Middle School Teachers’ Perceptions of Discipline

Dissertation

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Abstract

Exclusionary discipline is a punitive measure used to address problem behavior. Negative outcomes for students have been associated with the distribution of exclusionary methods. More recently, schools have begun to move toward implementing more positive approaches to correct problem behavior. As teachers work with students more regularly than administration, they should hold a functional position within the discipline policy development process. Minimal research exists on teachers’ perceptions as they relate to school discipline polices and previous research suggests administration should collaborate with teachers when developing such policies. The purpose of this study was to investigate teachers’ perceptions of appropriate discipline and determine how well those align with school discipline policies. In addition, this study explored the level of involvement the school psychologist has in addressing problem behavior and examined the role teachers want the school psychologist to fulfill.
Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who has been my eternal rock and source of refuge. My faith in him has given me the strength to complete this work. I also dedicate this dissertation to my husband, parents, family, and academic educators that have supported me throughout my educational career.
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Field of Study

Major Field: Education

Specialization: School Psychology
## Table of Contents

Abstract .......................................................................................................................... ii

Dedication ..................................................................................................................... iii

Vita .................................................................................................................................. iv

List of Tables .................................................................................................................. vii

Chapter 1 - Introduction ............................................................................................. 1
  Statement of the Problem ............................................................................................ 1
  Purpose of the Study .................................................................................................... 7
  Significance of the Study .............................................................................................. 8
  Research Questions ..................................................................................................... 9
  Limitations of the Study ............................................................................................ 10
  Definition of Terms ..................................................................................................... 11

Chapter 2 - Literature Review ..................................................................................... 13
  Exclusionary Discipline Practices ............................................................................. 14
  Minority Students and Exclusionary Discipline ...................................................... 21
  Exclusionary Discipline Across Grade Level .......................................................... 25
  Exclusionary Discipline Outcomes and Effects ...................................................... 27
  Closing the Discipline Gap ....................................................................................... 36
  Alternative Discipline ............................................................................................... 47
  The Roles and Functions of School Psychologists .................................................. 55

Chapter 3 - Methodology ........................................................................................... 54
  Sample ......................................................................................................................... 54
  Sampling Procedure ................................................................................................. 55
  Study Variables ......................................................................................................... 55
List of Tables

Table 1: Highest Degree Obtained ................................................................. 71
Table 2: Years Taught at Each Grade Level .................................................. 72
Table 3: Current Grade Taught ................................................................. 72
Table 4: Gender ......................................................................................... 73
Table 5: Ethnicity ......................................................................................... 73
Table 6: Rank Ordered Common Factors .................................................... 74
Table 7: Rank Ordered Common Factors for Truancy ................................. 75
Table 8: Teachers Appropriate Discipline verse School Discipline ..................... 77
Table 9: Effectiveness of School Discipline ................................................... 79
Table 10: School Psychologist’s Involvement with Truancy ............................ 80
Table 11: School Psychologist’s Involvement with Physical Violence ............... 81
Table 12: School Psychologist’s Involvement with Chronic Classroom Behaviors .... 81
Table 13: School Psychologist’s Involvement with Bullying ............................ 82
Table 14: Current Role of the School Psychologist ........................................ 83
Table 15: Emerge Themes and Responses from Qualitative Data .................... 84
Chapter 1 - Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Reviews of over 600 research studies indicate that the most effective responses to school discipline problems are social skills training, curriculum modifications, and behavioral interventions (Horner, Sugari, Todd, & Lewis-Palmer, 2005). Despite these reviews, schools continue to respond to problem behavior with exclusionary and punitive approaches that have limited value (Osher, Bear, Sprague, & Doyle, 2010). Exclusionary discipline is the act or practice of using negative or punitive measures in attempting to correct unwanted behavior. This stern approach to school discipline yields a number of unfavorable outcomes (Monroe, 2005; Noltemeyer & McLoughlin, 2010). According to Webster’s dictionary, the word discipline has more than seven definitions. The most appropriate meaning for this study is that training corrects, molds, or perfects the mental faculties or moral character through control gained by enforcing obedience or order. For years, exclusionary discipline has been a recurring theme in the school system and until recently, educators made limited progress in identifying better methods (Vogel, 2004).

Although suspension and expulsion are the most common forms of exclusionary discipline, they are ineffective measures for meeting the needs of students (Fenning & Rose, 2007). There is considerable evidence suggesting that disciplinary problems are often left unresolved in schools, resulting in the increase or continuation of student
misbehavior. Students who exhibit the highest frequency of behavioral difficulties continue to display problems throughout their schooling and have an increased risk for developing negative school adjustment (Atkins et al., 2002). For example, the removal of students from the school environment as a consequence for unwanted behavior, often increases the level of their misbehavior upon returning to the demands of the school environment. These students often struggle with new academic material from missed instruction while removed from school and acclimating back into school routines. Research examining disciplinary actions provides teacher and administrator reactions toward children who struggle with peer relationships, school structure, and demands (Horner, Fireman, & Wang, 2010). These reactions are commonly based on stigmas teachers and administration hold about students that demonstrate such struggles. There are numerous reasons for students’ misbehavior; therefore, it is vitally important that educators implement the most effective means of discipline to minimize behavior problems.

While attention to behavioral practices in the schools has increased, and rates of student delinquency and victimization have steadily decreased, the rates of exclusionary discipline in the schools continue to increase (Welch & Payne, 2011). These statements are concerning when the national trend of student delinquency moves in the opposite direction of the rates in which exclusionary discipline is distributed in the schools. The National Center for Education Statistics (2008) reported an 18% decrease in the occurrence of crime or violence in regular public schools. Supporters of exclusionary discipline attribute the decrease in school delinquency to the use of exclusionary
discipline methods; however, little to no supporting empirical data exists (Insley, 2001). When existing literature on this topic is examined, researchers have discovered the ineffectiveness of exclusionary discipline, the negative impact it has on students, and how it correlates with increased rates of incarceration (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008).

An overrepresentation of minority students, particularly African American males, receiving exclusionary discipline has been consistently documented in current literature (Fenning & Rose, 2007). African American students make up 17% of the public school population, but represent over 32% of all suspensions (Hinosjosa, 2008). These overrepresentations occur when minority students are subjected to exclusionary discipline at much higher rates than their white peers. Documented findings indicate that teachers reprimand and assign punitive exclusionary consequences to black children, even when youths of other races engage in the same unsanctioned behaviors (Monroe, 2005). Many researchers speculate about the underlying causes for minority students being overrepresented in the exclusionary discipline category.

Welch and Payne (2011) suggest that racial threat may relate to the use of exclusionary discipline for student punishment at the middle and high school level. Racial threat is the presumed threat of economic and political power to the white majority by minorities (Payne & Welch, 2010). According to social labeling theorists, the decision to discipline a child depends on the student’s behavior, the context in which the behavior was observed, and the tolerance level and attitudes of teachers and administrators (Horner et al., 2010). The implicit comparisons teachers and
administration make between minority students’ behavior and their own expectations, or assumptions of typical behavior, may contribute to the reported increased rates for minority students (Delpit, 2006; Horner et. al., 2010).

It is important for educators to become knowledgeable about students’ cultural norms in order to correctly interpret minority students’ behavior. The highest discipline rates for African American students were found in suburban schools, where 99% of the teachers were European American (Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, & Bachman, 2008). A study conducted in a large urban school district found that teachers disciplined minority students most often for subjective infractions due to misinterpretations of the student’s behaviors (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). Researchers have found that white teachers often interpret culturally based behavior, such as overlapping speech, as rude or offensive and tend to punish African American students for such behaviors (Gouldner & Strong, 1978; Skiba et. al., 2002). Educational expectations and policies typically reflect the values of white middle class individuals that occupy positions of power in education (Monroe, 2005). Until expectations and policies are reshaped, misinterpretations will remain prevalent.

Students who receive exclusionary discipline consequences are usually at-risk youth from socioeconomically disadvantaged environments, with social emotional deficits, and live in single parent homes (Atkins et al., 2002; Casella, 2003; Cohen, 2001). Students displaying these characteristics are in need of educational opportunity and guidance; however, exclusionary discipline denies both. Several detrimental outcomes are linked to exclusionary disciplines—decreased academic performance,
increased drop out rates, negative internalizing feelings, isolation from peers, and increased chances of being incarcerated (Blomberg, 2003; Casella, 2003; Costenbader & Markson, 1998). Students who drop out of school are 3.5 times more likely than high school graduates to be incarcerated at some point in their lives (Martin & Halperin, 2006).

Minority youth comprise over 60% of children detained by juvenile detention systems across the United States (Nicolson-Crotty, Birchmeier, & Valentine, 2009). Prison data reveals similar trends of incarcerated minorities that make up over 75% of the incarcerated population in the U.S (Skiba & Peterson, 2000). Situational variables such as being taught by unprepared teachers, special education referrals, and feelings of detachment from school contribute to minority students having altered educational pathways (Skiba, Peterson, & Williams, 1997). These variables influence the direct linkage between minority students and the school to prison pipeline. This pipeline proposes that exclusionary discipline techniques experienced by minority students alienate them from the learning process by steering them from the classroom and academic achievement toward the criminal justice system (Darensbourg, Perez, & Blake, 2010). According to Christie, Jolivette, and Nelson (2005), school level characteristics can help minimize the risks for youth delinquency.

At all school levels, suspension has increased over the past decade (Theriot & Dupper, 2010). Although exclusionary discipline is used at elementary, middle, and high school levels, suspension rates rise sharply at the middle school level (Arcia, 2007). Some research considers specific factors in the middle school environment that differ
significantly from elementary school as a potential source of stress leading to increased acts of disruptive behavior (Elias, 2001). Studies have linked this transition with negative educational outcomes, decline in student motivation, and psychological distress (Theriot & Dupper, 2010). The slight decrease in suspension rates at the high school level when compared to middle school may be attributed to student maturity and peer expectations for age appropriate behavior.

To diminish exclusionary discipline policies, school wide changes must be made. Schools should create discipline plans that are systematic and appropriate for all students. Educators must work together as a team to share opinions and suggestions in order to develop the best discipline plans for their students (Hirst, 2005). Within each school, collaboration between teachers, administrators, and school psychologists should also occur when discipline policies are created or amended. The role of the school psychologist may vary from school to school; therefore, the degree to which school psychologists are utilized within the discipline process or discipline policy creation may also vary. On the other hand, there is plenty of research that focuses on how well school psychologists are trained in strategies to reduce and/or prevent behavior problems. For this reason, teamwork between administrators, teachers, and school psychologists may be beneficial when determining successful discipline strategies. This collaboration would allow the opportunity for school psychologists to share their expertise and join forces with educators to potentially find the most effective means of discipline.

As part of the collaboration process, it is important for administrators to consider teachers’ perceptions of discipline and to utilize the expertise and knowledge of the
school psychologist in preventing and/or intervening in the problem behavior. School psychologists are trained professionals in areas of prevention and intervention and could assist with determining the most effective ways to address problem behavior. Currently, there is minimal research examining teachers’ perceptions as they relate to school discipline policies (Bibou-Nakou, Kiosseoglou, & Stogiannidou, 2000; Hamre, Pianta, Downer, & Mashburn, 2008; Libby, 2004; Skiba & Peterson, 2000). Since teachers tend to have the most contact with students during the school day, they typically know the characteristics of their students better than other school personnel.

When disciplinary issues arise, teachers may have valuable information regarding a student’s situation or the cause of a problem. This additional information can be vitally important when deciding the most effective and appropriate way to discipline a student. Investigating causes that lead to problem behavior and determining the congruence between teachers’ views of appropriate discipline and school policy are important factors for implementing effective discipline practices. When the causes for student misbehavior are unknown, discipline methods, such as exclusionary discipline, punish students without resolving the cause of the problem. Examining the role of school psychologists relative to their involvement in creating school discipline policies and determining the needs of teachers toward appropriately addressing problem behaviors are also essential pieces of the discipline puzzle.

**Purpose of the Study**

According to Sharkey and Fenning (2012), exclusionary discipline is currently one of the most common form of discipline used in public schools; therefore, this study
will seek to uncover whether or not teachers choose alternative or exclusionary methods to address common problem behaviors. Despite the ineffectiveness of exclusionary discipline, teachers are often required to implement this policy with little to no input (Middleton, 2008). As previously mentioned, minimal literature exists concerning teachers’ beliefs on appropriate discipline techniques (Osher et al., 2010). In order to correct unwanted behaviors, the applied discipline method must work to appropriately address the problem at hand. Many times students are punished with inappropriate sanctions (of exclusionary discipline) for infractions that warrant a more appropriate alternative discipline technique. Sanctions of exclusionary discipline do not seek to address the underlying cause of the problem, nor do they allow students to learn from the unwanted behavior (Welch & Payne, 2011).

The purpose of this study is threefold and will first aim to gather teachers’ perceptions toward the appropriateness of school discipline. Second, an investigation on whether or not teachers’ perceptions align with school’s discipline policies will be conducted followed by the examination on how teachers perceive the utilization of the school psychologist in their school.

**Significance of the Study**

A vast majority of research relating to school discipline focuses on the overrepresentation of minority groups, outcomes from punitive discipline methods, race and gender differences, and the link to the prison pipeline (Gregory & Mosley, 2004; Welch & Payne, 2011; Wiessman, 2010). This study will provide teachers’ perceptions of current discipline policies used in their school and compare those to techniques
teachers would prefer to implement. It will also present the resourcefulness of school psychologists as assessed by teachers and point out any functions teachers would like the school psychologist to perform relative to addressing problem behaviors. Ultimately, this study has the potential to influence educators to incorporate the use of alternative discipline techniques and the use of collaboration with school psychologists and school administrators when making discipline determinations.

**Research Questions**

This study will explore the following research questions:

1. What do teachers perceive as the greatest contributing factor to truancy, physical violence, classroom disruptions, and bullying?

2. What is the congruence between teachers’ discipline preferences and the effectiveness of their school discipline policy?
   a. When given the following choices: in school suspension, out of school suspension, expulsion, behavioral interventions, parent conferences, resources/guidance for outside support services, other; to teachers, what is the most appropriate way to address truancy, physical violence, classroom disruptions, and bullying?
   b. When teachers are given the following choices: in school suspension, out of school suspension, expulsion, behavioral interventions, parent conferences, resources/guidance for outside support services, other; how are truancy, physical
violence, classroom disruptions, and bullying addressed in the schools where they
work?
c. How effectively do the discipline methods used in the school reduce problems of
truancy, physical violence, classroom disruptions, and bullying?

3. To what extent are school psychologists utilized in the schools to assist with
addressing problem behaviors?
   a. How do teachers want school psychologists to address problem behaviors?

Limitations of the Study

Limitations of this study include the use of a non-random convenience sample,
limiting the results from being generalized beyond the participating population. The
participating teachers are from the largest urban school district in Ohio; therefore, this
sample may differ from teachers in other urban school districts. Teachers from this
sample may have greater accessibility to alternative disciplinary resources and more
professional development opportunities. The second potential limitation of this study is
non-response to the questionnaire. For teachers that do not participate or complete the
questionnaire, data adjustment will be required to account for the non-response error.
The third limitation of this study involves the use of a self-reporting survey. Survey
research is believed to be a well-understood method used to yield valid and easily
interpretable data (Pinsonneault & Kraemer, 1993). Self-reporting measures provide no
way to ensure the truthfulness or accuracy of the information being reported by the
participants.
**Definition of Terms**

1. **Exclusionary Discipline** – a sanction or punishment that removes a student from the typical classroom setting

2. **In School Suspension** – the removal of a student from the classroom to an alternative setting within the school building, where the student is required to complete school work and is excluded from extracurricular activities until the day following completion of this sanction

3. **Out of School Suspension** – a sanction that temporarily removes a student from the school premises and any extracurricular activities for a given timeframe (amount of days varies by school district)

4. **Expulsion** – the withdrawal or permanent removal of student from the school premises for the remainder of the school year or up to a full school year

5. **Alternative Discipline** – Any positive method of discipline that can be used to address and prevent problem behavior

6. **Behavioral Interventions** – these may include an agreement between the student and the school to correct problem behavior(s), as indicated by a developed plan, to assist the student with demonstrating appropriate behaviors and typically includes a rewards system

7. **Parent Conference** – verbal or face to face communication with the parent regarding the student’s behaviors as they relate to disciplinary actions

8. **Resources/Guidance** – provided information to seek treatment or outside support services
9. **Teachers’ Perceptions** – Independent responses from teachers regarding their views and opinions on discipline

10. **Public School** – A school belonging to a district that provides free and appropriate public education for children

11. **Middle School** – Between elementary school and high school, typically consisting of grades six through eight
Chapter 2 - Literature Review

Classroom disruptions and student misbehavior in educational settings are common challenges for teachers. They typically respond to such behaviors with exclusionary discipline, a procedure that imposes various sanctions on the perpetrator (Osher et al., 2010). Determining an effective way to discipline disruptive students is a difficult task for educators. Depending on school discipline policies, teachers may be given limited discretion on how to administer discipline measures in the classroom (Morris, 2005). Today, schools often deal with discipline problems by resorting to punishments that exclude students from the classroom (Welch & Payne, 2011). Opinions from educators regarding the most effective and appropriate discipline techniques are rarely found in research.

