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Principals' outlooks on suspension based on socioeconomic status, gender, years of experience, and school type

Jennifer Ohara

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**PRINCIPALS' OUTLOOKS ON SUSPENSION BASED ON SOCIOECONOMIC
STATUS, GENDER, YEARS OF EXPERIENCE, AND SCHOOL TYPE**

by

Jennifer K. Ohara

A Thesis

Submitted to the
Department of Educational Services and Leadership
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In partial fulfillment of the requirement
For the degree of
Master of Arts in School Psychology
at
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Thesis Chair: Terri Allen, Ph.D.

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Dedication

To Karrol Ann Jordan, the woman who inspired my love for psychology.

Acknowledgments

I will forever be indebted to my exceptional and devoted professor/thesis chair Dr. Terri Allen, my compassionate family, my brilliant classmates, and my soul mate; M.B. None of this work would have been possible without all of your encouragement and patience.

Abstract

Jennifer Ohara

PRINCIPALS' OUTLOOKS ON SUSPENSION BASED ON SOCIOECONOMIC
STATUS, GENDER, YEARS OF EXPERIENCE, AND SCHOOL TYPE
2014/15

Terri Allen, Ph.D

Master of Arts in School Psychology

The purpose of this study was to explore socioeconomic status within a school district, the years of experience, school type, and gender of a principal, supervisor, or disciplinarian and the effect that these variables would have on their attitude toward suspension. According to previous research done by Dr. Russell Skiba of Indiana University, high rates of suspension have been due to racial identity. Even after controlling for poverty status, racial disparities do not disappear (Skiba, Michael, & Nardo, 2000). After wanting to understand more on suspension and it's future in schools, this study explored the attitudes that principals, supervisors, and disciplinarians have on suspension and whether or not their socioeconomic status and years of experience had an effect on those outlooks.

A survey created by Dr. Russell Skiba, the Disciplinary Practices Scale was delivered via e-mail to the members of New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association (NJPSA). The items in the survey reflect principal attitudes and beliefs about the purpose, process and outcomes of school discipline, rather than simply than the frequency of disciplinary actions (Skiba, Simmons, Staudinger, Rausch, Dow, & Feggins, 2003). The data collected was found to be significantly correlated with gender, years of experience, and school type.

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|------|
| Abstract | v |
| List of Tables | viii |
| Chapter 1: Introduction..... | 1 |
| Chapter 2: Literature Review..... | 6 |
| Suspension | 6 |
| Suspension of Exceptional Learners..... | 7 |
| Principal Beliefs on Suspension | 9 |
| Zero Tolerance Policy | 11 |
| Consequences | 13 |
| Society | 15 |
| School | 16 |
| Chapter 3: Methodology | 20 |
| Participants | 20 |
| Materials | 21 |
| Design | 21 |
| Procedure | 22 |

Table of Contents (Continued)

| | |
|---|----|
| Chapter 4: Results | 23 |
| Hypothesis One | 23 |
| Hypothesis Two | 24 |
| Hypothesis Three | 24 |
| Chapter 5: Discussion | 25 |
| Conclusions | 25 |
| Comparison of Data | 26 |
| Limitations | 26 |
| Future Directions | 27 |
| References | 29 |
| Appendix A: Items Included in the Disciplinary Practice Scale | 35 |
| Appendix B: Items Added to the Disciplinary Practice Scale | 38 |

List of Tables

| Table | Page |
|--------------------------------------|------|
| Table 1. Frequency Question S3 | 24 |

Chapter 1

Introduction

When students breach the code of conduct within their school system, it is required that they receive some form of punishment. The manner in which this infringement is handled depends on the disciplinarian. When a student is consistently defiant the typical punishment is suspension. Most seem to understand that after multiple interventions are attempted, suspension is the next step in discipline. However, some disciplinarians are quick on the trigger and move directly to suspension after only a few minor infractions. Is this the reason that out of school suspension is on the rise, or is there another underlying factor? Or are principals suspending students because of factors including their own gender, years of experience, and school type/level, but the central aspect appears to be socioeconomic status (SES) of the school. More specifically, to what extent is the use of out of school suspension influenced by principal's perspectives based on those particular variables. During this study three hypotheses will be tested for correlation between the variable and principals' positions on out of school suspension. It is suspected that female principals will be more likely to favor anti-suspension. Principals working in a lower socioeconomic status will also favor suspension, as well as the zero tolerance policy. It is also believed that principals with little experience working in high schools will support the policies of zero tolerance and be more obliged to suspend their students with the belief that suspension is teaching their students appropriate skills and behaviors. Collected data will be obtained from male and female disciplinarians of diverse SES in the state of New Jersey in elementary, middle, and high schools with little to a numerous amount of years of experience. The principals that are members of the New Jersey Principal and Supervisors Association will be asked to participate in the

Disciplinary Practices Survey (see Appendix A) created by Dr. Russell Skiba, 2004. They will be asked to answer a series of questions from a survey based on resources available, awareness and enforcement, beliefs, and attitude towards discipline. For the purpose of attaining their socioeconomic status, principals will be asked to provide their letter that they are given based on the district factor group (DFG) report summarized by the State of New Jersey Department of Education. This will keep all answers provided by principals in confidence.

