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A comparison of academic growth in emotionally disturbed students in private vs. public school settings

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A COMPARISON OF ACADEMIC GROWTH IN EMOTIONALLY DISTURBED STUDENTS IN PRIVATE VS. PUBLIC SCHOOL SETTINGS

By
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ABSTRACT

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A Comparison of Academic Growth in Emotionally Disturbed Students in Private vs. Public School Settings

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This study was designed to measure the academic growth, in the areas of reading and math ability, between students who are classified emotionally disturbed and placed by the school district in private, out of district schools with similarly classified students who remain in district programs. Other indicators of academic success, such as attendance and frequency of suspension were also compared, statistically, between the two groups. Yet other factors, such as grade retention, counseling and student investment were compared loosely. Sixty high school students, (thirty from each setting) comprise the two groups. Previous academic testing from the 1997/98 school year was compared with current reading and math abilities, as determined from the administration of the Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT). Regarding the attendance and suspension rates, raw

numbers were collected for the most recently completed school year (1998/99). The statistical package included an independent sample test of means on all data and indicated that, contrary to the researcher's hypothesis, there was no statistical difference in academic growth between the two groups for the two-year period in the study. However, absenteeism and frequency of suspension rates were significantly higher for the out of district group.

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This study was designed to measure the academic growth between students who are classified emotionally disturbed and placed in private, out of district schools with similarly classified students who remain in district programs. There was no statistical difference in academic growth between the two groups, however, absenteeism and suspension rates were higher for the out of district group.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Need:

Since the beginning of the modern educational era, a great emphasis toward improving the academic performance of students has been a primary concern of educators. From raising standardized test scores to competitive levels both nationally and internationally to providing the most beneficial programming for students with special needs has been the incumbent responsibility of school boards, administrators and teachers. Improved facilities, newer textbooks, computers and better training for teaching staff represent a few of the varied challenges put before school administrators in their effort to provide a sound opportunity for education. And, in spite of the best efforts and intentions of the many fine decision-makers in schools, all of the most courageous and progressive of plans are ultimately limited by money. Clearly, one of the greatest challenges placed before the educational community today is to stretch the school budget across the many different areas of need. Realistically, not all educational needs can be satisfied within these limitations.

Responsible parents move into communities that have, among other qualities, good schools. Parents look at standardized test scores, the percentage of high school graduates who move on to college, safety of the schools, the quality of the buildings and other considerations when choosing a school system and ultimately a community to raise their children. As a quick check, parents will often determine the quality of a school system by investigating the average amount of money spent on each student. Research has

indicated that the more money spent, on average, generally translates into a better education. In the communities where this is not the case, an investigation will often follow.

Whether the infusion of dollars translates into a better education for students with special needs is, however, not so clear, particularly when these students are held to the same standards as listed above. For many multiply disabled, special education students, college may not be an appropriate consideration. Furthermore, they are often exempted from standardized testing. In many cases, their goals may be to develop the skills necessary to transcend their many handicaps and achieve employment and independent living. For these students, a sheltered workshop may be in their future rather than an undergraduate degree. Similarly, group home living is as much, or more, of a challenge, than dorm life. Clearly, the investment becomes more, often substantially more, than the cost of educating a typical high school student. Year round educational programs, specialized transportation, smaller skill development classes, the complex delivery of related services, and the specialized training of staff are necessary to accomplish the goals and objectives designed to achieve a higher quality of life. Naturally, this investment is both necessary and worthwhile.

But what about the students whose cognitive ability and, therefor, learning potential is the same as the typical high school student, yet have a behavioral or emotional disorder that prevents their learning at the same rate as the latter group. Members of this group are often too disruptive and non-compliant to receive instruction in a regular education curriculum and become classified eligible for special education services. The most

extreme behavioral problem students are eventually removed from their public school and are placed in private school where the tuition for education can run to nearly three times the cost of students who remain in the public school. Does the cost of their education remain a worthwhile investment? When the result of ignorance often translates into chronic unemployment and incarceration, the answer is a resounding yes.

If we accept the principle that ignorance is a disease that should be prevented at nearly any cost, then the question becomes how is this money best spent. Do the students who attend private schools at the school district's, and ultimately the taxpayer's, expense benefit from it proportionately? Do the academic expectations for these students remain high? Are they leaving the schools, upon graduation, well prepared for adult life? And, if not, is it now time to reconsider the cost effectiveness of private schools for students with emotional and behavioral disabilities and perhaps consider district managed programs with, perhaps, a shortened academic day, as well as, focus on vocational training and placement, community integration or preparation for acceptance into the Armed Forces.

It is these questions that the following study is designed to address.

Purpose:

A comparative study will be made of 30 students who are classified eligible for special education services and who participate in special education programs within a public school setting to 30 similarly classified students who have been placed in private school programs over a two year period. The primary focus of this study will be to measure academic growth

between the two groups and juxtapose that data against the cost of educating students in the two different settings. Academic growth, as professionals in education will nearly universally agree, can be measured by an increase in reading and math, but is not necessarily limited to these areas. For this reason, this study will compare the two groups over a number of different variables: an increase in reading, math and written language ability, student attendance rates, the frequency of student disciplinary referrals, the frequency of grade retention, the level of student access to direct instruction, the amount of student access to counseling services, the amount of student access to elective courses, the level of student investment in their own school experience, the level of parental support, and finally, the level of teaching experience of the staff in both educational settings.

Hypothesis:

The results of this comparative study should confirm that students placed in private, out of district schools cost more to educate which, should neither come as a surprise nor should it be considered, in and of itself, a bad thing. However, this study should also reveal that these very same costly students receive less academic instruction, spend fewer days in school, produce more disciplinary problems which further effects instruction time, have access to a less varied selection of courses, and are overall less invested in their own educational experience. This combination of factors leads to a lesser rate of academic growth and a higher rate of grade retention in students who are placed in private, out of district placements than their similarly classified public school counterparts. This should suggest that the current system of placing students, who are too disruptive to be successful in a public school setting, into private schools for the handicapped with the intention of their gaining a comparable high

school education, as indicated by the receipt of a state endorsed high school diploma, is neither an accurate assumption nor a cost effective means to educating a troubled population.

Theory:

In order to fully understand the commitment of the educational community toward providing an appropriate education for students with disabilities, we should first look at the history and then to the law that provides for this service. Throughout the early twentieth century, and as the field of school psychology was emerging, clinical psychologists were developing tests that could measure intelligence. Specifically, the Stanford-Binet scales (1915) were useful in determining a student's intellectual potential. Now there are many different forms of I.Q. test which are used to determine, among other things, whether an educational disability exists. As a simplified formula, when a student's I.Q. is below the average range or if their I.Q. is average but their academic performance is below age/grade expectancy, the student may be eligible for special education services. The cause for below grade level academic performance can be either a learning disability or an emotional/behavior problem. It is this latter group who are of interest in this research.

As testing instruments became more specific and, therefor, more reliable, the number of students who's needs could not be met in the typical classroom became more apparent. In 1975, Public Law 94-142, (IDEA) was enacted, outlining, by the federal government, the provisions needed to meet the educational needs of the disabled student. In New Jersey, the most recent (and progressive), translation of that law is found in the New Jersey Administrative Code 6A:14, adopted June 1998. The purpose of this code is to ensure that students with disabilities are assured a free and appropriate education, that they are educated

in the least restrictive environment and that the rights of the students, ages 3-21, and their parents are protected. Under this code, school districts must provide an appropriate education, at no cost to their parents and to the greatest extent possible, within the public school setting and must meet, at least yearly, to design an individualized educational program for each student determined eligible for special education. Furthermore, once determined eligible, students must be evaluated, at least, triennially to determine continued eligibility and programmatic needs. Parents, of course, must be an informed participant of this process.

The private school industry, schools designed to meet the academic, vocational, daily living and related service needs of the more severely handicapped students, have grown out of the public school system's inability to create and afford such programs. Although these schools seem to meet the "appropriate education" demands of IDEA, they also seem to fly in the face of the "least restrictive setting" principal. This is, however, just one of the many contradictions school systems find themselves in when both interpreting the code and trying to meet the needs of the youngster. Regardless, there exists currently hundreds of private schools in N.J. that provide programs for students with multiple handicaps to students with behavioral and emotional concerns. All of these schools need to be accredited by the state and are also held accountable to N.J.A.C. 6A:14. Typically, what these schools do differently revolves around class size, ability to provide related services at a higher rate and to provide specialized instruction in vocational training or daily living skill development. Tuition is paid for by the local school district, as indicated by the "free" clause and often exceeds four times that of the public school student. The "success rate" of these schools is difficult to measure, however, a great many students graduate with more personal independence and social responsibility than could otherwise be expected.

Definitions:

Private Schools for the Handicapped- State accredited private schools that provide programs for students with disabilities through contractual agreements with district Boards of education. May also be referred to as out of district placements or private schools.

Emotionally Disturbed- (E.D.) A condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely effects a student's performance due to:

An inability to learn that can not be explained by intellectual, sensory or health factors

An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers

Inappropriate types of behaviors or feelings under normal circumstances

A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression; or

The tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.

