

**Effective and Unifying School Discipline Policies in an Era of  
Unprecedented School Violence: A Comparative Analysis of Denver  
Public Schools and Los Angeles Unified School District**

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## **Executive Summary**

School violence has become a hot button issue on the national scale beginning with the Columbine High School shooting in 1999. Since then, schools have largely practiced zero tolerance discipline models that create hostile school communities and discriminate against students of color through a process commonly known as the school-to-prison pipeline. While there has been campaigns to bring more progressive discipline models to American schools, the prevailing culture of violence and the powerful gun lobby in the United States inhibits significant change within the public education system. This is a study comparing two fairly new progressive discipline policies in the United States. One is a restorative justice-based policy implemented by the Denver Public Schools (DPS) and the other is a school-wide positive behavior support based policy out of the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). The study aims to assess the effectiveness of each policy in its first few years of implementation through interviews with on-site and district-level administrators in both districts, teachers at several school sites in each district, and community organizers who fought for the original policy changes and are partnering with schools in each district to help with implementation. Through these interviews I found major challenges and flaws with implementation in both districts, from which I recommend several options as they move forward with implementation. These recommendations include more effective training programs, incentives for schools to implement, and more accessible community resources. Progressive discipline is imperative in repairing the damages that school violence and punitive discipline have had on the U.S. education system in the last 15 years, and must become a top priority for all districts moving forward, including DPS and LAUSD.

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## **Introduction**

The issue of discipline and safety in United States public schools is complex and has many facets that lie within local district politics, statewide and federal legislation, as well as national culture. In order to fully grasp the context of this issue, it is imperative to analyze and understand school violence not just through the numbers, but also through several lenses. First, it is important to analyze school violence and discipline from a racial perspective, as minority students are disproportionately affected by school discipline policies in ways that negatively impact their futures. Second, it is important to view school violence and discipline through a larger cultural lens, encompassing the growing normalcy of mass school shootings in American culture as well as the “culture of fear” that exists in America surrounding violence and other crime. Lastly, discipline and safety policies must be viewed through the lens of a policymaker by surveying the existing research on school communities and providing realistic and encompassing policies and implementation strategies to foster a school environment which encourages positive behaviors and safe learning environments. My research is intended to answer the question of what discipline and safety policies are most effective at reducing violence and fostering a sense of community among students in public high schools. Within this, I am investigating the impact of discipline policy on a school community, whether or not the policy helps to reduce the amount of all types of violence between students, and how well this policy has been implemented among teachers and administrators within school sites.

According to a 2012 report by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention on school violence, 20% of students grades 9-12 reported being bullied while at school, and 12% reported that they had participated in a physical fight in the 12 months before the survey. In 2010 alone,

there were 828,000 victimizations experienced by students ages 12-18 on school property.<sup>1</sup>

However, these statistics only uncover the basics of school violence and what types of incidents occur on school grounds. Violence in schools takes many forms, such as in bullying, fights, gang violence, or in school shootings, a phenomenon that is centered within the last 15 years in the United States.

These staggering figures give only a glimpse inside the complex issue of school violence. While the mass school shootings that are becoming more mundane in recent history are typically committed by White students in suburban school districts, the groups that are generally being targeted by punitive zero tolerance policies are students of color in urban school districts. Violence, in some form, happens at every school and in every district, but I assert that the link between school violence and race has historically not been accurately addressed through policy. While much of the debate regarding school violence is situated within a larger national conversation about gun rights that is dominated by major players like the National Rifle Association (NRA) and similar political lobbying groups, I believe that it is more important to focus on individual districts' discipline policies in order to more accurately assess policies and their implementation outside of the dominant narrative of fear. The national debate on these issues is often diluted by lobbying powers and political forces, whereas the policies passed in individual districts have the ability to address needs within targeted school environments in order to attempt to bring all types of violence to an end.

Despite the grim picture surrounding school violence in the last several decades in the United States, there are many campaigns across the nation hoping to change school discipline

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<sup>1</sup> "Understanding School Violence Fact Sheet", Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2012.

policy in order to stop racial profiling and create empowered school sites that are safer communities, less prone to the violence of the past. Within the last 10 years, progressive discipline policies have been gaining momentum abroad and in cities around the United States, largely with the help of community organizing groups hoping to reform schools to support social justice-related goals. These policies have gained such strength in cities like Oakland, California and Denver, Colorado that the issue is not only being investigated by many statewide legislators, but also is being propelled into the national spotlight. In the last six months alone, the Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights and the Justice Department have issued new guidelines for schools to use when crafting discipline policies, called the Supportive School Discipline Initiative.<sup>2</sup> In addition, the Obama administration has begun investigations of racial profiling in more schools than any other previous administration, initiating 25 investigations compared with only 1 investigation under President George W. Bush.<sup>3</sup>

My interest in this topic was initially sparked by my personal experience growing up within the Denver Public School system and my experiences working in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). I grew up about 10 miles from Columbine High and near the location of the Aurora, Colorado theater shooting in July of 2012, with connections to friends and family who were injured or killed during each tragedy. This personal experience with gun violence and school violence in conjunction with my interest in educational policy was the inspiration for the project. In addition, I worked for an organization called the Healthy School Food Coalition in the fall of 2012 and was able to teach community organizing courses in several LAUSD middle and

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<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Education. “School Climate and Discipline.” 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Isensee, Laura. “Fed Up with Zero Tolerance in Schools, Advocates Push for Change.” New England Public Radio, February 26, 2014.

high schools. This first glimpse of the Los Angeles school district sparked my interest about policies and their implementation within large school districts, including discipline policy. My sociology minor connected the dots when I initially became interested in studying American gun and violence culture. I hope for the results of my research to be useful to policymakers within school districts seeking to implement new policies and programs to prevent violence among students at school sites while promoting feelings of community and acceptance among the student body.

To begin addressing school violence and the most effective discipline policies, I will first review the literature on school violence, gun culture, and several different types of school discipline policies and their effectiveness based on studies that have previously been conducted. Additionally, I will review literature about the role that partnerships with community organizations play in public schools. I will then detail my methodology, including interviews of district-level employees, teachers, administrators, and staff at community organizations who are affiliated with implementation and policymaking around school discipline. Then I will begin my focus on the two case studies that I have conducted of LAUSD and DPS. Within each case study, I will explore the disciplinary history, existing policies, and strategies for implementation, and use my interview data to help review the current status of progressive discipline in each district. I will then provide my recommendations, methodological observations, and conclusions.

## **Literature Review**

### **Gun Culture**

To begin the conversation about progressive discipline in the United States, it is

important to first recognize the existence and persistence of gun culture and its relationship to school disciplinary practices. As stated, school shootings have increased drastically over the last 30 years, with almost 40 incidents total in the last 3 years alone.<sup>4</sup> Gun deaths are a huge issue across all age groups, and the statistics about gun violence are shocking. Since the Sandy Hook Elementary school shooting in December 2012, over 12,000 Americans have been killed by guns, significantly more than the 4,489 members of the U.S. armed forces that have been killed in the entirety of the war in Iraq.<sup>5</sup> In 2010, gun related deaths exceeded motor vehicle deaths in 12 states across the U.S., and an average of 32 people are killed by guns every day, including 8 children and teens under the age of 20. More than 30,000 people are killed each year, and homicide is the second leading cause of death among 15-24 year olds, putting the issue's importance in perspective.<sup>6</sup>

Incidences of violence in schools have contributed to a larger "culture of fear" in the United States; a culture which is reflected in the public school policies passed over the last 15 years. One of the first significant instances of school violence was the Columbine High shooting in April of 1999 which, in its aftermath, shaped the dominant narrative around school violence and discipline policy. In light of this tragic shooting, which resulted in 15 deaths including suicide by both perpetrators, a nationwide shift towards more militaristic discipline policies began with increased school security presence. The Columbine High shooting was the first large-scale school rampage shooting that was nationally publicized, sparking a debate over school safety that had not previously been addressed in history. This debate molded the culture of fear

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<sup>4</sup> "Timeline: School Violence in the U.S." *CNN*, 2012.

<sup>5</sup> *Periscope*, 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Kim, Clare. May 2013.

surrounding school violence and therefore set the precedent for zero tolerance policies that continued into the late 2000s.

The culture of fear that dominates American thought about school violence has a great impact on the way that school districts react to incidents of violence. It is well documented by parents of school age children that after incidents of mass violence, such as the Sandy Hook shooting or the Columbine High shooting, the conversation takes precedence nationally and debates are brought back to life regarding the best next steps for school districts to take.<sup>7</sup> When the conversation about school violence spikes, school districts have to make quick changes in order to appease the frightened masses, however, once the conversation dies down, fundamental changes are rarely made.<sup>8</sup> This is largely related to the lack of consensus and party divides regarding school violence issues, making it controversial and difficult for school districts to move forward and make meaningful change. In a culture that is dominated by the historic use of guns for sport and a political climate that caters to the lobbying power of pro-gun organizations such as the NRA, progressive change regarding issues of gun violence is consistently thwarted.

### Public Opinion and Media Surrounding School Violence

Public opinion on issues related to the relationship between school violence and gun culture in the U.S. provides important insight into attitudes of Americans towards gun control and school safety over time. In terms of gun ownership, it is interesting to note that in 1999, 26% of gun owners claimed they owned their gun for protection, while 49% of gun owners claimed they owned guns for hunting. However, by 2013, 48% of gun owners owned guns for protection

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<sup>7</sup> Martinez, Pam, Co-Director, Padres y Jóvenes Unidos, July 23, 2013.

<sup>8</sup> Avila, Lydia, Director of Community Organizing for Inner City Struggle, July 9, 2013.

while only 32% owned guns for hunting purposes, drastically changing the meaning behind gun ownership and its relationship to fear.<sup>9</sup> The public is extremely divided on gun and violence issues and whether new legislation would be effective at reducing mass shooting deaths, especially in schools. For example, Gallup polls from February 2013 show that 54% of Americans believe that stricter gun laws would reduce the number of deaths in mass shootings, but 58% of Americans feel that these gun laws would make it more difficult for citizens to protect their families.<sup>10</sup>

The public is similarly divided about the root cause of rampage shootings like the tragedy at Columbine High, which points to the role of media in the perception of these violent tragedies. One poll attempted to identify the public perception of the root causes of three different shootings, and gathered telling results. The poll asked whether a shooting was “a reflection of broader societal problems” or “an isolated act” after the January 2011 Tucson, AZ shooting which killed 6 and wounded 18 including U.S. Representative Giffords, the July 2012 Aurora, CO movie theater shooting which resulted in 12 deaths and 70 injuries, and the December 2012 Sandy Hook school shooting, with 28 fatalities and 2 injuries. The results show that a clear majority of 58% and 67% respectively agreed that the events in Tucson and Aurora were just isolated acts of “troubled individuals.” However, after the Sandy Hook shooting, the poll showed that 47% of Americans said the tragedy reflected broader societal problems while 44% said it was simply an isolated act. These types of attitudes that fluctuate greatly over time are reflective of how much the media influences the opinions of the public and frames the conversation in the aftermath of violent events. Therefore, what is perhaps most interesting about the violence in

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<sup>9</sup> Pew Research Group, polling results, June 2013.

<sup>10</sup> Pew Research Group, June 2013.

America is the media's portrayal of the problem's root causes, and the public's understanding of the issue based on the information they consume through media. Much of the literature on the media's role in violence cites this as a prime area of concern as well, many of which, including Michael Moore in his award-winning documentary *Bowling for Columbine*, claim that the culture of fear that is constructed out of the media's control over the topic is to blame for the pervasiveness of violence in our society.<sup>11</sup> Not only this, but the media's coverage of violence in America is highly racialized, which leads to the stereotyping that influences the life chances of people of color. A study conducted by Mastro et. al shows that "media exposure contributes to the construction and perpetuation" of negative stereotypes of Black Americans "by disproportionately depicting racial/ethnic minorities as criminal suspects and Whites as victims in television news."<sup>12</sup> As a result of media depictions of people of color as criminals and Whites as victims, stereotyping becomes institutionalized and has an immediate impact on students of color who are disproportionately punished through punitive discipline policies in a process known as the school-to-prison pipeline. Even more crucial to an analysis of the debate over violence in the United States is the overwhelming influence of very powerful groups, like the NRA, which has controlled and framed the discussion throughout American history and especially in recent years as their lobbying group, the Institute for Legislative Action, carries significant weight among politicians at the state and national level. The "culture of fear" constructed by the media and the influence of the NRA in ruthlessly protecting the second

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<sup>11</sup> *Bowling for Columbine*, 2002.

<sup>12</sup> Mastro, Dana, et al. "The Influence of Exposure to Depictions of Race and Crime in TV News on Viewer's Social Judgments." 2009.

amendment only exacerbates the culture of violence which already exists as a foundation of the American value system.

### School Violence

School violence exists in many forms and occurs in every school environment in a variety of ways. The types of school violence that typically dominate public debate over school safety are those associated with guns, rampage shootings and similar violent crimes that occur on school campuses. However, these highly publicized incidences only paint part of the picture of the ways that school violence manifests itself on a daily basis in the American public school system.

The most traditional understanding of violence is an incident in which one person physically harms another. This type of violence is common in schools, especially in the form of physical fights, as well as instances that include weapons and much more unusual incidents such as the Columbine High shooting in which students are fatally injured in their school environment. This type of school violence has plagued public schools for decades and long puzzled researchers and academics who struggle to understand its root causes.<sup>13</sup> A study completed in 1978 says that school violence and vandalism accounts for more than a half-billion dollars nationwide annually, including over 100 murders and 200,000 assaults on teachers and students.<sup>14</sup> While over 30 years has passed since this study was conducted, the issue has only worsened as it continues to plague the education system and has only become more scrutinized

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<sup>13</sup> Henry, Stuart. "What is School Violence? An Integrated Definition." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 2000.

<sup>14</sup> Brodbelt, Samuel. "The Epidemic of School Violence." *The Clearing House*, 1978.

by the public as more tragic, large-scale incidents have occurred. Physical violence in schools is the result of many factors, but is more likely to be perpetrated by low-income and at-risk students who come from inner city communities.<sup>15</sup> Many physical altercations are the result of gang-related violence, while others are simply the result of inter-personal disagreements.<sup>16</sup>

While school violence is traditionally defined in this way, more research is emerging in hopes of redefining school violence to include many other problematic and violent behaviors that regularly occur in school environments. The limited definition of physical violence described above does not take into account the broad scope of emotionally and psychologically violent behaviors that occur in American schools daily.<sup>17</sup> In an effort to create a more holistic definition of school violence, a study was conducted by Stuart Henry to help uncover many of the non-physical acts of violence that occur in schools. This study creates a new, holistic definition of school violence:

School violence is the exercise of power over others in school-related settings by some individual, agency, or social process, that denies those subject to it their humanity to make a difference, either by reducing them from what they are or by limiting them from becoming what they might be.<sup>18</sup>

This definition includes the types of physical violence listed above, in addition to several other important additions. It includes violence or discrimination perpetrated by a teacher or administrator on a student or parent, as well as discrimination by a School Board or school

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<sup>15</sup> Brodbelt, Samuel. "The Epidemic of School Violence." *The Clearing House*, 1978.

<sup>16</sup> Anderson, David. "Curriculum, Culture, and Community: The Challenge of School Violence." *Crime and Justice*, 1998.

<sup>17</sup> Henry, Stuart. "What is School Violence? An Integrated Definition." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 2000.

<sup>18</sup> Henry, Stuart. 2000.

district on a parent, teacher or student.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, it includes the psychological harm of discrimination or sexual harassment in the school environment, whether it be student-on-student, teacher-on-student, administrator-on-student, or any reversal of these pairs. This definition additionally includes all types of bullying, and the psychological and emotional damage that comes along with non-physical bullying and verbal abuse in schools.<sup>20</sup> These psychological and emotional issues have been shown to have harmful impacts on students well-being and learning experience; as a result, this more holistic definition is more encompassing of the issue of school violence as it manifests itself in the daily life of public school students.<sup>21</sup>

An emerging epidemic within the realm of school violence is cyber-bullying, which has become a way for bullying in schools to take another form through social media. In a society with a growing dependence on technology and accessibility to technology for youth, cyberbullying has become a problematic and growing issue that is difficult to regulate. When using technology as a venue for teasing or bullying, there is no direct confrontation, allowing bullies to operate with a higher degree of anonymity than ever before. This, combined with the lack of supervision available on the Internet, eases school-age bullies' ability to emotionally abuse their peers on school grounds or outside of school.<sup>22</sup> Because cyberbullying is a new phenomenon, there is little comprehensive research on the subject, however, there have been studies that have shown that up to 42% of teenagers report being cyberbullied during their time in school.<sup>23</sup> This form of violence in schools is still developing, but it's impacts are

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<sup>19</sup> Henry, Stuart. 2000.