This chapter will focus on the importance of moving away from negative discipline practices by discussing relevant literature on exclusionary discipline and its ineffectiveness. Subsequent discussion of disproportionate rates in which exclusionary discipline affects minority students and how this method transcends grade levels is presented. Next, a comprehensive review of proposals designed to reduce the noticeable discipline gap will be presented. Finally, a review of alternative discipline procedures, such as supportive intervention based on positive behavior and rewards will be presented.
Exclusionary Discipline Practices

Corporal punishment, one of the oldest known discipline methods, was accepted and used in schools for many years (Insley, 2001). This type of discipline permitted teachers to punish students using various forms of parental discipline techniques involving both reward and physical punishment of students (Middleton, 2008). The use of paddles, straps, and canes were often used to strike children when they misbehaved. Psychologists argue that corporal punishment causes emotional damage, affects the self-esteem of learners, and adversely impacts academic performance (Morrell, 2001). For the most part, corporal punishment has disappeared and has been banned in over thirty states in the U.S (Blomberg, 2003). Although the use of corporal punishment has been found to lead to serious injuries and long-term damage, 22 states were still using some form of corporal punishment in 2007 (Dupper & Montgomery-Dingus, 2008). Two to three million incidents of corporal punishment are estimated to occur in the schools each year, with reports of over 20,000 students seeking medical treatment as a result (Grayson, 2006). Numerous school districts in southern states continue the use of paddling as the main source of discipline especially within school districts that contain high numbers of African American student populations (Gershoff, 2008).

When the baby-boom generation greatly populated the school systems in the 1960s, a new approach to discipline became prevalent. As decades passed, policies such as corporal punishment persisted, but began losing the attractiveness it once held in the schools (Arcus, 2002). Following the increase of school shootings, the Clinton administration signed the Gun Free Schools Act of 1994, which swept zero tolerance into
a national policy mandating the expulsion of a student for one calendar year for the possession of a firearm (Skiba & Peterson, 2000). The law was originally drafted with intent to focus on dangerous student behavior and required educational personnel to refer students of such crimes to the juvenile delinquency system (Skiba, Peterson, & Williams, 1997). Over the years, schools have expanded the definition of this policy to include infractions that have relatively little impact on school safety, such as insubordination, tardiness, etc. (Wallace et al., 2008). There is a clear understanding that schools are responsible for taking the necessary means to protect students and staff by maintaining a safe school environment; however, disagreements arise when policies such as zero tolerance are used without evidence of increased safety.

Definitions of zero tolerance have become increasingly stricter over the years and continue to mandate predetermined consequences for specified offenses. Since 1995, the percentage of schools adopting the policies has never fallen below 75%. In fact, by the 1996-1997 school year, 94% of U.S public schools had zero tolerance policies for firearms, 91% for other weapons, 88% for drugs, and 87% for alcohol (Wallace et al., 2008). Insely reported a study in 1998, revealing that nine out of ten public schools had expanded their application the original policy to include other less serious infractions (Insely, 2001). Such expansion of zero tolerance policies has created much controversy for school districts, primarily because students are being punished too harshly for minor infractions. Graduate discipline systems have been found to be most effective where minor infractions receive less severe administrative consequences than more severe infractions (American Psychological Association, 2008; Grayson, 2006). This is contrary
to the philosophical intent of policies such as zero tolerance, which treats both major and minor incidents as equally severe in an attempt to set an example for other students (Skiba & Peterson, 2000). Parents have also reported that some punishments distributed under zero tolerance are too harsh for most of the infractions and seem unfair to those students committing first time school offenses (Casella, 2003).

Investigators have indicated that schools officials implement such policies with the belief that students are more likely to reflect upon an action prior to engaging in it, if they have knowledge of the consequence that follows. Although schools are required to hold a zero tolerance policy in place for firearms and explosive devices, they are capable of abandoning zero tolerance for all other misconduct. These facts are stated under the guns-free school zone act of 1990, and presume that school districts continue to implement these policies for other acts of misconduct at the discretion of the district.

With the rise in school shootings, it is understandable that schools maintain heightened security measures to help reduce the possibility of future school shootings (Skiba & Peterson, 1999). Researchers have indicated that educators feel responsible for previous school shootings when threats of violence were ignored or taken as minor threats (McCabe & Martin, 2005). In addition to zero tolerance, schools have adopted exclusionary discipline methods as a way to promote school safety. However, due to an increase in school security measures over the years, it has become difficult to determine the actual effectiveness of exclusionary discipline as it relates to school safety (Skiba & Sprague, 2008). To help alleviate and prevent school problems, educational institutions must revise codes of conduct, establish and enforce dress codes, and continue to use
security technology such as metal detectors and security cameras.

It remains unclear whether exclusionary discipline practices may, in fact, result in a reduction of violent acts (Skiba & Peterson, 2000). In 1998, a Department of Education study revealed that between 1991 and 1997 the percentage of students involved in physical fights decreased 14% and the number of students who carry weapons to school decreased by 28% (Insely, 2001). The data from a national longitudinal study on crime and violence in regular public schools supports the observed reduction in violent acts; however, no cause for the reduction was indicated. In 2004, survey results found that 81% of regular public schools reported the occurrence of violent acts during that school year. The 2006 results reported violent acts occurred in 77% of regular public schools. This was followed in 2008 by 75% of public schools and 73% during the 2010 school year (National Center for Education Statistics, 2004; 2006; 2008; 2010). School officials who support the use of exclusionary discipline often credit the decreases to the use of those exclusionary discipline methods (Quinn, Bell-Ellison, Loomis, & Tucci, 2007). However, there is little to no empirical data that supports exclusionary measures as an effective means toward resolving discipline problems. Due to the lack of supporting data, the observed reductions are likely due to the general decline in delinquent juvenile behaviors over the past decade.

Exclusionary discipline can be described as an imposition of a suspension, expulsion, or any other disciplinary action that removes a student from his normal learning environment (Monroe, 2005; Noltemeyer & McLoughlin, 2010; Welch & Payne, 2011). Schools are using exclusionary punishments to banish students, much in the same
way that broader society banishes criminals by incarcerating them (Sullivan, Dollard, Sellers, & Mayo, 2010). Although used to achieve zero tolerance policies, exclusionary discipline may last for varying lengths of time (Atkins et al., 2002). While these disciplinary banishments are in place, the student is prohibited from school premises and from attending any school related events until the duration of the penalty has been completed.

In the U.S. there are two common forms of suspensions that are typically meted at the elementary and middle school levels— in-school suspension (ISS) and out-of-school suspension (OSS) (Costenbader & Markson, 1998). By the early 1980s, school districts began using in-school suspension as a form of exclusionary discipline (Insely, 2001). The purpose of this type of discipline is to counteract the negative effects often seen with out-of-school suspension (Blomberg, 2003). In-school suspension has only more recently been investigated for its effectiveness; thus, limiting the amount of readily available literature. Most studies show how school districts ineffectively use in-school suspension and rarely focus on success and measures of change (Billings & Enger, 1995). Other studies tend to focus on the components of the actual room used for in-school suspension (Turpin & Hardin, 1997).

Costenbader and Markson (1998) surveyed 620 middle and high school students from two school districts, one located in an inner city and the other in a rural town. There were responses from 252 students that had been suspended at least once during their matriculation. Students reported that out-of-school suspension was of little use, describing it as more of a vacation day, or break from school. With in-school suspension,
some students believed it to be more to a form of punishment, because they were forced to remain in school isolated from their regular classroom. The amount of productivity while serving in school suspension varied, as some students indicated that they were required to complete schoolwork while others reported sleeping throughout the day.

School districts have the discretion to choose whether or not students are provided the opportunity to engage in schoolwork while serving either type of suspension. Such findings question the efficacy of exclusionary discipline practices.

Out-of-school suspension has been in place much longer than in school suspension and is typically assigned for more serious or reoccurring offenses (Morris, 1996). When used separately from the zero tolerance policy, expulsion is the withdrawal or permanent exclusion of a student for the remainder of the school year, at a minimum. During the expulsion period, students are removed from the school and are denied educational opportunity, unless the school district provides resources for alternative schooling, which is not required (Brown, 2007). Typically, these exclusionary discipline methods are used on a continuum, with expulsion being assigned as a last resort to students displaying extreme misbehaviors, repeatedly, and after other discipline methods have been unsuccessful (Payne & Welch, 2010). Surprisingly, truancy is one of the most common reoccurring minor offenses that imposes an out of school suspension on students (Garrison, 2006).

Discipline within public schools has been a recurring theme in public opinion research for years, however educators have made only limited progress toward addressing it (Vogel, 2004). Over the years, reasonable disciplinary measures have become widely
accepted by schools, parents, and to an extent, even students. The most persistent issue with discipline has been trying to find the most appropriate and effective discipline policies to use (Blomberg, 2003). A majority of educators understand that schools need good discipline and behavior policies to flourish; however, some contradict those statements when they fail to implement effective or evidence-based discipline policies and practices. Researchers have indicated that there are typically only a few students per classroom who misbehave or cause disruptions; however, it can still take a toll on teachers, especially those not trained in effective classroom management techniques (Insley, 2001). In addition to monetary factors, teachers often leave the teaching profession due to the lack of control they have over their classrooms and the inability to effectively discipline unruly students (Blomberg, 2003).

Tobin and Sugai (1996) suggest that suspension functions as a reinforcer, rather than a punisher, for students who misbehave as a means to avoid school. Many educators do not realize that suspension does not work as a deterrent to future misbehavior (Raffaele-Mendez, 2003). The removal of a student allows school avoidance to be met and conveys the message to students that misbehavior can lead to the escape from school. This increases the likelihood that students will misbehave in the future to avoid school. There is little evidence supporting the effectiveness of suspension and expulsion for improving student behavior or school safety (Skiba & Peterson, 2000). Prior research has focused mainly on how student behaviors and characteristics are associated with exclusionary punishments, while a limited amount has examined the potential impacts of school level influences (Welch & Payne, 2011). The use of exclusionary discipline treats
the student as bearing the sole responsibility for problems that arise. In reality, there are usually numerous contributing factors. Studies on school suspension have consistently found that up to 40% of school suspensions are due to the same students being punished for committing the same offenses (Blomberg, 2003). This type of data should motivate educators to further investigate why students repeatedly engage in events that lead to the same or greater consequences as previously experienced.

**Minority Students and Exclusionary Discipline**

The overrepresentation of minority students and exclusionary discipline are commonly referenced in the literature (Fenning & Rose, 2007). Much of the research on school punishment focuses on documenting racial differences and investigating school level factors to explain the disproportionality among those punished with out-of-school suspension (Hinojosa, 2008). African American and Latino males appear to be more affected by exclusionary discipline (vis-à-vis at a disproportionally higher rate) than females and non-minority students (Wallace et al, 2008). These male groups are two to three times more likely to receive a long-term suspension outside of their regular educational setting (Darensbourg & Perez, 2010). Educational statistics reveal that minority males frequently reflect academic deficits that may be explained by the lack of access to learning opportunity when punished with exclusionary discipline. Unfortunately, school districts are not required to provide educational alternatives for non-disabled children, even when disciplined by exclusionary tactics (Insley, 2001). The responsibility for seeking alternatives to prevent the child from absorbing academic deficits while receiving out-of-school discipline is commonly transferred to parents or
caregivers, who are generally not prepared or qualified for that role. An additional obstacle for such tasks is the locating and affording educational alternatives available to their children. The U.S census indicates that African Americans and Latinos comprise a significant segment of the lower socioeconomic and poverty brackets (U.S Census, 2011). Those numbers alone indicate how unaffordable alternative schooling is for many minority students and their families. Some school districts place students in alternative placements to complete their discipline sentence rather than removing them from the school setting altogether. These alternative schools allow students the opportunity to learn and focus on individual goals in a more structured environment (Lange, 1998).

Suspension and expulsion appears to be used with greater frequency among minority students when compared to non-minority students (Atkins et al., 2002). This is often attributed to the fact that African American students are disciplined for less serious offenses than non-minority students. Brantlinger (1991) reported that lower income students are not only more likely to be given consequences of greater severity, but these punishments are, generally, delivered in a less professional manner than when applied to higher income students. Hinojosa (2008) reported that several variables typically associated with socioeconomic status were predictors of suspension. Rates of absolute suspension appear to be the highest in poor urban districts and the disparities between black and white suspension rates appear to be greater in higher resourced suburban districts (Skiba et al., 2011). In contrast, disparities in rates of school discipline for other ethnic groups have not been documented as well and exhibit inconsistent findings.
While exclusionary punishments are intended for more serious forms of delinquency, it is doubtful that only the most troublesome students are punished with the harshest forms of discipline (Morrison & D’Incau, 1997). Studies have shown that exclusionary punishments are often assigned arbitrarily to minority students, and frequently stem from different standards among teachers (Welch & Payne, 2011). Educators often misunderstand minority student behavior, therefore, they interpret the actions of minority students as defiant or disobedient, which qualifies them for the application of exclusionary discipline. A study of 19 middle schools in a large Midwestern public school district found that Black students were suspended for more subjective reasons, i.e., “disrespect” and “perceived threat” while White students were suspended for more objective reasons, including smoking and vandalism (Skiba, et al., 2002; Wallace et al., 2008). Racial differences in school discipline outcomes may be due more to subjective or interactional elements of disciplinary encounters than to actual student behavior (Skiba et al., 2011). Rausch and Skiba (2004) collected data from Indiana schools, across four geographic locales, to investigate racial differences reflected in school typology and type of infraction. They discovered that African American students were disciplined at higher rates than all other ethnicities, at all locales, and for all infraction types; however, the highest rates were found in suburban schools where African American students were five times more likely to receive an out of school suspension or expulsion. Similar trends emerged for infraction types; African American students were four times as likely to receive out of school suspension for disruptive
behavior, and experienced five times greater likelihood for other infractions (indicated on a rating scale as “other”).

Problems for minority students occur when educators immediately judge behavior as being a danger or threat to others, when in reality, the responses are merely learned reactionary responses. Minority students, especially African Americans, often come from home environments where they witness and mimic the undesirable behaviors they present (Dunbar & Villarruel, 2002). Depending on the stimuli absorbed from the community and home environments, it is typical for students to exhibit those learned behaviors while in school. Some of these students are in need of structure and essential instruction on how to behave appropriately in a classroom setting. Teachers often hold misconceptions of student knowledge and expect all students to possess and demonstrate expected classroom behavior. When educators have a better understanding of their students’ lives outside of the classroom, they are more likely to create a classroom environment focusing on ways that teach students appropriate school behaviors. These classroom changes can ultimately reduce unwanted behaviors and the need to use exclusionary discipline practices (McNeely, Nonnemaker, & Blum, 2002). However, educators must accept and dedicate themselves to the amount of work that comes with building such an environment. Waiting for incidents to occur that warrant the use of exclusionary discipline is much easier than working toward reducing problem behavior.

There are a number of hypotheses used to explain the overrepresentation of minority students in programs of school discipline. Because white females dominate the teaching profession and the education field, the possibility that cultural bias and
mismatching or racial stereotyping exist. Several studies suggest that cultural mismatch and racial stereotyping are contributing factors toward the misrepresentation of behaviors observed by minority students (Ferguson, 2001; Townsend, 2000; Zumwalt & Craig, 2005). When teachers refer to students that have been excluded from school as “discipline problems” rather than as learners, greater focus is placed on punishment and behavior modification than on academic learning (Brown, 2007). Creating an awareness of the misconceptions held for minority races and identifying factors associated with such disproportional practices views provides a reasonable beginning point for addressing the issue.