Multiply Disabled- The presence of two or more disabling conditions, the combination of which causes severe educational problems that programs designed for the separate disabling conditions would not meet the students needs.

Social Maladjustment- A consistent inability to conform to the standards for behavior established by the school. Such behavior is seriously disruptive to the education of the student or other students and is not due to emotional disturbance.

Individualized Education Program- (IEP) A written plan which sets forth present levels of performance, measurable annual goals and short term objectives and describes a sequential and integrated program of individually designed instructional activities and related services necessary to achieve the stated goals and objectives.

IEP Team- The group of individuals responsible for the development, review and revision of the student's IEP. Includes parent, a special education teacher, student, one member of the CST, a regular education teacher, and others at the discretion of the IEP team.

Child Study Team- (CST) Comprised of a Learning Consultant, School Psychologist and School Social Worker, all of whom are state certified. A casemanager from this team is responsible for the educational programming, development and implementation of the IEP for each special education student on their caseload.

Assumptions:

1. That students of both groups want and can learn at equal rates. Even though all students will fall somewhere in the average range of intelligence, the students who have been placed in private, out of district placements may be less motivated by nature or have less motivation as a result of their placement in the private school.

2. That money (the amount of dollars spent on an individual student) has an impact on educational outcome. Certainly there are districts that spend less per student than other districts yet produce higher scores in standardized testing (ie. SAT scores).

3. That the intangibles that effect student progress can be accounted or controlled for. Parental support may be different for students who are placed in out of district schools than their public school counterparts, which, in truth, may have had an effect on the lack of progress that led to an out of district placement in the first place. This can, in part, be controlled for by measuring parental support. Parental support can be measured through the percentage of parents that attend IEP meetings

5. That teaching styles are a good match for student needs in both teaching environments. Furthermore that the classroom modifications that are described in the IEP are followed in both schools. In a sense, this is controlled for by comparing the level of teacher experience in public and. private schools.

Limitations:

1. This study can not control for environmental variables. Student socio-economic status, family cohesion and the like will be somewhat different for each student. However, all students in this study come from the same school district and will therefor be similar regarding some aspects, in that they are all suburban, classified, high school students from the northeast part of the U.S., with IQ's in the average range. Students who were incarcerated during the two years will be excluded from this study, as will students who

were removed from their home and either placed in foster placement or a residential facility during the two-year period of this study. Students with a psychiatric diagnosis other than conduct disorder will also be eliminated. Students with neurological disorders, and speech/language difficulties will also be excluded. All students in this study will use English as their primary language.

2. Do to the above, the results of this study may not generalize to urban or rural students, or students in other parts of the country.

3. As a result of need and practicality, private schools have developed a disciplinary policy that, on paper, is very much different than that of a public school, and at the time of implementation, becomes more different yet. Public schools have a need to exclude their most disruptive and noncompliant students whereas private schools are under contract to include these very same students, and often their reputation rests on this simple capability. Clearly, what is a suspendable offense in a public school may result in a counseling session in a private school. For this reason, a comparison of disciplinary infractions between public and private school students may not reflect the true picture.

4. Students in both public and private educational settings are subject to attendance, curriculum and credit requirements for promotion, unless otherwise indicated in their IEP. Out of necessity, privately placed students are more often exempted from attendance requirements and may therefore receive promotion in spite of poor attendance. Students who do not receive passing grades, in part, or wholly do to poor attendance would not be eligible for promotion regardless of attendance exemptions. But do to a

more lenient attendance policy for privately placed students, the total number of retained students from privately placed schools may be underrepresented. A closer look at attendance rated may provide a more accurate picture.

Overview:

Chapter 2 will include an exhaustive review of the relevant research in the area of academic success in public and private schools. The third chapter will reflect the design of the study with a discussion of the variables being measured. Chapter 4 will contain an analysis of the results of this study and lead into a discussion of the findings. It is the great hope of this researcher that the results of this current study add further illumination to the previous research reviewed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this study is to investigate the success of special education students in a private school setting and juxtapose that against similarly classified students in a public school setting, with the hope of determining whether one educational environment meets the needs of their students in a better fashion as indicated across a number of variables that are indicative of achievement. A number of recent studies have been undertaken to determine the variables involved in the achievement of EBD (emotionally/behaviorally disabled) students in alternative high school settings. Two of these studies will be investigated in depth. A variety of supporting studies will be reviewed to determine what previous researchers have determined in this area. Therefor, studies in the following areas will reviewed: attendance, cost of education, the effects of counseling, student perceptions, the effects of student integration into their public school and methods of student selection. A summary follows.

REVIEW OF TWO PRIMARY STUDIES:

In the study by James Stedman, et al, 1989, titled *Achievement in an Alternative High School for Emotionally/behaviorally Disturbed Students*, they investigated the cognitive, academic and psychosocial variable associated with success in an alternative high school for such students. Alternative high schools were described as schools, which are typically small, with low student to teacher ratios, and are administratively designed to handle troubled students and disruptive behavior and generally employ counseling as a teacher aid. Although

previous research focused on alternative school effectiveness in the areas of improving academic achievement, increasing student satisfaction and reducing disruptive behavior, this particular study focused on course credit accumulation as the principle indicator of student success. Although, in the alternative program under study, credit accumulation, in fact, reflected positive growth in the areas of behavior, attendance and academic achievement. This study, therefor, measured many of the same variables as previous works, but the researchers correctly make the point that credit accumulation and, ultimately, an earned high school diploma is the primary measure of success for any educational program.

In the Alternative School (AS) in the Stedman study, enrollment is about 130 students with a teacher to student ratio of 8:1. Earning 5 credits per class, per school year reflects successful credit accumulation. The program is self-paced and academic in nature, rather than vocational and is designed to be transitional, but only 10% of the students typically return to their district school. The remainder either graduate from this program (72%) or drop/move out (18%). The students in this study numbered 32 and had spent no less than one half of a school year in AS but no more than 1 full year. Nineteen were male and 13 female. Average cognitive functioning was measured at 98.5, full scale (Weschler). WRAT results indicated an average academic ability as follows: Reading, 8.8; Spelling, 7.4; and Math, 6.6. The duration of their school behavioral/family problems, the study's primary psychosocial variable, ranged from one year to 7 years.

This research revealed that cognitive functioning and academic ability at the time of admission did not correlate with success in the AS program. Whereas, family pathology, problem chronicity and student age at the time of admission were highly correlated with

future success in the AS program. In essence, young students with a long history of emotional and behavioral problems and who were likely to have long standing pathological family processes tended to earn the fewest credits per class over the course of one year (a mean average of 1.13 per year). Older students with short-duration problems, however, tended to do relatively well in their classes with an average of 4.94 credits earned. This study suggests that the ability to adapt to new school programs may be related to the duration of emotional and behavioral problems. At a second year follow up, only 17 of the original 32 students remained in the program. The remainder either changed program graduated or dropped out. Again, analysis indicates that even after a full year of adjustment, students who were initially identified as older with short-term problems earned credits at nearly twice the rate of students who were in the younger long-term problem group.

This data in this study suggests the following implications. First, that the ability to adapt and demonstrate success in new school programs may be related to the student's age and duration of emotional and behavioral problems. Second, that cognitive ability, academic functioning are not good predictors of academic success in students with emotional and behavioral disabilities and finally, that males and females succeed and fail at the same rate based on the duration of their emotional problems rather than other factors.

The Stedman study, albeit small, provides the reader with a great deal of useful information. Once a student's behavior has indicated that he/she can no longer be instructed in a regular education setting, it still remains the responsibility of the school district to provide an appropriate education for that pupil and, subsequently, there are a great many different private school placements to choose from. Having a sense, in advance of, typically, what

student will do well in what type of program is both helpful in program planning and is more fiscally intelligent than placing students in private educational programs haphazardly. Furthermore, personal experience tells us that often these decisions are based on the very same factors that the Stedman study indicates are relatively poor indicators of success. How often do child study team members make educational decisions based on "how smart" the student tests rather than on the social/emotional needs of the student? Additionally, parents have always thought that the realm of education is the sole arena of educators. This study reveals that long-standing emotional and behavioral problems, which often develop at home and are nearly as often not addressed through community resources, have a profound impact on educational success. Schools, therefor, have to work harder with community organizations and parents to identify youths early in the process of developing behavioral disorders and provide intervention before it can become a long-standing problem. Finally, for students who have a long history of behavioral problems, perhaps different programs need to be developed outside of the typical "sit behind a desk for the entire academic day" ones that exist currently. These programs could provide academic instruction in a work setting or a shortened day with community counseling and recreation integration, for instance. Should this be the case, school districts could move to provide alternative school programs, similar to what is commonly offered currently in the private school sector, within the confines of the district and at a economic savings and private schools would be better able to develop creative programs to meet the specific needs of students with long-standing emotional and behavioral problems.

