Show Me the Money: Antagonizing Educational Funding Inequities Through a Critical Race Lens

Lajuan Gray-Sylvester

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SHOW ME THE MONEY: ANTAGONIZING EDUCATIONAL FUNDING INEQUITIES THROUGH A CRITICAL RACE LENS

By

LaJuan Gray-Sylvester

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I want to acknowledge My Lord and Savior for giving me the strength to complete this journey. I am grateful to my family for understanding my absence and supporting me. I am without words to express my gratitude to my chair, Dr. Platt, and the dissertation committee: Dr. Nordstrom, Dr. Akey, and Dr. Zanskas for never wavering and guiding me on this journey.
Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my dad and mom, Mr. Monroe and Mrs. Zelma Gray who never stopped believing in me and instilled a love for learning at an early age. It is also dedicated to my husband, James Sylvester, for his unconditional support, love, patience, and encouragement during this process; to my children, Maya, Colby, Blake, and Dairien for their support and encouragement; and to all the middle-aged dreamers and educators who are fighting the good fight.
Abstract

Historically, race has been at the forefront in determining seats at the proverbial table of success. Dating back to the civil rights movement, racial inequity was the catalyst that ignited this defining movement. According to Crenshaw (2010), critical race theory was a social and legal frame connected to race that was used to mobilize individuals into a movement against racial injustice. Color blinded by privilege; most members of the dominant culture have been afforded access to success based on their race. The people of the majority culture would have one to believe that racism is ordinary, one of the tenets of critical race theory. Decuir and Dixson (2004) stated that color blindness and meritocracy allow the majority culture to turn a blind and neutral eye to the distastefulness associated with racism and maintain control of the white power hierarchy in society. Whites remain the haves, and people of the color continue to be the have nots. Critical Race Theory challenges these racial misnomers and invites counternarratives from the marginalized group (Decuir & Dixson, 2004).

Governmental powers in the United States are divided up among state, federal, and local governments under federalism. Although the United States' Constitution does not provide the federal government with powers over education, the federal government – through funding law and policy – has encroached upon education policy, an area of law and regulation constitutionally assigned to state governments (Nelson, 2018). Education federalism, the phrase used to identify the unique ways in which federalism applies in education policy, has led to states adopting various school funding policies that have varying outcomes across and within state boundaries. State and local level school funding policies with the aid of federal education policy have had disparate and inequitable impacts on urban schools.
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Chapter I: Introduction

As the mother of a son with a learning disability, I experienced my son’s marginalization in the educational system. Every year in elementary school, I had to educate his teacher on attention deficit disorder with hyperactivity and plead for accommodations. He was disciplined because of this disability. His teachers did not provide accommodation or learn new instructional practices to keep him engaged. The school had limited resources to provide adequate teacher training and educational resources for struggling students. The lack of needed resources to address my son’s deficits caused him to lack confidence, become disengaged, and problematic. I became a teacher because of this lack of empathy for students who learned differently.

My first teaching position was at the Yazoo County Alternative School. Most of the alternative setting students were very smart but had lost their way at an early age. As I listened to their stories, they all had a common thread. They did not get academic, social, and emotional support during their early years, and they gave up. They felt the educational system was against them, and in turn, they were against the system. This feeling was typical in the rural and urban school districts that I served. As I moved from a rural school district to an urban school district, I noticed a funding difference among the districts. The availability of programs, resources, additional personnel, and training was readily available in the better-funded districts resulting in better achievement. These districts were middle class and had community support. The school-to-prison pipeline was not a worry for those students. One of the leading causes of poorly funded, staffed, and resourced schools are the families’ socioeconomic level and the communities in which the schools reside (Anyon, 2014).
According to the American Civil Liberties Union (2022), zero tolerance and excessive discipline policies targeted minority students disproportionately than their white counterparts. The Office of Civil Rights (2021) reported that during the 2017-2018 school year, students of color only made up 15.1% of the student enrollment in U.S. public schools but made up 38.2% of all students who have been suspended from more than one and 31.4% of all students who have been suspended in school one or more times. White students represented 47.3% of the student population, but only 32.9% have had more than one out-of-school suspension and 38.8% in-school suspension. Black students accounted for 31.6% of all students arrested at school and 42.9% of alternative school enrollments. I often wondered why these numbers existed and why a solution had not been found. As a teacher and school leader, I saw how small, disruptive behaviors removed minority students from the learning environment. This removal from the class created a loss of instructional time and, thus, created academic gaps. It was discriminatory treatment toward African American students because restorative discipline practices were used with White students with similar behaviors to keep them in the class.

A significant consequence of a lack of educational funding is inadequate professional development for struggling or misinformed teachers (Duncan-Andrade, 2009). Teachers need training in cultural competency, poverty, implicit bias, and culturally relevant pedagogy to address marginalized students’ needs. Missing programs like those mentioned above have led to disproportionate discipline referrals and pushout for students of color (Bird & Bassin, 2014).

My experiences with my son and other marginalized African American students affirmed the pressing state our society has been in the field of education and continues to remain. Leveling the educational and economic playing field across diverse groups is still elusive for marginalized populations (Winn & Behizadeh, 2011). The 15-year period between my son’s experiences and
my own experiences as an educator highlights the systemic and oppressive nature of social policies and the systemic nature of embedded racism in our school system.

By applying CRT and a critical race methodology, the marginalized community’s voices were illuminated in the research. I am intrigued by critical race theory and want to continue researching how it is interwoven in explaining the role of school funding policies in the school-to-prison pipeline based on my experiences as a parent and educator.

**Educational Funding Dilemma**

Ladson-Billings (1998) summed up the role of systemic racism and inequality in education when she stated the following:

No area of education highlights inequity and racism better than school funding. CRT highlights that inequality in school funding is a function of institutional and structural racism. African Americans’ inability to qualify for job promotions, adequate employment, and home mortgages creates low academic achievement, underemployment and unemployment, and substandard housing for generations. Without experiencing a single personal encounter with racism, most African Americans suffer the consequence of systemic and institutional racism (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 20).

School funding laws and practices highlight racism in societal structures that oppress groups of people based on their race (Head, 2020). Baker and Corcoran (2012) noted that state and local governments exacerbated funding inequities in schools with the most funding needs. Definitive and implicit governmental actions led to the widespread creation of underperforming schools in urban communities (Baker & Corcoran, 2012).
The inadequacy of educational rigor and opportunities has also led to marginalized people’s disenfranchisement and the economic decay of their communities (Anyon, 2008; Lipman, 2015). The buildings are dilapidated, classes are overcrowded, and high-performing teachers are scarce. This vicious cycle of poverty mimics poverty living. Ostrander (2015) stated,

Without adequate education, students in low schools face a tough, uphill battle to become productive members of society. Schools in urban areas will be underfunded because they are primarily funded based on property values. The discrepancy between these schools and better-funded schools will increase as uneducated people continue to live in the same geographic areas with low property values and send their children to underfunded schools (Ostrander, 2015. p. 273).

Teachers teach through a deficit lens, and school functions cyclically in the same manner with low expectations and no viable avenue for students to escape their current situations (Anderson, 2013; Sharma & Portelli, 2014; Watson, 2011; Yosso, 2005).

**School to Prison Pipeline Dilemma**

The school-to-prison pipeline debate deals with the survival of marginalized and minority people and their communities (Barnes & Motz, 2018). According to Barnes and Motz (2018), African Americans are imprisoned at a disproportionate rate compared to other ethnicities. This disproportionality is especially true for African American males. The removal of the male contribution to the community and the family has a devastating effect on the family and the community’s success. This lack of male presence decimates families and the communities in which they reside (Clear, 2008). The lack of a two-parent household also contributes to generational poverty, academic failure, dependency on social programs, and social and emotional
deficits in families and their future generations (Yosso, 2005). The prison system has become the mecca for students from urban school settings. Understanding the connection and intersectionality of urban education and the prison population may unearth the cause of this devastating epidemic in the minority community (Nothemeyer et al., 2015).

Over the past few decades, urban education has been tasked with doing more with less. Reductions in local tax bases and federal and state funding have caused urban schools to cut needed programs and resources in critical areas of student development (Baker & Corcoran, 2012). The lack of resources and the lack of vital programs have created a microcosm of urban education problems (Chinos & Bragg, 2017). American Civil Liberties Union (2009) noted that these troubled urban schools are often understaffed or staffed with teachers unequipped to address urban students’ needs. Teachers who are not culturally competent misinterpret cultural trends and traditions as behavior problems and employ deficit thinking methods to perpetuate modern-day colonialism in the urban school settings (Bird & Bassin, 2014; Walsh, 2018). These institutions also lacked effective remedial programs in reading and math and effective academic and behavioral support to meet the needs of struggling students of color, which led to discipline issues and academic failure (Bottiani et al., 2017; Payne & Biddle, 1999). Zero tolerance discipline policies and overrepresentation and misrepresentation in special education also accelerate the likelihood that these students in an urban school setting may enter the prison system (Rodriguez Ruiz, 2017).

Theoretical Context

When analyzing equality, equity, and access, race and racism are the elephants in the room (Winston, 2016). Critical Race Theory places race as the one attribute that minimizes and
marginalizes others and limits access to the American dream (Gillborn, 2005). From purchasing a home to acquiring a job to having access to quality education, race and racism are interwoven in our country’s social fabric. CRT interrogates societal and cultural norms as they intersect with race, laws, policies, and power (Crenshaw, 2010; Delgado, & Stefancic, 2000; Delgado, & Stefancic, 2017). CRT exposes the notion that societal problems and issues are shaped by race and create more hierarchies, power structures, and cultural misnomers than personal and physical factors (Delgado & Bernal, 1998). CRT proposes that the dominance and power associated with white culture are historically and systemically continued over time and that the legal system may assist in this process of marginalization (Crenshaw, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Tate IV, 1997). Critical Race Theory works to change the connection between the legal system and racialized powers. CRT’s five tenets: racism is ordinary, normal, and endemic, the notion of colorblindness, interest convergence, the centrality of race, counter-narratives, and a critique of liberalism (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

**Strengths and Limitations of Critical Race Theory**

One strength of Critical race theory is its role in contesting the beliefs, stereotypes, and mischaracterizations held by society’s dominant culture by telling counter-stories (Cole, 2009; Delgado & Bernal, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 1998). The dominant culture’s narrative creates stories of failure and underachievement (Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2013). Counter stories can challenge the existing norms in society that cater to the dominant culture, but they can help shape unanimity and create a better understanding of another culture (Taylor et al., 2009). Taylor et al. (2009) stated that CRT scholars employ counter-narratives to antagonize deficit thinking, negative mischaracterizations, and stereotypes held by the dominant culture. Serrano (2013) posits counter-narratives that use the lived experiences of marginalized people affected by racism.
to challenge the stereotypes and labels placed on them by the dominant culture. Counter-narratives also counter the whitewashing of American history taught in schools (Watson, 2011). Positive stories, images, and accomplishments must be brought to the forefront and embraced by society instead of misleading propaganda (Duncan-Andrade, 2009). This insight into the African American community allows reflection and understanding of African American culture’s lived experiences (Cook & Dixson, 2013).

Another strength of CRT is its goal to eradicate racism by exposing how it is perpetuated in American society. By recognizing that race is the central construct used to hinder people of color, authentic discourse, and solutions around race can be formulated to accelerate the process (Zamudio et al., 2011).

Critical Race Theory fell short in only applying race as the only social construct that creates racist practices in American policies and practices (Crenshaw, 2010). Cole (2017) noted that CRT is limited because of its one-dimensional approach to antagonizing racism. According to Cole (2017), CRT is “flawed in prioritizing race over social class.” Critical race theory is also weak in that it lacks identity. CRT wants to participate in America’s capitalist sector and western ways (Cole, 2017). It does not offer an alternative social consciousness that challenges exploitation and oppression. It wants a piece of the pie, not a new pie.

**Applications of Critical Race Theory to Education and Education Funding**

CRT in education is a framework or set of basic perceptions, viewpoints, systems, and teachings that seek to discover, critique, and change those institutional and cultural tenets of education that preserve the hierarchy of power in our school funding system in which those in
power benefit from funding methods, measures, and policies (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Matsudo et al., 1993).

Critical Race Theory was the theoretical framework used to analyze the inequality and racism in educational funding practices and the connection to the school-to-prison pipeline. A substantial portion of educational funding is based on property taxes at the local level. The federal funding levels are comparable among districts, and state funds are allocated using a funding formula. The higher the property’s value, the higher the tax levied on the property. While wealthy school districts benefit from expensive homes and businesses near them that pay higher property taxes, poorer districts rely on dilapidated housing and property minimally valued and taxed based on that value (Flores, 2017).

Critical Race Theory confronts whiteness as property and privilege in research and rejects researchers who use a neutral and objective stance to minimize, silence, or contort the stories of those from the marginalized culture. Critical race theory in education critiques the dominant culture’s ideals and concentrates on the research participants’ experiences and knowledge (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). This deficit informed research provides insight without having insight (Delgado & Bernal, 1998).

Critical race theory in education also seeks to develop a theoretical approach that highlights race and racism in America’s education system and works to remove racism as a component of systemic oppression and marginalization based on gender, class, and sexual orientation (Matsudo et al., 1993).
Statement of the Problem

Adequate funding cures many problems in schools (Caskey & Kuperberg, 2014). This statement is true in most schools. Often resources are stretched to the limit, and necessary programs are missing or cut to address marginalized students’ needs. These programs are vital to meeting the social and academic needs and disrupting the school-to-prison matriculation of students of poverty (Simmons, 2009). Lack of adequate funding creates larger class sizes, hiring inexperienced teachers, missing social and emotional programs, missing viable curriculums, and missing technology (Cliff & Lechman, 2011). Students in these educational settings feel disengaged, develop adverse feelings toward schooling, and are removed from the establishment formed to help them (Neild et al., 2008). Disenfranchisement and exclusionary discipline practices push African American students into the school-to-prison pipeline at an alarming rate (Simmons, 2009). According to the American Civil Liberties Union (2022):

Black students only make up 16% of public-school enrollment, but they make up 42% of all students with multiple suspensions. This is in major contrast to white students, who represent 51% of public-school enrollment yet only constitute 31% of students who serve multiple suspensions. Black students represent 31% of school-related arrests. Black students are suspended and expelled three times more than white students. Students suspended or expelled for a discretionary violation are three times more likely to be sent to the juvenile justice system the following year (American Civil Liberties Union, 2022, para. 3).

Mis-categorizing behaviors in African American boys as early as Pre-K led to high suspension rates has stigmatized early learners (Howard, 2008; Mitchell, 2014). African
American boys learn that they are mischievous and are rule-breakers early (Jones et al., 2018). Teachers unintentionally criminalize the behaviors of African American boys (Heitzeg, 2009). There is no effort to find out why the student is acting out. There is little confidence and relationship building, and students develop a distrust of those in power (Sander, 2010).

**Purpose of the Study**

This study sought to connect funding inadequacies and prison matriculation for marginalized students. The rationale of this paper is to share insight into the social problem that has plagued marginalized communities for decades. Lack of access to quality education plays a role in stifling the growth and advancement of a race and increasing prison matriculation (Levine & Nidiffer, 1996; Myers, 2017). The lack of economic opportunities is magnified in low-income communities where many students of color live, and underperforming schools exist (Darling-Hammond, 1998).

This study’s findings could assist school and district administrators, local, state, and federal lawmakers, and activists in their quest for equitable and adequate education funding for programs needed to disrupt the school to prison pipeline.

**Conceptual Framework**

To understand the effects of inadequate school funding and equitable school funding on marginalized students, one must understand people of color’s systematic marginalization. Historically, the United States has used the law and funding programs to oppress minorities (Spring, 2016). *Brown vs. The Board of Education of Topeka 1954* allowed the government monies to schools that participated in segregation. *The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB)
ushered in school choice, for-profit schooling, and the rise of accountability models designed by companies who made millions off widespread testing and boxed curriculum. Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA) brought in a competitive grant that schools had to meet specific criteria to receive funding.

Being familiar with the context and the government’s role in education funding is essential in creating an effective response to the school-to-prison pipeline and addressing students of color in the school system. Through this study, I hope to expose how the federal, state, and local government funding policies aid in creating the school-to-prison pipeline. Critical race theory and methodology will analyze institutional racism embedded in educational funding practices, policies, and laws at the local, state, and federal levels.

**Contextual Framework**

The contextual framework supporting this study comes from understanding the lived educational experiences of students of color (Hunt, 2019). If students are negatively affected at school and criminalized continuously, they become disenfranchised, lose hope, develop a deficit mindset, and turn to the streets. Critical race theory is often used to examine the inequities for marginalized students through a racial lens (Ladson-Billings, 1998). CRT is also used to critique how funding inequities and inadequacies play a role in student matriculation into the school-to-prison pipeline. CRT’s goal is social justice through change and engagement (Ortiz & Jani, 2010).

Race and racism are interwoven in our country’s social fabric. Race and racism have marginalized people of color since they arrived in the United States (Crenshaw et al., 1995). Anyon (2014) posited those federal policies were designed to keep people of color poor.
According to Dovemark (2013), race and racism are ingrained in the structures of society privately and publicly. If the people who create funding policies are racist, then the policies they create are affected by racism (Anyon, 2014; Crenshaw et al., 1995).

**Research Questions**

Critical Race Theory was used to question the premise behind the coverture of racism and how legally, society has marginalized a group of people through exploitation and subordination. CRT sought to connect funding policies and funding inequities to the school-to-prison pipeline. The study sought the answer to the following research questions:

**RQ1.** How do school funding inequities contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline?

**RQ2.** What role has federal, state, and local policies and educational funding practices played in school funding inequities and the systematic marginalization of minorities?

**RQ3.** How is racism interwoven in funding laws, policies, and practices?

**RQ4.** What role can equitable educational funding practices, laws, and policies decrease the school-to-prison pipeline?

**Research Design**

A critical race methodological approach was used to analyze the inequity in education funding based on funding laws and policies and the effect on marginalized students in correlation to the school-to-prison pipeline. This approach involved a review of literature related to educational funding in the United States and Tennessee and interviews of principals who have first-hand knowledge of the causes of the school-to-prison pipeline and the effects of school
funding inequities in their schools. The interviews and literature review highlighted systemic
racism’s invisibility in political motives, historical actions and events, and social interactions
connected by the common thread of racism. Interview questions arose from the literature review
with a focus on school to prison, education funding at the local, state, and federal levels,
discipline data for the participants’ schools, teachers’ years of experience, implicit bias, and
cultural training availability for staff, as well as the availability of support for struggling
students. This CRT framework questioned the role of school funding inequities in the school-to-
prison pipeline. Additionally, CRT was the lens used to identify the racial dynamics influencing
funding policy, laws, and allocation.

**Significance of the Study**

This study is essential to the education community due to the facts related to education
funding inequities and its connection to the school-to-prison pipeline. Current research
highlighted the connection of inequity in school funding to limited resources in poor-performing
schools as a catalyst in the school-to-prison pipeline for students of color. Bacher-Hicks et al.
(2021) stated that researchers from Boston University, the University of Colorado Boulder, and
Harvard University conducted a study to see if a causal link existed between students who
encountered strict discipline policies at schools with zero-tolerance discipline practices and
prison matriculation as an adult. The researchers stated

That early censure of school misbehavior causes increases in adult crime – that there is, a
school-to-prison pipeline, any effort to maintain safe and orderly school climates must
consider the consequences of exclusionary discipline practices for young students,
especially young students of color, which last well into adulthood. Further, we find that
The negative impacts of strict disciplinary environments are most significant for minorities and males, suggesting that suspension policies expand pre-existing gaps in educational attainment and incarceration. Efforts to maintain safe and orderly school climates must consider the consequences of exclusionary discipline practices for young students, and especially young students of color, which last well into adulthood (Bacher-Hicks et al., 2021, para. 8).

Although present research exists on the school-to-prison pipeline, inequities in education funding provide the foundation for the causes to develop and thrive in the school setting that pushes students of color into the prison system. Despite the research on the cause of the school-to-prison pipeline, many students of color continue to matriculate to prison. These students attend low-performing schools and are subject to a lack of social-emotional resources, overcrowded classrooms, untrained teachers, and unchallenging coursework.

Educational funding uses the same formulas for all school districts at the state level to determine funding allocations and relies on property taxes to fund local allocations, thus inequitably funding low-performing schools located in poverty-stricken areas. These funding inequities create a school environment that fuels disenfranchisement, low performance, high discipline infractions, and criminal behaviors, which can lead students from the classroom to the jail cell.
Definition of Terms

- Critical Race Theory- a theory that highlights race as a social construct for the separation marginalization of the minority group (Bell Jr, 1979).

- Critical race theory in education is a framework or set of basic perceptions, viewpoints, systems, and teachings that seek to discover, critique, and change those institutional and cultural tenets of education that preserve the hierarchy of power in our school funding system in which those in power benefit from funding methods, measures, and policies (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Matsudo et al., 1993).

- Educational Funding- a blend of federal, state, and local dollars used to fund schools (Baker & Corcoran, 2012).

- School to Prison Pipeline- the trajectory to the penal system as an adult for students who are given repetitive discipline consequences throughout their years of schooling (Heitzeg, 2009).