**Exclusionary Discipline Across Grade Level**

Grade level does not appear to play a huge role in the use of the exclusionary discipline paradigm of suspension and expulsion when applied at all levels. Studies about exclusionary discipline at different schooling levels reveal that it is used most frequently (Woolley, Kol, & Bowen, 2009; Skiba & Sprague, 2008; Skiba et al., 2011). While the literature does indicate that exclusionary discipline is used at all schooling levels, the severity of the punishment appears to vary across grades (Gershoff, 2008). The use of temporary exclusion better known as “time out” from the classroom is most often used with younger children. This method of exclusionary discipline can be seen as early as pre-kindergarten and is used throughout the early years of middle school. With this method, teachers control when they send students out of the classroom and when they admit them back into the classroom. When teachers send students out of the classroom, they are typically placed in a hallway or assigned to the principal’s office for a
period of time. This method is commonly used to address minor misbehaviors such as off-task behavior or talking during instruction time. For the younger students this may also be used for minor physical altercations or acts of aggression between students, but not reported by the administration.

As students grow older, the use of suspension and expulsion become the punishment of choice. Generally, by the first or second grade, suspension is applied only when physical altercations occur (Raffaele-Mendez & Knoff, 2003). Minor offenses are usually followed up with in-school suspension throughout middle school (Billings & Enger, 1995). At the high school level, in-school suspension is rarely seen and uncooperative students are regularly disciplined with afterschool detentions or one to two day suspensions for minor infractions (Arcia, 2007). Misbehavior becomes less tolerable as students get older and non-age-appropriate behaviors may receive harsher punishments (Insley, 2001). The severity of the punishment is usually determined by the nature of the offense and whether or not the student has committed previous offenses. The length of the punishment tends to increase across grades with students in primary schooling receiving less time than students in secondary schooling. Many school policies have no clear line between infractions punishable by suspension or those deserving expulsion (Brown, 2007). Such policies give school administrators considerable discrentional power to impose the exclusionary sanction of choice. Depending on the climate of the school, discrentional power can lead to positive or negative outcomes for the student and the situation.
The vast majority of research on the use exclusionary discipline has been cursory, lacking depth and because it has been conducted at the secondary schooling level suffers from being unable to generalize results beyond that sample (Wallace et al., 2008). The transition from elementary to middle school is difficult for many students; however, the frequency of student discipline problems has not been adequately investigated (Theriot & Dupper, 2010). Developmental changes, such as the onset of puberty, are experienced at the middle school level and may contribute to the increased number of referrals and suspensions seen at this school level (Hirst, 2005). Pubertal changes have been shown to be associated with heightened emotional conflict and defiance of adults (Berk, 1993).

Theriot and Dupper (2010) investigated an increase in school discipline problems from fifth grade to sixth grade using 49 elementary schools and 14 middle schools in a Southeastern school district. Over a two year study period they found an 18% increase in infractions during the first year of middle school, when compared to the last year of elementary school. A majority of the increase was attributed to subjective infractions, including class disturbance and failure to follow classroom rules. Such studies demonstrate that either student behavior is worsening as students get older, or more frequent punitive disciplinary practices are being implemented.

**Exclusionary Discipline Outcomes and Effects**

Numerous studies have concluded that exclusionary discipline does not consistently align with a healthy childhood development (Nicholson-Crotty et al., 2009, Noltemeyer & Mcloughlin, 2010; Osher et al., 2010; Skiba, 2000). Often times, the punishment types are too severe and offer little to no positive opportunities for instruction.
or rehabilitation (McNeely et al., 2002). Researchers attribute the suspension recidivism rate to the fact that school exclusion offers students no help in addressing the behaviors that got them into trouble (Brown, 2007). Using suspension and expulsion to remove students from the learning environment potentially increases the amount of time they spend unsupervised and with other out of school youth (Wallace et al, 2008). Discipline practices that alienate children have been found to exacerbate misbehavior, especially among at-risk students who are on the verge of school failure and in need of extra support and guidance (Osher et al., 2010).

Removing students from school can eventually lead to adverse psychological effects, causing children to have negative, internalizing thoughts and feelings of alienation and failure (Costenbader & Markson, 1998). Exclusionary discipline is seen to have more of an emotional impact on students during the middle and high school years (Pane, 2009). The social piece that is present during the secondary schooling years may contribute heavily to the negative impact that may occur. Secondary schooling provides students the opportunity to engage in more social events; however, it can also take away those events from students punished under exclusionary discipline. Isolation from a social network of friends has been shown to correlate with the development of internalizing emotional problems (McNeely et al., 2002). Ejecting students from school may cause them to lose commonality with their school peers forcing them to search for acceptance in other areas throughout the community.

School disciplinary problems that are left unresolved or punished by exclusionary discipline practices often leave students who exhibit the highest frequency of behavioral
difficulties to continue their problems throughout their schooling years (Atkins et al., 2002). Children who require the most discipline also tend to have other behavioral and social-emotional deficits, which can be exacerbated by the use of exclusionary discipline (Cohen, 2001).

A great need for mental health and social support services in urban schools continues to exist. When children are removed from school they are less likely to have the opportunity to benefit from such services when they are available. Casella (2003) reported that exclusionary discipline increases the susceptibility to social emotional issues and tends to punish the most vulnerable students—those in need of guidance. Many of these students are poor, underachieving, or socially isolated by their residing in disadvantaged communities.

After receiving exclusionary discipline, some students are capable of maneuvering their way back toward success; however, those with histories of poverty, abuse, or neglect may not possess that ability. More students than not who receive exclusionary discipline exhibit increased social emotional behavioral issues, such as withdrawal and avoidance of school staff, stigmatization among peers, and decreased academic performance (Costenbader & Markson, 1998). Students with internal social emotional issues have a greater risk of being lost from the school system once they have been punished with exclusionary discipline (Morrison & D’Incau, 1997). Typically, these are students who do not adequately rebound from exclusionary discipline on their own. Some experts believe that students disciplined by exclusionary discipline began to view better alternatives outside the school setting (Castella, 2003). Exclusionary
discipline had a detrimental impact on some students, to a point where they considered suicide as their only remaining option. When suicide incidents have occurred while a student was under an exclusionary discipline punishment, they happened at the high school level.

St. George (2011) reported on the case of a boy from Fairfax County, Washington, who committed suicide in the aftermath of school disciplinary proceedings. The star athlete was accused of buying drugs and received an eleven-week suspension from school. His parents indicated that he became so emotionally unraveled during the suspension and reported that he took the punishment term harder than anyone would have imagined. Vozzella (2012) described the case of another boy, from a nearby county in Washington, who committed suicide in 2009, while awaiting a disciplinary hearing that was scheduled months after the infraction. The unfortunate premature deaths of these students reflect the detrimental internal effects that exclusionary discipline can have on students. Regardless if these students received numerous discipline infractions a year or just one in a lifetime; these examples provide concluding evidence that students can become so disconnected while under exclusionary discipline that they see death as a greater option than awaiting the discipline term.

The Justice Policy Institute believes that exclusionary discipline policies funnel students into the juvenile justice system when schools choose not to resolve matters within the school building (Insley, 2001). Wald and Losen (2007) argue that the education system can be punitive and isolating especially for minority children. They believe that without a safety net there is an increased likelihood that these youth will end
up incarcerated. More recently schools have become comfortable using exclusionary discipline and getting law enforcement involved for incidents such as fighting (Casella, 2003). Students who experience excessive suspension and expulsion are more likely to become apart of the school to prison pipeline (Fenning & Rose, 2007). This pipeline is also known as “the push out” or a national trend throughout the educational experiences that moves a student from education and graduation to the juvenile and criminal justice systems (American Civil Liberties Union, 2010). The connecting links in this pipeline are policies like high stakes testing and exclusionary disciplinary that deprive youth from mainstream schooling (Wiessman, 2010).

Rehabilitation has been the primary focus for the juvenile detention system where the goal is to treat juvenile offenders with therapy and education in hopes of assisting them in becoming productive citizens (Insley, 2001). That focus was the same within the school system where the goal was to discipline students in a manner that would help them become constructive adults (Wiessman, 2010). Changes have occurred within the school system because programs geared toward rehabilitation have been abandoned and policies such as exclusionary discipline have been put into place (Advancement Project, 2010). These changes often leave researchers questioning school discipline and whether educators truly understand the disobliging effects non-rehabilitating policies present.

Researchers question, how school districts can reduce the number of students that enter the juvenile justice system. This may be accomplished by clearly defining alternative options to current discipline policies (Fabelo et al., 2011). Researchers speculate numerous activities implemented by schools that might aid to sever the
connection with the justice system to include: early intervention programs, reduced use of preventative detention and other punitive disciplinary practices, reductions of disparity in special education assignment, and increased attention to the frequent physical and mental abuse suffered by at risk youth (Casella, 2003; Nicholson-Crotty et al., 2009). The Council of State Governments Justice Center released an article called Breaking School Rules: A statewide study on how school discipline relates to students’ success and juvenile justice involvement. The study looked at close to one million secondary students in Texas and found that nearly 60% of all students in the study were suspended or expelled during some point between seventh and twelfth grade. African American students were disproportionately affected especially among those with emotional disabilities. Suspended or expelled students were more likely to end up in the juvenile system the following year. One compelling finding, was that suspension and expulsion rates varied widely between schools, even among schools that were similar in terms of student race or socioeconomic status (Fabelo et al., 2011). This suggests that schools are capable of handling behavior problems with alternatives to exclusionary discipline leading to fewer negative outcomes for the students. Results from successful groundbreaking studies like this one should be documented and distributed to educators in hopes of encouraging the use of alternative discipline methods.

Nationally one in three black and one in six Latino boys are at risk of imprisonment during their lifetime (Hinojosa 2008). While boys are five times as likely to be incarcerated then girls, there is still a significant number of girls in the juvenile justice system as well (Nelson, 2008). The disproportionate trends of minorities in the
criminal justice system are similar to the overrepresentation of minorities punished under exclusionary discipline in the schools. These patterns appear to be established early in the lives of these groups. Many people do not want to believe that school systems play a leading role in the reasons why high numbers of minority students go to prison. However until educators are made aware of the prominent effects exclusionary discipline has on students, the trends will continue to increase.

School administrators have reported that removing a misbehaving child from school provides a cooling down period for both the student and the administration (Pane, 2009). Exclusionary discipline does remove the student from the classroom however; it fails to fix the underlying problems at hand. When true behavior problems are present, students that remain enrolled in school after being removed ultimately reassign the occurrence of the problem behavior to a later time or to another school building or school district. It becomes clear that educators fail to realize the detrimental outcomes that may result from cool down periods. Mitchell (1996) found that removing a student from the school setting as a source of punishment may significantly contribute to students becoming accustomed to a disrupted education and may develop difficulties adjusting or readjusting to school (Brown, 2007). It is extremely important for schools to re-evaluate their discipline policies often and examine underlying group biases.

Exclusionary punishments have been associated with various negative outcomes, including school failure, grade retention, negativity toward school, and a greater likelihood of dropping out of school (Atkins et al., 2002; Fabelo et al., 2011; Skiba et al., 2011). Loss of academic instruction can negatively affect academic achievement when
students are not provided schoolwork or alternative placement (Arcia, 2007). Brown (2007) examined the experiences of 37 students from a large urban district in the northeast that had been suspended or expelled from school. Of the participants, 97% reported having been suspended and 78% reported being expelled at some point in their schooling. According to the respondents, being absent from school to serve the exclusionary punishment caused them to miss out on valuable learning, to fall behind in their coursework, and to be retained. Many of the students were not on grade level and had significantly underdeveloped academic skills particularly in writing, reading comprehension, and mathematics.

Arcia (2007) conducted a longitudinal retrospective analysis on suspensions, achievement, and long-term enrollment status of students in a large urban school district. Both pre and post-suspension reading achievements of students that were suspended at least once in the past three academic years were compared to those of a comparison group matched on grade, gender, race, participation in the free and reduced lunch program, and limited English proficiency. The results in the study showed associations between suspensions and delays in reading achievement, pre-suspension reading achievement and suspension rates, suspensions and subsequent achievement, and suspensions and drop out rates. Students with lower achievement were suspended more than students with higher achievement. The longer students spent in suspension the less students gained in reading. Lastly, students that were suspended more days dropped out of school at higher percentages than students with fewer suspensions. Although student
behavior is often a determinant of both achievement and suspensions, the fact remains that when students are removed from the classroom they cannot be expected to learn.

A study conducted at Columbia University reported that African American male sophomores drop out of school three times the rate of other students their age. In addition they indicated that suspension and expulsion were the males primary reason for dropping out of school (Blomberg, 2003). Dropping out of school often resulted in future difficulties with employment prospects and limitations are placed on other life opportunities (Welch & Payne, 2011). Job attainment becomes extremely difficult without a high school diploma and increases the likelihood of needing government assistance to maintain life essentials. As dropout rates increase for minority students, heightened numbers under the poverty and low socioeconomic brackets will occur.

Students’ perceptions of exclusionary discipline typically differ from those of teachers and administrators, which has been found to be part of the reason student misbehavior escalates (Tobin & Sugai, 1996). Educators that believe exclusionary discipline is the factor causing behavior change will often be unable to acknowledge any real level of ineffectiveness in the policy. Literature does not support the effectiveness of exclusionary discipline, which remains an ongoing issue. Schools continue to implement such policies with the belief that they are either working or eventually outcomes of change will be seen. Exclusionary discipline is not evidenced based nor have any empirical studies been conducted to show its effectiveness. Schools that do not use evidenced based discipline techniques on a consistent basis are creating a negative school climate and are contributing to student failure. Consistency is a key essential to a
successful discipline plan. As previously indicated, one major implication of exclusionary discipline is the great variability across grades and school districts (Dunbar & Villarruel, 2002). This form of discipline pushes the student away from resources that may help with determining the antecedents leading to the misbehavior. Additionally, exclusionary discipline does not work on concepts for improving classroom management or conflict resolution, which is needed to prevent future issues from occurring.

**Closing the Discipline Gap**

Most educational research involving African American students typically focuses on educational inequalities of race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status (Skiba et al., 2002). The concept of the discipline gap is well known to educators; however, numerous speculations surrounding the reasons for its existence remain. Certain demographic characteristics that are more common among some racial and ethic groups have been used as a primary explanation for the racial discipline gap (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010). Throughout the school systems in the United States, the discipline gap can be explained by the tendency for African American students to be disciplined more frequently and severely than their peers (Monroe, 2005). Research has confirmed this gap time and time again by producing studies that demonstrate just how disproportionally these students are disciplined (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Gregory & Mosley, 2004; Gregory et al., 2010; Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Rausch & Skiba, 2004; Skiba et al., 1997). In order to fix the discipline gap, educators must first fully understand the gap and the reason it exists. Second, educators must want to close the gap and be open to suggestions on how to successfully bring it to its demise. Over the recent years, some school districts
have accepted the challenge of closing the discipline gap and have made commitments to end racial disparities in their school district (Horner et al., 2010).

Cultural conflict in the classroom has been considered part of the discipline gap foundation (Delpit, 2006). Monroe (2005) suggests that the cultural conflict between student and teacher norms creates a barrier of misunderstanding and prejudgment. An implication with culture of power contributes to the conflict list when teachers are not cognizant of the power they hold by solely being a member of the dominant group (Sullivan et al., 2010). Individuals belonging to a dominant race are typically unaware of the privilege they have over other racial groups. Unfortunately, the likelihood that these individuals subconsciously take for granted the nature of culture norms contributes to the discipline gap. These privileges are typically demonstrated in the classroom and can be seen in the expectations teachers hold for students with regards to personal and interpersonal relationships (McKown & Weinstein, 2008). Rubie-Davies, Hattie and Hamilton (2006) propose that instruction in most school districts weighs heavily on Eurocentric styles where behavioral expectations and policies are closely aligned with norms found among the White middle class. Moreover, teachers who fail to question why and how their discipline practices are culturally biased, often misinterpret student behaviors that are not aligned with their norms and expectations. Teachers that overlook culture in relation to behavior are found to often attribute perceived misbehavior to negative qualities of the student (Neal, Davis-McCray, Webb-Johnson, & Bridgest, 2003).
Another factor to the discipline gap is the image and criminalization society places on African American males (Monroe, 2005). Most media sources portray the life of black males as involving violence, drugs, and other environmental deficits that tend to overshadow positive components. Urban life in general is often portrayed negatively and is usually associated with minorities and criminal activity. It is common for black males to identify themselves through specific prototypes that are often frowned upon by educators that fail to understand the purpose behind the image (Monroe, 2005). For African American males it is important to hold a sense of power when surrounded by discomfort or feelings of disconnection from the climate that encloses them (Harper, 2004). They tend to demonstrate this by portraying an unflattering image as a sense of protection from the unfamiliar such as a feeling of separation from the school environment.

