Exploring Discipline Policy Problems in Mississippi Pre-K

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EXPLORING DISCIPLINE POLICY PROBLEMS IN MISSISSIPPI PRE-K

by

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

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ABSTRACT
Exploring Discipline Policy Problems in Mississippi Pre-K
(Under the direction of Dr. Melissa Bass)

This thesis seeks to examine the current state of discipline in publicly funded pre-K in Mississippi to determine policy that state policymakers can implement to prevent excessive suspensions and expulsions. This thesis also takes into account racial disparities found in disciplining pre-K students and explores methods that Mississippi can add to pre-K discipline policy as a preventive measure. Two case studies on North Carolina and Tennessee are utilized to identify potential strategies that Mississippi education can learn from. After analyzing both states, I realized that positive behavior reinforcement had success in both states. North Carolina’s Positive Behavior Support and Intervention (PBIS) provided many lessons for Mississippi in terms of implementation strategies. In conclusion, I strongly urge Mississippi legislatures to mandate PBIS practices into publicly funded pre-K programs.
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AYP       Adequate Yearly Progress
B-K       Birth to Kindergarten
CSEFEL    Center on the Emotional Foundations for Early Learning
ISS       In-School Suspension
LEA       Local Education Agency
ODR       Office Discipline Referral
OSS       Out-of-School Suspension
PBIS      Positive Behavior Intervention and Support
Pre-K (PK) Prekindergarten
SET       School-wide Evaluation Tool
SWPBIS    State Wide Positive Behavioral Intervention and Support
TACSEI    Technical Assistance Center on Social Emotional Intervention
TN VPK    Tennessee Voluntary Pre-K
TVC       Tennessee Voices for Children
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Racial profiling has once again gained national attention as a result of high profile interactions, especially between police and citizens. Incidents such as the Michael Brown and Trayvon Martin cases have shown that racial profiling is still a major issue in the United States. Racial disparities continue to be evident in incarceration rates with “African-Americans representing 26% of juvenile arrests, 44% of youth who are detained, 46% of the youth who are judicially waived to criminal court, and 58% of the youth admitted to state prisons” nationwide (Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice).¹

But racial profiling is not just an incident that is happening in terms of criminal identification: African Americans are racially profiled in the public school system, sometimes as early as pre-kindergarten.

In the 2009-2010 school year, a report done by The Center for Civil Rights Remedies released the estimated national suspension rates for K-12 were as follows: African American students (17%), American Indians (8%), Latino students (7%), White students (5%) and Asian American students (2%). It raised questions that there is a twelve percent difference in suspension rates between African American students and White students. There are also gender disparities in suspension rates. White males make up 7% of suspended students, white females (3%), black males (17%) and black females (9%). Black males have been punished with suspension at a higher percentage rate than other races and genders.²

¹ NAACP. Criminal Justice Fact Sheet. (2009)
Although I personally have known about the issue of racial profiling in academic settings, one evening of watching the national news was about to open my eyes to a problem in preschool systems of which I was completely unaware. A four year old black child named JJ from Omaha, Nebraska was suspended from his school for one day because he had thrown a chair. JJ’s mother recalls, “He did not hit anyone, but he could have, the school officials told me.” Together, JJ and his three year old brother Jonah were suspended a total of eight times in the 2014. I remember my shock as I listened to their mother explain that they had been suspended from school for incidents such as throwing a chair in the general vicinity of a teacher or for “endangering” a teacher by hitting her arm. From my perspective, these boys were just doing what boys their age would do. Toddlers like to run, and push, and throw things when they are upset. Their mother agreed that the behavior was inappropriate, but she also said she was “shocked that it resulted in a suspension.” As I continued to listen to the report, their mother spoke of how she mentioned that JJ was suspended to some of the mothers of JJ’s classmates at a birthday party and realized that some of the children were not punished in the same way as JJ. “One after another, white mothers confessed the trouble their children had gotten into. Some of the behavior was similar to JJ’s; some was much worse. Most startling: None of their children had been suspended.”

SECTION 1.1: THE PROBLEM

The Education Department’s Office for Civil Rights reported in March of 2014 that black children represented 18 percent of students enrolled in preschool in the United States yet they make up an overwhelming 48 percent of preschool children who receive

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3 Powell, Tunnette, My Son has been suspended five times. He’s 3. The Washington Post. 24 July 2014.
more than one out-of-school suspension. This news report made me think of my own brothers and sister. What would have happened to them had they been suspended while they were in pre-K for reasons like throwing a chair? I also began to think of my own future children who will be black and how racial profiling in school will affect them. I realized that this was an issue that needed to be addressed.

With 41 states having state-funded prekindergarten programs, Mississippi finally approved its first state funded prekindergarten collaborations in 2014. With the beginning of this new program Mississippi, it is important to take a proactive approach in regards to student discipline in state funded prekindergarten programs, especially when there are already existing problems when it comes to disciplining students in kindergarten through twelfth grade. For every one white student who receives an out-of-school suspension in the state of Mississippi, there are more than three black students who are suspended from school (SY 2009-2010, US Department of Education). 4 Mississippi is also one of the few states in the United States that condones corporal punishment, with most school districts in the state allowing this type of punishment (Southern Echo). These existing problems regarding race and school discipline already has a strong impact on the African American student body in Mississippi Public Schools and these problems have the potential to carry over into punishment of prekindergarten programs if proactive policy action is not taken.

With Mississippi’s passage of a bill to introduce state funded prekindergarten programs in 2014, it is necessary that policy makers take a proactive stance that will

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address preschool punishments and racial profiling issues. My thesis research will seek to answer the questions (1) how are current school discipline policies effecting preschool students, (2) to what extent are there racial disparities in school punishments and what are the implications for black prekindergarten students, and (3) what can Mississippi do to minimize the suspension of prekindergarten students and eliminate racial disparities in discipline policies?

SECTION 1.2: METHODOLOGY

My research will be divided into two sections. The first section will be a literature review. I will examine suspension and expulsion trends throughout the United States with a close focus on race and gender. I will also look at how suspension and expulsion influence black students both in their education programs and psychologically. I plan to analyze different works of research in order to discuss the importance of discipline in the education system – especially prekindergarten programs.

The second part of my research will consist of two case studies. There will be individual case studies on North Carolina and Tennessee. North Carolina was chosen because they have a state funded preschool program that has been active since 2011. North Carolina has also implemented a discipline program called North Carolina Positive Behavior Intervention and Support which has worked to decrease suspensions and expulsions in their public school system. This state could serve as a potential model for future Mississippi state Pre-K discipline. Tennessee was chosen because as a neighbor to the state of Mississippi, there are similarities between the preschool programs. As such, Tennessee’s Pyramid Model discipline policy should give great insight to Mississippi policy makers as well.
The final part of my paper will focus on analyzing the data presented in my research and making policy recommendations in how Mississippi legislators can present proactive solutions to decrease office referrals, suspensions, and expulsions and decrease future racial disparity issues in school discipline.

It is my hope that this research will provide insight on a problem that effects many students. Hopefully, if we begin to solve the problem in school sanctioned punishments in preschool programs, we can identify disparities before they carry over into K-12 as well as create a positive impact in continuing to reduce suspension and expulsion rates as these students advance to upper grade levels.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

SECTION 2.1: INTRODUCTION

“If students aren’t in school, they can’t learn. But if they are disruptive or violent, they may shortchange other students’ chances at an education.”

A longstanding challenge for public schools has been how to maintain an effective and safe school environment. To balance the need for adequate attendance with the need for a non-disruptive learning environment, public school districts have implemented a variety of policies. These include, but are not limited to, in-school suspension (or detentions), out-of-school suspension, and expulsion. Most of these policies are based on the principle of “zero-tolerance,” which has been a controversial issue since its conception during the Reagan era in the 1980s.

The purpose of this literature review is to examine the current discipline policies that are used by public schools. Many of the current punishments under the “zero-tolerance” spectrum result in the most racial discrepancies. This literature review will support my research in the case studies and explain how school discipline polices are currently effecting students from pre-K to grade 12 and to what extent are there racial disparities in school punishment.

SECTION 2.2: DEFINING ZERO-TOLERANCE

In the article “Weapons in Schools and Zero-Tolerance Polices, the author defines zero-tolerance policies as a “call for an ‘automatic’ mandatory punishment for students,

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treating specific types of offenses with uniform severity regardless of intent, circumstances, or the student’s record.”

Zero-tolerance policies find their origins when the U.S. Customs Agency combatted drug trafficking in the early 1980s. Although state and federal judicial systems have abandoned zero-tolerance, schools continue to use these policies within their system. Schools were forced to adopt these policies in the 90s when the Gun-Free Schools Act (GFSA) passed in 1994. This policy called for an automatic one year expulsion if a student was found with a firearm in schools. Although the federal government required these policies, implementation was left to the discretion of the individual states. Initially, schools expanded these policies to include firearms, weapons, drugs, alcohol, and fights. Since then, schools have further expanded them to include swearing, truancy, insubordination, disrespect, and sometimes even dress code violations. Also included in this list is a zero-tolerance for the representations of play or drawn firearms.

The article also addresses some of the concerns of enacting zero-tolerance policies in educational settings. The authors acknowledge that these policies help prevent school violence by “immediately removing dangerous students and serving as a deterrent for others.” However, there are also “dire consequences.” These include increased

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dropout rates, delinquency, repeat offenders for the same or potentially more severe behaviors, poor effects on educational achievement, and less overall safety. These policies also tend to be expensive as a result of increased arrests and incarcerations. Zero-tolerance is also strongly criticized for leading to discrimination, especially among students from minority backgrounds. The authors bring up further concerns about how zero-tolerance practices can negatively impact students with disabilities who are already at high risk for exclusionary actions.

The authors conclude this section by discussing the inflexibility of zero-tolerance policies. “Policies like these prevent administration from taking into consideration age, gender, grade level, special education status, seriousness of the offense, circumstances, student’s prior history of offenses, overall impact of offense, and student’s resiliency level in determining appropriate and effective discipline.”

My research will take this article’s background information on zero-tolerance policies examine how they directly impact prekindergarten students.

SECTION 2.3: ZERO-TOLERANCE POLICIES IN ACTION

Kirsten L. Allman and John R. Slate define and explain different school discipline methods in “School Discipline in Public Education: A Brief Review of Current Practices.” They begin by discussing in-school suspension. “The use of in-school suspension was a school consequence that served as a compromise to the criticism of out-
of-school suspensions."\textsuperscript{13} Although in-school suspension programs can vary from
campus to campus, they have some of the same features. Students are first removed from
their regular classroom upon arrival to school and placed in a separate, secluded
classroom. There is a certified teacher, educational assistant, or both to oversee
student(s) in this secluded classroom where students are served lunch in isolation.

The authors acknowledge that there are problems with in-school suspension as well. The major problem that they discovered is that students miss educational
opportunities that come with interactions because they are isolated from other students.
In most of the school settings, students work separately from the teachers who are
supervising the room and do not have the opportunity to receive assistance with school
assignments and ask questions. In-school suspension is also said to negatively impact a
student’s self-esteem as well as increases the likelihood of students dropping out.\textsuperscript{14}

“Although in more recent years in-school suspension has been utilized as an
intervention in lieu of out-of-school suspension, many schools use out-of-school
suspension in response to zero-tolerance policies and to remove students in an effort to
maintain a safe school environment."\textsuperscript{15} Out-of-school suspension is seen as a straight
forward consequence because the student is required to be absent from school for a
certain period of time. This punishes students by physically removing them from the
school setting and puts responsibility on the parents as well considering that the student

\textsuperscript{13} Troyan, B. E. (2003). The silent treatment: Perpetual in-school suspension and the educational rights of
students. Texas Law Review, 81, 1637-1670
\textsuperscript{14} Commission for Positive Change in the Oakland Public Schools. (1992). Keeping children in school:
\textsuperscript{15} Amuso, J. G. (2007). The occurrence of student absenteeism from the regular school setting and student
achievement on the seventh grade mathematics Mississippi curriculum test (Doctoral dissertation).
Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 3300838)
would remain at home if suspended. Suspension protects personnel and other students at the same time from students who could be considered violent. However, here are concerns with out-of-school suspension as well.

The authors stress that students who are suspended from school are often low academic achievers. Suspension causes students to fall behind in classes, sometimes to a point where they cannot catch up to the rest of their classmates. This could ultimately lead to the student dropping out of school. Also, it is a concern that suspension reinforces bad behaviors instead of stopping them. Students continue to get suspended for the same behaviors which leaves them out of school longer. The authors do acknowledge that there are state guidelines that have helped address some of issues associated with out-of-school suspension.16 “In Texas, for example, the number of days a student can be suspended for an offense is three school days.”17

Alternative schools are a common disciplinary action for public school systems. “School districts are required to offer academic instruction in the areas of English, language arts, math, science, social studies, and self-discipline within the disciplinary alternative education programs.”18 The authors of this study explain that the alternative school provides access to general education content while removing students from the general education campus. Some misbehaviors that result in referral to an alternative school are terrorist threats, drug offenses, and alcohol offenses. Students can also be placed in a program for other violations of the school policies as well.

17 Ibid.
Allman and Slate also address the concerns that come from alternative schools. For one, the teachers who are in charge of the programs usually are only certified in one subject and are not fully prepared to teach students in all subject areas. Also, there is the dilemma of working with students who attend the program and have already existing behavior problems. Many students who are placed in alternative education programs already have an existing problem of disruptive behavior, violence, incorrigibility, and a lack of respect for authority. These students tend to be more challenging to teach. However, Allman and Slate do address some benefits that can arise from the program. These include supervised counseling, social work intervention, and non-traditional schedules which potentially benefit students who have behavior problems.

Zero tolerance policies have not only been accredited with high suspension and expulsion rates, but also a cause of racial disparities in the education system. My research will look at the current discipline policies that are being used in the Mississippi Public School System and compare these policies with North Carolina and Tennessee to learn different methods that can employed at the prekindergarten level.