Bernard Stotsky M.D., et al, in their 1987 study entitled *Differences among Emotionally Disturbed Children in Three Treatment and School Settings* looked to determine whether

students who were placed into three different settings (special classes in public high schools, private day schools and residential programs) were in fact distinct populations or students who were similar to each other, but ranged along a continuum of emotional disturbance. It is commonly believed that students who were determined to be emotionally disturbed yet who remained within a public school system would demonstrate fewer behavioral problems, would be higher in intelligence, be more academically successful and have a lower occurrence of psychiatric diagnosis than students placed in private day schools and residential settings, respectively. Stotsky refers to previous work that attempted to predict change in educational placements and subsequent success by psychiatric diagnosis but found this particular factor alone of limited use. In further studies that used multiple factors, such as IQ, academic achievement, age, social class, social development and psychiatric diagnosis as predictors, found more success. It is evident that many researchers believe that the educational progress for students with behavioral and emotional problems can be predicted by measuring a number of variables. Should this be the case, it would have wide reaching implications for educators and social planners.

The population in this current study was comprised of 510 students, 309 in public school, 129 in private day placement and 72 in residential programs. The variables selected for analysis included total score on the Rutter child behavior scale, IQ score, age and social class. A multiple regression analysis yielded the following results. Although the single highest predictive factor for educational placement was age, none of the factors, including age, was sufficiently significant to be clinically useful. There existed significant overlap in all variables for all groups. In essence, no statistical techniques could definitively separate the three populations.

The findings in this study supported those of previous studies; namely, that children placed in these widely differing psychoeducational settings did not constitute completely distinguishable groups requiring different clinical and educational services. Contrary to expectations, no continuum exists for intelligence, academic achievement, psychiatric diagnosis or behavioral disturbance for these three groups of students. This data is significant for educators who can begin to examine whether the educational needs of emotionally disturbed students can be met, at a lower cost, by the public school system. If, educationally, the needs of students who are placed residentially can be met in the same fashion as emotionally disturbed students who remain in the public school, then the function of many residential programs can also be altered. Residential programs can now guarantee student attendance and provide the support necessary for students to complete homework and study for tests, as well as, provide the skill development and counseling that they are well known for, but do not need to provide the direct instruction that they may often be poorly equipped for. This would be a great savings to them and ultimately the taxpayer. Students who were previously believed to be unmanageable, less intelligent and poor academic achievers may, in fact, often be simply lacking the parental support and healthy home environment necessary for success, which changes the educational picture significantly.

OTHER RELEVANT RESEARCH:

COST OF PRIVATE SCHOOL EDUCATION:

Everyday school administrators, child study team members, teachers and parents must decide if the needs of students with special needs can be met in a public school setting.

Additionally, and in an ever growing number of cases, school personnel must balance the educational right to a public school education of students with emotional and behavioral disabilities against the rights of other students to learn in a harassment free environment. The decision is never easy and always costly. Private school tuition can often equal, in one year, the cost of a four-year college program. In many cases, school officials have to weigh the effect of these high tuition rates against the budgetary constraints that are a reality in every school district. In studying the effect this has on school districts, Diane Brockett (1997), determined that a third factor- the cost of legal battles is often the determining factor. She states that in 1993, Greenwich, Connecticut saw their cost of private school tuition rise from $750,000 to nearly $2 million in one year. In many districts, the unofficial policy is that unless you are sure you can win a court battle that can often run six days, it becomes more cost effective to give the parent their way. Lost in this equation is sometimes what's in the best interest of the student's education. Factor in the legal costs of the parent's lawyer, which the district is often accountable for if they lose and the fact that the money is nonrefundable if the student does not achieve success in the new placement and it is evident how burdensome this process, can be.

To the credit of the private school industry, however, they do not appear to be in this business simply for profit. A 1976 study (Marver), analyzed the program income and cost of 61 private schools and determined that, in most cases, private schools showed very little profit. The bulk of the tuition for students went to building maintenance, teacher and support staff salaries, staff training and school supplies. In many cases, these schools were equal to or an improvement over public schools in the latter areas of training and supplies, although they lagged in salaries and teacher experience on average. In essence, and perhaps contrary

to popular belief, private schools did not take advantage of state and local subsidization and were primarily motivated by the education of their students.

Perhaps the answer lies in compromise. Elizabeth Schneider (1985), describes how one N.Y. district developed a negotiating team comprised of school personnel and advocates for children with emotional and behavioral handicaps to create a range of programs that both met the needs of EBD students and saved money at he same time. The specifics of this type of programming will be described later in this review using more recent studies, however, a couple of useful points remain to be considered from this article. First, this approach was only undertaken to resolve a class action lawsuit, which indicates how contentious the relationship has become between school personnel and child advocates. Secondly, the solution seemed to involve educating this population in the district school system while providing many modifications to the curriculum (ie. intensive counseling, involving existing community resources and increased parental involvement). School districts and advocates nationwide can be encouraged that such problems can be solved without overburdening costs and without reinventing the wheel.

ATTENDANCE:

A study was completed (Hagborg, 1989) to investigate the differences between students who are classified emotionally disturbed and attend school at a high rate (within district policy) and similarly classified students who attend school at a much lower rate (outside of district policy and jeopardizing of promotion). The subjects, 82 in all, ranged in age from 13-21 years of age and all attended a school for students with behavior disorders. The results indicated that the primary factors positively effecting student's attendance rates included

living in a home of higher socioeconomic status, having demonstrated a superior behavioral adjustment (as indicated through administration of the Revised Behavioral Problem Checklist) and, interestingly, having a higher ability in mathematics. Factors that did not appear to effect attendance rates were gender, race, parental marital status, age, IQ, reading skills and frequency of discipline problems. The researchers report being surprised that, specifically, parental marital status and frequency of school disciplinary referrals did not impact school attendance. There suspicion, and most people in education would concur, was that children of broken homes would be less likely to attend school as a result of less parental supervision. Apparently, this is not the case. The researchers conclude by suggesting that the condition of the home environment does play a factor and recommend further research in this area.

This research offers an interesting corollary to this current study, in that attendance will be one of the variables measured as an indicator of success. The assumption made in the present study is that attendance will be lower for students placed in out of district schools than in district special education classes. If lower socioeconomic status and a poor home environment is indicative of poor attendance, as suggested in the prior study, than it would follow that placement may not have an effect in this area. It follows then, that a positive correlation between higher attendance and good parental support should exist as should lower attendance and poor parental support. Furthermore, parental support will also be likely to be lower for students placed in private schools if, in fact, parental support, as most people would agree has an important effect on school success.

RETENTION:

Student retention is a particular problem when working with students who, as a result of their disability, have a history of poor effort and school disaffection. It is both a symptom and a consequence. EBD students often become caught in the cycle of doing poorly and being retained until they have dug themselves a hole they feel they can never climb out of. Many child study team members can relate stories of 17 and 18 year old 9th grade students who eventually dropout of school. This problem was further investigated by Winston Hagborg, et al (1991), who compared 38 EBD students with a history of grade retention and a matched control group of students who were never retained. Not surprisingly, the retained students were significantly lower on a number of scholastic variables including achievement, intelligence and grades. Furthermore, they demonstrated poorer attendance rates and measured lower in self-esteem on the Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents. These retained students completed homework at a lower rate and produced more behavioral problems in school, per teacher assessment. They also shared a less positive school attitude, had lower expectations and believed their problems resulted from external sources. This final point is of particular interest. Students often blame the school and, in particular, their teachers for their own academic troubles. If they truly perceive this, then the cycle of failure and retention can become even more frustrating creating yet more noncompliance and disruption.

COUNSELING:

It is true that students who present with emotional and behavioral difficulties in the school setting have needs that can often not be met in a typical educational program. These students often need crisis intervention strategies and responsive counseling to meet their changing

needs. Public school education budgets often do not provide the funding for crisis counselors or psychologists and school social workers outside of those who are employed as members of a child study team. Child study team members are commonly too busy with maintaining compliance with the paperwork demands of special education law to provide consistent, ongoing counseling to the emotionally disturbed school population. And if a school is lucky enough to have one crisis counselor, that person is often too busy responding to the daily problems of the student body to provide ongoing counseling. The outcome is naturally to look to private school placements where counseling is more available for students with these needs. The need and value of such counseling is outlined in the following studies.

A study of 62 students, who ranged in age from 13-21 yrs., and who were classified emotionally disturbed was undertaken to determine their need for crisis intervention, in terms of frequency and intensity (Hagborg, 1988). Crisis intervention was provided in the form of a modified time-out procedure with a follow up counseling session. Data was collected regarding IQ, academic achievement, behavioral adjustment and socioeconomic status and there existed no hard evidence that the need for crisis intervention and counseling in school is related to any of the above variables. The need for such interventions depended almost exclusively on individual personality characteristics that were best described as a disturbance in conduct. In a related point of interest, results indicated that students who were in need of a high level of crisis intervention and counseling were more often rejected by their peers, but reported being positively perceived by them. In essence, students who were less needy, albeit still emotionally disturbed, chose to segregate themselves from their more crisis-oriented classmates. This is consistent with many teacher's experiences that indicates a great desire to be perceived "normal" even among student's who have a long history of emotional

and behavioral problems. These same students who act out in the classroom, often behave calmly and somewhat withdrawn on the trip to the local mall, for fear of being perceived as different by people whom they don't even know. Similarly, many students who have been placed in out of district schools report their wish to return to the school in which they were removed. Although there are, no doubt, many explanations for this, their desire to be perceived as a normal student is probably the most accurate. Translating this desire into action is an altogether different task.

