Social and Emotional Competency and Exclusionary Discipline

DISSERTATION

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By

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Abstract

Current exclusionary disciplinary practices used in American schools are problematic for several reasons. Exclusionary discipline is ineffective in changing behavior, it perpetuates the problems which account for negative outcomes for students, and it uses valuable resources wastefully. Furthermore, multiple studies have been published suggesting that students with a disability, male students, and students of minority ethnicity are disproportionately represented in exclusionary discipline referrals, suggesting that a larger societal problem of discrimination may exist. Researchers have long written about the influence of social and emotional competencies on positive life outcomes as well as the influence of school problems on negative life outcomes. The following study examines the relationship among demographic variables, social and emotional competencies as perceived by teachers, and exclusionary discipline. The researcher chose a strength-based instrument to measure competencies. As a result, the benefits of using a strength-based measure are also discussed. Results of the study indicate that social and emotional learning plays a significant role in student outcome. Implications for teachers, administrators, teacher trainers, and other school personnel are discussed.
Dedication

This document is dedicated the children I taught in 2005 and 2006 at FACES of Crisis Nursery in Phoenix. You are our future. Time invested in securing a better world for our children is time well spent.

The completion of this paper is especially dedicated in memory of my mother who taught me to always believe in the “good” of others, even more so, she taught me to believe in me. She taught me this through her life and after her death. I love you and miss you mom.
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I would like to first acknowledge my advisor, Dr. Miranda. I am forever thankful for the eye opening experiences that you have provided to me as a student in the School Psychology program. My perspectives, both from a privileged and marginalized point of view have been shaped by the experiences, conversations, and the assigned readings (yes, I read them). I would also like to thank Dr. Gliem for his countless hours of dedication to teaching me the “ins and outs” of statistical analysis, even when he had to say it more than once so that I could understand. Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Klein for serving on my committee and exposing me to the wonderful world of counseling psychology.

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Finally, I would like to thank the eight eighth grade English teachers at Hilliard Weaver Middle School and Norton Middle School for their participation in the project.
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Fields of Study

Major Field: Education
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Chapter One

Introduction

Brief Review of the Literature

In February 1998, a 12 year old boy in Chicago’s public school district had been suspended from school for one week for writing gang related symbols in his notebook. While on suspension the 12 year old shot two teenagers, point blank, and killed them. Some members of the community expressed relief that the student was on suspension and not attending school at the time he committed the murders. Other members of the community recognized that this shooting may be a call for the school district to implement an alternative consequence to banning students from school. A local priest, Father Bruce Wellems, of the Holy Cross Church, which is across the street from the school that the 12 year old attended said, “With something like zero-tolerance, you’re not dealing with the problem…It’s like the Ten Commandments-‘Thou shalt not, thou shalt not…’ OK, but what will you do? What’s the other side of that?” (Ayers, Dohrn, & Jackson, 2001, p. 11). The story of this 12 year old boy exemplifies the problem with zero-tolerance and exclusionary discipline policies because they do not allow for rehabilitation or individual intervention. Had the circumstances of the 12 year old been considered, an administrator may have made an informed decision to keep the child in school and work to provide intervention that may have addressed his problems with gang affiliation.
Zero tolerance policies have greatly influenced exclusionary discipline practices in American schools (Brown, 2007; Zhang, Katsiyannis, & Herbst, 2004). Zero-tolerance policies are standards set forth in a district or building to send a message that any student will have strict consequences without consideration of circumstances for exhibiting behavior related to or resembling a punishable behavior (Ayers, Dohrn, & Jackson, 2001).

An additional policy implemented in the United States with the intention of providing an easy solution to a large problem of safety is the Gun-Free Schools Act. Both, the zero-tolerance and the Gun Free Schools Act, had intentions of removing safety concerns from school buildings (Ayers, Dohrn, & Jackson, 2001); however, they have instead removed many students in desperate need of intervention from a place in which they could feel a sense of community.

Researchers have conducted studies to assess the importance of the school psychosocial environment as a protective factor for at-risk children as well as a predictor for improved academic achievement. Many of the studies have shown a general positive association between positive classroom environments and improved academic achievement along with affective gains. The research has consistently concluded that high expectations held for students as well as supportive and encouraging environments provide for the most optimal academic outcome for students. An important aspect of this research is the interpersonal relationships experienced by students. Researchers theorize that interpersonal relationships serve a purpose to connect the student to the school
culture, meaning that the relationship with an adult may provide the child access to the cultures and norms of a school environment. Additionally, the student will develop a sense of belonging to the school community through his or her relationship with an adult (Baker, 1999).

It is of interest to note, that even with the Gun-Free Schools Act and zero-tolerance policies, our schools and our children are no safer than before the implementation of these policies (Brown, 2007). For example, a Chicago public high school, with a zero tolerance policy for violence, had five shootings just outside its doors (Ayers, Dohrn, & Jackson, 2001). As stated by Ayers, Dohrn, & Jackson, “Prohibiting weapons in school while failing to engage a larger community is a fool’s errand,” (2001, p. xiii). Violence, racism, sexual harassment, aggression, and other potentially unsafe behaviors need more attention and effort than a zero-tolerance policy in order to make changes in the lives of students and restore safety in schools.

The present study examines exclusionary discipline measures defined as: in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, detention, and expulsion. Many problems exist with the current use of exclusionary discipline in schools: it is ineffective in changing behavior, minority students, male students, and students with disabilities are represented disproportionately, and exclusionary discipline perpetuates itself by creating a negative school climate, each of which will be discussed here.
ineffective in changing behavior.

The ineffectiveness of suspensions and expulsions to change behavior can be explained through recidivism rates, behavioral psychology and neuropsychology. Many studies have revealed that approximately 40-50 percent of the students who receive suspension as punishment are repeat offenders (Brown, 2007; Atkins et al., 2002; Chung & Paul, 1996). It is reasonable to assume that if the recidivism rate is 40-50 percent for suspension, then suspension is not sufficient or effective in deterring half of the offending students from violating school rules.

Furthermore, exclusionary discipline is currently used as a punishment procedure in schools. Punishment is the presentation of an aversive stimulus immediately following an undesired behavior in order to eliminate the undesired behavior (Domjan, 2003). A problem exists when conceptualizing the definition of punishment within the context of recidivism rates and exclusionary discipline. The recidivism rate reveals that misbehavior is not being eliminated through the use of suspension or expulsion, therefore detention, suspension, and expulsion are not actually a punishment. Prominent behaviorists such as Thorndike and Skinner spent little time examining punishment because they determined it to be ineffective in changing behavior (Domjan, 2003). Later behaviorists re-examined punishment and concluded that a punishment can be effective if it is immediate and severe enough for the subject to suppress an undesired behavior in order to avoid the aversive stimulus (Domjan, 2003). Immediacy and severity are difficult objectives for a school to accomplish logistically and lawfully. It would be
nearly impossible for a school to send a student home (proposed punishment) immediately following misbehavior worthy of suspension. Also, it would be difficult to find a punishment severe enough to deter behavior that was also within the guidelines of the law. One might question what purpose exclusionary discipline is serving in American schools.

Finally, neuropsychologists have defined the neural circuitry contributing to the expression of behavior as pathways. These pathways are the links between all the circuits that process conditioned stimuli and produce conditioned responses related to stimuli (Rodriques, LeDoux, & Sapolsky, 2009). Psychologists have also identified that the repeated use of these pathways strengthens a specific response to a specific stimulus or set of stimuli (LeDoux, 1996). The literature suggests that when a student is triggered by an event at school (specific stimulus), he or she will behave exactly how he or she has always behaved (specific response) unless a new pathway is constructed and practiced. Clearly, placing students out of the classroom or school does not allow an opportunity for the student to strengthen an alternate pathway for adaptive responses to the original stimulus which prompted misbehavior.

**disproportionate representation of students.**

receiving more exclusionary discipline assignments for behavior than other students, with African American students and students with emotional disorders receiving suspension as a means of punishment more than any other ethnic or disability group.

Skiba, Michael, Nardo, and Peterson (2002) completed an analysis of student discipline records regarding racial and ethnic differences. They explored three possible hypotheses for the overrepresentation of African Americans in exclusionary and punitive punishment records. First, they suggested that there could be a statistical error in reporting the data, meaning that differences between groups are not actually reflective of a disproportionate representation. Second, the high correlation of race and socio-economic-status could mean that the disproportionate representation of students is actually a reflection of his or her socio-economic-status rather than race. Third, a possibility exists that higher suspension rates of African American students is actually reflective of a higher rate of disruptive behavior displayed by those students.

The results of the study were consistent with the already existing large body of evidence documenting that the likelihood of office referral is highest for black males. When the researchers controlled for socio-economic status there were still significant racial disparities in likelihood of office referrals. Moreover, the researchers did not find evidence that the racial disparities were due to higher rates of African American student misbehavior (Skiba, et al, 2002). Consequently, this study suggests that there are discrepancies in the assignment of exclusionary discipline for African-American males as
compared with Caucasian and/or female students, meaning that racial and gender
discrimination may be occurring.

A study completed by Zhang and colleagues (2004) also found that students with
emotional and behavioral disorders were two times more likely than all other students
with disabilities to be excluded through discipline. The provisions of the Individuals with
Disabilities Improvement Act included a manifestation of determination procedure for
students who are identified with a disability and exhibit behavior typically punished by
exclusionary discipline. It is of concern that students who qualify for special education
services under the category of emotional and/or behavioral disorders are being assigned
exclusionary discipline at a significantly higher rate. The behavior of these students is
more likely to be connected to their disability than any other student with a disability;
therefore, questions remain about the frequency of seemingly punishing students for
having a disability. Additionally, students with emotional and/or behavioral disorders
have higher dropout rates, absenteeism rates, lowest grade point averages, lowest passing
rates on competency exams within their grade level, higher rates of incarceration, and
less positive adult outcomes (Zhang et al, 2004). Hence, students with emotional and
behavioral disabilities are most in need of emotional and social skills training.

The overrepresentation of minority students and students with disabilities in
exclusionary discipline could represent a problem with discrimination. This may be a
reflection of the structure and culture of public education in the United States and a
systematic exclusion of children who do not meet the standard expectations.
negative school climate.

Exclusionary discipline practices may be responsible for perpetuating the problems that schools are facing. Educational research informs the field that students perform best when they feel a sense of belonging and competency (Atkins et al., 2002). Research has shown that office discipline referrals go down when the school-wide climate supports appropriate behavior (Irvin, Tobin, Sprague, Sugai, & Vincent, 2004). The following section describes the perceptions and attitudes of students who are assigned exclusion as a means of discipline and how those attitudes relate to school climate and the perpetuation of discipline problems.

Often times students who cannot maintain behaviorally in their neighborhood or public school are placed in alternative schools for students with behavioral difficulties. Students who have been assigned an exclusionary method of punishment feel disliked and rejected by the regular education system as well as resentful toward the adults who are in charge of the educational system (Brown, 2007). As a result, it is difficult for adults in the alternative placements to build connections and relationships with the students placed in those settings (Brown, 2007). An interesting study conducted by Brown investigated the viewpoints of students at an alternative high school in a large urban district that serves suspended and expelled students. The researchers inquired about the experiences of students regarding exclusion from school as well as the relationships of excluded students with adults. The effects of exclusion on students’ perceptions of their academic standing were also noted. According to the students,
exclusionary punishments caused students to miss educational instruction, opportunities to complete schoolwork and contributed to failing grades. Many of the students in the alternative high school were not completing academic work at grade level. They were significantly behind in all academic skill areas. Additionally, only a little more than half of students at the alternative high school reported that they had good relationships with adults in the building and a mere 50 percent of students reported that they felt teachers were concerned about their well-being. Concurrently, a surprising 65 percent of students reported that they believed that doing well in school is “very important” to their future success (Brown, 2007). Even students who have behavior problems believe that success in school is important.

The results of Brown’s (2007) study are indicative of the inherent problem with school suspension. Many researchers in the field of education have written repeatedly about the exclusive importance of the relationship between students and teachers as an indicator of student success. For example, Baker (2006) expanded upon previous literature that supports the imperative role of student and teacher relationships on the academic outcomes for children (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Pianta 1999). Baker (2006) found significant positive correlations between student-teacher relationship quality and all other school adjustment measures for all students regardless of grade (K-5) or gender. Thus, school suspension not only ignores the problem that initiated the disruptive behavior, but it also has a detrimental affect on the attitudes of students toward the educational system and the adults within that system. As eloquently stated by Brown (2007), “Although it
may sometimes be necessary to remove a student from school, withholding educational services, intentionally or inadvertently, is antiethical to the goal of “assuring access to equal educational opportunity for every individual,” (p. 451). Suspension perpetuates the barrier between students and teachers.