SECTION 2.4: CORPORAL PUNISHMENT

Another type of school sanctioned punishment is corporal punishment, more commonly referred to as paddling. I present research on this type of discipline because there are currently 19 states in the United States that allow corporal punishment, Mississippi being one. Considering Mississippi’s new pre-k programs will be under the discretion of public school district administrative rules, it is important to consider the impact corporal punishment has on students.
An article written for USA Today says that corporal punishment is “typically swats with a wooden paddle on the backside of a student.”\textsuperscript{19} This use of punishment is grounded in the proverb “spare the rod and spoil the child” which is a reason why the states that typically allow corporal punishment are located in the “Bible Belt.” George Holden who was the chairman of the 2011 Global Summit on Ending Corporal Punishment and Promoting Positive Discipline said, “Most people were spanked when they were kids, and they think that’s the proper way to discipline.”\textsuperscript{20}

Defenders of paddling say that if this punishment is used properly and sparingly then it can be an effective method of discipline. A report in 2006 from the Department of Education said that 223,190 students were physically disciplined which was a decrease of 18\% from 2004. An argument from Priscilla Pullen, a principle at Midway Elementary Professional Development School in Shreveport, LA said that for some students, physical discipline works well while for other students, a paddling could create more discipline problems. Pullen said, “You must know your children. You must be able to tell a behavior problem from ‘I got a problem at home. I need help.”\textsuperscript{21}

Student personnel, however, who carry out punishment while they are working under their official duties face little recourse from injuring students because they are protected from criminal and civil liability, according to the Center for Effective Discipline. This leaves teachers and administrators with protection that some parents do

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
not have. Efforts have been made to ban corporal punishment nationwide, but these efforts have not been completely successful as of today.\textsuperscript{22}

Psychologist Elizabeth Thompson Gershoff has led studies on corporal punishment and came to the conclusion in 2002 that there are vast negative effects. Gershoff analyzed over 80 studies and found a strong correlation between corporal punishment and negative behaviors. “Researchers from Tulane University found that children who are spanked frequently at age 3 are more likely to show aggressive behavior by the time they’re 5 than kids who are not.”\textsuperscript{23} There are also studies that Gershoff analyzed that show physical punishment doesn’t actually work, even though it may appear to. According to Sandra Graham-Bermann, Ph.D., a psychology professor and principal investigator for the Child Violence and Trauma Laboratory at the University of Michigan, “Yes, spanking may stop problematic behavior, but that’s because the child is afraid. In the long term, physical punishment will only make kids’ behavior worse.”\textsuperscript{24} Physical punishment also encourages children to develop abusive relationships throughout childhood and into adulthood, and corporal punishment can actually alter kids’ brains. “A 2009 study [conducted by Akemi Tomoda, MD, PhD] found that children who are frequently spanked (defined as at least once a month for more than three years) had less gray matter in certain areas of the prefrontal cortex that has been linked to depression, addiction, and other mental health disorders.”\textsuperscript{25}

\textsuperscript{22} Alison, B, & USA, (2012), “Paddling: A divisive form of discipline.” USA Today.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid.
Racial disparities are also evident in the use of corporal punishment. Nationwide, African-American and Native American students are beaten in public schools at a rate that is much higher than their peers. In 2006, “African-American students make up 17.1% of the nationwide student population, but 35.6% of those who are paddled.”26 A study conducted by the Human Rights Watch compiled data to prove that corporal punishment is distributed in an unequitable manner. Although African American boys are 2.1 times more likely to be paddled than might be expected given their proportion of the student body in the 13 states with high rates of paddling, the disproportionality is also seen amongst African-American girls when compared to their white counterparts. African-American girls are 2.07 times more likely to be corporally punished than white girls in states that paddle more than 1,000 students per year. A former member of the Jackson (Mississippi) Public School Board of Trustees acknowledged the disproportionate treatment of black girls when he said, “Some of the white teachers, male teachers, were spanking black girls but not white girls. If they could spank black girls, then why couldn’t they spank white girls? So that was another issue. It was not being executed fairly. We have to have the same policy for everybody.”27

SECTION 2.5: DISCIPLINE IN PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS

A report written by Walter S. Gilliam, PhD, summarized the first study ever conducted on expulsion rates in prekindergarten programs across the United States. The data was collected as part of the National Prekindergarten Study (NPS), which was “a comprehensive data collection effort across each of the nation’s 52 state funded

27 Ibid.
prekindergarten programs operating in the 40 states that fund prekindergarten.”

Approximately 4,000 prekindergarten teachers were asked to report the number of children in their classrooms who were expelled for behavioral concerns within the last year. Teachers were also expected to report the child’s age in years, gender, and race or ethnicity.

The data collected showed that the prekindergarten expulsion rate was 6.7 per 1,000 prekindergarten students enrolled. An estimated 5,117 prekindergarteners are expelled nationally each year which is 3.2 times higher than the national expulsion rate for students grades K-12 (2.1 per 1,000 enrolled). African-Americans who attend state-funded prekindergarten programs are about twice as likely to be expelled as Latino and Caucasian children.

Expulsion rates also varied by state. “Although expulsion rates varied widely among the 40 states funding prekindergarten programs, the rate of expulsion for state-funded prekindergarten exceeded the rate of expulsion in K-12 classes in all but three states (Kentucky, South Carolina, and Louisiana).” The nine states with the highest expulsions per 1,000 students are: New Mexico, Missouri, Tennessee, Alabama, North Carolina, Virginia, Massachusetts, Maine, and Delaware. In addition, New Mexico Child Development Program has the highest expulsion rate at 24.3 per 1,000 students, Maine State Funded Head Start is the second highest at 18.4 per 1,000 students, followed by New Mexico State Funded Head Start (15.8 per 1,000 students), Alabama Office of School Readiness Prekindergarten (14.1 per 1,000 students), and Delaware Early

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29 Ibid, 4
Childhood Assistance Program (13.0 per 1,000 students) tied with North Carolina More at Four Pre-Kindergarten Program.\textsuperscript{30}

It is also interesting to note that “the seven states with an exceptionally wide variety of settings, including a high proportion of classrooms in child care centers not affiliated with either the public schools or Head Start, all have prekindergarten expulsion rates that exceed the national average.”\textsuperscript{31} Teachers who work in schools and Head Start programs typically expelled prekindergarten students at the lowest rates (6.2 and 6.6 per 1,000 students) compared to faith-affiliated settings (12.5 per 1,000), for-profit child care centers (119 per 1,000), and other community-based settings (7.6 per 1,000). Although school and Head Start programs had lower expulsion rates, they are still nearly three times higher than the expulsion rates of K-12 programs.\textsuperscript{32}

Dr. James M. Frabutt and M.J. Gathings of the Center for Youth, Family & Community Partnerships further analyzed the data by Walter S. Gilliam and examined expulsion rates for children in state-funded prekindergarten systems across the nation. One of the data findings they focused on was, “Overall, 9.5% of state-funded prekindergarten teachers reported expelling at least one child in the prior twelve months. Of those teachers who reported an expulsion, 78.3% expelled only one child, 15.2% expelled two, 5.5% expelled three, and 1.0% expelled four.”

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid, 5
Male children were expelled from preschool at a rate more than four times higher than females (10.5 for males and 2.5 for females out of 1,000 students). Older children were also expelled more than younger children. Children between the ages of 5 and 6 were expelled 11.6 out of 1,000 students, with 2, 3, and 4 years olds expelled at 3.8, 4.0, and 5.9 per 1,000 students respectively.\textsuperscript{33}

The data shown above describes the problem that my research will focus on: preschoolers are receiving expulsions at a high rate. To understand the problem it is important to study research that has discussed the predictors of early expulsion.

In a policy brief written by Dr. Walter S. Gilliam, characteristics of Pre-K and childcare programs that could impact early expulsion were analyzed. The first characteristic discussed was class size and student-teacher ratios. A higher number of children per teacher increased the likelihood of expulsion in state-funded pre-K programs. In 2008, only 7.7 percent of teachers in classes with a student-adult ration of less than 8 to 1 reported an expulsion whereas 12.7 percent of teachers reported an expulsion in classes with more than 12 children per adult. Lower student-teacher ratios were associated with better classroom quality for all children in the program.

Another predictor of expulsion was hours per day in the pre-K program. “Only 7.1 percent of half-day PK classes experienced an expulsion over a 12-month period of time, compared to 9 percent for school-day classes and 13.2 percent for extended-day classes of eight or more hours per day.”\textsuperscript{34} Program duration was related to expulsion rates

\textsuperscript{33} Gilliam, W. (4)
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.
in state-funded pre-K programs, however there has been no relationship established in child care centers.

There are also psychological factors that can contribute to expulsion rates as well. These factors include: teacher beliefs related to authoritarian childrearing, teacher depression, and job stress. Pre-K teachers who reported high levels of stress were more likely to expel a student. 14.3 percent of highly stressed teachers reported an expulsion in 2008 compared to 4.9 percent who reported lower levels of job stress. “PK teachers and child care staff who report elevated symptoms of depression are somewhat more likely to engage in child care practices that are rated as less sensitive to children’s needs, more intrusive and more negative, as well as lead classrooms that spend larger amounts of unstructured time.”

Dr. Gilliam also examines some of the factors that could potentially reduce Pre-K expulsion and comes up with a list of seven recommendations for policy makers. The first recommendation is to not expel children for challenging behaviors but instead assess the child’s needs and determine the best method of behavioral supports the child could use to succeed in their current program or either transition them to a program that better fits their needs. The second suggestion Dr. Gilliam made was to allow all teachers regular access to early childhood mental health consultants. Child care programs should also enforce student-teacher ratios of no more than 10 preschoolers per teacher, but preferably less. Teachers should also be allowed breaks away from students and other services to help decrease teacher job stress.

35 Ibid.
The research will directly support my attempt to identify discipline policies that can benefit Mississippi pre-K programs. All of the sources identify problems that negatively impact prekindergarten students and practically all of the researchers conclude that this is an area that needs further research and policy efforts. With these sources, I hope to find a discipline policy that distinctively and proactively benefit future discipline policies for Mississippi state funded prekindergarten programs.

SECTION 2.6: RACIAL DISPARITIES IN DISCIPLINE ACTIONS

As discussed in the previous subsection, African American preschool students are expelled at a higher rate than other racial groups. In 2005, Gilliam found that African American preschoolers were expelled at a rate of 10 students per 1,000 expulsions. 5.8 students were Caucasian per 1,000 preschool students expelled, 4.4 were Latino, and 1.8 were Asian American. “African-American children were expelled at a rate almost twice as high as Caucasian classmates, more than twice as high as Latino classmates, and more than five times the rate of Asian-American classmates.” With African Americans receiving a higher number of expulsions than other students in preschool students, it is important to understand literature on the causes of racial disparities and how they are effecting school discipline actions.

The Report of the Commission on Systemic Racism in the Ontario Justice System (1995) defines “racialization as a process by which societies construct races as real, different, and unequal with impact and meaning in stereotypes that can be expressed in ways that matter to economic, political, and social life.” Using the research of Jane

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Elliot, Phillip Semple designed exercises that would teach a Police Foundations class about the problems and issues surrounding racial profiling. This article includes their implementation as well as their results. Through these exercises, Semple was able to realize that most of his audience entered this training with a negative attitude, because most people did not believe they needed training on racial profiling. However, by using students who are offering their own experiences and perspectives, Semple was able to accomplish a non-judgmental environment that focused on interactive learning rather than lectured learning. This research shows that many police themselves do not even recognize that they are participating in racial profiling and other research bodies have found similar results. This experience can be directly correlated with teachers. It is likely that most teachers who use racial profiling do not realize that they are.

Bonilla-Silva argues ‘racial practices that reproduce racial inequality in contemporary America (1) are increasingly covert, (2) are embedded in normal operations of institutions, (3) avoid racial terminology, and (4) are invisible to most whites.’ In this research, Sharla examines public conversation among two all-white focus groups about racial profiling. These two focus groups are from North Carolina in the year 2000. By analyzing white Americans’ talk about racial profiling, Sharla concludes that both focus groups acknowledge the existence of racial profiling, but they do not think that there are any real or powerful consequences that come with this action. Sharla also notes that participants are able to “justify and normalize increased police

surveillance of black people, especially black men, with mostly color-blind language stating common-sense understanding about the social world.” Sharla comes to the general conclusion that racial difference, racial inequality, and racism are all intricately interwoven especially when it comes to interaction – simply expecting different behaviors and attitudes from white people and black people is enough to reinforce racial inequality.39

Racial difference, racial inequality, and racism are social problems that can be seen in everyday life, however these problems start during preschool. An article written by Sonali Kolhatkar, the host and executive producer of Uprising, describes that “American society dehumanizes blacks starting from early childhood.” A study conducted by the U.S. Department of Education has released data from 2011-2012 showing that although black children make up only 18 percent of preschool students, 42 percent of them were suspended one time and 48 percent were expelled multiple times. One reason that this disparity might occur is that the age of black children when compared with nonblack ones are often overestimated. The implication of this action is that black children would be seen as significantly less innocent than other children. There is also another study that was conducted by UC Riverside which found that “teachers tended to be more likely to evaluate black children negatively than nonblack ones who were engaged in play.”40 The study also found that there may be a “devaluing of positive attributes among black children.”41

39 Sharla Alegria (2014)
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid.
Psychology professor Tuppett M. Yates summarizes the effects of racial disparities in the preschool system when she says, “Across these different studies, black children are viewed differently. They are consequently given less access to the kinds of structural avenues required to advance in our society and ultimately they become less valued in our culture,” and are ultimately “fast tracked to the margins.”

The research available shows that racial profiling exists not only in everyday life, but in the school system as well. There are teachers who are passively profiling – even if they do not completely realize it, the effect is still the same. My research will focus on solutions to help correct this problem.

SECTION 2.7: CONCLUSION

The evidence in this literature review shows that there is a need for reform in the preschool system when it comes to how teachers and administrators are able to discipline students. The research also shows that zero tolerance policies might not be the most effective way to discipline students in public schools, especially in regards to prekindergarten students. These policies tend to lead to more students out of school and more racial disparities in the implementation of these punishments which has a strong, negative impact on black students especially.

All the researchers who have worked on preschool discipline, however, have realized that more research is needed on the topic of racial disparities in the discipline process. This thesis will work to add more information to the pool of research as well as take the literature review a step further in order to make recommendations that will allow
the state of Mississippi to have not only less racially inclined punishments, but less suspensions and expulsions overall.
SECTION 3.1: INTRODUCTION

In 1971, North Carolina’s first child day care licensing law was passed, creating the North Carolina Department of Administration, Office of Child Day Care Licensing. In 1993, the Child Care Day Care Section and other parts of the Department of Human Resources agencies were reorganized into the Division of Child Development. Today, this department has further developed into the Division of Child Development and Early Education (the Division or DCDEE).

The creation of the Division has “reflected the growing importance of child care to North Carolina families and the role of the state in ensuring quality standards and access for families to child care services.”42 Considering North Carolina has over 200,000 children that spend part or all of their day in child care settings, the importance of developing quality child care has been essential for the state’s continued economic growth.43 The North Carolina Division of Child Development and Early Education are currently responsible for the North Carolina Public Pre-K Program. This program places and funds eligible pre-K students into public schools, private settings, and Head Start programs.44

Currently, North Carolina public schools supplement their discipline system with a program called school-wide Positive Behavior Support and Intervention (PBIS). PBIS is a program that uses incentives to enforce positive behavior, especially among young children who are most susceptible to positive behavior modules. The main goal of PBIS is preventing problem behaviors and reinforcing the positive ones. PBIS is a data-driven approach that bases their practices on what works and what doesn’t work. North Carolina has seen improvements in their discipline referrals as less children are referred to the office. Racial disparities have also seen improvements as the number of black children referred to the office for disciplinary actions have decreased as well. There are many lessons that Mississippi can take from North Carolina discipline policy and its implementation into the public school system.

SECTION 3.2: THE NORTH CAROLINA PRE-K PROGRAM

The North Carolina Pre-K Program is “designed to provide high-quality educational experiences to enhance school readiness for eligible four-year-old children.” Since its inception in 2001, the Pre-K Program has served over 255,000 students. According to a study on the children’s outcomes and program quality in the North Carolina Pre-Kindergarten Program funded by the North Carolina Division of Child Development and Early Education, Department of Health and Human Services, “In 2012-2013, the NC Pre-K Program served 32,142 children in 2,150 classrooms located in

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Of these children, about half were placed in public schools, one-third were in private child care settings, and 16% were in Head Start. The NC Pre-K Program continues to serve low income children with 91% of the students funded qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch and 80% of the children have never been served in any preschool setting. The Division has created the NC Pre-K Program Requirements that are based on the National Education Goals Panel’s idea that to be successful in school, children need to be prepared in five developmental domains which include: (1) Approaches to play and learning; (2) Emotional and social development; (3) Health and physical development; (4) Language development and communication; and (5) cognitive development. These standards were created to ensure that a high quality pre-kindergarten experience is provided to all eligible four-year-olds and to provide as much uniformity across the state as possible. It is important to look at these standards to be able to draw parallels to the Mississippi state-funded Pre-K program.

SECTION 3.2.1: THE PRE-K CHILD

Children enrolled in a North Carolina Public Pre-K must be four years of age on or before August 31 of the program year. Children who are eligible for kindergarten cannot be served with funds from the NC Pre-K allocations. The child’s gross family

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48 Ibid.
income must also be at or below the 75% State Median Income level\textsuperscript{49} unless that child has an identified developmental disability, Limited English Proficiency (LEP), an educational need as indicated by results of a developmental screening, or a chronic health condition. A priority is made to serve the unserved population, or children “who have received no prior early education services outside the home in a group setting.”\textsuperscript{50}

Although a child may meet one or more of the eligibility factors, this does not guarantee placement in a North Carolina Pre-K program. The child could either be put on a waiting list if the funds in their county are insufficient, or the child could enroll in another state-funded program, like Head Start. Early childhood education services offered in North Carolina include: Child Care Subsidy, Child Care Resource and Referral, Head Start, Preschool Exceptional Children, Smart Start, and Title I Preschool.

