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Proactive Disciplinary Consequences in Three Illinois High Schools

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PROACTIVE DISCIPLINARY CONSEQUENCES

IN THREE ILLINOIS HIGH SCHOOLS

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BY

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For my family

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ABSTRACT

Disciplinary codes of conduct guide administrators when determining the consequences for student misconduct. The codes of conduct commonly found in schools rely on exclusionary measures that have been associated with negative student outcomes and controversy but little is being done to provide positive model for these written policies. Schools need to reconsider their disciplinary practices and begin to incorporate positive strategies into their policies. The goal of this study was to provide an examination of the factors necessary to sustain a positive approach to discipline. Unfortunately, the preliminary information was insufficient. Suggestions are made to continue the exploration of philosophies and practices necessary to support a positive approach to discipline.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The focus of this dissertation is on disciplinary practices in high schools. A recent study addressed school administrator time with respect to discipline. More than 37% of respondents indicated that disciplinary issues were either frequent or daily occurrences, and as it can take at least 20 minutes to process one referral for a single student (Fenning et al., 2008; Sugai et al. 1999; Sugai & Horner, 2002) the study indicates that discipline is a serious and time-consuming issue (Fenning et al., 2008). However, despite the seriousness of the issue, as yet, little is being done to provide positive models for the development of written formal discipline policies, such as codes of conduct. In the most basic sense, codes of conduct are written documents of varying levels of proscription to which school administrators can refer when determining the consequences for a particular behavioral infraction. While the work done to date with respect to discipline policies has focused on their punitive content, the purpose of the current dissertation will be to determine which schools, although perhaps limited in number, are currently offering proactive disciplinary measures for student behaviors, as well as what we can tell about the characteristics of these schools on a number of different levels (e.g., school size, staff and student populations, school setting).

Purpose and Goal of Present Study

The overall purpose then is to determine which of the Illinois high schools are currently offering proactive disciplinary measures and to begin to examine the characteristics of those schools on a number of different levels. The goal is to commence a line of exploration and provide a preliminary examination of the critical factors, or possible support factors, necessary to sustain a more positive approach to discipline. From a guiding study (Study 1) that provides the overarching framework for the present study, a sample of 64 high schools was examined and it was determined (procedures described in later sections) that 3 of the 64 schools were the most progressive in their use of proactive measures, in that they were offering proactive measures where most schools offered only reactive consequences such as suspension and expulsion. It is these three schools that will be examined in detail.

Research Questions

The primary question to be explored in this descriptive study is which schools are the most progressive in their offerings of proactive disciplinary consequences as options within their written policies? The secondary question to be examined explores the profile of the demographic factors of the schools that have embraced the inclusion of proactive measures in their codes of conduct relative to other high schools in the sample studied. The final question considers how the demographic characteristics of the chosen schools differ from the general sample of schools. Overall the selected schools will be examined, compared and contrasted with the general sample of schools with

respect to the use of proactive disciplinary consequences for a variety of student

behaviors.

Disciplinary Codes of Conduct

The current state of the field indicates that discipline is a concern not just for the

punished student but also for administrators, teachers, and the community as a whole

(Sugai et al., 1999; Sugai & Horner, 2002; Rose & Gallup, 2006). Administrators must

therefore turn to the disciplinary codes of conduct for guidance on how to handle

disciplinary issues. However, as currently written and despite decades of research to the

contrary, most schools still employ a reactive, punitive approach to discipline,

predominantly relying on the exclusionary responses of suspension and expulsion,

which have been associated with negative student outcomes and serious controversy.

(McCarthy & Hoge, 1987; Mendez et al., 2002; Morrison & D'Incau, 1997; Nelson et

al., 2003; Noguera, 2003; Skiba et al., 2004). School districts need to consider how

they can rewrite, revise, and re-conceptualize codes of conduct. In order to be aligned

with current mandates they need to begin to incorporate more proactive consequences

and alternatives to the current exclusionary practices. Some schools have begun to

incorporate primary prevention strategies but are yet to comprehensively integrate those

practices into the discipline policies, therefore setting inconsistent standards for the

students. Other schools, however, have begun to break from this pattern and institute

efforts towards consequences that result in the teaching of a behavior or building a skill.

Disciplinary codes of conduct are an important and useful tool as they are the medium by which school staff conveys behavioral expectations (Lally, 1982). Codes of conduct also are mandated by the No Child Left Behind Act (2001). Unfortunately, schools often still utilize policies of "zero tolerance", or policies that were originally enacted to combat violent or gang-related behavior (e.g., drugs, weapons) but over time have come to be interpreted as those which mete out severe punishment for even minor behavior infractions.

Zero tolerance. In an attempt to remove judgment and bias, school districts have embraced methods of "Zero Tolerance" to control severe and violent behavior. (Skiba & Peterson, 1999; Vavrus & Cole, 2002). Zero tolerance started as a U.S. Custom initiative in the 1980s as part of the war on drugs. The policy was adapted for schools in order to include guns, later being expanded to include broader definitions of what is constituted as weapons, as a means of preventing school violence by suspending any student who brought such a weapon to school. The unintended result, however, has been a unilateral approach that is as likely to punish minor, non-violent behaviors as it is major incidences of violence (or potentially violent) that threaten school safety.

 Skiba and Peterson (1999) make a resounding point when they state "Over time, however, increasingly broad interpretations of zero tolerance have resulted in a near epidemic of suspensions and expulsions for seemingly trivial events." (p. 26). For example, popular media accounts of students being suspended or expulsion for minor infractions, such as bringing a plastic knife to school in a lunch bag, are applications of

"zero tolerance" procedures (APA Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Skiba & Peterson, 1999; Skiba & Rausch, 2006).

Additionally, the harsh approach of zero tolerance, in turn, has contributed to the overrepresentation of minority students receiving disciplinary measures (APA Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Harvard University, Advancement and Civil Rights Project, 2000; Skiba & Peterson, 1999; Skiba & Rausch, 2006). School administrators, however, continue to cling to these policies despite the association with increased negative student outcomes and an utter lack of evidence of success (Martinez, 2009; Skiba & Peterson, 1999).

Exclusionary discipline. While disciplinary issues continue to challenge school staff, the written codes of conduct commonly found in schools rely heavily on exclusionary and punitive measures, such as suspension and expulsion (Fenning, Theodos, Benner, & Bohanon-Edmonson, 2004; Larson 1998). The drawbacks to using such reactive measures have been well documented. (McCarthy & Hoge, 1987; Morrison & D'Incau, 1997; Noguera, 2003; Pesce & Wilczynski 2005; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). These drawbacks fall into several categories. First, there is the inability to correct the problem behavior so the student repeats the behavior. Second, and an extension of the first, is that exclusionary practices have been correlated with negative student outcomes, in essence making the problems worse. Such negative outcomes would include less supervision, greater isolation and increased antisocial behaviors, increased high risk behaviors such as substance abuse (or other maladaptive

coping skills), decreased academic achievement, increased dropout rates, and increased involvement with the legal system. (Breunlin et al., 2002; Pesce & Wilczynski, 2005; Sugai & Horner, 2008; Skiba & Peterson, 1999; Townsend 2000; Wald & Losen, 2008). Suspending a chronically truant student further removes that student from the classroom, almost ensuring that the student will inevitably fall behind. Furthermore, the problem with a unilateral approach of exclusion is that such a corrective action does not remediate any underlying cause for the truancy in the first place. Rather, it may in fact serve to reinforce the student's learned escape or avoidant behavior. Third is the lack of a teaching component so that the student can learn the appropriate behavior. Fourth is the disproportionate representation of certain student populations (e.g., African-Americans, males, and low academic achievers) that receive punitive consequences, despite compelling evidence that these individuals are not more likely to engage in more severe behaviors to justify such responses (Morrison & D'Incau, 1997; Noguera, 2003; Skiba et al. 2002). Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson (2002) highlight that the overrepresentation of certain student groups (low socio-economic status, African-Americans, male students) has been occurring for at least the last 25 years.

