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## Teacher and School Leader Perspectives on Factors that Impact Relationships and Recidivism Among Black or African American Girls: A Mixed Methods Study

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TEACHER AND SCHOOL LEADER PERSPECTIVES ON FACTORS THAT IMPACT  
RELATIONSHIPS AND RECIDIVISM AMONG BLACK OR AFRICAN AMERICAN  
GIRLS: A MIXED METHODS STUDY

By

Ms. Amber Jan LaSalle

A Dissertation Submitted to the  
Faculty of The Graduate School at  
Coastal Carolina University in  
Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

Conway

2022

## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to the girls who I witnessed go in and out of the alternative school setting, not knowing which way to go. Know that this work was for you, to make things right.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I am extremely grateful to my professor and chair of my committee, Dr. Suzanne Horn, for her patience and believing in me throughout this entire process. I also could not have undertaken this journey without Dr. Catherine Scott and Dr. Deborah Perkins, my fearless committee members, who were always willing to provide feedback and shed new light on my work when I needed it the most. Without my committee, I would not be where I am today.

I would like to offer a special thank you to each individual who took the time to fill out my survey and participate in follow up interviews. Your work does not go unnoticed and will forever impact Black or African American girls within alternative schools.

Lastly, words cannot express how thankful I am for my family, especially my parents and my fiancé. Their constant encouragement and faith in me kept my motivation high throughout this process. All the countless hours you heard me talking about this work was what I needed to get through this process. I did this for you and I hope I made you proud.

## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to investigate teacher and school leader perspectives on how relationships with Black or African American girls' impacted recidivism in an alternative school setting. The following research questions were used to guide this study to examine the viewpoint of alternative school teachers and school leaders regarding factors that impact teacher and student relationships and preventing recidivism among African American girls:

1. What factors do alternative school teachers and leaders feel contribute to recidivism among Black or African American girls?
2. What are alternative school teachers' and school leaders' perspectives on how relationships impact recidivism among Black or African American girls?

In this study, teachers and school leaders provide their perspectives on factors that impact recidivism among Black or African American girls in alternative school settings as well as how relationships play a role in reducing recidivism. Systemic Stigma, School Environment, Home Environment, and Lack of Base School support emerged as themes to support the teacher and school leader perceptions on what they felt impacted relationships and recidivism among Black or African American girls in alternative school settings. Eliminating the stigmas that are within school settings on Black or African American girls and ensuring that appropriate supports such as counseling, mentorship, and a "clean slate" are provided within the school environment all were found to have an impact on recidivism. Additionally, ensuring that strong relationships are formed between the teacher and the Black or African American girls despite the trauma brought into the school environment from their home lives and aiding in ensuring that the base school

provides the appropriate transitional support needed were found to impact relationships and recidivism among the participants within this study. These perspectives will provide insight into perceptions and perspectives from the alternative school teacher and school leader lens.

The insights gained from this study will enable educators to refine the practices within alternative and base school settings to ensure that the needs of Black or African American girls are being met in order to reduce recidivism. Considerations should be made in terms of best practices and supports for Black or African American girls, no matter which school setting they are enrolled in: alternative school or a traditional base school setting. The implementation of an effective transitional program at the base school to support Black or African American girls upon their return from the alternative school is also recommended. Lastly, ensuring that professional development is provided for all stakeholders within the alternative school setting to ensure they understand the importance of transforming their practices in order to meet the needs of Black or African American girls instead of expecting the girls to transform based on the practices currently used.

*Keywords:* Alternative Schools, Perspectives, Perceptions, Black or African American girls, Teacher or School Leader, Relationships, Recidivism

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# **CHAPTER I**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Over the last 60 years, the discipline gap between white and Black or African American students has grown at an alarming rate. Educators across the United States have worked to close the discipline gap by employing numerous strategies and best practices. However, the impact of increasing disciplinary actions taken on Black or African American females has gone under the radar due to heavier emphasis on Black or African American males, bringing the question to the forefront: What about the influx of Black or African American females enrolled in alternative school settings? The topic of the proposed study investigates teacher and school leader perspectives on how relationships with Black or African American girls' impacted recidivism in an alternative school setting. The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the study, identify the key problem, and to give insight into the conceptual framework designed to help the reader understand the exploratory nature of the study.

### **Importance of the Study**

As a response to the increase in dropout rates across the United States, many public schools have implemented alternative school learning environments for students who are unable to meet expectations of a traditional school setting in terms of behavior (McGee & Lin, 2017). Although these settings were designed to support at-risk students and to decrease dropout rates, these school settings have turned into a 'dumping ground' for those experiencing subjective and punitive disciplinary actions, disproportionately impacting Black or African American females at alarming rates (Free, 2017; Payne & Welch, 2010). As a growing concern, alternative school placements are on the rise. This has to do with the increase in zero tolerance policies as well as

other reforms to ensure that all students receive an appropriate education. Within the alternative school setting as an exclusionary punishment, students are required to spend a minimum amount of time and complete specific requirements in order to return to a traditional school setting (Kennedy-Lewis et al., 2016). Since the 1970's, African American suspension rates have more than doubled; these students are three times more likely than their white counterparts to receive a suspension (Losen et al., 2015; Morris & Perry, 2017). The National Center for Education Statistics (2016) notes that in a study conducted on retention, suspension, and expulsion rates in 2013-2014, the rate at which Black or African American students are suspended from traditional schools more than doubles the rate of white students, from 5.3% to 13.7%. Of the students who were expelled in this same study, the percentage of students who were African American doubled those of any other racial group. This leads one to question the subjective and objective disciplinary actions taken on students of color.

It is important to consider the impact that these alternative school environments can have on any given student and additionally, what implications this placement can have on their future. It is important to consider the impact that relationships can have on students in the classroom. Teachers work towards fighting off the traditional stigmas associated with students who are deemed at-risk and attempt to build warm and inviting relationships with students to help guide them to success. With relationships being at the forefront of educators' minds, Cobb (as cited in Kennedy-Lewis et al., 2016) notes that more than 84% of the 126 students surveyed felt that their teachers at the alternative school did not care about them, nor did the relationships formed help them be successful in the traditional school environment upon their return. The relationships built between teachers and Black or African American students in alternative school settings are

impacted by many outside forces (Chesney-Lind & Shelden, 2014; DeComo, 1998; Free, 2017), which could lead to the development of a positive or negative relationship within a school, impacting recidivism rates. Black or African American girls in particular note the importance of how a teacher perceives them as a student and the impact of a teacher seeking out ways to meet them where they are in terms of need can have a great impact on relationships between the teacher and student (Cope et al., 2005; Zhang, 2008).

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were used to guide this study to examine the viewpoint of alternative school teachers and school leaders regarding factors that impact teacher and student relationships and preventing recidivism among African American girls:

1. What factors do alternative school teachers and leaders feel contribute to recidivism among Black or African American girls?
2. What are alternative school teachers' and school leaders' perspectives on how relationships impact recidivism among Black or African American girls?

### **Rationale for the Study**

The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to investigate teacher and school leader perspectives on how relationships with Black or African American girls' impacted recidivism in an alternative school setting. Alternative schools have been traditionally known as a restorative practice to help improve student behaviors so that they can be successful in traditional school settings (Kennedy-Lewis et al., 2016). The impact of relationships is a key factor in this restorative practice. However, the lack of positive relationships limits success that alternative schools can have on a student and can cause recidivism among students either in the alternative

school setting or the juvenile justice system. Scholars note that the relationships built within an alternative school could be the foundational base from which all other things are built (Malcolm, 2019). When students find a positive connection with another adult in the alternative school setting, this can set the student up to have a positive experience to then be translated back to the traditional school setting. Building relationships takes time; however, “the impact on the academic success of students of low socioeconomic status and those with African American backgrounds” (Powell & Marshall, 2011, p. 14) proves the effectiveness of those positive connections. There is a significant gap within the research noting the issue of how teacher-student relationships impact recidivism among Black or African American girls in alternative school settings through the teacher and school leader perspective using a mixed-methods lens.

### **Research Design**

This study used a mixed methods design for data collection and analysis. A mixed methods study approach was used to investigate teacher and school leader perspectives on how relationships with Black or African girls’ impacted recidivism in an alternative school setting. Teachers and school leaders completed a survey and then follow up interviews were conducted to explore their perspective and perception of factors that impact recidivism, relationships, and experiences with Black or African American girls in alternative school settings. A detailed description of this case can be found in Chapter III.

In a two phase approach, the first set of data were collected quantitatively, using a survey that consisted of Likert-scale, multi-select, and open-ended answer questions answered by teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators. Then, qualitative data that was collected in

the second phase, consisted of interview recordings and transcripts that were collected and used to identify common themes within the findings (Yin, 2018). Various codes were assigned to the data collected separately, where each specific code represented a concept or topic of interest as well as provided an interpretation of the researchers perspective from the literature and then were combined once all coding was complete to identify a common theme across both data collection methods (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018).

The tentative themes that were expected to emerge from the conceptual framework supporting this study based on the literature related to societal factors, home environment and school standing, and teacher/student relationships. These themes, or topics of interest, may include “Silence”, “Acceptance/Respect”, and “Lack of Support at Home and at the Base School”. These themes changed during the analysis process after all data was collected from participants.

### **Limitations**

This study is limited to one geographic region in the southeastern United States selected by the researcher. The small number of alternative school teachers and school leaders within the selected region posed a limitation on this study (n=43). The scope of this study was limited to alternative school teachers and school leaders in grades 6-12, which means that the data cannot be generalized to other settings and contexts. Additionally, this study focused on Black or African American girls through the perspectives of teacher and school leaders. Although there are other students at the alternative school, this group represents an underrepresented group in voicing perspectives and perceptions of relationships among students and teachers in the

alternative school setting. Although the study population was limited, the knowledge that was gained from this study is informative, due to its exploratory nature.

### **Definitions of Terms**

The following terms are used throughout the study, and are explored more in depth in Chapter II.

**Alternative Schools**, as described by Kennedy-Lewis et al. (2016), “serve students who are removed from regular schools either for receiving repeated office referrals for behavioral infractions or for committing a zero tolerance offense that has required their removal from school for a specified period of time” (p. 231).

**At-Risk**, refers to a youth who is considered to be at risk of academic failure, substance abuse, early pregnancy, juvenile justice involvement, truancy, and early school dropout (Berlowitz et al., 2017; Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Free, 2017).

**Traditional School or Base School**, refers to the general, pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade public school setting.

**Otherparenting/Fictive kin** relate to the act of being a “parent” to a child with no blood or relative relation (Williams, 2018).

### **Summary and Organization of the Dissertation**

The purpose of this study was to investigate teacher and school leader perspectives on how relationships with Black or African girls’ impacted recidivism in an alternative school setting. This mixed methods study approach allowed the researcher to form a triangulated view of the perspectives and perceptions on how relationships with Black or African American girls’ impacted recidivism in an alternative school setting.

This introductory chapter provided a rationale for the study and an overview of the research design. The remainder of the dissertation is organized into four chapters. Chapter II provides a review of literature relating to alternative schools and Black or African American females. Chapter III describes the methodology for this study and Chapter IV will present and discuss the findings found from the study. Chapter V discusses the implications of the findings for scholars and educators of at-risk students. Limitations of the study are also noted in Chapter V.



## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The purpose of this study was to investigate teacher and school leader perspectives on how relationships with Black or African American girls' impacted recidivism in an alternative school setting. To complete the literature review, only peer-reviewed articles were used, with emphasis placed on those from the last ten years (2011-2021), as well as seminal studies. The following topics were researched, given their relation to the study: alternative schools, at-risk students, and teacher-student relationships.

#### **Description and Early Development of Alternative Schools**

Dating back to the 1960's, educational reform impacted many areas of the education students received, explicitly in the area of challenging the ways that students were traditionally being taught in schools. The rise of new institutions which claimed to offer alternatives to regular public schools challenged the political norm of existing educational practices and strategies (Deal & Nolan, 1978). These newly founded institutions, alternative schools, were set up as a response to the diversity of American society and to help close achievement and discipline gaps within public education among groups of students (Arnone & Strout, 1978). Policy makers and writers battled over what specifically defined 'alternative' which led to school districts across the country to take the ambiguity of the term and create alternative options for their students to best meet their needs as a specialized school. "The U.S. education system has created alternative schools to decrease the number of at-risk students leaving school prematurely and serve these students by using different methods than found in traditional educational settings" (Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011, p. 106). This was a springboard for school districts across the

United States to integrate ways for students who were at-risk from dropping out of school to receive an alternative option. These alternative educational schools offered support for students who were unable to meet the achievement standards within a traditional educational setting (McGee & Lin, 2017).

Historically, alternative schools commonly served one of two types of students: those who were academically gifted or talented and those who were unsuccessful in a traditional school setting (Arnone & Strout, 1978). Across the United States, alternative school settings vary by specific need, with emphasis not only on these two subgroups, but also program-specific experiences designed to attract students. In the literature there are three primary types of alternative school settings to help support the individual needs of students that go beyond the traditional school setting (Brown & Addison, 2012):

- Type I: Program schools or schools of choice that provide students with specific experiences and strategies to attract students to attend.
- Type II: “Last Chance” schools for students who with behaviors that indicate the need for specific support are placed as the last step before expulsion from the traditional school setting.
- Type III: Therapeutic schools specifically designed as a non-punitive, remedial focus that assists students with academic and/or social-emotional issues.

These types of school options were specifically created to help reduce the dropout rate and increase the support provided to ensure success among students, specifically those considered at-risk. In this study, Type II alternative schools were the primary focus.

## **Type II Alternative Schools**

Type II alternative schools serve as a place for students who exhibit multiple conduct refractions and who ultimately have academic troubles in the classroom. As stated by Kennedy-Lewis et al. (2016), a contemporary definition of ‘alternative schools’ notes, “Disciplinary alternative schools serve students who are removed from regular schools either for receiving repeated office referrals for behavioral infractions or for committing a zero tolerance offense that has required their removal from school for a specified period of time" (p. 231). Alternative school programs began to form due to the ever changing political guidelines set forth by the government to ensure that all students are provided an education so that they may make successful academic progress. As a last resort, alternative schools were designed to help support those students deemed as incapable of behaving in a traditional classroom setting, all while inadvertently segregating school locations as these alternative schools were mostly filled with Black or African American students.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2016) and Carver et al. (2010) utilized data from the 2007-08 school year to note alternative school settings across the United States and compared those rates to the 2000-01 school year. Within this data set, it was found that 64 percent of school districts across the country reported having at least one Type II alternative school or program for at-risk students in comparison to 39 percent in the 2000-2001 school year. Within Carver et al.’s (2010) study, it was found that by 2008, there were over 645,000 students enrolled within an alternative school compared to approximately 612,000 in 2001. This increase indicates that the utilization of alternative school settings for students with

disciplinary infractions has increased over time in conjunction with the influx of school disciplinary policies.

### **Impact of Policies on Growth and Development**

Over the last 60 years, alternative schools have undergone a series of changes based on policies to help grow and develop the impact that the school can have on students and their success rates. Specifically, zero tolerance policies, along with the *Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994* and the *No Child Left Behind Act of 1994*, were policies enacted that created and enhanced programs to provide students an appropriate alternative to traditional school settings in lieu of expulsion.

#### ***Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994***

The implementation of zero tolerance policies in schools started in states and districts across the nation after the passage of the *Gun-Free Schools Act* (1994), which required each state that receives federal funding to have a policy in place to expel any student who is determined to have brought a weapon to school for at least one school year. This notion of zero tolerance helped give a broad range of exclusionary discipline acts as a response to drug and violence related behaviors (Kennedy, 2011). Zero tolerance policies were used as a way to deal with non-compliant behavior, leading to alternative school placement when student behaviors are too challenging for the traditional school setting (Carver et al., 2010; Fox & Harding, 2005; McNeal & Dunbar, 2010). However, alternative school placement is not equitable. Welch and Payne (2012) found that schools with large amounts of Black or African American students are more likely to use punitive discipline and implement the zero tolerance policies and less likely to implement restorative practices for those students. Additionally, Welch and Payne (2012), found

that for each 1% increase in the number of Black or African American students within a school, the odds of using expulsion increased by a factor of 1.04, leading to the idea that schools with a greater percentage of Black or African American students will have a higher expulsion and suspension rate, especially for zero tolerance policy infractions. This impacted the utilization of alternative schools for students who were no longer allowed in traditional school settings. This practice ensured that students impacted by the zero tolerance policy put into place with the *Gun Free Schools Act* (1994) had an alternative to traditional mainstream education to prevent dropout. The *Gun Free Schools Act* (1994) and the implications of zero tolerance discipline policies at the varying levels of the education system led to an increased number of students enrolled in alternative school settings who have committed certain behaviors deemed unacceptable in the traditional school environment (Murphy et al., 2013).

As the implementation of zero tolerance policies became prevalent across the country, the impact has led to the notion of what researchers alike refer to as the school-to-prison pipeline, which is a metaphor used to encompass those students who are unsuccessful in traditional learning environments, and because of that, are now led down a pathway to prison on the basis of behavior or lack thereof (Mitchell, 2014). Scholars found that when there is an increase in punitive school discipline policies, it pushes students out of school and into the hands of the United States juvenile and/or adult justice system (King et al., 2018; Mitchell, 2014).

#### ***No Child Left Behind Act of 2004***

Following suit, the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2004* (NCLB), an act that required states to participate in a standards-based educational reform to help disadvantaged students, “mandates that *all* students, not just well-behaved and academically motivated students make academic

progress” (Arter, 2007, p. 38). This initiated yet another influence on alternative school settings across the country. NCLB specifies that students who are considered an ethnic minority, students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, students with an academic or behavioral disability as well as those students who speak English as a second language are labeled at-risk. These students typically score lower on standardized tests and are more likely to drop out of school when compared to their peers (Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011; Payne & Brown, 2017; Ruiz et al., 2018). With the dropout rate decreasing from 8.3% in 2015 to 5.1% in 2019, alternative school enrollment has been used to help decrease the number of students not earning a high school diploma, which keeps pace with the trend of the increase of at-risk students in school settings (Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011, p. 106).

In 2014, the General Assembly searched to strategically annotate how states define alternative education. As noted by Porowski et al., (2014), the §§ 59–63–1300 defined alternative education:

The General Assembly finds that a child who does not complete his/her education is greatly limited in obtaining employment, achieving his/her full potential, and becoming a productive member of society. It is, therefore, the intent of this article to encourage district school boards throughout the state to establish alternative school programs. These programs shall be designed to provide appropriate services to students who for behavioral or academic reasons are not benefiting from the regular school program or may be interfering with the learning of others. It is further the intent of this article that cooperative agreements may be

developed among school districts to implement innovative exemplary programs.

A report published by the National Center for Education Statistics (Carver et al., 2010) stated that 64% of school districts in the United States report at least one alternative school program, which equals approximately 10,300 district-administered schools across the United States. With the large number of alternative schools, "The most common profile of districts with alternative schools was those in urban regions in the Southeast that enrolled over 50% students of color. Forty-eight percent of students attending alternative schools were in districts with over 50% of students of color, and 38% were in districts with over 20% of students living in poverty" (Kennedy-Lewis et al., 2016, p. 231). To put this in perspective, in 2016 the official poverty rate was 12.7% (United States Census Bureau, 2017). With those growing statistics, the need for alternative school settings has increased and has been identified as an effective way to help young adults receive an appropriate education all while providing them with the support needed to prevent delinquency and high school dropouts (Zhang, 2008).

### **Recent Political Impacts on Alternative Schooling and At-Risk Students**

#### **Alternative Schooling in South Carolina**

In a report by the Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education, Smith and Harper (2015) highlighted the disproportionality of suspension rates among Black or African American students in southern states. In South Carolina alone, 45,494 Black or African American students were suspended from K-12 public schools in a single academic year. Black or African American students were 36% of students in school districts across the state, but comprised 60% of suspensions and 62% of expulsions. Out of all suspended or expelled females

in South Carolina, 65.5% of those suspended were Black or African American, and 65.8% of those expelled were Black or African American (Smith & Harper, 2015). This report shows that among Black or African American girls and boys, especially in regards to suspensions and expulsions, 57.5% of Black or African American boys in South Carolina were suspended and 61.1% expelled, showing a slightly higher rate of suspensions and expulsions of Black or African American girls in the state. With that said, students who are suspended from school at least once were less likely to have graduated high school and were more likely to become involved in the juvenile justice system (Rosenbaum, 2018).

Smith and Harper (2015) also break down individual counties within each southern state to show the correlation between the percentage of Black or African American student enrollment and the percentage of Black or African American students suspended within their respective districts. In the counties (n=10) where the present study was conducted, the average total number of students enrolled within any given district was 22,429, with a total average of 2,355 suspensions in the 2017-2018 school year. The districts have a Black or African American average student enrollment percentage of 55.5% and an average of 74.98% of all out-of-school suspensions were of students considered Black or African American.

The Civil Rights Data Collection (2017) shows that South Carolina ranks within the top three highest-suspending states across the country. South Carolina also was one of the highest-suspending overall for each subgroup that was ranked by racial and ethnic grouping as well as gender across the United States (Losen & Whitaker, 2018).

The impact of zero tolerance policies and alternative school placements are predictors pertaining to student success rates. In a study conducted by Losen and Whitaker (2018), the



number of lost instructional days in relation to race across the country, it was found that South Carolina had a total of 296,057 total days of instructional time lost in the 2015-2016 school year. Specifically, Black or African American students lost on average 72 days of instructional time per 100 students, while their white peers lost an average of 21 instructional days per 100 students. Black or African American students lost at least 100 days per 100 students compared to their white peers with 28 days per 100 students lost (Losen & Whitaker, 2018).

### **Benefits, Limitations, and Perceptions of Alternative Schools**

#### **Benefits of Alternative Schools**

Reported benefits among alternative schools over the last 60 years include the services and support provided to students, low teacher-student ratios, personalized instruction that meets the needs of the learners within the classroom, counseling services, and supportive teachers that understand the needs of their students (Arnové & Strout, 1978; Free, 2014; Szlyk, 2018). Arnove and Strout (1978) conducted the first national study of alternative schools in eleven districts across the United States and found that warm environments and interpersonal relationships with students and teachers were what created an effective alternative school environment (Kennedy-Lewis et al., 2016). Additionally, it is important to consider this sense of community in terms of ‘family’. According to Kennedy-Lewis et al. (2016), “In qualitative interview studies with alternative school students across the United States, some students have articulated feeling more supported in these schools, even though they perceive the negative reputation associated with attending” (p. 232).

As an alternative to school suspensions, alternative schools provide students with the opportunity to acquire seat time within an academic setting and to reduce the number of lost

instructional hours as a result of out-of-school suspensions. Losen and Whitaker (2018) found that across the nation, students lost over 11 million days of instructional time as a result of out-of-school suspensions. In another study conducted by Kennedy-Lewis et al., (2016), Black or African American students lost on average 66 days of instruction compared to an average of 14 days for their white peers. Alternative schools serve as a space that can provide students with the opportunities to learn and reduce the chances of a student entering the juvenile justice system.

### **Limitations of Alternative Schools**

Although the purpose of an alternative school has been identified to help ensure those students who are deemed at-risk successfully earn a high school diploma, there are many studies that do not support the idea that alternative schools serve any impact on promoting education for youth and putting a stop to the school-to-prison pipeline (Free, 2017; Kennedy-Lewis et al., 2016; Kim & Taylor, 2008; Pace, 2018). Kennedy-Lewis et al. (2016) found that "In one longitudinal study of student's placed in disciplinary alternative schools or continuation schools in one upper-income county near California's San Francisco Bay, fewer than half returned to comprehensive schools and stayed enrolled for more than one school year" (p. 231). In another study in the southeastern part of the United States, findings reveal that of students who are sent to an alternative school at the elementary level, approximately 52.9% will be placed in the juvenile justice system, while 43.3% of students who are placed in the alternative school setting in the middle school level will reach that same placement within two years (Vanderhaar et al., 2015).

