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# Education Blues: A Study of the Experiences of Black Families Encountering Discipline Policies at a Charter School in Memphis, Tennessee

Ryan B. Warren

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EDUCATION BLUES: A STUDY OF THE EXPERIENCES OF BLACK FAMILIES  
ENCOUNTERING DISCIPLINE POLICIES AT A CHARTER SCHOOL IN MEMPHIS,  
TENNESSEE

by

RYAN B. WARREN

Under the Direction of Jonathan Gayles

ABSTRACT

This study will examine the educational experiences of black families with behavior management policies at a privatized public charter school. The sample for this study will include three African American families with middle school children enrolled in such a charter school. The study will utilize Critical Race Theory for the theoretical framework. Qualitative methods will be used to conduct in-depth interviews with students and their parents about their educational experiences as it pertains to behavior management systems at the charter school they attend. As a former teacher at the charter school in question, the researcher is uniquely positioned to gain insight from the perspective of former students and their parents.

INDEX WORDS: African American students, Behavior management, Critical Race Theory, Qualitative methods

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TENNESSEE

by

RYAN B. WARREN

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2018

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ENCOUNTERING DISCIPLINE POLICIES AT A CHARTER SCHOOL IN MEMPHIS,  
TENNESSEE

by

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Georgia State University

May 2018

**DEDICATION**

I dedicate this to my daughter, Kalani. I love you.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is important for me to acknowledge the people who support me in all that I do. I first must acknowledge that I would not have made the decision to pursue an academic career if it was not for the guidance, care, and love of my grandpa. From the day I was born, he has taught me valuable life lessons and reinforced the values that my parents instilled in me. I would also like to thank my parents who have always trusted my judgement and allowed me to expand my horizons with their unconditional love and support.

African American Studies is more than a college major to me. It is a community of scholars that is dedicated to community building, social justice, and empowering people of African descent in all aspects of life. With that said, I must thank my professors in the Pan-African Studies Department at the University of Louisville who first exposed me to ideas that challenged my thinking. I must also thank my professors in the African American Studies department at Georgia State University who have encouraged me to stay the course and continue to pursue my goals. Similarly, I would like to shout out all of my classmates in the field of Black Studies who have supported my efforts, exposed me to new concepts, and accepted me into the community.

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professor, and he has served as the chair to my thesis committee. I am forever grateful for all of his time and patience with me. He was able to see my vision for this research study and committed himself to supporting my efforts in completing the study I wanted to conduct.

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This study would not be possible nor relevant without the families who participated. They have sacrificed their time to participate in interviews for this study and remained open and honest throughout the process. I am thankful for their ongoing hospitality and support as we collaborate to improve education for the children of Memphis.

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## 1 REFLECTIONS

I first moved to Memphis in the summer of 2013 after recently graduating with my baccalaureate degree. I was a newly selected member of Teach For America (TFA) and had just been hired by a charter school in North Memphis to teach seventh grade social studies. I was excited about the possibilities of influencing young learners to become agents of social change. I must admit, arriving to Memphis was quite a culture shock.

As I rode into town on Interstate 40, I came behind a motorcycle club flying large confederate flags off the back of their bikes. Shortly thereafter, I arrived at the University of Memphis, where I would be staying for the summer institute for TFA. As I checked in, I noticed something I was not expecting: the majority of my cohorts were white. On the TFA website, I had read how they try to select corps members who come from similar backgrounds as the students they serve and being in Memphis, I thought that meant African American.

In summer training, I quickly identified the contradictions within the organization. As I moved from one session on behavior management policies that ensure student compliance, influenced by Doug Lemov (2010), to another session on the terrible racial oppression that has plagued the city of Memphis since its inception, I began to feel very uncomfortable. Similarly, the charter schools I worked at all sang the same song about putting students first, but rarely followed-up with any action to support that claim. It is difficult to believe that schools that implement testing constantly throughout the school year to collect data are really doing so for the students. Further, I do not believe a school that focuses so adamantly on strict discipline, including keeping students silent all day, are concerned at all about how the students feel or think.

My greatest concern came from being a white teacher who wanted badly to teach to spark a critical consciousness in students and uplift their voices and experiences, then realizing I would be tasked with doing the opposite. I was thrown into a system that not only failed to promote social justice, but boldly used the language associated with civil rights movements and social activism. When working at the charter school discussed in this study, I had a fifth grade girl raise her hand and ask a simple question: “Why are all the teachers at this school white?” As the class laughed and some oohs and aahs were heard, I simply replied, “that’s a great question.”

At the time I worked there, there were only three African American teachers at the school including the SPED teacher (yes, only one for the entire school!). However, one of those teachers was fired in the first semester of the school year. Nearly all of the teachers and administrators at the school were white and former TFA corps members. I could not help but wonder how the students received the demands for silence, perfect uniforms, and straight lines from their white teachers. I am grateful for the families who participated in this study who provided insight into these questions and who always showed me love from the time I stepped in front of their children.

## 2 INTRODUCTION

Beginning at the end of the 20th century, the most recent push in public school reform across the U.S. includes the emergence, and continued growth of privatized public charter schools. Charter schools most often replace “failing” traditional public schools in urban public school districts that serve the majority of the nation’s African American students. Schools are evaluated based on their performance on state-issued standardized tests and schools failing to meet their state’s required proficiency percentages are subject to scrutiny and possible closure. This reform is championed by Democrats and Republicans alike (Fabricant & Fine, 2015) and media outlets promote some charter networks as models for effectively educating marginalized student populations. However, researchers (Buras, 2015; Horn, 2016) have begun to dispute those claims and outline ways in which charter schools have deprived African American students of an equitable educational experience.

Charter schools are often modeled after the Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP) network that boasts a “No Excuses” model (Horn, 2016). The “No Excuses” model promotes “sweating the small stuff” and includes making children walk in straight silent lines in the hallways, and being silent for the majority of their school day (Horn, 2016). This model closely mimics the “zero tolerance” policy that was born out of the 1980s government-waged War on Drugs (Bonner, Butler, Joubert, & Lewis, 2010) where a wide range of offenses are met with non-negotiable punishment often leading to suspension and expulsion. In turn, students are deprived of critical engagement with academic material that would otherwise advance their learning experience.

In Memphis, Tennessee charter school reform has taken root and each year several traditional public schools find themselves on the “chopping block,” the list of schools subject to

close due to failing test scores on state standardized tests. KIPP schools and others who follow their model have embedded themselves in the educational landscape of Memphis. Like many districts that have been affected by charter school reform, it would not be difficult to find advocates from all backgrounds, races, socioeconomic status, and political affiliations in Memphis that support the ongoing effort to privatize public schools. However, the researcher, being a former teacher at three different privatized public charter schools in Memphis, will investigate the discipline policies and practices of a public charter school in an effort to understand if charter schools are meeting the expectations of the families they serve. The researcher experienced a constant internal dissonance as a white male teacher being expected to implement “No Excuses” discipline policies in a classroom serving African American students. It is for this reason that this study is a necessity.

## **2.1 Purpose of the Study**

This study will examine the discipline policies and practices, often referred to as behavior management systems, at a charter school in Memphis, Tennessee. The study will utilize counter-story telling which is a hallmark of Critical Race Theory (Buras, 2014; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Counter-story telling utilizes the experiential knowledge of marginalized people to form a narrative that opposes the “mainstream,” or white narrative. For this study, former students of the researcher and their parents or guardians will be interviewed in in-depth semi-structured interviews to better understand their experiences with the discipline policies and practices at the charter school. The research question that will guide this study follows: “What are the educational experiences of black families with behavior management policies at a privatized public charter school?”

### 2.1.1 Key terms

*African American/ Black-* To reflect the ways in which different authors and participants have contributed to this paper, these terms will be used interchangeably to describe people of African descent living in the United States.

*Behavior management systems-* This term refers to the behavioral expectations that an administration and its teachers have put in place at a school.

*Behavior management-* *Behavior management* refers to the practices of administrators and teachers as they interact with children concerning behavior.

*Counter-story telling-* *Counter-story telling* is defined as “a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told” (Solorzano & Yosso 2002, p. 32).

*Charter school-* The term *charter school* will be used to refer to “publicly funded schools that operate outside of the direct control of local school districts” (Zimmer 2009, p. iii).

*Discipline Policies-* For the purpose of this study, the terms *discipline policies* and *behavior management systems* will be used interchangeably.

*Discipline Practices-* For the purpose of this study, the terms *discipline practices* and *behavior management* will be used interchangeably.

*Experiential knowledge-* this term refers to the knowledge that comes from the “lived experiences” of people of color (Solorzano 1997, p. 7).

*KIPP-* Knowledge is Power Program, a network of public charter schools that operates nationwide and is considered the model for “No Excuses” schools.

*No Excuses-* This term refers to the behavior management systems/discipline policies (and how they are implemented) of charter schools that are extremely rigid and will be the focus of this study.



*Privatized public charter schools*- As stated above, charter schools are publicly funded schools, however, privatization refers to the fact that charter schools are governed by private boards that create their own rules and by-laws with no direct public oversight (NEA, 2014). The terms privatized public charter schools and charter schools will be used interchangeably in this study.

*TFA*- Teach For America, a teacher recruitment organization that places recent college graduates in impoverished rural and urban communities to fill teaching positions, often at public charter schools.

## **2.2 Background**

An examination of the history of public education in the United States highlights a troubled system plagued by institutional racism. There have been different stages of school reform over the years as racism takes new forms and activists fight to change policies that are detrimental to the education of young black students. This investigation will use Critical Race Theory to examine the changing dynamics of public schooling in the U.S. In order to contextualize the ever-changing climate of public education, this study examines the work of Carter G. Woodson in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, leading to the *Brown v. Board of Education* supreme court decision in 1954 and the push to desegregate public schools, and the more recent school reform measures beginning in the 1990s when privatized charter schools became a reality. The following review of literature will examine these reforms to place the current climate of public education in Memphis, Tennessee into context.

### ***2.2.1 Literature review***

The focus of this research is the current reform taking place in public education in the United States. The reform is strongly led by the emergence of privatized public charter schools that are replacing our nation's traditional public schools primarily in urban centers where African

American students are attending school. This review of literature will largely focus on the major events that have affected public education reform throughout history in order to place the current reform movement into context. It is important to note that although *Brown v. Board of Education* stands as perhaps the first major event to influence public education reform, the formal public schooling of African American children has a history that stretches back to the previous century.

As James Anderson (1988) states, “[b]lack education developed within [the] context of political and economic oppression” (p. 2). Public schools serving black students were first built in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century shortly after the institution of slavery was dismantled. However, this did not necessarily mean an easy path to freedom and equality for African Americans living in the U.S. Discrimination in public transit, unequally allocated funds for school buildings, and a host of other inequalities prevented African Americans from starting on an equal footing with their white counterparts. Vanessa Siddle Walker (1996) explains that despite the inequalities that are often highlighted as the history is told, there were schools in African American communities that were thriving. Furthermore, Adam Fairclough (2007) discusses the importance of black teachers in their communities and how they were highly respected citizens. Later, with the threat of desegregation, successful black schools and their teachers would face some painful setbacks.

Carter G. Woodson, author of *The Mis-education of the Negro*, made significant contributions to public education with an emphasis on African American history. Many researchers have acknowledged Woodson as a leading black scholar in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Buras, 2014; Durden, 2014; Goggin, 1993; King, et al. 2010; Fenderson, 2010; & Wiggan, 2010) who labored to empower black students with the knowledge of their own history. The

history of black people was then, as it is in many cases today, mostly omitted from textbooks. If there was a mention of black people, it served as a reminder of the inferior status that white supremacy placed on them in the U.S. Through Woodson's work, he developed culturally relevant curriculum for black students and had an unwavering devotion to black history (Woodson, 1995). He is responsible for founding Black History Week which eventually became Black History Month uniquely situated around the birthday of his predecessor Frederick Douglass. Woodson's legacy has left a lasting impression on public education and programs such as Black Studies in colleges and universities owe a good deal of gratitude to him. Woodson told a counter-story, before Critical Race Theory (CRT) existed as a framework (discussed below), by unearthing the experiences and histories of black people and making them accessible to the masses (Woodson, 1995).

#### ***2.2.1.1 Brown v. Board of Education***

Since the onset of public education in the United States, black students have found themselves on the margins of school policy and reform. This was magnified after the ruling of *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896 when the supreme court ruled "separate but equal" with regards to all aspects of social life including the schoolhouse (Buras, 2013). It quickly became apparent that spaces and resources reserved for black citizens would be separate, but they were far from equal. In his book entitled *Souls of Black Folk*, W.E.B. Du Bois (2003) recounts the summertime experience of teaching in a school for black students in rural Tennessee and the underwhelming conditions of the single-room schoolhouse reserved for their learning. As black people experienced these unequal and under-resourced conditions, they fought for a change that would give black students the tools they needed for success.

Although not always visible to the public, activists were fighting for equal opportunities in education as early as the 1930s and 1940s. School desegregation became the law with the passage of *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 (Ladson-Billings, 2004). The cases (over 100) brought forth in *Brown* highlighted the inequalities between black and white schools. Since the ruling of *Brown II*, which came a year later, called for desegregation with “all deliberate speed,” (Bell, 1995a, p. 6) school systems around the country dragged their feet while fighting back against the ruling. Public school systems across the nation proved to be unable to successfully desegregate despite decades of legal battles and strategies, such as busing, proposed by local and federal government. As the battle of *Brown* continued, it was argued that desegregation may not be the answer to the shortcomings of school districts serving black students (Ladson-Billings, 2004). School desegregation, it can be argued, has never fully materialized although it became a symbol of school reform for several decades (Ladson-Billings, 2004).

In some cases, schools serving black students did not wish to integrate. Black school leaders and teachers understood that integration would likely mean an end to their career as white teachers would be prioritized for jobs. Also, there are cases pointed out by Derrick Bell (1995a), in which schools did not wish to integrate because of its success as a black institution. In these ways, *Brown* became a symbol for yet another failed reform strategy as white supremacists managed to find fluidity in their racist practices.

Derrick Bell (1995b), a notable pioneer in Critical Race Theory, describes “interest convergence” by stating that “the interest of blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of whites” (p. 22). Consequently, Bell situates the *Brown* decisions as a policy beneficial to the U.S. The court ruling put the U.S. in a positive light internationally, it holds to the doctrine that “all men are created equal,” and offered

reassurance to black veterans who served in World War II and were facing discrimination and violent attacks upon returning to the country (Bell, 1995b).

### ***2.2.1.2 Neoliberalism, Teach For America, and Charter School Reform***

Most recently, education reform has taken a new face with the formation of privatized public charter schools which began to take root in the early 1990s. Charter school reform threatens traditional public schools serving low-income black students with failing to meet the criteria set by local governments which determine their fate. As traditional public schools are closed, privatized charter schools move into the community and set up shop. Closing black schools has proven to be a trend since the inception of *Brown*, and the policy remains that black students suffer the brunt of school reform.

The new age of education policy has been described as neoliberal school reform (Horn, 2016; Stuart-Wells, Slayton, & Scott, 2002). David Harvey (2005) defines neoliberalism as “a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (p. 2). Consequently, the adaptation of neoliberal policies in education reform have turned our nation’s public schools into economic interests. The reforms in place (i.e. charter schools, TFA, etc.) are geared towards globalization and “schooling [is] conceptualized from an economic perspective” (Horn, 2016, p. 66). Therefore, the white power structure has immense influence over the education of impoverished communities of color.

Several scholars have written about the impact of neoliberal policies and their impact on public education (Au & Ferrare, 2015; Casey, 2016; Fabricant & Fine, 2015; Kretchmar, Sondel, & Ferrare, 2014). Zachary Casey (2016) explains the push by neoliberal reformers to promote

public education as an avenue to generate workers in an economic system to produce consumable goods. In other words, in the neoliberal reform movement, schools are places to prepare students to be producers in the economy. This differs from the teachings of equitable educators who strive for educational experiences that foster social justice and critical thinking skills. Unfortunately, many of the charter schools that come out of this neoliberal reform misleadingly use the language of civil rights movements to promote themselves to communities of African American families.

With the support of both Republicans and Democrats, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) “was signed into law by President Bush on January 8, 2002” (Hursh, 2007, p. 493). The new law cemented the path of education reform in high-stakes testing and accountability. The neoliberal influence of this reform bill was based on an expanding global economy and the promise to increase academic achievement. Although the law was touted by its proponents as a vehicle to increase student achievement, David Hursh (2007) argues that the policies that came out of NCLB have not accomplished the goals they intended. The demand for high achievement on standardized tests and the push for education that prepares children for a global economy gave way to the increase of privatized public charter schools and other edu-businesses.

In his book, *Work Hard, Be Hard: Journeys Through “No Excuses” Teaching*, Jim Horn examines the close relationship that Teach For America (TFA), an organization that gives teachers an “alternative route” to becoming certified, has with the Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP) charter network that is a model in the charter school sector. Horn (2016) notes that with high teacher attrition rates, KIPP depends on TFA for its human capital. It is important to recognize how these human capital ventures have impacted veteran black teachers across the country.

Black teachers have largely felt the impact of school reform policies (Bell, 1995a), and in cities across the country TFA continues the practice by replacing local veteran black teachers with predominantly white teachers who are rarely native to the communities where they teach. Kristen Buras (2015) gives an eye-opening account of these practices. For example, in New Orleans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina “7,500 veteran educators and support staff, many of them tenured and most of them African American” were fired en masse (p. 25). Shortly thereafter, TFA was brought into the city to begin recruiting inexperienced, recent college graduates to train for teaching positions.