The following operational definitions were used in the process of this study:

Out of School Suspension: (OSS) The removal of a student from the school environment for a period not to exceed ten days (Mendez, Knoff & Ferron, 2002).

In-School-Suspension: (ISS) A discipline model where a student is removed from the classroom and compelled to stay in an ISS center for a variable length of time, ranging from part of a day to several days in a row. The ISS center is a specific staffed room where various behavior changing strategies, ranging from punitive to rehabilitative actions that attempt to stop or change student misbehavior without having the student removed from the school environment (Blomberg, 2003).

Zero Tolerance: Initially was defined as consistently enforced suspension and expulsion policies in response to weapons, drugs and violent acts in the school setting. Over time, however, zero tolerance has come to refer to school or district-wide policies that mandate predetermined, typically harsh consequences or punishments (such as suspension and expulsion) for a *wide degree* of rule violation. Most frequently, zero tolerance policies address drug, weapons, violence, smoking and school disruption in efforts to protect all students' safety

and maintain a school environment that is conducive to learning (NASP Online, 2001).

Peer mediation: Problem solving by youth with youth. It is a process by which two or more students involved in a dispute meet in a private, safe and confidential setting to work out problems with the assistance of a trained student mediator (Resolution Center, 2011).

Principal: The lead teacher in a school; the individual who bears the responsibility for the management and instructional leadership of the school (O'Neill, 2013).

Socioeconomic Status: (SES) Is often measured as a combination of education, income, and occupation. It is commonly conceptualized as the social standing or class of an individual or group. When viewed through a social class lens, privilege, power, and control are emphasized. Furthermore, an examination of SES as a gradient or continuous variable reveals inequities in access to and distribution of resources. SES is relevant to all realms of behavioral and social science, including research, practice, education, and advocacy (American Psychological Association (APA), 2014).

Engagement: Student engagement is a commonly used term that describes students' connections to school that involves a combination of thoughts, feelings, and actions (Crooks, Chiodo, Thomas, & Hughes, 2010).

District Factor Group: (DFG) Is an indicator of the socioeconomic status of citizens in each district and has been useful for the comparative reporting of test

results from the New Jersey's statewide testing programs (District Factor Group, 2014).

Functional Behavioral Assessment: (FBA) Evaluation that consist of finding out the consequences (what purpose the behavior serves), antecedents (what triggers the behavior), and setting events (contextual factors that maintain inappropriate behaviors (Hallahan, Kauffman, & Pullen, 2000).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act: (IDEA) The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act was enacted in 1990 and reauthorized in 1997 and 2004; it replaced PL 94-142, enacted in 1975. This federal law requires that to receive funds under the act, every school system in the nation must provide a free, appropriate public education for every child between the ages of three and twenty-one, regardless of how or how seriously he or she may be disabled (Hallahan, Kauffman, & Pullen, 2000).

Manifest Determination: Determination that a student's misbehavior is not a manifestation of a disability (Hallahan, Kauffman, & Pullen, 2000).

It is essential to understand that assumptions were made during the process of this study. First, it is assumed that the disciplinarian and school system are using the zero tolerance policy correctly. It is also assumed that the school system has options for intervention, other than discipline. Another assumption would be that not all disciplinarians are originally from the district that they now work, and that could possibly reflect their answers given in the survey. Limitations were also carefully examined during this study. The data was collected by survey sent via e-mail. It was impractical to believe

that all surveys would be returned, especially in a timely matter. Another limitation is that New Jersey is one of the toughest educational systems. The way disciplinarians hold their views could be due to the systems views. This study was only done based on the views of disciplinarians who work in the New Jersey School Systems.

In the following work, a review of previous literature will be taken to further explain the need for the study on the effects of gender and years of experience of the disciplinarian, SES of the district, and school type on the positive or negative outlook on suspension.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Suspension

Utilization. Out of school suspension (OSS) has been a very well recognized and typical way of punishing students who are consistent offenders of breaking the schools behavior policy, even though there is evidence that it is ineffective (Stokes, 2012). Depending on the situation the process may vary, but most of the time when a school employee becomes aware of a breach in the code of conduct a student will be reprimanded for their behavior by the classroom teacher. From there, if the behavior continues, the child may be referred to the office for a possible suspension sentence (Fabelo et. al, 2011). From a theoretical standpoint, the primary goal of suspension is to decrease or eliminate the probability that a student re-commits an offense that is so serious that another referral to the principal's office or another suspension is necessary (Mendez, Knoff & Ferron, 2002).

Throughout much prior research, it has been found that suspension is increasingly being used and therefore, decreasing in effectiveness (Schiraldi & Zeidenberg, 2001). Rudolph (1984) made a case that OSS might be a rewarding process for some students, and inadvertently providing the wrong incentives for poor behavior. When students are repeatedly suspended, the amount of time spent in school and the desire to complete school diminishes. At first it may seem that suspension of the student will be the most effective option to decrease the problematic behavior. Any individual that is involved with a school, whether it is a policymaker, educators, parents, or students, understands that it is the schools priority to provide a safe and positive learning environment. The one

way that schools can maintain this type of atmosphere is to present rules and regulations that all must follow (Fabelo, et. al, 2011).

