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The Effects of Implementing Restorative Justice in an In-School Suspension Program

Nikki Brown-Kersey
Western Michigan University

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THE EFFECTS OF IMPLEMENTING RESTORATIVE JUSTICE IN AN IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION PROGRAM

Nikki Brown-Kersey, Ph.D.

Western Michigan University, 2011

The purpose of the proposed study was to assess the effects of implementing an in-school suspension program with a Restorative Justice component on office referrals, suspensions and grade point averages. The combination of Restorative Justice and in-school suspension as an alternative to out-of-school suspension warrants empirical evaluation. According to recent research, neither Restorative Justice nor in-school suspension alone have enough empirical evidence to support their success and continued use in schools in isolation. The positive aspects of each combined may produce a more successful alternative to suspension. A group design procedure was used to assess if significant changes in the number of office referrals, suspensions and/or grade point averages are made when the in-school suspension program with the Restorative Justice component is implemented. This program had been implemented in an urban middle school in Michigan at the request of the school principal. The purpose of this study was to compare school data on referrals, suspensions and grade point averages from a 6 month time period prior to the implementation of the program with data during the 6 months when the program was implemented. This study may provide useful information to the school and to the district regarding whether or not the program is a viable alternative to out-of-school suspension.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am very thankful for the people who have helped me on this journey. To start, my four committee members have provided wisdom, insight, perspective, and assistance throughout this process. I would like to acknowledge the support of my chair, Dr. Amy Naugle, as well as Dr. Alan Poling, Dr. Eric Sauer and Dr. Scott Gaynor, all members of my committee. Dr. Naugle made the completion of my degree possible through her willingness to serve as my chair even though she was not a faculty member of the School Psychology program.

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Nikki Brown-Kersey
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INTRODUCTION

Discipline in America’s schools has been characterized as a major concern of the general public for the last three decades. Teachers and administrators continually report difficulty with discipline as a major stress in their job (Vanderslice, 1999). Even though many research studies show that the country has a stable and even declining rate of school violence and that out-of-school suspensions do not work, most schools continue to use this practice (Schiraldi and Ziedenberg, 2001). When asked why this practice continues to be used, most administrators point to the fact that out-of-school suspension seems to temporarily free the teacher to attend to the needs of the students who are behaving in class. However, it seems obvious that awarding negative behavior with a “vacation from school” is more of a reward than a punishment. Mendez and Knoff (2003) point out that even though a student’s behavior may be disrupting the classroom, the teacher still has a responsibility to analyze and meet the behavioral needs of that student.

Although there are times when a student needs to be removed from the classroom, they do not always need to be removed from the broader educational environment. Brown (2007) reported that suspension alone does not change behavior. She also reported that too much emphasis is being put on punishment and not enough on teaching positive alternative behaviors and promoting academic success. Overall, educators agree that out-of-school suspension does little for the students’ educational and social achievement. In fact, out-of-school suspensions are likely to increase discipline problems
because of the frustrating effect of the returning student finding him or herself even further behind than when he or she was evicted from school (Vanderslice, 1999). Additionally, time spent by administrators tending to the legal requirements of due process consumes a considerable amount of their time with no real gain (Vanderslice, 1999).

Originally, out-of-school suspension was intended to be used with students who were violent or grossly misbehaving. The suspension was seen as a needed cool down period, allowing the student to reflect on his/her behavior. More recent research has revealed that reasons for use of suspension are often not related to violence and that its use is often abused and deprives the student of the services they desperately need (Henderson and Friedland, 1996). Mendez and Knoff (2003) reported that the reason for suspension is rarely logical, functional, or connected instructionally to the offense. They point out that the biggest problem with any exclusion is that it happens in the absence of additional interventions to assist the student with behavioral change. Skiba, Peterson and Williams (1997) found that behaviors that led to office referrals were not those that threatened safety, but those that indicate noncompliance or disrespect. They also found little evidence of a consistent relationship between the seriousness of the offense and the severity of the consequence. Suspension use is on the rise. Between 1974 and 1998, the rate at which students in American were suspended and expelled from schools almost doubled from 3.7% to 6.8%. Over 3.2 million students were suspended in 1998 (Schiraldi and Ziedenberg, 2001). According to Mendez and Knoff (2003) the greatest rates of out-of-school suspension tend to be at the middle school and early high school grades, rising steadily from 7th and 8th grades and peaking at 9th grade. Skiba, Peterson
and Williams (1997) reported a disproportional pattern of suspension use with students based on race, socio-economic status, gender and disability. Kane (2006) reported that the suspension rate has continued to increase since the 1990s. Boys are four times more likely to be suspended than girls and are on average, suspended for longer periods of time than girls. African American males are suspended nearly four times more often than males of other cultural background. According to Kane, statistics show that students living in poverty (i.e. receiving free or reduced lunch) are at increased risk for suspension. “Working class students have often made a rational decision to reject compliance for credentials”. She further reports that if students’ goals for school are not directly related to being academically successful, most strategies to promote positive behavioral change without addressing the social status need will not be successful.

In the 1970s, researchers began propagating the notion that out-of-school suspensions were ineffective and perhaps even detrimental to students. Administrators began developing and implementing in-school suspensions as an alternative (Hrabak and Settles, 2005). The idea was that students would be punished for misbehaving but would continue time on task in a more supervised and structured environment in the school. After 30 years of reviewing this practice, researchers are finding that though in-school suspension programs have the potential to effectively decrease misbehaviors, hit or miss results suggest that program design greatly impacts its effectiveness. A poorly designed program will tend to have the same negative effects as an out-of-school suspension program (Hrabak and Settles, 2005). Additionally, if an in-school suspension program spends little or no time analyzing and correcting the behavior that got the student to the in-school suspension program, those behaviors are likely to continue. Further, Hrabak
and Settles report that unless there is follow up with each student after they leave the in
school suspension program, the student is likely to revert back to old behaviors.

According to Sheets (1996) there are many important parts of an in school
suspension program that are crucial to its success such as having a philosophy that
coincides with the school’s overall educational philosophy. Programs need policies to
give it structure. The development of the philosophy and the policies should be shared by
all staff, administrators and students, not merely handed down by administration (Sheets,
1996). Next, the instructor should have a background in counseling, social work or
special education. They need to have strong management skills and be knowledgeable in
relationship building techniques. It is imperative that the instructor build relationships of
trust with students to ensure good behavior in the program. The instructor will make or
break the program (Sheets, 1996).

Finally, an effective in-school suspension program must have an evaluation phase.
This component should measure student behavioral change over time and determine if the
objectives of the program are being accomplished (Sheets, 1996). It is necessary to keep
accurate records and to follow up with classroom teachers about the student’s behavior
after their stay in the program. Hraback and Settles (2005) report that effective in-school
suspension programs need a rehabilitation program with worksheets and lesson plans to
help the students learn appropriate replacement behaviors. They point out that functional
assessments of the behaviors need to be conducted on each student and a replacement
behavior should be taught. They also report that effective in-school suspension programs
should use assignments geared toward helping students problem solve and work through
choices. These assignments should be given every day and teachers should work with students to find alternatives to negative behavior.