- Critical Race Methodology is a framework for researching marginalized people’s lived experiences that highlight social injustices (Lynn, 2002, p. 123; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

*Students of color, marginalized students, African American students, and Black students will be used interchangeably.*
Assumptions

This study’s data was retrieved from the U.S. Department’s Office for Civil Rights, the Tennessee Department of Education, and The National Center for Education Statistics. Additional information was retrieved from interviews with principals from West Tennessee. It is assumed that the Office of Civil Rights, the Tennessee Department of Education, and The National Center for Education Statistics’ information is accurate. It also assumed that principals who participated in the interviews were honest and forthcoming when answering interview questions.

Delimitations

To allow for a focus on students’ problems attending underfunded schools, participants were limited to eight principals of high poverty schools located in urban districts in West Tennessee. Poverty was designated by a free and reduced lunch population of over 70 percent. Therefore, the findings may not apply to principals leading schools located in all West Tennessee and different regions of Tennessee. The principals’ experiences in rural, private, and suburban schools and education funding for rural, private, and suburban schools were not studied. School-to-prison matriculation for students in rural, private, and suburban schools was also eliminated from the study.

Summary

The purpose of chapter one was to introduce the research problem and focus. This chapter contained the personal and theoretical context, statement of the problem, the purpose of study, research questions, theoretical framework, and the study’s significance. Chapter two will introduce existing research on school funding history in marginalized communities, the local,
state, and federal government role in school funding, the creation of and matriculation to the school to prison pipeline, and the role funding has played in increasing the number of students of color in the penal system. Chapter three will discuss Critical Race Methodology, a description of data collection and analysis methods, trustworthiness and ethics, and participants’ demographics.
Chapter II: Literature Review

Introduction

Education is vital to climbing the social ladder and accessing the American dream in the United States (Erisman & Looney, 2007). Achieving the American dream should be available to all the citizens in this country. Since most students in the United States are educated in free, public schools, the quality of education must be its top priority (Flores, 2017). Over fifty percent of students in public schools are students of color (National Center for Education Statistics, & Department of Education, 2019). Bowman et al. (2018) stated that historically, most marginalized students from low-income communities attend underperforming public schools underfunded and under-resourced. Unfortunately, these funding inequities help contribute to creating low-quality education for marginalized students and make the American dream out of reach (Baker, 2016; Biddle & Berliner, 2002). Funding inequities have continued to exist in the United States since the inception of public schooling, and the public schools that cater to the most marginalized student population remain in the vicious cycle of underfunding (Darling-Hammond, 1998). Poverty, socio-economic status, and underfunded schools have continued the subordination of minority communities (Bischoff, 2008).

Federal, state, and local policies have also played a role in the systemic marginalization of people of color (Card & Payne, 2002). Underfunded and under-resourced public schools have become the new microcosm for race annihilation through deliberate, systemic practices and policy enactment (Gillborn, 2005; Lynn, 2002). Understanding fiscal policy is critical in advocating for equitable funding for urban schools. Equitable funding would allow marginalized students access to needed programs, resources, and interventions (Ostrander, 2015). Critical
Race Theory was used to question the premise behind the coyness of racism in educational funding; and how legally, society has marginalized a group of people through exploitation, criminalization, and subordination (Darling-Hammond, 2007). CRT sought to connect unfair funding policies and inequities to the school-to-prison pipeline.

**Critical Race Theory and Background of The Study**

Derrick Bell is known as the founder of the Critical Race Theory. Racial reforms were not progressing swiftly enough during the Civil Rights movement (Bell Jr, 1979). Bell and Alan Freeman, another pioneering critical race theorist, were dissatisfied with how traditional civil rights efforts were futile in addressing racism. Traditional approaches included sit-ins, marches, strikes, and a nonviolent approach to violence directed at civil rights protesters. Bell and Freeman felt that racism was permanent, and that Black people ignored history in their permanent subordination. CRT was formed from Critical Legal Studies to challenge the small temporary victories of the nonviolent civil rights movement (Bell Jr, 1979). Bell Jr (1979) stated

Black people will never gain full equality in this country. Even those herculean efforts we hail as successful will produce no more than temporary “peaks of progress,” short-lived victories that slide into irrelevance as racial patterns adapt in ways that maintain white dominance. This is a hard-to-accept fact that all history verifies (Bell Jr, 1979, p. 222).

It provided a critique of race and racism through a legal lens. Bell Jr (1979) posited that social gains, equality, and justice for Black Americans were possible only if their growth converged with White America’s interests. Bell’s interest convergence thesis hypothesized that African Americans’ growth was connected to a mutual growth or benefit for the dominant culture (Bell Jr, 1979).
Bell and Freeman were joined by Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate IV, who applied CRT tenets to education. They used the CRT framework to help explain the inequities found in the educational system in America (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Tate IV, 1997). Delgado and Stefancic (2001) suggest that CRT highlights the social construct of race and suggests legal supposition to be the product of societal experiences’ workings but see race as a vital factor. Ladson-Billings (1998) stated that CRT exists to eliminate all forms of racism, racial relegation, and prejudice. CRT is grounded in American society’s historical inequities and policies that negatively impact the lives of marginalized people based on race (Cook & Dixson, 2013). Americans tend to categorize racism as a past injustice, but racism is deeply intertwined with society’s framework and daily functions, and it seems natural (Delgado & Bernal, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 1998). People failed to see racism in daily occurrences and practices, which led to CRT’s development (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Kimberle Crenshaw also stated that race and other categories played a significant role in the inequities in America (Crenshaw, 2010). She coined the term intersectionality, highlighting how race intersects with other social categories such as gender, religion, sexual orientation, age, socio-economic status, and other social categories to disenfranchise other races in various social settings (Crenshaw, 2010; McCoy & Rodericks, 2015). Intersectionality highlights the multifaceted and complex layers of oppression, sees race as one component of disempowerment and does not allow a one-construct approach to racism (Crenshaw, 2010; McCoy & Rodericks, 2015).
Education Funding in the United States

Local communities were the benefactors of early public schools (Biddle & Berliner, 2002). In the form of property taxes, voluntary contributions financed them until the end of the 19th century (Biddle & Berliner, 2002). In the 1920s, local funding was responsible for over 80 percent of education funding (Biddle & Berliner, 2002). During the 1950s and with the National Defense Education Act in 1955, state and local governments became the largest contributors to education funding (Chinos & Bragg, 2017). The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 increased the federal government’s educational funding role. However, the federal government’s contribution decreased and remained less than ten percent as time passed.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 gave the federal government authority to discontinue funding to school districts that continued to discriminate against students of color and allowed lawyers to take legal action against non-compliant school districts (Chinos & Bragg, 2017; Hersch & Shinall, 2015). The Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965 provided federal monies to schools with disabled students (Hochschild & Scovronick, 2003). The Emergency School Aid Act of 1972 (ESAA) gave federal funding to school districts engaging in desegregation (Hochschild & Scovronick, 2003). States that explicitly fought for these segregated policies could not access these funds (Hochschild & Scovronick, 2003).

However, people still found ways to discriminate. Discrimination was camouflaged through shifts in tax breaks to companies located in the county, prejudiced real estate practices in the form of redlining where families of color were denied mortgages loans in white neighborhoods, and other unfair lending practices (Anyon, 2014). Banks used redlining to deter
housing rehabilitation and purchases in thriving suburban communities (Anyon, 2014; Traugott et al., 2019). Additionally, factories moved outside the city limits for promised tax breaks, which decimated the African American middle class that depended on factory work to enable them to live in the middle class (Anyon, 2014). These tax break incentives also contribute to the erosion of the property tax base in urban neighborhoods. These practices encouraged businesses to move from urban locations to suburbia. This suburban migration contributed to low property tax revenue and inadequate school funding sources in urban neighborhoods (Traugott et al., 2019).

School funding inequities had a debilitating effect on urban education. The lack of a property base to pay for educational services in cities affected improvised school districts (Anyon, 2014). Even the landmark case, *San Antonio Independent School District v Demetrio P. Rodriguez* upheld these financing practices stating that the San Antonio School District financing system, which was based on local property taxes, was constitutional and did not violate the Fourteenth Amendment’s equal protection clause (*San Antonio Indep et al.*, 1973). Justice Stewart, Associate Justice of the United States Supreme Court, noted that the Texas public education financing system created an unjust system but not an unconstitutional system (Sutton, 2008). The Supreme Court held that receiving an education was not a necessary right and that unequal school funding was not subject to strict scrutiny and held that Texas’s school financing system did not violate the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment (*San Antonio Indep et al.*, 1973).

### Federal Government Role in Educational Funding

The federal government has remained on the sidelines in addressing the school to prison pipeline. Although, the federal government has enacted numerous education funding policies,
there has not been specific legislation to offset the school to prison pipeline. A brief overview of applicable federal funding legislation is presented in Table 1. The table also includes the purpose or outcome of the legislation. The table below highlights how federal legislation is used to marginalize students of color in education funding.

Table 1: Federal Funding Legislation and Their Purpose

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Federal Funding Legislation</th>
<th>Purpose/Outcome</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The National Defense Fund of 1958</td>
<td><em>National Defense Education Act</em> (Public Law 85-864) provided assistance to state and local school systems for instruction in science, mathematics, modern foreign languages, and other critical subjects; state statistical services; guidance, counseling, and testing services and training institutes; higher education student loans and fellowships as well as foreign language study and training; experimentation and dissemination of information on more effective use of television, motion pictures, and related media for educational purposes; and vocational education for technical occupations necessary to the national defense. Black students were still excluded from challenging coursework during the early years of integration and with the lack of funding for challenging curriculum in low-performing schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal Funding Legislation</td>
<td>Purpose/Outcome</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Civil Rights Act of 1964</td>
<td><em>The Civil Rights Act of 1964</em> (Public Law 88-352) authorized the Commissioner of Education to arrange for support for higher education institutions and school districts to provide in-service programs for assisting instructional staff in dealing with problems caused by desegregation. Schools were not integrated internally, and Black students were grouped together in integrated schools therefore denying them access to an adequate education</td>
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Table 1: Federal Funding Legislation and Their Purpose Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Federal Funding Legislation</th>
<th>Purpose/Outcome</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965</td>
<td><em>Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965</em> (Public Law 89-10) authorized grants for elementary and secondary school programs for children of low-income families; school library resources, textbooks, and other instructional materials for school children; supplementary educational centers and services; strengthening state education agencies; and educational research and research training.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Child Left Behind Act of 2001</td>
<td><em>The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001</em> (Public Law 107-110) provided for the comprehensive reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, incorporating specific proposals in such areas as testing, accountability, parental choice, and early reading. NCLB did not account for existing deficits in low performing schools and expected high poverty schools to meet the same performance levels as low poverty schools</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Table 1: Federal Funding Legislation and Their Purpose Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Federal Funding Legislation</th>
<th>Purpose/Outcome</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Every Student Succeed Act of 2015</td>
<td>Every Student Succeeds Act (Public Law 114-95) reauthorized and amended the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, incorporating provisions to expand state responsibility over schools, provide grants to charter schools, and reduce the federal test-based accountability system of the No Child Left Behind Act. Placed equity and fairness of funding on state and made no additional provisions for plight of high poverty schools</td>
</tr>
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</table>


to school districts participating in desegregation. However, the federal government’s contribution decreased and remained less than ten percent (Chinos & Bragg, 2017).

In 1954, *Brown vs. the Board* determined that “separate education facilities were unequal” and shifted financial resources to provide a quality education for all students (Flores, 2017). *The Civil Rights Act of 1964* also gave the federal government the authority to cut off funds from school districts that discriminated and opened the door for lawyers to sue districts.

Nelson (2018) highlighted racial inequity in the discourse found in *Brown vs. the Board of Education of Topeka*, which allowed the states to circumvent the law’s enactment and continue desegregation. Brown vs. Board of Education’s purpose was to increase access to an adequate education for all students through the integration of white schools (Bell Jr, 1979). Governmental intervention created “a set of house rules” that equipped White America with the power to give access to the proverbial American dream via quality education (Nelson, 2018). These rules were not afforded to Black America.

*The Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965* provided federal funds for schools with disabled children. ESEA authorizes grants for public schools serving children of low-income families. These monies can be used for library resources, textbooks, instructional materials, professional development for teachers, state educational agencies, and supplemental education centers and services. ESEA became known as the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (National Center for Education Statistics & Department of Education, 2019). Klein (2015) stated that NCLB was a federal education law with requirements accepted by states that accepted federal program funds and increased the federal government’s role in holding schools accountable for students’ academic achievement whose academic achievement lagged their peers. States who did
not comply with the mandates risked losing federal Title I funds (Klein, 2015). Initially, the federal government provided approximately 13 percent of school funding, and today, the federal government provides less than 10 percent (McNichol & Waxman, 2017).

**State Government Role in Public Educational Funding**

State funding initiatives with federal education policy aid have had disparate and inequitable impacts on urban schools (Caskey & Kuperberg, 2014; Cliff & Lechman, 2011). Impoverished districts receive less money per student than the wealthiest districts do per student (Katz, 2019). Cuts in state aid affect school districts with a high concentration of children in poverty (Chinos & Bragg, 2017). States typically distribute general education aid through formulas that reserve additional funds to school districts with large shares of low-income and other high-needs children (Knight, 2017; Ostrander, 2015).

Since the 1950s and with the passing of the National Defense Education Act in 1955, state and local governments have contributed the most substantial monies to funding schools (Baker & Corcoran, 2012). According to the National Association of State Budget Officers (2022), states spent 35.8 percent of their total elementary and secondary education budgets in 2022. “State funds for K-12 increased 3.9 percent in fiscal 2021 and 4.4 percent in fiscal 2020, while federal funds grew 63.6 percent in fiscal 2021 and 8.2 percent in fiscal 2020.” (National Association of State Budget Officers, 2022, p. 12).

Some states have focused on less funding for education over the last decade. These cuts jeopardize the schools’ capacity to develop a high-performing group of teachers. Educational funding has been on the decline since 2009 (Caskey & Kuperberg, 2014). Most states saw deep cuts in education funding and have struggled to return to their pre-recession funding levels.
States relied heavily on the federal stimulus package to remain afloat and did not secure other funding sources when the stimulus ended. At least thirty states received less funding than before the 2008 funding levels (Cliff & Lechman, 2011). According to The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (2022), President Biden has proposed double funding to states for Title I grants from 17.5 million in 2022 to 36.5 billion in 2023.

According to the United States Census Bureau, public school system revenues totaled approximately $752 billion in the fiscal year 2019, and in Tennessee, the primary source of school system revenue was state funding during the fiscal year 2020 at $5.267 billion. The National Center for Education Statistics and Department of Education (2019) reported that public school system expenditures totaled approximately $602 billion. Public education expenditures in Tennessee totaled approximately $9.3 billion in 2019. Tennessee reported the highest total public education expenditures of any of its neighboring states but reported the second-lowest spending on public education as a percentage of its total budget compared to its neighboring states (National Center for Education Statistics & Department of Education, 2019).

The Basic Education Program (BEP) is the funding formula through which Tennessee education dollars are generated and distributed to districts. This formula’s primary goal is to determine the total amount of funding needed by each school system and the percentage of fiscal responsibility of the state and local funding entities (The Basic Education Program- TN.gov, 2019). Student enrollment or average daily membership drives the amounts in the BEP formula. The enrollment component affects the other components in determining the funds needed (Meyers et al., 1995; National Center for Education Statistics & Department of Education, 2019).
Local Government Role in Educational Funding

Education funding comes mostly from property taxes (Baker & Corcoran, 2012). The local funding amount varies in counties in Tennessee. In 2020-2021 school year, Davidson County provides 60.0% or $7413 of school funding compared to Shelby County, which provides 42% or $4813. Madison County and Haywood County provided 42% or $4142 and 24.9% or $2541 per student at the local funding level. The average per-pupil total spending highlights a different picture (See Table 2). According to Table 2, Davidson outspends Shelby County by over $800 and Madison County by over $2600. This per-pupil deficit equates to over ninety-four million dollars for Shelby County and $33 million for Madison County.

Table 2: Revenue by Funding Source Per Student

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Federal</th>
<th>Local</th>
<th>State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Davidson Co.</td>
<td>$12267</td>
<td>$1412</td>
<td>$7413</td>
<td>$3442</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelby Co.</td>
<td>$11423</td>
<td>$2105</td>
<td>$4813</td>
<td>$4505</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madison Co.</td>
<td>$9639</td>
<td>$1459</td>
<td>$4142</td>
<td>$4037</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haywood Co.</td>
<td>$10224</td>
<td>$1789</td>
<td>$2541</td>
<td>$5893</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Adapted from National Center for Education Statistics.*

https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/education/iea/iea_per_pupil_funding_2020-21_districts

Davidson County provides over 60 percent of local funding per pupil, while Shelby and Madison County’s per-pupil spending is around 42 and 43 percent. These differences bring into question the county’s fiscal capacity to fund education. Fiscal capacity is what the county could provide for education versus what they provide (Fahy, 2012). Davidson County exceeded its fiscal capacity by over $800, Shelby County exceeded its fiscal capacity by over $1400, and
Madison County exceeded its fiscal capacity by over $700. Shelby County’s fiscal capacity per pupil was $3367, and Davidson County’s was $6579.

States that provide a large share of state aid are not necessarily more equitable in distributing school funding (Baker & Corcoran, 2012). This distribution means that some well-off school districts receive more money per pupil than others (Chinos & Bragg, 2017). Varied local property taxes have been blamed as the primary cause of inequalities and called for more significant state funding as the solution (Baker & Corcoran, 2012).

The districts with higher funding levels could hire better-qualified teachers and offer much-needed programs (Card & Payne, 2002). Card and Payne (2002) assessed the effect of school finance reforms and the distribution of school spending across more affluent and more impoverished districts, and the consequences of spending equalization for students’ relative test performance from different family backgrounds.

The Creation of Funding Gaps

*Brown* contributed to today’s racial and economic segregation issues (Peters, 2019; Rothstein, 2014). Desegregation closed schools in the Black communities and displaced Black teachers, administrators, and school workers, forcing them into less professional jobs (Horsford, 2011; Peters, 2019). The loss of income created economic issues in the Black community and harmed the upward mobility of Black families (Peters, 2019). *NCLB* and *ESSA* Acts saw the rise of unattainable testing accountability and for-profit schools that siphoned monies from low-performing public schools in competition (Ladd, 2019; Spring, 2017).
State and local policies played a role in devaluing the property tax base in urban neighborhoods (Anyon, 2014). Redlining policies and tax breaks to businesses that relocated from urban locations to suburbia created a lower tax base in high poverty communities. This flight contributed to decreased property tax receipts and insufficient school financing (Anyon, 2014). Additionally, factories moved outside the city, which decimated the African American middle class depended on factory work to enable them to live in the middle class.

Public schools were created to help the communities they reside (Biddle & Berliner, 2002). For these communities to flourish, their population must be educated enough to earn a decent living (Agrawal et al., 2015). Under the current funding provisions, educating students in communities infested with poverty, crime, and low income has been a monumental and unachievable task (Carey, 2004; Chinos & Bragg, 2017; Darling-Hammond, 1998). Ravitch (2014) reminded us that the constitution’s unifying role is in taking care of the people for which it is written and must be the underlying foundation for the discourse and action needed to change school funding.

Income segregation refers to geographical lines and communities drawn and divided based on household income (Jargowsky, 1996). Middle and upper-income families live on the right side of the tracks and low-income families lived in low-income areas or on the wrong side of the tracks (Bischoff, 2008). Income segregation also created funding gaps (Bischoff, 2008; Jargowsky, 1996).

Families have factored school ratings in their decision to purchase homes. The value and prices of homes were higher in areas where school quality was higher, suggesting parents’ willingness to pay more to have access better-performing school districts (Machin, 2011).
Houses in a failing school system tend to stay on the market longer, and the property has a low value (Machin, 2011). Often, new schools are built in the suburbs near the factories and create a segregated school population (Massey & Denton, 1993). These suburban schools have increased as the middle-class flight created a rush to leave urban areas (Massey & Denton, 1993). This flight decimated the schools in urban areas and moved valuable funding dollars to the newly formed suburbs. This move to the suburbs was called a white or middle-class flight. White apprehension about race-mixing was associated with the belief that having Black neighbors undermined property values (Massey & Denton, 1993).

For-profit and charter schools have also siphoned money from public education. Charter schools target low-income community schools (Baker, 2014a). Baker and Miron (2015) identified the following concerning charter schools:

A substantial share of public expenditure intended for the delivery of direct educational services to children is being extracted inadvertently or intentionally for personal or business financial gain, creating substantial inefficiencies; (2) Public assets are being unnecessarily transferred to private hands, at public expense, risking the future provision of “public” education; (3) Charter school operators are growing highly endogenous, self-serving private entities built on funds derived from lucrative management fees and rent extraction which further compromise the future provision of “public” education (Baker & Miron, 2015, p. 3)

Charter schools are self-serving and profiting from the marginalization of students in poor communities (Baker, 2014a). According to Chapman and Donnor (2015), marginalized students that attend charter schools do not score better than their ethnic counterparts in public schools, nor
do they have similar experiences as white students. Chapman and Donnor (2015) stated that the continued push for charters is due to profits and lobbyists influencing lawmakers to ignore the lack of academic performance and success.