Two important qualities that are necessary for making this task a reality are self-esteem and school attitude. Both qualities, as well as client satisfaction and group cohesiveness were measured in a group of 48 5^{th}-8^{th} grade students who were classified E. D. and participated in group counseling for social and emotional problems (Hagborg, 1993). Client satisfaction was found to be more positively related to session attendance than any other variable, including socioeconomic status and even goal obtainment. This is consistent with a student's high need for acceptance as stated earlier. Naturally self-esteem was reported to be higher as the result of participation in-group counseling and therefor attitudes toward school were measurably higher as well. For many students who have a history of emotional and behavioral problems, their desire to behave normally may not be supported by their social skill development. In short, they often do not know how to behave differently. Socially appropriate behavior is a learned skill and needs to be modeled as well as taught formally. Realistically, very little socially appropriate behavior is being modeled in many out of district schools and, in many situations, behaving rudely or even violently can appear to be the norm. Counseling is a valuable tool in helping students overcome their emotional problems, but when the session is over, the student often needs to try out what he has learned in a setting

that is safer and more accepting of individuality than is customarily found in an out of district placement.

STUDENT PERCEPTION :

Since we have discussed the EBD student's desire to be perceived positively by other students it is also necessary to discuss the same student's perception of their educational programming. Too often, teachers, no matter how well prepared and conscientious, know they have lost their student when during the lesson he exclaims, "this is stupid." Clearly, student perceptions of the value of the classroom assignments and ultimately the value of the educational program they work within are paramount. The need for any student and certainly the student with a cynical attitude and a history of school failure to become invested in their educational program is the main ingredient for their own success. In this vein, a study was conducted to compare perceptions of classroom environment between mainstreamed and regular education students who participated in the same classroom (Hanson, 1998). Given that academic success is at least partly determined by student perceptions, the Classroom Environment Scale (CES) was administered to 202 middle school students of which 37 were identified as eligible for special education services and it was determined that no significant differences were found between the regular education and mainstreamed students. The results indicate that the special education students regarded the classes as positively as their regular education counterparts. The students reported a high sense of involvement and affiliation with their classmates, had a positive regard for their teacher and the level of control in the classroom, and reported the same sense of goal achievement, as well as other positive qualities. Clearly, the school in this study was making a strong attempt at successful mainstreaming and supported this project fully. Furthermore, the author cautions against

looking at this study's success as a panacea for education and does not recommend a regular education curriculum for all special education students. But it is important to note that the same positive experiences that members of the educational community want and strive to accomplish for their students are still possible when including special education and regular education students in the same classroom.

Conversely, students who have been determined to have emotional and behavioral problems in the school setting can perceive their problems as resulting from the educational environment. Sue Wise, et al, 1998, interviewed 36 students, aged 12-16 and reported that a student's disruptive and disaffected behavior can result from any one of a combination of factors including: schools being too large, impersonal and institutionalized, teacher-pupil ratios being too high and inconsistent and unfair teaching methods. Other factors included an irrelevant curriculum, inadequate student support and "bullying". The researchers make the point that school administrators can control for these occurrences making school settings a much more enriching environment for all students.

STUDENT SELECTION:

Certainly not all students who are placed out of district are good candidates for return to their public school. School administrators will need to determine a valid set of indicators that will enable them to choose students who are properly motivated toward success. Included in these would be the student's ability to maintain control during unstructured times, attendance within district policy and earning passing grades. In an effort to predict a successful transition from self-contained classes to a regular education setting, Barry Schneider (1984), assessed whether demographic, cognitive or academic skill development were useful

indicators. Pre and post testing was completed on 129 8-25 yr. old special education students (learning disabilities, emotional disturbances and mild cognitive delays) who were transferred from self-contained to a regular class setting. Additionally, teachers were asked to rate academic progress, classroom behavior and peer interaction after nine months. Results of this study indicate that previous academic progress is a good indicator of success in a mainstreamed program, as one would expect. The students in the study who showed the best classroom behavior, however, were those who had spent 1-2 years previously in a self-contained classroom. Subjects who had spent longer and shorter periods of time in a self-contained class were rated poorer in this area. Overall most subjects received a satisfactory or better rating. This study, although somewhat different in scope than our present study, in that our current study is less interested in mainstreaming into regular education classes and more interested in returning excluded students to their district schools, still provides us with useful information. Apparently the length of time spent out of the typical educational setting has an effect on positive adjustment when returning to that placement. Being out for too long may cement anti-social behavior in the EBD student and a period of time that is too short may not give the student the opportunity to learn the lesson. This is somewhat consistent with the length of behavioral disturbance factor in the Stedman study discussed previously and is clearly a useful area for future study.

Kay Hodges, et al, (1999) undertook a study to determine whether the Child and Adolescent Functional Assessment Scale (CAFAS) is a useful predictor of future academic success for students with emotional and behavioral problems. A sample of 3,187 students with serious emotional disturbance (SED) were administered the CAFAS at the beginning of the study and a follow-up assessment took place at one year. Initial higher CAFAS scores were

associated with more frequent hospitalizations and residential placements, poorer school attendance and an increase in police and court involvement. Conversely, lower scores reflected better school adjustment and less restrictive living arrangements. This would suggest that the CAFAS might be a worthwhile tool in predicting future student functioning.

Perhaps another quality that the perspective returning student should possess is a high level of student investment. This could be best described as how much a student feels that he/she is a member of their school. Participation in school activities such as dances and clubs, playing school sponsored team sports and volunteerism are typical, informal ways of establishing student investment. A recent study attempted to validate the Psychological Sense of School Membership (PSSM) and determine its usefulness for school personnel (Hagborg, 1998). This instrument was administered to 120 middle school, regular education students and a correlation was determined to exist between high scores and higher grades. Students who scored high on this assessment also reported spending more time on homework and higher levels of motivation. This information was confirmed through parent and teacher reports, as well. Based on this single study, school administrators can be hopeful that a positive correlation exists between a student's sense of belonging to their school and academic achievement. From this information, they can better predict a student's likelihood of success when considering him for return to their public school program.

If educators are to be encouraged by studies such as the ones listed above, the question becomes how do we best integrate students who had been excluded from their public school back into the same? A study was recently conducted (Hepler, 1998) that explored the social integration of 4 5th grade male students with emotional and behavioral disabilities back into a

public educational setting. These students had attended a private day placement program. An assessment was made of their skill deficits and a subsequent behavioral, cognitive and affective skill development program was developed. After a skill development period was finished, integration into the public school was initiated. When compared with a control group of similarly disabled students, the group who had benefited from the skill development training assimilated back into the public school setting much better, as indicated by both teacher and student evaluation. Furthermore, regular education students also reported benefiting from interaction with the subjects in the study. This research indicates the need for an action plan when returning previously excluded students back to the public school setting. An obvious component, social skill training, is one that was addressed earlier in this review. Social skill training is necessary for students who have not had the opportunity to develop these skills previously.

Brian McNeill (1996) provides a formula for returning students to their public school by developing an on-site unit within a public school for the purpose of reintegration of excluded students. He reports that although there was initial opposition to this program, once staff were properly trained and invited into the design of the program, they accepted it enthusiastically. Important factors that made this specific program successful included advanced behavioral training and emotional support for staff, a team approach to treatment and a hands on administration. A subsequent follow-up evaluation indicates that the inclusion of previously excluded EBD students into the public high school setting can work. John Morris (1996) cautions the school administrator against developing such programs and allowing them to become dumping grounds for students who are difficult to maintain behaviorally in the public school. He further states that schools are unwilling to give

students a second chance once they have been removed from their district school. He makes a strong case that students who are permanently removed are more likely to feel disaffected and suffer further school failure as a result. This of course leads to truancy, future unemployment and possible criminal activity. Morris concludes by suggesting that the Federal Government needs to take a more forceful role, as well as provide the financial resources to allow local school districts to develop worthwhile programs to reintegrate students back into the public school system.

SUMMARY

The need to provide an appropriate educational program for students who present emotional and behavioral problems in the school system is a necessary, yet costly endeavor. Programming for these students has to include the creativity necessary to meet their varied and complex needs. Yet, there are certain things that educators have learned as a result of experience and research. First, that there are very few differences in the areas of IQ, past academic achievement, and psychiatric diagnosis between students who are often placed in private schools and those maintained in a public school setting. The differences that do commonly exist between these two groups are typically the conditions at home and the duration of their emotional disturbance. Secondly, the type of programming needed for these students, that same environment offered in a private school setting, can be created to meet the needs of many EBD students by the public school system, without recreating the wheel and at a lower cost. Thirdly, that the many negative influences that affect student achievement, such as cyclical grade retention and poor attendance are now better understood and can be addressed by school districts. And, finally, that student perceptions and desires are often in

line with the very same goals that are held by educators. This is encouraging news, in that school personnel can now begin to develop more cost effective educational programs than what are now a their disposal and make more accurate choices regarding which students are most likely to find success when they are returned to their district schools.