The student population served by the NC Pre-K Program are children who are expelled at a higher rate than white students. Black children represent 18% of preschool enrollment nationwide, but they also represent 48% of preschool children who receive more than one out-of-school suspension.\textsuperscript{51} In 2012-2013, 37.0% of NC Pre-K Children were black.\textsuperscript{52} Since NC Pre-K is representing such a large number of African American students, this program is likely to have discipline problems related to race. Also, students with disabilities and English learners are prone to high suspension and expulsion rates as

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{49} For a Family of 1: $26,124; For a Family of 2: $34,162; For a Family of 3: $42,201; For a Family of 4: $50,239; For a Family of 5: $58,277; For a Family of 6: $66,315; For a Family of 7: $74,353; For a Family of 8: $82,391; *Based on August 1, 2013 North Carolina Subsidized Child Care Eligibility Limits
\item \textsuperscript{50} NC Pre-K Program Requirements & Guidance. Section 3. Issue Date: August 2012. 3-2
\end{itemize}
well. With the majority of the population served by NC Pre-K being students who are highly susceptible to suspension and expulsion, it is necessary for North Carolina to prevent high discipline rates from occurring.

SECTION 3.2.2: THE NC PRE-K SITE

The facility that hosts a Pre-K classroom must be a 4 or 5 star level facility unless granted otherwise. Pre-K classrooms are rated on a five star licensing system based on program standards, education standards, and a quality point which can be earned for “enhanced standards in staff education and program standards.”\(^\text{53}\) The sites must provide a Pre-K program for at least 6.5 hours per day for 180 instructional days per school calendar year. Students must also attend at least ten days of the month in order for the contractor to receive payment. If the child misses three consecutive class dates, the site-level administrator must contact the family to determine whether the child still meets participation standards. In addition, school sites must also provide breakfast, snacks, and lunch meals that meet United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) requirements. Families with children in Pre-K may be charged a “nominal amount for transportation to/from the NC Pre-K site if approved by the NC Pre-K Committee. However, children who are at risk should not be denied services based on the family’s inability to pay.”\(^\text{54}\)

Since the pre-K facility must be one of high standards, this program will be competitive for pre-K eligible students in the state to gain admission. The more competition a program has, the more likely they would be to expel that student


\(^{54}\) NC Pre-K Program Requirements & Guidance. Section 4. Issue Date: August 2012. 4-2
considering there would be another one to quickly take their place. However, there are some positive aspects of these high standards. In order to get 4 or 5 stars, the program must have highly qualified teachers. These teachers would be more knowledgeable in terms of effective discipline and would have lower expulsion and suspension rates in their classrooms. High rated programs could also provide a strong foundation in discipline and ensure that it was uniformly enforced throughout all classrooms.

SECTION 3.2.3: THE NC PRE-K CLASSROOM

All NC Pre-K programs must use the curriculum outlined in the *North Carolina Foundations for Early Learning and Development*. Classroom staff are also required to “to conduct formal assessments to gather information about each child’s growth and skill development, as well as to inform instruction.”

Also, the classroom must maintain a maximum staff-to-child ration of 1 to 9 with no class being larger than 18 children. There must be at least one teacher and one assistant teacher per classroom. Classrooms that provide inclusive settings for children with disabilities may require a child to teacher ratio lower than 1 to 9.

There should be a regular time, every day, when preschool-aged children are encouraged, but not forced, to nap or rest. Preschoolers are said to benefit from quiet rest times where they can relax, do quiet activities like reading, and/or participate in one-on-one interactions with staff. Classrooms shall also provide high-quality indoor and outdoor learning environments in addition to the regular academic curriculum. “Teachers

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55 The North Carolina Foundations for Early Learning and Development may be found at DCDEE’s website at [http://ncchildcare.nc.gov/providers/pv_foundations.asp](http://ncchildcare.nc.gov/providers/pv_foundations.asp)

56 NC Pre-K Program Requirements & Guidance. Section 5. Issue Date: August 2012. 5-4
shall arrange for children to be outdoors each and every day, for a minimum of one hour, weather permitting.”\textsuperscript{57}

NC Pre-K classrooms are also required to provide opportunities for family engagement in their child’s education. “NC Pre-Kindergarten Contractors shall develop a comprehensive plan for family engagement to implement strategies designed to develop partnerships with families and build reciprocal relationships that promote shared decision-making.”\textsuperscript{58} Some viable options to fulfill this need include: (1) Allowing Pre-K program teachers the opportunity for home visits; (2) Formal and informal parent/teacher conferences; (3) Classroom visits and options for parents and families to participate in classroom activities; (4) Parent education; (5) Allowing family members the opportunity for involvement in decision making about their own child and about their child’s early childhood program; and (6) Opportunities to engage families outside of the regular service day.\textsuperscript{59}

Something interesting about the North Carolina pre-K program are co-curricular activities. If children are required to have a nap or quiet time daily, there should be less behavioral problems due to overworking the students or exhaustion. Also, allowing the children daily playtimes should keep the children active and excited while providing a break from academics. All of this should directly impact the students stress levels and create a much more peaceful environment devoid of problem disciplinary behaviors.

\textsuperscript{57} NC Pre-K Program Requirements & Guidance. Section 5. Issue Date: August 2012. 5-6
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid. 5-6 and 5-7
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid. 5-7
North Carolina has also worked to build an effective classroom size along with active family participation. According to Walter Gilliam, the director of the Edward Zigler Center on Child Development and Social Policy at Yale University, classrooms are more effective at preventing expulsion when the student to teacher ratio is lower than 8:1. This provides the teacher more opportunity to work with their students on a 1:1 basis. This would allow for the teacher to address discipline problems more effectively by having that opportunity to have an individual conversation with the student instead of having to quickly punish the student while dealing with the entire classroom. Also, the strong family involvement in the pre-K child’s education will also create a more effective system in addressing discipline problems in the classroom and at home.

SECTION 3.2.4: THE NC PRE-K STAFF

It is also important to understand the makeup of the staff of the North Carolina Pre-K Program. Administrators of NC Pre-K sites must have either a North Carolina Principal License or a North Carolina Early Childhood Administrator Credential (NCECAC) Level III. There are some situations where a Level I or II will be given provisional approval for four years until they receive their Level III.

All lead teachers must hold, or be working towards, a North Carolina Birth through Kindergarten (B-K) or Preschool Add-on Standard II licensures. In order to hold either required license, the teacher must have a minimum of a Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Science degree and the following requirements: (1) NC Initial Provisional

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Lateral Entry BK License or, (2) A North Carolina K-6 license and a provisional
Preschool Add-on license, or (3) Another North Carolina or other state’s license and an
NC Provisional B-K Add-on license, or (4) A BA/BS degree in early childhood
education, child development, or a related field, and be eligible for a NC Initial
Provisional Lateral Entry B-K License. All teaching assistants must have a high school
diploma or GED. They must also hold, or be working toward, “a minimum of an
Associate Degree in early childhood education or child development or a Child
Development Associate credential.”

North Carolina has worked to improve the levels of teacher education and
credentials in the Pre-K programs over the last few years, and they have seen
improvements. “In 2012-2013, almost all NC Pre-K lead teachers had at least a
bachelor’s degree in both public school and private settings. Nearly all lead teachers and
over half in private settings had a B-K license, while almost no teachers in public schools
and under one-quarter in private settings had no credential.” This increase in highly
qualified teachers will work to provide teachers who are knowledgeable on how to handle
pre-k students with problem behavior. If teachers are properly trained to handle these
behaviors, they are less likely to expel or suspend these students.

SECTION 3.3: THE NEED FOR A NEW DISCIPLINE POLICY

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61 NC Pre-K Program Requirements and Guidelines. Section 6. Issued: August 2012. 6-1
62 Ibid. 6-2
Children’s outcomes and program quality in the North Carolina Pre-Kindergarten Program: 2012-2013
Pg. 26-27.
“We were drowning in data. Test data. Behavior data. Attendance data. And the bottom line was our staff was working harder than ever, but we didn’t make Adequate Yearly Progress according to the new federal guidelines.”

The North Carolina State Board of Education shared an article written Principal Denise W. Drawbaugh, Ed. D of Lynn Road Elementary School in Wake County Public Schools who recollected the general feelings of the school when Lynn Road Elementary School failed to meet Adequate Yearly Progress for the second year. This meant that parents of students who attended that school could request to have their child leave that elementary school and go to neighboring schools that had higher test scores. However, test scores were not the only scores that stood out; discipline referrals had reached a new high with referrals of approximately one per student if they were averaged. Lynn Road was not the only school in North Carolina that was displaying problems with their discipline system – this was a statewide problem.

Discipline data reported by the Department of Public Instruction, the Exceptional Children Division, and the Behavioral Support Services in the North Carolina public schools between the years 2000 and 2002 brought attention to behavioral issues in the K-12 system. There was also an increase of 71 percent in the number of students who were expelled from traditional LEA’s or local education agencies in the years 2000-2002. Long-term suspensions increased by 27 percent between the 2000-2001 and the 2001-2002 school year and over half of these suspensions were given to black and other

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minority students. “In total, out-of-school suspensions in 2001-2002 resulted in over one million lost instructional days for North Carolina public school students.” This loss of instructional hours was evident in student achievement as “students who received one or more out-of-school suspensions were less likely to score at or above grade level on End-of Grade and End-of-Course achievement tests across subject areas.” Black and other minority students were overrepresented in multiple short-term suspensions, long-term suspensions, and expulsions at the schools like Supply Elementary School. Supply Elementary School in Brunswick County School District had a total of 741 infractions that resulted in office referrals – 370 of these were from African American students. This means that roughly half of the discipline referrals are from black students when they only made up roughly 28 percent of the school.

By law, each local board must develop a safe school plan which is “designed to ensure that each school is safe, secure, and orderly, has a climate of respect and appropriate personal conduct for all students and all public school personnel.” In addition to this, “each local board of education has to develop and implement character education instruction with input from the local community. With the state of the discipline system as it was in the late nineties, North Carolina sought out a new program that would improve this issue and fit well with existing legislation. The Positive

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66 Ibid. Page 3
69 GS. 115C-105.47. 2005-446, s. 2/ Irwin (2006) Pg. 2
Behavioral Intervention and Support Initiative (PBIS) fit these requirements and North Carolina began the process of implementing the program into their educational system in 2000.

SECTION 3.4: POSITIVE BEHAVIORAL INTERVENTION AND SUPPORT (PBIS)

North Carolina implemented the Positive Behavioral Intervention and Support (PBIS) Initiative in their public school system in August of 2000. PBIS is “the process for creating school environments that are more predictable and effective for achieving academic and social goals.”

According to a report completed by the Center for Child and Family Policy at Duke University which evaluated the School-wide Positive Support program in North Carolina elementary schools, the program follows the belief that encouraging good behavior will reduce negative outcomes such as the number of suspension, the number of days suspended, and the amount of student turnover. As of October 1, 2008, there were nearly 8,000 schools in different stages of adopting State Wide Positive Behavioral Intervention and Support (SWPBIS) programs, North Carolina being one.

“PBIS is a framework or approach for assisting school personnel in adopting and organizing evidence-based behavioral interventions into an integrated continuum that

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enhances academic and social behavior outcomes for all students.” PBIS was established by the United States Department of Education’s Office of Special Education Programs under the Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports. The main focus of PBIS is prevention. Although most students follow school protocol and meet expectations, they are typically were not acknowledged or rewarded for their positive behavior. PBIS aims to enforce these positive behaviors through instruction, comprehension, and regular practice. The establishment of organizational supports or systems is emphasized with PBIS because it gives school personnel the tools to effectively intervene with behavioral issues at the school, district, and state levels. “These supports include (a) team-based leadership, (b) data-based decision-making, (c) continuous monitoring of student behavior, (d) regular universal screening, and (e) effective on-going professional development.”

According to the United States Department of Education, PBIS focuses on the most effective and most positive approach to addressing problem behaviors, regardless of severity levels. “Most students will succeed when a positive school culture is promoted, informative corrective feedback is provided, academic success is maximized, and use of prosocial skills is acknowledged.” It is important to note, however, that PBIS has no specific restrictions on the use of consequence-based strategies meant to reduce extreme “problem behaviors”. PBIS focuses on the cause of the behavior, rather than the effect.

76 Ibid.
When children continue to behave in a certain manner, PBIS seeks to understand why the problem is occurring, and searches for ways to eliminate the causation. “When student problem behavior is unresponsive to preventative school-wide and classroom-wide procedures, information about the student’s behavior is used to (a) understand why the problem behavior is occurring (function); (b) strengthen more acceptable alternative behaviors (social skills); (c) remove antecedents and consequences that trigger and maintain problem behavior, respectively; and (d) add antecedents and consequences that trigger and maintain alternative behaviors.”  

There are three different levels of prevention that the PBIS enforces. The main goal of PBIS is to establish and reinforce clear behavioral expectations by using the entire school staff and a systems approach. The first level or Primary Level, is for all students. The goal on this level is to reduce new cases of problem behaviors. Primary prevention is important because it shifts discipline approaches from reactive to proactive. “The primary prevention of positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) consists of rules, routines, and physical arrangements that are developed and taught by school staff to prevent initial occurrences of behavior the school would like to target for change.” An example of this would be if the school team determined they did not want students to disrespect their classmates. To target this change, they would create the behavioral expectation, Respect Others. “Research indicates that 3-5 behavioral expectations that are positively stated, easy to remember, and significant to the climate

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are best.” If these guidelines are followed when creating behavioral expectations, researchers should be able to walk into a classroom and ask the students what the expectations are and to give examples of what this behavior looks like in action. About 80 percent or better should be able to answer this question correctly.

After creating behavioral expectations, the school team would build a matrix listing the expectations in the horizontal row. The vertical columns would be labeled with areas where the behavior could be: 1) taught, 2) modeled, 3) practiced, and 4) observed. For example, the columns might include locations like cafeteria or gymnasium. Then the leadership team would come up with a few examples of what respecting others would look like in these areas. For example, respecting others in the cafeteria could be something like: Do not touch other people’s food without permission. The leadership team would then figure out how to best teach this behavior to their students. There are many different ways to do this. Some schools take their students through interactive stations while others may show the “bad” behavior first, followed by the appropriate one. The school has the power to choose the best way to teach this behavior based on their particular need. Finally, leadership team would need to identify students who are engaged in particular positive actions. Specific praise is extremely important in enforcing positive behaviors and increasing the chances of the behaviors happening again. These praises could be something as simple as a paper with “gotcha” written on them that could be passed out to students by teachers who witness these appropriate behavioral actions.

80 Ibid.
81 Ibid.
Research by the Department of Education shows that primary prevention support works for over 80% of students who participate in these activities.\textsuperscript{82} Although implementation looks different at different school sites, most schools realize similar results. There are two main advantages to systematic primary prevention. First, it reduces the large number of office discipline referrals for minor problems. The minor problems tend to distract school officials from more serious issues. Eliminating the vast number of office discipline referrals allows time for administrators to get to the root of the problem for students with more severe behavior issues. Primary prevention also creates a system for documenting targeted negative behaviors. For example, a student with four or more discipline referrals in a month might be considered to need secondary prevention. Although primary prevention decreases the number of students needing a greater level of prevention substantially, there are still students who will need more individualized and targeted attention. These students in need of more intensive intervention would receive secondary and/or tertiary prevention measures.