<sup>20</sup> Henry, Stuart. 2000.

<sup>21</sup> Henry, Stuart. 2000.

<sup>22</sup> Morgan, Hani. "Malicious Use of Technology." *Childhood Education*, 2013.

<sup>23</sup> Morgan, Hani. 2013.

overwhelmingly harmful to the emotional and psychological well-being of school age students.<sup>24</sup>

### School-to-Prison Pipeline

There are many ways in which school discipline policies are racialized through a system known as the “school-to-prison pipeline,” in which students of color are pushed out of school with harsh punishments for small disciplinary infractions, often landing them in the judicial system at a young age, thus depleting their life chances and diminishing their ability to succeed once they are released. The gravity of this situation becomes apparent when looking at the racial makeup of those who actually end up being punished for acts of violence or “victimizations” like the CDC reported. Based on a 2007 study, 70% of students involved in in-school arrests were Black or Latino, and 40% of students expelled from schools in America each year are Black.<sup>25</sup> As a result of this, Black and Latino students are twice as likely to not graduate from high school as White students, and Black students are three and a half times more likely to be suspended from school than Whites.<sup>26</sup> Another study from 2009, conducted by the Advancement Project and Power U Center for Social Change found that for every 100 students that are suspended in American schools, 15 are Black, 7.9 are American Indian, 6.8 are Latino and 4.8 are White.<sup>27</sup> Research shows that having a history of disciplinary referrals at school is the single greatest predictor of future involvement in the justice system, and multiple disciplinary referrals increases

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<sup>24</sup> Smith, Peter K. et al. “Cyberbullying: It’s Nature and Impact in Secondary School Pupils.” *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 2008.

<sup>25</sup> Amurao, Carla. “Education Under Arrest.” PBS, February 2013.

<sup>26</sup> “Telling It Like It Is” Advancement Project and Power U, 2007

<sup>27</sup> “Telling It Like It Is” Advancement Project and Power U, 2007

this likelihood by 1.5% per referral.<sup>28</sup> Each day that a student is suspended from school, their probability of landing in the justice system increases by 0.1%.<sup>29</sup>

Much of the reason for the endurance of the school-to-prison pipeline over time comes from the increase in school shootings, which has enhanced a problematic sense of fear surrounding school violence. Mass shootings are becoming more normalized in American society over the last 15 years, which has permanently shaped the conversation surrounding school discipline and safety. Specifically, there were 33 total school shootings reported in the 1990s, 35 reported between 2000-2010, and a shocking 39 reported in the short time between 2010-2013.<sup>30</sup>

### Disciplinary Policies in the Context of Gun Culture

#### *Zero Tolerance Policies*

Given this discussion of the issues associated with school violence and discipline, many policies and practices have been implemented to thwart violence among students in high schools. However, some have been less successful than others. One of the most widely used policies to deal with school violence is zero tolerance, in which students are immediately expelled, no questions asked, upon participating in violence or being found with a weapon in schools. School districts across the country have and continue to use zero tolerance policies, establishing the system as the norm for discipline policy nationwide. Zero tolerance policies operate under the dominant narrative of a “culture of fear” in the United States and use a fear-based philosophy to discipline that assumes the worst in students. These policies were created when the Federal Gun

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<sup>28</sup> Fowler, D. “School Discipline Feeds the “Pipeline to Prison.” Phi Delta Kappan, 2011.

<sup>29</sup> Fowler, D. 2011.

<sup>30</sup> “Timeline: School Violence in the U.S.” CNN, 2012.

Free Schools Act was passed in 1994 along with the Safe School Plan in 1995, requiring all schools to have an emergency preparedness plan. Despite the popularity of zero tolerance in the wake of increased numbers of school shootings nationwide, many argue that they only perpetuate unsafe environments in schools, and they are strongly linked with the school-to-prison pipeline for minority students. Garbarino argues that zero tolerance policies often aggravate at-risk students, which leads them to make threats more often. Instead, he believes that creating a community-based and positive school environment can help students feel safer on campus, and that at-risk students should be given special attention by counselors rather than immediately being expelled through zero tolerance.<sup>31</sup> There are other aspects of zero tolerance policies that have been deemed by scholars and organizers to be ultimately unsuccessful, many related to the militarization of schools that comes with the zero tolerance mentality. One example of a tactic used by a militarized school district comes from within LAUSD, which began a canine drug and weapon detection program in the 1990s that began in several high schools in the district and was used to enforce the zero tolerance policies.<sup>32</sup> Additionally, the district began their metal detectors program in 1993 at several schools, which is still in use at select school sites today.<sup>33</sup> LAUSD has the largest school police department in the country, has installed fences surrounding most of their school campuses, and often uses surveillance cameras throughout the schools to monitor the behavior of students. This militarization strategy has been shown to reduce the sense of

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<sup>31</sup> Garbarino, James, et al. "Mitigating the Effects of Gun Violence on Children and Youth." 2002.

<sup>32</sup> Minutes, Regular Board Meeting 5/11/99. Board of Education of the City of Los Angeles, May 11, 1999.

<sup>33</sup> *Los Angeles Unified School District Spotlight*, March 23, 1993, 12 edition.

community within school environments and can increase feelings of alienation among students at-risk for violent behavior.<sup>34</sup>

A study by Deborah Fowler concludes that under many punitive zero tolerance school policies, “common school misbehavior and such minor infractions as class disruption have been criminalized” and students are charged with misdemeanors and ticketed rather than taking a trip to the principal’s office.<sup>35</sup> These punitive policies are enforced more based on location, meaning that predominantly Black and Latino schools and schools with higher poverty levels have more disciplinary infractions and students are suspended or expelled more often.<sup>36</sup> This phenomenon takes opportunities away from the poor and people of color by establishing a criminal record for them during middle and high school, and often suspends or expels them from school as well. Missing classes due to suspension forces students to fall behind in coursework, which makes them more likely to drop out of school, and “nationally, high school dropouts constitute a large percentage of inmates in juvenile and adult prisons.”<sup>37</sup>

### *Curriculum-Based Discipline Programs*

There are several types of curriculum-based programs that integrate ideas and philosophies about building strong communities and narratives of acceptance into class curriculum. While these programs are not as rooted in fear as zero tolerance policies are, many of

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<sup>34</sup> Garbarino, James, et al. 2002.

<sup>35</sup> Fowler, D. 2011.

<sup>36</sup> Fowler, D. 2011.

<sup>37</sup> Fowler, D. 2011.

the principles and curriculum of the individual programs continue to operate under the dominant narrative that assumes the worst of students.

These programs often involve presentations in the classroom about the importance of community in a school environment and about the dangers of weapons or other violence to students and their peers. Other programs in this category involve older students visiting their younger peers to explain their personal experiences with violence in order to foster a mentor mentality that will help to reduce violence among younger generations in schools.<sup>38</sup> Some of these types of curriculum-based solutions to school violence are independently run by teachers in their own classrooms, where they emphasize the importance of acceptance and community among their students and try to create an atmosphere that rewards positive behavior and takes away the need for violence.<sup>39</sup> Other research looks to issues of school social cultures and how they can be resolved in order to address the issue of gun violence on campus, however, these theories have not been implemented or tested. For example, Karen Tonso investigated the culture of masculinity in high schools and how it impacts violent behavior, especially in male students. She suggests that schools implement programs to help praise all types of students for their positive behavior and to promote acceptance and community through school-wide campaigns in an effort to stop the culture that praises only sports-centered over-exaggerated masculinity and allows for alternative identities to be equally praised in the school environment.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Center to Prevent Handgun Violence. "Weapons Are Removed Now (WARN) Program." U.S. Department of Justice.

<sup>39</sup> Gonzalez, Thalia, Professor, Department of Politics, Occidental College, September 25, 2013.

<sup>40</sup> Tonso, Karen L. "Violent Masculinities as Tropes for School Shooters: The Montréal massacre, the Columbine Attack, and Rethinking Schools", 2009.

## *Restorative Justice Policies*

Restorative justice-based discipline is increasingly popular as an alternative to fear-based policies like zero tolerance because it is meant to empower students rather than use punitive measures against them. Over the last decade, a nationwide community organizing effort has taken place focusing around the idea of implementing restorative justice in schools, and has been successful in implementing restorative discipline in districts around the country.

Restorative justice focuses on wrongdoing in regards to its impact on a community rather than focusing on legal principles to guide punishments for perpetrators of violence.<sup>41</sup> Within these programs in schools, a resolution is agreed upon by all affected parties, and expectations are made clear to students about how they play a role within their school community.

Restorative justice has become a trend abroad in several large school districts, beginning in New Zealand and Australia and expanding into school districts in China. More recently, restorative methods have taken hold in the United States in areas such as Portland, Denver, Chicago, Minnesota, and Oakland, and are continuing to grow in popularity.<sup>42</sup> Denver Public Schools (DPS) is one of the districts involved in progressive discipline; the district passed a restorative-based discipline policy that will be elaborated on as the focus of one of my case studies for this research, called Policy JK-R.

There have been several case studies conducted to investigate the effectiveness of restorative-based discipline. In a study conducted on Australian schools with restorative practices, it was found that the policy had “widespread endorsement” and was an “effective process for repairing relationships, acknowledging consequences of behavior, and solving

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<sup>41</sup> “Restorative Justice in Schools.” Restorative Justice Colorado, 2012.

<sup>42</sup> Gonzalez, Thalia, Professor, Department of Politics, Occidental College, September 25, 2013.

disputes.”<sup>43</sup> A case study of two New Zealand schools also praises restorative justice discipline, saying that it helps students “develop a sense of personal agency” and increases their feelings of belonging.<sup>44</sup> Another case study of a restorative system used in a Hong Kong school showed that restorative methods could be an effective way to combat bullying in schools, and that restorative practices helped to foster a “community of care” within the school environment.<sup>45</sup> A case study of the Minnesota school system shows that restorative justice policies “allowed school administrators the freedom to construct creative remedies” to disciplinary issues, which dramatically reduced the number of suspensions within the district.<sup>46</sup> A study of two New York schools implementing restorative approaches praised the program, saying that it was an effective method of “shaping the moral character of students” that deepened the sense of democracy and fairness felt by students at the school sites.<sup>47</sup>

One main criticism in the literature on restorative justice-based school policy is that some teachers felt threatened by the policies due to a “perceived loss of power and control” in their classrooms and higher expectations to resolve conflicts within their own room rather than dismissing a student to continue teaching without the negative energy and distraction. Despite these criticisms, the successes of the program on students took precedence over these feelings

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<sup>43</sup> Shaw, G. “Restorative Practices in Australian Schools: Changing Relationships, Changing Culture.” *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, 2007.

<sup>44</sup> Wearmouth, Janice et al. "Restorative Justice: Two Examples From New Zealand Schools." *British Journal Of Special Education*, 2007.

<sup>45</sup> Wong, Dennis S. W., et al. "Program Effectiveness Of A Restorative Whole-School Approach For Tackling School Bullying In Hong Kong." *International Journal Of Offender Therapy & Comparative Criminology*, 2011.

<sup>46</sup> Karp, D. R., and Beau Breslin. “Restorative Justice in School Communities,” *Youth & Society*, 2001.

<sup>47</sup> Hawkes, Elijah T. “A Democratic Structure for School Discipline: Reflections from Two New York City High Schools.” *Studies in Education*, 2011.

among the teaching staff in Shaw's study.<sup>48</sup> Some challenges observed within the Australian restorative justice framework revolved around the ability to cohesively integrate the policy into the school's existing framework, and the amount of time it could take for schools to successfully implement the policy before reaping the benefits of it.<sup>49</sup> Another observation that was made in Hong Kong schools with restorative models was the integral role of the teacher in implementing a restorative process, claiming that "any effective intervention strategy should gear toward full involvement of teachers" in resolving conflicts through a restorative lens.<sup>50</sup> A case study of two New Zealand schools makes a blanket statement about the challenge faced by schools interested in implementing restorative discipline: "restorative justice challenges the hierarchical relationship of school, teacher and student and thus the power dynamic at the heart of traditional education."<sup>51</sup> Because of this, restorative practices require teachers to "reflect critically on notions of 'behavior difficulties,' inclusion, and the values associated with them" in order to fully embrace a restorative model.<sup>52</sup> While the studies shown above list the many benefits associated with restorative discipline in increasing the emotional well-being of students and improving achievement, the policies make a large departure from the traditional educational power structure, which could impede their full implementation.

### *School-Wide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS)*

Another example of a progressive discipline structure and policy frame that provides an

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<sup>48</sup> Shaw, G. 2007.

<sup>49</sup> Shaw, G. 2007.

<sup>50</sup> Wong, Dennis S. W., et al. 2011. Page 857.

<sup>51</sup> Wearmouth, Janice et al. 2007. Page 202.

<sup>52</sup> Wearmouth, Janice et al. 2007. Page 202.

alternative to the normalized fear-based discipline is called School-Wide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS). These policies operate under a philosophy that includes positive reinforcement of good behavior that is meant to promote an accepting and positive learning community at schools, and helps at-risk students by giving them intensive mentoring and support rather than immediately choosing to suspend or expel them.

SWPBS methods are becoming increasingly popular in the last several years as a result of community organizing efforts for progressive discipline that are similar to that of the restorative justice movement. SWPBS methods provide the framework for the progressive discipline policy passed in LAUSD, called the Discipline Foundation Policy, which I focus on more thoroughly in my case studies section. It has also been used in many other districts nationwide and it is estimated that over 18,000 schools in all 50 states are currently in the process of implementing a policy based in an SWPBS framework.<sup>53</sup> Many schools that have completed the implementation of SWPBS discipline systems have shown that students have improved behavior and academic achievement, and that the policies increase the perception of safety in the school environment.<sup>54</sup> A case study of a large urban high school that implemented SWPBS methods was shown to have a major decrease in the number of discipline referrals in the two years following the implementation of the new policy from 2006-2008.<sup>55</sup>

While these policies are typically a more progressive step than a zero tolerance mentality, they are not as progressive as restorative-based policies. However, many restorative justice

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<sup>53</sup> Fallon, Lindsay et al. "School-Wide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS) In The Classroom: Assessing Perceived Challenges To Consistent Implementation In Connecticut Schools." *Education & Treatment Of Children*, 2014.

<sup>54</sup> Fallon, Lindsay et al. 2014.

<sup>55</sup> Bohanon, Hank, et al. "A Case Example Of The Implementation Of Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support In A High School Setting Using Change Point Test Analysis." *Preventing School Failure*, 2012.

policies use elements of SWPBS within the discipline structure, especially because they are effective at examining the root causes of disrupting and violent behavior in at-risk students. Within these policies, the expectations of student behavior are typically very clearly laid out by teachers and administrators, allowing students to be more autonomous and understanding of their environment.<sup>56</sup>

There are few criticisms of SWPBS in the literature on the topic, however, one case study of a Connecticut school district described the difficulty experienced at the district level in ensuring that the SWPBS methods were implemented consistently at each school site.<sup>57</sup> This reflects a more universal challenge faced by school districts hoping to implement any model of progressive discipline, including restorative justice.<sup>58</sup> Especially when progressive discipline goes against the normative zero tolerance culture that has dominated the disciplinary agenda for years, it can be difficult to consistently alter the framework of discipline in each school across an entire district. This was a main challenge listed in much of the literature on all types of discipline policies, both abroad and in the United States.<sup>59</sup>

### School Partnerships with Community Organizations

Partnerships with community organizations have increasingly become a useful tool for public schools to provide resources and address the needs within school populations in many ways, including providing an infrastructure for discipline. Especially in light of large budget cuts

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<sup>56</sup> “Discipline Foundation Policy: School-Wide Positive Behavior Support.” Board of Education of the City of Los Angeles, March 27, 2007.

<sup>57</sup> Fallon, Lindsay et al. 2014.

<sup>58</sup> Karp, D. R., and Beau Breslin. “Restorative Justice in School Communities,” Youth & Society, 2001.

<sup>59</sup> Shaw, G. 2007.

to education nationwide, community organizations have been shown to be a helpful way to engage the community and fill gaps within a school staff to further improve the school environment for students.<sup>60</sup> There has been many studies conducted about the role of community organizations within a school and whether or not their presence is effective, and much more literature is beginning to emerge surrounding the community relationship as schools are beginning to rely more heavily on community organizations.