CHAPTER 3

Design of study

Sample:

The sample for this study will be selected from the educational roles of a suburban New Jersey school district. It will be comprised of 60 students, thirty of which attend a public high school and an identical number from a private school setting. The latter group will have arrived at a private school as the result of a school decision, as opposed to parental or personal choice. All students will have been determined classified eligible for special education services under the classification of emotionally disturbed. This classification will have been determined for a minimum of two years prior to the beginning of this study. All subjects will function in the average range of intelligence and will have been determined, via previous learning assessments, to perform academics below their age and grade level expectancy. All students will be between the ages of 13 and 21 years old and will have been placed from 7^{th} to 12^{th} grade. The sample will be comprised of both male and female students from a suburban setting. All students will be living, at the time of this study, in the home of their parent or legal guardian. Having lived, for any part of the two years that this study is concerned with, in a residential setting or correctional facility will automatically exclude that student from our sample.

Measures:

Initial student academic ability (reading and math skill level) will be obtained by reviewing the C.S.T. records of the 60 students in the sample. Previous testing by a

Learning Consultant will be used to obtain these baseline levels. The most common test of achievement used is the Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery, Revised. The WJ-R is a norm referenced and nationally standardized test. This test is a wide range, comprehensive set of individually administered tests for measuring cognitive abilities, scholastic aptitudes and achievement. Sub-tests of the WJ-R that are of interest in this study include letter-word identification and math calculation. The scores are converted to age equivalency, grade equivalency, percentile and standard score. The grade equivalency score will be used to measure growth when compared to the same score obtained from the WRAT (Wide Range Achievement Test).

The WRAT is an easily administered and scored test of specific reading and mathematical abilities. Whereas it does not give a comprehensive assessment of broad abilities, it will compare nicely with the WJ-R sub-tests mentioned previously. This test is often used as a screening instrument when determining grade level ability with unfamiliar students.

This researcher acknowledges the limitations of using different tests to measure the same skill development in students. However, he believes both instruments, the WRAT and the WJ-R word recognition and math calculation sub-tests, are similar enough in what they measure to be of use for this study. Furthermore, they are both norm referenced and standardized instruments that are used frequently in the field of education to determine the aforementioned skills. Finally, the purpose of this study is to begin the conversation regarding the value of private school education versus public school education for emotionally disturbed students, not be the final word on the subject. Should further study

be necessary, it can be determined at that point whether modifications to this design are appropriate.

Design:

The following is a comparative study, between subjects variety. Subjects, who fall within the confines of our sample population, will be selected randomly to comprise two groups, one within district group (group A), and one out of district group (group B). A review of each subject's folder will be completed to determine, via educational testing, their academic ability, in both reading and mathematics, two years prior (1997/98 school year). In an effort to measure academic growth during that period of time, the Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT) will be administered to all subjects and the amount of growth will be calculated. A comparison between the two groups will be made using an independent samples test of mean. As suggested in the previous section, the sample will be controlled for intelligence, academic ability and criminality. Separately, a raw score for attendance and disciplinary referrals will be tallied for each student in our study for the last full year of school (1998/99) and a T-test for independent samples will be used to indicate any significant difference between the two groups. Other variables, which will be looked at anecdotally, include grade retention, student access to direct academic instruction, student access to counseling, student access to elective coursework, the level of student investment, parental participation and the level of experience in teaching staff. This latter group of variables will be investigated through review of student records and discussions with school administrators, both public and private. Although no testing will be completed on this latter group of variables, they will be discussed in narrative form, in terms of the overall educational picture for students today and as areas for further study.

The Variables are further described below:

Academic growth will be measured across two areas, reading ability (word recognition), and math ability (math calculation). The amount of growth in these two areas will be determined by obtaining grade levels from educational testing completed in the 1997/98 school year (two school years ago) and comparing it to the academic levels obtained from administration of the WRAT during the 1999/2000 school year.

Student attendance rate will be measured simply by comparing a raw score of excused absences, unexcused absences and tardiness against the 180 day school year for both groups of students. Suspensions are considered excused absences, however sickness without a Doctor's note is considered unexcused.

Student disciplinary referrals will be measured by accessing the disciplinary files of the 60 students and totaling the number of suspensions and detentions earned over a one year period. Detentions assigned to public school students in this study that were not served and therefor became a suspension, will not be considered a separate act of breach of school policy since private school students are not subject to detentions since the lack of late busing prohibits it.

The frequency of grade retention will be measured by obtaining a raw score of the number of public school students in this sample who are not promoted to the next grade as a result of failing grades, poor attendance or lack of credit accruement during the two year period and

comparing that rate to the private school subjects who are subject to the same promotional requirements.

The level of student access to direct academic instruction will be measured by dividing the actual classroom time spent in academic study (Language Arts, Reading, Math, Social Studies, Science) as per each student's daily schedule into the total length of each student's school day. Coursework not included- PE/Health, Vocational, Shops, Homeroom, Lunch, Computer, Foreign Languages, Elective Courses. These latter courses are excluded, not because they aren't worthwhile parts of the school curriculum, but rather because they do not involve direct instruction in the three original skill levels concerned in our study (ie. reading, math and written language). Furthermore, they are not areas tested in the statewide assessment, which is a mandatory requirement for graduation.

The level of student access to counseling will be determined via the frequency and duration of counseling mandated in each student's IEP. Both individual and group counseling will be considered in the comparison of the two groups.

Student access to elective course work will be measured by again reviewing each student's yearly schedule and determining how many and what kind of courses are being taken outside of the mandated course requirements (Language Arts, Math, Science, Social Studies or PE/Health). Only elective courses that appear on student schedules in any of the schools, public or private, in the study will be considered. An assumption will be made that if an elective exists that is not on any of the sample student's schedules, then classified students may not have true access to that elective. Both samples will be compared in this area.

The level of student investment will be measured by determining each student's participation in extra-curricular and/or nonacademic activities and comparing the two groups. This participation would include involvement in the school newspaper, membership in clubs or sports teams, school sponsored community groups and the like. After school participation in these activities is indicative but not mandatory since transportation would be prohibitive for the private school students in the study. All classified student's, both public and private, are entitled, by law, to participate in their district's sports and extra-curricular activities. Similarly, all students are subject to the same academic eligibility rules regarding grades, discipline and attendance.

Parental participation will be measured by the number of times they have attended an IEP meeting relative to the total number of IEP meetings held over the two year period for each student. Some students may only have two such meetings held, whereas other students may have had as many as six or eight. Although, a more accurate measurement would include parental participation at informal meetings with the C.S.T., teacher conferences, back to school nights and the like. However, obtaining an accurate measurement over the past two years would be nearly impossible. Parental participation at an IEP meeting can be determined by their signature on the IEP or a notation by the casemanager that the parents were in attendance.

The level of experience of the teaching staff will be determined through the Board Office of the public school in the study and via the Director of each of the private schools in the study. For the public school, only the teachers in the Special Education department will be

considered. These figures will be compared to the entire teaching staff of all of the private schools in the study. In this way, the raw number of teachers in both groups should be similar.

Testable Hypothesis:

It is the researcher's belief, going into this study that student's who are determined eligible for special education under the classification of emotionally disturbed and placed in a private school setting will demonstrate less academic success, in terms of growth in the areas of reading and mathematics, than their public school counterparts. The null hypothesis, or that, which the data will hopefully disprove, is that students in group B (private school students) will show the same or more growth in reading and mathematics than group A (public school students). Furthermore, it is the expectation that the students in group B will have a higher absenteeism rate and demonstrate more frequent discipline problems than group A. To a certain extent, the latter statement could be expected since it was the severity of the behavior disorder that probably caused the out of district placement in the first place. Yet, it is worthy of study since private school students generally receive counseling at a much higher rate than public school students and, subsequently, a higher score in continued behavior problems could question the effectiveness of this counseling. Additionally, the other variables that are important to successful educational progress, namely student investment, parental participation, access to direct academic instruction and access to elective coursework would result in favor of students from group A.

Summary:

A comparison of academic growth, specifically in the areas of reading and mathematics, will be made between 30 emotionally disturbed students who remain in a district program and 30 similarly classified students who have been placed in private school settings. Scores from previous academic testing (WJ-R) from two years ago will be compared against more recent, researcher administered academic testing (WRAT). A between subjects analysis of variance will be used. Similarly, these two groups will be compared in attendance and disciplinary infractions, as well. For the purpose of discussing the quality of public verse private education, for students with emotional disturbance, a number of other variables will be considered; to include: student investment, parental participation, access to counseling and electives and teacher experience levels. Although no formal statistical measure will be employed for these latter variables, their importance will be discussed in narrative form.

