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A CASE STUDY: THE EFFECTIVENESS OF AN IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION  
PROGRAM AT CHEROKEE HIGH SCHOOL

By  
Scott D. Agnew

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the  
Masters of Arts Degree  
of  
The Graduate School  
at  
Rowan University  
April 15, 2004

Approved by

Professor

Date Approved

4/15/04

## ABSTRACT

Scott D. Agnew

The Effectiveness of an In-School Suspension Program at Cherokee High School  
2003/2004

Dr. Robert Kern

Master of Arts in School Administration

The purpose of this research project was to evaluate the effectiveness on an in-school suspension program at Cherokee High School. The intern evaluated three aspects of the program. The intern sought to identify if the population of the school views the program as a deterrent, as well as evaluate the rehabilitation aspect of the program. Additionally, the intern wanted to see how both the classroom and in-school suspension teachers at the high school were applying the program.

Surveys and interviews were used to collect and analyze data from the population of Cherokee High School. The intern administered surveys to a sample of students and teachers to identify their views on the current in-school suspension in place at Cherokee High School. Interviews were conducted on the current instructors of the programs and an assistant principal to identify how the policies and procedures match with what the teachers and students believe.

The findings of the study suggest that the in-school suspension program is generally effective in disciplining students who break the disciplinary code at Cherokee High School. The most important factor is that the affected student stays in school and completes assignments sent by his/her classroom teachers. There are, however, other areas that could be addressed to enhance the programs effectiveness.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge the selected students and teachers who provided the data to complete the study. A special thanks is extended to my supervisor/mentor, Mrs. Margaret Martin for her guidance and support throughout the completion of this study and the entire internship. Additionally, I would like to thank the Lenape Regional School District administration for allowing me to advance my leadership skills at Cherokee High School.

Lastly, I would like to thank my wife Colleen, daughter Katie, and son Brett for having the patience and dedication throughout my graduate career. It has been their support that has allowed me to complete my master's program in educational administration.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

#### Focus of the Study

Educational institutions have increasingly come under close government scrutiny, and been challenged to ensure that all students have the opportunity to succeed both socially and academically. Failure to achieve this goal may have an adverse impact on the amount of federal aid that the school was eligible to receive.

In spite of the efforts of school professionals, a segment of the school population refuses to conform to the school rules and regulations. The behaviors exhibited by these students' compromises learning for all students and, at times, for teachers in the classroom. The focus of this study was an in-school suspension and it's effect on changing problematic student behaviors.

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to evaluate the effectiveness of the in-school suspension program at Cherokee High School. Specifically, the study intended to identify if the program was a deterrent to unacceptable student behavior. The study also evaluated the rehabilitation aspect of the program using a case study design. The findings of the study were given to the principals of Cherokee High School and the teachers who currently run the programs with the hope that the results can be used to enhance the program effectiveness.

## Definitions

*Administrative Warning-* An administrative warning is a minor disciplinary action that may be given to students who are referred, by a teacher, to an assistant principal for violating the disciplinary code.

*Administrative Detention-* An administrative detention is disciplinary action that requires the student to report to a designated location monitored by a teacher for one hour after the school day.

*Saturday Work Alternative Program (SWAP) –* A SWAP is a form of suspension that requires the student to report to a designated area at the high school on a Saturday morning. During the three and one half hours the student must clean designated areas of the school. Teachers are used as proctors for the program. In some cases assistant principals may allow the affected student to use this program as an alternative to an in-school suspension.

*In-school suspension-* The in-school suspension program is for students who are involved in specific disciplinary actions. Students, engaged in violent acts aimed at other individuals or students involved in substance abuse, are not eligible for this program.

*Out-of-school suspension-* An out-of school suspension is disciplinary action that results in the student's dismissal from school for a limited period. Students, who are involved in violent acts aimed at an individual or individuals, will be given this type of suspension. Additionally, students who do not wish to serve an in-school suspension may be given an out-of-school suspension, with parental consent.

*Administrative Review-* An administrative review is utilized for students with continued disciplinary problems. It usually takes place following a sixth or seventh



suspension and includes a meeting between the student along with his/her parents or guardians, the assistant principal, the principal, and the student's counselor. The meeting's intent is to discuss the student's behavior and decide on possible educational changes for the student.

### Limitations

The study was limited by the fact that it was conducted in only one school. All data was collected utilizing questionnaires, interviews and statistical information from disciplinary records in this same school.

Further limitations included the fact that there were two in-school suspension rooms at Cherokee High School in two different buildings. One is used for the ninth and tenth grades and one is for grades eleven and twelve. There may have been a philosophical difference in the way the program was implemented since there were different teachers who staff the two in-school suspension classrooms. This introduced the possibility of creating a different culture in each classroom.

### Setting of the Study

Cherokee High School is one of four high schools in the Lenape Regional High School District. The district draws from seven sending districts and includes grades nine through twelve. Students living in Mt. Laurel attend Lenape High School, which was also the first high school, built in 1958. Shawnee High School opened its doors in 1971 and currently houses students residing in Medford and Medford Lakes. The newest school, which opened this past fall, is Seneca and houses students from Southampton, Shamong, Tabernacle, and Woodland. Cherokee High School opened its doors in 1975 and houses students from Evesham Township.

The geographic sending area of this district is three hundred and fifty square miles, which is larger than six counties in the state of New Jersey, including neighboring Camden County. It is the largest of 44 school districts in Burlington County. The entire population of the sending district is approximately 135,000. The Lenape Regional School District has been forced to expand due to an increase in population in its 40 years of existence. Additions were made to each of the first three schools, and by the late 1990's there was a need for another high school to be built to accommodate the growing population within the district. The majority of voters of the seven municipalities approved the bond referendum that was used to fund the building of the new high school, and expand Cherokee High by building a new school attached to the original building that could accommodate an additional 1,500 students. The new school at Cherokee High School (Cherokee High School South) opened its doors to students in 2001 and the new high school located in the Tabernacle, NJ. opened its doors after many delays in 2003.