**social and emotional competencies.**

Experts in the fields of education, psychology, and child development have proposed that misbehavior is actually a cry for help and indication of a lack of adaptive coping skills. One such expert, Harvard psychologist, Dr. Ross Greene, states, “Kids with behavioral challenges are not attention-seeking, manipulative limit-testing, coercive, or unmotivated. But they do lack the skills to behave appropriately,” (2008, p.1). Greene (2008) affirms that educators and parents must evaluate their beliefs about children. He suggests that adults adopt the philosophy that “kids do well when they can” rather than “kids do well if they want to” (p.1).

Although many studies have examined the connection between school discipline and skill deficits, none have included a comprehensive list of skills nor identified which of the skills are most salient for preventing misbehavior. Furthermore, most research has investigated these factors with a deficit model, therefore only identifying the skills that students who misbehave lack. Identifying skill deficits is a problem when education professionals are looking for what “to do” in order to prevent student misbehavior. The proposed study will identify the areas of skill strength for students who are not suspended or expelled. As a result, education professionals will have knowledge of which specific
social and emotional skills keep kids out of trouble in school. As stated by Atkins and colleagues (2002), “there is little research available that investigates children’s strengths and their relation to school discipline. In fact, we could not find one study that examined how competencies such as social skills related to school discipline,” (p. 363).

The social and emotional competencies identified for this study come from the instrument, the Devereux Elementary Student Strengths Survey (DESSA). The DESSA has identified eight areas of social and emotional competencies for elementary students and they are: self-awareness, social awareness, self management, goal directed behavior, relationship skills, personal responsibility, decision making, and optimistic thinking. These competencies are thoroughly grounded in the literature on emotional and social learning (Payton, Weissberg, Durlak, Dymnicki, Taylor, Schellinger, & Pachan, 2008; LeBuffe, Shapiro, & Naglieri, 2009).

Statement of the Problem

Schools have an obligation to keep students safe while at school. There is an imminent concern with the antisocial and violent behaviors displayed by some children (Irvin, Tobin, Sprague, Sugai, & Vincent, 2004). Also, there is a rising trend in the quantity of exclusionary discipline assignments in the United States (Zhang, Katsiyannis, & Herbst, 2004). The traditional response to student misbehavior is to assign exclusionary discipline, but this practice is ineffective, possibly discriminatory, and detrimental to the learning environment. Furthermore, exclusionary discipline does not provide the student with tools to cope with the challenging situations at school. Many
bodies of literature including: neuropsychology, cognitive - behavioral psychology, and child development support the notion that individuals need practice, recognition, and opportunities to learn in order to develop a repertoire of adaptive coping skills (Rodriques, LeDoux, & Sapolsky, 2009; Domjan, 2003; Bailey, 2001; Greene, 2009). Clearly, emotional and social learning are essential to address these skills and ensure safety in schools. For that reason, interventions must take place in schools and provide students with the opportunity to learn and practice adaptive coping behaviors. However, data is not available to determine which of the adaptive coping skills identified in literature are most important for predicting cooperative behavior in school.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship among social and emotional competencies along with select demographic variables and student discipline. The selected demographic variables were chosen based on problems with school discipline reported in the literature, such as over-representation. Social and emotional competencies were chosen because there appears to be a large gap in the literature regarding the relationship between competencies and discipline as illustrated here, “…there is little research available that investigates childrens’ strengths and their relation to school discipline,” (Atkins, McKay, Frazier, Jakobsen, Arvantis, Cunningham, Brown, and Lambrecht, 2002, p. 363). Currently, the researcher can only locate one other publication that examined the relationship between student strengths and discipline. The article used a strength-based rating scaled called, the Behavior Objective Sequence.
(BOS). The BOS is a measure of students’ behavioral and social competencies. The researchers collected data on demographic variables as well. However, they failed to examine the influence of the competency scores along with the demographic variables on student discipline. The following study will be the first to include both variables in an attempt to explain the variance in discipline referrals.

**Significance of the Study**

As stated by Wald and Losen, “Yet, despite the strong relationships that exist between troubled educational histories and subsequent arrest and incarceration, *the specific ways in which schools may either contribute to, or prevent, the flow of students into the criminal justice system remains largely unexplored,*” (2003, p. 4-5). By using a strength-based instrument, the results of this study will demonstrate specific skills that have contributed or not to student discipline rates. In turn then, the possibilities for school contribution can be conceived.

The results of this study will be helpful in developing specific curricula and interventions targeted toward students who historically have been excluded from school due to repeat misbehavior. As a result of receiving intervention, rather than exclusion, the climate of schools will become more conducive to academic, social and emotional learning which will in turn reduce disruptions and violence. Furthermore, student outcomes will be improved as a result of the interventions which will in turn decrease the societal burden of delinquents.
The researcher expects that students who receive multiple exclusionary discipline referrals will have low scores for adaptive social and emotional behavior. Future research should investigate the effectiveness of interventions that attempt to boost social and emotional skills. Moreover, discipline referrals should then be analyzed to determine if the intervention is also effective in reducing misbehavior.

**Research Questions**

**Research question one.**

Does the sample corroborate with existing data to suggest that male students, students with a disability and students of a minority ethnicity are disproportionately represented in exclusionary discipline records?

**Research question two.**

What are the relationships between teacher perceived student social and emotional competencies and each of the dependent variables measured: in-school suspension, out of school suspension, expulsion, detention, and lunch detention (academic intervention)?

**Research question three.**

How well can group membership be predicted for this sample when students are grouped according to frequency of discipline assignment (0 or 1 versus 2 or more) when we know something about the student’s ethnicity, gender, disability status, and Social Emotional Composite?
Limitations of the Study

A limitation of the study is the generalizability of the results because the participants were not selected randomly. The researcher will only be able to generalize to the sample of students who were in the study.

The study is limited by the instrument used because it measures teachers’ perceptions of student strengths. The teachers are subject to bias regarding some students. This may impact the data because a student may be inappropriately identified with low or high coping skills.

Conclusion and Chapter Overview

In conclusion, this study examined the relationships among ethnicity, gender, educational disability category, and exclusionary discipline for 175 eighth grade students in two central Ohio middle schools. The following paper is divided into five chapters. Chapter one provides an introduction to the research and research questions. Chapter two presents a thorough review of the literature associated with the researched topics. Chapter three presents a description of the research methods used for the study. Chapter four summarizes the results of the data analysis. Lastly, chapter five provides an explanation of the results and suggestions for future research.
Chapter Two

Review of the Literature

Importance of Evaluating Current School Discipline

There are four main issues surrounding the need to re-evaluate school discipline in the United States: safety of the schools, efficient and appropriate use of limited resources, its ineffectiveness, and the outcomes for students, schools, and society.

safety.

A report from the US Department of Education (2010) indicated that during the 2008-2009 school year there were 38 school-associated violent deaths, 1.2 million students between the ages of 12-18 were victims of nonfatal crimes at school, and eight percent of students reported being threatened or injured with a weapon on school property. The nonfatal crimes that were reported included 619,000 thefts and 629,800 violent crimes (simple assault and serious violent crime). Clearly, there are many threats to student safety in the school environment and there is an urgent need to address these issues.

As a result of these types of reports about school violence and threats to student safety, school personnel are being held responsible for ensuring safe environments. One such result of that burden on school staff came in the form of school suspension. Suspension as a means of discipline was originally created in order to keep classrooms
safe and free from violence as well as to send strong messages to students and parents about the unacceptability of extreme inappropriate behaviors (Irvin, Tobin, Sprague, Sugai, & Vincent, 2004). Due to increased violence in the 1990’s, zero-tolerance policies emerged and they have greatly impacted the assignment of students to suspension and expulsion in American schools (Atkins et al., 2002; Ayers, Dohrn, & Jackson, 2001; Brown, 2007; Zhang, Katsiyannis, & Herbst, 2004). In 1974, 1.7 million students were suspended annually from American schools as compared to 3.1 million annually in the early 2000’s, the number of students suspended has more than doubled on an annual basis. Also, the National Center for Education Statistics estimated that in the year 2000, U.S. public schools assigned 100,000 expulsions (Brown, 2007).

Zero-tolerance and the Gun-Free Schools Act policies across the United States were intended as an easy solution to a large program of safety in the schools. Both policies had the intent of removing safety concerns from school buildings (Ayers, Dohrn, & Jackson, 2001); however, they have instead removed many students in desperate need of intervention from a place in which they could feel a sense of community. Zero-tolerance policies heavily emerged in the 1990’s as a response to concerns about student safety (Wald & Losen, 2003). Zero-tolerance policies are standards set forth in a district or building to send a message that any student exhibiting behavior related to or resembling a punishable behavior will have strict consequences without consideration of circumstances. The consequences for zero-tolerance infractions are mostly suspension or expulsion. The initial goal of the policy was to clear up gray areas in discipline
procedures regarding specific issues and have clear procedures for disciplining students. As a result of clearing up gray areas, the policy has also taken away the liberty of educators to make informed decisions regarding appropriate student consequences. Zero-tolerance policies have no room for determining a standard of intent or assumed innocence as is the case in criminal law. Administrators are “forced” through district or school policy to implement harsh discipline (suspension/expulsion) regardless of circumstances (Ayers, Dohrn, & Jackson, 2001). It is ironic that the administration of consequences in a school building is vastly different than the practice of judges and juries in the United States criminal justice system. Many students are expelled or suspended under the zero-tolerance policy without any consideration of the individual or the situation.

For example, a Zero-tolerance policy greatly neglected consideration for the best interest of the following student. In February of 1998, a 12 year old boy in Chicago’s public school district had been suspended from school for one week for writing gang related symbols in his notebook. While on suspension the 12 year old shot two teenagers point blank and killed them. Some members of the community expressed relief that the student was on suspension and not attending school at the time he committed the murders. Other members of the community recognized that this shooting may be a call for the school district to implement an alternative consequence to banning these students from school. A local priest, Father Bruce Wellems, from the Holy Cross Church, which is across the street from the school that the 12 year old attended said, “With something
like zero-tolerance, you’re not dealing with the problem…It’s like the Ten Commandments—‘Thou shalt not, thou shalt not…’ OK, but what will you do? What’s the other side of that?” (Ayers, Dohrn, & Jackson, 2001, p. 11). The story of this 12 year old boy exemplifies the problem with zero-tolerance policies because they do not allow for flexibility or individualized discipline. Had the circumstances of the 12 year old been considered, an administrator may have made an informed decision to keep the child in school and work to provide intervention that may have addressed his problems with gang affiliation.

Interestingly, even with the Gun-Free Schools Act and zero-tolerance policies, our schools and our children are no safer than before the implementation of these policies (Brown, 2007). A report from the US Department of Education (2010) summarized crimes on school property in the past ten years. The number of crimes on school property has remained consistent, with a slight increase during the 2003-2004 school year for violent crimes and theft. The nation has not witnessed a decrease in crimes to indicate that our schools are any safer with the increased implementation of exclusionary discipline. As stated by Ayers, Dohrn, & Jackson, “Prohibiting weapons in school while failing to engage a larger community is a fool’s errand,” (2001, p. xiii). Violence, racism, sexual harassment, aggression, and other potentially unsafe behaviors need more attention and effort than a zero-tolerance policy in order to make changes in the lives of students and restore safety in schools.
The practice of excluding an individual from his or her environment may be necessary in order to secure immediate safety (physical and emotional) for the larger group; however, the individual will eventually return to the larger group. Without intervention, he or she will likely follow previously established behavior patterns. The punishment of children, adolescents, and adults who do not obey rules or laws is a relative concern for all citizens because the behavior of criminals is a burden to all members of society. Therefore, it is important for the consequences of rule breaking to facilitate change in the behavior pattern for these individuals. For example, an individual who has been caught robbing businesses may not have an established set of behaviors that allow him or her to succeed in maintaining a job to earn money. As a result, he or she will likely continue to commit robbery in order to have financial income; thus consequences for this individual should focus on expanding his or her occupational skill set rather than attempting to punish the behavior in the hopes that he or she will “learn a lesson”.

ineffectiveness.

Maya Angelou once wrote, “If I'd known better I'd have done better,” ("Maya Angelou Quotes"). In other words, when individuals know a better way to behave in order to meet his or her needs, individuals will behave in a more socially appropriate way. It is often assumed that all individuals have the organic means necessary to “pick up on” social rules and norms. Furthermore, it is assumed that all individuals have been exposed and systematically taught those rules and norms in a domestic setting.
Individuals who commit crimes, do so, because that is the way in which that individual knows how to meet his or her needs. If the individual knew how to meet his or her needs without risking the possibility of having to undergo punishment, then it is reasonable to assume that the person would choose the alternative (Atkins et al., 2002).