Through the revision process of defining alternative schools and how they can impact student success rates, it is important to consider the implications it may have on the students. As

Free (2017) cites, "Despite their original intention as "idealistic havens" for students who are not succeeding in their conventional schools, today, some scholars and practitioners consider alternative schools to be little more than "warehouses" or "dumping grounds" for disruptive students" (p. 502). Researchers note that it has not yet been determined whether or not alternative school placements provide students with a "second chance" or if it simply increases the students chances of entering the juvenile justice system, potentially leading to dropout (Kim & Taylor, 2008). The debate continues between those scholars and practitioners who support the idea that alternatives to traditional mainstream education are imperative to meeting the needs of at-risk youth (Free, 2017) and those that deem these students are on a one-way ticket to prison.

Programs have been put into place to help facilitate the proper implementation of alternative schools and reintegration to traditional schools, specifically the Intensive Aftercare Program (IAP) that was developed by David Altschuler and Troy Armstrong in 1994 (Pace, 2018). IAP includes reentry services that incorporate cultural competency, family involvement, and care, however, recidivism rates are still high despite the program's initiatives (Pace, 2018). In a study noting the significance of ethnicity and recidivism among alternative school students, Black or African American students were 3.37 times more likely to return to the alternative school setting during the same school year (Booker & Mitchell, 2011). Although strategies and best practices have been created, it is important to note that there is little to no information pertaining to the relationship of recidivism rates of students who are enrolled in alternative school settings and what factors influence the return (Booker & Mitchell, 2011).

## **Perceptions**

The perceptions and perspectives of traditional school faculty differ from educators at alternative schools. In the study findings, Kennedy-Lewis et al. (2016) found that educators who taught in the traditional school environment had very different perspectives of what the alternative school was like. Those in the traditional setting felt as if the alternative school should be there to serve as a form of punishment to students as well as a way to deter them from exhibiting misbehaviors that they were unable to control again. Additionally, in the same study, Kennedy-Lewis et al. (2016) found that when speaking with traditional school educators

Some teachers at this school described its purpose as a safety valve for the comprehensive schools, housing students that disrupted the environment at regular schools so that other students at those schools could learn. Other teachers described the school as providing a safety net for students who would otherwise fall through the cracks (p. 232).

Alternatively, the educators at the alternative school saw their roles very differently in the sense that they were to provide emotional support to students and help them learn coping strategies to use when they returned to the traditional school setting, which typically lacked structure and the resources they needed to address the root of their misbehaviors (Kennedy-Lewis et al., 2016). The varying perceptions and perspectives of the role of an alternative school can impact a student's mindset, which could lead them to an unsuccessful experience.

The stigma of alternative schools being known as a “dumping ground or warehouse for at-risk students who are falling behind, have behavioral problems or are juvenile delinquents” (Kim & Taylor, 2008, p. 2017) can pose a serious risk on student attentiveness, engagement, and

success. It is also noted by McNulty and Roseboro (2009), alternative school settings are a metaphoric “toilet”, where society and schools “flush” all of the problem students from the mainstream classrooms and put them in alternative school settings. With this negative perception, it gives students the impression that they are not worthy of being treated the same as other students. It is also known that when students are moved from the general education setting and placed at an alternative school so that they cannot “contaminate” other students, disenfranchised youth are often labeled as possible problems, [and] alternative schools are often the last stop before juvenile court (McNulty & Roseboro, 2009). On the contrary, research shows that when students are placed in an alternative school setting where a positive environment is created, student perceptions change from a “dumping ground” to a safety net due to the relationships and trust built among teachers and students (Kim & Taylor, 2008).

Research also suggests that school climate can pose negative perceptions on the school environment when exclusionary discipline is frequently used. Mitchell and Bradshaw (2013) found that when a teacher used exclusionary discipline strategies, it negatively impacted the student’s perception of school and may cause additional behavioral problems in the future. Research also discusses that the impact of poor discipline practices, such as exclusionary discipline, leads to long-term negative effects including school dropout and connectedness with the school-to-prison pipeline (Free, 2017). When schools have negative connotations attached to the building, staff, and curriculum, it presents a barrier that is hard for students to overcome. Alienation can lead to student perspectives lending towards negative viewpoints and could cause students to not perform academically. This negative perception parallels a connection to a sense of alienation from a societal membership, leaving the student feeling as if they do not belong to a

particular group, excluding them from the school community when the student is expelled or suspended (Mitchell, 2014). Research shows that alienation from school, when students feel that the school is challenging their beliefs about justice and fairness, increases the risk of failure and dropout (Amitay & Rahav, 2018; Mitchell, 2014; Murphy et al., 2013). With the dropout rate increasing in the United States, it is important that school settings find ways to encourage students to participate and attend. Alternative schools, for some students, can create an environment that is more conducive to at-risk student success where the school is able to provide positive teacher relationships, a safe environment where students do not feel alienation and the need for behavioral retaliation, creating a positive perception surrounding the idea of school (Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011).

### **At-Risk Students**

It is evident that at-risk students are of great concern, especially when it comes to exclusionary behavior and suspensions from school. Suspensions from school account for an estimated seven percent lower graduation rate in a study conducted among cohorts of students who did not graduate on time, noting these students at-risk (Losen & Whitaker, 2018). According to the Department of Education (2014), an at-risk youth is considered to be at risk of academic failure, substance abuse, early pregnancy, juvenile justice involvement, truancy, and early school dropout. The main out-of-school underlying factors leading to a youth being deemed at risk include family tragedy, lack of support, poverty, substance abuse, teen pregnancy, exposure to violence, socioeconomic status, and geographical location (Berlowitz et al., 2017; Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Free, 2017). Just the occurrence of receiving disciplinary infractions such as suspensions or expulsions greatly increases the likelihood of an at-risk the student not meeting

academic standards, increasing their risk of retention as well as creating a negative perspective and perception of school and its value to them as a student (Lam et al., 2012; Mallett, 2016). Research also suggests that schools and districts with lower socioeconomic levels and a greater percentage of students with low socioeconomic status are more likely than others to implement disciplinary infractions involving punitive discipline, suspensions, and expulsions (Ramey, 2015).

### **Alternative Schools and Racial and Ethnic Inequality**

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), found that “alternative schools are located disproportionately in urban districts, districts with high-minority student populations, and districts with high-poverty concentrations, making them susceptible to social, political, economic, and educational inequalities” (NCES, 2016). Moreover, research shows that statistically, racial and ethnic minority students, specifically Black or African Americans, are disproportionately expelled, suspended, and/or sent to alternative school settings compared to their white counterparts (Arnove & Strout, 1978; Grivan et al., 2016; Ramey, 2015). In a study conducted by Grivan et al. (2016), it was found that subjective office referrals were three times more disproportionate for middle school students and approximately 1.5 times more disproportionate for high school students relating to students of color compared to their white peers. Osher et al. (2012) also found that:

Over the past three decades, African American students experienced an increase of 9% points in school suspension rates, from 6% in 1973 to 15% in 2006. During the same period, the suspension rate for all students grew at a much smaller rate from 3.7% to 6.9%. The gap between suspension

rates for African American students and White students has grown from 3% in the 1970s to more than 10% in the 2000s. African Americans are now over three times more likely than White students to be suspended for behavioral offenses in schools that were at various stages of implementing schoolwide positive behavior supports (p. 285).

Based on the data, it is evident that the majority of students receiving school suspensions, expulsions, and assignments to alternative schools are those students of color (Murphy et al., 2013). Racial disparities relating to the implementation of zero tolerance discipline policies, suspensions, and expulsions are an integral part of what is commonly known as the school-to-prison pipeline. Scholars have donned this particular concept relating to the excessive use of zero tolerance discipline that pushes students out of school by using suspensions and expulsions, which is a major predictor of incarceration (Berlowitz et al., 2017). Research shows that Black or African American students are overrepresented at every point of the school-to-prison pipeline; from enrollment in low socioeconomic schools, to suspension and expulsion from schools, transferring to alternative schools, and referrals to the juvenile justice system (Gibson & Decker, 2019; Mitchell, 2014).

The impact of zero tolerance policies and the school-to-prison pipeline has both short and long term impacts on students. Short term, students are deprived of critical instructional time when they are suspended or expelled and long term impacts note that students are more likely to drop out and follow the pathway to prison (Mitchell, 2014).

### **Black or African American Girls and Alternative Schooling**



In a study conducted by Bottiani et al. (2016), it was found that when Black or African American students with low socioeconomic status were asked their perception of equity and support within their school, they rated it significantly lower than their white peers. Specifically, Bottiani et al. (2016) found that the perception of ‘caring’ was significantly lower for Black or African American students regardless of socioeconomic status, and that students cited poor quality relationships with teachers which led to an even lower sense of belonging within the school setting. Black or African American students reported less equity on average compared to their white peers in schools that were majority white or majority Black or African American (Bottiani et al., 2016). Perceptions of equity among Black or African American students had a direct correlation with their perceptions of caring relationships with teachers (Bottiani et al., 2016). “Across the nation, African American girls are disproportionately excluded from participation in restorative approaches and alternatives to exclusionary discipline because their actions may be subjectively determined as more “defiant” or intentionally disruptive to the learning environment” (Morris, 2019, p. 47).

Society plays a major role in the implications placed on at-risk Black or African American girls. Societal race and gender discrimination often influence create contexts that result in the arrest of marginalized youth which, in turn, leads to disproportionately high rates of control, monitoring, and incarceration for specific ethnic and gender groups (DeComo, 1998; Chesney-Lind & Shelden 2014; Free, 2017). Researchers show many instances of subjective disciplinary actions being taken on Black or African American girls are leading them down the school-to-prison pipeline faster than any other gender or race (Bridges et al., 2012; Free, 2017; Morris & Perry, 2017). This subjective discipline stems from societal expectations and norms.

These perceptions can negatively impact the views an educator may have on an Black or African American girl within the classroom. Chesney-Lind and Shelden (2014) also discovered that, "understanding youthful delinquency and violence matters when examining ethnic and gender identity development, not in the sense that ethnicity or gender causes crime, but in the sense that social perceptions of ethnicity and gender can persuade behavior" (p. 275). One common denominator in the juvenile justice system is the rapid increase in criminal behavior by young girls (Zhang, 2008). This subjective punishment of behaviors negatively impacts girls' graduation rates from high school and puts them at a severe disadvantage, continuing to widen the achievement gap. Subjective disciplinary actions such as dress code violations, disobedience, disruptive behavior, and aggressive behavior supports the idea that Black girls are much more likely than other girls to be cited for infractions.

When subjective discipline occurs, it negatively impacts students, especially Black or African American girls. Researchers found that when students are subjectively disciplined, especially in middle school, that these students over time may disengage from school, which leads to an increased truancy rate and potential dropout (Grivan et al., 2016). These offenses among Black boys and those of other races do not compare to those subjective disciplinary actions as Black females (Morris & Perry, 2017). To support Morris and Perry's (2017) research, Annamma et al. (2019), also reported findings that when disciplinary infractions were cited either objective or subjective, Black or African American girls were overrepresented for subjective behaviors deemed as detrimental, disobedient/defiant, or third-degree assault, that were dependent on school staff perceptions and interpretations of threat, non-compliance, and harm.

In order to fully support at-risk Black or African American girls in alternative school settings, supports may need to be differentiated to meet their needs. Innovative strategies are important to successfully move Black or African American girls down the alternative to the prison pipeline and instead, to be a productive citizen. This idea is also supported by Zhang (2008),

Although girls in trouble need the same things as other adolescents, such as opportunities to learn and develop, guidance in making constructive choices and help with specific problems or situations, there are also gender-specific strategies needed to tailor alternative education programmes specifically to the needs of girls (p. 179).

It is also known that once a student, in this case, an Black or African American girl, is sent to an alternative school setting, that by being “placed into public reformatives, the rehabilitative emphasis was not on making them more productive students, but rather on forming them into better servants for social elites” (Morris, 2016, p. 141). This research is supported by Crenshaw et al. (2015), stating that Black or African American girls' perceptions of school change when zero tolerance discipline policies are put in place leading them to disengage from school because they felt that discipline was prioritized over academic achievement and that the lack of teacher support and investment in them as students deterred them from the learning environment.

### **Perceptions of Black or African American Girls and Schooling**

The notion of school discipline comes attached with perceptions and perspectives that may negatively impact the consequences of Black or African American girls. Based on a study of classroom observations, Morris and Perry (2017) found that when Black or African American

girls were not acting like a “lady” or when being more assertive than a traditional white peer, educators disciplined these students based on societal norms, or in other words, subjective misbehavior (Gibson & Decker, 2019; Morris & Perry, 2017). This type of implicit bias based on the culturally appropriate actions of Black or African American girls can skew the punishment that is handed to these students. Many times, Black or African American girls are punished because they are not acting as a ‘white’ student. It was found by Morris (2016) that, “The audacity to stand up and be heard in the face of fierce patriarchy and racial oppression is not always celebrated; instead, adults with authority have misinterpreted it as being angry and combative” (p. 79). This type of action among Black or African American girls leads to many sent to alternative school settings.

The voices of students regarding implications surrounding alternative school settings and school/teacher relationships provides an insightful view. When looking through the lens of Black or African American girls, perceptions and perspectives surrounding school have a very different sightline than many other groups of students. Research states that Black or African American girls have stated that they struggle to meet the academic and behavioral demands of their teachers, simply because they are unable to act the “white” way (Carter Andrews et al., 2019). Scholars note that the perceptions of Black or African American girls being loud, having bad attitudes, and being considered dangerous create a sense of dominance that many educators associate with disobedience and defiance (Annamma et al., 2019; Gibson & Decker, 2019; Payne & Brown, 2017). Black or African American girls battle with how they should be perceived within a school setting but despite that perception, their perspective rarely is taken into account. Morris (2016) speaks to this issue regarding the notion of Black or African American girls being

expected to be ‘good girls’, which leads student perceptions of themselves down tricky pathways. Jones (2009) discusses in her book *Between Good and Ghetto: African American Girls and Inner-City Violence*:

[“good girls”] do not look or act like men or boys. Good girls do not run wild in the streets; instead, they spend the majority of their time in controlled settings: family, school, home, or church. Good girls are appropriately deferential to the men in their lives. Good girls are not sexually promiscuous, nor are they anything other than heterosexual. Good girls grow up to be ladies and once they have achieved this special-status position, they become committed to putting the needs of their family first (p. 20).

This social expectation of what a ‘good girl’ should be among Black or African American girls leads them to rebel against these expectations and are then at risk of being labeled a ‘bad girl’, which then allows them to have the perception of themselves that they are in turn ‘bad’. “Black girls who have challenged authority or attempted to negotiate poverty and racial isolation by participating in underground economies have been sent away to group homes, training schools, detention centers, and other institutions that attempt to transform “bad girls” into “good girls” (Morris, 2016, p. 20). The idea of trying to prevent “bad” girls is also found in a report by Crenshaw et al. (2015), where Black or African American girls voiced in a focus group that they felt as if teachers were more strict on them than they were the boys because that type of behavior was expected of the boys, but not of the girls. These instances help shape the perceptions that Black or African American girls have of themselves and ultimately shape the perspective they take on life outside of their homes. The perception of Black or African American girls drills

down to the idea that [they] must be assertive, take initiative, and show fortitude to combat the historical and contemporary racism that has been at the forefront of many Black or African American perspectives, which can be misconstrued by authority figures within a school setting (Annamma et al., 2019; Gibson & Decker, 2019).

Additionally, perceptions of Black or African American girls and stereotypes play a role in the expectations set forth by teachers and administrators in school. In an ethnographic study conducted by Waldron (2011), it was noted that racist and classist assumptions about “tomboys” or “ghetto girls” within the school led to more aggression or influence the girls to act out in retaliation as a survival tactic due to the lack of teachers and administrators not understanding the issues behind the anger. The Black or African American girls within Waldron’s (2011) study found that fighting was a way that they could earn power and respect within a school, going against traditional white feminine expectations and perceptions.

Black or African American girls seek out ways to survive in social settings and when placed in an alternative learning environment, in a study completed by Malcolm (2019), "there seemed to be a perception amongst some of the young adults that the learning which happened in alternative provision was not comparable to the academic learning which happens in mainstream school" (p. 93). Black or African American girls perceive the learning in traditional school settings unuseful and irrelevant to the needs that they feel must be met. The understanding that an alternative school setting may be able to provide Black or African American girls with the targeted strategies that could help them be successful is important. "Student perceptions of teacher support and teacher expectations can influence student motivation, self-perception, and academic performance" (Osher et al., 2012, p. 290). In a study by Payne and Brown (2017),

Black or African American girls also noted that their perceptions of school were that they were designed to set low-income Black or African American students up for failure by not providing them with proper instruction and guidance to help them be successful. The lack of teacher support and disengagement from the content being presented by teachers caused such tension that it undermined the intentions of student achievement (Payne & Brown, 2017).

### **Alternative Schools and Gender Inequality**

The disparities pertaining to discipline among Black or African American girls are increasing at a rapid rate. The behavior of Black or African American girls within traditional school settings and the response from school administrators along with the implementation of zero tolerance policies has increased the gender-based discrimination among school discipline policies. Researchers have found disparities in office referrals leading Black or African American girls to alternative school settings (Morris, 2019; Payne & Welch, 2010; Slate et al., 2016). In one longitudinal study, Black or African American girls (37%) were more likely to have their behavior labeled as “disobedient” or “defiant”. This subjective punishment aligns with research noting that Black or African American girls are more likely to receive a disciplinary infraction based on disobedience or defiance (Morris, 2019; Payne & Welch, 2010; Slate et al., 2016). In comparison, 53% of Black or African American girls were more likely referred to the office for behavior that was deemed detrimental compared to 44% of white girls referred for the same behavior (Annamma et al., 2019). Additionally, the frequencies and percentages of disciplinary consequences assigned to girls in grades 4-11 cite significant disparities among Black or African American girls when compared to peers of other ethnicities across the state of Texas (Slate et al., 2016). Slate et al. (2016) also found that there was an increase in the number

of Black or African American girls assigned to an alternative school placement from grade 6 (0.1%) to grade 9 (0.9%) when compared to white peers in grade 6 (0%) and in grade 9 (0.3%) who participated in the study. At each grade level, higher percentages of out-of-school suspensions were reported among Black or African American girls than by either white or Hispanic girls (Slate et al., 2016).

### **Importance of Teacher-Student Relationships and Interactions for Success**

Research supports the notion that positive teacher-student interactions have a long-term effect on student performance in the classroom. Conversely, not all relationships among teachers and students are positive due to conflicting interactions with teachers which are typically associated with academic and social emotional struggles (Engles et al., 2016). Specifically, research also suggests that the relationships built within an alternative school could be the foundational base upon which all other things are built (Malcolm, 2019). When students find a positive connection with another adult in the alternative school setting, this can set the student up to have a positive experience to then be translated back to the traditional school setting. Building relationships takes time; however, “the impact on the academic success of students of low socioeconomic status and those with African American backgrounds” (Powell & Marshall, 2011, p. 14) proves the effectiveness of these relationships.

Cope et al. (2005) report that successful teachers were able to build relationships with their students by showing that they cared about the students within their classroom by creating a warm classroom environment. These teachers were skilled at creating activities that were relevant to students; it was evident that the teachers had a strong knowledge of the students in the classroom. It is a common trend that “students are more likely to succeed when they feel



connected to the school. School connection is the belief by students that adults in the school care about their learning as well as about them as individuals” (Cope et al., 2005, p. 26). When teachers are able to successfully incorporate relationships with students who demonstrate behavior issues in the classroom, it allows the teacher to “invite students to see themselves as capable of tackling tough challenges, overcoming obstacles, accompanying great things, and behave accordingly” (Cope et al., 2005, p. 26). To support Cope et al.’s (2005) findings, Amitay and Rahav (2018) found that when at-risk students perceived teachers as understanding their needs and genuinely caring for them, the teacher was viewed as an advocate for their success.

In alternative school settings, teachers notice the connection between the relationships they build and success rates among those same students. Marzano and Marzano (2003) “found teachers who had positive relationships with their students reported 31% less behavior problems in a school year than those teachers who reported less positive relationships” (as cited in Free, 2014, p. 147). Not only do these relationships work, but teachers credit those same relationships as a pivotal factor in student success. In a study completed by Free (2017), “ninety-six percent of the school employees [interviewed] discussed the importance of creating positive and caring relationships between teachers and students. Although this is easier said than done, teachers are able to create positive relationships with students in the alternative school classroom by utilizing a series of strategies. Jackson et al. (2014), discuss the idea of building up a student based on what they bring to the table. Teachers who engage in culturally responsive caring foster relationships with students that encourage them to develop confidence, pride, a sense of responsibility, and critical consciousness (Jackson et al., 2014; Zygmunt et al., 2018). This sense of character development involves the teacher to serve as a positive role model for these students

which leads to undesirable behavioral outcomes (Chen et al., 2016). Additionally, when building relationships that center around the idea of being culturally responsive, a teacher can provide students with “demanding learning experiences in a supportive and encouraging environment” (Jackson et al., 2014, p. 400) and enhance student understanding of social change and ending inequality. This type of learning environment and relationship support helps the teacher play “the role of counselor, encourager, benefactor, and racial cheerleader to meet the needs of the whole student community” (Zygmunt et al., 2018, p. 400).

Students have a preference in how these teacher-student relationships work for them. Zhang (2008) found that "when asked how they liked to interact with the teachers about 42% of the [female] students indicated that they preferred individual private time with the teachers, while 38% of them enjoyed class discussion most" (p. 186). This type of teacher-student relationship preference shows that girls within this study preferred the one-on-one interaction more than any other type of way to help build relationships among teachers. This provides students the caring and safe environment that they are seeking to help create a strong bond with an adult within the school setting. In this same study conducted by Zhang (2008), 58% of the girls had a mentor and noted that these mentors were “caring, encouraging, trustworthy, and were good friends” (p. 186).

### **Teacher Training**

Carver et al. (2010), found that within alternative school programs across the United States, there were various requirements for teachers in order to educate students within an alternative school setting or program. Thirty percent of all public school districts with district-administered alternative programs had specific requirements for teaching in alternative

schools in addition to the regular teaching requirements, while nearly 48% of schools required targeted professional development to support teachers within an alternative school setting (Carver et al., 2010). In addition to the specific training for alternative school teachers, it is also important that teachers apply this specific training to coincide with the importance of relationship building.

There are specific characteristics within a school setting that increase the likelihood of a teacher-student relationship to form, including care, culturally responsive curriculum, and classroom management (Kennedy-Lewis, 2013; Kennedy, 2015; Osher et al., 2012; Zygmunt et al., 2018). Building strong teacher-student relationships, especially with marginalized youth, must stem from an authentic source rather than an aesthetic system of care (Matias & Zembylas, 2014), which is directly related to a teacher's ability to understand culturally specific behaviors (Osher et al., 2012). Lagana-Riordan et al. (2011), who focused on the perceptions of African American students and their relationships with teachers, found that African American students built the most positive relationships with teachers who genuinely cared for them, made sure they understood what was taught, and were fair and respectful when giving disciplinary consequences.

### **Culturally Responsive Teaching**

Teacher training on how to present material and deal with scenarios within the classroom with a culturally responsive lens has been a key factor in relationship building success among scholars (Murphy et al., 2013). When a teacher understands the impact of being culturally responsive regarding a student's behavior or attitude, it can alleviate miscommunication and disciplinary infractions. This allows the teacher to demonstrate an aspect of authentic care and

respect, which is a valued cultural aspect in the Black and African American community (Acosta, 2018; Matias & Zembylas, 2014; Murphy et al., 2013). Scholars discuss the importance of teachers understanding the external factors such as historical and contemporary struggles that Black or African American girls face and valuing the behaviors exhibited by these students such as being assertive, “loud”, and taking initiative as positive traits instead of which warrant a disciplinary infraction (Annamma et al., 2019; Morris & Perry, 2017).