The Township of Evesham has a population of 42,300. Currently there are 166 businesses involved in retail trade and 180 professional, scientific, and technical services. Additionally, there are 15 businesses in the manufacturing field. The unemployment rate in Evesham Township has fluctuated between two and three percent during the past two years although it spiked to three and one tenth percent last July, which was the highest it has been since February of 1996.

Evesham Township has the reputation of being middle to upper class community. 91 percent of the student population at Cherokee High School were Caucasian, four percent were Asian, and three percent were African American. 32 percent of the parents at Cherokee High School were either divorced or remarried. Generally, there has been

strong parental and community support for the school and this was evident in the history of school budget elections. Most of the budgets have passed, although the last two budgets did not which has adversely affected some of the programs in the schools. When the budget did not pass all of the town councils had to agree on the reduction set forth by the superintendent and the board of education. This was not always an easy task especially when those individuals had to answer to their constituents; however, historically there has been cooperation between the two entities in reaching an agreement on budget reductions. In the last two years the district had to make some cuts that have had an impact on many families in the district such as eliminating late bus transportation and summer school.

The district administration is currently preparing an initiative that would require another bond referendum. Lenape, Shawnee, and Cherokee High School North are in need of major repairs due to aging facilities. Committees will be formed in these schools to decide what needs to be overhauled and what additional repairs must be made to each school. The superintendent wants to bring these schools to the same level as Seneca High School and Cherokee High School South. The bond referendum, which is estimated at 50 million dollars, will be put to the vote in March of 2005.

The average teacher in the Lenape Regional High School District has 12 years of experience and a BA plus 30 graduate credits. There are over 600 teachers in the district and there have been a large number of new teachers due to an increase in student population and retirement buyouts in recent years. The district offers many advanced placement courses and is in the process of affiliating with Burlington County College to offer students the opportunity to earn college credits while they are still in high school.

Most course curriculums are revised every five years and this is accomplished through the collaboration of individual teachers from all four schools. The administration is supportive of professional growth and offers a variety of learning opportunities to the teachers. "Research for Better Teaching I and II", a 2-year course is the longest running initiative from the district on professional improvement. The program is in its seventh year and most teachers in the district have gone through the program. The purpose of the program is to analyze the latest research on learning and to offer different instructional strategies to use in the classroom. This program is a requirement for all non-tenured teachers. The district is currently offering a refresher course for the teachers who took the course when it was first offered.

#### Significance of the Study

One of the greatest challenges in the educational system has been in effectively dealing with students who continually break the rules. Although this behavior is not a new phenomenon, current social norms mandate that schools find ways to discipline students without removing them from the school building. Today dual career families and single parent homes create a situation that leaves an individual who is not in school, in an unsupervised environment. For troubled students, this situation can provide the opportunity for further problems. Additionally, an out-of-school suspension may cause an individual to fall behind academically. Removing a student from the school places the student at risk academically and does nothing to enhance the development of the social skills to eliminate the inappropriate behavior.

Because violation of school rules and regulations may have a negative impact on many people, including the offending student and his/her parents or guardians, teachers

and administrators, and other students, it poses a significant problem in the school system. School administrators must find ways of handling the problem without further compromising learning. Use of an in-school suspension program may have merit as a disciplinary action for certain infractions

Four years ago, Cherokee High School established an in-school suspension program. The intent of the program was to keep the students, who break the disciplinary code, in the school. This would ensure that those students do not have the opportunity to get into more trouble and fall behind academically. In addition, counseling was provided to correct the unacceptable behavior of the student. This program was not intended to address more serious infractions, such as, fighting or substance abuse.

The purpose of the intern's study was to analyze the effectiveness of the in-school suspension program at Cherokee High School. In order to evaluate the effectiveness of an in-school suspension program it was necessary to identify if the program has led to a reduction in disciplinary infractions. Any consequence to a broken rule cannot be a pleasant experience. The in-school suspension system cannot be seen as an easy day in school. It was also important to assess the amount of individual or group counseling that occurs in the program. This was a very important issue to address because an objective of any disciplinary program is to attempt to correct the unacceptable behavior. Finally, the intern wanted to determine if the teachers in the school were working to ensure that the program's intent was being achieved. Teachers are required to send appropriate supplemental work for their course to the in-school suspension teacher by homeroom on the day the student is assigned the suspension. This work should correspond with the work the student's class is doing on that particular day. It should also be enough work to

last the equivalent of one class period to ensure the student will stay on task. In summary, the questions that guided the intern's research study were:

1. To what degree is the in-school suspension program seen as a deterrent for students who may break the disciplinary code?
2. How much counseling takes place in the in-school suspension program to correct students' behaviors and how does this affect subsequent student behavior?
3. How are teachers in the school meeting the in-school suspension program objectives?

#### Organization of the Study

The remainder of the study is organized in the following manner; Chapter 2: Review of the Literature, Chapter 3: Design of the Study, Chapter 4: Presentation of the Research Findings, Chapter 5: Conclusions, Implications and Further Study.

## Chapter 2

### Review of the Literature

The literature provided support for the fact that learning cannot take place when there are discipline problems in a classroom. Even minor discipline infractions have a negative impact on the achievement levels of other students in the class (Wenglinsky, 1998). While unacceptable student behavior must be handled through a structured disciplinary process, the goal of the process must be to assist the student in developing appropriate behaviors.

In 1978, 60% of schools polled utilized out-of-school suspensions to discipline students for attendance problems such as class cutting or truancy (Chabot & Garibaldi, 1982). In the United States today, out of school suspensions are the most commonly used forms of discipline (Mendez & Knoff, 2003) in spite of the fact that they have not been shown to be effective in correcting the behaviors. Additionally, out of school suspensions often have a negative effect on the student and, possibly, on society in general.