**time out to doing time.**

There appears to be a theme within American culture to exclude those who fail to meet the expectations of a group. In its earliest and most primitive form, parents and preschool teachers sent children to “Time-Out” for infraction of family or school rules. Time-out continues to be a practice in American culture (Wolf, McLaughlin, & Williams, 2006). Exclusionary discipline, like time-out is usually assigned to students throughout middle childhood. Once a child reaches the his or her teenage years, time-out comes in the form of being “grounded” by parents or receiving an in-school suspension or expulsion by the school. Upon entering adulthood or committing a serious offense as a juvenile, the United States judiciary system is also set up to exclude perpetrators through jail or prison time.

**time out.**

Time-out is common practice and takes many forms; but currently, there is very little research to support the effectiveness of excluding a child, in the form of time-out, compared to other measures of discipline. Also, little research exists to compare the effectiveness between different time-out procedures. Wolf, McLaughlin, and Williams (2006) completed a review of time-out techniques and common uses. The researchers
concluded that, “Although time-out is frequently used by teachers, researchers and practitioners, it has become a controversial procedure because of misunderstanding, ineffective use, and ethical considerations,” (p. 27). Research does exist to suggest that some types of time-out procedures are effective, but it is indeterminable that the effective part of the intervention is the result being excluded (Wolf, McLaughlin, & Williams, 2006). The effectiveness could be due to an interaction of exclusion and other variables not controlled for in the study. For example, the effectiveness could be the result of removing the child from the stimulating environment, allowing for a cool down time, and practicing a more socially appropriate response to the trigger. Said differently, the whole procedure surrounding a time-out practice influences a child’s behavior, so it is unclear if just exclusion from the group accounts for the behavior change.

Furthermore, many behavior management programs advocate for the use of time-out as an effective behavior management procedure, but these programs also include many more components to the discipline procedure. One such program; Peace begins with me, strongly promotes the use of time-out as an effective discipline practice; however, this program also includes interventions for: self-talk, empathy, gender-neutral attitudes, feelings awareness, assertiveness, conflict resolution, health, parent appreciation, and other concepts (Wolf et al., 2006). The exclusion of a child from a reinforcing environment may be effective when coupled with other forms of social and emotional interventions, but one cannot conclude that time-out is effective when implemented independently of the other behavior modification tools.
prison.

Exclusionary discipline for adults and adolescents who commit severe criminal acts includes serving jail or prison time. The U.S. Department of Justice’s report in 2002 regarding the recidivism rates for prisoners released in 1994 is described hereafter. Nearly 67.5 percent were re-arrested for a new offense within three years of release. Most of the re-arrests were for serious misdemeanors or felonies, meaning that the re-arrests were not petty crimes, such as speeding. This trend is consistent with the findings from a similar study conducted with prisoners released in 1983 (United States, 2002). Unfortunately, the recidivism rate provides evidence that simply “doing time” does not help felons change their behavior patterns. The U.S. Department of Justice did not include any data about intervention or rehabilitation efforts that may have been made on behalf of the prisoners, so it is unclear if the prisoners received any services that may have contributed to the study as a variable besides exclusion from society. Therefore, this study may be an over estimate or under estimate of the affects of serving jail time on subsequent law-breaking behavior. However, it is clear that a problem exists in the current practice of excluding citizens from the greater society as a means for changing behavior. With more than half of the released prisoners in this study committing another crime within three years, one might justifiably ask why this form of punishment is still being implemented and paid for by citizens.
Finally, the ineffectiveness of suspension and expulsion are described here. Despite the popular use of suspension as a means of handling difficult behavior, there is very little research to support the effectiveness of such a practice (Zhang, Katsiyannis, & Herbst, 2004). Teacher training programs strongly encourage the use of evidence based teaching methods for academic subjects. However, discipline practices in the schools continue to be used, even without evidence to suggest that students are learning from the punishments and changing their behavior (Ayers, Dohrn, & Jackson, 2001).

Recidivism rates are indicative of the ineffectiveness of using exclusionary discipline. The probability of a student being reassigned a detention, suspension, or expulsion is extraordinarily high, indicating that the original punishment was not effective (Atkins et al., 2002). Researchers have shown the ineffectiveness of using suspension for changing behavior, as evidenced through repeat offenses; specifically, many studies have revealed that approximately 40-50 percent of the students who receive suspension as punishment are repeat offenders (Brown, 2007; Atkins et al., 2002; Chung & Paul, 1996). It is reasonable to assume that if the recidivism rate is 40-50 percent for suspension, then suspension is not sufficient or effective in deterring half of the offending students from violating school rules. The recidivism rate for suspension is similar to that of criminals in the justice system.

Additionally, a review of several studies reveals that the portion of the student population who have academic problems, are more likely than their academically
successful peers to be assigned exclusionary discipline practices for misbehavior (Atkins et al., 2002). These students are the individuals in need of intervention the most. These students exhibit a lack of self-regulation skills, they have academic difficulty, and social difficulty (Zhang, Katsiyannis, & Herbst, 2004). The following section explores the reasons that 40-50 percent of students are likely to commit repeat offenses because exclusion practices fail to remediate the real problems of the students. The failure of exclusion to remediate individuals can be explained by developmental psychology, behavioral psychology, and neuropsychology.

Developmental psychologist study the acquisition of skills and cognitions throughout the human lifespan. Self-regulation skills are one such set of life skills. These are the inhibitory skills that individuals develop as they mature. However, some environments as well as some individual traits can stunt the growth and development of these skills. It is necessary to develop self-regulation skills in order to cope with strong emotions in a socially appropriate manner (Greene, 2001). A study completed by Atkins et al. (2002) examined the differences between students who were assigned suspensions repeatedly and students who were assigned suspensions only once. The researchers divided the school year into three parts: fall, winter, and spring. During the winter portion of the study, teachers and students completed measures of students’ social skills and hyperactivity levels. At the conclusion of the study, disciplinary records were examined along with measures of the students’ behaviors. The results indicated that suspension was least effective for students who rate high on hyperactivity. This result is
not surprising considering that hyperactive students may have a clinical diagnosis of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Children with ADHD have trouble with inhibitory functioning and are on average three years behind their peers. As stated in a 2007 press release by the National Institute for Mental Health,

In both ADHD and control groups, sensory processing and motor control areas at the back and top of the brain peaked in thickness earlier in childhood, while the frontal cortex areas responsible for higher-order executive control functions peaked later, during the teen years. These frontal areas support the ability to suppress inappropriate actions and thoughts, focus attention, remember things from moment to moment, work for reward, and control movement – functions often disturbed in people with ADHD (p. 1).

Therefore in order to develop these skills, some children may need a lot of practice to avoid engaging in disruptive behavior; clearly the need for additional practice is not being met through standard discipline practices. Misbehavior is the result of a lack of skill or ability to behave appropriately. School removal does not provide an opportunity for students who have behavior difficulties to practice more appropriate behaviors. Often times, one can hear teachers telling students, “Make a good choice.” This assumes that the student knows the most appropriate choice and can carry out the actions required to make that choice. The fact that specific types of students are repeat offenders indicates that those specific groups must have a problem that is not being addressed with traditional discipline. Educators continually assume that these students make “bad” choices, even though they have been disciplined for that same choice in the past. The high rate of discipline for hyperactive and behaviorally challenged students may point to evidence that these students need more behavioral intervention than typical students
Furthermore, exclusionary discipline is currently used as a punishment procedure in schools. Punishment is the presentation of an aversive stimulus immediately following an undesired behavior in order to eliminate the undesired behavior (Domjan, 2003). A problem exists when conceptualizing the definition of punishment within the context of recidivism rates. The recidivism rate reveals that misbehavior is not being eliminated through the use of suspension or expulsion, therefore suspension and expulsion can not be labeled a punishment. One might question what purpose discipline is serving in American schools. Prominent behaviorists such as Thorndike and Skinner spent little time examining punishment because they determined it to be ineffective in changing behavior. Later behaviorists re-examined punishment and concluded that a punishment can be effective if it is immediate and severe enough for the subject to suppress an undesired behavior in order to avoid the aversive stimulus (Domjan, 2003). Immediacy and severity are difficult problems for a school to overcome logistically and lawfully. It would be nearly impossible for a school to send a student home immediately following misbehavior worthy of suspension. Also, it would be difficult to find a punishment severe enough to deter behavior that was also within the guidelines of the law.

Some readers may wonder how the neurobiology of emotion relates to education. It is the opinion of this author that by better understanding how the brain works regarding emotion, educators can better facilitate growth for students. This information can be used
to provide academically supportive environments for students. One might assume that an academically supportive environment consists of a physically and emotionally safe space where children can engage in critical thinking. However, classrooms with 20-30 children often cannot provide such a space without some intervention. Thankfully, with the use of information from neuropsychology, educators can facilitate effective coping for students who are not able to maintain the academically supportive environment. As a result, those students can stay in the educational environment, rather than be removed. Coping skills are the skills one uses to maintain composure when faced with an adverse stimulus. The sequence of actions that occur in the brain from the moment the stimulus (or stimuli) is perceived to the moment of physical action can be explained through neurological pathways in the brain. Neurobiologists have studied how these pathways are made and redefined. It is known that these pathways are strengthened through repeated use. Consequently, in order to make new pathways or replace maladaptive coping skills with adaptive coping skills, students must practice the new skill multiple times (LeDoux, 1996).

Lastly, the historical purpose of using suspension to send a strong message to parents about the unacceptability of behavior has lost its shock value. The use of suspension and expulsion for discipline has drastically increased each year (Zhang, Katsiyannis, & Herbst, 2004; Flanagan, 2007; Brown, 2007). It is reasonable to assume that as assignment of suspension has increased the exposure and familiarity of parents to
the practice has also increased. Therefore, the shock value that used to accompany suspension has lost its strength.

From time-out in early childhood to jail and prison time in adulthood it is clear that the sole practice of excluding a person from his or her environment does not guarantee that he or she will change deviant behavior. Exclusion as a form of punishment is not sufficient in and of itself based on the definition of punishment. Punishment is the addition of an aversive stimulus in order to reduce undesirable behavior (Domjan, 2003). Time-out, suspension, expulsion, and jail time all have notorious repeat offenders, meaning that excluding the individual does not actually decrease the behavior.

Resources.

In addition to exclusionary discipline, schools have also implemented many other measures to ensure student safety. They have increased police presence in schools, employed the use of metal detectors, implemented search and seizure procedures, and many state laws have been formed that mandate schools to refer children to the local authorities for certain school code violations (Wald & Losen, 2003). Unfortunately, all of these initiatives have been implemented using critical tax dollars on the back end of the problem, rather than on the prevention end of the problem. As a result, society is not reaping a pay-off from shelling out these monies.

The School-to-prison pipeline is indicative of the eventual burden on greater society of students who have behavioral difficulties in school. It is known that students
with school discipline records often become delinquents and eventually end up in the criminal justice system (Wald & Losen, 2003). The burden of criminals on society comes in the form of threat to public safety, exhausting law enforcement resources, as well as tax dollars spent locking the individual in an institution. Most states are currently facing a fiscal crisis. It has been reported that state spending on corrections nationwide between 1980 and 2000 grew at six times the rate of spending on higher education. Also, it was reported that the nation could save 1.4 billion dollars and the number of crimes would decrease by 100,000 if there was a one percent increase in male high school graduates (Wald & Losen, 2003). Undoubtedly, teaching people more acceptable behavior is initially a strain on resources because there is not a simple solution and teaching takes time and energy. However, many resources are currently wasted in attempts to exclude citizens from the larger community without significantly reducing the incidence of crime (United States, 2002).

**Impact of Exclusionary Discipline.**

The impacts of utilizing exclusionary discipline are many. Exclusionary discipline has an impact on the school community, general community, and society. The following section of this paper will describe the role of exclusionary discipline in creating negative school climates and perpetuating academic failure. Next, the paper describes the “school-to-prison-pipeline” which is demonstrative of the eventual impact of exclusionary discipline on a whole community. Finally, the results of studies on the
over-representation of certain demographic groups in exclusionary discipline records may have a societal impact by perpetuating institutional discrimination.

**Negative School Climate and Academic Failure.**

Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson (2002) collected information about all office referrals for 11,001 middle school students in a large, urban, Midwestern school district for a whole year. The data examined discipline practices including reasons that students received an exclusionary punishment. The following behaviors were punished with an exclusionary discipline measure: fighting, endangering, conduct interference, throwing/propelling objects, gambling, vandalism, sexual acts, indecent exposure, spitting, truancy, leaving without permission, use of tobacco, obscene language, disrespect, excessive noise, loitering, and threats. The review of these records is indicative that the use of exclusionary discipline is being used as punishment for behaviors far beyond serious infractions or threats to safety. School suspensions are no longer being used to protect student and staff safety as they were originally created. Unfortunately, suspension today has become a common practice used in schools to discipline students for any type of infraction on school policy, even minor offenses like talking-out or being tardy to class (Flanagain, 2007).