In addition to the firing of black teachers that made way for less experienced white teachers in New Orleans, Adrienne Dixson, Kristen Buras, and Elizabeth Jeffers (2015) describe what stands to be lost at the expense of charter school reform. Not only are veteran black teachers replaced, but the closing of traditional public schools that serve African American communities diminishes the histories of black neighborhoods that are rich in culture and have strong influences on the city’s identity. When traditional public schools are taken over by privatized charter schools run by outsiders who do not understand the culture of the communities they are impacting, it creates a distance between the students schooling experience and their families. Much like New Orleans, Memphis is a city with rich African American cultural roots that stands to lose out in this era of charter school reform.

In her article entitled “How White Teachers Construct Race,” Christine Sleeter explains that while the population of the United States is becoming increasingly diverse, the teacher workforce in public schools is becoming increasingly white. As TFA continues to recruit corps members from predominantly white middle-class backgrounds and bring them to regions of the country serving students of color, they perpetuate a system where white teachers are prioritized

for jobs and students' identities are becoming less represented in classrooms. The responsibility cannot be solely placed on TFA, however, as neoliberalism creates a space for privatized charter schools to carry out a similar agenda.

Sleeter (1993) identifies some of the issues with having white teachers in classrooms of predominately black and brown students. She notes that “racist institutions...are controlled by whites, who restrict the access of non-whites to power and privileges” (Sleeter, 1993, p. 164). When one sees the workings of a charter school that lines students up and marches them down hallways, like a boot camp or prison, then humiliates those who are not dressed “appropriately,” there should be questions raised about the end goal of the institution (Horn, 2016). Although these schools and TFA have heartfelt slogans and mission statements pledging to prepare students for college and career, their methods prove to be peculiar. Sleeter (1993) explains that giving white teachers training in cultural awareness is simply not enough. Too often, white teachers claim colorblindness or simply reinforce their own beliefs when confronted with the topic of race (Sleeter, 1993).

Proponents of education reform must acknowledge that although racism exists on an individual basis when it comes to white teachers, institutionalized racism is a glaring problem within the public charter schools. Sleeter (1993) differentiates between a “logical analysis” of racism and a “structural analysis” of racism. The logical analysis looks at the beliefs and practices of the individual, while the structural analysis evaluates the role of the institution. When looking at organizations such as TFA and privatized charter schools, they will not become any “less racist... as long as white people control them” (Sleeter, 1993, p. 164). Black children deserve an opportunity to interact with teachers who look like them and have had similar life experiences. It is a racist history in the U.S. that has placed black folks on



the margins and created a narrative that “shows the superiority” and “dominance” of white people over black people (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 8).

There is emerging research that examines the practices of charter schools that implement the “No Excuses” model (Horn, 2016; Yeh, 2016). Horn (2016) describes some damaging outcomes when depending on high expectations at public charter schools following the “No Excuses” model. He notes that this model “leads us away from the corrosive socioeconomic realities outside of school, while pushing our attention toward blaming children or blaming schools and their teachers” (Horn, 2016, p. 16). Further, the practices of “No Excuses” charter schools “look more penal than pedagogical” (Horn, 2016, p.16). Such practices include making children walk in straight, silent lines in hallways; students being labeled as “miscreants,” for not meeting expectations, and shouting at students (Horn, 2016, p. 22). These practices have shaped KIPP charter schools and have been closely modeled by many other charter organizations (Horn, 2016). KIPP schools experience high attrition rates for students due to the overwhelming demand placed on children and the high rates of suspensions and expulsions (Horn, 2016; Buras, 2015).

Kristen Buras (2015) outlines some of the troubling issues faced when one of KIPP’s strongholds, New Orleans, Louisiana handed over the entire public school system to education entrepreneurs following the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina. It is important to consider New Orleans because it has been touted as a model for innovative school reform since privatized charter schools moved into the area. Buras notes that charter schools operate as a system of schools rather than a school system. This decentralization of governance leads to less consistency across schools and, in effect, pits schools against one another. While inexperienced

teachers and administrators are brought in and local veteran educators are pushed out, charter school reform threatens to rid local communities of their historically rich cultural identities.

Kenneth Saltman (2014) explains the rigidity of privatized charter schools in the age of neoliberal school reform in his discussion of the focus schools have on *grit*. The proponents of charter school reform promote the character trait of grit as a form of self-discipline one possesses to ultimately accomplish a task (Saltman, 2014). Grit is acquired by students through rigid discipline policies that are in place to enforce the production of academic work. The focus on grit does not necessarily help instill a sense of passion in the students that would make their work more meaningful. Therefore, grit is a character trait that charter schools hope to instill in their children for the purpose of preparing them for the global economy.

### ***2.2.1.3 Public Education in Memphis, Tennessee***

Marcus D. Pohlman (2008) gives a detailed history of public education in Memphis, Tennessee. The first public schools in Memphis were opened in 1848 and provided a free education for white children. Years later, Memphis fell to the Union army early in the Civil War which allowed the Freedmen's Bureau to begin setting up schools for African Americans in the city. In 1866, racial tensions grew in the city as Irish residents became frustrated with competing for jobs with their African American neighbors. A three-day riot ensued and in the end all 12 schools serving African Americans were destroyed.

In 1869, the fourth charter for public schools in Memphis created the first official board of education and, "significantly, ...mandated that the city begin educating its African American students as well" (Pohlmann, 2008, p. 46). In the following two decades, the population of the city of Memphis would be ravaged by the yellow fever epidemic. Two of the first newly built schools erected in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century were Peabody High School for whites and Clay High

School for black students. The construction of these schools demonstrates the inequalities of public education in Memphis from the onset since the Peabody building fund nearly doubled that of the Clay school. Between 1889 and 1899 there were six new schools built, five for white students and only one for black students even though the city's population was more than a third African American.

The 1896 supreme court decision, *Plessy v. Ferguson* cemented the oppression and inequalities that would be carried out against black communities and their schools in the Jim Crow South. It was not until 1954 when the supreme court decided in *Brown v. Board of Education* in favor of school desegregation on the basis that black and white children were receiving unequal education opportunities. Even with this ruling, there was tremendous resistance from whites to abide by the new law and Memphis was no exception.

Daniel Kiel (2008) details the efforts of fourth grader Gerald Young and his mother to desegregate Volland Elementary School in September of 1958. The mother and her young son were sent away from the school which "was more than five blocks closer" than the segregated school he previously attended (Kiel, 2008, p. 262). Gerald's enrollment was denied based on the grounds that the system did not grant transfers "for mere convenience" (Kiel, 2008, p. 262). With the local schools unwilling to voluntarily desegregate, "Gerald Young and seventeen other Black school children filed suit on March 31, 1960" (Kiel, 2008, p. 270). The board of education was "well aware of the highly publicized and confrontational desegregation occurring in... Little Rock and New Orleans, and wanted desperately to avoid similar confrontations in Memphis" (Kiel, 2008, p. 272). In 1962 the court decided that desegregation efforts that "plac(ed) thirteen out of 51,000 Black students in formerly all-White schools was insufficient" (Kiel, 2008, p. 275).

Kiel details other battles for desegregation in Memphis that took the spotlight away from education in the following years. There were efforts to desegregate Memphis City Parks and more notably a strike by the city's sanitation workers who were mostly black. The sanitation worker's strike attracted the attention of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. who helped the workers organize peaceful protests in response to the city's unfair treatment and working conditions. On April 4, 1968, the morning after delivery his impassioned "I've Been to the Mountaintop" speech, Dr. King was assassinated by a sniper while leaving his hotel room in downtown Memphis. Riots broke out in Memphis in the days following Dr. King's death and the ordeal had lasting negative effects on the city.

A push for better "neighborhood schools" helped stagnate the desegregation efforts of the 1960s as the neighborhoods of Memphis were largely segregated (Rousseau, 2006, p. 116). As Kiel notes, "Residential segregation in Memphis actually increased between 1950-1970" (p. 287). In addition, the racial makeup of the city was changing and by 1970 the city population was 55 percent black (Rousseau, 2006). This change in demographics is largely attributed to "white flight," (Rousseau, 2006, p. 118) in which white residents move out of neighborhoods toward suburban areas as black residents move in. As neighborhoods experienced high degrees of racial segregation, school zones were being gerrymandered in order to ensure the segregation of neighborhood schools based on housing in the city. Thus, "the... district lines... result(ed) in predominantly Negro schools in one district and predominately white schools in an adjacent district" (Rousseau, 2006, p. 118).

Rousseau contends the next significant change to public education came in the early 1970s when busing was enacted as a means for desegregating Memphis schools. By 1973, only 33 percent of the city schools were white as a result of white families leaving the district to avoid

busing. An organization called Citizens Against Busing quickly formed several private schools at this time which drew a large portion of white students away from the city schools. The number of white students in Memphis city schools would continue to drop dramatically over the next couple of decades.

Several changes have come to Memphis schools in the new millennium. The first charter schools opened in the city in 2002, and in 2012, the Achievement School District (ASD) was given authority to close schools ranked in the bottom 5 percent in the state and replace them with charter schools. TFA partnered with the city in 2006 to help staff the growing number of charter schools in the area. TFA signifies a phenomenon highlighted by Zeus Leonardo and Margaret Hunter in their essay entitled, “Race, Class, and Imagining the Urban.” The authors explain how “urban reality” can be “imagined” as a positive place that “represents an outlet for entertainment and a venue for a sophisticated life” or as a negative place that is “an inescapable cul-de-sac of poverty and daily degradation” (Leonardo & Hunter, 2009, p. 148).

In an effort to recruit aspiring teachers to come to Memphis, the website for TFA Memphis exclaims “Memphians enjoy food just as much as they enjoy music (luckily most places offer the best of both), and restaurants offer great cuisine every night of the year” (Memphis, 2017). The website goes on to advertise all the cultural amenities the city has to offer, as if it is a travel agency. The problem is that the people of Memphis who create and maintain this culture are being exploited by the organization who has infiltrated their schools with these tourist-like teachers. The practices and policies of TFA Memphis showcase the ignorance and contradictory messages being sent by school reformers who disregard the value of the community members in the cities where they are located.

In addition to charter school reform, the city and county school districts briefly merged after years of efforts on the part of Memphis city officials to consolidate. The Memphis area was long operating under a dual school system, one predominantly white suburban district of Shelby County and the other predominantly black district of Memphis City. Mayor Willie Herenton pushed for consolidation of these two districts from the time he was elected in 1991 (Pohlmann, 2008). This dream was realized in 2011 when the Memphis school board voted to dissolve the city school district into the county school district. However, shortly after the merger suburban towns quickly seceded from the consolidated school system creating their own districts.

#### ***2.2.1.4 Discipline in Public Schools***

Over the past couple of decades, discipline policies and practices in our nation's public schools have been the increasing focus of research in the field of education (Bonner et al., 2010; Cornell et al., 2010; Fabelo et al., 2011; Horn, 2016; Noguera, 2008). This important research reveals that African American students are subject to harsher discipline than whites (Bonner et al., 2010; Fabelo et al., 2011; Morris, 2016; Noguera, 2008). These findings have the greatest impact on black students coming from impoverished families and neighborhoods. The implications of these discipline policies often mean that African American students spend less time in the classroom due to suspensions and expulsions. Therefore, African American students living in poverty are placed at a greater disadvantage to attain academic achievement (Noguera, 2008).

In her best-selling book, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, Michelle Alexander (2012) describes and contextualizes the history of criminal justice in the United States and how African Americans fell victim to mass incarceration through criminalization. Alexander (2012) draws the connections between the work of civil rights

activists in the 1950s and 1960s and the direct conservative response which called for “law and order” in the streets of America. By the early 1980s, she states, “President Reagan officially announced his administration’s War on Drugs” (Alexander, 2012, p. 49). Just a couple of short years later, this tough talk had reached the mainstream when “*Newsweek* declared crack to be the biggest story since Vietnam/Watergate...[and]...*Time* magazine termed crack ‘the issue of the year’” (Alexander 2012, p. 51). Alexander (2012) argues that the War on Drugs provided white people the race neutral language to oppose African Americans.

In addition, the focus has become increasingly situated on our nation’s children, specifically young people of color. On a mission to criminalize specific groups, politicians and policy experts who uphold the white power structure have further pushed ideas that dehumanize young African Americans specifically. In an article he wrote in 1995, John Dilulio birthed the term “super-predators” to describe children he deemed as aggressive, violent, and animalistic. In the article he describes “elementary school youngsters who pack guns instead of lunches” (Dilulio, 1995, para. 2). Dilulio later proclaimed his regrets for his depiction of children in his mid-1990s article (Becker, 2001), however, the damage was already done. Politicians, including Hillary Clinton, were using the term super-predators to describe young people of color and were influencing public policies in criminal justice reform and education reform.

The term *zero tolerance* first gained national attention in the mid-1980s when boats and vehicles used to carry drugs across the U.S. boarder were being seized (Skiba, 2000). Much as Alexander (2012) notes, Skiba (2000) explains that the mass hysteria caused by zero tolerance rhetoric did not take long to spread across the nation. Skiba (2000) explains that the language of zero tolerance “within months began to be applied to a broad range of issues, ranging from environmental pollution and trespassing to skateboarding, homelessness, and boom boxes” (p.

2). In schools, zero tolerance policies translate to “expulsions, locker searches, the use of metal detectors, [and] school uniforms” (Skiba & Peterson, 1999, p. 376).

One of the catalysts for zero tolerance policies in the 1980s was the *broken windows theory* presented as a policing strategy by James Wilson and George Kelling (1982). Broken windows refers to the concept that if a small problem is left unattended, then the effects of that problem will likely spread causing bigger issues. Similar to how a small crack in a window would spread if not remedied early on, a child having a conversation with a peer during silent work time could spread to an all-out argument or fight, so the logic goes. In this way, schools have adopted the idea that small problems must be addressed swiftly in order to prevent chaos. In his book, *Teach Like a Champion*, Doug Lemov charges teachers to “sweat the details” (p. 195). In that section of the book, he specifically refers to the broken window theory. The book is lauded by educators at urban charter schools and used religiously by administrators for teacher professional development.

Lemov (2015) released an updated version of the book which includes many of the original teaching strategies he promotes. In one section of the book, he argues that teachers must demand one hundred percent compliance from their students (Lemov, 2015). He states teachers should “[e]nsure that students follow through on a request in an immediate and visible way by setting a standard that’s more demanding than marginal compliance” (Lemov, 2015, p. 393). The language of compliance is troublesome when talking about school children who bring their own knowledge to be shared and appreciated in the classroom. Compliance and broken windows assume there is a crack to be fixed before the students enter the school’s doors.

In contrast, Luis Moll (1992), in his work with Chicano communities in Arizona, argues that students bring “an array of cultural and intellectual resources” (p. 132) to the school from



their homes. Similar to Moll, Paulo Freire (1972) argues that teachers have as much to learn from their students as the students do from teachers. It is difficult to imagine a learning environment that elevates the experiences of the children when compliance is demanded. Furthermore, it is unlikely for students to acquire a critical consciousness, as Freire encourages, in a classroom where students are treated as subordinates.

Our nation's urban public schools have largely adopted the zero tolerance approach when it comes to discipline policies (Monroe, 2005; Noguera, 2008). To be sure, "zero tolerance refers to policies that harshly punish all forms of student misconduct and wrongdoings with little or no regard for the severity of the offense that is committed" (Bonner et al., 2010, p. 8). Henry Giroux (2003) argues that these policies have specifically targeted children and posited them as irredeemable heathens prone to violence. Additionally, he maintains that children should be allowed to make mistakes as part of the educational process. There may not be a better example of zero tolerance policies in education than in "No Excuses" charter schools that serve predominantly poor black students across the country. This model has spread wildly and stands to be challenged.

The implications of these discipline policies are detrimental to the future of black students living in poverty. Studies have investigated the link between discipline policies that affect black students and incarceration rates (Darensbourg & Perez, 2010; Paternoster & Rocque, 2011) and how school discipline relates to the criminalization of students (Payne & Welch, 2010). The exclusionary practices of zero tolerance policies further marginalizes black students and isolates and segregates them inside of the school building. Excluding black students from classroom instruction will undoubtedly affect their academic achievement and opportunities of a promising educational future.

### ***2.2.2 Theoretical framework***

This study utilizes Critical Race Theory (CRT) to investigate school reform and policies to determine how policies are affecting public education in Memphis, Tennessee. CRT was first developed in the 1980s by legal scholars and stemmed from Critical Legal Studies (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Kristen Buras (2014) explains CRT posits that “racism is endemic to dominant culture and structured into the very fabric of laws and educational institutions” (p. 32). Central to CRT is the acknowledgement of race and racism, the value placed on marginalized people’s experiences, counter-story telling, and a call for social justice (Buras, 2014). Although there is a long history of resistance by people of African descent in the North American mainland, the call for social justice has been repeatedly met with unrelenting and devastating oppression from racist white Americans.

In their work on counter-storytelling Daniel Solorzano and Tara Yosso (2002), describe a “majoritarian” narrative which portrays white privilege as natural. The majoritarian story, they explain, “silence(s) and distorts the experiences of people of color” (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 26). Through counter-storytelling, people of color can share their experiential knowledge which will be positioned in direct resistance of the majoritarian narrative. This does not mean that counter-stories must directly respond to the dominant discourse, but should be authentic to the marginalized group and enhance their social and political position.

Kristen Buras et al. (2010 & 2013) and David Stovall (2006) have offered counter-stories that demonstrate the experiences of black people in both New Orleans and Chicago, respectively, as they have resisted the dominant narrative in an effort to maintain control of educating their children. Both authors have outlined the ongoing battles that black, often low-income, communities face when the education sector of a city is privatized. By going straight to the

source, in the case of both authors, the students, their families and the local community members, they have been able to compose a narrative that builds upon rich histories, strong cultural, familial, and political roots, and advocate for young people in the communities.

Similarly, Bettina Love (2015) has utilized Critical Race Theory to investigate how youth construct identity through hip hop music and culture. By using the counter-narrative, Love was able to “bring to bear the learning experiences of young urban children who have been left out of most child development studies” (Love, 2015, p. 117). The counter-story proves to be imperative to the work of community members in order to preserve the legacy of decades of resistance to racial oppression for which their ancestors have sacrificed immensely. This study will apply counter-story telling and the experiential knowledge of its participants.