When teachers understand the correlation between providing students with culturally responsive curriculum that they can understand and conceptualize and managing classroom discipline problems with those students' backgrounds in mind, it creates an environment for a positive relationship to grow (Osher et al., 2012). In order for a teacher to successfully manage a classroom, strategies and interventions should be implemented with fidelity (Kennedy-Lewis et al., 2016). Restorative practices utilized to help manage student behaviors within a classroom can allow a student to de-escalate and help build a trusting relationship between the teacher and student (Kennedy, 2011; Kennedy-Lewis et al., 2016).

## **Mentorship**

In order to aid the development of relationships among teachers and students in an alternative school setting, many alternative schools have adopted some form of mentor program or system to provide support for students. Research states that there are two types of mentoring: formal and informal (McGee & Lin, 2017). The former is the natural result of someone voluntarily reaching out to a child in random incidents while the latter occurs when the institution (such as a school) creates and subsequently provides structural support for and helps in planned mentoring activities" (McGee & Lin, 2017, p. 185). For Black or African American

girls in alternative school settings, it is important to provide a solid foundation for mentorship that encompasses all of the needs that must be met in order to provide appropriate support. Chesney-Lind and Shelden (2014), state that all girls want is to be able to voice their opinions to someone who will listen to them. Program documentation reveals some strategies for giving girls permanence in supportive relationships, but that solutions available to the neediest girls are often impermanent and lack intensity. They do not fill the gap left by "empty family," at least not for long, and they do not repair the damage caused by abuse and neglect. Teachers must work to find commonalities and encourage educational progress with students. Thus, mentoring has been touted as an effective means "for promoting positive social and academic outcomes for students with or "at risk" for emotional and behavioral disorders" (Vannest et al., 2008, p. 17).

The literature states that mentorship is an important factor when working with at-risk students. This mentorship role could be considered an effective intervention for promoting positive social and academic outcomes for students with or "at risk" for emotional and behavioral disorders (Vannest et al., 2008). With this intervention put into place, a mentor can guide students through not only life scenarios but also through academic progress. Examples from the literature include that mentorship that is "consistent with school-related assistance from the mentor has resulted in children being more receptive to learning with and making positive educational progress" (Vannest et al., 2008, p. 17).

### **Otherparenting**

The idea of a student building a relationship with an adult in a school setting is not an unfamiliar concept. However, in thinking of a deeper relationship, Black or African American girls find a sense of familiarity in forming a bond with a teacher who is representative of a

mother/mother figure. In these situations, students have the opportunity to find commonalities with another adult that holds no bloodline relationship, but can find ways to care about the student. In a study conducted by Williams (2018), when studying characteristics that Black or African American girls valued in a teacher, found findings revealed common themes surrounding the idea of inclusive caring by the use of other parenting and fictive kin, and developing loving relationships which helped build more inclusive and welcoming classrooms for Black or African American girls. Otherparenting and fictive kin relate to the act of being a “parent” to a child with no blood or relative relation. Similarly, to support Williams (2018) research on other parenting and fictive kin, a study by Carter Andrews et al. (2019) found that:

Girls highlighted four traits exhibited by women in their school that resemble behaviors of a mother/mother figure or close relative who authentically cares about a child's success. The traits are (1) intentionally prying in adolescents' personal lives, (2) seeking the best outcomes for students, (3) being direct in how advice and reprimanding is given, and (4) advocating for adolescents' well being" (p. 2560).

The idea of caring relationships also is evident in showing that the most resilient youth have a strong bond with a caring adult, which does not always have to be a parent (Powell & Marshall, 2011). Students find value in these types of bonds shared with another adult within a school building and express that when these adults show them respect, they are more likely to meet the expectations behaviorally and academically for that particular teacher (Kennedy, 2011; Malcolm, 2019).

### **Relationships and Transitions**

The bond that a student can form with a teacher in an alternative school setting can provide the student with skills and confidence to transition back to the traditional school setting. "The cultivation of genuine relationships between adults and children is essential for successful transition programming in alternative schools. Rather than something extra that can be added, relationships are essential to student success" (Powell & Marshall, 2011, p. 16). However, the difficult part for a student transitioning back to the traditional school setting is finding an adult to build a new relationship with to support them in the new environment. In a study by Powell and Marshall (2011), it showed that it was most important for students returning to their base school to have a positive relationship to help support them during the transition. Upon returning from the alternative school, preconceived notions and stigmas attached to these students make forming those initial relationships difficult. The most difficult part for students returning to the traditional school setting is starting off on the wrong foot with staff members upon their return (Powell & Marshall, 2011). To add to this, Zolkoski (2019) found that:

Teachers [relationships] impacted the participants positively and negatively; however, students expressed more negative than positive ones with their teachers at their regular school. At their regular schools, participants had an overall feeling that their teachers did not care about them and did not care if they were learning anything (p. 238).

When dealing with students who have a history of disciplinary actions, although teachers understand the impact building a relationship can have on a student, those with behavioral problems are more likely to develop a negative relationship with their teachers (Zolkoski, 2019). The absence of a strong relationship between the teacher and student can lead to an increase in

negative student behaviors, increasing the likelihood of recidivism at an alternative school setting.

Social, emotional, and academic needs are three important entities that must be met in order for a student to successfully build relationships and perform academically in a school setting. The relationships created in an alternative school setting are just as important and impactful as those formed in a traditional school setting (Free, 2014). In general, students learn from those who they feel care about them:

Research has shown that the quality of teacher-student relationships is important for various developmental outcomes. Positive teacher-student relationships are characterized by warm, sensitive, and responsive interactions. These relationships contribute to students' behavioral and academic gains, prosocial behavior, academic motivation, effort, achievement, and engagement (Engles et al., 2016, p. 1193).

In an alternative school setting, relationships between students and teachers are important to consider when aiming to ultimately change student behaviors in the general classroom. Students need to feel as if the staff members involved in their educational life care about and have a connection with them. According to Amitay and Rahav (2018), students are more likely to experience success if they feel an attachment and bond with the school they are attending and this can be done if a teacher and student has a close bond with one another and that a safe space is provided for the student to learn. It is important to consider the interactions among teachers and students and how those relationships can be translated into the learning environment.



### **Summary of the Review of Literature**

This review of the literature includes research that informs this study and describes the evolution of alternative schools and their impact on Black or African American females. In doing so, the evolution of the conceptual framework was created. In the following chapter, Chapter III, the methodological considerations of this study are discussed. In an extensive search of the literature, a gap exists regarding studies conducted that relate to exploring alternative school teacher and school leader perspectives relating to factors that impact recidivism and relationships among Black or African American girls.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this study was to examine the viewpoint of alternative school teachers and school leaders regarding factors that impact teacher and student relationships and preventing recidivism among African American girls. To achieve this purpose, the study used a mixed methods approach and investigated teacher and school leader perspectives on how relationships with Black or African American girls impacted recidivism in an alternative school setting. A mixed methods design was employed for collecting teacher and school leader perspectives and perceptions in regards to relationships with Black or African American girls within the alternative school setting. This approach supports mixed methods research by “combining elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches for the purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration” (Creswell & Clark, 2018, p. 3). This study attempted to discover teacher and school leader’s perceptions of the impact of student-teacher relationship and if those relationships were present, how those relationships impacted recidivism within an alternative school setting.

#### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were used to guide this study to examine the viewpoint of alternative school teachers and school leaders regarding factors that impact teacher and student relationships and preventing recidivism among African American girls.

1. What factors do alternative school teachers and leaders feel contributes to recidivism among Black or African American girls?

2. What are alternative school teachers' and school leaders' perspectives on how relationships impact recidivism among Black or African American girls?

### **Research Design**

Mixed methods research is designed to allow researchers to have “multiple ways of seeing” while incorporating diverse viewpoints (Creswell & Clark, 2018). Mixed methods research allows both a qualitative and quantitative approach to be used to effectively collect and analyze the data in response to the research questions and hypotheses (Creswell & Clark, 2018).

Within this study, a framework was used to inform the gaps within the literature to help address the issue of how teacher-student relationships impact recidivism among Black or African American girls in alternative school settings from the teacher and school leader perspective. In an exhaustive search throughout the literature, there were many studies done qualitatively. Additionally, in studies that have been conducted showing the perspective from a teacher or school leader lens, only qualitative results were gathered, but seldom on the topic of alternative school settings *and* Black or African American girls (Dawes et al., 2021; Kennedy-Lewis, 2013; Kunesh & Noltemeyer, 2019; Slaten et al., 2015; Zhang, 2008). Many studies have been conducted from the student perspective of both boys and girls, providing their voice on topics that relate to relationships and recidivism within alternative school settings; however, they do not cover teacher perspectives within the same setting (Baroutsis et al., 2016; Edgar-Smith & Palmer, 2015; Gibson et al., 2019; Jackson et al., 2014; Kennedy et al., 2019; Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011; Morris, 2016; Phillips, 2011; Scales et al., 2020; Slaten et al., 2016).

Gaps within the current literature exist because no previous studies could be found that looked at recidivism and relationships between teachers and Black or African American girls

through the lens of an alternative school teacher or leader using a mixed-methods design. Previous studies have only provided a partial view from the teacher and school leader perspective on the development of relationships with students using qualitative approaches, but did not cover its impact on recidivism rates among Black or African American girls in an alternative school setting (Duke & Tenuto, 2020; Free, 2016; Kennedy-Lewis et al., 2016; Waldron, 2011).

In the study conducted by Duke and Tenuto (2020), the primary focus was on administrator perspectives on creating communities of support located in the Northwest region of the United States using a case study design. This study was limited to a small scope of 8 alternative school administrators. Duke and Tenuto (2020) used a series of interviews and observations of alternative school administrators to help describe how the administrators created supportive communities for students. They found that it was important to create a culture of high standards while implementing personalized or caring approaches with teachers. Additionally, Duke and Tenuto (2020) found that it was critical that teachers had opportunities to explore and implement best practices for teaching and learning as well as how to manage students as individuals. This study did not specifically focus on Black or African American girls, but did look at alternative school settings on a small scale.

An ethnographic study was conducted by Waldron (2011), exploring an alternative schools journey to create a positive community within the alternative school setting that provided support for students who have not yet graduated from high school. This study consisted of observations and interviews with two full-time teachers, three part-time teachers, and one administrator in a one room schoolhouse setting. This study found that the environment within

the alternative school setting was conducive to a fun, flexible, and creative space for students to learn. The study found that the teachers were supportive of the students and were considered “saviors and heroes” (Waldron, 2011). Although this study provided an alternative school teacher viewpoint, the scope was very limited within participants and did not resemble a typical public alternative school. This study did not address any implications of findings with Black or African American girls specifically.

One other additional study relating to teacher and school leader perspectives using mixed-methods design by Kennedy-Lewis et al. (2016) focused on teachers and school leaders in both the alternative and base school setting. This study was limited to the perspectives of only two alternative school teachers and sixteen teachers from the base school. The primary focus was to obtain teacher and school leader perspectives on the purpose of alternative schools and to discuss the data trends to see if the alternative school placement was justified depending on the behaviors. This study found that the misconceptions that teachers had about the alternative and base school settings were having an impact on student placement within the alternative school (Kennedy-Lewis et al., 2016). Although this study utilized a mixed-methods approach providing teacher perspectives, the study did not provide research on how those misconceptions impacted Black or African American girls and recidivism and with the limited perspectives of alternative school teachers provided within this study showed a gap within the literature.

There was a need for a holistic view to compare and synthesize both quantitative and qualitative data from the teacher and school leader perspective, specifically within alternative school settings (Creswell & Clark, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Mixed methods allowed both qualitative and quantitative data to be collected in parallel, analyzed separately, and then merged.

In this study, a survey using Google Forms that contains Likert-scale, multi-select, and open-ended questions (See Appendix A for Survey Questionnaire) was sent to examine the viewpoint of alternative school teachers and school leaders regarding factors that impact teacher and student relationships. Then, a follow up interview was conducted with participants that indicated they were willing to do so by checking an affirmative response for being interviewed on the survey. All participants that indicated “yes” were contacted through email to arrange an interview time and were interviewed via phone/Zoom (See Appendix B for Interview Questions). The reason for collecting both quantitative and qualitative data was to validate the results of the two forms of data so that comparisons can be made and a more complete understanding emerges than that provided by quantitative or qualitative results alone (Creswell & Clark, 2018).

### **Conceptual Framework**

A conceptual framework allows the researcher to tell a story about what they think is happening and provides a model or map to explain why the particular phenomenon is taking place (Maxwell, 2008; Strauss, 1995). Providing a conceptual framework is the “system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories that support and inform your research” (Maxwell, 2008, p. 222). A conceptual framework allows the researcher to provide the viewpoint in what shapes the way they view the data and provides direction for the study’s development (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017). In this study, a conceptual framework was developed to explain how teacher-student relationships impact African American females recidivism rates in alternative school settings and what external factors may contribute to the development, or lack of relationships.

The relationships built between teachers and Black or African American students in alternative school settings are impacted by many outside forces such as societal expectations, disproportionate disciplinary measures, home environment, and teacher training (Chesney-Lind, 2014; DeComo, 1998; Free, 2017), which could lead to the development of a positive or negative relationship within a school, impacting recidivism rates.

### **Societal Expectations**

Research found that the societal expectations for Black or African American females are rooted from implicit bias that deems what actions are culturally appropriate, leading to Black or African American females being subjectively punished because they are not acting as a “white” female would (Fordham, 1993; Gibson & Decker, 2019; Morris & Perry, 2017). In a study conducted by anthropologist Fordham (1993), it was found that while Black or African American girls were expected to consume the image of an American white woman, it led Black or African American females to become silent and voiceless or gender “pass” and show more manly characteristics. These societal expectations of what ‘good girls’ should be, by noting that Black or African American girls should act more ‘white’, led Black or African American girls to develop the persona of a ‘bad girl’ as a form of rebellion (Morris, 2016). The perceptions of Black or African American girls being loud and having bad attitudes are typically considered dangerous, leading educators to associate this behavior with misbehaviors (Annamma et al., 2019; Fordham, 1993; Gibson & Decker, 2019; Payne & Brown, 2017). With that perception, Black or African American girls deem it necessary to act out in a survival tactic in retaliation by fighting, having more aggression, being assertive, and taking initiative to earn power and respect (Waldron, 2011).

## **Disproportionate Disciplinary Measures**

Systemic issues for marginalized communities, specifically Black or African American students pose a great impact on sense of belonging and school perception (Bottiani et al., 2016). Black or African American girls receive subjective punishments due to administrators deeming the student as more defiant or intentionally disruptive to the learning environment (Morris, 2019). Osher et al. (2012), also found that Black or African Americans are now over three times more likely to be suspended than white students for similar behavioral offenses, showing systemic issues relating to race and its implication on subjective or objective punishments.

With the immense pressure placed on Black or African Females from society to become more like their white counterparts inside the classroom setting, it is clear that the sense of deficiency seen among teachers and administrators has led to a disproportionate number of Black or African American females receiving subjective punishments. With these external factors impacting students within the classroom setting, it sheds light into the home environment for Black or African American females, which ultimately impacts their academic successes within a school setting. These localized challenges, specifically home environment, can impact a students ability to form positive relationships with teachers, which as a result, can impact their academic achievement.

## **Home Environment**

Research states that home environments can also have an impact on relationships among teachers and Black or African American students (Free, 2017). Many Black or African American students are considered at-risk due to home environmental factors such as family tragedy, lack of parental support, poverty, exposure to violence, and geographical location (Berlowitz et al.,



2017; Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Free, 2017). These environmental factors contribute to relationships between teachers and students because Black or African American families are consciously aware of the barriers that stand before them. They feel the need to ensure that their children understand to protect the family name and to prevent further victimization, which sometimes leads to misbehavior, causing the student to receive a disciplinary infraction, which could result in alternative school placement (Chen et al., 2016; Clark, 1983). Additionally, current research cites that students who come from low socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to live in high crime neighborhoods, which can have an impact on a student's behavioral lens within a school setting (Cammack et al., 2011; McMahon et al., 2013). This is also supported by a study conducted by Ruiz et al. (2018), where a side-by-side comparison of socioeconomic status by attendance area and school performance found that the schools with low academic performance were also in the same areas as those scoring lowest in terms of low socioeconomic status and high crime.

### **Academic Performance**

School standing and academic success or lack thereof can greatly increase the likelihood of retention or school dropout. Scholars note that students with low socioeconomic status, which shows an overlap of the impact of a student's home environment, score lower on standardized tests and are more likely to drop out of school (Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011; Ruiz et al., 2018). Disengagement from school due to outside factors and the lack of teacher support is shown in research to have an impact on academic achievement, especially when the student feels as if discipline is more of a priority than academic support (Crenshaw et al., 2015). In a study by Payne and Brown (2017), Black or African American girls also stated that their perceptions of

school were founded by the idea that they were designed to set low-income Black or African American students up for failure by not providing them with proper instruction and guidance to help them be successful. The lack of teacher support and disengagement from the content being presented by teachers caused such tension that it undermined the intentions of student achievement, which could lead to retention or school dropout (Kennedy-Lewis, 2013; Payne & Brown, 2017).

### **Teacher Training**

The premise of positive and negative teacher-student relationships revolves around specific characteristics that may stem from societal expectations as outside influences. Specific characteristics within a school setting increase the likelihood of a teacher-student relationship to form, including care, culturally responsive curriculum, and classroom management (Kennedy, 2011; Kennedy-Lewis, 2013; Osher et al., 2012; Zygmunt et al., 2018); however, each can be traced back to outside factors that may influence the outcome of the relationship. Building teacher-student relationships with the foundation of Noddings' (2012) "ethic of care" which allows the educator to focus more on the caring of students and their well-being before thinking about the teacher's success rate compared to academic achievement.

Caring for students as a foundation for building a strong teacher-student relationship, especially with marginalized youth, such as Black or African American females, must stem from an authentic source rather than an aesthetic system of care (Matias & Zembylas, 2014), which is directly related to a teachers ability to understand culturally specific behaviors (Osher et al., 2012). In a study by Lagana-Riordan et al. (2011), which focused on the perceptions of African American students and their relationships with teachers, it was found that African American

students built the most positive relationships with teachers who genuinely cared for them, made sure they understood what was taught, and were fair and respectful when giving disciplinary consequences. When teachers understand the correlation between providing students with culturally responsive curriculum that they can understand and conceptualize and managing classroom discipline problems with those students' backgrounds in mind, it creates an environment for a positive relationship to grow (Osher et al., 2012).

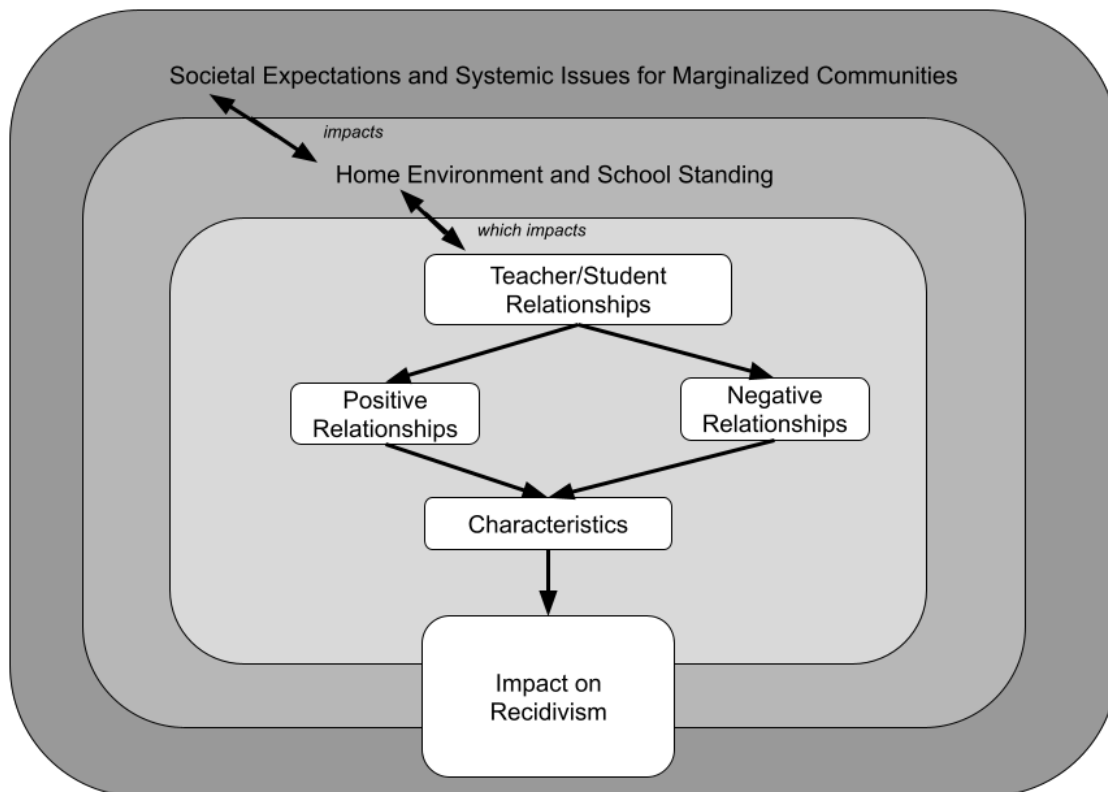
Societal expectations and systemic issues for marginalized communities, such as Blacks or African Americans, pose many outside factors that influence teacher and student relationships within a school setting. A gap in the literature notes a need to understand teacher and school leader perspectives on how external factors play a role in relationship development with teachers and its impact on Black or African American female recidivism rates in the alternative school using both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

Given this conceptual framework, this study focuses on the belief that teacher and student relationships are created based on outside factors such as societal expectations and systemic issues for marginalized communities, home environment, and school standing have an impact on recidivism rates among Black or African American students in alternative school settings. A visual representation of the conceptual framework for this study can be found in Figure 1. This diagram represents how societal expectations and systemic issues for African American girls have an impact on their home environments. Their home environments are impacted by their school standing, as well as societal expectations. With that being said, all of those external factors impact teacher-student relationships, allowing positive or negative relationships to form.

The characteristics of those relationships correlate to having an impact on recidivism among Black or African American Females in alternative school settings.

**Figure 1**

Conceptual Framework



### Informed Consent

Informed consent was obtained by those participating in this study as a requirement of the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Once the IRB of Coastal Carolina University provided approval, the researcher created a letter of consent and attached the letter to the beginning of the survey. All participants received a digital copy of the letter of consent and were required to select “yes” to agree that they were willing to participate. Participants were informed during the initial consent process about the potential of being contacted in the future for a second data collection

(Creswell & Clark, 2018). (See Appendix C for IRB Application & Appendix D for IRB Informed Consent Form)

### **Participant Selection/Site Selection**

When selecting participants, a set of operational criteria were created in order to ensure that appropriate participants were selected (Yin, 2018). In this case, the persons of importance are the teachers and school leaders who work in the alternative school setting. The schools selected for this survey were identified by their respective districts as an alternative school setting as a “last chance” opportunity for students in lieu of expulsion. During the first phase, survey participants were selected based on a specific geographic location, communities that run along the “Corridor of Shame” in South Carolina, which is an area where schools are located along the Interstate 95 corridor in South Carolina, donning them low-income and low-performing, with high populations of Black or African American students.

After retrieving contact information from school websites along the Corridor of Shame, the researcher contacted 148 teachers, two instructional coaches, and 26 administrators from alternative schools in the 16 districts located along the Corridor. Out of the 177 participants approached for this study, 87% of participants received access to the survey; 129 teachers, two instructional coaches, and 14 administrators. Records were kept to note participant emails that got returned to the sender based on “spam” or who no longer worked within the district. These participants were removed from the overall data collection, leaving 155 potential participants. Forty three total participants (thirty-six teachers, one instructional coach, and six administrators) participated in the survey, for a response rate of 28%. (See Table 1 for Survey Participant Demographics). Research notes that electronic email surveys receive approximately an 11%

lower response rate than that of traditional survey responses, which is typically between 30-40% (Punch, 2003). Of the surveys completed, nine out of thirteen school districts contacted were represented, with 16% completed by school leaders and 84% completed by teachers within their respective districts.