Students who have been assigned an exclusionary method of punishment feel disliked and rejected by the regular education system as well as resentful toward the adults who are in charge of the educational system (Brown, 2007). As a result, it is difficult for adults in the alternative placements to build connections and relationships
with the students placed in those settings (Brown, 2007). An interesting study conducted by Brown investigated the viewpoints of students at an alternative high school in a large urban district that serves suspended and expelled students. Questionnaires were administered to 37 students and inquired about the experiences of those students regarding exclusion from school as well as the relationships of those students to adults. The effects of exclusion on students’ perceptions of their academic standing were also noted. According to the students, exclusionary punishments caused students to miss educational instruction, miss opportunities to complete schoolwork and contributed to failing grades. Many of the students in the alternative high school were not completing academic work at grade level. They were significantly behind in all academic skill areas. Additionally, only a little more than half of students at the alternative high school reported that they had good relationships with adults in the building and a mere 50 percent of students reported that they felt teachers were concerned about their well-being. Only half of the students with behavior problems feel that they have a good relationship with one teacher. Concurrently, a surprising 65 percent of students reported that they believed that doing well in school is “very important” to their future success (Brown, 2007). The results of this study show that even students who have behavior problems believe that success in school is important.

The results of Brown’s (2007) study are indicative of the inherent problem with school suspension. Many researchers in the field of education have written repeatedly about the exclusive importance of the relationship between students and teachers as an
indicator of student success. For example, Baker (2006) expanded upon previous literature that supports the imperative role of student and teacher relationships on the academic outcomes for children (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Pianta 1999). Baker completed a three year study with 1,310 students and 68 teachers who were assessed using standardized instruments as well as some existing data from school reports. Variables measured in the study were: student-teacher relationship quality, child behavior, academic scores, and measures of school adaptation. Baker (2006) found significant positive correlations between student-teacher relationship quality and all other school adjustment measures for all students regardless of grade (K-5) or gender. Thus, school suspension not only ignores the problem that initiated the disruptive behavior, but it also has a detrimental affect on the attitudes of students toward the educational system and the adults within that system. As eloquently stated by Brown (2007), “Although it may sometimes be necessary to remove a student from school, withholding educational services, intentionally or inadvertently, is anti-ethical to the goal of “assuring access to equal educational opportunity for every individual,” (p. 451). Suspension perpetuates the barrier between students and learning.

Students with learning problems often behave inappropriately when faced with academic demands. These students have historically failed when presented with academic tasks, so schoolwork feels threatening and may serve as a trigger for a student to revert to fight or flight behavior (LeDoux, 1996). Some researchers have suggested that students may actually perceive suspension as a reward because of the attention they
receive from adults as well as the option to avoid completing academic work (Atkins et al., 2002). In addition to the ineffectiveness of the exclusionary practice at stopping the disruptive behavior, it also exacerbates academic problems because students who are sent out of the classroom for punishment miss educational instruction time (Brown, 2007; Chung & Paul, 1996). One can clearly understand that acting out to avoid schoolwork and then being sent out of the class for discipline leads to missing more instructional time which creates a vicious cycle of academic failure. A disturbing cycle exists for these students; they are behind academically, feel threatened by their lack of skills to complete work, act out, are assigned suspension, miss more educational instruction time, and then are sent back to class. Upon returning to class, these students are put at an even greater disadvantage academically causing teachers to consistently struggle with how to help these students catch up (Ayers, Dohrn, & Jackson, 2001). The above information indicates that students who are most in need of instructional time, interactions with adults, and behavioral supports are the exact students who are most often being sent out of the room or building without resources.

Furthermore, exclusionary discipline practices may be responsible for perpetuating the problems that schools are facing. Educational research informs the field that students perform best when they feel a sense of belonging and competency (Atkins et al., 2002). The school climate changes and trustful relationships turn sour when students are removed for misbehavior (Hinojosa, 2008; Brown, 2007). Research has shown the office discipline referrals go down when the school-wide climate supports appropriate
behavior (Irvin, Tobin, Sprague, Sugai, & Vincent, 2004). The cycle of exclusionary discipline to negative school climate and behavioral problems must be broken in order to provide students with an environment at school that is conducive to learning.

**School-to-Prison Pipeline.**

“The concept of the school to prison pipeline refers to systemic setbacks that gradually shepherd students away from positive school connections and academic success and into increasing criminal activity,” (Sander, 2010 p.1). Studies of the prison and juvenile justice populations have revealed interesting statistics regarding the connection between school failure and later criminal behavior. In 1997, 68 percent of the state prison population had not earned high school diplomas. Moreover, it was found that among adolescent females, the “single largest predictor” of arrest was having been assigned exclusionary discipline or being held back in school (Wald & Losen, 2003). The connection between school failure and later criminal outcomes is very concerning and should be considered when evaluating current school discipline trends. Research has shown that educational attainment and school connection are strong protective factors in preventing students from engaging in crime and delinquency (Sander, 2010). The school-to-prison pipeline analogy is relative to all citizens and when evaluated critically, opportunities for intervention are revealed.

**Disproportionate Representation of Students.**

Through the study of exclusionary discipline in the schools, researchers have found that African-American and male students are suspended at a disproportionate rate,
compared to their peers, even after controlling for socioeconomic status (Skiba, 2002). Additionally, students with disabilities are disproportionately represented in discipline records (Zhang, Katsiyannis, & Herbst, 2004). The following section provides details regarding these discrepancies by category: minority ethnicity, gender, and disability status.

As a result of the disproportionality data that have been published for many years, Hinojosa (2008) completed a study that attempted to answer the question: Why? Hinojosa hypothesized that students would be able to enlighten the academic world, through their perceptions of teacher behavior, about why African-American students are disproportionately represented in exclusionary discipline records. According to Hinojosa, research has concluded that African-American students are treated differently than their white peers in school; on average, teachers provide less praise and engage in less interaction with African-American students. As it relates to punishment procedures and outcomes for students, results of research studies conclude that similar behaviors exhibited by a white student and an African-American student are interpreted differently. On average, teachers rated the same behavior by African-American students as disruptive, but did not have the same rating for white students exhibiting the behavior (2008).

Additionally, schools are less likely to label an African-American child as “gifted” and on average teachers assess African-American students lower on measures of effort and academic achievement. Additionally, minority students perceive their teachers
as having lower expectations for them as well as teachers do not display care or concern for the academic achievement of minority students (Hinojosa, 2008).

Hinojosa (2008) examined many variables including: in-school suspension, out of school suspension, race (African-American or white), mother in the home, father in the home, number of siblings, available resources in the home, academic engagement, student misbehavior, student beliefs about teacher fairness and caring, and student beliefs about teacher expectations. Descriptive analysis revealed that African-American and white students differ significantly on all of the above variables. Additionally, logistic regression revealed that a model with all five variables does significantly explain discrepancy in suspension rates for white and African-American students; however, a large percentage of variance is yet to be explained. Hinojosa concluded that one of two things were impacting the data: there are variables not included in this study that may explain the disproportionality of African-American students who are assigned suspension or the disproportionality is due to discrimination.

It is estimated that African-American students across the United States are suspended at 2 to 3 times the rate of their peers (Hinojosa, 2008). If disproportionality cannot be explained by factors independent of race, sex, and disability, a real problem of systematic discrimination exists within the educational system. Similarly, the research indicates that the disproportionality may be due to bias or a cultural mismatch between educational professionals and the customers or students they serve (Skiba 2002).
Moreover, researchers have revealed that minority students feel a sense of injustice relating to suspension practices, contributing to the barrier between teachers and students. Black students have expressed that they feel discriminated against, meaning that teachers may punish black students more severely and often than their white counterparts. In addition to the feeling of injustice, research has shown that these students may actually act more severely when he or she feels that the disciplinary action is unjust (Brown, 2007).

Zhang, Katsiyannis, and Herbst (2004) completed an analysis of discipline data from the Annual Reports to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act over a four year period including 1998 to 2002. Many trends revealed in the data show the disproportionality of minority students and students with disabilities receiving more exclusionary discipline assignments for behavior than other students, with African American students receiving suspension as a means of punishment more than any other ethnic group. Moreover, a significant interaction effect was found regarding the number of times a student was removed by school personnel, race or ethnicity, and region of the United States (p< .05). A significant interaction effect was also found between number of long-term suspensions, race or ethnicity, and calendar year (p< .01) as well as between suspension, disability, and year (p < .001). These results indicate that the disproportionate removal of minority and disabled students is increasing in popularity as a discipline practice.
Students with disabilities are also disproportionately represented in suspension statistics. This specific disproportionality may be explained by the likeliness of students with disabilities to have fewer social/emotional regulation skills as well as poor judgment skills and thus are less adept at avoiding detention (Zhang, Katsiyannis, & Herbst, 2004). The disproportionality of students with disabilities assigned exclusionary discipline is again an indication that the students who need intervention the most are the students being sent out of school.

Social and Emotional Learning and Discipline

Social and Emotional Competencies.

In 1995, Daniel Goleman published his comprehensive book entitled, “Emotional Intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ.” His book is a seminal piece of literature in the field of psychology. Goleman advocated for the consideration of social and emotional intelligence as a factor in intelligence when looking at successful outcomes. Goleman labeled the following skills as part of Emotional Intelligence: self-control, zeal and persistence, and the ability to motivate oneself. The reason that Goleman’s book was so groundbreaking is that he provided a new perspective on being a successful adult. Until Goleman’s work, many believed that individuals were born with an Intelligence Quotient (IQ) which does not vary throughout the lifespan and therefore individuals are destined for success or failure. Goleman argued that some individuals with moderate IQ were more successful than some individuals with high IQ because they had more emotional intelligence. Goleman especially advocated for teaching emotional
intelligence skills to children in order to secure the best life outcomes for them. Morris and Howard (2003) reviewed the history of types of suspensions used by schools and found that most programs for in-school suspension that lacked counseling support failed in their goal to facilitate a change in behavior. The researchers suggested a model using both individualized and therapeutic models for successful remediation of students who are assigned exclusionary discipline. Morris and Howard suggested that a successful model should include work by the student on self-image, communication, and problem-solving skills. These skills are similar to many skills mentioned by Goleman as part of emotional intelligence.

Multiple professional organizations have recently advocated for the promotion of positive mental health services and positive psychology in the schools through publications in academic journals, including: The National Association of School Nurses, The American Psychological Association- Division 16, and The National Association for School Psychologists (Nickerson and Fishman, 2009). The National Association of School Nurses has recognized the needs of children beyond academic success, by noting that one in ten children have a mental illness impacting his or her developmental, behavioral, and emotional needs.

Researchers have conducted studies to assess the importance of the school psychosocial environment as a protective factor for at-risk children as well as a predictor for improved academic achievement.
Stanley, Canham and Cureton (2006) conducted a non-experimental study with 23 middle school students who had been assigned suspension. The Student Behavior Survey (SBS) was administered to teachers for each student. The SBS evaluates academic achievement, adjustment problems, and behavioral assets of students. The results of the study showed that the students in the sample scored low on Academic Resources which included: Academic Performance, Academic Habits, Social Skills, and Parent Participation. The same students scored high on both Adjustment Problems and Disruptive Behavior. Items on the Adjustment Problems scale were Health Concerns, Emotional Distress, Unusual Behavior, Social Problems, Verbal Aggression, Physical Aggression, and Behavior Problems. The Disruptive Behavior scale included: ADD/ADHD, Oppositional Defiant, and Conduct Problems. Assessment items for the last scale were developed from the criteria for each disorder in the DSM-IV. As a result, the researchers suggested that a lack of coping skills may play a large role in the population of students who are assigned exclusionary discipline due to the large number of stressors known to be linked to the population. Furthermore, the researchers advocated for services (social, emotional, and mental health) in order to improve mental health in the school age population and decrease discipline issues.

Principal, Robert Dillon, created a three prong program to address the needs of his middle school students who were frequently assigned suspension as a means of discipline. The three prongs of his program were leadership, school family, and social skills training. Dillon reported that his middle school, Nipher Middle School, in
Kirkwood, MO, had success with the three pronged program, meaning that the targeted students had a decrease in office referrals and less failing grades. He continued to say that programs aimed at helping to minimize the achievement gap, preventing students from dropping out, and maintaining safety in schools require flexibility and individualized programming (2006).