There are some limitations to in-school suspension as an alternative to suspension. Nancy Riestenberg (2006) reported that any kind of exclusion undermines the connections between students and staff if based on punishment. She further reported that in-school suspension has been correlated with poor academic achievement, grade retention and alienation. She believes that restorative measures which look at violations of relationships and culture, not rule violations, are more effective than punishment. “These practices aim to hold youth responsible for repairing relationship violations and create obligations”.

Another alternative to suspension that is used less frequently than in-school suspension is Restorative Justice. The Restorative Justice program utilizes many of the necessary components addressed above that make an in-school suspension program successful. The program contains worksheets and lesson plans directed at teaching prosocial skills, relationship building, retribution and active listening. Howard Zehr, author of “The Little Book of Restorative Discipline in Schools wrote that restorative discipline needed to have the following components:

1. Relationship building is seen as central to building a community in the school
2. Focus should be on harm not on rule breaking
3. A voice should be given to the person harmed
4. Students should engage in collaborative problems solving with peers and teachers
5. Programs should empower students to change and grow and should aim to enhance student responsibility
Zehr points out that all of the necessary components listed above are themes in healthy youth development studies.

In addition to teaching responsibility and building relationships between staff and students, Kane (2006) reported that social justice is very important to address in school, especially with urban youth. Social success is often more important than academic success because academic success may not be valued by parents. Restorative Justice addresses social skills by empowering the students and teaching them about community and relationship building within the school. William Haft (2000) studied the effects of Zero Tolerance in schools. The theory behind Zero Tolerance is that students need to be made aware that no misbehavior will be tolerated and that the consequences for doing so will be severe. The theory is that severe punishment for behavior will reduce the likelihood that the behavior will continue. Haft believes that this type of discipline places the staff and students in adversarial relationships and is not effective in changing behaviors. Casella (2003) reported that Zero Tolerance was intended to be swift punishment for violence and included funding for mediation, counseling and crisis intervention. However, it has been used with nonviolent behaviors and in many cases, no mediation or crisis intervention programs were implemented. Research shows that Zero Tolerance has not been effective in reducing behavioral problems in schools.

Haft (2000) believes that Restorative Justice is needed in schools to change behavior. He reported that Restorative Justice has three necessary components. First, staff should identify the parties involved in the incident, then inform and empower all parties, and finally establish accountability for past conduct and future intentions. He believes it is important for school staff to instill a sense of accountability and how one’s
actions affect others as well as the school community. He believes this approach is much more effective at changing behavior than out of school suspension because it involves face to face, non adversarial, informal meetings in a safe environment. The process also involves parents, which is helpful in changing behavior and building a sense of community within the school environment. Mirsky (2003) reported that instead of using Zero Tolerance and authoritative punishment programs, schools should use Restorative Justice because it places the responsibility on the student themselves and then uses a collaborative approach to wrong doing. This fosters a strong sense of community which helps build relationships. He theorizes that students who have strong relationships with school staff have better behavior and do better academically.

The SaferSanerSchools program is a program that utilized Restorative Justice in secondary schools. Officials first piloted the SaferSanerSchools program in 1998 in a middle school in Pennsylvania. This project included a whole school Restorative Justice program. Researchers credit the program with creating positive relationships between staff and students. Disciplinary referrals to the school office fell from 1,752 in 1999 to 815 in 2003. Out-of-school suspensions fell from 105 to 52 (Chmelynski, 2005). Teachers were trained in a variety of restorative practices to help students understand that they were as responsible for the success of the school and the relationships between students as the teachers were. Teachers reported that they used restorative practices in their classrooms when mild behavior problems arose instead of sending the students to the office. Students and teachers reported that they found restorative practices helpful with discipline problems (Mirsky, 2003). David Piperato is a principal at the school that first piloted the SaferSanerSchools program. He reported that, "You cannot separate
behavior from academics. When students feel good and safe and have solid relationships with teachers, their academic performance improves along with behavior”. When asked if restorative practices have had a positive effect on academics, both principals reported that they felt kids cannot learn if the teacher is spending valuable instructional time addressing behavior problems.

Mirsky (2003) studied several other districts in Pennsylvania that were using the SaferSanerSchool program. He found that when students report that they have strong relationships with teachers, their academic performance improves. He also found that student who reported that they felt cared for by adults in the school also reported that they were more willing to make academic changes. However, contrary to what was expected, after the implementation of the Restorative Justice program, office referrals increased. Mirsky investigated why referrals increased. He conducted informal interviews with students and reported that students stated they were reporting misbehaviors among their peers more often because they felt safe doing so and wanted to protect their school community and peers. The program was piloted as a whole school initiative. All staff and teachers were trained on the program. Eight teachers were trained as conflict managers and one teacher was available for students each hour of the day to provide medication.

The SaferSanerSchools program was also piloted in schools in Australia. In 2007, preliminary results confirmed that introducing Restorative Justice school-wide in the Southwestern Metro district of Adelaide, Australia had a positive impact on classroom culture and significantly decreased suspensions (Welden, 2008). Much has been written about Restorative Justice since its early development into practice in 1974 in Canada,
when a probation officer asked two young offenders, who had been vandalizing, to meet with their victims, apologize and make reparations (Youth Justice Board for England and Wales, 2004). Since then, schools all over the world have started Restorative Justice Programs as an alternative discipline strategy with some students. In the UK, Restorative Justice approaches in schools encompass a range of initiatives that operate along a continuum based on the gravity of the offense. These initiatives include circle time, peer mediation, facilitated meetings, short or informal conferencing, or formal restorative conferences. They may also include preventative measures such as conflict resolution education and curriculum additions that include training in active listening, appropriate communication skills and anger management (Youth Justice Board for England and Wales, 2004).

Much of the drive to bring Restorative Justice to schools started when Ted Wachtel, president of the International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP), based in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, began developing SaferSanerSchools in the mid 1990's. That program was created in response to what Wachtel saw as a crisis in American Education and in society as a whole (Chmelynski, 2005). Wachtel blames the dramatic change in young people's behavior on a loss of connectedness and community in modern society: “Schools have become larger, more impersonal institutions, and educators feel less connected to the families whose children they teach. Restorative practices involve changing relationships by engaging people: doing things with them instead of to or for them. This provides both high control and high support at the same time. This is the type of support researchers reported was needed in place of out of school suspension in order to change behaviors and lower suspensions. The SaferSanerSchools program is now in
30-40 schools mostly in Pennsylvania, New York and New Jersey. Some are also in
Australia, Hungary, Canada and the Netherlands. The programs focus on placing
responsibility on the students themselves, using a collaborative response to wrongdoing.
Wachtel reports that it is the relationship between staff and students, not the specific
strategies that bring about meaningful change.

Restorative Justice was also piloted in the PEASE academy in St. Paul Minnesota
s well as in 3 other schools in 1998. The Minnesota Department of Children, Families
and Learning received a three year $300,000 grant to implement and test alternatives to
out of school suspension. They looked at Restorative Justice’s effect on suspension,
expulsion, attendance, school climate and academic progress. Researchers found a
significantly lower number of suspensions, more positive school climate and an increase
in grade point averages for students attending schools with the Restorative Justice process
compared to students in schools that did not have the Restorative Justice program. Six
districts in Wisconsin conducted the same kinds of tests in the 2002-2003 school year and
reported similar results.