CHAPTER 4

Analysis of Results

Primary Hypothesis

Hypothesis 1:

The primary hypothesis in this study reflected the researcher's concern with academic growth in two groups of classified students, specifically those placed out of district and those with similar disabilities yet remain in district programs. It was hypothesized that students in private school settings will demonstrate less academic growth in the areas of reading and mathematics than their private school counterparts. The null hypothesis was stated as such: students in group B (private school students) will show the same or more growth in the areas of reading and mathematics than group A (public school students). The results are as follows:

Reading:

The mean average of 30 students from group B in the area of reading ability during the 1997/98 school year was measured at the 5.12 grade level. Subsequently, this same group's average reading ability was measured during the 1999/2000 school year to be at the 5.68 grade level. The growth in reading ability during this span is .56, or slightly over ½ of a grade level. The mean average of students from group A in reading ability during the 1997/98 school year was measured at the 7.14 grade level. At the 1999/2000 school year follow-up, reading levels for students in group A had increased to the 7.76 grade level, an overall increase of .62 grade level.

The results are represented in the following table:

Reading Levels	1997/98 Mean	1999/2000 Mean	Growth
Out of District	5.12 Grade Level	5.68 Grade level	.56 Grade Level
In-District	7.14 Grade Level	7.76 Grade Level	.62 Grade Level

Table 1.1

The difference in the means between group A and B has a significance level of .933. Based on this data, the researcher was unable to reject the null hypothesis regarding academic growth in the area of reading between in district and out of district classified students.

Other relevant data is as follows:

	t	df	Sig.
Reading	-.084	58	.933

Table 1.2

Mathematics:

The mean average of students from group B, in the area of math ability, during the 1997/98 school year was measured at the 4.96 grade level. Group B's average math ability was measured again in the1999/2000 school year to be at the 5.4 grade level. Growth in math ability during this span for group B is a .44 grade level, or slightly under ½ grade level of growth. The average for students from group A, in the area of math ability for the 1997/98 school year was at the 7.02 grade level. Group A's math level during the 1999/2000 school year was measured to be at the 7.6 grade level, reflecting a .58 grade level of growth.

The results are represented in the following table:

Math Levels	1997/98 Mean	1999/2000 Mean	Growth
Out of District	4.96 Grade Level	5.4 Grade Level	.44 Grade Level
In-District	7.02 Grade Level	7.6 Grade Level	.58 Grade Level

Table 2.1

The difference in the means between group A and B has a significance level of .213. Based on this data, the researcher was unable to reject the null hypothesis regarding academic growth in the area of mathematics between in district and out of district students.

Other relevant data is as follows:

	t	df	Sig.
Math	-1.260	58	.213

Table 2.2

Hypothesis 2:

A second hypothesis was ventured by this researcher reflecting his concern with student absenteeism among these two groups. It was hypothesized that students in group B (out of district) would have a higher absentee rate than there similarly classified students in group A (in district). The null hypothesis was stated as follows: Students in group B will have the same number, or fewer absences from school as the students in group A. The results are as follows:

The students from group B averaged 24.3 days absent and 5.7 days tardy for the 1998/99 school year. Students from group A averaged 10.4 days absent and 5.5 days tardy for the same school year. The students placed in out of district programs average 13.9 more

days absent than did their similarly classified peers who remain in in-district programs. However, the difference between the two groups in days tardy averages less than one day. This information is represented in the following table:

District	Absences	Tardy
Out of District	24.3 days	5.7days
In-District	10.4 days	5.5 days
Mean Differences	13.9 days	0.2 days

Table 3.1

The difference in the two groups' absenteeism is significant at the .00 level whereas the difference in days tardy between the two groups is not significant at the .93 level. Regarding days of absence, the researcher was able to reject the null hypothesis in that absenteeism was significantly higher for out of district students than in-district students, however with the caveat that the difference in days tardy was not significant. This latter point will be addressed in the next chapter.

Other relevant data is as follows:

	t	Df	Sig.
Absent	4.005	58	.000
Tardy	.092	58	.927

Table 3.2

Hypothesis 3:

This researcher's concern over student discipline problems was also reflected in this study. It was suggested that behavior problems and the subsequent need for student discipline would also be higher for students from group B than group A. The null

hypothesis for this was stated as follows: Students from group B would have the same number, or fewer, suspensions and detentions than students from group A. The results are as follows:

The students from group B averaged 4.7 days suspended from school and 1.4 days in after school detention during the 1998/99 school year. The students from group A averaged 2.4 days suspension and 4 days detention for the same school year.

This information is represented in the following table:

District	Mean Suspensions	Mean Detentions
Out of District	4.7 days	1.4 days
In-District	2.4 days	4.0 days
Mean Differences	2.3 days	2.6 days

Table 4.1

On average, students from an out of district setting were suspended 2.3 days more than their in-district peers and this is significant at the .005 level. Similarly, students from out of district placements averaged 2.6 fewer days detention than their in-district peers and this is also significant at the .00 level. Based on this data, the researcher was able to, in part, reject the null hypothesis, in that the number of days suspended was significantly higher for out of district students than in-district students. Although, that the data also indicates the number of detentions for out of district students are significantly fewer than in-district students would appear to refute this claim. This latter point will be addressed in the next chapter.

Other relevant data is as follows:

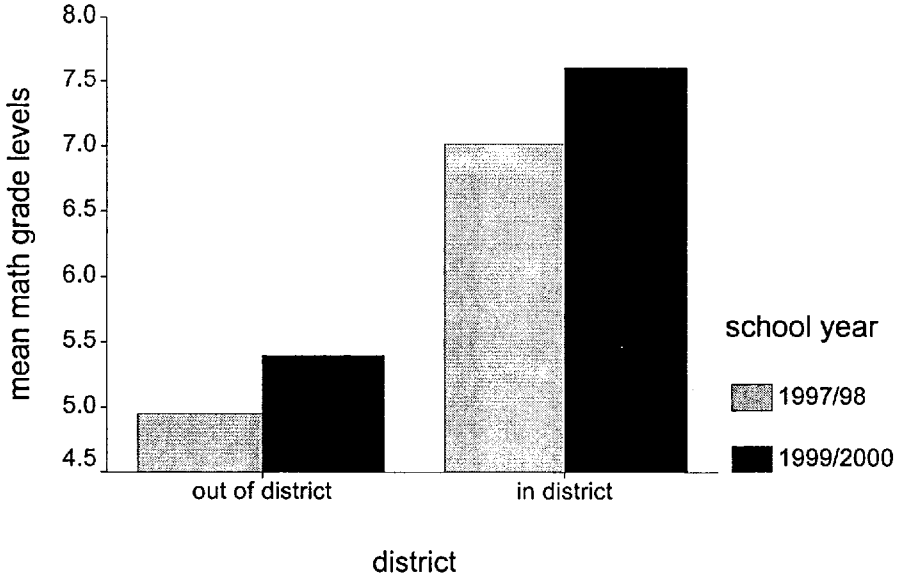
	T	df	Sig.
Suspensions	2.908	57	.005
Detentions	-4.159	57	.000

Table 4.2

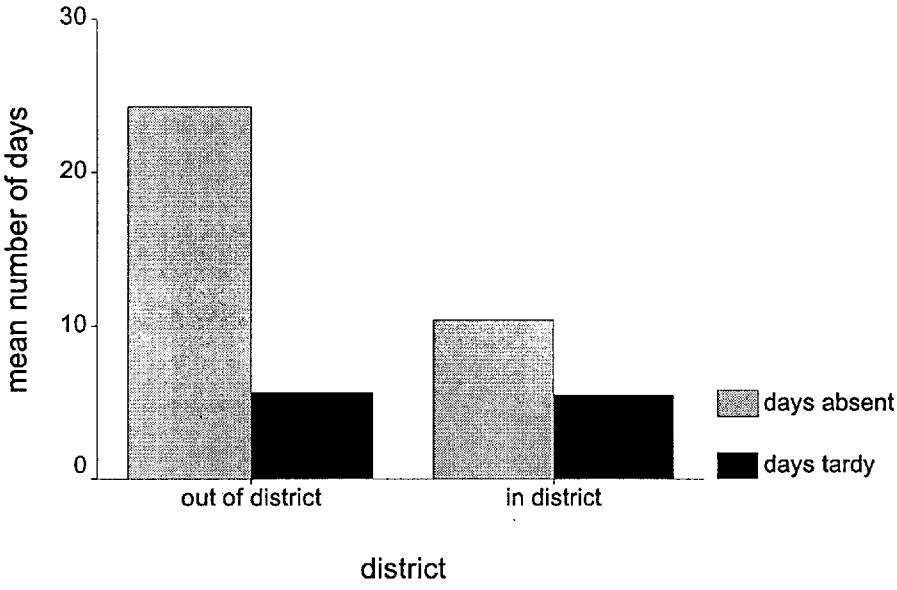
On the following pages, the reader can view, in graph form, the raw data that was collected in the three primary areas of study, reading and math ability, detention and suspension rates, and absenteeism. The reader is encouraged to note the difference in academic levels between both groups at the beginning of the study (1997/98), as well as, the similar rates of growth. The disparity in absenteeism and suspension rates is also visually evident on these graphs.

