leaders to dismiss or devalue the perspectives and experiences of their students and

staff. When school leaders express cultural arrogance, they may fail to recognize the uniqueness of their students. The Texas Education Agency (2022b) recently released discipline reports covering the 2021–2022 academic year, which provide insight into the disciplinary practices of schools across the state. This study focused on 19 campuses, which were found to have an average of 214 out-of-school suspensions and 578 in-school suspensions.

Interestingly, there were significant disparities between the racial groups when it came to disciplinary actions. The study showed the average school population percentage of Black students among the schools analyzed was 23%, while the average school population percentage of White students was 28%. The data revealed Black students received a disproportionately high number of out-of-school suspensions, accounting for 46% of the total, while White students received a disproportionately low number of out-of-school suspensions, making up only 19% of the total. Similarly, when it came to in-school suspensions, Black students accounted for 40% of the total, while White students accounted for just 18%.

Racial disparities in school disciplinary actions have been an ongoing concern, and these data underscore this continuing problem, suggesting certain groups of students are disproportionately punished. These findings are consistent with data collected by the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, which found Black students, who make up only 15% of the student population, receive 30–40% of exclusionary disciplinary actions (Gullo & Beachum, 2020).

According to Gregory et al. (2010), Black students often receive discipline at higher rates compared to their enrollment, sometimes twice or three times as much. The rate of out-of-school suspensions revealed, on average, Black students received out-of-school suspensions at a rate of 2.06, which is approximately 206% of their representation in the student population. In contrast,

the rate of out-of-school suspensions for White students was lower than their representation in the student population, with a rate of 0.76, which is equivalent to 76% of the White student population. The rate of in-school suspensions demonstrated, on average, Black students received in-school suspensions at a rate of 1.82, which is approximately 182% of their representation in the student population. Similarly, the rate of in-school suspensions for White students was lower than their representation in the student population, with a rate of about 0.80 or 80%.

My research contributes to the existing literature on the discipline gap by providing empirical evidence for the disproportionate discipline of Black students. Specifically, my findings demonstrate a significant positive correlation between the total cultural proficiency score and the number of out-of-school suspensions for Black students, indicating as cultural proficiency leadership increases, the number of out-of-school suspensions for Black students also increases. This finding is consistent with previous research showing Black students are more likely to receive disciplinary actions than White students (Gopalan & Nelson, 2019; Kinsler, 2011). Moreover, the positive correlation suggests cultural proficiency leadership alone may not be sufficient in addressing the discipline gap for Black students, highlighting the need for a comprehensive approach that considers other factors such as implicit bias.

In addition to clarifying the ongoing disproportionality of discipline for Black students, my study also sheds light on the potential role of cultural proficiency leadership in mitigating disciplinary disparities. The negative correlation between the total cultural proficiency score and the number of out-of-school suspensions for White students suggests cultural proficiency leadership may be effective in reducing disciplinary actions for White students. This finding is consistent with research showing culturally responsive practices can improve educational outcomes for all students, not just those from marginalized groups (Gay, 2010). However, the

negative correlation was not statistically significant for in-school suspensions, indicating further research is needed to understand the impact of cultural proficiency leadership on disciplinary outcomes for both Black and White students better.

The findings of this study align with the existing literature regarding the disproportionate disciplinary actions against Black students in the educational system. Despite a long history of efforts to promote educational equity, including landmark events such as slavery, *Brown v. Board of Education*, and the Civil Rights Movement, the American educational system has consistently fallen short in meeting the needs of Black students and research has consistently shown Black students are more likely to be subjected to disciplinary actions than their White peers (Gopalan & Nelson, 2019; Kinsler, 2011).

According to Cai (2020), Black students continue to experience disparities in educational opportunities. For example, they are more likely to live in poverty, lack access to the internet at home, attend high-poverty schools, and receive services for emotional disturbances (Cai, 2020). Additionally, there has been little to no improvement in the disproportion between Black students and Black teachers, and the achievement gap between Black and White students persists. The high school dropout rates among Black students remain high, and college enrollment and graduation rates for this population remain low.

Early American schools were not intentionally created to meet the needs of Black students, and as a result, reform efforts have not been effective in addressing the needs of the Black student population (Allen, 2008). As a result, research has shown the educational system prefers White students, resulting in the disproportion in disciplinary practices (Clark-Louque & Latunde, 2019; Gregory et al., 2010; Howard, 2008; Skiba et al., 2011).