In some ways, partnering with community organizations is thought to be the future of education in the United States. A study conducted by Aaron Schutz claims that community organizations are “front and center” as one of the “most promising avenues” for school improvement and community engagement.<sup>61</sup> However, Schutz outlines many of the failures of these relationships in the past and emphasizes that despite the “clear power” of community organizations in schools, it is important to be careful about placing too much responsibility on outside organizations to run a school.<sup>62</sup> Community organizations are praised for “providing the foundations necessary for rich collaboration” with school administrations, but only with “careful planning” to implement collaboration and change.<sup>63</sup> Despite high praise from many on the role of community organizations in schools, there are some differing opinions. A study conducted by Boyd and Crowson discusses some of the negative impacts that community organizations can have when infiltrating a school environment, and how these organizations contribute to changing roles within school administrations. While this study is slightly outdated, Boyd and Crowson

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<sup>60</sup> Leachman, Michael and Chris Mai. “Most States Funding Schools Less Than Before the Recession.” *Center on Budget and Policy Priorities*, September 12, 2013.

<sup>61</sup> Schutz, Aaron. “Home is a Prison in the Global City: The Tragic Failure of School-Based Community Engagement Strategies” *Review of Educational Research*, 2006. Page 725.

<sup>62</sup> Schutz, Aaron. 2006. Page 725.

<sup>63</sup> Schutz, Aaron. 2006. Page 726.

assert that their research shows that outside organizations have a “dependency on external or school system sources” that precludes their goals and makes them “toothless tigers” in school reform efforts.<sup>64</sup>

More specifically, there are several examples of instances where community organizations have helped to rebuild school environments and provide more equitable educational opportunities to students. Gold et. al conducted a case study of public schools in Oakland to identify the role that community organizations played in improving Oakland schools after it became clear that “urban public schools [were] failing to provide an adequate education” for students.<sup>65</sup> This study found that in terms of improving the school community, the quality of education, and the feelings of safety in Oakland school campuses, outside organizations contributed a “deep and sustainable” approach to education reform. One of the main reasons for the success of these outside organizations was their ability to “create the political will to address problems that would otherwise go unattended for lack of an organized constituency,” which helps with implementation of improvements throughout the school environment.<sup>66</sup> Another case study of school partnerships with community organizations in Vermont and Minnesota details the work of two community groups, Minnesota Neighborhoods Organizing for Change (NOC) and Voices for Vermont’s Children, and their work in trying to push school reform efforts. Both organizations intervened in their local school districts when they realized that their schools were failing to “generate significant improvement in low-performing schools and to close race- and

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<sup>64</sup> Boyd, William Lowe, and Robert L. Crowson. “The Changing Conception and Practice of Public School Administration.” *Review of Research in Education*, 1981. Page 356.

<sup>65</sup> Gold, Eva et al. “Bringing Community Organizing into the School Reform Picture.” *Nonprofit & Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 2004. Page 54.

<sup>66</sup> Gold, Eva et al. 2004. Page 70.

class-based achievement gaps” in their communities.<sup>67</sup> Using organizing strategies to build a base, these groups were able to fill the gaps that their districts were unable to provide in several ways. The groups stepped in and provided intensive mentoring for new teachers, helped at school sites for training on restorative justice strategies, and worked with school administrators to develop collaborative decision-making structures to engage parents and community members.<sup>68</sup>

Historically, community groups have stepped in where there is a gap in their local school systems. For example, in the early 2000s, multiple community groups and organizations stepped in to run many schools in Philadelphia after years of being “plagued by financial and academic woes.”<sup>69</sup> Many organizations stepped up to the plate, eager to help their communities and to get the district back on its feet, showing a more drastic example of the structural importance of community partnerships, especially in a time of economic hardship and budget cuts.<sup>70</sup>

Community organizations have a long history of partnering with public schools to help with implementation of policies, reform efforts, and providing resources to the student body; however, in recent years with setbacks to public education, community organizations are becoming even more vital of a resource to schools by helping to provide after-school programs, resources for at-risk populations, and assistance with implementation of policies.

While there has been extensive research theorizing options to improve school communities and create accepting, violence-free environments through discipline, there is one

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<sup>67</sup> McAlister, Sara, and Keith C. Catone. "Real Parent Power: Relational Organizing For Sustainable School Reform." *National Civic Review*, 2013. Page 26.

<sup>68</sup> McAlister, Sara, and Keith C. Catone. 2013.

<sup>69</sup> Reid, K. "Community Groups Looking to Run Philadelphia Schools." *Education Week*, 2002.

<sup>70</sup> Reid, K. 2002.

major hole in the literature which I hope to fill with my research. There is no comparative case study that has been conducted between two different school districts with different discipline policies. For my research, I will conduct a comparative case study between two large school districts that have recently passed progressive discipline policies. This method will help fill the gaps in the literature by evaluating two of the most well-known progressive discipline models, restorative justice and school-wide positive behavior support. My research will provide an evaluation of these policies as well as a comparative analysis of each district's implementation process, allowing for detailed recommendations that could help other school districts in creating progressive discipline structures in the future.

### **Methodology**

In order to answer my research question, what discipline and safety policies are most effective at reducing violence and fostering a sense of community among students in high schools?, I conducted case studies of two school districts, Denver Public Schools (DPS) and Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), to examine their discipline policies. My contacts with community organizations in Denver such as Padres y Jóvenes Unidos and organizations in Los Angeles like Inner City Struggle were essential to my methodology for this research project. I hope for the results of the project to be useful to policymakers within school districts seeking to implement new policies and programs to prevent violence among students at school sites.

The initial research that I conducted around the topic of school discipline was a research project that I conducted over the summer of 2013 as part of the college's Undergraduate Research Program. This project, titled "*From Columbine to Sandy Hook: Investigating the*

*Effectiveness of LAUSD School Safety Protocols in the Context of U.S. Gun Culture,*” focused on the impact that a culture of violence and the national gun lobby has on local district policy decisions regarding safety and discipline in Los Angeles. Completing this project motivated my enthusiasm for continued research on the nationwide push towards more progressive discipline and its impact on school violence and school communities, which led to my initial research question for this project: what policies could be implemented within the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) to reduce violence and encourage acceptance and community at LAUSD high school sites? This research question was accompanied by my current research question, but after completing my research and data collection, I chose to remove the initial research question from my project. When beginning my project, my basic knowledge of my two case studies led me to believe that I would ultimately provide recommendations for LAUSD based on the policies in place in DPS, however, after completing more in-depth research on both school districts, I decided it was more important to provide recommendations for both districts. This is largely due to the commonalities in implementation issues in both districts and the similarities between each district, which will be further discussed in my findings.

### Case Studies

My research for this project will be largely based on two case studies of both LAUSD and DPS and their respective discipline policies, procedures, and programs. I felt that the contrast between DPS, commonly known as a progressive, but large, school district, and LAUSD, a notoriously militarized large school district that is moving towards more progressive policy, would help me to most accurately address my research question. For each case study, I

conducted a comprehensive policy analysis of both districts' history of discipline policies and the current state of discipline practices and incidents of violence among students at both districts.

### Interviews

In order to complete the case studies and provide recommendations about proper implementation of effective discipline and safety policies, I interviewed 20 teachers, administrators, and organizers in Los Angeles and Denver. I visited several school sites to grasp different stages of the policy implementation process, and interviewed teachers and administrators at these school sites. I then found community organizations most involved with the shift towards progressive discipline in both cities, and interviewed staff members at each of these organizations to paint a clearer picture of the strengths and weaknesses in each district. My interview questions covered several key points in an attempt to ascertain the effectiveness of current policies in DPS and LAUSD. Questions that were asked covered topics such as the perception of campus climate, experiences with violence among students, the most pressing discipline issues in their schools/districts, their experience with discipline training, and observations about how they believe their schools/districts have responded in the wake of mass shootings elsewhere in the U.S. These well-rounded questions allowed me to investigate my research questions by analyzing the effectiveness of current policy, ideas for the future, and perceptions of safety and community on high school campuses. These interviews helped me to understand the school discipline landscape in each school site and in both districts which were valuable to my recommendations.

## Case Studies

### Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD)

I chose LAUSD as a case study because, as the second largest school district in the country, LAUSD has the power to affect great change nationwide through progressive policies. My contacts within the district from past internships made the case study more logistically feasible as well. LAUSD currently has 1,039 total schools throughout the city and county of Los Angeles, and serves over 900,000 students.<sup>71</sup> Over 85% of the district's general funds come from state tax revenues that amount to over \$6 billion in expenses.

#### *History of Discipline Policies*

Discipline policies in LAUSD have a long history of being punitive and operating under a strict zero tolerance mentality. As a result of this, LAUSD is notorious for disproportionately punishing minority groups and impoverished students through their discipline structure and layout. As mentioned earlier, LAUSD has pioneered programs that create a hostile school infrastructure, using wire fences around school campuses, surveillance cameras throughout the school buildings, and metal detectors at the doors at some schools. Organizers at Inner City Struggle in East Los Angeles claim that the use of metal detectors in LAUSD has historically been used only at lower income, inner city schools, and that minority students are generally punished more often than White students.<sup>72</sup> Additionally, LAUSD piloted a program using canines to detect drugs and weapons on students at several high schools, all run through the Los

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<sup>71</sup> Los Angeles Unified School District, "LAUSD Fingertip Facts: 2013-2014," 2014.

<sup>72</sup> Avila, Lydia, Director of Community Organizing for Inner City Struggle, July 9, 2013.

Angeles School Police Department (LASPD), which is the largest operating school police department in the country.

The data on school suspensions in LAUSD shows that almost 90% of students who are suspended in LAUSD schools are Black or Latino Students, and that, in the 2013-14 year to date, all but 2 on-campus arrests by LASPD were Black or Latino students.<sup>73</sup> Additionally, LAUSD reported that in 2009, 77% of Hispanic students and 8% of Asian, Black, and White students who were expelled were expelled under zero tolerance policies. Of these expulsions, 67% of the Hispanic students and 5% of the Black students were not offered educational services.<sup>74</sup> While the Office of Civil Rights has had a difficult time conducting their investigation of LAUSD with the lack of data provided by the district, they have found that school police officers often punish students doubly by suspending them and fining them, which is a large concern for community groups, as many of the students being punished are low income.<sup>75</sup> In 2006, LAUSD commissioned a study about students' perceptions of safety at several schools in order to create safer campuses and grasp how safe students feel in different parts of their school environment, and the results prove how embedded school violence is within the surrounding communities. The study found that students who carry weapons to school often carry them because they are afraid of walking home in their neighborhoods without being armed, pointing to larger societal reasons for students bringing weapons to school.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> "Student Discipline Data Reports," LAUSD, 2013-2014.

<sup>74</sup> Amurao, Carla. 2013.

<sup>75</sup> Criollo, Manuel. "LAUSD and LASPD Fail to Report Statistics to Federal Civil Rights Data Collection", 2012.

<sup>76</sup> Arnone, Gina, and Alice Gualpa. Los Angeles Unified School District Program Evaluation and Research Branch, March 9, 2006.

LAUSD has piloted two curricular programs around discipline, the Straight Talk About Risks (STAR) and Weapons Are Removed Now (WARN) programs, which used methods in the classroom to try to reduce gun violence. However, these programs petered out in the district and were only used in some schools as pilots for short time periods.<sup>77</sup> The STAR program, used mostly by LAUSD in the 1990s, was taught in classes from kindergarten through 12th grade to educate students about the risks associated with guns, how to recognize unsafe situations, how to combat negative peer pressure, and resolve conflicts without violence. The program allows students to learn coping and decision-making skills and also provides support for parents to educate them about ensuring that any guns in their homes are inaccessible to their children.<sup>78</sup> Within the WARN program, older high school students visit elementary and middle schools in LAUSD to present information about the dangers of weapons and violence on campus. These presentations are tailored to younger students and are sometimes in the form of skits, poetry, or music. While the WARN program was not implemented in many LAUSD schools, the number of recovered weapons in the district was lowered during the time it was being used during the 1990s, suggesting that it had an impact on the students who were exposed to it.<sup>79</sup>

### *Community Organizing*

Due to the discriminatory treatment that LAUSD's punitive discipline model was inflicting upon students of color, a community organizing campaign rallied students and parents

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<sup>77</sup> "A Start on Stopping School Weapons and Violence: Recommendations Proposed by the School Safety and Security Task Force." LAUSD, March 22, 1990.

<sup>78</sup> Center to Prevent Handgun Violence. "Straight Talk About Risks (STAR)." U.S. Department of Justice.

<sup>79</sup> Center to Prevent Handgun Violence. "Weapons Are Removed Now (WARN) Program." U.S. Department of Justice.

from LAUSD in 2006 and again in 2013 in hopes of pushing the district to make progressive change and fight the racial disparities in suspension and expulsion data.

In 2006, community organizations such as Inner City Struggle, L.A. Voice, the Community Rights Campaign, and Community Asset Development Re-defining Education (CADRE) began organizing around the discriminatory ticketing practices of the LASPD, and advocating for a more progressive system that would increase educational opportunities, especially for students of color. These organizations went door-to-door in hopes of engaging parents and community members about disciplinary injustices in the district, and gathered the stories of over 120 LAUSD students, 50 of whom had been unjustly suspended. This data was compiled into a report created by CADRE entitled “*More Education. Less Suspension. A Call to Action to Stop the Pushout Crisis in South Los Angeles*” released in 2006.<sup>80</sup> LAUSD staff began to acknowledge these organizing efforts and notified the involved community groups that they were drafting a more progressive policy, and as a result, these community groups began connecting with School Board members as well as members of the teachers union, the United Teachers of Los Angeles, to mobilize institutional support for the progressive discipline.<sup>81</sup> A rally was held for over 100 LAUSD community members to detail findings from CADRE’s report in June of 2006, but the vote on the policy was delayed due to a lack of support from key members of the Board. The community groups kept fighting, however, and began holding demonstrations at district offices and bringing parent organizers to LAUSD Board meetings for testimonies.

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<sup>80</sup> CADRE. “Accomplishments and Long-Term Goals.” 2014.

<sup>81</sup> CADRE. “A Parent-Led Victory in the Fight to End Pushout in Los Angeles Schools.” June 2007.

After the *Los Angeles Times* published a detailed article about the organizing efforts in 2007, the Board unanimously passed the DFP policy.<sup>82</sup>

More recently, a community organizing partnership called the Brothers, Sons, Selves coalition was created in hopes of improving the lives of young men of color in Los Angeles. The coalition was formed in the spring of 2013 in hopes of solving the crisis experienced by young men of color as a result of punitive discipline, especially within LAUSD, especially due to the noticeably slow implementation of DFP.<sup>83</sup> By using community-based participatory research and community organizing, Brothers, Sons, Selves was able to put pressure on the LAUSD School Board to pass the School Climate Bill of Rights in May 2013. The bill is a landmark for the district, promising to implement restorative justice and abolishing the ability to suspend students based on “willful defiance,” a discipline category with a long history of unfairly targeting minority students.<sup>84</sup> The bill also includes a detailed plan for implementation of the 2007 DFP policy in an attempt to hold the district accountable to all school sites. This victory by community organizations was accompanied by an organizing campaign with students at LAUSD school sites to try to raise awareness about students’ rights surrounding discipline entitled “College Prep, Not Prison Prep,” which helped the Brothers, Sons, Selves Coalition to gain enough momentum for the Bill of Rights to pass.<sup>85</sup> The DFP and the School Climate Bill of Rights will be the LAUSD policies I will be focusing on throughout my research as they are the most recent and most progressive policies in the district.

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<sup>82</sup> CADRE. “A Parent-Led Victory in the Fight to End Pushout in Los Angeles Schools.” June 2007.

<sup>83</sup> Liberty Hill Foundation. “Brothers, Sons, Selves.” 2014.

<sup>84</sup> L.A. Board of Education. “2013 School Discipline Policy and School Climate Bill of Rights.” May 14, 2013.

<sup>85</sup> Solano, Estephanie, Community Organizer, Inner City Struggle, November 22, 2013.