As stated above, Derrick Bell (1995b) describes the CRT concept of interest convergence and how it manifested with the *Brown* decision. Among the consequences of the *Brown* decision was the fact that many successful, middle-class black teachers lost their jobs when public schools began to desegregate. As Bell (1995b) explains, the push by black educators for equitable resources was only accommodated when whites realized the opportunity to create more jobs for white teachers. While black schools either closed or were subject to merge with white schools, white teachers were likely to be the first considered for any job openings. In this way, interest convergence and the *Brown* decision have had an historical impact on the whitening of the teacher workforce in the U.S.

### 3 METHODOLOGY

This study will use qualitative methods in the form of semi-structured interviews. Qualitative research, according to John W. Creswell (2007), “begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 37). This study will utilize qualitative methods to create meaning for the discipline practices of public charter schools by those who are directly affected by them.

This study is influenced by the works of Kristen Buras (2010 & 2011) who, in part, utilizes semi-structured interviews to tell the counter-narratives of education stakeholders in New Orleans. Buras examines the ways in which charter school reform has impacted communities in New Orleans since the devastation of Hurricane Katrina in 2005. New Orleans public schools have become a model that neoliberal reformers taut as being successful and innovative. This model has influenced the reform movement in Memphis, Tennessee as well as other major urban centers in the U.S. It is important, as Buras strongly states, that people affected by these policies are able to tell their stories.

#### 3.1 Research Question

The research question guiding this study is “What are the educational experiences of black families with behavior management policies at a privatized public charter school?”

#### 3.2 Positionality of Researcher

The researcher formerly taught fifth and sixth grades at the charter school in this study. While he taught at the charter school, the researcher was in his second year as a Teach For America corps member in Memphis, Tennessee. The researcher is a white, cis-gender male and

grew up in an upper-middle class suburban family. The researcher attended affluent public schools in the Midwestern United States as a child.

### **3.3 Sample**

The participants for this study include three African American families whose children recently finished their 8th-grade year. All of the student-participants attended the same privatized public charter school for some portion of grades fifth through eighth, however, some of the participants were displaced during their eighth-grade year because their housing complex closed.

### **3.4 Setting**

This study examines a privatized public charter school in Memphis, TN. Interviews were conducted in Memphis, TN at a location of the participants' choice.

### **3.5 Measures**

For this study, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with the student-participants and their parents. The interview questions focused on the experiences of students and their parents with behavioral expectations, behavior management systems used in the classroom, and discipline policies at the charter school.

### **3.6 Procedures**

The researcher reached out to families of students he formerly taught at the proposed school site. The researcher built relationships with his students and their families during his time in Memphis and has remained in contact with them via home visits, phone calls, and text messages. Once the proper IRB credentials were obtained, the researcher contacted the parents of the students to get consent forms completed so that interviews could be conducted.

The interviews lasted approximately one hour each. Once the interviews were complete, the researcher used the audio recordings from the interviews to compose transcripts. The transcriptions were given to the participants to review for accuracy. The transcriptions were then coded using Narrative Coding as the first cycle coding and Pattern Coding as the second cycle coding to identify emergent themes.

### **3.7 Analysis**

It was important for the researcher to use the voices of the participants in this study. To detail the experiences of the participants effectively the researcher utilized Narrative Coding as the first cycle coding strategy. Johnny Saldaña (2009) explains that Narrative Coding is especially effective for “exploring intrapersonal and interpersonal participant experiences and actions to understand the human condition through story...” (p. 109). Narrative Coding allows the researcher to interpret the experiences of the participants in a way that tells their personal stories. This was followed up with the Pattern Coding method for second cycle coding to extract the emergent themes from the participants’ stories.

### **3.8 Reliability and Validity**

It is important, for this study, that the participants’ stories are authentic and reflect the experiential knowledge they gained from attending the privatized public charter school. To ensure accuracy and validity of the interview transcriptions, the researcher will ask each participant to review the transcripts of their interview. The researcher will recruit two reviewers to strengthen the reliability of the codes that emerge.

## 4 RESULTS

In this chapter, the results of the qualitative research will be presented. Six participants (three families) were interviewed to share their experiences with the discipline policies at a privatized public charter school. All participants were assigned pseudonyms for their protection which will be used throughout the following chapters.

The first participant was Jaqueline who is currently 15 years old, identifies as African American, and attended the charter school from sixth to eighth grade. Jaqueline's mother, Ms. Ortiz also identifies as African American and was the second participant in this study.

The third participant for this study was Rhonda who is currently 14, identifies as African American, and, like Jaqueline, attended the charter school from sixth to eighth grade. Rhonda's grandmother, Ms. Johnson identifies as African American and participated in the study.

The fifth participant was Laila who is currently 13 years old, identifies as African American and attended the charter school from fifth through seventh grade. Laila's mother, Ms. Perry identifies as African American and was the sixth participant in this study.

When I taught at the charter school discussed in this research, I taught fifth and sixth grade science. I taught Laila as a fifth grader and Jaqueline and Rhonda as sixth graders in the same year.

### 4.1 In Favor of Charter School's Discipline Policies

The participants in this study experienced a wide range of feelings about the discipline policies at the charter school. All the participants explained aspects of the discipline policies at the charter school they liked and disliked. There were three themes that emerged that served as reasons why the participants were in favor of the charter school's discipline policies. The major

themes for why the participants were in favor of the school's discipline policies were character building, fairness, and relationship building.

#### ***4.1.1 Character building***

An important aspect of a child's development is character building. In asking the participants about what they liked about the charter school's discipline policies and how they experienced them, it was clear they felt the school built character. There were a number of character traits the participants felt were taught or acquired by attending the charter school. The character traits mentioned by participants included: ethics, discipline, persistence, teamwork, preparedness, responsibility, and professionalism.

While the students interviewed were well aware of the positives they felt they gained from attending the charter school, it seems that the adults interviewed for this study were particularly invested in the behavior policies and practices of the charter school. Ms. Ortiz, who stated that she came from a military background, described why she liked the school's strict policies for her daughter by saying:

[y]ou have to be persistent, willing to listen, and willing to accept the fact that it's kind of strict, but it's for your own good, like the posture and the responses. I think it teaches some good ethics to carry them on in adulthood, and how to present themselves, and how to hold their body postures. I think it was pretty positive. How to talk, and how to hold your body gestures, and how to be straight up, not slouching. Overall, I got from [the charter school] is ethics, taught the kids ethics.



Perhaps drawing on her family's military background, Ms. Ortiz is invested in the rigid policies that teach her daughter everything from how to hold her posture to how she responds to other people. Ms. Ortiz seems to place a high value on the image portrayed by her daughter in social settings. In addition, she feels that her daughter is learning valuable lessons in character building that will set her up for success in adulthood.

One important aspect of a child's learning experience at school is learning to work with other people in a positive way. Positive interactions between students are usually praised by teachers at any school. Ms. Johnson, the grandmother of Rhonda, described the ways in which the schools behavior policies benefitted her granddaughter by stating:

I liked the rules where they were showing them how to be as a team. I think that was good, because you, everything that dealing with life, you have sometimes have to be team. Team worker...[T]he school was wonderful. Like I said, was showing them teamwork and that they can learn to work together and get along. It's pretty much showing them, and activity of growing up. And everybody doesn't think the same. Everybody doesn't react the same, but still we all there to get along and for the same purpose, is to learn.

Similar to Ms. Ortiz, Ms. Johnson understands the importance of character building and how it can translate into success as an adult. She believes the school's rules encourage teamwork and allow the students to work through their differences in a positive manner.

There is no doubt that the adults interviewed for this study were proud of the character building happening with their children. Similarly, the children interviewed had positive

recollections of the impact of the discipline policies on their character. In discussing how the school had prepared her for the future, Laila said:

The best part of going to the school was, I learned more and I was used to doing all the work. That school was all about preparing me for college. They gave us a lot of work. They really pushed me and prepared me for what's going to happen in high school and college. That's what I really liked about the school.

Laila's statement indicates that she felt better equipped to take on more school work and possibly more rigorous work. As she speaks about what she gained from her time at the charter school, Laila understands how it is preparing her to accomplish her goals. Laila undoubtedly is happy with how the charter school has prepared her for the future.

Likewise, Rhonda shared her thoughts on why the school's discipline policies benefitted her. Similar to Laila, she felt that the character traits she was acquiring were preparing her for the future, and she understood the reason for strict behavior policies. Rhonda states:

Because at [the charter school] they were trying to train us into going to college. Expectations were very high that ... we can all achieve and reach to, that we actually did at the end. By the time I got to eighth grade, I found things that I would like to understand why the rules were set the way they were. It made me feel old and proud of myself to be different from where I was before I got there to while I was there to see improvement.

In conducting interviews with the participants, it was unmistakable that they felt character building was a direct result of the discipline policies at the charter school. The strict rules were welcomed by the participants when character traits like responsibility, teamwork and being prepared were the results.

#### ***4.1.2 Fairness***

Fairness is another major theme that emerged in the coding process. A major component discussed about the school's discipline policies was the strict uniform policy. There was a split reaction to the uniform policy. The adults and Rhonda seemed most pleased with the uniforms the students were required to wear. The participants repeated many times that they felt the strict uniform policies of the charter school brought fairness to the school.

When asked about the school's uniform policy Ms. Perry responded:

I like the uniform expectations. That way all the children wore the same thing. Nobody had on anything that cost any more or any less. That was one thing that I really liked, was the uniform.

Ms. Perry was in favor of the uniforms for children because students would not be distracted by what their classmates were wearing. All students came to school in the same clothes so no one had spent any more money on their clothes than the next person. This also implies that students would not be made fun of for wearing clothes that were perceived as less expensive or fashionable.

Similar to Ms. Perry, Ms. Johnson proclaimed her satisfaction with the school's uniforms by stating:

I loved the uniforms, simply because children, a lot of time, when they go to school, they worried at what another wearing and not wearing, and with the uniform, it pretty much, everybody looks the same.

Ms. Johnson reinforces Ms. Perry's point that the uniforms are likely to cut down on distractions at school. If students are not worried about what the next person has on they are likely to be more focused on their teacher's lesson. Too, the uniforms eliminate the chance that arguments would arise as a result of someone being made fun of for what they are wearing. Therefore, participants found the uniform policies at the charter school to be fair.

In the interview process, there was one student who agreed with the fairness of all students wearing uniforms at the charter school. Rhonda exclaimed:

Teachers and administrators always treated each child the same... They also made sure we were equal, and that's why I liked the fact that we had uniforms. No one could be sad or worried about what the other person got on because we all be wearing the exact same thing.

Here, Rhonda emphasizes the fairness of the uniform policy at the school. She further explains that she felt as though she was treated fairly by her teachers and administrators. In examining the uniform policy at the charter school, it is apparent that the participants found the uniforms to instill fairness across the school.

### ***4.1.3 Relationship building***

Without a doubt, one of the most important parts of the educational experience for a child is to feel that they belong and to make new friends. Throughout the interviews, the students described the different ways in which they were able to build relationships at school. In addition, the adults described how the atmosphere at the school allowed their children to foster meaningful relationships with their classmates and teachers.

When asked about her interactions with the teachers at the school, Jaqueline explained:

The teachers...[t]hey were easy to communicate with...[b]ecause I allowed the teachers to connect with me more emotionally than any other student would.

In her statement, Jaqueline suggests that she had a closeness with her teachers that other students may not have experienced. Perhaps, as she alludes to, she was more open with her teachers and willing to allow them to make an emotional connection with her. Besides her willingness to communicate with her teachers, Jaqueline found that her teachers were approachable and easy to talk to.

Like Jaqueline, her mother noticed the advantages of a school where relationship building was valued. Ms. Ortiz describes how the charter school allowed her daughter to meet new people and build lasting relationships. Ms. Ortiz states:

Yes. She became more of a people person. She became more...interactive with people. She was always a little quiet, timid child. But she, when going to [the charter school], actually opened up her personality. Her meeting [her friend] and they just hit it off as

good, good friends, and still friends to this day. I believe [the charter school] had a lot to do with it.

Ms. Ortiz describes the change she observed in Jaqueline's personality when she started going to the charter school. She believes the policies at the school allowed her daughter to blossom and open up to the people around her more. In turn, she was able to make a good friend and build a lasting relationship with one of her classmates.

Additionally, Rhonda explained her experiences with the teachers at her school by stating:

Then there were teachers who were cool and understanding who, you know, could have a little chill time and talk about things and they could relate to you. Basically, if you're having a bad day or not, they, in the morning time... you always are being greeted with positivity, a happy mood, and encouragement all through the day, encouragement and positivity.

Rhonda felt comfortable talking to her teachers and found them relatable. Her experiences with the teachers reflect positivity and encouragement. Viewing the charter school as a space to build and maintain meaningful relationships is certainly a favorable component of the school. As stated above, the positive relationships built in school can carry forward into the future and help students in the long run.

Throughout the interview process, all of the participants shared positive experiences they had at the charter school. Mostly, those experiences revolved around character building,

fairness, and relationship building. However, there was another side to the conversations brought forth in the interview process. Just as the participants remembered favorable experiences at the charter school, in contrast, they all recollected on experiences that posited them in opposition to the discipline policies at the charter school.

## **4.2 Opposition to Charter School's Discipline Policies**

In discussing the charter school's discipline policies with the participants, three major themes emerged that set the participants in opposition with the school's policies. The three themes that reflected unfavorable experiences at the charter school were rigidity, compliance, and embarrassment.

### ***4.2.1 Rigidity***

Perhaps the most common theme in talking about the charter school was its rigidity. As discussed above, there were aspects of the school's rigid policies that were considered favorable by the participants. In contrast, there were discussions of the charter school's rigidity that seemed overbearing, controlling, and unfair.

One of the most common behavior policies that was opposed by the children was the expectations to remain silent throughout much of the school day. The participants described the strict expectation of silence as unfair, frustrating, and something they hated. In her recollection of receiving negative consequences for talking, Jaqueline explains:

Well, it could be times like when we're doing independent work, and someone doesn't understand, and the teacher's working with someone else. So one student would try to help the student who doesn't understand. But both would get a demerit because of the situation and then they try to explain still and get another demerit.

The situation described by Jaqueline highlights a striking contradiction to the themes outlined above. Whereas the participants often found themselves placed in positions to develop positive relationships and engage in teamwork, the expectation to be silent certainly impeded on those experiences. Further, Jaqueline describes how students would be given a negative consequence for trying to explain themselves. In this way, the student voices were shut out and marginalized. Laila explained a similar experience with the expectation to be silent in the school by saying:

I really think the rules are unfair and very strict... Our talking rule. We would be in class. If you get caught talking to somebody, we had paycheck dollars. You would get a demerit that deducted a paycheck dollar just for talking or you could have just been asking for instructions or something. I thought that it was very unfair because talking is normal. You're really punishing someone for doing that, for doing something that they do on a regular basis. You can't stop someone from talking and punishing them when they don't stop talking... It's really like somebody forcing you to be quiet for the whole day...People are going to talk regardless.

Laila's experience with the discipline policies was that they were unfair and too strict. She found that students were being punished for something that is normal for people to do. When students earn demerits for talking, they are sent the message that they are trouble-makers and what they are doing is wrong even if it is simply communicating, a normal human behavior.

Some participants felt that the rigidity of the charter school's discipline policies were too controlling. The participants' experiences were that the punishments for committing an



infraction were overbearing and unjust. Laila goes on to explain how lunch time offered another method of punishment other than receiving demerits by saying:

Sometimes, we were put on silent lunch. It wasn't everybody's fault, so it was pretty unfair... Yeah. Sometimes, we would get put on silent lunch because of certain people talking. It wasn't everybody, so we had to be punished for everybody's decision. It was unfair to some people who were doing the right thing.

By placing everybody on silent lunch, the teachers and/ or administrators were displaying their control over the students. Although, as Laila points out, there were students in the group who were following the rules, they were punished the same as those students who were violating the school's behavior policies. Similarly, as she explained her only issue with the school's discipline policies Ms. Ortiz stated:

It really wasn't anything, but what I thought was unfair is if one student got in trouble, the whole class got punished for it. I just didn't understand that, per se.

This form of control over the students was a trademark of the rigid policies encountered by the participants. Rhonda describes a similar experience of the school's rigid policies around being silent:

[w]hen we come in you have to be silent breakfast, silent in the hallways... And you have to earn talking...I didn't like having to be silent at breakfast, but I understood why we had

to be silent while the teacher was teaching us a lesson. That's the only time I hated being silent, was for breakfast.

It seems that at key times for the students to be socializing and fostering those relationships that the families find important to their student's educational experience, the school was steadfast in shutting down communication with the threat of more silence. Again, the only reasonable explanation for silent breakfast and lunch is to enforce a controlling presence over the students at the school.

Similar to the other students, Jaqueline describes her experiences with having to be silent for the majority of the day. She explains:

It depends. It depended on how well we did in class, like in our previous classes before lunch. It would determine if we were able to talk during lunch.... It was very frustrating because, I mean, I talk a lot. I talk a lot so it's frustrating because to be told not to talk all the time... Well, I can say I was frustrated because they always told us to be quiet and stuff... I guess you could say they didn't like it. I mean it was only like probably half an hour they get to talk to friends, and they have to go back into that school mode for another four, five hours.

Here, Jaqueline describes her frustration with the lack of time she is allowed to socialize with her peers. As much as she enjoyed the relationships she was able to build at the charter school, it seemed as though she was not given many opportunities inside the school day to talk to

her friends. Similar to this sentiment, Ms. Perry explained her opposition to the lack of opportunities the school allowed for students to interact with one another by stating:

...but it can also be negative for those children that are already disciplined. It may kind of seem a little bit more unfair to them, because it's more severe, more intense than what they're used to. My least favorite rule may not necessarily be a rule, but I didn't like the fact that they didn't interact with their peers a lot at all. I didn't like the fact that they had to stay in one room all day.