**The Case of Shelby County School Board v Haslam**

In 2015, Shelby County School Board, the Shelby County School District’s governing body, filed a complaint on behalf of the school district, students, educators, and itself. Davidson County and Hamilton County joined the lawsuit later. Students who deserve a fighting chance to be successful and who should have access to an adequate education regardless of their zip code are affected the most by underfunded education budgets (Bischoff, 2008; Chinos & Bragg, 2017). The case was against William Haslam, the governor of Tennessee, the Commissioner of Education, the State Board of Education, and other state officials. This case highlighted the ongoing disparity issue in educational funding. School funding has been consistent at Tennessee’s federal and state levels (Shelby County School Board v William Haslam, 2015). The federal government contributes approximately eight percent, and the state adds about ten percent (Chinos & Bragg, 2017). The rest of the funding comes at the local level through property taxes (Baker, 2014b). Tennessee recognized this discrepancy early on and created a funding reform package called the Basic Education Program (Meyers et al., 1995). According to the lawsuit, the Basic Education Program (BEP) fails to meet its purpose to adequately and equitably fund education to meet the needs of all students in Tennessee.

The lawsuit contended that Tennessee funding violated the state constitution by not providing access to quality and adequate education. In *Shelby County School Board v Haslam*, the board argued that Governor Haslam and other state officials were derelict in providing
enough funding to educate students in Shelby and Davidson County and that unfunded expectations created an impossible accountability measure the counties could not meet.

In this case, litigators who represented the defendants addressed the state’s role in perpetuating the inequitable education funding in Shelby, Hamilton, and Davidson County. The case also raised the unfunded accountability measures required by the state accountability office and the district’s inability to meet those measures due to lack of funding. Programs and services that were beneficial to the academic, social, and emotional success of students were cut. Additionally, the complaint highlighted unfunded mandates and reforms the state required of districts. The litigation goals were to ensure the state funds education and fulfill the tenets of the Tennessee Constitution and its funding mandates. The complaint also stated that school fees are unconstitutional and violate the state constitution to provide free public education. The lack of funding creates serious detrimental effects on marginalized students, students with special needs, and English as a Second Language students (Knight, 2017). The case hinged on the plaintiffs’ adequate funding argument, arguing that the state was not providing students with a free, adequate, and equitable education.

The plaintiffs claimed the Basic Education Program (BEP) funding formula that the state used to calculate and allocate resources did not meet the students’ needs in Shelby and Davidson County (Shelby County School Board v William Haslam, 2015). This funding gap has eliminated critical positions in schools and at the central office in Shelby County. These key positions included teacher assistants, assistant principals, teachers, guidance counselors, social workers, and the closure of seventeen schools (Shelby County School Board v William Haslam, 2015). These loopholes in the language created a set of house rules that afforded the status quo the power to determine who gained access (Nelson, 2018). BEP was not calculated with socio-
economic status, geographical location, and students’ demographics but using a funding formula (Meyers et al., 1995). Quinn and Steinberg (2015) stated that the funding difference created by BEP allocation is considered an adequacy gap between the funding that is needed versus what they must use to educate students.

According to *Shelby County School Board v Haslam*, in 2012-2013, student demographics in Shelby County showed that 84.3% of the student population was poor, with more than 36% of its students having a household income of less than $10,000. Because of this high poverty, Shelby County contends these students need significant emotional, social, and academic support. Because of the lack of funding, Shelby County has not been able to provide the needed support. *Shelby County School Board v. Haslam* also highlighted the second tenet of Critical Race Theory. This tenet suggests that the dominant culture will support social progress if it is beneficial for them (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). It is rooted in common sense beliefs held by the status quo of the culture in power (Ladson-Billings, 1998). This case allowed African Americans’ counter-narratives to be told to expose the ills associated with underfunding and challenged the status quo. African Americans must create a counter-narrative and expose the ills associated with underfunding (Delgado & Bernal, 1998).

Exclusionary disciplinary practices, academic underachievement, and poor student relationships cause disenfranchisement and create barriers to learning. Dancy (2014) further states this disenfranchisement in communities of color perpetuates the pipeline to prison, specifically for men of color. Additionally, local funding inequities further intensify the prison pipeline trajectory for students of color and race, and class (Wald & Losen, 2003). This class and race connection is apparent in the social hierarchy of zip codes and property values (Bischoff, 2008). According to Neighborhoodscout.com, the median home value in Memphis, Tennessee, is
$107,381 compared to surrounding suburbs. Property values averaged $227,225 in Bartlett, Tennessee, $380,460 in Cordova, Tennessee, and $374,587 in Germantown, Tennessee. This huge variance and the current property tax funding basis suggest that students who reside in Shelby County’s suburbs will have access to better teachers, more resources, and better facilities. For the marginalized students, this means schools with teachers’ shortages, classrooms staffed by untrained substitutes, missing support personnel to address social and emotional needs, larger class sizes, stressed-out teachers who are already overworked, and punitive zero-tolerance discipline policies that ensure marginalized students ascension to prison (Osher et al., 2012). Winn and Behzadeh (2011) noted poverty, lack of access to pre-k programs, and advanced placement courses also perpetuate the school-to-prison pipeline.

Several attempts to dismiss the lawsuit failed. When Governor Haslem left office in 2019, and Claudia Bonnyman, the presiding judge over the case, retired, it was unclear when the case would go to trial.

**Tenets of Critical Race Theory**

CRT’s five tenets are racism is ordinary, normal, and endemic, interest convergence, the centrality of race, counter-narratives, and a critique of liberalism (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Racism is normal and underscores the dominant culture’s narrative that racism is not prevalent in all areas of society and has no bearing on marginalized people or people of color (Delgado, 1994). Delgado (1994) suggested this way of thinking allows white people to feel irresponsible for the subjugation and societal tribulations plaguing marginalized people and their communities. CRT’s fundamental idea examines the dominant culture’s role in funding policies and creating inequities in urban schools based on the belief that the dominant culture can impact policies that
create these funding inequities in education. Addressing racialized power allows the discussion surrounding the need for a policy change that addresses color-blindness, race, and racism (Gillborn, 2005).

Critical Race Theory also examines the centrality of race (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Race is a social category created by society to compartmentalize groups of people (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Race is behind the premise of inequity, subordination, and inferiority narratives for people of color (Yosso, 2005). Public schooling is at the mercy of policies and practices that continue to suppress the achievement of minorities based on an underlying deficit view in society (Taylor et al., 2009). Nelson (2018) noted this caste system has been in place for minorities in the U.S. since the arrival of slaves over four hundred years. Race has always been used to oppress and justify the second-class citizenship that people of color have been subjected to (Gillborn, 2005; Yosso, 2005). Education funding inequities create an oppressiveness and inferiority system for people of color (Biddle & Berliner, 2002). CRT is used to challenge race as the culprit that helps create achievement gaps, poverty, and increased entrance into the school-to-prison pipeline (Brown & Jackson, 2013). Lack of financial resources and economic growth in marginalized communities have exacerbated inadequately funded schools. These underfunded institutions have led to the disenfranchisement of people of color (Biddle & Berliner, 2002). CRT highlights the presence of race as an influencer of policy and actions related to education funding.

Counter-narratives are the fourth tenet of Critical Race Theory. Historically, people and communities of color have been demonized and labeled as inferior while being denied access to resources readily afforded to the dominant culture for years (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). People of color use counter-narratives to offer a different story that challenges the
deficit thinking and privileged discourse based on racial stereotypes (Cook & Dixson, 2013). Ladson-Billings (1998) notes that counter-narratives are vital because they serve as a reminder of rationalized oppression. These narratives by people of color act to contradict the remembrance of racism and shake up the historical account of the treatment of African Americans by the dominant culture (Ladson-Billings, 1998). The counter-narratives serve as announcements of power and pride in direct contradiction to the commodification and problematic labels the dominant culture has used in its description of people of color (Lorde, 1992; Lynn, 2002). Ladson-Billings (1998) posits the importance of marginalized people’s counter-stories in changing current educational practices. The school-to-prison pipeline is fueled by the dominant culture’s lack of understanding of African American behaviors and the dominant culture’s need to remain in power by erasing people of color’s essence (Jones et al., 2018; Lynn, 2002; Myers, 2017). The assimilation into European culture is viewed as correct behavior, and anything different or challenging to its core is met with punishment and disdain (Yosso, 2005). Counter-narratives highlight the struggles and lack of resources students of color face in poor school districts (Lynn, 2002).

The last tenet of CRT deals with the dominant culture being the benefactor of civil rights and policy legislation. This evaluation of liberalism through a critical race lens critiques funding legislation. Brown vs. Board of Education’s subliminal goal was to help the U.S. solidify its humanitarian status on a global stage during a world war (Bell Jr, 1979), and The Civil Rights Act of 1964 incentivized white schools that complied with desegregation with additional funding (Hersch & Shinall, 2015). Additionally, NCLB and ESSA offered incentives and grants to school districts that adopted national standards and stringent accountability systems based on the dominant society’s metrics and ushered in the rise of school choice (Darling-Hammond, 2007;
Klein, 2015; Lipman, 2015). Critical Race Theory challenges the real rationale and benefactors behind enacting the policies. CRT suggests this systemic behavior creates an underlying inequity in academic achievement by further increasing the achievement gap in marginalized groups (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Critical race theory in education also seeks to develop a theoretical approach that highlights race and racism in America’s education system and works to remove racism as a component of systemic oppression and marginalization based on gender, class, and sexual orientation (Matsudo et al., 1993). For far too long, marginalized students have been subjected to subpar schooling (Chinos & Bragg, 2017). Due to the lack of social-emotional learning resources, grief, and trauma support, struggling students drop out, participate in criminal activities, or work minimum wage jobs (Darling-Hammond, 2007). Students who do matriculate out of school tend to lack the skills to be successful at the post-secondary level and, as a result, continue the cycle of poverty (Darling-Hammond, 2007). Crenshaw (2010) stated that the social construction of race and institutional racism highlights the notion that these missing supports relegate people of color to the bottom of society.

**Critical Race Theory Applied to Educational Funding Policy**

To come to grips with the intricate way racism is embedded in the education system in America, society must look at the origin of the United States and the origin of education for People of Color in America (Yosso, 2005). To understand the depth of racism since the country’s origin, look no further that The Declaration of Independence and the Constitution (Gordon-Reed, 2018). The language in these texts highlights the systemic racism found in the law (Gordon-Reed, 2018). The contradiction of slavery in the language challenges the principles of equality
and freedom (Thomas & Casper, 2019). The Thirteen Colonies allowed slavery and the Constitution protected slavery (Gordon-Reed, 2018). The Declaration of Independence states: We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal, endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness (The Declaration of Independence, 1776).

Jack Rakove, a Stanford historian, noted Jefferson was not referring to individual equality when he wrote, “all men are created equal.” In an interview with Stanford News, Rakove stated that Jefferson meant that American colonists had the same right to self-govern as other people in other nations. As Americans began to interpret the statement differently, it became a rallying cry for equality with marginalized groups (DeWitte, 2020).

Unfortunately, freedom to self-govern did not include African Americans and women. African American slaves were subject to horrid living conditions and abusive treatment (Thomas & Casper, 2019). Learning to read and their unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness were denied because of their capitalistic value and role as property (Rasmussen, 2010).

“Fearing that black literacy would prove a threat to the slave system — which relied on slaves’ dependence on masters — whites in many colonies instituted laws forbidding slaves to learn to read or write and making it a crime for others to teach them” (Slavery and the Making of America, n.d., p. 1).

Without strong foundational literacy skills, children cannot become proficient readers and access a rigorous curriculum (Wamba, 2014). Strong literacy skills play a key role in moving people out of poverty (Wamba, 2014).
This study applied three of the five Critical Race tenets to this research. Interest Convergence, racism is normal, ordinary, and endemic, and counter-narratives was used as the focus of the CRT framework in this study.

**Interest Convergence**

Governmental powers in the United States are divided up among state and federal governments under federalism (Flores, 2017). Although the United States Constitution does not provide the federal government with powers over education, the federal government has encroached upon education policy through funding law and policy, an area of law and regulation constitutionally assigned to state governments (Flores, 2017; Sylvester & Nelson, 2019). Education federalism, the phrase used to identify the unique ways federalism applies in education policy, has led to states adopting various school funding policies with varying outcomes across and within state boundaries (Flores, 2017; Sylvester & Nelson, 2019).

Federal, state, and local governments have tried to camouflage urban schools’ plight by passing laws that address the inequity in education (Baker & Corcoran, 2012). NCLB’s and ESSA’s rhetoric engaged the nation in “feel good” discourse without the funding to see it come to fruition (Knight, 2017). People in power ignored the educational system’s systematic ways disenfranchised students of color (Gillborn, 2005). The status quo narrative sold to people of color is that they roll up your sleeves, work hard, do their best, and everyone can achieve the American dream (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). This fraudulent claim negates those years of oppressive behaviors and invisible systems that have caused people of color to be relegated to second-class citizenship and are viewed through a deficit lens (Yosso, 2005). This thought process also implies that racism is ordinary and customary. It suggests that marginalized people
are not successful because they are not trying hard enough (Reyna, 2000; Reynolds, 2010). It is their fault that people of color are marginalized and struggling, and that the system does not play a part in suppressing their growth (Reyna, 2000; Reynolds, 2010).

Education policy reform has tried to remedy the inequities of educational services provided to the underserved population (Baker, 2014b). This has been addressed in many forms throughout history. According to Sander (2010),

“Because race and racism are so ingrained in society, they are also present in every structure of society, including education. If some people are racist and some racist people create policies that inform educational practices, then educational policy and practices are in effect contaminated by racism (Sander, 2010, p. 27).”

This means that if racism people are responsible for creating policy; the decision making will be influenced by their belief systems. Separate but equal doctrine in *Plessy v Ferguson 1896*, which never materialized on its face, offered the country and the European power coalition a feel-good moment and support for continued unequal treatment of minorities (Medley, 2012). Separate but equal doctrine trickled down to educational attainment and upheld separate school facilities for whites and Black people but with equal access to resources that never happened (Henry & Robinson, 1998). Integration was also used to address white and black educational attainment (Rist, 1978).

The process of protecting the rights of the dominant culture is evident in unfair discipline policies that target marginalized students (Yang et al., 2018). The discussion surrounding the exclusionary discipline practices that target students of color and the protection and safety of other students highlight interest convergence. Students of color are suspended under the goal of
increased school safety. Dancy (2014) also highlighted suspensions and other exclusionary discipline practices as a form of social control that demanded minority students conform to the norms and expectations of the dominant culture thus promoting the interest of maintaining the status quo.

Racism is Normal, Ordinary and Endemic, the Notion of Colorblindness

National funding policies are notorious for incentivizing test performance at the expense of forcing out underperforming students, mostly students of color (Card & Payne, 2002; Darling-Hammond & Friedlaender, 2008). Educational funding levels at the state, federal and local level ignore the needs of schools in high poverty areas by not looking at their funding needs. The federal government allocates the same percentage for all states. These actions highlight the federal government’s color blindness in enacting policies by not factoring in the needs and deficits of marginalized people. The federal government did not consider additional programs that are needed for students to successfully access high quality curriculum, offset trauma, social, and emotional development delays, and learning in a school environment that is safe, fully operational, and nurturing. Without these programs, students have a high chance of matriculation to the school to prison pipeline.

NCLB intensified the marginalization of students of color by not leveling the playing field and addressing the academic deficits which hindered their ability to achieve the law’s aggressive achievement levels. These actions highlight the normalcy in when students of color are written off and pose a great threat to the survival and success of students of color by creating circumstances of frustration and disenfranchisement. Teachers ill-equipped to identify these academic deficits misidentified the deficits as discipline issues. This led to high discipline
referrals and a disproportionate number of Black students facing discipline practices. These exclusionary practices were catalysts that propelled students of color toward the school to prison pipeline (Burnett, 2014).

State funding policies utilize a funding formula established by the legislature (Baker & Corcoran, 2012). The county commission manages the local funding for education and relies heavily on property taxes (Baker & Corcoran, 2012). Property taxes are based on the value of the property. Property in poverty-stricken communities has less value than in the suburbs, thus generating fewer tax revenues (Baker & Corcoran, 2012). Fewer tax revenues mean less money for education (Carey, 2004). Local property tax funding discriminates against students living in high poverty areas by highlighting the lack of available tax bases for education which relegates at-risk students to failing schools (Koski & Hahnel, 2014).

State-level school funding policies with federal education policies have had disparate and inequitable impacts on urban schools (Baker, 2014b). Schools in wealthy or property-rich areas flourished while schools in poverty-stricken areas struggled to repair old buildings, access technology, utilize a rigorous curriculum, and lower-class sizes (Spatig-Amerikaner, 2012). Baker (2014b) noted that state funding formulas failed to sufficiently accommodate the differences in students’ needs in different districts across the state. Baker (2014b) also noted the federal government allocated the same percentage of funding to all states: ignoring the individual needs of schools located in impoverished areas. The state willfully chooses to ignore the needs of students attending low performing schools grappling with crime, poverty, gang violence, academic deficits, unqualified teachers, large class sizes, and staff shortages. These underfunded programs allow the school to prison pipeline to thrive (Potter et al., 2017).
Since the times of Jim Crow, African American students have faced education inequities (Henry & Robinson, 1998). Separate but equal doctrine denied students of color equal access to schools attended by their White counterparts (Henry & Robinson, 1998). While the goal since Brown vs. the Board of Education of Topeka has been to provide an adequate education to all students, this has not been accomplished (Tate IV, 1997). Race and racism are highlighted in the systematic and historical oppression and marginalization of the communities of color throughout their education accessibility in the United States (Crenshaw, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Tate IV, 1997). The lack of access to equitable and adequate education and the role of funding policies in school funding are at the heart of CRT’s argument against the power structures that maintain the status quo (Crenshaw, 2010).

The goal of integration was to give marginalized students access to better facilities, teachers, and resources (Garda Jr, 2011; Rist, 1978). This was an epic failure. African American students who participated in integration remained in segregated classrooms in white schools (Rist, 1978). Only those African American students with the highest aptitude were placed with their white counterparts (Rist, 1978). Other reforms included privatized education, which saw the rise in for-profit organizations, high stake testing, and school choice (Baker, 2014a; Baker & Corcoran, 2012; Flores, 2017; Klein, 2015). None of which has offered a solution to closing the achievement gap of marginalized students or disrupting their matriculation to the school-to-prison pipeline (Baker & Corcoran, 2012; Flores, 2017).

The dominant culture narrative would suggest that racism is only evident in a small portion of society and does not play a part in the failure or success of people of color (Crenshaw, 2010; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1998; & Tate IV, 1997). This racialized power notion allows the dominant culture to feel indifferent to the destitution of marginalized
people (Decuir & Dixson, 2004). Decuir and Dixson (2004) suggested this color-blindness creates the need for a subgroup, “the minority,” as a rationale for the dominant culture to maintain its influence in society. Meritocracy allows for a clear conscience and feels good moments when those in power choose to share their power with those less fortunate (Decuir & Dixson, 2004). Meritocracy is evident in funding inequalities in urban districts based on the control that the dominant culture has on federal, state, and local laws that created the unfunded and unattainable mandates and the funding inequities that led to the school district’s inability to provide necessary programs and resources to address the numerous needs of the students (Crenshaw, 2010; Decuir & Dixson, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

School funding has been a means by which the dominant culture has continued perpetuating segregation (Bischoff, 2008). Invisible segregation has occurred in the form of property taxes (Bischoff, 2008). Those families who have the means to live in more affluent neighborhoods bustling with businesses and low crime generate high property taxes (Bischoff, 2008; Jargowsky, 1996). Unfortunately, families living in areas with little to no economic development are subjected to lower property values, which result in fewer dollars for education (Anyon, 2014; Yosso, 2005). Urban students have been denied access to a quality education because of these deficit funding practices (Chinos & Bragg, 2017). Students are subjected to crowded classrooms, dilapidated buildings, a lack of technology, and subpar teachers (Christle et al., 2005). Ryan (1999) further connected this inept funding to race influences.

The Need for Counter-Narratives

Educational funding systems continue to create barriers for marginalized students. By underfunding mandates and program and staffing needs, federal, state, and local entities
contribute to high teacher turnover, teacher and student burnout, frustration, and missed opportunities to address learning deficits (Anglero, 2017). The experiences and stories of those affected the most by unfair policies and practices have been told through the lens of the dominant culture (Delgado & Bernal, 1998).

Critical race theory uses marginalized people’s experiences as strengths to tell their side of the story (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). These experiences are known as counter-narratives. There are several types of counter-narratives. First, personal counter-narratives give participants ownership in sharing their marginalization experiences and oppression. The second type of counter-narratives uses someone else to share another person’s experiences with oppression and marginalization. The interview of school leaders aligned with the second type of counter-narrative, which employs someone else to share the experiences and responses of the student of color. Finally, composite stories form counter-narratives that use a collection of narratives from many participants that highlight people of color’s experiences with subordination (McCoy & Rodericks, 2015; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

Critical race theory critiques the dominant culture’s ideals and concentrates on the research participants’ experiences and knowledge (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Critical Race Theory also confronts whiteness as property and privilege and rejects researchers who use a neutral and objective stance to minimize, silence, or contort the stories of those from the marginalized culture. This deficit informed research provides insight without having insight (Delgado & Bernal, 1998).

