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# Effective In-School Suspension Programming: An Exploratory Study

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Effective In-School Suspension Programming: An Exploratory Study

Mariam Bashiri Graff, BSW

MSW Clinical Research Paper

Presented to the Faculty of the

School of Social Work

St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas

St. Paul, Minnesota

in Partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Social Work

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The Clinical Research Project is a graduation requirement for MSW students at St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas School of Social Work in St. Paul, Minnesota and is conducted within a nine-month time frame to demonstrate facility with basic social research design that is approved by a research committee and the university Institutional Review Board, implement the project, and publicly present the findings of the study. This project is neither a Master's thesis nor a dissertation.

## EFFECTIVE IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION PROGRAMMING

### **Abstract**

Extensive research has shown out-of-school suspension as a deterrent to inappropriate behavior in school does not work. It further shows that the most frequently suspended populations are the same populations with the highest drop-out rates and that are most at-risk for becoming involved with the criminal justice system. This study seeks to look at the alternatives to out-of-school suspensions. A cross sectional survey was used to ask school professionals to describe their school suspension programming and to what extent they are using it. Twenty-eight respondents indicated results similar to what was found in the literature review; that while promising, in-school suspension lacks consistency, documentation, outcome data and enough funding to be successful. Implications for social work practice include school social workers working to build strong programs in the schools they are in, advocating for the implementation of in-school suspension programming and dissuading the use of out-of-school suspension. Also, promoting the importance of the maintenance of data to help support the future evidence of the successes of in-school suspension.

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**Table of Contents**

List of Figures..... 5

Introduction.....6

Literature Review.....9

Conceptual Framework.....22

Methods.....24

Design.....24

Sampling.....25

Protection of Human Subjects.....26

Measurement.....27

Advantages and Disadvantages .....28

Analysis.....29

Results/Findings.....30

Discussion.....39

References.....42

Appendix B: Informed Consent.....47

Appendix C: Survey Questions.....48

**List of Figures**

Figure 1. Position in School Bar Chart

Figure 2. Histogram of Clarity of Behavior Expectations

Figure 3. Specific Process for In-School Suspension Assignment Bar Chart

Figure 4. How Often is this Process Followed Histogram

Figure 5. How Much Support or Resistance to Suspension Histogram

Figure 6. Important Parts of In-School Suspension Measure of Central Tendency Chart

## EFFECTIVE IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION PROGRAMMING

Suspension is the disciplinary removal of a student from instruction in a school setting. Suspension is one of the most widely and frequently used disciplinary methods for disciplinary infractions, the most common infractions involving disruptive behavior (Skiba & Sprague, 2008).

In a 2012 report for the Civil Rights Project, Losen and Gillespie report that “well over three million children, K-12, are estimated to have lost instructional ‘seat time’ in 2009-2010 because they were suspended from school, often with no guarantee of adult supervision outside the school. That’s about the number of children it would take to fill every seat in every major league baseball park and every NFL stadium in America *combined*” (p. 6).

One of the issues that has created greater visibility to the general public about school behavior are the incidences of school shootings and information that comes out about students that bring firearms to school. This has created a societal demand for harsh and extreme measures with zero-tolerance policies (Skiba & Peterson, 1999) . However, the zero-tolerance discipline policies brought to the forefront with the media coverage of school shootings show no evidence that zero-tolerance improves school safety or student behavior (Losen & Skiba, 2010).

Some schools of thought are that removing disorderly students allows the teachers to have a break from difficult students as well as providing a break for the students that are trying to learn in the classroom by these removing students, as well as deter other students from misbehaving. It is also believed that suspending some students is a way of getting parents involved, a kind of wake up call, and letting them know there are issues

## EFFECTIVE IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION PROGRAMMING

with their child and in doing this creating a way, through obligation, to connect with the parent and possibly help the parent connect to additional resources if necessary (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2003).

Furthermore, the students that need to be in school the most and are in the greatest danger of dropping out are the most frequently suspended. It is of the utmost importance to keep students, especially those that are facing inequality in other parts of their lives enrolled in school because suspension increases students' risk for dropping out and for becoming involved in the criminal justice system and additionally that the statistics of use of suspension on African American students and Special Education students is of extreme concern (Losen & Gillispie, 2012).

Many of these same students have been exposed to violence and trauma, up to 88 percent of students in urban settings in the United States have seen everything from beatings to robberies and murder in their own communities. Exposure to violence at home, school and in the community is associated with lower academic performances. It also strongly correlates to school attendance and suspension rates (Ramirez et al., 2012).

School characteristics play a role in the number of suspensions as well, Rauch and Skiba (2004) found that schools with principals that had more favorable attitudes about suspension had higher numbers of suspensions and schools where the principals believed in other interventions such as prevention and alternatives to suspension had lower suspension rates.



## EFFECTIVE IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION PROGRAMMING

As far as offering educational value or improving safety in schools out-of-school suspension has been found to be ineffective. The trend of future research looks to be in the direction of alternatives to out-of-school suspensions such as in-school suspensions that focus on methods such as using teaching methods for students to learn behavior management, conflict resolution, restorative justice and training for teachers in cultural competence and sensitivity training.

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW, 2005) states that school social workers are one of the few resources in schools charged with addressing personal and social problems that are keeping students from their maximum learning potential. As part of this field in education school social workers assess and intervene in the social and emotional needs of students. Understanding and improving the school environment to a positive environment as well as strengthening the connections between family, school and community lays the groundwork for a strong support system for the school social worker to work within. The NASW advocates for the school social worker to see that disciplinary policies and practices in schools follow a path to shape student behavior toward productive participation in school and society. The discipline should help students accept their responsibility for their own behavior, and work toward problem-solving processes. School social workers should help guarantee due process in serious disciplinary cases, be advocates for best interests of students and the school, and create alternative education programs based on students' unique educational needs. And importantly, that school social workers should work to evaluate and document effectiveness of programs and services offered in the schools.

## EFFECTIVE IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION PROGRAMMING

It is within these constructs put forth by the NASW that the school social worker is most able to help assess the needs for and create a fitting in-school suspension program and then determine whether it is working as an intervention to behavior in their setting.

### **Literature Review**

Out-of-school suspension has been determined to be ineffective as a deterrent to disruptive behavior, it has also shown to put students already at risk for dropping out at greater risk for dropping out as well as for involvement with the criminal justice system. In-school suspension keeps students supervised and provides an opportunity for them to receive instruction and in some cases the additional support they need.

### **Types of Suspensions**

Out-of-school suspension is when a student is required to stay home from school (OOS). In-school suspension (ISS) is when the student is suspended but is accommodated within the school system in several different types of settings depending on the school district. Some school districts have an identified room assigned to accommodate students, some districts have the students sit in a different classroom, such as an older student sits in a classroom with younger students and the teacher in the younger students' room then supervises the student, and another example according to Sussman (2011), New York has a special separate Alternative Learning Center school where students report to once suspended, this method is used in other states as well.

## EFFECTIVE IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION PROGRAMMING

Programming for in-school suspensions varies within districts as well, allowing each school to determine how to staff and supervise their own programs.

### **Lack of Family Support Systems**

The American Academy of Pediatrics policy statement (2003) states part of the importance of continuity in education is because educational success is strongly linked to health and safety. This report states that while many districts have developed programs for suspended students, many have not and that students can be required to stay home for periods ranging from days to months waiting for space to be available in alternative settings. This same report states that the children that are most often suspended are the least likely to have supervision at home. Further, that, “children who use illicit substances, commit crimes, disobey rules, and threaten violence often are victims of abuse, are depressed, or are mentally ill. As, such, children most likely to be suspended or expelled are those most in need of adult supervision and professional help” (p. 1207). The report also highlights that for students who already have major home-life stressors that school suspension just compounds that and makes further behavioral problems more likely rather than less likely.