A final important aspect of this research is the interpersonal relationships experienced by students. Baker (1999 & 2006) has conducted two research projects to explore teacher-student relationships and how they related to positive school outcomes. Her first study, conducted in 1999 examined teacher-student interactions and relationship quality among poor, African-American students in an urban school. Baker chose to look at student-teacher relationships because research has shown that students at risk for school failure also often experience alienation and poor academic achievement. She found that there were differences in the interactions between teachers and students for students who liked school versus students who did not like school. In 2006, Baker published a second study examining student-teacher relationships and positive school adjustment. The results of this study demonstrated a protective effect. Students in the study with developmental vulnerabilities and a close relationship with a teacher had significantly more advantage over peers who did not have the close relationship with a teacher. As a result of her work, Baker theorizes that interpersonal relationships serve a purpose to connect the student to the school culture, meaning that the relationship with an adult may provide the child access to the cultures and norms of a school environment.
Additionally, the student will develop a sense of belonging to the school community through his or her relationship with an adult.

The aforementioned studies are a glimpse into the wealth of research on protective factors and positive student outcomes. Clearly, emotional intelligence plays an important role in preventing students from earning exclusionary discipline assignments in the school and on the contrary, a lack of emotional intelligence is problematic. In Goleman’s book, he quotes Karen Stone McGown who is the developer of Self Science Curriculum and founder of Nueva from an interview. She said, “Learning doesn’t take place in isolation from kids’ feelings. Being emotionally literate is as important for learning as instruction in math and reading,” (1995, p. 262). It is imperative that the literature on protective factors and social and emotional learning be utilized to stress the need for putting our resources into preventative measures, rather than ineffective consequential measures.

**Social and Emotional Competencies and Strength Based Assessments.**

Strength based assessments align succinctly and appropriately with a model of positive psychology in the schools. Strength based assessments allow educational professionals to measure the competencies of students. The 2004 reauthorization of IDEA mandates the use of strength-based assessment in the development of Individualized Education Plans (Nickerson, 2007). Furthermore, there are four practical benefits to measuring competencies instead of deficits: provides an all-inclusive perspective of a child’s level of functioning, can be directly linked with interventions, can
be useful in building positive relationships between the school and parents, and by emphasizing a student’s strengths to him or her allows for the student to feel empowered and motivated (Nickerson and Fishman, 2009).

The theoretical foundation for strength based assessment is found in resilience literature. Resilience is a phenomenon that has been defined as the ability to achieve positive life outcomes even in the presence of serious threat. Researchers have attempted to define the characteristics of an individual’s personality that make up resilience for many years and they term those characteristics, protective factors. Protective factors have been shown through research to better predict life outcomes than risk factors (Nickerson 2007). Thus strength based measurement may be a better predictor of outcomes than deficit based measurement. Some studies have been conducted to test this hypothesis.

Donovan and Nickerson (in press) provided administrators, psychologists and special education teachers with either a traditional deficit based report or a combined report with the traditional deficit measurements as well as a strength based measurement (BERS-2). The educational professionals who read the report with the BERS-2 predicted more positive short-term academic and social outcomes than the respondents who read the traditional report. However, the educational professionals did not differ on predicted educational placement or long-term outcomes. Cox (2006) also conducted an experiment using a strength based measurement. The study consisted of children and youth already requesting and/or receiving mental health services. The participants were assigned to
either the control group (traditional diagnostic assessment) or the experimental group (caregiver completed the BERS in addition to the diagnostic assessment). The researcher did not find any main effect differences between the outcomes of each group. However, an interaction effect was found between the groups and the orientation of the clinician treating the child. If the clinician was oriented toward a strength based model of treatment and the child was given the BERS, significant differences in outcomes and parent ratings of internalizing and externalizing behaviors were noted.

**Direct Link to Intervention.**

Strength based assessments are written with the desirable skill in the question and deficit based assessments are often written with the unwanted behavior in the question. As a result, writing the intervention goal becomes a non-issue because the goal is for the child to exhibit the desired behavior. As mentioned previously, the reauthorization of IDEA in 2004 also mandates the use of strength based assessment when writing an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) for students with disabilities (Nickerson, 2007).

**Positive Relationships with Parents.**

Parents or caregivers of difficult students are repeatedly reminded during meetings that their student has many skill deficits. They are consistently reminded that their student is struggling and not keeping up with peers. However, a strength-based assessment allows for the examiner to provide strengths during a meeting that can be utilized in creating interventions for the student. Moreover, the students are viewed as
individuals with competencies, resources, and experiences who also have unmet needs; rather than individuals with pathologies/problems (Nickerson, 2007).

**Empowering and Motivating Students.**

As stated by Nickerson, “Students whose competencies are highlighted are likely to feel more empowered and motivated to strive for social and emotional health,” (2007, p. 15). Strength based assessment lends itself to perceiving children within a social context and therefore allows educational professionals to think of prevention and wellness promotion utilizing supportive resources (Nickerson, 2007). As a result, the educational professional has convenient access to language that can be used to talk with the child about his or her strengths and areas that may need improvement. Students are more likely to feel empowered and motivated to work toward change when goals are set for them, rather than statements made about the skills they lack.
Chapter Three

Methodology

Research Design and Procedure

overview.

A non-experimental correlational design was utilized to assess the relationship between student discipline data and teacher perceptions of student social and emotional competencies. English teachers completed a Devereux Elementary Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) checklist for each student in one section of his or her general education eighth grade English classes. The teachers also recorded number of exclusionary discipline occurrences for each student for the current school year as well as gender, educational placement (special education category or regular education), and ethnicity for each student.

details of study procedures.

Due to the sensitive nature of student data, it was appropriate to keep student identification anonymous. Therefore, a participant coding system was used to ensure that the researcher would not have access to student names or any other identifying information. Furthermore, the researcher did not have contact with students at any point during the study. Teachers were provided with two forms for data organization. Form A had a list of codes to which teachers connected student names. The codes used were not
identifiable information. For example, a list of codes looked like, A1, A2, and A3. The codes were formulated for the teachers to prevent teachers from using identifiable information as a code. Form A was completed by the teacher and kept secure in a locked box until the completion of the study at which time Form A was be destroyed. The locked box was kept in the principal’s office and only removed by the teacher when necessary for completing the assessments and/or Form B. The placement of the locked box in the principal’s office was to ensure that Form A and Form B were never left unattended in the same room of the building. Form B consisted of student codes and the other variables of interest in the study (discipline, gender, etc.).

**data collection.**

Form B was collected for each student regarding his or her number of suspensions (in-school and out of school), lunch detentions, after school detentions, expulsions, gender, ethnicity, and special education status. Student discipline numbers were collected as an indicator of student misbehavior. Irvin and colleagues (2004) reviewed multiple studies on student behavior and office discipline referrals. The researchers concluded that office discipline referrals are indeed, reflective of the school-wide behavioral climate.

The information from Form B was matched with the information from the DESSA for each student code and entered into the database accordingly.
participants.

Two different participant groups were recruited for the study. The first group consisted of nine eighth grade teachers from two different school districts. The second group consisted of 178 eighth grade students. Complete data were not submitted for three of the eighth grade students (less than 2% of the sample), as a result those data were not included in the study and the final number of student participants was 175.

The sample size (n=175) was adequate for the number of independent variables (11) therefore, the assumption of normality for the regression analysis was met. Two suggestions for necessary sample size are outlined by Tabachnik & Fidell (2007): \( N \geq 50 + 8m \) (\( m \) is the number of independent variables) and \( N \geq 104 + m \). The current study met both standards: \( 50 + 8 \times 11 = 138 \) or \( 104 + 11 = 115 \).

variables.

The independent variables chosen for this study were selected based on a thorough review of the literature. Specifically, gender, ethnicity, and disability status were chosen because certain groups within each of those categories have been historically over-represented in the discipline data (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002; Hinojosa, 2008; Zhang, Katsiyannis, & Herbst, 2004). The dependent variables were chosen based on the work of Irvin, Tobin, Sprague, Sugai, & Vincent (2004) which validated the use of office discipline referrals as a measure of the effectiveness of school-wide behavioral climate.
The Devereux Elementary Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) is a 72-item, standardized, norm-referenced behavior rating scale that assesses the social-emotional competencies which serve as protective factors for children in kindergarten through the eighth grade. It is important to note that the instrument was selected because of its strength-based approach. The purpose of using a strength-based instrument is to boost teacher awareness of student strengths and eliminate the potential harm of assessing student deficits. The DESSA has eight scales of social and emotional competencies and they are: self-awareness (realistic understanding of strengths and limitations), social awareness (capacity to interact with others respectfully), self-management (success in controlling emotions and behaviors), goal-directed behavior (initiation of and persistence in task completion), relationship skills (actions that promote positive connections with others), personal responsibility (care and reliability in actions contributing to group efforts), decision making (problem solving), and optimistic thinking (attitude of confidence and hopefulness about self and life situations) (DESSA; LeBuffe, Shapiro, & Naglieri, 2008; Nickerson and Fishman, 2009).

Each item on the DESSA starts with the statement, “During the past four weeks, how often did the child…” and the sentence ends with a description of a specific behavior relating to one of the eight social and emotional competencies. Teachers and parents may then rate the frequency of such behavior on a five-point Likert scale: 0 (never), 1 (rarely), 2 (occasionally), 3 (frequently), and 4 (very frequently). The raw points are then
converted to T scores; higher T scores represent more competence in a specific area and low T scores indicate less competence in the specific area (DESSA; LeBuffe, Shapiro, & Naglieri, 2008; Nickerson and Fishman, 2009).

The DESSA was standardized with a sample of 2,496 parents and teachers (n = 1,250 teachers, n = 1,246 parents/relatives). The sample was representative of the population in the United States in regards to race, gender, ethnicity, region of residence, and poverty status. The instrument has been shown to be internally reliable; the test-retest reliability correlation coefficients range from \( r = .79 \) to \( r = .90 \) for the parents and from \( r = .86 \) to \( r = .94 \) for teachers and staff (DESSA; LeBuffe, Shapiro, & Naglieri, 2008).

The validity of the DESSA has been studied using a criterion validity design for students who were already identified as having social, emotional, or behavioral disorders compared to their non-identified peers (DESSA; LeBuffe, Shapiro, & Naglieri, 2008). Convergent and divergent validity were established by Nickerson and Fishman (2009). The convergent and divergent validity study consisted of 227 participants (n = 94 teachers, n = 133 parents) who were invited to participate through personal and professional contacts of the researchers with schools and school groups. Pearson product moment correlations were run between the parent and teacher ratings on the DESSA and two other social/emotional measures: the Behavior Assessment System for Children Second Edition (BASC-2) and the Behavioral and Emotional Rating Scale Second Edition (BERS-2). All subscales on the BERS-2 and BASC-2 correlated significantly at
the $p < .01$ level with subscales on the DESSA. Thus providing support for convergent validity of the measure. Divergent validity was measured by correlating the BASC-2 Behavioral Symptoms Index and clinical subscales with the DESSA subscales. Significant negative correlations exist for most of the scales with the exception of Anxiety, Somatization, and Withdrawal for the parent ratings and the with the exception of Anxiety and Somatization for the teacher ratings (Nickerson and Fishman, 2009).

**internal validity.**

The instrument used in this study has been shown to be a valid instrument for measuring social and emotional competencies. Therefore, social and emotional competencies as measured by the DESSA are a valid measure which ensures the face validity of the study. Furthermore, suitability is ensured by the inclusion of more variables (gender, special education status, and ethnicity) suggested in the literature as predictors of the dependent variable (number of suspensions).

**external validity.**

The researcher does not plan to generalize the results to any population beyond the sample. Therefore, external validity is not a concern.

**research questions.**

**research question one.**

Does the sample corroborate with existing data to suggest that male students, students with a disability and students of a minority ethnicity are disproportionately represented in exclusionary discipline records?
research question two.

What are the relationships between teacher perceived student social and emotional competencies and each of the dependent variables measured: in-school suspension, out of school suspension, total suspension, expulsion, detention, lunch detention (academic intervention), total detention, and total exclusionary discipline?

research question three.

How well can group membership be predicted for this sample when students are grouped according to frequency of discipline assignment (0 or 1 versus 2 or more) when we know something about the student’s ethnicity, gender, disability status, and Social Emotional Composite?

Data Analysis

analysis of research question one.

Disproportionate representation of minority groups in the special education was studied as long ago as 1968 by Dunn. At the time of Dunn’s classical article, overrepresentation meant that the percent of minority pupils represented in the population and the percent of pupils represented in special education were compared to one another and the group was considered overrepresented if the latter percentage was higher. For example, if African-American students made up 15 percent of the total population of a school, yet 60 percent of the students in special education were African-American, they would be considered overrepresented. Since the time of this article, overrepresentation
has been discussed in academic literature as well as in court cases (MacMillan and Reschly 1998).