Colorblindness reared its head in coded discipline initiatives that establish behavior expectations for all students based on the definition of good behavior set by White culture.
(Massey, 2019. Additionally, students are expected to fit a Eurocentric behavior and appearance model as a trade-off for inclusion in society (Yosso, 2005). Marginalized students have become a commodity in which their culture and racial context are not valued as a part of the dominant culture and status quo (Yosso, 2005). Whitewashing the experiences and culture of students of color to colonize those behaviors to fit mainstream society and the dominant culture’s narrative is an invisible catalyst for miscategorized discipline issues and linked to the school to prison pipeline trajectory (Christle et al., 2005; Decuir & Dixson, 2004; Hoffman, 2014).

Summary

Race is the elephant in the room when analyzing equality, equity, and access (Darling-Hammond, 1998). Critical Race Theory places race as the one attribute that minimized and marginalized others and limited access to the American dream (Hochschild & Scovronick, 2003). CRT challenges societal and cultural norms as they intersect with race, laws, policies, and power (Brown & Jackson, 2013; Cole, 2009; Crenshaw, 2010; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). CRT argues that social and racial assumptions are influenced and create more societal structures and cultural assumptions than individual and psychological factors (Crenshaw, 2010). CRT proposes that the dominance and power associated with white culture are historically and systemically continued over time and that the legal system may assist in this process of marginalization (Nelson, 2018). CRT works to change the connection between the legal system and racialized powers. CRT in education is a framework or set of basic perceptions, viewpoints, systems, and teachings that seek to discover, critique, and change those institutional and cultural tenets of education that preserve the hierarchy of power in our school funding system in which those in power benefit from funding methods, measures, and policies (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Matsudo et al., 1993).
The Federal Government funding practices must be reviewed by looking at the reallocation of resources to combat factors that increase the school to prison pipeline (Losen et al., 2014). Additional funding support is needed for teacher training, additional support personnel, and mental health support programs for students. State funding practices highlighted the need to evaluate funding formulas thorough an equity lens. Policymakers must take into consideration the needs of individual districts and schools to fund programs that disrupt the school to prison pipeline (Potter et al., 2017). Leaders at the local level must produce a funding initiative that does not exclude students from access to a quality education based on geographical location. The use of property taxes highlights class, poverty, and social economic status in the denial of access to a quality education (Anyon, 2014).

Chapter two consisted of a review of literature on the history of educational funding in the United States and federal, state, and local funding laws. Critical Race Theory was also discussed with a focus on interest convergence, racism is normal, ordinary, and endemic, and counter-narratives for this study. Educational funding litigation involving Shelby County Board of Education and Governor William Haslam was also discussed.
Chapter III: Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to analyze the role education funding policies at the federal, state, and local levels have in funneling marginalized students to the school-to-prison pipeline through a critical race lens. Historically, race has been at the forefront in determining seats at the proverbial table of success (Yosso, 2005). Racial inequity was the catalyst that ignited the Civil Rights Movement (Fairclough, 1990). According to Crenshaw (2010), critical race theory was a social and legal frame connected by race and was used to mobilize individuals into a movement against racial injustice. Additionally, critical race theory was born out of a reaction to unjust laws and social misconduct grounded in race and feminism (Crenshaw, 2010).

Color blinded by privilege; most members of the dominant culture has been afforded access to success based on their race (Yosso, 2005). Most people from the dominant culture believe that racism is ordinary, one of the tenets of critical race theory (Bell Jr, 1979; Crenshaw, 2010; Decuir & Dixson, 2004). Decuir and Dixson (2004) stated that color blindness and meritocracy allow the majority culture to turn a blind and neutral eye to the distastefulness associated with racism and maintain control of the white power hierarchy in society. White people benefit from their whiteness while maintaining the status quo, using societal structures to oppress people of color (Yosso, 2005). Critical Race Theory challenged these racial misnomers and invited counter-narratives from the marginalized group (Decuir & Dixson, 2004). The study sought the answers to the following research questions:

RQ1: How do school funding inequities contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline?

RQ2: What role has federal, state, and local policies and educational funding practices play in school funding inequities and the systematic marginalization of minorities?
RQ3: How is racism interwoven in school funding laws, policies, and practices?

RQ4: What role can equitable educational funding practices, laws, and policies play in decreasing the school-to-prison pipeline?

The first research question sought to connect educational funding inadequacies and prison matriculation for marginalized students. The purpose of the second research question addressed how the lack of access to quality schools in poverty-stricken areas plays a role in stifling the growth and advancement of a community and increases the matriculation into prison (Simmons, 2009). Simmons (2009) stated that the lack of economic opportunities is magnified in low-income neighborhoods where many students of color live and underperforming schools exist. The third research question centered around racism and race as a social construct that influences policy and decision-making in school funding. The dominant culture influences the local, state, and national policies that create the funding inequities between urban and suburban schools (Crenshaw, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1998). The final question was about school funding solutions to decreasing the school-to-prison pipeline.

Chapter three discussed Critical Race Methodology, a description of data collection and data analysis methods, trustworthiness, positionality, ethics, and participants’ demographics.

**A Critical Race Methodological Approach**

Critical race methodology is “a theoretically grounded approach to research that foregrounds race and racism in all aspects of the research process” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 24). This approach involved a literature review and interviews of principals who have first-hand knowledge of inadequate funding effects on marginalized students. Interview questions were
developed from the literature review and research questions (See Appendix D). The interviews highlighted systemic racism’s invisibility in political, economic, and historical actions, events, and interactions.

Parker (2015) suggested that Critical Race Methodology offers a way to be deliberate about conducting education research based on a racialized premise of discrimination. Critical Race Methodology was used to analyze school funding laws, policies, and practices through a racialized lens and bring attention to the privilege historically present in regulations and guidelines created by the dominant culture (Crenshaw, 2010, Decuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1998). This methodology also helped inform the discussion around ethnic epistemologies and played a vital role in shaping the research process (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Additionally, Critical Race Methodology challenged the researcher from the dominant culture’s ability to give voice to marginalized participants and, therefore, challenged the authenticity of that research to truly capture the voice of people of color (McCoy & Rodericks, 2015; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

Critical race methodology provided a foundational perspective linked to changes in how marginalized communities and people are studied and written about (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). It also gave the voices and narratives of people of color a platform to be explored (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). These counter stories or counter-narratives challenged the European perspective and added realness and identity to the lack of accurate representation faced by people of color within academic research (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). By interrogating the dominant culture’s research on racism’s role in the continued oppression of people of color, Critical Race Methodology and Critical Race Theory exposed the societal ills that inherently limit the success of the people of color (Parker, 2015).
Solórzano and Yosso (2002) provided several basic tenants for critical race counter-stories in education. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) explained that counter-stories could be used to

1. build understanding and community among members of society by putting a humanistic side to educational theory and practice,

2. challenge the perceived wisdom of those at the hierarchy of societal power, open new lens into the lived experiences of marginalized folk by showing the possibilities beyond the ones they live and showing that they are a part of a bigger picture, and

3. teach others that some elements of lived experiences are rich and add to the story’s sustenance.

Solórzano and Yosso (2002) also highlighted five elements that provide the basis for critical race methodology. These five elements include

1. the intercentricity of race with other forms of subordination and oppression, which focuses on the significance of race without putting one form of oppression against another,

2. denial of the notions of color blindness, race neutrality, and meritocracy,

3. a call for social justice,

4. placing people of color at the center of the discourse, and

5. using information and processes from across disciplines to highlight oppression.

This study situated the research around the intercentricity of race with other forms of subordination and oppression, the denial of the notions of color blindness, race neutrality, and meritocracy, and placing people of color at the center of the discourse.
Critical race theory methodology sought to use marginalized people’s experiences as strengths and a basis in other interdisciplinary subjects (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). These experiences are known as counter-narratives. There are several types of counter-narratives. First, personal counter-narratives give participants ownership in sharing their marginalization experiences and oppression. The second type of counter-narratives uses someone else to share another person’s experiences with oppression and marginalization. Finally, composite stories form counter-narratives that use a collection of narratives from many participants that highlight people of color’s experiences with subordination (McCoy & Rodericks, 2015; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). The interviews of school leaders aligned with the second type of counter-narrative, which employs someone else to share the experiences and responses of the student of color.

The study's fundamental ideas focused on the context sources of evidence and critical race design that centered on the social situation of race and racism’s role in subjugating educational opportunities for people of color and how the notion of race contributed to the school to prison pipeline (Myers, 2017; Yosso, 2005). By reviewing the literature, prevailing research, and interview responses through a race frame, the voices, insights, and experiences of people of color guide the discourse and study around marginalized communities, schools, and students. This aligns with the Critical Race Methodology element of placing people of color at the center of the discourse. The development of the interview questions and the analysis of the interview responses also placed people of color at the center of the discussion.

Although race and racism were the focus of the critical race analysis, research must also address the intersection with other discrimination methods such as gender and class (Crenshaw, 2010; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Critical Race Methodology is grounded in critical race theory and challenges the conversation on race, gender, and class by highlighting how they connect to
explain the experiences of students, schools, and communities of color (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). This study looked at the race and class connection to further explain the marginalization of Black students through funding inequities.

**Research Site and Selection of Participants**

Permission to conduct this research was sought from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at The University of Memphis. The IRB ID number was #Pro-FY2021-218. After approval was received from the Institutional Review Board, consent was requested from school leaders in Shelby, Haywood, and Madison County. Participants were emailed a request to gather information. Since the inception of COVID-19, zoom interviews have been utilized to collect information. Participants were interviewed using the ZOOM virtual meeting platform in a quiet area of their choice. Data collection involved a literature review on federal, state, and local funding policies, laws, and litigation and the adverse effects funding deficits have on at-risk students.

Based on the individuals’ responses, interview times were scheduled, and consent forms were shared and signed electronically. The electronic form and signature allowed convenience and time since it did not require participants to print, sign, scan, and email their signed consent form. The zoom online meeting platform was utilized as the interview medium, and participants were asked to download the application on their phones or computers. On the day of the interview, consent was reviewed, and an explanation of the purpose of the study, the data collection process, and the data used were explained. Participants were informed of the rationale behind the interview. To bring context to their position on school funding and the school-to-prison pipeline, I asked for their unique perspective on education funding and how funding
inequities affected marginalized students’ success, and the connection of inadequate funding to the school-to-prison pipeline. Any other questions or concerns were answered at the time of the interview.

Participants were selected from school districts in West Tennessee. The eight participants were chosen based on an 80 percent or higher free and reduced lunch student population to establish a connection to poverty. According to The Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth (2018), most counties in West Tennessee have seen an increase in the child poverty level. The goal was to gather information from school leaders at different school levels to show the systemic nature of funding disparities and the connection to the school to prison pipeline across K-12. Additionally, enlisting the perspectives of different genders and ethnicities allowed those affected by school funding inequities to have their voices heard.

I protected the participants’ privacy and confidentiality by creating a pseudonym to limit ethical issues during the data collection process. Additionally, the participants were not identified by the schools they led, only by their district’s name. Participants were informed of the study’s purpose, the data collection process, and data use. The informed consent form was reviewed, and any other questions were answered before the start of the interview. Participants were informed before recording them. The right to withdraw from the study was announced at this time.

Ethics in CRT involves race and social policy (Crenshaw, 2010). The critical race theorist perspective used the tenets to disaggregate the data from the interviews to gain knowledge of the school principal’s interpretation and thoughts on school funding and the prison pipeline. Also, a review of the literature was critiqued through the lens of race and racism.
This study used purposeful or criterion-based sampling for this research study. With the influence of critical race theory, purposeful or criterion-based sampling allowed the participants to tell their stories about the effects of inadequate school funding on marginalized students at risk of matriculating into the school to prison pipeline (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006; Gill et al., 2008). My sample selection criteria included:

- Four Elementary principals, two middle school principals, and two high school principals
- Principals with three or more years of experience
- Principals in West Tennessee schools
- Principals of schools with 80% or higher free and reduced lunch population

Participants

The data for this study consisted of interview responses from eight principals from the West Tennessee area. Each principal was selected based on at least an 80 percent free and reduced lunch population to establish the poverty level of their student population. The participants identified and chosen for this study were appropriate based on the study’s purpose and connection to the research questions. These principals represented Shelby, Madison, and Haywood counties. One participant was an African American male, five participants were African American females, and two were Caucasian females. All participants had over three years of experience. Participants allowed me to select their pseudonyms. Additionally, personal information or specific details such as institution names linked to individual participants were omitted.
Description of Participants

This section provided descriptions of the participants in this study. The names of the participants and the schools they lead have been changed. Table 6 summarizes the demographics of the participants.

1. Mrs. Bassett has been a principal for five years. She has been a principal in Madison County and Shelby County. She is an African American female. Her current school has a free and reduced lunch population of 94 percent.

2. Mrs. Pope has been a principal for 12 years in the Madison County School District. She is an African American female. Her current school has a free and reduced lunch population of 97 percent.

3. Mr. Montrell has been a principal in Madison County for seven years. He is an African American male. His current school has a free and reduced lunch population of 86 percent.

4. Mrs. Anderson was a principal for five years in Haywood County. She is a Caucasian female. Her school has a free and reduced lunch percentage of 84 percent.

5. Mrs. Chandler has been a principal for 20 years in Madison County. She is an African American female. She has a free and reduced lunch population of 97 percent.

6. Mrs. Jackson has been a principal for over 20 years in West Tennessee in various districts. She is currently a principal at an elementary school with a 98% free and reduced lunch population in Madison County. She is a white female.
7. Mrs. Queen has been a principal for seven years in West Tennessee. She has a free and reduced lunch percentage of 83%. She is a Black female.

8. Mrs. Songbird has been a principal in West Tennessee for four years. She has a free and reduced lunch percentage of 90%. She is a Black female.

Table 3: Interview Participants Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Years of Service as an Administrator</th>
<th>Free and Reduced Lunch Percentages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bassett</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pope</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montreal</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anderson</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chandler</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackson</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>20+</td>
<td>98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queen</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Songbird</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Collection

I applied the McNamara’s eight principles to the preparation stage of interviewing. The eight principles including choosing a location with minimal distractions; explaining the rationale for the interview; discussing the confidentiality measures, explaining the interview process, including the length of the interview; sharing ways to contact the researcher; allowing an opportunity for participants to ask questions before the start of the interview; recording the participants’ responses and not relying on the researcher’s memory of responses (McNamara, 2009). My application of the interviewing principles can be found in Table 4.

Table 4: Application of the Eight Principles in the Preparation of Interviewing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eight Principles in the Preparation of the Interview</th>
<th>Application to My Interviewing Process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Choosing a location with minimal distractions</td>
<td>Virtual interviewing through the Zoom platform in a quiet space with little to no distractions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explaining the rationale for the interview</td>
<td>The purpose of this study is to understand the role inadequate school funding plays in perpetuating the school to prison pipeline in marginalized students. Interviewing school principals in urban schools will give a first-hand account of the effects of inadequate school funding on marginalized students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4: Application of the Eight Principles in the Preparation of Interviewing Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eight Principles in the Preparation of the Interview</th>
<th>Application to My Interviewing Process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discussing confidentiality measures</td>
<td>Confidentiality will consist of names being removed from the study, school districts’ names, and other names mentioned during the interview being removed from the study. Individually identifying information, such as my name, will not be published in connection with this study. All results and all tape recordings from this study will be disguised by a fake name and this name will be used on all the research records. All recordings will be kept in a locked filing cabinet and uploaded to a password protected cloud provided by the University of Memphis. Audio /video recordings will be destroyed by the following year.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 4: Application of the Eight Principles in the Preparation of Interviewing Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eight Principles in the Preparation of the Interview</th>
<th>Application to My Interviewing Process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Explaining the interview process including the length of the interview</td>
<td>The interview will range from 30 minutes to 60 minutes using Zoom. Permission to record will be obtained from each interviewee before the interview begins. Participants will be informed when the recording starts and ends. Notes will be taken during the interview. To protect the participants' privacy and confidentiality, the interviewer will conduct the interviews in a private location. Confidentiality will consist of names being removed from the study, school names, and other names mentioned during the interview being removed from the study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing ways to contact the researcher</td>
<td>Researcher contact information will be in the invitation email and the confidentiality agreement that participants will receive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allowing an opportunity for participants to ask questions before the start of the interview</td>
<td>The researcher will read the confidentiality agreement, the purpose of the study, and allow for any questions or concerns prior to the start of the interview</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Interviews were used to collect data from school leaders. The interview aimed to discover participants’ perspectives on the research topic (Turner III, 2010). Another goal of the interview was to gather promising information to develop connections and themes from the data (Turner III, 2010). Semi-structured interviews were used with the participants of this study. Semi-structured interviewing consisted of key questions centered around the research’s key ideas, but it also allowed the interview the flexibility to move in a different direction to pursue an idea more in-depth. This discovery or elaboration led to more detailed discussion and critical discourse not previously thought of (Gill et al., 2008). Cohen and Crabtree (2006) also stated that semi-structured interviews were formal and used an interview guide consisting of questions and topics that needed to be addressed.

Cohen and Crabtree (2006) and Turner III (2010) posited that semi-structured Interviews allowed the participants the freedom to share their viewpoints, and questions can be prepared beforehand with the ability to add or change questions as the interview progresses (See Appendix D). Participants were of different genders, ethnicities, races, and ages. Having an array of backgrounds ensured a variety of responses (Merriam, 2009). Background information was noted, and topics for discussion ranged from school factors that contribute to the school to prison, funding effects on students and the school environment, and solutions to changing students’ trajectories. Follow-up questions were asked to provide further explanation or clarification as needed. The interview ranged from 30 minutes to 60 minutes using Zoom. The zoom application was a downloadable app for the computer or cell phone, allowing individual video and voice calls. There was also a recording feature. Permission to record was obtained from each interviewee before the interview began. Participants were informed when the recording started and ended. Notes were taken during the interview. The interviewer conducted
the interviews in a private location to protect the participant's privacy and confidentiality. The interviews were conducted from the researcher’s home office, free and clear of noise and distractions. The interview’s goal was to obtain the school leader’s perspective on the effects of school funding on students’ success or its role in perpetuating the school-to-prison pipeline. Confidentiality consisted of names being removed from the study, school districts’ names, and other names mentioned during the interview being removed from the study.

Interview questions were predetermined and are found in the interview guide in Appendix C. Following Brinkmann (2014) guide to creating interview question prompts, introductory questions were asked at the beginning to gather background information and provide context for participant responses. Follow-up questions and probing questions were asked to allow participants to add more details or clarify their statements. Specifying questions were asked to gather key facts not expressed while answering the predetermined interview questions. These supplemental interview questions are found in Appendix C.

Data collection also involved a literature review that included funding policies on the national, state, and local levels and their effects on urban schooling and marginalized students. A literature review is a systematic method for identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing an existing body of work produced by researchers and scholars and will be the best method to obtain the necessary data and information for the study (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Data was also retrieved from several district spending formulas and local tax revenue reports. I studied the effects of funding legislation on the marginalization of people of color. I reviewed seven federal legislation and four court cases. A list of funding legislation and court cases is found in Appendix D.
Data Storage

Transcribed interviews were stored in the following ways. Digital copies of both the audio and transcribed interviews were saved on the researcher’s laptop (which requires a password for entry) and uploaded to a password protected cloud (i.e., One Drive). All files were saved without participants’ identification information. Hard copies of all interviews were used for analysis and stored in a secured location in the interviewer’s home office space.

Positionality Statement

Positionality highlighted the researcher’s viewpoint and position within their research. The researcher’s perspective was concerned with the humanist beliefs based on that individual’s background, history, and experiences. Additionally, this viewpoint can be influenced by political associations, race, gender, and religion. With many influences and a strong positionality, I checked these notions and acknowledged my views and belief system about my study. I had to continuously reassess my assumptions and how my position may influence data analysis and interpretation (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).

Growing up in a rural community where resources were scarce seemed to be the norm. I went to a segregated elementary, middle, and high school. So did my siblings and my parents. We all attended the same community school. I was used to seeing textbooks that had been issued to my sibling, who was seven to eight years ahead of me. It was not until I went to high school and saw that we were using books discarded by the local academy that I became disheartened. We had a guidance counselor for a couple of days a week, and much of her time was spent servicing the private academy students. She did not help us navigate the path to college or entrance exams. The final blow came graduation night when she placed my scholarships on a
desk as I was putting on my cap and gown. This poor behavior is prevalent in schools with marginalized students. My counselor did not feel that I was worthy of her time. I excelled despite her lack of direction.

Teachers should have been trained to deal with my son with ADHD. Support and interventions should have been implemented to help him excel and reach his potential. I am connected to my research through these experiences. I was not a neutral researcher, and I realized this could create potential problems. To keep my biases under control, I acknowledged these truths about my life. I noted my reactions and assumptions as I became aware of them. Secondly, I used a peer to check for bias.