Suspension of Exceptional Learners

“Classroom management and discipline are recognized as among the most difficult problems of teachers, both general and special education (Evertson & Weinstein, 2006; Kauffman et al., 2011, as cited in Hallahan, Kauffman, & Pullen, 2012, p. 222).” When you add a child with an emotional, behavioral, or academic disorder to discipline, it then becomes much more complicated. Many teachers and school administrators become confused about what’s legal, and what is not (Hallahan, Kaufman, & Pullen, 2012). Even when things like manifest determination and functional behavioral assessments (FBA), which are explained in the following sections, are used in schools special educators and school personnel are often uncertain of what the law requires (Landrum, 2000; Mueller, Edwards, & Trahant, 2003; Sasso et al., 2001; Sugai & Horner, 1999-2000, as cited in Hallahan, Kauffman, and Pullen, 2012).

Manifest determination procedure. The manifest determination process is involved with exceptional learners and how they are disciplined. Most disciplinary issues are particularly controversial for students with emotional and behavioral disorders because, although their behavior may be severe, the causes of these misbehaviors are often difficult to determine (Hallahan, Kauffman, & Pullen, 2000). School administrators and teachers use manifestation determination to establish if a students’ misbehavior is a manifestation of his or her disability. There are procedures that school administration follows to provide the proper discipline to students with disabilities:

(1) They must determine whether or not the behavior is or is not a manifestation of the student's disability. (2) Provide an alternative placement for the student's education for an interim period if temporary removal from the student's present placement is necessary. (3) Develop positive, proactive behavior intervention plan (Hallahan, Kauffman, & Pullen, 2000, p. 223).

Schools can remove an exceptional learner from school for up to 10 days in an appropriate interim alternative educational setting (Hartwig & Ruesch , 2000). Any exclusion that lasts longer than 10 days is considered to be a change in placement, and that requires IDEA change in placement procedure or a court hearing (Ahearn, 1994). As with most things, there are exceptions to the "10-day rule". If a student with disabilities were to bring in some type of weapon or illegal substance to school, the district may then move the student to an interim educational setting for up to 45 days (Hartwig & Ruesch, 2000). In 2005, Congress reauthorized IDEA and stated that no matter the child's disability, or whether the disability manifested the problematic behavior, if an exceptional learner brings in a weapon, drugs, or "...inflicted serious bodily injury" to another person, he/she will be automatically removed for up to 45 days (Education Improvement Act of 2004).

History. Even though the IDEA provides an extensive guide, the process of determining manifestation can still be extremely difficult (Skiba, 2002). There have been several court cases based on whether or not students with disabilities could be removed from school. In 1972, *Mill v. BOE of the District of Columbia*, the court ruled that students with behavioral disorders could not be expelled for behaviors that may have an expected relationship to their disability (Skiba, 2002). This is what most parents of exceptional learners wanted for their children, but those of general learners could and

would not agree. In 1981, *S-1 v. Turlington*, the Public Law 94-142 preceded that a student with a disability could be expelled only if there is no relationship between the misconduct leading to the expulsion and the student's disability. The battle of coming to an adequate decision is a catch 22; it's a fight of wills, pitting school principals seeking to exercise the option of disciplinary removal against special education administrators seeking to preserve the rights of special education students (Skiba, 2002).

Functional behavioral assessment. When a student's behavior becomes a persistent problem, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) calls for a functional behavioral assessment (FBA) (Hallahan, Kauffman, & Pullen, 2012). An FBA is a comprehensive and individualized approach to investigating variables that are manifested from a child's behaviors (Tilly et al., 1998). "It refers to a behavioral assessment method used to identify the functional relationship between behaviors, antecedents, and consequent events (Hartwig & Reusch, 2000, p. 240)." In simpler terms, the purpose of an FBA is to support educators in determining and altering the factors that account for a student's misconduct (Hallhan, Kauffman, & Pullen, 2012).

Principal Beliefs on Suspension

Variations. Not all principals have the same beliefs on out-of-school suspension. A study was done by Russell Skiba and Heather Edl on "The Disciplinary Practices Survey: How Do Indiana's Principals Feel About Discipline" in 2004, the findings were in agreement that principals, based on the school characteristics, had varying beliefs on discipline.

Results showed that about one third of the responding principals supported preventative approaches to school discipline. These principals were also more likely to believe that it is critical to work with parents before suspension, that discipline should

be adapted to meet the needs of the disadvantaged students and students with disabilities, and that conversations with students are an important part of the disciplinary process... Other principals agreed that zero tolerance makes a significant contribution to maintaining order at their school... Finally, about a third of the responding principals could be characterized as a “pragmatic prevention” group. Of the three groups, this group was most likely to report that disciplinary policies were strictly enforced at their schools and least likely to believe that “There is really nothing a school can do if students are not willing to take responsibility for their behavior (Skiba & Edl, 2004, p. 3).

Practice. Just as principals feel diversely regarding suspension, they also vary greatly in their exploitation of suspension. As clearly stated before, many studies are finding that suspension is being over used and consequently it is becoming an inadequate form of discipline. Principals are looking for ways of maintaining a safe school environment while trying to keep the referral level to a minimum. There is a principal in a high school that has seen the growing numbers in referrals for petty violations. During the interview he stated that “something needs to change, whatever we are doing here isn’t working and we need to figure it out (R. Aiello, personal communication, November 21, 2014).” This principal has started a new period for the students. In the past, students had to remain in their proper lunchroom; they always needed a pass to be in the hallway during their study hall time, and absolutely no cell phone use during the school day. He has decided to combine lunch and study hall into a one-hour period. During this time, students are allowed to get lunch in any room or use one of the kiosks in the hallway, walk around the building with their friends, and even use their cell phones. According to this principal, the number of referrals has decreased dramatically in the first semester (R. Aiello, personal communication, November 21, 2014). Although schools need a conduct policy for their students to follow, there should be some leniency. Where could disciplinarians find room to implement compassion? Most school districts’ code of

conducts is often more than 50 pages in length, reflecting the intricacy of these frameworks (Fabelo et. al, 2011).