The present study offers valuable insights into the relationship between cultural proficiency leadership and disciplinary outcomes for Black and White students. The findings highlight the importance of addressing cultural misunderstandings and implicit bias in the educational system to reduce the discipline gap. Educators and administrators must be aware of their biases and take steps to promote cultural proficiency, which includes understanding the cultural background and experiences of their students. By improving culturally proficient leadership in schools, educators and administrators can create a more equitable and inclusive educational environment for all students.

To address the discipline gap, it is essential to provide additional training and support for school leaders. Cultural proficiency training can help school leaders understand the diverse cultures and backgrounds of their students and develop strategies to build positive relationships with all students. This type of training can also help school leaders recognize and address their implicit biases, which may contribute to the discipline gap. By developing a deeper understanding of cultural differences, school leaders can better support their students and create more inclusive and supportive learning environments.

In addition to cultural proficiency training, school leaders should be trained to use restorative practices, which prioritize repairing harm and restoring relationships rather than punishing students for misbehavior. Restorative practices can help school leaders address the underlying causes of misbehavior and promote a sense of accountability and responsibility among students. Research has shown restorative practices can improve school climates and reduce rates of disciplinary actions (Gregory et al., 2010). By implementing restorative practices, school leaders can create a more positive and supportive learning environment for all students.

Implications for Practices

This study provides an opportunity for school leaders to reflect on their own beliefs and practices, which can be a valuable tool in addressing these disparities. By evaluating the self-perception of school leaders, the study offers a unique perspective on how cultural proficiency and disciplinary practices contribute to the exclusionary disciplinary outcomes for Black students. This perspective can help school and district leaders understand the underlying factors that contribute to these disparities and develop strategies to address them. Additionally, the insights gained from the study can provide valuable information for district leaders seeking to support campus leaders in reducing these disparities. This information can inform the development of policies and practices that are more culturally responsive and equitable and that prioritize the needs of Black students.

The findings of the study have the potential to be a powerful tool for district and campus leaders seeking to address disciplinary disparities for Black students. By providing a unique lens on the issue, the study can inform the development of more equitable policies and practices that better serve the needs of all students.

This study has important implications for school districts seeking to promote more culturally proficient leadership. By providing professional development opportunities that cover the essential elements of cultural proficiency, as well as other areas, school districts can equip their leaders with the knowledge and skills needed to create a more inclusive and equitable learning environment. There are significant benefits for schools and school districts that increase the level of support provided to school leaders in the area of cultural proficiency.

Providing opportunities for professional growth in culturally proficient leadership can help school leaders better understand the essential elements of cultural proficiency, such as

valuing diversity, managing the dynamics of differences, and adapting to diversity. This knowledge can have a positive impact on school practices (i.e., discipline policies, curriculum development, and teacher training) and ultimately lead to a more equitable and inclusive learning environment for all students.

Expanding the level of support to include all areas represented by the essential elements of cultural proficiency can further enhance the impact of professional development. This could involve providing opportunities for training in areas such as cultural awareness, inclusive leadership, and equitable disciplinary practices. By doing so, school leaders can gain a broader understanding of the issues related to the disproportionate disciplinary practices that impact Black students and develop a more comprehensive approach to addressing these issues.

As school district leaders focus on addressing the discipline disparities experienced by Black students, school districts could develop and implement professional development programs that specifically emphasize cultural proficiency in the context of discipline practices. This could include training on implicit bias, restorative practices, and alternative approaches to discipline that are more equitable and inclusive. Williams (2017) described how some of the images, assumption, and stories one carries in their minds becomes the truth that leads to their decision-making. Hines (2014) mentioned how Black students' behavior is viewed as negative and misguided while White students' behavior is viewed as normal kid behavior. The program would provide ongoing support and training to school leaders, which could help them to identify and address their own biases and develop new strategies for working with students from diverse backgrounds.

School district leaders could also review and revise their current discipline policies and practices to ensure they are fair and equitable for all students. This could involve developing

policies that promote positive behavior support, restorative practices, and conflict resolution moving away from zero-tolerance policies that often disproportionately impact Black students. Additionally, school districts could consider implementing programs that provide additional support to students who may be at a higher risk for disciplinary action (i.e., mentoring or counseling programs).