In light of the new DFP policy and the School Climate Bill of Rights, the entire state of California has begun a transition to more progressive discipline policy in all of its schools, and statewide policies are being drafted to require a more positive approach than zero tolerance in all California public schools. The California Department of Education released their suspension records for the 2012-13 academic year to prove that they have experienced a 12% drop in just one year for suspensions and expulsions, fueling the efforts to make discipline policy more progressive.<sup>86</sup>

### *Progressive Discipline*

The school-wide positive behavior support policy, titled the Discipline Foundation Policy (DFP), includes several main plans and outlines several responsibilities for school administrators, district administrators, and teachers under the policy. DFP calls for a committee to be formed at each school that is responsible for the school-wide implementation of the new discipline model, as well as the development of school-wide behavioral expectations with reinforcement of appropriate behaviors and violence-prevention curriculum. The policy also calls for fair, “corrective” discipline that reinforces and rewards positive behavior while utilizing alternatives to suspension. DFP requires consistent communication with parents and community stakeholders about school discipline issues, and creates a three-tiered approach to discipline that includes more intensive interventions for at-risk students, one of which is the use of a disciplinary review team. Lastly, the policy requires collection and evaluation of discipline data in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the school’s policies in the future. Under the policy,

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<sup>86</sup> Ferriss, Susan. “New California Data Show Drop in Overall School Suspensions, Expulsions.” *Juvenile Justice Information Exchange*, February 3, 2014.

school administrators have the highest responsibility in overseeing its implementation. Teachers are expected to play a “fundamental role” in fostering a positive classroom environment, and local district jurisdictions are in charge of overseeing proper implementation of the policy within their areas. The policy defines these district responsibilities as developing intervention procedures, analyzing data and monitoring school policies, and ensuring that schools use alternatives to suspension and expulsion. The larger central district is responsible for trainings available to parents, students, and staff as well as forming a task force of stakeholders who will work with an independent auditor to ensure implementation of the policy. When DFP passed in 2007, schools were expected to begin implementation by the 2007-2008 academic year, however no further implementation timeline was explicitly outlined.<sup>87</sup>

After the DFP was passed in 2007, a subsequent School Discipline Policy and School Climate Bill of Rights was passed in 2013 as a follow up that added a larger framework to the guidelines from the DFP Policy. This bill includes more restorative approaches and has stronger language than the DFP. For example, the bill mandates that unless suspension is required based on the discipline ladder, a school must exhaust all other options before suspending a student. Additionally, students are no longer able to be suspended or expelled due to “willful defiance,” and the bill resolves to develop and implement restorative justice in all LAUSD schools by 2020. The policy mandates that each school site will receive training based on restorative practices beginning in 2015, and that data about school suspensions will be widely available for students and parents. The policy contains accountability structures by including the ability for students and parents to file formal complaints if the school-wide positive behavior support system is not

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<sup>87</sup> “Discipline Foundation Policy: School-Wide Positive Behavior Support.” Board of Education of the City of Los Angeles, March 27, 2007.

implemented within 60 days of a request. The policy outlines roles for the LASPD as well, hoping to avoid unnecessary criminalization by reviewing school police policies and data about school arrests and citations and providing clear guidelines about the roles of school police. The task force created in the DFP is required to be augmented under the bill with specific meeting requirements in order to keep the district accountable for implementing the DFP model.<sup>88</sup>

While DFP has not yet been implemented at every school, the policy change has yielded several improvements to many of the discriminatory practices that LAUSD was well-known for under zero tolerance. Between 2006 and 2012, the number of days of suspension for students fell by nearly 75%, and between 2005 and 2011, the number of expulsions has dropped by 73%.<sup>89</sup>

### *Institutional Response to School Shootings*

LAUSD has a history of responding in the immediate aftermath of school shootings nationwide with increased security or school memos without making any significant long term change, something which is common in many school districts due to the fearful nature of the school violence narrative. After the Columbine High tragedy, LAUSD released several memos emphasizing the importance of the zero tolerance stance and advising that it be enforced more severely.<sup>90</sup> An organizer at Inner City Struggle described the drastic increase in school police presence at LAUSD schools in December 2012 after the Sandy Hook shooting, something that went away within a matter of weeks.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> L.A. Board of Education. "2013 School Discipline Policy and School Climate Bill of Rights." May 14, 2013.

<sup>89</sup> "Los Angeles Unified Delivers." *The Special EDge*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (2012).

<sup>90</sup> L.A. Board of Education. "Minutes, Regular Board Meeting 4/27/99."

<sup>91</sup> Avila, Lydia. Director of Community Organizing, Inner City Struggle. Phone, July 9, 2013.

### *Grant High School*

In LAUSD, I chose to focus on three main school sites, the first of which is Grant High School, located in Van Nuys. Grant High has an enrollment of 2,280 students and is predominantly Latino, with 61.3% of the student body identifying as Latino and 29.2% identifying as White.<sup>92</sup> Statistics from the 2012-13 school year indicate that 68.9% of Grant's student body qualify for free and reduced lunch, and 15.2% of the population are English language learners.<sup>93</sup>

Grant High is designed with several small learning communities, or SLCs, to help break up the large student body into smaller community groups. The SLCs offered at the school are 9th Grade Academy for incoming freshman, the Communications Technology Magnet, Humanitas Academy, the Dance and Performing Arts Academy, the Social Justice Academy, the Business and Consumer Affairs Academy, and the School for Advanced Studies.<sup>94</sup> Grant High's discipline structure has historically followed a zero tolerance approach, and those practices are still used today despite the district's DFP policy. The school historically used paper referral sheets in the event of a disciplinary infraction that would send students to the dean, but had to switch to e-mail referrals in 2011 after students that were sent to the dean never arrived and left campus instead. This has helped to ensure that students with disciplinary referrals face consequences, though the consequences are punitive.<sup>95</sup> Grant High also has a history of racial tensions, which climaxed in

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<sup>92</sup> "California Schools Guide: Ulysses S. Grant Senior High." *The Los Angeles Times*. 2013.

<sup>93</sup> "California Schools Guide: Ulysses S. Grant Senior High." *The Los Angeles Times*. 2013.

<sup>94</sup> L.A. Board of Education. "Profile of Ulysses S. Grant High School, 2012-2013."

<sup>95</sup> Kommer, Alaina. Teacher at Grant High School, LAUSD. In Person, December 3, 2013.

2002 when there were several race riots on campus between Latino and Armenian students that closed the school for several days. While tensions were high during that time, the violence in the school has decreased significantly over the last 10 years and today there are typically only minor disciplinary infractions.<sup>96</sup>

### *Garfield High School*

The second LAUSD school site that I chose to focus on for this project is Garfield High School, located in East Los Angeles. Garfield High is one of the schools that has partnered with Inner City Struggle, an outside organization that helped to pass progressive discipline in LAUSD and has offered their support with the implementation of Policy DFP and the School Climate Bill of Rights at Garfield High.

Garfield High is well-known worldwide as the school depicted in the award-winning film *Stand and Deliver* about a teacher named Jaime Escalante who empowered his students of color by revamping the Advanced Placement program at the school in the 1980s.<sup>97</sup> Since then, the school has been known for its Advanced Placement program, which was ranked in *Newsweek* as the 581st top high school in the nation in 2004.<sup>98</sup>

Garfield High reported an enrollment of about 2,500 students in 2008, with 99.26% of the student body identifying as Latino.<sup>99</sup> The school has high poverty rates, with over 91.8% of the student population qualifying for free and reduced lunch.<sup>100</sup> Like all LAUSD schools, Garfield

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<sup>96</sup> Kommer, Alaina. Teacher at Grant High School, LAUSD. In Person, December 3, 2013.

<sup>97</sup> Jesness, Jerry and Henry Jesness. "Preface." *Standing and Delivering: What the Movie Didn't Tell*. 2010.

<sup>98</sup> Mathews, Jay. "The Complete List of the 1,000 Top U.S. Schools." *Newsweek*. 2004.

<sup>99</sup> "Ethnic Breakdown by School." *Los Angeles Unified School District*, 2013. Accessed April 8, 2014.

<sup>100</sup> "California Schools Guide: James A. Garfield Senior High." *The Los Angeles Times*. 2013.

High used zero tolerance policies historically until the DFP passed in 2007. However, the school was one of few schools that was heavily involved in the organizing efforts to pass progressive discipline in LAUSD due to their partnership with Inner City Struggle, which is also based in East Los Angeles. Students at Garfield High have been involved in organizing prior to the campaign for progressive discipline, however. In 2004, Garfield High students created a group called United Students to try to reform the school's tardy policy that sent students to the "tardy room" even if they were one minute late to class, forcing them to miss the entire period. Students felt that this was unfairly taking away their time in the classroom, and surveyed hundreds of their fellow students to prove to their administration that the policy was depriving them of their educational rights. The students were successful and Garfield High overhauled their tardy policy.<sup>101</sup> In 2006, students were involved in the campaign to pass the DFP alongside many community organizations like Inner City Struggle and CADRE.

### *UCLA Community School*

The third site that I chose to focus on for my research is the UCLA Community School, located in the heart of Koreatown. UCLA Community School is a pilot school that has designed and implemented a unique SWPBS discipline structure based on the DFP model that the district created in 2007. The school is new to LAUSD, opening in September of 2009 with only an elementary program and expanding to K-12 in the last few years.<sup>102</sup> The school was built at the

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<sup>101</sup> Vasquez, Raul. "Tardy Room Blues: United Students at Garfield High Pushes to Create a More Productive Policy for Late Students." *Inner City Struggle*, 2004.

<sup>102</sup> Lauler, Julienne. "UCLA, LAUSD Team Up to Create UCLA Community School with Dual-Language Approach." *The Daily Bruin*, 2010.

site of the former Ambassador Hotel where Robert F. Kennedy was assassinated in 1968, and the complex was built in his name.<sup>103</sup>

UCLA Community School has an enrollment of 975 students and provides a K-12 program for its students. The school is predominantly Latino, with 79.8% of the student body identifying as Latino and 16.9% identifying as Asian. The school has a 55.2% rate of students that qualify for free and reduced lunch programs, and 50.7% of its student body are English language learners.<sup>104</sup> The school takes a dual-language approach as one of their main objectives, and classes are taught in a fully bilingual format in three languages: English, Spanish and Korean.<sup>105</sup> As a pilot school, the school operates much like a charter school in the sense that they are free from many of the district requirements and have more freedom to mold their curriculum and policies, however, they are not selective in their admissions and allow all students from the local community to attend. The school was the result of a partnership between LAUSD and the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA); a UCLA team was responsible for the pilot school proposal and the design of the curriculum, as well as many of the faculty, 80% of whom are graduates of the UCLA education program.<sup>106</sup> The school practices a model of discipline that is closely tied to the DFP and based on the model of SWPBS.

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<sup>103</sup> Lauler, Julienne. 2010.

<sup>104</sup> "California Schools Guide: UCLA Community School." *The Los Angeles Times*. 2013.

<sup>105</sup> Lauler, Julienne. 2010.

<sup>106</sup> Lauler, Julienne. 2010.

## Denver Public Schools (DPS)

I chose DPS for my second case study because it was one of the first districts to adopt a restorative justice approach to disciplinary policy. My personal experience as a student in the Denver Public Schools as well as my mother's career within the district made the case study more feasible as well. DPS has a total of 172 schools and serves over 84,000 students throughout the city and county of Denver. While DPS receives over \$160 million in grants and contributions, \$530 million of the district's general funds come from state tax revenues.<sup>107</sup>

### *History of Discipline Policies*

Prior to the JK-R policy in DPS, the district also practiced a zero tolerance policy which, as stated, was the norm nationwide. While zero tolerance was in place in DPS prior to the 1999 shooting at Columbine High, the shooting solidified and strengthened the support for a strict, "no nonsense" policy.<sup>108</sup> Though information about race and ethnicity within the district's suspension and expulsion data is unavailable, there is data showing that in the 2009-2010 academic year there were 603 students referred to outside law enforcement, 185 expulsions and over 6,000 out of school suspensions.<sup>109</sup> An unnamed district employee that I interviewed during the research process explained that DPS has experienced disparate incidences of suspension, expulsion and arrests based on race and ethnicity, and that the district is making a pointed effort of reducing the disproportionate impact that their school discipline system has on students of color.<sup>110</sup> DPS does

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<sup>107</sup> Denver Public Schools. "Comprehensive Annual Financial Report for the Denver Public Schools."

<sup>108</sup> Martinez, Pam, Co-Director, Padres y Jóvenes Unidos, July 23, 2013.

<sup>109</sup> Denver Public Schools. "Report of Unduplicated Students Who Received Suspension(s) and/or Expulsion(s) by School 2009-2010."

<sup>110</sup> Unnamed Female Interviewee. District Employee for DPS. In Person, January 7, 2014.

not have a school police department and the security presence at DPS schools is minimal, however, there is a police officer from the Denver police department stationed at each school and each school has 1-2 security guards on duty each day. This security presence is described as friendly, however, and security guards and officers rarely have altercations with students, but rather serve as their mentors and friends.<sup>111</sup> DPS has not recorded any notable curriculum programs to prevent violence at their school sites, but individual schools often organize speakers and other campus events to help promote a positive school culture and work to prevent violence.

In the last five years, DPS has begun an overhaul of their zero tolerance policies and has begun a restorative model for discipline based on Policy JK-R that was passed in 2008. Policy JK-R is now being implemented in many schools throughout the district. DPS has acknowledged their disproportionate treatment of people of color under past zero tolerance policies, and has issued statements since 2013 about prioritizing the reduction of racial differences in disciplinary action. This goal is one of their main aims for the 2014-2015 school year, and they are hoping to further incorporate issues of racial discrimination into their trainings district-wide.<sup>112</sup>

### *Community Organizing*

Policy JK-R was the result of a long, hard-fought battle by community based organizations that began in 2003 when a local community-based organization, Padres y Jóvenes Unidos, teamed up with the Advancement Project to collect data on the impacts of zero tolerance policies within DPS. To collect the data, Padres surveyed over half of the student body of North High School and interviewed parents, students, and community allies to gather testimonials

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<sup>111</sup> Smith, Ariel. Teacher at North High School, DPS. In Person, January 6, 2014.

<sup>112</sup> Unnamed Female Interviewee. District Employee for DPS. In Person, January 7, 2014.

about the harmful impact of punitive discipline.<sup>113</sup> This data was compiled into a 2005 report by the Advancement Project titled “*Education on Lockdown: The Schoolhouse to Jailhouse Track*,” which highlighted the rise in expulsions and suspensions within the district. Once released, Padres presented these findings to several community organizations including Escuela Tlatelolco and the Denver Classroom Teachers Association, who expressed support and began endorsing the progressive discipline agenda.<sup>114</sup> After this report was published, DPS approached Padres and the Advancement Project in hopes of negotiating changes to the discipline policy, and the district allowed Padres to develop a pilot restorative justice program for a trial period at several middle schools and one high school, North High. Padres used an inside/outside approach to organizing for the campaign; collaborating with DPS staff while also organizing student walkouts and protests, holding press conferences and canvassing affected communities to gather support for progressive discipline. While the campaign took years and was met with strong opposition, Policy JK-R passed in 2008 after two years of piloting restorative justice programs with identifiable successes.<sup>115</sup>

### *Progressive Discipline*

As stated, DPS passed a policy called Policy JK-R in 2008 that was a historic policy based on a restorative justice philosophy with elements of SWPBS. The policy outlines “successful disciplinary practices” as ones that respond to students individual needs, ensure educational opportunity, include prevention and intervention measures, and provide opportunities

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<sup>113</sup> Gonzalez, Thalia. “Restoring Justice: Community Organizing to Transform School Discipline Policies.” 2011.

<sup>114</sup> Gonzalez, Thalia. 2011.

<sup>115</sup> Gonzalez, Thalia. 2011.

for parent and student participation. The policy also requires that staff training be provided “as needed” to ensure that the policy is implemented, and that the policy not be used in a discriminatory manner. The policy explicitly discusses the importance of addressing racial disparities and states that “efforts shall be made” to eliminate them, and the policy mandates that rules and policies will be made clear and transparent. Additionally, the policy specifies that individual schools may adopt their own school rules or codes of conduct as long as they are consistent with Policy JK-R. The policy suggests that schools minimize the use of suspensions, expulsions, and arrests, and mandates that consequences be “reasonable” and carefully planned. In evaluating disciplinary decisions, a structure is created in JK-R to ensure that a student is considered on an individual level based on their mental health, prior conduct, and other factors; the policy also requires that schools use three types of intervention strategies. The first is administrative strategies, which are rule-based, restorative strategies, and therapeutic and resource strategies such as mental health counseling. The policy contains a discipline ladder with six levels of offenses and their corresponding consequences and intervention strategies. JK-R specifically discusses methods for suspension and expulsion prevention, including behavior intervention plans, restorative interventions, and mandatory behavior intervention plans. The policy also details appeal rights for students who appeal an out-of-school suspension.<sup>116</sup>

In terms of accountability, the policy requires that each school and the central district evaluate and monitor the policy’s effectiveness using disciplinary data. Each school is required to review their school climate and submit a report to the Board of Education, Superintendent, and District School Improvement and Accountability Council, and schools are “encouraged” to

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<sup>116</sup> Denver Public Schools. “Policy JK-R: Student Conduct and Discipline Procedures.” Colorado Department of Education, August 29, 2007.

establish a discipline committee to monitor the school's implementation progress.<sup>117</sup> Despite these guidelines, the policy is enforced based on the discretion of individual school principals only; there are not district representatives assigned to make sure the implementation process is in place. As a result of this, some schools have a stronger restorative approach than others based on how dedicated the administration at each school is to the philosophy behind policy JK-R.<sup>118</sup> The policy's mission emphasizes the importance of a strong school community and for self-discipline and understanding on part of the student perpetrators of violence and other disruptions to the school environment. Trainings for teachers and administrators under Policy JK-R focus mainly on creating strong relationships between teachers and students, and some provide examples and guides for facilitating restorative dialogues with students in the school.<sup>119</sup>

The policy has had noticeable success since its implementation in 2008 and in its pilot programs that began in 2006. Statistics from the 2008-2009 year, very soon after the new policy was passed, show that 223 disciplinary cases used restorative justice methods in lieu of an out-of-school suspension. Additionally, in 2008-2009, there was a decrease in suspensions by 5,400, and over 30% of students showed improvement in school attendance.<sup>120</sup>

### *National Scrutiny*

Beginning with the Columbine High shooting, the state of Colorado and the area surrounding the city of Denver has undergone many traumatic shootings and school-related

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<sup>117</sup> Denver Public Schools. "Policy JK-R: Student Conduct and Discipline Procedures." Colorado Department of Education, August 29, 2007.