Zero Tolerance Policy

Beginning in 1989, school districts in California, New York, and Kentucky mandated expulsion for drugs, fighting, and gang-related activity. By 1993, zero tolerance policies had been adopted across the country, often broadened to include not only drugs and weapons, but also smoking and school disruption (Skiba, 2000). The adoption of zero tolerance discipline policies, not increased student misbehavior, has fueled this rise of suspension (Black, 2014). Despite stable rates of assaults with and without weapons in America's schools over the last two decades, suspensions and expulsions from America's schools are at record highs. This finding adds to the growing body of research that calls into question the harsh application of zero tolerance policies (Schiraldi & Zeidenberg, 2001). The zero tolerance policy leads to schools having metal detectors, surveillance cameras, school uniforms, and locker searches (Skiba, 2000).

Students are being suspended for both major and minor behavioral violations. "These policies often entail a suspension or expulsion for certain behaviors or practices, with no exceptions (Blomberg, 2003, np.)." Infringement on the schools dress code, as mentioned before, could be one of the minor violations. Being suspended for something petty seems to be pretty harsh on students, especially because of the statistics that show suspension could lead to increased dropout rates. In fact, schools themselves report that minor misbehaviors, like disruption and disrespect, account for 95% of suspensions and expulsions (Black, 2014). With the introduction of modern zero tolerance policies and harsh approaches to discipline, schools now punish much more behavior than they ever

have before (Black, 2014). Students are also being punished for things that are happening outside of school. Some of these events that take place outside of school are in violation of the zero tolerance policy. The school, in compliance with the policy, takes actions as to suspend or even sometimes, expel the student.

The zero tolerance policy is seemingly becoming something that not all disciplinarians agree upon. While some believe that the policy is outrageous, others believe that it helps keep their school safe. Despite the differences that schools are having, at least 75% of schools have reported the use of the zero tolerance policy for serious offenses such as: firearms, weapons other than firearms, alcohol, drugs, violence, and tobacco (NASP Online, 2001). The question is, whether or not the zero tolerance policy is successful and effective in handling disciplinary issues. With suspension having no effective impact on students, there must be a relative correlation between suspension and the zero tolerance policy. In a study done by the American Psychological Zero Tolerance Task Force in 2008, "Are Zero Tolerance Policies Effective in the Schools?", researchers examined if the zero tolerance policy made schools safer and more effective in handling disciplinary issues. It was found in each of these hypotheses that the policy had no increase in future positive behavior, decreased future positive behavior, or the topic was too broad to narrow it down to an increase in future positive behavior because of the policy. The overall conclusion of this study was that the zero tolerance policy has not been shown to improve school climate or school safety, even though it seems intuitive that removing disruptive students from school will make schools better places for those who remain.

Consequences

There are many reasons as to why a student might be given a few days of OSS. The Zero Tolerance Policy attempts to send a message by punishing both major and minor incidents severely (Skiba, 2000). Major breaches include weapons, violence, threats, and drugs brought to the school by students. A minor incident can include swearing or violation of the dress code. Whether the student is being suspended for something major or minor, the student will still be deferred from coming to school for a given period of time.

Engagement. “Perhaps the most important issue related to OSS is that it tends to push away the very students who need the most support from school (Blomberg, 2003, np.).” Without student engagement, it is likely that students will see dropping out as a more positive alternative to being suspended from school consistently. Costenbader and Markson (1997) examined the responses of 252 students who had been suspended during their school career. Sixty-nine percent of those surveyed felt that suspension was of little use, and 32% predicted that they would be suspended again. The survey also found that 55% of students suspended were angry at the person who had suspended them.

Behavioral engagement emerged as the strongest negative predictor of dropout (Stokes, 2012). It has been found in studies that a school there is a correlation between high suspension and high drop out rates (Lee, Cornell, Gregory, & Fan, 2011). Suspension is positively associated with negative student, school and societal outcomes including dropout rates (Stokes, 2012). A study done by *Columbia Teachers College Record, 1986* found that sophomores who are suspended from school drop out three times the rate of their peers. The more the student becomes disengaged with the school and all

of its activities, the more likely that student will disengage himself with school completely. In a study done by P.A. Haupt in 1987, found that when a child is suspended it “raises in the student’s mind the issue of whether he/she belongs in school at all.” Suspending students from school removes them from the learning environment and makes it harder for them to keep up with their class work. In addition, school removal practices potentially send a message that students are not wanted in the school, thus affecting their perceptions of support from both adults and peers, and ultimately their investment in school (Lee, Cornell, Gregory & Fan, 2011).