**Table 1**

*Survey Participant Demographics*

Role	Ethnicity	Gender	Total
Administrator	African American	Male	3
	Prefer not to say	Female	1
	White	Female	1
	White	Male	1
Instructional Coach	White	Male	1
Teacher	African American	Female	9
	African American	Male	2
	Prefer not to say	Female	5
	Prefer not to say	Male	1
	White	Female	13
	White	Male	6
Total			43

Administrators made up 14% of the population to which the survey was sent, and 15% of the respondents; instructional coaches made up 2% of the population to which the survey was sent, and 1% of the respondents; teachers made up 84% of the population to which the survey was sent, and 83% of the respondents.

During the second phase, participants who indicated they would agree to a follow up interview were contacted to provide further clarification on their own perspectives and perceptions on the relationships formed in their time spent as an alternative school teacher or school leader. Of the forty-three survey participants, thirty-four indicated that they would consider participating in follow up interviews. After contacting each survey participant willing to participate in follow up interviews, fourteen agreed to participate in a follow up, one-on-one interview, which represented 33% of the sample. The remaining 20 survey participants who initially agreed to participate in a follow-up interview did not respond to the researcher to set up a date and time to talk. The interview participants represented five of the initial thirteen school districts initially contacted. Of the participants interviewed, 14% were school leaders and 86% were teachers. In terms of ethnicity, the interviewed participants were a good representation of the total survey participants, with 43% of interviewees identifying as African American, 50% as white, and 7% preferring not to say. Seventy one percent of the participants interviewed were female and 29% were male. Of the interview participants, 28% held a bachelor's degree, 57% held a master's degree, and 14% earned a doctorate. In terms of total years of teaching experience, 71% of interview participants indicated that they had taught for more than ten years, 21% had 4-9 years of total teaching experience, and 7% had less than three years of total teaching experience. Interview participants also indicated that 42% had spent three or less years teaching specifically in an alternative school setting, 28% had 4-9 years experience teaching in an alternative school, and 28% had ten or more years of experience teaching within alternative school settings (See Table 2 Interview Participant Demographics).

**Table 2***Interview Participant Demographics*

ID	Gender	Ethnicity	Highest Level of Education Completed	Total Years of Teaching Experience	Years of Teaching Experience in an Alternative School
Participant A	Female	Prefer not to say	BA	4-9	0-3
Participant B	Female	African American	M.Ed	4-9	0-3
Participant C	Male	White	BA	15+	15+
Participant D	Male	African American	M.Ed	15+	15+
Participant E	Female	White	Ph.D	15+	15+
Participant F	Female	White	BA	0-3	0-3
Participant G	Female	White	M.S.	15+	0-3
Participant H	Male	African American	Ed.S	10-15	0-3
Participant I	Female	African American	M.Ed	15+	15+
Participant J	Female	African American	M.Ed	15+	0-3
Participant K	Female	White	M.Ed	15+	4-9
Participant L	Female	African American	M.Ed	4-9	4-9
Participant M	Male	White	Ed.S	15+	4-9
Participant N	Female	White	Ed.D	15+	4-9



## **Data Collection Procedures**

Data were collected through survey questions and interviews during the 2021-2022 school year. Following approval by the Institutional Review Board at Coastal Carolina University, the researcher contacted school administrators, instructional coaches, and teachers who worked in an alternative school setting via e-mail correspondence. Through email, teachers and school leaders were sent a survey using Google Forms to answer a series of Likert-scale, multi-select, and short answer questions. Then, the researcher made the decision to follow up on specific questions that emerged from the quantitative results to help direct the follow-up sampling to best be able to explain the phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Clark, 2018). Data was kept in a Google Spreadsheet for analysis. Throughout the process of the interviews the researcher kept a journal, voice transcriptions, as well as voice recordings of each of the interviews conducted to help ensure accurate data was collected (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

### **Survey**

The purpose of the survey was to gather data from alternative school teachers and school leaders regarding their perceptions and perspectives of teacher-student relationships and how those relationships impacted recidivism in the alternative school setting. The goal was to gather data by posing close-ended as well as open-ended questions so that the results could be compared about the same concept from both a quantitative and qualitative analysis (Creswell & Clark, 2018). The questions asked on the survey were parallel questions that would allow for both qualitative and quantitative data collection (Creswell & Clark, 2018).

The survey consisted of open and close-ended questions that aligned to the conceptual framework of the study. Likert-scale questions which allowed for a scaled response of ‘Strongly

Disagree' (1) to 'Strongly Agree' (5), were included within this study as an effective means to gather perceptions from participants (Punch, 2003). Discrete categorical questions were also included within this survey, where participants selected all items that applied to a particular question. This would allow each response to be its own measure (Punch, 2003). Open-ended questions concluded the first section of the survey where participants would have the space to provide their own perspective and perceptions on the questions posed (Creswell & Clark, 2018). (See Appendix C for Survey Questionnaire).

The first section of the survey was designed to primarily collect perceptions and perspectives using a Likert-Scale on statements that included professional development strategies and supports to African American girls, barriers faced by African American girls that may impact success, barriers teachers and school leaders may face in supporting African American girls, and teachers and school leaders helping support student transitioning back to the regular school setting. The second section of the survey continued with discrete categorical questions encompassing the perspective of teachers and school leaders regarding factors and challenges that Black or African American girls face that may impact recidivism.

The third section of the survey included open-ended questions designed to allow teachers and school leaders to express perspectives and perceptions. Sample questions from the third part of the survey included topics regarding professional development opportunities and factors that may contribute to the lack of relationships development between teachers and school leaders and Black or African American girls. The last portion of the survey was designed to primarily collect teacher and school leader demographic data which included role/content specialization, levels of

education completed and years of teaching experience in and out of an alternative school setting, ethnicity, and gender.

## **Interviews**

The purpose of the semi-structured, one-on-one interviews was to gather data from teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators as a follow-up to their survey responses regarding their perceptions and perspectives of teacher-student relationships and how those relationships impacted recidivism in the alternative school setting. (See Appendix B for Interview Questions) Data gathered using follow-up interviews was used to triangulate the findings and to validate conclusions drawn by the quantitative results from the survey. The researcher posed open-ended response questions to help note *why* relationships were important and *how* relationships impacted recidivism rates, which allowed the researcher to have a strong foundation to ensure the questions were based on the central phenomenon in the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). This research allowed the researcher to use an inquiry approach to collect data within a natural setting relative to the participants and then use the data collected to formulate themes and patterns to help explain the researcher's interpretation of the problem and how it relates to current literature (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). As Creswell and Poth (2018) state, “qualitative research begins with assumptions and the use of theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaningful individuals to a social or human problem” (p. 42).

All follow-up interviews were conducted using the participants preferred contact method, phone or Zoom. The participants were asked for permission to record and transcribe the interview. The researcher chose to record the interviews in order to accurately transcribe the data

collected (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). This allowed for the interviews to be conducted in a more conversational manner while remaining open-ended (Yin, 2018). The semi-structured, one-on-one interviews allowed the researcher to hear the voices of participants and to help reach a detailed understanding of the topic. In order to achieve this, talking directly to the participants in the alternative school setting will allow them to tell their perspectives and perceptions unencumbered by what the researcher expected to find or what was stated in the literature (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Each interview was transcribed via a voice transcription program and Google Sheet Pivot Tables were used to correlate the data. Each respondent was provided with the opportunity to review and provide any clarification on any statement made during the interviews serving as a member check (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher emailed each respondent the voice transcription and provided one week for the participant to make any clarification notes and to provide feedback, if necessary.

### **Reliability**

Reliability, as described by Yin (2018), places the responsibility on the researcher to ensure that if this same study were conducted at any given point in time, the researcher would arrive at the same findings and conclusions. The researcher ensured this by:

1. Providing a detailed report of each step of the study (Yin, 2018, p. 44).
2. Ensuring voice recordings of data were of good quality and could be used to understand accurate accounts of each participant (Creswell & Poth, 2018).
3. Keeping a reflective journal with all interviews and transcriptions (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

4. Used various themes that arose in the data in an organized way to “ensure the stability of responses” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 264) using Google Sheets.

By ensuring reliability, it minimizes the errors and bias in a particular study (Yin, 2018). This is achieved through documenting the study processes as explicitly as possible (Yin, 2018).

### **Validity**

Validity in mixed-methods research is important to achieve in order for an objective viewpoint to be shared (Yin, 2018, p. 43). Ensuring validity within mixed-methods research focuses on description and explanation, and whether or not the given explanation fits the given description, allowing the research to produce a viewpoint with the least amount of subjectivity (Janesick, 1998, p. 50) as well as referring to the “ability to generalize the results of the research to populations, settings, treatment variables and measurement variables” (Sproull, 2002, p. 138). This study is only generalizable to African American Female students in alternative school settings along the “Corridor of Shame” in South Carolina. The study is not generalizable to male students, other ethnic backgrounds, or other states.

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), the process of proving validity is achieved when a researcher attempts to assess the “accuracy” of the findings as best described by the participants and the readers” (p. 259) through the researchers viewpoint using data collected. Without validity, the variables of the study may be skewed by the researcher, showing holes within the study. The triangulation of data between teacher and school leader interviews, member checking, and survey results will ensure that the data collected and methods were credible to vouch for validity since objective reality can never be captured (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). In this study, validity was obtained by:

1. Using *multiple sources of evidence* (Janesick, 1998; Yin, 2018,). Using multiple perspectives from various teachers via survey results and via survey results and interviews. The researcher looked at viewpoints from a variety of perspectives. This ensures that the researcher spent a significant amount of time in the field (Creswell & Poth, 2018). External validity was evident by using multiple sources of evidence that showed how the study findings can be generalized across other studies that specifically relate to Black or African American Girls in alternative school settings along the “Corridor of Shame” in South Carolina (Yin, 2018).
2. Establish a *chain of evidence* (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Janesick, 1998; Yin, 2018). The researcher triangulated the data from the survey and interviews to provide a chain of evidence to support findings and shed light on themes and perspectives. The researcher achieved this through thick, rich descriptions with detailed writing that describes the participants and the setting under study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). This allowed the researcher to ensure internal validity by using the thick, rich descriptions and identifying key themes across the data collected and showed that inferences the researcher made can be proven using the chain of evidence collected (Yin, 2018).
3. Using member-checking to allow all participants to review the report to provide clarification, if needed, as well as provide a judgment on accuracy and credibility of the account in the themes represented (Creswell & Clark, 2018; Janesick, 1998; Yin, 2018). This ensured that the researcher captured the perspectives and the meaning of their words appropriately.

4. Ensuring that the researcher clarified any bias from past experiences or prejudices that may have shaped the interpretation and approach to the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This type of internal validity ensures that the researcher sufficiently developed a set of measures to provide objective judgements on the subject at hand instead of providing a subjective view based on preconceived notions (Yin, 2018).

### **Data Analysis**

Mixed methods analysis allowed the researcher to analyze separately the quantitative and qualitative data gathered and then combine the findings to address each research question posed (Creswell & Clark, 2018). The data collected from survey results and one-on-one interviews was categorized into a collection of instances to find meaning through a series of analysis tactics (See Table 3. for Data Analysis Strategy).

**Table 3**

*Data Analysis Strategy*

Analytical Step	Data Set Analysis: Description of the Process
(1) Preparing Survey Data for Numerical Analysis using Descriptive Statistics	(1) Each survey question was broken down into the average Likert-scale score, the range, and mode.
(2) Preparing Interview Data for Coding Analysis	(2) Transcribing the recorded interviews and becoming familiar with the data set.
(3) Coding the Data Sets from the Survey and Interview	(3) Coding the entire set of data, separately, based on initial themes and those that emerged using research questions as a guide. Keywords based on participant responses that related to themes were noted (See Appendix E for Coding Themes from Data Analysis.

(4) Comparison of Data Set Results

(4) Using qualitative and quantitative tables and matrices produced by Google Sheet Pivot Tables to search for patterns, insights, or concepts that seem noteworthy.

(5) Interpretation of Codes

(5) Grouping similar codes based on patterns to provide overall meaning of data. For example, the researcher arranged the coded data “Lack of Academic Support” and “Class Size” into the overarching theme: “School Environment”.

(6) Identifying factors that impacted relationships and recidivism from teacher and school leader perspectives

(6) Examined the evidence-based thematic coding from the survey and interviews to identify factors that impact Black or African American girls recidivism rates and relationships from the teacher or school leader perspective. Summarized these results in a narrative.

### **Summary**

At the conclusion of the data analysis, the researcher provided a detailed description of how external factors impact relationships between teachers and Black or African American females and how that correlates to recidivism rates in alternative school settings. Each teacher and school leader provided their own perspective on the impact that their relationships have on one another and how that may, or may not, influence students in positive ways. The analysis allowed the researcher to triangulate the data and explain the findings that emerged from the survey and interviews. The findings provided insight on the impact that relationships can have on at-risk students in alternative school settings. Chapter IV will provide a detailed exploration into the perceptions and perspectives discussed by teachers and school leaders relating to relationships and how that impacted recidivism.



## **CHAPTER IV**

### **RESULTS**

The purpose of this study was to examine the viewpoint of alternative school teachers and school leaders regarding factors that impact teacher and student relationships and prevent recidivism among African American girls. To achieve this purpose, the study took a mixed methods approach. This study used two different instruments - a survey with Likert-Scale, multi-select, and open-ended questions, and interviews with open-ended questions. These instruments were used to answer the following two research questions:

1. What factors do alternative school teachers and leaders feel contribute to recidivism among Black or African American girls?
2. What are alternative school teachers' and school leaders' perspectives on how relationships impact recidivism among Black or African American girls?

This chapter details and discusses the findings of the study, organized by instrument type. First, results from the survey sent to teachers and school leaders are presented, followed by a discussion of how those results led to specific themes. Then, the results from the one-on-one interviews were discussed as a follow up to the themes found within the survey results.

Using the data collected from both the survey and one-on-one interviews, four major themes emerged relating to external factors that impact relationships between teachers and Black or African American females: Systemic Stigma, School Environment, Home Environment, and Lack of Base School Support. In order to ensure reliability and validity, the researcher verified that participant voices were accurately transcribed through member-checking to help support the themes that arose within their responses from the survey and one-on-one interviews. Multiple

sources of evidence from each of the instruments within this study were used to establish a chain of evidence in order to eliminate any bias from the researcher. Once data was collected, the researcher coded the data based on initial themes that emerged, using the research questions as a guide. Keywords based on the participant responses within the instruments that related to the themes helped create an initial set (e.g., “breaking the cycle” and “home life”). Then, the researcher used this data to find patterns, insights, and common concepts to create the final themes that emerged based on the interpretation of the initial coding. A table was created to show initial coding of themes found within the survey results and interview responses to show what the researcher identified as emerging themes based on examples provided. (See Appendix E for Coding Themes for Data Analysis)

In the following sections, results from both the survey and one-on-one interviews will be discussed. Appropriate tables and participant examples will be shared throughout to provide the reader with context and the viewpoint from teachers and school leaders within alternative school settings.

### **Survey Results**

In the first phase of data collection, survey participants (n=43), consisting of teachers and school leaders, were asked questions relating to factors that contribute to recidivism and relationship development between teachers/administrators and Black or African American girls. As part of the survey, the researcher included likert-scale (See Appendix F for Likert-Scale Survey Question Responses), multi-select questions (See Appendix G for Multi-Select Survey Responses), and open-ended questions (See Appendix H for Open Ended Survey Responses) to

gain further insights on teacher and administrator perceptions regarding Black or African American girls and recidivism.

## **Systemic Stigma**

### ***Bias and Discrimination***

Historically, Black or African American girls have been disproportionately disciplined due to race and gender discrimination because their actions are seen as subjectively more “defiant” or intentionally disruptive to the learning environment (Chesney-Lind, 2014; DeComo, 1998; Free, 2017; Morris, 2019). Survey results showed that participants (67.45%) agreed or strongly agreed that Black or African American girls must overcome significant barriers to be successful and return to their base school. Survey participants did not identify that Black or African American girls expressed feelings of oppression (23.26% agreed or strongly agreed) as a primary concern relating to Black or African American girls and recidivism in the alternative school setting. The implicit bias of Black or African American girls not expressing oppression as a barrier from the teacher and school leader perception may align with Morris’ (2016) research stating that, “The audacity to stand up and be heard in the face of fierce patriarchy and racial oppression is not always celebrated; instead, adults with authority have misinterpreted it as being angry and combative” (p. 79).

### ***Relationships with Teachers***

Studies suggest that the overall impact of relationships built between a teacher and a Black or African American girl creates avenues of success for the students because the teacher understands their needs and genuinely cares for them (Amitay & Rahav, 2018; Cope et al., 2005). Synthesized results from the open-ended survey questions show that survey participants

indicated important factors that contribute to the development of relationships which included trust (25.58%), transparency (16.28%), creating a comforting environment (13.95%), providing opportunities for success (11.63%), and sharing experiences (11.63%). The participants justified the research within their responses that when students are provided trust, transparency, a comforting learning environment that allows for opportunities to be successful and share experiences, it allows for an opportunity to enhance student understanding of social change and ending inequality (Jackson et al., 2014; Zygmunt et al., 2018).

It is also important to consider that survey respondents also mentioned other strategies that assist in relationship development, but did not emerge as strong themes across the majority of participants: building a positive rapport with student, consistency, knowing background/home life, and providing outside services such as therapy and counseling to students (9.30% each); authenticity, building a positive rapport with parents, empathy, cultivating growth mindset within students, and small class sizes (6.98% each); actively listening and creating mutual respect (4.65%); and the idea of developing relationships with all students, not just Black or African American girls (2.33%). Moreover, when examining each of these themes, research shows that all of those aspects are found to be beneficial in relationship development. Specifically, in a study conducted by Carter Andrews et al. (2019), it was found that Black or African American girls “described relationships with adults in their schools who encouraged them to be their best selves and affirmed their racial and gender identities” (p. 2559) due to the fact that the school provided specific supports that helped eliminate the negative racialized and gendered experiences they had within the school setting served to buffer the negative racialized and gendered experiences the Black girls were having.

### ***Additional Social Stigma Factors***

The multi-select survey responses revealed that, from the participants' perspectives, *important factors* leading to recidivism rates among Black or African American girls included the pressure to prove themselves (60.47%) and societal expectations (55.81%). In addition, survey participants also identified *challenges* Black or African American girls face that may contribute to the cycle of recidivism that included socioeconomic status (72.09%), peer pressure (69.77%), societal expectations (65.12%), and racial perceptions and expectations (51.16%). An abundance of literature documents that the relationship between socioeconomic status and neighborhood crime has an impact on the behavior of a student inside the school setting, which could impact the rate at which a Black or African American girl is sent to an alternative school setting (Cammack et al., 2011; McMahon et al., 2013; Ruiz et al., 2018).

These factors and challenges identified by survey participants align with research relating to Black or African American girls and the impact that society has on their actions and perceptions of school. Research suggests that when students who cannot “fit the rigid social structures of traditional school” (Aronson & Laughter, 2020, p. 269) showing that they are unable to conform to the societal expectations of “being white”, Black or African American girls experience struggle to meet academic and behavioral expectations on the notion of whiteness (Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Lamboy et al., 2020; Morris, 2016).

Some survey participants did indicate that zero tolerance policies (32.56%) were a factor that impacted recidivism among Black or African American girls. One survey participant mentioned with intentionality that “Zero tolerance policies, teacher centered rules and expectations” were a primary factor that contributed to recidivism (Survey Participant 15,

personal communication, April 18, 2022). A few survey participants also indicated that racial prejudice (2.33%) was a factor impacting recidivism among Black or African American girls.

Survey Participant 12 shared that :

I feel that the African American girls at my school seem to get in trouble more frequently or repeatedly and get expelled sooner than my students that are not of color. Anytime we get a new student, I feel like some of the older veteran teachers might have them stereotyped in their head and have this expectation in their head, constantly looking for the negatives with these students and possibly missing the mistakes of students that are white. (Survey Participant 12, personal communication, April 7, 2022)

However, zero tolerance policies and racial prejudice did not emerge as primary concerns among teachers and school leaders as factors that lead to recidivism in the alternative school setting, contradictory to the literature (Carver et al., 2010; Fox & Harding, 2005; Kennedy-Lewis et al., 2016; McNeal & Dunbar, 2010).

The findings within this study add another dimension to what the literature found regarding systemic stigmas by providing the perspective of teachers and school leaders within the alternative school setting relating to Black or African American girls. These perspectives share similar views on the impact that bias and discrimination can have on the relationships with teachers that are found within the literature (Jackson et al., 2014; Zygmunt et al., 2018).

## **School Environment**

### ***Academics as a Priority***

The literature suggests that disengagement from school due to outside factors and the lack of teacher support is shown in research to have an impact on academic achievement, especially when the student feels as if discipline is more of a priority than academic support (Crenshaw et al., 2015). When examining the results from the survey, most participants agreed or strongly agreed that relationships between teachers/administrators and Black or African American girls play an important role in reducing recidivism (86.05%). Previous studies show that the students rely heavily on their teachers to see past their challenging behaviors and for them to believe that the student can succeed by providing them with rigorous curriculum materials and engaging instructional practices (Brown, 2007; Cushman & Rogers, 2008; Kennedy-Lewis, 2013). The majority of participants also agreed or strongly agreed that their role as the teacher/administrator to help students transition back to the base school is the same for all students (67.44%). This is contradictory to what the literature states, noting that it is important to provide gender-specific strategies as well as a culturally responsive curriculum to help tailor alternative school programs to specifically meet the needs of girls (Payne & Brown, 2017; Zhang, 2008).

Additionally, when students do not have a positive perception of the teachers they have within the school environment, they will become disengaged from the content and not perform academically (Bottiani et al., 2016; Free, 2017; Morris, 2019; Payne & Brown, 2017). Survey participants identified academic weaknesses (67.44%) as a factor that impacts recidivism among Black or African American girls, which aligns with the research previously conducted discussing the impact of a Black or African American girls perception of the teachers within the building

could impact their academic performance (Bottiani et al., 2016; Free, 2017; Morris, 2019; Payne & Brown, 2017).

Furthermore, survey results also showed that many participants agreed or strongly agreed that the alternative school provided support for Black or African American girls to reduce recidivism rates in the alternative school setting (48.83%). This is important because the teachers and school leaders recognized that support must be in place in order to combat the negative perception of the alternative school setting. This provides an interesting perspective because previous studies found that when Black or African American girls were asked about their perception of support and level of care from teachers within the traditional school, they rated those significantly lower than their white peers (Bottiani et al., 2016; Morris, 2019). The findings from this study correlate with the literature because teachers and school leaders perceived the relationship development between base school teachers and Black or African American girls as almost nonexistent, causing it to be a factor leading to recidivism.

The shared perspectives from teachers and school leaders within this study adds to the base of knowledge regarding the impact that curriculum and academic performance can have on a Black or African American female and the rate of recidivism in an alternative school setting. Previous studies cover the impact of academic performance on student success rates (Bottiani et al., 2016; Payne & Brown, 2017), but this study in particular covers the perspective of how academic performance in conjunction with the curriculum impacts recidivism among Black or African American girls in alternative school settings specifically.

### ***The Need for Professional Development***



In order to ensure that Black or African American girls are receiving quality instruction that is tailored to their needs, professional development should provide teachers the ability to learn strategies and practices to support these students (Cavendish et al., 2020). Over 45% of survey participants disagreed or strongly disagreed that they received strategically designed professional development to help them support Black or African American girls (46.51%). Based on participant responses, the survey reveals that teachers and school leaders did not identify as being provided with appropriate professional development to support Black or African American girls academically or behaviorally. Research shows that forty-eight percent of public school districts across the United States required targeted professional development to support teachers within alternative school settings (Carver et al., 2010). The survey findings align closely with the literature noting that less than half of teachers and school leaders across the United States are not provided with appropriate professional development to support Black or African American girls within the school setting.