An analysis on black males self-presentation and power indicated that they acquire power by stylizing their bodies to reflect their uniqueness and provoke fear in others as a shield of protection (Weis & Fine, 1994). Unfortunately these identifications produced to acquire power often leads to the creation or reiteration of stereotypic beliefs that black males are threatening or troublesome individuals. Research on school discipline has examined the criminalization of black males and has been found to be a powerful component to the discipline gap (Gregory et al., 2010). Such findings are demonstrated among educators that adopt those stereotypic beliefs by attempting to discipline these youth more often due to their portrayals. Literature has exposed that teachers approach classrooms or groups containing a greater numbers of African
American males or low income students with an emphasis on controlling, and severely disciplining student behavior even when it does not seem required (Monroe, 2005). Although several aspects point to the expansion of the discipline gap, many teachers do not see the connection between their discipline decisions and reactions toward specific students and the perceptions and stereotypes they hold. Until educators are able to identify that differential treatment is given to specific groups and recognize that actions are guided by stereotypical beliefs, the intricate challenge to close the discipline gap will continue to linger.

One of the first steps toward attempting to close the discipline gap begins with expanding teachers’ knowledge and assisting them with identifying culturally biased behaviors (Milner & Tenore, 2010; Neal et al., 2003). Caucasian female teachers often hold a sense of fear and discomfort when forced to discipline African American students (Morris, 2005). Enlightening teachers on topics such as cultural competency may help to raise confidence levels when addressing student behavior. Increasing teacher’s cultural awareness and educating them on the positive impacts cultural awareness can have on students; in hindsight may raise their self-efficacy and encourage them to stay abreast of cultural competencies (Emmer & Hickman, 1991). Completely eliminating the discipline gap requires multifaceted solutions that are applied on structural and personal levels (Monroe, 2005). Although researchers have not settled on any exact way to address the discipline gap, a few suggestions have been provided in an attempt to ease cultural conflicts in the classroom. Furthermore, there still may be additional steps that educators must take to end any demographic disparities they possess.
The first suggestion for improvement toward closing the discipline gap is for educators to use culturally responsive classroom management and discipline techniques (Gregory et al., 2010; Monroe, 2005; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003). Good descriptive data revealing contrasts in behavioral norms between teachers and students has been found (Mattison & Aber, 2007). Therefore, educators can engage in techniques such as adapting to the norms of their students and practice using those norms in the classroom setting. Unfortunately, very few teacher programs focus on how to implement culturally responsive discipline techniques leaving most teachers placed in urban settings attempting to discipline in all the wrong ways (Gay & Howard, 2000; Irvine, 2003; Latz, 1993).

Literature on how to improve diverse classrooms tends to concentrate on a concept known as culturally responsive education or classroom management (Brown, 2004). This occurs when teachers incorporate students’ home and personal lives with learning in the classroom. The use of pedagogies and cultural synchronization are additional ways to create a culturally responsive classroom (Monroe & Obidah, 2004). Culturally responsive teaching involves purposely responding to the needs of diverse learners by choosing to deliver ethnically and culturally relevant curricula (Skiba et al., 2002). Teachers of urban classrooms are generally presented with challenges for numerous reasons. Over that past fifteen to twenty years there has been a large influx of immigrants to enter the United States causing waves of diversity to sweep through school systems (U.S Department of Education, 2011). Many of these immigrant students enter the school system knowing very little English and take time to adapt to traditional
American customs. Another challenge for teachers of diverse student populations are issues of school phobia or fear of social rejection, which may arise more often due to the presence of identifiable cultural differences among students (Garrison, 2006). An additional challenge for teachers is obtaining student cooperation for classroom instructional activities (Milnor & Tenore, 2010). The literature indicates that numerous studies have been conducted to inquire ways in which teachers can establish a classroom atmosphere that makes student cooperation conducive (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008).

Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, & Curran (2004) suggest that there are several principles that have been conceptualized as ways to shape a culturally responsive classroom: recognition of teachers’ own ethnocentrism, knowledge of student’s cultures, understanding of the broader social, economic, and political systems in education, appropriate management strategies, and development of caring classrooms. Therefore, teachers must think of developing and implementing a culturally responsive classroom as a frame of mind opposed to a set of acquired skills or actions. Teachers that attempt to establish these principles should use their accomplishments in the classroom to culturally validate and affirm their efforts (Schlosser, 1992). Additionally, teachers have to remain focused on their goal of creating a culturally responsive classroom and not become defeated by the challenges and barriers.

Students often enter the classroom lacking nurturance, attention, supervision, and the assurance that someone cares for them among many other voids. For that reason, it is important for teachers to assure students that the classroom is a safe place where missing voids can be fulfilled. Gay and Howard (2000) propose that students prefer teachers that
establish a family type classroom environment, display caring bonds, and exhibit positive
attitudes. Common characteristics of care that can be demonstrated by teachers include
showing a genuine interest in each student and reflecting mutual respect through the use
of a congruent communication process. In order to shape the opportunity to build a
relationship with students, it is important for teachers to show warmth and affection to
them.

It is important for teachers to use consistent communication strategies to establish
expectations for student behavior (Weinstein et al., 2004). Expectations must reflect the
students’ values and beliefs about learning, teacher responsibilities, and the students’ role
in the school setting (McKown & Weinstein, 2008). Too often it is found that teachers
hold lower expectations and provide less encouragement to students from lower
socioeconomic or disadvantaged environments (Rubie-Davies et al., 2006). Teachers are
frequently unaware that students can recognize and interpret a sense of care from
assertive teachers. Students can identify teachers that pressure them to complete difficult
work as a way of showing awareness of the student’s capabilities. Brown (1999) found
that African and Hispanic American students associate personal care from teachers that
demand the completion of challenging work, expect them to perform well, and insist they
pay attention during lessons. Teachers that adhere to policies where they accept minimal
excuses for non-submitted or incomplete assignments are viewed more often as effective
teachers (Morris, 2005). It is important for teachers to implement policies that lead
students to develop a sense of personal responsibility by holding them accountable for the
completion of school assignments.
Monroe and Obidah (2004) found that students from an urban eighth grade classroom recognized the use of their teacher’s non-verbal responses over her verbal responses. The students indicated that non-verbal responses such as smiling, facial expressions, and direct eye contact showed them that their teacher listened to what they had to say and cared about them personally. Social interaction and reaction can make a definite impact on the relationship between students and teachers. Caucasian teachers often identify elevated voice levels; self initiated student speech, self-directed student movement, and pupil-to-pupil interaction as inappropriate classroom behaviors (D’Amato, 1996). The behaviors listed above fall within the basis of African American culture. When teachers view such behaviors as inappropriate, they often cause confusion for these students making it difficult for them to decide when and where to appropriately use certain behaviors. It is almost as if African American students must possess an ability to internally interpret teacher expectations in order to understand the functions of the classroom.

The term “call response” is a type of social interaction that occurs when a person is speaking and others whom are listening blurt out comments in response to their feelings toward the comment made by the person speaking (Monroe & Obidah, 2004). This communication style is often used within the home lives of minority students (Sale, 1992). This action is used as a sign of acknowledgement or agreement with the comment made by the speaker (Townsend, 2000). Teachers that are unfamiliar with this style of social interaction may view these actions as rude or disruptive. Although the interaction may not be appropriate for all school setting, teachers should have some knowledge of

43
this style to assist them with understanding the reasoning behind the students’ behavior. Educators’ negative reactions to call response may cause and accentuate strained relationships between students and teachers (Obidah & Manheim-Teel, 2001). Another example can be seen with Asian students who often laugh or smile as a reaction to confusion or a misunderstanding of language (Brown, 2004). Teachers unaware of this cultural response may also misinterpret Asian students’ behaviors and assume that the student is being defiant or not taking the teacher seriously. Having some basic understanding of different cultural responses may aid teachers with finding empathetic ways to redirect student behavior they feel is inappropriate for the classroom setting. By responding with a sense of empathy the teacher allows the opportunity to positivity explain the inappropriateness of the behavior and clarify the behaviors they expect to see in the future.

When establishing a classroom environment for urban students, teachers must be assertive with the use of authority (Davis & Jordan, 1994). Misbehavior must be addressed immediately and consistently in order to establish an acceptable climate of the classroom (Charles, 2002). Milnor and Tenore (2010) found that lower socioeconomic students had more difficulty following indirect requests from teachers because they did not sound like rules or explicit directives. Consequently, teachers should be more direct when teaching diverse student populations and steer away from the use of indirect requests. Teachers may perceive the ignoring of a command as an act of insubordination when in reality the student failed to understand the demand. When building relationships with students, it is important for teachers to define each person’s role for the student and
the teacher. It is appropriate and worthwhile for teachers to be friendly with their students, however remaining assertive, setting boundaries for the relationship, and creating distinctions between the authority figure and the student are just as important.

The second suggestion for improvement toward closing the discipline gap is for education programs to recruit more students of color to train and become competent practitioners (Guarino, Santizbanez, & Daley, 2006; McNeely et al., 2002; Sleeter, 2001). This suggestion is due to the statistical increases in diversity among school districts throughout the nation. With demographic data indicating that school populations are only going to continue rising in diversity levels; recruiting additional students of color to enter the teaching profession may be a plausible solution toward closing the discipline gap.

Sleeter (2001) reviewed literature on pre-service teacher programs for underserved students, indicating that students of color tend to enter teacher training programs grounded more firmly in principles of social justice and equity when compared to white counterparts. The literature in no way indicates that one race of students entering teaching programs are more equipped academically than the other. However, it does allude to the notion that students of color hold a higher commitment toward giving back to their communities by creating schools that are more just. With students of color being more attuned to issues of equity and antidiscrimination, they may enter the teaching profession with powerful beliefs that are strong enough to influence school districts’ disciplinary practices and classroom management techniques. One downfall for students of color in the teaching profession is that many pre-service teachers are marginalized in
their training programs (Delpit, 2006). Monroe (2005) reported that students of color in education programs expressed feeling undervalued and frustrated by their white colleagues or professors. These students indicated that their academic institutions confined scholarship worth to mainstream theories, research and practices. Additionally, the students of color emphasized that they often encountered defensive reactions when they would challenge long-standing sources of knowledge. Such findings point out possible reasons why non-minority educators enter the classroom setting with a lack of cultural knowledge even after completing education training programs.

Non-minority educators hold a great deal of pedagogical knowledge, however they fail to acquire knowledge of non-traditional teaching methods and behaviors (Odidah & Manheim-Teel, 2001). As a defense mechanism these teachers attribute many misunderstandings they experience in behavior from minority students as inappropriate or offensive conduct (Gay & Howard, 2000). Multicultural centered programs in teacher education would tremendously improve trainees’ level of cultural competency. They could acquire new insights into cultural factors by sharing authentic dialogues with others to better construct themselves as teachers preparing them to teach any population.

The third suggestion for improvement toward closing the discipline gap is to incorporate community immersion experiences into teacher training programs (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003). This should occur for both pre-service and in-service teachers to expose them to culturally diverse students and situations. Authentic community experiences strengthen teachers’ holistic understanding on how to best educate urban students (Irvine, 2003). Participating in immersion experiences prior to
teaching urban populations allow teachers to get a sense of the populations’ cultural norms, interactions, and behaviors. By gaining exposure to the population teachers can then work toward increasing their awareness of the norms and practice culturally relevant teaching skills to enhance their understanding of culturally diverse students. These tasks can assist teachers to build confidence and expand their repertoire when correcting behavior or disciplining diverse students. The primary suggestions previously mentioned were developed after social scientists discovered that all literature and research focused mainly on curricular implications as the issue surrounding cultural conflict (Milner & Tenore, 2010). Social scientists began to contest that inattention to other components such as classroom management, school climate, and discipline were placing restrictions on discovering a complete understanding of cultural conflict (Irvine, 2003). Educators that are willing to continue addressing racial disparities while broadening their acquired knowledge on the relationship between culture and classroom practices are in alliance with closing the discipline gap.

**Alternative Discipline**

Numerous school districts implement alternative discipline policies opposed to using exclusionary discipline practices. Some groups and state coalitions challenge school districts that implement exclusionary discipline in attempt to reduce the school to prison pipeline (American Civil Liberties Union, 2010). This is done by educating school officials on the effects such policies have on student outcomes and by introducing programs that handle discipline in a positive manner. The Cradle to Prison Pipeline Campaign was recently launched to address school discipline policies by formulating
action plans to promote best practices, build communities, and create change (Fabelo et al., 2011). Another program is the Black Community Crusade for Children that works toward dismantling the pipeline through community education (Advancement Project, 2010). In addition to numerous books and publications, these are two programs that work toward encouraging the use of alternative discipline methods by educating people on the effects of exclusionary discipline.

**Positive Behavior Intervention Support**

An alternative model that has begun to show familiarity in the schools is a concept known as Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS). This model is an empirically validated, function based approach that uses educational and systematic methods to enhance the quality of life and minimize problem behavior (Carr et al., 2002). It involves a careful assessment and re-engineering of school environments to form positive and lasting behavior changes among student populations (Dunlap et al., 2000). PBIS initially evolved within the field of special education and emerged from three major sources: applied behavior analysis, the normalization movement, and person centered values (Carr et al., 2002). The correct use of PBIS decreases the need for intrusive or adverse interventions (Bambara, & Knoster, 2009).

The general definition of PBIS is standard across most settings, however the implementation of the model may vary slightly depending on the population involved. PBIS is rather new to the urban school environment and has been replicated nationally in several elementary, middle, and high schools (McCurdy, Mannella, & Eldridge, 2003). Until recently, the application of the model mostly occurred in suburban or rural schools.
in an effort to assess the overall impact on student behavior (Bohanon et al, 2006). Research indicates that students in urban schools have a tendency to engage in more risk-taking behaviors, require more teacher discipline, and are absent more often than students from suburban or rural school districts (Lassen, Steele, & Sailor, 2006). The implementation of PBIS in urban schools has been used to reduce and prevent the escalation of problem behavior.

PBIS can be implemented as an individualized self-management approach or as a school or classroom wide group approach (Luiselli, Putnam, Handler, & Feinberg, 2005). It has the capability to target an individual student or an entire school, because it focuses on several aspects including changing environmental variables such as the physical setting, task demands, curriculum, instructional pace, and individualized reinforcement (Cohn, 2001). PBIS encompasses three broad phases of implementation consisting of the primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention phases (Fairbanks, Sugai, Guardino, & Lathrop, 2007; Safran, & Oswald, 2003). The primary prevention phase includes universal management strategies used to reduce disruptive behavior and teach prosocial skills to all students. This phase assists teachers with introducing classroom management techniques to students using positive mannerisms. Next, the secondary prevention phase is based on intervention strategies focusing on a smaller group of students that display more serious disruptive behaviors. Lastly, the third and final stage is the tertiary prevention phase that includes treatment strategies for an individual or small number of students that engage in the most inappropriate or problem behaviors on a more consistent basis then surrounding peers (McCurdy et al., 2003). The different phases allow all
students to receive PBIS and aids educators with supplying the most appropriate amount of support needed for each student.

Most schools and school districts have some type of mission statement symbolizing a goal to maximize student learning opportunities through building academics, social, and life skills (Scott & Barrett, 2004). Educators often face challenges when attempting to address every aspect of mission statements due to social and behavior mishaps that occur in the schools (McNeely et al., 2002). School climates are often found to be reactive or controlling when multiple initiatives overlap or compete with one another (Tableman & Herron, 2004). To resolve part of this problem, educators need to revamp school mission statements to reflect models such as PBIS and other empirically validated techniques. School districts that are capable of collaborating with the community, social service agencies, and justice systems are more likely to benefit the most from models like PBIS (Sugai & Horner, 2006). Focusing on preventative measures together, both the schools and the community can work toward obtaining resources for greater student success.

In recent years, urban schools have attempted to address behavior problems using PBIS (Morrissey, Bohanon, & Fenning, 2010). Educators have recognized that typical school wide approaches to discipline, prevention, and management of problem behaviors are insufficient to address some urban students’ needs (Warren et al., 2003). Urban schools have reported a decrease in problem behaviors with the use of PBIS; however, some researchers believe more can be done with the use of this model (Horner, Sugai, & Anderson, 2010). Suburban and rural school districts are still succeeding at higher rates
than urban schools which is most likely due to environmental differences and lack of community support (McCurdy et al, 2003). Most urban schools that implement PBIS are still lacking collaboration with parents and the community, which are most helpful during the implementation stages of PBIS (Sugai & Horner, 2006). Communication between the parent and the school can provide academic and behavioral support which in turn helps develop a healthy school climate (Cartwright-Dee & Boyle, 2006).

An oversight committee was used to help overcome the resistance given by some educators during the first implementation stages of PBIS at urban schools in Atlanta, Georgia (Fabelo et al, 2011). Educators from urban schools must understand that PBIS does not provide a quick fix to behavior problems and will take time to show improvements in behavior. PBIS is estimated to take at minimum one year of intensive support to educators and students to sustain long-term change (Lassen et al., 2006).