Suspension rates. Another significant correlation found in studies done throughout the past is between low socioeconomic status and high suspension rates. In a specific study done by Mendez, Knoff, and Ferron in 2002, a correlation was found between the students who were eligible for free lunches and the OSS rate. They concluded that the correlational analyses conducted were clear in showing that socioeconomic status tended to illustrate a strong positive relationship with suspension rates at individual schools. Between the years of 1974 and 1998, the rates of student victimization have been relatively stable. On the other hand, the rates of suspension and expulsion have dramatically increased (Schiraldi & Zeidenberg, 2001). The concerning question is what is the cause for the rise in suspension? The findings of Schiraldi and Zeidenberg add to the developing research that questions if the zero tolerance policy is too harsh on students.

Society

Delinquency. While many parents are at work, this allows for suspended students to be on their own for as many days as they were banned from school. This can lead to many types of delinquent behavior from these students. Delinquent behaviors are commonly defined as behaviors that are prohibited by law, such as drug use, vandalism, theft, burglary, and violence (Farrington, 2009). A conductive study was done by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, CDC, the results found that “out-of-school” adolescents were more likely than “in-school” adolescents to have become involved with physical altercations, carrying a weapon, smoking cigarettes, using drugs, drinking alcohol, sexual intercourse with four or more partners (CDC, 1994). Adolescents from low SES, urban, high crime neighborhoods are more likely to engage in delinquent behaviors (Farrington, Loeber, & Stouthamer-Loeber, 2003). There is also research that suggests that the school environment may be a significant influence on adolescent’s high-risk behavior (Wilson, Gottfredson, & Najaka, 2001).

Jail. Various schools rely on police expertise for security assessments, drug awareness programs, staff training, and other special projects (Coon & Travis, 2012). In a study done by Johnson (1990), police and other law enforcement officers were being employed in city schools to decrease the violent crimes that were being committed by youth. The officers employed within the school are becoming concerned with their involvement. There are numerous officers that feel as though their role should not include disciplining students for minor misbehaviors in class, or enforcing schools rules that regard to minor infractions. Officers fear that punishing a student for a petty violation

may cause them to become aggressive and this may lead to an arrest (Coon & Travis, 2012).

School

Academics. Associations between delinquent behaviors and poor academic outcomes in adolescence are significant (Fergusson, Vitaro, Wanner, & Brendgen, 2007). In other words, OSS results in poor academic achievement of students who receive it the most. Because disruptive behavior typically results in lost instructional time and, thus, compromised learning, interventions that recover and maximize instructional time by keeping students in class should produce improvements in academic areas (Lassen, Steele & Sailor, 2006). Academic achievement is severely effected by OSS, because students are not only losing time in the classroom, but most schools do not often require teachers to send home class work or any other type of instruction. Suspended students often find themselves bereft of any form of education. Twenty-six states currently have no requirement to provide suspended or expelled students with alternative education (Schiraldi & Zeidenberg, 2001). Engagement of students is an essential element of learning. There is an abundance of evidence showing increases in both school disengagement and poorer academic achievement from early to late adolescence (McDermott, Mordell, & Stolfus, 2001).

Prevention/Alternative programs. “Providing students with an orderly environment in which to learn and even guaranteeing students’ safety is becoming more and more difficult in many schools in the United States (Posner, 1994).” With the being said, it is important for schools to have prevention plans in place. There are an increasing number of schools teachers and administrators, both public and private, that face severe conflicts with students (“Stop the Violence, 1994). There are quite a few

prevention/alternative options for schools to put into place. In-School Suspension (ISS) is one of most frequently used alternative program used for OSS. ISS has been an accepted alternative for ISS to remove disruptive students from the classroom, but also allowing them to benefit from remaining in school to continue to work on their assignments (Dickinson & Miller, 2006). Many schools have turned to ISS simply because OSS was found to be failing to address core behavior problems and it allows for students to be released onto the streets without supervision (White, 2003). Even though ISS is used in schools as a more effective discipline for problematic behaviors, there are both supporters and opponents. Although, both sides of ISS agree that the program is more effective when there are certain features involved (Dickinson & Miller, 2006). Some of the more important characteristics:

First, a school needs to develop a mission statement for its ISS program and include all staff members in the decision making process. At the same time, an ISS program requires structure, including policies that are "...complete, concise, clear, modifiable, and flexible" (Sheets, 1996, p. 90).

There are also researcher's who have found that when ISS is being implemented, rehabilitation or group counseling should also be used (Dickinson & Miller, 2006). It was found that students who did not participated in the group counseling during their ISS were 15 times more likely to be referred to the principal's office and 13 times more likely to be sent back to ISS (Hochman and Worner, 1987).

Peer mediation is another preventative program that can be used to avert OSS. A five-year longitudinal study done by D.W. Johnson and R.T. Johnson (1995) found highly significant results for teaching students who to be "Peacemakers". They had first

through ninth grade students partake in conflict resolution training. Johnson and Johnson found that:

Students were actually learning conflict resolution measures taught, retained knowledge throughout the school year, were able to apply the conflict resolution procedures to actual conflicts, transfer the procedures to nonclassroom and nonschool settings, use the procedures similarly in family and school settings, and, when given the option, engage in problem solving rather than win-lose negotiations (Johnson & Johnson, 1995, p. 417).