Ms. Perry describes the policy that instead of students transitioning in between classes, the teachers would switch rooms. By limiting students' movement, the school's policies promoted the control over students' bodies and limited their interactions with each other. This especially limited the people students came in contact with throughout the day. Again, limited interactions among peers does not help foster positive relationships.

In discussing the school's rigidity, another example of strict policies emerged that seemed unfair to the students. Ms. Johnson describes her least favorite policy for her granddaughter by saying:

Yes. It was about using the bathroom, 'cause whole lot of children that cannot hold their bladder or anything like ... I didn't kind of like those, but those are some of the things that they would have to learn. The rules with the bathroom, I didn't kind of like those.

Ms. Johnson is concerned that the schools control over the students is obstructing their freedom to perform normal, everyday human functions. The school only allowed students to use the restroom during the scheduled restroom breaks when the entire grade level would transition to the restroom and all teachers and administrators would be present in the hallways. Only if the teacher felt that it was a true emergency, would a child be able to go to the restroom during class time. It seems a bit unfair that in the pursuit to maintain control of the students' behaviors, the school would deny the students the right to use the restroom.

#### ***4.2.2 Compliance***

The second major theme to emerge in opposition to the charter school's discipline policies was compliance. Compliance is a word often associated with law enforcement and carries with it some negative connotations. By implementing discipline policies demanding the compliance of the students, the rigid policies of the school hinder the opportunities for students to express themselves, socialize, and have individuality and freedom.

Like rigidity, compliance evoked feelings of a school discipline system that was overbearing, controlling, and unfair. Jaqueline describes how she got in trouble for performing a basic task that should be encouraged by any educator:

That we couldn't read in the classes. That was one of the things I hated... Yes. Like in Math class, if we did our work and I did everything, and I started reading, I would get a demerit for that. It didn't make sense to me at all, because I was still doing something educational and I got in trouble for it. Reading. Reading. That's like doing work for another class.

Jaqueline's experience with trying to read in her math class after completing her work highlights a system that is controlling. The teacher, in this case, is more concerned with maintaining a discipline system than promoting educational growth. The only thing that could possibly be learned in this situation is that the student holds a subordinate position to the teacher and must be mindful of that position at all times.

Another glaring form of compliance for the sake of controlling students was how they were to maintain their posture in the classrooms. Jaqueline describes:

SWAG was ... well because we decided ... a way to show our professionalism. We would have to sit up straight, watch the speaker, ask questions, ... we had to sit with our hands folded across the desk... and I forgot what g was. But they stood ... like it was an acronym.

It makes sense that a teacher would want their students' attention during class when a lesson is being taught. However, to maintain a strict posture in which each part of the body has an exact position to maintain throughout the long school day is a lot to ask of any person let alone a child. Like Jaqueline, Rhonda recollects her experiences with SWAG:

SWAG is ... basically you have to sit proper in your chair, your back has to be on the back of the chair, like all the way on the chair, and your hands have to be crossed... I guess so they can basically see our hands to make sure we wasn't doing anything, ... and you have to sit them in front of you and make sure your shoulders are straight. It's just a posture... You had to be quiet and have your eyes on the speaker..As a class, you have to

work together, you guys have to do exactly what the teacher says. If the teacher says, "Be quiet", or "Can you guys move?" Then you guys have to do exactly what they say the first time. You have to move at a good pace, so you can get through the whole lesson.

It is insightful that Rhonda says her hands must be up on her desk so that the teacher can make sure she is not doing anything. This assumes the child to be a troublemaker who will cause a problem at the first chance they get. There seems to be little trust in students to make the right decisions without maintaining strict control over their bodies. Rhonda also states that students "must do exactly what the teacher says" when being asked by the teacher to move which sounds more intimidating and controlling than necessary.

The use of SWAG was certainly not popular among the children that were interviewed. In the mission to maintain compliance from the students, the school's policies made students feel as though they had little freedom to relax. Laila describes her experiences with SWAG by stating:

SWAG is a position you have to sit in while you're in the classroom. SWAG, it keeps you from distractions or doing anything other than paying attention and learning what the teacher's telling you to do... Because, like I said, we had paycheck dollars. If you weren't staying in SWAG or if you were doing anything other than paying attention, you would get a demerit. You were really forced to sit in SWAG or that paycheck dollar would be deducted.

Laila uses strong language to oppose the implementation of SWAG by her teachers. She feels as though she is “forced” to hold the position or bear the consequences. Only by complying with her teachers’ strict expectations can she be assured not to lose her “paycheck dollars.” Laila’s mother echoed her daughter displeasure with the schools controlling behavior policies by stating:

It did kind of keep her under control in more ways than one, so I guess it was kind of good in that way, but she couldn't enjoy school... but she didn't like it. She hated not being able to interact.

Ms. Perry describes how the control her daughter was placed under limited her freedom to enjoy her educational experience. In addition, the strict policies, such as SWAG, limited her freedom to interact with the students around her and demanded her full attention be given to the teacher. In this way, student compliance with the behavior policies maintained a system of control that limited the freedom of the students.

In the discussion of school uniforms above, the participants expressed their positive outlook on the uniformity of all students being required to wear the same school clothes. However, there were many troubling comments made about the uniform policies that will be discussed in more detail below. To begin Jaqueline explains the requirements around complying with the school’s dress code by stating:

I didn't really have a problem with wearing uniforms until I got demerits about not wearing a belt or... not wearing appropriate colored socks, or correct shoes or having a

hair bow in my hair... if we were girls and wearing flats, and you can see the socks, we would have to take our socks off, take our hair bows out...

Jaqueline was upset that having a seemingly minor uniform infraction caused her to earn a demerit plus she was required to fix the problem by removing the article from her attire. By complying fully with the school's uniform policy, the students were relinquishing all aspects of their individuality at the front doors of the school. It is nice for students to find commonalities among their peers, however, individuality and uniqueness is often what attracts two friends together to build a meaningful relationship. By limiting the individuality of the students, the school is asserting their control and ensuring complete compliance.

Like Jaqueline, Laila describes the discomfort with always having to comply with the uniform policies at the school by stating:

I was pretty much forced to wear my uniform, and if I didn't, or if I leave out any of my uniform attire, I would be forced to wear a smock for the rest of the day...If you're not in uniform attire, you would have to get a smock.

Like her experiences with other aspects of the school's behavior policies, Laila felt forced to have to wear a uniform, without any missing components, each day. Additionally, she brings up another feature of the uniform policy that will be discussed in further detail in the section below, the smock.



### ***4.2.3 Embarrassment***

As stated above, perhaps the most important part of the schooling experience for young children is the opportunity they have to socialize with their peers and make friends. With that said, the last emerging theme of the opposition to the charter school's discipline policies is embarrassment. It is difficult to imagine a school setting in which children would be intentionally humiliated in order for the school to seek compliance with their discipline policies.

In this section, the experiences the participants had with embarrassment will be examined. The source of the feeling of embarrassment was the consequence for not wearing the proper uniform attire, the smock. All three student-participants had experienced wearing a smock at school with their feelings varying slightly. However, embarrassing was a word that came up more than once in relation to being made to wear a smock. Jaqueline describes the smock and the time she was made to wear one by stating:

In seventh grade I had to wear a smock like a week, I believe, because I had lost my tie... They would give us a demerit, and then they would give us a smock...It felt embarrassing because it was like ... it's really big on you and you really can't do anything and you stand out in the crowd...The smock was basically ... it was a robe that people wear in hospitals where they do surgery, they put on smocks...

Jaqueline describes the smock as a big "robe" similar to what a surgeon would wear in surgery. To her, wearing a bulky smock was an embarrassing experience. It is difficult to imagine how the smock rectifies a student coming to school dressed slightly different from their classmates.

Like Jaqueline, Laila recalled misplacing her tie one time and having to wear a smock at school. She states:

It was really unfair and embarrassing because I had people talk about me. It was this big gown that you had to wear. Really, I was uncomfortable wearing it because I didn't want to come to school looking like that.

Similar to Jaqueline, Laila describes the smock as a big gown that was embarrassing to have to wear. She experienced her classmates talking about her which was sure to add to her embarrassment. Further, Laila explains that she felt this discipline policy was unfair.

When asked about how other students experienced the smocks, the students explained that they had similar experiences. Jaqueline explained:

They would laugh at other kids, for wearing the smocks, but I don't think it was as bad every time but, yeah, sometimes yeah, depending on who would get the smocks.

By her recollection, it seems that the ridicule would depend on who was wearing the smock on a given day. However, she is clear in stating that the smock was a source of harassment for students at the school. So, if a child was not popular among their peers and they came to school without their complete uniform, the administrators would hand them a smock that would ensure their exposure to being tormented.

When asked how other students who wore smocks were treated, Laila replied:

I feel like they were made fun of. Anyone who had to wear a smock were made fun of. If you had on a smock, you were made fun of. Yeah.

Laila's observations match those of Jaqueline in witnessing the ridicule of the students who were made to wear smocks at school for violating the uniform policy.

Rhonda described her experiences with smocks in this way:

we had these things called smocks and if we was missing our blazers, had the wrong shirt on or missing our ties we had to wear these big smocks but if we wear the wrong shoes we had to [wear] the little booties.... I just have to put the smock on, make sure I bunch it up out of the way and keep it on throughout the day, until it's time to go at the end of the day... At first, it was kind of weird because I wasn't used to it, I felt like it was weird that's all.

Rhonda explains that in addition to having to wear a smock, the students who came to school without the proper shoes on would be made to wear booties over their shoes. As opposed to getting a minor consequence for not having a complete uniform, students were given smocks and booties to further place them in contrast to their peers. This form of punishment was certain to make a student stand out and feel humiliated for not complying with the school's discipline policies.

## 5 Discussion

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences that black families have when encountering the discipline policies at a public charter school. The charter school that the participants in this study attended has been operating in Memphis for nearly a decade after relocating a couple of times. This research was conducted to fill a void in the literature on education reform in the urban centers of the southern U.S. Investigations into the charter school reform movement in Memphis, Tennessee are sparse. Further, understanding the experiences of African American families with discipline policies at charter schools in the South has had limited attention. Therefore, the location of this study is significant.

Jerome Morris and Carla Monroe (2009) explain the importance of studying education in the U.S. South. They note that, historically, “white philanthropists from northern areas dictated the direction of schooling for Black children in the South...often demanding that Black institutions promote primarily industrial education” (Morris & Monroe, 2009, p. 23). Charter schools, such as the one in this study, are no strangers to taking philanthropic money (Fabricant & Fine, 2015) from influential whites who wish to change the landscape of public education. The result is “No Excuses” charter schools that demand compliance with their rules.

Similarly, there are studies that investigate the community impact of charter school reform (Buras, 2015) and the experiences of teachers with implementing charter school discipline policies (Horn, 2016) but few, if any, have addressed specifically the experiences of children and their families with the discipline policies at charter schools. This study seeks to fill that void through sharing the stories of the families that participated. In doing so, the perspective of those directly impacted by the discipline policies at charter schools are given a platform for their voices to be heard.

In staying true to the tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT), this study was based on the importance of the experiential knowledge of the families who participated and the objective was to genuinely represent their counter-stories. This study sought to understand how the students received the messages sent by their teachers through the implementation of behavior management policies and practices and how they are expressed. Similarly, the study sought to understand how parent-figures noticed the impact of school discipline policies on their children.

Fundamental to the discussion of CRT is the permanence of racism in the U.S. When asked about the role that race played in their experiences with the charter school most of the participants explained that they felt race had no bearing on their experiences. Ms. Ortiz went as far to say she did not “see color.” Only Laila believed that one of her white teachers had mistreated her and her classmates based on their race. As a white teacher at the school, I can say I found it quite uncomfortable implementing the policies and expectations with predominantly African American students. Laila’s experience was that her teacher would be more lenient with students of her own race, but punish black students for similar behaviors. She also stated she told her mom about the experiences she was having with the teacher. When I asked her mother about situation, she believed Laila was interpreting her teacher’s actions and words as racist, however, Ms. Perry believed Laila had similar grievances against her black teachers, too.

As a scholar of CRT and an educator who has taught at several different charter schools, I had a different interpretation of the charter school experience and the findings of this study. The CRT concept of interest convergence (Bell, 1995b) applies directly to the charter school experience. African American families living in impoverished communities with failing schools have suffered detrimental public educational experiences for most of this nation’s history. Now that the white business elite have taken an interest in urban education reform, we are seeing

charter schools take over traditional public schools. This usually comes with some cosmetic repairs to the school buildings themselves along with new staff, mission statements, visions, and some college pennants. The funding from the white business elite is the backing of the neoliberal agenda that strives to prepare students to be career-ready workers in the capitalist economic system (Casey, 2016). Therefore, the education of African Americans only becomes an interest to the white business elite when black children are viewed as human capital. Incorporating business-like uniform policies for middle-schoolers and building character are important aspects of fulfilling this mission.

This study resulted in mixed findings, in which participants derived meaning from the discipline policies at the charter school they were in favor of and some they opposed. The emerging themes that resulted from the experiences the participants had in favor of the charter school were character building, fairness, and relationship building. Of these themes, fairness stuck out as a surprising result. The school, no doubt, has strict discipline policies in which all of the participants alluded to. It was unanticipated to hear participants describe their experiences with these rigid policies as fair, especially the children. Only Laila adamantly stated that she felt the discipline policies at the school were unfair.

The participants were clear to state that character building was an important attribute of the school. Students stated they felt more responsible because of the character traits they acquired at the school. The school's principal is an avid supporter of the "grit" model (Saltman, 2014). It is likely that the students in this study were often encouraged to show their grit in accomplishing tasks at the school which ultimately translated to their feelings of responsibility, self-discipline, and organization. The rigidity of the school played a part in the character building of its students

and the grit model left little room for students to foster a passion for their education. Instead, their satisfaction came with being able to follow rules and complete tasks.

The students who viewed the discipline policies as fair explained that the charter school had a higher level of order than the traditional schools they attended and therefore allowed them to learn more. Also, the students interviewed explained that their classmates were sometimes disruptive and disrespectful to their peers and teachers. By that measure, it may seem fair for that behavior to be shut down. As a critic of the policies at the charter school, I ask if the strict control and demand of compliance is the only way to build character. Where is the learning for students who come to school and disrespect those around them only to be silenced (and I argue, disrespected)? How will those students learn to interact with their peers in a positive way when they are quickly met with punitive measures?

Although the families in this study found favorable aspects of their experiences with the school, they were open about the discipline policies they opposed. Among the themes that emerged from the discussions of their opposition to the charter school's policies were rigidity, compliance, and embarrassment. The rigid nature of the charter school is a direct result of the zero tolerance policies that have infiltrated public education since the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Monroe, 2005). The broken window theory (Kelling & Wilson, 1982) is prevalent when a school is bent on "sweating the small stuff," a term used regularly by the school's principal, in order to prevent major behavior issues. The problem is that the mandate for compliance and rigidity of the discipline policies were in place before there was ever a crack in the window. The assumption was that the community in which the charter school is meant to serve is at a deficit.

The deficit model posits that a student's culture makes them deficient and their behavior unacceptable (Harry & Klingner, 2007). Deficit thinking towards the families of impoverished

African American students in Memphis, Tennessee denies them the opportunity to share their cultural capital (Moll et al, 1992) with the world around them. Rather, their culture is used up by charter schools who deceitfully use the language of their ancestors who resisted racial oppression, and it is used up by organizations like Teach For America that advertise the Bar-B-Que and Blues music (Memphis, 2017) that makes the city popular among young white professionals looking to build their resumes.

The most telling response to the interviews was that students were dealt a punishment for not wearing their complete uniforms that embarrassed and humiliated them. To require a business-professional uniform and demand that students follow the requirements of the uniform perfectly, but then make a child wear a smock for forgetting a minor accessory is beyond comprehensible. It defeats the purpose of uniformity and certainly does not look professional. Smocks at the charter school are solely meant to humiliate children and dehumanize them. Yet, with the backing of major corporations, the charter school entered the community with a view of their students as producers and consumers in the marketplace (Molnar, 2018) rather than recognizing their humanity.

## **5.1 Limitations**

I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge the limitations of this study. First, after attempts were made to reach out to multiple families with children that attended the charter school, the consent and assent forms that were returned were from three families all with students who identify as female. By not having any boys participate in the study, it limits the gendered-perspective of the participants. In addition, all of the girls who participated, as their families indicated, were very well-behaved and had limited experiences with the tiered behavior system of the school. This limits the contact these students had with the dean of culture as well



as their experiences with detentions and suspensions. With only six participants, this study was limited in exploring the wide range of experiences that were likely had by families with the proposed charter school.

In their study on African American male discipline, school district responses, and the impact on academic achievement, Lewis, Bonner, Butler, and Joubert (2010) use the term *discipline gap*. The discipline gap is defined as “a concept coined to draw attention to the disproportionate discipline policies and procedures meted out to certain student groups at rates that supersede (sometimes drastically) this group’s statistical representation in a particular school population” (Lewis, et al., 2010, p. 10). In their article (Lewis, et al., 2010), the authors explain that African American males are disproportionately suspended and expelled from public schools in comparisons to other groups, including African American females. For that reason, this study misses the opportunity to understand the experiences of people who identify with a group (African American males) that is most likely to experience the school’s discipline policies negatively, and who attend the charter school in this study.

In remaining authentic to the ethos of this study, the researcher finds it important to create a space where all voices are heard and to bring those that are typically marginalized to the fore. That stated, it is important to recognize the lack of the scholarly presence of black females in the review of literature in this work. Moving forward, it will be important for the researcher to seek out all voices on the issue of education reform policies and to ensure a better representation of genders.