According to the United States Department of Education, “Secondary Prevention is designed to provide intensive or targeted interventions to support students who are not responding to Primary Prevention efforts.”\textsuperscript{83} Secondary Prevention typically involves small groups of students (at least 10) or simple individualized intervention strategies. The targeted group interventions are more of a focus at this level of prevention, however, given that Secondary Prevention focuses more on classroom behaviors. Secondary Prevention at the individual level includes: “(1) teaching the student to use new skills as a

replacement for problem behaviors, (2) rearranging the environment so that problems can be prevented and desirable behaviors can be encouraged, and (3) monitoring, evaluating, and reassessing this simple plan over time.”

Secondary Prevention focuses on supporting students who are at risk for more serious problem behaviors. Decisions on whether this type of intervention should be implemented is compiled by classroom teachers or other professionals. There are some schools where students with a certain number of disciplinary references can also be referred to Secondary Prevention. However, intervention is not an expert-driven process; it is approached in a collaborative manner. The student works with a support team which includes: the student’s family, educators, and/or other direct service providers. They are the individuals who assess the student and intervene when behavior is not deemed appropriate. “The support team are the people who know the student best, have a vested interest in positive outcomes, represent the range of environments in which the student participates, and have access to resources needed for support.” Effective secondary interventions have produced positive changes in behaviors and improvement in the student’s quality of life. When a student needs more individualized attention, however, the PBIS system refers to Tertiary Level Prevention.

The final level of PBIS is Tertiary Prevention. This type of prevention was designed to focus on students who show repetitive behavioral problems. These behavioral problems are normally highly disruptive, impede on the learning process, and/or are dangerous to the students and others. Although Tertiary Prevention has been

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84 Ibid.
85 Ibid.
associated with developmental disabilities and autism, the highly adaptive nature of the system makes it effective for students with a wide range of characteristics, whether they have a diagnostic label or not.

Like Secondary Prevention, Tertiary Prevention works best in a collaborative and comprehensive manner. The process should not only include the student with the behavioral issues, but the people who know him/her best. This behavioral support team works together to create a support that fits the individual’s specific needs and circumstances and promotes positive changes in the behavior. “The goal of Tertiary Prevention is to diminish problem behavior and, also, to increase the student’s adaptive skills and opportunities for an enhanced quality of life.”86 The Tertiary Prevention involves functional behavior assessment and the creation of a support plan that is specifically for the individual. The intervention strategies in the plan include a wide range of options such as: (1) guidance or instruction for the student to use new skills as a replacement for problem behaviors; (2) some rearrangement of the environment so that problems can be avoided and positive behaviors can be encouraged; and (3) specific procedures for readdressing the plan when necessary.87

SECTION 3.5: IMPLEMENTATION

According to a report published by the Public Schools of North Carolina and written by Dr. Denise Drawbaugh, Dr. Drawbaugh’s school, Lynn Road Elementary School was one of the fourteen schools that was accepted as a pilot school for the PBIS

87 Ibid.
statewide introduction. After implementing the program into the program, Dr. Drawbaugh has noticed significant improvement in her school. Lynn Road Elementary School was no longer classified as a Title I School “In Need of Improvement” after just a year of the program. According to the United States Department of Education says that if a school fails to make adequate yearly progress for two consecutive years, it is considered by be a Title I School “In Need of Improvement.” This means that students can transfer to a school that meets AYP standards. In the first year of the PBIS program at Lynn Road the Public Schools of North Carolina Department reported 700 positive office referrals, regular office referrals decreased by 50%, and suspensions decreased by 66%. The school also saw improvements in their test scores. Overall reading scores increased by eight points and over all math scores by half a point. Dr. Drawbaugh said, “We think that what changed in addition to what we were already doing is that students were in class rather than sitting in the office waiting to be seen for an office referral. Parents were happier when we called, students were happier, staff members were happier, the office staff was happier, and that might just be why it’s called Positive Behavior Intervention and Support.”

In North Carolina, PBIS began as a part of the State Improvement Program Grant. This program was federally funded through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The grant was for personnel development and a systems change

89 HEADEN, MONICA DOLORES. The Role of the Principal in the Implementation of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports in Exemplar Elementary Schools in North Carolina. (Under the direction Dr. TamaraV. Young.) (2013). Repository.lib.ncsu.edu/ir/bitstream/1840.16/8310/1/etd.pdf. pg. 18
with seven proposed reading centers, one mathematics center, and one behavioral support center. Oak Grove Elementary was the first school to implement this program. This school was a predominately African-American school with 960 students (40% receiving free or reduced lunch) in Durham, North Carolina.

A study conducted by Monica Headen under the direction of Dr. Tamara V. Young at North Carolina State University completed a qualitative multiple case study to examine how principals contribute to the success of PBIS in North Carolina. This study found that there was a quick change at Oak Grove Elementary after PBIS was implemented. “Oak Grove Elementary quickly experienced a reduction in suspensions, dropping from 109 students suspended for a total of 149 days in 2000-2001 to 51 students suspended for a total of 109 days in 2001 and 2002.”\textsuperscript{90} There was also a decrease in office discipline referrals (ODRs). During the same time period, ODRs dropped from 993 to 702 – almost a 30% reduction. This success led North Carolina to spread the PBIS program to other schools. Since that time, most of the school districts in North Carolina have a PBIS program in at least one of their schools. “In a 2009-2010 evaluation report released in January 2011, 100 of the state’s 115 districts had some level of participation in the program initiative, for a total of 909 schools.”\textsuperscript{91}

As a result of the growing use of PBIS in North Carolina, in 2007 North Carolina Legislature created a new PBS Consultant position to serve as the lead implementer for the state. This professional position also provides leadership to the Regional Coordinators, local education agencies (LEAs), and the schools. This was the first time

\textsuperscript{90} Ibid. Pg. 19.
\textsuperscript{91} Ibid. Pgs. 19-20
that state funding had been delegated to specifically support NC’s PBS Initiative.\textsuperscript{92} North Carolina also has an active Positive Behavior Support Team which was created in 2002. This team includes state and local representatives and professionals from college and university professional development programs. The team is responsible for the Action Plan for which they meet regularly to define and redefine the work that is being done and that needs to be done in NC PBS schools. The PBS Leadership Team also has subcommittees which are responsible for coaching and training, evaluating, and visibility and political support. Although the Leadership Team sets the goals and tone for implementation in the state, however, supporting these goals is the responsibility of the PBS Consultant and Regional Coordinators.

A report completed by the OSEP Technical Assistance Center of the U.S. Department of Education completed a report that estimates the cost to implement School-wide PBIS. The evaluation brief takes into consideration three scenarios to give school districts an estimated amount to budget for PBIS. The first scenario is district implementation of Tier I SWPBIS with 10-15 schools as part of a brand new initiative. The costs associated with this stage of implementation include the direct transition costs, the new on-going costs, and the opportunity costs related to using existing resources. For a mid-size district (30-50 schools) the report estimates that the total unit cost of the program would be $5,000 to $10,000 per school over a two year period. The second scenario comes into play when a district chooses to scale up tier 1 SWPBIS from the initial 15 schools to an additional 30 new schools. “The net result is that adding a cluster

https://www.pbis.org/common/cms/files/pbisresources/ncevaluationreport07_08.pdf Pg. 4
of 30 new school teams implementing SWPBIS to the initial 15 pilot schools can be achieved at a cost of approximately $3,000 per school over the initial 2-year adoption window with $400 per year per school for access to data applications.”93 The costs associated with this stage of implementation would be implementation activities like workshops, direct transition costs like hiring personnel, and new on-going costs such as purchasing a data collection system. The third scenario is district investing in 15 tier 1 SWPIS schools broadening implementation to include Tier II and Tier III Practices and Systems. The costs for this stage would include materials, training expertise, staff time for team training, and related data systems. The report addresses that this scenario is difficult to put a price on. Schools have different needs and as such will pay different prices to implement effective PBIS.94

As the PBIS program has spread throughout North Carolina, sustaining the program has become a state responsibility with increased amounts of targeted state funding in the past few years. However, there are still funds available to North Carolina public schools for PBIS implementation available in state and federal funds. Program Report Code 118 (PRC 118) provides funding to PBIS. A program report code, “designates a plan of activities of funding designed to accomplish a predetermined objective.”95 In order for an LEA to receive funding from PRC 118, they must have an active PBIS trainer. The funding supports the LEA Trainer and Training to support PBIS based on a funding formula. “The current funding formula allows for $500 to support

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94 Ibid. Pg. 1-5.
trainer expenses (primarily travel to attend regional meetings and to assist with trainings in the region), $300 per team trained in Modules 1-3 in the LEA, $400 per team trained in Modules 1-3, and/or $150 per 6 hour day of additional training with the LEA up to a maximum of $12,500. 96 LEAS that receive funding are required to submit budget and training reports at the mid-year and end of the year. The PBIS staff also reserves the right to make the final funding decisions. 97

“PBIS implementation requires an upfront investment of time and effort from the school PBIS team and the rest of the school staff.” 98 The cost for the school PBIS team usually only requires paying for the substitutes necessary for the team members, especially considering training is usually conducted within their LEA or region to reduce traveling costs. Schools determine how much money is needed to successfully implement the program into their school. Meaning if the incentive for positive behavior in a school is giving a child a ticket for good behavior which allows them to pick out a prize, the school would be responsible for funding the tickets and prizes. However, these costs tend to vary as some schools would use prizes which could be more expensive than schools who opt to use stickers as a reward. In general, schools spend a few hundred dollars to post school rules and/or support a reinforcement system. To supply this money, schools usually form partnerships with local business, seek grants, or gain support from parent-teacher organizations (PTOs).

97 Ibid.
3.6: EVALUATION OF PBIS

According to an evaluation of the North Carolina PBIS programs conducted by Monica Headen of North Carolina State University, North Carolina uses the *School-wide Evaluation Tool (SET)* in order to measure the effectiveness of whether the PBIS is successful or not in achieving its goals. In the 2004-05 school year, the original 16 schools that were funded as demonstration sites were evaluated using the School Wide Evaluation Tool (SET) developed by the National Positive Behavior Supports and Interventions Center. The SET assesses and evaluates the features of school-wide effective behavior support. These features include: (1) expectations defined; (2) behavioral expectations taught; (3) on-going system for rewarding behavioral expectations; (4) system for responding to behavioral violations; (4) monitoring and decision-making; (5) management; and (6) district-level support. These evaluations are based on interviews from administration, teachers, students, and others staff. There is also an observation part to the evaluation which is generally administered by an outside observer like a district or regional coordinator who is trained in the use of SET.

Headen made extensive references to an article written in the *Journal of Positive Behavior and Interventions* written by R.H. Horner, T. Lewis-Palmer, L. Irvin, G. Sugai, and J. Boland in 2004. These researchers gave more perspective on SET. According to Horner, “Each SET item is scored on a 3-point scale ranging from a score of zero, which

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99 HEADEN, MONICA DOLORES. The Role of the Principal in the Implementation of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports in Exemplar Elementary Schools in North Carolina. (Under the direction Dr. TamaraV. Young.) (2013). Repository.lib.ncsu.edu/ir/bitstream/1840.16/8310/1/etd.pdf. Pg. 20

47
means not implemented, to a score of two, which represents full implementation.”\textsuperscript{101} The researchers also say that the SET is “a valid, reliable measure that can be used to access the impact of the school-wide training and technical assistance efforts.”\textsuperscript{102} However, Headen raises valid reservations about the SET instrument. She makes note in her study that the SET is only capable of measuring “ocular components of PBIS implementation” meaning what was done and what still needs to be done.\textsuperscript{103} The SET is made mostly of yes or no questions which does not effectively measure or account for the process of implementing PBIS or the specific strategies principals use to ensure successful implementation. It also does not “describe how or why the actions of principals were influenced by the way they made sense of PBIS and the implementation process.”\textsuperscript{104} Headen also raises the point that evaluation of the PBIS program during the first few years of implementation relied completely on data collected by the schools themselves. It was not until 2006-2007 that schools began using regional coordinators and trainers to evaluate the schools implementing PBIS using the SET instrument.\textsuperscript{105} However, Headen does believe the SET instrument shares pertinent data about PBIS implementation in North Carolina public schools.

\textsuperscript{101} HEADEN, MONICA DOLORES. The Role of the Principal in the Implementation of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports in Exemplar Elementary Schools in North Carolina. (Under the direction Dr. TamaraV. Young.) (2013). Repository.lib.ncsu.edu/ir/bitstream/1840.16/8310/1/etd.pdf. Pg. 20
\textsuperscript{103} HEADEN, MONICA DOLORES. The Role of the Principal in the Implementation of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports in Exemplar Elementary Schools in North Carolina. (Under the direction Dr. TamaraV. Young.) (2013). Repository.lib.ncsu.edu/ir/bitstream/1840.16/8310/1/etd.pdf. Pg. 20
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid. Pg. 22
Headen made use of the data collected by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction with the SET and the results after PBIS implementation were positive. Out of the sixteen schools, nine had at least 80% on Total Implementation and 80% on Behavioral Expectations. There was only one school that did not have school system level support. However, nine had total implementation of school-wide systems above 80%. Two of the schools also had scores of 100% on all of the features previously listed. Schools that started after the demonstration schools still needed support and training to reach the achievement level of the initial sixteen.

Several schools reported that office referrals exhibited stable patterns or reductions in their end-of-year reports. However, there were schools that had greater reductions than baseline schools. Supply Elementary School displayed a 69 percent decrease in office referrals whereas Oak Grove showed a 41 percent decrease. There were reductions in suspensions as well at: Balfour (11%), McCrary (32%), Supply (47%), Southwood (46%) and Marlow (59%) Elementary Schools.\textsuperscript{106} By looking at one specific elementary school, however, one can see the significant impact the PBIS program can have on an individual school.

The North Carolina Public School System also reported positive results. “Bald Creek Elementary has decreased student office referrals from the first to the last year of implementation by 97 referrals or by 60.2%.”\textsuperscript{107} In the 2003-04 school year, Bald Creek


had 161 office referrals, 147 referrals in 04-05 and 64 referrals in 05-06. Students referred to ISS also decreased from 112 students in ISS for one or more offense to 31 in ISS the 05-06 school year. This is equivalent to a 72.3% decrease. In addition, OSS referrals have fluctuated. In 03-04 there were 8 suspensions, in 04-05, 4 suspensions, but interestingly, there was an increase to 7 suspensions in 05-06. Bald Creek also showed signs of improved academic performance after the implementation of PBIS in 2003. In 2001-02, students at or above the grade level in reading was 78.1% and in math was 88.6%. In 2004-05, the students who performed at or above the grade level in reading increased to 84.2% and in math increased to 89.5%. Although there may be other factors that could have contributed to these increases, these are “interesting trends that should be further investigated at the school, district, and state level of PBIS implementation.”

Changes in student behavior have also resulted in savings in time allocated to problem behavior. When a student receives an office referral, it takes time out of a teacher’s and administrator’s day to appropriately handle each case. “For example, using conservative estimates of 20 minutes of teacher time and 10 minutes of administrator time for each referral, approximately 1520 hours of teaching time and 760 hours of leadership time were saved in Green Valley Elementary School’s reduction in office referrals.” When administrators and teachers are not spending numerous hours disciplining students, they can focus on different tasks such as teaching, interacting with

109 Ibid. Pg. 18
the students, and making sure the school is successful. The time allocation has a positive impact on all outcomes of the school system.

PBIS also provides some corrective support to racial disparities in discipline. PBIS provides an equitable system for discipline actions because it includes “the use of data collection systems that encourage disciplinary consistency across students and teachers and allow schools to review potential trends in their office discipline referral (ODR) data across student groups, locations, times, or behaviors.”

Looking at a study of schools from 6 schools from the Durham Public School system (4 elementary and 2 secondary) who are successfully implementing PBIS and meet district criteria for “developed teams”, a total of 3936 hours of instructional time have been gained. African Americans have gained the most instructional time out of PBIS implementation (3456 hours), with Hispanics gaining 276 hours, and Caucasians gaining 156 hours. Also African Americans see a reduction in office referrals as well. In 2000-01 there were 370 infractions from African Americans from Supply Elementary School. In 2004-05, there were 81 infractions reported. Suspensions also decreased from 105 in 2000-01 to 15 in 2004-05. This saved about 90 instructional days for students which also saw an increase in academic performance from African American students.