<sup>118</sup> Unnamed Female Interviewee. District Employee for DPS. In Person, January 7, 2014.

<sup>119</sup> Denver Public Schools. "Policy JK-R: Student Conduct and Discipline Procedures." Colorado Department of Education, August 29, 2007.

<sup>120</sup> Gonzalez, Thalia. 2011.

violence. To name only a few relevant events, the mass shooting in an Aurora, CO movie theater in July 2012 and a recent school shooting at Arapahoe High School just outside of Denver in December 2013 were both devastating to the Denver community. As a state that has struggled with the division stemming from repeated incidences of mass gun violence and a long history of hunting and gun use embedded in the state's history, Colorado has received national scrutiny regarding its laws surrounding gun violence. In the aftermath of the Columbine High shooting, for example, the head of the NRA at the time, Charlton Heston, traveled to Denver to speak about the importance of gun rights and the violation of human rights that would result if gun laws were tightened in the state.<sup>121</sup> Despite the increased attention that is brought upon the Denver area regarding gun violence and school violence, DPS has managed to be a progressive leader nationwide with the JK-R policy and act as pioneers to the rest of the country in how to create a positive behavior-based policy while also trying to focus on restorative practices and resolving racialized issues within the discipline system.

### *Institutional Response to School Shootings*

In terms of reactions to mass shootings elsewhere in the country, DPS has a stronger and more long lasting response than many other school districts. This is likely because of the increased scrutiny on school violence and mass shootings in Colorado, which pressures DPS to act more swiftly when school shootings happen, whether they are elsewhere in the country or within the state. Based on several interviews with DPS teachers and administrators, I gathered that buzzers and cameras were installed in all DPS schools after the Sandy Hook tragedy, and

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<sup>121</sup> *Bowling for Columbine*, 2002.

visitors must be buzzed in by the front office staff when they come throughout the day to pick up or drop off their children. This procedure has become an important facet of security in all DPS schools after the Sandy Hook shooting in order to reduce the possibility of an outside threat entering a DPS school building.

### *George Washington High School*

For this research, I focused on two school sites within DPS, the first being George Washington High School, located in the Washington Virginia Vale neighborhood of southeast Denver. Based on statistics from the 2009-2010 academic year, enrollment at the school was 1,491 students, with a population made up of 42% Black students, 30% White students, and 22% Latino students. Of this population, 51% of the students were eligible for free or reduced lunch.<sup>122</sup>

George Washington High is recognized as the first school in Colorado to offer an International Baccalaureate (IB) program, which began in 1984. The school also offers an Advanced Placement program and an AVID program to prepare students for higher education. The school historically has experienced gang violence, but the levels of gang related violence at have decreased significantly in the last 5 years.<sup>123</sup>

George Washington High is still in the midst of the implementation process of Policy JK-R. While the school has applied for and received grants to have Americorps members working on the implementation of restorative practices, there are still many aspects of the discipline structure that reflect the philosophy of zero tolerance that has been embedded in the DPS philosophy

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<sup>122</sup> Denver Public Schools. "George Washington High School." 2010.

<sup>123</sup> Unnamed Female Interviewee. District Employee for DPS. In Person, January 7, 2014.

throughout it's history.<sup>124</sup>

### *North High School*

The second school site that I focused on in DPS is North High School, located in the Highland neighborhood near downtown Denver. Based on statistics from the 2009-2010 academic year, the enrollment at North High is 953, with 85.4% of the population identifying as Latino and 8.6% identifying as White. Of this population, 86% are eligible for free and reduced lunch.<sup>125</sup>

North High does not have any magnet programs, but it does offer Advanced Placement courses which 43% of the student body participate in.<sup>126</sup> Like George Washington High, the school has experienced periods of gang violence, but these incidents have decreased over the last 3 years.<sup>127</sup> The school has many partnerships with outside organizations such as Padres y Jóvenes Unidos, Upward Bound, Mi Casa, and Colorado Youth for a Change.<sup>128</sup> Like George Washington High, North High also works with the AVID program to help prepare their students for higher education.

North High has fully implemented restorative practices from Policy JK-R and was the original site of the first restorative justice coordinator in the district, Dr. Ben Cairns, who is a nationally recognized expert in restorative justice research and advocacy. His involvement at the school as well as the partnerships that the school has fostered with outside community

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<sup>124</sup> Hartman, Sarah. School Counselor for George Washington High School, DPS. In Person, January 7, 2014.

<sup>125</sup> "Best High Schools: North High School." *U.S. News Education*, 2011.

<sup>126</sup> "Best High Schools: North High School." *U.S. News Education*, 2011.

<sup>127</sup> Smith, Ariel. Teacher at North High School, DPS. In Person, January 6, 2014.

<sup>128</sup> North High School. "Partners." North High School, 2014.

organizations like Padres y Jóvenes Unidos make North High the most successful example of Policy JK-R within the DPS to date and helped to make the implementation process of Policy JK-R at North High efficient and successful. In the years following the implementation of Policy JK-R, North High improved their probationary status on the School Performance Framework, a system launched by DPS in 2008 to evaluate schools efforts to engage students. This growth at North High from 2010-2012 was the highest growth seen among all 9-12 high schools in the district, which stands as a testament to the benefits of restorative justice for engaging students.<sup>129</sup>

### **Findings**

For my research, I completed a total of 20 interviews with staff persons who work with LAUSD and DPS. Through these interviews, I was able to paint a clearer picture about the effectiveness of different types of discipline policies, the importance of structured systems for implementation, and the relationship that community organizations play in the implementation stage. I was able to investigate the importance of the relationship between school community and school violence, and how policy plays a role within that partnership. I learned through my interviews that the issues faced within the discipline structure were very similar in both school districts. These issues pertain to the training that teachers and administrators receive about their district's policies, and the level of support from the administration within each school site. I found that the implementation of policies in both districts is complex and inconsistent, something which I will explain more thoroughly here. At school sites that had fully implemented the newer policies, Policy JK-R for Denver Public Schools and the DFP in the Los Angeles Unified School

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<sup>129</sup> North High School. "State of the School: School Performance Framework (SPF) Results." 2013.

District, the policies seemed to be working as planned and were effective at improving campus community while also reducing some of the race- and class-based discrimination that comes with zero tolerance policies. Both school districts are making positive strides towards a more progressive discipline structure, but more coordination is needed in both districts in the implementation stages in order for these policies to realize their full potential.

Interview Demographics

The following chart displays the breakdown of my 21 total interviews based on school district and employee title:

|                        | LAUSD     | DPS       |
|------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| Teacher                | 4         | 5         |
| Community Organizer    | 3         | 2         |
| On-Site Administrator  | 4         | 2         |
| District Administrator | 0         | 1         |
| <b>Total</b>           | <b>11</b> | <b>10</b> |

Although this interview group only scratches the surface of the large number of school sites in both LAUSD and DPS, I believe that I was able to identify and understand the factors related to the differing phases within the implementation process. While I was not able to reach a large number of school sites in DPS or in LAUSD, I believe that the diversity of schools that I was able to visit and the wide range of faculty and staff that I spoke with legitimize my findings and are able to show a variety of issues at all steps of the implementation process.

### Comparison of Policy DFP (LAUSD) and Policy JK-R (DPS)

To begin an analysis of my findings, I will first compare each policy document in order to assess similarities and differences between each district as well as strengths and weaknesses of each policy. This comparison will help to ground my findings and provide a clear picture of the differences that exist in each district.

In many ways, the DFP and Policy JK-R have many similarities, including the creation of task forces and committees to ensure implementation of policies at the district and school level. Additionally, each policy explicitly states the importance of reducing suspensions, expulsions and arrests, and each creates a discipline ladder with different levels of infractions and their consequences. While each policy includes parts of an implementation timeline, there is not an extended timeline detailed. Weak language like “encourage” rather than “mandate” is used throughout each policy when discussing implementation. While fundamentally there are similarities between each policy, there are also several foundational differences between the two. Policy JK-R does not explicitly define the roles of the district and schools within the implementation process as Policy DFP does. Policy JK-R explains restorative intervention strategies much more specifically than Policy DFP. It is clear that Policy DFP is based significantly more around the SWPBS model of discipline, while Policy JK-R is based more around the restorative justice model, making each policy substantially different from the other. The policy documents themselves provide only one side of the story, and the findings from my interviews within each district detailed here will help to paint a clearer picture of how effective these policies ultimately are in LAUSD and DPS.

## Consistency of Implementation

The most significant finding from all of my interviews in each district was the challenges associated with consistently implementing new policies district-wide. As large public school districts experiencing near constant budget cuts, DPS and LAUSD face many barriers when attempting to enforce and regulate new policies at all of their school sites.<sup>130</sup> There are several main reasons why the task of implementation is so daunting in a large district. First, school districts are unlikely to have the funding available to send representatives to each school on a consistent basis to enforce the implementation of a new policy. There is simply not enough time or money in education to support the staffing needed to make sure that each individual school is completing implementation in a timely manner. Secondly, each school environment is different, and as a result, implementation happens in different phases and timelines depending on the school environment.

Keeping these challenges and barriers in mind, I found that policy implementation was inconsistent between different school sites. There were several reasons for this. First, some schools had an on-site administration that was deeply involved with and supportive of progressive policy changes, which was a determining factor in how well the policies were being implemented. Having an on-site administrator that felt passionate on an individual level about restorative justice, positive behavior support, or about ending the racial inequality associated with the school-to-prison pipeline had a clear impact on the school's implementation timeline. Many interview subjects explained that the passion of one of their schools' administrators surrounding the issue was the main reason that the policy had taken hold, and others cited the

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<sup>130</sup> Leachman, Michael and Chris Mai. "Most States Funding Schools Less Than Before the Recession." *Center on Budget and Policy Priorities*, September 12, 2013.

lack of passion surrounding the issue to be one of the reasons why the policy had not been implemented. One school site, UCLA Community School, is a pilot school that had more freedom within their school site to mold their policy. The school is supported by the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) in several important ways. Many of the school's programs are staffed by graduate students from UCLA, and UCLA provides after-school opportunities and summer programs for students, increasing the middle and high school students' engagement in their school community. Because of the UCLA Community School's status as a pilot school, they are able to create many of their own practices that are unique to their school environment and are less confined because of their relationship with UCLA. The vice principal at the UCLA Community School elaborated on this, saying that, while the district provides "specific guidelines," their school "gets to decide how they want to implement those policies."<sup>131</sup> The school must follow the general guidelines provided by the district, but mold these guidelines to fit their school philosophy of community. As a result of this, the school's discipline structure has been rooted in principles of SWPBS and restorative justice since it's opening in 2009.<sup>132</sup>

Additionally, the existence of an accountability structure within a school had a large impact on the timeline of implementation. These accountability structures always began with the principal, who was in charge of keeping the assistant principals on track, and the assistant principals held both the dean and the faculty accountable for carrying out the policy. These systems ensured that teachers understood policies and felt supported by their school's administration, and made resources available for teachers so they were able to better understand new policy changes. When these systems were not in place, there was confusion throughout the

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<sup>131</sup> Kim, Queena. Vice Principal at UCLA Community School, LAUSD. In Person, December 13, 2013.

<sup>132</sup> "UCLA Community School." *UCLA Graduate School of Education & Information Studies*.

faculty and staff about the roles of teachers and administrators in the discipline process, and sometimes a sense of frustration among faculty who felt unsupported and unsure of how to successfully manage their classrooms. One teacher at George Washington High in DPS, Aaron Betcher, echoed this sentiment. Betcher described an incident where a fight happened in his classroom, and after the fight, he visited the dean's office for advice on dealing with similar instances in the future, but the dean had little guidance. Betcher voiced his frustration at this incident, saying "I am not a counselor, I cannot solve that type of conflict in my room... it was frustrating. We have big problems with consistency and accountability when it comes to discipline here [at George Washington High]."133

In addition to an accountability structure, there was one other factor that impacted the consistency of policy implementation within each district: pilot programs. UCLA Community School in LAUSD is a pilot program that is based around the concept of "community." Here, I was able to interview two administrators who discussed the process of creating a unique discipline structure within the pilot system. When speaking with the school's behavior support counselor, Debbie Bailey, she discussed her hesitancy to take the position offered to her because "being a dean was fundamentally against everything [she] stood for... [she] did not want to be known for yelling," but once she learned more about the program at UCLA Community School, she was able to work with the administration at the school site to develop their own unique discipline plan.<sup>134</sup> The school is based primarily around the idea of creating a community with personal connections to each student, something emphasized heavily in restorative justice and

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<sup>133</sup> Betcher, Aaron. Teacher at George Washington High School, DPS. In Person, January 6, 2014.

<sup>134</sup> Bailey, Debbie. Behavior Support Counselor for UCLA Community School, LAUSD. In Person, December 13, 2013.

SWPBS practices, however, the discipline ladder itself is based mainly in positive behavior support. The discipline structure at UCLA Community School directly follows the structure outlined in DFP, and was the only LAUSD school site that I visited that had fully implemented the principles of the DFP policy. The school prided itself on being a community, and as Bailey stated, “in a community, if you know your kids, you know when something is wrong,” implying that the school practices a restorative and positive behavior-based mindset when disciplining their students.<sup>135</sup>

### Policy Confusion

As I began my interviews, one consistent finding in both DPS and LAUSD was a general sense of confusion about existing policies and policy changes, especially among teachers. This confusion and, in some cases, lack of awareness about the actual policy existed in both districts. However, this issue was not mentioned in any of the interviews with community organizers or administrators in either district, likely because community organizers were heavily involved in campaigns to pass the policies, and administrators in both districts received more memos and information regarding district policy than teachers received.<sup>136</sup> In Los Angeles, 75% of teachers were unaware of the large policy overhaul to DFP in 2007, about 7 years ago, despite the fact that all of the teachers interviewed had worked in the district prior to the policy change in 2007. There were no teachers interviewed that had knowledge of the School Climate Bill of Rights, which was passed in May 2013, possibly because it is the most recent discipline policy change

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<sup>135</sup> Bailey, Debbie. Behavior Support Counselor for UCLA Community School, LAUSD. In Person, December 13, 2013.

<sup>136</sup> Unnamed Female Interviewee. District Employee for DPS. In Person, January 7, 2014.

for LAUSD. Confusion about policy changes were also cited by DPS teachers, but only in two out of five of those interviewed. Within these examples, there were several different ways that confusion about policy manifested itself, which I will elaborate on below.

There were two LAUSD teachers at Grant High School who had no knowledge of the 2007 policy change and believed that discipline policies had not changed at a district level during their time in LAUSD. Each of these teachers had been employed at Grant long before the 2007 policy changes and the 2010 supplement Bill of Rights. Despite this, both interviewees did not feel that there had been any significant changes to Grant High School's discipline procedures since they began at the school. One unnamed female interviewee stated, "I have always known to just send students to the dean's office as soon as there is a discipline issue in the classroom."<sup>137</sup> When asked if she had experienced any major discipline changes during her time at Grant, one interviewee, Alaina Kommer, described the change from paper discipline referral sheets to email referral sheets.<sup>138</sup> One unnamed teacher recognized a drop in the number of suspended students, but did not associate it with any policy change that she knew of. When discussing the number of suspensions, the teacher said that "schools are penalized when students are suspended... as a result, students do not have much consequence for violence because the school can not afford marks against it."<sup>139</sup> In both of these examples, teachers raised the important issue about the clarity of the information that they received from the district-level administration. There was one LAUSD teacher, Ron Arreola, who was unaware that the district was in charge of discipline policies at all, and was not sure that any formal policies existed. When asked about his

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<sup>137</sup> Unnamed Female Interviewee. Teacher at Grant High School, LAUSD. In Person, December 3, 2013.