The purpose of suspension and expulsion, and indeed punishment in general, is to deter an individual from behaving in an undesired manner, (APA Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Breunlin et al., 2002; Martinez, 2009; Mayer, 1995; Skinner, 1953) yet the majority of students receiving such punishments are often suspended multiple times. If exclusionary discipline practices were truly effective, a corresponding decline

in the use of suspension over time should be logically evident, as well as a reduction in the likelihood that the behavior of concern will happen again, but this is not the case (Martinez, 2009). It appears that the use of suspension is ineffective at decreasing undesirable student behavior, particularly because a suspension does not address the underlying purpose of the student behavior. (Pesce & Wilczynski, 2005; Sugai, Sprague, & Horner, 2000). Disciplinary consequences are intended to punish a student's behavior (e.g., deter future misconduct). Unfortunately, as currently written, considerations are not given to what is truly punitive from the student's perspective. Without considering what factors may be motivating and sustaining the student's behavior, supposedly punitive consequences may only perpetuate the cycle by providing reinforcement instead. Consequences that consider neither the function of the individual's behavior nor the environmental factors that precipitate and maintain the behavior will continue to be ineffective. Consider the student who wants to avoid a difficult class. The student therefore engages in disruptive behaviors in order to be removed from the class. Unfortunately while the school staff may have attempted to "punish" the student through exclusion, the student's behavior was actually reinforced and the student now has learned that the way to avoid the difficult class in the future is to continue behaving poorly. Punitive measures that make no attempt to understand such environmental factors cannot be successful, whereas considering whether a more positive, proactive consequence might be employed may allow the student continued exposure to learning opportunities. (Drasgow & Yell, 2002; Mendez et al., 2002; Sugai

et al., 1999; Sugai, Horner, & Sprague, 1999) Suspension and expulsion reduce a student's exposure to various aspects of the curriculum (teacher, classroom, whole class/small group/independent work, instructional time, etc.) and thus reduce their ability to learn (Breunlin et al., 2002; Townsend, 2000). Such exclusionary practices also allow at-risk students to spend more time away from supervision and other positive role models, and more time exposed to possibly negative influences putting them at greater risk of dropping out of school (Pesce & Wilczynski, 2005; Townsend, 2000; Zurkowski, Kelly, & Griswold, 1998).

Another drawback to punitive measures is that they are designed solely to punish unwanted behavior while providing no teaching component. They do not allow for any direct instruction or reinforcement of the appropriate behavioral expectation or skill. (Farmer, 1996; Mendez et al., 2002; Pesce & Wilczynski, 2005; Skiba & Peterson, 2003). Finally, there is the issue of over-use or misuse of punitive practices with regards to certain student populations, particularly African-Americans, male students, students of low socio-economic status, or low academic achievers (Morrison & D'Incau, 1997; Noguera, 2003; Skiba et al. 2002). The punitive practices result in the fact that these groups disproportionately receive exclusionary disciplinary consequences regardless of the fact that they engage in the same minor (non-violent) behavioral infractions committed by their Caucasian peers (Fenning & Rose, 2007; McCarthy & Hoge, 1987; Morrison & D'Incau, 1997; Skiba et al. 2002). Therefore, as currently utilized, reactive, punishment based discipline policies and practices, and codes of conduct, as

written documents that reflect these practices, are insufficient to remediate the behavior infractions they are designed to address.

School climate and primary prevention. The movement to create school climates and cultures that provide positive environments for students provides a guiding framework for written codes of conduct. The movement is premised on the hypothesis that a positive school climate, in turn, promotes positive student outcomes. School climate has been defined as staff and student attitude toward, perception of support, and comfort level in the school (Skiba & Peterson, 2001). The work surrounding issues of school climate has led to interventions at both the individual and school-wide level in order to increase positive student outcomes and decrease the more negative ones. Positive outcomes include for example meeting behavioral expectations, staying in school, or increased academic achievement. Negative outcomes might include inappropriate or disruptive behavior, dropping out, substance abuse, or poor academic achievement. One example of a school-wide intervention program designed to improve school climate while reducing negative student outcomes is Positive Behavioral Support (PBS) (Sugai et al., 1999).

Positive behavioral support. PBS refers to a prevention oriented approach (rather than only using exclusionary practices such as suspension and expulsion) that embraces the use of proactive, teaching interventions for both individuals or school-wide systems in order to decrease inappropriate student behavior, and when taken a step further emphasizes the need for codes of conduct to include an instructional component

(as opposed to relying solely on punitive principles) (Doll & Cummings, 2008; Fenning & Bohanon, 2006; McEvoy & Welker, 2000; Sugai & Horner, 2007). Furthermore, PBS strategies focus on preventing problematic behavior before it occurs as well as utilizing an appropriate, instructive response if it does because such preventative programming has been shown to improve student outcomes (Drasgow & Yell, 2002; Horner, Sugai, & Horner, 2000; Skiba & Peterson, 1999; Sugai et al. 1999; Sugai & Horner 2008; Sugai, Horner, & Sprague 1999).

While disciplinary issues continue to challenge school staff, and in stark contrast to the efforts (in some schools) being made to create positive environments through the implementation of primary prevention strategies (e.g., PBS), the written codes of conduct commonly found in schools rely heavily on exclusionary and punitive measures, such as suspension and expulsion (Fenning et al., 2004; Larson 1998). Because of the disparity between the impetus to create positive school climates and the punitive tone of the codes of conduct (which are the ultimate resource for administrators when addressing disciplinary concerns), the unfortunate consequence is that students are caught in systems fraught with inconsistencies. The students may receive school-wide messages to the contrary, but they experience only the punitive side of discipline when formal discipline decisions are made.

Need for proactive alternatives. While the implementation of such programs as PBS is helpful in teaching behavior to all students, the culminating result for school administrators is that while they are faced with a need to create positive school climates,

they are ill equipped to do so effectively. Some schools may have implemented school-wide interventions based on models of prevention, but administrators are still bound by the exclusionary practices that govern the disciplinary codes of conduct because the use of more pro-social alternatives that directly teach a skill are still not in the main stream of what is written in discipline policies. Therefore as currently mandated, school codes of conduct need to begin to consider incorporating more proactive measures, rather than relying solely on exclusionary measures. (Drasgow & Yell, 2002; Kajs, 2006; Mendez et al., 2002; Skiba & Peterson, 2003; Sugai & Horner, 2008; Zurkowski, Kelly, & Griswold, 1998). In an effort to begin to navigate this disparity, written codes of conduct are receiving increasing attention. In particular, recent work has examined the degree to which codes of conduct do or do not align with proactive approaches to behavior management.

Background for Current Study

The subject and particular problem for this dissertation stems from a research project already in progress (Study 1) that is examining the content of discipline policies, initially in roughly sixty (60) high schools in Illinois, but more recently (Study 2, not discussed herein) across several states (Texas, Oregon, Georgia, New York, and Iowa). In Study,1 the researchers were interested in determining whether punitive responses were more common than proactive ones, (which they were), particularly for minor behavioral infractions (Fenning et al., 2008). However, the results of Study 1 (discussed later) present only part of the picture. Further exploration of these codes of conduct

indicated that there are a few schools making an attempt to codify proactive measures into their discipline policies. The present dissertation is focused on continuing the exploration in order to identify those select few schools that are taking a more positive approach to discipline and determining if there are any distinguishing characteristics that set them apart from the larger sample of schools. In addition, the exploration will include what specific types of proactive responses are incorporated into written policies for minor behaviors, as well as what factors support a more positive approach to discipline.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Discipline is an ever-present issue facing building staff that is growing in importance. Incorporating proactive consequences into school disciplinary codes of conduct, however, is a fairly new area of research and, as such, is reflected in the somewhat limited information available on the subject. This review of the literature will begin with a reflection on the need to address discipline as an overarching concern facing administrators and school staff. It will then address the manner in which codes of conduct have historically been and are currently being used. Next it will examine the content of discipline policies and the outcomes associated with the policies as currently written. Finally, the review will then turn to the more recent advocating and indeed mandated inclusion of proactive measures into school district codes of conduct (e.g., positive behaviors supports, alternative to suspension programs, school-wide prevention programs).

Disciplinary Codes of Conduct

The use of discipline in schools is a challenging issue facing school administrators, teachers, and members of the community. It is not necessarily a new, but rather pervasive and time-consuming concern (Drasgow & Yell, 2002; Mendez et al., 2002; Rose & Gallup, 2006; Sugai & Horner, 2002). For guidance when addressing the

numerous student behavioral infractions, administrators therefore turn to the school's disciplinary code of conduct.