Johnson and Johnson (1996) have the idea that conflicts are not the problem that schools face, it is that schools are too “conflict-avoidant”. With a program like Teaching Students to be Peacemakers, the students will be learning positive tools to use during conflict; self-monitoring, judgment of appropriateness in situations, and modifying behavior accordingly (Johnson & Johnson, 1996). With the skills that students learn in this program, they will be able to resolve any conflicts that they have with other students, family members, teachers, administration, etc. Johnson and Johnson (1996) believe that to be able to manage a conflict beneficially, students must be able to learn the process.

There are many other types of preventative/alternative programs that schools can be implementing into the school day routine. From Dr. Russell Skiba’s *Disciplinary Practices Scale*, individual behavior plans or programs for disruptive students, counseling/therapy, in-class telephones for reporting behavior problems, in-service training and workshops for teachers on classroom management, metal detector and/or video technology, bullying prevention programs, security guard/resource officer/police presence, instruction in social skills, problems solving, or violence prevention, and anger management training.

Preventative/Alternative programs for exceptional learners. Other than the programs explained above, students with disabilities have another option for prevention. When a disabled student is identified as having a behavioral problem, the school must provide that student with a positive behavioral intervention plan (BIP) (Hallahan, Kauffman, & Pullen, 2012). Another way a exceptional student would get a BIP is if he/she is going to be suspended for 10 (or more) consecutive days the IEP team has a FBA and manifest determination meeting; if they find that the student's behavior interferes with school performance, they will develop a BIP (Hartwig & Ruesch, 2000).

Chapter 3

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to determine how principal's perceived suspension based one socioeconomic status, gender, years of experience, and school type.

Participants

The participants were recruited via Qualtrics from the New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association (NJPSA), which consist of principals, vice principals and supervisors of all school aged children from elementary to secondary. There were a total of 13 NJPSA members who responded to the survey. Members who participated responded with their District Factor Group (DFG). To find the DFG, there are certain variables that go into verifying a schools socioeconomic status. After combining the variables together, the school districts are then placed into groups represented by letters ranging from A (lowest socioeconomic district) to J (highest socioeconomic district) (District Factor Group, 2014). One female middle/high school and one male elementary school principal were from DFG "A", two high school male principals and one female elementary/middle school principal were from DFG "B", two male high school and one female middle school principal were from DFG "CD", one female middle school principal was from DFG "FG" and one from "GH", and one male elementary school principal and one female high school principal were from DFG "I". These participants voluntarily completed the survey and their identities were kept anonymous. All data was kept in a locked safe.

Materials

The survey was comprised of sixty questions organized with seven content areas: a) attitude towards discipline in general, b) awareness and enforcement of disciplinary procedures, c) beliefs concerning suspension/expulsion and zero tolerance, d) beliefs about responsibility for handling students misbehaviors, e) attitude toward differential discipline of disadvantaged students or students with disabilities, f) resources available for discipline, and g) attitude toward and availability of prevention strategies and an alternative to exclusion. Of those questions, 49 assessed participants on their opinions using a five-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree). Eleven of the items asked the respondents to estimate how frequently they use certain disciplinary or preventative strategies by ranging them from Very Frequently to Never. The remaining questions were comprised of demographic questions. The content area data was ranked using a five-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree or Disagree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree). The frequency data was ranked using another five-point Likert scale (Very Frequently, Frequently, Occasionally, Rarely, and Never). The demographic questions included gender, district factor group (socioeconomic status), years of experience, and school type. In some cases, reverse scoring was used to interpret data. The reliability of Dr. Russell Skiba's scale was good for purposes of research, $\alpha = 0.67$.

Design

The design of this study was a cross-sectional analysis. Due to some limitations in during the study, there was no analytic data found. The study revolved solely around frequency and descriptive statistics.

Procedure

The study had four different independent variables; socioeconomic status, gender, years of experience and school type. The dependent variable was the “outlook on suspension.” The participants went through sixty questions and then answered four demographic questions that were used to interpret data. All information remained anonymous; no participants were asked to give their names. The only defining character was the district factor group, but not enough information is provided in that context to make a personal identification.

Chapter 4

Results

This study surveyed the correlation between gender, socioeconomic status, and years of experience to principals' in elementary, middle, and high schools and their positions on out of school suspension.

Hypothesis One

Hypothesis one tested the correlation between the gender of the principal and his/her outlooks on suspension. It was believed that female principals would be more likely to favor anti-suspension. After completing an independent samples t-test to compare gender of principals to the total score, no significance was found for either gender. However, the majority of principals, no matter the gender, responded negatively to the use of suspension. Of the 13 subjects in this study, 84.6% strongly agreed that “conversations with students referred to the office are important, and should be factored into most decisions about disciplinary consequences (Skiba, 2004).” Additionally, 53.8% of the 13 participants disagreed that the majority of this school’s discipline problems could be solved if the most persistent troublemakers could be removed (See Table 1). A high 76.9% of principal’s strongly agreed that putting prevention programs into place would help to reduce the need for suspension and expulsion. On the contrary, 46.2% agreed that “repeat offenders should receive more severe disciplinary consequences than first-time students (Skiba, 2004).”

