

**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCHOOL CLIMATE AND OUT OF SCHOOL
SUSPENSION**

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Abstract

The purpose of this mixed qualitative and quantitative study was to examine the relationship between the number of out of school suspensions and teacher perceptions of school climate. A second purpose was to examine the effect free-reduced lunch percentage had on the relationship between climate and out of school suspensions. The study was conducted in a school district in a suburb of a major mid-western city in the United States. Included were 3906 students in ten elementary schools employing 311 teachers. The relationship between out of school suspensions and school climate during the 2009-10 school year was investigated in the quantitative portion of the study. A correlational method was employed to determine the extent of a relationship between these variables. For the qualitative part of the study, a comparative method was utilized. Principal expertise was elicited through interviews to provide further insight into any relationship. The data from the quantitative and qualitative methodology were combined to fully describe the relationship of out of school suspension rate and staff climate. The data showed a statistically significant negative linear relationship between out of school suspension (OSS) incidents and climate as measured by survey item six, "My principal takes adequate disciplinary measures to deal with disruptive behavior." Additional findings demonstrated the socio-economic status of the school population has no effect on the relationship between out of school suspension and school climate.

Dedication

My father began teaching me at an early age there is no task or accomplishment too great; that nothing is out of reach. Posted above his desk was a variation of Napoleon Hill's quote, "Whatever the mind can conceive and believe, it can achieve." As I read this quote repeatedly in childhood and in my transition to manhood, it helped me label what my father was doing in his life. My father has always persevered and continued to pursue his dreams. This study is dedicated to him because of his example and inspiration.

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Chapter One

Introduction and Rationale

Educators across the nation strive to create schools in which students feel safe, have a sense of belonging, and ultimately are learning (Flanagain, 2007). To promote positive climate, schools carry on traditions to provide important rites of passage and character education is a multi-million dollar industry (Hudd, 2004). Educators know a positive school climate is paramount to successful schools and the research clearly reveals the effects of school climate on student achievement. School climate “reflects the physical and psychological aspects of the school that provide the preconditions necessary for teaching and learning to take place” (Tableman, 2004). School climate is affected by many factors including discipline policy and school violence.

Increased incidence of school violence have received widespread television coverage and had a major impact on the laws and policies that govern schools. On April 20, 1999, Eric Harris and Dylan Kleboid entered Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado and killed 12 students and a teacher, injured 23 others and killed themselves (Toppo, 2009). While this wasn't the first incident of school violence in the United States, this event was the worst. A year earlier on March 24, 1998, two boys, ages 11 and 13 shot at classmates and teachers, killing four girls and a teacher in Jonesboro, Arkansas. After Columbine, shooting continued with at least one incident each year from 1999 – 2008 except for 2004. One of the worst incidents occurred on March 5, 2001, when a 15-year-old student killed two and wounded 13 in Santee, California (Timeline of School Shootings, 2008). During this time of increased awareness of school violence, legislators attempted to create policies that ensure schools have the safe and orderly environment necessary for high student achievement. School districts, in an attempt to address

increasing concern with discipline and bullying adopted increasingly stringent policies to address student behavior (Raffaele Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Krezmien & Achilles, 2006; Howarth, 2008) and the rate of out of school suspensions in the United States increased from 3.7% in 1974 to 6.8% in 1998. (Schiraldi & Ziedenberg, 2001; Christle, 2003)

Punitive discipline policies began even before the increase in the number of school shootings and the public outcry from the violence. In the 1990s, zero tolerance policies became common in school districts. Zero tolerance became a federal policy under the Gun Free Schools Act in 1994 and is defined by the U.S. Department of Education as “school or district policy that mandates predetermined consequences or punishments for specific offenses” (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). State legislatures passed laws, such as Missouri’s Safe Schools Act of 1996, which further tightened the discipline structure and defined consequences for students who violate these policies. More recently, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2001, also known as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) has also emphasized safer schools. Because of this legislation, schools use out of school suspension as a consequence for major misbehavior and have increasingly used out of school suspension to deal with more minor acts as well (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2003). For the purpose of this study, out of school suspension is defined as the practice of removing disorderly students from the school environment (Losen & Skiba, 2010). Despite the increased use, the body of research has revealed out of school suspensions are not widely effective in changing student behavior (Costenbader & Markson, 1998; Dupper & Bosch, 1996; Imich, 1994; Kajs, 2006; Kern and Manz, 2004; Lane & Beebe-Frankenberger, 2004; Raffaele Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Skiba & Peterson, 2000; Skiba and Sprague, 2008; Christle, Nelson, & Jolivette, 2004).

Problem Statement

Public schools have long been scrutinized in the United States for a variety of reasons. At their inception, schools were judged on how well they promoted the separation of economic classes of people (Stornello, 1998). Later, as advocates such as Thomas Jefferson fought to change the purpose of schools, scrutiny changed to examine how well public schools created an informed electorate (Stornello, 1998). Schools' efficiency and ability to sort students into tracks of education in which they are prepared for work from menial labor to professions has also been questioned and examined (Cubberly, 1929). More recently, public schools in the United States have been compared with other nations' school systems and how those systems prepare students for careers through studies like *Trends in Mathematics and Science Study* (1995) and reports like *A Nation at Risk* (1983).

Safe school environments have been an area of focus for news media, legislators, and the public over the past 20 years. Increasingly stringent and strict policies have been developed to define consequences for students who break the policies. Out of school suspension has increasingly been utilized as the consequence for major and minor behavior problems (Skiba, Peterson, and Williams, 1997; Skiba & Peterson, 2000; American Academy of Pediatrics, 2003) despite a lack of support in the research previously noted that out of school suspension is an effective practice in changing behavior. Students with behavior problems are repeatedly being excluded from an opportunity to learn and problem behaviors are continuing inside schools (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2003; Tobin, Sugai, & Colvin 1996). Excluded students feel less a part of the school community and view school in an unfavorable manner (Dunbar and Villarruel, 2004). Excluded students with an unfavorable view of schools contribute to a negative school climate (Opportunities Suspended, 2000). It may be logical to conclude the use

of out of school suspension has a relationship with school climate. However, the research on the relationship between the use of out of school suspension and school climate is inconclusive. The research does not clearly describe how the two areas relate.

Background of the Study

The school district in this study is located in a major metropolitan area in the mid-western United States. There are a total of ten elementary schools in the district. The district boundaries include parts of the major city and two suburbs. During the 2009-10 school year, the district served 8,622 students in grades K-12, 3906 of whom were K-5 elementary school students.

Table 1

Students Enrolled at Each Grade Level (K – 5)

Grade Level	Frequency	Percent
K	580	14.85%
1	656	16.79%
2	666	17.05%
3	657	16.83%
4	668	17.10%
5	679	17.38%
K-5	3906	100.00%

Note: Demographic enrollment data are from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE, 2009)

Over half of the students in the district are eligible for free and reduced lunch (DESE). As presented in table 2, the two largest ethnicities represented in the district are white (45.4%) and black (45.0%). Students of Hispanic, Asian, and Indian ethnicities also attend the district.

Table 2

District Student Ethnic Composition

Ethnicity	Frequency	Percent
Asian	168	1.9%
Black	3880	45.0%
Hispanic	625	7.3%
Indian	32	0.4%
White	3912	45.4%

Note: Demographic enrollment data are from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE, 2009)

There were 311 elementary instructional staff members in 2009-10. All teachers were fully licensed and considered highly qualified by the state in which the school district is located. The average teacher salary in the district was \$48,108, teachers averaged 10.9 years experience. 57% of teachers held a masters degree or higher (*Note:* Faculty Demographics are from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2009).

All of the elementary schools in the school district utilized the Behavior Intervention and Support Team (BIST) model of discipline management. The BIST Parent Brochure (2010) defines BIST as a non-punitive, teaching model that balances the delivery of grace and accountability when helping students learn three skills for life.

1. I can have an overwhelming feeling and be okay.
2. I can be okay when others are not okay.
3. I can follow the rules or directions even when I don't want to (or have a really good reason not to).

BIST defines grace as acceptance of students and their problems, pain and needs. Accountability is defined as “guiding students to look at what problems the behaviors create in the student’s life” (p. 2). The model includes the use of a common philosophy, language, and a structure of placement for students who are acting out (Behavior Intervention Support Team, n.d.). The system has been in place in the district for fifteen years.

The school district in this study has utilized a building climate survey since 1997-98 to inform administrators about school climate in all elementary schools. Initially, the survey was informal and the questions were different at each building. A small group of teachers or the leadership team at each building generated a list of questions specific to the building. After principal approval, the survey was administered and the results given to the principal. Beginning in the 2003-04 school year, the building climate survey began to be administered by the district office to gather consistent data from buildings and to mitigate personal attacks. The Directors of Elementary Education and Personnel reviewed a climate survey from four other school districts (Columbia, MO, North Kansas City, Independence, one other unnamed district) and after reviewing the questions, selected the ones the directors determined were most informative. The survey was typed and distributed as a paper copy. Teacher responses were hand written and returned to principals. Concerns were raised by teachers regarding principals being able to recognize the handwriting of respondents on the surveys. To answer this concern, surveys were given to a building teacher representative and delivered to the Director of Elementary Education to tabulate the results.

During the 2006-07 school year, the survey was revised by an administrative group, and questions were changed. The administrative group based some of the decisions to include or eliminate survey items based on Rick DuFour’s work. Additionally, the district began

administering the survey electronically using a web based survey program. (V. Santone, personal communication, January 18, 2011)

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this mixed methods quantitative and qualitative study was to examine the relationship between the number of out of school suspensions and the school climate in the ten elementary schools that comprise a suburban public school district. A second purpose was to examine the effect of free-reduced lunch percentage had on the relationship between climate and out of school suspensions at the schools in the study.

Research Question

Research questions guide the study and help organize the manner in which results are presented (Roberts, 2004). This study focused the following research questions.

1. Is there a relationship between the number of out of school suspensions and teacher perceptions of school climate?
2. Does the socio-economic status of the school population affect the relationship between the number of suspensions and teacher perceptions of school climate?

Significance of the Study

The literature previously noted has revealed the ineffectiveness of out of school suspension as a means for helping students with discipline problems. Studies have also examined the personal characteristics of students and the behaviors that result in out of school suspension (Costenbader & Markson, 1998; Dupper & Bosch, 1996; Imich, 1994; Skiba & Peterson, 2000). Other studies described other factors and how they relate to out of school suspension. Christle, for example, examined the relationship between school characteristics and suspension rates in her 2003 study. She included characteristics such as enrollment, gender

breakdown, socioeconomic background, ethnicity, attendance, achievement and found the characteristics to be “differentially related to suspension rate” (p. 71).

School climate is also a widely studied topic in educational literature (Bowman, 1975; Case, 2010; Deal & Peterson, 1998; Dunn & Harris, 1998; Schlaffer, 2010). Studies link school climate to student achievement (Dunn & Harris, 1998; Sutherland, 1994; Schlaffer, 2006, NSCC, 2010). Esposito (1999) reports school climate is a predictor of academic achievement as early as first and second grade. Additionally, Esposito’s research said students’ adjustment to school, social skill development, and test scores in reading and math are related to school climate factors. Bowman (1975) determined a relationship between achievement and workplace conditions and found that where a positive climate is present, students encounter positive learning opportunities. Other research has confirmed this supposition and determined climate to be the most reliable factor in predicting a school’s effectiveness (Gentile, 1997). Despite the literature on both out of school suspensions and school climate, the relationship between the two has not been widely investigated. The outcome of this study may contribute to practices in use and provide information for educators to consider when setting discipline policies and in daily practice regarding climate. The study may also contribute to the existing literature on out of school suspension and climate.

Delimitations

Delimitations are used by the researcher to narrow the scope of the study (Roberts, 2004).

This study was delimited by the following:

1. The study was conducted during the 2009-10 school year.

2. Students and staff members of ten elementary schools were included in the study. The study did not include middle and high school populations; therefore the findings may not apply to these levels.
3. One suburban, public district in the Kansas City, Missouri area was the setting for the study. Generalizing the findings to school districts with dissimilar characteristics may be difficult.

Assumptions

Assumptions are those factors the researcher has concluded to be true (Roberts, 2004).

This study included the following assumptions.

1. The participants answered the school district climate survey questions openly and honestly.
2. The principals who were interviewed for the study responded to questions openly and honestly.
3. Out of school suspension data in the student information system of the district was recorded accurately.

Definition of Terms

Behavior Intervention Support Team (BIST) – a proactive, non-punitive approach to discipline which utilizes four components to accomplish the mission to “help teachers, administrators, parents and students learn techniques to effect positive change and create a healthy learning environment for all.” (Resource Development Institute, 2010).

First Tier Suburb – The National League of Cities (2010) defines first tier suburbs as “municipalities located outside of central cities and inside the ring of developing suburbs and

rural areas” (p. 1). The school district in this study is located adjacent to the city of Kansas City, Missouri and inside the developing ring of suburbs and rural areas adjacent to the suburb.

In-School Suspension – “Instances in which a child is temporarily removed from his/her regular classroom(s) for disciplinary purposes but remains under the direct supervision of school personnel. Direct supervision means school personnel are physically in the same location as students under their supervision” (Maine.gov, n.d.).

Non-Punitive Discipline – “an approach for disciplining children that does not use any form of punishment, be it physical or non-physical” (Parenting Without Punishment, n.d.).

Out of School Suspension – The practice of removing disorderly students from the school environment (Losen and Skiba, 2010).

Punishment – Punishment is a primary act in punitive discipline to deter unwanted behaviors. In *Discipline with Dignity*, the authors describe punishments as something “done to others. The goal is to achieve the proper amount of misery so the behavior will not reoccur” (Curwin, Mendler, & Mendler, 2008, p. 83).

School Climate – “reflects the physical and psychological aspects of the school that provide the preconditions necessary for teaching and learning to take place” (Tableman, 2004, p. 1).

Socio-economic status – “A measure of an individual or family's relative economic and social ranking.” (U.S. Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences, 2010)

Zero Tolerance – School or district policy that mandates predetermined consequences or punishments for specific offenses” (U.S. Department of Education, 2001).