The political climate of the country and the cultural warfare in the United States has also influenced my position. Colin Kaepernick, a former NFL quarterback for the San Francisco 49ers, who peacefully protested during the national anthem to bring attention to police brutality in marginalized communities of color, lost his job as a quarterback and was scrutinized for kneeling during the National Anthem (Graber et al., 2020). Additionally, on video, George Floyd, an African American murdered by a White police officer, created national and international protests of police brutality against marginalized people (Oriola & Knight, 2020). This was after several other high-profile murders of African Americans at the hands of White people. The former president, Donald Trump, also fanned racial tensions with racist rhetoric that labeled people of color as thugs (Joseph, 2020). To make matters worse, COVID-19, a worldwide pandemic, is killing African Americans at an alarmingly higher rate than their White counterparts (Kullar et al., 2020).
I lost my brother to the pandemic because his life at age 80 was not deemed valuable enough to offer medical support during the early days of the pandemic. My mom had two major COVID-related strokes and is still unconscious. My son tried to commit suicide and is still dealing with the emotional and physical side effects of a suicide attempt. The pressure of life and setback after setback seemed to pressure him and led to a mental breakdown. All these occurrences fueled my disdain for racism and desire to find solutions. I reconciled these feelings to ensure my research was fair and not guided by personal thoughts.

Credibility

This study’s overarching goal was to add to the school’s debate on the prison pipeline and the catalysts that help keep the pipeline active within marginalized communities and struggling schools. Additionally, the study and the knowledge gained from the study were trustworthy, dependable, and adhered to the privacy and protection of the participants involved (Merriam, 2009). The following protocols were implemented to ensure the study produced reliable data and addressed any ethical dilemmas. Member checking happened through the participants’ lens in the research and was the most crucial step for establishing credibility (Lincoln et al., 1985). This study considered member checking to review the findings and have the participants review the transcriptions and notes for accuracy. Participants’ comments during this process became a part of the final study results. Using member checking and data review added another layer of credibility and accuracy to the data.

Data Analysis

When performing data analysis, the researcher turned into the channel for inquiry, making coding decisions, and contextualizing the data (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). Qualitative
coding was reflective and allowed the researcher to interact and think about the information collected (Savage, 2000). The coding process allowed the researcher to streamline their attention to specific characteristics and commonalities of the data (Morse & Richards, 2002). This allowed the researcher to develop ideas about the connections and themes developing in the data (Morse & Richards, 2002). Key pieces of data were identified and labeled for indexing related to a theme or issue in the data (King, 2004).

The categories that developed from my literature review came from terms in my research questions. Key terms were identified from the questions and formed major areas in the literature review. The literature that supported the answer to the first research question centered around key terms from research question one included school to prison pipeline and school funding inequities. Key words from the second research question consisted of federal, state, and local policies, educational funding practices, and marginalization of minorities. Racism, education funding laws, policies and practices were the key terms from the third research question. The fourth research key terms that informed the literature review included equitable and decreasing the school to prison pipeline. These key words helped me identify articles reflective of the topic of study.

The data analysis method applied to this study was thematic analysis. The analysis process was informed by Braun and Clarke's seven thematic analysis steps. The seven steps involved transcription, reading, familiarization, coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining, and naming themes, and finalizing the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

To become familiar with the data, the interview recordings were uploaded to the computer and transcribed. The transcription was an arduous task with multiple playbacks to accurately gather the participants' feedback. The interviews were transcribed verbatim, and
transcripts were highlighted for frequently used words and phrases to develop themes and connect critical race theory tenets during this process. I used observation notes to clear up the ambiguity in the tapes. The aim was to analyze the social context of the research through a critical race lens and methodology. The interviews were conducted by applying three elements of critical race methodology where applicable: (a) the intercentricity of race with other forms of subordination and oppression, (b) the denial of the notions of color blindness, race neutrality, and meritocracy, and (c) placing people of color at the center of the discourse (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Codes were developed from frequently used words and phrases and developed into initial themes. The initial themes were analyzed for commonality among words and phrases to develop more defining final themes. The tenets of critical race theory were also used to analyze participants’ responses. Results are discussed in chapter four.

Step one involved transcribing the interviews. This was done using the live transcription on zoom. Live transcription provides robot transcription services that enabled speech-to-text transcription in zoom meetings. Step two involved reading and familiarization. Interview transcripts were read three to five times to locate broad ideas. Before conducting the interviews, interview questions were aligned to research questions (See Appendix C). Envelopes labeled with the research questions were used to collect responses. This process allowed similarities in responses to be identified. The contents of each envelope were analyzed, and codes developed. Frequently used words and phrases that were repeated were highlighted in the responses. The codes that developed were funding needs, resource allocation, effects, representation, and teacher actions. Table 5 highlights the data that informed the codes in step three.
Table 5: Data Reporting and Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data</th>
<th>Initial Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Extra personnel needed (counselors, social workers, instructional</td>
<td>Funding Needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>coaches, behavior interventionist)”</td>
<td>Resource Allocation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Teacher development, student development, teacher training”</td>
<td>Funding Needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Engaging curriculum keeps discipline under control”</td>
<td>Resource Allocation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Students can relate to the material and is challenged”</td>
<td>Effects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Class sizes are large and create discipline issues”</td>
<td>Effects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New teachers struggle and quit, teacher shortages”</td>
<td>Effects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Have to follow guidelines when using the money” “Specific items</td>
<td>Resource Allocation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>must be purchased with federal funds”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I don’t have what I need to reach all of my students”</td>
<td>Funding Needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I can identify the students who are going to end up in jail” “I</td>
<td>Effects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>have been right before”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5: Data Reporting and Codes Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data</th>
<th>Initial Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“School to Prison pipeline is real in my building” “It takes programs like mentoring, recruiting strong qualified teachers that can connect to the students”</td>
<td>Teacher Action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“My budget is never enough” I do not know how they arrive at my budget amount</td>
<td>Representation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Teacher training inadequate”</td>
<td>Funding Needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“We have a committee for everything except the budget. I should have a say in my funding’”</td>
<td>Representation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Repeat offenders fall behind and stay behind academically”</td>
<td>Effects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Inexperienced teachers don’t build relationships with struggling students”</td>
<td>Effects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Inexperienced teachers have high discipline referrals” “Always putting out fires”</td>
<td>Teacher Action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Students don't like the teacher and creates havoc in those classrooms”</td>
<td>Teacher Action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Have to seek out grants and community partners to make some purchases”</td>
<td>Funding Needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data</td>
<td>Initial Codes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Expected to meet the needs of all students with the same resources”</td>
<td>Funding Needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Effects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“We could reach troubled students early if we had the resources”</td>
<td>Effects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Funding Needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“School improvement plan lists needs but funding does not cover the plan”</td>
<td>Resource Allocation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Some teachers don’t connect well with the students” “They are overwhelmed”</td>
<td>Teacher Action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Monies do not cover my school’s needs” “Specific dollar amount given to school not based on need”</td>
<td>Resource Allocation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Had to choose between technology and instructional support”</td>
<td>Resource Allocation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Building repairs are unaddressed, so students deal with leaky ceilings and HVAC issues. It has always been an issue at the schools I have worked in inner-city”</td>
<td>Funding Needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Funding does not address the whole child needs (social and emotional)”</td>
<td>Funding Needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Resource Allocation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Effects</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Table 5: Data Reporting and Codes Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data</th>
<th>Initial Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Lose high-quality teachers because of large class sizes and behavior issues”</td>
<td>Effects</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Professional development has to be done inhouse”</td>
<td>Resource Allocation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Step four involved looking at patterns in the data that emerged from the codes. Initial themes were generated from the patterns and are found in Table 6. Themes were reviewed to determine if they represented the participants' experiences.

Table 6: Initial Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Initial Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Representation</td>
<td>School Leadership a part of budgeting decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disconnect with decision makers and school needs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Resource Allocation</td>
<td>Choosing between the resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher training inadequate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effects</td>
<td>High teacher turnover</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High discipline referrals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students left behind academically</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Run-down buildings that need updates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Loss instructional time</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

81
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 6: Initial Themes Continued</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Effects Continued</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Funding Needs</strong></td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher Action</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Step five involved defining the final themes. The following six themes emerged:

1. Inadequacy of funding
2. Systemic effects of inadequate funding
3. Limited control and representation in the school funding and allocation conversation

4. Unfunded mandates that exacerbate the school to prison pipeline problem

5. Expected to do more with less

6. A call to action for all leaders and stakeholders

The themes that occurred the most among participants were considered final themes. The themes were aligned to the purpose of the study and the research questions. The findings are reported in Chapter 4.

**Summary**

This study used critical race methodology to explore the connection between education funding inequities in marginalized community schools and the school-to-prison pipeline. Critical race informed this study’s methodology and provided a framework that focused on race and racism’s role in education funding inequities. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns or themes based on the tenets of critical race theory and methodology. The themes were used to code the interview participants’ responses and the literature referenced in the study. Chapters four discussed the study’s findings and connect the themes to the research questions in more detail.
Chapter Four:

Findings

This study explored the connection between educational funding inequities and the school-to-prison pipeline. This study sought to understand how funding inequities perpetuated the marginalization and criminalization of students of color through a racialized context. The study highlighted the historical, subliminal, and systemic nature of oppression in urban communities created by a lack of equitable education funding. Critical Race Theory helped develop the research questions, which were designed to answer the contributing reasons for inadequate education funding and its role in matriculating marginalized students to the school to prison pipeline. This chapter contains the results of the qualitative study conducted to answer the research questions:

RQ1. How do school funding inequities contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline?

RQ2. What role has federal, state, and local policies and educational funding practices played in school funding inequities and the systematic marginalization of minorities?

RQ3. How is racism interwoven in school funding laws, policies, and practices?

RQ4. What role can equitable educational funding practices, laws, and policies play in decreasing the school-to-prison pipeline?
Results

This section presented the findings of the study. A participant’s narrative was presented for each principal to provide context for the results. Common themes and research questions were discussed last.

Applying the Tenets of CRT to the Findings

All students should have access to quality education. Lack of access to a quality education occurs most often in marginalized communities and seems to be centralized around race and accessibility of effective schooling based on funding, CRT allowed the layers to be peeled off and in-depth analysis of school funding to occur (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Critical race theory was the framework used to voice the devastating effects of inadequate educational funding on marginalized students with a specific focus on their matriculation to prison. Critical race theory was used to guide this study by magnifying the voices and narratives of school principals in West Tennessee. Critical Race Theory is based on the marginalization and subjugation of oppressed groups. The CRT tenets were used to determine if Race plays a factor in educational funding inequities. The following CRT tenets were applied to the research:

a. The notion that racism is normal, ordinary, and endemic denial of the notions of color blindness, race neutrality, and meritocracy
b. The idea of an interest convergence
c. The idea of counter-narratives- placing people of color at the center of the discourse

Three of the six CRT tenets (racism is normal, ordinary, and endemic, interest convergence, and counter-narratives) informed the study and were used to code, interpret, and analyze the data. Critical Race Theory helped develop the research questions, which were
designed to answer the contributing reasons for inadequate education funding and its role in matriculating marginalized students to the school to prison pipeline.

The funding narrative suggested that the three educational funding systems at the federal, state, and local levels work together to provide an adequate education for all students to succeed. The counter-narratives demonstrate that academic and social structures informing the educational funding via the dominant culture narratives appear different from the participants’ experiences. The counter-narratives of the participants challenged the assumptions that the funding system in place provided adequate and equitable education for all. The participants cited a lack of funding for challenging course offerings, additional intervention, and remediation personnel to work with struggling students to close the achievement gap. The participants also cited the lack of funding to fix major building repairs like leaky roofs and faulty HVAC systems. They stated the teachers needed training in understanding the culture of the students they taught and how to build relationships with challenging students and their parents.

Historically, the majority group has whitewashed Black people’s history (Constance-Huggins, 2012). Ortiz and Jani (2010) noted whitewashing allows the dominant culture to justify and legitimize its power. CRT noted that minorities are better equipped to define race and racism based on their experiences with discrimination and oppression. CRT implores marginalized people to assert their voice and counter the narrative created through a Eurocentric lens.

The tenets of Critical Race Theory that formed the study's theoretical framework were vital to my research because they highlight the magnitude of racism in educational funding laws and the role in pushing students into the school-to-prison pipeline. Table 7 summarizes the CRT tenets’ connection to the research and the data.
Table 7: Application of Critical Race Tenets to the Research and Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tenets of Critical Race Theory</th>
<th>Application to the Research</th>
<th>Connected to the Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) The idea of an interest convergence</td>
<td>The overlapping of local policies like redlining and local property tax funding that result in class and income segregation of schools Federal policies and social behaviors like middle class flight and white flight that contribute to the marginalization of students of color Intersectionality of race, gender, and social class within low performing and underfunded schools</td>
<td>“Inexperienced teachers have high discipline referrals” “Always putting out fires” “Building repairs are unaddressed, so students deal with leaky ceilings and HVAC issues” “Had to choose between technology and instructional support” “Monies do not cover my school’s needs” “Specific dollar amount given to school not based on need”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenets of Critical Race Theory</td>
<td>Application to the Research</td>
<td>Connected to the Data</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) The idea of an interest convergence</td>
<td>Property taxes generate local school funding; districts within high property areas generate more tax dollars than schools located in low property valued communities. The federal government uses policies and legislation to further perpetuate inequity in the name of educating all students. The rise of for-profit education to save poor performing schools in communities of color when in fact they further oppress students through assimilation</td>
<td>“We could reach troubled students early if we had the resources” “Have to follow guidelines when using the money.” “Specific items must be purchases with Federal Money” “My budget is never enough” “My students live in low-income housing surrounding my school”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenets of Critical Race Theory</td>
<td>Application to the Research</td>
<td>Connected to the Data</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) The notion that racism is normal, ordinary, and endemic denial of the notions of color blindness, race neutrality, and meritocracy</td>
<td>The federal government uses policies and legislation to further perpetuate inequity in the name of educating all students. Intersectionality of race, gender, and social class within low performing and underfunded schools To maintain the status quo, education has never been equitably funded at the federal, state, and local level. Crenshaw asserted colorblindness in policies helped maintain racial subordination</td>
<td>“Engaging curriculum keeps discipline under control” “Students do not like the teacher and creates havoc in those classrooms” “Professional development must be done inhouse” “Lose high-quality teachers because of large class sizes and behavior issues”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7: Application of Critical Race Tenets to the Research and Data Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tenets of Critical Race Theory</th>
<th>Application to the Research</th>
<th>Connected to the Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(b) The notion that racism is normal, ordinary, and endemic denial of the notions of color blindness, race neutrality, and meritocracy</td>
<td>The notion that race is not a factor is an injustice toward minorities creates an injustice and upholds white privilege. The denial of colorblindness in the historical and social context of race places additional limitations on marginalized people. CRT challenges these contexts by highlighting how the lack of equitable funding disenfranchise Black students by creating underfunded school programs and underperforming schools in their communities.</td>
<td>“Building repairs are unaddressed, so students deal with leaky ceilings and HVAC issues” “It has always been an issue at the schools I have worked in inner-city” “Had to choose between technology and instructional support” “Some teachers don’t connect well with the students” “They are overwhelmed “We could reach troubled students early if we had the resources” “Inexperienced teachers have high discipline referrals” “Always putting out fires”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7: Application of Critical Race Tenets to the Research and Data Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tenets of Critical Race Theory</th>
<th>Application to the Research</th>
<th>Connected to the Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(b) The notion that racism is normal, ordinary, and endemic denial of the notions of color blindness, race neutrality, and meritocracy</td>
<td>The endemic nature of racism suggests power structures and hierarchy that implicitly marginalized minorities and that racism is a normal part of society and embedded in systems and institutions like the legal and finance system. Race is evident in structures, customs, and experiences. Noted that race is the main force that defines and explains human experiences. The lack of adequate funding has become the norm in urban school settings. Old buildings, untrained teachers, depleted resources, and missing student support are widely accepted in law.</td>
<td>“Class sizes are large and create discipline issues” “New teachers struggle and quit; create teacher shortages” “I don’t have what I need to reach all of my students”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenets of Critical Race Theory</td>
<td>Application to the Research</td>
<td>Connected to the Data</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) Counter-stories</td>
<td>The use of counter-stories</td>
<td>“Have to seek out grants and community partners to make some purchases”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>from principals on the effects of funding on the marginalized population</td>
<td>Building repairs are unaddressed, so students deal with leaky ceilings and HVAC issues”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Looking at the effects that federal funding legislation has on schools in communities of color. Underfunding programs for trauma and SEL, and offering challenging curriculum, employing high quality teachers, and professional development for teachers on cultural competency</td>
<td>“Funding does not address the whole child needs (social and emotional)”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Looking at the root cause of the school to prison pipeline by determining the role race, culture, ethnicity, and stereotypes</td>
<td>“Had to choose between technology and instructional support” “Some teachers don’t connect well with the students” “They are overwhelmed”</td>
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</table>
### Table 7: Application of Critical Race Tenets to the Research and Data Continued

<table>
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<th>Tenets of Critical Race Theory</th>
<th>Application to the Research</th>
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<td>(c) Counter-stories</td>
<td>Exclusionary practices that deny marginalized students from instructional time which creates learning, achievement, and opportunity gaps</td>
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<td>Unfair discipline policies excluded Black students at a higher rate than their white counterparts resulting in major academic deficits</td>
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**Participants' Narratives**

This section contained each participant's narrative. The narratives contained the principals’ backgrounds and beliefs about the connection of school funding to the school-to-prison pipeline.
Mrs. Bassett

Mrs. Bassett has been the principal of a high school in Shelby County and an elementary school in Madison County. She had seen the school to prison pipeline at work in the high school and elementary settings. The students at the school in Shelby County were far behind academically and acted out to avoid the work. The teachers were overwhelmed, which often put the students out of the class instead of finding a solution to the behavior. She felt teachers struggled to maximize relationships with their struggling students at both schools. Her students complained of boring classes at the high school, and she noted a lack of AP courses. She had two armed and two unarmed guards on duty at the high school. She felt she was constantly battling teachers at the elementary level when addressing behaviors. She stated her more inexperienced teachers wanted the misbehaving students removed from class for the slightest infraction and were fearful of parent communication for those students. She stated that a lack of funding could influence the school-to-prison pipeline. She felt her struggling students needed more academic and behavioral support, trauma counseling, remediation to close the academic gaps, and access to courses that interested and challenged them.

Mrs. Pope

Mrs. Pope had been an elementary school principal for 11 years and a high school principal for one year in Madison County. She noted that students struggled to regulate behaviors in the elementary school setting and cope with different triggers. They wanted to fight about the most minor things and did not understand how to communicate. She said some of her students came from poverty-stricken areas and often came to school late, hungry, and dirty. These students were not on grade level, and their parents were not interested in working with the school.
to get them on grade level. She said she used funding for an instructional coach and part-time interventionist to close the gap. She wanted a behavior interventionist trained in restorative practices, but her budget could not cover the cost of the position. Her first year as a high school principal consisted of keeping unmotivated students in school and built strong relationships with parents. She felt that school funding did not directly cause the school-to-prison pipeline but influenced factors that caused the pipeline. She felt she knew what resources she needed to meet the needs of her students but was not allowed the opportunity to share that information or given the resources to meet those needs.

**Mr. Montrell**

Mr. Montrell has been a middle school principal for seven years in Madison County. He felt middle schoolers were at a crossroads in development. He stated they wanted to act like adults and children simultaneously. He felt this caused a lot of behavior issues. He said he dealt with a lot of fights and gang activity. He also said it was hard to get parents involved. Mr. Montrell had a high Tier III population, with most of those students two grades behind. He felt because these students could not read or comprehend at grade level, they acted out. He stated he needed funding for an extra interventionist, a SEL program, and teacher training programs on trauma. He felt more funding was needed for struggling students’ emotional and behavioral development. Mr. Montrell felt these programs would build skills to help students cope and keep students out of trouble and prison.

**Mrs. Anderson**

Mrs. Anderson was a principal for five years at an elementary school in Haywood County. She felt her teachers were dedicated to meeting the needs of all students. She
acknowledged that her teachers struggled with behavior-pronged students and relating to their parents. She stated her district did very little training on poverty, culture, and race. She believed more funding could help send staff to train to help them understand their students better. She said this would help decrease discipline, and those students would focus on activities versus getting into trouble. She felt the school-to-prison pipeline could be eliminated by training teachers to see the teacher and environmental actions that push students to the pipeline.

**Mrs. Chandler**

Mrs. Chandler has been an elementary, middle, and high school principal for over 20 years in Madison County. She said criminalizing behaviors start in elementary school. She stated she trained staff on cultural differences to offer insight into the student’s world outside the school building. She noted she still had teachers who could not connect with the students or parents. She stated she had a lot of middle school students unable to read and comprehend on grade level, which turned into discipline issues. Her struggling students had given up at the high school level and were her main discipline issues. She sent several of these students to the alternative school for gang violence, smoking, fighting, and selling drugs. If programs and resources were available beginning at the elementary level, she felt that struggling students would not be lost to the juvenile justice system.

**Mrs. Jackson**

Mrs. Jackson has been an elementary principal for 20 years in various districts in West Tennessee. She said she was a no-nonsense leader and held teachers and students accountable for teaching and learning. She said she never had a voice in funding matters where it counted the most and that she wanted to be a part of the allocation conversation. She said excessive tardies
and absences were a significant problem at her school. She said it was difficult to get parents of struggling students and students in trouble to participate in their child’s education. She lost several teachers to classrooms being out of control. She stated the school-to-prison pipeline could be minimized if leaders committed time, money, and people to the problem.