<sup>138</sup> Kommer, Alaina. Teacher at Grant High School, LAUSD. In Person, December 3, 2013.

<sup>139</sup> Unnamed Female Interviewee. Teacher at Grant High School, LAUSD. In Person, December 3, 2013.

experience with discipline policies in the district, he responded “I do not think there are really any [discipline policies] when it comes to the classroom,” and that while teachers have been trained occasionally on classroom management, those trainings were “nothing like a policy.”<sup>140</sup> This same teacher later said that he had been teaching at Grant for over 15 years. Not only was there little knowledge of the DFP policy change in 2007, but there was confusion about the district’s role in school protocols in the first place, pointing to severe communication gaps. While the teachers interviewed are a small sample size and therefore may simply have been uninformed, the lack of clarity on the policies points to a void between the information that the district administration is passing on to the schools, and how that information is being received by teachers.

In DPS, there was similar confusion about policies, but this confusion was less holistic and more specific to different aspects of policy changes. The principle policy confusion cited among teachers in DPS was confusion about the online reporting system that accompanied the policy change to JK-R in 2008. This issue arose in two out of the five interviews with teachers that I conducted in DPS. Both of these teachers specifically talked about the disciplinary referral process that was built in to the “Infinite Campus” online module for the district. They both referred to several times where they reported a student through the online referral system, but their referral was erased because the district said that they did not complete the online form correctly. This was a large complaint for one teacher, Mark Snyder, who felt that his referrals were being erased without explanation. The module contains many fields that must be entered correctly, and an entire referral can be erased when a single required field is overlooked in the

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<sup>140</sup> Arreola, Ron. Teacher at Grant High School, LAUSD. In Person, December 3, 2013.

process of filling in the online forms. He said: “I have written five referrals, and all of them have been erased because they told me I did not follow the proper procedures.”<sup>141</sup> This lack of communication between school administration and teachers shows a possible lack of training for teachers on the online module, and a lack of understanding when small mistakes are made on the module’s discipline forms.

### Administration Support

In both districts, many interviewees commented on the way that the administration at a school site supports its teachers, and what the on-site administration and teacher each feel their separate roles are when it comes to implementing a discipline policy. These findings show the importance of a school administration that feels passionately about a new policy.

In DPS, many teachers and even administrators acknowledged the importance of administrative leadership when it comes to implementing new discipline protocols. One unnamed interviewee, who assists in writing policy at the district level, heavily emphasized the importance of the administration at each school site in the implementation process. She described the importance of an “accountability structure” where the principal holds the assistant principals accountable, and those assistant principals hold the teachers accountable. To quote, “when you have a system with that accountability structure, it works well as far as the implementing of the policy and procedure goes. If you do not have [that system], then you can have the best policy in the world but it does not appear to be effective at the building level.”<sup>142</sup> Throughout my interviews in Denver, I found examples of strong accountability structures in the implementation

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<sup>141</sup> Snyder, Mark. Teacher at George Washington High School, DPS. In Person, January 6, 2014.

<sup>142</sup> Unnamed Female Interviewee. District Employee for DPS. In Person, January 7, 2014.

of Policy JK-R as well as examples of weaker accountability structures, which I will detail further below.

An example of a strong administrative structure in DPS was North High, which had fully implemented JK-R and was using it for every disciplinary case at the school site. At North High, the administration is structured with a principal, three assistant principals, a social worker and two deans who double as restorative justice coordinators, which makes them unique in discipline to other DPS schools. As previously stated, North High was the first school in DPS to implement JK-R, largely because of the commitment to the policy by their dean and restorative justice coordinator at the time, Dr. Ben Cairns. Cairns was able to serve as the restorative justice coordinator at North High solely because of a grant that the district received in 2007 during a pilot program for the restorative approach at North High; the grant applied to a very small number of schools. As a result of this, as well as the support from the other members of the administration at North High, the school was able to fully implement the policy and successfully support the teachers in utilizing restorative practices in the classroom. One of the teachers that I interviewed at the school, Ariel Smith, said that they had gone from 180 suspensions in 2010 to just six suspensions in the fall 2013 semester after implementing Policy JK-R. When discussing the North High administration, Smith talked extensively about the dean's training and work with restorative practices. Smith described this part of the school administration as a "really well-used process" and when referencing the other members of the administration, she said "that is the thing about [restorative justice], you do not need the administrators. Once you focus on relationship building with your students, you have complete control over how you resolve

things.”<sup>143</sup> While this was a different perspective than many of the teachers in other schools that I researched, it was clear that the North High administration was supportive of their faculty in many ways. For example, Smith talked extensively about multiple “restorative justice trainings” that teachers go through, and that these trainings “focused around creating relationships with students.”<sup>144</sup> These trainings included several components, starting with information sessions and presentations about Policy JK-R and the purpose of restorative justice in eliminating the school-to-prison pipeline and encouraging community. Additionally, the trainings included hands-on examples of restorative dialogue and went over talking points to help teachers learn how to conduct restorative-based conversation with their students. Another North High teacher, Lisa Yemma, discussed the trainings, saying that they “spend several days going through the discipline ladder” and also described the school’s “prevention and intervention team,” which is made up of administrators and teachers who have created prevention and intervention policies at North High specifically.<sup>145</sup> Many of these included restorative dialogues and other restorative practices.

Another school in DPS, George Washington High School, was still in the implementation process and appeared to have a weaker accountability system in place with their on-site administration. Unlike North High, George Washington High was only able to begin the implementation process because their school counselor felt passionately about restorative justice and applied for a grant to assign an Americorps member to the school to help with

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<sup>143</sup> Smith, Ariel. Teacher at North High School, DPS. In Person, January 6, 2014.

<sup>144</sup> Smith, Ariel. Teacher at North High School, DPS. In Person, January 6, 2014.

<sup>145</sup> Yemma, Lisa. Teacher at North High School, DPS. In Person, January 6, 2014.

implementation. Even with the help of this Americorps member, the counselor, Sarah Hartman, discussed some challenges with the on-site administrative hierarchy.

I think you really need administrative support, someone to say ‘this is going to be our school culture’, and we have some great people, but we also have some who can not get behind that. Most of what has been done so far has been me advocating to my administration.<sup>146</sup>

With less of a support structure in place, there seemed to be more confusion among teachers about the policy, causing teachers to feel unsupported by administrators. Aaron Betcher, a teacher at George Washington High, described an incident where he felt the on-site administration was unsupportive, saying “one of my friends had a fight in his room and he was pretty traumatized... none of the [administrators] even came by his room to check and see if he was okay, he had blood all over the floor and everything.”<sup>147</sup> Later, Betcher said he had not been getting a lot of support from the administration regarding hate speech written on his students’ Gay Straight Alliance posters, which he described as “frustrating.”<sup>148</sup> Derrick McNeill, another George Washington High teacher said he did not feel JK-R was successful because “of the additional workload that it puts on the teacher when it comes to filing complaints.”<sup>149</sup> As stated earlier, many of the teachers at George Washington High also had their discipline referrals erased without explanation by their administrations, causing many of them to complain about a lack of communication and understanding.

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<sup>146</sup> Hartman, Sarah. School Counselor for George Washington High School, DPS. In Person, January 7, 2014.

<sup>147</sup> Betcher, Aaron. Teacher at George Washington High School, DPS. In Person, January 6, 2014.

<sup>148</sup> Betcher, Aaron. Teacher at George Washington High School, DPS. In Person, January 6, 2014.

<sup>149</sup> McNeill, Derrick. Teacher at George Washington High School, DPS. In Person, January 6, 2014.

The issue of administration support was less clear during my interviews of staff within LAUSD. This is likely because of the general lack of confusion about the policies, so teachers were unsure what the role of the teacher and the administrator was defined as, and were not sure what they would choose to improve within that relationship. All of the teachers interviewed at Grant High said that their only understanding of the disciplinary role of the on-site administration was to always send students to the dean if the issue was too difficult to resolve in the classroom, but no teacher had specific criteria for when a situation became “too difficult,” complicating the issue. This was echoed throughout all of the interviews in LAUSD, but not in the interviews in DPS. Antonio Marquez, a teacher at Garfield High School in LAUSD, experienced a positive relationship with his administration, saying that “[the administration] wants to know what they can do to support teachers, and they have a sense of genuine support for the environment and the students.”<sup>150</sup> The administrators interviewed in LAUSD only referred to discipline incidences where students were sent to the dean’s office, but did not explicitly mention any classroom management on the teacher’s parts. This is evidence that the school administrations in LAUSD are unsure of the amount of classroom management and discipline that teachers handle within their own rooms, leading to further conclusions that there is little communication about the roles of teachers and the administration within LAUSD schools.

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<sup>150</sup> Marquez, Antonio. Teacher at Garfield High School, LAUSD. In Person, January 31, 2014.

## Principal Engagement

As mentioned, the level of engagement of each school principal had a large impact on the timeline of implementation and the priority that progressive discipline policies were given within each school site. When a school had a principal who felt particularly passionate about restorative justice, SWPBS, or ending the racial injustice associated with the school-to-prison pipeline, there was a high likelihood that those school sites would see more substantial change in their discipline structures.

In DPS, I examined one school with high levels of engagement from the principal, and one that had a sense of indifference which clouded the ability to execute a new discipline model. At North High, the restorative justice program was carried out in part by the partnership with Padres y Jóvenes Unidos, and was heavily supported by Dr. Ben Cairns. Cairns personal investment in the policy change fueled much of the change at North High in the last seven years and fostered passion in the school principal, which helped the school to quickly implement Policy JK-R and can be attributed to the success of the policy at North High. At George Washington High, however, there is less prioritization of the policy due to a lack of engagement on part of many members of the administration. When speaking to Sarah Hartman, the school counselor at George Washington High, she said that, while the school had been practicing parts of restorative-based discipline for five years, more progress was difficult to make because there was ultimately only “one administrator who is really supportive of restorative justice” at the school, and that some administrators and teachers “can not get behind” the new methods, most notably, the principal.<sup>151</sup> While Hartman had invested many hours outside of the bounds of her

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<sup>151</sup> Hartman, Sarah. School Counselor for George Washington High School, DPS. In Person, January 7, 2014.

job description to apply for grants and pursue other ways to more effectively implement Policy JK-R, the lack of prioritization from the principal has made it difficult to sustain a vested interest in the issue. An unnamed DPS district employee echoed the same sentiment, saying that the policy is “only going to be effective when people embrace it” and if a school “has a principal that does not view [discipline] in this way,” implementation becomes nearly impossible.<sup>152</sup>

Many similar sentiments came from interviews out of LAUSD. At Grant High, there was general confusion about the policies in place and the principal did not appear to have taken initiative on the issue, making the DFP structure a low priority within the school. However, at Garfield High, Antonio Marquez described the way that the principal “genuinely cared” about the discipline structure and about creating a positive school environment, which had made a world of difference when compared to ten years earlier at Garfield High.<sup>153</sup> Additionally, at UCLA Community School, many members of the administration including the assistant principal were openly passionate about the new policy and the positive behavior approaches. When speaking with Debbie Bailey, the school behavior support counselor there, it was clear that her passion for the issue and the support of the vice principal was a driving force in the success of the discipline model within the school. Bailey spoke in depth about her passion for viewing discipline from a “social work” perspective that views each student as a holistic person, and that she had taken it upon herself to foster an environment based on SWPBS principles as soon as she began her job at UCLA Community School.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Unnamed Female Interviewee. District Employee for DPS. In Person, January 7, 2014.

<sup>153</sup> Marquez, Antonio. Teacher at Garfield High School, LAUSD. In Person, January 31, 2014.

<sup>154</sup> Bailey, Debbie. Behavior Support Counselor for UCLA Community School, LAUSD. In Person, December 13, 2013.

With a large school district like DPS and LAUSD, it is difficult to monitor every school site in their implementation of a progressive discipline policy. However, when members of the school staff and administration, especially the principal, have a personal investment in the issues related to discipline, the chances that a school will be farther along in the implementation process are much higher. Not only do these engaged principals make implementation a goal for their schools, but they are more likely to seek out grants and partnerships with community organizations to help make progressive discipline a reality at their school sites.

### Training

There were several findings to be drawn from the interviewees reflections on their trainings regarding discipline and violence-related policies. Both in Denver and in Los Angeles, it seemed that teachers received significantly less training than administrators on discipline policies, despite the fact that all teachers agreed that most of the discipline was handled within the classroom, without the help of the administration.

In DPS, teacher trainings seemed to be dependent on the school and were not mandated by the district. Aaron Betcher at George Washington High said, “we have to watch videos on some training methods... I think just because they want to cover themselves for liability so they never really give you anything other than general guidelines.”<sup>155</sup> When it came to training on restorative practices outlined in Policy JK-R, Betcher said “we are not trained on anything that helps us know how to sit down and work through a kid’s problem, not even close... no training on that.”<sup>156</sup> Derrick McNeill, another teacher at George Washington High said he received “no

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<sup>155</sup> Betcher, Aaron. Teacher at George Washington High School, DPS. In Person, January 6, 2014.

<sup>156</sup> Betcher, Aaron. Teacher at George Washington High School, DPS. In Person, January 6, 2014.

training on how to handle violence... I have sat through power points on how the discipline policy is done, that is about it.”<sup>157</sup> Mark Snyder, a teacher new to George Washington High in the 2013-2014 academic year, said, “I have not been given any training, so I had to teach myself how to do it. There was nothing.”<sup>158</sup> However, at North High, which has fully implemented Policy JK-R, Ariel Smith said, “we all have to do [restorative justice] training... teachers learn how to do restorative dialogue and we go over what to do when there is a fight or other violence... the trainings are all about how to create a strong relationship.”<sup>159</sup>

When speaking with on-site administrators and district employees about the DPS trainings, there seemed to be a disconnect about how the training information gets passed along to faculty members. An unnamed district-level employee said that she leads trainings with the principals of each school that includes “a breakdown of every section of the policies, and how to implement the policy.”<sup>160</sup> On-site administrators are required to attend trainings throughout each year, as often as every eight weeks. When asked whether the principals pass that training along once they return to their school site, she said “that is a mystery, it just depends on the principal as a leader.”<sup>161</sup> Gideon Geisel, the vice principal at George Washington High, said that he attends “endless meetings” about discipline, at least once a month.<sup>162</sup> Sarah Hartman, the counselor at George Washington High, was frank about the lack of training passed on to teachers, explaining that they had not been able to organize any restorative justice trainings for teachers in the

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<sup>157</sup> McNeill, Derrick. Teacher at George Washington High School, DPS. In Person, January 6, 2014.

<sup>158</sup> Snyder, Mark. Teacher at George Washington High School, DPS. In Person, January 6, 2014.

<sup>159</sup> Smith, Ariel. Teacher at North High School, DPS. In Person, January 6, 2014.

<sup>160</sup> Unnamed Female Interviewee. District Employee for DPS. In Person, January 7, 2014.

<sup>161</sup> Unnamed Female Interviewee. District Employee for DPS. In Person, January 7, 2014.

<sup>162</sup> Geisel, Gideon. Assistant Principal at George Washington High School, DPS. In Person, December 18, 2013.

building thus far. This was the case for several reasons. First, only one of the school's administrators was particularly passionate about implementing Policy JK-R, making it a lower priority among the school's administration as a whole. Additionally, because teacher trainings are at the jurisdiction of each individual school, a training program would have to be created by members of the George Washington High staff, which is a large time commitment especially given that Policy JK-R has already become a low priority among a majority of the school's administration.

In LAUSD, the situation surrounding trainings was similar to DPS in the sense that much of the training that on-site administrators received never trickled down to the faculty. One of the teachers interviewed at Grant said “we have a handbook and occasionally get reminded that we should fill out proper referrals, but that is the extent of training that I have ever had.”<sup>163</sup> Another teacher at Garfield High, which is farther along in the DFP implementation process, said “we have trainings after every school development meeting with protocol and we learn how to handle discipline cases and classroom intervention.”<sup>164</sup> Administrators in LAUSD attended trainings at least once a year, all of which “updated [administrators] about policy changes and talked about crisis intervention,” according to Queena Kim, the vice principal at UCLA Community School.<sup>165</sup> Two of the other administrators that I spoke with at Garfield High said that “when [they] first became deans, there was no training about how to do it, but after the change to progressive discipline [they] get trained every few months.”<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Kommer, Alaina. Teacher at Grant High School, LAUSD. In Person, December 3, 2013.