SECTION 3.7: CONCLUSION

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North Carolina’s shift in discipline policy is evident. The belief “that behavior is learned and thus can be taught in schools is spreading throughout the state”\textsuperscript{112} is leading schools to find effective ways to implement PBIS state education policy. The decreases in office referrals, ISS, OSS, and expulsions that North Carolina has experienced are interesting, if not to say impressive. Also, the idea that implementation is quick, efficient, with low costs is promising. Other states, like Mississippi, would be able to implement a similar program into their public schools with few obstacles. That the program is aimed at elementary (Pre-K – grade 5 students) should be useful for implementing a similar initiative into Mississippi public pre-K, as well. The PBIS program has provided significant improvements in discipline data and a lesson can be learned from North Carolina – positive reinforcement can lead to positive results.

CHAPTER 4: TENNESSEE CASE STUDY

SECTION 4.1: INTRODUCTION

In May of 2005, the Voluntary Pre-K for Tennessee Act of 2005 was passed by the House and the Senate to create a voluntary pre-K program for Tennessee’s public school districts. The law distributed $25 million in excess lottery dollars to districts through competitive grant processes to establish pilot pre-kindergarten classrooms. Today, Tennessee’s Voluntary Pre-K program continues to grow. In the 2013-2014 school year, over $85 million from the state’s education budget was allocated to pre-K supporting 935 pre-K classrooms in all 95 Tennessee counties to serve over 18,000 four-year-olds each year. According to the Tennessee Department of Education, “the Tennessee Voluntary Pre-K (TN VPK) is recognized as a national leader in pre-K quality, achieving 9 out of 10 quality standard benchmarks of the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER).”

Tennessee, as a border state to Mississippi, possesses many similarities in their pre-K programs. For this reason, a case study on Tennessee pre-K and discipline policy will be of use in determining a potential discipline policy for Mississippi pre-K. Tennessee currently uses The Pyramid Model, a program funded by The Center for the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning and the Technical Assistance Center on Social Intervention. Using a tier system, the Pyramid Model works to provide all children with support by using building nurturing and responsive relationships in high quality settings. This could mean embedding positive behavior reinforcement in a child’s

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daily routine or even building a strong teacher and student bond to nurture that responsive relationship previously mentioned. The Pyramid provides a positive intervention model which should effectively decrease suspension and expulsion rates. This should also provide a remedy for racial disparities in discipline as well.

SECTION 4.2: THE TENNESSEE PRE-K PROGRAM

SECTION 4.2.1: THE TENNESSEE PRE-K CHILD

Tennessee’s Voluntary Pre-K strives to be accessible to all 4-year olds. However, the program places a greater emphasis on enrolling students who live in high priority communities or are otherwise at-risk. To accommodate this, first priority is given to children who meet free or reduced price lunch income guidelines. If there is any space available after this, then the program will seek to enroll children with disabilities, English Language Learners, children who are in the state’s custody, or children who are at risk of abuse or neglect, regardless of income. After these groups of students are offered spots, if there is still space available after the first 20 days of the new school year, all other children can enroll.

The limited space in the pre-K programs can complicate aspects of Tennessee’s discipline policy. If students misbehave in the classroom, schools might move more quickly to expulsion, given there are other children who could immediately take a disruptive child’s spot. Also, the children the pre-K program caters to are children who are more likely to receive disciplinary actions, such as those who are in poverty, those

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115 Ibid.
who represent minority populations, those who have a disability, or those who are English learners. Tennessee’s pre-K discipline policy needs to address these two major issues to prevent an overly high level of pre-K expulsions. The Tennessee Department of Education states, “The TN VPK programs cannot dismiss a child due to inappropriate behavior without submitting documentation of the attempted behavioral interventions to the Tennessee Department of Education, Office of Early Learning.” However, this only provides a method of accountability – this does not prohibit a student’s dismissal from the program.

SECTION 4.2.2: THE TENNESSEE PRE-K SITE

The contractor of a pre-K facility must provide a preschool calendar that includes 200 working days of seven and one half hours for teaching staff and a minimum of five and one half hours per day for 180 days of educational activities for students. The contractor must also provide a program that meets the guidelines of Child Care Standards of Tennessee. Sites must pass fire and environmental inspections and be approved by the Department of Education or the Department of Human Services. In order for a private childcare center to open a VPK program, the center must have three stars on STAR quality scale. The Star-Quality program in Tennessee recognizes child care providers who meet a higher standard of quality. If enrolled in this voluntary program, a provider can receive one, two, or three starts to place on their license.

118 Ibid.
According to the University of Tennessee College of Social Work Office of Research and Public Service, the more starts a program has the higher the quality of the program is said to be.\textsuperscript{119} Centers are scored on: (1) the director’s qualifications or experience, education, and training; (2) the education, training, and previous work experience of teaching staff; (3) developmental learning; (4) parent and family involvement; (5) ratios and group sizes; (6) the center’s pay and benefit plans for staff; and (7) program assessment (on-site observation).\textsuperscript{120}

The high quality of the pre-K facility allows for a more structured discipline system. If schools are performing at high STAR quality, there will be more resources to apply to positive reinforcement rather than increases in suspensions and expulsions. However, the high quality of the program would also make admission into these pre-K programs highly competitive. As mentioned above, if the prospective student pool is large the school would not be negatively impacted by an expelled student. They would immediately replace that child with a student on a waiting list.

SECTION 4.2.3: THE TENNESSEE PRE-K CLASSROOM

All Tennessee Voluntary Pre-K programs must provide a comprehensive, research-based educational curriculum that is approved by the Office of Early Learning and aligned with the Tennessee Early Learning Developmental Standards. This educational program must focus on developmental areas (language, cognitive, social-
emotional, and physical) with a balance between “direct instruction, individualized instruction, group activities, and choice of center-based activities.”

The pre-K classroom should have a minimum adult to child ratio of 1:10 for four-year-olds at all times. The maximum class size is 20 students and there must be at least one teacher and one assistant teacher per classroom. TN pre-K classrooms must also provide opportunities for the family to engage in their children’s education. This can include family consultation, parenting skills training, home visits, and opportunities for families to volunteer on site. Parent/teacher conferences must also occur at least twice yearly.

The adult to child ratio is problematic. There can already be difficulties in managing one four-year-old with behavior problems; ten four-year-old students would be more challenging to handle. It is a possibility that students will not receive the necessary individualized attention if teachers are focused on ten students at once, especially in terms of discipline. According to Walter Gilliam, the director of the Edward Zigler Center on Child Development and Social Policy at Yale University, “Classrooms with fewer than eight students per teacher are much less likely to expel children.” However,
family participation in TN pre-K programs allows for discipline problems to be addressed at home, as well as in the classroom.

SECTION 4.2.4: THE TENNESSEE PRE-K STAFF

In every pre-K classroom, there must be a teacher who is state licensed and endorsed for Early Childhood Education or is “teaching under an approved waiver or transitional license.” However, teachers who have a waiver or transitional license must make adequate progress towards a full license before being allowed to return and teach for a second year. There must also be at least one teacher assistant in each classroom who hold at least a Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential. Otherwise the teacher assistant must have an associate degree in early childhood and working be actively working towards a CDA Credential. If there is no applicant to the position who holds these credentials, the program could hire a teacher assistant who holds a high school diploma and has previous experience in early childhood.

Tennessee’s standards for teaching pre-K are flexible: teachers do not have to have all of the certifications and credentials at the time of employment, but simply prove that they are working towards these standards. This calls into question the general levels of expertise of the teachers in the TN VPK and the availability of qualified teachers in the state. If teachers are not fully qualified, they may not effectively address discipline issues, leading to more suspensions and expulsions.

126 Ibid.
SECTION 4.3: THE TENNESSEE PRE-K DISCIPLINE POLICY

Data collected in 2005 as a part of the National Prekindergarten Survey (NPS)\textsuperscript{127}, a comprehensive data collection effort 40 states that fund pre-K, found the national expulsion rate was 6.7 students expelled per 1,000 prekindergarteners enrolled.\textsuperscript{128} Tennessee, however, had an expulsion rate that exceeded the national rate. Tennessee had an expulsion rate of more than 10 students expelled per 1,000 prekindergartners enrolled with boys expelled at a rate 4.5 times greater than girls.\textsuperscript{129} Tennessee also had racial disparities in their expulsion rates within the Pre-K-12 public education system. Black students represented 25\% of the students who received OSS in Tennessee while white students only represented 6\%.\textsuperscript{130}

Tennessee created a policy on discipline in the Voluntary Pre-K for Tennessee Act of 2005 (T.C.A. Section 49-6-101). This was the same year that data was collected for the NPS which identified the high prekindergarten expulsion rate in Tennessee. This act stated that in order for a pre-K program to qualify for state funding, the program must develop a behavior management policy that includes strategies found in the Pyramid Model Based Classroom Support Guide.\textsuperscript{131} According to the Tennessee Department of Education, these strategies “ensure that discipline is positive, reasonable, appropriate, and

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{127} The National Prekindergarten Study (NPS) was conducted by Walter S. Gilliam and Crista M. Marchesseault of the Edward Zigler Center for Child Development and Social Policy at Yale University. (2005).
  \item \textsuperscript{129} The Impact of Social Emotional Learning. Team Tennessee – Project B.A.S.I.C. Partnership. September 2013.
  \item \textsuperscript{130} U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights. “Civil Rights Data Collection: Data Snapshot (School Discipline).” (March 21, 2014). https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/crhc-discipline-snapshot.pdf
  \item \textsuperscript{131} The guide can be found at http://challengingbehavior.fmhi.usf.edu/do/resources/documents/tool_classRoutine_guide_early_ele.pdf
\end{itemize}
in terms the children can understand.”¹³² The state acknowledges the fact that the behavior of pre-K children is unlike that of K-12 children due to their different level of development. An example the Department of Education used was four-year-olds throwing temper tantrums. “Although temper tantrums and other behavioral outbursts must be addressed to ensure the safety of the child and others, they are a common response of many 4 year olds to new situations and should be treated accordingly.”¹³³ Corporal punishment is also prohibited in the TN VPK as outlined in the School Administered Child Care Rule 0520-12-1-09.

The policy this case study will focus on is the Pyramid Model. Not only has this program had success in more than ten states, but the Tennessee legislature wrote the Pyramid Model into TN VPK legislation as the backbone of all discipline policy. The Tennessee Center for the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL) Pyramid Model Partnership Team believed that the implementation of the Pyramid Model in TN VPK would bring positive outcomes for children and for the program itself. These positive outcomes would include reductions in suspension and expulsion rates.

SECTION 4.4: THE PYRAMID MODEL

The Pyramid Model for Promoting the Emotional Development of Infants and Young Children is a conceptual framework of evidence-based practices developed by two national federally funded research and training centers: The Center for the Social and

¹³³ Ibid.
Emotional Foundations for Early Learning and the Technical Assistance Center on Social Intervention. The Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL) is “focused on promoting the social emotional development and school readiness of young children birth to age 5.” CSEFEL is funded by the Office of Head Start and Child Care Bureau for, “disseminating research and evidence-based practices to early childhood programs across the country.” The Technical Assistance Center on Social Emotional Intervention (TACSEI) is funded by the U.S. Department of Education. There are currently eleven state partners that implement some form of the Pyramid Model into their education discipline policy: California, Colorado, Hawaii, Iowa, Maryland, Massachusetts, Nebraska, North Carolina, Tennessee, Vermont, and Wisconsin.

CSEFEL described the Pyramid Model as a model that “builds upon a tiered public health approach to providing universal supports to all children to promote wellness, targeted services to children who need more support, and intensive services to children who need them.” CSEFEL uses a set of guiding principles and values with the Pyramid Model. These include: (1) supporting young children’s social and emotional development to prevent challenging behaviors; (2) individualizing interventions to meet a child’s unique interests, strengths, and needs; (3) promoting skill building that has enough power to effect change in the child’s behavior and growth; (4) implementing

136 Ibid.
strategies that are naturally occurring in routines and a child’s everyday environment; and (5) modifying strategies to meet the cultural and linguistic diversity of families and their children.\footnote{138 “Wisconsin CSEFEL Pyramid Model.” CSEFEL. http://www.collaboratingpartners.com/docs/WI%20Pyramid%20general%20overview%5B1%5D.pdf} According to CSEFEL, the main focus of the model is social and emotional well-being in children from birth through five years of age. Healthy social emotional development refers to the developing capacity of a young child to form relationships with adults and peers; experience, regulate, and express emotions in socially acceptable ways; and explore their environment and learn from it.\footnote{139 Ibid.} All of the development takes place in the context of family, community, and culture. This is important, because socially-emotionally competent children tolerate frustration better, get into fewer fights, engage in less destructive behavior, are healthier, are less lonely, are less impulsive, are more focused, and have greater academic achievement.\footnote{140 Ibid.} As a result, socially-emotionally competent children are less likely to face suspension or expulsion.

The first tier of the Pyramid Model is the Yellow Foundation which provides the base of the entire program. In theory, according to CSEFEL, “If this [foundation] is in place, most children won’t need more intensive interventions.”\footnote{141 “Wisconsin CSEFEL Pyramid Model.” CSEFEL. http://www.collaboratingpartners.com/docs/WI%20Pyramid%20general%20overview%5B1%5D.pdf} This level of the pyramid works on ensuring that the workforce is able to adopt and sustain evidence-based practices. The foundation focuses on building nurturing and responsive relationships in high quality environments. According to the Technical Assistance Center on Social Emotional Intervention for Young Children (TACSEI), “The relationships level of the pyramid model includes practices such as: actively supporting children’s
engagement; embedding instruction within children’s routine, planned, and play activities; responding to children’s conversations; promoting the communicative attempts of children with language delays and disabilities; and providing encouragement to promote skill learning and development.”

The Blue Tier builds on the Yellow Foundation by providing nurturing and responsive relationships between children, parents, and teachers as well as high quality environments. However, the blue tier focuses more so on the design of the classrooms and programs that meet TACSEI’s definition of “high quality early education.” According to TACSEI, “this includes the implementation of a curriculum that fosters all areas of child development, the use of developmentally and culturally appropriate and effective teaching approaches, the design of safe and physical environments that promote active learning and appropriate behavior, the provision of positive and explicit guidance to children on rules and expectations, and the design of schedules and activities that maximize child engagement and learning.” This level of intervention works to create positive interactions, consistency and predictability in the classroom routine, clearly defined expectations, and engaging activities. TACSEI believes if there is structure in the classroom that young children will be less likely to exhibit bad behaviors. However, there are some children who would require more individualized attention in regards to their social emotional development.

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143 Ibid.

The Green Tier works to prevent discipline actions by promoting practices that teach social emotional strategies. This is considered to be the prevention level of the Pyramid and focuses on children who need more systematic and focused instruction on social emotional skills. “Children might need more focused instruction on skills such as: identifying and expressing emotions; self-regulation; social problem solving; initiating and maintaining interactions; cooperative responding; strategies for handling disappointment and anger; and friendship skills.”¹⁴⁵ This level of prevention provides guidance and support for helping very young children regulate emotions and stress, as well as understand others.

Finally, the Red Tier works on intervention which “supports practices that focus on children who need individualized intervention when the child’s behavior does not respond to practices from the lower levels of the pyramid.”¹⁴⁶ At this level of intervention, Positive Behavior Support (PBS) is used “to develop and implement an intensive, individualized intervention.”¹⁴⁷ The process begins with creating a team to implement the child’s support plan. This team includes the child’s family, teacher, and other primary caregivers. The behavior support plan that the team develops is based on a hypothesis of the reasons a child behaves a certain way – the team seeks out what “triggers” a child’s reactions.¹⁴⁸ By addressing these problems, the team can create new

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.
¹⁴⁸ Ibid.
ways for the child to express these emotions. Therefore, this is a proactive approach to discipline, rather than a reactive approach.

