

UConn

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT
AND FAMILY SCIENCES

Doctoral Dissertation Defense



Presented by

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“It’s not ignoring the code of conduct; it’s how do I help this child?”: Discipline Policies, Educator Mindsets, Discipline Decision-Making, and Disparities”

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Advisory Committee

Major Advisor: Maria LaRusso, Ph.D., Human Development & Family Sciences

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Abstract

Disparities in school discipline outcomes are well-documented in the literature. Specifically, schools serving students from minoritized backgrounds are more likely to rely on exclusionary, rather than restorative, approaches to discipline; this results in an overrepresentation of minoritized student populations in exclusionary discipline outcomes and facilitates the school-to-prison pipeline. To best address these inequities, there is a need to better understand the relationships between codes of conduct and discipline disparities, as well as the role of educator mindset in the discipline decision-making process. This dissertation aims to address these gaps by conducting: 1) a state-wide analysis of codes of conduct and exclusionary discipline outcomes in Florida, and 2) semi-structured interviews with educators to uncover the variability in mindsets underlying the discipline process. Results suggest a gap between research, policy, and practice. The inclusion of best practices is limited in codes of conduct, and both minoritized and minoritized intersectional student identities are over-represented in exclusionary discipline outcomes. Additionally, results indicate that individual educator characteristics, school context, knowledge and acceptance of codes of conduct, and awareness of alternative discipline approaches inform educator sensemaking about discipline policies and ultimately influence discipline decision-making. Key implication from these studies: 1) a need to bridge the gap between research, policy, and practice, to promote equity in school discipline outcomes, and 2) the importance of individual educator mindsets and critical perspectives on discipline policies and practices.