Luiselli et al. (2005) demonstrated success overtime with a PBIS intervention that was implemented for two years at an urban elementary school. The results indicated a decrease in discipline problems and improvements in academic performance. In order to maintain a successful implementation of PBIS, teachers were well educated on the model to ensure adequate implementation once training personnel were gone. Ongoing teacher training and professional development workshops are needed to address any perceived barriers educators face during the implementation stages of PBIS (Bambara, Nonnemacher, & Kern, 2009). Training can be used to keep educators abreast of modifications made to PBIS, provide suggestions on how to gain family and community involvement, and continue demonstrating positive successes from the use of PBIS.
Typical teacher service trainings tend to focus on exposure level presentations of behavioral interventions, classroom management, and school wide discipline policies (Sugai & Horner, 2006). Such focal points are insufficient to educators if the skill has not been fluently achieved and evaluated.

School wide PBIS is a systems approach used for establishing social culture and behavioral support, which is needed in the schools to help create effective learning environments for all students (Warren et al., 2003). It aims to alter school environments by creating improved systems and procedures that promote positive change in student behavior by targeting staff behaviors as well (Bradshaw, Mitchell, & Leaf, 2010). The critical components of school wide PBIS include: setting consensus driven behavior expectations, teaching critical interpersonal skills, providing systematic positive reinforcement for meeting and exceeding performance criteria, monitoring intervention efficacy, involving stakeholders in the formulation of discipline practices, and reducing reactive and punitive exclusionary strategies (Luiselli et al., 2005). Problem behavior is the single most common reason why students are removed from regular classrooms (Skiba & Sprague, 2008). Students with the most extreme problem behaviors typically account for about 20% of schools’ population and over 50% of the behavioral incidents (Cohn, 2001). Behavior problems can negatively affect the student committing the misbehavior as well as surrounding students in the classroom or school. Teachers that have successfully implemented class wide PBIS to address problem behavior described the intervention as an effective contribution to better learning in the classroom (Bradshaw et al., 2010).
Behavior problems are usually present when a student is seeking to gain or avoid something. An act of misbehavior is typically followed by something the student deems positive or results in a consequence that provides the ability to escape the undesired (Metzler, Biglan, Rusby, & Sprague, 2001). PBIS is used as a tool to determine the function of the student’s problem behavior (Scott & Barrett, 2004). A functional behavior assessment consists of identifying the antecedents, consequences, and frequency of a behavior (Dunlap et al, 2000). McLaren and Nelson (2008) recommend educators first assess the problem behavior and decide what action of the behavior is most detrimental. Next, identify the antecedent or trigger causing the behavior to occur. Usually, this is an event that occurs directly before the problem behavior arises. Lastly, the consequence or any action that directly follows the unwanted behaviors must be detected. This is what the student is seeking to achieve and is the object or event that reinforces the student’s misbehavior. In addition to identifying the items previously mentioned; it is relatively important to also document the frequency of the misbehavior. Once all components to the problem behavior have been identified; educators can make necessary adjustments to prevent future occurrences. Collaboration among educators, parents, and students will maximize the likelihood of positive outcomes from using PBIS (McCurdy et al., 2003). All procedures including baseline data collection, progress monitoring, and evaluating must be thoroughly conducted with high levels of fidelity to obtain adequate results. Issues of fidelity have not been sufficiently addressed in research dealing with PBIS.
It is critical that schools evaluate PBIS interventions used in the schools longitudinally to ensure the effects are present overtime. Each stakeholder should have maximum involvement in designing, applying, and determining the effectiveness of the intervention. Team building among educators is the first step toward successful PBIS and should define role responsibilities, facilitate consensus around objectives, and lead to permanent in house program management by the local school personnel (Luiselli et al., 2005). The evaluation process should provide each stakeholder the opportunity to provide feedback and recommendations when needed. Sustaining PBIS may be a financial burden for some school districts and should be estimated and assessed prior to implementation. Schools must have monetary funds available to purchase adequate materials. Therefore, school districts that do not foresee the PBIS required budget should acquire additional resources by soliciting donations from the community, social service agencies, or apply for state and federal grants.

After PBIS has been implemented and results are visible; a reduction in student problem behavior may offset the school district’s budget. Money allocated toward paying administrative time devoted to disciplinary incidents and alternative educational placement of high-risk students will reduce over time (Scott & Barrett, 2004). The saved monies can benefit students and educators by providing the district funds to spend on events and community activities. Urban and low-income districts may obtain greater levels of support from the community once they begin to implement positive behavior support; especially when the intervention focuses on student academic success. Members belonging to these immediate communities surrounding the school often understand the
necessity of student academic success as a stepping stone toward removing themselves from such communities.

**Restorative Justice**

Another alternative to exclusionary discipline that has recently been introduced to the school system is an evidenced based practice called restorative justice (Amstutz & Mullet, 2005). This approach aims to mend broken relationships by uniting the offender and victims by working to resolve issues caused by the offenders behaviors (Papik, 2006). The practice of restorative justice offers all participants involved and affected by the perpetrators actions to participate in dialogue and activities that enable the opportunity to connect on emotional level (Morrison, 2007).

In 2009, a restorative justice program was launched in San Francisco public schools as a means to find alternatives to the seven-year 152% spike in suspensions and expulsions. Students that committed acts of misbehavior were required to listen to each other, write letters of apology, work out solutions with the assistance of parents and/or educators, or engage in community service. With continued implementation of the restorative justice program in San Francisco public schools, expulsions had fallen by 28% and suspensions by 35%. School board members supported the program and indicated that restorative justice practices kept students out of the criminal justice system (Adam-Smith, 2006).

In the United States, restorative practices are know to exist in the following states: California, Colorado, Georgia, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New York Texas, Pennsylvania, and Connecticut (Schiff, 2013). In addition to
the previously mentioned study in California, several states saw reductions in student misbehavior and rates of assigned exclusionary discipline (Advancement Project, 2010). Currently, there is no readily available research indicating the use of restorative justice programs in Ohio school districts. However, such programs will likely appear across more states as positive results are continuously demonstrated. As with PBIS, restorative justice is also an approach that is likely to gain support from the community especially with the link it has toward reducing the school to prison pipeline. In addition, educators may respond more optimistically to restorative justice then to approaches like PBIS because it is simpler to implement and does not entail specific processes in order to demonstrate success.

As with most alternative approaches, funding to support the continuation of such programs becomes a barrier. Restorative justice can be extremely expensive depending on how ambitious the school district is in seeing change. For example, the previously mentioned San Francisco public school district was forced to end the implementation of the restorative program due to educational budget cuts that were too severe to continue supporting the program. Prior to the implementation stage of such programs, it becomes important for school districts to have in place plans and procedures towards addressing possible barriers that are subject to arise. Programs like restorative justice will likely demonstrate most beneficial results when implemented consistently opposed to starting the program and stopping the program when barriers become present.
The Roles and Functions of School Psychologists

School Psychologists have historically worked with a limited segment of student populations primarily those who have or are suspected of having disabilities (Merrell, Ervin, & Peacock, 2011). In past decades, school psychologists were considered the gatekeepers in determining student eligibility for special education. Now, special education eligibility is a team-based decision and school psychologists have expanded their functions beyond the traditional role of conducting assessments (Fagan & Wise, 2007). Additionally, school psychologists work with all populations of students to prevent, assess, and intervene on academic or behavioral problems. According to the National Association of School Psychologist, there are ten domains of practice that the School Psychologist should attempt to provide in the schools. Those domains include: data based decision making and accountability, consultation and collaboration, intervention and instructional support, interventions and mental health services, school wide practices to promote learning, preventative and responsive services, family/school collaboration services, diversity in development and learning, research and program evaluation, and legal, ethical, and professional practice (NASP, 2010).

Understanding teachers’ perceptions as related to the functions of the school psychologist can provide important information regarding how school psychologists’ are utilized in the schools. Collaboration between the school psychologist, teachers, and administration is vital to student success especially as it relates to school discipline. School psychologist can collaborate with educators to assist with developing effective discipline plans for students. Often times, school psychologists and teachers collaborate
with a common goal of meeting the needs of students. However, when collaboration is not encouraged, the school psychologist’s competencies are often overlooked or not utilized. Farrell, Jimerson, Kalambouka, and Benoit (2005) conducted a study to obtain teachers’ views of school psychologists in eight countries. The results indicated teachers appreciated the quality of service the school psychologists provided but wanted to see them more within the school setting. Newer legislation calls for more collaboration between teachers and school psychologists (IDEA, 2004).

Prior to the collaboration process, it must be determined what teachers feel the school psychologist can assist them with accomplishing. Teachers are probably less likely to engage in a collaboration process regarding topics they do not feel they need assistance with. Also, if teachers are unaware of school psychologist’s competencies, or base the roles and functions of the school psychologist on the traditional definition, they would mostly likely not initiate the collaboration process or seek assistance from the school psychologist. A study conducted within five school districts in Missouri examined teachers’ perceptions of the school psychologist’s responsibilities. Teachers reported viewing the school psychologist as having a primary role in the service and delivery of mental health services and conducting academic and behavioral assessments (Reinke, Stormont, Keither, Puri, & Goel, 2001). As demonstrated in both studies, the role of the school psychologist varies depending on the population they serve. School districts should take advantage of the knowledge school psychologists have on discipline techniques and utilize their skills to assist in addressing problem behavior.
Chapter 3 - Methodology

Over the past decade, school districts have begun to explore preventative alternatives also known as positive behavior intervention support to address problem behavior (Skiba, Rausch, & Ritter, 2005). When exclusionary discipline methods are used, inappropriate sanctions are often distributed to students and unfavorable outcomes arise. This study will seek to obtain teachers’ perceptions on appropriate discipline methods for specific behavior problems, determine whether or not teachers’ beliefs align with discipline methods used in their schools, and gather teachers’ views on the utilization of the school psychologist in their school building.

Sample

A large urban school district in the Midwest will be the study site. The sample will consist of all middle school teachers from this district that teach sixth through eighth grade. During the 2012-2013 school year there were 20 middle schools with 675 middle school teachers. Among the middle school teachers, 28% are male and 72% are female. Teacher ethnicity demographics are 62.6% Caucasian, 35.3% African American/Black, 1.2% Hispanic Latino, 0.7% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.2% American Indian/Native Alaskan.
Sampling Procedure

A non-random convenience sample will be used to acquire teachers’ perceptions of discipline. All middle school teachers from the Urban School district during the 2012-2013 school will be recruited to participate in the study. It is common for researchers to stray away from the use of random sampling when the main focus is to obtain descriptive information from populations closely related to the topic of interest (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). The utilization of this sample type and the basis for using the Urban School district was decided upon due to the geographic location of the district to the researcher, and the large number of potential participants. Middle school teachers were selected as the grade category of choice because the literature denotes middle school students as having a high report of discipline related incidents (Theriot & Dupper, 2010).

Study Variables

Based on the research questions for this study, relationships between forms of discipline; problem behaviors; effectiveness level of school policy; the engagement of the school psychologist with regards to discipline. The greatest contributing factors for each of the problem behaviors will be treated as ordinal variables with four levels once ranked by the respondents. Discipline method is categorical with six levels: in-school suspension, out of school suspension, expulsion, behavioral intervention, parent conference, resources/guidance; Problem behavior is categorical with four levels: truancy, physical violence, chronic disruptive behaviors, and bullying. A Likert type scale with four levels: highly ineffective, ineffective, effective, and highly effective will be used to indicate the effectiveness of the discipline method used in the teacher’s school;
this is an interval scale of measurement. The engagement of the School Psychologist consists of four parts, the first part is the level of involvement and the second part is the level of influence both with regards to school policy. Parts one and two are interval scales of measurement with three levels each: not involved, somewhat involved, very involved; not influential, somewhat influential, very influential. Part three is the role of the school psychologist in addressing problem behavior, which is categorical with five levels of measurement: conduct in-service trainings with teachers, consult with teachers, hold parent conferences, provide resources and guidance for outside services. The final part is what teacher would like the school psychologist to do to address problems behavior, which is also categorical with five levels of measurement: conduct in-service trainings with teachers, consult with teachers, hold parent conferences, provide resources and guidance for outside services.

There are several demographic variables being collected in this study. The variables include highest degree obtained, years taught at each level, current grade taught, gender, and ethnicity. These variables will be collected on the final page of the questionnaire. Highest degree obtained is an ordinal scaled variable with four levels, B.A/B.S, M.A/M.S, and Ph.D. Years taught at each level is ratio scaled and will be collected using an open ended format for the participant to indicate the number of years they have taught at each schooling level. For data analysis purposes, the researcher will categorize years taught into three categories, 0-5 years, 6 – 11 years, and 12 + years. Current grade taught is categorical with three levels, 6th, 7th, and 8th grade, and is provided as an open ended question in case respondent teaches more than one grade.
Gender is categorical with two levels, male and female. Ethnicity is categorical with six levels, Caucasian/White, African American/Black, Hispanic/Latino, Asian/Pacific Islander, Native American/Alaskan, and Other ethnicity not listed.

**Instrument**

Participants will complete an online survey to provide their perceptions of the causes of problem behavior, appropriate discipline methods for specific behaviors, school policy, and the function the school psychologist plays within the school building. The researcher carefully developed a survey instrument that provides insight into teachers' perceptions as they relate to discipline, identify teachers' attributions to common problem behavior, and examine teachers' views of the school psychologist. Currently, there is a minimal research that has investigated teachers' perceptions related to school discipline (Osher et. al., 2010; Tillery et. al., 2010). According to the literature, the most common behavior problem students within the school environment are truancy, physical violence, chronic classroom disruptions, and bullying (Reid, 2005, 2008; Wang, Iannotti, & Nansel, 2009; Edwards & Watts, 2010). Inconsistent research exists regarding exactly how these unwanted behaviors are addressed; however, more than enough literature indicates that exclusionary discipline is often used. In addition to locating the most frequent school problems, the researcher investigated the greatest contributing factors that influence these problems to occur.

Although there are several possibilities for problem behavior, the researcher coded different causes identified in the literature into four overarching themes: individual factors (i.e., lack of self-esteem, social skills, and confidence, poor peer relations, learning
difficulties, special needs, etc.), family factors (parentally condoned absences, lack of value for education, economic deprivation, inconsistent parenting styles, lack of parental support, etc.), school factors (poor relationships with teachers, perceived irrelevance, low teachers expectations, etc.), and community factors (lack of community support for education, socioeconomic factors, location of school, etc.). Teachers most often attribute student misbehavior to out of school and individual issues (Hoges-Kullinna, 2007). Truancy and problematic absenteeism has been identified and related to various problems such as unstructured and unmonitored free time (Powell, 2012). Another study recognized school factors to include bullying, the curriculum, and poor teaching as the prime reasons for student misbehavior in the classroom (Reid, 2005). Moon, Hwang, and McCluskey (2011) indicated, bullying occurs within organizational networks and is mainly attributed to social problems, aggression, externalizing problems, and psychopathic personality traits. are consequences to the bullying experience.

Based on the aforementioned literature, the researcher created the survey and configured it into an online version. The questionnaire was created specifically for this one time data collection procedure and is not intended for direct replication. This survey will allow the researcher to anonymously gain descriptive information on teacher beliefs and collect demographic information that otherwise may not be disclosed under the use of another data collection technique.

The survey consists of four main sections: causes that lead to problem behavior, perceptions on the appropriateness and effectiveness of discipline types, the role of the school psychologist, and demographic questions at the conclusion. The first section
prompts teachers to rank order the top four causes that lead to truancy, physical violence, chronic classroom disruptions, and bullying. The second section asks teachers to indicate most appropriate solution to address students that engage in truancy, physical violence, chronic classroom disruptions, and bullying. Teachers are then encouraged to specify the form of discipline that is used in their school to address the same four problems. From there, teachers are asked to rate how effectively their schools discipline policy assists in reducing each of the problem behaviors. Section three prompts teachers to evaluate the role of the school psychologist in their school and indicate their level of involvement and influence on their school’s discipline policy. Teachers are then encouraged to share what they would like the role that school psychologist to include. The final section of the survey consists of optional demographic questions to obtain insight into the background of the respondents.

**Data Collection Procedure**

Through the use of the Urban School districts internal database system, participants will be sent a recruitment email inviting them to participate in the study. The email will introduce the participants to the study and provide them with essential information needed to complete the survey. Information on informed consent will be provided in the recruitment email and will indicate that participating in the survey will serve as the participants’ informed consent. The email will also inform all participants of the option to withdrawal from the study at anytime during the data collection process without consequence. Once the participant clicks the enclosed survey link, they will be
directed to the survey web page. The completion time for the online survey estimated to range between 5 to 10 minutes.

