

Washington State University

College of Education

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Will defend the dissertation on

Date: November 8, 2023

Time: 2:00 P.M.

Spokane Campus – SCRS 250

Zoom available upon request to gradstudies@wsu.edu

Faculty, students and the general public are encouraged to attend

A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF PRINCIPAL DISCIPLINE DECISION MAKING

Chair: Sharon Kruse

Disproportionality in school discipline (i.e., disparities in exclusionary discipline for certain subgroups) represents one of the most significant problems in education today (Losen et al, 2015; Welsh & Little, 2018). This qualitative study investigated how school principals describe their pressures, tensions, and concerns when making student discipline decisions. Additionally, it explored how principals describe a good student discipline decision. The findings in this study provide insight on how to support school leaders in their efforts to close the discipline equity gap. Study findings suggest principals have three overarching concerns when administering student discipline. These concerns include (1) following state and district policy, (2) maintaining positive and healthy relationships, and (3) upholding internal consistency as decisions get made. In addition, when making student discipline decisions, findings show principals experience three enduring pressures. These pressures include (1) keeping everyone safe, (2) performing in a public arena, and (3) incorporating the added complexities of the principalship. Moreover, results show principals navigate through three overarching tensions when making student discipline decisions. They experience tensions with (1) organizational contexts, (2) core values and beliefs, and (3) laws, policies, and procedures. Importantly, results suggest four major categories that describe good discipline decisions. Good discipline decisions (1) produce results, (2) keep relationships intact, (3) get resolved at the lowest level, and (4) address root causes. Finally, the results unveiled a discipline decision making cycle consisting of three phases including learning, planning, and enacting as well as the associated tensions.