Codes of conduct are an important resource for administrators because the policies provide a much needed proscribed guide for enforcing discipline and for managing student behavior in their schools. They also are the primary vehicle for communicating behavioral expectations to the larger student population and their families (Fenning & Bohanon, 2006; Lally, 1982).

Zero tolerance. As codes of conduct play a pivotal role in the meting out of discipline in response to student behavior, it is important to consider the content of the disciplinary policies as they are currently being used. Current practices are fraught with controversy. In an effort to apply a "Get Tough" disciplinary approach to deter and control severe and violent behavior, school districts have implemented policies of "Zero Tolerance". (Skiba & Peterson, 1999; Vavrus & Cole, 2002).

Zero tolerance was adopted from the U.S. Customs initiative in the 1980s in an attempt to combat against drug related crimes. In 1994 the policy was modified specifically for schools in order to include guns with the Gun Free Schools Act and was later changed to address weapons more generally. The initial intent of the policy was to prevent violence by suspending any student who brought a weapon to school however, in practice a different result has been achieved. The unilateral approach of zero tolerance ultimately punishes minor, non-violent behaviors (such as tardy or truant

behavior) equally as severely as it does violent (or potentially violent) behavior as originally intended.

Furthermore, zero tolerance has been connected with the disproportional gap in exclusionary discipline consequences, which is widening even further than what has occurred prior to its inception, particularly for African-American males (Gun Free Schools Act, 1994; Harvard University, Advancement and Civil Rights Project, 2000; Skiba & Peterson, 1999; Skiba & Rausch, 2006). Prior studies have shown that schools with codes of conduct that rely heavily on the more punitive consequences are associated with a disproportionate representation of minority students who are disciplined and suspended (Bowditch, 1993; Morrison & D'Incau, 1997; Nelson et al., 2003; Noguera, 2003; Townsend, 2000).

A major aspect of the controversy pertaining to zero tolerance policies, the overrepresentation of minority students in exclusionary discipline practices such as suspension and expulsion, has been well documented (Children's Defense Fund, 1975; McCarthy & Hoge, 1987; Skiba et al., 2002; Wu, Pink, Crain, & Moles, 1982). Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson (2002) in their study examined discipline data for roughly 11,000 middle school students for the academic year 1994-1995. The students represented 19 different urban public middle schools ranging in size from less than 400 students to more than 800 students. 52% of the participants were male, 48% were female. Furthermore, 56% were African-American, while 42% were Caucasian (the remaining 2% was a mixture of Latino and Asian-American). 83% of the middle school

participants were in general education, while 17% were in special education (nearly

10% were designated as having learning disabilities). 74% qualified for free or reduced

cost lunch. After reviewing the data base of office discipline referrals and subsequent

administrative dispositions, several determinations were made. African-American

students and male students were disproportionately overrepresented with respect to all

of the selected measurements for schools discipline (e.g., office discipline referrals,

suspension, and expulsion). The findings were consistent with the previous body of

research, particularly with respect to urban and smaller schools. The authors go on to

highlight that in order to address the disparity and reduce the overrepresentation of

certain student populations, there is a need to consider revising the existing overarching

system (Skiba et al., 2002). In later work, Skiba, Eaton, and Sotoo (2004) discuss that

the disproportionality of minority students represented in exclusionary discipline is

reflected in both law enforcement interventions at the school and the juvenile justice

system, emphasizing that discipline impacts the community at large as well, leading to

what has been articulated as "The School to Prison Pipeline" (Wald & Losen, 2003).

Furthermore, whether suspension is used appears to be tied to a socio-cultural context,

and that students who are racially different from the teacher are more likely to be

singled out. (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Harvard University, Advancement and Civil

Rights Project, 2000; Skiba et al., 2002; Skiba & Rausch, 2006; Vavrus & Cole, 2002).

Several researchers have argued, that while respecting that the purpose of zero

tolerance was to increase school safety, what is actually called for is an approach that is

strong but fair to all students, in which major and minor offenses are not automatically met with the same severe consequences, a result inconsistent with the wide application of zero tolerance. (Curwin, 1999; Essex, 2004; Kajs, 2006). Furthermore, Skiba and Peterson (1999), along with Breunlin, Cimmarusti, Bryant-Edwards, and Hetherington (2002), point out that schools that have embraced policies of zero tolerance are ironically less safe than schools that have not.

In an effort to address the controversy surrounding zero tolerance, the American Psychological Association (APA) convened a task force (Zero Tolerance Task Force) to further examine the effects of zero tolerance policies. What the task force determined is that while the overarching goal of zero tolerance to maintain the safety of our schools is commendable, the implementation of such policies is problematic. Despite the use of such policies student behavior management continues to be a problem, there is no corresponding increase in positive student outcomes or school climate, and in fact there is an association with not only negative student outcomes but an overrepresentation of minority students who receive exclusionary discipline. The task force emphasizes that because zero tolerance policies have not been shown to be effective, alternatives to such policies should be considered, alternatives that provide prevention strategies as well as allow for greater flexibility and more tempered responses to less severe behaviors. The task force ultimately calls for a change. (APA Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008).

Exclusionary discipline. The influence of zero tolerance is plainly reflected in the formal discipline policies as currently written. Previous research has shown that, in current practice, disciplinary codes of conduct are typically based on exclusionary and punitive measures more often than more proactive, teaching consequences (Breunlin et al., 2002; Fenning, Parraga, & Wilczynski, 2000; Larson, 1998). The exclusionary and punitive measures that dominate current policies and practices have been associated with a variety of negative implications and student outcomes, most notably the loss of instructional time, and a disproportionate impact on minority students. (Morrison, Furlong, & Morrison, 1994; Skiba et al. 2002; Skiba & Rausch, 2006; Zurkowski, Kelly, & Griswold, 1998).

Breunlin et al.(2002) highlight three primary concerns with the punitive nature of most disciplinary codes of conduct. The first is the inability to diminish inappropriate behavior (Breunlin et al., 2002). The second addresses the disproportionate application of exclusionary discipline to certain student groups (Breunlin et al., 2002). Finally, a negative outcome is the increase in negative student outcomes, such as loss of instructional time or increased isolation (Breunlin et al., 2002). Pesce & Wilczynski (2005) discuss that as currently used, suspension is actually an ineffective behavioral modification technique. The authors point out that behavior problems are often aggravated because suspension neither addresses what led the student to initially misbehave, nor teaches the student the socially appropriate behavior (Pesce & Wilczynski, 2005). Mendez, Knoff & Ferron (2002) address that while the intent of

suspension is to diminish unwanted student behavior, it in fact correlates with negative student outcomes, in particular the disproportionate representation of certain groups in exclusionary discipline. Additionally, Townsend (2000) further articulates that such exclusionary practices in effect bar students from the learning environment, do not allow for the teaching of appropriate expected behaviors, decreases time with positive role models, and increases student dropout rate. In a recent study Martinez (2009) also highlights that suspended students are excluded from the learning environment.

New perspective. Recognizing that codes of conduct are an invaluable tool for administrators, students and their families, and the larger community, codes of conduct have been mandated since the late 1970s. More recently, however, the mandates speak directly to the inclusion and integration of proactive disciplinary measures into the policies (as opposed to an over-reliance on punitive measures) (IDEA, 2004; No Child Left Behind Act, 2001).

Previous studies recognize that, as current practices are not only ineffective but associated with negative student outcomes, there is a need for a shift in perception. Noonan, Tunney, Fogal, & Sarich (1999) make an interesting recommendation when they advocate for home-school collaborations on discipline policies in order to emphasize that the focus of discipline should not be on punishment but on understanding the expectations, that discipline is a natural outgrowth of the learning process. Sugai, Horner, and Sprague (1999) advocate for the use of functional assessment when determining appropriate behavioral interventions. They argue that

understanding what it is about the environment that not only leads to but maintains a

student's behavior is paramount to implementing an effective behavioral intervention

(Sugai, Horner, & Sprague, 1999). In later work, Sugai and Horner (2008) discuss the

importance of a positive school culture and the school-wide system that can maintain it.