**Issues with Validity**

External validity is the extent to which the results of a study can be generalized to and across populations, setting and times (Johnson & Christensen, 2000). Threats to external validity are present in this study due to the selection process and the questionnaire instrument used for data collection. A non-random convenience sample will be used; therefore the findings will only be generalized to the sample of the study. The questionnaire was created for the purposes of this study and direct replication is not intended.

Internal validity is how well a study is conducted and the confidence that the observed effect is produced solely by the independent variable and not by extraneous variables (Creswell, 2009). The survey has good face validity as the researcher created clear and concise questions to gain straightforward responses to directly answer the research questions of the study. Threats to internal validity are plausible because the survey instrument used in the study requires participants to self-report all responses. Due to the topic of the study, participants may provide inaccurate or socially desirable responses, which fails to depict the true nature of teachers’ perceptions toward discipline practices. Another threat to internal validity is the unknown number of attributing factors that may impact the relationship between the study variables. Lastly, based on the design of the study, no causal relationships can be determined from the results.
**Recommended Data Analysis**

The Statistical Package for the Social Scientists (SPSS) will be used to conduct the data analyses for the study. Section one of the survey will address **Research Question One** (What do teachers perceive as the greatest contributing factor of truancy, physical violence, classroom disruptions, and bullying); each cause will be numerically coded (response will be numerically coded (1 = Individual Factors, 2 = Family Factors, 3 = School Factors, and 4 = Community Factors) Descriptive statistics will be run to determine the frequencies, and distribution of the ranked responses. Graphical representations such as box plots and histograms will also be used to visually describe the descriptive information. Descriptive statistics constitutes a mathematical summarization of data allowing the researcher to provide a richer picture to examine the phenomenon of interest (Trochim, 2006). A box plot is a graphical image used to show how far from most of the extreme values are presented the median and quartile values (Vogt & Johnson, 2011). A histogram is a graph that shows the frequency distribution of data to include outliers and skewness (Lomax, 2007).

Section two of the survey will address **Research Question Two** (What is the congruence between teachers’ discipline preferences and the effectives of their school discipline policy) which as broken down in three sub-questions. Survey question five (To teachers, what is the most appropriate way to address truancy, physical violence, classroom disruptions, and bullying) will address Part A of Research Question Two. Each response will be numerically coded (1 = ISS, 2 = OSS, 3 = Expulsion, 4 = Behavioral Intervention, 5 = Parent Conference, 6 = Resources/Guidance); descriptive statistics will
be run to determine the frequencies, central tendency, distribution, and dispersion of
responses and graphical representations will be used to visually present the data. Survey
question six addresses Part B of Research Question Two (How are truancy, physical
violence, classroom disruptions, and bullying addressed in the teacher’s school?) The
respondents will indicate which form of discipline is used to address each of the problem
behaviors in the school where they work. As in part A, each response will be numerically
coded (1 = ISS, 2 = OSS, 3 = Expulsion, 4 = Behavioral Intervention, 5 = Parent
Conference, 6 = Resources/Guidance) and descriptive statistics will be run to determine
the frequencies, central tendency, distribution, and dispersion of responses along with
graphical representations. Survey questions seven through ten will address Part C of
Research Question Two (How effective are the discipline methods used in their school
to address truancy, physical violence, classroom disruptions, and bullying). The
responses will provide the effectiveness of exclusionary discipline or positive discipline
that is used in the teacher’s schools for each problem behavior. The responses are in the
format of a Likert type scale and are coded as 1= Very Ineffective, 2 = Ineffective, 3 =
Effective, 4= Very Effective. Descriptive statistics will be run to provide frequencies,
mode, median, and quartiles of the responses. The four levels of effectiveness for each
discipline method will be merged together to create two categorical variables, effective
and ineffective.

A chi-square statistic will be run for each of the four behavior problems to
investigate whether or not the effectiveness of exclusionary discipline or positive
discipline are rated differently by the following demographic variables: highest degree
obtained, number of years of teaching, gender, and race. A chi-square tests of independence will be used to determine whether or not any the aforementioned demographic variables (highest degree obtained, number of years of teaching, gender, and race) relates to the way the teacher rated the effectiveness of exclusionary discipline used in their school to address each of the problem behaviors. The null and alternative hypotheses for these chi-squares will be, Ho: the effectiveness rating is independent of highest degree obtained (or the demographic variable being used); Ha: the effectiveness rating and highest degree obtained (or the demographic variable being used) are related. Since highest degree obtained has three levels, a two by three contingency table will be used denoting degrees of freedom to equal 2. The probability level of .05 will be used to determine the critical value on the chi square distribution table to reject or confirm the null hypothesis. The same chi-square test of independence will be used to investigate the relationship between the effectiveness of exclusionary discipline and number of years taught. The three categories of years taught will be used for this analysis. Given that the demographic variable race has six levels, a similar chi-square test of independence will be run with the exception of a six by two contingency table. To examine any relations between gender and the effectiveness of exclusionary discipline a two by two contingency table will be used. The responses from survey questions five through ten will be used to indicate the congruence between teachers’ discipline preferences and the effectives of their school discipline policy (Research Question Two). Cross tabulations, simple statistics, and correlations between categorical variables will be investigated
Section three of the survey will address **Research Question Three** (To what extent are School Psychologists utilized in the schools to assist with determining appropriate ways to address problem behavior in general?). A cross tabulation will be used to demonstrate how teachers’ view the role of the school psychologist in their school compared to what they believe the role should consists of. Frequency counts and percentages will also be calculated and graphical representations will be used to visually describe the descriptive information.

**Expected Results and Discussion**

The results from this study are somewhat difficult to anticipate due to the minimum amount of literature regarding teachers’ perceptions as they relate to school discipline. Most studies that have been conducted focus on teachers’ perceptions of school discipline problems (Bibou-Nakou, et al., 2000; Harme et al., 2008; Monroe & Obidah, 2004; Skiba, 2000). Garcia and Taaca-Warren (2009) conducted a qualitative study examining teachers’ perceptions of suspension; however, this study was performed with a sample of 15 high school teachers. The authors recommended that more literature be conducted in this area, as there is a lack of teachers’ perceptions relating to discipline across most grade levels. This study will investigate middle school teachers’ perceptions of the leading causes of problem behavior in the schools, appropriate discipline techniques for specific problem behaviors, and compare those perceptions to their school’s discipline policy. It will also examine the role of the School Psychologist and any involvement or influence they may have on schools’ discipline policy.
Overall, it is opined that teachers’ will attribute home or individual factors as the greatest causes of student problem behavior. It is expected that they will endorse more positive forms of discipline as most appropriate to address truancy, physical aggression, chronic problem behavior, and bullying. This expectation aligns closely with literature on discipline that endorses a negative perception toward the use of exclusionary discipline. Additionally, it is anticipated that current methods used in the schools to address the aforementioned problem behaviors will reveal more negative forms of discipline. Furthermore, it is expected that when compared, a moderately strong negative relationship will lie between teachers’ perceptions of appropriate discipline and school policy. It is believed that overall teachers will rate their school’s discipline policy as ineffective for addressing problem behaviors. With regards to the role of the School Psychologist, it is opined that teachers will indicate the lack of involvement and influence School Psychologists have on their schools discipline policy. It is anticipated that teachers will want School Psychologists to be more involved in the process of addressing problem behavior.

Teachers are often pressured by administration and other school officials to enforce policies like exclusionary discipline (Insley, 2001). Therefore, it is believed that when given the opportunity, teachers will denote exclusionary discipline practices as inappropriate for creating behavior changes. Based on the demographic information obtained from the Ohio Department of Education, it can be assumed that the majority of participants will be Caucasian females with bachelor degrees. Given that educators typically have access to new information that researchers produce and publicize, it is
presumed that higher degree level educators may hold different amounts of knowledge on educational related topics than other educators (Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2003). Consequently, some differences may be seen among those teachers that hold different degree types (i.e., Bachelors degree compared to Masters, etc.) suggesting that teachers with higher held degrees may disagree with the use of exclusionary discipline. Additionally, opposite opinions maybe present among teachers that have taught for two decades or longer. It is expected that experienced teachers could possibly hold different views toward the appropriateness of alternative discipline when compared to less experienced teachers.

Educators must move toward a unified system of discipline and away from exclusionary practices that demonstrate poor levels of effectiveness toward making behavior changes or creating safer schools (Fenning & Rose, 2007). Although it is anticipated that teachers will rate school suspensions and expulsions as an ineffective form of discipline; it is projected that out of school suspension will be denoted as the most frequent form of discipline used in the schools to address the problem behaviors.

The consequences of the expected findings are detrimental to students that are consistently impacted by the use of exclusionary practices. Such effects will increase if educators do not make the appropriate changes to current discipline plans. From the expected results, it can be concluded that collaboration among educators and School Psychologist needs to take place during the developmental stages of disciplinary plans and policies. Teacher input should also have a significant impact on administration and school officials’ decisions. In this study, the biggest discrepancy that is believed to arise
is between teachers’ perceptions of appropriate discipline and what is actually implemented in the schools. When such discrepancies are present, there is a greater likelihood for inconsistent distribution of discipline to students; ultimately leading to the enhancement of issues surrounding the discipline gap.

There are a few potential implications of this study. The first is the use of a non-random convenience sample that limits the generalization of the study results. Future studies may want to consider a random sample consisting of numerous school districts. Failure to complete the questionnaire is the second implication of the study. Non-response to the questionnaire reduces the sample size and lessons the portrayal that the perceptions of teachers from the Urban School district have been represented. Another implication is the self-reporting measure that is used to obtain the teachers’ perceptions. This type of measure does not make certain that the responses are a true depiction of the teachers’ attitudes and beliefs toward school discipline. This implication is difficult for researchers to control because there is no away to guarantee the accuracy of responses. However, future studies may resolve this implication by using a different response measure or data collection technique.
Analysis and Presentation of Data

School discipline should be described by clear expectations with detailed consequences that work toward encouraging positive student behavior. When boundaries and expectations are set for students, they are more likely to behave appropriately and be successful in school. Conversely, when consequences include methods of exclusionary discipline, students are not taught effective ways to manage or correct unwanted behavior. Instead, students are isolated from peers and the learning environment throughout the conclusion of the punishment. School discipline policies vary widely from school district to school district and so may the opinions of teachers that witness consequences being distributed to students.

The purpose of this study was to investigate teachers’ perceptions of discipline as it relates to specific problem behavior and explore the role of the school psychologist. The teachers in the study were from middle schools in an urban school district in Central Ohio. As mentioned in chapter one, there is an increased amount of office referrals at the middle school level that results in some form of assigned discipline. Furthermore, Osher et al. (2010) denoted a nominal amount of research exists regarding teachers’ views toward school discipline.
Response Rate

This chapter begins with an overview of the analysis of the quantitative data collected. The survey instrument collected anonymous data so there was no way to detect whether or not a teacher form each of the 26 schools participated. A total of 688 teachers were invited to participate in the study; 130 teachers responded to participated in the study yielding a response rate of roughly 19%. The overview of the analysis will include the procedures within the analysis and a description of the demographic characteristics of those educators that participated in the study.

The results of the teachers’ responses to each of the following research questions were examined: 1) What do teachers perceive as the greatest contributing factor of truancy, physical violence, classroom disruptions, and bullying? 2) What is the congruence between teachers’ discipline preferences and the effectives of their school discipline policy? 2a) To teachers, what is the most appropriate way to address truancy, physical violence, classroom disruptions, and bullying? 2b) How are truancy, physical violence, classroom disruptions, and bullying addressed in the teacher’s school? 2c) How effective are the discipline methods used in the schools to address truancy, physical violence, classroom disruptions, and bullying? 3) To what extent are School Psychologists utilized in the schools to assist with addressing problem behavior? 3a) In what ways would teachers like the School Psychologist to assist with addressing discipline problems? The end of this chapter will present a summary of the data findings as they relate to the research questions.
Data Analysis Procedures

The survey (Appendix A) consisted of four sections. The first part contained questions intended to produce the most common causes of problem behavior in the schools. The second part included single choice response items related to the appropriateness of discipline, the type of discipline used in the schools, and Likert scale questions regarding the effectives of school discipline. The third section incorporated multiple response questions associated with the function of school psychologist in addressing behavior problems. The fourth part proposed to collect demographic data of the teachers participating in the survey.

The researcher utilized data collected from an online survey distributed in May 2013 over a two-week period. The researcher closely worked with a research specialist employed through the urban school district’s Research and Evaluation Division to anonymously recruit teachers to participate in the survey. A recruitment email was sent to 688 middle school teachers through the urban school district teacher Listserv. Teachers agreed to participate in the study by clicking the survey link that directed them to a separate web page. All responses were anonymously collected. Data were collected from all willing participants and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), Version 19.0 for Mac software. The population of this study was composed of 111 teachers certified by the Ohio Department of Education. Although 688 teachers were invited to participate, only 130 teachers responded to the invitation and 111 (86%) out of those 130 completed the total survey.
Demographic Data

The survey contained questions intended to produce specific demographic data about the participating teachers. This part included questions about the highest degree obtained, years taught at each level of schooling, current grade taught, gender, and ethnicity. Tables 1 through 5 illustrate these results.

The first question asked participants to indicate the highest degree they have obtained. Twenty-three teachers, representing 20.9% of participants held a bachelors degree, eighty teachers (72.7%) held a master’s degree, and 7 teachers (6.4%) held doctorate degrees.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>20.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>72.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Highest Degree Obtained

The next demographic question asked respondents to specify how many years they taught at each schooling level. A multiple response variable was defined for years taught at each level and for current grade taught. It is common for teachers to teach more than one grade level at both the middle and high school levels. Often times, teachers educate at different schooling levels throughout a teaching career as well. Fifty-six teachers indicated they taught at the elementary level for average of 3.32 years. At the
middle school level, 110 teachers implied they taught for an average of 11.94 years, and 49 teachers taught for 4.41 years at the high school level. Of the 105 middle school teachers that responded too this question, 61.9% taught sixth grades, 73.3% taught 7th grade, and 67.6% taught eight-grade (see Table 3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>4.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>11.94</td>
<td>8.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>4.41</td>
<td>6.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Table 2: Years Taught at Each Grade Level</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6th</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>61.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7th</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>73.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8th</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>67.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>213</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Table 3: Current Grade Taught</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Column totals do not equal 100% as respondents can teach more than one grade*

As displayed in Table 4, there were 110 participants that decided to answer this question. Twenty-eight of those respondents were male, representing 25.5% and females represented 75.4% of the participating population.
The final demographic question asked teachers to provide their ethnicity. A multiple response variable was defined for ethnicity and the frequencies are displayed in Table 5. The ethnicities were 79.1% European American, 14.5% African American/Black, 1.8% Latino/Hispanic, 2.7% Asian/Pacific, and 1.8% Native American/Alaskan. Two respondents (1.6% of the participants) marked two races indicating biracial ethnicities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>European American/White</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>79.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American/Black</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino/Hispanic</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American/Alaskan</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Ethnicity

The three research questions were examined using frequency statistics to include percentages and cross tabulations. The percentages provided the proportion of the
responses given for each question, while the cross tabulations measured the associations between variables in a two-way table.

**Research Question One**

Table 6 displays the rank order of causes for each of the problem behaviors from lowest (most common) to highest (least common). When all factors were compared across problems, “individual factors” were ranked as the greatest contributing factor followed by “family factors” on three out of four problem behaviors (physical violence = 46.2% (individual), 39.5% (family); chronic classroom behavior = 63.4% (individual), 22.5% (family), bullying = 60.8 (individual), 29.2% (family). For truancy, “family factors” were ranked as the most common cause at 82.6% followed by “individual factors” at 10.8% (see Table 7). Respondents ranked school factors as the lowest contributing factor for each problem behavior.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Physical Violence</th>
<th>Chronic Classroom Disruptions</th>
<th>Bullying</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual Factors</td>
<td>46.2%</td>
<td>63.4%</td>
<td>60.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Factor</td>
<td>39.5%</td>
<td>22.5%</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Factors</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Factors</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: Rank Ordered Common Factors
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Truancy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family Factors</td>
<td>82.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Factor</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Factors</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Factors</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7: Rank Ordered Common Factors for Truancy

**Research Question Two**

Table 8 presents teachers perceptions of the most appropriate form of discipline to address each of the problem behaviors and lists the percentages from most appropriate to least appropriate. For truancy, 39% of respondents elicited parent conferences as the most appropriate form a discipline. There were no responses provided for out of school suspension or expulsion to address truancy. In opposition, 44.6% of teachers chose out of school suspension as the most appropriate way to handle physical violence in school. This was followed by expulsion at 17.7%. Responses for the other discipline methods were noted, however the percentages were greatly dispersed. Additionally, 35.9% of respondents rated behavioral contracts and behavioral interventions as most appropriate for chronic classroom behaviors followed by parent conference at 25.6%. Furthermore, 28.2% endorsed resources or guidance for support services to address problems of bullying, followed by behavioral contract/behavioral interventions at 22.2%, and out of school suspension at 20.5%.