ACADEMIC GROWTH IN READING BY DISTRICT

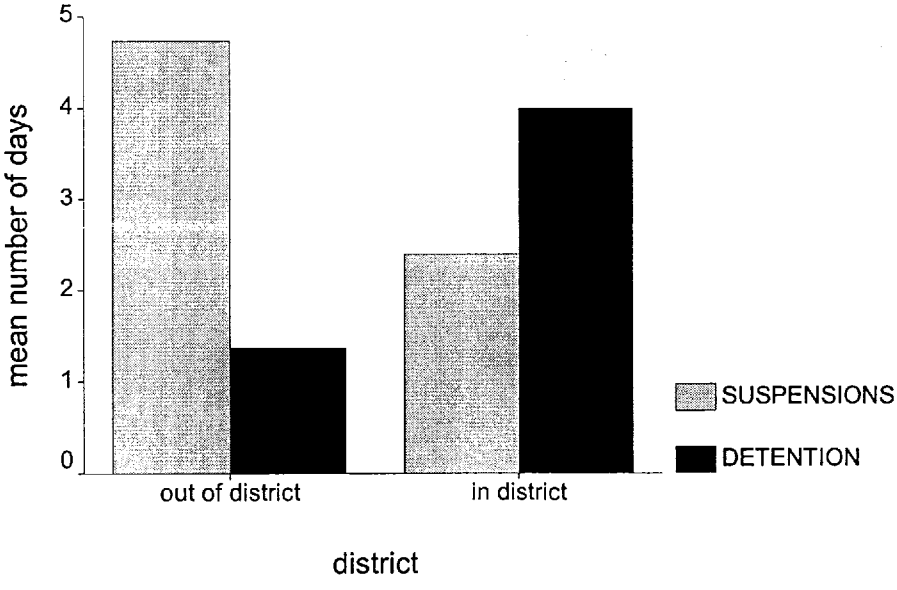
ACADEMIC GROWTH IN MATH BY DISTRICT



DAYS ABSENT AND TARDY BY DISTRICT



DETENTION AND SUSPENSION RATES BY DISTRICT



Additional Data

The following data was collected from the same 60 subjects that comprised group A and group B in the previously presented research. The data was not subjected to any form of statistical analysis and is presented in its raw form for the readers' review and with the hope that it will spark further research in these areas. The researcher reserves the right to discuss the possible implications of this data in the following chapter, with full knowledge that any issues raised are purely speculative.

Grade retention:

Regarding grade retention for both in-district and out of district students, the researcher was interested in making a loose comparison between the two groups in the area of frequency of grade retention as a result of failing grades, poor attendance or lack of credit accruement. Over the two year period, reflecting school years 1997/98 and 1998/99, five students from group A were retained a total of 6 times (one student was retained both years). From group B, nine students were retained a total of 12 times (three students were retained both years). In all cases for both groups, poor attendance was a factor in the decision to retain the student, although the total number of missed days for the out of district students was higher than in-district students. In fact, for some out of district students who were passed on to the next grade, their total number of days absent ran higher than those in-district students who were retained for attendance reasons.

Access to Instruction:

The researcher wished to make a general comparison of what percentage of their school day, on average, students from each group spent in classrooms benefiting from direct

academic instruction (ie. Language Arts, Mathematics, Social Studies and Science). This was accomplished by multiplying the number of times classes from the above list appear on each student's schedule by the length in minutes of each class period and dividing that number into the total length, in minutes, of the school day. Students from group A spend, on average, 44% of their day in classes receiving direct instruction in the four academic areas listed previously. Students from group B, on average, spend 35% of their day in these classes. The difference is the result of private schools having, on average, class periods, which run 12 minutes less, and a school day which, on average, runs 43 minute less than the public school in this study.

Counseling:

A comparison of student access to counseling, in frequency and duration was made between the students of group A and group B. Each occurrence of counseling, individual and group that appeared on the student's IEP was counted and noted for length. In general, students who attend the district school receive counseling on an individual basis at a frequency of 2 times a month, for 42 minutes. Out of district schools provide counseling at a much higher rate. Nearly all students from this latter group received a minimum of individual counseling,1 time a week, for thirty minutes. However, many students received individual counseling 2-3 times a week and some received group counseling as often as daily.

Access to Elective Courses:

A survey of elective class offerings was undertaken between the two subject groups in an effort to compare the two different educational settings in terms of providing a well

rounded educational experience. The student IEP's were examined to determine what class offerings, outside of the four academic subjects listed previously, are typically offered in public and private schools to students in special education. Students in group B generally had two elective courses listed on their class schedules. These classes were, in most cases, of vocational orientation. Classes such as computer training, auto mechanics and horticulture are typically part of the program. However, they are not true electives in that students don't "elect" to take them, rather they are assigned automatically to fill out the student's schedule. Students in group A also generally have two elective classes per schedule, however they are more often classes of their own choosing and are in many cases, classes in the regular education program. These classes included JROTC, woodshop, home economics, journalism, creative writing, environmental science, graphics and in one case, a foreign language.

Student Investment:

Student investment was measured by determining if any of the students from either group participated in extracurricular and/or non-academic activities. Of the thirty students from group B, only one student participates in an after-school activity (basketball), whereas twelve students from group A participated in activities. Of the latter group, many of those mentioned were involved in more than one activity. The public school students participated in band/color guard, football, basketball, baseball, JROTC, PEP squad and other activities.

Parental Participation:

Parental involvement was measured by determining how many times a parent has attended an IEP meeting relative to the total number of IEP meetings held over the two year period. An overall percentage for each group was determined as follows: Group B, 38%; Group A 52%.

Experience of Teaching Staff:

The level of experience of the teaching staff in both the public and private schools was determined to be follows: Public school special education teachers, 16.8 yrs.; private school teaching staff, 3.8 yrs.

Summary:

This research was founded on the belief that academic growth, specifically in the areas of math and reading ability, would be significantly less in classified students who have been placed in an out of district school than similarly classified students who have remained in district programs, over a two year period. The academic growth between these two groups was found to be not significantly different, refuting the hypothesis stated by the researcher. Furthermore, it was hypothesized that absenteeism and disciplinary actions, such as suspensions and detentions, would be higher for out of district students than public school students. Out of district students did, in fact, have a significantly higher rate of absenteeism and suspension rate than their public school peers, supporting the researcher's hypothesis. However, tardiness was significantly higher for in-district students than those placed out of district.

CHAPTER 5

Summary and Conclusions

Summary:

This study was developed out of the recognition that educational funding is now, more than always, at a premium and it is incumbent on administrators to get the optimum value for each educational dollar at their disposal. Secondarily, for some students who have an emotional and behavioral disorder and who, as a result, are classified eligible for special education, it is determined that the public school setting cannot meet their educational needs. These students are commonly referred to private school settings where tuition can run three times the cost of educating a student in the public school. Therefor, it is important to determine whether the taxpayer, school boards and ultimately, the student placed in a private school is getting their educational dollars worth.

Primarily, it was this researcher's belief that student's who are placed by their school district into private schools would show less academic growth in reading and math ability, over a two year period than their similarly classified, public school peers. Furthermore, these same students were suspected of having significantly poorer attendance and would create significantly more discipline problems, as indicated by a higher suspension rate, than those students in the public school. Other factors, such as frequency of grade retention, student access to direct academic instruction, availability of counseling, access to elective coursework, student investment, parental participation and

teaching staff experience, were loosely compared with the belief that they would reflect negatively for the private school group.

The results indicate that there was no significant difference in reading or math growth between the two groups over the two-year period, although the in-district students were, on average, a full two grade levels higher in both academic areas. This latter point coincides nicely with previous research, which predicts student success in out of district placement as a function not of intelligence, necessarily, but rather the duration of behavioral problems. Student absenteeism was significantly worse for out of district students who averaged 5 more days absent than their public school peers. Moreover, suspensions were significantly higher for out of district students, although detentions were significantly higher for district students. Based on raw numbers, the out of district group reflected more grade retentions, benefited from more frequent counseling, spent a lower percentage of their day in academic instruction, were less likely to participate in after school activities/sports and were less likely to have their parents attend an IEP meeting.

The results of this research present a mixed picture. On one hand, academic growth, the primary goal of all educational systems, appears to be the same for both groups, indicating that both schools seem to be doing a similar job in instructing their students. On the other hand, private school students seem to be more disenfranchised and, in spite of their academic growth, appear to continue to be making a poorer adjustment toward the demands and non-academic benefits of the educational system. There are clear implications here for further research.

