Academic Optimism: The Possible Benefits Over Current Discipline Policies

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David was regarded by some of his former teachers as a lost cause. His behavioral antics, while in high school, led to multiple suspensions from school. As a result, David's academic achievement suffered due to missed instruction and incomplete assignments. Feeling overwhelmed and forgotten by the establishment, David dropped out of school at the age of fifteen. At 19, David decided to return to school and reenrolled at his former high school. David did this without the support of his mother or any other family member.

For the first two months of school, David was an adept student; receiving above average grades in all of his classes. He was a tremendous help to his peers, whom he tutored, and his teachers. However, prior to the Thanksgiving break, his success ended. On his way home from school, David was jumped by a group of well-respected boys. He reported the assault the following day to the assistant principal who immediately blamed David; attributing it to his prior transgressions.

The opinions expressed by the administrator directly led to David's undoing, and after winter break, David once again dropped out of school. David began hanging out with members of a local gang. Within three months, David was arrested for breaking into a house and killing an innocent man. Presently, he is serving a 60 year sentence.

Introduction

Unfortunately, David's scenario is not unique. Across the nation, addressing discipline issues continues to be an area in which school administrators and teachers struggle. They become less tolerant of students who do not appear to be responsive to traditional classroom management practices. Due to their constant disruptive behaviors, other students' access to instruction and learning is inhibited because the teacher has to address frequent misbehavior (Nichols, 2004). This can leave the teachers feeling ineffective and in need of controlling the learning environment

through limited student-centered activities and resorting to more traditional methods of instruction. In this report we present the theory of academic optimism as a means by which school personnel and stakeholders may make a positive impact on student behaviors by reducing the use of unsuccessful and exclusionary (i.e. suspension and expulsion) discipline policies.

In many schools across the country, discipline referrals are on the rise. It appears that teachers have failed to recognize the power they have to address most behavioral issues within their classroom. Additionally, parents of referred students are rarely provided the opportunity to be involved in deciding what appropriate strategies to implement in order to deter the behavior (Monroe, 2005; Nichols, 2004). Current school discipline policies tend to support the use of exclusionary practices towards students who display challenging behaviors (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Fenning, Theodus, Benner, & Bohanon-Edmonson, 2004; Koch, 2006; McCarthy & Soodak, 2007; Nichols, 2004; Pinnell, 1985).

Principals may become hardened towards habitual offenders and impart tougher consequences on these individuals. Case studies have suggested that the history and reputation of the child are more important factors than the actual behavior in the administrative decision about what consequence should be imposed. Thus, principals tend to review a student's grades and discipline history to decide whether to suspend or expel the student (Bowditch as cited in Fenning et al., 2004, p. 47).

Researchers have attempted to identify what constitutes this need for punitive practices. Forty years ago, Coleman (1966) reported on the availability of educational opportunities in public schools for minority students, many of whom were still attending largely segregated schools. The Coleman Report revealed that "the social composition of the school, the student's sense of control of his environment and future, the verbal skills of teachers, and the student's family

background" were all linked to a student's educational success (Kiviat, 2000, ¶6). Furthermore, Garner, Bootcheck, Lorr, and Rauch (2006) state that students of today "experience confinement, regimentation, batch-treatment, and rules that appear to be non-negotiable" in their schools; something that is separate and socially different than what they experience in their own homes (Garner et al., 2006, p. 1023). In addition, there are published research studies that have suggested that minority students, especially African American males, have disproportionately receive exclusionary discipline consequences more often than white students even when the offenses were similar (Fenning et al., 2007; HULSERC, 2008; Skiba, Michael, & Nardo, 2000; Temper, 2004; Ward, 2006)

With schools faced with an ever increasing population of minority students and a disconnect in expectations between home, school, and the community, school leaders need to reevaluate how they address discipline issues within their school. Could the educational experiences of all students improve if there is a school climate in place which has high academic optimism, encompassing the notion of mutual trust, teacher collective efficacy, and an increased emphasis on academic achievement for all?

The Theory of Academic Optimism

Classrooms exist where teachers have a strong sense of efficacy, trust in their students and parents, and have created classrooms that are student centered with an emphasis on academic achievement for all. The norm is to promote high, but achievable goals for students, maintain an orderly and serious learning environment, where students are motivated to work hard to achieve. Discipline within these classrooms are maintained through mutual respect and a sense of belonging in respect to their classroom. Researchers have identified these classrooms as having academic optimism.