Although almost half of the survey participants revealed that no specific professional development has been provided specifically relating to Black or African American girls in an alternative school setting (48.84%); school-based training that were specific to individual school needs were provided to teachers (23.26%). Several survey participants gave specific mentions of training they had been provided as teachers/school leaders in alternative school settings in the open-ended survey responses: trauma training (16.28%), restorative practices (9.30%), and social-emotional learning (9.30%). The findings from this study suggest that teachers and school leaders are in fact provided strategies to assist with relationship development as a tool to combat the systemic stigmas within the school setting that are attached to Black or African American

girls. Across participants, it is evident that although specific training geared towards Black or African American girls is not always provided, authentic training related to specific needs were provided that help “complement the developmental needs of pre-adolescent and adolescent students” (Booker & Lim, 2018, p. 1046), which adds to the base of knowledge from previous studies specifying the importance of authentic training that is specifically related to Black or African American girls to reduce recidivism (Carver et al., 2010; Cavendish et al., 2020).

### ***Additional School Environment Factors***

Cultural awareness (6.98%) and MTSS (Multi-Tiered Systems of Support) (2.33%) were mentioned, but did not emerge as a commonality among survey participants on professional development provided, but are however aspects of authentic pedagogy. To support this, one participant provided a great deal of strategies they used within the school environment to reduce factors impacting recidivism among Black or African American girls sharing, “Diverse texts, community circles, writing practices that include student voice, clear expectations, grades based on reflections and self-assessment” (Survey Participant 15, personal communication, April 18, 2022). According to survey responses, participants did not feel as if they faced barriers or obstacles that may prohibit them from supporting Black or African American girls (23.25% agreed or strongly agreed), although it was mentioned that a barrier one teacher had specifically was “rebuilding the trust that is lost on discipline and lack of understanding of students with trauma” (Survey Participant 16, personal communication, April 8, 2022). Additionally, low self-esteem and the lack of specific strategies (2.33%) did not emerge as primary concerns among teachers and school leaders as factors that lead to recidivism in the alternative school setting.

## **Home Environment**

### ***The Importance of the Family Name***

The underlying assumption among many Black or African American families is that they are aware of the barriers that stand before them and that they must ensure that the family name is protected at any cost (Chen et al., 2016; Clark, 1983). Participants agreed or strongly agreed that Black or African American girls must overcome significant barriers to be successful and return to their base school (67.45%) aligned with previous research describing the impact that home environments can have on a student's success, or lack of, within the school setting (Berlowitz et al., 2017; Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Free, 2017). When Black or African American girls are in home environments where they must prove themselves and uphold the family name through fighting or violence, this can lead to misbehaviors within the school setting, which could result in alternative school placement (Chen et al., 2016). This can be seen in Survey Participant 30's response discussing the importance of understanding how the pressures from home to succeed at any cost impacts student behavior:

Understanding their situation outside of school and help [sic] them to feel safe in the classroom. Safe enough to ask a question and safe enough to fail. Safe enough to fail leads to discovering weaknesses and celebrating strengths, and builds a foundation to overcome. (Survey Participant 30, personal communication, April 13, 2022)

Alternative school teachers and leaders identified the importance of family and upholding the family name, regardless of the repercussions to follow based on their perspective. This study adds to the base of knowledge that has been cited from the student perspective on the importance

of being loyal to one's family at any cost and solidifies that home environment is a factor impacting recidivism (Baroutsis et al., 2016; Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011; Phillips, 2011; Scales et al., 2020).

### ***A Home Away from Home***

Several open-ended survey responses mentioned that many students do not have parental figures at home to confide in or to look up to as role models. Five survey participants (11.62%) stated that the lack of parental involvement was an external factor impacting recidivism. This lack of parental involvement, albeit because of work or other factors, such as a student being in foster care creates a sense of uneasiness and uncomfortable environments for students. Six of the survey responses (13.95%) also referred to the student having a support system at the school as an important factor due to the support being obsolete at home. As one teacher stated:

Most teenage girls want someone they can feel comfortable with and may not have a reliable woman figure in their life, so I try to be that person for them and motivate them to be better. I also make sure to educate myself constantly. The relationship between a teacher and a student is reciprocal; I don't only teach them, but I also learn from them too. Because I'm a white woman, there are many things I don't know about their struggles, so I talk to them honestly and listen to what they say, and learn from them. (Survey Participant 12, personal communication, April 7, 2022)

The idea of providing Black or African American girls a "safe space" that may be different from their home environment was also mentioned Survey Participant 14, sharing

I think the students enjoy the space where they can express themselves or advocate for themselves. A space where they are heard and not told to "shut up" or "go to your room". They feel safe and supported because of the climate we created in the classroom. (Survey Participant 14, personal communication, April 8, 2022)

In addition, when one participant said, "A building feeling level of support in which students feel comfortable, and in a setting where students feel like they have someone to talk to, or someone that "has their backs"" (Survey Participant 43, personal communication, April 18, 2022).

These findings were further confirmed by participant responses to the multi-select and open-ended questions, where they indicated that the lack of support at home (81.40%) was a factor impacting recidivism rates. This study adds another dimension on the idea of the "family perspective" of being a caregiver at school that focuses on relationship-building practices, similar to a mother-figure, and how it creates a connection between the home environment and school learning space (Henderson et al., 2018). This study provides this sentiment from the teacher and school leader perspective to complement what previous studies from the viewpoint of the students have found (Baroutsis et al., 2016; Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011).

### **Lack of Base School Support**

#### ***Missing the Connection with Black or African American Girls***

Alternative school settings have been strategically designed to provide students with services and support to help students return to the base school; however, those same supports are not always provided at the base school once a student returns (Arnove & Strout, 1978; Free, 2014; Szlyk, 2018). Some survey participants (27.91%) agreed or strongly agreed that Black or

African American girls express lack of support from their base school teachers serving as an external factor as a cause of recidivism. As Powell and Marshall (2011) state, "having positive relationships is especially important for students returning to their home schools, because they need all the support they can get during this challenging transition" (p. 15).

In line with previous research, Black or African American girls may have trouble forming caring relationships with teachers because they sense that the base school perceives them as a recurring problem. As described by Survey Participant 14: "Teachers or admin do not care about the needs of the students. They do not show interest in the student's life or trauma that they express. They don't teach them how to deal with particular situations or trauma" (Personal communication, April 8, 2022). These findings were further confirmed by participant responses to the multi-select questions, where they indicated that lack of support at the base school (65.12%) was an external factor impacting recidivism rates among Black or African American girls. This study adds to the base of knowledge in the literature discussing the role of a base school setting and the support that they provide for students by showing that Black or African American girls need more of a connection with their teachers at the base school in order to reduce recidivism rates, which is similar to what other races and genders may also need (Kennedy-Lewis et al., 2016). This study shares this from the teacher and school leader perspective, which is an additional dimension not previously shown within the literature.

Systemic Stigma, School Environment, Home Environment, and Lack of Base School support emerged as significant issues that helped drive follow up interview questions with participants.

### **Interview Responses**

The second phase of data collection was designed to gain a deeper understanding of teachers' and school leaders' perceptions regarding the causes of recidivism and effects of relationships with Black or African American girls based on the themes that emerged from survey results. During the second phase, consenting survey participants (n=14) were interviewed to gain further insights into their survey responses and to allow for further questioning. Along with the themes found in the initial survey results (Systemic Stigma, School Environment, Home Environment, and Lack of Base School Support), additional commonalities were also found during the interview sessions. A further examination of the data was conducted by doing a comparison between interview participant subgroups, which included looking at differences in responses based on participants' gender, identified ethnicity, and years of experience. This analysis allowed for a deeper understanding of those alternative school teachers who might share similar demographics with the students in the classroom, as well as those who bring a number of years teaching experience within alternative school settings (ten or more years), and those who do not have as much experience within that same environment (nine or less years).

## **Systemic Stigma**

### ***The Black and White Label***

An abundance of literature documents the idea that Black or African American girls must fit the image of an American white woman, leading Black or African American girls to either become silent in times of adversity or to act in “unlady-like ways” to prove their worth (Fordham, 1993; Gibson & Decker, 2019; Love, 2012; Morris, 2016; Morris & Perry, 2017). In line with previous research, all fourteen interview participants (100%) discussed the idea that Black or African American girls lacked the ability to see beyond societal expectations and

practiced “fight or flight” techniques or chose to participate in self-sabotage to diffuse situations that may lead them to be successful to gain respect:

It's really difficult for them to see past and themselves actually too, once they've been labeled, you know. Fighting, for example. Then they feel like if they come to our school, they have to prove that they're tough and so then they've gotta, you know, act out again in order. So the getting past labels of being a bad kid really affects them. (Interview Participant A, personal communication, May 26, 2022)

Interview participants (42.85%) shared Black or African American girls feel hopeless in the fact that no matter what improvements they make, the societal labeling of being a “bad student” stays with them. As Interview Participant B mentioned,

I've noticed that some of them are like kind of feeling hopeless. I guess is the best way to describe it. Not that they're like, done with the world, but more just like they get comfortable here and then they start feeling like I'm not going to be successful at my high school, so I might as well just kind of stay here. (Interview Participant B, personal communication, May 6, 2022)

Teachers and school leaders discussed that the environment that is created in an alternative school setting is very different because teachers see beyond the discipline issues while the looming label of a “bad student” sticks with them once they leave the alternative school setting. Three interview participants (21.42%) discussed the idea that teachers struggle with classroom management and school-wide expectations to hold students accountable, leading to a sense of inconsistent behaviors from not only the teacher, but the student as evidenced in the following statement:



...If I have an African American student and I have a white student, if they're doing the same exact problematic behavior, I feel like my African American students get punished more heavily or severely or get called out on things more than my white students do. Like, for instance, they're not allowed to wear hoods or anything at school. Umm, but you know, like they might call it out on an African American student compared to a white student. Uh. And I do feel like there are teachers that, you know, specifically look for these problem behaviors in their African American students and their African American students. They're the ones that are suspended most of the time. It's not because you know they're more problematic or anything. I think it's the teachers or administration might be looking at them more severely than our white students. They let things slide with our white students that wouldn't, with an African American student. (Interview Participant F, personal communication, May 18, 2022)

This is important because when interview participants mentioned these instances of inconsistent behaviors, research considers this implicit bias whether the participant recognised it or not; where Black or African American girls are punished because they are not acting as a 'white' student (Gibson & Decker, 2019; Morris, 2016; Morris & Perry, 2017).

When looking at participant responses by gender, it was noted that female teachers and school leaders were much more likely to recognize the impact of societal expectations and stigmas surrounding Black or African American girls when compared to their male colleagues. Of the ten female interview participants, six made mention of

the impact of systemic stigmas (60%); however, no male interview participant discussed this issue. Additionally, in terms of ethnicity, it was found that of the six participants who mentioned the impact of societal expectations surrounding Black or African American girls, 50% identified as Black or African American, 33% identified as white, and 17% preferred not to say. Data analysis also showed that of these same participants, five of the six (83%) had less than nine years of teaching experience within the alternative school setting. This data revealed that the impact of systemic stigma surrounding Black or African American girls is most commonly seen from the perspective of a Black or African American female teacher or school leader with less than nine years of teaching experience within an alternative school setting, when compared to their peers. This is important because Black or African American female teachers may not have the same implicit bias that a white teacher may have surrounding the systemic stigmas that are being placed on Black or African American girls, which could lead to subjective disciplinary actions being taken on Black or African American girls, leading them down the school-to-prison pipeline faster than any other gender or race (Bridges et al., 2012; Free, 2017; Morris & Perry, 2017).

This study is unique because previous research had not looked at the impact that systemic stigmas could have on the relationship development between a teacher and a Black or African American girl from the teacher or school leader perspective; only providing this from the student perspective (Baroutsis et al., 2016; Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011; Morris, 2016).

### ***Cultural Misunderstandings***

During the interviews, the concern that some teachers of other races may not fully understand the impact that culture has on Black or African American girls was brought up nine times (64.28%). Experiencing the cultural normalities can be found in instances such as this:

A lot of African American teachers, we relate to what the African American students are seeing in their neighborhoods, and we can relate to because a lot of our students are witnessing, you know, the murders of their peers in their neighborhoods. And some of them are their classmates, you know, or former classmates. And as African Americans, we, we're in the same neighborhoods. You know, a lot of times. And so we witness it. And as close to home for us, whereas for a lot of our Caucasian teachers, you know, they don't live in the neighborhood, they're not familiar with the children and their families. So it doesn't, you know, it doesn't have as much of an impact. (Interview Participant J, personal communication, May 24, 2022)

To support this concern, three teachers (21.42%) mentioned specifically how being white does have an impact on being culturally sensitive when relating to Black or African American girls. One interview participant shared, “Sometimes I don't know if exactly what I'm doing is appropriate or not because I don't know if their culture sees things in that way or not” (Interview Participant N, personal communication, May 18, 2022). This is important because research shows that Black or African American girls identify a “preference for teachers of color because they are able to engage them both academically and socially” because they can easily understand their challenges (Khalifa, 2011; Nganga

et al., 2019). These findings suggest that the teachers and school leaders within this study identify this as a factor that may impact the ability to build relationships with Black or African American girls.

The interview participants justified the theme of Systemic Stigma because the perceived fight or flight mentality among Black or African American girls coupled with cultural misunderstandings show the researcher that societal expectations and stigmas are attached to the behaviors exhibited by these girls within the alternative school setting. When looking at participant responses by ethnicity, it was noted that four out of the nine (44%) participants who recognized the role of culture in the girls' school performance identified as African American and 56% identified as white. In terms of alternative school experience, three out of the nine participants (33%) had ten or more years experience with the rest having less than nine years of experience (66%). Across the participants according to gender, five participants were females (56%) and four were males (44%). This data reveals that those participants with fewer years of teaching experience recognize the role that culture has in student performance, while gender had less variable results. This is important because research suggests that if teachers are unable to eliminate the implicit bias or cultural misunderstandings they may have with marginalized youth, it will lead to a high rate of suspension and expulsion, impacting recidivism (DeComo, 1998; Chesney-Lind & Shelden 2014; Free, 2017). This provides the researcher insight into the expressed need for additional professional development that is targeted towards supporting Black or African American girls within the alternative school setting.

Additionally, four of eight participants interviewed (50%) that discussed how cultural misunderstandings were due to race and the impact that being white can have on building relationships with students were female and had nine or less years of experience. This was equally represented among both Black or African American (50%) and white participants (50%). Of the four male teachers who also discussed the impact that cultural misunderstandings can have on relationships and recidivism among Black or African American girls, none mentioned the impact of being white in their responses. This data reveals the awareness that some female teachers, regardless of ethnicity with a low number of years experience within the alternative school setting, have for how race plays an important role in building relationships with students, coming from both the perspective of a female Black or African American or a white teacher. This also reveals that the male teachers may not see the impact of being white as a reason for recidivism of lack of relationship development with Black or African American girls. According to the literature, this may attribute to the fact that many female teachers are having to break the stereotypes placed on them by the student from what they have experienced within their home lives, while that same stigma does not exist for adult males in Black or African American girls lives (Morris, 2016). This is important because research discusses that in order to build relationships with a Black or African American girl, it is most effective when the student can build a strong bond with a caring adult who is able to create a loving environment that may resemble a fictive kin, or “other parent” (Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Williams, 2018). This shows the researcher that societal expectations and stigmas are attached to Black or African American girls, but that from the perspective of

female teachers and school leaders, they are aware of the impact they can have on these external factors to help build relationships and reduce recidivism.

## **School Environment**

### ***Class Size***

When examining school environment settings for Black or African American girls, research suggests that when small class sizes are implemented, it allows the teacher to provide a more individualized experience for students (Zhang, 2008). Four alternative school teachers and leaders (28.57%) mentioned the impact that class size has on recidivism among Black or African American girls. With smaller class sizes, the teachers could utilize preferential seating and focus on individualized instruction more frequently. Interview participant E said,

The largest class we usually, I usually, have is around 16 to 20. So, normally I have between maybe 5 and 12, so it's, it's really easy to get to know the kids. They don't all come at the same time” (Interview Participant E, personal communication, May 24, 2022).

Moreover, when the student is sent back to the base school setting, the success the student saw during their time at the alternative school, which teachers attributed to the small class sizes, diminished. The ability for teachers and school leaders to provide small class sizes and individualized instruction for Black or African American girls is substantial at an alternative school; however, once the student returns to the base school, they are “simply a number” (Interview Participant D, personal communication, May 6, 2022).

Teachers also mentioned that small class sizes made strong impacts on the relationships that they were able to build with Black or African American girls. Interview participants stated

that the small class sizes allowed them to connect with students and learn more about them, which would be different if they were in a traditional school setting. This allowed the teachers to understand the past and present trauma that the student may be experiencing, which could impact relationship development. Specifically, Interview Participant I stated:

We actually take the time to listen. And you know, a lot of times in the larger schools that are the schools, they're home schools. There's so much going on, the teachers don't have time to listen. You know, you give me an attitude, but you're really not giving me an attitude. You're mad at something else. So what is it? You know, we have to decipher very quickly what's going on. Whereas in the home school many of the teachers don't take the time to figure that out because their class sizes are anywhere between 25 and 28 and my maximum right now, a class is 22. And that's very, not normal. So I think that's what it is (Interview Participant I, personal communication, May 18, 2022).

These findings are consistent with research stating that providing an inclusive environment that allows for student-teacher connections and individualized instruction benefit students in general (Jackson et al., 2014; Slaten et al., 2015; Zhang, 2008) and even specifically with African American Boys (Slaten et al., 2016), however, in recent studies a gap within the literature exists when looking at relationship development among Black or African American girls in alternative school settings.

When looking at participant responses by total years of teaching experience within the alternative school setting, class size and its impact were discussed by four participants: of the four, three of the participants (75%) had fifteen or more years of experience in working within an

alternative school setting when compared to their peers with nine or less years of experience (25%). Of these participants, there was no significance between ethnicity; however, both Black or African American (50%) and white (50%) teachers and school leaders each perceived class size as an impact of recidivism among Black or African American girls. This data shows that teachers and school leaders who have a large number of years experience working within alternative school settings, regardless of ethnicity or race, believe that class size has an impact on recidivism among these girls. This is important because it supports the literature that discusses the impact that small class sizes can have on Black or African American girls relationship development and recidivism, with this study incorporating this sentiment from the teacher and school leader perspective (Jackson et al., 2014; Slaten et al., 2015; Zhang, 2008).

This current study adds to the base of knowledge because from the teacher perspective it was found that relationships with Black or African American girls are best built when inclusive environments are created, where the student feels as if they can connect with the teacher regarding their trauma in some way, and has the time to allow the relationship to develop, specifically looking at class size, especially by those with a vast array of experiences within the alternative school setting. This study helps fill in the gap of the literature in terms of relationships development between teachers and school leaders and Black or African American girls from the teacher and school leader perspective.

### ***Classroom Characteristics***

Interview participants also discussed several instances where school environment relating to behavior was an external factor impacting recidivism rates among Black or African American girls. Across participants, it was mentioned that services provided to students as well as the



accessibility of adults for students to make personal connections attributed to the behavioral aspect of the school environment. Similar to previous work, interview participants stated that Black or African American girls needed opportunities to provide deep, individualized instruction and the incorporation of strategies that promote growth and empowerment to help develop relationships and reduce recidivism. When examining these factors, there are specific characteristics within a school setting that increase the likelihood of a teacher-student relationship to form, including care, culturally responsive curriculum, and classroom management (Kennedy, 2011; Kennedy-Lewis, 2013; Osher et al., 2012; Zygmunt et al., 2018).

Three of the interviewees (21.42%) shared that although the alternative school is there to provide students with a “second chance”, the alternative school environment was not equipped to appropriately combat poor behavior choices all while creating a nurturing environment to help students learn strategies to cope and change the way they respond in situations. This lack of opportunity and support causes students to struggle behaviorally in the classroom, leading to disruptions and future disciplinary actions. Participants K and L shared similar viewpoints, sharing that Black or African American girls would most benefit from learning strategies and perspectives that promote ways to better handle situations that got them to the alternative school to begin with, going deeper into the issue to find the cause.

Eight interview participants (57.14%) elaborated on the idea that Black or African American girls needed a personal connection with an adult within the school building, and when they did, it had a positive impact on the success of the student within the alternative school setting but may not be reciprocated at a base school. In one shared response:

We see repeat offenders and we think it's because they do have that person that they can talk to there, where that their home school, they don't have that relationship with someone and so we think a lot of times that we have repeat offenders just because of what they find at the alternative school is in as far as you know, having that one on one relationship with an adult. Having someone to talk to, having things that you know just, comforts that they don't find in their home school. (Interview Participant J, personal communication, May 24, 2022)

Interview participants also expressed common statements regarding their perception of empowerment and how building that into relationships with Black or African American females impacts recidivism. Four interview participants (28.57%) discussed the importance of providing encouraging opportunities to students so that they can see themselves as successful. One interview participant gave a specific example of this relating to a student who had problems at home, but school was made a safe space for her to have opportunities to experience failure and success in a supportive environment:

So after she left us, she went back to the regular high school and she actually came when she graduated to tell me that she was enrolled in a nursing program. So it's just by empowering her and showing that whenever she was around her mom, it was always a put down. And whenever she was around us, she wanted to. Okay, you can do this and look for the positive. (Interview Participant C, personal communication, May 2, 2022)

Interview participants also mentioned the importance of being the understanding adult that Black or African American girls could lean on when they have made a mistake, in a mentorship way. When a student has a consistent adult at an alternative school, they will “at least hear them out about why they got into a fight versus let's just suspend them and be done with it” (Interview Participant B, personal communication, May 6, 2022).

Among participants who mentioned classroom characteristics within the school setting as factors that may impact recidivism, there was no one direct correlation between gender, ethnicity, or years of teaching experience within the alternative school setting for those discussing these factors; two were female (one African American and one white), two were white males, and one female and one male had more than 15 years of experience, while one male and one female had less than 15 years of experience. The perspective on the importance of making personal connections and encouraging a growth mindset and student empowerment was a sentiment shared by all stakeholders no matter ethnicity, gender or years of teaching experience within an alternative school setting, aligning to current literature (Kennedy, 2011; Kennedy-Lewis, 2013; Osher et al., 2012; Zygmunt et al., 2018).

Previous studies identified this by conducting qualitative studies using both male and female student perspectives, but the current study shows this alignment within an alternative school setting from the teacher and school leader perspective which shows that this study is unique because prior literature does not discuss this topic. This is important because these types of relationships formed within the alternative school setting supports the idea of school environment being a central theme within this study that impacts recidivism among Black or African American girls.

## **Home Environment**

### ***A Place of Understanding***

Studies suggest Black or African American girls who come from low socioeconomic status homes do not have high parental involvement rates when compared to their white peers (King et al., 2018; Morris, 2016). Twenty-nine percent of interview participants mentioned that home life and the lack of parental involvement was an external factor contributing to recidivism. Teachers and school leaders stated that in many cases, students were not being treated as a young adolescent or young adult at home, but instead, a parental figure or dealing with situations that adults should handle. When discussing the impact that the lack of parental involvement, simply because of their job, had on students, one interviewee shared their perspective:

I would tell you the majority of my students do better when the parents aren't involved. Because they're beat down, they're told that they can't do it or they're basically raising themselves. And that's not because parents are bad, it's because they're trying to survive. You know, we got parents working two jobs. And while they're doing that, they don't have time to take care of their kids. So you got a 14 or 15 year old that knows when they get home off the bus they gotta take care of little ones or they're the ones that have to clean the house or they're the ones that have to cook. (Interview Participant C, personal communication, May 2, 2022)

Following statements surrounding the theme of home life, participants also mentioned that Black or African American girls need additional support to learn strategies to manage and cope with those situations at home. As teachers and school leaders discussed this, they mentioned that this played a strong role in building a relationship with the student because it provides students the

“freedom” that they may not get at home to be a young adolescent and as one interview participant shared, “I think if they know that, you understand [that ]and that even if you had experience with it, that makes it easier for them to to open up and to trust you” (Interview Participant L, personal communication, May 9, 2022). This is important to consider when viewing the impact that home environment can have on the relationship between a teacher and Black or African American girls because these findings are from the alternative school teacher and school leader perspective. Previous literature does not discuss the impact that relationships can have between teachers and school leaders and Black or African American girls within alternative school settings.