They discuss the importance of a system that encourages accepted behaviors but deters

unacceptable ones (Sugai & Horner, 2008). Furthermore they highlight that the use of

exclusionary practices such as suspension and expulsion has been shown to be

ineffective and associated with negative student outcomes (Sugai & Horner, 2008). The

authors have highlighted the need to reframe the concept of discipline as an

instructional technique that considers the student's own motivation as well as the role

played by the environment (Sugai & Horner, 2008). Schools therefore need to consider

alternatives to the typical exclusionary measures such as suspension and expulsion,

particularly when addressing minor behavior infractions (e.g., tardy, truancy), which

they already embrace (Drasgow & Yell, 2002; Horner et al., 2000; Knoff, 2000; Skiba

& Peterson, 1999, 2003). Mendez et al. (2002) discuss how a school's suspension rate is

tied to its behavioral interventions, and that in order to reduce the number of

suspension, the school should consider a school-wide prevention program. Sugai,

Sprague, and Horner (2000) advocate for primary prevention, a behavior system that

provides instruction, and one in which behavior of varying levels of severity is met with

an appropriately intense response. Skiba and Peterson (1999) discuss that school-wide

prevention programs and the discipline plan should present a consistent message of

promoting and supporting positive student behavior, as opposed to simply punishing

unwanted behavior. Furthermore it has been shown that attempting to keep students in

school and utilizing methods of primary prevention (e.g., school-wide initiatives,

intervention planning) has been associated with the school making an effort to improve

overall school safety, as well as an increase in positive student outcomes and

corresponding decreases in negative ones (Bohanon, Flannery, Malloy, & Fenning,

2009; Osher, Sandler, Nielson 2001; Pesce & Wilczynski, 2005; Skiba and Peterson,

2001). In order to accommodate this shift in perspective, codes of conduct need to focus

less on the proscribed exclusionary measures currently utilized and focus more on

embracing policies and programs that teach students acceptable behaviors. The

emphasis needs to be on codes of conduct that clearly define behavioral expectations

and the programs or curricula that will teach it. There needs to be a clear outline of

goals and processes for programs or interventions that provide an alternative to

suspension. Overall the codes of conduct need to provide examples of how to teach

what is acceptable behavior, rather than to simply punish what is not.

Summary

The literature has provided an analysis of the limitations of the discipline codes

of conduct that are currently in use and acknowledged the need for more proactive

alternatives to such exclusionary methods of punishment such as suspension and

expulsion. Primary prevention and other proactive school-wide programs have been

endorsed as ways to improve school safety, decrease negative student outcomes and

increase positive ones, but little has been said about written codes of conduct. It has

been pointed out that inconsistency is a major issue, particularly when a school building

has embraced a proactive, teaching, school-wide initiative such as Positive Behavior

Interventions & Supports, yet continues to rely on exclusionary and punitive

disciplinary measures. The result is a conflicted message to the student population

which will continue until codes of conduct take into consideration current mandates

advocating for the inclusion of proactive measures (Fenning et al., 2004; Fenning et al.,

2008; Sugai & Horner, 2002; Zurkowski, Kelly, & Griswold, 1998).

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

The overall purpose of the current project is to determine which of the Illinois high schools are currently offering proactive disciplinary measures and to begin to examine the characteristics of those schools on a number of different levels. The goal is to provide a preliminary examination of the critical factors, or possible support factors, necessary to sustain a more positive approach to discipline.

The research questions are as follows: (1) Which schools within the overall sample offer the most proactive disciplinary consequences relative to the other schools within the sample; (2) what type of demographic profile (e.g., school size, staff and student ethnicity) exists for schools determined to have more proactive policies; and (3) do schools with more proactive policies differ from schools in the overall sample with respect to demographic characteristics, and if so, what type of differences are found?

Three separate approaches will be taken to analyze the policies. First, the demographic characteristics for each of the selected schools will be presented separately in order to better understand the characteristics of each individual school. Subsequently, the selected schools will be compared to each other in order to establish the demographic profile. Finally, a comparison will be made between the schools whose discipline codes of conduct have been identified as proactive in comparison with the overall sample.

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The review of the literature demonstrates that, as currently written and enforced, disciplinary codes of conduct are primarily punitive in nature, relying heavily on exclusionary measures such as suspension and expulsion. A guiding study (Study 1) (Fenning et al., 2008) provides the background for the present study. According to Fenning et al. (2008), proactive school responses are defined as those with the potential for teaching an expected behavior or providing an alternative to punishment. Reactive consequences are defined as those that are strictly punitive in nature, providing no teaching or instructive component, leaving students with no opportunity to learn alternative or expected behaviors (Fenning et al., 2008). The results of Study 1 indicated that the content analysis of 64 codes of conduct from a sample of Illinois high schools were primarily punitive, with an emphasis on suspension and expulsion (Fenning et al., 2008). Therefore overall it was determined that the content of the discipline codes of conduct was more often punitive than proactive in nature (Fenning et al., 2008).

Participants in the Guiding Study

The original sample pool was comprised of the 585 Illinois high schools as listed in the Illinois State Board of Education database. The principals for these high schools were initially contacted in February of 2004 through the mail to determine their desire to participate in the study focused on content analysis of discipline policies (3 additional mailings to non-responders were sent between May through October). In total, 64 high schools with widely varied student populations from a variety of settings across the state of Illinois agreed to participate (11%) and returned their consent forms,

summary demographic, academic, and behavioral data, along with their current disciplinary code of conduct (Fenning et al., 2008).

Instrumentation in Guiding Study

      Development of tools. In the original study, the desire was to study the content of the collected codes of conduct. According to Babbie (1990, p.29), content analysis consists of "the systematic examination of documents, such as novels, poems, government publications, songs, and so forth." Therefore, in order to evaluate the content of the written disciplinary policies the researchers in the guiding study used a coding system known as the Analysis of Discipline Codes Rating Form-Revised (ADCR-R). The ADCR-R was a modification of the earlier tool, the ADCR, which was originally created as a coding system generated directly from the data, based on an analysis of school sanctioned behaviors and consequences in a pilot study of high school discipline codes of conduct. The earlier version had focused primarily on more severe, violent offenses (e.g., weapons possession). The primary additions in the revised instrument were the inclusion of minor behavior infractions (non-violent, no threat to school safety). The end result was a coding system that included 47 behaviors and 16 possible consequences (Fenning et al., 2008). Two main forms were used in the overarching study. The first was the previously mentioned ADCR-R. The second form used allowed schools to provide a summary of certain demographic, academic, and behavioral information about the school (Fenning et al., 2008).

Training of independent raters. The Loyola team instituted the following training method prior to coding any of the actual policies with the ADCR-R during the initial study. In order to obtain inter-rater reliability of at least 80%, the team engaged in training sessions (4 in total), during which they began by jointly coding sample policies and identifying areas of disagreement or confusion, then moving on to the independent rating of sample policies. One such area of disagreement surrounded the manner in which the ADCR-R originally separated various forms of "assault" into highly particular categories, making it difficult to apply to the content of the policies. A team decision was made to collapse the subcategories into one larger category, referred to as "general assault", at which point an inter-rater reliability of 87% was achieved in July of 2004. Once minimum reliability was achieved, each of the 5 team members were assigned various policies from the participating schools (64 in all) for independent coding (Fenning et al., 2008).

Method of data coding. The 5 Loyola team members, acting as independent raters, used the ADCR-R (with the collapsed "general assault" category) to evaluate the content of the 64 disciplinary codes of conduct received from the participating Illinois high schools. Each policy was examined for the presence of absence of a particular consequence, whether the consequences were linked to specific behaviors, and whether provisions were made for repeat violations (Fenning et al., 2008). Demographic data also was collected and recorded. Information included office discipline referrals, suspension rate, expulsion rate, grade point average, attendance and dropout rates,

student and teacher race information, percentage of students receiving free/reduced

lunch, school size, and school setting.