Discussion of Primary Research:

As stated previously, the amount of growth in both academic areas between the two groups, was not significantly different. First, this is an encouraging fact, since it supports the work that takes place by the many fine professionals who work in private schools and it demonstrates to educational administrators that their dollars are well spent. More importantly, these results are also relevant for the students who attend these schools in that they are not harmed academically by the placement decision made by the school district, on their behalf. This research did not produce all good news, however. Students who are placed in out of district schools lagged behind, on average, nearly a full two grade levels in both math and reading ability than their public school counterparts. Given that both groups were similarly classified and of similar ages/grades, and all participants were in the average range of cognitive ability, one can surmise that out of district students are more likely to have a long history poor academic performance. This can result in a number of ways, such as periods of school interruption, elementary school retention where the same material is presented for a second time, and an earlier classification where maintaining appropriate grade level abilities can be second to maintaining classroom behavior. Regardless, the discrepancy in grade level abilities between the two groups is consistent with the research discussed previously. Positive school adjustment, whether it was in a private school, public school or residential program was less effected by intelligence or type of program, and more effected by the duration of the student's behavioral disability. If it can be accepted that private school placement is the result of poor adjustment to the public school setting, then it follows that their disability is probably more long-standing than those who are able to function and remain in the public school. That these same students have lesser academic abilities would support that

contention. Another possible explanation exists. Perhaps students in the private school setting do not necessarily value academic success and have not worked to their potential for a number of years. These students may prefer hands-on, vocational pursuits to classroom work. Therefor, their behavior becomes problematic and their academic growth lags. Since many private schools also offer vocational classes, these students become more invested and may maximize their time spent in academic classes. This latter point would explain the similar levels of academic growth during the period of study. It would follow, however, that a decrease in suspensions and an increase in attendance would also exist and this is not the case. Clearly more research is needed in this area.

Another glaring concern that resulted from this research is reflected in the amount of overall growth in the public and private school subjects. Although the study covered growth over a two-year period, the subjects, on average only demonstrated a ½ grade level in growth. The subjects in this study were of average intelligence and most were not known to have any secondary learning disabilities. Of course, many learning disabilities are masked by or, at least, coincide with behavioral problems but this limited growth cannot be dismissed that easily. Currently, all students in New Jersey and other states are expected to take and, in many cases pass, a High School Proficiency Test in order to receive their diplomas. Educational planners ought to consider whether this is a reasonable expectation if all students are not progressing academically at the same rate. Furthermore, school administrators and special education teachers should review their teaching styles in an effort to promote more growth in their students. Finally, parents

should become more invested in their own child's progress and support the efforts of their children's teachers.

Regarding student attendance, as suggested, out of district students missed school at a significantly higher rate than in-district students. This did not come as a surprise for a number of reasons. First, out of district students are believed to be more disenfranchised than public school students and one expression of this would be in poor attendance. Secondly, out of district students are also believed to have less parental support than in-district students and this is partly supported by the decreased likelihood that private school student's parents will attend an IEP meeting. This decrease in parental support can also result in their not ensuring that their child gets out of bed and on the bus for school each morning. Additionally, the public school student, in most cases has a fifteen minute ride to school each morning, whereas the private school may be as much as an hour away. A disenfranchised student and an hour-long bus ride is a recipe for poor attendance. Finally, the likelihood for a public school student to participate in extra-curricular activities is higher, as suggested in this research. These activities have certain eligibility requirements that include, among other things, a minimum level of attendance. Moreover, good attendance is a requirement for promotion at year's end. These two factors, no doubt, have a resounding effect on public school students. However, since tuition for private school students can be over three times that of public school students, attendance requirements are often somewhat relaxed. In these cases, the cost benefit of retaining a student, and paying another years tuition are measured against the knowledge that retention rarely increases attendance the following year.

The difference in the two groups tardiness rate was considerably less dramatic (and not statistically significant). The reader is cautioned not to perceive this as a rejection of the previously stated product of disenfranchisement in the private school student. Rather, this can be more easily explained in terms of school distance. When the public school student misses his bus, his school is typically only a short ride in his parent's car or a somewhat longer walk away. Unfortunately, when the private school student misses his bus, his parents may not be able to drive him to school and walking is clearly out of the question. It is obvious, therefor, how poor attendance can result for the private school student's simple tendency to oversleep, and may not always be a case of disenfranchisement.

Private school students also present a significantly higher frequency of suspensions from school than their public school peers. This should not come as a surprise to the reader since it was behavior problems that led to the private school student's removal from the public school in the first place. It is possible, however, that this number actually under represents the true level of disciplinary problems created by out of district students. Private schools are subject to the same restrictions as public schools that limit the number of days in which a school can exclude a student from program for disciplinary reasons before a change in program is necessary. However, private schools do not always have the option of different programming in which to offer a student and would therefor be in a position to lose that student if suspensions became too frequent. Furthermore, parents and districts place considerable pressure on private schools to develop other responses to problematic behaviors, such as additional counseling and in-school suspension, rather than constant home suspension. Subsequently, when private schools suspend at a rate

that is alarming to parents and district personnel, they can develop a reputation as an ineffective program and lose future referrals. Moreover, as stated previously, private school students are less likely to participate in sports or extra-curricular activities and thus, have less to lose by misbehaving. For these reasons, and for reasons that are in the best interest of the student, certain bad behavior may be "hidden" from official reports. Finally, and in a purely speculative vein, poor behavior would increase because private schools are too commonly defined as the "safe" place where one can misbehave. By safe, it is meant that misbehavior is expected, no real harm will come to the misbehaver and the school nearly always has to take the student back. Corrective actions, such as suspensions and parent/district meetings often pose no real threat to the emotionally disturbed adolescent. For this reason, helping a student become invested in their own education is the best indicator of success.

Similar to student tardiness, a higher rate of student detention for public school students does not indicate fewer behavioral problems in the out of district group. Public schools can punish inappropriate behavior by interfering with the student's free time, either after school or on Saturday mornings. A late bus, parental transportation or simply having the school within walking distance of the student's home allows this to be possible. Because of logistical transportation difficulty and expense, it is nearly impossible for private schools to offer an afterschool detention program to address misbehavior, as public schools can. No doubt, this would be an effective tool for private schools, as well.

Discussion of Additional Data:

The additional data, presented in raw number form, is useful in obtaining an overall picture in the differences, both positive and negative, in the private school and public school programs, and their ability to have a beneficial effect on the students that attend them. One of the significant benefits of attending a private school would be the increased level of counseling obtained there. All students in private schools received counseling in individual and/or group form, and in some cases, as often as daily. This is beyond situational counseling that is often provided as problems occur. Furthermore, all private schools in the study employed trained counselors who's sole responsibility was in direct service to a limited number of students, unlike the public school system, where there is one crisis counselor and one school psychologist for hundreds of students. Clearly, in the private school setting there can be a continuity of counseling with long-range goals and this is the more effective course. Delivery of service at this level may unfortunately interfere with other things. For instance, private school students spend a smaller percentage of their day in academic classes. This would be alarming had academic growth not been measured to be nearly the same over the two-year period. Instead of being a shortcoming, this is apparently a proactive adjustment in the educational programming of emotionally disturbed students. Perhaps public schools should take note of this.

Grade retention was higher for private school students than those who attend a public school. However, this again may be an inaccurate picture. Due to the excessive cost of private school tuition and the private school's inherent need for their students to appear

successful, students in private schools may not be held to quite the same standard as those in the public school. Clearly this is an area for future study.

Student participation in elective courses and their ability to participate in extra-curricular activities both were more favorable for public school students. This should come as no surprise since both reflect a higher level of student investment, which would be more common of this group. An important question that needs to be asked is whether students participate in these opportunities because they are more invested or whether their investment is fostered by their participation. Certainly, as school administrators plan for the future, they will be well advised to research this question and develop policy to enhance student investment in this area.

Finally, that parents of out of district students are less likely to attend their child's IEP meeting than those of public school students should again, come as no surprise. As indicated by previous research, positive student adjustment to a school setting is a direct result of the duration of the behavioral problems. Long-standing family dysfunction is indicative of poor adjustment and lack of parental involvement in the educational planning process can indicate family problems. Too often school personnel complain that their efforts are not supported at home. Unfortunately, parental involvement and support of educator's efforts cannot be legislated.

Implications for Future Research:

This research was intended to begin the conversation regarding the comparison of public and private school education for students who have been classified eligible for special education

and determined to have behavioral and emotional needs beyond what is provided by a public school and those who remain educable within the public school system. This was not intended to be the definitive work that will result in the birth of new educational policy but rather a vehicle that will allow educators to consider student's programming needs in light if the considerable costs of private school education. As such, it may have produced as many questions as it attempted to answer. Future research can begin by determining from a larger sample, with more internal controls whether academic growth for students in private schools does in fact approach that for public school students, as indicated by this current study. Furthermore, it would be useful for educators to know the nature of student investment, how it develops and how schools can further foster it in their own students, in an effort to decrease absenteeism, poor behavior and grade retention. Finally, the relationship between student success and family dysfunction appears to be consistent throughout previous research and is further supported in this study. This is clearly an area where educators would benefit from a thorough understanding.

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