Teachers also indicated the form of discipline their schools use to addresses each of the problem behaviors. Teachers specified that parent conferences are the most common way truancy (40.0%), chronic classroom disruptions (37.1%), and bullying
(31.6%) are addressed. This method was followed by in-school suspension for each behavior as well. Physical violence was the only behavior problem noted as typically addressed through out of school suspension at 70.9%. The first and second most common ways to address each problem behavior were relatively close in selection. Conversely, physical violence had one common way to address the problem and was roughly 60 percentile points from the second most common form.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Truancy</th>
<th>Physical Violence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N (%), Rank</td>
<td>N (%), Rank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISS</td>
<td>13 (11.0); 4</td>
<td>23 (20); 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OSS</td>
<td>0 (0.0); NR</td>
<td>3 (2.6); 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expulsion</td>
<td>0 (0.0); NR</td>
<td>0 (0.0); NR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral Intervention</td>
<td>21 (17.8); 3</td>
<td>6 (5.2); 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Conference</td>
<td>46 (39.0); 1</td>
<td>46 (40.0); 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources/ Guidance</td>
<td>38 (32.2); 2</td>
<td>37 (32.2); 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (n)</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Chronic Classroom Disruptions</th>
<th>Bullying</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N (%), Rank</td>
<td>N (%), Rank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISS</td>
<td>21 (17.9); 3</td>
<td>42 (35.3); 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OSS</td>
<td>18 (15.4); 4</td>
<td>15 (12.9); 3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expulsion</td>
<td>2 (1.7); 6</td>
<td>0 (0.0); NR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral Intervention</td>
<td>42 (35.9); 1</td>
<td>15 (12.9); 3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Conference</td>
<td>30 (25.6); 2</td>
<td>43 (37.1); 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources/ Guidance</td>
<td>4 (3.4); 5</td>
<td>2 (1.7); 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (n)</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8: Teachers Perceptions of Appropriate Discipline and Teachers Perceptions of Most Frequent Discipline Methods Used by School Administration

*Note: ISS = In-School Suspension, OSS = Out of School Suspension*

Table 9 displays the ways teachers rated the effectiveness of discipline methods

77
used in their schools. A Likert-type scale with a four-point scale: 1 = Very Ineffective, 2 = Ineffective, 3 = Effective, and 4 = Very Effective was used. The ineffective scales were merged together as well as the effective scales to produce two categories, ineffective and effective. Of the 46 respondents that indicated their school addresses truancy through parent conferences, 11 respondents (23.9%) reported parent conferences as an effective means toward reducing truancy. Similarly, 42 respondents listed parent conferences as most frequently used to tackle chronic classroom disruptions, 13 respondents or (33.4%) of those respondents rated parent conferences as effective. This same trend was exhibited for bullying as well. Of the 81 respondents that reported out of school suspension as the most frequently utilized form for addressing physical violence, 48 respondents (59.2%) endorsed this method as effective for reducing physical violence.

Teachers denoted in-school suspension as the second most frequently used discipline technique in the schools for 3 out of the 4 problem behaviors. Out of the 23 teachers that indicated they perceived in-school suspension as most frequently used to address truancy, 2 teachers (8.7%) rated this method as effective for reducing problems of truancy. Forty-one teachers denoted they perceive in-school suspension is used to address chronic classroom disruptions but only 7 teachers (17.1%) rated in-school suspension as effective for reducing chronic classroom disruptions. Lastly, out of the 27 teachers that endorsed in-school suspension is used to address problems of bullying, only 3 teachers (11.1%) rated this method as effective for reducing bullying. Fourteen teachers reported behavioral contracts/behavioral interventions as most frequently used in the schools to address chronic classroom behavior; eight teachers (57.1%) rated this to be an
effective measure toward reducing these behaviors. Thirty-five teachers responded that resources and guidance for outside support services are used in the schools to address truancy; 18 teachers (51.5%) rated this technique as effective.

The number of responses for each discipline effectiveness category varied because teachers were only prompted to rate the effectiveness for discipline methods they perceived as most frequently used in the school they work in. For example, three respondents rated the effectiveness of out of school suspension for addressing truancy. This indicates at least three teachers perceived that out of school suspension is the most frequently used method in their school to address truancy. The effectiveness of some discipline types were not provided; therefore, an assumption can be made that if no response was provided then teachers do not perceive that specific discipline type as most frequently used in their school to address that particular problem behavior.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effectiveness N (%)</th>
<th>Truancy</th>
<th>Physical Violence</th>
<th>Chronic Classroom Disruptions</th>
<th>Bullying</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ISS</td>
<td>2 (8.7)</td>
<td>3 (27.3)</td>
<td>7 (17.1)</td>
<td>3 (11.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OSS</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
<td>48 (59.2)</td>
<td>2 (14.3)</td>
<td>5 (20.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expulsion</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
<td>2 (50.0)</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
<td>2 (66.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral Interventions</td>
<td>3 (60.0)</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
<td>8 (57.1)</td>
<td>1 (10.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Conference</td>
<td>11 (23.9)</td>
<td>1 (6.3)</td>
<td>13 (33.4)</td>
<td>9 (25.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources/Guidance</td>
<td>18 (51.5)</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
<td>2 (1.6)</td>
<td>4 (40.0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9: Teachers perceptions of effectiveness of discipline methods used by the school

Note: N does not equal 130 as teachers only rated the effectiveness for the discipline type they perceive as most frequently used in their school
Research Question Three

Cross tabulations were calculated to determine how teachers perceived the involvement and influence of School Psychologists as it relates to addressing problem behaviors. With regards to truancy, out of 112 teachers, 62 or 55.4% of them indicated the school psychologist is not involved in addressing truancy problems; 24 or 21.4% indicated the school psychologist is somewhat involved, and 22 or 19.6% marked the response “do not know” for level of involvement. As displayed in Table 10, 66 teachers (58.9%) marked more involvement is needed from the school psychologist regardless of the currently level of involvement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Involvement</th>
<th>No Change</th>
<th>Less</th>
<th>More</th>
<th>Do Not Know</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not Involved</td>
<td>7 (6.3)</td>
<td>1 (0.9)</td>
<td>37 (33.0)</td>
<td>17 (15.2)</td>
<td>62 (55.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat Involved</td>
<td>4 (3.6)</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
<td>17 (15.2)</td>
<td>3 (2.7)</td>
<td>24 (21.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Involved</td>
<td>1 (0.9)</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
<td>2 (1.8)</td>
<td>1 (0.9)</td>
<td>4 (3.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do Not Know</td>
<td>1 (0.9)</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
<td>10 (8.9)</td>
<td>11 (9.8)</td>
<td>22 (19.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (N = 112)</td>
<td>13 (11.6)</td>
<td>1 (0.9)</td>
<td>66 (58.9)</td>
<td>32 (28.6)</td>
<td>112 (100.0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10: School Psychologist’s Involvement with Truancy

Sixty-nine teachers or 61.1% of the 133 teachers that responded implied that the school psychologist is not involved with discipline decisions regarding physical violence. However, 76 or 67.3% of these teachers noted the need for more involvement from the school psychologist. Conversely, 17 teachers or 15.0% indicated they “do not know” the
school psychologist’s level of involvement (See Table 11). These same trends were consistent across each of the four behavior problems. Results for chronic classroom disruptions and bullying are displayed in tables 12 and 13.

### Table 11: School Psychologist’s Involvement with Physical Violence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Involvement</th>
<th>No Change</th>
<th>Less</th>
<th>More</th>
<th>Do Not Know</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not Involved</td>
<td>7 (6.2)</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
<td>48 (42.5)</td>
<td>14 (12.4)</td>
<td>69 (61.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat Involved</td>
<td>3 (2.7)</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
<td>20 (17.7)</td>
<td>1 (0.9)</td>
<td>24 (21.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Involved</td>
<td>1 (0.9)</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
<td>2 (1.8)</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
<td>3 (2.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do Not Know</td>
<td>2 (1.8)</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
<td>6 (5.3)</td>
<td>9 (8.0)</td>
<td>17 (15.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total (N = 113)</strong></td>
<td>13 (11.5)</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
<td>76 (67.3)</td>
<td>24 (21.2)</td>
<td>113 (100.0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 12: School Psychologist’s Involvement with Chronic Classroom Behaviors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Involvement</th>
<th>No Change</th>
<th>Less</th>
<th>More</th>
<th>Do Not Know</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not Involved</td>
<td>5 (4.4)</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
<td>43 (38.1)</td>
<td>9 (8.0)</td>
<td>57 (50.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat Involved</td>
<td>2 (1.8)</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
<td>27 (23.9)</td>
<td>3 (2.7)</td>
<td>32 (28.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Involved</td>
<td>3 (2.7)</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
<td>5 (4.4)</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
<td>8 (7.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do Not Know</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
<td>8 (7.1)</td>
<td>8 (7.1)</td>
<td>16 (14.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total (N = 113)</strong></td>
<td>10 (18.9)</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
<td>83 (73.5)</td>
<td>20 (17.7)</td>
<td>113 (100.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Involvement</td>
<td>No Change</td>
<td>Less</td>
<td>More</td>
<td>Do Not Know</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Involved</td>
<td>5 (4.5)</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
<td>52 (46.8)</td>
<td>10 (9.0)</td>
<td>67 (60.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat Involved</td>
<td>4 (3.6)</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
<td>14 (13.5)</td>
<td>3 (2.7)</td>
<td>22 (19.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Involved</td>
<td>1 (0.9)</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
<td>4 (3.6)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>5 (4.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do Not Know</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
<td>7 (86.3)</td>
<td>10 (9.0)</td>
<td>17 (15.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (N = 112)</td>
<td>10 (9.0)</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
<td>78 (70.3)</td>
<td>23 (20.7)</td>
<td>111 (100.0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 13: School Psychologist’s Involvement with Bullying

Presented in Table 14 are teachers’ perceptions of the school psychologist’s role and function as it relates to addressing problem behavior. The current functions the school psychologist fulfills are ranked from most common to least common. Of the 65 teachers that responded 47.3% indicated the school psychologist consults with teachers, 41.9% reported they hold parent conferences, 33.3% implied they provide resources and guidance, 31.22% indicated “none of the above”, 26.9% specified they implement behavioral interventions followed by 7.5% that indicated they conduct in service trainings. A multiple response variable was calculated as teachers may have selected more than one function of the school psychologist.

Of the 105 teachers that shared the services they prefer the school psychologist to provide, 83% chose resources and guidance for students to seek outside support services followed by 77.4% that want behavioral interventions implemented. Although consulting with teachers, conducting in service trainings,
and holding parent conferences were not the most preferred role of the school psychologist, around 70% - 75% of teachers listed these as preferred functions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role of the School Psychologist</th>
<th>Current Role</th>
<th>Preferred Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consult with teachers</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>47.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hold Parent Conferences</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>41.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide resources and guidance</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implement behavioral Interventions</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>26.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduct in-service trainings with teachers</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of the Above</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>31.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 14: Current and Preferred Role of the School Psychologist

Note: N does not equal 130 as some teachers selected more than one role for the school psychologist.

Qualitative data

On part two of survey, participants had the option to select “other” as a response to the current role of the school psychologist and provide what functions they would like the school psychologist to perform. If “other” was selected, a place for an open-ended response was available. “Other” was selected by teachers to explain how they would like the school psychologist to address discipline. Sixteen respondents provided open-ended responses to describe the current role of the school psychologist. The researcher coded participants’ responses into three themes: parent and community outreach (2 responses), student focused (2 responses), and special education process (9 responses). Three
responses were excluded as they were coded to have fallen within the “none of the above” category.

| Parent Outreach and Community Involvement (2) |
| Community support |
| Hold parent education classes |

| Student Focused (2) |
| Be more available to help students |
| Observe and evaluate students in class or the setting where the child is having |

| Special Education Process (9) |
| Administer MFE evaluations to students |
| Assessment for special services |
| Assist in special education qualification |
| Attend weekly horizontal meetings |
| IAT/IEP |
| IAT Meetings |
| IEP |
| Behavioral and academic testing |
| Only test students for learning disabilities or behavioral disorders |

Table 15: Emerged Themes and Responses from Qualitative Data

**Summary**

This chapter began with an explanation of the instrument reliability and survey response rate, an overview of the data analysis procedure, a report of the demographic characteristics of the 111 teachers that participated in the study, and the description of responses as they relate to the research questions. The main focus of this study was to examine teachers’ perceptions of appropriate discipline, investigate whether or not school
discipline aligns with how teachers believe problem behaviors should be corrected, and inquire how teachers think school psychologists should be utilized. The data suggests that teachers prefer positive discipline methods over exclusionary practices and teachers’ perceptions of appropriate discipline align with school policy for truancy and physical violence. With regards to the functions of the school psychologist, a majority of teachers reported low involvement and influence levels of the school psychologist and suggested the need for more involvement to assist with problem behavior. The information obtained in this study will contribute to the minimal amount of readily available research on teachers’ perceptions of discipline.
Chapter 5: Discussion

Teacher input is an important component needed when developing school discipline policies and procedures. Consequences for student misbehavior are often predetermined by administration followed by a notification to the teacher once the consequence is in effect. There has been little research focusing on the perceptions teachers have on school discipline policies. This study intended to add to the body of literature by obtaining teachers views on discipline as it related to addressing specific problem behavior. In addition, the findings from this study may assist school districts with ascertaining whether or not to include school psychologist in the discipline decision-making process. Furthermore, these finding may aid the school district to determine the best way to utilize the school psychologist as a resource for teachers as well as students.

Summary of Procedures and Purpose

The survey instrument was created based on recommendations from previous studies that suggested the need for research that investigates teachers’ perceptions of discipline (Bibou-Nakou et. al., 2000; Osher et. al., 2010). In addition, the researcher wanted to investigate the way literature portrays educator’s views toward factors that cause students to engage in problem behaviors.

The population of the study was comprised of middle school teachers from a large urban school district in the Midwest. The teachers were invited to complete an online
questionnaire that contained rank ordered items, single response, multiple response, Likert-type scale questions, and open ended responses. Participation in the study was voluntary and participants were contacted through the district’s Listserv. Participants’ responses were anonymously collected and analyzed using SPSS, Version 20 for Mac software. Survey responses were explored using frequencies, percentages, and cross tabulations.

**Demographic Data and Patterns**

The survey instrument prompted respondents to provide specific demographic information which included, highest degree obtained, years taught at each schooling level, current grade taught, gender, and ethnicity. The majority of the respondents held a masters degree as highest degree obtained, followed by bachelors then doctorate degree. About half of the respondents taught middle school for 10 years or more and over half had taught at both elementary and high school levels. These results are not unexpected as in 2010, the Ohio Department of Education reported an average of 15 years of experience for middle school teachers. Seventh grade was the most commonly taught grade however, a majority of the respondents indicated they teach more than one grade. It is not uncommon for teachers to cross teach different grades especially at the middle and high school levels. Over three-fourths of the respondents were European American/White females. This percentage was comparable to national education statistics that report 75.8% of teachers within the U.S are White females (NCES, 2010). Due to the lower than expected response rate, chi-squares could not be calculated in an attempt to determine whether or not specific demographic variables (ethnicity, gender, highest degree
obtained) were independent of how effectively teachers rated the different discipline
types. When using chi-squares, the condition that each cell contains at minimum of 5
responses should be met (Lomax, 2007). When cross tabulations were run, several cells
held less than 5 responses. Without meeting this condition, information provided by the
chi-squares could not be properly interpreted.