The above research supports the use of Restorative Justice in schools however,
most empirical evidence on Restorative Justice is based in the criminal justice field and
not in schools. McCold (2002) evaluated a Restorative Justice program used in a southern
Pennsylvania alternative education day treatment program. He reported that the results
present sufficient empirical evidence that changes in attitudes and behavior were the
result of participating in the school’s restorative milieu. They based their conclusions on
recidivism rates, self-report and academic success after completion of the program.
Authors found that youth who completed the program showed significant improvement in
their attitudes toward authority, increased self-esteem, and lower recidivism rates than those students given behavioral discharges from the program.

I have been the school psychologist in the building studied for the last five years. I have seen the impact of rising behavior problems on the staff, students and parents. I have seen student and staff morale, school culture and climate and parent involvement decline. Discipline practices were becoming increasingly ineffective. The school experienced high recidivism rates and no behavioral changes were occurring. Student’s grades were declining and the school was not making Adequate Yearly Progress which was affecting their funding form the State of Michigan. In fact, this district as a whole was cited and fined 1.5 million dollars for excessive suspensions to African American males at the middle school level. The school’s principal requested that I work with them to modify the program that was being used. This study is the evaluation of the program that was ultimately developed by the school’s administration team. Part of my job as a school psychologist in this district is to find programs that are effective in changing behavior. I looked to the research on suspensions, in-school suspensions and alternatives to out of school suspensions. It became clear that an effective in-school suspension program needed a pro-social component. Restorative Justice was a type of pro-social program already being implemented in the building on a case by case basis through a grant received by the district. After consulting the research on Restorative Justice, it was decided to include it in the in-school suspension program as an attempt to teach pro-social skills.
Problem Statement

Research has suggested that suspensions do not reduce behavior problems in schools and in fact, may actually perpetuate more problems by isolating students and keeping them from necessary instruction. Therefore, an effective empirically based alternative is needed. For the last 30 years, in-school suspension programs have been used as an alternative to suspension in an effort to decrease behavior problems while increasing instructional time and keeping students in a structured environment. However, research on in-school suspension programs report that simple punishment is not enough. If there is no pro-social and academic component, in-school suspension has little or no advantage over out-of-school suspension (Hrabak and Settles, 2005). Although there are few empirical studies in the area of Restorative Justice and its use in schools, the studies that exist suggest that it improves the school environment and enhances learning opportunities which may lead to a decrease in behavior problems (Chmelynski, 2005). Restorative Justice can be used to teach students responsibility, help develop relationships between students and staff, and help them develop a sense of community. However, Restorative Justice alone is not enough. Integrating it with an in-school suspension program would provide teachers a needed place to send student to cool down while teaching them how to react differently next time. It will also provide students time to work on class assignments so they do not get behind. The combination of these two alternatives to suspension warrants empirical evaluation.
Current Study

The school staff at a Midwestern urban school district expressed concern about the increasing number of office referrals and suspensions. In addition, staff was concerned about the decline in student achievement. The principal at the school initiated an in-school suspension program that was evidence based and contained a Restorative Justice component as an alternative to out of school suspension. The program was implemented at the beginning of the 2009-2010 academic year. The goal of the disciplinary program was to decrease student office referrals and suspensions, and to increase academic performance. The proposed project was designed to examine the initial effectiveness of this program. The primary purpose of this study was two-fold. 1) Comparison data was collected from the school; researchers accessed archival data on office referrals and suspensions from for the 2007-2008 school year. The only alternative to suspension during that time period was for the student to sit in the office for a given period of time. This served as baseline or comparison data. 2) During the intervention phase, researchers studied the alternative program put in place by the principal to assess if the change in program had an effect on office referrals, number of suspensions, and grade point averages.

To help address current research gaps, the current study examined a school that implemented a program that combined in school suspension with Restorative Justice in an effort to decrease out of school suspension. The aim of the study was to examine the assumption that keeping students in school via an in school suspension program would decrease the number of office referrals and allow students time to complete their school work with the help of a certified teacher in the in school suspension room. Further, the
The overall research goal was to examine and describe the practices utilized by the educators within the school, and compare them to the practices previously used in the same school, which was out of school suspension only. With that goal in mind, the following research questions were developed:

1) What effect does an in school suspension program with a Restorative Justice component have on total office referrals in an inner city middle school?

2) What effect does an in school suspension program with a Restorative Justice component have on suspensions in an inner city middle school?

3) What is the overall teacher satisfaction with the in school suspension program coupled with the Restorative Justice program?

4) Is academic performance increased in students who have participated in the in school suspension program when compared to their performance during baseline?

Methods

Participants

Participants in this study were students attending a Midwestern middle school in the 2007-2008 and 2009-2010 academic years. Participants were not directly recruited for this study. The study was an investigation of data already collected routinely by the school administration on programs that were already part of standard practice at the school. Data from the 2008-2009 school year were not examined because the intervention program was implemented during the middle of the school year and therefore a complete data set for that year was not available. Participants were divided into 3 groups. Group 1
included students referred and/or suspended in the 2007-2008 school year \( (n = 188) \).

Group 2 included students referred and/or suspended in the 2009-2010 school year \( (n = 256) \). The intersection of Groups 1 and 2, referred to as Group 3, included students who were referred and/or suspended and who were enrolled at the school for both the 2007-2008 and 2009-2010 school years \( (n = 153) \).

Only students who were referred to the office for one or more of the following reasons were included in the study: persistent misconduct, insubordination, swearing, verbal fighting and/or disorderly conduct. Students referred for physical assault, theft, weapons and drug possession are referrals for which the district requires students to be suspended out of school. Therefore, data from these referrals were not included in the study. Students with no office referrals also were not included in the study. Additionally, students in the cognitively impaired programs at the middle school were not included because when these students are involved in disciplinary action, they are required to work with the school psychologist and social worker on an individual behavior plan and therefore are not included in the in school suspension program.

In the 2007-2008 school year (Group 1), 64% of students were African American, 23% of were Caucasian, 9% were Hispanic, and 4% of students were of Asian or other descent. In the 2009-2010 school year (Group 2), 72% of students were African American, 18% were Caucasian, 7% were Hispanic, and 3% of students were of Asian or other descent. A chi-squared analysis was conducted to examine whether there were any demographic differences across the two academic years. Results showed that the differences in student populations by year were not significantly different (see Table 1).
Table 1

*Chi Squared Analysis of Student Population Across Academic Years*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
<th>$\chi^2$</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2007-2008</td>
<td>2009-2010</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>48</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The school provided permission to access this data which was provided in aggregate (see Appendix D for Letter of Support). No individual students were identified and no manipulation or treatment was imposed because this study.

**Restorative Justice/In-school Suspension Condition**

These students were referred to the office for a violation of the student code of conduct (excluding mandated suspension referrals discussed above). The student’s parent or guardian was called by an administrator to discuss the incident and the impending suspension. Parents were informed during the phone conversation about the in school suspension program. Parents were given the option to have the student enrolled in the in school suspension program as an alternative to out of school suspension. If the parent agreed, the student was assigned to the in school suspension program. The administrator was in charge of assigning the number of days the student had to serve in the program based on the situation leading to the suspension.
Out of School Suspension Condition

These students were referred to the office for a violation of the student code of conduct. If the student had already attended the in school suspension program and the administrator had discipline referrals for that student while in the in school program, they were no longer eligible for the in school suspension program and had to be suspended out of school. Also, if the reason for suspension was physical assault, theft, weapons or drug possession, students were mandated to be suspended out of school due to the school district’s policy. Finally, if the student’s parents were contacted and they chose not to have their student enrolled in the in school suspension program, the student was suspended out of school. The administrator was in charge of assigning the number of days the student was suspended out of school based on the situation leading to the suspension.