Deridder (1991) looked at reasons why students dropped out of school and found that being suspended is one of the top three reasons for dropping out. He also noted that dropouts have five times the number of disciplinary infractions as students who remain in school. Two other studies (Black, 1999; DeRidder, 1991) concluded that people, who are high school dropouts, are often involved in criminal activity. Costenbader and Markson (1998) further suggest that students who are suspended have an increased chance of criminal activity. Obviously, it is in the interest of the educational system to find

alternative means of discipline because it may indeed become a societal issue involving these individual later in life.

Other studies have looked at the impact of out of school suspensions on the student. One of the common attributes of students who are suspended is the feeling of rejection (Black, 1999; DeRidder, 1991) and recognition that the school cannot effectively handle the problem. DeRidder (1991) also suggests that students who get suspended have resentment for any kind of authority. Both Black (1999) and DeRidder (1991) have concluded that one of the major problems with out of school suspension is that there usually is no plan of action to correct the inappropriate behavior. This is a punitive measure that does not include any counseling to correct the behavior.

Another problem with out of school suspensions is a disproportionate number of minorities are suspended, as compared with the general population (Chabot & Garibaldi, 1982; Credit, 2001; Mendez & Knoff, 2003). Although black students make up just 17% of the general school population, they account for 32% of the suspensions (Mendez & Knoff, 2003). Explanations for this over representation of black students being suspended include cultural or societal misunderstandings, a lack of adequate teacher and / or administration training, or discrimination. Minorities may not “connect” with the curriculum and may feel helpless in their situation. Their course of action may be to rebel against school rules (Mendez & Knoff, 2003). Additional studies have suggested that there are other similarities between students who are suspended. Academic ability seems to be a factor as students with learning disabilities or overall low ability are suspended more often than others (DeRidder, 1991; Fox & Elder, 1980).



A study by Black (1991) estimated that over 1.5 million students missed at least one day of school in 1999, due to suspension. There was no indication, in the study, of how many students missed more than one day. The study also did not break down the numbers with regard to the types of infractions. A study by Mendez & Knoff (2003) found that the majority of out of school suspensions were for minor infractions such as disobedience, class or detention cutting, and class disruptions. Other authors (Black, 1999; DeRidder, 1991) suggest that out of school suspensions for non-serious offenses are detrimental to all involved in the educational system. One of the strongest arguments against out of school suspension is that it does nothing to address the reason behind the infraction and does not address ways to remedy the problem (DeRidder, 1991).

In addition to the previously mentioned negative aspects of out of school suspension, there have been recent laws and lawsuits that have made the suspension process more complicated. In *Goss vs. Lopez*, the United States Supreme Court maintained that a student's right to an education is protected under the Fourteenth Amendment (Black, 1999). The ruling mandated that schools could suspend a student no longer than ten consecutive days without formal due process. A suspension over a ten-day time period could only occur after a full hearing on the matter. The Individuals with Disabilities Act provides that students with learning or behavior disabilities would have different considerations when it came to discipline (Black, 1999). This law mandates that school districts pay attention to the needs of individual students and infers that simply administering suspensions might not be a remedy for all students. A Children's Defense Fund Study (Fox & Elder, 1980) concluded that the practice of out-of-school suspensions

should be eliminated, except for the most severe disciplinary infractions. This conclusion was based on all the negative aspects of removing a student from the school.

Since there is so much criticism of the out-of-school approach to suspension, the better alternative may be to keep students, who break the disciplinary code, in school. There has been much research on the positive aspects of in-school suspension programs. Two studies (Fox & Elder, 1980; Berger & Graham, 1998) have indicated that a good in-school suspension (I.S.S.) program will promote a better learning environment for the students who are not disciplinary problems. Learning is not possible unless there is order in the classroom. Additionally, the student who is placed in the program will learn the expected behavior and will be able to use that upon returning to the classroom. Two studies (Fox & Elder, 1980; Berger & Graham, 1998) support the idea that students who are administered the in-school suspensions have better self-esteem upon completion of the program. During an in-school suspension program, students must complete their academic course work; they also receive counseling as part of the program.

Accomplishing such tasks provides students with a feeling of self worth. Another positive aspect of I.S.S. is that students are forced to stay on course with their peers in their classes (Fox & Elder, 1980). This will reduce the tension as a student enters back into the general population. Two studies (Fox & Elder, 1980; Berger & Graham, 1998) also concluded that in-school programs facilitated public relations, especially with parents. Today, there are many one-parent households or two parent households in which both parents work today. The I.S.S. programs address the parental and societal concerns that are mandated by working families.

Another suggested benefit of I.S.S. programs is that student dropouts will decrease (Fox & Elder, 1980). This may be due to the fact that students tend to feel less rejected by teachers and administrators. They feel that the school is working with them and doing everything possible to correct the problematic behavior. The decline in the dropout rate seems to be the most important attribute of I.S.S (Berger & Graham, 1998). One of the most important goals of the educational system is to allow all students to be productive members of society.

Review of the literature, on ISS programs, also offers advice on what makes the most effective programs. Some of the literature (Sanders, 2001; Berger & Graham, 1998; Mendez & Knoff, 2003) list counseling as one of the most important aspects of any program. The program must address the individual problem and work to correct it before sending the student back to his/her classes. Additionally, academics must be addressed. In order for a program to be successful, the classroom teachers must devote themselves to the program by ensuring the student gets the appropriate instructional materials (Fox & Elder, 1980). Small class size is also important (Fox & Elder), in order to ensure that counseling and academic assistance is available on an individual basis.