Moreover, this study answered many questions about the experiences of African American families with the discipline policies at a charter school. Yet, the study opens some new lines of questioning that would be worth investigating in future studies. The participants

shared strong feelings in favor of the charter school as well as in opposition to the charter school. Although, the participants were asked to compare their experiences at the charter school versus their experiences at a traditional public school (all participants had previously attended traditional public schools and Laila is currently in eighth grade at a traditional public school), there was not an opportunity for participants to share how their educational experiences could be optimized to avoid the pitfalls of the charter school. This study did not address an investigation into what the ideal educational experience for the children would look like.

## **5.2 Conclusion**

To be clear, this study was not conducted to pit charter schools against traditional public schools, rather to take a critical lens to the current policies and practices at the charter schools that are taking the place of traditional public schools. In discussing black masculinity and the criminal justice system, Paul Butler (2017) describes single-sex schools with strict discipline policies that focus on “disruptive behavior...and being bad” (p. 164) which he says limits the “flexibility about what it means to be a black male” (p. 164). There may be evidence that such schools help instill character traits such as responsibility and self-discipline. However, the implications of this study are that while families see the benefit of strict discipline policies at times, the question must be asked: at what cost? Robin Kelley (2002) describes *freedom dreams* and argues that as we resist structural oppression and work to dismantle it, we must also think about the vision we must build for the future. It is imperative that we continue to take a critical lens to the policies of charter school reform and allow for a vision that truly promotes freedom and social justice.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A

#### Interview Protocol Child Interviews

1. What grades did you go to (the charter school)?
2. What is your race?
3. If you had to describe in detail the rules/expectations to someone else, how would you describe it?
4. Are the rules/expectations fair? Why/why not?
5. What is your least favorite rule? Why?
6. Do you think your identity as African American/Black plays a factor in how you experienced the rules at the school? If so, how?
7. How did you feel about white teachers implementing the rules/expectations at the school?
8. Would you have felt differently if the rules expectations were implemented by African American teachers? Why or why not?
9. What school did you attend before (the charter school)? Charter school or not?
10. You previously attended a traditional public school before coming to the charter school. How would you compare the rules/expectations of the previous school to the charter?
11. What was the best part of going to the school?
12. What was the most difficult part of going to the school?
13. How did you feel about the rules/expectations at the school?
14. How often did you receive positive praise and rewards at school?
15. How did your teachers give you positive praise/ rewards?
16. How did this make you feel?
17. How often did you receive negative consequences at school?
18. How did your teachers give you negative consequences?
19. How did this make you feel?
20. Tell me about wearing uniforms. What are your thoughts towards wearing them? How did you feel about the uniform expectations?
21. How did it make you feel to earn a negative consequence for not having your uniform on correctly?

#### Follow-up Interviews

1. How old are you?
2. What grades did you attend the school?
3. Did the rules/ expectations change as you moved to higher grade levels?
4. Did they change for the whole school or just each grade level?
5. Can you describe what SWAG is?
6. How did you feel about the amount of time you had to socialize with your peers while at school?
7. How did it feel to have to be silent at these times throughout the day?
8. How did it feel to receive a consequence for talking at school?

9. Can you describe an experience you had with the expectation to be silent for much of the school day (good or bad)?
10. Describe what a day at (the charter school) was like. Walk me through your schedule from the time you arrived at the school...
11. How did you feel about the expectations that students remain silent during breakfast and lunch?
12. How do you feel about the expectation that students were to walk in straight silent lines in the hallways during each transition?
13. How did you feel about the fact that children had to wear smocks if they did not have on their complete uniform?
14. When students were made to wear smocks, did you ever hear kids making fun of them? Explain what that was like?
15. Can you tell me about any times when you saw other students being treated unfairly at school?
16. Were there times when you thought the teachers or staff were too hard on other kids?

#### Parent Interviews

1. What is your race?
2. If you had to describe in detail the (rules/expectations) to someone else, how would you describe it?
3. Are the rules/expectations fair? Why/why not?
4. What is your least favorite rule? Why?
5. Can you describe any relationship between your child's behavior at home and the way school personnel describe their behavior?
6. Was this different from what his/her teachers were telling you about their behavior at school? How?
7. How do you think your child's behavior outside of school was affected by their experience at school?
8. Was there any change in your child's behavior when they started going to the school? If so, how?
9. How would you explain their changes?
10. How do you feel about the uniform expectations at the school?
11. What things about the school did you like best? Why?
12. What would you like to see the school do differently? Why?
13. What would the ideal school (in terms of expectations and rules) look like for your child?
14. Do you think your identity as African American/Black plays a factor in how you experienced the rules at the school? If so, how?
15. When it comes to the ideal teacher for your child is race a factor?
16. How did you feel about white teachers implementing the rules/expectations at the school?
17. Would you have felt differently if the rules expectations were implemented by African American teachers? Why or why not?
18. Do you think your identity as African American/Black plays a factor in how you experienced the rules at the school? If so, how?
19. When it comes to the ideal teacher for your child is race a factor?
20. How did you feel about white teachers implementing the rules/expectations at the school?



21. Would you have felt differently if the rules expectations were implemented by African American teachers? Why or why not?
22. You previously attended a traditional public school before coming to the charter school. How would you compare the rules/expectations of the previous school to the charter?
23. What did you like about the rules at the traditional schools that you disliked about the charter schools?
24. What did you dislike about the rules at the traditional schools that you liked about the charter schools?

## Appendix B

Georgia State University  
Department of African American Studies  
Informed Consent

Title: Education Blues: An Examination of the Experiences of Black Families  
Encountering Discipline Policies at a Charter School in Memphis, Tennessee.  
Principal Investigator: Jonathan Gayles  
Student Principal Investigator: Ryan Warren

### Purpose:

You are invited to join in a research study. The purpose of the study is to understand the experiences of black families with discipline policies at a charter school. You are invited to join because you have a child who has attended a charter school. A total of six people will be in this study. Involvement will require approximately three hours and fifteen minutes of your time.

### Procedures:

If you decide to join, you will answer questions about your experiences with a charter school.

You will be asked to participate in one-hour, audio-recorded interviews in up to three sessions. The researcher will provide you with a copy of interview transcripts to review for accuracy.

As a participant in this study, you will:

Work with the researcher to complete interviews.

Choose a location of your convenience to hold the interviews.

Review transcripts after each interview. Reviewing transcripts should take about five minutes for each interview session.

### Risks:

In this study, you will not have any more risks than you would in a normal day of life.

### Benefits:

Overall, we hope to gain insight about how people experience charter schools. This research can inform future debates on education reform.

### Compensation:

The parent/guardian will receive a \$30 prepaid credit card for joining this study. Compensation will be provided at the time of the first interview.

### Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:

Participation in this research is voluntary. You do not have to be in this study. You have the right to drop out of the study at any time. You may skip questions or stop participating at any time. Whatever you decide, you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

### Confidentiality:

We will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. Jonathan Gayles and Ryan Warren will have access to the information you provide. Data may also be shared with those who make sure the study is done correctly (GSU Institutional Review Board, the Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP)).

We will use number codes rather than your name on study records. A key for the number codes used to protect your identity will be kept in the home office of the researcher. This is to ensure that the key will not be linked to the stored data. Your name and other facts that might connect you will not appear when we present this study or publish its results. The findings will be summarized and reported in group form. You will not be identified personally. The recordings will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the office of the principal investigator. The recordings will be stored securely for the extent of the study.

Contact Persons:

Contact Jonathan Gayles or Ryan Warren at 404-413-5142 and jgayles@gsu.edu or rwarren10@student.gsu.edu if you have questions, concerns, or complaints about this study. You can also call if you think you have been harmed by the study. Call Susan Vogtner in the Georgia State University Office of Research Integrity at 404-413-3513 or svogtner1@gsu.edu if you want to talk to someone who is not part of the study team. You can talk about questions, concerns, offer input, obtain information, or suggestions about the study. You can also call Susan Vogtner if you have questions or concerns about your rights in this study.

Copy of Consent Form to Participant:

We will give you a copy of this consent form to keep.

If you are willing to volunteer for this research and be audio-recorded, please sign below.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Principal Investigator or Researcher Obtaining Consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix C

### Assent Form

#### Purpose:

You are invited to join in a study. We want to understand your experiences at school.

#### Procedures:

If you want to be in this study, you will talk with the researcher. They will ask you questions about your experiences at school. The researcher will record your answers. Once the interviews are over, the researcher will ask you to review a written copy of what you talked about.

#### Risks:

You will not have any more risks than you would in a normal day of life.

#### Benefits:

We hope to understand how people experience charter schools.

#### Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:

Participation is voluntary. You do not have to be in this study. You have the right to drop out of the study at any time. You may skip questions or stop participating at any time.

#### Contact Persons:

Contact Jonathan Gayles or Ryan Warren at 404-413-5142 if you have questions, concerns, or would like to stop participating in this study.

If you are willing to volunteer for this research and be audio-recorded, please sign below.

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Printed Name of Participant

---

Signature of Participant

---

Date

---

Principal Investigator or Researcher Obtaining Consent

---

Date

## Appendix D

### Participant Profiles

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Grades Attended Charter School</b>
Jaqueline	15	African American	Female	6 <sup>th</sup> -8 <sup>th</sup>
Rhonda	14	African American	Female	6 <sup>th</sup> -8 <sup>th</sup>
Laila	13	African American	Female	5 <sup>th</sup> -7 <sup>th</sup>

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Relationship to Child-Participant</b>
Ms. Ortiz	African American	Female	Jaqueline's Mother
Ms. Johnson	African American	Female	Rhonda's Grandmother
Ms. Perry	African American	Female	Laila's Mother

## Appendix E

### Interview Transcripts

#### Jaqueline Interview One

Researcher: Alright. Cool. So the first question is just what grades did you attend (the charter school)?

Jaqueline: Sixth grade, seventh grade and eighth grade.

Researcher: Okay. Cool. How would you identify your race?

Jaqueline: African-American.

Researcher: Okay. If you had to describe in detail the rules or the expectations to someone else, how would you describe it? So the rules or the expectations at the school.

Jaqueline: They were fair. I guess. I guess I could say they were fair. Reasonable.

Researcher: Okay. What was your least favorite rule?

Jaqueline: That we couldn't read in the classes. That was one of the things I hated.

Researcher: That you couldn't read in other classes?

Jaqueline: Yeah, like during ... like if I finished an assignment, I couldn't read afterwards.

Researcher: Gotcha. And why was that your least favorite?

Jaqueline: Because I like to read and it keeps me doing something.

Researcher: Yup. Okay. Do you think your ... alright, here let me ask you this. What was your favorite part of going to the school?

Jaqueline: The teachers. They were easy to communicate with.

Researcher: Okay. Why do you say they were easy to communicate with?

Jaqueline: Because they understood, like I had a different experience there than everyone else.

Researcher: Why would you say that?

- Jaqueline: Because I allowed the teachers to connect with me more emotionally than any other student would.
- Researcher: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Okay. What was the most difficult part about going to the school?
- Jaqueline: The students.
- Researcher: The students?
- Jaqueline: Yeah.
- Researcher: And describe that more. Why was that difficult?
- Jaqueline: Because they were ... sometimes they were rude to the teachers, and-
- Researcher: Okay.
- Jaqueline: -it would be hard to like have a voice about that because when you're in middle school, you want to have friends and stuff and they don't want to see you with a buzz kill. When you have opinions about stuff like that, it's like sit down, because you want those friends.
- Researcher: Gotcha. How often did you receive positive praise and rewards at school?
- Jaqueline: Almost all the time.
- Researcher: Almost all the time? Okay. How did your teachers give you positive praise and rewards?
- Jaqueline: I would go places with some of my ... well, when I had a mentor, she used to take me places. I got certificates for being in school and I guess, when we got our dress-out passes, those are rewards as well.
- Researcher: Tell me about that. What's the dress-out pass?
- Jaqueline: Well, every week we got merits and demerits. Merits count up as money and whoever had the most amount of money, like the top ten people in the classroom, who had the most amount of money, they would dress-out pass and they would get to wear whatever they wanted to school on Friday.
- Researcher: Okay. Cool. And you talked about the Mentor Program? Is that something like, did you have to be ... like how did that work? Did you have to be doing well in school to get a mentor? Could anybody get a mentor or how did that work?

- Jaqueline: Anyone can get a mentor but my mentor specifically, she rewarded me a lot.
- Researcher: Gotcha.
- Jaqueline: For the things I did.
- Researcher: Cool. And then how did it make you feel to get like the dress-down pass or the rewards, whether it's from your teacher or your mentor?
- Jaqueline: I mean it made me feel like I was a favorite sometimes.
- Researcher: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Is that it?
- Jaqueline: Yeah.
- Researcher: Okay. That's cool. How often did you receive negative consequences at school?
- Jaqueline: Not often.
- Researcher: Alright. Yeah I already know. How did your teachers give negative consequences if you ever did?
- Jaqueline: I would get demerits, but that would be something as small as talking when you're not supposed to, or being disrespectful to other students or something, or not turning in homework. This is the only type of consequence I've gotten. I've never been suspended.
- Researcher: Okay. And then, you talked about getting trouble for like reading, would you actually get a demerit for reading when you weren't supposed to?
- Jaqueline: Yes. Like in Math class, if we did our work and I did everything, and I started reading, I would get a demerit for that.
- Researcher: Did your teachers tell you why they didn't want you reading in Math class?
- Jaqueline: No.
- Researcher: Like, does that make sense to you at all that they didn't want you reading in other classes?
- Jaqueline: It didn't make sense to me at all, because I was still doing something educational and I got in trouble for it. Reading.



- Researcher: Yeah.
- Jaqueline: Reading. That's like doing work for another class.
- Researcher: Right. And you said you did that after all of your work was done for that class, right?
- Jaqueline: Yeah.
- Researcher: Yeah. Okay. So how did it make you feel to get negative consequences for any of those things you said? Like talking when you weren't supposed to talk, disrespect or anything like that?
- Jaqueline: I felt like the consequences were fair for [inaudible 00:07:21], but sometimes when I talked it wasn't always like just blankly being disrespectful. It was sometimes to help other students.
- Researcher: Okay. Cool. So tell me about wearing uniforms. What are your thoughts about wearing them? How did you feel about the uniform expectations?
- Jaqueline: I didn't really have a problem with wearing uniforms until I got demerits about not wearing a belt or wearing inappropriate ... not wearing appropriate colored socks, or correct shoes or having a hair bow in my hair.
- Researcher: What would happen if you wore the wrong belt or the wrong color socks or any of those things you just said?
- Jaqueline: We'd either have to take our socks off and just wear ... if we were girls and wearing flat, and you can see the socks, we would have to take our socks off, take our hair bows out and provide shoes and not wearing blazers. We got a smock. That was for sixth and seventh grade.
- Researcher: That was for sixth and seventh grade, they'd give you a smock?
- Jaqueline: Yeah.
- Researcher: Okay. And what was the smock? Tell me about it.
- Jaqueline: The smock was basically ... it was a robe that people wear in hospitals where they do surgery, they put on smocks.
- Researcher: Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Jaqueline: We basically had those.

- Researcher: And you would have to put that on over your clothes?
- Jaqueline: Yeah. If we didn't have on the correct shirt or if we didn't have a tie or if we didn't have on our blazers. We would have to wear a smock.
- Researcher: Yeah. Did you ever have to wear a smock?
- Jaqueline: In seventh grade I had to wear a smock like a week, I believe, because I had lost my tie.
- Researcher: How did it make you feel to wear a smock at school?
- Jaqueline: It felt embarrassing because it was like ... it's really big on you and you really can't do anything and you stand out in the crowd.
- Researcher: Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Jaqueline: So even [crosstalk 00:10:06]
- Researcher: So you talked about ... oh I'm sorry, keep going.
- Jaqueline: Even though it was a consequence for not having the required uniform, it was embarrassing, to have to wear it.
- Researcher: I got you. So you talked about a lot of kids being disrespectful towards each other and sometimes the teachers. Do you think like when kids had to wear smocks, were they being disrespectful to each other for wearing smocks?
- Jaqueline: Yeah, I believe so.
- Researcher: Yeah. And then, what about on those days when people got to dress down or wear regular clothes instead of their uniform based on how many merits they got, did people ever get made fun of wearing their regular clothes or not wearing the regular clothes?
- Jaqueline: Well, some people that made fun of for wearing their original uniform and sometimes they always was made fun of with wearing smocks as well because-
- Researcher: Yeah.
- Jaqueline: Everything was looked at as ... I don't know. I didn't really have a preference of everyone I accepted and what did they wear.

- Researcher: Right. Okay. Okay, so how do you think your identity as African-American played a factor in how you experience the rules at your school? Or do you think ... do you think it did? Do you think being African-American affected how you experienced that?
- Jaqueline: I don't know. It wasn't many others, well, there were no other races at our school other than African-American until like the eighth grade when we got some, I believe we had one person outside of our race.
- Researcher: Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Jaqueline: I mean, I don't really remember.
- Researcher: Okay. Well, let me ask you this. What about the race of your teachers? Were there black and white teachers? Were there more white teachers or more black teachers? How did that work?
- Jaqueline: It was a mixture. It wasn't ... you couldn't really say it was more black or white, because it was an even amount of black and white teachers there.
- Researcher: Okay. Did it feel any different, you talked about being silent, like what does that look like throughout the day? Was there a lot of times when you were supposed to be silent or were there times where you had more freedom to talk to your classmates and things like that?
- Jaqueline: I mean we had some free time, but we had to earn it.
- Researcher: Tell me about that. How would you earn the free time?
- Jaqueline: Throughout the day we had at least seven classes. I mean we only were taught four subjects but four classes ... we had seven classes and in each class we got truth points and it was basically reflecting on how well the class had portrayed the real meaning of (the charter school).
- Researcher: Right. Good. So did you feel ... you talked about being like an even mix of black and white teachers, did you feel any different like getting the rules from a white teacher from a black teacher or did it seem the same from all the teachers?
- Jaqueline: I believe that the white teachers were trying not to be as hard on us as some other teachers and the black teachers seemed to be more invested in our learning, making us feel like we ... I don't know how to put it.
- Researcher: Okay. Well, you were saying the white teachers maybe weren't as hard on you discipline-wise? Is that what you were saying?