Academic optimism has been defined by McGuigan and Hoy (2006) as

a shared belief among faculty that academic achievement is important, that the faculty has the capacity to help students achieve, and that students and parents can be trusted to cooperate with them in this endeavor—in brief, a school wide confidence that students will succeed academically (p. 204).

The three dimensions of academic optimism which are functionally dependent on each other are: collective efficacy, faculty trust in parents and students, and academic emphasis (Hoy, Hoy, & Kurz, 2008). Teacher's beliefs and positive emotions, especially optimism, must be evident. In an optimistic classroom, teachers focus on creating learning opportunities for the students as well as fostering positive interactions.

At the heart of the teachers' collective efficacy is Bandura's theory of self-efficacy. Teachers believe that they have the skills necessary to help their students achieve their educational goals. This includes bringing about a change to student learning; especially with those students who are unmotivated or behaviorally challenging (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, & Hoy as cited in Hoy et al., 2008). If teachers believe they can enact change and their students can learn, they will "set higher expectations, exert greater effort, and persist in the face of difficulties" (Hoy et al., 2008, p. 822).

A sense of self-efficacy does not have to stop with individuals teachers. The idea of a collective efficacy among teachers towards the educational success of their students has the potential to be equally powerful. "Collective efficacy is an organizational property that represents collective judgments concerning the extent to which the group as a whole can cause a particular outcome," (McGuigan et al., 2006, p. 207). Teachers who possess self-efficacy and identify it among their peers create positive and effective educational experiences, for there exists: (1) a sense of collegiality from the school leadership, (2) an emphasis on teacher professionalism, and (3) community engagement (Kirby & DiPaola, 2009).

Classrooms, schools, and the wider community are interdependent environments with a sense of

responsibility to and sharing of a common set of values. To be successful, the members of each environment must trust each other. Tschannen-Moran (2009) has defined trust as "one party's willingness to be vulnerable to another based on the confidence that the other is benevolent, reliable, competent, honest, and open" (Trust section, ¶ 1). Trust is a key component in an educational setting and is strongly related to a teachers self-efficacy (Da Costa and Riordan, as cited in Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy, 2004).

Trust in the classroom elicits a mutual respect and feeling of support between both the teacher and his or her students; outside of the classroom it promotes a mutual trust among teachers and parents. Hoy et al. (2008) stresses that "teachers must trust that their students possess openness to learn, capability to grasp concepts, and honesty" (p. 822). High expectations are set by the teachers for students they trust and teachers rely on parents for support during the learning process.

Positive student achievement is at the core of academic emphasis. There is a focus on all students achieving; even those students who may have difficulty conforming to a traditional classroom structure. Teachers create a student-centered instructional environment that promotes risk taking (Hoy et al., 2008; McGuigan et al., 2006). Teachers use a humanistic approach to discipline in their classrooms, effectively promote "optimism, openness, flexibility, understanding, and increased student self-determination" (Hoy, et al., 2008). Classrooms which incorporated student-centered instruction based that instruction on student "interests, abilities, knowledge, and needs" and ran more efficiently, had more positive communication and pupils desired to help each other (Hoy et al., 2008). Students felt ownership not only over their learning, but their learning environment.

Academic emphasis focuses on rigor and engagement in a learning task. Hoy et al. (2008) describes such classrooms as "positive student learning" environments (p. 822). It was viewed by researchers as a crucial part of achievement in reading and math. Schools that held high expectations, pushed students to excel, and encouraged engagement and participation had higher success rates – especially those schools with high-poverty rates (McGuigan et al., 2006). As such, there are four facets that have been identified as predictors of academic optimism: (1) dispositional optimism; (2) humanistic classroom management; (3) student-centered teaching, and (4) teacher citizenship behavior (Hoy et al., 2008).

The first facet, dispositional optimism, refers to the teacher's ability to effectively address possible issues of stress and depression related to their job and a belief in a positive end result in relation to his or her students' academic achievement. The second facet, humanistic classroom management, is the approach a teacher takes in addressing how the classroom will be managed: either through a custodial approach or a humanistic approach. Custodial classrooms are characterized as more controlling through the use of punishment by the teacher. Students are viewed by the teacher as irresponsible. Conversely, humanistic classroom environments are ones in which students are viewed as responsible, self-regulating members of the classroom. The third facet, student-centered learning, has the teacher in the role of facilitator; guiding the learning process and using various methods of assessment in order to adjust the instructional plans to meet the needs of the students. The last facet, teacher citizenship behavior, is characterized by teachers going beyond the responsibilities designated in their contract. They are committed to ensuring their students' success which may mean going beyond what is required (Hoy et al., 2008).