Setting

Information for the current study was gathered on and provided by a large middle school in Michigan. The school has registered students in grades 6th, 7th, and 8th. During the treatment year (2009-2010) the student population is characterized as 77% free and reduced lunch, suggesting that 77% of the student body came from homes that were considered at or below the poverty line as determined by the State of Michigan. Based on the income of the family, these students did not pay for lunch or paid a reduced rate which was calculated by the state and dependent on their parents’ income level. African American students made up 72% of the student population while Caucasian students
made up 18% and Hispanic students made up 7%. The other remaining 3% of students were from Asian or other descent.

The in school suspension/Restorative Justice program was housed in a first floor general education classroom that was not being used. The classroom was located across the hall from the security office and two doors down from the main office where the principals were located. This location was chosen so teachers would have the support of security and administration quickly if there were any behavioral problems. The room had 30 student desks, which is the same number of desks as the other classrooms in the building. Desks were arranged in rows facing the front chalk board. Posters designed by students describing school rules were hung throughout the room. Restorative Justice posters encouraging respectful behavior were also hung throughout the room. Students were expected to complete in class assignments they were missing from each of their 5 core classes. Each teacher was given the list of the students attending the room each day. Each morning teachers sent the student’s work to the in school suspension room. At the end of the day, the students gave the teacher in the in school suspension room their homework. The teacher then placed all work in the respective teachers’ boxes.

Human Subjects’ Protection

The current study was approved by the Western Michigan University Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB Project Number 09-04-11). Because the interventions investigated in this study were sanctioned by the school district to be implemented for the entire school, no consent was required from teachers, parents, or students. Students were sent home with a letter describing the program and listing the
phone number of the school principal if they had any questions or concerns. This was the principal’s method of informing the parents of the new program.

Interventions

**Out of school suspension disciplinary action.** Students were sent to an administrator’s office following the office referral. If the administrator decided the student was to be suspended out of school, the student was informed by the administrator while in their office. The student was also informed of the number of days they were being suspended for and the code of conduct infraction leading to the suspension. The administrator then alerted the disciplinary secretary who typed a suspension letter to the parent including the infraction and the number of days the student was suspended. The letter contained a return to school date and noted that a parent must bring the student to school on the return date and meet with the administrator who suspended the student in order for the student to return to school. During this meeting the student was required to sign a form indicating they would follow the code of conduct. Once the letter was typed, it was given to the student to take home. The parent was then informed of the suspension via phone call by the administrator suspending the student. Transportation home was arranged and the student was sent to wait for their ride home in the main office lobby.

**In-school suspension and Restorative Justice program.** Students were sent to an administrator’s office following a referral to the office. The student’s parent was called. If the student did not have any prior discipline referrals while in the in school program and the parent agreed that the student could attend the in school suspension/Restorative Justice program, the administrator filled out a form assigning the student to the program.
The form was then given to the discipline secretary. She used these forms to compile the list of students who were attending the in school program each day and then gave that list to the teachers via email every morning before school. The student was informed about the program, where it was located and how many days they were to attend. They were also given a copy of the form assigning them to the room, which served as their ticket into the room. Teachers provided classroom work each morning to the program's first hour teacher based on the list emailed out by the discipline secretary each morning.

During the intervention phase of the study, researchers gathered existing data (see appendix C) on the number of and reason for office referrals and suspensions, as well as students' grade point averages during the time the in-school suspension program was in place. The in-school suspension room policies and procedures were made by administration. Administration reported that they designed the program based on empirical evidence of successful in-school suspension and Restorative Justice programs. The intervention phase data was collected during the 2009-2010 academic year. The in-school suspension program included five hours of instruction in core academic areas and one hour of Restorative Justice for all students assigned to the room each day. A Restorative Justice specialist, already employed by the school, implemented the Restorative Justice program during the last hour of the in-school suspension program. This program consisted of several restorative practices based on empirical evidence from a program in a Pennsylvania school district. When students came to in-school suspension, they were required to enter with the in school suspension form signed by an administrator that indicated their assignment to the in school suspension room as well as the details of the incident. This referral form was then given to the Restorative Justice staff person who
used it to set up a restorative conference with the parties involved. The parties involved in the Restorative Justice conference were: the student who was referred and any teachers or other students who may have been involved in the incident. During the conference, all parties were able to tell the group their version of the incident. Each person as allowed to speak without being interrupted. The staff member acted as the group leader and maintained order during the conference. Next, the Restorative Justice staff member asked the parties to join in a peace circle. During the peace circle, each group member was encouraged to talk about how each person’s involvement made them feel and how it impacted their life. Once feelings were verbalized the staff member would recap the impact everyone’s actions had on each other and then ask appropriate members what others could do to make them feel better. A plan was agreed upon and a contract was signed. The restorative Justice staff member gave that contract to the students’ teachers and administration so they could ensure the plan was followed. Students who were not involved in conferences or peace circles would work on Restorative Justice assignments designed to help students learn about Restorative Justice and how to live by the Restorative Justice guidelines at home and in school.

Strategy for Ensuring Fidelity of the Program

To ensure treatment fidelity and integrity, investigators examined information recorded on the Teacher and Restorative Justice Duty Checklist (see Appendices D and E, respectively) forms created and implemented by the school principal. The Teacher Duty Checklist was created to ensure each teacher was running the in-school suspension room the same way each day. A different teacher may have been in charge of the in-
school suspension room at any given time. The checklist included items to be done each hour of each day. The teachers were required to fill out the checklist and turn them in to the principal at the end of each hour. Random classroom visits were also made by the principal. The in-school suspension teachers were given a list of rules developed by administration for them to follow at the beginning of the program implementation. The supervisor of the district’s Restorative Justice program conducted random observations of the Restorative Justice specialist and filled out a duty checklist indicating that the program was being run consistently. The Restorative Justice teacher was to fill out a Duty Checklist at the end of each day and turn it in to the principal. All identifying information was removed by the principal after she reviewed the forms. She then placed the forms in the researcher’s mailbox in the school’s main office.

METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

Procedure

Comparison data were provided by the school in order to examine differences across the two disciplinary action conditions. These data included archival information about referrals occurring during the 2007-2008 academic year. Data were gathered from archived records provided by the school discipline secretary from the school’s discipline data base. Data collection included the total number of office referrals and suspensions for students referred for insubordination, persistent misconduct, disorderly conduct, swearing and verbal fights in each grade level. The number of referrals and reason for referral were recorded. Student’s grade point averages by quarter were also recorded.
This is a procedure that was already in place at the school prior to the current investigation.

Instrumentation

1) Office referral Form (see Appendix B). This form is the school district’s office referral form. This was used by the secretary to enter the age, grade, reason for referral and the referral to either suspension or in school suspension. This information was entered into the school’s discipline data base. The researchers did not see this form. It was used only by the discipline secretary.