As described by MacMillan and Reschley (1998) there are two suggestions for calculating overrepresentation,

One estimate calculates the percent of children in a disability category who are members of a given ethnic group. That is, the first estimate asks the question, "What percent of the children classified as MMR are Black?" Reschly (1997) has described this statistic as the "percent of category or program by group." In this calculation, the number of Black children classified as MMR serves as the numerator and the total number of children classified as MMR serves as the denominator. Calculations using this formula are the most frequently employed and were cited in the litigations to demonstrate the magnitude of the overrepresentation of Black children in MMR (as in Larry P., Marshall et al. v. Georgia, 1984; S-1 v. Turlington, 1979). To illustrate, when the Larry P. trial began in 1971, Black students constituted 10% of the California school enrollment, but 25% of the enrollment in MMR programs. The 25% figure was calculated based on the formula shown above (Reschly, 1988, 1997).

A second formula that has been employed provides the "percent of group in category or program," and this estimate asks the question, "What percent of Black students are enrolled in MMR programs?" The same numerator serves (the number of Black children classified as MMR), but the denominator in this calculation uses the total number of Black children in the district, state, or national school population. This second formula provides a perspective on the percent of children in a certain ethnic group that are classified into one of the sanctioned disability categories. Typically, it is a much smaller percentage. For example, at the time of Larry P., as noted, whereas 25% of the total MMR enrollments were Black, only 1.1% of Black students in California were enrolled in MMR programs;” (p. 16).

The researcher for the current study chose to evaluate the data using both options to estimate the representation of minority students, students with disabilities, and male students within the discipline data.
**Analysis of research question number two.**

Hierarchical multiple regression was used in order to allow the researcher to explore relationships among multiple independent variables and one dependent variable. The independent variables measured were: teacher perceived social and emotional competencies, gender, ethnicity, and disability status. The dependent variables were number of in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, detentions, and academic interventions.

Hierarchical multiple regression also allowed the researcher to determine which variable and/or combination of variables could explain the most variance in discipline rates. The theoretical framework in the literature reviewed informed the selection of the variables identified for the regression.

**Analysis of research question three.**

Logistic regression was chosen based on the interval (continuous) level of the independent variables and the dichotomous nature of the dependent variable (Tabachnik & Fidell, 2007; Black, Anderson, & Tatham 2006). Logistic regression is a frequency analysis done in logit form with a discrete dependent variable and a multiple regression analysis with a dichotomous dependent variable (Tabachnik & Fidell, 2007). Logistic regression will allow the researcher to predict group membership (students with discipline records and students without discipline records) based on what we know about a student’s perceived social and emotional skill set, ethnicity, disability status, and gender. The purpose of analyzing the data with two discrete dependent variables is so
that the researcher can specifically study the characteristics of the targeted group (two or more discipline referrals).
Chapter Four

Results

Demographic Data

Eight eighth grade English teachers from two central Ohio suburban middle schools participated in this study. As a result, data on 175 eighth grade English students were collected. Demographic information concerning the teacher participants was not collected as it was not considered in the research questions.

Demographic information from the 2009/2010 school year collected by the Ohio Department of Education was averaged to find the representation of each demographic group in the population from which the sample was derived. The following table provides a comparison between the population and the sample by each demographic variable studied. It should be noted that the disability category of Autism was not reported by the Ohio Department of Education.
### Demographic Summary of Sample and Population

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Variable</th>
<th>Representation in Sample</th>
<th>Average for Both Schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n = 175</td>
<td>N = 1,389</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Percentage)</td>
<td>(Percentage)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>56 (n = 98)</td>
<td>53.7 (n = 746)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>44 (n = 77)</td>
<td>46.3 (n = 643)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Disability</td>
<td>78.9 (n = 138)</td>
<td>91.5 (n = 1,234)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Health Impairment</td>
<td>11.4 (n = 20)</td>
<td>1.4 (n = 19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific Learning Disability</td>
<td>8 (n = 14)</td>
<td>7.1 (n = 96)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autism</td>
<td>1.7 (n = 3)</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>78.9 (n = 138)</td>
<td>76.4 (n = 1,053)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>7.4 (n = 13)</td>
<td>7.3 (n = 100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>6.9 (n = 12)</td>
<td>8.6 (n = 114)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian Pacific Islander</td>
<td>2.9 (n = 5)</td>
<td>2.7 (n = 37)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-Racial</td>
<td>4 (n = 7)</td>
<td>5 (n = 70)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*not reported
Research Questions

The following study was designed to address three major research questions:

1. Does the sample corroborate with existing data to suggest that male students, students with a disability and students of a minority ethnicity are disproportionately represented in exclusionary discipline records?

2. What are the relationships between teacher perceived student social and emotional competencies and each of the dependent variables measured: in-school suspension, out of school suspension, total suspension, expulsion, detention, lunch detention (academic intervention), total detention, and total exclusionary discipline?

3. How well can group membership be predicted for this sample when students are grouped according to frequency of discipline assignment (0 or 1 versus 2 or more) when we know something about the student’s ethnicity, gender, disability status, and Social Emotional Composite?

Data Analysis

Research question one.

Does the sample corroborate with existing data in the literature to suggest that male students, students with a disability and students of a minority ethnicity are disproportionately represented in exclusionary discipline records?
Two methods for analysis were used to answer this research question as suggested by MacMillan and Reschly (1998). The first analysis compared the proportion of students within each demographic category (i.e. ethnicity) who had a discipline referral to the other groups (i.e. Multi-racial) within that same category.

Representation of each demographic group was first calculated by finding the proportion of each group who had a discipline referral. The proportions were then compared to the other groups within the same category for each type of demographic variable. For example, all reported ethnicities were compared to one another.

Percent of Students with Disciplinary Problems by Ethnicity

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>71.7</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian-Pacific Islander</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>83.3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-racial</td>
<td>85.7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Percent of Students with Disciplinary Problems by Gender

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>74.4</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>68.8</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percent of Students with Disciplinary Problems by Disability Category

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Disability</td>
<td>65.9</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific Learning Disability</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Health Impairment</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autism</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the sample used for this study, African American, Hispanic, and Multi-Racial students are represented at a higher proportionate in the discipline data as compared to their Caucasian peers. This result corroborates with existing literature which suggests
that minority students are over-represented in the discipline data. On the other hand, Asian Pacific Islander students were proportionately under-represented in the discipline records as compared to their Caucasian peers.

According to the sample of students for this study, students with Autism were represented at just about the same rate as students without a disability. However, students with a Learning Disability or Other Health Impairment were represented at a higher proportion in the discipline records as compared to students without a disability. This finding also corroborates with the existing literature which suggests that students with a disability are represented at a higher rate than students without a disability.

In the sample, it appears that male students were represented at a slightly higher proportion than the female students in the discipline records for this sample. Again, this finding supports the existing literature regarding gender representation in discipline records.

**Alternative Analysis**

Another option for calculating overrepresentation was used which looked at the proportion of students in each demographic category who have a discipline referral, compared to the proportion of that same group in the sample. The actual number of students for each category is in parentheses.
Comparison of Total Sample and Those with Discipline Problems

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Category</th>
<th>Total Sample (n=175)</th>
<th>Sample with Discipline Problems (n=126)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>56 (98)</td>
<td>58 (73)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>44 (77)</td>
<td>42 (53)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Disability</td>
<td>78.9 (138)</td>
<td>72.2 (91)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Health Impairment</td>
<td>11.4 (20)</td>
<td>15 (19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Disability</td>
<td>8 (14)</td>
<td>11 (14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autism</td>
<td>1.7 (3)</td>
<td>1.5 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>78.9 (138)</td>
<td>78.6 (99)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>7.4 (13)</td>
<td>7.9 (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>6.9 (12)</td>
<td>7.9 (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian Pacific Islander</td>
<td>2.9 (5)</td>
<td>0.7 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-Racial</td>
<td>4 (7)</td>
<td>4.8 (6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As stated by MacMillan and Reschly, “Evidence of overrepresentation has focused on simple proportions of a given ethnic group … The underlying assumption is that the proportion of different ethnic groups in any category or program should be equal.
to the proportion of that ethnic group in the general school population if there is no discrimination,” (1998, p. 15). So, the assumption is that if 10 percent of the sample is male, then no more than 10 percent of disciplined kids should be male. Put another way, students who were male made up 56 percent of the sample however, male students made up 58 percent of students with a discipline record. For the sample group used in this study, males were slightly over-represented in exclusionary discipline records using the alternative analysis.

The alternative analysis suggests that students without a disability and students with Autism were under-represented in the discipline records. Alternatively, some of the other disability categories like, students with a Learning Disability or Other Health Impairment were represented in the discipline records at a higher proportion than their representation in the sample.

Finally, the sample reveals that Asian Pacific Islander students and Caucasian students were under-represented in the discipline records and African-American, Hispanic, and Multi-racial students were over-represented.

The results of question number one reveal interesting differences in conclusions regarding the over or under representation of demographic groups in the discipline records. Overall, the sample used in this study does corroborate with the current literature that suggests that males, students with a disability, and students of minority ethnicity are over-represented in the discipline records.
Research question two.

What are the relationships between teacher perceived student social and emotional competencies and each of the dependent variables measured: in-school suspension, out of school suspension, total suspension, expulsion, detention, lunch detention (academic intervention), total detention, and total exclusionary discipline?

The assumption was made that the subscales on the DESSA were independent of one another. However, multi-collinearity diagnostics for the multiple regression indicated that the subscales are not independent of one another for this sample.

A correlational matrix was created for all of the independent variables to demonstrate the high level of inter-correlation amongst the scales. A summary of the correlations are in the following table.
**Correlations between DESSA Subscales**

Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>X1</th>
<th>X2</th>
<th>X3</th>
<th>X4</th>
<th>X5</th>
<th>X6</th>
<th>X7</th>
<th>X8</th>
<th>X9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal Responsibility (X1)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.804</td>
<td>.917</td>
<td>.794</td>
<td>.823</td>
<td>.748</td>
<td>.753</td>
<td>.847</td>
<td>.915</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimistic Thinking (X2)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.799</td>
<td>.789</td>
<td>.818</td>
<td>.842</td>
<td>.834</td>
<td>.780</td>
<td>.911</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal Directed Behavior (X3)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.735</td>
<td>.791</td>
<td>.707</td>
<td>.771</td>
<td>.781</td>
<td>.889</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Awareness (X4)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.850</td>
<td>.812</td>
<td>.722</td>
<td>.866</td>
<td>.895</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision Making Skills (X5)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.884</td>
<td>.827</td>
<td>.868</td>
<td>.935</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Skills (X6)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.847</td>
<td>.810</td>
<td>.906</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Awareness (X7)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.787</td>
<td>.892</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Management (X8)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.918</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social and Emotional Composite (X9)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As a result, because of the large inter-correlations, the Social and Emotional Composite (SEC) score was used as the independent variable for the multiple regression. The SEC score is a composite score of all eight scaled scores on the DESSA. The SEC is measured as a T-score with a mean of 50 and standard deviation of 10. Higher scores indicate more social and emotional competency and lower scores indicate social and emotional competency skill deficits. The revised research question is as follows: How much of the variance in number of discipline occurrences can be explained by the demographic variables along with the SEC?
Due to the low number of students with an educational disability and ethnic minorities, new categorical variables were created to serve as the independent variables for the regression analyses. The new ethnicity variable grouped the participants into two categories: Caucasian or Ethnic Minority (which included Hispanic, African American, Asian Pacific Islander, or Multiracial). The new disability variable also grouped the students into one of two categories: No Disability or Disability (Autism, Other Health Impairment, or Learning Disability).

Also, new independent variables were made based on type of exclusionary discipline. Detentions, Suspensions, and Expulsions are all behavioral-type infractions, so they were totaled and the new dependent variable was called, Behavioral Discipline. On the other hand, Lunch Intervention or Lunch Detentions were academic interventions used when students did not completed in-class or homework. The new dependent variable was entitled, Academic Intervention. The two dependent variables (Behavioral Discipline and Academic Intervention) were regressed separately on the independent variables.
Summary Data for Behavior Related Discipline, Academic Intervention, and Selected Variables

(n=175)

Table 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>X1</th>
<th>X2</th>
<th>X3</th>
<th>X4</th>
<th>Y1</th>
<th>Y2</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Sd Dev</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Emotional Composite (X1)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>-.15</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-.45</td>
<td>-.33</td>
<td>46.97</td>
<td>8.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (X2)a</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.56</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability Status (X3)b</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.41</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity (X4)c</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.41</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral Discipline (Y1)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Intervention (Y2)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a 0 = Female; 1 = Male
b 0 = No Disability; 1 = Educational Disability
c 0 = Caucasian; 1 = Minority

A multiple regression analysis was used to explain the variance in discipline occurrences. A hierarchical analysis was used to evaluate the variance explained by each independent variable. The independent variables were chosen from a review of the literature.