The Impact of Discipline Policies

Throughout history, various disciplines have attempted to identify possible theories on external and/or internal factors that influence human behavior. Educational institutions and, in recent decades, policymakers have attempted to use the information collected in order to develop discipline policies in schools. Many of the current school discipline policies rely on a system of rewards and punishments in order to address student misbehavior. Beginning in the 1950s, Bowlby's

study of the relationships between young children and their primary caregivers led to attachment theory. Over the last half century, other theorists have expanded on this theory by applying it to different relationship situations. Their findings could help school divisions and policymakers rethink how they look at discipline and how they develop discipline policies for schools.

Attachment Theory

People have fundamental needs that need to be met in order for people to thrive. Consequently, they behave in such a manner as to meet those needs. Should their needs be met, there is an increased likelihood of the behavior reoccurring. As such, some theorists believe that behaviors are learned (Alberto & Troutman, 1999, p. 18). Shifts in this type of thinking began to occur in 1969, when the idea of attachment theory was presented as more humanistic proposal for behavior. According to research conducted by Michiels, Grietens, Onghena, and Kuppens (2008), "The heart of attachment theory lies in the quality of the relationship between parents and children" (p. 527). A disruption in experiences for a child with his or her parents could lead to later behavioral difficulties such as an inability to relate to others and form appropriate relationships.

There are three patterns of attachment for infants: one was identified as "secure" and two were labeled insecure. A fourth pattern was labeled disorganized, characterized as "lapses in the organization of attachment behavior in a notable minority of children" (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, and Wall as cited in Madigan, Moran, Schuengel, Pederson, & Otten, 2007, p. 1043). A child who exhibited disorganized attachment experienced fear of their primary caregivers and were either neglected.

The World Health Organization (WHO) embarked on a study to determine what external factors were influential in a child's development. "Freudian and behavioral theories of children's development, dominant until the 1960s, assumed that the infant was passive and dependent on the environment for stimulation" (WHO, 2004, p. 11).

They identified that the years between birth and three years old were the most important ones in regards to the interactions between a child and his primary care giver (WHO, 2004, p. 5). To gain a better understanding of this concept, WHO asked Bowlby to research attachments and early childhood development in children who had been left homeless following World War II. He found that children needed to have a continuous, warm, and intimate relationship with their mothers if they were to form happy relationships and personal security (James, 2008). Lack of an attachment results in a child progressing through three phases of separation: (1) protest, (2) despair, and (3) detachment.

Ainsworth expanded on Bowlby's theory through her study which compared the rearing of children in Uganda to those in Baltimore, Maryland. From this research, she described the progression through four phases of attachment during the first year of life. The first stage was birth where "the infant shows undiscriminating responsiveness to people through signaling" (WHO, p. 22). The second stage was differential response and occurred within the first few months. Here an infant shows favoritism towards its mother. During the third stage (six to seven months), the infant showed a "sharply defined attachment" towards the mother (i.e. will cry when the mother leaves). In the last stage (between twelve and fourteen months) the child beings to develop attachments to other individuals.

Research has revealed that students' who have experienced poor relationships are at-risk for school failure, excluded from school, drop out, and become involved in the juvenile justice system. Individuals charged with developing or redesigning their school discipline policy would benefit from applying the findings from attachment theory to assist them in implementing a more creative response to misbehavior especially in regards to African American male students. Over the last thirty years, researchers have identified that this population has experienced a disproportionality of exclusive discipline practices (Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2005; Fenning et al., 2004; Fenning et al., 2007;

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, n.d.; Tuzzolo & Hewitt, 2006; Ward, 1998).

School Discipline Policies

School discipline policies were born out of a necessity to maintain order and control within a school environment. Members of the local school boards were tasked with developing discipline policies, along with other school related documents. However, some policies have had an inadvertent effect on how discipline is administered. As Rist (as cited in Pinnell, 1985, p. 286) observed, "In an interdependent social system, changes in one area can have ramifications in any number of areas, and not all of these changes can necessarily be anticipated". Thus, schools or school districts could be viewed as interdependent because if you "introduce change in one part of the system, through policy decisions and logistic analyses, this can create changes in other parts" of the system (Pinnell, 1985, p. 286).