Only four participants discussed the role of home life and its impacts on recidivism, one male and three females. Three of the four (75%) of these participants had nine or less years of experience working in the alternative school environment, and three of the four identified as white and one as Black or African American. Given the small percent of respondents discussing home life, it is not possible to attribute any demographic factors to their responses.

This study adds to the base of knowledge because these findings suggest that, according to newer alternative school teachers and leaders specifically, when Black or African American girls are provided with an environment that provides a sense of understanding, “learners are more likely to develop a strong sense of belonging” (Nganga et al., 2019; Osher et al., 2012).

### **Lack of Base School Support**

#### ***Transitions Aren’t Smooth***

When interview participants were asked about the support provided at the base school in order to help students transition and to assist in overcoming external factors that may contribute

to the lack of relationship development, teachers and school leaders both said that support once a student transitions from an alternative school setting to the base school was nonexistent.

Interview Participant K said that the student would transition “straight back into whatever schedule they were doing before” (Personal communication, May 25, 2022) without any consideration of the support that the student received in the alternative school setting. Teachers (n=4) stated that base schools lacked the ability to provide students the support that worked well for them in the alternative school setting, such as small class sizes and individualized learning sessions.

Alternative school teachers and school leaders (28.57%) also shared in their interviews that they discuss with the base school the recommendations that they have in order for the student to be successful in the new learning environment, but said that most of those recommendations are not followed through. Those teachers attributed the lack of follow through because the base school is willing to wait until the student commits one act of inappropriate behavior, almost as if they are not wanted, so that they can be sent back to the alternative school setting. Interview participant L mentioned,

Once our students leave from us, they have a like a target on their back or they went to [Freedom Mountain], oh they are trouble. We have to watch them because they're probably gonna mess up again. And I think that's another thing I, I think the bridge between the base schools and the alternative schools there needs to be a, a greater connection there, so that the transition is smooth and supportive rather than just, you know, the school waiting for the other shoe to drop. (Interview Participant L, personal communication, May 9, 2022)

Teachers expressed that base schools do not provide the supportive and differentiated environment that Black or African American girls need to make a smooth transition from the alternative school setting to the base school. This is important because the literature states that Black or African American girls appreciated when their teachers were “generally sensitive in the learning process and the learners’ individual educational needs” (Nganga et al., 2019, p. 7), which according to interview participants, does not always happen at the base school level.

Three interview participants (21.42%) also discussed the importance of having a clean slate with students when they arrive at the alternative school. They perceived this as an important factor in how relationships impact recidivism. One interview participant gave a specific example of how not having a clean slate mentality sent a student who returned quickly to the alternative school from their base school:

So first, the schools do not open their arms and they are always labeled as a problem child. They don't have the opportunity of starting fresh. They always start with that constant reminder of you are gonna go back, you are gonna go back. Until eventually they go back and then the issues with trust and resentment begin again and in most of the cases are worse than the first time because they feel like they didn't want them back. (Interview Participant N, personal communication, May 18, 2022)

Teachers also cited the lack of consistency built within relationships among teachers at base schools as a factor that impacts recidivism. As cited by Zolkoski (2019) & Powell and Marshall (2011), the most difficult part for students returning to the traditional school setting is starting off on the wrong foot with staff members upon their return.

When examining the participant responses relating to the lack of base school support, in terms of gender, this was mentioned only by four female teachers and school leaders, three of whom are white and one who is Black or African American, when compared to their colleagues. Additionally, the four females, who represented 29% of the interview participants, had nine or less years of experience working within the alternative school setting. These findings add to the literature because in previous studies that provided insight from the student perspective, they identified the struggles they face when returning to the base school (Powell & Marshall, 2011), while the current study shares this same sentiment, but specifically from the white female teacher or school leader perspective with nine or less years of experience. This adds to the base of knowledge when examining the impact that relationships can have on recidivism among Black or African American girls, especially if the relationships are not as strong at the base school as they were at the alternative school.

### **Summary**

This chapter identified the four main themes that emerged from the study. The emerging themes: Systemic Stigma, School Environment, Home Environment, and Lack of Base School Support resulting from coding methods have been presented with support of data and direct quotes from the surveys and interviews. The data collected from both the surveys and one-on-one interviews support the four main themes that help answer the following research questions:

1. What factors do alternative school teachers and leaders feel contribute to recidivism among Black or African American girls?



2. What are alternative school teachers' and school leaders' perspectives on how relationships impact recidivism among Black or African American girls?

Chapter V discusses the limitations and implications of this study. Suggestions for how this research applies to best practices among schools are also addressed. The findings of this study have clear implications for researchers as well as educators serving in both base and alternative school settings who support Black or African American girls.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **DISCUSSION**

In this chapter, the researcher first provides a discussion and makes conclusions about the findings. Then, the researcher discusses the implications of these findings for researchers and educators who are interested in understanding factors that impact teacher and student relationships to help prevent recidivism among Black or African American girls.

The purpose of this study was to examine the viewpoint of alternative school teachers and school leaders regarding factors that impact teacher and student relationships and prevent recidivism among Black or African American girls. To achieve this purpose, the study took a mixed methods approach and investigated teacher and school leader perspectives on how relationships with Black or African American girls impacted recidivism in an alternative school setting. The researcher investigated the perceptions of teachers and school leaders regarding factors that impact recidivism and relationships relating to Black or African American girls. To achieve this purpose, the researcher conducted and analyzed: 1) a survey with Likert-Scale, open-ended and multi-select questions; and 2) one-on-one semi structured interviews with teachers and school leaders.

#### **Statement of the Problem**

The two research questions that guided this study are as follows:

1. What factors do alternative school teachers and leaders feel contributes to recidivism among Black or African American girls?
2. What are alternative school teachers' and school leaders' perspectives on how relationships impact recidivism among Black or African American girls?

The researcher is not aware of any other study that has focused on the teacher and school leader perspective regarding external factors impacting relationships and recidivism among Black or African American girls using mixed methods design. This study has addressed a more detailed perspective from the teacher and school leader standpoint on the factors that they believe are impacting recidivism and their ability to build relationships with Black or African American girls. Very few studies have been conducted to examine the viewpoint of alternative school teachers and school leaders regarding the factors that may impact teacher and student relationships as well as help curb recidivism among Black or African American girls using a mixed-methods design; most have been conducted using qualitative design (Dawes et al., 2021; Kennedy-Lewis, 2013; Kunesh & Noltemeyer, 2019; Slaten et al., 2015; Zhang, 2008). Currently, there are no mixed-methods studies on the factors that impact recidivism and relationships between teachers and Black or African American girls from the perspective of teachers and school leaders. The few studies that do exist used qualitative methods to examine viewpoints of teachers (Duke & Tenuto, 2020; Kennedy-Lewis et al., 2016; Waldron, 2011) and both male and female students (Baroutsis et al., 2016; Edgar-Smith & Palmer, 2015; Gibson, 2019; Jackson et al., 2014; Kennedy et al., 2019; Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011; Morris, 2016; Phillips, 2011; Scales et al., 2020; Slaten et al., 2016) about alternative schools, but none specifically address the issue of recidivism and relationships relating to Black or African American girls.

The survey results as well as the personal accounts given by participants of this study detail the teacher and school leader perceptions and perspectives on factors that impact

recidivism, as well as how those factors impact the ability to form a relationship with Black or African American girls. There was a need for a holistic view to compare and synthesize both quantitative and qualitative data from the teacher and school leader perspective (Creswell & Clark, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). The accounts given by teachers and school leaders support understanding the factors impacting a student, as well as considering the ways in which one can build strong relationships with a student, may reduce recidivism rates among Black or African American girls in alternative school settings.

## **Discussion**

### **What factors do alternative school teachers and leaders feel contributes to recidivism among Black or African American girls?**

Using the data collected from both the survey and one-on-one interviews, four major themes emerged relating to external factors that contribute to recidivism among Black or African American girls: Systemic Stigma, School Environment, Home Environment, and Lack of Base School Support.

#### ***Systemic Stigma***

Participants within this study discussed several ways in which systemic-created stigmas impacted recidivism rates amongst Black or African American girls. When discussing specific behaviors, alternative school teachers and school leaders provided the perception of Black or African American girls lacking the ability to see beyond societal expectations, and their home teachers and administrators being unable to see beyond those expectations. Teachers and school leaders saw that the girls allowed their past behaviors to define them and continued to participate in fighting due to feeling the pressure of having to prove themselves in the environment

surrounding them. This relates to the systemic stigma on how fighting is used as a way to prove themselves shows that by going against traditional ‘white’ feminine expectations and perceptions, Black or African American girls resort to fighting as a way to earn power and respect as well as prevent further victimization within a school setting (Chen et al., 2016; Morris, 2016; Waldron, 2011).

It was evident within teacher responses that societal expectations of being more ‘white’ and the pressure to prove themselves are factors that impact Black or African American girls recidivism rates in alternative school settings which is corroborated by previous literature (Fordham, 1993; Gibson & Decker, 2019; Morris & Perry, 2017). This is an important finding because fighting as a response to prove themselves, according to the literature, shows a deeper root cause in the idea that Black or African American girls struggle to identify where they fit into a “white man’s world”, while trying not to leave behind the loyalty and humility shown within their cultural values (Morris, 2016). The literature supports this because “When schools offer punitive responses to girls’ decisions to fight, they in essence fight fire with fire—exacerbating the problem instead of working toward resolution at the root level” (Esposito & Edwards, 2018, p. 102). Participants in this study felt it was simply the act of fighting as a factor impacting recidivism, but this reinforces the impact that zero tolerance and subjective discipline policies have on Black or African American girls, serving as a leading factor in recidivism in alternative school settings.

Additionally, study participants mentioned instances where Black or African American girls allowed past behaviors to define them within the alternative school setting, whether that be because teachers stereotyped the student specifically or because the student could not see past the

societal label that had been placed on them for attending an alternative school. This is consistent with the literature discussing the implications that are placed on a student for attending an alternative school because they are systemically known as a “dumping ground”, “warehouse”, or a “toilet” to where society and schools essentially “flush” away the problem students from the mainstream classroom (Free, 2017; Kim & Taylor, 2008; McNulty & Roseboro, 2009). With this societal labeling following Black or African American girls from the traditional school to the alternative school setting, it gives these students the perception that they are not worthy of being treated the same as other students and increases the risk of failure and dropout (Amitay & Rahav, 2018; Mitchell, 2014; Morris, 2016; Murphy et al., 2013).

With the negative perception created by a constant systemic issue of zero tolerance policies and subjective discipline, Black or African American girls are put in positions where they must prove themselves to the teacher leader within the alternative school setting, despite consequences that may follow. This extends the current research stating that zero tolerance policies and subjective disciplinary actions lead to further disciplinary actions, which could point a student down the school-to-prison pipeline, despite their intentions of deterring students from repeating the same behaviors, specifically with Black or African American girls (Berlowitz et al., 2017; Losen & Whitaker, 2018; Mitchell, 2014). It is important that the teachers within this study recognized that stereotyping and bias exist within their buildings, however, despite teacher and school leaders best efforts to combat systemic stigmas that accompany students when they arrive at the alternative school setting. This study reveals weaknesses that the alternative schools within this study have in terms of the role that the teachers and school leaders can play to help eliminate systemic stigmas placed on Black or African American girls to impact recidivism;

afterall “school is the only place [they] can learn how *not* to play the circumscribed role the rest of the world casts them in” (Morris, 2016, p. 114).

### ***School Environment***

Through this study, the concern relating to the impact of how the school environment sets up academic success, whether that be at the base school or the alternative school posed as a factor that impacts recidivism among Black or African American girls. Participants referenced the impact of small class sizes, specifically within the alternative school setting and by providing that learning environment, students felt successful and were encouraged to continue to learn within the academic environment. A study conducted by Malcolm (2019) discusses the idea that students felt the academic learning environment in an alternative school setting was not comparable to the academic learning environment in a base school, specifically due to class size and the increased importance placed on academics versus behaviors. The alternative school teachers and school leaders within this study felt that they were able to fully support Black or African American girls academically within their classrooms due to small class sizes because they were able to invest in the students lives and build relationships with them (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Malcolm, 2019; Morris, 2016; Osher et al., 2012) but they also felt that the base school was unable to provide the appropriate academic environment with small class sizes for Black or African American girls in order to be successful (Osher et. al., 2012).

This is important because the teachers had a sense of awareness of the impact that small class sizes had on helping to reduce recidivism among Black or African American girls. It is also concerning due to the fact that the base schools were unable to provide students with the support needed in the context of small class sizes.

Participants in this study also discussed instances where behavior impacted recidivism among Black or African American girls. Similar to previous work, alternative school teachers discussed the idea that the alternative school's purpose is to provide students with strategies and ways to cope with scenarios that may impact their behaviors so that they can be successful in a base school setting. Study participants also discussed the misconceptions that teachers at the base school have about the role the alternative school plays (Free, 2017; Kennedy-Lewis et al., 2016). Study participants shared the importance of providing specific strategies that may not be academically related to help students become successful outside of the alternative school setting, for example; additional counseling services, programs and initiatives for specific genders, and conflict resolution strategies. However, this proves to put students at a disadvantage when they return to the base school due to the fact that the base school is solely focused on the achievement of its students and not the improvement of behavior. In regards to the base school, students still were not receiving the appropriate support based on the same premise of meeting state required academic standards.

Without the appropriate behavioral support that Black or African American girls need in order to reduce behavior issues in the base school setting, the girls ultimately would land themselves back into the arms of the alternative school because they did not receive the support to help them continue to overcome their behavioral tendencies. This type of school environment-related behavior is a factor that impacts recidivism because although the literature describes alternative schools as having the purpose to help provide their students support using different methods, the participants in this study indicated that this was not happening within traditional school settings (Kennedy-Lewis et al., 2016; Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011). If the



alternative school is the best placement for Black or African American girls success, it is hindered by the South Carolina Code of Regulations, §§ 43-234 that specifies in order for a student to graduate, they must be enrolled in their base school for at least the semester prior to graduating. This law creates a conflict for the students; a student being enrolled at their base school for the semester before they graduate versus placing the student in the environment that best fits their needs to be successful.

### ***Home Environment***

Teachers and school leaders alluded that situations at home are frequently brought into the school setting and that the students need a time and a place to cope with their feelings and experiences they have at home. It was shown within the interview responses that providing time to allow these students to decompress and cope with their feelings and emotions helps combat home environment as an external factor impacting recidivism. Teachers and school leaders noted that students who had the most success in combating home environment factors were provided with a safe and comfortable environment within the school setting because it was something that they lacked in their home environment (Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011). Although teachers provide that additional layer of support needed by Black or African American girls, it does not replace the gap left by “empty family”. This is where teachers mentioned the constant need to work with students to find commonalities and encourage educational progress to aid in the process (Vannest et al., 2008). Additionally, studies suggest that when other parenting, the idea of inclusive care where a relationship is developed to be more inclusive and supportive, is used students are more likely to meet behavioral and academic expectations (Kennedy, 2011; Malcolm, 2019; Williams, 2018). This idea of other parenting was supported in participant responses because they believed

that when teachers help facilitate creating a strong bond that they may not have in their home environment, it will lead to success.

Because home environment impacts recidivism among Black or African American girls, the alternative school participants emphasized the need to understand the home situations of their students and provide them support (e.g. other parenting, coping strategies, or individual attention) to ensure that their needs are met so that the girls can be successful and return to their base school. This is unique because not only are the teachers having to help students through home life issues and provide them a safe environment where they are not having to be the “adult” in the room, but they also have to combat cultural norms that are instilled within the girls to show them that teachers can be trusted. This finding assists in filling a gap within the current literature because previous work discusses the home lives of boys and the role of gang life impacting success, however, this study shows that Black or African American girls are having to play more of a parental role, according to teacher and school leader perceptions (Gibson et al., 2019).

### ***Lack of Base School Support***

Teachers and school leaders mentioned trust as a basis for the lack of base school support because Black or African American females were forced to attempt to rebuild the trust that is lost due to disciplinary measures; however, the label attached to the student as a “bad student” prohibited the rebuilding of trust. Similar to previous work, it is evident that Black or African American girls have a difficult time rebuilding their trust within teachers because they have been misinterpreted and misunderstood by teachers and administrators (Morris, 2016).

This aligns with the research conducted by Powell and Marshall (2011) where they discussed the difficulties students have transitioning back to the base school because Black or African American girls continually start off on the wrong foot with staff members upon their return. This is supported even further by research noting that at base schools, students experience more negative relationships than positive ones upon their return and had an overall feeling that their teachers did not care about them because they were unable to show interest in the students' lives (Cope et al., 2005; Zolkoski, 2019).

Teachers and school leaders both stated that once a student transitions from an alternative school setting to the base school support was nonexistent, another external factor impacting recidivism. Teachers alluded to the idea that base schools lacked the ability to provide students the support that worked well for them in the alternative school setting, especially ensuring that they have a supportive adult within the base school that was similar to one they had in the alternative school setting (Powell & Marshall, 2011). The foundational needs that Black or African American girls require in order to successfully meet academic and behavioral requirements at a base school according to the study participants, are insufficient.

### **What are alternative school teachers and school leaders perspectives on how relationships impact recidivism among Black or African American girls?**

Using the data collected from one-on-one interviews, results supported the themes initially found in the survey relating to teacher and school leader perspectives on how relationships impact recidivism among Black or African American females: Systemic Stigma, School Environment, Home Environment, and Lack of Base School Support.

#### ***Systemic Stigma***

Study findings indicated that when a teacher or school leader has the ability to relate to Black or African American girls on issues that may be impacting them in the home and/or school environment, a strong relationship may form. This was justified when it was mentioned explicitly by Black or African American teachers that they are able to connect to Black or African American girls easier than their white colleagues because those teachers were living the same realities as their students. The perspectives from a white teacher were also shared stating they were sometimes unsure of how to best support Black or African American females because they had not had appropriate professional development. Study results indicated that almost half of the teachers and school leaders did not receive the appropriate professional development to help support Black or African American girls, which is contradictory to what the South Carolina Policy §§ 59-63-1370 expects states teachers at alternative school programs to do relating to staff development:

Each school district or consortium shall establish procedures for ensuring that teachers assigned to alternative school programs possess the pedagogical and content-related skills necessary to meet the needs of the student population served by the school. Each school board also shall ensure that adequate staff development activities are available for alternative school program faculty and staff and ensure that the faculty and staff participate in these activities. The State Department of Education in consultation with other appropriate entities shall provide assistance to school districts in the development of staff development programs which include best practices. These programs shall be made available to all district teachers.

In this study, some participants opened up about concerns that as a white educator, they were at a disadvantage to fully understanding where Black or African American girls came from and how experiences these girls have had within the school setting impact their ability to form relationships with them as a white teacher (Malcolm, 2019; Morris, 2016). The literature discusses that teachers and school leaders feel that enhancing student engagement and increasing parental involvement should be the main focus of professional development, not how to engage the white teachers with best practices on how to work with Black or African American girls (Curry et al., 2018). This is unique finding within this study because previous studies that have been conducted focused on the curriculum aspects of professional development that apply to all students instead of the role that teachers and school leaders play in helping to reduce the systemic stigmas on Black or African American girls in alternative school settings (Allen & Penuel, 2015; Curry et al., 2018; Dos Santos, 2020) or have specifically looked at professional development designed to support Black or African American boys (Slaten et al., 2016). Another unique finding within this study is although the issue was presented in survey results and interview responses, the problem has not been solved with appropriate professional development for teachers, which causes a disconnect with their ability to form relationships with Black or African American girls, impacting recidivism.

### ***School Environment***

In this study teachers and school leaders were specific in identifying that to best build a relationship with Black or African American girls, a teacher must be consistent within their expectations and actions within the school environment. Participants indicated that although they

recognize that consistency is an important factor in building relationships, they do see other teachers within their school buildings lacking the ability to be fair in their expectations and actions with Black or African American girls (Free, 2017). Teachers and school leaders did, however, recognize that those teachers do not have strong relationships with their students. Furthermore, consistency helps build relationships among Black or African American girls and educators that are strong enough for a girl to hold onto once they return to the base school (Kennedy et al., 2019).

These findings add another dimension to the literature showing the teacher and school leader perspective on Black or African American girls on how school environment and systemic stigmas of stereotyping and labeling impact the ability to form relationships with students because previous works only cover that perspective from the Black or African American girl viewpoint (Kennedy et al., 2019; Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011; Morris, 2016; Phillips, 2011). Teachers and school leaders understood that when students see that the teacher is there to help them emotionally and academically, they respond in positive ways and rise up to the expectations set for them (Malcolm, 2019; Morris, 2016; Powell & Marshall, 2011).

### ***Home Environment***

Findings based on the idea that Black or African American girls search for a safe environment with a trusting adult to help build their confidence and self-esteem allows for the teacher and student to build a strong relationship despite the girls' situations in their home environments. Responses indicated that teachers and school leaders perceived the home lives in terms of emotional care and support in addition to a stable environment where they feel safe to

be a young adolescent impacted their ability to build a relationship with Black or African American girls.

Respondents discussed that many students do not have parental figures at home to confide in or to look up to as role models (Chen et al., 2016). The impact of a Black or African American girl feeling as if she was “heard” and in a space where they could advocate for themselves because the environment was not upheld at home was an important factor in helping reduce recidivism according to participants (Jackson et al., 2014; Zygmunt et al., 2018). By providing the opportunity for students to express themselves, teachers and school leaders felt it had a positive impact building relationships. Consistent with research, study participants discussed the importance of building self-esteem and confidence among Black or African American girls so that they rise up and defeat the barriers standing in their way (Jackson et al., 2014; Morris, 2016).

This study is unique because it provides an alternative viewpoint on the specific needs in terms of home environment for Black or African American girls from the teacher or school leader perspective that is different from what previous studies have found when identifying the impacts that home environment have on Black or African American males (Wright, 2021). This is significant because empowering Black or African American girls is consistent with the research discussing that when caring and trusting relationships develop with teachers and Black or African American girls, it provides them with a safe environment to help build their self-esteem and encourages positive choices both academically and behaviorally (Jackson et al., 2014; Morris, 2016).

### ***Lack of Base School Support***

The findings from this study indicated that teachers and school leaders in alternative school settings faced specific barriers stemming from the lack of base school support when trying to form relationships with Black or African American girls. Study participants cited that the girls left the alternative school, where they had supportive relationships with at least one teacher, to an environment that was not conducive to acceptance and starting “fresh”. Zolkoski’s (2019) study found that at the base school, students expressed more negative experiences than positive ones with their teachers once they returned and had an overall feeling that their teachers did not care about them and their learning experiences.

This aligns with previous research showing that despite the support students had received at the alternative school, it was nonexistent at the base school (Kennedy et al., 2019). The teachers at the base school expected students to conform to the traditional school setting with no regard to the recommendations or specific strategies used to help Black or African American girls be successful. Additionally, research supports the claim that study participants made regarding the lack of a “clean slate” for these girls and that the base school lacked the ability to practice appropriate pedagogical strategies to support these girls (Kennedy et al., 2019).