Additionally, school district leaders could prioritize the collection and analysis of discipline data to identify patterns of inequity and develop targeted interventions. By analyzing discipline data by race, gender, and other demographic factors, school district leadership can identify areas of concern and develop strategies to address them. This could include implementing schoolwide interventions (i.e., restorative practices or cultural proficiency training) or providing targeted interventions for individual students who may be at risk for disciplinary action.

To alleviate the discipline gap faced by Black students, school districts can implement certain actions such as creating professional development programs, updating current discipline policies and practices, and placing emphasis on gathering and examining discipline data. In summary, these steps can be taken by school district leaders to address the discrepancy in disciplinary outcomes for Black students. While these actions may not eradicate all disciplinary inequalities, they have the potential to considerably improve and align the perspective that campus administrators use in making final disciplinary decisions.

Recommendations for Further Research

In this study, I utilized a Likert scale to assess school leaders' self-perception of their cultural proficiency, with the aim of (a) identifying their level of cultural proficiency, (b) examining the exclusionary disciplinary rates of Black students in each participating high school,

and (c) exploring how administrators' beliefs about cultural proficiency impact Black students' disciplinary rates on their campus. While this quantitative study had meaningful, significant results, it is recommended that further research is conducted to expand, replicate, and refine the investigation on the topics of cultural proficiency and disparities for students.

Further investigation into disciplinary data over multiple years could reveal patterns of inequity and inform the development of targeted interventions. For instance, researchers could explore how specific cultural proficiency practices or strategies impact disciplinary outcomes or investigate how cultural proficiency leadership interacts with other factors such as socioeconomic status to influence disparities in disciplinary actions. Another investigation could involve examining the impact of cultural proficiency leadership on student outcomes beyond disciplinary rates (i.e., academic achievement or graduation rates). By examining these broader outcomes, a more comprehensive understanding of the ways in which cultural proficiency leadership impacts student success could be built.

In addition, a study could be conducted to explore the intersectionality of cultural proficiency leadership with other demographic factors such as race, gender, or socioeconomic status to identify how cultural proficiency can be tailored to support the needs of students from diverse backgrounds and experiences.

The results of this study indicated the need for school district leadership to develop and implement professional development programs that specifically focus on the behaviors and practices of culturally proficient leaders in the context of discipline practices. This could include training on implicit bias, restorative practices, and alternative approaches to discipline that are more equitable and inclusive. In addition, school district leadership can analyze the impact of

discipline policies and practices in the district by looking at how district-level policies influence discipline outcomes or exploring the impact of different approaches to discipline.

There are several potential areas for future research that could build on the findings of this study and contribute to a deeper understanding of cultural proficiency and discipline practices in schools. These areas include exploring the relationship between cultural proficiency and discipline practices, investigating the impact of cultural proficiency training on school leaders, and examining the impact of discipline policies and practices at the district level.

Conclusion

In this chapter, an examination is provided of a study on the self-perception of school leaders regarding their level of cultural proficiency. The study results underscore the importance of school districts offering professional development opportunities to school leaders, particularly in the area of cultural proficiency. Such opportunities can enable leaders to develop the skills and knowledge necessary to better understand the unique needs and experiences of all students.

The role of a school principal is not a universal one, as there are different approaches to leadership that can be taken. However, one approach that can be particularly beneficial is to embrace cultural proficiency. Culturally proficient leadership can provide principals with the opportunity to recognize and appreciate diversity within their schools (CampbellJones et al., 2010; D. B. Lindsey & Lindsey, 2014; R. B. Lindsey et al., 2018; Terrell et al., 2018).

Cultural proficiency is a crucial aspect of promoting a positive school culture and climate. It can serve as a model for school leaders to interact with their students and promote positive relationships among all stakeholders. With the increasing student diversity in schools, cultural proficiency is even more important as an identifier of effective leadership (DeMatthews et al., 2017; R. B. Lindsey et al., 2018; Terrell et al., 2018). Therefore, implementing cultural

proficiency as an essential element can be an effective way to support the development and maintenance of a positive school culture and help leaders adapt to changing student demographics.

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