- Jaqueline: Yeah.
- Researcher: Alright. And then but black teachers maybe seemed like they were more concerned with your learning?
- Jaqueline: Yeah.
- Researcher: Okay. That's fair. What school did you go to before (the charter school)?
- Jaqueline: In fifth grade I went to Wind Ridge Elementary.
- Researcher: Okay, was that a charter school or no?
- Jaqueline: That was a public school.
- Researcher: Just a public school? Cool. How would you compare the rules, do you remember back at, you said at Wind Ridge?
- Jaqueline: Yeah.
- Researcher: How would you compare the rules there to (the charter school)?
- Jaqueline: (the charter school) prepared me for the real world better than fifth grade, I believe.
- Researcher: Why would you say that?
- Jaqueline: Because in fifth grade I really didn't know how people were and I didn't know how to expect real situations in life until I got to (the charter school), because they showed us how difficult it would be to be surrounded by different people, with different perspectives.

#### Jaqueline Interview Two

- Researcher: Alright. The first question is, how old are you?
- Jaqueline: I'm 15.
- Researcher: Okay, what grades did you attend the school?
- Jaqueline: Sixth grade, seventh, and eighth.
- Researcher: Okay. Did the rules or expectations change as you moved to the higher grades? Like were they different for eighth graders than they were for sixth or seventh graders?

- Jaqueline: I don't think so. I mean, the grade, the way the school would change over the years, like from the first year I was there, it evolved.
- Researcher: How would you say that it changed?
- Jaqueline: Well, we moved buildings. We were able to do a lot more things as years like camp out. We made more rooms about things and were allowed to do more things, like more stuff-
- Researcher: Can you give me [crosstalk 00:01:13]-
- Jaqueline: Like, in sixth grade, we had get smart, which was something that we did for when we didn't do our homework or we didn't turn in our homework. And, in seventh grade, we no longer had that demerit. And, in eighth grade, we really didn't get in trouble about our homework as much as we did in sixth grade.
- Researcher: Okay. And what was get smart, again?
- Jaqueline: It was like a detention for people who didn't do their homework.
- Researcher: Okay was it an after school detention?
- Jaqueline: No. It was during clubs. Like if you had clubs. Like people would go to clubs. Or, if you had detention, you would go to detention during the clubs time.
- Researcher: Gotcha. And then could you describe what swag was? Or what it is?
- Jaqueline: Swag was ... well because we decided ... a way to show our professionalism. We would have to sit up straight, watch the speaker, ask questions, and I forgot what g was. But they stood ... like it was an acronym. And it stood for sitting up straight, watching the speaker, asking and answering questions, and I cannot remember what the g was.
- Researcher: Cool. Did you have to have your hands up on the desk as well.
- Jaqueline: Yes, we had to sit with our hands folded across the desk.
- Researcher: Okay. How'd you feel about that?
- Jaqueline: Sometimes I didn't think it was necessary. But I understood why we did it.
- Researcher: So did your teachers tell you why they wanted your hands on the desk and sitting up straight and all that stuff?
- Jaqueline: Well, so that we wouldn't look [inaudible 00:03:52].

Researcher: Okay. Got it. How did you feel about the amount of time you had to socialize with your peers while you were at school?

Jaqueline: We didn't really ... well, I didn't really talk to a lot of people, so that wouldn't be a good question to ask me. Because I didn't talk to a lot of people.

Researcher: Alright, I got it. So what about other students who maybe were wanting to socialize. How do you feel about the amount of time that they had to socialize with their friends? From what you observed?

Jaqueline: I guess you could say they didn't like it. I mean it was only like probably half an hour they get to talk to friends, and they have to go back into that school mode for another four, five hours.

Researcher: Okay, so what was that half hour? What part of the day would that be?

Jaqueline: Probably lunch.

Researcher: Okay. Got it. Did you always get to talk at lunch or was lunch silent every-

Jaqueline: It depends. It depended on how well we did in class, like in our previous classes before lunch. It would determine if we were able to talk during lunch.

Researcher: Gotcha. How did it feel ... so when I was there as a teacher, there was silent breakfast, and I think most lunches were silent, and then the hallways were silent. And then if you weren't doing partner work or group work in class, and you had to raise your hand, and you pretty much had to be silent in class. How did it make you feel to be silent at these times throughout the day?

Jaqueline: It was very frustrating because, I mean, I talk a lot. I talk a lot so it's frustrating because to be told not to talk all the time.

Researcher: So how did it feel to receive a consequence for talking at school?

Jaqueline: Well, I can say I was frustrated because they always told us to be quiet and stuff.

Researcher: Okay. Let me see. Okay, so describe coming in to (the charter school), kind of like the morning routine, when you first get there, from the time you enter the building, tell me what goes on, and what's happening from the time you walk up to the doors.

Jaqueline: In the morning, we would turn in our phones, make sure we had our attire on correctly, our ties on, our blazers buttoned up, our shirt tucked in. Had to make sure that we were dressed appropriate for the school day. And we would shake the principal's hand and say, good morning, my name ... well, state your name and then say, I'm ready for the school day ... I believe, I forgot, it was a year ago. But

he would ask then ... and we would have our homework and stuff already out before he made us come to our classrooms so we would already be prepared to turn them in.

Researcher: And then would turn in your homework when you got in there?

Jaqueline: Yes.

Researcher: And then from there, what would happen?

Jaqueline: After turning in our homework, we would walk into the school ... we would walk into our classrooms and sit down. And class work, well, first it's worksheets, and then, after breakfast, our first class starts.

Researcher: Okay, and you described, last time we talked about the uniforms a lot and having to wear a smock if you didn't have your whole uniform on. So would that happen ... let's say the time you had to wear a smock, did you ... when they checked your uniform at the door, what would happen if you didn't have your uniform on?

Jaqueline: They would give us a demerit, and then they would give us a smock.

Researcher: Okay, and you just put it on there in the hallway or something?

Jaqueline: Yeah.

Researcher: Okay. So how did you feel specifically thinking about walking in straight, silent lines in the hallways, how did you feel about being silent during those transitions?

Jaqueline: I never ... well, I mean, sometimes I would get in trouble because I would talk to someone, like once or something. And they would give me a demerit, so I guess I wouldn't like it.

Researcher: Okay. Got it. Let me see here. I think we talked about this a little bit last time, too. When students were made to wear smocks, did you ever hear other kids make fun of them or how did you think the kids felt about the smocks.

Jaqueline: They would laugh at other kids, for wearing the smocks, but I don't think it was as bad every time but, yeah, sometimes yeah, depending on who would get the smocks.

Researcher: Gotcha. Yeah. Can you tell me any times when you saw another student being treated unfairly at the school?

Jaqueline: Well, every day. A lot of kids would get bullied by someone else.

Researcher: Okay. What about by teachers or administrators? Do you ever feel like the other students were being treated unfairly by the teachers?

Jaqueline: No.

Researcher: Okay. And were there times when you thought the teachers or staff were being too hard on other kids? So I know we talked about you not getting very many consequences from your teachers but did you see other kids getting maybe in trouble where you thought the teachers were being too hard on them.

Jaqueline: Yeah.

Researcher: So explain that.

Jaqueline: Well, it could be times like when we're doing independent work, and someone doesn't understand, and the teacher's working with someone else. So one student would try to help the student who doesn't understand. But both would get a demerit because of the situation and then they try to explain still and get another demerit.

Researcher: Gotcha. So it's kinda like ... so you're saying you were supposed to be working by yourself, and if you try to help a classmate you would get a demerit for that?

Jaqueline: Yeah.

Researcher: And then if you try to tell the teacher what was happening, that you weren't just goofing off, that you maybe get another demerit.

Jaqueline: Yeah.

Researcher: Okay. Gotcha. Were there any other instances where you felt like maybe other kids were not being treated fairly.

Jaqueline: Yeah, like ... well, then, no I don't think so.

#### Ms. Ortiz Interview

Researcher: Okay, so my first question is how would you identify your race?

Ms. Ortiz: Our race? African American.

Researcher: If you had to describe in detail the rules or the expectations to someone at (the charter school), how you would you describe them?



- Ms. Ortiz: You have to be persistent, willing to listen, and willing to accept the fact that it's kind of strict, but it's for your own good, like the posture and the responses. I think it teaches some good ethics to carry them on in adulthood, and how to present themselves, and how to hold their body postures. I think it was pretty positive.
- Researcher: Thinking about the posture and stuff, can you give specific examples of the expectations that the school would have for those things?
- Ms. Ortiz: Okay, it was called ... I forgot what it was called.
- Researcher: Was it slant?
- Ms. Ortiz: No, not slant. How they would have to sit up at the desks with straight posture and hold their heads. I can't remember the term that they were using for it.
- Researcher: Were they using swag? I know they used different-
- Ms. Ortiz: Yeah, swag. The swag. The hand gestures. Shake your hand when you want to be acknowledged. The proper responses that you had to give to be acknowledged instead of just blurting out or just, you know, those type of things.
- Researcher: Are the rules and expectations fair and why or why not?
- Ms. Ortiz: Very much so. I felt that they was fair. I don't feel like they were asking too much of them. By me being raised in a military family, I really felt like it was a good thing. It was a good school, give the kids the opportunity of knowing how to conduct themselves, and how to talk properly, and how to hold their pose right, and their body language, and their gender. Because all that makes a difference. All this sends out signals and different responses. If you know how to conduct your body and yourself and present yourself well, you'll get well reaction. I think that it was a good idea.
- Researcher: You mentioned coming from a military family. Do you see parallels between things that are taught in the military and things that were taught at (the charter school)?
- Ms. Ortiz: Yes, the strictness. How to talk, and how to hold your body gestures, and how to be straight up, not slouching. Overall, I got from (the charter school) is ethics, taught the kids ethics.
- Researcher: Good. What was your least favorite rule for (Jaqueline) going to that school?
- Ms. Ortiz: It really wasn't anything, but what I thought was unfair is if one student got in trouble, the whole class got punished for it. I just didn't understand that, per se. But anything else, no problems. I love this school.

- Researcher: Can you describe any relationship between your child's behavior at home and the way the school personnel described their behavior? What you were seeing from your child at home versus what teachers would tell you how she was acting at school.
- Ms. Ortiz: Alright, well, basically the same.
- Researcher: The same?
- Ms. Ortiz: Yeah, it was basically the same.
- Researcher: How was her behavior?
- Ms. Ortiz: It was excellent the majority of the time. She did have little incidences where she wanted to get in her feelings, and want to shut down, and not be completely responsive to a question or real dry. It was shocking to me at times when I get it. When the school would say something about it, I'm like, "Oh yeah, I get that, too."
- Researcher: Cool. How do you think your child's behavior outside of school was affected by their experience at school?
- Ms. Ortiz: I believe it was affected on a good scale because I know, I remember her first year there, she was so excited about it because in elementary school, (Jaqueline) was very advanced, so it was like in elementary it was too slow for her. When she got into (the charter school), it was more of a challenge. Once she got used to how the teachers were teaching, then it became more into her depth. Because she was already advanced on it. Or just good at whatever lesson that was being taught at the time, she would pick right up on it to the point of where it's like, okay, it's not a challenge no more. She gets bored real quick.
- Researcher: Gotcha. Was there any change in your child's behavior when they started going to the school?
- Ms. Ortiz: Yes. She became more of a people person. She became more [conversive 00:06:40], more interactive with people. She was always a little quiet, timid child. But she, when going to (the charter school), actually opened up her personality. Her meeting (her friend) and they just hit it off as good, good friends, and still friends to this day. I believe (the charter school) had a lot to do with it.
- Researcher: Can you think of anything in particular that (the charter school) did that helped her with that?
- Ms. Ortiz: I believe the kindness and the [patientness 00:07:33] of the teachers, of the staff. That would allow her to open up more, and be more receptive to people, and give people a chance to be your friend because (Jaqueline) mean. She just had that

mean personality, though it's like when she gets comfortable and used to being around, her little bubblyness just shows where she's just so lovable.

Researcher: Gotcha. Cool. How do you feel about the uniform expectations at the school?

Ms. Ortiz: I thought it was excellent. It made them look like little businessmen and women.

Researcher: One thing that (Jaqueline) and I talked about was she said there was a week where she had lost her tie or something.

Ms. Ortiz: Yes.

Researcher: One of the things that they do is they give the children a smock to wear. We talked about that. How do you feel about that?

Ms. Ortiz: I mean, when you're out of uniform, you're out of uniform.

Researcher: Gotcha.

Ms. Ortiz: There are consequences to it. It's a rule set, so it's like you know that these are the things that you need. You're supposed to be prepared the night before so you don't have any mishaps. If you're not prepared, it's consequences. A smock was the consequence.

Researcher: What things about the school-

Ms. Ortiz: I-

Researcher: Go ahead.

Ms. Ortiz: I was going to say I agreed with it because it would teach them responsibility. You didn't want to walk around looking different from everybody else with this black, ugly, long smock on, so keep it in mind. Teaching responsibility. "I don't want to go to school and put on no smock, so let me make sure I've got my tie on, make sure I've got my blazer right." I thought it was a good thing.

Researcher: You already talked about this a little bit, but what things about the school did you like the best and why?

Ms. Ortiz: That they are very, very concerned about their education. (the charter school) is very hands-on. They're very nice and [meritable 00:10:05] and respectful. I like that.

Researcher: Okay, good. What would you like to see the school do differently and why?

Ms. Ortiz: Expand more. Give more kids that same opportunity.

- Researcher: Making the school itself bigger or maybe opening another school? How would you want to see that?
- Ms. Ortiz: You've got to crawl before you walk.
- Researcher: Right.
- Ms. Ortiz: I would say make the school a little bit more bigger or get a bigger building. That way you can hold more students and get more staff.
- Researcher: Gotcha, yep. Let me see. In terms of expectations and rules, what would be the ideal school for your child? What would it look like?
- Ms. Ortiz: (the charter school).
- Researcher: (the charter school)? Okay.
- Ms. Ortiz: Yeah.
- Researcher: Alright, do you think your identity as African American plays a factor in how you and your child experience the school?
- Ms. Ortiz: It's a possibility, but I never really gave that any thought like that.
- Researcher: Right.
- Ms. Ortiz: I am, but I have to finish talking to him. I'm listening.
- Researcher: What (Jaqueline) and I talked about was I had asked her about how many teachers were White versus how many teachers were Black. She said it was a pretty fair mix, pretty even mix, and she hadn't really considered that too much, either, especially since-
- Ms. Ortiz: I didn't, either.
- Researcher: The majority-
- Ms. Ortiz: I feel like it was an equal amount. I really didn't pay any attention of the numbers of each race and whatnot.
- Researcher: My next question is when it comes to the ideal teacher, is race a factor?
- Ms. Ortiz: No, it's not.

Researcher: Did you feel any differently, I think you kind of already answered this, but did you feel any differently about White teachers implementing the rules versus African American teachers implementing the rules there?

Ms. Ortiz: Of course not.

Researcher: I'm sorry. Say that one more time.

Ms. Ortiz: I said of course not. It was all for the better good, for the great of the kids, I'm all for it. I don't see color.

Researcher: Gotcha. Yeah, that pretty much answers the last question, too. Alright, hang on one second, alright?

Ms. Ortiz: Alright.

Researcher: Actually, before I do that, is there anything else you'd want to add about this conversation about the rules and expectations at (the charter school)?

Ms. Ortiz: No.

#### Rhonda Interview One

Researcher: Okay so the first question I have is what grades did you go to the school?

Rhonda: 6th through 8th.

Researcher: Okay, what is your race? How would you describe your race?

Rhonda: African American.

Researcher: Okay. If you had to describe in detail the rules and expectations to someone else at (the charter school), how would you describe it?

Rhonda: I would just say it like what you mean expectations? Like how it was?

Researcher: Yeah well like what's rules and discipline and behavior and things?

Rhonda: It was the discipline was on a good matter, it wasn't out of order or too much. It was actually on a good level that middle school kids need. Expectations were very high that they need we can all achieve and reach to, that we actually did at the end.

Researcher: Okay so would you say that the rules, are the rules and expectations fair?

Rhonda: Yes.

- Researcher: Okay and why do you say they are fair?
- Rhonda: Because at (the charter school) they were trying to train us into going to college. And the rules and expectations was like based on had they wanted to help us out in the future and it helped us to get to the form of where we were actually like college kids like organized and actually ready for anything that was coming our way.
- Researcher: Okay, what was your least favorite rule and why?
- Rhonda: My least favorite rule was I really didn't have one because I understood mostly why we had rules.
- Researcher: Okay, do you think your identity as an African American plays a factor in how you experience the rules at the school? And if so how?
- Rhonda: No, what do you mean like?
- Researcher: So, there ... Hang on let me make sure because I have other questions. Okay I'm going to go ahead and ask the next question. So, my next question, how did you feel about white teachers implementing the rules and expectations at the school?
- Rhonda: I felt fine.
- Researcher: Okay so did it give you ... Did it make any difference if a white teacher was telling you a certain rule or whether it was a black teacher did any of that seem different to you?
- Rhonda: Uh-uh no sir.
- Researcher: Okay would you have felt differently if the rules and expectations were, well nevermind hang on, let me ask the next one. What school did you attend before (the charter school)? Where did you go to school?
- Rhonda: (traditional public school).
- Researcher: Alright, that's not a charter school right?
- Rhonda: No sir, it's not.
- Researcher: Okay. And so, before coming to the charter school, how would you compare the rules? I know that was a few years back, but how would you compare (traditional public school) to (the charter school) with the rules and expectations?
- Rhonda: (traditional public school) was more out of order it, like it wasn't organized and basically they was like madness. They had no control.