### **Racial Disparities and Suspensions**

The suspension rates for African American students and Special Education students (of which African American males are disproportionately a part of as well) are of great concern because these students are barely maintaining a connection to school, then are being suspended at alarming rates and are the same populations that have the

## EFFECTIVE IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION PROGRAMMING

highest dropout rates and the highest incarceration rates. The Civil Rights Project reports National Statistics for suspension rates show that 17 percent, or one out of every six Black K-12 students were suspended at least once. Similarly, there is a one in thirteen (8%) for Native Americans, one in four for Latinos (7%) and one in twenty (5%) for Whites and one in fifty (2%) for Asian Americans. As well as 13 percent of students with disabilities were suspended, this includes all racial groups combined but is about twice the rate of non-disabled peers (Losen & Gillispie, 2012).

Losen and Gillispie (2012) report for the Civil Rights Project reflected some of the same findings as others, that differences in school leadership, policy and lack of effective support and training for teachers and possibly racial and disability bias play a role in schools with higher numbers of suspensions. Black students are suspended at two to three times higher rates than other students and that they are also overly represented in office referrals, expulsions and corporal punishment. Some of this disparity may be related to cultural differences and some of these cultural differences could be moderated by working with classroom teachers and school administrators in understanding some of the cultural differences and how to work with students in a way that minimizes the need to suspend them (Skiba & Sprague, 2008). Teachers are the first link in the chain and they make the decision whether to keep the disruption limited to classroom control and to contain it and handle it themselves or to make the decision to make the referral that takes it out of their hands and sets it on the track that could lead to suspension (Wald & Casella, 2006, p. 90). Sometimes the cultural differences between middle-class white teachers and students of color may be part of the conflicts and misunderstandings that lead to classroom referrals that can then lead to suspensions. Sometimes the impassioned

## EFFECTIVE IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION PROGRAMMING

and emotive manner popular among young African Americans might be interpreted as combative or argumentative by unfamiliar listeners and might result in teachers taking offense when being spoken to in that manner. This can also be complicated when African American students speak in nonstandard English and teachers may misunderstand the student's intended meaning or tone (Townsend, 2000, p. 384). Gay (2006) noted, "many students of color, especially in middle and high schools, are not willing to passively submit to the demands of teachers for immediate and unquestioning compliance in conflict situations, especially if they feel they are treated unfairly and denied the opportunity to defend themselves" (p. 353).

### **Inadequately Staffed Classrooms**

The groups of students that are most frequently suspended have less access to the teachers with the best instruction and classroom management skills, shown by the example that the same student can behave differently in different classrooms (taught by different teachers), and further that disruption in the classroom tends to increase or decrease with the teacher's skill in providing engaging instruction and in-classroom management skills. As classroom engagement goes up misbehavior and suspensions tend to go down (Losen & Gillispie, 2012).

This is a two-fold problem affected by a teacher shortage and an African American teacher shortage. In a report by the National Task Force on Public Education, Ingersoll (2004) reports that teacher shortages disproportionately impact students in high-

## EFFECTIVE IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION PROGRAMMING

poverty urban school districts. These schools are unable to match salaries and benefits of more affluent school districts and that causes them to have difficulties in competing for the available supply of adequately trained teachers and subsequently leads to employment of larger proportions of underqualified teachers (p.3). Additionally, the report explains that teaching is a high-turnover profession but that teachers who departed surveyed claimed reduction of student discipline problems was a frequent factor suggested and that schools with more student behavior problems had higher teacher turnover regardless of urban, rural, poor or affluent (p. 14). The report also notes that schools where teachers were allowed more input into issues, student discipline in particular, and increasing teacher decision-making power and authority as well as increasing parental involvement would be some of the main steps in retaining the teachers (p. 15).

Townsend (2000) talks about the extreme shortage of African American teachers and administrators and how this limits students' exposure to school professionals who serve as role models. This also increases the likelihood that students will be taught by teachers who have limited knowledge of, or exposure to, and understanding of their culture. Additionally, that students living in poverty have very different experiences than their teachers, even those that share ethnic backgrounds, because the teachers likely live in middle-class communities and participate in activities associated with middle-class status (p. 383).

### **Students with Trauma Experiences**

One issue that has not been addressed much in the research is the effect of trauma on students and their behavior responses. Perry (1995), an expert on neurobiology and

## EFFECTIVE IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION PROGRAMMING

trauma addresses the issue of traumatized children, and when applied in a school setting it demonstrates how easily the situation can turn into a suspendable offense. Perry explains that children who have suffered trauma frequently have more sensitive than normal hyperarousal and dissociative triggers and often use the freezing mechanism when they feel unsure of the nature of any given event. They experience anxiety deeply and feel out of control cognitively and tend to physically freeze. When adults ask them to comply with a directive they will sometimes act as if they didn't hear or as if they are refusing. This typically causes the adult to give another instruction, generally with more threat, such as, 'if you don't...I'm going to...' Both the verbal and non-verbal escalation of threat causes the child to feel more anxious, threatened and out of control and can move to terrorized. If it is enough for them to feel terrorized the child may completely dissociate (p. 279-280). To untrained school personnel this looks like outright defiance and will certainly end up in suspension. Using this information from Perry combined with the report from the American Academy of Pediatrics (2003), stating the children that are most likely to be suspended are those that suffer abuse and likely have other traumatic situations in their home life, this is an area for further research within the suspension topic.

### **No Positives for Out-of-School Suspension**

The frequent use of suspension had no positive impact on test scores or graduation rates to dispel the myth that the good kids learn better when you remove the problem students and additionally, found that schools with lower use of out-of-school

## EFFECTIVE IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION PROGRAMMING

suspension, after controlling for race and poverty, actually had higher test scores (Losen & Gillispie, 2012).

### **School Characteristics**

School characteristics play a role in the number of suspensions as well, Rauch and Skiba (2004) found that schools with principals that had more favorable attitudes about suspension had higher numbers of suspensions and schools where the principals believed in other interventions such as prevention and alternatives to suspension had lower suspension rates.

### **Looking at Alternatives to Out-of-School Suspension**

The importance of the overall effects of the research done on suspension for the Civil Rights Project and discussion of the serious concerns about the disparities brought up in the research as well as the unjust denial of educational opportunity should be of concern to many. The alternatives to out-of-school suspension are underutilized in many districts possibly because education policymakers and parents are not aware of how many students are at risk of being suspended, and more importantly, how much instructional time and money is being lost as a result (Losen & Gillespie, 2012).

While the literature review strongly suggests that out-of-school suspension is not successful as a deterrent to inappropriate school behaviors it fails to find strong, research based, empirically tested, outcome focused information about in-school suspension programming. “The story of ISS is one of both promise and pessimism. There are often limited case examples of schools and districts that use ISS so effectively that it



## EFFECTIVE IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION PROGRAMMING

dramatically changes the discipline climate and suspension rate in their schools. These case studies show promise but they tend to be a description of the author's success, instead of a truly objective measure of change" (Blomberg, 2003, p. 5). The anecdotal information on in-school suspension and discipline methods used in place of out-of-school suspension that was available and reviewed is outlined here:

### **Types of In-School Suspension**

Morris and Howard (2003) identified that there are four basic types of models that in-school suspension programs follow: Punitive, Academic, Therapeutic and Combined.

**Punitive:** This model is based on the belief that students misbehave because they want to cause trouble in the classroom and that punishment will eliminate the misbehavior. This is the most common in-school suspension model. In this model rules are extremely restrictive, including no talking and restricted restroom use. Students spend their time either completing assignments or doing punitive work such as picking up trash or cleaning up the cafeteria.