<sup>164</sup> Marquez, Antonio. Teacher at Garfield High School, LAUSD. In Person, January 31, 2014.

<sup>165</sup> Kim, Queena. Vice Principal at UCLA Community School, LAUSD. In Person, December 13, 2013.

<sup>166</sup> Wallace, Cedrik and Mellado, Aurora. Deans at Garfield High School, LAUSD. In Person, January 31, 2014.

In both districts, administrators receive significantly more detailed and frequent trainings than teachers, despite both the DFP and JK-R policies being focused mainly on classroom management and handling discipline issues within the classroom setting. At schools that were further along in the implementation of their progressive policies, teachers were more likely to feel that they had been adequately trained; at schools that had not progressed through implementation, teachers seemed to feel lost. At the district-level in DPS, there was no accountability structure on principals to make sure that information was being carried down within each school site, making it easy for teachers to never receive the information they needed about how to use restorative and positive behavior practices in the classroom. Throughout the interviews, teachers echoed the sentiment that each policy change added more and more to their plate, making it difficult for them to keep up with their responsibilities. Without proper training, it is difficult for these teachers to successfully utilize policies like JK-R and DFP in their classrooms, leaving them feeling overwhelmed and, consequently, making it difficult for the policy to be fully effective.

#### Partnerships with Community Organizations

During my interviews, I found that some schools has strong partnerships with community organizations that were involved in progressive discipline campaigns, while others lacked these community resources. Partnering with community organizations proved itself to be a very important part of creating an effective and positive environment at a school, largely because of the added staff and energy given to discipline when outside community organizations were present. When community organizations were not located in a school or helping with the

implementation process, the policy often seemed to be less of a priority to the school administration. There was one school in each district that had a strong connection with an outside community organization. I was able to investigate this relationship through faculty and administration at the school, and I was also able to interview a member of the staff at each of the community organizations affiliated with the two schools.

Of the schools I visited in Denver, North High had a strong partnership with Padres y Jóvenes Unidos, one of the organizations that was instrumental in the fight to bring restorative justice to Denver schools, while George Washington High did not have a similar organization helping them with implementation, leaving them understaffed and having to apply for grants to help them start the restorative discipline process. North High was one of the original “test” schools for the restorative justice program, and the outside organizations helped it to become a leader throughout the district. When speaking with an organizer at Padres, he described schools like North High as ones that have “fully embraced the reforms” and are reaping the benefits, while recognizing many of the downfalls of the bureaucratic district, saying that “other schools are in transition or conflicted internally, while some have refused to change.”<sup>167</sup> In a small community organization like Padres, there is unfortunately not enough staff to monitor each school’s implementation process, which is why other school sites like George Washington High have not received the same support. Padres is located only about a mile down the road from North High, and this physical proximity helps to make the partnership logistically more feasible. The backing that Padres was able to provide at North High helped them to commit to policy

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<sup>167</sup> Kim, Daniel. Organizer, Padres y Jóvenes Unidos. Email, February 19, 2014.

implementation, even in the face of large budget cuts to education throughout the state.<sup>168</sup> This partnership was helpful for several main reasons, because the organization was present in the school prior to Policy JK-R being passed in order to spread awareness about the school-to-prison pipeline and organizing students and teachers around the campaign to pass a restorative-based policy. This created an awareness of the policies and their importance from the beginning, helping to solidify the passion and commitment among members of the school's staff, faculty and student body. The partnership also cemented the accountability structure that is so vital to the integration of these policies, because outside staff members from Padres were present in the school making sure that the on-site administration was held accountable in addition to educating the school community about the new discipline plan.

In Los Angeles, Garfield High is one of six schools that has developed a strong partnership with Inner City Struggle, one of the organizations who worked closely on the DFP policy as well as the School Climate Bill of Rights. Working with this organization at the school level gave Garfield High the amount of extra energy and support needed to further their discipline structure without putting extra responsibility on the administration or teachers. Like North High in DPS, Inner City Struggle connected with faculty, staff and students at Garfield High during their organizing campaign for progressive discipline, helping to educate students and staff about the importance of more progressive policies. This, combined with the presence of passionate outside staff members from Inner City Struggle helped to ensure that policy implementation did not fall to the wayside. Teachers at Garfield High were grateful for the outside support, especially due to large budget cuts to education that left schools understaffed, to

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<sup>168</sup> Leachman, Michael and Chris Mai. "Most States Funding Schools Less Than Before the Recession." *Center on Budget and Policy Priorities*, September 12, 2013.

help them fill the gaps that they could no longer afford. When speaking with an organizer at Inner City Struggle, she explained “the district has some resources but they are not very accessible... I think a lot of the schools that are farther ahead with implementing positive discipline policies are schools who also work with community organizations.”<sup>169</sup> However, at Grant High, which did not have a relationship with a community organization like Inner City Struggle, there was no one to hold principals accountable to the new policy and no passion within the school fueling the policy implementation and therefore, it has not been able to catch on in the same way as it has at Garfield High.

These partnerships with outside organizations were particularly valuable to school sites when it came to implementing new policies such as Policy JK-R and the DFP. Within a large district, there is no guarantee that an accountability structure exists to ensure that information passed to school principals from district-level employees is put to action or taken to faculty, making it difficult to be certain that schools are following through on changes made by the School Board. When an outside community organization comes in, they are providing extra help while also making sure that the administration at the schools that they work at fulfill their promises.

### School Community

Based on the data that I have been able to collect, there is a relationship between the strength of a school community and the phase of policy implementation that a school is in with discipline. The feeling of community among the student body was significantly different at

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<sup>169</sup> Solano, Estephanie. Community Organizer, Inner City Struggle. In Person, November 22, 2013.

schools who had not implemented new policies than it was at schools that had begun or completed the implementation process.

Within DPS, there was a vast difference in feelings of community as voiced by administrators and teachers at North High and at George Washington High. When speaking to teachers at North High, they described their school community in positive terms. Ariel Smith says, “I think North High is a community that perseveres through all changes and I think that is why it is easy for us to hold our students accountable, because they understand they are part of a community.”<sup>170</sup> Another North High teacher, Lisa Yemma, discussed a new uniform policy and how it was helping the sense of community within the school by saying “with the uniforms, when you walk into this building, you are a North High team member. I think schools need to work more on how to embrace the team idea rather than how to accuse you before you have even stepped in the building.”<sup>171</sup> North High had created a sense of consistency that gave it the tools that it needed to build their community, both in terms of creating a uniform that identifies all students as “team members” of the community, but also in their education surrounding restorative justice. Teachers describe the way that North High encourages conversation about the restorative practices in the classroom in order to help educate students about the importance of community within a restorative model while also gaining student feedback about the school community. Because the concept of community is so integral to the restorative process which North High values highly, the on-site administration takes extra steps to make sure that students are included within that process and are able to mold their own community through class discussion and education. At George Washington High, the community was described as being a

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<sup>170</sup> Smith, Ariel. Teacher at North High School, DPS. In Person, January 6, 2014.

<sup>171</sup> Yemma, Lisa. Teacher at North High School, DPS. In Person, January 6, 2014.

bit more divided, especially due to many different magnet and other programs within the school. One teacher described the division in community due to groups like International Baccalaureate (IB), Advanced Placement, Avid, and Traditional, saying, “I think we need to learn to live with the fact that we have multiple paths and communities here.”<sup>172</sup> Another teacher noted the “bifurcated community” at George Washington High, saying that efforts to create a community are “misguided” because “we have communities, not just a community.”<sup>173</sup> This was mainly a response to the division in the student body due to the many different magnet programs at the school listed above. Administrators at George Washington High echoed similar sentiments about the school community. The assistant principal, Gideon Geisel, said, “we have 1,000 kids that come here from all over the [Denver] metro area, so this is not their neighborhood, and I think that makes it hard when building a community here.”<sup>174</sup> George Washington High is unique because of its IB program, which draws in hundreds of students that “choice” in to the school from all over the city, while North High is generally made up of students from the surrounding community because they do not offer any specific magnet programs. Both schools are “neighborhood” schools, but the “choice” system is used more frequently at George Washington High than it is at North High due to the programs offered. Overall, the sense of community seems to be in need of improvement at each DPS school that I visited, but the community seemed to be much stronger at North High, where Policy JK-R was fully implemented.

In LAUSD, the sense of community depended largely on the school. However, schools with a stronger community were always farther along in their progressive discipline

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<sup>172</sup> McNeill, Derrick. Teacher at George Washington High School, DPS. In Person, January 6, 2014.

<sup>173</sup> Betcher, Aaron. Teacher at George Washington High School, DPS. In Person, January 6, 2014.

<sup>174</sup> Geisel, Gideon. Assistant Principal at George Washington High School, DPS. In Person, December 18, 2013.

implementation, implying that a solid community can help to ease the implementation process. Grant High teachers did not seem to feel that the school had a strong community as a whole, but because the school is split up into several small learning communities (SLCs), they felt that some students may only feel a sense of community within their own SLC. A teacher at Garfield High, however, described a “true sense of community and teamwork,” where students know that they are part of a larger community and a larger team.<sup>175</sup> These same ideas were echoed at UCLA Community School, where administrators said they make strong efforts to “make sure that every student is known and looked at as a whole person,” and even provide an extra advisory session each day for students to be mentored and to give them a space to talk about their lives.<sup>176</sup>

At Garfield High and UCLA Community School, where SWPBS policies have been fully implemented, teachers and administrators raved about a strong community, whereas at Grant High, teachers said it could be improved. The same was true in Denver, where at North High the community was described as strong and team-oriented, and at George Washington High, where the school was still in the midst of implementation, it could have been improved upon. This serves as evidence that Policy JK-R and DFP are successful when implemented correctly, especially in terms of creating a safe and trusting school community; however, when policies are not implemented, there is no way for those school sites to reap their benefits.

The above findings show that restorative justice and positive behavior policies and the sense of community and pride within a school are linked. In some ways, using a progressive discipline model can help to strengthen a community in a school and, additionally, where there is a stronger community within a school, the implementation of a new discipline model is a

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<sup>175</sup> Marquez, Antonio. Teacher at Garfield High School, LAUSD. In Person, January 31, 2014.

<sup>176</sup> Kim, Queena. Vice Principal at UCLA Community School, LAUSD. In Person, December 13, 2013.

smoother transition.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of my interviews and research on both districts, this section presents my recommendations for how LAUSD and DPS can improve their discipline policies and ensure full implementation of these policies at all school sites in the districts. Both districts have remarkably sound and progressive policy documents, however, many of the failings of the policies that I was able to find during my interview process were related to the challenges of implementing a policy overhaul in a large public school district with limited budget and time constraints. This reflects much of the information that I gathered in my literature review about the struggle of consistently implementing progressive discipline policies because of their departure from the traditional public school power structure. Additionally, my research on the persistence of a fear-based culture likely impedes the implementation of these progressive policies; when zero-tolerance dominates the narrative on school discipline and when the conversation is shaped by political lobbies and media outlets that endorse punitive discipline methods, progressive change becomes increasingly difficult. I hope to make recommendations that are both realistic and significant in order to speed up the implementation process and create functioning progressive discipline models in all LAUSD and DPS schools.

## **Monitoring and Accountability**

There are two recommendations that would help to monitor the implementation process of Policy JK-R and the DFP/School Climate Bill of Rights policies and keep on-site

administrators accountable for implementation. A first step in helping to make discipline models a top priority for schools would be for each policy document to include a detailed and lengthy implementation timeline. As of now, both the DFP and Policy JK-R include pieces of an implementation timeline, but the timelines are outdated and unrealistic. The DFP policy mandates the creation of committees at each school to help with school-wide implementation as well as a task force at the district-level with an independent auditor to ensure timely transitions to the policy. However, according to Policy DFP, schools were expected to begin implementation by 2007-2008, and no further timeline was provided. My interview findings show that many schools have barely begun the implementation process six years after the policy framework requires, showing that the LAUSD timeline is weak and unrealistic. To improve the consistency of implementation at all LAUSD school sites, more specific dates should be provided for schools to follow, including a date by which each school committee must be formed and how often the school committees are required to meet. Dates should be provided through 2017, giving schools that are late to the implementation process realistic time to complete the policy transition. In DPS, no specific timeline is given, but schools are required to submit a report about their school climate annually and are “encouraged” to establish school-wide committees similar to those mandated in LAUSD. Like LAUSD, DPS should create a more firm timeline and use stronger language within the policy to mandate the creation of school-wide committees and provide step-by-step timelines of the committee’s duties and the dates by which each school must be fully compliant with Policy JK-R. These dates should also extend to 2017, giving all schools, including those that have yet to begin implementation, a realistic time frame to fully incorporate the new discipline model.

Secondly, a more structured reporting process could help to ease transparency and increase accountability between the district-level employees and the administrators at individual school sites in both districts. Under Policy JK-R in DPS, each school is required to submit an annual report regarding the school climate to the Superintendent and the Board of Education. However, the guidelines for this report in the policy are vague and the concept of “school climate” is subjective. LAUSD’s DFP Policy has no stipulation about reporting back to the district regarding the policy’s implementation, leaving little accountability between individual schools and the central district. As a result, I believe that each district should mandate a monthly report sent to the district Superintendent and Board of Education by the school’s principal and dean(s) with notes from all discipline committee meetings that occurred during that month as well as updates on the progress of the implementation timeline provided in the JK-R and DFP policies. I recommend that these reports be submitted each month until the school completes the implementation process, and switch to a semi-annual report after implementation is complete. Not only will this increase administrators accountability to the district, but will provide an added incentive to complete the process so that the reports will be required less frequently. This recommendation would be helpful for both districts, especially in LAUSD where no reporting process is currently in place under the DFP Policy or the School Climate Bill of Rights.

### Incentives and Negative Consequences

Another option to improve the consistency of implementation throughout the district is to create an incentive program that outlines consequences and rewards for schools based on their ability to complete the implementation process within the specified time period. There are

several ways that the district could go about an incentive program. One option would be an program that rewards schools, such as offering grant or foundation money to schools that have successfully completed the implementation of new discipline models, while not offering the same resources to schools that do not follow the implementation timeline. These incentives could be associated with community partnerships, by offering expanded resources from community-based organizations to schools who prioritize the implementation of progressive discipline. Another option would be a program of negative consequences for schools who do not complete the implementation process, likely by withholding funding for programs within the school until implementation has been completed. Because both districts struggled to meet the timelines and implementation guidelines that were laid out in Policy DFP and Policy JK-R, this recommendation would be equally useful for each district to use in order to make progressive discipline a higher priority at each school site.

### Training

My findings suggest that trainings regarding the progressive discipline policies in DPS and LAUSD were often only provided to on-site administrators but not sufficiently passed down to teachers. Within DPS' JK-R policy, trainings are required for staff "as needed" to ensure implementation, but also allows individual schools to adopt their own school rules and codes of conduct as long as they are consistent with Policy JK-R. There is no other mention of training in Policy JK-R. In LAUSD's DFP Policy, the central district is tasked with providing trainings that are available to parents, students and staff members, but the language regarding these trainings is

weak and not specific. In the School Climate Bill of Rights for LAUSD, however, trainings based on restorative practices are mandated for each school site beginning in 2015.

While LAUSD's School Climate Bill of Rights requires that trainings begin a year from now in 2015, there are still ways that LAUSD can improve the trainings provided to make sure they convey the correct information to the most effective audience. This same principle applies to DPS, who would benefit from improved training curriculums. One of the main issues that I found was the lack of training passed on to teachers, largely because both DPS and LAUSD only mandated the trainings for on-site administrators, who had the option of passing the training on to faculty but chose to not pass the information on in most cases. Because of this, I recommend that the district mandate at least one training per year for all teachers, instructed by a district employee or a staff member of a community organization to ensure that the training actually takes place. For these trainings, I recommend that both districts create a more interactive training curriculum that includes examples of restorative dialogue, as well as specific examples of SWPBS to give trainees a clear example of progressive discipline. Additionally, I believe that each district should provide background information on the purpose of progressive discipline and its roots within the school-to-prison pipeline in order to increase engagement in the issue and provide context for teachers and on-site administrators going through the training process. Many of the faculty and staff that I spoke with had no context for the policies and knew little about the school-to-prison pipeline, which contributed to the lack of personal investment in the issue. This lack of personal engagement was a main reason that the policies were being disregarded or not prioritized at the schools that I visited, and giving adequate background information would help to increase interest and fervor for the new progressive policies.