TACSIE acknowledges that the Pyramid Model was designed with certain assumptions related to its implementation. The Pyramid was designed to be implemented in early childcare settings such as preschool, early intervention, Head Start, and early childhood special education programs. The Pyramid also is believed by TACSIE to be effective for all children – even those with disabilities or other special circumstances. Further, these inclusive social settings are the context for intervention, meaning that interventions do not involve pulling a child from their natural settings. “They [interventions] are dependent on a rich social context where the number of opportunities to learn and practice social skills can be optimized.”149 The pyramid model tiers also build on one another – the Green and Blue tier are reliant on the proper provision of practices in the lower tiers to promote optimal child outcomes. Also, as children move up the pyramid tiers, they require more individualized instruction, so early childhood programs need adequate staff. Finally, in order for the Pyramid Model to be most effective, there must be familial and administrative support. Families are important in this type of discipline because reinforcement of positive behaviors must be used in the home as well. Administrative support is also important because administrators play a major role in the implementation process. “Every administrative decision impacts program quality and sustainability. Of particular importance are the facilitative administrative practices that provide sustained commitment, timely training, competent

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149 Ibid. Pg. 3.
coaching, the use of process and outcome data for decision-making, and the development of policies and procedures that are aligned with high fidelity implementation.”\(^{150}\)

### SECTION 4.5: IMPLEMENTATION

Tennessee Voices for Children, Inc. (TVC) was formed in 1990 by Tipper Gore. This is a statewide coalition made up of individuals, agencies, and organizations who worked together to promote children’s health and education services. According to the Tennessee Voices website, “TVC works collaboratively with parents, professionals, state and federal officials, policy makers and other key stakeholders to ensure that services provided to children and families in Tennessee are family driven, community based, and culturally and linguistically competent.”\(^{151}\) TVC established their Early Childhood Programs in 1996. These programs focus on providing training and technical assistance to “parents and staff associated with childcare, Head Start, and pre-k programs throughout Tennessee.”\(^{152}\) Since July 1, 2010 TVC’s Early Childhood Programs have redirected their attention to sustaining and expanding the CSEFEL/Team TN Partnership Initiative. Considering their direct interest in this initiative, TVC has provided a thorough account of the implementation of the Pyramid Model in the state of Tennessee.\(^{153}\)

In 2001, Tennessee became one of 11 states selected by CSEFEL to implement an early childhood professional development initiative based on the CSEFEL Pyramid Model. The partnership formed between CSEFEL and Tennessee became known as the


\(^{153}\) Ibid.
Tennessee Partnership Initiative (CSEFEL/Team TN). The CSEFEL/Team TN Leadership Group is composed of 12 senior officials “representing statewide systems whose job responsibilities include the development and management of workforce capacity building for programs serving young children and their families.” The leadership group includes representatives from the TN Department of Education/Office of Early Learning and Special Education/Office of Early Childhood; TN Head Start State Collaboration Office; TN Early Childhood Training Alliance (TECTA); TN Department of Health: Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems; TN Department of Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities; TN Department of Human Services/Child Care Licensing and Infant and Toddler Initiatives; TN Institutions of Higher Education; TN Child Care Resource and Referral Network; TN Association for the Education and Young Children (TAEYC); Tennessee Department of Children’s Services/Office of Child Safety; and liaisons to CSEFEL. This leadership group provides support to ensure statewide implementation of the Pyramid Model. The leadership group has targeted three specific populations during the Pyramid implementation process. The primary target population consisted of “a statewide training and coaching cadre of early childhood educators, technical assistance providers and administrators affiliated with public school and community-based voluntary pre-K programs, early childhood special education programs, Head Start, and Early Head Start programs, child care centers, family-based provider services and Institutions of Higher

154 CSEFEL/TACSEI State Team Update: Tennessee (March 2011)
156 Ibid.
Education (IHE).” The secondary target population were teachers, child care providers, specialty program staff and family members, and early childhood education systems. Finally, the tertiary target population was made of children (birth to 5 years) and their families that were served by these early childhood education systems.  

CSEFEL has implemented numerous trainings for site administrators, external technical assistance coaches, and Leadership Group Members. In addition to trainings, a new Team TN Mental Health Consultant-Coaching Project was established from October 1, 2010-June 30, 2011. According to a Tennessee Update completed by CSEFEL/TACSEI, “the guiding vision is that all child care, Head Start, pre-K and other early childhood education programs in Tennessee will have access to trained, capable coaches to support implementation of the Pyramid Model.” This project had the following efforts: 1) creating an accessible network for coaches; 2) creating a coaching pairs system across geographical and program boundaries; 3) development of a comprehensive training program; and 4) ongoing recruitment of new participants. The project also hoped to adapt CSEFEL preschool models for use in K-1. This project was funded by the Tennessee Mental Health Department. 

In order to implement the Pyramid Model, TN Voices for Children received direct support grants from state departments. FIGURE 4.1 illustrates the financial contributions from different Tennessee state departments.

158 Ibid.
159 CSEFEL/TACSEI State Team Update: Tennessee (March 2011)
**FIGURE 4.1: Tennessee Pyramid Model Funding**

Source: CSEFEL/TACSEI State Team Update: Tennessee (March 2011)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Direct Support Grant</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TDOE/Youth Violence and Drug Use Prevention</td>
<td>FY 09: $87,396</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FY 10: $87,396</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FY 11: $87,396</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TDOE/ Head Start Collaborative Office</td>
<td>FY 09: $6,200</td>
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<td>TDOE/ Tennessee’s Early Intervention Systems</td>
<td>FY 10: $100,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FY 11: $100,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TDHS/TECTA/TN State University</td>
<td>FY 10: $25,000</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>TDOH/ECCS</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although the Youth Violence and Drug Use Prevention department of TDOE does not directly say it, it can be inferred that they have an invested interest in preventing behavior problems early on. “Children who are identified as hard to manage at ages 3 and 4 have a high probability (50:50) of continuing to have difficulties into adolescence.”

By preventing these problems early on, the positive affects learned from the Pyramid Model would continue into adolescence and decrease youth violence. CEFEL provided training manuals, DVD’s, and materials for the three Training Institutes and Leadership Development Conference which was worth an estimated $11,000. CSEFEL print and video materials were also purchased for statewide use for $40,000 by the TDHS/CCR&R System. This group also funded the 2010 TN CCR&R Targeted Technical Assistance Institute for 118 participants.

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161 CSEFEL/TACSEI State Team Update: Tennessee (March 2011)
162 (Campbell & Ewing 1990; Egeland et al 1990; (Campbell & Ewing, 1990; Egeland et al., 1990; Fischer, Rolf, Hasazi, & Cummings, 1984)
163 CSEFEL/TACSEI State Team Update: Tennessee (March 2011)
SECTION 4.6: EVALUATION OF THE POLICY

Although I could find no direct data in reference to discipline changes in pre-K students in Tennessee, a study conducted under the direction of Lise Fox, PhD, who works in the Department of Child and Family Studies at the University of South Florida provides a comprehensive evaluation of the policy and some of its shortcomings. This report was published in *Infants & Young Children* in 2010. The preparation of this report was also supported by the following institutions: the Technical Assistance Center on Social Emotional Intervention for Young Children (TACSEI which is directly connected to the Pyramid Model), the US Office of Special Education Programs, and the US Department of Education.

The study outlines some of the positive social-emotional development outcomes that the Pyramid Model is credited with, such as knowing and being able to follow behavioral expectations. However, the study also outlines some questions and concerns with the Pyramid Model. The study first raises questions about the lack of evidence to support the Pyramid model’s first tier strategies “to prevent or remediate challenging behaviors.” Fox and his co-researchers acknowledge that there is considerable research supporting the intervention outlined in the second and third tier (the same research that supports PBIS which is used in North Carolina public schools), however effective preventive effects have not been strongly established. “The variables identified as essential tier 1 strategies, related to relationships and environmental arrangements, are derived from consensus documents and compelling indirect research findings, but there is

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very little rigorous research that has directly tested the effects of these variables in promoting healthy social-emotional development and preventing the occurrence of challenging behaviors.”

Next, the study finds problems in facilitating implementation of the model in early childhood programs. “In particular, development of the model will benefit greatly from evaluation, correlative, and case study investigations focused on systems variables (eg., administrative practices, policies, personnel preparation, and funding formulae) that contribute to fidelity and sustainability of the data collection, problem-solving, and procedural aspects of the approach.” The study acknowledges that there are “useful and encouraging” examples of program-wide implementation, but the researchers also say that the need remains for “more focused examinations to help refine the model’s components and scale-up capabilities.”

Finally, the study explains how the Pyramid Model focuses on social-emotional development but not strategies for enhancing intellectual and academic development. Fox and his co-researchers call for a more integrated approach that can be considered a “comprehensive, interconnecting model addressing all aspects of optimal development of young children.” The researchers acknowledge that this will be a challenge, however, and say that the “attainment of this goal will require a clear focus on the design of

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166 Ibid.
167 Ibid.
168 Ibid.
inclusive programs with a full appreciation for the needs of a diverse population of children, including children with multiple risk factors and a range of disabilities.”

The researchers, however, do believe that the Pyramid Model provides “a useful, problem-solving process that is highly compatible with the goals and priorities of early childhood education and early intervention.” The study finds that the model provides an exciting promise to improve the capacity of early childhood programs. They attribute this to the model preventing serious consequences for challenging behaviors and promoting healthy mental development of children. Despite the Pyramid Model’s shortcomings, the researchers still view it favorably.

This was the only evaluation source of the Pyramid Model by a reputable institution. When researching how the Pyramid Model impacted Tennessee’s pre-K expulsion and suspension rates there was no data available. There are explanations as to why this data is unavailable. One might be that this program is fairly new. Teachers and administrators were not trained in Tennessee on the Pyramid Model until 2010. A five year span may mean that the model is still in the process of implementation, therefore there is not enough data for researchers to effectively analyze. Another reason could solely be there was no collected data. Pre-K programs were created 2005, meaning this is only a ten year program. There would need to be enough time to gather data on suspension and expulsion rates before program implementation and to gather data after

implementation. Perhaps there has not been enough time to collect an efficient data pool to conduct a thorough study.

However, because there are similarities between the Pyramid Model and Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS) which is used in North Carolina, we can make predictions based on evidence in the North Carolina case study. First, considering that the Pyramid Model is a tiered model, there are levels of intervention which allows for individualized attention. The individual prevention planning allows for a more effective teaching of what are good behaviors and what are wrong. This in turn should decrease the number of students who are disciplined over time. Also, the Pyramid Model stresses the need for prevention teams to incorporate strategies that are culturally appropriate for the students. It can be inferred that in order to do so the teachers must be culturally competent based on training. Theoretically, this should decrease racial disparities in discipline policies as teachers and administrators become more understanding of their students.

SECTION 4.7: CONCLUSION

Although there may not be sufficient data in regards to the effects of the Pyramid Model on discipline in pre-K in Tennessee, the model still seems promising. Similar to North Carolina, Tennessee has adopted the strategy that positive intervention is most effective, especially when it comes to young children. The individual attention this model provides has the potential to decrease discipline rates including suspension and expulsion. Also, the cultural focus allows for advancement in racial equity in discipline. However, there are shortcomings. There are no guaranteed prevention methods for the entire student population (tier 1) and there is little data that shows how effective this
particular model is. Still, its most significant strength is the idea that positive prevention and intervention is an idea that should be incorporated in a pre-K discipline model.
CHAPTER 5: MISSISSIPPI

SECTION 5.1: INTRODUCTION

“Pre-K is important because it provides a great foundation for kindergarten. It also exposes children to an educational environment. Many students need that extra year to become accustomed to a classroom and learn how to play with other children. Pre-K gives children a chance to develop and grow while also learning skills needed to be successful for the rest of their lives.”

– D’ Angela Keys, Achievement School District, Memphis.170

This chapter seeks to apply the lessons learned from the North Carolina and Tennessee case studies to the state of Mississippi. In order to accomplish this, I will first be a close examination of the Mississippi Pre-K legislation and how the program is currently being implemented in the state. After this, I will examine the current state of discipline in Mississippi public schools. Finally, I will discuss on how Mississippi can create a mandated Positive Behavioral Intervention Support programs in Mississippi Pre-K programs.

SECTION 5.2: THE EARLY LEARNING COLLABORATIVE ACT

In 2013, Mississippi passed its first Pre-K legislation, the Early Learning Collaborative Act. This act provided $3 million in the first year to local communities to expand and establish pre-K programs, making it the first state-funded pre-K program in Mississippi history. “The purpose of the Early Learning Collaborative award is to

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provide funding to Early Learning Collaborative Councils to support and facilitate the implementation of voluntary prekindergarten (pre-K) programs.”

During the 2013 Mississippi Legislative Session, Republican Senator Brice Wiggins introduced the Early Collaborative Act, which he authored. The bill not only raised the required qualifications to teach pre-K, it also mandated that they have at least a bachelor’s degree if they were a teacher and an associate degree if they were an assistant. This caused debate when the bill arrived in the Mississippi Senate as senators questioned Senator Wiggins about the effects the legislation would have on current pre-k teachers and existing local preschool programs, like those operated by churches. Wiggins responded to this debate by saying, “We don’t want [kids] to be just babysat. The idea is that if they’re going to be there, that we educate them.”

At the time of the debate, about 85 percent of three and four year olds in the state of Mississippi attended some form of daycare or preschool program. The bill passed through bipartisan support with endorsements from the Speaker, the Lt. Governor, and Mississippi Governor Phil Bryant.

The Collaborative Act sets up the pre-K program by saying that any public, private, or parochial school, licensed child care center or Head Start center that serves prekindergarten children is considered to be a prekindergarten provider and are eligible for state funding. In order to participate in this program, school districts must form an early learning collaborative. This is a collaborative council who is “comprised, at a

172 Mader, Jackie. “Mississippi passes landmark pre-k bill, moves forward with charters.” The Hechinger Report. (April 2013). Hechingered.org/content/Mississippi-passes-landmark-pre-k-bill-moves-forward-with-charters_6154/
173 Ibid.
174 Miss. S.B. No. 2395 (2013); Section 1(1)(c); Lines 41-44
minimum, of a public school district and/or a local Head Start affiliate if in existence, private or parochial schools, or one or more licensed child care centers.”175 This council works to develop an application for funds and also describes how the members will work to serve the community pre-kindergarteners. The legislation also establishes a “lead partner” which is a public school district or nonprofit entity that has both instructional expertise and the capacity to manage the early learning collaborative’s prekindergarten program as described in the funding application.176 “The lead partner is tasked with distributing funds, facilitating a professional learning environment for teachers, and ensuring that the collaborative “adopts and implements the curriculum and assessments that align with the comprehensive learning standards.”177 Childcare centers that are not associated with a public school district must be licensed to participate and must be able to demonstrate program quality with a Mississippi Department of Education approved assessment tool.178

The Senate Bill appointed the Mississippi Department of Education with the responsibility to “administer the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the voluntary prekindergarten program, including awards and the application process.”179 MDE also is in charge of the application process for awarding funds. The State Early Childhood Advisory Council (SECAC) was tasked with assisting the MDE with implementation of this program.180

175 Miss. S.B. No. 2395 (2013); Section 1(1)(b); Lines 33-37
176 Ibid. Section 1(1)(d); Lines 45-49
177 Ibid. Section 1(1)(d); Lines 50-56
178 Ibid. Section 1(3)(d); Lines 174-180
179 Ibid. Section 1(3)(c)(iv); Lines 112-114
180 Ibid. Section 2; Lines 313 - 357
The Collaboration Act also increased the standards needed for teachers to teach prekindergarten. Teachers must hold a bachelor’s degree and have some type of specialized training in early education. Master teachers must hold a bachelor’s degree, have training in early education, and show “effectiveness as an early childhood educator.”181 Assistant teachers must hold an associate’s degree with specialized training in early education.182 In addition, classroom must have “teacher/child ratios of one adult for every ten children with a maximum of twenty children per classroom and a minimum of five children per classroom.”183

The Collaboration Act emphasizes high-quality teachers with manageable classroom sizes. This is a positive detail when creating a pre-K discipline policy. Teachers who are qualified are more likely to implement the policy effectively into their classrooms. They have the proper training to control a classroom filled with 4-year olds and enforce positive behaviors. The small teacher/student ratio also allows for individualized one-on-one time between students and teachers. As described in earlier chapters, teachers who have the time to understand their students on a personal basis and figure out the cause of their problems tend to have significantly less discipline problems in the classroom. These classroom conditions will work in favor of a pre-K discipline policy and help ensure that the program is effectively implemented.