**Academic:** This model assumes that discipline problems arise out of learning difficulties that students have. This operates under the premise that as their academic skills increase their frustration levels will decrease and with that their behavior will improve as will their grades. Some unique characteristics of this model is that it should include measurement of academic skills and learning difficulties should be identified and assessed and academic goals set with those measurements as guidelines. Individual instruction in basic skills should be provided, as well as support resources. The in-school suspension teacher should be trained in diagnosing learning difficulties and on how to instruct basic skills development.

## EFFECTIVE IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION PROGRAMMING

Therapeutic: This model is designed to begin talking to students about the reasons they are in in-school suspension. It is designed to help students develop problem-solving skills that should lead to appropriate behavior changes. A basic tenet of this model is that student misbehavior stems from a particular problem that a student is experiencing. This model believes that as an important step in controlling misbehavior the student is expected to accept responsibility, which usually happens once they have had an opportunity to reflect on the situation. A student may write an essay to begin processing the event in order to recognize and acknowledge the problem. The benefits of this model are the improvement of the student's self-image, communication and problem-solving skills. It also employs counseling techniques, such as individual, group, and peer counseling as well as referrals to outside agencies.

Combined: This model is the most recent model, it is also known as the Individual model. It is based on the presumption that misbehavior causes are varied and any model used should seek to change behavior through a combined program that best meets the individual student's needs. The key to this model is the evaluative component that determines the type of model needed. In-school suspension programs that were not successful failed to provide a counseling component of some sort (p. 157).

Program Models for in-school suspension: Some of the specific program articles that were reviewed contained various levels of actual program use. Following is a summary of the work done in the in-school suspension area.

**Conflict resolution therapy.** Conflict resolution strategy has a goal to find a solution to a conflict where both parties get what they want and avoid violence in the

## EFFECTIVE IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION PROGRAMMING

process. It comes from the principals and practices of mediation, where one side usually has to win and one side has to lose. The resolution or mediation process comes about when there is discussion of each sides needs and negotiations around those needs until both sides feel their needs have been met and they are able to have a satisfying outcome. The cognitive skills most worked on in this therapy situation are primarily perspective taking and active listening, as well as being able to control their emotions and be able to communicate their needs. In this suspension alternative program, a conflict resolution therapy program was offered to students and their families as an alternative to out-of-school suspension. It is in response to this school's belief that situational violence occurs in response to a set of unusual circumstances and relationship violence arises from interpersonal disputes and that both of these patterns occurred frequently in their school. Situations where an adolescent finds themselves in a situation where the only solution seems to be to act out violently or where a conflict between students who know each other ends up escalating until violence becomes the solution they are able to use (Breunlin, Cimmarusti, Bryant-Edwards, Hetherington, 2002). The program is for these violent students who are at the point of suspension. If they agree to be in the program they received reduced suspensions. This program includes the parents because they found that some of the most significant risk factors for violence originated with the family. The family is assigned a trainer and they work through a 36 page skills manual titled "Making the Smart Choice: Tools for Resolving Conflict" and they go over the manual with the trainer in four 90- minute sessions. This study did contain hard data and showed that students that participated in the program were re-suspended less than those that did not participate. However, this program is not participated in during the school day, the family

## EFFECTIVE IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION PROGRAMMING

meets with the trainer in the evening or on weekends, so it is not considered to be an in-school suspension, but an alternative to out-of school suspension.

**Restorative justice.** Restorative justice began as a part of the criminal justice system as a model seeking healing and reconciliation for both the victims and the offenders as well as others that were affected by the crime. There are four Rs of restorative justice: repair, restore, reconcile, and reintegrate. This is for all parties involved and includes restitutions, admissions of fault, apologies and forgiveness, as well as agreed to new behaviors (Menkel-Meadow, 2007). A study on Restorative Justice was conducted by the Minnesota Department of Education by surveying 417 school principals, 66 percent reported using restorative justice methods. “Restorative practices encompass a number of approaches that hold misbehaving students accountable by helping them understand the harm they’ve caused and helping them repair it” (Brown, 2012). A school climate specialist with the Minnesota Department of Education promotes restorative justice practices because they work, in 2001 Minneapolis Public Schools received a grant to train teachers to use restorative circles (you sit in a circle with adults and the students involved and pass around a ‘talking piece’ and each person gets to speak their side of the story, including the victim and the accused. The circle adjourns when the community agrees they are ready to accept the accused back in to good standing with the group) the school saw a 63 percent reduction in suspensions (Brown, 2012).

**PBIS (Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports).** This is school-wide behavior intervention and support program that is data driven, takes several years to implement and comes with training for all staff. It does use both out-of-school

## EFFECTIVE IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION PROGRAMMING

suspension and in-school suspension as part of its programming. It has a focus on positive expectations and behaviors. It is defined as, “a framework for enhancing the adoption and implementation of a continuum of evidence-based interventions to achieve academically and behaviorally important outcomes for all students”. It emphasizes clear and distinctive, positively stated behavior expectations and routines. 18,277 schools are implementing this plan at the writing of this article ([www.pbis.org](http://www.pbis.org)).

**Literacy-based behavior management.** Haley and Watson (2000), an English curriculum doctoral candidate working in an in-school suspension program teamed up with a university colleague with a background in literacy development, adolescent psychology and qualitative research and together they designed, implemented and monitored a literacy-based behavior management program in an urban middle school. The premise for the program was that it was non-punitive and required the students to work on academic tasks. The writing was a way to strengthen writing skills, and also to reflect on their actions that brought them to in-school suspension. The writing focused on the pre-writing stage as most middle-schoolers fail to make a writing plan. The students were given five prewriting strategies: brainstorming, clustering, free-writing, listing and outlining. They also were given survey instruments, writing prompts and data collection tools by Watson. The qualitative data was collected by keeping a portfolio of each student’s writing. The researchers reflected on what made their model successful and they noted that consistent practices were important. They also noted that respect, dignity, reflection, autonomy, and academic enhancement appeared effective in producing academic and behavioral improvement.

**Reinforcing resilience/creating supportive resources.** Gootman (1998) discusses the importance in being aware of students' home-life situations. That while there is little to do about students' out-of-school lives, in-school suspension time can be used to help them behave more responsively, thus becoming more resilient to their daily pressures. "The recidivism rate among children from dysfunctional family environments is extremely high" (p. 39) and having an adult that thinks they are worth-while, and sensitive to their feelings can help give them a sense of power and control in their lives. She advocates for helping the students brainstorm possible solutions to their everyday problems such as feeling like hitting someone or leaving homework at home all the time. This helps the students take responsibility for their actions and the solutions and gives them a supportive adult to go to if those solutions still aren't working. Further, she says this resource should maintain a connection to the student even after their in-school suspension is over and to be sure to let the student know someone has confidence in them and that when they do make mistakes they are still worthwhile and they have a resource to turn to if they begin to veer off the path (p. 39).

Dupper, Theriot, and Craun (2009) accurately point out that, "it is important that school social workers assume a more proactive stance in advocating for changes in school discipline policies, but this will not occur until and unless they are equipped with empirically supported knowledge in this area. Specifically, school social workers need to be aware of research findings and interventions focused on the elimination of students' problematic behaviors rather than on the elimination of students themselves" (p.7). This statement strongly explains why more research needs to be done in this subject area that affects such high numbers of at-risk and disenfranchised populations. It is the social

## EFFECTIVE IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION PROGRAMMING

worker in the school that has the skill set and the integrative framework to evaluate not only the individual students but the programming for suspensions, the school, the school district, the community the school serves and the society that should be very concerned at the numbers contained in this report.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study will be the empowerment framework. Gutierrez (1995) explains that the empowerment theory suggests that creating changes in people's beliefs and attitudes can help them to want to make contributions as individuals in creating social change and that individuals will want to work for the communal good if they develop a sense of critical consciousness. Empowerment suggests a personal sense of efficacy, to be competent in ability, understanding, motivation and self-worth. The empowerment approach as a practice method uses existing and potential strengths in the client systems to build on to create personal, social and political change (Miley, O'Melia and DuBois, 2007).