Mrs. Queen

Mrs. Queen had been an elementary school and high school principal for seven years in Madison County. She experienced leaky roofs and failing HVAC systems at both schools. She needed more security at the high school because students would walk out of class and leave school. She felt she was not meeting the needs of her struggling students because she did not have enough interventionists on staff. She said her new teachers struggled with classroom management and relationship building. She had a high teacher turnover. She felt funding each school based on their needs would give leaders the resources to move struggling students academically. She said she could reduce class sizes, offer proper teacher training, and support students and families. She stated these changes would change the outcome for many students headed to the juvenile justice system.

Mrs. Songbird

Mrs. Songbird is an elementary principal in Madison County. She has been principal at this school for four years. She became a principal because her mother had been a school leader for years and she grew up in the environment. She realized that a strong and knowledgeable leader was needed to guide staff and students in her role as a teacher. As a teacher she had experienced the helplessness when nothing works to reach a troubled student. She recalled not being able to develop the right relationships with parents to help students academically and behaviorally.
saw these same students assigned to the alternative school in later years. She also had empathy for teachers because the discipline options were ineffective when she was a teacher and other discipline methods were not available at her school. As a principal, she noticed heightened behaviors in her students who could not read. She struggled to get some of her teachers to see beyond the behaviors. She needed training to help change the teachers’ mindsets. She did not feel her in-house training was adequate. She stated extra funding could offset the factors that contribute to the school to prison pipeline by allocating more funds to teacher training, providing additional personnel to target academic gaps, and adopt targeted behavior intervention program.

**Major Themes**

After analyzing interview transcripts, six themes emerged that described participants’ experiences at their respective schools located in West Tennessee. The first theme centered around the inadequacy of funding to meet marginalized students’ academic, social, and emotional needs. The second theme highlighted the systemic effects of inadequate education funding on marginalized students. Inadequate funding created many societal issues for Black students, including fueling the school-to-prison pipeline. The third theme questioned the agency, voice, and value of school leaders’ participation in the discussion and decision-making regarding their funding needs. The fourth theme echoed the sentiment that underfunded mandates created additional problems for students who had been systematically discriminated against in education. Teachers have been under accountability pressure and subject to faster lesson pacing to teach everything before the state test. Struggling students were often left behind because teachers hurried through lessons without ensuring mastery or providing remediation and interventions. The fifth theme suggested leaders have lowered the expectation of receiving the funding necessary to reach the needs of their high-poverty student population. The participants felt they
were expected to do more with less. The final theme was a call to action for all leaders and stakeholders at the federal, state, local, district, and school levels. The participants felt everyone involved in funding needed to work together to create a more equitable funding system based on the student's needs. The participants' responses act to counter the school funding narrative that funding is fair and equally distributed.

**Research Question 1**

The first research question asked, “How do school funding inequities contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline?” I sought to understand what factors influenced by school funding led to the school-to-prison pipeline. The following themes addressed this question: (a) inadequacy of funding, (b) systemic effects of inadequate funding, and (c) expected to do more with less. The consensus among the participants was a lack of adequate funding forced them to prioritize one need over another need. Participants felt the social-emotional needs of struggling and marginalized students were not addressed adequately. There were also concerns about being about to meet the needs of students dealing with trauma. Principals felt that professional development in cultural competency, poverty, and implicit bias was lacking. They noted that teachers with high discipline issues struggled to connect and build relationships with students. Mrs. Anderson stated

I have teachers who do not understand African American culture or cultures different than their own. They cannot identify students with home life issues and trauma issues. They think students should respect them because they are the teacher. If my students do not like you, they show it through defiance and misbehavior. I try to address this by
having my counselor present poverty and diversity, equity, and inclusion training before school starts.

Public education in America is riddled with unfairness based on race and class (Anyon, 2014). As noted in Chapter two, minority students who attend high poverty schools have access to fewer or insufficient resources, unqualified teachers, and unchallenging coursework than their white counterparts. As a result, these students have lower graduation rates, academic deficits, learning gaps, higher rates of college dropout, and matriculation to the school to prison pipeline (Wald, & Losen, 2003). The school-to-prison pipeline came into existence by adopting zero-tolerance discipline policies, overcrowded schools, poorly trained teachers, lack of support programs, unengaging instruction, and highly segregated failing schools (Heitzeg, 2009; Marrus, 2015). “The school to prison pipeline refers to this growing pattern of removing students out of schools, primarily via zero-tolerance policies, and, directly and indirectly, into the juvenile and adult criminal justice systems” (Heitzeg, 2009). The Children Defense Fund (2021) stated Poverty is the largest driving force of the school to prison pipeline. Children who do not participate in high-quality early education have had higher rates of juvenile delinquency arrests and juvenile court petitions. Educational disadvantages make it more likely that children will enter the juvenile justice system (The Children Defense Fund, 2021, pp. 1-2).

Educational funding plays a vital role in the success of an educational system. According to Kim et al. (2010), insufficient educational resources were one of the leading causes of the school-to-prison pipeline.
Ostrander (2015) also noted that low-income and inner-city urban families were forced to send their children to lower funded schools. By using local property taxes to fund schools, which varied widely between wealthy and impoverished areas, districts created funding gaps. Schools located in areas with high property values had a higher per-pupil expenditure and higher graduation rates, whereas inner-city school students lacked resources and were headed towards a prison complex. The demographic makeup mirrored the community surrounding low-performing schools while white students from well-to-do families retreated to upscale neighborhoods with better-resourced schools and more resources, creating the school-to-prison dilemma in education (Ostrander, 2015). Overcrowded classrooms with underqualified teachers without resources to properly educate students from impoverished areas contributed to a lack of achievement, dropouts, and delinquency, which led to criminal behavior and the matriculation to the school to prison pipeline (Curley, 2016). Goodwin (2000) consigned similar reasons for lack of achievement and delinquency into six fundamental areas: (1) inadequate curriculum; (2) ineffective teaching practices; (3) lack of collaborative student to student discussions; (4) poor student self-knowledge, self-understanding, and self-confidence; (5) futile adjustment to the school environment; and (6) bias.

Specific attention has been paid to the reading deficits in marginalized students when they advance to third grade. Students from marginalized households enter kindergarten academically behind their white counterparts from suburban areas (Ozturk et al., 2015; Reardon, 2013). The cognitive deficits in disadvantaged students increased throughout the rest of their school years and led to increased behavior issues. Teachers who were not trained to teach struggling students how to read often misidentify academic cries for help for behavior issues. This misidentification often led to exclusionary practices that remove the struggling student from
classroom instruction and magnify the loss of necessary reading skills. Every year, the cycle duplicated itself until the educational system disenfranchised the student leading to the school to prison matriculation.

Analyzing The School to Prison Pipeline

The Children Defense Fund (2021) reported,

- In 2019, 696,620 children were arrested in the U.S. A child or teen was arrested every 45 seconds despite a 62 percent reduction in child arrests between 2009 and 2019.

- During the 2015-2016 school year alone, there were over 61,000 school arrests and 230,000 referrals to law enforcement, overrepresented by students with disabilities, Black students, and Indigenous students. The prioritization of police over mental health professionals in schools often led to the criminalization of typical adolescent behavior and fueled the school-to-prison pipeline. Today, fourteen million students attend schools with police but no counselor, nurse, psychologist, or social worker.

- Although the number of children in the juvenile justice system has been cut in half since 2007, 43,580 children and youth were held in residential placement on a given night in 2017. Nearly 2 in 3 were placed in the most restrictive facilities.

- Another 653 children were incarcerated in adult prisons on any given night in 2019—down from 2,743 in 2009.

- Despite research showing that young people’s brains continue to develop and mature through their late teens and into their mid-twenties, young adults do not often have access to the age- and developmentally-appropriate policies and resources they need. Adolescents and young adults often “age out” of offending; however, as of 2021, 46
states and the District of Columbia automatically prosecute 18-year-olds as adults and three states automatically prosecute 17-year-olds as adults (Vermont is the first and only state to expand juvenile court jurisdiction to 18). All states also allow or require younger children charged with certain offenses to be prosecuted in adult court.

- Although 63 percent of children arrested in the U.S. were white, Indigenous children were 1.5 times more likely to be arrested and Black children were 2.4 times more likely to be arrested than white children.

- In 2017, the residential placement rate for children of color was two times higher than that of white children nationwide: Hispanic children were 1.4 times more likely, Indigenous children were 2.8 times more likely, and Black children were 4.6 times more likely to be committed or detained than white children. In eighteen states and the District of Columbia, the residential placement rate for children of color was four times higher than that of white children.

- Two-thirds (67 percent) of children in the juvenile justice system were children of color: 41 percent were Black, and 21 percent were Hispanic.

- Children of color are also disproportionally transferred to the adult criminal justice system, where they are tried and prosecuted as adults. In 2018, Black youth represented less than 15 percent of the total youth population, but 52 percent of youth prosecuted in adult criminal court.8 Black youth are nine times more likely than white youth to receive an adult prison sentence, American Indian/Alaska Native youth are almost two times more likely, and Hispanic youth are 40 percent more likely (The Children Defense Fund, 2021, pp. 30-31).
Discipline data from the three counties that participated in the study followed the national trends. African American students made up 81% of all students who received at least one out of school suspension in Haywood County and Madison County. Ninety percent of all students who received at least one out of school suspension in Shelby County was African American. Expulsion rates for African American students in Shelby County was 90% of all students expelled, 85% in Madison County of all students expelled, and 66% in Haywood County of all students expelled. African American students made up 76% of all students who received a school related arrest in Madison County, 100% in Shelby County, and 33% in Haywood County. Of all students referred to law enforcement, 82% were African American in Madison County and 100% were African American in Shelby County (Office of Civil Rights, 2017).

When asked what concerns the participants had about the knowledge of school to prison pipeline and their experiences with STP at their school, the participants shared their fears and that it seemed generational. Most participants noticed that the parents stayed in trouble and the siblings had similar behaviors when they were students at their school. The principals felt the only options available were in school and out of school suspensions. They stated very few parents answered their phones when the teacher called to discuss behavior concerns and solutions.

Mrs. Queen stated

I need mentors and people in the community to step up and show my kids they have options. It is hard trying to convince my high schools not to sell drugs when they made more money than their teachers. My students told me they did not have a choice when becoming a member of a gang. They were afraid if they did not, they would be assaulted
every day. My school security was not equipped to deal with this every day. The district stopped funding a member of the police force located in schools. These police officers trained staff on how to identify gang colors, signs, and clothing. I need the right staff and enough staff, mentoring programs, and alternative learning options for students who have lost their way. The school to prison pipeline is real in my school but I do not have what I need to offset it.

Mrs. Bassett stated

I have several students who a headed that way. They do not have support at home, and they are constantly sent home for behavior. We do not have enough personnel to run programs to help them enough. I must use my in-school suspension person for other duties most days and I have one counselor and she is overwhelmed. We try to infuse character education into the reading curriculum. It is not always done with fidelity. My teachers get frustrated with the disruptions and send the students to the office. There are so many negative things available to my students once they leave the building. It is hard keeping them out of trouble and safe once they go home. I am afraid gang activity and drugs are going to disrupt my entire culture. The students have learned how to be covet and not get caught.

Mr. Montrell stated

It seems generational with my students. Their parents got into a lot of trouble as students and ended up going to juvenile detention and jail as adults. Their children want to be just like them and will end up in the same place. These students are already behind academically and the behavior issues are a result of their frustration. I we do not find a
way to change their thought process, my students who stay in trouble and who look to the
streets for their role models are on the path to go to prison.

Mrs. stated

At the elementary level, you hope you are wrong with identifying students who are not
going to make it. Most of the time I have had their sibling who acted out the same way. If
the child needs to be tested for special education services to get support academically and
behaviorally, it is very hard to get parents to agree to the services. They think it is a
terrible thing. So, the child continues to struggle and get in trouble. They fall behind
academically, and their avoidance behaviors intensifies. They do everything they can to
get kicked out of class.

The consensus was that without programs and personnel to offer options to students,
students who struggling could end up in the juvenile justice system. The participants felt these
students needed additional supports academically so they would not become frustrated and give
up. They had seen many students in the middle and high school who did not care anymore and
acted out to get suspended on purpose.

Inadequacy of Funding

“Lack of funding has always been an issue in the inner-city schools I have worked in”

Theme one highlighted a consensus among all the participants that their schools were
inadequately funded. In 2022, per-pupil funding averaged around $10,499 in Tennessee, and
Tennessee ranked forty-three out of forty-nine states in terms of per-pupil funding (Hanson,
2022). Although the National Report Card stated Tennessee’s funding fairness grade was a B
which meant it was progressive in providing more funding to its highest poverty districts than its
lowest poverty districts, participants felt they needed more money to do the work needed to help
all students and decrease the chances of them entering the juvenile justice system. Mrs. Anderson stated

I asked my teachers to step up and spread responsibilities around and delegate some of the instructional coach’s duties to lead teachers. It took two years to build up my technology and change projectors and smart boards in every classroom. I have had to wait years for improvements because it was not in the budget.

Mrs. Queen’s perspective also contradicted fairness in funding distribution. Mrs. Queen stated

I have worked in an inner-city school before, and I had written grants for fun and had more money than I even knew what to do with it, but my budget at my current school is insufficient. We must pay for staffing; a lot of the money goes to just my instructional coach, so we do not have the extra money to play with to get the support services many students need. So, I feel like we must pitch to get the things that serve all students, and there is not enough money to specifically designate funds for a specific group of students, if you understand what I am saying. Yes, so it does not matter if it is from the federal, state, or local pot is just not enough to meet those needs that you have that you currently have.

Mrs. Queen’s viewpoint highlighted a widespread problem in equal funding versus equity funding. Using the same state funding formula for all districts meant low performing, high needs districts did not receive the money to succeed. Although state funding showed about a $500 to $900 increase per student in smaller districts during the previous fiscal year, it was not adequate to fund all the programs to meet the needs of struggling students.
Mrs. Jackson tied the systemic nature of funding inequities to long-term politicians and the overarching effects on her school. She stated:

The county commission is not going to raise property taxes. So, even though maybe needs to increase and things and buildings need to be repaired, the school system needs to figure out how they cut their budget back and be able to do it with the money that we, you know, are allotted for them and so what we were getting from the county and the county commission was the same for decades or more. So as needs grow, you just think about technology. As technology needs grow and the expense is there, there is a need to increase the amount of funding you give. Buildings get outdated and dilapidated, and you need new roofs. If the school system is solely responsible for doing all those things with the system’s budget, then when you have those capital projects that are in desperate need. Something must be cut to be able to fix those things, and then they think about needing to build new schools, and the list goes on and on.

School improvements can take a big bite out of a district’s budget. Improving schools is a joint responsibility between local, state, and federal governments. Ostrander (2015) noted a lack of clear separation in the roles of federal, state, and local governments has led to a lack of accountability for policies and programs that hurt school funding and important school improvement initiatives. While the state retains primary fiscal responsibility for the school funding in Tennessee through the BEP funding formula, the federal government has increasingly played a prominent, visible role in funding and policymaking. However, local taxes make up a sizable portion of school funds. The ambiguity in the level of responsibility in education funding between federal, state, and local governments has led to a lack of accountability (Ostrander, 2015). Local property tax differences in poverty-stricken communities have also been blamed as
the leading cause of education funding inequalities and called for increased state funding to solve the funding deficits and shortfalls. However, under the current model of funding formulas, states were not necessarily more equitable in allocating state funds. The state funding formula tended to magnify funding inequities through the per-pupil spending component rather than dismantle them and do so in a way that supports high-performing districts with the slightest need (Baker, & Corcoran, 2012).

The Systemic Effects of Inadequate Funding

“Loss of high-quality teachers because of large class sizes and behavior issues”

These two dealt with the systemic effects of inadequate funding. According to Baker et al., (2016), a low ranking of school funding fairness for a state correlated to inferior performance on crucial resource indicators, including less access to early childhood education, lower wages for teachers, and higher teacher-to-student ratios. The participants shared a consensus on the systemic and lingering effects they experienced in their building. They all highlighted the following issues:

1. Loss of high-quality teachers because of large class sizes and behavior issues
2. Building repairs were unaddressed, so students dealt with leaky ceilings, HVAC issues, and a safe school environment.
3. Professional development had to be done in-house.
4. The choice between technology and instructional support
5. Funding did not address the whole child’s needs-Social Emotional Learning (SEL) needs
Mr. Montrell felt that the inequities forced administrators to choose the lesser of two evils. If leaders spent money on an extra counselor to offset behavior, principals could not hire extra teachers or teacher assistants that would lower class sizes. Mr. Montrell stated

We have one counselor who is a part of the Special rotation. She teaches classes during this time. It is hard for her to counsel behavior students consistently to see a change in behaviors. I need two counselors, a behavior interventionist, and an extra instructional coach. I have lost four teachers because of student behavior.

Additional resources were needed to address at-risk students’ emotional and behavioral needs. Mrs. Pope felt the inequities did not provide principals with the resources that addressed the trauma that most students in urban schools experienced. Mrs. Pope felt that by not addressing the SEL needs of the student and addressing the professional development needs of teachers in cultural competency, she lost good teachers. She felt these teachers became frustrated with struggling students’ behaviors and constant needs. She stated

There have been programs that I would have; I would need to implement but is not readily available, like SEL programs, conflict resolution, and relationship building, because I could not afford the staff to implement the programs, or the training needed to ensure staff understood how to address the needs of those students with some federal funding being based on criteria.

Funding was unavailable for capital improvements. Mrs. Bassett stated

Years of neglect from lack of funding led to issues within my building. The ceiling leaked, and there were constant issues with the HVAC. I had garbage cans in the middle
of the hallways when it rained. Then when the air conditioning went out, it would be over 90 degrees in the classroom. This was unbearable for the teachers and the students. It was hard to convince my students that I cared for them when they were subjected to conditions like these. I had to ask teachers to pick up the slack and do more because I did not have extra personnel. Teachers who did not want to do extra work assignments transferred to other school districts.

Hiring highly qualified teachers was a crucial part of addressing the school-to-prison pipeline. Darling-Hammond (2000) found that better-funded school districts hired better trained, highly qualified teachers. Highly qualified teachers produced high student achievement outcomes. School districts that spent more per student offered smaller class sizes which helped attract experienced teachers and led to higher achievement results (Biddle & Berliner, 2002).

**Expected To Do More with Less**

“One size fit all”

As stated in chapter 2, fiscal capacity refers to the local and state government’s ability to pay, and fiscal effort refers to the state and local governments’ willingness to pay. According to Chervin (2007), “Fiscal effort refers to the relative extent to which a local government utilizes the revenue sources available to it – its fiscal or revenue capacity.” Table 6 highlights the local funding capacity for districts of the participants in the study. Davidson County’s per-pupil fiscal capacity exceeded the state by $3752 or 50.2%, and its per capita income exceeded the state by $17,498 or 38.7%. Davidson County’s actual per-pupil expenditure was $8277, which exceeded its per-pupil funding capacity by 11%. 

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Table 8 confirmed that even though property values and income levels varied among the district, actual per-pupil expenditures exceeded each district’s fiscal capacity. Additionally, Davidson County had the highest per capita income and property value of the districts listed. Haywood County had the lowest per capita income, but actual per-pupil expenditure exceeded its per-pupil fiscal capacity by $4797.

Table 8: 2021 Per Pupil Fiscal Capacity by County and State with per Capita Income by County and State

| Per Pupil Fiscal Capacity by County and State in Relation to Per Capita Income by County and State 2021 |
|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| Per Capita Income                              | Per Pupil Fiscal Capacity                       | Actual Per Pupil Expenditure                      | Average Property Value                          |
| State of Tennessee                             | $45,192                                         | $3710                                           | $9619                                           | $215,040                                        |
| Haywood County                                 | $30,992                                         | $2101                                           | $6898                                           | $113,768                                        |
| Madison County                                 | $41,155                                         | $4842                                           | $6698                                           | $189,900                                        |
| Davidson County                                | $62,690                                         | $7462                                           | $8277                                           | $383,000                                        |
| Shelby County                                  | $47,042                                         | $3500                                           | $6938                                           | $220,000                                        |
| Gibson County                                  | $37,494                                         | $1925                                           | $5775                                           | $162,500                                        |

Retrieved from Tennessee Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations and Realtor.com

The fifth theme centered around expectations of principals doing more with less money. While the study participants’ districts highlighted in the table were funding education above their fiscal capacity, funding levels were still inadequate to meet the needs of the students.
All participants highlighted critical instances where they felt they had to do more with less money. Mrs. Songbird stated

My leadership team and I had to teach classes when substitute teachers were unavailable. I have used my educational assistants to cover classes. Teachers bought materials out of their own pockets when their $100 supplies allocation ran out. We stretch resources and get creative with student incentives when funds are not available to buy items for student celebrations. My teachers supplement the curriculum with internet finds. I hate teacher pay teachers, but sometimes this is the most affordable resource to supplement the curriculum for my teachers.