The analysis was run using variables supported by the literature as predictive of discipline outcome. Behavior Related Discipline was regressed on the following variables: Gender, No Disability vs. Disability, Caucasian vs. Ethnic Minority, and Social
Emotional Composite score (as measured by the Devereux Elementary Student Strengths Assessment).

A review of the residuals showed no violation of the assumptions for multiple regression (Gliem, 2008).

Regression of Behavioral Discipline on Social Emotional Composite Score and Disability Status

Table 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE B</th>
<th>R² Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>7.90</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Emotional Composite</td>
<td>-0.15</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Disability vs. Disability</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian vs. Ethnic Minority</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The regression revealed that a negative correlational relationship existed between the Social and Emotional Composite (SEC) score and Behavioral Discipline. The SEC accounted for approximately twenty-one percent of the variance in Behavioral Discipline.
occurrences. Furthermore, the No Disability vs. Disability variable accounted for approximately four percent and Caucasian vs. Ethnic Minority accounted for one percent of the variance in Behavioral Discipline occurrences. The results from the regression reveal that Gender accounted for zero percent of the variance in Behavioral Discipline occurrences for this sample. Clearly, the results of the regression analysis for Behavioral Discipline revealed that SEC accounts for the most variance in number of occurrences.

Regression of Academic Intervention on Social Emotional Composite Score

Table 9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE B</th>
<th>R² Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 1</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>11.70</td>
<td>1.97</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Emotional Composite</td>
<td>-.17</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Disability vs. Disability</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td>.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-.48</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Caucasian vs. Ethnic Minority</td>
<td>-.23</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For this sample, SEC explained approximately eleven percent of the variance in number of Academic Intervention occurrences. Gender, Disability vs. No Disability, and
Caucasian vs. Ethnic Minority did not account for any of the variance in number of Academic Intervention occurrences for this sample.

A review of the residuals showed no violation of the assumptions for multiple regression (Gliem, 2008).

**Research question three.**

How well can group membership be predicted for this sample when students are grouped according to frequency of discipline assignment (such as 0 or 1 versus 2 or more) when the student’s ethnicity, gender, disability status, and/or Social Emotional Composite are known?

In order to answer this question, the researcher used the following dependent variables: “Suspensions, Expulsions, and Detentions” as well as “Academic Intervention.” Next, frequency tables were run for all student participants on each of those dependent variables. Of the 175 students in the study, 78 students had some sort of record for suspension, detention, and/or expulsion. Of those 78, 51 students or 65.4 percent of them had two or more discipline infractions. Furthermore, 112 of the 175 student participants had been assigned Academic Intervention. Of those 112 students, 87 or 77.7 percent were assigned two or more Academic Interventions. As a result, approximately two-thirds of the students in the sample with behavioral issues were repeat offenders and approximately three-fourths of the students in the sample with academic issues were repeat offenders. To examine more closely the differences between the students with two or more behavioral or academic infractions as compared with students
who had only one or zero infractions, a new dichotomous variable was created, “Repeat Offenders vs. Non-Repeat Offenders”, for both the behavioral and academic dependent variables.

*Classification Table without Model: Behavioral Discipline*

Table 10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavioral Discipline</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-Repeat Offender (0 or 1)</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>70.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repeat Offender (2 or more)</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>29.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>100</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Classification Table without Model: Academic Intervention*

Table 11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Intervention</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-Repeat Offender (0 or 1)</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>50.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repeat Offender (2 or more)</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>49.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Hierarchical Logistic regression was used in an attempt to predict group membership of students given their Social Emotional Composite score on the DESSA. Please see above tables in research question number two for dependent and independent variable inter-correlations.

*Logistic Regression: Behavioral Discipline (n=175)*

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Regression Coefficient</th>
<th>Sd Error</th>
<th>Wald Statistic</th>
<th>Exp(B)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Emotional Composite</td>
<td>-.17</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>31.96</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>6.88</td>
<td>1.34</td>
<td>26.23</td>
<td>975.16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Model Chi-Square = 50.54

*Classification Table with Model*

Table 13

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predicted</th>
<th>Non-Repeat Offender</th>
<th>Repeat Offender</th>
<th>Percent Correct</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Observed Non-Repeat Offender</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>92.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observed Repeat Offender</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>47.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall Percent Correct 79.4
The hierarchical logistic regression revealed that when the Social and Emotional Composite score was accounted for, the proportional reduction in error for the model was 29.4 percent, meaning that there were 29.4 percent fewer errors of classification when predicting whether students will be Repeat Offenders using the model compared to not using the model (Gliem, 2008).

*Logistic Regression: Academic Intervention (n=175)*

Table 14

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Regression</th>
<th>Wald</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coefficient</td>
<td>Sd Error</td>
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<td>Social Emotional Composite</td>
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<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>.90</td>
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</table>

Model Chi-Square = 15.43
Classification Table with Model

Table 15

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observed</th>
<th>Non-Repeat Offender</th>
<th>Repeat Offender</th>
<th>Percent Correct</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-Repeat Offender</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>59.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repeat Offender</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>60.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall Percent Correct 60.0

The proportional reduction in error for the Academic Intervention model was 19.5 percent, meaning that there were 19.5 percent fewer errors of classification when predicting whether students will be Repeat Offenders using the model compared to not using the model (Gliem, 2008).

The results of the logistic regression confirmed the results of the multiple regression, indicating that SEC was related to number of Behavioral or Academic Discipline occurrences. For this sample, students with higher SEC scores had fewer disciplinary problems and students with lower SEC scores had more disciplinary problems.
Chapter Five
Discussion and Conclusions

Discussion

The current study aimed to explore the issues surrounding exclusionary discipline and social and emotional competency. The results of the study provide support for moving toward a more integrative and whole-child approach to education in the public schools. Fortunately, demographic variables were not able to explain the high or low number of discipline occurrences for the students. On the other hand, social and emotional competencies were found to explain a substantial amount of the variance in exclusionary discipline occurrences. These results leave one hopeful. Researchers have found that social and emotional learning programs are effective in boosting students’ social and emotional skills (Payton, Weissberg, Durlak, Dymnicki, Taylor, Schellinger, & Pachan, 2008). By implementing these programs, fewer students will potentially experience school failure and at the same time, more students will have the skills necessary for contributing meaningfully to the classroom and the community.

Current research on school discipline is highly focused on issues of over and under representation of specific groups of students in the discipline data. As a result, over-representation was looked at in the current study. Two different calculation techniques were discussed in the literature for calculating representation of minority groups within educational disability categories (MacMillan & Reschly, 1998). When the
results of each data analysis were compared to one another, a large difference in conclusions one could draw from the results was very apparent. For example, the first analysis showed that 100 percent of students with a Learning Disability in the sample had been assigned exclusionary discipline. On the other hand, the alternative analysis revealed that students with a Learning Disability made up eight percent of the sample and eleven percent of the students who were assigned exclusionary discipline. Consequently, it appeared that one analysis provided support for over-representation of those students while the other analysis did not support that conclusion.

There is a current lack of research to support one method over the other as a valid or meaningful calculation. When concluding studies about over representation, each researcher has the opportunity to choose how representation will be calculated in their respective studies, so representation data from one study may not be comparable to representation data from a different study. Furthermore, the over or under representation of a specific group within a study does not necessarily provide useful and/or meaningful information, as illustrated in the current study. Despite these inconsistencies, the literature points to multiple reasons for over-representation: discrimination, cultural mismatch between teachers and students, and students with disabilities potentially having fewer social/emotional regulation skills and poor judgment skills (Hinojosa, 2008; Skiba, 2002; Zhang, Katsiyannis, & Herbst, 2004). The aforementioned variables are not easily influenced or manipulated factors. Discrimination and cultural mismatch are systemic issues, meaning that impacting these issues would require multiple dynamic approaches.
and tactics in several environments. On the contrary, social and emotional competencies can be easily acquired by students when instruction is targeted in the schools (Payton, et al., 2008). Based on the dissimilarity in conclusions for representation in this study, it is reasonable to conclude that a sound method for analyzing representation is yet to be found. Consequently, the finding in this study suggests that researchers should abandon efforts to prove that discrimination and cultural mismatches are present in the school system. Instead, it may be better to focus on methods for impacting the underlying issues contributing to those issues, like building meaningful relationships between students, teachers, administrators and staff.

To be clear, discrimination is not acceptable and must be addressed appropriately and not ignored. For example, those who experience discrimination in the schools must be provided with support services to assist with their emotional well-being and those who display blatant discriminatory behavior must be stopped from further damaging students’ perceptions of themselves. Additionally, discrimination is often the result of misunderstandings due to a cultural mismatch (between the individuals involved). One such cultural mismatch that often occurs in schools is a mismatch between the culture of the middle class and the culture of those living in poverty. As stated by Payne, “Many of the behaviors that students bring to school are necessary to help them survive outside of school. Just as students learn to use various rules, depending on the computer game they’re playing, they also need to learn to use certain rules to be successful in school settings and circumstances,” (p. 77, 1996). Efforts must be made to teach the framework
for understanding culture to teachers and administrators, rather than blame them for discriminating against students who do not meet the behavioral standards of the school. Furthermore, once teachers and administrators have an understanding of the cultures of the students in their classes, they will perceive the behavior as serving an adaptive purpose for the student, rather than assuming mal-intent on the part of the student. Teachers may then experience true empathy for students and build genuine relationships. In conclusion, identifying the existence discrimination as a problem in the schools through research studies is no longer enough. A better use of resources would be to research effective methods for providing opportunities for understanding between teachers, administrators and students.

The research regarding over-representation is plentiful; however with it comes a significant void of applicability. It is difficult to calculate over-representation and once established, it is even more difficult to intervene. Phinney (1996) discussed the problems of defining and categorizing individuals by ethnicity for research purposes. She described that there is more variance within an ethnic group than between ethnic groups in regards to social class, income, education, generation of immigration, geographical region, and family structure. Phinney described three aspects of ethnicity which may play an important role in psychological research: “(a) the cultural values, attitudes, and behaviors that distinguish ethnic groups; (b) the subjective sense of ethnic group membership; and (c) the experiences associated with minority status, including powerlessness, discrimination, and prejudice” (p. 919, 1996). Phinney charged
researchers with the responsibility to investigate the aspects of ethnicity, rather than use ethnicity as an individual characteristic. MacMillan and Reschly also discussed the importance of specificity when discussing ethnicity in psychological and educational research, especially for issues concerning overrepresentation of certain groups. They recommend that researchers specify the aspect of ethnicity they believe to play a role in the research, rather than naming ethnicity as a factor (1998). The comments made by Phinney, MacMillan, and Reschly highlight the importance for perceiving the problem of discipline as a lack of student skills than an issue of demographic characteristics including, race and/or ethnicity. However, it is extremely important to continue to consider the specific difficulties and challenges experienced by many minority students in schools and intervene when necessary.

The results of this study indicate that measuring over-representation can be troublesome because there is not a valid measurement for over-representation. Furthermore, a review of literature on the overrepresentation of minority students, students with a disability, and male students reveals that the cause of over-representation is complicated. On the other hand, additional results of this study revealed that social and emotional competencies may account for up to twenty percent of the variance in discipline referrals for students. This is great news because school administrators, teachers, educational trainers, and in-service providers can make a direct impact on social and emotional learning.
Furthermore, in the sample for this study, social and emotional competencies explained more variance in discipline occurrences than the demographic variables, and in fact, gender and ethnicity did not contribute significantly to the prediction of behavioral discipline or academic interventions. This further supports the need to focus on teaching social and emotional skills, rather than the “types” of students who are assigned suspension. Students who were rated with low scores on the SEC were assigned more exclusionary discipline assignments than those with high scores on the SEC, which suggests that if training was provided for teachers to help increase a students’ social-emotional competence, the frequency of exclusionary discipline could be decreased.

As mentioned above, ethnicity, gender, and disability status cannot be influenced or manipulated by educational professionals, but social and emotional intelligence curriculum can be added to the classroom. The fact that the SEC contributes significantly to both academic discipline and behavioral discipline strongly suggests that social-emotionally focused intervention could have a meaningful and positive impact on the frequency of exclusionary discipline and in the end the overall trajectories of student outcomes. The Collaborative for Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) conducted a review of three meta-analyses on social and emotional learning. The review included 317 studies and 324,303 children. The reviewers found that social and emotional learning programs, “…improved students’ social-emotional skills, attitudes about self and others, connection to school, positive social behavior, and academic performance; they also reduced students’ conduct problems and emotional distress,” (Payton, Weissberg, Durlak,
Dymnicki, Taylor, Schellinger, & Pachan, 2008). When one views the results of the review completed by Payton and colleagues in combination with the results of the current study, it appears that change is possible. It is possible to impact the future for students who are experiencing social, behavioral, and/or academic difficulties. There is a direct connection between social and emotional learning programs and improved social and emotional competencies, which could prevent discipline problems and school failure. The current study clearly supports the notion that educational professionals can positively improve the outcomes for many students by providing opportunities for social and emotional learning.