Exclusionary discipline practices have become the norm when addressing misbehavior; such practices show a lack of regard for student behavioral needs. According to Suarez (as cited in Fenning et al., 2004) "Suspension is one of the most widely used reactionary disciplinary procedures present in school discipline codes," (p. 47). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) released their 2008 report which discusses status and trends in relation to suspension or expulsion among the different racial group. Based on data collected in 2004, NCES disaggregated the data to reflect gender and race/ethnicity from the total number of students enrolled in public schools for that year. The data revealed startling trends as well as serious implications for students in relation to their educational careers. Of the total school population, approximately nine percent of the male population was African American males while approximately thirty percent were White males. Overall, African American males were more likely to be suspended (19%) than their peers.

To date the use of exclusionary discipline practices in addressing inappropriate student behavior has revealed that the students who receive suspensions and/or expulsions are more likely to continue to receive such punishments instead of deterring the behavior (Christle et al., 2005; Farmer as cited by Fenning et al., 2004; Fenning et al., 2004; Fenning et al., 2007; Tuzzolo et al., 2006; Ward, 1998). Consequently, these students are at-risk for early involvement in the juvenile justice system (Christle et al., 2005; Greig, Minnis, Millward, Sinclair, Kennedy, Towlson, Reid, & Hill, 2008; Tuzzolo et al., 2006; Ward, 1998). This creates what some researchers have termed the "school-to-prison pipeline" (Christle et al., 2005; Tuzzolo et al., 2006). Students who are at risk for exclusionary discipline have every day life risks that included family relationships, community involvement, and peer groups (Christle et al., 2005; Michiels et al., 2008; Tuzzolo et al., 2006).

In 1994, Congress enacted the Gun-Free Schools Act which was reauthorized in 2001 in the wake of several high profile school shootings. Dubbed the zero tolerance policy, this act sets out to enact severe punishment for all offenses regardless of the severity (Koch, 2000; McCarthy et al., 2007). The law was intended to allow for the equal treatment of all students. Instead, it has exacerbated the discipline problem, for it has not been successful in teaching more positive replacement behaviors. Habitual offenders are removed from the school setting temporarily, but upon return, engage in the same inappropriate behavior. It would appear that school personnel find it easier to suspend or expel a problem student than attempt to address the misbehavior and teach a more appropriate replacement behavior (Christle et al., 2005; Fenning et al., 2004; Fenning et al., 2007; Koch, 2000; Tuzzolo et al., 2006).

Even with the supporting research demonstrating the negative effects of exclusionary policies, schools continue to practice these policies. "For an individual minority student who is on the receiving end of disproportionate discipline year after year, their discipline records and academic opportunities become increasingly unequal to that of white students" (Howard University Law School's Education Rights Center (HULSERC),

2008, Disproportional Discipline of Minority Students section, ¶ 1). The consequences for these students is an "immediate loss of educational opportunities, academic decline and failure, increased likelihood of dropping out, increased likelihood of being sent to the juvenile justice system, and permanent notations of such disciplinary actions in academic records" (HULSERC, 2008, Disproportional Discipline of Minority Students section, ¶ 1).

Disproportionate discipline practices in schools can be attributed to the disparity between the SES of teachers and administrators and the student body as well as a lack of cultural awareness which contributed to lowered academic achievement expectations for minority students (Chubbuck, 2004; HULSERC, 2008; Monroe, 2008; Sleeter, 2008). The cultural differences between these groups can mean a misinterpretation of the communication style of the minority students.

Additionally, there continues to be liberal interpretations of what is inappropriate or disruptive behavior.

> The vagueness of certain educational legislation and/or discipline codes may leave room for too much discretion in teacher referrals, thereby enabling teachers to refer students to the office based on social misunderstandings, misplaced racial bias, or simple unwillingness to confront the problem personally" (HULSERC, 2008, Zero tolerance policies section, ¶ 1).