This framework is a good fit with the aspect of in-school suspension program development being viewed with a positive lens. Looking at a program, in school, where a student is given a place and a helping staff person to process how they have gotten to the point of suspension and how they need to work to get out. Empowerment links individual strengths and abilities, natural helping systems, and proactive behaviors to social policy and social change. Empowerment theory, research, and intervention connect the individual well-being with the larger social and political environment. Theoretically it asks people to think in terms of positives instead of negatives such as, wellness versus

## EFFECTIVE IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION PROGRAMMING

illness, competence versus deficits and strength versus weakness, abled versus disabled (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995).

This theory may not have been commonly used with this population before. This population has been primarily seen through the lens of deviancy before. While social learning theory and the social learning of deviant behavior may initially seem like a more logical fit, that captures the negative view and the punishment aspect of out-of-school suspension whereas the empowerment theory and interventions focus more on identifying capabilities and eliminating problems rather than placing blame and creating unproductive punishments.

Empowerment is working with others to achieve goals, gain access to resources, understanding of the basic components of the construct and organizational processes and structures that increase member participation and goal achievement for the organization (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995). In this regard, to a more macro look at empowerment within the in-school suspension topic, it is important to apply the knowledge learned in the Civil Rights Project and look from each individual student and their participation in the in-school suspension and how they can be supported and helped to succeed, but more importantly to look at the big picture taken by the report, which is current, August 2012, and see how the organization of the schools can expect member participation to effect the ultimate goal achievement, reduction in suspension numbers. “Oppression, discrimination, injustice, and experiences of powerlessness are the very circumstances that call for the application of empowerment-based social work practice” (Miley, et al., 2007, p. 92).



## EFFECTIVE IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION PROGRAMMING

Using this empowerment framework to guide research will focus the efforts on making the research questions framed in a positive light, looking for solutions and interventions that are working. Using the empowerment framework applies to the study by looking at the school setting and what programs are in use and how successful they are and being able to use that data to move forward in developing change through the larger systems.

### **Methods**

#### **Design**

This study asked the question, “Are schools using in-school suspension? If so, what in-school suspension programming is currently being used by individual schools and districts and if these interventions are being used successfully?” This study looked to identify both what interventions are being used and what interventions are being found to be successful as alternatives to out-of-school suspensions. A cross sectional, quasi-mixed method survey was used to ask both closed ended and open ended questions as well as demographic questions. The quantitative data was used to analyze the demographic questions as well as the closed ended questions. The survey did not require the participants to answer every question. The qualitative data collected via the open ended questions was analyzed and summarized.

The data was collected using an on-line survey software service called Qualtrics. This program creates surveys, distributes surveys via email, collects responses

## EFFECTIVE IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION PROGRAMMING

to the survey, and analyzes the data collected. This software anonymously distributed, collected and processed the surveys and returned the data for processing. The quantitative data was processed using SPSS software and the qualitative data was summarized.

### **Sampling**

A total of 346 email invitations were sent out requesting participation in the survey. These contacts were primarily school social workers, as well as several school counselors, school principals and behavior deans. These contacts were chosen for their professional knowledge of behavior interventions being used in the schools they are employed in. The contacts were made by using my personal contacts as well as a snow ball technique to invite my contacts to forward to employees of similar nature. Additionally, the Minnesota School Social Workers Association LISTSERV email list was used. This LISTSERV contained 258 email addresses. There were 37 surveys started and 28 surveys completed. The survey was open to participants for 30 days. Several reminders were sent via Qualtrics as well as reminders were sent out via the Minnesota School Social Workers Association email LISTSERV. The final sample group included 22 school social workers, 1 teacher, 3 school counselors, 1 paraprofessional/associate educator and 1 behavior specialist.

## EFFECTIVE IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION PROGRAMMING

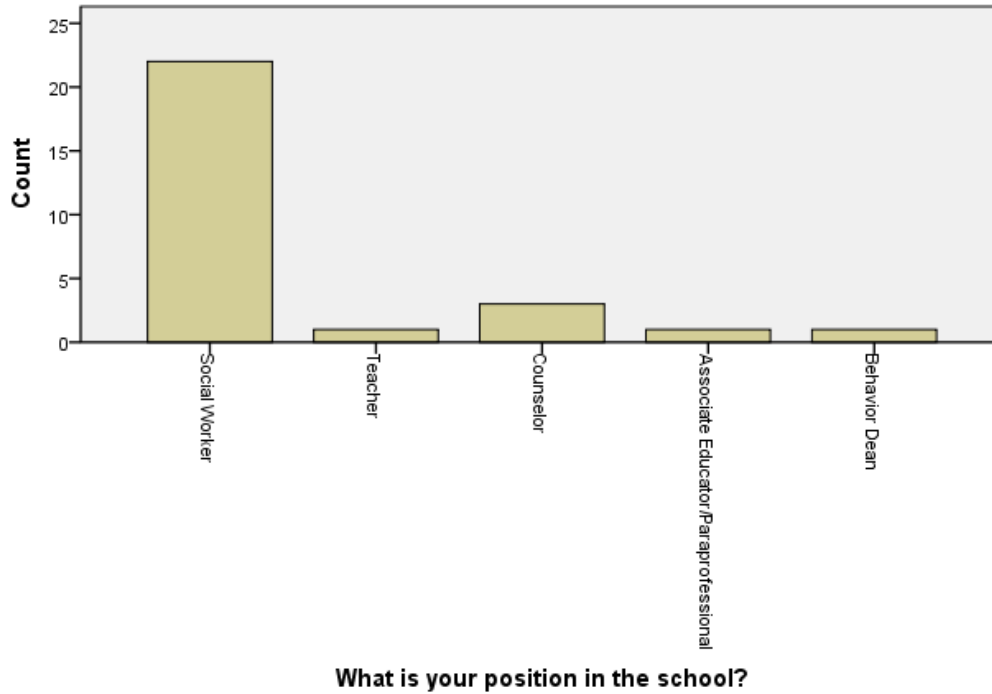


Figure 1. Position in School (N=28)

1=Social Worker, 2=Teacher, 3=Counselor, 4=Assoc. Educ/Para, 5=Behavior Dean

### Protection of Human Subjects

The protection of human subjects was of the utmost importance. The steps that were taken to ensure protections to maintain confidentiality of respondents were: the on-line survey had an opening page that confirmed that the respondent understood their answers would be confidential, that it would be unknown to the researcher whether or not they completed the survey. In addition, that they gave consent but knew that they were in no way obligated to participate as it was completely voluntary. It confirmed an understanding that there would be neither incentives nor penalties for completing the survey. Only by confirming their understanding of all these factors were they able to move on to the actual survey. In order to move on to the survey the participants had to read that these conditions exist and choose from buttons marked “Yes, I would like to

## EFFECTIVE IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION PROGRAMMING

continue” and “No- will discontinue survey”. Due to the large number of contacts made via email, as well as the snowball technique using the multiple uses per link selection in the Qualtrics software, anonymity was easily maintained as the identity of those contacted and those that chose to reply were not and could not be correlated in any way.

Additionally, the study had approval from the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board (the IRB) to conduct the study.