Undoubtedly, a shift in thinking regarding the management of children in schools must take place. For example, children are often disciplined and excluded from the learning environment for lacking appropriate social and emotional skills, yet they are remediated or receive intervention services when they lack academic skills. When a child enters Kindergarten without knowing how to identify letters, teachers often introduce multiple opportunities for the student to learn how to identify letters (i.e. singing, coloring, making collages, etc.). On the contrary, when a child enters Kindergarten without knowing how to ask another child to play with her, she may be punished for inappropriate social behavior (i.e. hitting, pushing, name calling, etc.), and removed from the very setting, even if briefly, that could be used to teach her new behaviors and coping strategies. Children who know their letters likely had the opportunity to learn them at home by interacting with literature or by watching others interact with literature.
Moreover, students who know how to interact in socially appropriate ways also likely learned those skills by watching others and receiving direct feedback when interacting with others. As stated by Greene, “Kids with social, emotional, and behavioral challenges lack important thinking skills,” (p. 10, 2008). Thus children who come with inadequate social and emotional skills are in need of intervention not punishment for their weaknesses.

Many of the current methods for managing children and their behaviors rely on behaviorism with the focus on rewards and consequences. Although these practices can be effective for temporarily manipulating behavior, they do not necessarily help the child to develop better character (Kohn, 1993). An easy alternative answer does not exist, but suggestions for improving the process are abundant. The realities of implementing such programs present very difficult circumstances (many elaborate on what this issues are so it is clear how Kohn’s points address the issues), but with creativity and a desire to change, they are possible. Kohn advocates for implementing the “three C’s”: content, collaboration, and choice. Content refers to re-thinking the requests we make of children and assessing how reasonable the request is. Collaboration refers to mutual problem solving on the part of the teacher and child. Children should be included (at developmentally appropriate levels) in the evaluation of their behavior and the proposed plan for solving the problem. Choice refers to providing children with an opportunity to have a real choice in deciding what happens to them (1993). The ambiguity of the alternative suggestion can be overwhelming and intimidating, but with
proper resources allocated for professional development and time for real problem
solving in the classroom, it is possible to make an impact on the lives of children who are
struggling in school.

Currently, juvenile offender systems and educational systems are greatly
disconnected from one another in most states. As a result, the children involved in those
systems are suffering. They miss large amounts of school to go to court and the
academic instruction in the juvenile justice system does not usually corroborate with the
state educational curriculum. Furthermore, these students are not offered adequate
opportunities for counseling or programming designed to help them re-enter the
educational setting. The lack of transition resources sets these students up for repeated
failure (Wald & Losen, 2003).

On the other hand, there are examples of juvenile justice systems servicing
children effectively. In Missouri, the juvenile detention facilities are home to the most
severe and dangerous juvenile offenders and they also have the lowest recidivism rates in
the country. The recidivism rate is seven percent in Missouri compared to the range of
12-50 percent in other states. The juvenile justice system in Missouri is innovatively
designed with no armed guards, no fences, and front doors are often unlocked. They
utilize a group home type of format and the homes are usually located on large college
campuses. The purpose of the juvenile justice system in Missouri is to identify and treat
underlying issues that cause the children to break laws and act inappropriately. Those
issues may be educational or mental health related. As stated by Sander, “This is an
example to keep in mind for schools as well—to address the reasons for the behaviors, rather than simply punish the student’s behavior or low motivation,” (2010).

Again, the example set forth by the Missouri juvenile justice system indicates that change is possible. It is imperative that educational professionals take responsibility for fostering the whole child, rather than just the intellectual child. Research repeatedly indicates that teachers, administrators and other school personnel can make an impact on students’ social and emotional competencies and in turn, eventual positive life outcomes. As demonstrated in the data for this sample, it may be helpful to target a “repeat offenders” group for intervention as they have more similarly perceived social and emotional competencies.

**Future Research**

Although the current study makes it clear that social and emotional competencies contribute to misbehavior in schools, the following aspects of this research study should be further investigated in future research: teachers’ perceptions of student competencies, the impact of utilizing strength-based assessment, and the efficiency of the DESSA (administration time and subscale utility).

First, the influence of teachers’ perceptions of students’ competencies had a definite impact on the current study. It is difficult to determine if the teachers were able to accurately assess each item on the DESSA independent of the other items. This may have contributed to the high inter-correlations among the DESSA subscales. In the literature, disability status, stress level of the teacher, and matching of student on gender
and ethnicity variables have been found to impact teachers’ perceptions of student behaviors (Tyler, Boykin, & Walton, 2006; Whiteman, Young, & Fisher, 1985; Taylor, Gunter, & Slate, 2001; Ohan, Cormier, Hepp, Visser, & Strain, 2008). As a result, it is reasonable to assume that multiple variables may have had an impact on teacher ratings of student competencies in the current study. In the future, variability within student data should be analyzed to determine if teachers’ ratings for each item are reliable and independent of one another. For example, if a teacher perceives a student as overall more socially and emotionally competent, is she more likely to rate the student higher, even on items for which the student is not actually competent. And vice versa, if a teacher has a negative impression of a student, can she accurately and reliably rate each skill independent of the others?

Second, in order to continue to improve the depth of information on student social and emotional competencies and their impact on student success, it is imperative that specific skills be measured and targeted. The SEC was helpful in establishing the correlation between social and emotional competency and misbehavior, but it is a broad measure. As discussed in the literature, there are multiple components to social and emotional competency. For example, it would be even more helpful to know that low social awareness, specifically, explains a significant amount of variance in exclusionary discipline assignments. This would be helpful for applying the results to the real world setting. Hence, future studies should investigate the content validity of each subscale and its ability to measure specific skills independent of the other subscales. Also, a statistical
analysis should be run to determine if some of the scales can be combined as they may be measuring the same construct. From this research, educational professionals could target specific interventions for students that would promote school success.

Third, the use of a strength-based instrument may have had unknown impacts on the current study. Strength-based assessments have been regarded as valid and reliable instruments for detecting students with difficulties (Naglieri, LeBuffe, Shapiro, 2008). Furthermore, strength-based assessments can be directly linked with intervention, can be useful in building positive relationships between the school and parents, and emphasize a student’s strengths to him or her which allows for the student to feel empowered and motivated (Nickerson and Fishman, 2009). As a result, future research should assess the influence of using the strength-based assessment on teachers’ perceptions of students and how that perception may impact the student-teacher relationship. Hinojosa found that students who had difficulty in school still had concerns about teachers’ perceptions of them (2008). Also, research has repeatedly shown that student-teacher relationships are a key element to student success (Firestone & Brody, 1975 Baker, Grant & Morlock, 2008). Consequently, the use of a strength-based instrument may improve the relationships between teachers and students and therefore become part of the intervention for student success.

Finally, the instrument chosen for this study was very time consuming (about 10-15 minutes per student) for the teachers to complete. Since the completion of this project a brief measure of the same instrument has been published. The brief version provides an
overall score of social and emotional competency, similar to the SEC. The scores obtained on the brief measure have been found to be as reliable and valid as the SEC on the full scale (Naglieri, LeBuffe, Shapiro, 2008). Future studies should investigate the utility of progress monitoring social and emotional learning interventions with the use of the brief measure.

Conclusions

Exclusionary discipline has a long history in our society and our schools. Unfortunately, as a society, we have continued to allow the cycle of school failure to continue when a large amount of research demonstrates that there are better methods for fostering development in children. Clearly, detention, suspension, and expulsion were not effective in changing the behavior of most students who received two or more exclusionary discipline assignments for this sample. Also, exclusionary discipline has been found to have a negative impact on teacher-student relationships and the overall school climate (Hinojosa, 2008). Students who experience difficulties in school are extremely likely to end up in prison as an adult. These citizens place a burden on all of society. However, research has indicated that social and emotional learning can take place in the school setting and be effective in changing behavior. Undoubtedly, there is a better way to foster growth in children and promote citizenship than implementing exclusionary discipline. There is an urgent need to close the existing research to practice gap.
References


Ohio Department of Education (2010, June 14). *Whose Idea is This? A Parents Guide to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 1994 (IDEA).*


Appendix A: Teacher Recruitment Letter

Dear Teacher:

You have been invited to participate in a research dissertation project being conducted by a doctoral candidate at The Ohio State University. You are being asked to participate because you have been identified as an expert on the behavior of students in your classes.

The following is an outline of the research project proposed by Megan Hemmeler, M.A. at The Ohio State University. Shortly, you will receive a waiver of consent document with important details of the study. Please review the document carefully and feel free to contact the researchers with any questions.

**Project Name: Social and Emotional Competencies and Exclusionary Student**

**Discipline**

- Eighth grade English teachers will complete a Devereux Elementary Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) checklist for each student in one section of his or her English classes.
- Student identities will be kept anonymous through a coding system.
- Teachers will also record discipline for the current school year (number of suspensions and expulsions), gender, educational placement, and ethnicity for each student.
- The DESSA has eight scales of social and emotional competencies and they are: self-awareness, social awareness, self management, goal directed behavior, relationship skills, personal responsibility, decision making, and optimistic thinking.
• The goal of the study is to identify the relationships between student coping skills and misbehavior.
• The researcher will not have contact with students at any point during the study.

Please contact Megan Hemmeler with any further questions:

Mhemmeler@gmail.com
614-397-5438
Appendix B: Letter of Support

Office of Responsible Research Practices
The Ohio State University
300 Research Foundation Building
1960 Kenny Road
Columbus, Ohio 43210-1063

To Whom it May Concern:

I am writing on behalf of _________ Middle School in the ____________ City School District in support of the research project entitled “Social and Emotional Competencies and Exclusionary Student Discipline” being conducted by Megan Hemmeler, a doctoral candidate at The Ohio State University. We are very excited about the opportunity to work with Ms. Hemmeler and the university on this project.

Sincerely,

__________________, Principal
__________ Middle School
Appendix C: FORM A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
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Appendix D: FORM B

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Appendix E: Sample of DESSA Questions

_During the past 4 weeks, how often did the child..._  

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<th></th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Frequently</th>
<th>Very</th>
<th>Frequently</th>
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<td>1. carry herself/himself with confidence?</td>
<td>☐ ☐</td>
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<td>2. try to do her/his best?</td>
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<td>3. resolve a disagreement?</td>
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<td>4. act comfortable in a new situation?</td>
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Appendix F: Definitions of Terms

Ethnicity

The terms used to describe the participants’ ethnicities in this study were derived from the terms used for the students’ official school records.

Child with a disability

This term is used as it relates to students who have been found eligible by their school district to be serviced as a special education student under one or more of the disability categories defined by the state. The following disabilities were represented in this study.

Other health impairment

As defined by Whose IDEA is This?, “Having limited strength, vitality, or alertness, including a heightened alertness to environmental stimuli, that results in limited alertness with respect to the educational environment, that is due to chronic or acute health problems such as asthma, attention deficit disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, diabetes, epilepsy, a heart condition, hemophilia, lead poisoning, leukemia, nephritis, rheumatic fever or sickle cell anemia and Tourette syndrome; and adversely affects a child’s educational performance,” (2010, p. 62-63).
Learning disability

As defined by Whose IDEA is This?, “A disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, write, spell or to do mathematical calculations. The term includes such conditions as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia and developmental aphasia. The term does not include children who have learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing or motor abilities, of cognitive disability, of emotional disturbance or of environmental, cultural or economic disadvantage,” (2010, p. 63).

Autism

As defined by Whose IDEA is This?, “A developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction, generally evident before age 3 that adversely affects a child’s educational performance. Other characteristics often associated with autism are engagement in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements, resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines and unusual responses to sensory experiences. The term does not apply if a child’s educational performance is adversely affected primarily because the child has a serious emotional disturbance. A child who manifests the characteristics of autism after age three could be identified as having autism if the requirements of the first two sentences of this definition are satisfied,” (2010, p. 62).
**Emotional disturbance**

As defined by Whose IDEA is This?, “A condition showing one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a degree that it affects a child’s educational performance, resulting in:

* An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory or health factors;
* An inability to build or maintain satisfactory relationships with peers and teachers;
* Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances;
* A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression; or
* A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.

The term includes schizophrenia. The term does not apply to children who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they have a serious emotional disturbance,” (2010, p. 62).

**Exclusionary discipline**

For the purpose of this study, exclusionary discipline measures include: in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, detention, and expulsion.

**Academic intervention or lunch detention**

A type of discipline used by both schools in the following study to intervene academically by which students must report to an assigned room after lunch to complete their school work. As a result, students often miss recess or after lunch free time.