They shared stories where they had to repurpose personnel to cover intervention needs, use personnel to mentor struggling students, and ask for outside assistance. Mrs. Jackson said she would always hear, “do the best you can with what you have.” Mrs. Pope and Mrs. Bassett had similar thoughts on trying to make one size fit all in funding when different schools needed more than others in areas that would support the social and emotional needs and additional personnel to help provide more intense one-on-one instruction for struggling students. Mrs. Songbird stated she had to rely on her Partners in Education (PIE partners) to help with some of her needs. She noted

I spend a lot of time reaching out to partners and asking them if they can be purchased for us, like our instructional materials for students is through the workbooks, and our partner, a printing company, does that for us, so we do not have enough money to get even those things. And I know it is based on the percentage of poor students we have. But I find myself asking partners to pay for things, and thank goodness they have done that, because
our students need that there, that is that, and that is what I am saying, that is the sad part about it.

Mrs. Bassett, Mr. Montreal, and Mrs. Chandler felt helpless in meeting the state testing performance accountability expectations and needs of all their students. Mathis (2004) noted that state tests are a vital part of school accountability measures when used to show school improvement over time and determine who is not receiving an adequate education. Mathis (2004) also suggested that although there was usefulness in testing accountability, leaders must not allow test scores to “punish those who were denied equal or adequate resources in the first place.” Mrs. Songbird stated

I have a lot of special needs student population and a lot of students not on grade level. Although I am doing interventions, it is not enough to close the gaps promptly. The funds are not available to address the needs of my at-risk students. My school, teachers, and students are punished because of the deficits, and my hands are tied due to the limited support I can provide.

Based on the literature and data from the participants’ responses, school funding inequities cause the factors that lead marginalized students to the school to prison pipeline. The lack of support programs, qualified teachers, appropriate academic and behavior interventions, teacher trainings, and capital improvements push students out of the classroom and into the juvenile justice system.
Research Question 2

The second research question asked, what role has federal, state, and local policies and educational funding practices played in school funding inequities and the systematic marginalization of minorities? I sought to connect laws, rulings, and policies to school funding inequities and how they oppress marginalized students. This research question is addressed by the following theme: unfunded mandates that exasperate the school-to-prison pipeline.

Historically, systematic marginalization has occurred in the U. S through laws, policies, and funding programs that have oppressive outcomes for minorities (Spring, 2016). Varying funding levels at the federal, state, and local levels have created struggling school districts. Baker (2014b) refers to these districts as underfunded districts that educate students who need the most resources and services but try to educate with inadequate funding. Baker (2014b) also classified the cause of funding inequities into five types.

1) Savage inequalities: How persistent disparities in local taxable property wealth continue to undermine equity in American education.

2) Stealth inequalities: How dysfunctional, poorly designed state school finance formulas fail to correct sometimes reinforce disparities

3) Some politics were still local: How local tax policy and budgeting decisions may undermine state equity objectives.

4) Not-so-blurred lines: How small, segregated enclaves embedded in population-dense metropolitan areas reinforced fiscal disparities.
5) A shift: How the changing demography of urban and smaller cities in America leads to emerging fiscal disadvantages (Baker, 2014b, p. 8).

All the participants interviews felt that government mandates worked to the disadvantage of marginalized students. All participants stated that marginalized and low-income students who entered education without the foundational skills and support from middle to high-income levels and that performance accountability on state tests assumed all students started at the same place. The participants felt that low-income students were set to fail because the support to meet testing proficiency levels was inadequate. Mrs. Anderson stated they were doing the best they could with what they had in terms of resources. She acknowledged that funding inequities created a nuisance for leaders, and she was guilty of choosing what would be most beneficial for her students. Mrs. Chandler stated

I can identify my students who will end up in the prison system. These students are too far gone. The counseling we can offer is not enough. Their gaps are not closing fast enough to access grade-level materials, so the gaps grow. They struggle with following the rules and eventually stop caring about their learning. Without the right personnel to help with behaviors and social and emotional needs, these students fall through the cracks.

According to Chinos and Bragg (2017), federal funding is unilateral and remains around 10% for most districts in the United States. Most states use a funding formula for state education funding. Local funding is primarily based on property taxes. Property taxes in low poverty areas are less than adequate for the funding capacity necessary to equip urban schools with the funding needed to advance marginalized students (Baker & Corcoran, 2012).
Most state funding levels have not kept up with pre-Great Recession era funding for K-12 schools, with some states continuing to cut budgets years after the Great Recession. Funding shortfalls have caused a decrease in the quality of education for students. For all students to be successful members of society, they must attend schools with competent, highly qualified teachers, small class sizes, high quality and rigorous curriculum, and social and emotional support and resources. These cuts in district funding exacerbate the school-to-prison pipeline by weakening the educational structures needed to develop and expand the opportunities for marginalized students (Leachman et al., 2016)

Unfunded Mandates That Exasperate the School to Prison Pipeline

“Lack of teacher connection to students and the culturally relevant curriculum creates disengagement due to increased accountability pressures and pacing in the curriculum”

The fourth theme centered around unfunded mandates that exacerbated the school-to-prison pipeline. Mrs. Pope stated

The mandates created frustration for the teachers, which affected teacher motivation and productivity. Student relationships became less of a focus, and if students did not master the content, some students were left behind. I liked the RTI portion of the mandate that addressed the needs of struggling students, but I am frustrated with not having the personnel to fully implement what was needed to implement the program with fidelity.

She did not feel she successfully implemented requirements from NCLB or ESSA by asking everyone to do a little extra to help the students. She stated the following:

I do know the RTI process was embedded in that. Thus, we must ensure that we serve students at every tier, but our special needs students receive separate services. Our tier
two and tier three students receive the intervention. So, it is the intervention power, and we do an excellent job of doing that here. We have not done it the way we typically have because of COVID-19; we have not been able to mix groups, but we use data to build those RTI groups because those models are that we must intervene early. And then our classroom teachers are teaching tier one and having to do an intervention, and sometimes it can be too much; you must talk them through and help them realize that they are the interventionists too if you are not just the classroom teacher. The stress and strain are more so on the teachers, but I try to support them, and my instructional coach and staff also try to support them through the processes. It is a lot. It is a lot. They are responsible for a lot. One of them, one of my principles that I interviewed, you know, she said one of the strange for her was losing good teachers because it got to be too much some teachers just throwing their hands up and walk away or, you know, go to your complaint she said that was just the most significant thing for her was just losing that high quality, those teachers. Because of all those mandates because it just fell into their hands, you know, and I will tell you why, you know, I had teachers I had lost when they lost their spirit and joy for teaching, and I have had a high turnover with teachers.

Mrs. Chandler noted that NCLB and ESSA required her to choose between what she felt the school needed the most to meet the requirements of the mandates. She stated Mentoring, self-esteem, and confidence-building initiatives took a back seat to instructional needs. Teacher development on poverty, relationship building, and cultural competency were not addressed. The pressure to perform on state tests superseded the SEL needs of the students. These needs keep students motivated to come to school and thus decrease the chance of matriculation to prison. When spending and allocating my
monies, I ask if we get the best bang for our buck. And that can sometimes be a downfall if you are a school that gets a lot of money. Sometimes we throw it into too many programs. And so, you do not spend quality time and monitoring and saying, you know, trying to decide was, did we get the results worth spending this amount. So, I do not know; I think that sometimes. We must always be thinking about that and monitoring, making sure we were progressing; what can we look back and see what we think contributed most to the growth that we got academically. Then you look at how the student is lacking socially and emotionally. You realize you cannot address those needs as adequately as you need to. The teachers need training in that area. Students and teachers cannot connect if teachers cannot understand where the students come from. When students do not feel cared for, they turn to other things. I have seen students act out in one teacher’s class because of the lack of connection and excel in another because of the time that another teacher takes with the child.

The remaining participants felt the *NCLB*, and *ESSA* added additional pressure on students, teachers, principals, and districts without guiding them to achieve the results. They felt the frustration trickled down to the students and created disenfranchisement for the students. Mr. Montrell stated

Students felt the pressure to perform, and when they did not meet the expectations, they were treated as failures. It is like a scarlet letter if you are assigned a failing number or letter as a school. It became a badge of shame. I have had teachers encourage those students to leave the system or not show up for testing so scores would not be affected. I was not given additional money to reach my students who were two to three grades behind, even though they would be calculated in my school’s score. My teachers sent
students to the office more frequently during test prep time because my teachers were anxious and frustrated. They did not want bad scores associated with their name and counted against them for their effectiveness score.

Teachers’ effectiveness scores and school ratings were tied to student test scores. The pressure to perform was unimaginable year after year with NCLB and ESSA. Teachers often left the teaching profession because they felt too much responsibility placed on the teacher and not enough on students and their parents.

**Research Question 3**

The third research question asked, “How is racism interwoven in funding laws, policies, and practices? I sought to uncover racism in laws, policies, and practices. This research question is answered by the following theme: Limited control and representation in the funding conversation.

Black people have had a storied and complicated relationship with education in America dating back to slavery which made it against the law for slaves to read (Butchart & Rolleri, 2004). During the Jim Crow era, Black students were subjected to segregation and unequal access to public education with their White counterparts. According to Marrus (2015), exclusionary disciplinary policies functioned as modern-day Jim Crow laws by creating interruptions in learning and schooling, thus increasing the likelihood of marginalized students matriculating into the school-to-prison pipeline. Several court decisions and laws have also continued the marginalization of students of color.
The purpose of *Brown vs. Board of Education* was to provide Black students access to quality education through school integration with whites (Bell Jr, 1979). The case opened the door for additional funding to schools that accepted integration. Southern states were against integration and used the language in the Supreme Court ruling “all deliberate speed’ to drag the integration process out for years. Nelson (2018) highlighted racial inequity in the discourse found in *Brown*, which allowed the states to circumvent the law’s enactment and continue desegregation. Governmental intervention created “a set of house rules” that equipped White America with the power to give access to the proverbial American dream via quality education (Nelson, 2018). These rules were not allowed in Black America. *Brown* created separation within segregation, which further disenfranchised students of color. *Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964* prohibited discrimination in public schools because of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin and sought to enforce *Brown*. *The Civil Rights Act* also led to greater social and economic mobility for people of color. While overt discrimination was placed at the forefront of awareness in the United States, schools continued to find ways to disallow equal access to essential educational needs of Black students (Chinos & Bragg, 2017; Hersch & Shinall, 2015).

*The Emergency School Aid Act of 1972 (ESAA)* gave federal funding to school districts engaging in desegregation (Hochschild & Scovronick, 2003). *The No Child Left Behind Act and Every Student Succeeds Act* ushered in unsustainable accountability measures, pushing low-performing schools toward unattainable goals, and rewarding high-performing schools with additional funding to meet performance mandates. These laws did not consider the academic deficits that had plagued low-performing schools for years or provide funding to subjugate the problem of inadequate teachers, large class sizes, and unchallenging curriculum.
As stated in Chapter three, marginalization was camouflaged through discriminatory real estate practices and unfair lending practices (Anyon, 2014). Banks used redlining to deter housing rehabilitation and purchases in urban communities (Anyon, 2014). The deteriorating houses decreased the value of the communities and discouraged business investments (Anyon, 2014). Factories moved outside the city limits for promised tax breaks, which decimated the African American middle class that depended on factory work to enable them to live in the middle class (Anyon, 2014). These tax break incentives also contribute to the erosion of the property tax base in urban neighborhoods (Anyon, 2014). This suburban migration contributed to low property tax revenues and inadequate school funding sources (Anyon, 2014). Deficit funding had a debilitating effect on urban education — the lack of a property base to pay for educational services in cities affected improvised school districts (Anyon, 2014). According to Henderson. S. (2022),

Local governments pick up a larger share of school funding than the state’s education funding formula requires. The BEP formula calculates a combined state and local total for education spending in each district based on numerous variables and assumptions about what is necessary for basic education. In FY 2020, the BEP formula calculated that $7.3 billion was needed to fund schools, including 66% from the state and 34% from local governments. School districts reported over $9.5 billion of in-state revenues, including 54% from the state and 46% from local sources. Local revenues exceeded BEP requirements by 76 percent, while state revenues were over 8 percent (Henderson. S., 2022, p. 5).
Although the Henderson’s figures challenge the argument that local governments are not funding school districts according to state requirements, the amount of funding is still not enough to address the needs of the schools located in impoverished areas.

**Limited Control and Representation in Funding Conversation**

*“County commission rules the purse”*

The third theme centered around limited control and representation in funding conversations. The participants felt they were given an amount from the district office and had some control at the building level to disperse the funds. They had budget restrictions that determined the overall allocation of federal, state, and local funds. Mrs. Songbird stated:

> I met with my assigned district Title I coordinator to discuss my assigned budget and what money was available for different purchases. I had to use certain federal money for students from low-income families, English Language Learners, students with disabilities, and teacher training and development.

Participants felt they did not have a voice at the decision-making levels and needed representation at meetings concerning their school’s funding. Mrs. Jackson stated:

> This lack of inclusion was due to long-term members on the school board and the county commission who had become out of touch with the school system’s needs and were still aligned to the old county and city being separate entities. When the two merged, the county felt it was doing the city a favor by providing financial support for the school system. The county commission is not going to raise property taxes. So, even though maybe needs to increase and things and buildings need to be repaired, the school system needs to figure out how they cut their budget back and be able to do it with the money.
that we, you know, are allotted for them and so what we were getting from the county and the county commission was the same for decades or more.

Most of the female leaders echoed the same sentiment that the “good old boy” system hindered funding capacity at the state and local levels. These leaders felt that the people were making the decisions needed to visit the buildings and talk to school leaders to get a clearer picture of the schools and their financial needs.

**Research Question 4**

The fourth research question asked, what role can equitable educational funding practices, laws, and policies decrease the school-to-prison pipeline? I sought ways that equitable funding could stop or decrease the school-to-prison pipeline. The following theme addresses this research question: A call to action.

According to Kim et al. (2010), insufficient educational resources are one of the leading causes of the school-to-prison pipeline. Students of color are at a higher risk of experiencing disciplinary practices that remove them from the classroom. Overrepresentation in the receipt of these exclusionary discipline practices increases and ensures their matriculation in the juvenile justice system as they approach adolescence and enter adulthood (Dardenbour et al., 2010). It is essential to fund education at federal, state, and local government capacity to decrease the school to prison pipeline matriculation. The participants in this study highlighted the need for additional counselors to address student trauma and SEL needs, conflict resolution, and decision-making skills. The participants also felt parental outreach programs that provided educational support to families outside of school would benefit struggling students and build stronger relationships in the community.
Research has shown that increased funding to repair old school buildings positively affects academic achievement and student behavior. Baker and Bernstein (2012) noted that proper heating and cooling systems, adequate lighting, uncrowded learning spaces, and availability of proper equipment and furniture fueled student academic achievement.

An educated population leads to economic mobility within a community. Educated communities have fewer reports of criminal activity present. Increased crime rates deplete valuable resources needed to fund education in the communities that need it the most. Improving school funding and educational outcomes could be one solution to decrease crime and poverty in low-income communities. Crews (2009) noted uneducated citizens increase their chances of being arrested.

The lack of viable job opportunities that pay livable wages could lead to criminal behavior (Crews, 2009). Increased criminal behavior decreases education attainment. This lack of education eliminates higher-paying job opportunities due to increased performance and hiring standards. On the other hand, a more educated individual will be unlikely to be arrested or have interactions with the police.

**A Call to Action at All Levels**

“**Staff training on cultural competency, relationship building, and meeting the social and emotional needs of all students**”

The final theme highlighted the need for action. Mrs. Jackson stated ongoing poverty and cultural competency training were needed to introduce teachers to student life outside the school building. She felt cultural competency training is needed for the dominant culture to understand other cultures and not misrepresent it as a discipline issue. Mrs. Jackson stated
Although we have a discipline matrix that details the difference between major and minor infractions, teachers still confuse the two infractions. They send students to the office for the smallest reason. Sometimes, the behaviors range from talking too loudly to fidgeting too much. I often tell them that boisterous conversation is the norm in African American communities and movement is a symptom of ADHD or an active child. I tell them not to be reactive to behaviors that seem to disrupt their classroom environment but to be proactive by creating spaces students can relate.

Mrs. Pope echoed this and felt teachers needed additional support to help students struggling with trauma. Mrs. Queen and Mr. Montrell felt these needs could be addressed by bringing in additional counselors and social workers. Mrs. Queen stated

I have had several students who have lost a relative to gun and gang violence. The parents usually send the student back to school without notifying us of the tragedy. These students are either withdrawn or act out in anger. If my counselor teaches classes all day, these needs go unaddressed and fester. I deal with homelessness with my demographics, and we try to provide timely support, but sometimes the counselor is simply unavailable, and the teachers do not catch the signs or have the time to talk to their students in-depth.

Mr. Montrell and Mrs. Queen felt that these support personnel could focus on relationship building to create safe, nurturing landscapes for students of color in schools. Mrs. Bassett advocated for a true community school with programs to uplift parents like job resources, housing resources, workforce development, and increased parent-school connections. Mrs. Bassett stated
I hosted several community events on Saturdays to help strengthen parent-school relationships. I had companies set up hiring booths that hired on the spot. I had health professionals conducting health screenings and discussing healthy lifestyles. Local colleges presented information on program offerings and career planning. Mortgage professionals presented information on home buying programs and the steps to homeownership. The cost of putting together these events was not in my budget, and I had to rely on community donations and volunteers to cover the cost.

Strengthening parent and school relationships is a crucial component in decreasing discipline issues with at-risk students and increasing academic achievement. Parents become an integral part of their child’s education process.

**Summary**

The findings of this study indicated that most participants do not feel that the education funding system in their school could be changed, thus leading to a more equitable system for schools that requires more funding. Most of the participants felt their autonomy of spending funds came at the school level, and even that was monitored through various funding laws and policies handed down from the state and local powers. These policies and laws determined what monies could be used for capital projects, teacher development, personnel, material needs, and school culture, climate, and morale. Most participants felt that school funding was unfair and needed to be revisited to address the needs in urban schools. There was a consensus that urban schools needed challenging curricula, teachers explicitly trained in urban education, and social service personnel to address triggers that caused students to act out. Hughes et al. (2010) noted that it is vital for educators to understand the stress that living in poverty-stricken, high crime,
and high unemployment areas have on Black students. Shipler (2004) stated that these stressors included poor housing choices and limited access to adequate medical care, created fear, anxiety, and depression issues, and mentally and physically affected students who experienced these stressors daily.

Some of the participants connected to the benefits of programs that addressed SEL needs because they had served in other districts and schools that received more funding. Students in those districts had access to support services and better- culturally trained teachers. Their experiences working in other districts increased their awareness of the inconsistencies in funding practices based on district and school locations. Most participants noted newer buildings or building upgrades, better teacher training programs to increase teacher cultural quotient, and more advanced courses offerings at their schools would place them on the same playing and achievement field as districts working with more funding capital.

The following chapter utilized these themes to discuss how the findings of this study can inform practice to ensure stakeholders are better able to meet the needs of their marginalized population. Implications and recommendations for future research are also provided.
Chapter V:
Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to identify the connection between educational funding inequities and the school to prison pipeline. The results of this study were to then be used to inform practices and policy and budget making decisions at the federal, state, and local levels to decrease the school to prison pipeline. This study shared narratives of principals in West Tennessee and their experiences with educational funding inequities and the school to prison pipeline.

This qualitative study aimed to critique educational funding inadequacies in urban schools and connect them to the school-to-prison matriculation. Framed by Critical Race Theory, the study examined the educational funding, practices, policies, and laws at the federal, state, and local levels for urban school districts and the corresponding effects on the lives of marginalized students in those areas. Critical Race Theory was also used to question the premise behind the covertness of racism in educational funding and how legally, society has marginalized a group of people through exploitation and subordination. CRT was used to connect race to funding policies and funding inequities to matriculate into the school-to-prison pipeline. Additionally, CRT offered a process to examine how racialized policies, laws, and practices manifest within educational finance. Ladson-Billings (1998) explicitly connected the United States’ inability to confront the achievement gap between marginalized students and their white counterparts and its ingrained beliefs about privilege connected to whiteness as property. The path to making significant strides in closing the growth gap includes getting the majority in society to recognize that an educational funding deficit exists, and debt is still owed to marginalized students (Ladson-Billings, 1998). The study addressed the following research questions:
RQ1. How do school funding inequities contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline?

RQ2. What role has federal, state, and local policies and educational funding practices played in school funding inequities and the systematic marginalization of minorities?

RQ3. How is racism interwoven in funding laws?

RQ4. What role can equitable educational funding practices, laws, and policies decrease the school-to-prison pipeline?

Overview of the Study

Chapter one introduced the research questions, problem and the purpose of the study, the theoretical framework used in the study, and the significance of the study. It highlighted an educational funding dilemma situated around equitable funding for schools in high poverty areas. It discussed the school to prison pipeline dilemma. Chapter two consisted of a review of literature. Literature on Critical Race Theory, the history of educational funding in the United States. The literature also reviewed federal state and local funding practices and policies. The Shelby County School Board v Haslam, a pending Tennessee case on inequitable funding practices was reviewed. Chapter three discussed the methodology used in the study. A Critical Race Methodological approach was used to conduct the interviews. This approach was applied to the data collection by placing people of color at the center of the discourse, acknowledging the intercentricity of race and other factors that lead to oppression, and recognizing race and racism—the denial of color blindness, race neutrality, and meritocracy. Chapter four discussed the results of the study. Data analysis and the coding process was detailed. Themes that developed from the coding process was discussed in connection to the research questions and supported by data from
the participants’ interviews. Critical Race Tenets were also applied to the data in this chapter. Chapter five consisted of the study overview for all chapters, limitations and implications of the study, and recommendations for future research.