In order for a Black or African American girl to be able to go back to their base school, they must meet specific requirements set forth by the alternative school. The alternative school then deems the girl ready to return to the base school setting because they have learned how to modify their behavior to meet the expectations of the base school. Despite the fact that the alternative school teachers were aware of the support they provided Black or African American girls, it was not evident that they were able to advocate for the girls when they returned to the base school, which further impacted the relationship that they had built with the girl prior to



them leaving (Kennedy, 2011; Kennedy-Lewis et al., 2016; Zhang, 2008). This study provides key findings that fill in the gaps within the literature regarding the teachers' and school leaders' within the alternative school settings perception of the base school and how they feel it supports Black or African American girls with relationship development.

### **Implications**

Although the root cause of recidivism among Black or African American girls cannot be pinpointed to one specific factor, this study confirms what previous research as well as extends the current literature on the impact that external factors can have on Black or African American girls and their ability to form relationships with teachers to help reduce recidivism. The results of the study suggest the following implications for teachers and school leaders within the alternative school setting:

First, Black or African American girls need to be provided with consistent access to strategies that alternative school programs offer that best fit their needs. This would start by executing an evaluation of the strategies implemented within the alternative school setting and would follow with the incorporation of these strategies within the traditional or base school. Doing this would ensure that *all* schools would be providing access to best practices to reduce recidivism rates among Black or African American girls. This may include small class sizes, one-on-one support, counseling services, and the initiation of a mentorship program to provide a consistent positive relationship between teachers and school leaders and Black or African American girls. Teachers within this study reinforced the idea that they felt they were able to provide support in a variety of ways that the base school could not, so by ensuring that the base school could offer these supports would aid in the transition and reduce recidivism. This would

ensure that Black or African American girls had access to the supports put in place within the alternative school setting that help them be successful both academically and behaviorally, while not being in an alternative school environment that is over-represented with students of color. This would ensure equitable access to both support for behavior and academic success. Redefining the traditional or base school as a place where students are provided these supports on a consistent basis would help eliminate the systemic stigma placed on students because the school would be known more for its role in supporting and increasing success among Black or African American girls, instead of making it a place that leads students to the juvenile justice system. Changing the stigma by placing Black or African American girls in the appropriate setting to learn with the supports they need to be successful, would help impact the recidivism rate among Black or African American girls in alternative school settings and reduce the systemic stigma traditionally found in the base school setting.

Secondly, based on the teacher and school leader perspectives shown within this study, there is a critical need for a transitional program and process to be set up in order to support the transition from the alternative school to the base school for Black or African American girls. The transitional program and process should go beyond an intake meeting and should provide the girls with support identified as being effective within the alternative school setting, in addition to the same support as other students at the base school, for an extended period of time to ensure a smooth transition. This support would be outlined in a transitional plan that would be shared with all stakeholders; the student, parents, teachers, and school leaders (Sheldon-Sherman, 2010). It is suggested that all stakeholders who will work with the Black or African American girl fully understand the background of the student and the context of which helps the girl be successful

within the classroom setting, using the transitional plan. This teamwork would allow for all parties involved to understand the home and school environmental factors that may impact the Black or African American girls ability to be successful within the base school setting. This idea aligns with Hirschfield's (2014) findings that discussed transitional programs and processes to help students transition from juvenile correctional institutions to traditional school settings, which were initially created using the Intensive Aftercare Program (IAP) developed by David Altschuler and Troy Armstrong in 1994 (Pace, 2018).

Lastly, while the teachers within this study revealed that they lacked appropriate professional development to successfully meet the academic and behavioral needs of Black or African American girls, it is suggested that alternative schools seek to address the deeper root cause of behaviors and actions prohibiting Black or African American girls to be successful. The deeper root cause should allow the teachers and school leaders to learn strategies and best practices that allow them to eliminate stigmas and stereotypes in order to best meet the needs of Black or African American girls, which may need to begin with a transformation of school culture. This initiative would need to be one that would help transform, rather than reinforce the factors that systemic stigmas, home and school environment, and lack of base school support bring to the table (Kelly, 2020).

In order to do this, schools would need to implement a series of training and professional development sessions that are applicable to the student body within the alternative school setting. For example, in order to ensure that all teachers and school leaders understand the impact that home life may have on their students, a bus tour of the communities in which the students live in may be appropriate. This would allow teachers and school leaders to see some of the

environments students are coming to school from. Another example of training or professional development sessions that would be impactful would be to provide teachers with culturally responsive curriculums that meet the needs of Black or African American girls. This type of curriculum would push teachers beyond the stigmas and stereotypes that society has created and would provide an avenue of success for Black or African American girls. This would allow Black or African American girls to be able to relate to specific topics covered, especially those dealing with systemic or societal stigmas and could provide opportunities for candid conversations within the classroom, which helps build relationships.

### **Limitations**

Although this study had a number of compelling features, there are a few limitations to note: (a) that the sample size was focused on the alternative schools within the Corridor of Shame on the coast of South Carolina; (b) the sample size only consisted of alternative school teacher and leader perspectives; (c) data could not be broken down into specifics in terms of ethnicity among interview participants. As a result, these findings cannot be generalizable because responses may be different depending on the area the study is conducted in as well as if the study focused on a different race or gender. There may also be a variance in responses if students were involved. Nevertheless, the findings align well with and extend the literature on the impact that external factors can have on a teacher or school leader building relationships and reducing recidivism among Black or African American girls.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Findings from this study suggest a few ways to expand the knowledge base within the context of Black or African American girls and alternative school settings to help reduce recidivism. Recommendations for future research include:

1. A replication of the current study, using Black or African American girls as the sample to gain their perspectives on factors they believe impact recidivism and how they form relationships with their teachers would allow the researcher to expand the knowledge base. This type of study design would allow the researcher to compare data sets to identify emerging themes from both the teacher and school leader perspective as well as the Black or African American girls.
2. A study specifically aligned to observe the implementation of professional development series within an alternative school(s) setting. This would allow the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the types of professional development being provided to teachers and to assess the degree of its effectiveness among Black or African American girls in alternative school settings.
3. A study that takes on the perspective of a Black or African American girl and her experiences at an alternative school and documents her transition back to the base school in an ethnographic form. This would allow the researcher to identify areas of strengths and weaknesses through a Black or African American girls perspective in terms of the levels of support needed in order to reduce recidivism.
4. A curriculum analysis comparing curricular initiatives at alternative schools and traditional schools, to determine how each addresses social, emotional, and academic concerns through a culturally responsive lens.

5. An extension of this study using the survey responses from a quantitative lens analyzing the perspectives of teachers and school leaders in alternative school settings based on gender, ethnicity, and number of years of experience teaching in an alternative school setting specifically. The researcher would need to analyze their perspectives on relationships and recidivism among Black or African American girls.

## **Conclusion**

### **Factors Contributing to Recidivism**

Teacher and school leaders perceived that systemic issues relating to bias and discrimination paired with factors that impact their ability to build a relationship with Black or African American girls contributes to recidivism among Black or African American girls. As a result, the need for appropriately designed professional development that would most benefit Black or African American girls was left neglected, according to study participants. These issues stemming from the school environment served as perceived factors that contribute to recidivism among African American girls. The impact of the home environment for Black or African American girls also emerged as a main theme as a factor that impacts recidivism based on study participant perceptions. Lastly, the lack of base school support emerged as a concern among study participants when providing their perception on the factors that impact recidivism among Black or African American girls. Study participants focused on the idea that despite the support put in place for the girls in the alternative school setting, those supports diminish when they return to their base school, leaving the girls to fall back into previous behaviors, serving as a factor impacting recidivism rates in the alternative school setting.

### **Perspectives on Relationships Impacting Recidivism**

This study provided teacher and school leader perspectives on how relationships with Black or African American girls impact recidivism rates. The findings from interview responses supported the findings from the survey. Participants discussed the impact that societal labeling and specific racial stigmas have on the teacher's ability to form relationships with Black or African American girls, which related to the revealing of teacher misconceptions regarding cultural norms and expectations with the Black or African American community. Additionally, the school environment also had an impact on relationship development according to study participants with specific mentions of class size and classroom characteristics that best supported Black or African American girls. Participants praised their ability to form relationships when small class sizes and specific strategies were used to build relationships with Black or African American girls. Home environment impacted the teacher's ability to form relationships with Black or African American girls due to the fact that the girls were bringing in additional "baggage items" or challenges that teachers had to navigate through in order to build a strong relationship. Lastly, it was also confirmed that Lack of Base School support had an impact on the ability to form relationships with Black or African American girls because of how the girls are treated once they return to their base school. Teachers discussed that the unwelcoming environments that searched for ways to send the girls back to the alternative school built up walls of mistrust among the girls. This impacted the way that they acted once they returned to the alternative school, making it hard to form relationships.

Based on the findings from this study, it is evident that alternative school teachers and leaders understand the impact that they can have on Black or African American girls by being cognizant of external factors that may impact recidivism to help build meaningful relationships.

The implementation of best practices and support and the continued transformation of the purpose of alternative school settings to meet the needs of Black or African American girls will help reduce recidivism and aid in decreasing the discipline gap.



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## APPENDIX A

### SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

#### **The Silent and Forgotten Struggle: African American Girls & Alternative Schools Questionnaire**

**Section 1:** Please answer the questions below using a scale from 1-5, with 1 being the strongest disagreement and 5 being the strongest agreement.

Professional Development is strategically designed at my school to help me support African American girls in alternative school settings.	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: center;"> <div>Strongly Disagree</div> <div> 1      2      3      4      5 </div> <div>Strongly Agree</div> </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; margin-top: 10px;"> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> </div>
In the alternative school setting, African American girls must overcome significant barriers in order to be successful and return to their base school.	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: center;"> <div>Strongly Disagree</div> <div> 1      2      3      4      5 </div> <div>Strongly Agree</div> </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; margin-top: 10px;"> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> </div>
As a teacher/administrator in an alternative school setting, I face barriers or obstacles that may prohibit me from supporting African American Females from being successful in a school setting.	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: center;"> <div>Strongly Disagree</div> <div> 1      2      3      4      5 </div> <div>Strongly Agree</div> </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; margin-top: 10px;"> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> </div>
My role as a teacher/administrator in helping students transition back into the regular school setting is the same for all students.	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: center;"> <div>Strongly Disagree</div> <div> 1      2      3      4      5 </div> <div>Strongly Agree</div> </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; margin-top: 10px;"> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> </div>
My school provides support for African American females to reduce recidivism in the Alternative School setting.	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: center;"> <div>Strongly Disagree</div> <div> 1      2      3      4      5 </div> <div>Strongly Agree</div> </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; margin-top: 10px;"> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> </div>
Relationships between the teacher/administrator and student play an important role in reducing recidivism among African American girls in the alternative school setting.	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: center;"> <div>Strongly Disagree</div> <div> 1      2      3      4      5 </div> <div>Strongly Agree</div> </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; margin-top: 10px;"> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> </div>



African American girls express feelings of oppression as a cause for recidivism in the Alternative School setting.	<div style="text-align: center;"> 1      2      3      4      5  Strongly Disagree    ○    ○    ○    ○    ○    Strongly Agree </div>
African American girls express the lack of support from teachers as a cause for recidivism in the Alternative School setting.	<div style="text-align: center;"> 1      2      3      4      5  Strongly Disagree    ○    ○    ○    ○    ○    Strongly Agree </div>

**Section 2:** Please choose as many selections that you feel are appropriate for the statement.

For "Other...": Please describe in your own words.

What factors do you think lead to African American girls recidivism in the Alternative School setting?	<input type="checkbox"/> Lack of Support at Home <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of Support at the Base School <input type="checkbox"/> Pressure to prove themselves <input type="checkbox"/> Academic Weakness <input type="checkbox"/> Gang Involvement <input type="checkbox"/> Societal Expectations <input type="checkbox"/> Subjective Discipline <input type="checkbox"/> Zero Tolerance Policies <input type="checkbox"/> Other: {describe in your own words}
What challenges do you think African American girls face that contribute to a cycle of recidivism?	<input type="checkbox"/> Peer Pressure <input type="checkbox"/> Societal Expectations <input type="checkbox"/> Socioeconomic Status <input type="checkbox"/> Zero Tolerance Policies <input type="checkbox"/> Racial Perceptions and Expectations <input type="checkbox"/> I do not think African American girls face any greater challenge than any other type of student at their school. <input type="checkbox"/> Other: {describe in your own words}

**Section 3:** For this portion of the survey, please fill in an answer.

Describe the types of professional development or teacher training you have received related to working with African American girls in an alternative setting.
What do you see as the most important factors that contribute to the development of relationships between teachers/administrators and African American females at the alternative school?

Is this similar or different to your experience working with other groups of students?

What do you see as the most important factors that contribute to the lack of relationship development between teachers/administrators and African American females at the alternative school?

Is this similar or different to your experience working with other groups of students?

## **APPENDIX B**

### **INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. Tell me more about your experience in working with African American females. What works?
2. Can you give me an example of a successfully built relationship you had with an African American female? What strategies did you use? What worked? What didn't?
  - i. Or give me an example of an unsuccessful attempt. Why do you feel it didn't work?
3. Do you feel as if AA girls are repeating the cycle of attending the alternative school? Why do you feel African American girls are repeat 'visitors' to the alternative school?
4. You noted in the survey that the lack of support from teachers was not a cause of recidivism among AA females. What do you think is the main cause?
  - a. What external factors are impacting this?
5. You mentioned in your survey the following as a factors that may impact recidivism among African American females:
6. In what ways do external factors impact relationships between teachers and Black or African American females?
7. In what ways do you feel these external factors impact relationships between teachers and Black or African American females?
8. In what ways do teacher-student relationships impact African American or Black females recidivism rates in alternative school settings?

9. Can you give an example of a specific barrier(s) you see African American girls facing in your school that may impact recidivism?

a. What is the biggest barrier you've seen students bring into the classroom?

10. Tell me more about the professional development you mentioned:

i. What professional development has been offered? OR

ii. Tell me more about the specific support your school offers to help reduce recidivism among African American girls.

1. If there are none, what do you think would most benefit this particular group of students?

What is missing that you think would have a great impact?

## APPENDIX C

### IRB APPLICATION

You MUST download and save this form to your computer to complete.



Proposal # _____
Date: _____

#### Research with Human Subjects STUDENT Exempt Review Request

Fields marked with a red asterisk (\*) are **REQUIRED**. Incomplete forms will be returned without review.

<b>*PI Name:</b>	Amber LaSalle
<b>*PI Email:</b>	ajlasalle@coastal.edu
<b>*Study Title:</b>	The Silent and Forgotten Struggle: African American Girls & Alternative Schools
<b>*Proposed Start Date:</b>	04/11/2022
<b>*Proposed End Date:</b>	06/23/2022
<b>*Faculty Advisor Name:</b>	Dr. Suzanne Horn
<b>*Faculty Email:</b>	shorn@coastal.edu
<b>*Faculty Department:</b>	Spadoni College of Education

#### Section I: Research Team

**\*Enter each team member (including PI) in the table below. A member of the research team is defined as one who will: 1) access participants' private identifiable information; 2) obtain informed consent; or 3) interact with participants.**

All members of the team must complete the **REQUIRED CITI training**.

Name	Role	Responsibilities Select all that apply from the list of Responsibilities below (e.g., "a, b, c")	Receive IRB Correspondence Yes or No	CITI Completion Report #
Amber LaSalle	PI	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> d, m	Yes	35313246
Suzanne Horn	Faculty Advisor	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> l	Yes	32081642
	Other		Yes	
	Other		Yes	
	Other		Yes	
	Other		Yes	
	Other		Yes	

**Note:** Any changes in personnel must be submitted to the IRB at: [OSPRS@coastal.edu](mailto:OSPRS@coastal.edu).

#### Responsibilities

<b>a.</b> Screens potential participants	<b>h.</b> Conducts physical exams
<b>b.</b> Obtains informed consent	<b>i.</b> Collects biological specimens (e.g., blood samples)
<b>c.</b> Has access to identifiable data	<b>j.</b> Conducts study procedures
<b>d.</b> Administers survey(s)	<b>k.</b> Dispenses medications
<b>e.</b> Conducts interviews	<b>l.</b> Supervises exercise
<b>f.</b> Enters subject data into research records	<b>m.</b> Educates participants, families or staff
<b>g.</b> Analyzes data with identifiable information	<b>n.</b> Other: describe

**Note:** In some cases, expertise to perform study procedures (e.g., blood draws, interviewing participants about sensitive topics) must be documented to show that risks to participants are minimized. The Research Personnel Form and/or a CV may be attached to document expertise.

## Section II: Study Details

### 1. \*Study Description:

Briefly describe any relevant background, the purpose of the research, any literature searches performed, the research question and anticipated plans for disseminating results. If more space is needed, attach an additional document when submitting this form.

See attachment.

### 2. \*Procedures of the research as they relate to the participant:

If more space is needed, attach a separate document that includes: a summary of participant recruitment plans; description of the data that will be collected; and how the data will be stored and destroyed upon completion of the research.

See attachment.

### 3. \*Type of Research (check all that apply):

☐ Faculty Research

☒ Dissertation/Thesis/Honor's Thesis

☐ Product of Learning

☐ Class Project – Course Number:

☐ Other

Describe "Other":

### 4. \*Results Dissemination (check all that apply):

☒ Plan to publish (thesis, dissertation, journal, book, etc.)

☐ Plan to publicly present off-campus

☐ Plan to publicly present on-campus

☐ Will not publish or present outside of classroom assignment setting

### 5. \*Source of Funding

☒ N/A

☐ University

☐ Federal

☐ Other:

If federal or other funds are selected, attach a copy of the grant award/contract/cooperative agreement.

### 6. \*Is another organization engaged in the research (i.e., will an agent of another organization/institution obtain informed consent or interact with research participants)?

No ☒

If yes, please list the organization/institution(s) and indicate whether that IRB will review or rely on the CCU IRB.

If yes, please explain what, if any, relationship exists between the PI(s) and the organization/institution?

If applicable, attach statement of approval (e.g., letter of agreement) from any organization/institution that will need to approve the research.

### Section III: Review Categories

This section is **REQUIRED** – please select **at least one** category below.

- ☒ (1) Research, conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, that specifically involves normal educational practices that are not likely to adversely impact students' opportunity to learn required educational content or the assessment of educators who provide instruction.
- ☐ (2) Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if *at least one* of the following criteria is met:
- (i) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects;
  - (ii) Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation; or
  - (iii) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts at least a *limited review*.
- ☒ (3) Research involving benign behavioral interventions in conjunction with the collection of information from an adult subject through verbal or written responses (including data entry) or audiovisual recording if the subject prospectively agrees to the intervention and information collection and at least one of the following criteria is met:
- i. The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects;
  - ii. Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation; or
  - iii. The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts at least a *limited review* to make the determination.

Benign behavioral interventions are brief in duration, harmless, painless, not physically invasive, not likely to have a significant adverse lasting impact on the subjects, and the investigator has no reason to think the subjects will find the interventions offensive or embarrassing.

- ☐ (4) Secondary research for which consent is not required. Secondary research uses of identifiable private information or identifiable bio-specimens, if at least one of the following criteria is met:
- i. The identifiable private information or identifiable bio-specimens are publicly available;
  - ii. Information, which may include information about bio-specimens, is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, the investigator does not contact the subjects, and the investigator will not re-identify subjects;
  - iii. The research involves only information collection and analysis involving the investigator's use of identifiable health information when that use is regulated under HIPAA (i.e., 45 CFR parts 160 and 164, subparts A and E), for the purposes of "*health care operations*" or "*research*" as those terms are defined at 45 CFR 164.501 or for "*public health activities and purposes*" as described under 45 CFR 164.512(b); or
  - iv. The research is conducted by, or on behalf of, a Federal department or agency using government-generated or government-collected information obtained for non-research activities, and conducted in compliance with 45 CFR 46.104(d)(4)(iv).
- ☐ (5) Research and demonstration projects that are conducted or supported by a Federal department or agency, or otherwise subject to the approval of department or agency heads, or the approval of the heads of bureaus or other subordinate agencies that have been delegated authority to conduct the research and demonstration projects), and that are designed to study, evaluate, improve, or otherwise examine:
- public benefit or service programs;
  - procedures for obtaining benefits or services under those programs;
  - possible changes in or alternatives to those programs or procedures; or
  - possible changes in methods or levels of payment for benefits or services under those programs.

- ☐ (6) Taste and food quality evaluation and consumer acceptance studies, (i) if wholesome foods without additives are consumed or (ii) if a food is consumed that contains a food ingredient at or below the level and for a use found to be safe, or agricultural chemical or environmental contaminant at or below the level found to be safe, by the Food and Drug Administration or approved by the Environmental Protection Agency or the Food Safety and Inspection Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.
- ☐ (7) Storage or maintenance for secondary research for which broad consent is required: Storage or maintenance of identifiable private information or identifiable biospecimens for potential secondary research use if an IRB conducts at least a *limited review* and makes the determinations.
- ☐ (8) Secondary research for which broad consent is required: Research involving the use of identifiable private information or identifiable biospecimens for secondary research use, if the following criteria are met:
- (i) Broad consent for the storage, maintenance, and secondary research use of the identifiable private information or identifiable biospecimens was obtained in accordance with
    - a. § .116(a)(1) through (4), (a)(6), and (d);
  - (ii) Documentation of informed consent or waiver of documentation of consent was obtained;
  - (iii) An IRB conducts at least a *limited review* and makes the determination that the research to be conducted is within the scope of the broad consent; and
  - (iv) The investigator does not include returning individual research results to subjects as part of the study plan. This provision does not prevent an investigator from any legal requirements to return individual research results.



#### Section IV: Conflict of Interest

1. **\*Do any of the researchers responsible for the design, conduct or reporting of this research have a known or potential conflict of interest related to this research?**

No

*Conflict of interest relates to situations in which financial or other personal considerations, circumstances or relationships may compromise, involve the potential for compromising or have the appearance of compromising a researcher's objectivity in fulfilling research responsibilities.*

If yes, **please explain** who has the conflict, whether the conflict has been disclosed and/or managed and **explain how** participants will be protected from the influence of competing interests:

## Section V: Participant Population and Recruitment

1. \*Number of participants sought:

2. \*Targeted participant population (check all that apply, select at least one):

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> College students (= or >18 years)                | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Adults (non-college students >18 years)                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> College students (<18 years may participate)     | <input type="checkbox"/> Minors (<18 years/Age range): <input style="width: 80px;" type="text"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prisoners  | <input type="checkbox"/> Minorities  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cognitively or emotionally impaired              | <input type="checkbox"/> Institutionalized   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Non-English speaking                             | <input type="checkbox"/> In-patient (medical)  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pregnant   | <input type="checkbox"/> Outpatient (medical)  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Employees of a profit or non-profit organization | <input type="checkbox"/> International research  |

3. \*Federal regulations require the equitable selection of participants. Is the targeted population an appropriate group to bear the burdens of this research?

Yes

If no, please explain:

\*Are participants a subset of the population most likely to receive the benefits of this research?

Yes

If no, please explain:

4. Explain any inclusion and exclusion criteria for the study.

See attachment.

5. \*Describe how subjects will be recruited.

See attachment.

*If applicable, attach a copy of any recruitment materials being used.*

6. \*Does the research include any compensation or incentive for participation?

Yes



If yes, please explain:

Participants will be entered into a drawing to win a Target Gift Card (\$25). There will be two winners.

## Section VI: Informed Consent

**1. \*Consent to participate in the research will be sought by providing** (check all that apply):

- ☒ A statement of the purpose of the research
- ☒ An explanation of the procedures of the study
- ☒ An explanation of the foreseeable risks or benefits to the participant
- ☒ An explanation that participation is voluntary and that there are no consequences if the subject refuses to participate or decides to discontinue participation at any time
- ☒ Contact information for the investigator
- ☒ Statement of oversight and contact information for the OSPRS

If any of the consent items above are not checked, **please explain:**

**2. \*Will participants sign an informed consent?**

No



***\*Attach \*** a copy of the consent form or documentation of the text to be used in obtaining verbal consent.*

## Section VII: PI Statement of Assurance

By signing this Assurance, I understand that I am responsible for the activities related to the completion of this study, the protection of the rights and welfare of the human subjects and strict adherence by anyone on the research team to all Coastal Carolina University Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirements, federal regulations and state statutes for research involving the use of human subjects.