Behavior Categories in Guiding Study

The 47 behaviors that were included in the ADCR-R were then subdivided into

three severity categories: mild, moderate, and severe. In order to obtain these ratings,

the behaviors were judged by the Loyola research team (five members in total), based

on the level of impact. Furthermore, the opinion of seven outside raters was obtained for

judgmental validity. The outside raters, who were selected based on content expertise

and were comprised of both practitioners and researchers, each rated the 47 behaviors

independently of the Loyola team as well as each other. Ultimately, the outside ratings

of 5 of the 47 behaviors were excluded due to missing data, multiple ratings, or other

discrepancies. For 31 of the remaining 42 behaviors (74%) the outside raters

categorized the behaviors at the same level of severity as the Loyola team. In these

cases, the unilateral severity rating was used. For the remaining 11 behaviors where

there was a discrepancy between the Loyola team's rating and that of the outside raters,

the Loyola team deferred to the outside raters, where the outside raters had achieved a

consensus of 70% or higher (at least five of the seven raters agreed). The severity

ratings of three behaviors were subsequently changed: derogatory remarks to students,

misuse of fire alarm, and vandalism. The final behavioral categorizations incorporating

the feedback from the outside raters are shown in Table 1 (Fenning et al., 2008).

Table 1

Behavioral Categorization by Severity

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Severity   Behavior (Abbreviation)

_____

Mild   Cheating/Plagiarism (C/P); Class Disruption (CD); Derogatory Staff

                Remarks (DSR); Dress Code Violation (DCV); Electronic Devices (ED);

                Forgery (F); General Staff Disrespect (GStfD); General Student

                Disrespect (GStdD); Loitering (L); Misuse of Computer (MC); Student

                ID Violation (SIDV); Tardies (Tardy); Tobacco Offenses: Distribution

                (Tob1); Possession (Tob2); Sale (Tob3); and Use (Tob4); Truancy

                (Truancy)

Moderate   Bullying; Fighting; Intimidation; Social Exclusion; Student Remarks;

                Vandalism

Severe   Alcohol Offenses; Arson; Assault/Threat; Battery; Bomb Threat; Drug

                Offenses; Gang Behavior; Hazing; Misuse of Fire Alarm;

                Fireworks/Explosives Offenses; Racial Slurs; Sexual Harassment;

                Theft/Burglary; Weapons Offenses

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Consequence Categories in Guiding Study

The possible consequences for student behavioral infractions also were categorized by the five members of the Loyola team. Initially, the 16 different consequences from the ADCR-R were categorized in one of two ways; as either proactive measures or reactive measures. The proactive measures were determined to include a teaching component, allowing a student to learn something from the situation. Examples might include the student learning an appropriate alternative response in a similar situation, or a more appropriate and acceptable replacement behavior. The reactive measures sought only to punish student behavior as the sole means of deterring future misconduct. The ratings of proactive were somewhat lenient in order to have as broad a spectrum of proactive responses as possible, therefore any consequence that could possibly allow for an opportunity of direct instruction was included. Both the proactive measures and the reactive measures were further subdivided. The proactive measures were divided into those referred to as teaching, as well as those referred to as global. The teaching consequences included those responses that directly taught a desired skill or behavioral expectation. On the other hand, the global responses were those that were far less proscriptive and directed but were more general and global in nature, without reference to the development of a specific skill set (e.g., substance abuse intervention" would be teaching, while "counseling" would be more global). Finally, the reactive consequences also were divided, based on the degree of exclusion from the

instructional environment, into mild, moderate, and severe categories. The

categorizations as finally determined are shown in Table 2 (Fenning et al., 2008).

Table 2

Categorization of Consequences in Discipline Codes of Conduct

Category	Consequence
Proactive Global	Community Service (CS); Counseling (C); Natural Consequence (NC); Parent Conference (PC); Teacher Conference (TC)
Proactive Direct Teaching	Peer Mediation (PM); Skill Building (SB); Substance Abuse Intervention (SAI)
Reactive Mild	Detention; Saturday Detention
Reactive Moderate	Classroom Removal; In-School Suspension
Reactive Severe	Alternative School Placement; Expulsion; Out-of School Suspension; Police Involvement

Framework for Current Project

The prior study indicates that overall the approach of written disciplinary policies is punitive and reactionary (Fenning et al., 2008). However, when examining the school policies from the overarching study relative to each other for use of proactive consequences, several exceptions emerge. The identification and selection procedures for these exceptions appears later in the results section in greater detail, but in general, when compared with the sample at large, certain schools were selected because of their efforts to include a greater number of proactive, teaching consequences in their codes of conduct, rather than sole reliance on punitive, reactionary measures. It is these exceptions, these schools that differ in some way from the general sample that will form the basis of analysis for the present study. It is the demographic information of these exceptions that will be examined in order to highlight any differences between them and the sample at large.

Behavior Category for Current Project

For the present study, which is aiming to provide a profile of the demographic factors associated with inclusion of proactive measures in codes of conduct, it was determined to focus on the mild behavior category. Mild behaviors are more statutory in nature and lack the threat of violence present in the severe behaviors. Mild behaviors were chosen for the present study because they lend themselves to instruction and correction and do not warrant the extreme reaction that can result from use of exclusionary and punitive measures. Furthermore, studies have shown that it is the mild

behaviors that occur most frequently in schools, that it is the non-violent offenses (e.g., tardy, truancy) that are the most problematic (Skiba & Peterson, 1999). From the categorizations established for the pre-existing study, this results in the inclusion of 14 mild behaviors, as previously detailed in Table 1.

Consequence Category for Current Project

Just as the present study is focused solely on the mild behavior category, so it is similarly focused solely on the proactive consequences, of which there are eight. Because the goal is to determine the critical factors associated with integration of proactive disciplinary consequences into formal written codes of conduct, the 64 policies as originally coded for the larger study will be used here, but with an emphasis on the proactive measure, both "global" and "teaching". The selected consequences are shown in Table 2.

Design for Current Project

The research design for the current study will be a collective case study using data collected during an ongoing research study (Study 1) (Fenning et al., 2008). The information about the content of the school discipline policy as well as school academic, behavior, and demographic data was obtained from publicly available school codes of conduct or the Illinois State Board of Education's archive of school report cards.

Procedures for Current Project

      Selection of policies for current study. In the present study, procedural

selection of the participants is somewhat synonymous with the detailed results of how

certain schools were able to distinguish themselves and become the subject for this

collective case study. Final determining information is shared in the results section. For

the 14 mild behaviors (listed in Table 1), each was paired with each of the eight

possible proactive consequences (shown in Table 2), or consequences that specifically

teach a desired behavior or skill. The pairings created 112 possible mild

behavior/proactive consequence combinations such as Tardy-Teacher Conference,

Tardy-Skill Building, Class Disruption-Teacher Conference, or Class Disruption – Skill

Building. A full listing of pairings and the frequencies, or number of schools including

such pairings in their code of conduct, is shown in Table 3.

Legend for Table 3				
Prosocial Consequences	CS= Com Svc	C=Counseling	NC=Natural Consequence	PC=Parent Conference
	PM=Peer Mediation	SB=Skill Building	SAI=Substance Abuse Intrvntn	TC=Teacher Conference
Mild Behaviors	CP=Cheating or Plagiarism	CD=Class Disruption	DSR=Derogatory Staff Remarks	DCV=Dress Code Vltn
	ED=Electronic Devices	F=Forgery	StfD= Staff Disrespect	StdD= Stdnt Disrespect
	L=Loitering	MC=Misuse of Computer	SIDV=Stdnt ID violation	Tardy
	Tob1=Tobacco Distbtn	Tob2=Possn	Tob3=Sale	Tob4=Use
	Truancy			

Table 3

Number of Schools Offering Prosocial Consequences for Mild Behaviors

	CS	C	NC	PC	PM	SB	SAI	TC
CP	**1**	**3**	32	19	0	**3**	0	**7**
CD	**3**	**5**	11	28	**1**	**6**	0	16
DSR	**2**	**3**	**6**	17	**2**	**5**	0	**3**
DCV	**2**	**3**	34	28	**1**	**5**	0	**8**
ED	**1**	**1**	38	29	**1**	**3**	0	**2**
F	**2**	**1**	**10**	21	**1**	**4**	0	**5**
StfD	**2**	**3**	12	29	**1**	**5**	0	**6**
StdD	0	0	0	**7**	0	0	0	0
L	**2**	0	**3**	**9**	**1**	**3**	0	**5**
MC	**1**	**3**	37	14	0	**3**	0	**2**
SIDV	**1**	0	15	14	0	**1**	0	**3**
Tardy	**2**	**2**	14	28	**1**	**3**	0	21
Tob1	0	0	**4**	**4**	0	**1**	**1**	0
Tob2	**1**	**2**	18	29	**1**	**5**	13	**6**
Tob3	0	0	**5**	**6**	0	**1**	**1**	0
Tob4	**1**	**2**	19	24	**1**	**5**	**9**	**4**
Truancy	**4**	**8**	35	38	**1**	12	0	12

A frequency analysis for each of the 112 paired combinations was run using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Once the frequency for each combination across the entire sample of 64 schools was determined, further review revealed that certain combinations were much less frequent than others, or were "rare" meaning that a particular prosocial consequence was offered for a particular mild behavior by 10 or fewer schools out of 64 (15% or fewer schools). The analysis to select the final participants is detailed in the results section, in response to the initial research question.