2) Duty Checklist – Teacher (see Appendix C). This is the form made by the principal that was used by researchers as the treatment integrity form. All identifying information was removed by the principal prior to releasing it to the researchers. Duty Checklist- Restorative Justice (see Appendix D). This is the form made by the Restorative Justice Supervisor that was used by researchers as the treatment integrity form. All identifying information was removed by the principal prior to releasing it to the researchers.

3) Data Collection Form (see Appendix E). This is the form that was used by the researchers to collect data on number of office referrals, suspensions, grade level, sex, and ethnicity. It also included reason for referral or suspension.

4) Teacher Satisfaction Survey (see Appendix F). This was the survey given to teachers that was to be filled out anonymously. It was used to collect data on the teacher’s satisfaction with several aspects of the in-school suspension program. It was a YES/NO survey with a section for written comments.
RESULTS

In this study, the effects of implementing Restorative Justice in an in-school suspension program in an urban Midwestern school district was evaluated by examining effects of the program on office referrals, suspension rates, grade point average. Three subgroups of participants were included in the analyses: Group 1 was comprised of students enrolled at the school in 2007-2008 (baseline group); Group 2 included students enrolled at the school in 2009-2010 (treatment group); and Group 3 included those students enrolled at the school in both the 2007-2008 and 2009-2010 school years (longitudinal group). Paired t-tests and chi-square analyses were used to compare differences in the school-wide data from pre-intervention (2007-2008) to post-intervention (2009-2010) in four basic areas: number of office referrals, number of suspensions, grade point average, and teacher satisfaction.

First, the number of office referrals and suspensions for the 2007-2008 school year was compared to the number of referrals and suspensions in the 2009-2010 school year. During the 2007-2008 school year the only discipline options for students were either to sit in the office for the hour they were referred or to be suspended out of school. During the 2009-2010 academic year, discipline options for students referred to the office included the in school suspension program with the Restorative Justice component or out-of-school suspension. Second, grade point averages of students during the 2007-2008 and 2009-2010 academic years were examined to determine what, if any effect the in-school suspension program had on students' grades. Academic performance was measured using
the students' grade point averages at the end of each quarter. Finally, overall teacher satisfaction with the in school suspension program was examined using responses from a teacher satisfaction inventory as well as informal interviews of students and teachers.

It was hypothesized that the in-school suspension program with the Restorative Justice component would significantly decrease office referral and suspension rates and increase student grade point averages compared to the alternative; out of school suspension or sitting in the office for the hour they were referred.

Analysis of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1

It was hypothesized that the total number of office referrals would be significantly lower during the treatment condition than during the baseline period. The number of office referral rates for the 2007-2008 and 2009-2010 academic years were collected. The mean number of office referrals for Group 1 was 5.56 ($n = 188; \sigma = 6.57$) and 5.09 ($n = 256; \sigma = 5.01$) for Group 2. When comparing the mean office referral rates for students in Group 3 only ($n = 153$; students enrolled for both the 2007-2008 and 2009-2010 academic years), the mean number of referrals in 2007-2008 was 6.03 ($\sigma = 6.65$) and 6.06 ($\sigma = 5.34$) in 2009-2010 (see Table 3).

Analysis of the referral rates found a significantly smaller deviation in the number of referrals per student in the treatment year ($F = 4.756, p = 0.03$). However, no difference in the overall mean number of referrals was found ($t = 0.824, p = 0.41$). This analysis suggests that students with higher numbers of office referrals had fewer office referrals in
2009-2010 (treatment year) compared to 2007-2008 (baseline year). A visual analysis of the distribution of office referrals for both academic years is provided in Table 3.

Table 2

*Differences in Number of Referrals from 2007-2008 to 2009-2010*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group 1</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>5.56</td>
<td>6.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>5.09</td>
<td>5.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 3 (07-08)</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>6.03</td>
<td>6.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 3 (09-10)</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>6.06</td>
<td>5.34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hypothesis 2

It was hypothesized that there would be a significant decrease in the number of suspensions while using the ISSRJ program compared to baseline. The mean number of suspensions for Group 1 \((n = 188)\) was 2.12 \((\sigma = 2.91)\) and 1.32 \((\sigma = 1.75)\) for Group 2 \((n = 256)\). An independent t test was conducted. Results indicated significantly fewer numbers of suspensions per student for Group 2 than Group 1 \((F = 17.50; p < 0.001)\).

Those students in attendance for both academic years (Group 3) had a mean of 2.22 \((\sigma = 3.00)\) suspensions in the 2007-2008 academic year and 1.62 \((\sigma = 2.01)\) for the 2009-2010 academic year (see Table 2). A paired t test showed the average number of suspensions significantly decreased in 2009-2010 compared to 2007-2008 for Group 3 \((F = 6.197; p < 0.05)\; \text{See Table 4).}\)
Table 3

*Differences in Number of Suspensions from 2007-2008 to 2009-2010*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group 1</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>2.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>1.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 3 (07-08)</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 3 (09-10)</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td>2.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Hypothesis 3**

It was hypothesized that there would be a significant increase in grade point average for students with discipline issues while using the ISSRJ program compared to baseline. When comparing grade point averages for the 2007-2008 and 2009-2010 school years, quarter 4 data was not examined because the study ended during the 4th quarter of the 2009-2010 school year.

An independent samples test was used to compare quarter one and quarter three grades for both academic years to determine statistical significance. The first analysis showed the differences in quarter 1 grades between 2007-2008 and 2009-2010. The mean grade point averages for quarter one were 2.04 ($\sigma = 0.921$) in 2007-2008 and 1.78 ($\sigma = 0.931$) in 2009-2010. The second analysis showed the differences in quarter 3 grades between the two academic years. The mean grade point averages for quarter 3 were 1.88 ($\sigma = .941$) for 2007-2008 and 2.21 ($\sigma = .829$) for 2009-2010. Results suggest that when comparing first quarter grades, the differences are not significant ($F = 0.029; p >0.05$).
However, when comparing 3rd quarter grades, the differences are significant ($F= 4.234$, $p< 0.05$).

Group 3 was analyzed separately using paired t-tests to analyze the difference in quarter one and quarter three grades across years. Results showed a significant drop in grade point average during the baseline year from a mean of 2.01 in quarter 1 to mean of 1.84 in quarter 3 ($p < 0.05$). Results showed a significant increase in the treatment year from a mean of 1.70 in quarter 1 to a mean of 2.14 in quarter 3 ($p< 0.05$). Considering data for Group 3 alone, a mean grade point of 1.84 ($\sigma=.919$) occurred for the baseline year (for quarters one through three) and a mean grade point average of 2.13 ($\sigma=.817$) occurred for the treatment year. A paired samples correlation test showed the mean grade point average significantly increased in the treatment year compared to the baseline year for group 3 ($p<0.05$).

![Figure 1. Grade point comparison.](image)
In addition to the above hypotheses, school administration examined the reasons for referral and if those reasons changed during treatment.