### **Measurement**

The measurement for this study was an email survey with twenty-seven open and closed ended questions. The emails were sent out via an email survey software created by Qualtrics. The survey contained demographic questions primarily focused on school population demographics, including community type, number of students, age level/grade taught at location and student demographics such as free and reduced lunch percentage, special education student population percentage and student ethnicity. Professional position of participants’ demographics were also collected. It also contained questions that measured ordered response alternatives using a Likert scale (Monette, Sullivan, & DeJong, 2011) such as how clear the behavior expectations for the students are and what part of in-school suspension is viewed as most important. Additionally, it included text boxes allowing for “Other, please explain” to be chosen within the multiple choice questions for those answers that fall out of the exact categories required of multiple choice selections. This allowed for a qualitative aspect within the quantitative questioning of the demographics.

## EFFECTIVE IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION PROGRAMMING

### **Advantages and Disadvantages**

One of the disadvantages is that only surveying adults gives only their perception of what they deem to be successful interventions and programs. The voices of the children being suspended will not be heard. Additionally, information from parents of suspended students will not be addressed as the survey will only be given to education professionals. Another disadvantage is that some school staff may be hesitant to answer questions about whether students are suspended too much. Some of them may be guilty of trying to get difficult students out of the building in order to protect their own sanity. Similarly, some school staff may have a hard time answering questions about racial and special education status discrimination. Another disadvantage may be the difficulty in getting at the research question is because there may not be anything to measure. Some schools do not collect any data and some staff do not pay any attention to anything such as specifics in programming available unless it directly involves them.

Advantages may be finding out some successful in-school suspension programs exist. Another advantage is that by seeing a survey on the topic some school personnel may be interested to think about their school climate and investigate what their suspension rate and programs look like. Another advantage is the survey will be taken by school professionals including school social workers, but additionally by other professionals and those professionals may not have the extensive person-in-environment training that social workers have and may see some aspects of in-school suspension differently.

## EFFECTIVE IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION PROGRAMMING

### **Analysis**

This study was exploratory in nature and therefore used a combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques. A univariate analysis was used to look at frequency distributions of demographic variables such as what types of school professionals actually participated in the study, as well as the specific demographics of their schools such as grade levels, whether they are urban, suburban or rural, numbers of students. Univariate analysis was also used to determine if schools have in-school suspension in their school and if they have specific staff in that room. Additionally, it was used to find out if data for in-school suspensions is kept if they do have in-school suspension in their school.

Measure of central tendency was used to analyze what part of in-school suspension was seen as the most important, an ordinal level variable. This was analyzed to determine what factor of in-school suspension was seen as the most valuable.

The email survey also allowed for text box answers in order to collect qualitative data to further the understanding of what methods are being used for in-school suspension.

After receiving the survey report several schools reported using SWIS for reporting behavior data. SWIS stands for School Wide Information System and is a web based computer application for data entry and report generation. It is tied to Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports program mentioned previously in this report.

## EFFECTIVE IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION PROGRAMMING

Additionally, one possible reason for the low survey participation rate may be that there were several complaints that the forwarded email links from Qualtrics were not consistently opening to the survey easily and this may have dissuaded some participants who were short on time and or patience.

### **Results/Findings**

#### **Demographics**

Out of 346 surveys sent out 28 were completed. This represents a 8.1% response rate. The final sample group included 22 school social workers, 1 teacher, 3 school counselors, 1 paraprofessional/associate educator and 1 behavior specialist.

This sample group represented 20 elementary schools, 12 middle schools, and 7 high schools. Of these schools 6 were urban, 11 were suburban, 9 were rural and 1 was considered suburban but is a 1<sup>st</sup> tier northern suburb of Minneapolis and serves an urban population of Minneapolis. Two schools had less than 250 students, seven schools had between 250-500 students, 10 schools had 500 to 750 students and one each had 1000-1500, 1500-2000, and 2501 or more. The schools' free and reduced lunch percentages, which demonstrate how many students' households' income levels are near the Federal poverty line, 8 participants reported 0-25% of their students receive free lunch, 8 participants reported 26-50%, 4 reported 51-75% and 5 schools reported 76-100% of their students receiving free or reduced lunch.

## EFFECTIVE IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION PROGRAMMING

### Suspensions

Of this sample group, 23 participants reported having in-school suspension and 4 reported not having in-school suspension in their schools. In Figure 2 below, a histogram shows the result of how clear the survey participants' believe behavior expectations are for students.

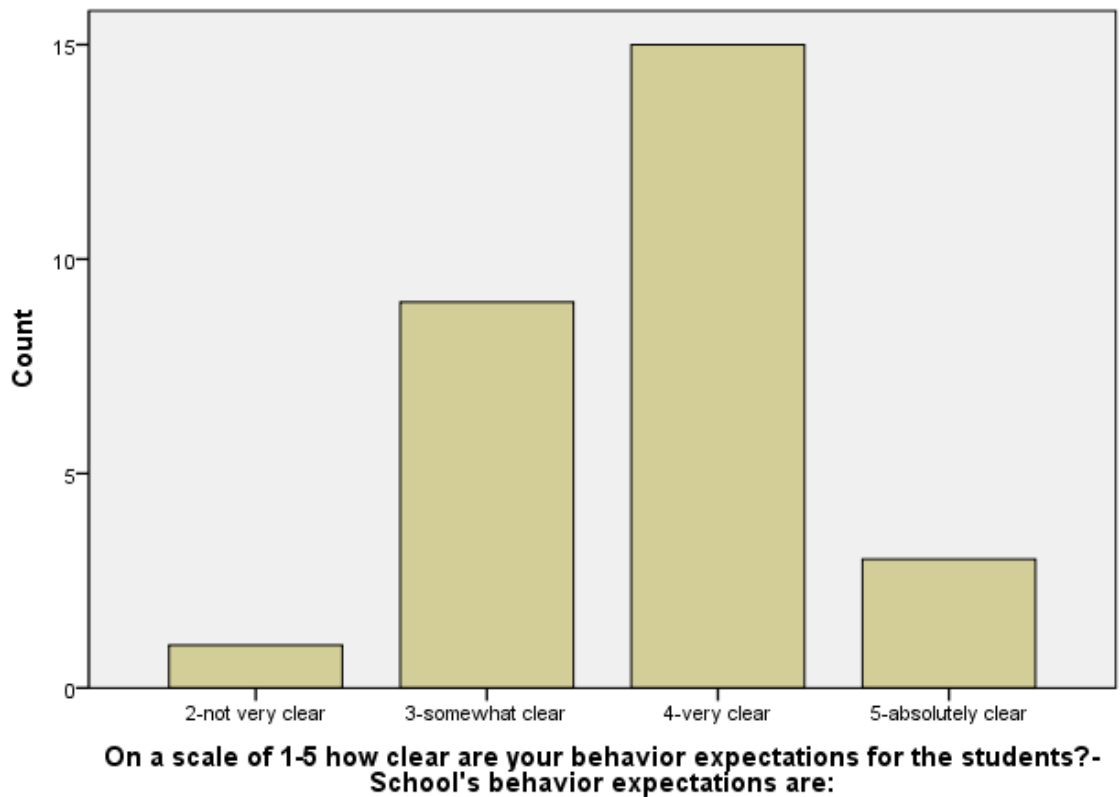


Figure 2. Clarity of Behavior Expectations

1=Not Clear, 2= Not Very Clear, 3= Somewhat Clear, 4=Very Clear, 5=Absolutely Clear



## EFFECTIVE IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION PROGRAMMING

When asked about teacher's having classroom behavior management training out of 25 participants 9 said their teachers did have training, 16 said they did not have training throughout the year. This is a mean response of 1.64 percent.

In Figure 3 below shows the responses to whether there is a specific process for students to be assigned to in-school suspension. Figure 4 follows and looks at how often this process is followed.

