Purpose & Goals

When unarmed Michael Brown was shot to death by a police officer on the neighborhood streets in Ferguson, Missouri at the young age of 18, his death sparked a massive outcry for the valuing of Black lives and for the re-evaluation of America's judicial system. "We are all Michael Brown!" became a symbolic statement signifying the rejection of a broken system that uses excessive force on marginalized groups, especially African-American males. In fact, in the months that followed, inflamed by Ferguson, individuals and groups mobilized the national *Black Lives Matter* movement as additional tragic examples, like Freddie Gray, Eric Garner and Tamir Rice, surfaced one after another. On March 5, 2014, the extensive *Investigation of the Ferguson Police Department* report, compiled by the United States Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, illuminated disgraceful law enforcement practices. The report found clear and insurmountable evidence that policing patterns in Ferguson reflect discriminatory intent, exacerbated racial bias, and revealed racial disparities. Moreover, the report highlighted a deep mistrust between parts of the community and the police department.

It is within this volatile context of distrust, social control and aggressive policing practices that marginalized youth, in Ferguson and beyond, live and attend school. By understanding society as nested social spaces with boundaries that are porous, allowing cultural practices and symbols to seep from one field to another (Sewell, 1999), African-American students in Ferguson, like Michael Brown, experienced a culture of disempowerment both inside and outside of school walls. As documented by the U.S. Department of Justice, schools within Ferguson were found to replicate and reinforce punitive neighborhood practices. The report found, "FPD's [Ferguson Police Department's] approach to policing impacts how its officers interact with students, as well, leading them to treat routine discipline issues as criminal matters and to use force when communication and de-escalation techniques would likely resolve the conflict" (p. 37). Student Resource Officers were found to use unnecessary force on students, for example, pushing a female student into lockers and drive-stunning a middle school student with an electronic control weapon (EWC). Ferguson is not an anomaly, rather it is indicative of hundreds of schools serving marginalized populations where students are disciplined through practices that punish, isolate and alienate. These students face unhealthy, daily encounters with symbolically violent practices, as well as with consciously and unconsciously-enacted forms of micro-aggressions or verbal, behavioral, or environmental factors that degrade them. Hence, through Ferguson, our nation is compelled to make the connection between schools and neighborhoods and to begin to link maltreatment within educational institutions, entrusted to take care of children, to hostility and social unrest in confronting authority outside of school. This proposed research project seeks to study one school's disciplinary culture and teaching practices with youth already experiencing marginalization within their neighborhoods, while highlighting the public health implications when anger, aggression and alienation are normalized experiences inside and outside of schools.

Project Partner – University City School District

Last year, a research collaboration began with University City High School (UCHS), at the request of the district leadership, focused upon how the district's only high school could become the most positive, just, and rigorous school community possible. Phase one of the study was exploratory and focused upon the research questions: 1) What are the trends in student discipline at University City High School and why? and 2) How does the current discipline system contribute to the school culture? In separate focus groups for administrators (e.g., principals, assistant principals, director of safety and security), staff (e.g., teachers, facility staff, guidance

counselors), and students, discipline data and trends of the high school were shared in graphical representations and utilized to facilitate conversations. Focus group members were encouraged to express their views regarding the school's discipline approach, the school culture, and interactions/relationships between students, teachers, and administration. Preliminary findings revealed the need for a consistent and positive school wide discipline philosophy and implementation approach. Additionally, teachers and students expressed strong feelings of being disrespected by one another. While teachers felt unsupported by administrators in disciplining students and sought harsher measures to be used on the small percentage of "troublemakers," students lacked trust in teachers, felt disempowered in school - equating it to a prison, and they expressed feelings of being targeted, degraded and minimized. These findings are significant in light of the aforementioned links between schools, neighborhoods and public health.

Whereas the exploratory phase was designed to provide macro-level information regarding school culture, phase two aims to understand more deeply the micro-level interactions that unfold in classrooms. Specifically, phase two of the study seeks to answer: 1) How do socio-economic, gender and racial profiles affect teacher/student interactions during the disciplinary moments in classrooms? 2) How do students perceive school authorities (e.g., teachers, administrators, nonteaching staff) given the disciplinary interactions, and how do these interactions affect attitudes toward other authority figures? and 3) How can University City High School develop a community school culture of trust, respect and shared responsibility?