I understand that, should I use the project described in this protocol as a basis for a proposal for funding (either internal or external), it is my responsibility to ensure that the description of human subject activities in the funding proposal is identical in principle to that contained in this application.

I assert that the information provided in this application is accurate to the best of my knowledge and hereby agree to:

- Conduct this research in accordance with the relevant, current protocol(s) and will only make changes in a protocol after notifying the IRB, except when necessary to protect the safety, rights or welfare of subjects.
- Ensure that all research procedures involving human subjects will be performed under my supervision or that of another qualified research team member listed on this protocol.
- Inform all research subjects or legally authorized representative of the nature of this research project as required in 21 CFR Part 50 and 45 CFR Part 46. This includes allowing subjects, or legally authorized representatives, sufficient opportunity to review the consent document, to discuss the research with other people and to ask questions before signing the informed consent document.
- Ensure that the requirements for obtaining informed consent are met per the regulations found at 21 CFR Parts 50 and 56, and 45 CFR Part 46.
- Promptly report to the IRB all changes in the research activity, all unanticipated problems or any adverse experiences that occur in the course of the study.
- Ensure that all associates, colleagues and employees assisting in the conduct of the research are fully informed about the protocol and their respective research related duties and functions.
- Ensure that all research team members have completed the required CITI human subjects training program modules.
- Immediately notify the IRB upon termination of the study or departure of the PI from CCU.
- Maintain adequate and accurate records in accordance with the regulations and to make those records available for inspection in accordance with the regulations.
- NOT begin this study until final IRB approval has been obtained.

Entering my name and email address together constitute my intent to sign this application.

**PI Name:**

**PI Email:**

**Date:**

**Faculty Advisor:**

**Date:**

**Submit this protocol for review by emailing the completed form and all attachments to your faculty advisor.**

## **IRB Review Application**

### **CHECKLIST**

#### **STUDENT**

*Faculty Advisor submits ALL documents to [OSPRS@coastal.edu](mailto:OSPRS@coastal.edu)*

**Which category of Review you are requesting?**

- ☒ Exempt
- ☐ Expedited/Full Review

**Have you?**

- ☒ Completed Exempt/Expedited/Full Review Form
- ☒ Completed required CITI training modules
- ☐ Attached an Informed Consent document (ex: exempt, focus group, minor, interview, etc.)
- ☒ Attached ALL supporting documents (ex: surveys, recruitment letters, flyers, brochures, etc.)
- ☐ Attached a Debriefing Statement (if applicable)\*
- ☐ Attached Permission/Acknowledgment Letter from External Site (if applicable)

\*If your research is related to a sensitive subject, it is suggested that the contact information for Counseling Services be added to the informed consent document and debriefing information, if applicable.

**Office of Counseling Services  
251 University Blvd.  
(843) 349-2305**

#### **Required statement on ALL Informed Consent documents:**

**The Office of Sponsored Programs and Research Services is responsible for the oversight of all human subject research conducted at Coastal Carolina University. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact this office by calling (843) 349-2978 or emailing [OSPRS@coastal.edu](mailto:OSPRS@coastal.edu).**

*\*\*Failure to provide all documents can result in a delay in the review process.\*\**

## Section II: Study Details

### 1. Study Description:

- a. As a response to dropout rates and an increase in school disciplinary referrals, alternative school settings have been incorporated across the United States as a way to help at-risk students be successful in school. African American girls suspension rates and alternative school placements are on the rise due to zero tolerance policies, but the problem relates to a deeper level in noting the importance to understand how external factors affect the relationships between teachers and African American students and its impact on recidivism in alternative school settings.
- b. Extensive literature searches were performed regarding the history of alternative school settings, the impact of zero tolerance policies on African American females, and the outcomes of alternative school placement on African American girls' success rates in school.
- c. Research questions for this study include: In what ways do external factors impact relationships between teachers and African American Females? In what ways do teacher-student relationships impact African American recidivism rates in alternative school settings
- d. The researcher will disseminate these findings to the school districts in which the study was conducted in order to improve practice and identify areas of potential professional development for teachers and staff. Findings from this study will be

presented to the alternative school principal and any other member designated as a part of the leadership team to improve practices.

2. Procedures of the research as they relate to the participant:

- a. Participants will be sent a Google Form survey, in which the Informed Consent will be shown and participants will have the option to choose to continue with the survey or to decline, which will end the survey in its entirety. By completing this survey, participants are agreeing that they have read the study information, that they fully understand the contents of this document and consent to taking part in this study. Study information will be provided within the email blurb sent with the survey attached.
- b. The participants in this study will be selected based on employment at an identified Alternative School in the state of South Carolina.
- c. The data will be collected by participants answering the survey questions via the following question types:
  - i. Likert-Scale
  - ii. Select All That Apply/Multiple Response
  - iii. Open Ended Response
  - iv. Demographics

Additionally, participants can opt-in to participate in follow up interview questions with the researcher, if needed.

**Link to Survey:**

[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSceBdjYR7fY-leWSsGkInHJOSBt9EkFEhnpFvVcVUtnIk\\_7XQ/viewform?usp=sf\\_link](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSceBdjYR7fY-leWSsGkInHJOSBt9EkFEhnpFvVcVUtnIk_7XQ/viewform?usp=sf_link)

**Email Blurb (to be included with the survey):**

Hi,

My name is Amber LaSalle and I am a doctoral student at Coastal Carolina University. I am reaching out to you to share an opportunity for you to participate in a research study that involves your experience at the Alternative School as a teacher or administrator. Within my study, I focus on the impact of teacher/student relationships and how that relates to placement in Alternative School settings for African American girls. The following survey has been designed to collect information to help better understand the impact that relationships between teacher/student can have on recidivism in Alternative School Settings. In this survey, you will be asked to respond to questions on a scale of 1-5, multiple choice, and short answer. Your participation in this survey is voluntary and there is no consequence if you choose to not participate or decide to discontinue participation at any time. This survey should take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete.

You can access this short survey by clicking here: [African American Girls & Alternative Schools Questionnaire](#).

Please complete this form by May 9, 2022.

Participants in the survey have a chance to win a **\$25 Target Gift Card!**

Thank you in advance,  
Amber LaSalle

**Section V: Participant Population and Recruitment**

1. The participants included in this study will be teachers, administrators, and instructional coaches who are employed in an Alternative School setting in South Carolina. The participants excluded in this study are those teachers, administrators, and instructional coaches who are employed in a traditional school setting in South Carolina.
2. Describe how subjects will be recruited.
  - a. The participants in this study will be recruited based on employment at an identified Alternative School in the state of South Carolina. The list used to generate these teachers/administrators/instructional coaches can be found at this



website:

(<https://ed.sc.gov/districts-schools/student-intervention-services/alternative-schools/alternative-school-program-contact-list-2021-22/>). The researcher will use this

list of schools to identify teacher/administrator/instructional coach contact information via email to send the survey out.

- b. This survey will be sent out to participants on Monday, April 11, 2022 (if approved) and follow up survey reminders will be sent on each subsequent Monday until May 9, 2022.
3. The data collected will be stored on a Google Drive, that is password protected to ensure security and confidentiality. The data will be deleted from the designated Google Drive upon completion of the research.

## APPENDIX D

### INFORMED CONSENT FORM



### INFORMED CONSENT FOR HUMAN SUBJECT RESEARCH PARTICIPATION

#### **Introduction**

My name is Amber LaSalle and I am a Doctoral Candidate at Coastal Carolina University. I would like to invite you to take part in my research study entitled, "The Silent and Forgotten Struggle: African American Girls & Alternative Schools". You are free to talk with someone you trust about your participation in this research and may take time to reflect on whether you wish to participate or not. If you have any questions, I will answer them now or at any time during the study.

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study will be to understand the impact that relationships between teachers and Black or African American girls have on recidivism in an alternative school setting.

#### **Procedures**

For this research study, you will be asked to complete a brief, electronic survey consisting of 8 likert-scale questions, 2 multiple choice, and 5 short answer questions. If you agree, you may be contacted for follow-up interviews, if needed. These interviews would be conducted via phone or Zoom.

#### **Duration**

For this research study, your participation will be required for approximately 5-10 minutes. Participants may elect to be contacted for follow-up interviews, if needed. These interviews would take approximately 10-15 minutes.

#### **Rights**

You do not have to agree to participate in this research study. If you do choose to participate, you may choose not to at any time once the study begins. There is no penalty for not participating or withdrawing from the study at any time. If you are a CCU student, your decision to participate or not will have no affect on your grade.

#### **Risks**

During this research study, no risks or discomforts are anticipated.

#### **Benefits**

By agreeing to participate in this research study, you may benefit by improving relationships with staff members/students at the school. This research, however, may

help gain a better understanding of others within your community or society as a whole as a result of finding an answer to the research question.

### **Incentives**

For your participation in this research study, you will be entered in a randomized, electronic drawing to win one of (2) \$25 Target e-gift cards. All participants who wish to be included in this randomized, electronic drawing will need to include their email at the conclusion of the survey in order to be contacted, if drawn as a winner.

### **Confidentiality**

Unless you provide consent to the contrary, the confidentiality of your participation in this research study, your responses or any individual results will be maintained by the PI and all members of the research team.

Note that confidentiality will only be violated when required by law or the ethical guidelines of the American Psychological Association. This usually includes, but may not be limited to, situations when your responses indicate that you, or another clearly identified individual, is at risk of imminent harm or situations in which faculty are mandated reporters, such as instances of child abuse or issues covered under Title IX regulations. For more information about Title IX, please see the University's webpage at: <https://www.coastal.edu/titleix/>.

### **Sharing the Results**

As the Principal Investigator on this research study, I plan to share the results of this study by sharing it with the school board(s), the principal of the alternative school(s), and members of the school's leadership team to help educators make decisions and be informed of best practices to support African American girls within the alternative school setting.

### **Contacts**

If you have any questions about this research study, please feel free to contact me by phone 828-234-8169 or [ajlasalle@coastal.edu](mailto:ajlasalle@coastal.edu).

My faculty advisor on this study is Dr. Suzanne Horn and she can also be contacted by phone 843-349-4044 or email [shorn@coastal.edu](mailto:shorn@coastal.edu).

**The Institutional Review Board (IRB) under the Office of Sponsored Programs and Research Services is responsible for the oversight of all human subject research conducted at Coastal Carolina University. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant before, during or after the research study, you may contact this office by calling (843) 349-2978 or emailing [OSPRS@coastal.edu](mailto:OSPRS@coastal.edu).**

This research study has been approved by the IRB on [insert date of approval letter].  
This approval will expire on [insert expiration date from approval letter] unless the IRB  
renews the approval prior to this date.

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Consent**

### **Voluntary Consent for Participant:**

By completing this survey, you are agreeing that you have read the study information,  
that you fully understand the contents of this document and consent to taking part in  
this study. All of your questions concerning this study have been answered.

## APPENDIX E

### CODING THEMES FOR DATA ANALYSIS

Initial Code	Synthesis Examples to Support	Data Source	Final Theme
Acceptance/Respect	Concern about students having	Interview Response	
	Feel the need to be accepted	Interview Response	
	Students give in to peer pressure and cultural expectations versus doing well in academics	Interview Response	
Accepting Differences	seeing them for who they are understand the small things	Open-Ended Survey	

Initial Code	Synthesis Examples to Support	Data Source	Final Theme
Behavior Defines Student	Concerns about staff members not looking past previous actions from a student	Open-Ended Survey	Systemic Stigma
	Defining students based on past behaviors leads to undesired behaviors	Open-Ended Survey	
	Misunderstanding of disciplinary actions leading to mistrust of adults	Open-Ended Survey	
	Some teachers may be more quick to stereotype a student based on years of experience	Open-Ended Survey	
	Teacher-centered rules teacher-centered expectations versus student-centered	Open-Ended Survey	
Cultural Impact	Be aware of differences and know the approach to assist will be different	Open-Ended Survey	

Initial Code	Synthesis Examples to Support	Data Source	Final Theme
Cultural Sensitivity	Concern that some teachers of other races may not fully understand the impact that culture has on African American girls	Interview Response	
	If they're struggling, social, emotional, is academics really the most important thing right now?	Interview Response	
	Teachers must be aware of norms at home instilled by parents to fully understand a student	Interview Response	
	Teachers utilize surveys to help understand home life - How many people live in the house? What's your position in the house? How many adults are there? Who's in church?	Interview Response	
	Understanding that the teacher may represent an adult figure the student has at home - which could be positive or negative	Interview Response	
	Concern that drama and fighting with other students causes recidivism	Interview Response	

Initial Code	Synthesis Examples to Support	Data Source	Final Theme
Fight or Flight	Students resort to fighting first and talking after rather due to not knowing how to solve it in another way	Interview Response	
	Students respond to problems with fighting instead of walking away as a means to prove themselves	Interview Response	
	Students use fighting as a way to prove themselves	Interview Response	
	Students try to live up to their reputation	Open-Ended Survey	
	lacking opportunities to be successful	Interview Response	
	Peeling back the layers to understand deep trauma	Interview Response	
	Providing students with resources and supports they need to be successful	Interview Response	



Initial Code	Synthesis Examples to Support	Data Source	Final Theme
Awareness of Needs	Students are more than just a number	Interview Response	
	Students having a trusting adult they can have deep/hard conversations with	Interview Response	
	Students need personal contact that goes beyond the instructional day	Interview Response	
	take the time to listen and understand deep trauma	Interview Response	
	Providing students with resources and supports they need to be successful	Interview Response	School Environment
Empowerment	Ensuring students have opportunities to be successful and to have a growth mindset	Interview Response	
	Providing students the opportunity to discover who they are and how they fit into the world	Interview Response	
	Students just need someone to believe in them		

Initial Code	Synthesis Examples to Support	Data Source	Final Theme
		Interview Response	
Identity	Concern that students are still trying to figure out who they are despite trauma	Interview Response	
	Enforcement of school rules is inconsistent at base school and alternative school	Open-Ended Survey	
Inconsistent Rule Enforcement	Students feel personally connected to the consequences given to them, despite not understanding the rule	Open-Ended Survey	
Individualized Time	Providing students with resources and supports they need to be successful	Interview Response	
	Students are more than just a number	Interview Response	
	Students having a trusting adult they can have	Interview Response	

Initial Code	Synthesis Examples to Support	Data Source	Final Theme
	deep/hard conversations with Students need personal contact that goes beyond the instructional day	Interview Response	
	Rigid expectations to meet academic standards, without the support students need	Interview Response	
Lack of Academic Support	Students express frustration when they have a lack of understanding, but do not have the support to assist	Interview Response	
Opportunity	Students need to see success	Open-Ended Survey	
	adults interested in students lives	Open-Ended Survey	
Sense of Sincerity	Be a positive example for students	Open-Ended Survey	

Initial Code	Synthesis Examples to Support	Data Source	Final Theme
Small Class Size	Provide students sincere care	Open-Ended Survey	
	Can build relationships with smaller class sizes	Open-Ended Survey	
	Small class sizes allow teachers to work more closely with students	Open-Ended Survey	
	A focus on discipline rather than relationships being built at base school	Open-Ended Survey	
	Availability to provide one-on-one assistance in a smaller atmosphere allows students to get to know the teacher and vice versa	Interview Response	
	Classroom management is easier with small class sizes to assist with relationship building	Interview Response	
	The intermittent arrivals of students helps assist teachers with keeping classes small and building relationships as students arrive	Interview Response	

Initial Code	Synthesis Examples to Support	Data Source	Final Theme
Trust	Create mutual, meaningful relationships	Open-Ended Survey	
	Students are afraid of making connections	Open-Ended Survey	
	Teachers must actively find ways to build trust	Open-Ended Survey	
Understanding Trauma	Feel the need to be heard and understood by adults	Open-Ended Survey	
	Understand that trauma does not define them	Open-Ended Survey	
Breaking the Cycle	Having to work at a young age to break the cycle of poverty, but school provided the opportunity	Interview Response	
		Interview Response	

Initial Code	Synthesis Examples to Support	Data Source	Final Theme
Home Life	Behaviors of students are manifestations of the process to deal with situations that happen outside of the learning environment		
	Concern that students are expected to be the "adult" at home due to parents work schedule so teachers try to encourage students to be empowered and change the cycle	Interview Response	Home Environment
	Students need opportunities to be vulnerable and sensitive due to trauma at home and when teachers provide that, the student learns to trust	Interview Response	
	When home lives are hard, students search for ways to cope at school	Interview Response	
Parental Involvement	Students lack environments that encourage their voice to be heard	Open-Ended Survey	
	Students search for someone who "has their back"	Open-Ended Survey	

Initial Code	Synthesis Examples to Support	Data Source	Final Theme
Clean Slate Mentality	Girls want someone they can talk to because they may not have a reliable adult to talk to at home	Open-Ended Survey	Lack of Base School Support
	Parent experience in school impacts student experience in school	Open-Ended Survey	
	Parents may not be as involved and students are impacted by peers more than family	Open-Ended Survey	
	Concern that base schools seek to find ways to send a student back to the alternative school based on past behavior incidents	Interview Response	
	How do you overcome the fact that when you come back you are not really welcome?	Interview Response	
	Teacher chooses to get to know the student as an individual, not their discipline	Interview Response	
	Teacher promotes advocacy for student, beyond the discipline issues	Interview Response	

Initial Code	Synthesis Examples to Support	Data Source	Final Theme
Consistency to Build Trust	Stressed the impact of teacher attendance at school so students see the teacher as reliable	Interview Response	
	Students rely on a teacher to be there for them when they have made mistakes	Interview Response	
	Students respond to high expectations when they know the teacher cares for them	Interview Response	
	Understanding the adult that the student trusts the most to help intervene and guide student as a mentor	Interview Response	
Lack of Base School Support	Concerns about students being targeted based on past behaviors once they return to the base school	Interview Response	
	Lack of follow through to provide effective student	Interview Response	



Initial Code	Synthesis Examples to Support	Data Source	Final Theme
	supports at base school		
Perception of Discipline	Teachers struggle with classroom management and school-wide expectations to hold students accountable	Interview Response	
	Students resort to deflection due to past disciplinary situations instead of learning how to solve the issues	Interview Response	
	Teachers struggle with classroom management and school-wide expectations to hold students accountable	Interview Response	
	Teachers struggle with classroom management and school-wide expectations to hold students accountable	Interview Response	

Initial Code	Synthesis Examples to Support	Data Source	Final Theme
Accessibility	Learning about students beyond academics	Open-Ended Survey	
	time and accessibility	Open-Ended Survey	
	Focusing on academic standards rather than getting to know students	Open-Ended Survey	

## APPENDIX F

### LIKERT-T SCALE SURVEY RESPONSES

Likert-Scale Survey Question	1 - Strongly Disagree	2- Disagree	3- Neutral	4- Agree	5- Strongly Agree	Mean	Theme
My role as a teacher/administrator in helping students transition back into the regular school setting is the same for all students.	16.28%	2.33%	13.95%	20.93%	46.51%	3.79	Research Question 1: School Environment
In the alternative school setting, African American girls must overcome significant barriers in order to be successful and return to their base school.	6.98%	9.30%	16.28%	44.19%	23.26%	3.67	Research Question 1: Systemic Stigma, Lack of Base School Support, Home Environment
My school provides support for African American females to reduce recidivism in the Alternative School setting.	13.95%	13.95%	23.26%	30.23%	18.60%	3.26	Research Question 1: School Environment
Professional Development is strategically designed at my school to help me support African American girls in alternative school settings.	25.58%	20.93%	23.26%	18.60%	11.63%	2.7	Research Question 1: School Environment
African American girls express feelings of oppression as a cause for recidivism in the Alternative School setting.	20.93%	20.93%	34.88%	16.28%	6.98%	2.67	Research Question 1: Systemic Stigma
African American girls express the lack of support	20.93%	23.26%	27.91%	23.26%	4.65%	2.67	Research Question 1:

Likert-Scale Survey Question	1 - Strongly Disagree	2- Disagree	3- Neutral	4- Agree	5- Strongly Agree	Mean	Theme
from teachers as a cause for recidivism in the Alternative School setting.							Lack of Base School Support
Relationships between the teacher/administrator and student play an important role in reducing recidivism among African American girls in the alternative school setting.	0.00%	2.33%	11.63%	32.56%	53.49%	4.37	Research Question 1: School Environment
As a teacher/administrator in an alternative school setting, I face barriers or obstacles that may prohibit me from supporting African American Females from being successful in a school setting.	27.91%	20.93%	27.91%	13.95%	9.30%	2.56	Research Question 2: School Environment

## APPENDIX G

### MULTI-SELECT SURVEY RESPONSES

Multi-Select Survey Question	Response	Percent Selected	Theme
What factors do you think lead to African American girls recidivism in the Alternative School setting?	Lack of Support at Home	81.40%	Research Question 1: Systemic Stigma, School Environment, Home Environment, Lack of Base School Support
	Academic Weaknesses	67.44%	
	Lack of Support at the Base School	65.12%	
	Pressure to prove themselves	60.47%	
	Societal Expectations	55.81%	
	Gang Involvement	46.51%	
	Subjective Discipline	46.51%	
	Zero Tolerance Policies	34.88%	
	Academic Tutoring	2.33%	
	Mentorship Opportunities	2.33%	
	Anger Management	2.33%	
	Coping Strategies	2.33%	
	Girls rarely comes back to the Alt. The boys are most likely to come back. If the girls do come back is because of lack of self awareness or self control. They get caught up in fights and get expelled.	2.33%	
	Lack of positive role models in their life	2.33%	
	Lack of specific learning strategies	2.33%	
	Low self-esteem and concept	2.33%	
	No desire to do work	2.33%	
	Our alternative school does not provide students with the tools necessary to make changes that will enable them to be successful at their home schools (counseling	2.33%	

Multi-Select Survey Question	Response	Percent Selected	Theme
	Racial prejudice	2.33%	
	Socioeconomic Status	72.09%	
	Peer Pressure	69.77%	
	Societal Expectations	65.12%	Research Question 1:
What challenges do you think African American girls face that contribute to a cycle of recidivism?	Racial Perceptions and Expectations	51.16%	Systemic Stigma, Home Environment, Lack of Base School Support
	Zero Tolerance Policies	32.56%	
	I do not think African American girls face any greater challenge than any other type of student at their school.	11.63%	
	They aren't being given the tools to break the cycle of behavior that they have developed.	2.33%	

## APPENDIX H

### OPEN-ENDED SURVEY RESPONSES

Open-Ended Survey Question	Response	Percent Selected	Theme
Describe the types of professional development or teacher training you have received related to working with African American girls in an alternative setting.	None	48.84%	Research Question 2: School Environment
	School-Based Trainings	23.26%	
	Trauma Training	16.28%	
	Restorative Practices	9.30%	
	Social Emotional Learning	9.30%	
	Cultural Awareness	6.98%	
	Poverty Training	4.65%	
What do you see as the most important factors that contribute to the development of relationships between teachers/administrators and African American females at the alternative school?	MTSS	2.33%	Research Question 2: Systemic Stigma School Environment
	Trust	25.58%	
	Transparency	16.28%	
	Create a Comforting Environment	13.95%	
	Provide Opportunities for Success	11.63%	
	Sharing experiences	11.63%	
	Build a positive rapport with student	9.30%	
	Consistency	9.30%	
	Know Background/Home life	9.30%	
	Provide Outside Services (Therapy, Counseling, etc.)	9.30%	

Open-Ended Survey Question	Response	Percent Selected	Theme
	Authenticity	6.98%	
	Build a positive rapport with parents	6.98%	
	Empathy	6.98%	
	Growth Mindset within Student	6.98%	
	Small Class Size	6.98%	
	Actively Listening	4.65%	
	Mutual respect	4.65%	
	I think it is important to develop relationships with all students in the alternative placement, not just the girls.	2.33%	