- Researcher: Okay.
- Rhonda: And they had [crosstalk 00:03:47] to lose a lot good thing[inaudible 00:03:52]
- Researcher: So do you think it's important for a school to have control over the students?
- Rhonda: Yes sir.
- Researcher: And why? Why is that?
- Rhonda: Because if they don't then the kids are going to do whatever they want to do and basically it will be like just a waste of their time coming because if they do what they want to do then they not going to be learning anything.
- Researcher: Okay. That's ... So, what's the best part of going to (the charter school)?
- Rhonda: Meeting different people who understood me in their own kind of way.
- Researcher: Alright, explain more about that. Like, how are the people different? And all that.
- Rhonda: Because it was like some teachers who were strict, and you know they only want ... they didn't really ... they wasn't really into like the plan stuff they was really into the work. I understood and it brought out the seriousness in you. Then their teachers who were cool and understanding who [inaudible 00:04:58] you know could have a little chill time and talk about things and they could relate to you.
- Researcher: Okay, cool, cool. What was the most difficult part of going to the school?
- Rhonda: Can you repeat that question?
- Researcher: Yep, what was the most difficult part of going to (the charter school)?
- Rhonda: The most difficult part I want to say was the time of getting out of school, like getting out at 4:30.
- Researcher: Okay so why was that difficult?
- Rhonda: Because I wasn't used to it and I really would like, I was to busy wanting to be outside and stuff like that so it was like a childish moment.
- Researcher: Okay so you were saying that getting out at 4:30 made it like a long day?
- Rhonda: Yes sir.
- Researcher: Gotcha. Okay. How often did you receive positive praise and rewards at the school?

- Rhonda: Every single, every single week.
- Researcher: Every week? Okay. What did that look like? How did your teachers give you positive praise? Or rewards?
- Rhonda: They will either come up to me tell me that they have been paying attention to what I've been doing and that they are proud of me. They will either give me certificates or little treats or either we have community celebrations and they will call my name for certain things that are very rewarding. And good -
- Researcher: Cool. And what else?
- Rhonda: And good reward and good things.
- Researcher: Okay. Good. How did it make you feel getting those?
- Rhonda: It made me feel old and proud of myself to be different from where I was before I got there to while I was there to see improvement.
- Researcher: Okay. Good. And how often did you receive negative consequences at school?
- Rhonda: I really didn't because I was behaved so.
- Researcher: Right. So, so not often?
- Rhonda: Uh-Uh, no sir.
- Researcher: Alright, how did your teachers give negative consequence? So if you did receive a negative consequence how would they do that?
- Rhonda: Uh I would get a demerit, and I would have to ...It depends on how many I got I would of went to work harder.
- Researcher: What was work harder?
- Rhonda: Work harder was like a detention where you have to do write offs.
- Researcher: Okay was it after school?
- Rhonda: No, sir it was during school.
- Researcher: What part of the day?
- Rhonda: It would be during the evening, in the last couple of minutes of school.



- Researcher: Okay what would be going on in school while you had work harder? What were the other kids doing that didn't have that?
- Rhonda: The other kids would be at our extra curriculum clubs or either lunch.
- Researcher: Okay. Alright. Tell me about wearing uniforms. What are your thoughts about wearing uniforms?
- Rhonda: At first, I didn't understand why we had to wear uniforms but then once I got there longer I understood that it was to make us look professional.
- Researcher: Okay. Do you think it's important for middle school students to look professional?
- Rhonda: Yes sir.
- Researcher: Okay. How did it make you feel to earn a negative consequence? Did you ever come to school out of your uniform? Or like not have part of it?
- Rhonda: Yes sir. Okay.
- Researcher: What was it like when you came and you didn't have your whole uniform on?
- Rhonda: In 6th and 7th grade we had these things called smocks and if we was missing our blazers, had the wrong shirt on or missing our ties we had to wear these big smocks but if we wear the wrong shoes we had to the little booties.
- Researcher: Right. What ... So how ... Did you ever have to wear smock or booties?
- Rhonda: I had to wear a smock twice.
- Researcher: How did it make you feel wearing a smock at school?
- Rhonda: At first, it was kind of weird because I wasn't used to it, I felt like it was weird that's all.
- Researcher: Okay. It didn't bother you?
- Rhonda: No sir.
- Rhonda Interview Two
- Researcher: All right. My first question is how old are you?
- Rhonda: I'm 14.
- Researcher: 14. What grades did you attend the school?

Rhonda: Sixth through eighth.

Researcher: Did the rules or the expectations change as you moved from the higher grades? Were they different when you were in sixth grade to when you were in seventh and eighth grade?

Rhonda: No, sir. I just had a different perspective. By the time I got to eighth grade, I found things that I would like to understand why the rules were set the way they were.

Researcher: Okay. But you said they did not change?

Rhonda: No, they did not.

Researcher: Can you describe what swag is at the school?

Rhonda: Swag is ... basically you have to sit proper in your chair, your bag has to be on the back of the chair, like all the way on the chair, and your hands have to be crossed, and you have to sit them in front of you and make sure your shoulders are straight. It's just a posture.

Researcher: Was there anything else with that?

Rhonda: You had to be quiet and have your eyes on the speaker.

Researcher: Okay. How did you feel about swag?

Rhonda: At first I didn't like it, but then I started liking it.

Researcher: What did you not like about it at first, and what did you end up liking about it?

Rhonda: I didn't like how every time I was doing something, I would get caught [inaudible 00:01:45]. I was used to other schools, like if the teacher said, "Be quiet," you just [inaudible 00:01:54]. I wasn't used to all that. Once I finally understood how Veritably was different from other schools, I understood why they was doing what they was doing.

Researcher: You said part of that was having your hands up on your desk?

Rhonda: Yes, sir.

Researcher: Did your teachers tell you why they wanted your hands up on your desk?

Rhonda: No. I guess so they can basically see our hands to make sure we wasn't doing anything. [inaudible 00:02:26] So they can make sure you wasn't doing anything [inaudible 00:02:33] because the teacher wasn't being descriptive.

- Researcher: Okay. How did you feel about the amount of time that you had to socialize with your peers while you were at school?
- Rhonda: I liked it. I felt real good.
- Researcher: About how much time did you have to socialize, would you say?
- Rhonda: I was able to socialize with my peers all the time because they made sure we were doing a lot of table work. And then we also would get to talk at lunch, and then we also had recess. So I was talking to them a lot.
- Researcher: Okay. ... put minutes on it.
- Rhonda: I think.
- Researcher: What was that?
- Rhonda: I said I can't put any minutes on it. Because it was all the time.
- Researcher: Okay, I got you. You said you would have talking lunch. I know when I was there teaching, it was like silent breakfast and silent lunch, and silent in the hallways. Did that change after I left? Or was it kind of like that most days?
- Rhonda: It was sorts the same. We have a cafeteria now, so when we come in you have to be silent breakfast, silent in the hallways. If you are talking, you have to be talking like library voice, like [inaudible 00:04:02]. And you have to earn talking by truth points.
- Researcher: Okay. What were the truth points?
- Rhonda: Truth. T stands for "teamwork", R stands for "respect", U stands for "urgency", the other T stands for "Tenacity", and H stands for "honesty".
- Researcher: How do you earn those points?
- Rhonda: As a class, you have to work together, you guys have to do exactly what the teacher says. If the teacher says, "Be quiet", or "Can you guys move?" Then you guys have to do exactly what they say the first time. You have to move at a good pace, so you can get through the whole lesson. You cannot be quick to give up, and if they ask you a question, you have to be truthful about ... If they say "Do you understand the word?" Be honest about that you understand what you're doing, or if you do something you don't have no business and they ask you, "Did you do this?"
- Researcher: Okay. How did it make you feel to have to be silent throughout the times of the day? You said, if you're in a lesson, the teacher would tell you to be silent, or

maybe it was breakfast or things like that. How did it feel to have to be silent at those times?

Rhonda: I didn't like having to be silent at breakfast, but I understood why we had to be silent while the teacher was teaching us a lesson. That's the only time I hated being silent, was for breakfast.

Researcher: What did you feel like the lesson was for that?

Rhonda: Basically, because if you started talking, then everyone was gonna get to hyped up and therefore you're gonna be already energized to like get into more trouble, be too talkative by the time you get to class because you guys ain't gonna want to stop talking.

Researcher: Okay. How did you feel if you received a consequence for talking at school?

Rhonda: I felt like it was a [inaudible 00:06:10]. I felt like it was good. It wasn't an outrage.

Researcher: Okay. Can you describe ... hang on one second ... Can you describe a day at (the charter school)? What it was like when you first showed up at the doors of the school until the end of the day? You don't have to give me minute-by-minute, but kind of like what was the routine each day?

Rhonda: Basically, if you're having a bad day or not, they, in the morning time they always try to, they say ... you always are being greeted with positivity, a happy mood, and encouragement all through the day, encouragement and positivity.

Researcher: Okay.

Rhonda: And laughter.

Researcher: So what would happen when you first showed up at the school, before you even came in, what was going on? Kind of tell me ...

Rhonda: There will be a teacher, or the principal at the door, you have to walk up, and you have to shake their hand and do eye contact. They'll say "Good morning", you have to say, "Good morning" to whoever you're talking to. And they ask, "How are you?" You say you're doing good, and they have to walk you to another door, and there'll be the dean right there at all times. She'll say "Good morning." She'll say "Turn in your phones" and she'll check you. Then you go on in, you have [inaudible 00:07:40] and then you go around.

During the morning you're just greeting people like the teachers, turning in the hallways to have to shake their hand. No, you don't have to shake their hand, you have to say "Good morning" to them, turn in your homework, and just sit down.

- Researcher: Was the principal checking uniforms at the door?
- Rhonda: Yes, the dean was, because she was the person that was on the inside.
- Researcher: Okay so she was the one that would take your cell phones if you had them.
- Rhonda: Yes.
- Researcher: Would she hold on to your cellphone until the need of the day or something?
- Rhonda: Yes, sir. She would put them in our classroom bins, because we had bins. She would put them in the bins and would come around at the end of the day to give them to us.
- Researcher: And she also checked your uniforms?
- Rhonda: Yes, sir.
- Researcher: You told me last time we talked that you came out of uniform, I think twice? Tell me about that. One of those times when you stepped up and you didn't have your uniform on. Tell me what would happen.
- Rhonda: They would ask you, "Let me see your uniform, button your blazer so they could see my belt and I would tell them, upfront let them know that I don't have what I have on right. I forgot my blazer one day and she was like, "Where's your blazer?" And I was like "I left it at home." And they was like, "Oh, okay this time." And I got a smock and a dress down violation.
- Researcher: Okay. So she told yo to get a smock. And what happened?
- Rhonda: I just have to put the smock on, make sure I bunch it up out of the way and keep it on throughout the day, until it's time to go at the end of the day.
- Researcher: How did it make you feel to wear the smock all day?
- Rhonda: I felt fine. At first I didn't like it, but then I felt pretty good about it because It was just like ...I don't know I was getting used to them. I was like, "Well, it doesn't even matter."
- Researcher: Okay. How did you feel about the expectations to walk in straight lines in the hallways during transitions?
- Rhonda: I felt good about it because most of the time, there was two classrooms coming from different ways, and so to keep confusion and things like that from going on, that was good, because everybody was able to come through quietly and get to where they need to be.

Researcher: Okay. Did you ever hear other students making fun of students for wearing smocks if they had to?

Rhonda: No, sir. They acted pretty cool.

Researcher: The students did?

Rhonda: Mm-hmm (affirmative). They actually like laughed. At first, they was laughing, then they thought it was cool for some reason.

Researcher: You don't know why they thought it was cool, or what?

Rhonda: Mm-unn (negative). I guess because, I guess you want to say popular kids, when they wear that they thought it was cool, but I don't know that they thought it was cool. They wasn't making a big deal out of it. Everybody wasn't coming with them on.

Researcher: Yeah. Okay. Can you tell me about any time when you saw other students being treated unfairly at school? By teachers or administrators or anything like that?

Rhonda: Teachers and administrators always treated each child the same, where the same was [inaudible 00:11:45] no matter what. They also made sure we were equal, and that's why I liked the fact that we had uniforms. No one could be sad or worried about what the other person got on because we all be wearing the exact same thing.

Researcher: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Were there times when you thought teachers or staff were too hard on the other kids?

Rhonda: No, sir.

#### Ms. Johnson Interview

Researcher: Okay. The first question is, what is your race?

Ms. Johnson: I'm African American.

Researcher: Okay. If you had to describe in detail the rules or the expectations to someone else at the school, how would you describe them?

Ms. Johnson: The rules?

Researcher: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ms. Johnson: Well, from what I could see, the rules was pretty set. Most stable, you know, for the children.

Researcher: There were pretty what?

Ms. Johnson: They were pretty much set. They was pretty much set. I kind of like the rules that what they had going there for (the charter school).

Researcher: Okay. Did you think the rules were fair? Why or why not?

Ms. Johnson: Repeat the question. I couldn't hear you.

Researcher: Did you think the rules were fair? Why or why not?

Ms. Johnson: Well, I thought they was fair. They was learning the children how to be responsibility and that everything don't go their way. Sometimes children have to have some guidance, so I think the rules pretty much set.

Researcher: Okay.

Ms. Johnson: Pretty much good.

Researcher: Good. What was your least favorite rule at the school and why?

Ms. Johnson: Okay. I liked the rules where they were showing them how to be as a team. I think that was good, because you, everything that dealing with life, you have sometimes have to be team. Team worker.

Researcher: Good. Were there any rules that you noticed (Rhonda) encountering that were the ones that you didn't really like, or was there anything like that?

Ms. Johnson: Yes. It was about using the bathroom, 'cause whole lot of children that cannot hold their bladder or anything like ... I didn't kind of like those, but those are some of the things that they would have to learn. The rules with the bathroom, I didn't kind of like those.

Researcher: Do you know what the rule was, with the bathroom?

Ms. Johnson: Yes, that they had to sit and wait 'til a certain time to go.

Researcher: Okay.

Ms. Johnson: With some of 'em, you know, that's what my understanding were. Then there were sometimes [inaudible 00:02:17] those, not tell like the whole story, 'cause some of them want to run back and forth because their little friend is going, and they want to up and go because they are, you know, it is kind of, mm-hmm (affirmative).

Researcher: Can you describe any relationship between your child's behavior at home and the way the school personnel described their behavior? So, was the school telling you one thing about your child and then you were like, "Well, that's not how it is at home." Was there anything like that or was it pretty consistent with what you saw at home?

Ms. Johnson: It was pretty consistent. It was pretty consistent.

Researcher: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ms. Johnson: Mm-hmm (affirmative). It was very consistent, yeah.

Researcher: Yeah, and I can imagine with her.

Ms. Johnson: Yeah.

Researcher: Let me see. How do you think your child's behavior outside of the school was affected by her experience at the school?

Ms. Johnson: I think it was pretty much the same. Pretty much consistent. They were pretty much the same.

Researcher: So, the other day we talked about how she went to (the traditional public school) in elementary school before she went to (the charter school). So when she started going to (the charter school), you didn't see any change in her?

Ms. Johnson: Okay, it was a change whereas that she had more confidence in herself. I forgot about (the traditional public school). (The traditional public school) was kind of saying that she was not, but (Rhonda) was studying, and I think at one time they was not giving her the credibility that she deserved 'cause she was come home and study very hard. And when she got to (the charter school), some of her grades changed. Her grades changed for better.

Researcher: Okay.

Ms. Johnson: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Researcher: Good. All right. Okay, how did you feel about the uniform expectations at the school?

Ms. Johnson: I loved the uniforms, simply because children, a lot of time, when they go to school, they [inaudible 00:04:24] at what another wearing and not wearing, and with the uniform, it pretty much, everybody looks the same.

Researcher: Okay.



Ms. Johnson: With the uniform. So I liked that. I dig the uniform.

Researcher: What things did you like about the school the best? And I think you kind of already talked about this, but ...

Ms. Johnson: Well, the school was wonderful. Like I said, was showing them teamwork and that they can learn to work together and get along. It's pretty much showing them, and activity of growing up. And everybody doesn't think the same. Everybody doesn't react the same, but still we all there to get along and for the same purpose, is to learn.

Researcher: What would you like to see the school do differently and why?

Ms. Johnson: Well, I really, at the moment, I cannot think of anything that I'd like to see the school do differently, 'cause to me they're doing good. Yeah, they're doing wonderful. I think it's a wonderful job.

Researcher: Do you think your identity, your family's identity as African American plays any factor in how you experience the rules at the school?

Ms. Johnson: No, I don't think so.

Researcher: What about when it comes to the ideal teacher that you would have for (Rhonda), does race play a factor?

Ms. Johnson: No. No. No.

Researcher: So, with those being said, did it feel any differently with white teachers implementing the rules that they did for African American teacher implementing the rules at the school?

Ms. Johnson: No, not to me. No.

Researcher: All right, and I guess my last question would be just talking a little bit more about the comparisons to (the traditional public school) and (the charter school). What were the rules and the expectations like, if you can remember back to when she went to (the traditional public school)? What was that like?

Ms. Johnson: I think the rules was pretty much the same, you know. I think they were pretty much the same. I was just to me, seemed a little bit more ... How would I put? I'm trying to think of the word to put it. I can't think of the word to put it.

Both of them, to me, they all had the same rules that you had to respect one another. I don't know, (the charter school), there's something about, like it gave (Rhonda) a whole outlook on herself and pushing forward. I think she kind of liked it. I think the uniform, at first, she wasn't too, was tickled about it, and once

she got into the uniform and looked at herself, I think it kind of made her feel like, "Hey, I like this here." Made 'em look like more dress up, you know, more dress up.

#### Laila Interview

Researcher: Alright. What grades did you go to the school?

Laila: I went there 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 7<sup>th</sup> grade.