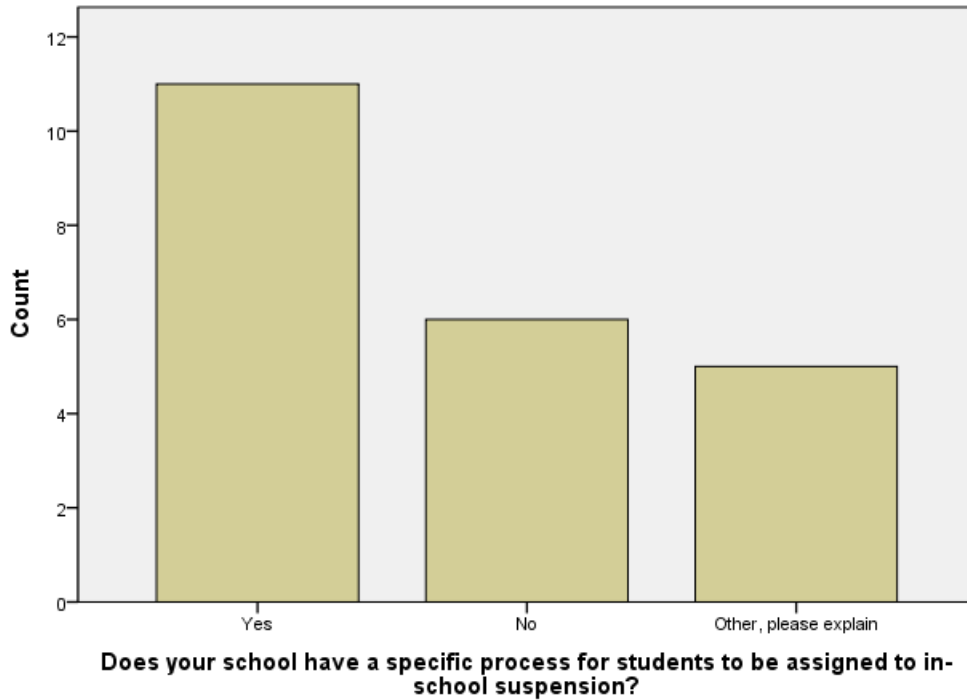


Figure 3. Do you have a specific process to be assigned to in-school suspension?

1=Yes, 2=No, 3=Other

Figure 3. (N=22)

## EFFECTIVE IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION PROGRAMMING

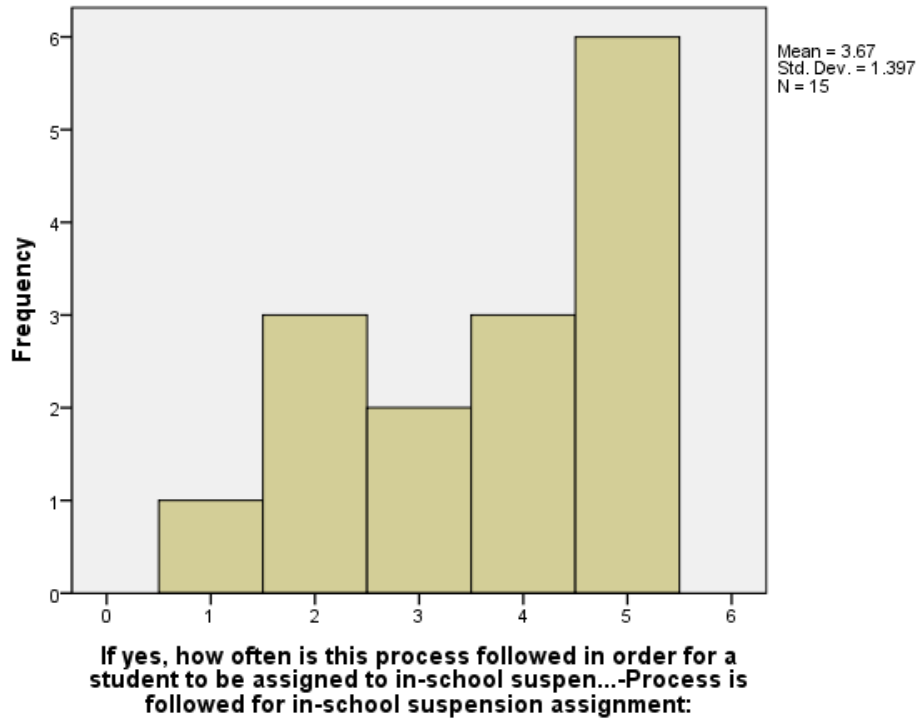


Figure 4. How often is this process followed?

1=Never, 2=Rarely, 3=Sometimes, 4=Quite Often, 5= Very Often

When asked if there is a designated in-school suspension room 7 responded yes, 12 responded no and 3 gave qualitative answers in the category other.

As far as set programming for an in-school suspension room 3 responded yes there is, 13 responded no there is not and 6 responded other and provided explanations about what is used. Three out of four participants use curriculum provided or created by the school and the one remaining participant uses a purchased program utilizing problem solving and response questions.

In Figure 5 below, a histogram shows the results when asked about their school's culture toward suspension. Out of 26 total responses one participant believed they were

## EFFECTIVE IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION PROGRAMMING

very resistant to suspension, 6 were somewhat resistant, 7 were neither supportive nor resistant, 8 somewhat support suspension and 4 were very supportive of suspension.

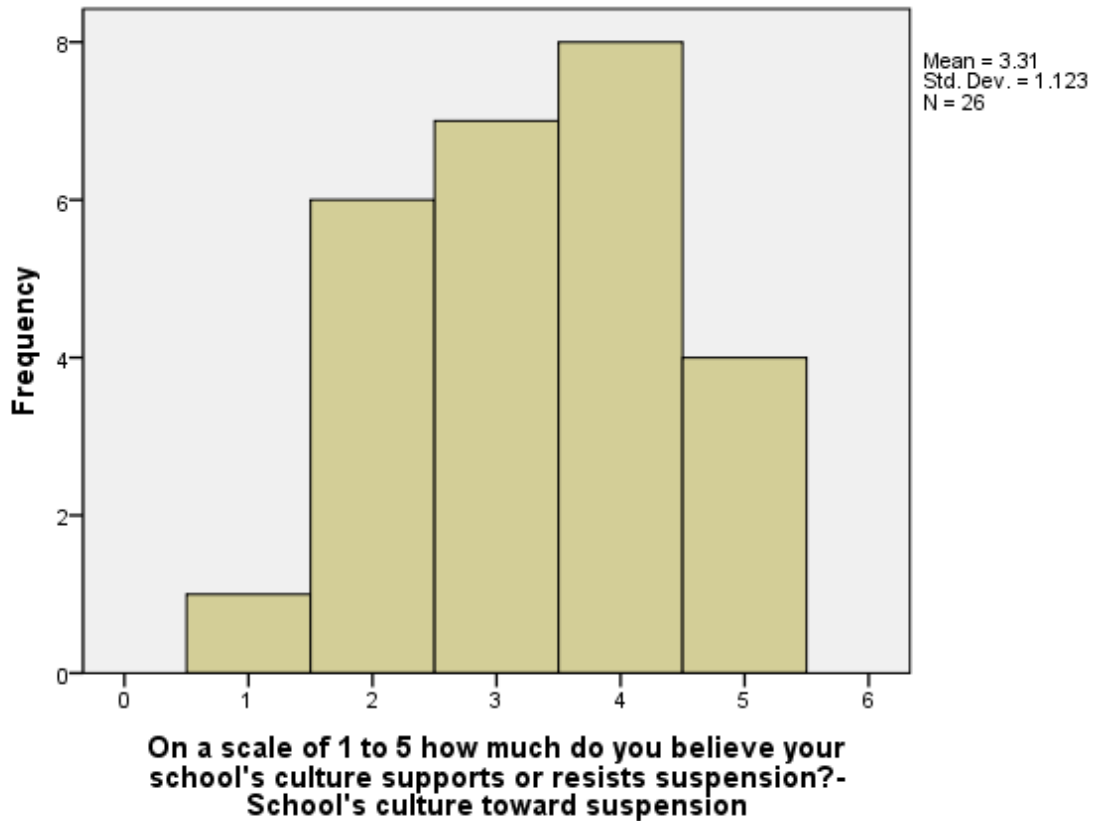


Figure 5. How much do you believe your school supports or resists suspension?