Table 1

Frequency Question S3

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|-------|-----------|---------|------------------|-----------------------|
| Valid | 1.00 | 7 | 53.8 | 53.8 | 53.8 |
| | 2.00 | 2 | 15.4 | 15.4 | 69.2 |
| | 3.00 | 2 | 15.4 | 15.4 | 84.6 |
| | 4.00 | 2 | 15.4 | 15.4 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 13 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

Hypothesis Two

Hypothesis two examined the correlation between principals working in low socioeconomic status and the six factors. It was hypothesized that the principals in low SES would be more likely to favor both suspension and the zero tolerance policies. However, there was not a normal distribution between participants, therefore, no statistical analyses could be performed.

Hypothesis Three

The final hypothesis combined school type and years of experience and their relationship to principals' attitudes on suspension and zero tolerance policies. It was believed that high school principals with little years of experience would be more likely to suspend his/her students and would support the policies of zero tolerance. With not having a normal distribution with participants, no statistical evaluations could be completed. Although, 46.2% of principals disagreed that the zero tolerance policy is increasing the number of students being suspended or expelled.

Chapter 5

Discussion

Conclusions

After assessing the data established from this research, there is still a very important question that has gone unanswered. If principals are considering suspension as an unsuccessful disciplinary tool and they are focused on prevention, what is causing the rise in out-of-school suspension? After reviewing all of the descriptive data, it seems as though most principals, no matter their DFG, gender, years of experience, or school type, are finding suspension to be ineffective. Each principal in every school district, privileged or poverty-stricken, is dealing with a unique situation. Female principal's may be more nurturing than the more authoritative male. Elementary and middle school principal's do not ordinarily contend with such behavioral manners that high school principals manage. This would very well lead to high school principals having to suspend their students more frequently, because of the policies that the students are defying. Socioeconomics may also be a reason as to why particular principals would rather have their students suspended than be in their school wrecking havoc. Principals in a lower socioeconomic status district tend to have a considerable magnitude of students who are not being supervised at home, due to their parents being at work for a great deal of time. This could lead to corrupted behaviors both at home and in school, which ultimately leads to those principals having to suspend their students more frequently.

Essentially, the gathered statistics explain the genuine feelings about suspension by principals. Numerous are sincerely focusing on preventing their students from time on the streets, academic disengagement, and juvenile delinquency. Many of the principals

consider prevention programs to be the most efficient way to maintain positive behavior in their schools. The concluded results allow for a better understanding of what demographic factors are involved in suspension of students. The collected data may permit educators and school employees to come across more rational ways of disciplining their students. However, the previously declared data should be interpreted with caution due to the low sample size.

Comparison of Data

When comparing these results to Dr. Skiba's, 2004, there are great differences. The most imperative reason that these results were so diverse was that he was able to collect much more data. A total of 267 surveys were completed in lieu of Skiba, making his response rate 14%. Comparatively, this survey only received 13 respondents and an additional ten that started the survey but did not finish. It is also possible that the results from this research were unique because the respondents were from a different state, New Jersey. Skiba conducted his research on principals in the Indian Department of Education. New Jersey has one of the toughest codes of student conduct in all of the United States.

Limitations

Regarding the limitations of this research, there is much to be discussed. First of all, this study only used one state, New Jersey, to collect principal's surveys. Having other states involved would have lead to a more valid study. In turn, only using New Jersey lead to an exceedingly small sample size. The small sample could reflect upon the validity of the collected statistics. For both correlations both highly significant and data that was not found significant, there could be abundant deviations in the results if there were more participants. Another limitation during the study was the dilemma of self-

report bias. Some of the questions on the survey were very personal and borderline prejudice. Most people do not see themselves as being a racist being, and in all probability, would not completely answer the questions honestly. The final limitation of this study was the uneven gender comparison. Much of this research was based on the gender of the participant. In this study, males accounted for 46.2% of the respondents, while females accounted for 53.8%. Even though this percentage isn't too far off, the results related to gender may have been more valid with a more comparable number. Overall, it was extremely difficult to get in contact with principals from around the state. The survey was placed in a newsletter and sent out via email to all NJPSA members. The survey was sent out multiple times, but did not get enough attention in the newsletter. It was with great regret that this research was only able to get a small population sample of 13.

Future Directions

While all of these variables (gender, SES, years of experience, and school type/level) seem as though they would be responsible for causing the rise in suspension, there is something else involved that has not been uncovered in this research. Further research should include variables related more towards the students, other school staff, parents, school policies, etc. There is a reason that suspension is on the rise, and it is important that it is uncovered. There are other steps that future researchers should take to ensure minor limitations within their research. To better meet validity standards, future investigations should include more than just a single state. This will allow for more respondents, which in turn allows for better influence. Another way to send out the survey should be explored; direct e-mail, mail, physical handouts, etc.

Again, future researchers need to look for the reason as to why there is such a dramatic rise in suspension. With the answer to this education can take the next step in determining how to keep their students engaged within the school. Working with principals to determine the best way to punish their students in a more effective manner. Look more into the students and question them on their opinions for how they believe proper punishment for specific violations should be handled. Another question worth examining is whether or not there are other variables involved with principal's attitudes towards suspension? Does one of the variables (gender, SES, years of experience, school type/level) have more of an input than another? This research leaves much room for further investigation, and it is tremendously important to understand as much as we can about suspension of students.