Overview of Methods

A mixed-method inquiry was utilized to explore and explain the relationship between out of school suspension and school climate as well as the effect of socio-economic status on that relationship. A complementarity (Creswell & Clark, 2008) design was utilized to more fully describe and enhance the results between qualitative and quantitative results. The quantitative portion of the study used a correlation method to describe the relationship between out of school suspensions and climate during the 2009-10 school year. The entire instructional staff (n= 311) at each of ten elementary schools in the selected school district were invited to complete a survey administered by the district to evaluate climate. The out of school suspension data was gathered from the school district's student information system. In the qualitative portion of the study, four principals from the school district were selected to participate in the interviews. A semi-standardized interview was employed to explore principal perceptions of climate, out of school suspension, and their relationship.

Organization of the Study

This study includes five chapters, a bibliography, and appendixes. Chapter two includes a summary of the literature on discipline legislation and policies, suspension, approaches to discipline, and school climate. In chapter three, the methodology of the study is explained. Instrumentation, data gathering procedures, and statistical analysis are described. Chapter four includes a report of the results of the data analysis. Chapter five contains a summary of the findings and recommendations for future study.

Chapter Two

Review of Literature

The review of literature for this study includes information on the increase in school violence in the United States. The review examines legislation that has affected discipline policy. The review of literature includes information regarding the use and effects of out of school suspension. Research studies that describe school climate were examined and included in the review. Connections between the use of out of school suspension and affects on school climate were reviewed.

School Violence: “We don’t need another Columbine!”

The Columbine High School massacre in Littleton, Colorado in which 12 students and a teacher were killed and 23 others were injured (Toppo, 2009) was a highly publicized and covered event. Years since the tragedy, the devastating event continues to receive attention and serve as a reference point and metaphor as educators and parents describe school climate and bullying. The situation has been exacerbated by print and video media, news coverage, and the full length feature movie by Michael Moore, *Bowling for Columbine*. A common phrase heard when discussing the topic of bullying and its relationship to school violence is, “We don’t want another Columbine.”

The Columbine massacre in 1999 was not the first incident of school violence in the United States; however the incident was the worst of its kind, and received a lot of public attention. A year earlier on March 24, 1998, two boys, 11 and 13 shot at classmates and teachers, killing four girls and a teacher in Jonesboro, Arkansas. More incidents of school violence occurred with at least one incident each year from 1999-2008 except for 2004. Another

school massacre that was one of the worst occurred on March 5, 2001, when a 15-year-old student killed two and wounded 13 in Santee, California (U.S. News and World Report, 2008).

Public reaction to these shootings was understandably strong and as investigations deepened, reports indicated many of the perpetrators of the shootings were victims of bullying, threats and intimidation in their schools over a period of years. During this time of increased awareness of school violence, legislators attempted to create policies that ensure schools have the safe and orderly environment necessary for high student achievement.

Discipline Policy

Discipline policies in schools have grown increasingly more punitive due to legislation enacted in the United States. Russell Skiba described the climate of the country in the *Washington Post* on January 14, 2000, “The pervasive fear created by a string of tragic school shootings has left both schools and society more receptive than ever to tough talk. Zero tolerance has gained wide popularity for its promise of a no-nonsense solution to a difficult problem.” Zero tolerance policies had become in vogue stemming from drug enforcement in the 1980s during the war on drugs. “Zero Tolerance” was the policy used by drug enforcement officials when harsh consequences were given to individuals who possessed even small amounts of illegal drugs (Christle, 2003). Facing the difficult situation of publicized school violence and a public outcry to address the safety of school children, zero tolerance policies gained momentum in the realm of education (Skiba & Sprague, 2008).

Zero tolerance policies began to become more prevalent in education in the early 1990s and have become a part of many federal and state mandates guiding school discipline policies. The U.S. Department of Education defines zero tolerance as “school or district policy that mandates predetermined consequences or punishments for specific offenses” (U.S. Department

of Education, 2001). While the policies are intended to ensure the safe and orderly environment necessary for an effective school, zero tolerance has been widely criticized for disproportionate consequences and is one of the most significant causes to the increase of suspensions (Opportunities Suspended; McCord, Widom, Bamba, & Crowell, 2000; Mellard & Seybert, 1996; Christle 2003; Raffaele Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Shepard, 2009).

In 1994, the Federal Gun-Free Schools Act, 20 U.S.C. §8921 was enacted in Congress, calling for a one-year expulsion of students carrying firearms on school property. Schools that failed to enforce this policy were faced with the loss of federal funding (Opportunities Suspended, 2000). This policy, along with those that followed, allowed administrators little leeway to use judgment or consider mitigating circumstances when determining discipline consequences. These restrictions and limitations on judgment led to severe consequences for students who failed to meet the standards and an increase in the use of out of school suspension. Part of the Federal Gun-Free Schools Act, 20 U.S.C. §8921 required states to pass legislation to accompany the federal law (U.S. Department of Education, 1994) increasing the prevalence of zero tolerance policies. Correspondingly, school suspensions for student behavior also increased (Skiba & Knesting, 2001). Suspensions in Maryland increased 58.7% from 1995 to 2003 (Krezmien, Leone, and Achilles, 2006). This trend was due to the increase in the scope of what was considered under the zero tolerance policies. Suspensions increased as states and districts adopted policies of zero tolerance for minor infractions such as disobedience, disrespect, and general classroom disruption (Skiba & Peterson, 2000; American Academy of Pediatrics, 2003). In one study, office referrals and suspensions in middle schools were examined and the study determined minor behaviors such as insubordination and noncompliance were more frequently

referred than more serious behaviors like weapons possession, drugs, and alcohol (Skiba, Peterson, and Williams, 1997).

In Missouri, the state legislature passed the Missouri Safe Schools Act 1996. The Safe Schools Act addressed the gun-free portion of the Gun-Free Schools Act as well as provided for other facets of school safety. The Safe Schools Act defined penalties for possession of controlled substances near schools, marketing or possession of ephedrine, assault on school property, institutional vandalism, and false bomb reports amongst others. (DESE, 1996) Thusly, Missouri and other state legislatures increased the scope of Gun-Free Schools Act and broadened zero tolerance policies and how they affected school practice when addressing student discipline.

In 2001, Congress reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, more commonly known as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). NCLB required states to report on school safety to the public. Schools were also encouraged by NCLB to work closely with law enforcement and the community to keep the learning environment safe by enforcing truancy, suspension and expulsion policies and criminal laws. NCLB called for violence prevention programs and designated specified principles of effectiveness and be grounded in scientifically based research that provides evidence that programs will reduce violence and illegal drug use. Under NCLB, states must report school safety statistics to the public on a school by school basis, and districts must use federal school-safety funding to establish a plan for keeping schools safe and drug free. These plans must include:

- a. appropriate and effective discipline policies
- b. security procedures
- c. prevention activities
- d. student codes of conduct

- e. a crisis management plan for responding to violent or traumatic incidents on school grounds

Additionally, NCLB provided a means for students to leave persistently dangerous schools. NCLB required schools to implement a statewide policy giving students the choice to attend a safe public school within the district if he or she attends a persistently dangerous public elementary or secondary school or becomes a victim of a violent crime while in or on the grounds of a public school the student attends.

Out of School Suspension: Use and Effects

While legislatures across the United States grappled with a public perception of increased school violence, schools were not immune to the pressure to implement more stringent policies to address student behavior. (Raffaele Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Krezmien, Leone & Achilles, 2006; Howarth, 2008). “Concern over school crime and violence has prompted many public schools to take various measures to reduce and prevent violence and ensure safety in schools. Such measures include adopting zero tolerance policies; requiring students to wear uniforms; employing various security measures such as requiring visitor sign-in and using metal detectors; having police or other law enforcement representatives stationed at the school...” (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). These increasingly stringent policies, coupled with public pressure, and less leeway to utilize judgment saw out of school suspensions rise dramatically. In 1973, on average, 3.7 percent of all students were suspended at least one time. By 2006, that number had risen to 6.9 percent (Losen & Skiba, 2010).

Out of school suspension as a discipline measure has some support among researchers. Some supporters of the use of out of school suspension state the practice defuses emotional response (Arica, 2007). Other supporters contend out of school suspension effectively limits the

recurrence of misbehavior immediately following the out of school suspension as well as acts as a deterrent to other students. (McCord, Widom, Bamba, & Crowell, 2000; Mellard & Seybert, 1996) In effect, out of school suspension is a short term solution to some students and serves as an example to others, setting the limit on what is and is not tolerated in the school environment. The removal of misbehaving students would then have a positive effect on the school environment as their removal provides an environment in which students that are meeting behavior standards are able to learn without distraction (Ewing, 2000). Out of school suspensions can also provide schools the time needed to identify resources, create behavior plans, and partner with parents of the suspended student (Shepard 2009). Effective planning could result in prevention of future out of school suspension incidents.

While supporters' arguments tend to have an appealing logic, others in the field of education have found no evidence of the effectiveness of out of school suspension in improving school climate and decreasing recidivism of student misbehavior. "...despite nearly two decades of implementation of zero tolerance disciplinary policies and their application to mundane and non-violent misbehavior, there is no evidence that frequent reliance on removing misbehaving students improves school safety or student behavior" (American Psychological Association, 2008).

The record shows that the number of students repeatedly suspended has increased. The findings show out of school suspension do not meet the goal of decreasing or modifying student misbehavior (Costenbader & Markson, 1998; Dupper & Bosch, 1996; Imich, 1994; Kajs, 2006; Kern and Manz, 2004; Lane & Beebe-Frankenberger, 2004; Raffaele Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Skiba & Peterson, 2000; Skiba and Sprague, 2008) and out of school suspension may actually "accelerate youths' progress along a pathway to delinquency" (Christle, Nelson, and Jolivette, p.

510). In addition to failing to prevent recurrence of misbehavior by suspending students, “the available data suggest that, if anything, disciplinary removal appears to have *negative* effects on student outcomes and the learning climate (APA, 2008).” Tobin, Sugai, & Colvin (1998) concluded out of school suspensions may actually reinforce negative behavior rather than be a punishment for inappropriate behavior. (Atkins, et al., 2002) found discipline referrals increased for students who received out of school suspensions and detentions and therefore were ineffective. Atkins and his colleagues (2002) reported that the removal of students from class by these measures may have been a reward for both students and teachers. “One organization, Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, a non-profit organization of 5,000 police chiefs, sheriffs, prosecutors and other law enforcement leaders recently stated (FightCrime.org, n.d.), ‘While school safety must be maintained and truly dangerous students removed from the school community as appropriate, suspension and expulsion often provide troubled kids exactly what they do not need: an extended, unsupervised hiatus from school that increases their risk of engaging in substance abuse and violent crime’” (Losen & Skiba, 2010). Instead of creating safe schools, suspension and zero tolerance policies are excluding children from education (Siegel and Tracy, 2008).

One explanation for the recidivist nature of student misbehavior may stem from the very nature of the zero tolerance policies that have required out of school suspension. Zero tolerance policies, while explicitly stating the consequence for actions, without regard for any other circumstance, do not require any re-teaching, counseling, or other instructive support in improving behavior. Children require trusting adult relationships with adults to learn (Opportunities Suspended, 2000). Students who are suspended and excluded from the school environment are prevented from the opportunity to develop such relationships which interferes with healthy psychological and sociological development (Dunbar and Villarruel, 2004). The

harsh and punitive nature of out of school suspension relies on the consequence being painful enough for the student to make a change in behavior. When learning and life circumstances are more painful to misbehaving students, no amount of suspension could be painful enough to affect a change (Curwin, Mendler, & Mendler, 2008). Instead, the unjust practice of suspension breeds “distrust in students toward adults, and nurture an adversarial, confrontational attitude” (Opportunities Suspended, 2000).

In addition to students being suspended multiple times and an adversarial attitude toward adults, and perhaps because of those factors, students who have been suspended suffer academically (Opportunities Suspended, 2000) and many students drop out of school (Shepard, 2009). The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP, 2003) notes “The suspension process may have created more problems for school districts” as students who are suspended are missing class and instructional time. Absence from class may cause low test scores (Shepard, 2009). Often, students missing classes due to out of school suspension are those who are at-risk academically and need additional instructional support (Yell, 2006). Alternatives to out of school suspension are important if schools are going to help students achieve at the necessary levels (Elliot, 2009; Klump, 2006; Shepard, 2009).

Ultimately, the purpose of public schools in the United States is to ensure a democratic citizenry capable of intelligently participating in governing our country. Zero tolerance policies and the use of out of school suspension are counterproductive to this goal. Out of school suspension has been found to be a predictor of school dropout (Balfanz, Spiridakis, Neild, & Letgers, 2003) and many children are entering the criminal justice system as schools rely on others to punish students. In the findings of the Harvard Civil Rights Project, *Opportunities Suspended: The Devastating Consequences of Zero Tolerance and School Discipline Policies*,

the authors write boldly about the negative impact of out of school suspension and zero tolerance policies. “As a result of Zero Tolerance Policies, children are being increasingly subjected to criminal or juvenile delinquency charges. Actions that were once considered non-violent, childhood pranks have resulted in five young men being charged with felony assault for throwing peanuts, two ten-year-old boys facing felony charges for putting soap in a teacher’s water, and an eleven-year-old girl being arrested and dragged away in a police car for bringing a plastic knife to school in her lunch box to cut her chicken” (Opportunities Suspended, 2000 p. vii). Zero tolerance policies and out of school suspension were never intended to affect schools in these ways; however, now the policies are in place, the negative impact is readily apparent.