Intellectual Underpinnings & Sustainable Urbanism

The current modus operandi of American schools is a reliance on exclusion as a form of discipline. Exclusionary discipline is any disciplinary measure that forces the student out of the learning environment. This includes sending a student out of a classroom, in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, and expulsion. Since zero-tolerance policies came to popularity in the 1990s, exclusionary discipline is on the rise (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010). Zero-tolerance policies create an automatic punishment for each student infraction, without considering the context of the misbehavior. They were intended to eliminate administrator and teacher bias, but instead these policies created an over-dependence on exclusionary measures without eliminating racial bias. Racial disproportionality in school discipline is widely supported by statistical analysis. For example, Shirley and Cornell (2012) found that African-American and black students are suspended about three times as much as their white peers. Another study found that while African Americans make up 17 percent of the American public school student population, they represent 32 percent of all students suspended (Hinojosa, 2008). Discipline disproportionality holds even when controlling for rates of misbehavior. This means that Black students do not misbehave more frequently than students of other races, even though they are punished at higher rates (Skiba et al., 2011). The literature around outcomes for students who have been suspended can be understood in three veins: short-term risk, intermediate risk, and long-term risk. When a student is suspended, short-term outcomes include increased risk of course failure and chronic absenteeism (Balfanz, Byrnes, & Fox, 2013). Because students are forced out of the learning and social environment, they may disengage both from their coursework and from the social relationships they have developed. Intermediate effects can include high school dropout and increased interaction with the juvenile justice system (Marchbanks, Blake, Booth, Carmichael, Seibert, & Fabelo, 2013; Noltemeyer & Mcloughlin, 2010a). These intermediate effects have outcomes of their own, but empirical research even suggests that students who are suspended show decreased civic engagement, as evident in

different voting patterns (Kupchik & Catlaw, 2013). This empirical research suggests that
exclusionary discipline can have strong and life-long impacts on youth.

Methodology

This qualitative study is designed to be educative and transformative to those involved.
Research participants will include stakeholders in the school whom are either involved in
discipline procedures (e.g., teachers and administrators) or recipients of (i.e., students) discipline
procedures. The research process will consist of: 1) administering the Social Competence
Interview (SCI) (Ewart, Jorgensen, Suchday, Chen, & Matthews, 2002); 2) conducting
observations/video recordings of classrooms and other programs (e.g., a new restorative justice
program); 3) facilitating focus group discussions with students and teachers; and 4) holding
solution-oriented cogenerative dialogues. Moreover, data collection will begin in January 2016
by administering the SCI to students to measure social stressors and specifically assess their
physiological and social-emotional responses to the school discipline system. SCI responses will
be subsequently coded to illuminate the extent to which discipline practices can lead to anger or
hostility and to evaluate the overall impact on students' socio-emotional well-being. During
February and March 2016, ten of the students who partook in the SCI will be invited to
participate in a series of 4-6 focus group discussions to discuss stressors related to school
disciplinary practices, their perceptions of and relationships with authority figures within the
classroom, school and other community environments., and the support structures the students
access on a daily basis. Additionally, ten teachers will be invited to participate in a different
series of focus groups to discuss the role of implicit bias, race and socioeconomic profiles on
teacher-student interactions. Five of these focus group teachers' classrooms will be video-
recorded from March - May 2016. Data analysis will occur through qualitative coding, discourse
analysis, and video microanalysis, and during the summer, participants (both teachers and
students) will be invited to become co-researchers in the process of reviewing data emerging
from the focus group discussions and video clips of their classrooms as well. Finally, in the fall
of 2016, a series of cogenerative dialogues will be held with students and teachers to jointly
develop and implement strategies for the positive transformation of their learning environment.

Expected Outcomes

It is anticipated that this project has the potential to be deeply transformative to the school as
a whole, especially because the leadership is genuinely invested in developing a community
school culture of trust, respect and shared responsibility. When marginalized youth are
disproportionately affected by suspension and expulsion rates, their manifest and latent behaviors
as a result of disciplinary procedures have far reaching consequences, for in school and out of
school dynamics on a community level. Thus there is enormous benefit in coming to understand
students' perceptions of stressors related to school disciplinary practices, and to learn about their
relationships to those in authority positions, both inside and outside of school. At the local level,
administrators, teachers, and staff will potentially strengthen their relationships with students,
improve classroom interaction patterns, and positively impact the overall school culture.
Students will also benefit by learning about stressors while adopting an active role in improving
their schooling experiences. While the results from this study cannot be exactly generalized to
other schools, important seeds will be planted to make the case for more research examining the
interconnections across school discipline and neighborhoods and linking treatment of children in
schools to healthy outcomes as adults. Findings will certainly have broad public health
implications as this research and future studies can help to address and minimize the micro-
aggressions experienced by marginalized youth as they transition from adolescence to adulthood.