Research data was collected through semi-structured interviews with eight participants in school principal roles in West Tennessee with at least an 80% free and reduced lunch population. Following the analysis of interview data, I identified six themes that highlighted the participants’ experiences. These themes were:

1. Inadequacy of funding
2. Systemic effects of inadequate funding
3. Limited control and representation in the school funding and allocation conversation
4. Unfunded mandates that exasperate the school from the prison pipeline problem
5. Expected to do more with less
6. A call to action for all leaders and stakeholders

Theme one, the inadequacy of funding, dealt with the participants’ experience with educational funding inadequacies. Most participants felt they experienced funding shortfalls in their schools. Theme two, systemic effects of inadequate funding, described the effects that inadequate educational funding had on students and teachers in their building. There was a consensus surrounding the participants’ ability to provide emotional support for the students and training for the teachers to help decrease frustration and matriculation to the school-to-prison pipeline.

The third theme focused on the principals’ limited control and representation in the school funding and allocation conversation. Most principals felt they had to go along with the structures in place that limited their voice in funding matters. All the principals felt they could
add valuable insight into what was needed and why equitable and adequate funding should be topics of discussion. They believed their keen insight into the actual day-to-day needs should be considered when making decisions about allocation.

Theme four dealt with unfunded mandates that exasperated the school to the prison pipeline problem. Principals felt this unnecessary pressure to perform without all the required tools did more harm to struggling students. They noted that teachers did not have time to build relationships with struggling students, which would have given those students a sense of belonging. They also felt the mandates pushed teachers to a pace that left struggling students behind.

 Expecting principals to do more with less was the fifth theme. All the principals felt stretched to the limit in terms of resources. They were over-utilizing personnel and lost some due to the extra work. They felt not having enough resources to do the job correctly also led to students being disenfranchised and not having their academic and emotional needs met.

The final theme resulted in a call to action for all leaders and stakeholders. The call to action highlighted the need for the federal government to fund districts with more pressing problems. Principals also felt the county commission or local government should fund education based on funding capacity, and those additional monies should be allocated to social programs that students need.

This chapter discussed limitations of the study, provided implications and recommendations from the study, and provided direction for future research.
School Funding Narrative

The greater good is the need to make public education accessible, adequate, and equal for all students. If society has set education attainment as the method to achieve success and the means to provide for oneself and family, then society should provide equitable access to quality public education. The federal government would like citizens to believe it shares this goal of equity and fairness. The government’s actions and upheld laws tell a different narrative over the years. Winston (2016) noted that educational federalism involved state and local control of education and restricted federal control. Federalism has also hindered significant reform efforts to promote educational attainment (Winston, 2016). The U.S government mocked federalism by constantly enacting statutes that hinder all students’ education processes and allow funding to be shifted or limited in high poverty areas. Although the constitution does not provide public education within its guidelines, the federal government continues to blur the lines with significant educational policy.

Limitations

As with all research, this study was subjected to limitations. First, the researcher’s experiences as an African American mother of African American males and as a minority teacher and educator could affect her perspective and understanding of the participants’ experiences. The sample size was small, but it was essential to collect data from principals specific to the student population affected most by inadequate funding practices. The study focused on eight participants only in West Tennessee. Secondly, the sample was not representative of the entire minority student population in West Tennessee and all principals’ unique experiences leading schools of high poverty student populations in West Tennessee. This
study did not include local, state, and federal policy makers who determine educational funding allocation. The study only wanted to establish a connection between educational funding inequities and the school-to-prison pipeline. There are numerous other factors that lead minority students to the school-to-prison pipeline, including family structure, socioeconomic status, mental capacity and special education needs, and strength of the community.

I Implications

Implications can be drawn from this study. These implications are applicable to all schools and leaders serving minority or marginalized populations and those who make decisions about educational funding.

Historically, public education in America has sustained changes in how and who funds schools. Before the 1970s, local school districts had the autonomy to allocate funds based on their calculations and whims (Biddle & Berliner, 2002). Local districts allocated monies based on their specific needs and what was more impactful to student learning (Baker, 2014b). Property taxes remained the primary funding method for local government educational funding (Ostrander, 2015). Students who live in high or middle-income areas had property wealth which allowed for higher funding levels by the local county commission (Chinos & Bragg, 2017). Schools in poverty areas were funded with low property values resulting in fewer monies available for necessary programs (Baker & Corcoran, 2012; Ostrander, 2015).

The disservice that inadequate funding for education over the years has created achievement gaps in communities of color across the United States that have decimated growth and achievement in poverty-stricken areas and the minority community. Funding inequities have been prevalent since the beginning of America (Flores, 2017). From Brown to Every Student
Succeed Act, the government has used its power to continue to subjugate African Americans’ educational opportunities. Society must understand how making policy, setting guidelines, and organizing knowledge are grounded in and perpetuate white privilege.

Ladson-Billings (2006) contended this achievement gap is a debt owed to education. The debt was the missing or unappropriated resources that could have been assigned to low-income marginalized students, which created social issues like crime, minimum wage jobs, and low workforce participation. These social issues require additional public funds that could be used to decrease the achievement and opportunity gap between marginalized students and their counterparts (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

Race and racism are embedded in the school and funding systems’ structures and hierarchy, most notably in state and local funding systems (Delgado & Bernal, 1998). Equal, adequate, and equitable funding is hidden in complicated funding calculations, which gets in the way of districts’ ability to educate all students (Darling-Hammond & Friedlaender, 2008). State lawmakers must change how revenue is generated for schools and the unintended consequence of allowing socioeconomic status to determine educational opportunities. Discussion should center around lessening the dependency on local property taxes which hinder students from low social economic statuses access to a quality education (Anyon, 2014).

Leaving local county commissions responsible for funding has questioned funding capacity issues and inequitable funding practices across districts. Districts that need more funding are at the mercy of the commission, which rarely funds education at the necessary capacity to meet the needs of high poverty districts (Baker, 2014b). Districts are then forced to choose between programs and initiatives to fund. Several participants suggested they faced this
choosing dilemma year after year and often decided what initiative would give them the most leverage with students. One participant stated she had to decide between an instructional coach who would help elevate the rigor in instruction and provide strategies and coaching to teachers to help struggling students or an extra counselor to meet her students’ SEL and trauma needs.

CRT exposes the manifestation of that privilege that upholds and sanctions racism (Crenshaw, 2010; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2016). Because society views access to a good education is viewed as a right, not having access violates that right (Hochschild & Scovronick, 2003). Since this violation occurs most often in marginalized communities and is centralized around race and accessibility of effective schooling based on funding, CRT allows the layers to be peeled off, and an in-depth analysis of school funding occurs (Crenshaw, 2010).

School funding policies have helped shape communities of color’s narrative and painted a color blinded, meritocracy approach to silence the struggles and history of the marginalized communities (Crenshaw et al., 1995). Although the State of Tennessee has made strides in increasing funding for education, it has not been enough to combat the urban schools’ growing problems. The lack of job opportunities, economic development, increased crime, and poverty can be traced to a lack of quality education (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Critical Race Theory provided the framework for discourse and action from all stakeholders about what is needed to turn the tide on the urban population’s marginalization (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). CRT highlighted racism in the challenge of funding methods and the use of property taxes that perpetuate school segregation (Carey, 2004; Cole, 2009). CRT also challenged the narrative of the nation’s blind eye to racism in educational funding methods at all funding levels (Crenshaw et al., 1995).
The economic separation via class and income is a threat to the survival of people of color and their ability to transition out of poverty. Income levels, social mobility, and class levels are influenced by the level of education (Hardaway & McLoyd, 2009). Being a part of the middle class is tied directly to obtaining a college education (Hardaway & McLoyd, 2009). Class and status are a measurement of success in our society (Bischoff, 2008). Unfortunately, those marginalized souls entrenched in poverty were the least likely to become educated and move to the middle class (Mortenson, 1998). People in poor communities continued to live in poverty and fell into the perpetual generational cycle of low-income existence and life tied to the penal system (Levine & Nidiffer, 1996).

The language of the United States laws surrounding education has been cloaked in the wizardry of bait and switch (Henry & Robinson, 1998; Marmor, 2008; Nelson, 2018). With the sleight of hand, Congress managed to fool an entire movement into believing separate but equal was fair, desegregation was necessary to provide equal access to quality education, and numerous other efforts in the name of the public good (Nelson, 2018). The use of rhetoric like equal, fair, all, adequate, and equity sparked an emotional contextualization of the law by marginalized people without any close critique of those laws by the very people affected the most by enactment (Nelson, 2018; Ryan, 1999). It is time to challenge the statement that things are equal and advance marginalized students' educational agenda to ensure they have a chance at a piece of the proverbial American pie (Anyon, 2014; Yosso, 2005). Tennessee school funding policy and the system that administers funding highlighted an institutional structure that needs to be critically examined based on the discriminatory practice and racial hierarchy.

Although the school-to-prison pipeline has been fueled by zero-tolerance discipline policies and police or resource officers assigned to schools (Mallett, 2017; Novak, 2019; Pigott
et al., 2018), inadequate education funding is an underlying catalyst for prison matriculation for youth. “Inadequate and inequitable funding contributes to overcrowded classrooms, underqualified teachers, and missing resources necessary to meet the needs of struggling students’ and often contribute to delinquency and future criminal behavior” (Knight, 2017).

**Recommendations**

One recommendation is the need for equitable funding at the federal, state, and local levels. This would ensure that schools that needed the most would receive the funding they needed. Murnane (2007) highlighted the need to fund *No Child Left Behind* with a renewed focus on accountability, incentives, and capacity. Accountability would be revised to more reachable performance goals. The goals would focus on skills proficiency instead of test performance. Incentives would allow for more school choice options for low-income students attending low-performing schools. Capacity would allow the federal government to increase competitive matching grants to states to support failing schools and districts. These grants would support programs that improved instruction and offered alternative learning settings for students who struggled in a traditional high school setting (Murnane, 2007). Rebell (2018) highlighted the results of a study by Jackson in 2016 that found

A 20 percent Increase in annual per pupil spending for K-12 low-income students led to almost one more year of completed education. In adulthood, these students experienced 25 percent higher earnings and a 20 percent decrease in adult poverty. The researchers posit that these results could reduce the achievement gap of adults who were raised in low- and high-income families by at least two-thirds (Rebell, 2018, p. 6).
The counter-stories of the interview participants refuted the notion that the government is funding education at an adequate rate and hammered home the effects of inadequate school funding initiatives on the growth and well-being of low-income students. Participants discussed how making program choices due to funding inadequacies created adverse outcomes for schools located in high-poverty areas. Counter-stories have been used to increase awareness of systemic marginalization at the various levels of government (Bell Jr, 1979). Study participants noted that school leaders needed to share their stories to get the level of funding their schools needed to change the trajectory of at-risk students.

Secondly, my findings support the need for additional teacher training that addresses the needs of urban students. According to the participants, teachers were not equipped with strategies to deal with minority students’ behaviors. The participants felt the lack of cultural awareness caused teachers to misidentify some student behaviors as disrespect and noncompliance. This misidentification led to frequent office visits and discipline measures that excluded students from instruction. High discipline referrals lead to loss of learning time and in-school and out-of-school suspensions (Skiba et al., 2014). All these factors can lead a student to the school-to-prison pipeline (Landa & Stephens, 2017; Skiba et al., 2014) suggested that teacher education students should develop the skills and knowledge of cultural competence as a significant part of course requirements in the teacher preparation curriculum. Development in cultural competency skills and understanding could help teachers develop social awareness and an understanding of the diversity, equity, and inclusion connection between teaching and social equity and equip teachers with the tools to become change agents.
Directions for Future Research

The essential work of changing educational funding policies to reduce the school-to-prison pipeline requires diligent focus and commitment. Future research must target the systems of funding inequity and create funding systems that eradicate race as the underlying factor that leads Black students to the prison pipeline. Whereas this study lent the voices of school leaders to highlight funding woes at the school levels, future research needs to incorporate the voices of Black students who are currently in or have been a part of the juvenile justice system.

Additional research on the efficacy of teacher education and professional development programs with a concentration on urban school settings should also be explored. Study participants highlighted the need for teacher training in cultural competency, urban classroom management, and building relationships with urban parents. Participants felt the training at the district and school level was not adequate to develop teachers’ cultural awareness and cultural quotients needed to stop misidentification of behaviors referred for disciplinary actions.

Recommendations for future research must also include research agendas based on the lens of teachers struggling with relating to, instructing Black students, and evaluating local and state government funding sources with school leaders included in the discussion. The study concluded that leaders felt left out of the funding discussion but were held accountable for the results.

Conclusion

This study explored school funding in schools with an 80% or more free and reduced lunch demographic in West Tennessee, and the role funding inequities play in the school to
prison pipeline. Framed by Critical Race Theory (CRT) and using the concepts of qualitative research, this study examined how inadequate funding of necessary programs and resources can matriculate marginalized students into the school-to-prison pipeline.

Following my analysis of interviews with eight participants, six themes evolved during my data analysis: 1) Inadequacy of funding, 2) Systemic effects of inadequate funding, 3) Limited control and representation in the school funding and allocation conversation, 4) Unfunded mandates that exasperate the school from the prison pipeline problem, 5) Expected to do more with less, and 6) A call to action for all leaders and stakeholders.

My findings indicated that most participants felt funding was inadequate to meet the needs of the students in their schools. There was a consensus that leaders had to choose between funding instructional coaches to increase the rigor in instruction or a counselor to deal with the social, emotional, and trauma needs of their students. Due to the lack of funding, professional development was conducted by staff members with little to no training in cultural competency, culturally relevant pedagogy, restorative discipline practices, and relationship building with students and parents.

The participants acknowledged that funding inequities had a disparaging effect on Black students and made them more at risk for the school to prison pipeline. The lack of training in the key areas mentioned above also led to increased discipline issues for Black students. Most participants felt that discipline issues could be averted if funding were in place for pre-school programs and reading intervention programs. Students would enter kindergarten at grade level and not fall victim to academic frustrations, which could lead to behavior issues. Teachers would learn how to build relationships with Black students by understanding and acknowledging their
culture. Restorative practices would eliminate exclusionary discipline practices and keep students in school.

My findings highlighted the need for educator representation at the decision-making table. At the federal level, Congress votes on education funding legislation. At the state level in Tennessee, the state house of representatives and the state senate vote on education funding legislation. Additionally, a funding formula is used to determine the number of state funds received by districts in Tennessee. The local county commission determines the amount of local funding allocated to school districts. Educational leaders are not represented at the federal, state, and local levels. The participants felt they did not have a voice in the level of funding required to meet the needs of their students.

Using zip codes to determine educational funding has not been effective in meeting the needs of all students. Equity funding means providing what districts need to meet the students’ needs academically, socially, and emotionally. In 2022, the Governor of Tennessee proposed sweeping changes to educational funding. The governor’s proposal would overhaul K-12 funding with $6.6 billion for per-pupil expenditures and $1.8 billion to provide extra support to struggling students. The adoption of a student-based funding model proposed by the governor would be a move in the right direction of funding equity for Tennessee and the disruption to the school-to-prison pipeline.
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Appendix A

Interview Request

“Hello, ______ I would like to officially announce that I will be conducting an extensive research review that will help guide me during the dissertation process. I would like to ask you to be a participant in my dissertation section of data collection. In February, I would like to interview you on the school leader’s perspective on school funding inequities influence on the school to prison pipeline in marginalized communities as a school leader, you have first-hand knowledge of the struggle a lack of funding can cause. I feel you can provide a unique perspective on inadequate school funding’s role in perpetuating the school to prison pipeline. Please respond with your answer by October 16.”

If the participants agreed to be interviewed a copy of a confidentiality agreement will be sent to the participants. A copy of that agreement can be seen in Appendix B below:
Appendix B

Consent Form

I agree to take part in a research study titled ______________________ which is being conducted for _______________ at the University of Memphis under the direction of Dr. Ronald Eric Platt in the Department Education Leadership and Policy. My participation is voluntary; I can refuse to participate or stop taking part at any time without giving any reason, and without penalty. I can ask to have information related to me returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

I am aware that the purpose of this study is to understand the role inadequate school funding plays in perpetuating the school to prison pipeline in marginalized students. I will not benefit directly from this research. If I volunteer to take part in this study, I will be asked to sit for up to a 1-hour interview lasting from one to two hours. Depending on my desire for involvement in this study, my participation will last from 1 day and can vary from participation in one 2-hour interview to participation in numerous un-timed encounters with the researcher. No discomforts or stresses are expected during this interview or participant observation process. There are no significant risks to participation in the study. If my reflection on experiences leads to any type of emotional upset, the researcher is prepared to give me contact information for community mental health services.

I permit my collected stories to be used by Lajuan Gray-Sylvester for in-class purposes only if my name is kept confidential. The only people who will know that I am the research subject are members of the research team. Information provided by me will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with my permission or as required by law. An exception to confidentiality involves information revealed concerning suicide, homicide, or child abuse which must be reported as required by law or if the researcher is required to provide information by a judge. Individually identifying information, such as my name, will not be published in connection with this study. All results and all tape recordings from this study will be disguised by a fake name and this name will be used on all the research records. All recordings will be kept in a locked filing cabinet. Audio/video recordings will be destroyed by the following year.

The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the project, and can be reached by telephone at 731-217-6394 or by email at lgrysylv@memphis.edu. My signature below indicates that the researcher has answered all the questions to my satisfaction, that I understand the procedures described above, and that I consent to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Lajuan Gray-Sylvester
Name of Researcher

Signature

Date

Phone: ______________

E-mail: ______________
### Appendix C

**Interview Questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTERVIEW QUESTIONS</th>
<th>CONNECTION TO RESEARCH QUESTIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How adequate do you feel funding is for your school at the federal, state, and local levels?</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Local educational funding is based on property taxes in the United States. How is your school location affected by local property tax revenues?</td>
<td>1,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What effects has funding levels had on your ability to meet the needs of your marginalized students?</td>
<td>1,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With some federal funding being based on criteria, what does this look like for your school?</td>
<td>1,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did NCLB or ESSA affect program rollout and support for struggling students?</td>
<td>1,2</td>
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<tr>
<td>The school to prison pipeline can be traced to missing programs and support. What concerns do you have about STP at your school?</td>
<td>1,2,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In your experience as an urban school leader, how has inadequate funding contributed to STP?</td>
<td>1,2,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The local tax bases and the county commission determine the amount of monies allocated to education. How has this process advanced or hindered students from marginalized communities at your school?</td>
<td>1,2,3</td>
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<tr>
<td>How involved are you in the allocation of your school funding and school budget?</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>A consequence of STP is school pushout and dropout. Why do you think students become disengaged in the learning process?</td>
<td>1,2</td>
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<tr>
<td>What solutions to STP, achievement gaps, and opportunity gaps would adequate</td>
<td>4</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
funding provide? 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is there a connection to high discipline issues and inadequate funding at your school?</td>
<td>1,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What programs would you fund if you controlled the purse and why?</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Supplemental Interview Questions**

**Introductory Questions**

Describe your background in education?

What do you know about the school to prison pipeline and describe your experience with school to prison pipeline?

Describe your experience with at-risk students.

**Follow-up and Probing Questions**

Have you seen instances where students in your building were heading in that direction?

What situations at your school seemed to place students on the path to the prison?

Can you give me some examples of your discipline practices?

What were some specific things you did not purchase but needed to purchase with your allocated funds?

Describe your experience as a high school principal in Shelby County.

**Specifying Questions**

What worked to get students back on track? What did not work?

Why do you think the behavior interventions did not work?

What do you feel the teachers need the most to reach their students and build relationships?

How did you support your teachers and students when suspensions were ineffective?
### Federal Legislation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The National Defense Fund of 1955</th>
<th><em>Brown v The Board of Education of Topeka</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Civil Rights Act of 1964</td>
<td><em>Plessy v Ferguson</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965</td>
<td><em>Shelby County School Board v Haslam</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>The Emergency School Aid Act of 1972</td>
<td><em>Texas v Rodriguez</em></td>
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<td>No Child Left Behind Act of 2001</td>
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<td>Every Student Succeed Act of 2015</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Constitution of the United States</td>
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</table>
Institutional Review Board
Division of Research and Innovation
Office of Research Compliance
University of Memphis
315 Admin Bldg
Memphis, TN 38152-3370

March 16, 2021

PI Name: Lajuan Gray-Sylvester
Co-Investigators:
Advisor and/or Co-PI: Ronald Platt
Submission Type: Initial
Title: Show Me the Money; Antagonizing Educational Funding Inequities Through A Critical Race Lens
IRB ID: APPO-FY2021-218
Exempt Approval: March 16, 2021

The University of Memphis Institutional Review Board, FWA00006815, has reviewed your submission in accordance with all applicable statuses and regulations as well as ethical principles.

Approval of this project is given with the following obligations:

1. When the project is finished a completion submission is required
2. Any changes to the approved protocol requires board approval prior to implementation
3. When necessary submit an incident/adverse events for board review
4. Human subjects training is required every 2 years and is to be kept current at citiprogram.org.

For any additional questions or concerns please contact us at info@memphis.edu or 901.678.2705
APPENDIX F