The school principal predicted that of the reasons for referral included in this study, referrals for insubordination (directly refusing a staff member) and persistent misconduct (more than three suspensions for the same violation) would significantly decrease due to the implementation of the program. This prediction was based on the principal’s announcement to staff that they should “crack down” on students who were continually disobeying rules. Results of this study showed that swearing and disorderly conduct significantly decreased during the treatment year, while referrals for verbal fighting decreased slightly but not significantly. Contrary to what was expected, the number of referrals for persistent misconduct increased and the number of referrals for insubordination nearly doubled. A visual depiction of the results is shown in Figure 2. Additional analyses were not conducted because of confounding variables including; differences in teacher classification and focus on behavioral issues in the treatment year.

![Figure 2. Visual analysis of results.](image-url)
Hypothesis 4

The fourth hypothesis was that teachers would rate the program positively. A teacher satisfaction inventory (see appendix G) was developed by school administration and administered to all teachers in the school \((n = 31)\). Teachers completed the satisfaction questionnaires anonymously. The school principal asked each teacher to fill out a survey at a mandatory staff meeting at the end of the 2009-2010 school year. Eighty-seven percent of the surveys were returned. The results are shown in Table 5.

Table 4

*Teacher Satisfaction Inventory Results*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>(\chi^2)</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I believe the in school suspension program with the restorative justice component is helping change the students behavior</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>.806</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.3691</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I believe the current in school suspension program is more effective than out of school suspension.</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>9.323</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.0022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I believe the students are doing better academically with the current in school suspension program than with past programs.</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>1.581</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.2087</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I support the continuation of this program.</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>17.065</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The program is user friendly for teachers.</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>9.323</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.0022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I would recommend this program to other schools.</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>14.226</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Overall I am satisfied with the program currently.</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>.806</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.3691</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Overall, results indicate that although most teachers felt the program was user friendly, would recommend it to other schools and supported its continuation. Also, seventy eight percent said it was more effective than out of school suspension. However, less than 50% were satisfied with the program currently. The most common comments written by teachers at the bottom of the form suggested that teachers liked the idea of the program but had trouble with how it was staffed and the particulars of how students were referred. Some teachers wrote that they believed that parents should not be consulted for permission before allowing students to participate in the program.

DISCUSSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This study examined the effects of incorporating Restorative Justice in an in-school suspension program in an urban Midwestern school district. Research on in-school suspension programs report that simple punishment is not enough. If there is no pro-social and academic component, in-school suspension has little or no advantage over out-of-school suspension (Hrabak and Settles, 2005). In an expansion of previous studies, the current study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of in school suspension by including a pro social component (Restorative Justice) and an academic component to the program. Although there are few empirical studies in the area of Restorative Justice and its use in schools, the studies that exist suggest that it improves the school environment and enhances learning opportunities which may lead to a decrease in behavior problems (Chmelynski, 2005, Mirsky, 2003 and McCold, 2002). This study attempted to further investigate the effectiveness of alternatives to out of school suspension in a middle school.
setting. The effectiveness of the program was evaluated by examining effects on office referrals, suspension rates, grade point averages and teacher satisfaction data.

According to Sheets (1996), an effective in-school suspension program must have an evaluation phase. This study and its results serve as the evaluation phase for this program. Contrary to what was expected, the results of the current study did not support the efficacy of the program in reducing the overall number of office referrals. However, results did support the efficacy of the program in significantly reducing the number of suspensions as well as significantly increasing grade point averages during the treatment year. The first hypothesis of the study was that the total number of office referrals would be significantly lower during the time the administration utilized the in school suspension program with a Restorative Justice component than during the baseline period. Analysis of the referral rates found a significantly smaller deviation in the number of referrals per student in the treatment year. However, no difference in the overall mean number of referrals was found ($t = 0.824, p = 0.41$). This analysis suggests that students with higher numbers of office referrals had less office referrals during the treatment year. Therefore it is reasonable to assume that the program had a positive effect on those students who had higher numbers of office referrals.

The second hypothesis of the study was that there would be a significant decrease in the number of suspensions while using the in school suspension program compared to baseline. Results supported this hypothesis. The number of suspensions significantly decreased in Group 2 and Group 3. This suggests that while students were still being referred to the office as frequently during the program as they were during baseline, those referrals did not end in an out of school suspension as often. The goal of the program
was to keep students in school and engaged in the curriculum with teacher support. The program met that goal by reducing the amount of time the students were suspended out of school and increased their instructional time.

The third hypothesis of the study was that there would be a significant increase in grade point averages for students with discipline issues while using the in school suspension program compared to baseline. Results suggest that when comparing first quarter grades for both years, the differences are not significant. However, when comparing 3rd quarter grades for both years, the differences are statistically significant. This difference in quarter results may have been a result of the program becoming a part of the school culture by the third quarter. During the first quarter, the program was just beginning and students may have been testing the rules of the program by not completing assignments on time, which would have negatively impacted their grades.

The reason for referral was also examined. Administration predicted that office referrals for insubordination and persistent misconduct would significantly decrease due to the implementation of the program. Skiba, Peterson and Williams (1997) found that generally behaviors that led to office referrals were not those that threatened safety, but those that indicate noncompliance or disrespect. Results of this study showed that swearing and disorderly conduct significantly decreased during the treatment year. Verbal fighting decreased slightly but the decrease was not statistically significant. Contrary to what was expected, the number of referrals for persistent misconduct increased and the number of referrals for insubordination nearly doubled. This partially supports the previous research findings that most office referrals are for noncompliance and disrespect.
The lack of a significant decrease in persistent misconduct and insubordination may be due to several reasons. It is possible that by implementing this program, the teachers were more likely to refer students to the office because they believed something useful would come from the referral. Teachers reported that in the past, they were more hesitant to refer students to the office because they did not believe the discipline options at that time were helpful. It may also be that student who were referred to the in school suspension program were named on a list that was circulated to all teachers in order to get homework assignments for them. Therefore, teachers knew which students had been referred, and may have been more likely to refer them for persistent misconduct because they were able to see how many times the student had been sent to the in school suspension program by other teachers. Teachers did not usually know what students were referred by other teachers before the implementation of the program. Further, during a staff meeting, the principal announced that one of the goals of administration was to “crack down” on students who were insubordinate in an attempt to promote a more respectful school climate. Hence, teachers may have been more likely to refer students for insubordination in an attempt to adhere to the administrator’s request.

The fourth hypothesis was that teachers would rate the program positively. Administration predicted that teachers would be satisfied with the program’s design, feel that it improved students’ behavior and grade point averages, and would therefore support the program’s continuance. This data was important because administration felt that staff buy in was critical to the success of the program. They wanted the staff to know that their concerns would be heard and discussed. They also wanted staff to know that their suggestions would be put in place where possible, to make changes to the
program. To test this hypothesis, a teacher satisfaction inventory was developed by school administration only and administered to all teachers in the school.

Overall, results indicate that although most teachers felt the program was user friendly, would recommend it to other schools and supported the continuation of the program, less than 50% were satisfied with the program currently. There was not an overall satisfaction question on the survey to judge what percentage of teachers were overall satisfied. Instead results on individual questions as well as individual comments were used. Many teachers reported that they liked the idea of an in school suspension program and also liked the Restorative Justice component, but they did not like that there was a different teacher assigned to work the room each hour. They also did not like that teacher had different rules about what types of behavior was acceptable while in the program and that some teachers did not send homework for the students to work on in a timely manner. This suggests that there are other variables which may play an important factor in teacher satisfaction. Hrabak and Settles (2005) reported that a poorly designed program will tend to have the same negative effects as an out-of-school suspension program. Based on teacher survey and interview results, this program may have been poorly designed.