**Research Questions**

The first research question provided rank ordered data indicating the most
common factors teacher perceive lead to specific problem behaviors. Teachers ranked
“Individual Factors” as the top-contributing factor for students who engage in physical
violence, chronic classroom disruptions, and bullying. As indicted in the literature,
teachers often attribute student’s misbehavior to home and student factors (Hodges-
Kulinna, 2005). Teachers proposed that student truancy was influenced mainly by the
student’s family factors. Early research conducted by Tyerman (1968) suggested that an
adverse home life increases the likelihood of non-attendance. Family factors may
contribute to the problem of truancy however; recent literature supports the notion that
school factors are the leading cause of student truancy (Reid, 2005). Based on the survey
results, incongruence lies between current literature that attributes student truancy to
school factors such as poor relationships with teachers, perceived irrelevance, low teacher
expectations, etc.) and teachers’ perceptions obtained in this survey that attribute family
factors as the most influential factor of truancy. The current survey did not investigate the
reasons for teachers selected factors, which may have provided information to further
explain the incongruence. From the results alone, it is unknown whether or not teachers
accurately have knowledge of the factors that influence problem behavior or if the responses were based on assumptions.

The second research question was answered by teacher’s indications of the most appropriate way to address problem behaviors. As expected, teachers chose positive methods (parent conferences, behavior contracts, resources and guidance) over exclusionary methods (in-school suspension, out of school suspension, expulsion) to address the majority of the unwanted behaviors (truancy, chronic classroom disruptions, and bullying). Teachers elicited exclusionary discipline methods to address physical violence. Teachers endorsed attending to bullying with positive discipline however, they included the exclusionary method of out of school suspension and expulsion as the second and third most appropriate techniques. Based on these results, it appears that teachers view exclusionary methods as the first utilized option toward addressing some behaviors although the literature reiterates that these methods do not support effective behavior modification. This may be due to teachers being in an environment in which exclusionary practices are part of the culture of the school. Thus, it has become the norm in addressing certain behavior problems.

The researcher incorrectly forecasted that a majority of teachers would shy away from endorsing exclusionary methods as appropriate when the data implied that almost half of the participating population supported the use of exclusionary discipline for physical violence. The researcher projected that less experienced teachers and teachers with higher educational degree would be more likely to endorse positive discipline methods to address all behavior problems. This was based on the assumption that these
groups would have had a greater amount of exposure to recent literature supporting the use of alternative positive methods. Due to the lower than expected response rate chi-squares could not be conducted to test the relationship between the appropriate discipline method selected and years of experience or highest degree obtained. When interpreting chi-square tests, there is an assumption that each cell contains at least five cases or responses. Based on the responses from this survey, there were several cross tabulation cells that contained less than five cases or responses therefore, conducting chi-squares would not have presented an accurate depiction of the relationships between the aforementioned variables.

The literature suggests that many seasoned teachers feel frustrated because students do not behave the way students used to many years ago (Nelson, 2008). For this reason, the researcher predicted teachers with more experience would choose to use exclusionary techniques and rate those methods as most appropriate. Again, this prediction was incorrectly demonstrated when the mean number of years taught at the middle school level was calculated based on 110 teachers that provided a response to this demographic question. The average number of years taught at the middle school level was 12 years, suggesting that a majority of the participating population were seasoned teachers that selected positive measures over negative measures to address three out of the four problems. There was congruence between teachers’ perceptions of appropriate discipline and the ways in which they perceive their schools addresses problem behaviors.
A favorable element from the results of this study is that schools are moving toward the use of positive forms of discipline over punitive measures. Parent conferences were listed as the most common way to address truancy, chronic classroom behaviors, and bullying. This positive method was followed by in-school suspension, which was mentioned in previous chapters to only function as an exclusionary punishment. With the literature that supports the ineffectiveness of exclusionary discipline, one would expect several positive measures to be exhausted before using an exclusionary measure. Behavioral contracts and behavioral interventions appeared to be utilized by about a fourth of the participants’ schools. Out of school suspension is considered a negative form of discipline; however, alignment occurred between teachers selecting this method as an appropriate consequence for physical violence and as the schools most frequent way to address problems related to physical violence. Prior to obtaining the survey results, the researcher expected the schools to implement exclusionary practices and teachers to prefer more positive methods. This hypothesis was based on a combination of information gather from the literature and the researchers experiences in the school.

When teachers’ opinions were compared to school discipline policies, the greatest congruence was present for discipline methods used to address truancy and physical violence. The most common appropriate discipline method elicited by teachers was also the most frequently distributed method in the schools for those behaviors. There was some variation between teachers’ opinions and school policy regarding the form of discipline to correct chronic classroom disruptions however, both measures stemmed from positive techniques (teachers = behavior contract, schools = parent conference).
The effectiveness level for discipline methods used in the schools varied greatly across the problem behaviors. As reported by teachers, some of the positive techniques such as parent conferences have failed to effectively address truancy, chronic classroom disruptions, and bullying. For this specific study, elaborations were not obtained from teacher’s to investigate why such methods were rated as ineffective. Although unknown, it is suspected that the ineffectiveness ratings of parent conferences may stem from the ways in which parent conferences are conducted. There is no information indicating when such parent conferences are held, or whether they are used as a prevention tactic and occur before the misbehavior, or as a measure of solely informing the parent of their student’s misbehaviors.

Teachers rated most exclusionary methods as ineffective for each of the problem behaviors with the unexpected exception of physical violence. It is opined that teachers elicited the use of out of school suspension as a means to make a safer school environment for the victims by removing the perpetrator. As mentioned in chapter three, the researcher expected to see some variations among the levels of effectiveness for positive verses negative techniques.

Research question three focused on the role of the school psychologist and used cross tabulations to categorize teachers’ perceptions. For all problem behaviors, over half of the respondents implied that the school psychologist is neither involved nor has an influential role in the school discipline process. Almost a fourth of teachers do not know the level of involvement the school psychologist has in addressing problem behavior. School psychologists are trained professionals that can contribute knowledge and
suggestions to help teachers and administration with handling school problems. In addition to the involvement questions, teachers were prompted to share how beneficial the school psychologist’s level of involvement is and if any changes should be made. Regardless of the level of involvement indicated by teachers, over half the respondents noted the need for more involvement from the school psychologist. This data allows school psychologists to gain insight of teachers’ needs, which provides them the opportunity to use those needs to determine how to be most resourceful for teachers.

The role of a school psychologist is ever changing and often varies from school to school. Teachers reported the most common role of the school psychologist to include consulting with teachers and holding parent conferences. Although these roles are beneficial to the school environment, teachers noted they would prefer school psychologists to provide resources and guidance, implement behavioral interventions, and consult with the teachers in that order. In addition, one-fourth of teachers described the current role of the school psychologist as “none of the above.” This survey failed to further investigate the role of the school psychologist when “none of the above” was selected. Fourteen teachers provided open ended responses that were coded into the following themes: parent and community outreach, student focused, and special education process. Responses that were coded and placed under “parent and community outreach” were straightforward and consisted solely on increasing parent and community involvement. The “student focused” theme consisted of any response that portrayed the need to work directly with students.
The “special education process” was the largest theme of the three. Most responses directly or indirectly related to the special education evaluation process (MFE, IEP, IAT, etc.) or referenced something about a student being evaluated for special education services. Some open ended responses appeared to represent the assumption that school psychologists only work with students categorized as having a disability or can only assist if an academic or behavior problem has risen. A review of the teachers’ comments supports the notion that teachers continue to feel that school psychologists are most beneficial for special education students.

For years, school psychologists have attempted to move away from the assumed function as the special education gatekeeper. There are many contributions school psychologists can make to the regular education population. More collaboration between teachers and school psychologists is needed regarding regular education issues to help enlighten teachers on the many roles school psychologists can fulfill. Not only would such collaboration allow teachers to observe and learn skills the school psychologists has to offer, but will also aid in reducing some of the problem behaviors they have with regular education students. It may take time for such collaboration to occur however; it is believed that once teachers can benefit from the school psychologists’ assistance, future collaboration will likely be initiated.

Limitations of the Study

The researcher of this study acknowledges several limitations that specifically relate to the external and internal validity of this study. As mentioned in chapter one, this study used a nonrandom convenience sample to access the population used, therefore the
results would have only been generalizable to the urban school district. Due to the low response rate, generalizations can only be made to reference the group of teachers that actually participated in the study. Caution should be used when making any generalizations based on the research findings due to: the use of the nonrandom convenience sample which limited the study to middle school teachers within one urban school district; the survey was emailed to teachers through a district Listserv that the researcher did not have access to; and all data was collected within a two week time period. The researcher may have obtained additional responses if the survey window would have remained open longer. However, the data showed, the longer respondents waited to complete the survey the less likely they were to complete it. Reminder emails were sent at noon every three days; on the days the reminders were sent, the response rate increased by 45% and had declined to 10% by the morning of the third day. For this specific study, the researcher may have received a lower response rate if the survey completion window would have been stretched for a longer period. The low response rate may also been due to the timing in which the survey was distributed to teachers. The survey was distributed during the final two weeks of the school year.

The lack of respondents to the questionnaire was a major limitation that extremely reduced the sample size and possible variations in responses that could have been discovered. The low response rate limited the ability to use chi-square tests of independence to further analyze the data. Although there was room for open-ended responses, additional space for participants to elaborate on non open-ended questions, make comments, or provide feedback was not provided. Additionally, this survey was a
self-reporting measure that prevented the researcher from knowing whether or not
responses reflected the true opinions of the participating teachers.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The following recommendations for further research can be made based on the
findings from this research study: This survey was limited to middle school teachers
within one urban school district. Perhaps increasing the sample to include individuals
from both primary grades and high school could provide a greater collection of
information. In addition, extending the sample to multiple school districts across different
demographics to include rural and suburban may also provide supplementary information
that was not collected with one type of school district. The survey used the top four most
common behavior problems as indicated in the literature however, theses problems may
not be applicable in all schools especially if future studies extend to primary schooling
where truancy problems are not as common. A similar study that allows teacher to choose
the most common problem behaviors for their school may provide a more accurate
account for how discipline is addressed.

Further investigation into the low response rate of this study may provide
additional insight for future researchers to make necessary changes to increase future
response rates. Obtaining an accurate list of active emails and possible contact with
participants prior to the start of the study may provide the researcher with a better
estimate of the response rate. As this study provided information on how teachers
perceived the role of school psychologists, a future study may examine school
psychologists’ perceptions of how they are utilized by school staff. This study could be
conducted to test congruence between the views of educators and the school psy- 
chologist. This type of study may supply reasons that determine whether or not school psy- 
chologists engage in the process of addressing discipline problems. Such a study should be conducted across school districts with different demographics to examine whether or not the role of the school psychologist is influenced by demographic differences.

A parallel study should be conducted to investigate the perceptions of school administrators and the school psychologist as they relate to discipline. This would allow a researcher to discover if differences exist between teacher and administrator perceptions of discipline. Participation in the current study was completely voluntary; participants could withdrawal from the study at any time and were not given an allotted time period to complete the survey. There were several surveys that were started but not completed in totality. Perhaps future studies could offer better incentives to respondents to enhance the rate of participation and survey completion. Additionally, giving participants a maximum amount of time to complete the survey within may aid in reducing the number of participants that began the survey with intentions to finish but never return to complete the remainder of the survey.

The existence of charter schools has risen drastically over the past decade. It would be interesting to obtain the perceptions of charter school teachers as they relate to discipline and the role of the school psychologists compared to the perceptions of teachers in public schools. While the instrument used in the current study provided a good amount of information, additional opportunities for open-ended responses or space
for responses elaboration may have granted more detailed information regarding teachers’ perceptions. Assuming a higher response rate for future studies, it would be interesting to further analyze the data with chi-squares to examine whether or not any of the perceptions were influenced by demographic variables. Future studies may want to further disaggregate collected demographic data to compare teacher perceptions as they relate to the effectiveness level of distributed discipline for behavior problems.

**Implications for Practice**

This study has implications for school administrators, teachers, and school psychologists. Teachers’ perceptions of discipline policies provide a general idea of the improvement school districts have made in adopting positive discipline strategies. In addition, teacher perceptions toward the role of the school psychologist may supply information that transparently exists. Furthermore, these results may change the system in which school districts make the most of the knowledge and skills school psychologists’ hold.

Too often educators attempt to look toward outside factors for the cause of problem behavior. School factors do not always reference the teacher, and may consist of an array of additional factors within the school and home environment. In order to lesson the problem behaviors, teachers must become advocates for students and investigate the main reasons for the problems. It is important that teachers do not assume causes for problem behaviors but rather investigate the cause and work with the student in an attempt to mend the problem. If individual factors are truly the main cause for most behavior problems as indicated by the teachers, schools should consider those factors
when determining the best way to address school problems. Every student has different factors that may cause them to misbehave; therefore, discipline should be personalized and structured to correct the problem without installing punitive measures.

As an additional way to evaluate the effectiveness of employed discipline methods, as shown from the results in this study, administration should consider teachers perceptions of distributed discipline. It does not seem practical to implement discipline methods that do not work to alleviate the problem. Teachers’ perceptions can provide insight on how effectively the discipline method aids in reducing the problem behavior within the school environment. These perceptions should be taken into account when discipline polices are developed. Regardless of the type of discipline strategy, teachers are more opt to support discipline polices that are deemed effective in reducing the problem behavior.

Although teachers prefer positive approaches for each of the problem behaviors excluding physical violence, it becomes impractical for teachers to use exclusionary methods before exploring the cause of the problem. Teacher proposed student factors to be the cause of physical violence; if such information is true, positive methods should be attempted when trying to correct those factors before implementing punitive measures. Teachers should consider combining more than one method to achieve positive results. To address a physically violent student, a behavioral contract or intervention should be implemented in addition to outside support services being sought for the student. Only after all positive methods have been employed and assessed for effectiveness should an exclusionary method be used as a final result.
Based on the information obtained from teachers in this study; school psychologists’ expertise as it relates to discipline is needed by teachers. School psychologists fulfill several roles and functions within the school buildings they work in. Choosing not to utilize school psychologists effectively can deprive students from learning strategies for success. Administration should determine the needs of teachers as they relate to aspects the school psychologist can assist with, work with the school psychologist toward addressing those needs, and encourage collaboration between teachers and the school psychologist to diminish problems that occur throughout the school year.

Denoting the need for more involvement from school psychologists provides enlightening information. It becomes the responsibility of the school psychologist to make attempts to collaborate more with teachers and become more involved in school discipline polices. Valuable information school psychologists can supply to school staff regarding evidence based discipline methods may influence teachers to use more effective measures when addressing problems.
References


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111


112


Appendix A - Sample Recruitment Email to Teachers

Subject Line: Research Project, Teachers’ Perceptions of Discipline

Attention Middle School Teachers:

The topic of discipline can be controversial topic and can lead to many challenges for educators when it comes to implementing the most appropriate and effective discipline techniques. Currently there is limited data that reviews teachers’ perceptions of discipline techniques used in schools.

You are invited to participate in a research study to obtain middle school teachers’ perceptions of discipline. Anitra Wheeler is conducting this study under the direction of Dr. Antoinette Miranda, at the Ohio State University. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a middle school teacher currently teaching in the Columbus City School district.

If you choose to participate in the study, you will be asked to complete a 5-10-minute online survey regarding your perceptions of discipline. You can access the survey at the link below.

https://eheosu.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_9HOyEyNH26zASF&Preview=Survey&BrandID=eheosu

Although you have been contacted through the Columbus City School email database system, the survey link will direct you to a separate web page to complete the survey. The
privacy of your responses will be protected as your survey responses are anonymously submitted to the researchers survey account. All information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential.

Clicking the survey link above will serve as your consent to participate in the survey, however if you change your mind about participating, you can withdraw from the survey at anytime. Your participation is completely voluntary. If you choose to withdraw, simply exit out of the survey web page. Your responses will only be attainable to the researcher if you hit the submit button at the end of the survey. Once you have submitted the survey, your responses are unable to be withdrawn; since the survey is anonymous the research would have no way to identify your responses.

If you have any questions about this survey, please contact Anitra Wheeler at wheeler.735@osu.edu. You may print a copy of this email for your records.

For questions about your rights as a participant in this study or to discuss other study-related concerns or complaints with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact Ms. Sandra Meadows in the Office of Responsible Research Practices at 1-800-678-6251.
Appendix B - Survey

Thank you for choosing to participate in this study. Your opinions are needed and will be a beneficial factor toward assisting educators with developing the most appropriate discipline policies.

The survey will begin on the next page and should take 20 minutes to complete.

Instructions for the Survey:

Please feel free to skip any questions you do not wish to answer

Section I – You will be asked to rank order the main causes of each of the problem behaviors (truancy, physical aggression, chronic classroom disruptions, and bullying.

Section II- You will be asked to indicate the most appropriate form of discipline to address each of the aforementioned problem behaviors. You will also be asked to indicate how your school addresses each of the problem behaviors and rate how effectively the methods address the problem behaviors.

Section III – You will be asked to indicate your School Psychologists level of involvement and influence on the schools discipline policy. You will also be asked to specify the role of the School Psychologist in your school and indicate ways they can help you address problem behaviors.