Selection of variables for current study. The primary dataset used for analysis in the present study included information about the participating high schools that was obtained through the Illinois School Report Card database.

The school report card data include information about the school's student population such as percentages by race, income, limited English proficiency, drop out rate, truancy rate, mobility rate, attendance rate, and enrollment.

Report cards also include instructional setting information such as amount of parent contact, student-staff ratios, class size, and amount of time per subject; teacher data such as percentage by race, gender, number, and experience level; district finance information such as teacher/administrator salaries, expense by function, revenue sources, expenses, and other indicators; and finally academic performance indicators such as state tests.

To date the literature provides limited guidance regarding what is found in the content of written codes of conduct, and any strategies for schools to create more proactive documents. What literature is not focused on the drawbacks of exclusionary methods and approaches to discipline tends to highlight initial recommendations for policy and practice. The body of research does not yet highlight support factors critical to adopting or sustaining a positive approach to discipline. It is the goal of the current project to begin that exploratory process. The analysis of the chosen schools will therefore commence with a basic profile of each school. The profile will consist of independent demographic factors about the schools that do not change regardless of school interventions or initiatives. The demographic variables to be examined for the current study include school size (e.g., student-staff ratios and class size), school setting, both student and teacher race, teacher experience level, and financial information (e.g., mobility rate, free/reduced lunch status, and salaries). Once the basic profile is set for each individual school, they will be cross-compared to each other and to the larger sample in order to isolate the similarities and differences that make these three schools stand out from the rest.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

The research questions are as follows: (1) Which schools within the overall sample offer the most proactive disciplinary consequences relative to the other schools within the sample; (2) what type of demographic profile (e.g., school size, staff and student ethnicity) exists for schools determined to have more proactive policies; and (3) do schools with more proactive policies differ from schools in the overall sample with respect to demographic characteristics, and if so, what type of differences are found?

Question One

The first question pertains to the selection of the schools that will provide the basis for the current case study. The beginning procedures for participant selection are detailed in chapter three, but in summary an analysis was used to determine the frequency of occurrence of the pairings of mild behavior infractions with certain proactive consequences. Those frequencies are shown in Table 3. For example, across the entire sample of schools the options of natural consequence and parent conference were the most prevalent. 32 schools offered a natural consequence for cheating or plagiarism, 38 schools offered it for misconduct involving electronic devices, and 35 schools offered a natural consequence for truancy. In terms of parent conference, 28 schools offered the consequence for class disruption, 28 offered it for dress code violations, and 38 schools offered a parent conference as a consequence for truant

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behavior. The third most prevalent proactive response was teacher conference, offered by 16 schools for class disruption, 21 schools for tardy behavior, and 12 schools for truant behavior. It is important to remember that in order to have a broader selection of proactive consequences a great deal of leniency was shown in the categorizations.

Despite this leniency, in certain instances particular behavior-consequence combinations were determined to be "rare" (offered by 15% or fewer schools). These infrequent occurrences, or "rarities", tend to indicate that if these practices are prevalent in only 15% or fewer schools, then there should be something unique about those schools that they would embrace such practices, setting them apart from the larger sample. For instance, out of the 64 schools in the sample, community service was offered by, at most, four different schools for truant behavior. Peer mediation was only offered by two schools for derogatory staff remarks.

A review of the dataset then determined which schools in fact comprised these "rare" schools, or schools with a higher frequency of proactive responses relative to the schools within the overall sample. There were 24 in all. Furthermore, graphing the 24 schools with the number of mild behavior-prosocial consequence offerings in the code of conduct clearly shows that three of the schools (School IDs 43, 52, and 31) are outliers even among the 24 "rare" schools that were offering more prosocial consequences for mild behaviors. That is to say that among the 15% or fewer schools (out of the total 64 schools in the general sample) making the greatest efforts to offer prosocial consequences for mild behavior infractions, three particular schools

distinguish themselves further by offering the greatest number of prosocial options. The graph shown at Figure 1 indicates the number of schools offering mild behavior-prosocial consequence pairs. For instance, 11 schools offered between 0 and 5 prosocial consequences for mild behavior infractions. On the other hand, only one school offered between 20 and 25 mild behavior-prosocial consequence pairings. Three schools have been selected for the present study which seeks to describe the critical demographic characteristics of these top three users of proactive consequences, to examine them, compare and contrast them, and look for any existing patterns between them and the remaining sample overall (the remaining 61 schools).

Figure 1

Graph of 24 Rare Schools with Highest Frequency of Proactive Responses
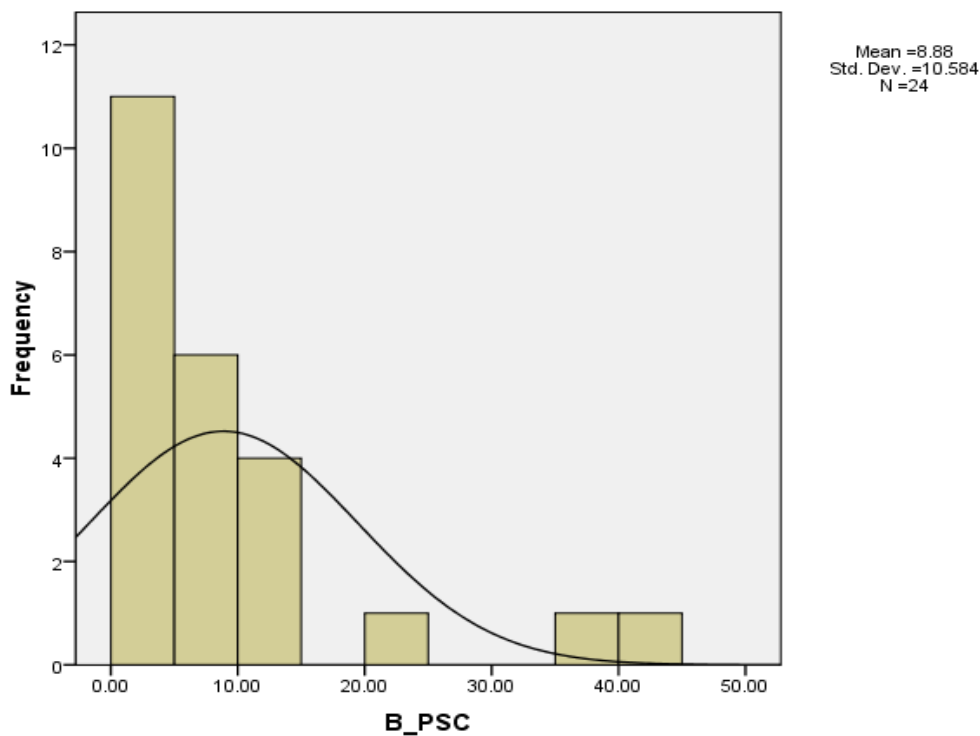
Question Two

The second question begins to construct an initial profile of the demographic factors of the schools that have incorporated a higher number of proactive responses in their codes of conduct. Review of the 2004 Illinois School Report Cards reveals the following information about the three selected schools.