Punitive Alternatives to Out of School Suspension

With the overwhelming research demonstrating the negative impact of out of school suspension and the ineffectiveness of out of school suspension in changing undesired behaviors, schools sought alternative approaches to address the suspension problem (Peterson, 2009). Case (2007) conducted a study to understand the relationship between school climate and the social, behavioral, and intellectual outcomes of 5th grade students. In the study, Case noted actions to maintain order did more to alleviate public anxiety than to decrease unwanted behaviors. Case cited six ineffective punitive approaches to discipline, “(1) scare tactics, (2) adding prevention programming to an already besieged school (3) the isolation of misbehaving students, (4) creating overly simplistic approaches that go unsupported by the school climate, (5) a program focused solely on the enhancement of student self esteem, and (6) a program which merely provides information without including opportunities for practice or actionable next steps” (Case, 2007 p. 17). The American Academy of Pediatrics (2003) notes other alternatives to out of school suspension such as parent phone calls, detentions, community service, and Saturday

school. However, the punitive nature of these policies as well as the failure to emphasize encouraging or teaching of socially appropriate behaviors (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2003) make these practices ineffective.

In-school suspension programs are a traditional alternative to out of school suspension in which students who have violated the school discipline policy are removed from the general student population and isolated in a separate part of the school for a predetermined amount of time. Although this practice is also punitive in nature, in-school suspension programs which provide academic and behavioral support could be more effective as they provide supervision for the student and focus on the inappropriateness of the child's behavior and not the child him or herself (Education.com, 2006-10).

Models of School Discipline

Some schools have attempted to change from reactive and punitive discipline programs to more proactive and supportive programs (Sugai & Horner, 2002). Two such programs are described in this section. Positive Behavior Supports (PBS) or School Wide Positive Behavior Supports (SWPBS) will be explored in depth because of its current prevalence in research and practice in the United States. The Behavior Intervention Support Team (BIST) will be described in more detail because of its use in the school district in this study.

School Wide Positive Behavior Supports (SWPBS).

SWPBS utilizes school policy and procedures to address behavior intervention for the entire student population of the school (Smith, 2010). The U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) described SWPBS as being a "decision making framework that guides selection, integration, and implementation of the best evidence-based academic and behavioral practices for improving important academic and behavior outcomes for

all students” (pbis.org). To accomplish this goal, SWPBS emphasizes four elements: “(a) data for decision making, (b) measurable outcomes supported and evaluated by data, (c) practices with evidence that these outcomes are achievable, and (d) systems that efficiently and effectively support implementation of these practices” (pbis.org). The SWPBS model is divided into three tiers, (a) universal intervention, (b) small group intervention, and (c) individualized intervention (pbis.org). Students receive support in one or more of the tiers as student behavior designates is necessary (Turnbull, et al., 2002). All students receive support at the first tier, universal intervention, while tier two and three supports are provided for a decreasing number of students (Smith, 2009). SWPBS places emphasis on clearly defining and teaching behavioral expectations, providing positive reinforcement for desired behavior, data driven decision making and reflection on effectiveness, and ongoing support of individuals, groups, and the community (Warren, et al, 2006).

SWPBS implementation has expanded across the nation (Vaughn, 2006) and now over 4000 schools are utilizing this program (Cohen, Kincaid, & Childs, 2007; Barrett, Bradshaw & Lewis-Palmer, 2008). Some of the reason for the expansion may be increased funding and policy at the federal level (Johnston, Foxx, Jacobson, Green & Mulick, 2006; Tincani, 2007; Vaughn, 2006). Another possible reason for the rapid expansion of SWPBS is the result of many studies reporting a significant decrease in office discipline referrals and out of school suspensions (Luiselli, Putnam, and Sunderland, 2002; Barrett, Bradshaw, & Lewis- Palmer, 2008; Mass-Galloway, Panyan, Smith & Wessendorf, 2008; Muscott, Mann, & LeBrun, 2008) as well as in relation to academic progress (Lassen, Steele, & Sailor, 2006). In conclusion, SWPBS shows considerable support in the literature as an effective means in teaching students socially appropriate behavior and decreasing out of school suspensions.

Behavior Intervention Support Team (BIST).

Noting an increase in the number of referrals from public schools, BIST was created in 1986 by Nancy Osterhaus as an outreach program of the Ozanam Home for Boys (Price, 1998). BIST is a proactive, non-punitive approach to discipline that “grew out of a desire to keep at-risk students in a community school. Our mission is to help teachers, administrators, parents and students learn techniques to effect positive change and create a healthy learning environment for all” (Resource Development Institute, 2010). BIST is based on balancing grace and accountability to help children make changes in their lives. BIST utilizes four components to accomplish this mission: Early Intervention, Caring Confrontation, Protective Plan, and Outlasting the Acting Out (BIST Parent Brochure, 2010).

The BIST Model provides a tiered approach to discipline. BIST includes an emphasis on establishing clear expectations for faculty members and students, directly teaching expectations to students, providing opportunity for students to practice expectations, instruction of social problem solving skills, and reinforcing appropriate behavior (BIST, n.d.). BIST utilizes a recovery process and a continuum of placement to help students de-escalate disruptive or unsafe behavior. Students who are behaving in a disruptive or unsafe manner will be placed in increasingly more supportive and isolated locations on the continuum (figure 1) until the acting out stops (Price, 1998). After a student’s behavior deescalates, teachers and staff members work with the child to provide support to the child in problem solving and planning to prevent future problems.

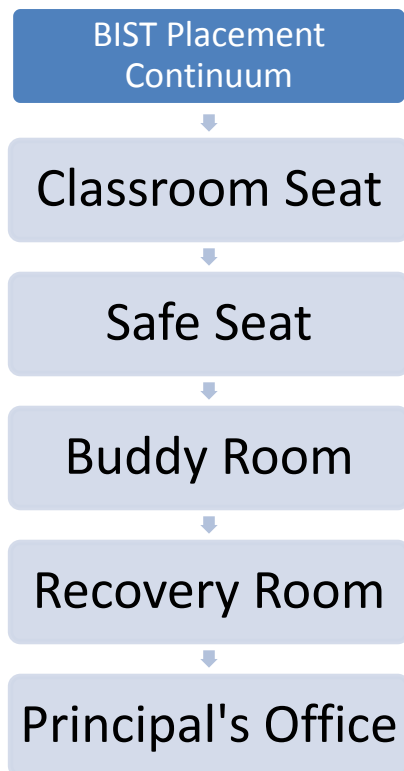


Figure 1: BIST Placement Continuum *Note:* BIST Placement Continuum is from www.bist.org

One major component of BIST that is different than other programs is the emphasis on professional development for staff. BIST does not rely solely on workshops to teach BIST to staff members, but provides ongoing monthly support in schools. BIST consultants work with school staffs on areas such as classroom management, processing with students, planning for individual students, and conducting class meetings to solve problems or build community (Resource Development Institute, 2010).

The BIST Model has primarily existed as a regional model primarily implemented in the Midwestern United States. Little research has been conducted on BIST. In 1998, Price determined the BIST model had no significant effect on academic achievement, hourly absences, and student self-concept. In 2000, Condra found no significant relationship between BIST and academic achievement. Then, in 2010, the Resource Development Institute of Kansas City, MO

released results of their evaluation of the Behavior Intervention Support Team (BIST) approach to managing student behaviors in schools. RDI found “in schools that implemented BIST on a school-wide basis consistently revealed substantial reductions in the number of office discipline referrals (ODR’s) after implementation compared to the number of ODR’s prior to implementation” (Resource Development Institute, 2010).

School Climate

The National School Climate Center (NSCC), formerly the Center for Social and Emotional Education, defines school climate as “the quality and character of school life. School climate is based on patterns of school life experiences and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching, learning and leadership practices, and organizational structures”(2008). School climate is described by Schlaffer (2006) as “an idiom used by contemporary educators to describe the learning environment and work place conditions that exist in the education setting.” Fisher defined school climate to include “*enduring characteristics that distinguish one school from another, and is a set of measureable, shared perceptions by the members of the organization that influence their behavior*” (2003-emphasis Fisher’s). Although the definitions used by researchers vary semantically, the definitions share an emphasis that climate is based on the shared perceptions individuals hold regarding the physical and social-emotional environment of the school. Positive school climates include a problem solving environment characterized by staff and students have caring, respectful relationships, in which clear communication exists, and academic achievement is high (Sutherland, 1994). In contrast, negative school climates are found to have staffs that “are extremely fragmented, where the purpose of serving students has been lost to the goal of serving the adults, where negative values and hopelessness reign” (Deal & Peterson, 1998).

School climate has long been studied by researchers and determined to be an important factor in determining the success of students. Studies link school climate to student achievement (Dunn & Harris, 1998; Sutherland, 1994; Schlaffer, 2006, NSCC, 2010). Esposito (1999) reports school climate is a predictor of academic achievement as early as first and second grade. Additionally, Esposito's research said students' adjustment to school, social skill development, and test scores in reading and math are related to school climate factors. Bowman (1975) determined a relationship between achievement and workplace conditions and found that where a positive climate is present, students encounter positive learning opportunities. Other research has confirmed this supposition and determined climate to be the most reliable factor in predicting a school's effectiveness (Gentile, 1997). Prominent change expert and writer Michael Fullan (2002) notes that schools and districts will not be successful unless they are addressing the social and moral climate. In his book *The New Meaning of Educational Change* (2007), Fullan describes the importance of open, collaborative environments in schools as being critical to ensuring the sustainability of reform initiatives necessary to achieve success for all students.

The National School Climate Center (NSCC) reports a strong relationship between school climate and school performance. According to their research, schools with higher climate ratings have better test scores and graduation rates. NSCC developed standards that support effective school climate improvement efforts:

1. "The school community has a shared vision and plan for promoting, enhancing and sustaining a positive school climate.
2. The school community sets policies specifically promoting (a) the development and sustainability of social, emotional, ethical, civic and intellectual skills, knowledge,

- dispositions and engagement, and (b) a comprehensive system to address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage students who have become disengaged.
3. The school community's practices are identified, prioritized and supported to (a) promote the learning and positive social, emotional, ethical and civic development of students, (b) enhance engagement in teaching, learning, and school-wide activities; (c) address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage those who have become disengaged; and (d) develop and sustain an appropriate operational infrastructure and capacity building mechanisms for meeting this standard.
 4. The school community creates an environment where all members are welcomed, supported, and feel safe in school: socially, emotionally, intellectually and physically.
 5. The school community develops meaningful and engaging practices, activities and norms that promote social and civic responsibilities and a commitment to social justice" (National Climate Standards).

In a *Best Practices* Brief, Tableman (2004) writes school climate has a significant impact on academic achievement. Tableman noted the following four aspects of school environments to define school climate:

- "A Physical Environment (P) that is Welcoming and Conducive to Learning
 - A Social Environment (S) that Promotes Communication and Interaction
 - An Affective Environment (AF) that Promotes a Sense of Belonging and Self-Esteem
 - An Academic Environment (AC) that Promotes Learning and Self-Fulfillment"
- (p. 2)

Although there is a large quantity of work in the area of school climate, there is no consistent agreement to the components. Despite the lack of consistency in defining components of school climate, there is consensus that school climate has an impact on the educational outcomes of students and the importance of school climate is widely emphasized.

School Climate and Out of School Suspension

Many studies link positive school climate to high academic achievement (Barton, Coley and Wenglinsky 1998; Bryk, Lee, & Holland 1993; Chubb & Moe 1990; Mayer, Mullens, & Moore, 2000). However, the literature is less comprehensive on the relationship between school climate and out of school suspension rate. Christle (2003) examined characteristics of schools and relationships to out of school suspension rates. Christle found several conditions that might influence out of school suspension rates such as unclear rules, lack of direct teaching of expectations, unwillingness of staff to problem solve and examine staff responsibility in causing student behavior. Shepard (2010) also noted school characteristics and the relationship to out of school suspension. Shepard found “Through the years, causes for out-of-school suspension have been found to be more likely to occur in certain school settings.” And Losen, Putnam, and Sunderland (2002) hypothesized that “purging the school of misbehaving student does not appear to improve school climate.” Skiba and Rausch (2006), noted schools with higher out of school suspension rates paid less attention to school climate. These studies all indicate a possible relationship between school climate and out of school suspension.

Summary

The literature is clear on the increasingly intrusive and punitive nature of policy regarding student discipline in the United States. Increasing school violence and the reaction by the legislatures that create the policies has caused schools to examine the way in which schools

handle discipline and to use the practice of out of school suspension when dealing with issues of student discipline. The literature shows out of school suspension is not an effective practice in changing student behaviors. It is repeatedly demonstrated in the literature that students who are suspended continue to struggle and are frequently suspended again. The recidivism rate is a clear indicator of the ineffectiveness of out of school suspension. The relationship between school climate and out of school suspension is unclear in the literature. Although several studies have alluded to a relationship, few studies have demonstrated how the use of out of school suspension and school climate relate.

The presentation of methodology and procedures used for data collection and analysis is found in Chapter Three. Methodology and procedures are organized by population, sample procedures, instrumentation, validity and reliability, data collection procedures and the analysis, and hypothesis tests along with the limitations to show qualitative and quantitative research methods of the study.

Chapter Three

Research Methodology

Chapter three contains a description of the research design of this mixed methods study regarding the relationship between school climate and out of school suspensions. The population, sample and sampling procedures are described. Additionally, instrumentation, measurement, and the data collection procedures are explained. Finally, data analysis procedures, delimitations, and limitations of the study are provided.

Research Design

A mixed methods inquiry was conducted to explore and explain the relationship between out of school suspension and teacher perceptions of school climate. Clark and Creswell (2007) define a mixed methods design as one that includes “at least one quantitative method (designed to collect numbers) and one qualitative method (designed to collect words)” (p. 122). Specifically, a complementarity design was chosen. Clark and Creswell define the rationale of a complementarity method is “To increase the interpretability, meaningfulness, and validity of constructs and inquiry results by both capitalizing on inherent method strengths and counteracting inherent biases in methods and other sources” (p. 127).

The relationship between out of school suspensions and teacher perceptions of school climate during the 2009-10 school year was investigated in the quantitative portion of the study. A correlational method was employed to determine the extent of a relationship between these variables (Gall, Gall, & Borg 2005). For the qualitative part of the study, a comparative method was utilized. Comparative studies “compare the specific content of the expert knowledge of a number of people” (Flick, 2006 p. 142). Principal expertise was elicited through interviews to

provide further insight. The data from the qualitative and quantitative methodology were combined to fully describe the relationship of out of school suspension rate and staff climate.