Parental support is a key component in the success of any educational program (Sanders 2001; Mendez & Knoff, 2003). The more parents are involved in a positive way, the better the chances are of eliminating or reducing inappropriate and/or unacceptable student behavior. A study conducted in 1974-75 (Chobot & Garibaldi, 1982) showed that there was little parental support with regards to in school suspension programs. Today most parents support in-school suspension programs as an appropriate measure to discipline their children (Berger & Graham, 1998). One program today

incorporates city officials and police officers in their system in an attempt to get as many people as possible involved (Berger & Graham, 1998). These people offer their life and career experiences to affected students in an attempt to correct the behaviors. Another study (Mendez & Knoff, 2003) also suggested incorporating outside services to be utilized by the students and their parents to ensure long-term success in correcting the behavior.

In order for an in-school suspension program to be effective, it must have a clear purpose. It cannot be something to merely keep the students, who break the rules, in school and off the street. Written objectives must be developed and met before a student is admitted back to the general population (Sanders, 2001).

The data collected (Black, 1999; Chobot & Garibaldi, 1982) have indicated that there is indeed a need for alternative discipline such as I.S.S. to reduce the occurrences and negative impact of traditional suspensions. By working to actively correct a situation rather than using punitive measures, educators are enhancing the chances of allowing those individuals to become productive members of society and, at the same time, working to ensure a better learning environment for all the stakeholders in the institution.

## Chapter 3

### Description of the Research Design

#### Development and Design of the Study

The intern utilized a multi-instrument approach to collect the necessary data for the study. The instruments included questionnaires, interviews and review and collection of relevant historical data.

Separate questionnaires were constructed for the teachers and the students in the schools. Both forms had five choices that the participants could choose from when answering their questions. There were no open-ended questions. The choices ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Questions were intended to identify the opinions of the subjects regarding the in-school suspension program at Cherokee High School.

Interviews were directed to current faculty members, including instructors of the in-school suspension program, at both Cherokee High School North and Cherokee High School South. The interviews were structured in order to ascertain how the program is being implemented.

Lastly, the intern collected suspension rates from 1998-2003. This data was analyzed to determine significant changes in the disciplinary process during the specified time frame.

#### Sampling Technique and Data Collection

The teacher-based questionnaires (Appendix B) were distributed to 100 teachers who were randomly selected. This number represents slightly more than 50% of the entire

teaching population of the school. The intern received 19 completed surveys to use for the study. Teachers were asked specific questions in order to discover if they effectively utilize the program to keep in-school suspension students on pace with the rest of the class. Other questions were constructed to identify concerns that the teachers may have had with the administration of the program. The intent of these questions was to identify if teachers felt overwhelmed by the preparation required, or by the time constraints imposed, by the program. Teachers were also asked to give their views on the program's success in improving student behavior. Finally, the teachers were questioned regarding the amount of counseling that they believe takes place in the program.

The student-based questionnaires (Appendix A) were administered to students currently enrolled in U.S. History 1 Level 3 and 4, U.S. History 2 Level 3 and 4 and World Cultures Level 3 and 4. The intern randomly selected 40 completed surveys to use for the study. This purposive sampling was conducted in order to ensure that the data would be meaningful. The intern wanted to include, in the sample, students who had been involved in the program as well as those who had not.

The student questionnaire had two sections. Section 1 was to be completed by all students, while section two was to be completed only by those students who had been involved in an in-school suspension. The goal of the questions in section one was to discover what the students knew about the program. Students, who had not experienced an in-school suspension, would only know of the program through word of mouth from their peers. The answer to these questions may be useful in distinguishing if students in the school really understood the program or if there is a need for education regarding the program. The answer to some of the questions in this section may also identify if the

program is a deterrent to poor behavior by students who have not previously had discipline problems.

For students who were assigned to the program, the questions in section two became a primary source of information on the program. Through the use of the instrument, the students evaluated the appropriateness of the assigned class work and its effect on their ability to keep up with their class. Additionally, the students answered questions that were intended to ascertain if the suspension was a deterrent to future inappropriate behavior in school.

Personal interviews (Appendix C) were conducted with the present in-school suspension instructors in both schools. Some of the questions that were asked in the interviews were similar to those asked of the teachers in the survey questionnaires. However, the primary purpose of the instructor interviews was to gain knowledge of the structure and content of the in-school suspension program and to determine congruence across both settings. The instructors were also asked to evaluate the commitment, of the teachers, to the program. Like the teachers, the instructors were questioned regarding the amount of individual counseling that was occurring in the program. The intern also tried to solicit the instructors' opinions on the positive aspects of the program, as well as any negative ones.

The intern also interviewed a former in-school suspension instructor, who is currently teaching, at Cherokee High School, in another field. This individual was asked the same questions as the current in-school suspension instructors were asked. The intent of this interview was to identify policies or procedures that may have changed and to evaluate

the effect of those changes. The intern was also interested in the former instructor's perception of the effectiveness of the program.

In order to solicit input from the administration at Cherokee High School, the intern interviewed (Appendix D) an assistant principal. This individual was chosen for the interview because she was an administrator prior to the development of the in-school suspension program. The assistant principal's longevity, at the school, meant that she was also in a position to evaluate the effectiveness of the program in terms of a decline in delinquent student behavior. As an administrator, this individual was also able to comment on the program as it was currently operating.

The intern also compiled discipline statistics from Cherokee High School to analyze for the study. Suspension rates dating back to the beginning of the in-school suspension program were used. The analysis of this data allowed the intern the opportunity to identify any significant changes in the area of discipline over the last 5 years.

#### Data Analysis Plan

The use of this multi-instrument approach facilitated data collection by allowing the intern to utilize the tools most appropriate to each sample population. The questions asked through interviews and surveys allowed the intern to obtain meaningful data to judge the effectiveness on the in-schools suspension program at Cherokee High School. Additionally, the review of disciplinary statistics provided information that allowed for conclusions to be drawn regarding the effectiveness of other methods of discipline as compared with the in-school suspension.