Given the above discussion regarding the program's impact on suspensions, office referrals and academic performance, it is reasonable to assume that combining an in school suspension program with a Restorative Justice component could be successful in decreasing suspensions and office referrals and increasing grade point averages.
Anecdotal Observations

This information provided in this section is not scientific and is based on observations made by this researcher. This information, while not collected systematically, can provide meaningful feedback to those who implemented the program evaluated in this project. Kane (2006) reported that it is important to have access to informal data and feedback, especially when working with at risk youth in an urban school setting because many times the students may not feel comfortable participating in structured interviews.

Michigan’s State Board of Education Positive Behavior Support (PBS) policy states that each school district in Michigan must implement a system of school wide positive behavior support strategies. More specifically the policy states that the educational community must provide a system that will support students’ efforts to manage their own behavior and assure academic achievement. An effective behavior support system is a proactive, positive, skill building approach for the teaching and learning of successful student behavior.

Also, the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act of 2004 IDEA requires schools to incorporate school wide positive behavior support for all students with disabilities. It seems that this school could have benefited from incorporating Restorative Justice into their school wide PBS plan, which they are required to have by state and federal law. While systematic information from school staff was not collected outside the satisfaction survey, several staff members provided feedback and observations about the program and its implementation. Such information may be viewed as useful in helping modify aspects of the program as well as in facilitating buy-in from staff in the future.
During this informal feedback, it was repeatedly stated by staff and students that there was a lack of positive relationships between staff and students. According to Wachtel, the founder of SaferSanerSchools, it is the relationship between staff and students, not the specific strategies used that brings about behavioral change (Mirsky, 2003). Students reported that they did not feel that the teachers in the program cared about their success and they did not feel that they had a positive relationship with teachers.

During fidelity observations, teachers were mainly sitting at their desks working on various things and not engaged with the students. It seems that the relationships between staff and students could have been positively impacted if Restorative Justice became part of the school culture and not just something people engaged in for one hour while attending the in school suspension program. Students and staff who were not involved in the program were informally asked what they knew about Restorative Justice. Most of them reported that they did not know anything. Chmelynski (2005) reported that implementing Restorative Justice on a school wide basis may improve the school environment, thereby improving the relationships between students and teachers.

An additional explanation came from the informal feedback from several teachers who reported that they were referring more students when the program was in place than during baseline because they felt that something helpful was being done with the students they were referring. When the administration noticed the referrals increasing, they pointed out at a staff meeting that while the in school program provided more instructional time to students than out of school suspension, teachers needed to continue to work on behaviors in their classroom as often as possible and not refer students to the office that they would not have previously referred. Teachers asked the administration if
they were tracking teachers' names on the referrals and administration reported that they were not. Teachers may have continued to refer students more often because they felt they could do so without consequence. It is likely that this had an impact on the number of office referrals made. The teachers reported that they were able to teach students who were not having behavior problems more efficiently when the students with behaviors were out of the room. Mirsky (2003) reported that one cannot separate behavior from academics. That is, a student cannot learn if they are misbehaving.

Students were also interviewed informally and noted that they disliked the in school suspension room because they were required to come to school but couldn’t see their friends and that they were still required to do work. Nearly all students interviewed reported that they preferred out of school suspension because they did not have get up early and they had freedom to choose their activity at home.

Barriers

There were some general barriers to conducting research as well as barriers to program implementation. A general limitation is that the results cannot be generalized to all middle schools because the study includes only one such school. The participants were primarily African American in an urban setting and therefore do not represent a heterogeneous sample, indicating that results may not generalize to a more diverse group of participants. The relatively small sample size may have resulted in insufficient power to detect smaller, yet significant differences. Also, this study was an evaluation of an intact program with externally controlled and dictated elements, which was a major barrier to program implementation.
One is that the investigators did not track individual behaviors to compare the independent variables' impact on each student's behavior or grade point average. Also, the names of the teachers making office referrals were not tracked. These data would have been helpful to assess whether certain teachers were referring students significantly more often than others and therefore skewing results.

It would have also been helpful to track student's individual class assignment completion to ascertain if certain students continued to not hand in assignments and therefore skewed results. Formally interviewing or administering a survey to students who made significant individual progress may have resulted in valuable information. This may also have resulted in discussions of ideas that individuals had, which may have strongly influenced their subsequent behavior. Also, a one-time brief intervention may lack potency in maintaining changes. Wachtel's studies of the SaferSanerSchools program ran for three consecutive years. Results showed that the behavior change became more significant as the program continued. It would be helpful to analyze longitudinal data on the program's effectiveness.

In terms of the program design, Sheets (1996) suggested that successful in school suspension programs need to be structured, focused on building relationships with students and should be developed with and supported by staff. This program had no structural plan in place in terms of what teachers would be staffing the room. Teachers frequently changed based on availability. Teachers did not have any input into the program. It was handed down by administration in one staff meeting. Instructors had no background in counseling or social work, and many lacked strong classroom management skills. Teachers were not chosen to staff the room based on their ability. Instead they
were chosen based on their availability. Further, the administrators assigning the students consequences for behavior did so somewhat arbitrarily based on their perception of each individual case. There was not an integrity component in place for the administrators’ decision making process. Further, the form intended to be used as a treatment integrity measure for the program was not able to be used as such because forms were frequently not turned in and observations by the Restorative Justice supervisor and the principal were not conducted as planned. Therefore, treatment integrity of the study was poor.

An additional limitation to the study was that it did not include a parent interview or satisfaction survey which would have given rich data to help the administration make changes in the program and allow parents to feel that the development of the program was a mutual effort. This may have helped develop more positive relationships between the staff and parents.

Finally, it is problematic that some participants were mandatorily excluded from the study due to serious behavior issues as discussed in the participants section above. The data from these students would have been useful to include since they had some of the most difficult behaviors. These students had a high recidivism rate, which suggests that suspending them out of school was not effective in changing their behavior. Since these behaviors were the most severe and in some cases compromised the safety of staff and students, it seems especially important to include them in a program that may change their behavior. It seems logical that a Restorative Justice program would not only be relevant, but may also have a greater impact on these students. According to a study done by Welden (2008), some of the students studied had personal issues that resulted in explosive behavior in school. After the implementation of Restorative Justice there was a
dramatic turnaround in school culture. She stated that when the "authority" administers
discipline (punishment) the opportunity for the individual to take responsibility and be
accountable, is lost. The focus of Restorative Justice is to build on student’s strengths and
finding solutions to problems, thereby helping reduce the recidivism rate. Also if the
students with the most severe behavior problems begin to feel a sense of belonging within
the school culture, they may be less likely to engage in dangerous behaviors that threaten
the safety of that community.