1= Very Resistant, 2=Somewhat Resistant, 3= Neither, 4=Somewhat Supportive, 5=Very Supportive

In this chart, Figure 6, below, what the participants' believed were the most important factors about in-school suspension are looked at. It shows that most of the categories including, being away from peers, out of the classroom, relationship with person/adult in in-school suspension room, supportive activities were rated pretty closely in importance with contact with parent having the highest mean score, and with punishment actually having the lowest mean score.

## EFFECTIVE IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION PROGRAMMING

What part of in-school suspension do you see as being the most important?

#	Question	Least important	somewhat important	neither important nor unimportant	very important	most important	Total Responses	Mean
1	punishment	4	9	2	8	1	24	2.71
2	away from peers	0	6	2	12	3	23	3.52
3	out of classroom	2	7	0	12	4	25	3.36
4	contact with parent	1	2	2	14	6	25	3.88
5	relationship with staff in suspension room	1	5	10	6	3	25	3.20
6	supportive activities in in-school suspension room	2	4	5	11	4	26	3.42
7	other, please explain	0	1	0	1	1	3	3.67

Figure 6. Most important part of in-school suspension

### Data Collection

When surveyed on data tracking on in-school suspension recidivism rate 14 participants responded that they do keep data, 5 responded that they do not keep data. Of the three additional responses one disclosed they were unsure if data was kept, one handled data on a case by case basis and one only has 1-2 students per year in in-school suspension. When questioned about suspension tracking data the response was 15 responded that yes they keep data, 8 responded no they don't keep suspension data and 3 chose other and responded as unsure, don't know and probably but unaware of it.

## EFFECTIVE IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION PROGRAMMING

### **Open Ended Responses**

These responses were given in optional text-response boxes attached to questions as a choice of 'Other, please explain'. These answers tended to be short, single answer, comment style answers.

When asked if you don't have in-school suspension what do you do for inappropriate behavior other than out-of-school suspension one participant remarked that they have a team of staff that rotate being "on call" for students needing behavioral intervention and they will meet with that student. They used to have in-school suspension but it was poorly run so they are trying this method for this year. One school keeps students in from recess and in the office as their suspension time. Another school has teachers rotate throughout the day. There is a different teacher in the detention/suspension room every hour. One participant has an off-site location that is used for students. Another uses in-school suspension for keeping general suspension numbers and especially special education suspension numbers down.

Looking at whether there is a specific process for students to be assigned to in-school suspension one participant stated it is handled on a case by case basis, another commented that it is an individual decision (but didn't specify whether individual student or a certain individual in school makes the decisions). Another participant explained that the principal decides when it is appropriate or if a behavior support plan (which would be special education related) requires it. It further states, after usually three behavior incidents for a general education student then they are assigned to in-school suspension.

## EFFECTIVE IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION PROGRAMMING

Another school says it is an administration decision and the last participant states it is rarely used and the principal decides if behavior warrants missing instruction for it.

In response to whether the school has a designated in-school suspension room one participant replied that they have an off-site location, one stated they use the hall outside their office, and one school calls the room the Independent Study Choice Room and students use it to study, take tests and for in-school suspension and that it is staffed all day.

Further, regarding whether the school has set programming for in-school suspension two participants replied that the student works on what the class is working on but by himself, one commented that they work on any school work and another that students work on missing work. Another responded that students are put in another classroom for all or part of the day and that they are given grade level work to complete during this time.

The models used in in-school suspension varied, one replied that their program was mostly restrictive, working on school work but restricted from peers especially and that there was also discussion between the student and the principal, social worker or teacher(s). One more responded similarly adding that it was academic, therapeutic and little interaction with peers. Another school says there is always discussion to prepare for the future and if it is academic concerns they assist with those as well. Several responded discussion/processing and school work combined, one school uses academics, discussion about what got them suspended as well as cafeteria clean up. Another school uses the same and added in problem solving and apologies if necessary. Yet another school uses a

## EFFECTIVE IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION PROGRAMMING

behavior reflection form and they have a discussion with the supervisor about making better choices and giving the student the conflict resolution skills to re-enter the classroom.

Some schools have a specific staff person assigned to the in-school suspension room and others used a behavior specialist or principal, another school has the room in the middle school office area so the staff in the area supervise, and another school has staff rotate throughout the day.

Data collection processes varied, one participant responded that their special education staff track their (special education case load) students, another school keeps track of frequent visitors to ISS and then works with their families, one school keeps a log book and the behavior team looks at the repeat offenders and if they have been to in-school suspension too many times and it isn't changing their behavior then they may be suspended out-of-school the next time. In another school the administration receives discipline reports and the child study team uses the information. Another school uses the information if a student is referred for special education assessment or uses information when meeting with parents. Several mentioned SWIS and stated that data entry is part of the procedure. SWIS is a reporting service used with PBIS which (mentioned previously in this research) is outcome data based. Most comments made about data tracking that were positive for tracking data referred to the SWIS reporting.

### **Discussion**

This research overwhelmingly confirms what was found in the literature review, that in-school suspension, while promising, lacks consistency, documentation, outcome data and funding to be successful. With only 11 out of 23 participants responding that they have a specific process for assigning students to in-school suspension and the very strong consensus of the qualitative comments being primarily that most of the decisions are either handled on a case by case basis or they have a chart but don't always follow it, or it seems quite ambiguous or they are not sure how it is handled and the lack of data kept makes documenting success difficult. The findings were very unsurprising and followed what was found in the literature review quite closely.

As mentioned earlier one difficulty with the research question was obtaining answers to the research question as many of the participants were not from schools using any sort of specific programming and falling far short of determining if any interventions were being used successfully. It was difficult to collect enough information on any intervention use at all let alone the quality or out-come of such intervention.

Implications for social work practice include making sure social workers are part of building a strong programs in schools which creates strong ties between students, schools, their families and the surrounding community. Also, dissuading the use of out-of-school suspension by including an in-school suspension program that implements clear processes and expectations. Encouraging the use of a curriculum that is based in social, emotional learning that is missing in the educational systems.



## EFFECTIVE IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION PROGRAMMING

Also, to make sure to advocate for the importance of the data, in order to provide empirical evidence of the success of in-school suspension. Any in-school suspension program should have a solid data collection procedure set up to use for both for recidivism rates as well as RTI (Response to Intervention) for students who are having difficulty in school to be sure that they are receiving the most beneficial educational programming available to them and that they are placed most appropriate setting where they can be successful.

Implications for policy is to be aware of how valuable in-school suspension can be. It keeps the student in school which benefits them in many ways, it keeps them engaged in the educational experience, it keeps them supervised, it introduces them to staff in the school that may be different than teachers. It also benefits the school by bringing in the student stipend for their daily attendance. If the Department of Education calculated the amount of money lost to suspension the sheer dollar amount may make the policy needs more of a priority. Especially after considering the information about disenfranchised populations and the ultimate costs if these students end up in the correctional systems. The saved money could go into developing curriculum that could be used consistently throughout all schools and could then be researched more accurately to determine how to better help students be successful.

This is a topic ripe for research. There has been very little research done on anything other than out-of-school suspension. The benefit to the wealth of research on out-of-school suspension is that we can be certain it does not work, so finding new

## EFFECTIVE IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION PROGRAMMING

solutions will be very carefully looked at in the near future. Behavior in school is becoming an extremely important topic from all aspects.