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Appendix A

Items Included in the Disciplinary Practice Scale

Questions will be answered by 1 (Strongly Agree), 2 (Agree), 3 (Neutral), 4 (Disagree), 5 (Strongly Disagree)

A. Attitude toward Discipline in General

- I feel that getting to know students individually is an important part of discipline
- Although it would be nice to get to know students on an individual basis, especially those who need help, my duties as an administrator simply don't allow me the time.
- I feel it is critical to work with parents before suspending a student from school.
- Regardless of the severity of a student's behavior, my objective as a principal is to keep all students in school.
- The primary purpose of discipline is to teach appropriate skills to the disciplined student.
- Students should receive some recognition or reward for appropriate behavior
- It is sad but true that, in order to meet increasingly high standards of academic accountability, some students will probably have to be removed from school.
- The majority of this school's discipline problems could be solved if we could only remove the most persistent troublemakers.
- Schools cannot afford to tolerate students who disrupt the learning environment

B. Awareness and Enforcement of Disciplinary Procedures

- My school keeps detailed records regarding student suspension and expulsion
- Teachers at my school are aware of school disciplinary policies.
- I believe students at my school are aware of school disciplinary policies.
- Violence is getting worse in my school.
- Disciplinary policies are strictly enforced in my school.

C. Beliefs concerning Suspension/Expulsion and Zero Tolerance

- Out of school suspension makes students less likely to misbehave in the future.
- Zero tolerance makes a significant contribution to maintaining order at my school.
- I believe suspension and expulsion allow students time away from school that encourages them to think about their behavior.
- Suspension and expulsion do not really solve discipline problems.
- Out-of-school suspension is a necessary tool for maintaining school order.
- Zero tolerance sends a clear message to disruptive students about appropriate behaviors in school.
- Students who are suspended or expelled are only getting more time on the streets that will enable them to get in more trouble.

- I believe suspension is unnecessary if we provide a positive school climate and challenging instruction.
- Out-of-school suspension is used at this school only as a last resort.
- Regardless of whether it is effective, suspension is virtually our only option in disciplining disruptive students.
- Certain students are not gaining anything from school and disrupt the learning environment for others. In such a case, the use of suspension and expulsion is justified to preserve the learning environment for students who wish to learn.
- Zero tolerance increases the number of students being suspended or expelled.

D. Beliefs about Responsibility for Handling Student Misbehaviors

- The primary responsibility for teaching children how to behave appropriately in school belongs to parents.
- Teachers ought to be able to manage the majority of students' misbehavior in their classroom.
- Most if not all discipline problems come from inadequacies in the student's home situation.
- Schools must take responsibility for teaching students how to get along and behave appropriately in school.

E. Attitude toward Differential Discipline of Disadvantaged Students or Students with Disabilities

- Teachers at this school were for the most part adequately trained by their teacher-training program to handle problems of misbehavior and discipline.
- I need additional resources to increase my school's capacity to reduce and prevent troublesome behaviors.
- Disciplining disruptive students is time consuming and interferes with other important functions in the school.

F. Resources Available for Discipline

- Suspensions and expulsions hurt students by removing them from academic learning time.
- In-school suspension is a viable alternative disciplinary practice to suspension and expulsion.
- Please rate the extent to which the following programs are used in maintaining discipline and promoting safety in your school:
 - (a). Social skills and conflict resolution training for all students
 - (b). Individual behavior plans or programs for disruptive students
 - (c). Counseling or therapy
 - (d). Peer mediation
 - (e). In-class telephones for reporting behavior problems
 - (f). In-service training and workshops for teachers on classroom management

- (g). Metal detector and/or video technology
- (h). Bullying prevention programs
- (i). Security guard, resource officer, or police presence
- (j). Instruction in social skill, problem-solving, or violence prevention
- (k). Anger management training
- I believe that putting in place prevention programs (e.g., bullying programs, conflict resolution, improved classroom management) can reduce the need for suspension and expulsion.
- Time spent on prevention programs or individualized behavior programming is wasted if students are not willing to take responsibility for their behavior.
- Prevention programs would be a useful addition at our school, but there is simply not enough time in the day.
- I have noticed that time spent in developing and implementing prevention programs pays off in terms of decreased disruption and disciplinary incidents.

G. Attitude toward and Availability of Prevention Strategies as an Alternative to Exclusion

- Students with disabilities who engage in disruptive behavior need a different approach to discipline than students in general education.
- Repeat offenders should receive more severe disciplinary consequences than first-time offenders.
- A student's academic record should be taken into account in assigning disciplinary consequences.
- Students with disabilities account for a disproportionate amount of the time spent on discipline at this school.
- Disciplinary regulations for students with disabilities create a separate system of discipline that makes it more difficult to enforce discipline at this school.
- Disadvantaged students require a different approach to discipline than other students.
- Students from different ethnic backgrounds have different emotional and behavioral needs.
- Suspension and expulsion are unfair to minority students.
- Disciplinary consequences should be scaled in proportion to the severity of the problem behavior.
- Conversations with students referred to the office are important, and should be factored into most decisions about disciplinary consequences.

Appendix B

Items Added to the Disciplinary Practice Scale

Demographic Questions

- Gender
 - (Male or Female)
- Please choose the following District Factor Group for your school district
 - (A, B, CD, DE, FG, GH, I, or J)
- Years of experience as a principal/supervisor/disciplinarian
 - (Less than 3, 3-5, 6-9, 10 or more)
- Choose the setting in which you are the principal/supervisor/disciplinarian. Please check all that apply.
 - (Elementary School, Middle School, High School)