Sample

The study's sample was teachers and principals in a suburban school district. In 2009-10, 311 teachers and 10 principals comprised the instructional staff in the elementary schools of the selected school district. All teachers were invited to complete the climate survey. Principals were primarily responsible for OSS decisions at each building. Four of the principals were interviewed for the study. All elementary teachers and principals met the certification requirements of the state and No Child Left Behind Act (V. Santone, personal communication, June 3, 2010).

Sampling Procedures

Purposive sampling was utilized in this study. "Purposive sampling involves selecting certain units or cases "based on a specific purpose rather than randomly" (Clark & Creswell, 2007, p. 203). Specifically, this type of sampling was conducted to achieve representativeness. This technique is used when the researcher wants to select a sample that represents the population as closely as possible (Clark & Creswell, 2007).

For the quantitative portion of the study, the entire instructional staff (n= 311) at each of ten elementary schools in the selected school district were invited to complete the survey. All elementary school buildings in the district were selected to be a part of the study. The ten elementary schools shared common characteristics in curriculum, staffing, professional development, and behavior management. The shared characteristics allowed for fewer limitations.

For the qualitative part of the study, four principals from the school district were selected based on the free-reduced lunch status of the building in which they work and the suspension rate. Principals from each of the following groups were selected: high OSS rate and high free-reduced lunch status (one principal), low OSS rate and high free-reduced lunch status (one principal), and low OSS rate and low free-reduced lunch status (two principals). These groups were determined by the researcher to represent the district as a whole because the sample included principals from schools at all areas of the district continuum of suspension rate and free-reduced lunch percentage.

Instrumentation

Two separate instruments were utilized in this study, the building climate survey and principal interviews. A climate survey was used to assess the climate in each building in four areas, physical, social, affective, and academic environments. Interviews were used to describe and explain any relationship between climate, out of school suspension rate, and school SES. Each of the instruments is described below.

Building Climate Survey

The school district administers an annual electronic survey called the “Building Climate Survey” (Appendix A). Participants were asked to “rate the following statements” and then responded to statements on a Likert scale with 1 representing *never*, 2 representing *sometimes*, and 3 representing *always*. The survey included twenty-five statements. The survey statements addressed the following environment related areas: physical, social, affective, and academic. All items were stated in a way in which a 3 would indicate a positive feeling related to the item with one exception. Item nineteen (I frequently feel overloaded and overwhelmed when working) was stated in a way that a 3 reflected a negative feeling. Because the item was stated in this way,

for data analysis, the item was reverse coded. A process was utilized in SPSS software to translate all responses for item 19 changing 3 to 1 and 1 to 3. Any responses that were 2 represented the midpoint and remained 2.

Climate survey measurement.

The building climate survey measured teacher perceptions of school climate. In a *Best Practices Brief* on School Climate and Learning, Betty Tableman (2004) from Michigan State University developed four aspects to define school climate:

- A Physical Environment (P) that is Welcoming and Conducive to Learning
- A Social Environment (S) that Promotes Communication and Interaction
- An Affective Environment (AF) that Promotes a Sense of Belonging and Self-Esteem
- An Academic Environment (AC) that Promotes Learning and Self-Fulfillment (p. 3)

The climate survey instrument items utilized in the study were categorized by the researcher for the purpose of this study to address the four aspects of school climate defined by Tableman (2004). An expert panel of nine administrators was selected to review the categorization of items and provide feedback on the item placement. The expert panel was selected based on years of experience in education and advanced education (Table 3).

Table 3

Expert Panel Education and Experience Characteristics

	Mean
Years in Education	25
Number of Post Graduate Degrees	2.22

Expert panel members had experience in different positions relevant to school climate and discipline at the school level. All panel members had experience as a classroom teacher and as a building principal (Table 4).

Table 4

Expert Panel Job Experience Characteristics

	Teacher	Assistant Principal	Principal	Central Office Position
Positions Held	9	6	9	2
Average Years Experience By Position	13.89	3.11	7.78	.22

The expert panel reviewed the categorization of the questions and provided feedback (Appendix B). Tableman's aspects of school climate and corresponding climate survey items are listed below. A table follows the list of items for each aspect (See Tables 5 through 8). The number listed in each column of the tables indicates the number of expert panel members who placed the item in the aspect under the column heading. Table 8 includes a column heading "?" to note the number of expert panel members who indicated their perception the climate survey item fit none of the environmental aspects developed by Tableman (2004).

A Physical Environment (P) that is Welcoming and Conducive to Learning

1. At my school, I feel safe and secure.
2. At my school, the building is kept clean and in good condition.
14. Sufficient resources are provided by the district (e.g., funds, books, equipment, supplies, etc.)

Table 5

Expert Panel Physical (P) Environment Survey Results

Item #	P	S	AF	AC
1	9	0	0	0
2	9	0	0	0
14	8	1	0	0

A Social Environment (S) that Promotes Communication and Interaction

3. At my school, personnel work together as a team.
4. My principal solves problems effectively.
5. At my school, I feel that my ideas are listened to and considered.
6. My principal takes adequate disciplinary measures to deal with disruptive behavior.
8. Staff demonstrate good interpersonal skills.
9. Conflict at my school is dealt with constructively.
12. School personnel are receptive to constructive criticism.

Table 6

Expert Panel Social (S) Environment Survey Results

Item #	P	S	AF	AC
3	0	9	0	0
4	0	8	1	0
5	0	7	2	0
6	1	8	0	0
8	0	9	0	0
9	0	9	0	0
12	0	9	0	0

An Affective Environment (AF) that Promotes a Sense of Belonging and Self-Esteem

- 7. School personnel represent the school in a positive manner.
- 10. My concerns are responded to in a reasonable time.
- 11. My principal treats me with respect.
- 13. My principal supports the staff at this school.
- 16. I have a feeling of job security in my present position.
- 17. I like working at my school.
- 18. Staff morale is high at my school.
- 19. I frequently feel overloaded and overwhelmed while working.
- 24. The overall climate or atmosphere at my school is positive and helps students learn.

Table 7

Expert Panel Affective (AF) Environment Survey Results

Item #	P	S	AF	AC
7	0	0	9	0
10	0	2	7	0
11	0	0	9	0
13	0	0	9	0
16	0	0	9	0
17	0	0	9	0
18	0	0	9	0
19	0	0	9	0
24	0	0	8	1

An Academic Environment (AC) that Promotes Learning and Self-Fulfillment

- 15. I feel satisfied with how my career is progressing.
- 20. Annual teacher evaluations are fair and reasonable.
- 21. Annual teacher evaluations are used to improve teacher performance.
- 22. In-service programs keep me informed of the latest educational strategies.
- 23. I believe children attending my school are receiving a good education.

Table 8

Expert Panel Academic (AC) Environment Survey Results

Item #	P	S	AF	AC	?
15	0	0	1	6	2
20	0	0	1	5	3
21	0	0	0	8	1
22	0	0	0	9	0
23	0	0	1	8	0

For physical, social, affective, and academic environment, a minimum of seven of nine panel members confirmed each item's placement in the assigned category with the exception of two items in the academic environment. Items 15's placement was confirmed by six panel members and item 20 by five of the panel. Consideration was given by the researcher to eliminate these items from the data analysis; however the items were included in the analysis in the end.

Principal Interviews

Principals were interviewed to further illustrate the relationship between the out of school suspension rate and the climate as measured by the building climate survey. A semi-standardized interview design was utilized in the interviews. Semi-standardized interviews utilize three question types to elucidate the interviewee's understanding of the topics. Open questions are used first to allow the interviewee to provide information he or she has readily available. Open questions are followed by theory driven questions which are "oriented to the scientific literature about the topic or are based on the researcher's theoretical presuppositions"

(Flick, 2006, p. 156). Theory driven questions provide assumptions with which the interviewee can agree or disagree. Finally, confrontational questions are utilized in which the interviewer offers a competing idea to an answer the interviewee has provided and offers the interviewee an opportunity to further solidify a previous answer, clarify a response, or assume a new position (Flick, 2006)

Questions (see Appendix C) were developed to measure the principals' perceptions of school climate, the use of suspension, and how the two relate. In the climate portion of the interview, principals were asked to describe the climate in the school. Additionally, questions on school climate were designed to further elaborate on the principal understandings and beliefs regarding who is responsible for the school climate and what efforts are made by the principal to monitor and improve climate.

1. How would you describe the climate in your school? Why do you describe it that way?
2. Who is responsible for the climate in your school?
3. How do you monitor the climate in your school?
4. What is your role in improving climate in your building?
5. Do you involve others in monitoring and improving climate in your building?

The questions regarding suspension were designed to provide insight into the principals' beliefs about the use of out of school suspension. Principals were also asked to describe how they monitor suspension numbers in the building and involve others in decreasing the suspension rate.

1. What do you think of the use of out of school suspension and what is the purpose?

2. How do you use out of school suspension? (In what circumstance? Who decides? How do you decide?)
3. Are the suspensions at your school too high, too low, or at the appropriate level? Why?
4. What do you believe your role to be in decreasing the number of suspensions in your building?
5. Do you involve others in monitoring and decreasing suspensions in your building?

Finally, questions were developed to illuminate how principals believed out of school suspensions and climate relate to each other.

1. Do you think school climate and suspension rate relate? How?
2. (adaptable question) If the purpose of suspension is (restate interviewee response), then (present with an opposing view point expressed by the interviewee in the interview)?
3. How could decreasing suspensions negatively affect school climate?

Data Collection Procedures

Requests for permissions to collect data were distributed and granted by Baker University and the participating school district (Appendix D and E). Data collection began in May and was completed in June 2010. At the conclusion of the May administration of the Building Climate Survey, the aggregate reports of the survey results from each of the ten elementary buildings were provided by the central administration of the school district. The selected school district's student information is kept in PowerSchool, a web-based student information system. Data for out of school suspension are logged by the principal or his or her designee. Out of school

suspension data were gathered through a report from PowerSchool called a “Discipline Log” report. At the end of the school year, in early June 2010, discipline log reports were generated from PowerSchool on each of the ten elementary buildings to tally the number of out of school suspensions for the 2009-10 school year.

Interviews were conducted in June and July 2010. A phone call was placed to invite each of the principals selected to participate in an interview. Interviewees were assured that no identifiable information about the interviewee or their school would be shared in the study. All principals invited agreed to be interviewed. The interviews were held at each of the principal’s respective buildings. All interviewees consented to be recorded. Each interview was recorded using a BlackBerry and notes were taken to document responses. Interview data was transcribed by a professional transcriptionist to create a script of responses.

For the purpose of this study, items on the climate survey instrument utilized in the study were categorized by the researcher to fit into the four aspects of school climate defined by Tableman (2004). An expert panel of nine administrators was selected to review and provide feedback the placement of items via the Climate Survey Coding document (Appendix B). The expert panel data was gathered in three settings, a meeting, telephone, and mail. Six responses were gathered in a meeting. Prior to the meeting, the meeting facilitator provided permission via telephone to administer the survey. At the meeting, the Climate Survey Coding (Appendix B) was distributed and respondents read and completed the survey independently. Surveys were collected and the data was compiled in an excel document. Two expert panel members were invited to participate via telephone. The expert panel survey was e-mailed to the participants and a phone call was made to collect the data. The researcher recorded the data on separate Climate Survey Coding sheets and added the data to the excel document for analysis. The final expert

panel member completed the Climate Survey Coding document independently and returned to the researcher via mail.

Quantitative Data Analysis

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software was utilized for conducting the quantitative data analysis. The percentage of students who qualified for free-reduced lunch at each school was utilized to preliminarily code schools into one of two categories, high or low SES schools. Schools were divided to create two equal groups of five.

School climate was divided into four categories (Physical, Social, Affective, and Academic Environment) defined by Tableman (2004). Responses to the survey questions were totaled in each category. Correlations were then utilized to measure the relationship between the variables of out of school suspensions and each of the four categories of school climate and compared. T-tests were conducted to determine if each correlation was an index of a statistically significant relationship between a climate factor and OSS as well as individual climate survey items and OSS.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Content analysis was utilized to examine the interview material. "Content analysis is one of the classical procedures for analyzing textual material" (Flick, 2006, p. 312). Responses to the interview questions were analyzed and categories specific to each question were developed to compare subject responses. Responses were grouped into categories specific to each question. Paraphrasing and summarizing were used in the grouping to further justify placement in a specific category and illustrate important aspects to the subject's response. The categories show similarities and differences in responses and are expanded on and presented in the results in chapter four.

Mixed Methods Analysis

Following the analysis of quantitative and qualitative analyses, the data were sorted and analyzed by hypothesis. First the data were examined without regard for SES level of the school to address the first hypothesis, 1). There is no significant relationship between out of school suspensions and teacher perceptions of school climate. Following this data analysis, the data were sorted by school SES level to answer the second hypothesis, 2). The socio-economic status of the school population has no effect on the relationship between out of school suspension and teacher perception of school climate. The results of the mixed methods analysis are organized by hypothesis, expanded upon, and presented in chapter four.

Limitations

Roberts (2004) describes limitations as aspects of a study which are out of the researcher's control and that "may negatively affect the results or (one's) ability to generalize" (p. 146). This study includes several limitations:

1. Implementation of the BIST program – BIST is a philosophy based program that includes many components to manage student behavior. Staff members at different schools have varying levels of experience, training, and attitudes about BIST. These differences could affect the successful implementation of BIST. The effectiveness of the implementation of BIST could affect both climate and number of out of school suspensions in the building.
2. Principal's use of out of school suspension – The selected school district adopted the state school board association's policies after careful consideration and some modifications. The policy regarding student discipline provides a continuum of options for consequences for different behavior depending on the seriousness of

the infraction and the repetition of the offense (Missouri Department of Education, n.d.). The principal's approach to discipline and philosophy regarding use of out of school suspension could vary from school to school. This could affect the number of out of school suspensions at a particular school.