## Chapter 4

### Presentation of Research Findings

#### Introduction

The results of this study were based on feedback from the participants in the research study, and on the suspension rates at Cherokee High School since the adoption of the in-school suspension program. The intent of the study was to evaluate the effectiveness of the in-school suspension program at Cherokee High School from the perspective of both the students and the teachers. The in-school suspension program was established to allow the students, who were disciplined, to have the opportunity to keep up with their peers in academic classes and to correct their behavior through participating in individual and group counseling. The multi-instrument approach, utilized for the study, provided meaningful data that could be used to evaluate the program's effectiveness.

How do students in the school perceive in-school suspension as a correctional program? A review of the data suggested that students were well informed on some aspects of the in school suspension program, but not on others. When students were asked if they thought I.S.S. was an easy day in school, 40% agreed. Since only 25% of the students surveyed had served time in I.S.S., this number seems to indicate that I.S.S. is not where a student would want to be placed.

There were also misconceptions, among the students, about the I.S.S program. Seventy percent of the surveyed students thought a student would be referred into the program for offenses such as fighting and substance abuse. However, students involved

in these infractions were not considered for the program. Fifty percent of the students believed that a student must complete all assigned work before leaving the program. The interviews conducted by the intern, with the current in-school suspension instructor and an assistant principal, indicated that students were required to stay on task the entire time, except for lavatory and lunch breaks. If a student worked throughout the day and did not get his/her required assignments finished, the work was assigned as homework. If a student did not stay on task, he/she might have been assigned an additional day, or the student might have been removed and assigned an out-of-school suspension. This was a rare occurrence, since the instructors of the programs indicated that they made every effort to work with the involved students to ensure their success in the program.

Sixty percent of the students questioned thought the behaviors of the individuals, who went through the program, did not change. This belief may be due to the fact that, in school year 2002-2003, there were 61 repeat offenders out of the 151 students who served time in I.S.S. Obviously, for the students who were repeat offenders, I.S.S. was not a deterrent to their future acts. Conversely, there were 90 students who did not return to I.S.S. after their first visit. It would appear that the program might be a deterrent for some students, but not for others.

Questions related to the counseling, that took place during I.S.S., were directed only to the students who had been assigned to the program. The intern believed those students were the only ones who could provide accurate data in this area. Only 6% of the students questioned either strongly agreed or agreed that adequate counseling took place while they were in the program. Seventy-two percent of the students questioned either strongly disagreed or disagreed with the same statement. While this data appeared to suggest that

counseling was not taking place in the program, it is possible that the students did not recognize interactions with the instructor, regarding their behavior, as counseling. They also may not have been able to identify other methods that were used as counseling tools. Either way there was a perception, from the students who have been assigned to in-school suspension, that there was not an emphasis on counseling in the program.

The students' perception regarding the lack of counseling was also supported by interviews with the in-school suspension instructors. Due to limited human resources, it appears that Cherokee High School did very little, if any, one on one counseling with students assigned to in-school suspension. The data collected through the interviews indicated that the main responsibility of the instructor in the program was to keep the students on task. On occasion the instructor might have engaged in informal conversation with individuals regarding their problems with school policy, but this was not done consistently. Most of the counseling was accomplished through behavior modification packets. These packets contained behavior modification activities and were used when a student finished his/her class work. The packets contained information for specific infractions such as, smoking, class cutting, frequent lateness, etc. One of the current I.S.S. instructors made up his own packets for students who may have had more than one stay in I.S.S. Both of the I.S.S. instructors indicated, during the interviews, that they reviewed the students' responses to the behavior modification packets, if time permitted. Other methods of counseling included having the students write a reflective essay regarding their stay in the program. This writing activity forced students to evaluate their infraction and determine if the consequence fit the infraction.

All students who went through the program had to complete an exit questionnaire, which was designed to elicit the students' feelings about the I.S.S. program. The questionnaire also attempted to determine what the student's parents thought about the program.

There is evidence that Cherokee High School offered a variety of other programs to help students with some of their social and emotional problems. The data collected, through the interview with an assistant principal, indicated that the Substance Abuse Coordinator in the school dealt with many students who were having problems coping with many areas of their lives. The assistant principal discussed the importance of a group that was formed by the coordinator involving students who have a difficult time managing their anger. Many times an assistant principal compromised with a student who has gotten himself into trouble and agreed to reduce a consequence to an infraction if the student agreed to meet with the coordinator to discuss the problems. Additionally, a mentor program was established at Cherokee High four years ago. This program allowed volunteer teachers to be matched with a student who may have had some academic or emotional problems. This program was established to give more students the opportunity to work through some of their problems, on a more personal level, with adult interaction.

How do the teachers of the school perceive in-school suspension as a correctional program? When asked, a slight majority (56%) of teachers either strongly agreed or agreed that the I.S.S. program has led to fewer disciplinary infractions. When questioned about whether the program was adequately working to rehabilitate the participating students, 74% of the teachers surveyed believed that the program was effective in this area. Review of this data suggested that teachers did not believe that the program was a

deterrent to the behaviors that the I.S.S. program was intended to address. However, they did believe that the program was effective in correcting the behavior of the students who were referred.

When questioned about the amount of counseling in the program, 52% of the teachers either strongly agreed or agreed that counseling took place in the program. This information led the intern to conclude that many of the teachers did not have a strong knowledge base about the structure of the program. They seemed to know only that the students completed their course work while participating in the I.S.S program.

How appropriate is the work assigned by the subject teacher to the in-school suspension student? The one I.S.S. instructor interviewed indicated that 75-80% of the teachers sent enough work to last approximately one class period. These teachers also felt that the work being sent to the students corresponded closely to what their peers were doing on that particular day. When teachers were asked this same question, 85% believed that the students were given an appropriate amount of work to do during I.S.S. Conversely, only 60% of the student population thought teachers gave enough work to last an entire period. In reviewing the results of these interviews, this intern concluded that, while most teachers prepared enough work for the student to do during I.S.S., some did not. Therefore, it might be prudent to infer that a student who had seven or eight classes might not have received an assignment from one or more of his teachers on the day he/she was assigned the suspension. This could hamper the effectiveness of the program.