Researcher: Alright. What is your race?

Laila: I'm a black African-American.

Researcher: Okay. If you had to describe in detail the rules or the expectations to someone, how would you describe it?

Laila: I really think the rules are unfair and very strict. Sometimes, one of our rules was about chewing gum. I really feel that was too much overboard for a rule. We got in trouble for chewing gum. I felt like that was just too much.

Researcher: Okay. Was that the only rule that you felt was unfair, or were there others?

Laila: You're saying what rule I thought was unfair to other people?

Researcher: No, I'm saying, you said the rule that you couldn't chew gum was unfair. Were there any other rules that you felt like were unfair?

Laila: Our talking rule. We would be in class. If you get caught talking to somebody, we had paycheck dollars. You would get a demerit that deducted a paycheck dollar just for talking or you could have just been asking for instructions or something.

Researcher: Got it. Alright. Do you think your identity as African-American plays a factor in how you experience the rules at your school? If so, how?

Laila: No, I don't think so, because the majority of my teachers were my race. Yeah.

Researcher: How did you feel? If you had white teachers, how did you feel about white teachers implementing the rules or the expectations at your school?

Laila: In sixth grade, I think it was seventh grade. I did have a teacher that I felt like she would always just pick on me about the rules and just give demerits for no reason, so yeah. I experienced that.

Researcher: Was that a white or an African-American teacher?

- Laila: Oh, she was white.
- Researcher: Do you feel like her race and your race had something to do with that, or what?
- Laila: Yes, I did. I told my mama about it multiple times because I felt like that she wanted to pick on me or something or just because I was black. I don't know if she had something against my race. I was unsure.
- Researcher: Do you feel like, can you give me anything specific that made you feel that way?
- Laila: Let's see.
- Researcher: Here, let me ask you another question real quick. You were saying most of your classmates are African-American, right?
- Laila: Yes.
- Researcher: Did she treat any of your classmates the same way, or were they treated differently?
- Laila: Yes, I think they were treated differently, because for instance, she would always point out our wrongdoing instead of all the other kids that were her race. I feel like she just had something against us black African-Americans if she goes by race. It would always be stuff about us and what we do instead of what the other students have done that were her race.
- Researcher: Okay. Got you. Would you have felt differently if the rules and expectations were implemented by an African-American teacher? Why or why not? Would it feel different having a black teacher telling you the rules rather than a white teacher?
- Laila: No. Well, yes, it would feel different because it's coming from somebody who has experience a life of a black African-American, so I'm sure they understand, opposed to a white person telling you something, giving you a rule or something. I just know it's different because they know from a black person's perspective. They know how black kids are going to ask, opposed to a white teacher, it's a whole other ballgame.
- Researcher: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Got you. You said you went to the school in 6th and 7th grade. Did you go to a charter school in 8th grade, or was it a traditional school?
- Laila: It was a traditional school.
- Researcher: How would you say those schools were different or the same, or how would you compare them?

Laila: I think going to a traditional school this year is different. I have more freedom to do things because charter schools, their rules are so strict. You have so much homework to go by. You have to abide by so many rules. On the other hand, a traditional school, you have freedom to go play sports. You have freedom to do things. You still have rules, but they're not that many that you have to abide by. You still have freedom to, you don't have to sit in SWAG all day that we have to do. You can still, we used to have, now we have lockers, but at my charter school, we didn't. We had to ask to go places. Now, at my traditional school, we don't have to do that because they see that we are moving on to going to high school. That's the things we're going to be doing in high school. Instead, going to a charter school, you're locked down and have to be asked to do a lot of certain things. I think it's more freedom going to a traditional school than a charter school.

Researcher: Got it. I think the phone cut out. The first thing you said was that you have more freedom to play sports at the traditional school?

Laila: Yes, because our charter school didn't really have sports during my sixth grade year. They just had cheer.

Researcher: Okay, got you. You talked about SWAG. Can you tell me what that is?

Laila: SWAG is a position you have to sit in while you're in the classroom. SWAG, it keeps you from distractions or doing anything other than paying attention and learning what the teacher's telling you to do, but now at my traditional school, we don't have to do that. SWAG is, you're forced to do it.

Researcher: Why do you say you're forced to do it?

Laila: Because, like I said, we had paycheck dollars. If you weren't staying in SWAG or if you were doing anything other than paying attention, you would get a demerit. You were really forced to sit in SWAG or that paycheck dollar would be deducted. I feel like we were forced to have to sit in SWAG.

Researcher: Got you. You're talking about paycheck dollars. Can you talk about those? Tell me what that's about.

Laila: Paycheck dollars is a paycheck log that you have at the beginning of the week. You start off with \$50. As the week goes on, the things you do are either positive dollars or negative dollars. Demerits deduct from your paycheck. We have a thing called dress-out where we don't have to wear our uniforms if we have the most paycheck dollars. It all depends on your paycheck dollars and how many demerits and merits you have on your paycheck log.

Researcher: Got it. What's the best part of going to the school?

Laila: The best part of going to the school was, I learned more and I was used to doing all the work. That school was all about preparing me for college. They gave us a lot of work. They really pushed me and prepared me for what's going to happen in high school and college. That's what I really liked about the school.

Researcher: Got you. What was the most difficult part of going to the school?

Laila: The most difficult part for me was, like I said before, the rules and the way, if you didn't do your homework, you would have to be isolated from everybody else, just because you didn't do the homework, or even if you forgot. Some causes might be you either had a death in your family or something could have been going on that you weren't able to do your homework, but since you didn't do your homework, you're still going to be isolated from everyone else.

Researcher: How are you isolated? What happens when you don't do your homework?

Laila: During lunch, they get everybody's name who didn't do their work. While everybody else is talking and doing lunch, you have to be set aside at a different table with other students. You have to write a summary or a passage about why you didn't do your homework or whatever the cause might be that you didn't complete your homework, and what will you do next time to complete your homework.

Researcher: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Got you. How often did you receive positive praise and rewards at the school?

Laila: During my 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade year, I received a lot, but during my 7<sup>th</sup> grade year, it got tougher and harder, and I received. I'd say I received some two or three times a month. It wasn't that often during my 7<sup>th</sup> grade year.

Researcher: Okay, got you. Let's see. How often did you receive negative consequences at school?

Laila: I received mostly a lot of those because I wasn't staying in SWAG or either I was talking to someone else because of how strict they are and the demerits they take, because of those simple things.

Researcher: Got you. How did it make you feel when you got positive praise and rewards?

Laila: When I got positive rewards, I was really happy because that's something hard to get because of the paycheck dollars they're taking. If you get a positive reward, you feel good about yourself because that's something most people at our school cannot, that's a level some people at our school could not reach because they have so many demerits taken from them.

Researcher: Got you. How did it make you feel to get a negative consequence?

- Laila: I really didn't feel any type of way because, like I said, they take away a lot of negative marks for simple things that we do. I'd just think to myself that I could do better next time, because I thought it was really unfair, and that I should just go for it next time.
- Researcher: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Got you. Tell me about wearing uniforms. What were your thoughts on wearing them? How did you feel about wearing uniforms?
- Laila: My thought about wearing uniforms, I disliked them a lot. If you violated the uniform policy, you would have to wear a smock.
- Researcher: A smock?
- Laila: Yeah, you have to wear a smock.
- Researcher: Tell me about - no, go ahead.
- Laila: I was pretty much forced to wear my uniform, and if I didn't, or if I leave out any of my uniform attire, I would be forced to wear a smock for the rest of the day.
- Researcher: Got you. Did you ever have to wear a smock?
- Laila: Yes, I did, once because I forgot my tie. Actually, I lost my tie and couldn't find it, but I had to wear a smock, so either bought me another tie or I found it.
- Researcher: Got you. How did it make you feel to wear a smock?
- Laila: It was really unfair and embarrassing because I had people talk about me. It was this big gown that you had to wear. Really, I was uncomfortable wearing it because I didn't want to come to school looking like that.
- Researcher: Got you. Do you feel like other kids who had to wear those, do you feel like they were made fun of, too, when they had to wear a smock?
- Laila: I feel like they were made fun of. Anyone who had to wear a smock were made fun of. If you had on a smock, you were made fun of. Yeah.
- Researcher: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Got you. Alright, hang on one second. I've got a few more questions. Alright, how old are you right now?
- Laila: I'm 13.
- Researcher: 13, okay. You talked about this. From the time you went to 6th to 7th grade, did the rules change at all at the school, or did they pretty much stay the same?
- Laila: No, the rules pretty much stayed the same the whole time.

- Researcher: Got you. Alright. How did you feel about the amount of time you had to socialize with your peers while you were at school?
- Laila: I felt like it wasn't enough because most of the time, we did independent work or sometimes when we talk to our peers, they feel like we're going to be off-task, so we really didn't talk to our peers that much. It was unfair to other scholars because sometimes people want to socialize and probably get to know people a little bit better.
- Researcher: Yeah. When I was there as a teacher, it was silent breakfast, silent lunch, silent in the hallways. Like you said, it was silent in the classroom unless you were some type of partner or group work or if you raised your hand. How did it make you feel to be silent at these times throughout the day?
- Laila: Sometimes, we were put on silent lunch. It wasn't everybody's fault, so it was pretty unfair because-
- Researcher: You said it wasn't everybody's fault?
- Laila: Yeah. Sometimes, we would get put on silent lunch because of certain people talking. It wasn't everybody, so we had to be punished for everybody's decision. It was unfair to some people who were doing the right thing.
- Researcher: Got you. How else did you feel about the expectation to be silent throughout the day?
- Laila: It's really like somebody forcing you to be quiet for the whole day. If you get talking, you would get a demerit. You can only for certain things like if you're not following, you could sneak and talk to somebody. You will get in serious trouble. If they tell you to be quiet and you're steady trying to talk, then you will get in trouble, just because you're trying to talk and they're making you be quiet for the rest of the day.
- Researcher: Got you. How often did you? Hang on a second. How did it feel to earn negative consequences for talking?
- Laila: I thought that it was very unfair because talking is normal. You're really punishing someone for doing that, for doing something that they do on a regular basis. You can't stop someone from talking and punishing them when they don't stop talking. People are going to talk regardless.
- Researcher: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Alright. Describe what it's like when you first show up to school. Give me the routine that you go through, when you first come through the doors of the school, and what happens.

- Laila: When I first come to school, we have to stand outside for 15 or 20 minutes until someone comes to open the door. We walk through the door. We have to have out our homework. We have three lines. They check our homework for each subject, and they flip through all of our homework to see if we completed it. If we didn't complete it, they'll write our name down. Like I said, we'll have detention isolated from the rest of the kids.
- Researcher: Got you. Would the principal be out there? Would they check uniforms and do that type of thing?
- Laila: Yes, when our teachers are not there, the principal will be checking homework as well or if he's not checking homework, when you walk in, he will greet you as you come into the door.
- Researcher: Got you. Would they check your uniforms as you came in?
- Laila: Yes, they would check your uniforms.
- Researcher: Got it.
- Laila: If you're not in uniform attire, you would have to get a smock.
- Researcher: Got you. How did you feel about the expectation to remain silent during breakfast and lunch?
- Laila: During the morning, you would want to come in and talk to people and greet people, tell them good morning, but you don't have that privilege because you have to be quiet during the morning time. Some people will still talk, but that's taking away our privilege to greet people in the morning. Some people might be having a bad morning. Just by you speaking to them and greeting them, just might bring a smile to their face.
- Researcher: How do you feel about the expectation that students had to walk in straight, silent lines in the hallways?
- Laila: I feel like that's keeping us back from what we will be experiencing later in life because high school, you're not going to be forced to walk in lines. You're not going to be forced to be quiet. You have to basically do things on your own, so as we're in middle school, going to go to high school, that's not really preparing us for what's going to happen in high school.
- Researcher: Got you. Can you tell me about any times when you saw other students being treated unfairly at school, either by students or teachers?
- Laila: One time, this student had gotten a demerit for people doing something they weren't supposed to do. This other student turned around and did it, but they didn't



get a negative mark. That was one of the reasons, back when you asked me about the race and how the rules apply and how I felt like was I being, was my teacher being racial towards me? That refers back to then, because I feel like that was unfair and that person should go through consequences as well.

Researcher: Okay, got you. Can you tell me what those students did?

Laila: The students were playing in the hallway.

Researcher: Okay. One student got in trouble for that and the other student didn't?

Laila: Yep.

Researcher: Got you. Were there times when you thought the teachers or staff were being too hard on other kids?

Laila: Sometimes, when we don't do our homework, our writing teacher or the dean, they will come in and have a speech, cutting into our education, about how we should do our homework and the consequences we would face if we didn't do our homework. I just thought that was a little bit too much because some people are going through things at home. They might not have time to do their homework or don't have a better understanding of doing their homework. They're being punished because they didn't do their homework.

#### Ms. Perry Interview

Researcher: All right. What is your race?

Ms. Perry: African American.

Researcher: Got you.

Ms. Perry: Female.

Researcher: Okay. If you had to describe in detail the rules or the expectations to someone else, how would you describe it? For the charter school.

Ms. Perry: Kind of strict. A little bit more than what I would expect for a charter school.

Researcher: Okay. Are the rules and expectations fair? Why or why not?

Ms. Perry: I think they're fair, because they're more disciplined, and because a lot of the children in the neighborhood, the community, need that discipline, and that foundation. I think it's good in a way, but it can also be negative for those children that are already disciplined. It may kind of seem a little bit more unfair to them, because it's more severe, more intense than what they're used to.

Researcher: Got you. What's your least favorite rule at the school?

Ms. Perry: My least favorite rule may not necessarily be a rule, but I didn't like the fact that they didn't interact with their peers a lot at all. I didn't like the fact that they had to stay in one room all day.

Researcher: Got you.

Ms. Perry: Yeah. That was the most that I hated the worst.

Researcher: Okay. Can you describe any relationship between your child's behavior at home and the way that the school personnel describe their behavior? Was there a difference between the way the school was saying that she acted and the way she actually acted at home?

Ms. Perry: No. It was very disciplined, and that discipline pretty much, I have to say, carried over when she came home from school, because she had so much work to do. Because of the rules that they had for the children, she knew that she had to do certain things in order to stay in compliance with the rules, so the discipline pretty much carried over from school to home. I did see-

Researcher: Okay. Let me see. Do you think ... You already answered that one, too. Hang on a second. Was there a change in her behavior when she started going to the school?

Ms. Perry: In the charter school?

Researcher: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ms. Perry: It was a change in her behavior for the good. Like I said, it made her a whole lot more disciplined, but she didn't like it. She hated not being able to interact. It did kind of keep her under control in more ways than one, so I guess it was kind of good in that way, but she couldn't enjoy school.

Researcher: How did you feel about the uniform expectations at the school?

Ms. Perry: I like the uniform expectations. That way all the children wore the same thing. Nobody had on anything that cost any more or any less. That was one thing that I really liked, was the uniform.

Researcher: Okay. What things about the school that you liked best?

Ms. Perry: I'm sorry. What was that?

Researcher: Like, what things about the school did you like the best?

Ms. Perry: I liked the hours. The hours were a lot more convenient. They'd allow me to drop her off, go into work, and then still be able to pick her up when I got off work, without having to worry about somebody else picking her up, or her having to stand outside. They always kept them inside. That was the most convenient thing, the time.

Researcher: Okay, so her and I talked about her going to the traditional school versus the charter school. Was the time of the school day longer at the charter school?

Ms. Perry: Yes. The days were longer at the charter school, so that made it much more convenient. As a working parent, it made it much more convenient. Whereas now, she gets out earlier and I got to be trying to track her down to see where she is. Is she at home, and how she's getting home. The hours were perfect.

Researcher: Okay. What would you like to see the school do differently?

Ms. Perry: One thing that I think would help the children kind of enjoy each other a little better is change classes. Instead of sitting in one class all day, that they'd be allowed to go from class to the other, and be able to sit with and enjoy other children of their same age, their other peers. Get to know not just children in that one class, but all over the whole school. They would interact a little bit more.

Researcher: Okay. Do you think your identity as African American plays a factor in how you experienced the rules at the school, or how (Laila) experienced the rules at the school?

Ms. Perry: No. I really don't think so, but I do believe that because of the majority of people are African American in the community that it's in, I would assume that they probably figured that it'd have to be more stability, and a more disciplined environment because of the community area, I guess. I don't know. I'm thinking that may be the reason for some of the policies that they have, is to discipline [inaudible 00:06:33], and keep them more under control and focused.

Researcher: Why do you think ... why would that be important, or why would the school want to do that?

Ms. Perry: Because children now, they're not focused. If they're not given rules and regulations to comply with, to [inaudible 00:06:54], without consequences, then it's easy for them to get off track, get off focus, and then they start acting up, and not being respectful, and just a lot of different things. It interferes with their learning as well as the other children around them. It has its advantages and disadvantages.

Researcher: Yeah. How did you feel about white teachers implementing the rules at the school?

- Ms. Perry: I really didn't have a problem with it, as long as I felt like that they were being fair, and not mistreating the children, then I don't have a problem with it at all.
- Researcher: Okay, and so would you have felt any differently if the rules or expectations were implemented by African American teachers?
- Ms. Perry: No, not really.
- Researcher: Okay. The only other thing I have is (Laila) was saying that there was one teacher in seventh grade, she was a white teacher that she felt like maybe was discriminating against her or something. Do you remember anything about-
- Ms. Perry: I kind of briefly remembered her saying that, but she's had the same problem with black teachers, too. It's just that she [inaudible 00:08:28] they discriminate, she may come home, and say, "Well, she don't like me," or, "She don't treat me the same," or something like that. I think that colors matter in the way she interprets whether it's discrimination or she just don't like her. I think you can pretty much get the results ... the treatment, I guess, she look at it the same, but may call it discrimination because it's a white person, and then when it's a black person, it's, "She don't like me," or, "She mean," or something. I guess that's the way that they look at it.