Summary

Chapter three included information on the mixed methods study of the relationship between school climate and out of school suspension. Principal surveys, staff surveys, and out of school suspension data were used to collect data for the study. A description of the data collection and analysis procedures were included. Limitations were also included in this chapter. In chapter four, results of the analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data will be included.

Chapter Four

Results

As stated in chapter one, the purpose of this mixed qualitative and quantitative study is to describe the relationship between school climate and out of school suspensions. This chapter describes the results of the study in terms of the two research questions previously presented.

1. Is there a relationship between the number of out of school suspensions and teacher perceptions of school climate?
2. Does the socio-economic status of the school population affect the relationship between the number of out of school suspensions and teacher perceptions of school climate?

Descriptive Statistics

The schools in the study all belonged to the same school district. Table 9 shows statistical information about each school, the number of incidents of OSS, student to teacher ratio, and number of survey respondents. Free-reduced lunch percentages had a range of 37.26% from 80.45% to 43.19%. The number of incidents of OSS had a range of 103 from 108 to 5. Student enrollment, students per teacher, and number of survey respondents were similar at each school (see Table 9).

Table 9

Descriptive Statistics by School

School	F-R Lunch %	Student Enrollment	# of Incidents of OSS	Students Per Teacher	# of Survey Respondents
A	80.45	376	108	18	10
B	71.89	375	23	19	9
C	70.73	401	57	19	18
D	63.45	395	98	19	13
E	62.23	409	53	19	11
F	57.18	378	65	19	9
G	52.78	319	38	13	13
H	49.41	417	5	19	41
I	46.32	440	8	20	18
J	43.19	441	20	18	17

Hypothesis Testing**Quantitative data.**

Pearson product moment correlation coefficients were calculated to discover any statistically significant relationships between OSS and the measures of perceived climate. Statistical significance was set at $p < .05$. Marginally significant relationships were defined $.05 \leq p \leq .11$. Below, analysis of the data is organized by the research questions described in chapter one. Each question is stated below and tables of correlations are presented along with explanations of the results from the study as it pertains to each question.

1. Is there a relationship between the number of out of school suspensions and perceptions of school climate?

First, the relationship between OSS and the average ratings for each of the four climate aspects: physical, social, affective and academic were determined. No statistically or marginally significant relationships were found between OSS and the four aspects of school climate (see the last row of table 10).

Table 10

Relationships between OSS Incidents and Climate

	Affective Environmen t	Physical Environmen t	Social Environmen t	Academic Environmen t	Out of School Suspension
Affective Environmen t	1.00				
Physical Environmen t	.658	1.00			
Social Environmen t	.841	.650	1.00		
Academic Environmen t	.712	.653	.700	1.00	
Out of School Suspension	-.092	-.092	-.112	.023	1.00

Next, correlations were calculated comparing the out of school suspensions with all of the individual climate survey items. Table 11 presents the correlations for items 6 ($r = -.264$, $n = 153$, $p = .001$), 19 ($r = .183$, $n = 153$, $p = .023$) and 23 ($r = -.144$, $n = 149$, $p = .080$). The weak negative relationship between OSS and each of these individual items are interpreted as OSS increase, responses to the survey items tend to decrease. The correlation between OSS and Q6 indicates as OSS increase, teacher perceptions of how adequately the principal takes disciplinary

measures to deal with disruptive behavior become more negative. In other words, as out of school suspensions rise, teachers perceive the principal is less adequately dealing with disruptive behavior. The correlation coefficient for Q19 indexes the relationship between OSS and teacher perception of work load, as suspensions rise, teachers feel less overloaded at work. The relationship between OSS and workload is indexed by the correlation for Q23. As OSS increases, teacher perception of the quality of education becomes more negative. No statistically or marginally significant relationships were found between out of school suspensions and climate survey items 1-5, 7-18, 20-22, or 24.

Table 11

Significant Relationships between OSS Incidents and Climate Survey Items

	<i>r</i>
Q6: My principal takes adequate disciplinary measures to deal with disruptive behavior	-.264**
Q19: I frequently feel overloaded and overwhelmed while working.	.183**
Q23: I believe children attending my school are receiving a good education.	-.144*

Note: ** statistically significant ($p < .05$) * marginally significant ($.05 < p < .11$)

2. Does the socio-economic status of the school population affect the relationship between the number of out of school suspensions and teacher perceptions of school climate?

To examine the effect of the socio-economic level of the school on the relationship between OSS and perception of climate, the data set was divided into two groups, placing the

five highest SES schools (low free-reduced lunch percentage) in one group and the five lowest SES schools (high free-reduced lunch percentage) in the other (see table 9). Correlations were calculated comparing OSS with the four aspects of climate. No statistically or marginally significant relationships were found between OSS and the four aspects of school climate with the High SES schools (see the last row in table 12).

Table 12

Relationships between OSS Incidents and Climate and at High SES Schools

	Affective Environment	Physical Environment	Social Environment	Academic Environment	Out of School Suspension
Affective Environment	1.00				
Physical Environment	.710	1.00			
Social Environment	.875	.678	1.00		
Academic Environment	.745	.697	.771	1.00	
Out of School Suspension	-.008	-.072	.071	.011	1.00

In the Low SES group, two marginally significant relationships were found between OSS and Physical Environment ($r = .209$, $n = 58$, $p = .115$) and between OSS and Academic Environment ($r = .230$, $n = 54$, $p = .094$). The last row of Table 13 presents the correlations between OSS and the four aspects of climate for the low SES schools. The correlation between OSS and physical environment indicates as suspensions are higher, the physical environment is

perceived more positively. Similarly, the correlation between OSS and academic environment indicates as suspensions are higher, the academic environment is perceived more positively.

Table 13

Relationships between OSS Incidents and Climate at Low SES Schools

	Affective Environment	Physical Environment	Social Environment	Academic Environment	Out of School Suspension
Affective Environment	1.00				
Physical Environment	.572	1.00			
Social Environment	.793	.585	1.00		
Academic Environment	.662	.607	.626	1.00	
Out of School Suspension	.060	.209*	.161	.230*	1.00

Note: * marginally significant ($.05 < p < .11$)

Correlations were next calculated comparing OSS data with individual climate survey items by school SES level. One marginally significant relationship between OSS and High SES schools was found with item Q23 ($r = -.144$, $n = 149$, $p = .080$), “I believe children attending my school are receiving a good education.” The weak negative relationship indicates as suspension incidents are higher, teacher perception is more negative about the quality of education. No statistically or marginally significant relationships were found using high SES between OSS and any other survey item.

For Low SES schools, two marginally significant relationships were found between OSS and Q14 ($r = .208$, $n = 60$, $p = .110$) and OSS and Q15 ($r = .216$, $n = 60$, $p = .098$). One statistically significant relationship was found with Q5 ($r = .261$, $n = 60$, $p = .044$). Table 14

presents the correlations. The weak positive relationships with these items indicate that as OSS incidents are higher, perceptions are more positive.

Table 14

Significant Relationships between OSS Incidents and Climate Survey Items at Low SES Schools

	<i>r</i>
Q5: At my school, I feel that my ideas are listened to and considered.	.261**
Q14: Sufficient resources are provided by the district (e.g., funds, books, equipment, supplies, etc.)	.208*
Q15: I feel satisfied with how my career is progressing.	.216*

Note: ** statistically significant ($p < .05$) * marginally significant ($(.05 < p < .11)$)

Qualitative data.

To address the research questions, four principals were interviewed. Questions were asked in three categories: climate, OSS, and the relationship between climate and OSS. Principals were chosen to represent schools of high and low SES and high and low out of school suspension rates. The letter assigned to the interviewed principals corresponds with the letter given the school in Table 9. For example, Principal A was principal of School A.

The first interview question was “How would you describe the climate in your school? Why do you describe it that way?” Principals B and J’s responses were centered in the Affective category citing relationships, mutual respect, and collaboration when describing the climate.

Principal A's response centered on academics and the expectations of high achievement for all. Principal H's response included comments about team but focused primarily on the sense of order in the school and the importance placed on supervision of teachers and students.

All the principals answered question two, "Who is responsible for the climate in your school?" similarly. All principals cited specifically that everybody is responsible for creating a positive climate. All but Principal B cited it was the principal's responsibility to lead the way. In describing the principal's responsibility at the school, Principal J used the phrase "sets the tone" and Principal A stated, "The principal is the visionary".

Question three, "How do you monitor the climate in your school?" produced varied responses from principals. All principals utilized the district's climate survey in some way; however the degree of use varied. All principals stated several ways were utilized to monitor the climate in their respective buildings including attendance data, formal meetings, and student interactions. Principals J and H stated they relied on feedback from "people you can trust" to monitor the climate in an on-going basis. Principals J and B both include the use of informal observations of the building.

"What is your role in improving climate in your building?" was the fourth question in the "climate" section of the interview. Principals B, J, and H mentioned several different ways to improve climate in the building. Principals B and J's answers were most similar and included staff meeting activities and staff recognition. Principal B emphasized supporting individuals by listening and showing you care about people. Principal A and H's responses contrasted with Principals B and J. Principal A only included one way to improve building climate stating "Focus on the students instead of the fluffy stuff." Principal H's responses emphasized confronting problems and being a role model.

Responses to question 5, “Do you involve others in monitoring and improving climate in your building?” were divided equally. Principals B and J both included others in monitoring the climate while A and H did not.

Responses to the first question in the OSS section of the interview “What do you think of the use of out of school suspension and what is the purpose?” revealed principal B and J to have a balanced view of out of school suspension. Principals B and J were not fully in favor of OSS as a practice, but both discussed how it had a place in helping students. In contrast, principals A and H were both in opposition to the use of OSS and although they used OSS at their respective schools, both strongly stated they did not believe it to be effective practice. All four principals described the purpose of OSS similarly and included concepts such as defining boundaries, protecting others, adhering to legislation and policy, and to punish.

All principals indicating the principal was responsible for deciding when OSS was used in response to OSS question 2, “How do you use out of school suspension? In what circumstance? Who decides? How do you decide?” Each principal mentioned specific behaviors which would result in suspension such as weapons, fighting, assault of a teacher, or alcohol or drugs. Each principal response indicated that as behavior severity and intensity increased, the number of days of OSS would increase. Principal A indicated out of school suspension would not be used in instances in which the staff did not implement a behavior plan or provide adequate support in supervising the student. Principal A stated in school suspension would be utilized as an alternative and a meeting to review the plan would be conducted.

Principals B, H, and J indicated OSS incidents at their respective buildings were appropriate in response to question 3, “Are the suspensions at your school too high, too low, or at

the appropriate level? Why?” Principal A indicated out of school suspensions at Building A were too high and stated “any suspension is too much suspension.”

All principals interviewed stated a belief that problem solving with staff members was an important way to decrease out of school suspensions in response to question 4, “What do you believe your role to be in decreasing the number of suspensions in your building?” Other common responses included supervising teachers and staff members, planning for students, collecting data, and providing staff professional development in working with students with behavior problems. Principal J included communicating with students in response to the question.

The final question of the OSS section of the interview was “Do you involve others in monitoring and decreasing suspension in your building?” All principals indicated they utilize others.

The final section of the interview allowed the principals to compare climate and out of school suspension. Responses to the first question, “Do you think school climate and suspension rate relate? How?” were similar. All interviewed principals indicated a belief there is a relationship between OSS and climate. Principal B stated “when people enjoy what they’re doing and where they’re doing it, kids enjoy it” in describing a belief that students behave better when students enjoy school. Principal H stated, “So if the school climate is positive, teachers are happy, they’re supervising students and there’s less chance of a child doing something ... or if a child is misbehaving, that we can catch it right away. I would venture to say that school climate definitely has effect on suspension.”

Question 2 in the comparison of OSS to climate section varied slightly as the interviewer utilized specific examples from the interviewees’ previous responses in the question. As all four

principals had similar beliefs about the purpose of out of school suspensions (defining boundaries, protecting others, adhering to legislation and policy, and to punish) the first part of the question was similar. The second half of the question varied slightly. With principal A, B and H, the second part of the question was about OSS affected students in reconnecting with their community. The responses all stressed the importance of a re-entry component to decrease the likelihood of a repeat offense and to reconnect student to the environment. The second part of the question for Principal J was about the use of out of school suspension in changing student behaviors. Principal J indicated OSS works in changing behaviors of some students, however indicated sometimes OSS continues a “cycle of dysfunction” in which the break in the relationship between the student and the school makes it difficult when the student returns to school and could cause more behavior that results in out of school suspension.

The final question of the interview inquired how changing the frequency of use of OSS could negatively affect climate. All principals included a perception that if the school became chaotic and was not safe and orderly, perception of climate would become more negative. The principal responses indicated a shared belief that out of school suspensions maintained that order and that without out of school suspension, order in the school could be in jeopardy.

The interview responses provided insight into principal dispositions toward out of school suspension and school climate. Principal responses indicated many similarities in belief about the use of out of school suspension and the importance of school climate regardless of the out of school suspension rate or free-reduced lunch percentage of the school. Principals reported using out of school suspension for similar reasons and to accomplish similar purposes although responses varied in principal perception about the current out of school suspension rate in each building. Principals varied somewhat in what was emphasized in describing school climate,

however all the principals took a large degree of responsibility for climate and took a people centered approach in improving school climate. Responses regarding the affect of reduced out of school suspension rates leading to a more chaotic atmosphere in the school and negatively affecting school climate were widely shared. No pattern of difference between beliefs and dispositions of principals at the different schools emerged.

Summary

The results of the study were presented in chapter four. Correlations were calculated to determine the relationship between perceptions of school climate and incidents of OSS. Additionally, the SES level of the school was examined to determine its affect on the relationship between perceptions of climate and incidents of OSS. Three statistically significant and six marginally significant relationships were found. The qualitative results indicated no pattern of difference in principal perception of out of school suspension and school climate between low and high SES schools.

Chapter five contains a summary of the study including an overview of the problem, purpose statement and research questions, and a review of the methodology. Chapter five presents the major findings of the study, describes how these findings are related to the literature. Finally, implications for action and recommendations for future research are offered.