The students who were involved in the program were asked if their teachers put an appropriate amount of time into the assigned work. Only 20% felt that the teachers put

enough time into the assignments. In addition, 40% of those students believed the teachers actually checked the work returned to them. This data suggests that the students believe teachers were not putting enough time and effort into the assigned work. If the students were correct in their perception, it is possible that these students may not have kept pace with their fellow students and that may have been obvious to others when they returned to the classroom.

### Conclusion

Ninety-five percent of the surveyed teachers either strongly agreed or agreed that the in-school suspension program was an effective way to deal with discipline problems in the high school. This suggested that teachers preferred this form of suspension rather than removing the student from the school environment.

When evaluating the results of this study, it is important to consider if the program has been effective in reducing the amount of infractions that would have resulted in a suspension. The data showed a decline of seven percent in the suspension rate from school year 1998-1999 to 1999-2000. The intern noted another nine percent decrease for the following school year. During the school year 2000-01 to 2001-02 there was an increase of 24% in the suspension rate. The following school year saw a modest decrease of two percent.

The dramatic spike in the suspension rate in 2001-2002 may be related to variables that were not present during the previous school years. The intern identified two factors that may have contributed to the increase. First, the freshman class in that year was the largest class ever to enter Cherokee High School. However, that should not account for an increase of that size in one year. The other factor that must be considered is that this

was the first year that Cherokee High School South was opened. For the first time in the history of the school, the ninth and tenth grade students were housed in a separate building from the eleventh and twelfth grade students. It is possible that this separation may have increased the opportunities for students to misbehave, resulting in more suspensions.

The suspension statistics, teacher surveys, student surveys, and interviews allowed the intern to collect the necessary data to determine the overall effectiveness of the in-school suspension program at Cherokee High School. Generally, the intern has concluded that the program has been effective in dealing with students who were not following the discipline code. Additionally, the data indicated that, while the program may have been a deterrent for some individuals in previous years, the separate high schools for different grade levels may have had a negative impact on this.

In spite of the identified problems with the program, the major benefit of in-school suspension program has been that it has kept students in school. Regardless of behavior modifications, students were in school and were required to complete work similar to what their peers were doing on that day. The intern also believes that modifications could be made to the current program to increase the effectiveness of it for both the students and staff.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusions, Implications, and Further Study

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of an in-school suspension program. The success of this program was evaluated using the end points of student and teacher perceptions of the program's ability to deter and correct inappropriate behaviors in those students who have been referred to the program. Review of the data suggested that the program is generally effective in terms of the identified outcomes. However, the major benefit of the in-school suspension program appeared to be that it kept the affected student in the school, completing material that was equivalent to that which his/her peers were working on that day.

Although the study results appeared to confirm the value of the in-school suspension program, they also identified additional areas for improvement within the existing program.

#### Conclusion

Analysis of the data suggests that students do not believe I.S.S. is an easy day in school. This supports the idea that the program may be a deterrent to unacceptable behavior within the student body. Further assessment of the data indicates that, although the I.S.S. program may be a deterrent to many students in the school, it is not as successful in the area of rehabilitating students. The intern believes that, although there are some students who dread the idea of being assigned to I.S.S., they may also be the



same students who continually do not follow the rules and the threat on an in-school suspension is not enough to deter their behavior.

The data also confirmed that the students doubted that adequate counseling took place in the program. Since a large majority accepted this as fact, the intern suggests that this is an area that needs to be addressed. Counseling on an individual, or group basis, might be the key to help the repeat offenders improve their behavior.

It is apparent that the teachers did not have the same perception of the in-school suspension program as the students. Half of the teachers believed that the program has led to fewer disciplinary infractions while the other half did not consider it to be a deterrent. Interestingly, 74% of teachers believed that the I.S.S. program was effective in rehabilitating the students who were assigned the suspension.

This data suggests that teachers felt the program was effective for first time offenders placed in the program, but not for the students who found themselves in trouble frequently. It would also appear that the teachers do not know the extent of counseling that takes place in the I.S.S. program.

There was conflicting data in the analysis of the quality and quantity of work, administered to the students assigned to I.S.S. Overall, the classroom teachers and the I.S.S. instructors believed there was appropriate work given to the students. The students, however, believed the opposite to be true. The data suggested that students did not think the teachers put much effort into the assignments that were sent to the I.S.S. room. This attitude, of the students toward the teachers, could be counter productive to the student/teacher relationship.

The intern believes that it is important to show the involved students that everyone in the school is working to ensure student success. This cannot be accomplished if a student believes that his/her teachers are not putting the time and effort into the preparation and evaluation of assignments.

#### Implications of Study on Leadership Skills

Throughout the study, it was apparent that the discipline process in a high school is a complex one that must be evaluated on a continuing basis. Administrators must constantly look for different ways to rehabilitate students who are not adhering to the rules. Although an in-school suspension program may be effective in disciplining select students, it cannot stop there. Administrators need to work with the “at risk” students to identify strategies that will help them be successful throughout their educational careers. Likewise, administrators need to support the teachers to do the same since these are the people on the front line who can recognize some of the problems at hand.

#### Implication of Study on Organizational Change

Although the current in-school suspension program has been effective in dealing with the student population who do not follow the disciplinary code, there are areas that must be improved to enhance the program’s effectiveness. One area that needs to be addressed is communicating, to the student body, the I.S.S. program’s intent and design.

The data suggested that students were unclear about what happens in I.S.S. If students were aware that there was little or no interaction with other students while in I.S.S., they may refrain from committing the infractions that resulted in the initial suspension.

Counseling is another area that requires improvement. Although the program has been structured so that the student’s counselor would meet with the student after program

completion, many times this did not happen. Because the counselors have numerous responsibilities, they often did not have had the time to see a student when he/she completed an I.S.S.