There has been much written about the "school to prison pipeline". The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) called the school to prison pipeline "one of the most urgent challenges in education today" (p. 1). "Student discipline problems and criminal behavior are strongly linked" (Ward, 1998, p. 30). This has also been corroborated by the fact that individuals who end up in prison have come from settings in which their family life was unstable, suffered racial prejudices, had schools that weren't responsive to their needs, and grew up feeling abandoned (Christle et al., 2005; Greig et al., 2008, Madigan et al., 2007; Michiels et al., 2008; Redden, as cited in Ward, 1998; Sturz, as cited in Ward, 1998; Tuzzolo,

2006). Individuals from predominantly low-income, single-race communities demonstrated a lower level of academic effort characterized by a lack of interest in schoolwork, lower attendance, and higher dropout rates and school failure (Garner et al., 2006; Greig, et al., 2008).

It is important for school personnel to work collaboratively with stakeholders in order to incorporate procedures which promote good behavior while addressing academic needs of students. "Policies deliberately aimed at alleviating discipline problems can also be destructive and work against the very goals they try to attain" (Pinnell, 1985, p. 288). Special care should be used when creating discipline policies and consideration should be given the overall impact and legality of the policy in relation to the educational value (Pinnell, 1985). Possible appropriate discipline policies would include: (1) fostering a positive school climate; (2) fostering student involvement and a sense of belonging; (3) students feeling as sense of accomplishment towards something they perceive as important; (4) teachers knowing all students in a school by name; and (5) displaying student work throughout the building (Pinnell, 1985).

Discipline issues need to be addressed on an individual bases with appropriate strategies identified and implemented that will deter the behavior from occurring in the future. Schools need to start moving away from "the political and academic rhetoric of the zero tolerance debate" and instead address each discipline issue on an individual basis, implementing alternative school safety programs currently being used by effective teachers. (Trump, n.d., ¶12). He believes these alternative programs should involve students, parents, and communities in order to effect a safer learning environment for students and staff (e.g. anti-bullying, peer mediation). "Building student-teacher relationships, challenging curriculum, and teacher training in classroom management and cultural competence make schools safer, more equitable, and educational" superior (Fact Sheet, Alternative strategies section, ¶1).

Academic Optimism and Discipline Policies: From
Theory to Practice

Academic optimism's three components – academic emphasis, teacher trust, and teacher's sense of efficacy – teamed with a foundational knowledge of attachment theory can provide educators with an alternative means of addressing exclusionary discipline policies. In a school with academic optimism, discipline policies would focus on trust, maintenance of an orderly learning environment, and a shift in teacher beliefs about educating students. The current culture of zero tolerance, which results in suspensions or expulsion, and a risk for early involvement in the juvenile judicial system, would need to change. According to Fenning et al. (2004), there are a small percentage of students (approximately 3-5%) who continue to have difficulty conforming to the school policies that have been established. These students consume a majority of the administrators' time and effort which causes them to devote less time to their role as instructional leader.

The use of suspension and expulsion exacerbates the academic problems that students who are considered discipline problems already experience. When these students are suspended or expelled, they are unable to make up assignments they have missed. As such, they fall further and further behind which in turn can cause them to continue to act out resulting additional suspensions.

The fundamental component of all relationships in human society is social interaction. These interactions are based on individual's social up bringing as well as their early formed attachments to caregivers. The culture of a school dictates the environment and what is considered socially appropriate behavior. There is a limited amount of time for educational personnel to help students form appropriate attachments while meeting the demands of a standards based educational system.

In schools where there is a culture of academic optimism, students have the opportunity to form positive attachments, engage in more responsible behaviors, and discipline policies will reflect a more humanistic approach to address inappropriate or delinquent behaviors. The school will be viewed as a community with the teachers in the role of facilitator, encouraging students to demonstrate their potential through student-centered instruction and activities. Teachers and administrators will coach and guide students in forming needed attachments as they learn to solve real-world problems while understanding that there are relevant consequences for their actions. Smith and Hoy (2007) assert that knowledge and tolerance of cultural differences is also an important aspect in schools, especially school located in urban settings.

Implications of Academic Achievement on
Discipline Policies

Discipline policies currently in our schools are not working. Suspension and expulsion are too punitive and show a lack of regard for student needs as well as future implications. Educators are beyond the point where they can continue to think of students as living separate lives; one in school and one outside of school. It is time they advocate for a communitywide, proactive, and long-term approach to implementing discipline policies through viewing the school as not only part of the community, but as a community of its own. When school is viewed as just a "place", there is a move to increase security through coercive measures: the use of police offices on campus, metal detectors at each entrance, and tougher punishments. "School viewed as an 'integrative process' would encourage discipline measures that would facilitate an inner locus of control and cooperation between students, school staff, parents, and the wider community focused on a common purpose (solidarity)" (Ward, 1998, p. 35).