Chapter Five

Interpretation and Recommendations

This study examined the relationship between perceptions of school climate and incidents of OSS at elementary schools in one Midwestern, first-tier suburban school district. Results from the district's annually administered climate survey were compared with incidents of OSS. Additionally, analysis was conducted to evaluate the effect school SES had on the relationship between OSS and perception of climate. Chapter four presented the results of the study. This chapter contains a summary of the study including an overview of the problem, purpose statement and research questions, and a review of the methodology. Also included in this chapter are the major findings of the study and how these findings are related to the literature. Finally, implications for action and recommendations for future research are shared.

Study Summary

Overview of the problem.

Scrutiny of schools has changed over time as the focus of the public's attention and priorities change. Early in public school history pressure existed for schools to separate economic classes of people (Stornello, 1998). Later, scrutiny shifted to how well public schools created an informed electorate (Stornello, 1998). Schools' efficiency and ability to sort students into tracks of education in which they were prepared for work from menial labor to professions has also been questioned and examined (Cubberly, 1929). More recently, public schools in the United States have been compared with other nation's school systems and how those systems prepare students for careers.

The environment of the school has become more important in recent times. Increasingly stringent policies have been developed to define consequences for students who break the

policies. Out of school suspension has increasingly been utilized as the consequence for major and minor behaviors (Skiba, Peterson, and Williams, 1997; Skiba & Peterson, 2000; American Academy of Pediatrics, 2003) despite the lack of support previously noted in the research that indicates out of school suspension is not a practice which is effective in changing behavior.

Students with behavior problems are repeatedly being excluded from an opportunity to learn and problem behaviors are continuing inside schools (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2003; Tobin, Sugai, & Colvin 1996). These excluded students feel less a part of the school community and view school in an unfavorable manner (Dunbar and Villarruel, 2004). Excluded students with an unfavorable view of schools contribute to a negative school climate (Opportunities Suspended, 2000). The research on the relationship between the use of out of school suspension and school climate is inconclusive and does not clearly describe how the two areas relate.

Purpose statement.

The purpose of this mixed methods qualitative and quantitative study was to examine the relationship between the number of out of school suspensions and the school climate in the ten elementary schools that comprise a first tier suburban public school district. A second purpose was to examine the effect free-reduced lunch percentage had on the relationship between climate and out of school suspensions at the schools in the study.

Review of methodology.

A mixed methods inquiry was conducted to explore and explain the relationship between out of school suspension and teacher perceptions of school climate. A complementarity design was chosen. Clark and Creswell define the rationale of a complementarity method is “To increase the interpretability, meaningfulness, and validity of constructs and inquiry results by

both capitalizing on inherent method strengths and counteracting inherent biases in methods and other sources” (p. 127).

The relationship between suspensions and school climate during the 2009-10 school year was investigated in the quantitative portion of the study. A correlational method was employed to determine the extent of a relationship between these variables (Gall, Gall, & Borg 2005). For the qualitative part of the study, a comparative method was utilized. Principal perspective was elicited through interviews to provide further insight into any relationship. The data from the qualitative and quantitative methodology were combined to fully describe the relationship of out of school suspension rate and staff climate.

Major Findings

Findings of this mixed methods study are presented with regard to the research questions. The first hypothesis in this study examined the relationship between out of school suspensions and school climate. No statistically significant relationships were found between OSS and the four aspects of school climate. However, closer examination of the results of the climate survey revealed certain aspects of climate as measured by individual items may have a stronger relationship than others. Based on the data from two items, there is evidence that an increase in OSS is negatively related to school climate.

Teacher perception of the adequacy of the disciplinary measures the principal takes to deal with disruptive behavior (Q6) was found to have a statistically significant, weak, negative relationship with OSS incidents ($r = -.264$, $n = 153$, $p = .001$). In other words, as out of school suspensions rise, teachers perceive the principal is less adequately dealing with disruptive behavior. One could possibly conclude that teachers perceive suspensions as an inadequate discipline response that occurs when other means could have been used to prevent suspension.

This conclusion regarding teacher perception of suspension would correspond with the interviewed principals' perceptions of suspension. All four principals regarded suspension as an undesirable, although necessary, response to behavior. If the preceding conclusion is accurate, it would also suggest that teachers perceive the principal to hold the ultimate responsibility in preventing out of school suspension and promoting positive climate. The interviewed principals' responses confirmed this view. All four principals interviewed stated they hold a primary role in setting the climate in the building as well as in determining if a student is to be suspended. One explanation for the weak relationship may be explained in principal B's response to "Who is responsible for the climate in your school? Principal B responded "Well, because I think everybody is responsible for creating their own attitudes and their own happiness." The other three principals also stated that although they have a primary role in the school climate, climate is the responsibility of the entire staff.

One marginally significant finding indicated teacher perception of climate based on their belief about the quality of education children were receiving at the school (Q23) was related to OSS rate. As OSS increases, teacher perception of the quality of education becomes more negative. This finding would suggest principal and staff perception of OSS to be similar and support the idea that OSS is a practice that does not support quality education and a positive climate.

Feeling overwhelmed while working (Q19) was another factor that showed a statistically significant relationship to OSS incidents. The data suggest that as suspensions rise, teachers feel less overloaded at work. Principal interview responses do not correspond with this finding. All principals stated several examples of actions taken to decrease suspensions in schools. All principals included problem solving with staff members. Other responses included planning for

students, increasing supervision, data collection, and staff professional development. All responses to suspension suggested by principals would involve teacher participation, therefore increasing workload of teachers. One might possibly conclude the students whose behavior leads to suspension has a stronger relationship to teachers feeling overloaded while working than involvement in problem solving.

The second hypothesis examined the effect the socio-economic status of the school had on the relationship between suspension and school climate. The results from both quantitative and qualitative measures indicate there is no difference between low and high SES school populations in this study. The results of the quantitative data for low SES schools reveal two marginally significant, weak relationships in Physical and Academic environment. The correlation between OSS and physical environment indicates as the physical environment is perceived more positively, suspensions are higher. Similarly, the correlation between OSS and academic environment indicates as out of school suspension rate is higher, the academic environment is perceived more positively. The qualitative data do not support a difference between schools of different SES as principal statements regarding the relationship between OSS and perception of climate were similar.

Upon review of the data for the individual items, no pattern of difference was apparent between high and low SES schools. Despite the lack of difference in the relationship between OSS and the perception of climate based on school SES, one statistically significant weak relationship was found with low SES school OSS data and Q5 (At my school, I feel that my ideas are listened to and considered). The qualitative data did not support a difference between low and high SES schools as principals of both high and low SES schools stated the importance of team problem solving to decrease suspension and involving all staff in improving the climate

in buildings. Three marginally significant, weak relationships were discovered from both low and high SES school OSS data (Q3, Q14, Q15). The weak relationships and lack of support in the qualitative data could lead to the conclusion that the second hypothesis is true, the socio-economic status of the school population has no effect on the relationship between suspension and school climate.

Findings Related to the Literature

A review of the literature was conducted and revealed studies on the topics of climate and related to OSS. Supporters of the use of OSS contend suspension effectively limits the recurrence of misbehavior immediately following the suspension as well as acts as a deterrent to other students. (McCord, Widom, Bamba, & Crowell, 2000; Mellard & Seybert, 1996) In effect, suspension is a short term solution to some students and serves as an example to others, setting the limit on what is and is not tolerated in the school environment. According to Ewing, the removal of misbehaving students would then have a positive effect on the school environment as their removal provides an environment in which students that are meeting behavior standards are able to learn without distraction (2000). The findings of this study reveal that the principals believed suspensions were necessary in setting examples, however the quantitative data did not support that the use of out of school suspension was positively related to teacher perception of school climate.

Other research states a negative relationship between suspension and climate. In addition to failing to prevent recurrence of misbehavior by suspending students, “the available data suggest that, if anything, disciplinary removal appears to have *negative* effects on student outcomes and the learning climate (APA, 2008).” Tobin, Sugai, & Colvin (1998) concluded out of school suspensions may actually reinforce negative behavior rather than be a punishment for

inappropriate behavior. Atkins, McKay, Frazier, Jakobsons, Arvanitis, Cunningham, Brown & Lambrecht (2002) found discipline referrals increased for students who received out of school suspensions and detentions and therefore were ineffective. Perhaps the strongest findings in this study support this literature. The analysis of the data from the current study revealed a statistically significant negative relationship between OSS incidents and climate as measured by Q6 (“My principal takes adequate disciplinary measures to deal with disruptive behavior”). Though the relationship found in the quantitative analysis is relatively weak, the interview responses support the premise that staff perceptions of how a principal intervenes with discipline relates strongly to both suspensions and teacher perception of climate. Principals interviewed reported they are responsible for determining whether a student is suspended from school. Principals also reported holding a major role in decreasing the number of suspensions in the building through problem solving with staff, students and parents to alleviate the occurrence of behaviors that would result in suspension. One could conclude that as principals were effective in this type of problem solving, OSS incidents would potentially decrease and teacher perception of how principals dealt with discipline issues would be positive.

Christle (2003) examined characteristics of schools and relationships to suspension rates. Christle found several conditions that might influence suspension rates such as socio-economic status of the student population, unclear rules, lack of direct teaching of expectations, and an unwillingness of staff to examine staff responsibility in causing student behavior. The results of this study did not support or contradict school factors in the relationship between OSS and teacher perception of climate. Although there were some marginally significant relationships found, SES did not affect the relationship between OSS and teacher perceptions of climate.

Conclusions

Recommendations for future research.

This study allowed the researcher to examine the relationship between incidents of OSS and perceptions of school climate and how SES affects this relationship. The following suggestions are recommended for those interested in further exploration of the topics presented:

1. Replicate the study utilizing a different climate survey that includes student perceptions of climate. Especially in light of attention paid to the specific issue of bullying and how it may impact climate, a student climate survey could help illuminate this issue more fully and add to understanding of school climate.
2. Replicate the study and gather demographic data about teacher respondents as to the grade level taught and years experience in education. Examining the results by these factors may reveal differences or similarities in attitudes of teachers and provide practitioners more information about how to provide differentiated support for teachers.
3. Replicate the study including more schools and multiple school districts. The lowest free-reduced lunch percentage for a school in this study was 43.19%. Including schools with a lower free-reduced lunch percentage, multiple administrators, more variance in school population, and other factors is recommended. Expanding the population and sample may produce more conclusive results and allow them to be more widely generalized to other contexts.
4. Utilize a pre- and post-assessment of climate to evaluate the impact of suspension reducing programs on climate. An investigation of this nature may allow for better isolation of the variable of OSS in its effect on climate.

5. More extensive qualitative research should be conducted to evaluate how principal dispositions toward out of school suspension affects OSS rate in schools.

Implications for action.

As repeatedly noted, the use of out of school suspension to change student behavior is not always effective. Many previously noted studies indicate the importance of school climate and note climate as a key factor in determining the success of a school. This study reveals some evidence an increase in OSS is negatively related to school climate. This evidence indicates principals and teachers should consider programs such as SWPBS and BIST to provide support for students to decrease the behavior that leads to out of school suspensions. Discipline policies should be considered and no tolerance policies should be carefully examined to determine their necessity. Finally, educators should examine the climate of organizations and carefully monitor and take action to positively affect school climate.

Concluding Remarks

In closing, it is this researcher's belief that all aspects of school climate have a profound impact on schools, as does the use of OSS. Children need to attend schools in which the environment is safe and nurturing in order for them to best experience success academically, socially, and emotionally. The practice of excluding students from school for even brief periods of time should be examined and used carefully. OSS is less necessary in an environment in which students receive instruction, guidance and support in learning how to change behaviors. Policies and practices in response to tragic circumstances and media pressure should be avoided. The literature and research on effective practice should carry the day so schools can provide the environment necessary for the success of all students.

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Appendix A: District Climate Survey

District Climate Survey Items

1. At my school, I feel safe and secure.
2. At my school, the building is kept clean and in good condition.
3. At my school, personnel work together as a team.
4. My principal solves problems effectively.
5. At my school, I feel that my ideas are listened to and considered.
6. My principal takes adequate disciplinary measures to deal with disruptive behavior.
7. School personnel represent the school in a positive manner.
8. Staff demonstrate good interpersonal skills.
9. Conflict at my school is dealt with constructively.
10. My concerns are responded to in a reasonable time.
11. My principal treats me with respect.
12. School personnel are receptive to constructive criticism.
13. My principal supports the staff at this school.
14. Sufficient resources are provided by the district (e.g., funds, books, equipment, supplies, etc.)
15. I feel satisfied with how my career is progressing.
16. I have a feeling of job security in my present position.
17. I like working at my school.
18. Staff morale is high at my school.
19. I frequently feel overloaded and overwhelmed while working.
20. Annual teacher evaluations are fair and reasonable.
21. Annual teacher evaluations are used to improve teacher performance.

22. In-service programs keep me informed of the latest educational strategies.
23. I believe children attending my school are receiving a good education.
24. The overall climate or atmosphere at my school is positive and helps students learn.
25. What overall grade would you give the climate of this school?

Appendix B: Climate Survey Coding Form – Expert Panel

Climate Survey Coding Form – Expert Panel

As part of my program to earn a doctoral degree from Baker University, I am conducting research on school climate and suspensions. As part of this research, I would like to gather your input regarding school climate. Specifically, I would like you to evaluate whether the questions from the climate survey utilized in my study have been appropriately categorized in the framework provided on the following pages.

You have been selected to be a part of this expert panel based on your expertise and experience as a school administrator. All responses and information provided by you in the survey will remain anonymous and confidential. Information reported in the study will not reveal your name or the name of your school.