The intern believes that these meetings are critical, to the success of the program, and suggests that other ways be identified in order to provide needed support to the guidance department.

By utilizing current resources, school administrators may be able to enhance the opportunities for counseling. There is a group of teachers who work as a team to identify and help "at risk" students in the school. Each member of the team could be assigned a section of the alphabet, and if one of his or her students were assigned to I.S.S., he/she would be responsible to counsel the individual. The school also has a full time police officer assigned to the building. This officer might be able to work with, and informally counsel, students who are repeat offenders.

The final area that needs improvement is the method of transferring work between the classroom teacher and the in school suspension teacher. The problem is a factor of the way in which the program is structured. Currently, when a student is assigned to I.S.S., the suspension commences the following day. The I.S.S. teacher notifies the classroom teachers by putting a form in each teacher's mailbox, asking for the work to be available on the next school day. Oftentimes, teachers go to their mailboxes once a day and do not get the notice until the day of the suspension. Obviously, this procedure does not allow the teacher to adequately prepare an assignment for the student. There is also the possibility the teacher may forget to send the work to the I.S.S. classroom.

The intern believes it is important for students assigned to I.S.S. to begin the suspension on the next school day. However, it is essential to ensure that teachers have time to prepare meaningful work for the involved students. This school has two full time security workers who patrol the building the entire day. When a student is assigned to in school suspension, the intern suggests that one of these individuals be assigned to hand deliver the form to the appropriate teachers. This would ensure that the teachers receive the notice in a timely manner. It may also give them the necessary time to put together meaningful work to coincide with what they would be doing in class on that day.

Overall, the in school suspension program at this school is an effective means of discipline. It also appears that school personnel are working together to ensure its success. The recommendations, suggested in this paper, would further enhance the program and potentially make it more meaningful for those directly involved.

#### Further Study

Recent federal and state initiatives mandate that schools address the needs of the entire student body, not just the majority. This means that schools must find ways to do all that they can to help the “at risk” students. At the same time, classrooms are evolving into learning centers that are becoming more complex. The traditional teaching style of lecture and note taking are becoming a thing of the past. In order to provide an environment that is conducive to classroom learning for all students, deviant behavior cannot be tolerated. It is essential that administrators work together to identify appropriate solutions to the problem of effective student discipline.

Additional research, on programs such as in-school suspension, is necessary in order to find the best strategies for disciplining problem students and thus enhance learning in

schools. The intern recommends that the in-school suspension program, currently in place at Cherokee High School North and South, be expanded and incorporated into the other three schools in the Lenape Regional High School District. Studies should then be conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of each individual program. The data, collected from all schools, would then be analyzed and used to identify and implement the best aspects of the in school suspension program.

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**Appendix A**  
**Student Survey**

**STUDENT SURVEY ON THE IN SCHOOL SUSPENSION PROGRAM AT**

**CHEROKEE HIGH SCHOOL**

**This survey is totally voluntary and anonymous. Do not include your name anywhere on this paper.**

**Directions:** Read each question or statement and circle the response that best describes your thoughts on the in school suspension program at Cherokee High School.

1. What is your gender?                      *Male*              *Female*
  
2. Did you know that there is an in school suspension program at Cherokee High School?  

*Yes*              *No*
  
3. Have you ever been assigned to in school suspension at Cherokee High School?  

*Yes*              *No*
  
4. I.S.S. (in school suspension) is administered to students who break the disciplinary code.  

*strongly agree*              *agree*              *neither agree nor disagree*              *disagree*              *strongly disagree*
  
5. I.S.S. is utilized for all infractions, including fighting and substance abuse.  

*strongly agree*              *agree*              *neither agree nor disagree*              *disagree*              *strongly disagree*
  
6. I.S.S. is administered more often than out-of-school suspension.  

*strongly agree*              *agree*              *neither agree nor disagree*              *disagree*              *strongly disagree*
  
7. I.S.S. is an easy day in school.  

*strongly agree*              *agree*              *neither agree nor disagree*              *disagree*              *strongly disagree*



8. A student must complete the work assigned to him/her by his/her teachers before being released from the program.

*strongly agree*      *agree*      *neither agree  
nor disagree*      *disagree*      *strongly disagree*

9. I.S.S. students must eat their lunch in the I.S.S. classroom, not the cafeteria.

*strongly agree*      *agree*      *neither agree  
nor disagree*      *disagree*      *strongly disagree*

10. While in I.S.S students are permitted to talk with other students after they finish their work.

*strongly agree*      *agree*      *neither agree  
nor disagree*      *disagree*      *strongly disagree*

11. If a student is assigned to I.S.S he/she can choose to take an out-of-school suspension instead.

*strongly agree*      *agree*      *neither agree  
nor disagree*      *disagree*      *strongly disagree*

12. Misbehavior in I.S.S will result in being administered additional days in the program.

*strongly agree*      *agree*      *neither agree  
nor disagree*      *disagree*      *strongly disagree*

13. The behavior of students assigned to I.S.S. change very little after being released from the program.

*strongly agree*      *agree*      *neither agree  
nor disagree*      *disagree*      *strongly disagree*

14. Parents would rather have their child assigned to I.S.S., opposed to out-of-school suspension.

*strongly agree*      *agree*      *neither agree  
nor disagree*      *disagree*      *strongly disagree*

15. Teachers assign work to I.S.S. students that would consume approximately one class period.

*strongly agree*      *agree*      *neither agree  
nor disagree*      *disagree*      *strongly disagree*

16. Assistant principals are consistent, with regards to applying the disciplinary code, when assigning students to I.S.S.