As social workers who know the value of research we need to be better about responding to requests for information. In a career where you are asked to help in every realm you are in, it is difficult to add in one more responsibility but empirical outcome research will be the fastest way to get funding for programming out of the government entities that hold the purse strings.

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# EFFECTIVE IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION PROGRAMMING

## APPENDIX B

### Effective In-School Suspension Programming: An Exploratory Study

Researcher Name: Mariam Bashiri Graff

IRB Tracking Number: 402357-1

#### **Describe Study:**

The attached link will take you to a survey that is intended to research both the programs available for in-school suspension as well as the effectiveness of in-school suspension programs that are currently being used as alternatives to out of school suspensions.

Should you choose to participate the following survey should take approximately ten minutes or less. This will be the duration of your participation in this research study.

There are no reasonably foreseeable risks and you may choose not to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer. The surveys will be distributed to a large listserv of email addresses as well as a large number of school contact email addresses and all responses will be anonymously collected by an online survey software service company and your identity and your responses will be unknown to anyone.

Your participation is greatly appreciated and will benefit furthering the understanding of what types of in-school suspension are being used but is entirely voluntary and refusal to participate will be unknown to anyone.

The protection of human subjects is of the utmost importance and the study has been approved by the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board.

#### **Participant Questions:**

What questions will be asked to assess the participant's understanding of his/her participation in your research? Identify 3-5 open ended questions (not "yes/no" questions) that address procedures, risks (if any), confidentiality and voluntariness.

At the beginning of the email survey there will be a page asking the participant if they understand the study and what is being asked of them to click "I agree" and this will only then take them to the survey. If they do not agree they will be given a page with an email address that they can contact the researcher if they have questions or they can discontinue the survey with no obligation.

#### **Obtaining Consent:**

At what point in the research process will consent be obtained? Be specific.

Prior to accessing the link to the survey questions.

Will the investigator personally secure informed consent for all subjects? Yes.



## EFFECTIVE IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION PROGRAMMING

### APPENDIX C

#### Effective In-School Suspension Programming

Q27 This survey that is intended to research both the programs available for in-school suspension as well as the effectiveness of in-school suspension programs that are currently being used as alternatives to out of school suspensions. Should you choose to participate in the following survey, it should take approximately ten minutes or less. This will be the duration of your participation in this research study. There are no reasonably foreseeable risks and you may choose not to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer. The surveys will be distributed to a large listserv of email addresses as well as a large number of school contact email addresses. All responses will be anonymously collected by an online survey software service company and your identity and your responses will be unknown to anyone. Your participation is greatly appreciated and will benefit furthering the understanding of what types of in-school suspension are being used. It is entirely voluntary and refusal to participate will be unknown to anyone. The protection of human subjects is of the utmost importance and the study has been approved by the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board. Click Yes if you would like to continue. Clicking No will discontinue survey.

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

If No Is Selected, Then Skip To End of Survey

Q1 What grade levels attend your school?

- Elementary (1)
- Middle School (2)
- High School (3)
- Other, please explain (4) \_\_\_\_\_

## EFFECTIVE IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION PROGRAMMING

Q2 What is your position in the school?

- Social Worker (1)
- Teacher (2)
- Principal (3)
- Counselor (4)
- Staff (5)
- Associate Educator/Paraprofessional (6)
- Behavior Dean (7)
- Other, give job title or description (8) \_\_\_\_\_

Q3 Is your school:

- Urban (1)
- Suburban (2)
- Rural (3)
- Other, please describe (4) \_\_\_\_\_

Q4 In which state is your school located?

Q5 How many students attend your school?

- 0-250 (1)
- 251-500 (2)
- 501-750 (3)
- 751-1000 (4)
- 1001-1500 (5)
- 1501-2000 (6)
- 2001-2500 (7)
- 2501 or more (8)
- Other, please explain (9) \_\_\_\_\_

EFFECTIVE IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION PROGRAMMING

Q6 What is your school's Free and Reduced Lunch population percentage?

- 0%-25% (1)
- 26%-50% (2)
- 51%-75% (3)
- 76%-100% (4)

Q7 How many of your students are identified as Special Education students?

Q9 What is the estimated percentage breakdown of ethnic populations in your school?  
(Categories taken from Census Bureau)

- \_\_\_\_\_ American Indian or Alaska Native (1)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Asian American (2)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Black or African American (3)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Hispanic or Latino (4)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Multi-Racial Population (5)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (6)
- \_\_\_\_\_ White (7)

Q10 On a scale of 1-5 how clear are your behavior expectations for the students?

	1-not at all clear (1)	2-not very clear (2)	3-somewhat clear (3)	4-very clear (4)	5-absolutely clear (5)
School's behavior expectations are: (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q11 Does your school have a clear continuum of consequences for inappropriate behavior, such as: 3 warnings, referral, sent to the office, in-school suspension, out of school suspension?  
Please explain:

EFFECTIVE IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION PROGRAMMING

Q28 Does your school have in-school suspension?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q29 If No, what is done for inappropriate behavior other than out of school suspension?

Q12 Does your school have a specific process for students to be assigned to in-school suspension?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Other, please explain (3) \_\_\_\_\_

Q13 If yes, how often is this process followed in order for a student to be assigned to in-school suspension?

	Never (1)	Rarely (2)	Sometimes (3)	Quite Often (4)	Very Often (5)
Process is followed for in-school suspension assignment: (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q14 Does your school have an in-school suspension room that is specified as such?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Other, please explain (3) \_\_\_\_\_

## EFFECTIVE IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION PROGRAMMING

Q16 Does your school have a set programming for students in in-school suspension?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Other, please explain (3) \_\_\_\_\_

Q17 If yes, is this program set-up/created by your school or a pre-made/purchased curriculum program? Please give details of either choice:

Q18 Is your Program Model: Restrictive: no talking, either doing school work or punitive work i.e. clean the cafeteria Discussion/Therapeutic: self-esteem, social skills, problem solving, work on processing problem. Academic: Instructional based skills development. Combined: Combines any of the above models of punishment, therapeutic and academic skill learning.

- Restrictive (1)
- Discussion (2)
- Academic (3)
- Combined, please describe (4) \_\_\_\_\_
- Other, please explain (5) \_\_\_\_\_

Q15 If yes, does your school have a specific person assigned to staff that room?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Other, please explain (3) \_\_\_\_\_

Q20 How does your school use/evaluate data on student assigned to in-school suspension?

Q21 Does your school track/use data on recidivism rate (how often the same students re-offend and are in in-school suspension again) for the in-school suspension room?

- Yes, please explain (1) \_\_\_\_\_
- no (2)
- other, please explain (3) \_\_\_\_\_

EFFECTIVE IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION PROGRAMMING

Q19 What part of in-school suspension do you see as being the most important?

	Least important (1)	somewhat important (2)	neither important nor unimportant (3)	very important (4)	most important (5)
punishment (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
away from peers (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
out of classroom (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
contact with parent (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
relationship with staff in suspension room (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
supportive activities in in-school suspension room (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
other, please explain (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q22 Does your school track/use data on trends in suspensions used in your school?

- Yes, please explain: (1) \_\_\_\_\_
- No (2)
- Other, please explain (3) \_\_\_\_\_

Q23 On a scale of 1 to 5 how much do you believe your school's culture supports or resists suspension?

	1-very resistant to suspension (1)	2-somewhat resistant (2)	3-neither resist or support (3)	4-somewhat support (4)	5-very supportive of suspension (5)
School's culture toward suspension (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## EFFECTIVE IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION PROGRAMMING

Q24 Do your teachers have classroom behavior management training throughout the year?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q25 If yes, how often?

Q26 Is there anything else about this topic you would like to share that hasn't been covered in the survey questions?

## EFFECTIVE IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION PROGRAMMING



## EFFECTIVE IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION PROGRAMMING