Assuming that LAUSD fulfills the promise stated in the School Climate Bill of Rights of providing trainings at each school site for teachers beginning in 2015, the recommendation about mandated teacher trainings would only be required in DPS. In the DPS trainings, there should be an additional portion added to the teacher training that provides a detailed explanation with examples of how to correctly file an online report using the Infinite Campus online system, as many teachers felt that the system was confusing and left unexplained. This would help to ensure that teachers feel supported by the administration at their school, and would also increase the accuracy of the data received by the central district.

### Teacher Engagement

One issue that arose in many of my interviews was the importance of teachers within the successful implementation of progressive discipline. Teachers play a fundamentally large role in both restorative justice policies as well as SWPBS policies because both models are largely based on classroom management. Despite this, I found that many teachers in both districts felt unsure of how to successfully manage their classrooms under the new policies and felt frustration with their on-site administrations for not providing more guidance.

In order to begin to improve the engagement of teachers in progressive discipline beyond the training that I detailed above, I recommend two things. First, teachers should be provided with a clear and concise “how-to” guide to progressive discipline in the classroom. This guide would be provided in the form of an info-graphic and its creation could likely be the responsibility of an outside community organization. This how-to guide could map the fundamentals of a restorative dialogue and provide examples of typical classroom discipline

issues and their progressive discipline-based responses. Additionally, the guide could be integrated into the training process for teachers to ensure that teachers understand the layout and concepts described in the guide. This guide would provide teachers with valuable information to immediately refer to in the case of a classroom disciplinary issue and would walk them through the steps of managing the problem through a progressive lens, which would make them more comfortable and competent with their school's discipline model. The discipline "how-to" guide could be a required material in each classroom, similar to the concise guides to emergency procedures that are required in LAUSD and DPS classrooms currently.

Secondly, I recommend that teacher's labor unions get involved in the progressive discipline implementation process by working with teachers to define their responsibilities. Many teachers interviewed expressed that they felt they had too much responsibility and were overwhelmed by the work put on them by the district and their on-site administrators. Teachers unions have the ability to survey faculty to assess any confusions or stressors that they have with their responsibilities under progressive discipline policies. The unions could use this information to identify problem areas within the expectations for classroom management, and pass that information along to on-site administrators. While labor unions have thus far not been heavily involved in the fight for progressive discipline, their support would likely speed up the implementation process due to their clout within each district. Union involvement could help to improve communication about teacher frustrations to their on-site administrations, which could improve the possibilities for improved classroom management in the future.

## Community Partnerships

My interviews within DPS and LAUSD suggest that the connection between school sites and community organizations is likely to have a high impact on a school's ability to quickly and successfully implement a progressive discipline model. This was seen at North High in DPS, which had a strong partnership with Padres y Jóvenes Unidos, as well as at Garfield High in LAUSD, who partnered with Inner City Struggle. Schools with weaker partnerships to community organizations were less likely to have even begun the implementation process, as seen in George Washington High in DPS and in Grant High in LAUSD.

As a result of this, I recommend that both DPS and LAUSD take steps to make community resources more widely available and accessible to individual school sites hoping to build partnerships. The two community organizations that I focused on make up only a small fraction of the community organizations that work on social-justice issues related to school discipline in both cities, proving that schools have many opportunities to create partnerships but may have a hard time finding these community resources or making the connections. To name only a few, in Denver there are organizations such as Denver Kids, the Denver Foundation, Mi Casa, Colorado UpLift, Colorado Youth for a Change, Padres y Jóvenes Unidos as well as the Colorado Criminal Justice Reform Coalition that all focus on empowering and educating youth. In Los Angeles, there are similar organizations such as the Advancement Project, Community Asset Development Re-defining Education (CADRE), Community Coalition, Liberty Hill, Californians for Justice, Khmer Girls in Action, CentroCHA, Brothers Sons Selves, and Inner City Struggle. All of these organizations are education-based community organizations that currently partner with some schools within LAUSD and DPS, but are not necessarily reaching

the scope they are capable of in their school partnerships. In addition to these local organizations, there are national organizations such as City Year or Americorps who can use staff members to help with implementation at school sites, a resource that was used to help begin implementation at George Washington High in DPS. There are many more organizations in both of these cities, and the possibilities for connections is endless in the realm of progressive discipline and the school-to-prison pipeline.

Given the number of education-based community organizations in each city, DPS and LAUSD should work to make these opportunities for partnerships more accessible to on-site administrators at individual schools throughout each district. Each organization has unique aims, but these and other organizations are community-based education groups who likely would have valuable organizing, educational and implementation strategies for schools in their areas. By creating an infrastructure for individual schools to connect with these organizations, both parties would benefit. Community organizations would be able to broaden their scope in the community through the partnerships, while schools would have increased support to help educate and strategize for the implementation of Policies JK-R and DFP in each respective district. These organizations could be valuable in providing assistance with the mandated teacher trainings described above, especially with providing workshops on restorative dialogues and trainings about how to handle classroom conflicts. This database of community resources should be made widely available to faculty and staff within each school, and especially to the principals and vice principals at each school site district-wide.

### Improved School Communities

My last recommendation is in regards to school communities and the importance of building a strong, accepting school climate in order to help ease the implementation process. In the schools that I visited, the campus community was more likely to be described as strong when the school had an explicit mission statement with expectations of community members.

Providing this information about the expectations of the school community kept students accountable for their behavior, and schools with an explicit mission and expectations were more likely to be farther along in the implementation process. Policy JK-R in DPS does not mention any mandated school mission statements, however, Policy DFP in LAUSD requires that the discipline committee in each school site create school-wide behavioral expectations that include reinforcement of positive behaviors. While this is a good first step in LAUSD, the lack of accountability between the central district and LAUSD school sites makes it hard to ensure that these guidelines and expectations are being created and widely distributed.

As a result of this as well as the lack of mission statements in DPS, I recommend that each school district mandate that principals create a mission statement and a list of school-wide expectations. In order to ensure accountability of this task, a staff member at the district level should speak with school principals to define a realistic timeline for the school mission statement, and request that principals send their school's mission statement and school-wide expectations to the Superintendent and Board of Education within this negotiated timeline. The mission statement and school-wide expectations could be formed with the assistance of each school's discipline committee to make sure that many members of the community are able to contribute, such as teachers, students, and administrators. This information could be bundled

with the previously explained implementation report to ease the process and reduce the need for additional reports to the Superintendent and Board of Education. This would help each school to ground itself in a set of expectations, while fostering a community among the student body by providing clear expectations for all community members. This recommendation is helpful in two ways: it will likely speed up the implementation process, while also likely lowering discipline rates and creating a more streamlined vision for each school site.

Many of my recommendations may require no additional funding for DPS or LAUSD to implement. Adding a more specific implementation timeline to Policy JK-R and Policy DFP would likely not need additional funding, and requiring monthly reports from school principals with the inclusion of a school mission statement would also require no added funding. However, some of my recommendations do include increased funding, especially recommendations regarding changes to the current training process. LAUSD and DPS would likely need to hire a staff member to develop the new training curriculum, and that staff member would also be responsible for organizing the instruction of these trainings at each school site.

The incentive program for schools to follow their implementation timelines requires additional funding, possibly in the form of outside grants; however, the negative consequences program would not require any additional funding. Creating a database for schools to easily connect with outside community organizations would also likely require a staff member, which could increase funding. While these proposals may be difficult in a struggling economy, I believe that the positive outcomes that I observed at schools that had completed implementation are proof that progressive discipline should be a high priority. In order to implement these

recommendations and achieve full implementation of Policy JK-R and Policy DFP in both districts, I suggest that each district consider applying for grants from foundations. Community organizations could also likely provide support with these recommendations in several ways. Organizations could likely partner with schools to staff trainings and help to create the “how-to” guides to increase the engagement of teachers, as well as assist with the grant writing process for an incentive program to lessen the burden on district employees. Colorado may have another venue to fund their discipline implementation after Amendment 64 was passed in 2013, legalizing recreational marijuana in exchange for large tax revenues to fund the construction of new school sites. After its first month of implementation, Amendment 64 raised \$2 million in revenues to go towards school construction; perhaps in future months the legislation could be amended to allow for funds to go towards progressive discipline implementation.<sup>177</sup> Similar “sin taxes” on products such as alcohol and tobacco in California could be used in a similar way to help fund progressive discipline in California schools.

Another funding option for California comes from legislation that arose from a statewide victory of the campaign to end racial disparities in discipline. This law, called the Local Control Funding Formula, was approved last June and allocates funding for school districts based on the number of disadvantaged students within their district population.<sup>178</sup> The law created eight priority areas for schools to focus on, including school climate and minimizing the use of suspension and expulsion as a disciplinary strategy. As a result of this legislation, LAUSD will be receiving over \$800 million in the coming year, specifically allocated to meet the needs of

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<sup>177</sup> Ingold, John. “Colorado Saw \$2 Million in Recreational Marijuana Taxes in January.” *The Denver Post*, March 10, 2014.

<sup>178</sup> Fulton, Mary Lou. Senior Program Manager, California Endowment. Phone, April 15, 2014.

disadvantaged students. Within LAUSD, 86% of students are considered disadvantaged based on their status as students of color, foster youth, English language learners, and low-income students.<sup>179</sup> With this huge increase in funding, the district has an opportunity to prioritize the implementation of progressive discipline and could use these funds towards incentive programs and staff trainings on Policy DFP and the School Climate Bill of Rights.

These recommendations are realistic options for DPS and LAUSD as they continue to move forward with implementation of the DFP/School Climate Bill of Rights and Policy JK-R. However, it is important to consider the dominant narrative of gun culture and fear-based media when thinking about successful implementation of these policies. LAUSD and DPS may be reluctant to take a firm stand for efficient implementation of their policies because the policies lie fundamentally outside of the popular narrative of safety in schools that is constructed by the gun lobby and national media. However, by taking a resolute stand that is strongly in favor of prioritizing progressive discipline, DPS and LAUSD have the opportunity to make history and become national leaders in the field of school safety, while taking advantage of the resources of the many eager community organizations that are fighting for the cause.

### **Methodological Reflections**

During my interview process, there were several areas which, in hindsight, could have been handled more effectively in order to gain more in-depth information from my interviewees. Additionally, due to the time constraints of this project, there were several limitations to my

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<sup>179</sup> Fulton, Mary Lou. Senior Program Manager, California Endowment. Phone, April 15, 2014.

methodology that I hope readers intending to expand upon this research would take into consideration in the future.

Looking back at my interview data and findings, I would have liked to explore the community partnerships that existed in schools more deeply. In my list of questions, I did not explicitly include a question about the role that community organizations play in the school environment, so I was only able to gather that information when participants happened to bring it up in the context of another answer. Additionally, I believe that including more follow up questions about the trainings received by teachers and on-site administrators would have helped me to gain a better picture of which trainings are required district-wide, which were specific to each school site, and what information specifically was conveyed at those trainings.

In future research, I would tailor my interview questions more specifically when interviewing district employees. During this research, I found that some of my interview questions were not as relevant to district employees who are not familiar with any specific school environment and may not observe disciplinary issues in the same realm as on-site administrators or teachers do. This same issue arose when interviewing staff of community organizations, but was most significant with the district-level administrators.

Lastly, due to time constraints, there were some limitations in terms of how far I could expand my research and sample sizes for this project. My limited time frame made it nearly impossible to consider applying for LAUSD or DPS Internal Review Board approval, which would have allowed me to spend more time at each school site, and could have allowed for student interview subjects, adding a whole new dimension to my current research.

Reflecting upon my experience with this research, there are several ways that I may have approached the project in different ways to more accurately assess the quality of discipline policies and their implementation in LAUSD and DPS. I hope that these issues are considered if further research projects are conducted in the future.

## **Conclusion**

In the last 15 years, school violence has become the norm as rampage shootings and gun control debates have taken hold of the public consciousness. However, within the debate is an often ignored truth about the impact that school violence has on school communities and students of color. While thousands of students of color nationwide have struggled with disproportionate treatment in public schools and have often been pushed out through the school-to-prison pipeline, most discipline policies in the United States have focused on zero tolerance in light of increased gun violence in schools. However, these policies have consistently reinforced discriminatory practices and are shown to be ineffective at fostering a positive school community. This research examines positive alternatives to these approaches.

Over the last five years, many schools throughout the United States have begun to re-evaluate their discipline practices in light of increased pressure from community groups surrounding the school-to-prison pipeline. Progressive discipline models are emerging as a new option to help end institutional racism that begins in public schools while fostering strong school communities. These policies, one restorative justice-based and one based upon the theories of school-wide positive behavior support, have been passed in the last five years in Denver Public Schools and the Los Angeles Unified School District.

Despite undeniable progress made by DPS and LAUSD to change the discriminatory and militaristic nature of zero tolerance policies, a long journey lies ahead for each district as they attempt to end racial discrimination in discipline while bringing restorative and positive behavior approaches to the field of school discipline. My research in this project, though only focusing on select schools in two districts, acts as a comparative analysis of two progressive discipline policies. Through this research, I found that implementation was a major barrier to the effectiveness of these policies, even years after the policies had passed in each district. Moving forward, each district must commit more time and resources to strengthening the implementation process in order to accomplish the goals that the policies initially sought to achieve.

The American education system is founded in the idea that all students are born with the right to an equitable and safe education, something which has been taken from many students of color through the practice of zero tolerance policies which still prevail, even in districts that are slowly trying to overhaul their practices. In an era of substantial school violence, operating under a culture of violence nationwide, it is imperative that DPS and LAUSD see their progressive discipline policies as an absolute top priority to the success of their districts. Without successful implementation, the policies mean nothing; and the efforts of organizers and the struggles of students in unsafe or discriminatory environments are affectively ignored.

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## **Appendix 1: Interview Questions**

### Interview Questions for Community Organizing Staff Members

1. Tell me a bit about your experience working and organizing around discipline policies in DPS or LAUSD.
2. What has been your experience with violence among students at DPS or LAUSD school sites?
3. What do you feel are the most pressing issues within DPS or LAUSD's current discipline structure?
4. Do you feel that consequences for violent behaviors in DPS or LAUSD currently "fit the crime"?
  - a. Why or why not?
5. Based on your knowledge of the current system in place, do you think DPS or LAUSD adequately trains teachers and students about the discipline policies that are in place?
  - a. How about how to handle violence among students?
6. From your organizing experience, do you think that DPS or LAUSD enforces their discipline policies consistently at all school sites? Why or why not?
7. What has been your perception of feelings of acceptance among students within the schools that you've worked in? Feelings of community?
  - a. Do you think these feelings could be improved through campus safety campaigns?
8. Have you been organizing within the district when the discipline policy made a large structural change?
  - a. If so, how do you think the new policy has changed the school environment?
9. How do you feel that DPS or LAUSD responds in the wake of mass shootings elsewhere in the country?
10. Is there any other information you'd like to add about violence among students or discipline policies in DPS or LAUSD?

### Interview Questions for Teachers

1. Tell me a little bit about your experience with discipline policies in DPS or LAUSD.
2. What has been your experience and observations of violence among students in the school environment(s) that you've worked in?
3. How have you perceived students feelings of community and acceptance within their school environment?
4. Do you feel that consequences for violent behaviors in DPS or LAUSD "fit the crime"?
  - a. Why or why not?
5. What type of training have you been given regarding DPS or LAUSD's discipline policies?
6. What type of training have you been given regarding handling violence among students?
7. What do you feel are the most pressing issues within your school's current discipline structure?
8. How do you think discipline policy in DPS or LAUSD could further be improved?
9. How do you feel DPS or LAUSD responds in the wake of mass shootings elsewhere in the country?
10. Is there any other information you'd like to add about discipline policies in your district?

#### Interview Questions for Administrators and District Employees

1. Tell me about your experience with discipline policy in your school district.
2. What has been your experience/observations of violence among students in your school environment or school district?
3. How do you perceive students feelings of community and acceptance in DPS or LAUSD school environments or DPS/LAUSD in general?
4. Do you feel that consequences for violent behaviors in DPS or LAUSD "fit the crime"?
  - a. Why or why not?
5. What type of training have you been given regarding your district discipline policies?

6. What type of training have you been given regarding handling violence among students?
7. What do you feel are the most pressing issues within your district's current discipline structure?
8. How do you think discipline policy in DPS or LAUSD could further be improved?
9. How do you feel your school district responds in the wake of mass shootings elsewhere in the country?
10. Is there any other information you'd like to add about violence among students or discipline policies in your district?