Proactive school number one. School number one offered the greatest number of proactive consequences for mild student behaviors (41 pairings). In addition to the more commonly offered natural consequence, parent conference, and teacher conference, the first school offered community service, skill building, and was the only one of the three to offer peer mediation. While school number one routinely offered six of the eight proactive consequences, the school did not offer the more general consequence of counseling, nor did the school offer a substance abuse intervention for tobacco offenses. Additionally, school number one had no provisions for 6 of the 14 mild behaviors. Excluded were cheating/plagiarism, misuse of computer, student ID violations, tobacco distribution, tobacco sale, and student disrespect.

School number one is a rural high school and had a total enrollment of 170 students. The average class size was 13 students. Teachers were 100% Caucasian, 25% of which were male and 75% were female. 70% of the teachers had bachelor's degrees, while 30% held master's degree or higher. Teachers also had an average of 15 years teaching experience. In terms of the student population, nearly 98% also were Caucasian, 1% were Asian/Pacific Islander, and the remaining 1% was a mix of African

American and Hispanic. 26% of the student population was considered low income, and there was a 22% mobility rate.

In regards to district financial information, the average teacher salary was $38,454, and the average administrator salary was $77,559. In terms of expenditure by function, 27% of the district expenditures were for instruction, 3% was for general administration, 19% was for supporting services, and 51% was classified as other. Revenue sources included 20% from local property taxes, 2.5% from other local funding, 18% from general state funds, 56% from other state funding, and 3.5% from federal funds.

Proactive school number two. School number two offered the second greatest number of proactive consequences for mild student behaviors (37 pairings). The second school most commonly utilized natural consequence, parent conference, teacher conference, community service, and skill building. For 5 out of the 14 mild behaviors school number two offered counseling as well. For none of the mild behaviors did school number two offer peer mediation or substance abuse intervention. For three of the mild behaviors (electronic devices, tobacco possession, and tobacco use), only the consequences of natural consequence and parent conference were offered. Furthermore student disrespect, tobacco distribution, and tobacco sale were not included at all.

The second school also is a rural high school and had a total enrollment of 213 students. The average class size for the second school also was 13 students. Teachers again were 100% Caucasian (25% male, 75% were female). 89% of the teachers had

bachelor's degrees, while 11% held master's degree or higher. Teachers had an average of 13 years teaching experience. In terms of the student population, 99% also were Caucasian, with the remaining 1% mixed between Asian/Pacific Islander and African American. 28% of the student population was considered low income, and there was an 11% mobility rate.

In regards to district financial information, the average teacher salary was $40,221, and the average administrator salary was $70,500. In terms of expenditure by function, 32% of the district expenditures were for instruction, 4% was for general administration, 18% was for supporting services, and 46% was classified as other. Revenue sources included 25% from local property taxes, 4.5% from other local funding, 29% from general state funds, 37% from other state funding, and 4.5% from federal funds.

Proactive school number three. Of the chosen three schools, school number three offered the least number of proactive consequences for mild student behaviors (21 pairings). For school number three only four of the eight proactive consequences were used regularly: natural consequence, parent conference, counseling, and skill building. Community service also was offered for truant behavior. Tardy behavior had two proactive consequences (teacher conference and parent conference), student ID violations had two consequences (natural consequence and parent conference), and electronic devices only offered parent conference. Peer mediation and substance abuse

intervention were not offered, and no provisions were made for student disrespect, tobacco distribution, tobacco sale, or loitering.

School number three is a suburban high school and had a total enrollment of 1,501 students. The average class size was 18 students. Teachers were 98% Caucasian and 2% Hispanic (47% of which were male, and 53% were female. 34% of the teachers had bachelor's degrees, while 66% held master's degree or higher. Teachers had an average of 14 years teaching experience. In terms of the student population school number three was the most diverse. 57% of the students were Caucasian, 35% were Hispanic, 6% were Asian/Pacific Islander, and the remaining 2% was a mix of African American and Native American. 18% of the student population was considered low income, and there was a 9% mobility rate.

In regards to district financial information, the average teacher salary was $76,553, and the average administrator salary was $136,242. In terms of expenditure by function, 47% of the district expenditures were for instruction, 4% was for general administration, 36% was for supporting services, and 13% was classified as other. Revenue sources included 85% from local property taxes, 8% from other local funding, 2% from general state funds, 3% from other state funding, and 2% from federal funds.

Comparison of the three chosen schools. The profiles for the three selected schools have certain commonalities as well as vast differences. In terms of policy offerings, none of the three schools offered proactive consequences for student disrespect, tobacco distribution, or tobacco sale. In terms of actual proactive

consequences offered, none of the three offered a substance abuse intervention. Although they may have varied from each other in how often they offered a proactive consequence, they all offered natural consequences, parent conferences, teacher conferences, community service, and skill building. Demographically, all three schools had predominantly Caucasian staff and a higher percentage of female teachers than male teachers, with between 13 and 15 years of teaching experience. Two of the schools were small rural high schools while the third was a much larger suburban school. In addition to a more diverse student population, the third school also had slightly larger class sizes. All three schools differed with respect to percentage of students determined to be of low income status, as well as percentage of mobility rates. The three also differed with respect to highest degree held, average salaries, expenditures, and revenue sources. Schools one and two tended to be more similar on these points, but the third school differed greatly. School three was the only school where a greater percentage of teachers held master's degrees or above, the average salaries were nearly double the other two schools, and most notably that revenue sources were predominantly local sources of funding.

While each of the schools is both similar and dissimilar from the others, schools one and two seem to have slightly more similarities to each other than to the third school. It also is these first two schools that had nearly twice the number of proactive consequences than the third school. Therefore in terms of a rudimentary profile of the schools that are currently incorporating proactive disciplinary measures it seems that

natural consequences, parent conferences, teacher conferences, community service, and skill building are the most frequently offered proactive consequences. Other characteristics include smaller (both overall school size as well as class size) rural settings, both Caucasian teachers and student population, a greater percentage of female teachers the majority of whom hold bachelor's degrees and have between 13 and 15 years of teaching experience. However, although not at the same level as the first two schools, the profile of the third school should not be discounted.

Question Three

The final question compares the demographic characteristics of the chosen schools (incorporate less common proactive consequences into their school codes of conduct) with the general sample of schools. Again, while the basic profile of the third school should not be discounted, because the profiles of the first two schools were most similar, the information learned from the first two schools will be initially compared to the summary information available for the general sample.

While the general sample was a mixture of urban (18%), suburban (33%), and rural (49%) high schools, nearly half of the general sample consisted of rural high schools, with 36% of the general sample representing smaller schools of less than 500 students. The general sample also showed an average of 95% Caucasian teachers across the various high schools. Student populations were mostly Caucasian (80% on average) with the remaining 20% split between African American (9%), Hispanic (9%) and

Asian/Pacific Islander (2%). The average low income percentage across the various settings was 22%.

On these initial points, the demographic characteristics of the schools selected for their progressive use of proactive disciplinary consequences do not seem to differ greatly from the larger sample. Even when the characteristics of the third school are taken into account, nearly one-third of the general sample also were suburban high schools, and 18% of the schools had between 1500-1999 students. One area of difference is that the third school did have a lower percentage of Caucasian students, 57% as compared to the 80% of the general sample. On the whole, however, the three selected participant schools for the case study do not differ from the larger sample of Illinois high schools.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

The present study focuses on disciplinary practices in high schools because discipline is a serious issue for not only school staff, but students, their families, and the community at large. Unfortunately, the codes of conduct commonly found in schools continue to rely on exclusionary measures despite the fact that have been associated with negative student outcomes and controversy, and are insufficient to remediate misconduct. As yet, and to the detriment of the school administrators that utilize the codes of conduct for guidance when addressing student behavior, little is being done to provide positive models for the development of written formal discipline policies. The current state of the field indicates that in order to be aligned with current mandates, school districts need to re-conceptualize their disciplinary practices and begin to incorporate positive strategies into their written codes of conduct.