# of Years Employed in Education:		
Post Graduate Degree(s):		
Current Position Title:		
# of Years in Current Position:		
Other Positions Held / Number of Years in Position	Job Title	Number of Years in Position

Background and Directions

In a *Best Practices Brief* on School Climate and Learning (2004), Betty Tableman from Michigan State University developed four categories to define school climate:

- A **Physical Environment** (P) that is Welcoming and Conducive to Learning
- A **Social Environment** (S) that Promotes Communication and Interaction
- An **Affective Environment** (AF) that Promotes a Sense of Belonging and Self-Esteem
- An **Academic Environment** (AC) that Promotes Learning and Self-Fulfillment

The items from the survey instrument utilized in the study have been categorized in these four areas by the researcher. Your input is necessary to validate the researcher's suppositions or to offer your own contradictory position in the categorization of the survey items. Following each category description and examples, the corresponding survey items are listed. The enclosed x (⊗) indicates the category the researcher has designated. If you believe the item is placed in the appropriate category, circle the ⊗. If you think the item would better fit in another category, mark an X in the column you believe is most appropriate.

A Physical Environment (P) that is Welcoming and Conducive to Learning

Supports Learning

- School building contains a limited number of students.
- Students are, and feel, safe and comfortable everywhere on school property.
- Classrooms are orderly.
- Classrooms and grounds are clean and well-maintained.
- Noise level is low.
- Areas for instruction and activities are appropriate for those uses.
- Classrooms are visible and inviting.
- Staff members have sufficient textbooks and supplies.

Impedes Learning

- School building contains a large number of students.
- Students are harassed by other students in halls, restrooms, lunch rooms, or playgrounds.
- Classrooms are disorganized.
- Classrooms and grounds are dirty, poorly lit, and poorly maintained.
- Noise level is high.
- Classrooms are in rooms not intended for that use. Space is overcrowded.
- Classrooms are hidden and protected from scrutiny.
- Textbooks and supplies are insufficient. Deliveries are delayed.

P	S	AF	AC	#	Climate Survey Items
⊗				1	At my school, I feel safe and secure.
⊗				2	At my school, the building is kept clean and in good condition.
⊗				14	Sufficient resources are provided by the district (e.g., funds, books, equipment, supplies, etc.)

A Social Environment (S) that Promotes Communication and Interaction

Supports Learning

- Interaction is encouraged. Teachers and students actively communicate.
- Teachers are collegial. Student groupings are diverse. Parents and teachers are partners in the educational process.
- Decisions are made on-site, with the participation of teachers.
- Staff are open to students' suggestions; students have opportunities to participate in decision-making.
- Staff and students are trained to prevent and resolve conflicts.

Impedes Learning

- Interaction is limited. Students and teachers do not speak to each other. Teachers are isolated from one another. Students self-segregate. Parents are not treated as equal partners.
- All decisions are made by central administration or the principal without teacher involvement.
- Students have no role in determining classroom or building activities and decisions.
- Bullying and conflicts are ignored.

P	S	AF	AC	#	Climate Survey Items
	⊗			3	At my school, personnel work together as a team.
	⊗			4	My principal solves problems effectively.
	⊗			5	At my school, I feel that my ideas are listened to and considered.
	⊗			6	My principal takes adequate disciplinary measures to deal with disruptive behavior.
	⊗			8	Staff demonstrate good interpersonal skills.
	⊗			9	Conflict at my school is dealt with constructively.
	⊗			12	School personnel are receptive to constructive criticism.

An Affective Environment (AF) that Promotes a Sense of Belonging and Self-Esteem

Supports Learning

- Interaction of teachers and staff with all students is caring, responsive, supportive, and respectful.
- Students trust teachers and staff.
- Morale is high among teachers and staff.
- Staff and students are friendly.
- The school is open to diversity and welcoming to all cultures.
- Teachers, staff, and students are respected and valued.
- Teachers, staff and students feel that they are contributing to the success of the school.
- There is a sense of community. The school is respected and valued by teachers, staff, students, and families.
- Parents perceive the school as warm, inviting and helpful.

Impedes Learning

- Interaction of teachers and staff with students is generally distant and minimal. Students are subject to favoritism. Some students are overlooked. The circumstances of some students are ignored.
- Students do not see teachers and staff as acting in their interest.
- Morale is low among teachers and staff.
- Staff and students are unfriendly.
- The school “belongs” to the majority students.
- Teachers and staff feel unappreciated.
- Students receive no positive reinforcement for work or actions.
- Teachers, staff and students do not feel they have any impact on what happens in the school.
- Teachers, staff, students, and families do not feel they are part of the school community.
- Parents do not feel welcome at the school. Parents feel “blamed” for their child’s difficulties.

P	S	AF	AC	?#	Climate Survey Items
		⊗		7	School personnel represent the school in a positive manner.
		⊗		10	My concerns are responded to in a reasonable time.
		⊗		11	My principal treats me with respect.
		⊗		13	My principal supports the staff at this school.
		⊗		16	I have a feeling of job security in my present position.
		⊗		17	I like working at my school.
		⊗		18	Staff morale is high at my school.
		⊗		19	I frequently feel overloaded and overwhelmed while working. (reverse coded)
		⊗		24	The overall climate or atmosphere at my school is positive and helps students learn.

An Academic Environment (AC) that Promotes Learning and Self-Fulfillment

Supports Learning

- There is an emphasis on academics, but all types of intelligence and competence are respected and supported.
- Teaching methods respect the different ways children learn.
- Expectations are high for all students. All are encouraged to succeed.
- Progress is monitored regularly.
- Results of assessments are promptly communicated to students and parents.
- Results of assessments are used to evaluate and redesign teaching procedures and content.
- Achievements and performance are rewarded and praised.
- Teachers are confident and knowledgeable.

Impedes Learning

- Academic performance is downplayed or not rewarded. Teaching methods do not allow for a variety of learning styles.
- Expectations are low. Some students are expected to fail.
- There is minimal or no periodic assessment.
- There is little communication about results of assessments. Students do not know how to improve their performance. Parents discover that their child is struggling academically at report card time.
- Results are not used to improve teaching and learning. Teachers and students repeat the same cycle of failure.
- Rewards and praise are minimal.
- Teachers are unsure or under-prepared.

P	S	AF	AC	?#	Climate Survey Items
			⊗	15	I feel satisfied with how my career is progressing.
			⊗	20	Annual teacher evaluations are fair and reasonable.
			⊗	21	Annual teacher evaluations are used to improve teacher performance.
			⊗	22	In-service programs keep me informed of the latest educational strategies.
			⊗	23	I believe children attending my school are receiving a good education.

Appendix C: Interview Guide

Interview Guide

Introduction:

As part of my program to earn a doctoral degree from Baker University, I am conducting research on school climate and suspensions. As part of this research, I would like to interview you about this topic. You have been selected based on your position as principal and the free/reduced lunch and suspension data from your school. All responses and information provided by you in the interview will remain anonymous and confidential. Information reported in the study will not reveal your name or the name of your school.

I will be asking you three different types of questions.

Open Questions: “Open questions may be answered based on the knowledge the interviewee has immediately at hand.” (Flick, 156)

Theory Driven, hypotheses questions: “oriented to the scientific literature about the topic or are based on the researcher’s theoretical presuppositions.” (Flick, 156) “The assumptions in these question are designed as an offer to the interviewees, which they might take up or refuse according to whether they correspond to their subjective theories or not.”

Confrontational questions: This type of question allows the interviewee the opportunity to respond to the theories and relations he or she has presented and re-examine them in light of competing alternatives. (Flick, 157)

Climate:

1. How would you describe the climate in your school? Why do you describe it that way?
2. Who is responsible for the climate in your school?
3. How do you monitor the climate in your school? (Do you use the district climate survey?)
4. What is your role in improving climate in your building?
5. Do you involve others in monitoring and improving climate in your building?
(Do you involve others in analyzing the data from the district climate survey?)

Suspensions:

1. What do you think of the use of out of school suspension and what is the purpose?
2. How do you use out of school suspension? (In what circumstance? Who decides? How do you decide?)
3. Are the suspensions at your school too high, too low, or at the appropriate level?
Why?
4. What do you believe your role to be in decreasing the number of suspensions in your building?
5. Do you involve others in monitoring and decreasing suspensions in your building?

Relationship between Suspensions and Climate:

1. Do you think school climate and suspension rate relate? How?
2. If the purpose of out of school suspension is to (repeat interviewee's answer from #4 – open-ended), (fill in contradictory question #1) – do you have students that

are suspended more than one time (change student behavior), #2 – does the environment of your school get safer as suspensions increase (maintain order).

3. How could (decreasing or increasing – from #3 theory driven questions) suspensions negatively affect school climate?

Appendix D: IRB Letter

2-24-2011

Mr. Matthew Miller
School of Education Graduate Department
Baker University



RE: IRB: BU-2010-13: The Relationship Between School Climate and Out of School Suspension

Dear Mr. Miller:

The Baker University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your research project application (BU-2010-13) and approved this project under the Expedited category. As described, the project complies with all the requirements and policies established by Baker University for protection of human subjects in research. Unless renewed, approval lapses one year after approval date.

1. A Project Status Report must be filed with the IRB annually for continuation.
2. Any significant change in the research protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to altering the project.
3. Any change in the investigator(s) named in the original application must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to altering the project.
4. Any injury to a subject because of the research procedure must be reported to the IRB immediately.
5. When signed consent forms are required:
 - a. the primary investigator must retain the forms until filed,
 - b. consent forms must be filed with the OIR with the annual report,
 - c. the subject must be given a copy of the form at the time of consent.
6. If this is a funded project, a copy of this letter must be with the grant file.

The Office of Institutional Research (OIR) must be notified when this project is completed or terminated. As noted above, you must provide an annual status report to receive approval for maintaining your project. If your project receives funding which requests an annual update, you must file your annual report at least one month prior to the annual update.

Thanks for your cooperation. If you have questions, please contact me.

Sincerely,

William R. Miller, Ph.D.
Chair, Baker University Institutional Review Board

CC: Harold Frye, Ph.D., Faculty Supervisor.

P.O. Box 65
Baldwin City, KS 66006
785.594.6451 | 785.594.2522 fax
www.bakerU.edu

Appendix E: Institutional Review Board Request

IRB RequestDate September 20, 2010IRB Protocol Number _____
(IRB use only)**I. Research Investigator(s)** (students must list faculty sponsor first)

Department(s) _____ Education _____

Name	Signature	
1. <u>Matthew S. Miller</u>		Principal Investigator
2. <u>Dr. Harold Frye</u>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Check if faculty sponsor
3. <u>Peg Waterman</u>		
4. <u>Dr. Charmaine Henry</u>		

Principal investigator or
faculty sponsor contact information:Phone (816) 678-1571email matt-m816@hotmail.com

Mailing address of Principal Investigator:

321 W. 7th Street #301
Kansas City, MO 64105**Expected Category of Review:** Exempt Expedited Full Renewal**II: Protocol Title**The Relationship Between School Climate and Out of School Suspension

III. Summary:

The following summary must accompany the proposal. Be specific about exactly what participants will experience, and about the protections that have been included to safeguard participants from harm. Careful attention to the following may help facilitate the review process:

In a sentence or two, please describe the background and purpose of the research.

The purpose of this mixed methods study is to examine the relationship between the frequency of use of out of school suspension and the climate of a school climate in ten elementary schools a first tier suburban public school district in the Kansas City, MO area.

The literature reveals the ineffectiveness of suspension as a means for helping students with discipline problems. The research describes the importance of school climate in increasing achievement and the components of school climate. It also describes practices for educators to create positive climate in schools. Despite the abundance of literature on both suspension and school climate, there were no studies found that examined the relationship between the two topics. The outcome of this study may contribute to practices in use and provide information for educators to consider when setting discipline policies and in daily practice.

Briefly describe each condition or manipulation to be included within the study.

The study is a mixed method study utilizing both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data from out of school suspensions and the climate survey results from the 2009-10 school year will be examined to determine relationships. Qualitative information elicited from the interviews of three of the school principals will be used to help describe the relationships found in the quantitative data.

What measures or observations will be taken in the study? If any questionnaire or other instruments are used, provide a brief description and attach a copy.

Data will be gathered from the selected district's climate survey (questions attached) and an interview of three principals (questions attached).

The climate survey is given in the selected district each year and contains twenty five questions. Respondents answer questions using a Likert scale to indicate positive or negative strength of response.

The interview questions are being designed to elicit information from the interviewees as to their beliefs in the area of school climate, use of suspension, and how the topics relate.

Will the subjects encounter the risk of psychological, social, physical or legal risk? If so, please describe the nature of the risk and any measures designed to mitigate that risk.

No, the subjects will not encounter any psychological, social, physical or legal risk.

Will any stress to subjects be involved? If so, please describe.

No, the subjects will not be involved in any stress.

Will the subjects be deceived or misled in any way? If so, include an outline or script of the debriefing.

No, the subjects will not be deceived or misled in any way.

Will there be a request for information which subjects might consider to be personal or sensitive? If so, please include a description.

No, there won't be a request for information which subjects might consider to be personal or sensitive.

Will the subjects be presented with materials which might be considered to be offensive, threatening, or degrading? If so, please describe.

No, subjects will not be presented with materials which might be considered to be offensive, threatening, or degrading.

Approximately how much time will be demanded of each subject?

Subjects participating in a one-on-one interview will be asked for approximately 30 minutes of his or her time.

Who will be the subjects in this study? How will they be solicited or contacted? Provide an outline or script of the information which will be provided to subjects prior to their volunteering to participate. Include a copy of any written solicitation as well as an outline of any oral solicitation.

Participants in the study will include 311 teachers, 3,906 students, and three elementary school principals from the same school district.

Script from the oral solicitation:

As part of my program to earn a doctoral degree from Baker University, I am conducting research on school climate and suspensions. As part of this research, I would like to interview you about this topic. You have been selected based on your position as principal and the free/reduced lunch and suspension data from your school. All responses and information provided by you in the interview will remain anonymous and confidential. Information reported in the study will not reveal your name or the name of your school.

What steps will be taken to insure that each subject's participation is voluntary? What if any inducements will be offered to the subjects for their participation?

Communication with the interview subjects will include an invitation to participate and will allow subjects the opportunity to state whether they are willing to be part of the project. I will offer to share my findings with the school district as an inducement for the district to participate.