SECTION 5.3: FUNDING

181 Miss. S.B. No. 2395 (2013); Section 4(a); Lines 860-861
182 Ibid. Section 4
183 Ibid. Lines 157-159
A hotly debated topic caused by the Early Learning Collaborative Act was money. Legislatures were not convinced that Mississippi could afford to implement an effective pre-K program in Mississippi. There were many who also thought that even if funding a pre-K program was hypothetically possible, they believed that there were other pressing education issues that were higher priorities. In the following section I will first examine what the Early Learning Collaborative Act mandates in regards to funding a pre-K program. It is important to understand how much money is already being spent for this program before attempting to add additional costs. I will then briefly outline the debate that Mississippi leaders had in regards to funding the program. Finally, I will explain the implications this has on implementing a discipline policy in pre-K.

**SECTION 5.3.1: WHAT THE EARLY LEARNING COLLABORATIVE ACT ALLOWS**

“The Early Learning Collaborative Act of 2013 provides funding to local communities to establish, expand, and support successful early childhood education and development services.” The Mississippi Legislature appropriated funds for the Collaborative Act that were to be implemented in phases. Each phase would last approximately 3-5 years and the Mississippi Department of Education would determine the best time to transition to the next phase. The first phase of the program, which the state is currently in, would be an annual state appropriation of eight million dollars that would serve approximately 3,500 children through 5-8 early learning collaboratives.

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185 Miss. Senate Bill 2395 (2013); Section 1(3)(h)(i) Line 235-237

186 Ibid. Section 1(3)(h)(i)(1); Lines 238 – 242
However, Mississippi did not fund this much in reality. The Legislature only appropriated three million dollars for the Collaborative Act. The Mississippi Legislature defines an early learning collaborative as “a school district or countywide council that writes and submits an application to participate in the voluntary prekindergarten program.” The Mississippi Department of Education will select these five to eight early learning collaboratives to be awarded state funds based on the community’s “capacity, commitment, and need” which requires “evidence of existing strong local collaborations of early learning stakeholders.”

The second phase would have an annual state appropriation of $16 million to serve 7,000 children through ten to fifteen early learning collaboratives and their prekindergarten providers. The third phase would have a larger appropriation of $33,950,000.00 and would serve 15,000 children through 20-25 early learning collaboratives and their prekindergarten providers.

The Senate Bill then adds that early learning collaborative would be expected to match state funds on a 1:1 basis on a local level. These funds could include local tax dollars, federal dollars as allowed, parent tuition, philanthropic contributions, or in-kind donations of facilities, equipment and services. The cost per child would be $4,300 per child per full day programs (half would come from the state with the other half coming from local funding) and half day programs would cost $2,150 per child. Finally, the

188 Miss. S.B. No. 2395 (2013). Section 1(1)(b) – Lines 31-33
189 Ibid. Section 1(3)(h)(iv); Lines 285-291
190 Miss. S.B. No. 2395 (2013). Section 1(3)(h)(i)(2-3); Lines 243 – 253
191 Ibid. Section 1(3)(h)(iv); Lines 270-275
192 Ibid. Section 1(3)(h)(iii); Lines 260-269
legislature established a tax credit for local collaborators and providers not to exceed $1 million, in order to defray the administrative and other costs.\footnote{Ibid. Section 6; Lines 900- 912}

\section*{SECTION 5.3.2: THE MONEY DEBATE}

One constant area of debate in the Senate about the Collaboration Act was money. Meghan Tooke, director of the Tallahatchie Early Learning Alliance in the Delta said, “A constant fear is that this money is going to run out after two years.” She continues and says, “There’s teachers that want to teach pre-K, but they worry that when the money runs out in two years, they’re not going to have a job to go back to.”\footnote{Mader, Jackie. “Mississippi finally funds statewide pre-k – but only for six percent of its youngest learners.” \textit{The Hechinger Report}. (March 2014). http://hechingerreport.org/mississippi-late-pre-k-funds-just-6-percent-youngest-learners/} There were legislators who were opposed to spending public funds on a state-funded early education programs. Mississippi State Senator Angela Hill (R-Picayune) said, “I will not apologize for voting against a bill that grows government programs below kindergarten in a state that is desperately trying to manage an education budget which already consumes around sixty percent of the entire state budget.”\footnote{Mader, Jackie. “Mississippi finally funds statewide pre-k – but only for six percent of its youngest learners.” \textit{The Hechinger Report}. (March 2014). http://hechingerreport.org/mississippi-late-pre-k-funds-just-6-percent-youngest-learners/} She was not alone in her views against this act. Many legislators thought that the bill would not serve the state’s neediest children, who most pre-K programs are designed for. This pre-K program did not give priority to students who were low income or those who had a limited English proficiency. They also believed that it would be difficult for rural daycare programs to stay open because of a lack of funds or the lack of ability to handle the administrative responsibilities necessary like paperwork or licensing. Carol Burnett, the founder and director of
Mississippi’s Low-Income Child Care Initiative said, “It’s going to benefit the communities that have the resources, and leave behind the communities that don’t have the resources.” However, despite opposition, the bill into law on April 18, 2014 by Governor Phil Bryant and when into effect on July 1, 2014.

SECTION 5.3.3: WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR PRE-K?

Funding for this pre-K legislation disappointed many because of the moderate amount allocated to pre-K programs. Robin Lemonis, the director of early childhood, literacy, and dyslexia for the Mississippi Department of Education said, “[Legislators] are aware that the three million that was appropriated fell very short of what the community or the state needs were.” Currently, the money allocated for the first phases will serve fewer than 6 percent of the state’s population of 4-year-olds, according to Lemonis. “This is, at best, a start. That’s about all you can say,” according to Steve Suitts, Vice President of the Southern Education Foundation. He continues to say, “All the other states are putting substantially more money.” Suitts and other pre-K advocates argue that pre-K programs are not a priority in the state of Mississippi and the funding allocations prove it considering Mississippi has $548 million in state funds unallocated that could go towards education and implementing stronger pre-K programs.

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196 Mader, Jackie. “Mississippi passes landmark pre-k bill, moves forward with charters.” The Hechinger Report. (April 2013). Hechingered.org/content/Mississippi-passes-landmark-pre-k-bill-moves-forward-with-charters_6154/
200 Ibid.
The cost of implementing pre-K raises concerns on the cost of discipline policy. A member of the Tallahatchie Early Learning Alliance, Meghan Tooke, explained that a lot of resources go into creating a comfortable environment for small children. Some of these resources could be used to make bookshelves safe or increasing the number of books and toys in the classrooms. She concluded that “it’s so, so expensive” to improve quality of existing pre-K programs.\textsuperscript{201} There is also the high cost of licensing childcare centers because in order to be certified they must meet the long list of standards. The executive director of the Mississippi Low-Income Child Care Initiative said, “Nobody is disputing that those environments need to be improved but the problem is there isn’t any money to help centers cover those costs.”\textsuperscript{202} There is the concern that if there are already issues with funding, that discipline would not be a strong focus to the Mississippi Department of Education. If we are already potentially underfunding pre-K programs in Mississippi, there needs to be an incentive to spend money on an effective discipline policy. Also, this enforces the fact that this program is going to have to be cost-efficient. The more expensive the discipline policy, the less likely that Mississippi will implement it into state funded pre-K programs.

However, there is a more optimistic result that could come from the Mississippi Department of Education overseeing state-funded pre-K programs. MDE would have a great interest in ensuring that these pre-K students are successful in their educational endeavors. Data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study showed that students who attend a high-quality pre-K show improvement in their reading skills as early as first

\footnotesize{\par \textsuperscript{201} Ibid. \par \textsuperscript{202} Ibid.}
grade. Also, pre-K has a positive impact on students’ achievement trajectories throughout their education as well as long-lasting effects on life outcomes in the adult world. In short, if students can be successful in pre-K, the positive effects will be seen throughout their K-12 educational experience. But in order for students to receive these benefits, they must be in the classroom. Suspension and expulsion will remove pre-K students from the classroom and give them less exposure to these positive aspects of pre-K. MDE should have an interest in keeping as many students in classrooms as possible with effective discipline policy.

SECTION 5.5: PROBLEMS WITH DISCIPLINE IN MISSISSIPPI

“In the last few years, in Meridian (MS), a male student estimated that he went back and forth between school and the juvenile justice system thirty times. In 8th grade, he was put on probation by a youth court judge for getting into a fight. Since then, reportedly, an infraction, even some as minor as being a few minutes late to class or wearing the wrong color socks in violation of the dress code, were counted as violations of his probation and resulted in the immediate suspension and incarceration in the local juvenile system.”

A report titled “Handcuffs on Success” completed by the Advancement Project, American Civil Liberties Union of Mississippi, the Mississippi State Conference of the NAACP, and the Mississippi Coalition for the Prevention of Schoolhouse to Jailhouse,

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204 Ibid. Pg. 3
205 Advancement Project, American Civil Liberties Union of Mississippi, Mississippi State Conference of the NAACP, Mississippi Coalition for the Prevention of Schoolhouse to Jailhouse. Handcuffs on Success. January 2013. 8
discussed the school discipline problem in the state of Mississippi. “In October 2012, the United States Department of Justice filed suit against the city of Meridian, the County of Lauderdale, two youth court judges, the State of Mississippi, and two state agencies for operating a school to prison pipeline.”\textsuperscript{206} The complaint alleges that the State of Mississippi was violating children’s constitutional right by unlawful conduct through which they systematically arrested and incarcerated children for minor school rule infractions.\textsuperscript{207} Whether for dress code violations, profane language, or a schoolyard “scuffle”, children are being arrested and forced into Mississippi’s school-to-prison pipeline.\textsuperscript{208}

Civil rights advocates believe that the harsh disciplinary practices that are used in many Mississippi public school lead to children being expelled at high levels, as well as to being incarcerated for minor infractions.\textsuperscript{209} Handcuffs on Success reports that in recent years “school districts have been adopting and applying to youth the same strategies that have led to the mass incarceration of adults.”\textsuperscript{210} According to this source, schools are implementing three main strategies. The first one is a mandatory minimum sentencing strategy that requires ISS, OSS, or expulsion for many offenses, even some offenses that are objective like “insubordination.”\textsuperscript{211} The second is a three-strike policy that states that students who misbehave two times can be referred to an alternative school on their

\textsuperscript{206} Ibid. 3.
\textsuperscript{207} Ibid. 3.
\textsuperscript{208} Ibid. 3.
\textsuperscript{209} http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/01/17/mississippi-school-discip_n_2496062.html?
\textsuperscript{210} Advancement Project, American Civil Liberties Union of Mississippi, Mississippi State Conference of the NAACP, Mississippi Coalition for the Prevention of Schoolhouse to Jailhouse. Handcuffs on Success, January 2013. 9
\textsuperscript{211} Lauderdale County School District Student/Parent Handbook (2012-2013) 29, available at http://www.lauderdale.k12.ms.us/?DivisionID=9052&DepartmentID=9521&ToggleSideNav
third offense. Finally, there is a “broken windows” policy, which is “a law enforcement strategy of aggressively policing traditionally ignored minor offenses with the intended purpose of preventing more serious crime.”

212 An example of this is immediately giving a student OSS for disorderly behavior like a schoolyard argument. The effect of these types of discipline policies leads to students being criminalized in large numbers for a range of behaviors which, according to the ACLU and NAACP, do not fit the punishment.

The report also explained that Mississippi schools are suspending students at a high rate compared to other states. When the Office of Civil Rights collected data from 115 school districts in Mississippi, they found that there were over 54,000 OSS suspensions for the 2009-2010 school year. That meant that Mississippi was suspending students at a rate of almost 6 students for every 100 students in attendance, a rate that was much higher than our neighboring states as shown in Figure 5.1 below.

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The report also points out that the Mississippi school districts with the highest OSS suspension rates surpass the national average significantly. The six Mississippi school districts with the highest rates have rates that are more than nine times the rate of the national average, as shown in Figure 5.2.

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213 Ibid. 12.
High suspension rates are not the only problem this report identified in Mississippi. There are also significant racial disparities in the implementation of discipline with black students being hit the hardest. “Black students, who made up half the student population in these districts received almost 75% of the out-of-school suspensions, making them over three times more likely than White students to receive an out-of-school suspension.”

In some districts the problem is even more prominent: Lawrence County suspends Black students to White students at an 8:1 ratio. The report explains that this is not a problem only in predominately black school districts. Black

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students are suspended at high rates in predominately white school districts as well.

Figure 5.3 shows black OSS suspensions compared to white OSS suspensions in predominately white school districts in Mississippi:

FIGURE 5.3: Black Out-of-School Suspension (OSS) Rate per 100 Students v. White Out-of-School Suspension (OSS) Rate per 100 Students in Select Majority White School Districts
(SY 2009 -2010) Source: U.S. Department of Education

The report notes other differences in the treatment of black and white students when it comes to discipline. A mother reported that her black, middle school son was arrested and charged with assault for getting into a fight with a white student who used racial slurs against him. The white student was not disciplined for his actions. Incidents like these are consistent with national reports finding that racial disparities are not the result of black children having more discipline problems, but rather differences in how

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216 Advancement Project, American Civil Liberties Union of Mississippi, Mississippi State Conference of the NAACP, Mississippi Coalition for the Prevention of Schoolhouse to Jailhouse. Handcuffs on Success. January 2013. 11.
adults respond to student behavior. “Broad, discretionary offense categories like ‘disorderly conduct,’ ‘disrespect for authority,’ or ‘disobedience’ are mainly in the eye of the beholder, leaving significant room for implicit and explicit racial biases to creep into the discipline process and exacerbate disparities.”217 This was evident in interviews with Mississippi students about their school’s discipline. In “The Shocking details of a Mississippi School to Prison Pipeline,” Hing wrote, “In 2011, a high school student was suspended and sent to alternative school for five weeks after his school administrators learned about a rap song he had written and recorded, while at home, about his school.”218 The problem is not only among high school students; young children are being subjected to this type of treatment as well. “In Holmes County a five-year-old Black child was escorted home in a sheriff car for the dress code violation of wearing shoes with some red and white symbols on them, where the dress code required solid black shoes.”219

Students are also being subjected to high rates of corporal punishment. “During the 2008-09 school year, there were 57,953 cases of corporal punishment in 110 of the state’s 152 school districts,” according to the state Department of Education.220 Mike Kent, superintendent of Madison County, explained that these punishments are used for “flagrant” disrespect toward any person.221 These behaviors could include horseplay,
tardiness, or skipping class. The school district with the highest number of reported incidents of corporal punishment was DeSoto County with almost 5,000 reported spankings.

SECTION 5.6: MISSISSIPPI DISCIPLINE POLICY

In terms of discipline policy, state-funded pre-K programs will follow the same Codes of Conduct as K-12 schools. In order to create a new discipline policy for pre-K students, it is imperative to understand the types of punishment a school could currently utilize for bad behaviors. “The Community Guide to School Discipline in Mississippi” by the Southern Poverty Law Center outlines the current methods that Mississippi schools use in regards to punishment and ways to help Mississippi public school students facing disciplinary proceedings.