There are three identified behavioral approaches that teachers use when addressing discipline issues in their classrooms: interventionist, interactionist, and noninterventionist. The interventionist uses coercion, punishment, manipulation, and reward to control student behaviors. There is an "us vs. them" mentality. Interactionists guide students in developing their own inner discipline where the locus of control is internal and the idea of cooperation and being focused on a common purpose. The last approach is the noninterventionist

which uses observation, questioning, and nondirective statements that help lead to an understanding that student behavior is emanating from a humanistic/phenomenological philosophy (Ward, 1998, p. 35).

As a means of moving away from exclusionary discipline policies and towards more appropriate policies that are individualized, school leaders should consider implementing of the four facets that have been identified as predictors of possible academic optimism: (1) dispositional optimism; (2) humanistic classroom management; (3) student-centered teaching, and (4) teacher citizenship behavior. These facets of academic optimism may be one way to assist students who have possible attachment difficulties to engage in learning and be the basis for them to formulate positive and supportive relationships. Students who feel in control of their environment are less focused on gaining that control and more focused on the tasks at hand (Alberto et al., 1990; Fenning et al., 2004; Hoy et al., 2006; Hoy et al., 2008; Kirby et al., 2009; McGuigan et al., 2006; Trump, n.d.; Ward, 1998).

Conclusions

The three dimensions of academic optimism – teacher sense of efficacy, teacher trust, and academic optimism – can easily be applied to the discipline policy practices in schools. These three aspects of academic optimism are functionally dependent upon the other. If a teacher believes that he or she can enact change and bring about student learning, this prompts the teacher to communicate to his or her students' high expectations for their educational performance. The teacher can also apply this strategy when discussing with students behavioral expectations for the classroom. It is important that the teacher believe that students can behave appropriately and that there are alternatives to exclusionary disciplinary practice and to voice high behavioral expectations for the students.

It is not enough for the teacher to simply verbalize educational expectations; it is also important that he or she demonstrate this through his or her actions. Students observe the teacher putting effort into the act of teaching through dialogue, hands on experiences, and a student-centered learning environment which has been created based on their individual needs, experiences, and interests while maintaining rigor. The teacher also models appropriate behavioral reactions to various situations that are encountered throughout the day. Children mimic what they see and hear. It is important for the teacher to walk the walk and talk the talk when reinforcing what appropriate interactions and reactions are when faced with difficult situations.

Through open, honest, and respectful dialogue with parents, the teacher can establish trusting and mutually supportive relationships on behalf of the student. It is also important that the teacher establish that same trust, honesty, openness, and respectful dialogue with his or her students. In relation to discipline policies, students and parents need to know that disciplinary action taken is fair, respectful, and is not exclusionary or disproportionately administered.

Research has shown that when a humanistic approach to discipline is implemented, there is an increase in student optimism, self-determination, and appropriate behaviors (Alberto et al., 1990; Fenning et al., 2004; Hoy et al., 2006; Hoy et al., 2008; Kirby et al., 2009; McGuigan et al., 2006; Trump, n.d.; Ward, 1998). The purpose of schools is to educate the next generation of leaders, parents, workers, and educators. Schools can no longer be viewed as separate entities from the community in which they are located.

According to the research on attachment theory, many students come to school with their basic needs not being met at home (Greig, et al., 2008; James, 2008; Madigan, et al., 2007; Michiel et al., 2008). As such, they experience an ability to form appropriate relationships with others and demonstrate socially appropriate behaviors. These students have become disassociated from their communities, parents, peers, and the establishment as a whole. Zero tolerance and the use of suspension and expulsion have not deterred inappropriate behaviors. In actuality, implementation of these practices places students at a higher risk for

continued academic failure as well as early contact with the juvenile justice system. They are caught in a vicious circle of failure that they have no way of getting out. These students lack the problem solving skills, relationships, and emotional and educational supports of their peers. A school that practices academic optimism not only for the academic aspect, but also for the disciplinary aspect, has a better chance of reaching these students than what is currently being practiced. With an emphasis on the attachment theory, and a more positive and proactive approach used with these students, it might result in a more equitable discipline practice within schools.

More research needs to be conducted on the possible impact of academic optimism theory in relation to discipline practices to provide school leaders, teachers, parents, and communities with a different way of addressing habitual behavioral issues in the school setting.

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