The current literature base for the topic area of disciplinary codes of conduct is limited but thus far creates a strong argument against the use of exclusionary, punitive measures (APA Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Mendez et al., 2002; Pesce & Wilczynski, 2005; Skiba et al., 2002; Skiba & Rausch, 2006; Zurkowski, Kelly, & Griswold, 1998), highlighting that change towards a system that embraces more proactive and inclusive measures can be slow. Despite the enormous deference given to punitive measures there are a few schools that are incorporating more proactive

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measures into their policies, particularly with respect to mild behaviors, even though those proactive measures tend to be more global in nature (e.g., parent conference, teacher conference) rather than directly teaching a skill or behavioral expectation (e.g., skill building). 24 of the 64 high schools in the general sample had a higher frequency of proactive responses for mild behaviors, and of those 24, the 3 with the greatest frequency of proactive responses were examined in depth.

In the literature, suggestions have been made as to new directions such as the advocacy of integrating more proactive disciplinary strategies in order for codes of conduct to be aligned with current mandates (Drasgow & Yell, 2002; IDEA, 2004; Kajs, 2006; Mendez et al., 2002; No Child Left Behind Act, 2001; Skiba & Peterson, 2003; Sugai & Horner, 2008; Zurkowski, Kelly, & Griswold, 1998). Unfortunately what has not yet been examined are the critical factors connected with a school district's decision to implement and sustain a more progressive approach to discipline. What have not yet been explored are the characteristics of the school districts that are beginning to integrate proactive, teaching consequences as a response to student behavior. The goal of this collective case study was to begin that exploration in order to provide a preliminary examination of the critical factors necessary to sustain a more positive approach to discipline. By way of entry into this new area of research, and without guidance from the literature as to where to begin the process of creating a profile of the selected schools, it was determined that as a starting point readily and publicly available data such as basic demographic and financial information about the schools should be

reviewed and compared. Analysis of the information revealed that while 3 of the 64 schools were more progressive in their adoption of proactive disciplinary consequences, the available demographic and financial information was insufficient to truly distinguish the selected participant schools from the general sample.

Limitations

While the preliminary information is helpful in understanding more about the chosen three schools, unfortunately these initial points of demographic and financial characteristics were insufficient to distinguish the selected three schools from the general sample as a whole. The results from this preliminary investigation are not surprising. As the literature has not yet specifically addressed these types of critical support factors, a decision had to be made in order to establish a starting point for this line of exploration. No expectations were firmly held with regard to the development of an initial profile, although it was hoped that the publicly available demographic and financial information would provide some insight into the three selected schools. Unfortunately, as an initial foray into exploring the characteristics of the three schools for the case study, demographic and financial information does not appear to provide the hoped for basic profile.

One issue to keep in mind, however, was that nearly half of the high schools in the general sample were in rural settings while less than 20% of the schools were from urban settings. Also, in terms of the general sample as a whole, the present study was based on data that was available in 2004, and a somewhat limited sample of only 64

high schools. It would be helpful not only to expand the dataset to include more recently available information about the original 64 schools, but also to consider broadening the study beyond the borders of the state of Illinois. A more representative sample may have allowed for greater distinction and variation of the three chosen schools from the larger sample, and ultimately a more accurate profile.

An additional issue stems from the process of identification of the most "progressive" schools. For the present study, three schools were selected because they offered the greatest number of proactive consequences for mild behavior infractions; however, on balance they were all still far from offering as many positive options as were available. Perhaps there is a different way to conceptualize "progressive" and in turn consider a different sample of schools for further study.

Future Research

In addition, while no direct guidance was available with regard to critical factors for a profile, it may be helpful to turn to the supporting literature pertaining to PBS and other school-wide initiatives that address school climate in order to provide indirect guidance. The emphasis on the importance of the philosophies held by administrators, teachers, and other school staff may tend to indicate that philosophies more closely aligned with instructional, prevention oriented approaches to school climate and discipline possibly might indicate likelihood to incorporate proactive responses to student behavior in their discipline codes of conduct. Additional exploration of

philosophies or beliefs may reveal a relationship with a school's decision to include proactive responses in the written code of conduct.

Furthermore if a school utilizes teaming, or team structures, along with interventions that tend to support an alternative to suspension, it is possible such practices might indicate that a school has adopted a collaborative, proactive approach to problem solving, and therefore it may be more likely to include proactive disciplinary responses in the code of conduct. Again, additional exploration of a school's actions and practices may reveal a connection to a more positive approach to school discipline.

Something else to consider, then, in continuing the exploration, would be to determine not only what additional factors (e.g., philosophies, practices) but what individuals or what groups ultimately impact the school district's decision to adopt a more positive approach to discipline. It would be helpful to determine which people are the key stakeholders, or identify those that have the greatest influence or impact on policy decisions.

Implications

The present study was undertaken in order to begin to explore a new direction within the topic area of high school disciplinary practices. To date the field has provided a history about the development and necessity of disciplinary codes of conduct, including a foundation based on the principles of zero tolerance. The literature also has provided extensive evidence of the drawbacks associated with codes of conduct that rely on exclusionary and punitive disciplinary practices such as suspension and

expulsion. The controversy surrounding these punitive policies and practices has been well researched and documented, yet there are only some initial suggestions as to how codes of conduct need to be adapted in order to be aligned with current mandates. Influence is taken from PBIS with school-wide initiatives of primary prevention, understanding that the surrounding environment plays a pivotal role in student behavior and student outcomes. Additional current mandates for disciplinary codes of conduct emphasize the consideration of including positive, proactive measures as a means of alternative to exclusionary disciplinary practices.

The primary purpose of the present study was to focus on the few schools that are attempting to codify proactive measures into their codes of conduct. The goal was to begin the exploratory process about the schools themselves in order to discern how they may differ from the schools in the general sample. It should be noted that the general sample of schools that provided the basis for the current study was overwhelmingly punitive. Even when schools offered proactive consequences for mild behaviors they tended to include those that were more global in nature (e.g., parent conference, teacher conference) rather than directly teaching a skill or behavioral expectation (e.g., skill building). Thorough examination of the schools that did offer more proactive teaching consequences revealed that only a small grouping of schools was incorporating these consequences into their policies. Only in delving further into the three with the greatest frequency of proactive responses can initial differences begin to be seen, and even then the differences are slight. While it is commendable that these three schools are

including proactive teaching responses in their codes of conduct, unfortunately their

efforts are overshadowed by the majority of policies which remain highly punitive in

their use of exclusionary measures such as suspension and expulsion.

Unfortunately, the chosen means to begin to explore the schools, an examination

of the demographic and financial information, did not yield as strong of a profile as was

hoped for. However, there is still something to be learned from these, and possibly other

schools, that are forging ahead and incorporating positive strategies into their codes of

conduct, despite a dearth in the research instructing them as to how to proceed. PBS and

other school-wide initiatives that address school climate and embrace philosophies of

prevention and models of behavioral support provide some indirect guidance (Doll &

Cummings, 2008: McEvoy & Welker, 2000; Sugai & Horner, 2007), because they place

a strong emphasis on finding viable alternatives to punitive measures such as

suspension and expulsion. The emphasis on the importance of staff philosophies may

indicate a more positive approach to discipline. Furthermore, proactive, supportive

school practices (e.g., teaming, interventions that provide an alternative to suspension)

also might indicate a more proactive response to discipline than other schools that do

not utilize such practices.

In the long run, as a field there is a need to continue this exploration in order to

better understand why some schools are willing to be pioneers in how they embrace a

proactive response to student misconduct. There is a need to understand how these

schools and school districts have initiated a change from the norm. Finally, there is a

need to understand how they are able to sustain that change. Although basic demographic and financial information did not seem to play a role, it will be important to expand the sample and revisit any impact. Additionally, the role of certain individuals and groups, along with their attitudes, philosophies, values, and beliefs will have to be examined, along with the current actions, policies, and practices. Considering the short term however, there are actions that those in the field of education can take. It is necessary to advocate for and disseminate information about, the need for a change in philosophy. It is important to re-conceptualize discipline as an extension of instruction, a responsibility that falls to all involved (e.g., administrators, schools staff, students, families). By teaching and instructing students as to the appropriate behavioral expectation, students learn what they "should do" as opposed to merely being punished for what they "did do". Educators must therefore advocate for systems and initiatives that improve and support a positive school environment, one that has the ability to instruct and possibly prevent student misconduct.

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The final copies have been examined by the director of the dissertation and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the dissertation is now given final approval by the committee with reference to content and form.

The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

_____   _____

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