The brief states that, “Mississippi law requires schools to develop student Codes of Conduct that include policies and procedures for dealing with students who cause disruptions in class, on school property or vehicles, and at school-related activities.”222 The power to determine the type of punishment and the severity of that punishment usually belongs to the principal, superintendent and school board. The principal has the initial responsibility of determining the punishment. However, the school board has the final say and the superintendent can make recommendations to the school board to modify the length of suspensions and expulsions.

There are six types of punishment that Mississippi school officials can use to handle student misbehavior: In-School Suspension (ISS), Out-of-School Suspension

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(OSS), Alternative School, expulsion, criminal charges, or corporal punishment. Each of these punishments differ in severity and they are chosen based on the type of behavior the student displays. However, these punishments follow the guidelines of zero-tolerance. The Meridian School District Code of Conduct can be used as an example. The U.S. Justice Department filed suit against the Meridian School District in October 2012 claiming they were running a “school-to-prison pipeline” for minor infractions. However, this critique is not limited to Meridian. Although each school district is responsible for creating their own standards, most of the districts have created the same general codes. Also, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) claim that “the Meridian lawsuit is just one example of a problem that has plagued Mississippi schools statewide for years.” Many schools use zero-tolerance policies which lead to students being suspended, expelled, and incarcerated.

The Meridian School District groups code violations into five levels, ranging from least to most severe. “Before determining a classification at the administrative level, the principal or designee will conference with the involved students and school personnel. Once the classification of the violation is determined, the principal or designee will implement the disciplinary procedure according to the written policy.

Level 1 Infractions involve misbehaviors that are “low in intensity, passive, and/or non-threatening in nature.” Teachers are responsible for managing these problems. Level 1

Infractions include things like: not having a hall pass; throwing objects; using a prohibited cell phone, iPod, or other electronic devices; violating the dress code; being tardy to class; or disrespecting authority figures. The process for handling Level 1 Infractions would be to first redirect the student by either providing the student with a choice to comply with a rule or giving appropriate warnings. The teacher would then hold a private conversation with the student to outline clear expectations. If this did not work, the teacher would then contact the parent. If none of these steps work, the teachers would then use detention as a deterrent from future misbehavior.

If the misbehavior is moderate in intensity and non-threatening, they are classified as Level 2 Infractions. Examples of these behaviors are: campus disturbances (loud noises in the hallways), encouraging fights, cutting class, excessive tardiness, skipping school, repeated disrespect for authority, or missed assigned disciplines. These behaviors are handled by teachers and the “school discipline administrative team” by using “a range of corrective strategies.” These strategies could include any non-exclusionary discipline, primarily detention. However, the teacher must first conduct a mandatory student conference, contact the parent, and provide the student with a “meaningful reflective writing activity” which could include a letter of apology. Exclusionary discipline could not be used for these types of infractions.

Level 3 Infractions are “misbehaviors that are more serious in intensity but non-threatening in nature” and they are managed by using a “range of intensive in-school corrective strategies.” Examples of this behavior are: using, distributing, or selling...

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227 Ibid. 8.
228 Ibid. 4.
tobacco products; possessing or using non-prescription drugs; disturbing the campus (Meridian Public School District defines this as “any deliberate and inappropriate behavior that disturbs or interrupts the daily routine(s) of school operations” such as drawing a crowd); initiating or instigating a fight, but the fight does not occur; profanity in communication with staff; and defying authority. 229 The principal or another administrator may assign in-school suspension for this type of behavior. In-School Suspensions (ISS) are given to a student when their behavior warrants removal from a class for a short period of time. Usually, these types of suspensions last a day. 230 However, out-of-school suspension (OSS) cannot be assigned for this type of behavior.

Level 4 Infractions are “misbehaviors that significantly interfere with others’ safety and learning and/or are threatening or harmful in nature.” 231 Examples of this type of infractions are: disturbing a bus driver’s ability to maintain control of the bus (e.g. throwing objects that hit a bus driver); causing a serious campus disturbance that compromise the safety of others; possessing alcohol; cyber-bullying and bullying; fighting or inflicting bodily injury; threatening and intimidation; trespassing; or deliberately making a false accusation against authority. Although administrators are not required to, they could assign an out-of-school suspension for this type of behavior. This involves prohibiting a child from attending school for a period of time. 232 The principal must ensure that a behavior plan is developed for students with these types of infractions and that corrective strategies are used appropriately.

229 Ibid. 12-14.
The most serious misbehaviors to the Meridian School District are behaviors that need an immediate response from the school administrators and/or the Central Office. These behaviors include the sale, purchase, possession, or use of alcohol or drugs; group fights or gang activity; possessing a weapon; inflicting serious bodily injury; engaging in serious retaliation against school officials; battery or assault of a staff or faculty member; public indecency; repeated harassment; participating in a sexual act on campus; or other severe campus disturbances (e.g. arson and bomb threats). These behaviors can result in expulsion. Expulsion is when a child may not attend school at all for a period of time.

However there are mandatory strategies that school officials must start with. There must first be an investigation by the school administrative team followed by parent contact and a student conference. If the administrators determine that discipline action is necessary, the must then have a school level conference with the student, parents, and administrative team followed by a referral to the school’s Teacher Support Team (TST), which implements formal behavioral supports if necessary. If the action involved weapons, drugs, explosives, or serious bodily injury, the student would be referred to law enforcement. The administrative team could implement corrective strategies such as OSS or alternative school placement. Students are usually referred to alternative schools if their suspensions or expulsions last for more than 10 days. However, if the administrators decide that expulsion is the best strategy, the expulsion must be approved by the Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, and Meridian Public School District Board of Education after “a formal due process hearing, if requested.”

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The Meridian Public School District has implemented Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) into their school district. Their Code of Conduct actually complements the implementation of PBIS. “All schools in the Meridian Public School District are expected to create an environment that promotes a positive school climate.”\(^{234}\) The corrective strategies that the Code of Conduct outlines are meant to build positive relationships between teachers and students and provide the skills necessary for the students to achieve success. This is a new feature in the Meridian Public School District brought about by the lawsuit against the school district. The Meridian Consent Decree of 2013 called for Meridian Public Schools to integrate PBIS into their discipline policy. However, regardless of whether this program was mandated or not, the program is relevant and is currently being used as a way to implement more fair and just discipline in the school district.

Corporal punishment is a type of discipline that is not allowed by Meridian’s Student Code of Conduct. Although Meridian may not use corporal punishment, this type of discipline is allowed in many school districts in the state of Mississippi. Mississippi Code of 1972, Section 37-11-57, authorizes school districts to use corporal punishment as a disciplinary action. This includes “swatting with a wooden paddle”\(^{235}\). Section 1 of 37-11-57 says “except in the case of excessive force or cruel and unusual punishment, a teacher, assistant teacher, principal, or an assistant principal acting within the course and scope of his employment shall not be liable for any action carried out in conformity with state or federal law or rules or regulations of the State Board of

\(^{234}\) Ibid. 1.
\(^{235}\) Mississippi House Bill 1096 Preamble. (1972).
Education or the local school board regarding the control, discipline, suspension, and expulsion of students.” Currently, 48 counties in Mississippi allow corporal punishment to be used in their public school districts.

Studying the current discipline infrastructure of Pre-K – 12 gives an idea of the types of discipline that currently applies to pre-K students. Although one might expect that the types of punishment would vary with age, it is important to understand that policies to not prohibit pre-K students from being suspended for hitting a teacher or expelled for fighting with another student just because they are 4 years old. This could be why we are seeing an escalating number of pre-K suspensions and expulsions nationwide – because there is no explicit written statement saying pre-K students will not be punished in these ways for behaviors that are generally considered normal for a 4 or 5 year old. The lack of explicit policy makes it even more important that Mississippi establish a set, age-appropriate discipline policy for pre-K students.

SECTION 5.7: MISSISSIPPI PRE-K RECOMMENDATION

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Although Mississippi does not have explicit policy relating to pre-K discipline, it does have guidelines for developing positive engagement in the learning environment as outlined in the “Mississippi Early Learning Guidelines”. The guidelines stress the need for teachers to provide “dependable routines for children so that they will learn what is expected of them and how to meet those expectations.” The guidelines also suggest that teachers keep the number of rules to a minimum and state them in a positive way. It is strongly suggested that the rules reflect a “non-violent resolution of conflict.” Teachers should never engage in physical punishment of the children like grabbing a child by the arm to pull the child away from a situation.

The Mississippi Early Learning Guidelines also suggest a collaborative learning process when it comes to discipline issues. One example is to model respect and caring for others through songs, examples, and art experiences. Then when the student has learned what this skill is, expect them to display it in their everyday play situations. There will be times, however, that students do not show the skill fully and the teacher’s job is to positively reinforce the ideals. This could be by having time at a “peace table” to work out problems one-on-one or even talking them through their play to provide corrective action as the action is occurring. However, all of these positive suggestions are only suggestions. This is not required in all prekindergarten programs which leaves schools to participate in reactionary discipline policies such as suspension and expulsion. An established, state-wide policy is necessary for pre-K students to continue to encourage positive, thoughtful disciplinary methods in the classroom.

\[238\text{ Mississippi Early Learning Guidelines, Mississippi Department of Education. (10/19/2006) Page 197}\]

\[239\text{ Mississippi Early Learning Guidelines; Mississippi Department of Education. (10/19/2006) Page 220}\]
Mississippi should have a special interest in implementing a program that reduces discipline referrals for pre-K students. As outlined in both the North Carolina and Tennessee chapters, positive intervention strategies can have a powerful impact on students, especially on younger students like those in pre-K. I believe that implementing a mandatory statewide Positive Behavior Interventions and Support program for all of Mississippi pre-K programs would not only be effective, but also feasible.

The first reason that mandatory PBIS is feasible is that PBIS is already being implemented in some school districts in Mississippi, which means the infrastructure for a successful program is already being created. REACH MS (Realizing Excellence for ALL Children in Mississippi) is currently working on implementing and collecting data on PBIS from the model sites. In 2012, the REACH MS SWPBIS was using fifteen elementary schools, four middle schools, and three high schools as model sites. These schools have passed an external evaluation which means PBIS has been fully implemented in the schools and verified. These model schools can serve as resources to other Mississippi schools as they continue to implement PBIS statewide.

Another reason that Mississippi should stand behind PBIS is that there results are already being seen at the model sites. In 2012, Alcorn Central Middle School was in year six of implementing PBIS. The school has already seen a decrease in minor negative classroom behaviors as well as an increase in faculty/staff and student motivation regarding PBIS. North Pontotoc Upper Elementary also saw improvements in their

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discipline referral process after creating a Minor Behavior Tracking Form. They found that after implementation of this technique there was an increase in consistency and structure when addressing discipline issues, a decrease in inappropriate student behaviors, an increase in instructional time, an increase in meaningful family involvement, and an increase in positive interactions between students and faculty/staff. These are just a few examples of the many successful outcomes of PBIS in Mississippi.

Finally, PBIS is fiscally possible. As discussed in the North Carolina chapter, the primary cost of implementing PBIS is payment for training and some cost associated with implementation. Program implementation could be as simple as creating a form to distribute to teachers to keep them accountable. However, a school could use more money to give their students a sticker for demonstrating positive behavior. The beauty of this program is that the cost is completely up to the school since this is a school led initiative. The fiscal feasibility should allow Mississippi to not only implement the program statewide, but to make sure that the programs implemented are effective for pre-K students.

I fully believe that if this program is mandated for pre-K programs across the state, that it will prevent a high number of discipline referrals. Based on the positive impact PBIS has had on North Carolina and Tennessee, I foresee a significant decrease in the number of referrals, the severity of referrals, and less racial disparity in decisions. These are the trends reported in North Carolina, Tennessee, and other states that have implemented PBIS.

I believe the most important factor of PBIS is that it gives teachers and administrators methods to seek understanding as to why their students behave a certain
way, rather than how do I immediately stop this behavior through a reactive discipline technique. Racial prejudices tend to come from a misunderstanding of a different race’s culture and background. By providing teachers the tools to enforce positive behavior in their classroom through well thought out intervention methods, we would be providing the teacher more time to understand the impact their decisions have on individual students and that a quick reaction is not always the best policy. This would significantly impact the racial disparity issue and provide more equity in the school discipline system.
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

Although Mississippi’s education system may be far from perfect, I believe there is ample opportunity for Mississippi to take a proactive stance in pre-K discipline in regards to racial disparity. As I reflect on my research regarding discipline, I once again think of the little boys mentioned in my introduction. Would the teachers have been so quick to suspend these boys if they realized they engaged with the boys and understood why they were throwing the chairs? Would the teachers rush to contact a parent if they could effectively replace the problem behavior with another positive one? Maybe the teachers would not see a troubled black boy but rather a 5 year old child wanting attention when he hit another student and instead of rushing to punish the boy, that teacher would want to explain to the boy why that behavior was wrong in a way that he could understand.

The data I have presented in this thesis shows that there is a problem in the United States in regards to pre-K discipline. We are suspending too many of our students at a high rate and our black children are being impacted the most. PBIS is necessary in the state of Mississippi and we should not just encourage it in school districts – we should mandate it. The benefits are too great for our state to ignore and Mississippi cannot afford to allow this national issue to impact the early beginnings of our state-funded pre-K system.

I do have a few ideas for people who study this problem in the future. Throughout the data, I noticed that there was a lack of data in Tennessee in regards to the impact that the Pyramid Model had on discipline throughout schools. This was concerning to me which is why I did not suggest Mississippi implement the Pyramid into its pre-K system. North Carolina had a lot more data about the positive effects of PBIS. However, I do not want
to completely discount the Pyramid Model. There could be information that supports the model in Tennessee that is not readily accessible. I would suggest future researchers, if using Tennessee as a model, directly contact possibly delve deeper by contacting Tennessee officials and maybe observing a few classrooms.

Secondly, if I could do this study over again, I would have interviewed teachers and administrators who use PBIS in their schools and those who do not. I think it is important to take into consideration the opinions of the people who are responsible for reinforcement. I would like to know if they personally notice a difference in their classroom and how has it changed their daily routines. I believe the literature was lacking in the area of teacher and administrator opinions. I would have liked to hear their side of the story.

Finally, I would recommend researchers study children over a period of time. It is great if a student is receiving positive behavioral intervention in pre-K. But what effect does this have on the student as they progress to the next grade level? Also, it would be interesting to study what happens if the student goes from a PBIS classroom to a classroom that uses more traditional discipline. Following the story of particular students would add another aspect to the impact PBIS has on students.

I plan to present my research to people who play a direct role in education policy by creating a short policy brief to send to legislatures and educators across Mississippi. The recommendation of PBIS can be implemented in different government agencies. Whether through Senate, the Department of Education, or even in local school districts. However, schools need to realize that there is another option besides zero-tolerance. I also plan on reaching out to organizations like Mississippi First who played an
instrumental role in passing pre-K legislation. This organization would have a direct interest in this research in order to ensure that Mississippi pre-K remains a high quality program.

The next step for me, however, is attending Wake Forest University School of Law in Winston Salem, North Carolina. I am most excited for the opportunity to participate in advocacy clinics, such as the Child Advocacy Clinic where I would have the opportunity to represent children in different disputes including disputes with the public school system. I realize that a lot of students end up in this situation based on racial disparities in discipline, as my research has shown. I cannot wait to put my knowledge to use as I work to defend children in the courtroom and I work to keep them in school.

Discipline in public pre-K is a new problem area in need of more research. However, I do believe that my thesis can serve as a starting point for policymakers nationwide. Former United States First Lady Bird Johnson once said, “Children are likely to live up to what you believe of them.” It is time that we begin to believe that all children are deserve a fighting chance in their pre-K programs. Instead of rushing to suspend and expel prekindergartners, we must work to show them compassion and understanding. We must teach them to use positive behaviors in their life by positively reinforcing them in their everyday life. I strongly urge Mississippi to mandate PBIS in state-funded pre-K.
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