How will you insure that the subjects give their consent prior to participating? Will a written consent form be used? If so, include the form. If not, explain why not.

A written consent form will be provided (attached) for interview subjects.

Will any aspect of the data be made a part of any permanent record that can be identified with the subject? If so, please explain the necessity.

No, no aspect of the data will be made a part of any permanent record that can be identified with the subject

Will the fact that a subject did or did not participate in a specific experiment or study be made part of any permanent record available to a supervisor, teacher or employer? If so, explain.

No, the fact that a subject did or did not participate in a specific experiment or study will not be made part of any permanent record available to a supervisor, teacher or employer.

What steps will be taken to insure the confidentiality of the data?

The steps taken to insure the confidentiality of the data will include the removal of all names of subjects and schools. Additionally, any statements or quotes used in the study will be examined to ensure no identifying information is shared.

If there are any risks involved in the study, are there any offsetting benefits that might accrue to either the subjects or society?

No, there are no risks to the subjects or society.

Will any data from files or archival data be used? If so, please describe

Yes, data from files will be used. Information from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education website will be used as will suspension data from the participating school district's student information system.

Appendix F: District Request and Approval to Conduct Study



"Shrader, Lynda"
<Lynda.Shrader@raytownschools.org>

09/22/2010 02:07 PM

To "Matt.Miller@leesummit.k12.mo.us"
<Matt.Miller@leesummit.k12.mo.us>

cc

bcc

Subject RE: Use of Data

You may definitely use our data and I would definitely like to hear about the findings. Things going well with you?

From: Matt.Miller@leesummit.k12.mo.us [mailto:Matt.Miller@leesummit.k12.mo.us]
Sent: Wednesday, September 22, 2010 1:22 PM
To: Shrader, Lynda
Cc: Lewis, Linda
Subject: Use of Data

Hello Ms. Shrader,

As part of my dissertation, I would like to use data from the Raytown School district. Specifically I would like to use out of school suspension data taken from PowerSchool and the results of the May 2010 Staff Climate Survey. In the study, I will be examining the relationship between the use of out of school suspension and staff climate. I would be happy to share the findings of my study with the Raytown School District upon its completion.

Thank you for considering my request.

Sincerely,
Matthew S. Miller

Appendix G: Interview Data Coding

Interview Data:

Question C1

How would you describe the climate in your school? Why do you describe it that way?

	P	S	AF	AC
Principal J			X	
Principal A				X
Principal B			X	
Principal H	X			

Principal J: Supportive, inviting, students feel comfortable and like being there, staff likes working together, they know their main job is to be there for students. (Why?) Interactions among students and teacher. My expectation is to be supportive and I communicated about that expectation.

Principal A: student centered, guided by data, and dedicated to high levels of learning – is our mission, and why we go to work every day, and why we’re serving our kids. For achievement.

Principal B: I’d say the climate is relaxed, and people-centered, and relationship-driven. I’d say that pretty much ... you know, and one of mutual respect – kids for adults, and adults for kids. And, cooperative and collegial and collaborative. You know, all those things are kind of descriptors, but I think it’s relaxed. I think, I mean, when people come in, I think they see people relaxed and enjoying what they’re doing.

Principal H: Oh why do I think it’s a positive climate? First of all, I think we do a lot of, we talk a lot about Team Robinson and we talk about it’s our school. We talk in faculty meetings, I’m always referring to our kids instead of the first grade children or the fifth grade students. And I, I insist and I monitor teachers being on hall duty in the mornings and if I see a teacher that is not at their door, I’m going to say something to them. I’m going to give them a verbal reminder and after that, they will probably, if I don’t see them a couple of times after that, they will get a memo from me. And I truly believe that way, the kids are not running or getting into trouble and everybody is, you know, supervising the students. And I think less discipline creates a positive climate in our building. It’s not negative. Now, do we have discipline problems? Yes.

Question C2

Who is responsible for the climate in your school?

	All	Principal	Notes
Principal J	X	X	Principal's role: Set the tone Supportive of teachers and students Provide leadership roles Provide structure and accountability
Principal A	X	X	The principal is the visionary. The leadership team kind of is the keeper of the perimeter, and then it's everybody's responsibility to be professional and positive and be problem solving and making sure that we don't lose sight of our mission and vision.
Principal B	X	No specific mention of principal	Well, because I think everybody is responsible for creating their own attitudes and their own happiness. And so I think it's a choice to be happy and it's a choice to be engaged and involved and with others.
Principal H	X	X	Overall, I am but I can't do it alone.

Question C3

How do you monitor the climate in your school? (Do you use the district climate survey?)

	Trusted Employees	Informal Observations of Building	Attendance Data	Formal Meetings	Student Interactions	Climate Survey
Principal J	Have people you can trust who will be honest with you.	X			X	X District Climate Survey I'd like to develop my own climate survey based on staff perceptions
Principal A			X	X data meetings Leadership Team Meetings		X MIM (Missouri Integrated Model) Survey Parent and Student Surveys District Climate Survey
Principal B		X				X Informal, admin generated survey District climate Survey
Principal H	X					X

Question C4

What is your role in improving climate in your building?

	Staff Meeting Activities	Recognition	Mission / Vision / Purpose	Listen	Care for people	Confront Problems	Be a Role Model
Principal J	X Motivational Messages	X Staff recognition of each other	X Connect activities with MVP				
Principal A			X Focus on students instead of fluffy stuff				
Principal B	X Interesting Activities at staff meetings "Simple Truths" video	X Little gifts teachers can use in classroom at indoor recess		X Provide a trusting environment so people will share their reality	X You know, just have to motivate and try to show that you care about people, that you're willing to go the extra mile for them. (See interview transcript)		
Principal H						X	X

Question C5

Do you involve others in monitoring and improving climate in your building? (Do you involve others in analyzing the data from the district climate survey?)

	Yes	No
Principal J	X Leadership Team Lit Coach Trusted Teachers Grade Level Meetings	
Principal A		X
Principal B	X PLC Coaches Team	
Principal H		X One-on-one conversations with problems No involvement in looking at the district climate survey

Question S1 – part I

What do you think of the use of out of school suspension and what is the purpose?

	Pro	Con
Principal J	It's necessary to provide boundaries or when a student is dangerous to others Provide all other supports necessary before suspensions Progress from ISS to OSS and increase OSS days with repeated offenses Kids don't learn from suspension	
Principal A		X Use ISS whenever possible Implemented school within a school to decrease OSS OSS is time away from instruction
Principal B	Only effective if parent supports it to reinforce what needs to change Uses ISS whenever possible	
Principal H		X Last resort – doesn't bring about change For weapons, don't have a problem with using it Prefer ISS and believe it is more effective

Question S1 – part II

What do you think of the use of out of school suspension and **what is the purpose?**

	Purpose
Principal J	Protect others Punish
Principal A	to adhere to the Safe School Act violations I think the other purpose of out-of-school suspensions is to send a message sometimes to families and to kids. I think another purpose of out-of-school suspensions is possibly to get the school and the home to partner together with the medical field and get some assistance for a child that may have some medical needs that are not being met
Principal B	To remove the child from his peers and his surroundings and let them know that you cannot attend school if you do certain behaviors, if you exhibit certain behaviors
Principal H	Establish and enforce boundaries with students, parents and teachers

Question S2

How do you use out of school suspension? (In what circumstance? Who decides? How do you decide?)

	Who decides? How do you use?	Specific Behaviors	BOE Violation	Safe Schools
Principal J	Principal – progressive discipline	X Danger to others Weapons physical altercation striking a teacher assault	X	
Principal A	Principal – progressive discipline Won't use suspension if the adults didn't do a good enough job	X Physical fight Assault of a teacher Unsafe actions Safety of self or others Weapons Alcohol or drugs To maintain order when they haven't been able to partner	X	X

Principal B	Principal – progressive discipline	X Severity and frequency of the behavior	X	
Principal H	Principal – progressive discipline	X Severe threats Weapons Physically hurt someone Stealing		

Question S3

Are the suspensions at your school too high, too low, or at the appropriate level? Why?

Principal J	About right – I probably have suspended a couple of kids when I didn't
Principal A	Too high – any suspension is too much suspension
Principal B	About right
Principal H	Appropriate

Question S4

What do you believe your role to be in decreasing the number of suspensions in your building?

	Supervising Teachers and Staff	Problem Solving with staff members	Planning for students	Collect Data	Staff Professional Development	Communicate with Students
Principal J	X	X		X		X
Principal A		X	X	X	X	
Principal B	X	X		X	X	
Principal H	X	X	X			

Question S5

Do you involve others in monitoring and decreasing suspensions in your building?

	Y	N
Principal J	X	
Principal A	X	
Principal B	However in	X

	other answers stated he would problem solve with staff on specific issues he feels contribute to suspensions	
Principal H	X	

Question RBS&C1

Do you think school climate and suspension rate relate? How?

Principal J	Overall they do. Some kids it doesn't make a difference. More positive school climate provides less opportunity for students to get OSS.
Principal A	Yes. Connect academic achievement and performance, rate of learning and behavior go up, OSS go down. I hope for a 30% - 35% decrease in OSS and if not, my perception of climate is off base.
Principal B	I think when people enjoy what they're doing and where they're doing it, kids enjoy it. Their affect spills over on to the kids, whereas if a teacher is pissed off all the time – hates what she's doing, hates where she's at – that affect spills over into the classroom and the kids. So you know.
Principal H	Absolutely... if the school climate is positive and structured and people understand that the climate and the purpose of school is for children to learn, then that's, you know, that needs to be upmost and foremost in everyone's mind. So if the school climate is positive, teachers are happy, they're supervising students and there's less chance of a child doing something ... or if a child is misbehaving, that we can catch it right away. I would venture to say that school climate definitely has effect on suspension. If students think they can get by with something, if a climate is negative, it's going to bring out the negativeness in people. And that's going to be kids too.

Question RBS&C2

If the purpose of out of school suspension is to (repeat interviewee's answer from #4 – open-ended), (fill in contradictory question #1 – do you have students that are suspended more than one time (change student behavior), #2 – does the environment of your school get safer as suspensions increase (maintain order).

Do you think that by suspending kids, that it's going to help students when they return to change their, they're going to change their behavior and then contribute to that sense of order? Or is that going to be more of exclusionary tactic, where they're going to come back and feel like they're not a part of the community?

Okay. Earlier in the interview, you said that the purpose that you saw for suspension is to essentially set boundaries for kids, the kid that does the behavior, other kids that see the kid, for teachers, to let them know that that's not going to be tolerated, for parents. It's to set boundaries for all those people, and to help them understand what the expectation is for what school is like. So if that's the purpose of ...

If the purpose of out-of-school suspension is to set boundaries for kids, and from what you're saying – you said remove the children from their peers and surroundings, to exclude them from the environment, set boundaries for what's appropriate and not appropriate – how do you think that affects students when they come back to try to reconnect with their community, with their school, and feel like they can come back in and be successful without a repeated suspension?

Principal J	For some students it works and for some you get repeated suspensions. OSS can be a wakeup call and a shock for parents and students. For students with a bad family background, relationship is part of the cycle of dysfunction. Some students ISS and school supports don't have an effect.
Principal A	Re-entry has to be meaningful and effective. Make transition from school to home to work purposeful.
Principal B	I think that has to do with, a lot with – that's probably the main reason for having reentry conferences and making sure the teacher, the parent, the student, the principal, all the parties that were involved in that issue, are there. Because I've always made it a point that, you know, you tell them. This is where we want you to be. You know, this is where you belong. You know, we don't ever want you to be in trouble. We never want you to have to repeat this behavior again to where it's going to exclude you. You know, all of that has to be part of that conversation, so the student feels like, you know, I'm back in a place where people want me. You have a chance to express that. Whereas, you wouldn't if a kid just walked back into your classroom and the hustle and bustle of the morning routines.
Principal H	See interview notes: Re-entry process reconnects kids to the environment and prevents

	recidivism
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Question RBS&C3

How could (decreasing or increasing – from #3 theory driven questions) suspensions negatively affect school climate?

Principal J	<p>Allowing students to disrupt the learning of others. Interrupting 20 other kids on a regular basis. Teachers not being supported.</p> <p>Allowing the kids to be in control and set the tone in the school. You can't stop suspending and not do anything else.</p>
Principal A	<p>Every school should have tight, tight structure if OSS decreases but behavior continues, school will be chaotic. With tight structure OSS will decrease. Problem solving team identifies if this doesn't work, school has to see success in structure.</p>
Principal B	<p>Q: How could maintaining a level, like you said, the amount of suspensions that you have now feels appropriate to you. How can maintaining that suspension level negatively affect school climate?</p> <p>A: I don't know that it would negatively impact it if we stayed at that level. I guess if you were looking at that as part of a success report card, you could say you're not getting any better at it, you know. So you know, I guess – or you certainly would not have a feeling of accomplishment if you just kept doing the same thing year after year. But I think there gets to a point where you have X amount of kids and X amount of, you know, interactions and X amount – you're going to have X amount of, you know, there's going to be a point where you're just going to plateau and you're not going to get much better than what you've got.</p> <p>Q: If behaviors got worse, and suspension numbers stay the same, could that negatively affect staff climate?</p> <p>A: Yeah. Well, it depends. I mean, if teachers felt like that kids needed to be suspended and weren't being suspended, then yes, that would affect climate. But as long as the teachers' perspective is that discipline is being maintained, I don't think they care where the numbers go. Up, down, sideways. As long as their perception is that things are staying orderly and conducive to learning.</p>
Principal H	<p>It would affect negatively if teachers thought that I was not addressing situations of behavior of children that made the school feel unsafe. If they thought that I would not suspend kids for misbehaving or violating the Safe Schools Act, I would not have the respect of my staff. They'd be all over that. But I also tell them, "Once you turn it over to me, then I make the decision of what</p>

	<p>happens to this kid and you may or may not agree with me. So if you want to control the behavior, and have tight structure in your classroom, you know, then you have control over that. But once you send him to the principal's office, then I make the decision, and you may like it and you may not."</p>
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