Future Directions

It will be important for researchers to continue to study the effectiveness of
various alternatives to suspension, so that schools may chose empirically validated
methods or programs to replace out of school suspension. While the data on the
ineffectiveness of suspension are very clear and very well documented, data on
alternatives to suspension are lacking. Research needs to continue in this area so that
administrators can chose from empirically validated programs. This would allow them to
make a convincing argument to the school board officials and promote system wide
changes with regard to discipline practices. Despite strong data on the ineffectiveness of
suspensions, schools are still using it because successful, research based alternatives are
lacking. Restorative Justice is an example of an alternative to suspension. While there are
some research studies on Restorative Justice in the schools, there are not many and most
have not been replicated. The research that has been done shows positive results on
decreasing the number of office referrals and suspensions in schools. Data also shows
that Restorative Justice can help change the culture and climate of a school. Studies need
to be replicated to lend more support for its use in schools before districts will spend time and money to implement such a program. This study demonstrated preliminary effectiveness, but much more needs to be done.

An investigation into why the number of office referrals were reduced in students with a high number of office referrals but not reduced for the rest of the students is warranted. It may be that since the students with a high number of referrals were likely to visit the program more frequently, and that this frequent exposure allowed them to benefit more from the program than those who were only exposed to the program once or twice.

In addition, tracking individual students who participated in the program would give administration the opportunity to reward students for making progress while in the program. Rewarding positive behavior is a critical piece of the School Wide Positive Behavior Support model, which all schools are mandated to implement by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004. Students in the current study were not rewarded for progress because their progress was not monitored individually.

Staff reported in informal interviews that they were frustrated that what they felt was their best effort at decreasing referrals and suspensions and raising grade point averages failed. However, as discussed above, the data collected in this study provided useful information about future directions for the building. The building should focus on the data provided by this study and continue to work to develop an empirically based program as an alternative to out of school suspension as opposed to throwing out the program all together.
My professional goal is to continue working with districts as a consultant on implementing empirically based programs aimed at reducing behavior problems and increasing academic success. I believe school psychologists are uniquely trained to help facilitate the development and implementation of such programs and their evaluation. It was clear in this building that administration was not well trained in collecting or analyzing data and did not realize the importance of consistency in implementation. Nor did they have backgrounds in counseling, classroom management or behavior modification techniques that would help students and teachers build positive relationships and improve climate and culture in the school. School psychologists are trained in these areas and could lead teams of educators in making systemic changes in their districts and evaluating the outcomes. Successful programs would benefit the district financially and academically.
REFERENCES


Appendix A

HSIRB Approval Letter
Date: April 22, 2009
To: Amy Naugle, Principal Investigator
    Nikki Brown-Kearsey, Student Investigator for Dissertation
From: Chris Cheatham, Ph.D., Vice Chair
Re: HSIRB Project Number: 09-04-11

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project entitled "The Effects of Implementing Restorative Justice in an In-School Suspension Program" has been approved under the exempt category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note that you may only conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: April 22, 2010
Appendix B

Office Managed Behavior Referral Form
Dwight Rich Middle School
Office Managed Behavior Referral Form

Date of Incident: 
Student Name: First_ Last_ Referring Teacher’s Name_ Hour_ Time_

Please check ALL that apply to this Incident:

☐ Swearing #31
☐ Bullying #30
☐ Assault #37
☐ Inappropriate/Inappropriate #36
☐ Destruction of Property #35
☐ Lying #34
☐ Obscenity #33
☐ Theft #32
☐ Littering #31
☐ Drunk #30
☐ Trash #29
☐ Drugs #28
☐ Disrupting #27
☐ Destroying Property #26
☐ Harassment #25
☐ Truancy #24
☐ Disorderly Conduct #23
☐ Physical Assault #22
☐ Physical Assault on Person #21
☐ Physical Assault on Classroom #20
☐ Physical Assault on Person #19
☐ Physical Assault on Person #18
☐ Physical Assault on Classroom #17
☐ Physical Assault on Person #16
☐ Physical Assault on Classroom #15
☐ Physical Assault on Person #14
☐ Physical Assault on Classroom #13
☐ Physical Assault on Person #12
☐ Physical Assault on Classroom #11
☐ Physical Assault on Person #10
☐ Physical Assault on Classroom #9
☐ Physical Assault on Person #8
☐ Physical Assault on Classroom #7
☐ Physical Assault on Person #6
☐ Physical Assault on Classroom #5
☐ Physical Assault on Person #4
☐ Physical Assault on Classroom #3
☐ Physical Assault on Person #2
☐ Physical Assault on Classroom #1

From those you have checked above, please CIRCLE the one that is of most concern:

Please check all teacher interventions applied BEFORE the incident:

☐ Warnings Given 1 2 3 or more
☐ Parent Contacted by: Phone #15 1 Letter #16 1 Email #17

Date: Time: 

Please indicate the location of the incident:

☐ Classroom #18 ☐ 8th Grade Wing #19 ☐ 7th Grade Hall #21 ☐ 6th Grade Hall #22
☐ Gym #23 ☐ Cafeteria #24 ☐ Computer Lab #25 ☐ Library #26
☐ Bus Loading #27 ☐ Restroom #28 ☐ Playing Fields #29

TEACHER COMMENTS:

Revised 1/27/2309
Appendix C

Data Collection Sheet
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Appendix D

Principal Permission Letter
To Whom it May Concern,  

April 1, 2000

I am writing to let you know that I have granted permission for Nikki Brown Kersley to collect and analyze data at Dwight Rush Middle School. She will be using data that is already collected by our building secretaries on pranks, suspensions and office referrals. We are very hopeful that the data will be helpful in allowing us to determine what alternative to suspension is most effective at decreasing suspensions. We are looking forward to the results.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Linda Angel-Wienberger, Principal

Dwight Rush Middle School
2000 Hamden Dr.
Lansing, Michigan 48911
Appendix E

Duty Checklist – Teacher
Please make sure the following steps are completed each hour and turn in at the end of the day to the Principal’s mailbox.

- Safe: signs to teens, supervision, and attendance log at beginning of hour
- Attendance: taken at beginning of hour
- Assignment log: checked for each student at beginning of hour
- Half-hour breaks at half-hour
- Daily logs: recorded, per hour
- leave notes: written and turned in at the end
- Report cards: reviewed and turned in at the end
- Instructed students to sign new look at end of hour
- Students to sign name
- Students sent to Principal for after-school work

Comments: ___________ ___________ ___________ ___________
Appendix F

Duty Checklist – Restorative
Please make sure the following steps are completed each day and turn in at the end of the day to the RJ supervisor's mailbox.

- Read a page from a book that is reviewed and discuss the beginning of the chapter.
- Participate in a group reading activity, whether in class or at home.
- Prepare a group instruction for RJ practices.
- Record any other activities or discussions.

Note any questions or areas of confusion for the RJ.

Student may have:

- Student write down if he used it well?
Appendix G

Teacher Satisfaction Survey
In school Suspension Program
Teacher Survey

Teachers please fill out the following quick survey regarding your opinions about the current in school suspension program. Your input is critical to this program’s success!

1. I believe the in school suspension program with the Restorative Justice program is helping change the students’ behavior. Yes/ no

2. I believe the current in school suspension program is more effective than out of school suspension. Yes/ no

3. I believe the students are doing better academically with our current In school suspension program than with past programs. Yes/ no

4. I support the continuation of this program. Yes/ no

5. The program is user friendly for teachers. Yes/ no

6. I would recommend this program to other schools. Yes/ no

7. Overall, I am satisfied with the program currently. Yes/ no