*strongly agree*      *agree*      *neither agree  
nor disagree*      *disagree*      *strongly disagree*

**Answer the following questions if you have ever been assigned to in school suspension:**

17. Teachers check and/or grade the work that is completed in I.S.S.

*strongly agree*      *agree*      *neither agree  
nor disagree*      *disagree*      *strongly disagree*

18. Students feel behind their peers academically when returning from I.S.S.

*strongly agree*      *agree*      *neither agree  
nor disagree*      *disagree*      *strongly disagree*

19. Teachers put an appropriate amount of time into the work they assign to I.S.S. students.

*strongly agree*      *agree*      *neither agree  
nor disagree*      *disagree*      *strongly disagree*

20. Counseling to correct the behavior of a student assigned to in-school suspension occurs on a regular basis.

*strongly agree*      *agree*      *neither agree  
nor disagree*      *disagree*      *strongly disagree*

**Appendix B**  
**Teacher Survey**

**TEACHER SURVEY ON THE IN SCHOOL SUSPENSION PROGRAM AT  
CHEROKEE HIGH SCHOOL**

**This survey is totally voluntary and anonymous. Do not include your name anywhere on this paper.**

**Directions:** Read each question or statement and circle the response that best describes your thoughts on the in school suspension program at Cherokee High.

1. I.S.S. (in school suspension) is administered to students who break the disciplinary code.

*strongly agree*      *agree*      *neither agree  
nor disagree*      *disagree*      *strongly disagree*

2. I.S.S. is utilized for all infractions, including fighting and substance abuse.

*strongly agree*      *agree*      *neither agree  
nor disagree*      *disagree*      *strongly disagree*

3. I.S.S. is administered more often than out-of-school suspension.

*strongly agree*      *agree*      *neither agree  
nor disagree*      *disagree*      *strongly disagree*

4. A student must complete the work assigned to him/her by his/her teachers before being released from the I.S.S. program.

*strongly agree*      *agree*      *neither agree  
nor disagree*      *disagree*      *strongly disagree*

5. I.S.S. students must eat their lunch in the I.S.S. classroom, not the cafeteria.

*strongly agree*      *agree*      *neither agree  
nor disagree*      *disagree*      *strongly disagree*

6. While in I.S.S., students are permitted to talk with other students after they finish their work.

*strongly agree*      *agree*      *neither agree  
nor disagree*      *disagree*      *strongly disagree*

7. If a student is assigned to I.S.S., he/she can choose to take an out-of-school suspension instead.

*strongly agree*      *agree*      *neither agree  
nor disagree*      *disagree*      *strongly disagree*

8. Misbehavior in I.S.S will result in being assigned additional days in the program.

*strongly agree*      *agree*      *neither agree  
nor disagree*      *disagree*      *strongly disagree*

9. The behavior of students assigned to I.S.S. change very little after being released from the program.

*strongly agree*      *agree*      *neither agree  
nor disagree*      *disagree*      *strongly disagree*

10. Parents would rather have their child assigned to I.S.S. opposed to out-of-school suspension.

*strongly agree*      *agree*      *neither agree  
nor disagree*      *disagree*      *strongly disagree*

11. The I.S.S. program is used as an effective way to discipline students who break the disciplinary code.

*strongly agree*      *agree*      *neither agree  
nor disagree*      *disagree*      *strongly disagree*

12. Assistant principals are consistent, with regards to applying the discipline code, when assigning students to I.S.S.

*strongly agree*      *agree*      *neither agree  
nor disagree*      *disagree*      *strongly disagree*

13. Teachers are given sufficient time to prepare work for their students assigned to the I.S.S. program.

*strongly agree*      *agree*      *neither agree  
nor disagree*      *disagree*      *strongly disagree*

14. Teachers assign work to I.S.S. students that correspond with what their peers are doing in class on that particular day.

*strongly agree*      *agree*      *neither agree  
nor disagree*      *disagree*      *strongly disagree*

15. The I.S.S. program has led to a general reduction in discipline infractions.

*strongly agree*      *agree*      *neither agree  
nor disagree*      *disagree*      *strongly disagree*

16. Students would rather be assigned out-of-school suspension opposed to in school suspension.

*strongly agree*      *agree*      *neither agree  
nor disagree*      *disagree*      *strongly disagree*

17. Teachers assign work to I.S.S. students that would consume approximately one class period.

*strongly agree*      *agree*      *neither agree  
nor disagree*      *disagree*      *strongly disagree*

18. I.S.S. is used too much by the administration

*strongly agree*      *agree*      *neither agree  
nor disagree*      *disagree*      *strongly disagree*

**Appendix C**

**In-School Suspension Teacher Survey**

**Interview Questionnaire on the In school Suspension Program at Cherokee High**

**School**

Teacher interviewed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of interview: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Does a student have to complete all of his/her work prior to being released from the program?
2. Do students have any freedoms while in I.S.S.?
3. What are the consequences for not following the rules, while in I.S.S.?
4. Do teachers give enough work to an individual to last a class period?
5. Do teachers give appropriate work (similar to what their peers would be doing in class on that day) to individuals assigned to I.S.S.?
6. Does any counseling take place to correct a student's behavior?
7. Approximately how many I.S.S. students repeat the program?
  - a. How many times can a student get I.S.S. before getting an Administrative or Superintendents review?
8. Do you think the program has led to a decrease in disciplinary infractions throughout the school?



**Appendix D**  
**Administrator Survey**

**Interview Questionnaire on the In school Suspension Program at Cherokee High**

**School**

Principal interviewed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of interview: \_\_\_\_\_

1. What offenses determine whether a student would be assigned an in-school suspension or a SWAP?
  
2. What do you think is the most important aspect of the in-school suspension program at Cherokee High School?
  
3. Is there any aspect that you would change to enhance the current program?
  
4. To what extent does counseling take place to correct a student's behavior?
  
5. Approximately how many I.S.S. students repeat the program?
  - a. How many times can a student get I.S.S. before getting an Administrative or Superintendents review?
  
6. Do you think the program has led to a decrease in disciplinary infractions throughout the school?
  
7. Do you think assistant principals suspend more students because the school utilizes an in-school suspension program?

