

Rowan University

Rowan Digital Works

Theses and Dissertations

4-29-1999

The effect of an alternative in-school suspension program on the suspension rate of special education students as compared to a program of out-of-school suspension

Kelly Brydges
Rowan University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://rdw.rowan.edu/etd>



Part of the [Special Education and Teaching Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Brydges, Kelly, "The effect of an alternative in-school suspension program on the suspension rate of special education students as compared to a program of out-of-school suspension" (1999). *Theses and Dissertations*. 1774.

<https://rdw.rowan.edu/etd/1774>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Rowan Digital Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Rowan Digital Works. For more information, please contact graduateresearch@rowan.edu.

THE EFFECT OF AN ALTERNATIVE IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION PROGRAM ON
THE SUSPENSION RATE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS AS COMPARED
TO A PROGRAM OF OUT-OF-SCHOOL SUSPENSION

by
Kelly Brydges

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of Arts Degree
Of
The Graduate School
At
Rowan University
May 1, 1999

Approved by

Professor

Date Approved 4/29/99

ABSTRACT

The Effect of an Alternative in-School Suspension Program on the Suspension Rate of Special Education Students as Compared to a Program of Out-of-School Suspension
1999

Dr. Kuder
Masters of Special Education

The purpose of this study was to determine if an alternative in-school suspension program will reduce the suspension rate of special education students as compared to an out-of-school suspension program. Thirteen special education students were selected to be the subjects of this research. The discipline records of these thirteen students from the 1997-98 school year were compared to the 1998-99 school year. The alternative in-school suspension program for the 1998-99 school year differs from the 1997-98 school year. The discipline policy for the 1998-99 school year includes a Learning Center which is attended from three in the afternoon to seven at night by the students who have received fifty disciplinary points by the administrator. This program allows students to attend school in an alternative placement as opposed to being out-of-school suspended. The research was attempting to find if the Learning Center would provide enough of a deterrent that the special education student's rate of misbehavior would decrease. However, sixty-four percent of the students actually had an increase of disciplinary points in the 1998-99 school year. Therefore, the results suggest that the in-school suspension program was not successful.

MINI-ABSTRACT

Kelly Brydges

The Effect of an Alternative In-School Suspension Program on the Suspension Rate of Special Education Students as Compared to a Program of Out-of-School Suspension.

1999

Dr. Kuder

Masters of Special Education

This study examined the effect of an alternative suspension program on the suspension rate of special education students as compared to a policy of out-of-school suspension. It was hypothesized that when students experienced this alternative in-school suspension program the behavior problems would decrease in school. However, it was found that sixty-four percent of the student's misbehavior increased with the adoption of this policy.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. RELATED STUDIES AND LITERATURE.....	4
Out of School Suspension.....	5
An Effective In-School Suspension Program.....	7
Goals of ISS.....	10
Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.....	12
Legislative Impact.....	14
III. RESEARCH DESIGN.....	16
IV. RESULTS.....	20
V. DISCUSSION.....	21
Bibliography.....	26
Appendix A.....	28

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

Student misbehavior is a continual problem for schools. Dealing with serious behavior problems generates a significant challenge. The challenge is even greater when dealing with the special education population. State laws place a constraint on the disciplinary actions pertaining to classified students. Schools have to plan effective disciplinary policies in order to deter misbehavior.

Schools across the nation have an array of disciplinary policies handling student misbehavior. The array of options include in-school suspension (ISS), out-of school suspension (OSS), alternative schools, alternative in-school suspensions and detentions. It is a formidable task for public schools to find a policy that will meet the needs of everyone involved. Each approach has positive and negative aspects that may be pertinent to the respective school.

Student misbehavior causes an innumerable amount of disruptions to the educational process. These disruptions cause the students to possibly be taken out of the classroom which disrupts the educational climate for the student, teacher, and other students in the class. If the student is allowed to stay in the classroom the behavior may persist since a strong discipline action was not taken. Students need to be aware that a strong and consistent policy is in place within the school. The infliction should be a deterrent to the students so the misbehavior will cease.

Student misbehaviors range from improper language or dress to being violent in the school. Undoubtedly some misbehaviors are more severe than others, however, each has a negative affect on learning. Each needs to be addressed by the discipline policy of the school. If misbehaviors are not addressed the result will be continued to disruption to the educational process.

Selecting the most appropriate discipline policy for a school is an imprint task. The policy needs to have the full support of the administration, staff and parents in order to be most effective. If one of these means falters the entire structure is potentially in jeopardy of failing. Different factors need to be considered in each school. The population of the school, the patterns of misbehavior, and the financial constraints of the school need to be taken into account. A discipline policy needs to be constantly monitored and evaluated in order to make sure the policy is effective.

Pennsville Memorial High School has recently taken the above into consideration and devised a new discipline policy for the 1998-99 school year. The school has evolved from an in-school suspension (ISS) discipline policy, to an out-of school suspension (OSS) discipline policy to a new alternative in-school suspension policy. In the past the ISS and OSS could not be properly maintained in a manner that was effective. Student misbehaviors did not decrease, which is a concern to be addressed. If students do not perceive the policy as a deterrent and do not receive proper support and guidance the plan has failed.

An important factor that also needs to be taken into consideration is how the discipline policy is going to fit the needs of the special education population. If a school is going to institute a OSS policy, the administration needs to take into account that special education students can only be suspended a total of ten days a school year. For students who continually misbehave, this could pose a problem. A defined deterrent needs to put in place to address these needs.

This new discipline policy consisting of an alternative in-school suspension, should help to reduce the rate of suspension for the special education population. This learning center, as it has been named, will offer the students instruction from a teacher in all of their required disciplines. This program will offer an alternative to out of school suspensions which will help keep PMHS in compliance with the suspension laws concerning special education students. The time spent in the alternative in-school suspension does not count in the ten day limit imposed on special education students.

The Learning Center is financially possible because of grant applied for by the special education department. It came as a direct result of having to find an effective deterrent for improper behavior. If the suspension rates decreases as a result of the Learning Center, the problem of not being able to suspend special education for a maximum of ten days a year will subside. Improper behavior will decrease, which benefit the student in every aspect of their education.

The discipline policy of out of school suspension is often not seen as a punishment. The students would consider the suspension a three day vacation from school. Many times an infraction would be strategically planned towards the end of the week so the student could have a long weekend from school. The policy was not taken seriously by the students and eventually not by the faculty.

Unfortunately, as a result of the out of school suspension rates being so high and frequent the faculty became very discouraged with the previous policy. It is very difficult to teach in a school where the students are not afraid to display bad behavior. If there are no rules abided by and the students are not intimidated by the consequences of their behavior, a teacher has very little recourse.

If an appropriate deterrent to misbehavior is in place, the suspension rate will decrease, therefore increasing a student's performance in the classroom. As a result of not misbehaving, the student is given the opportunity to stay in class where their education will not be disrupted. Unfortunately, studies indicate that a student will get further behind in their work if they are suspended out-of school. The student many times does not make up the work, which results in poor grades. It becomes very difficult for the student to "catch up" to the rest of the class.

This study will examine the effect of an alternative in-school suspension program on the suspension rate of special education students as compared to a policy of out-of school suspension. When students are subjected to this alternative in-school suspension the behavior problems will decrease in the school.

Chapter Two

RELATED STUDIES AND LITERATURE

Discipline in schools is a growing concern in today's society. School administrators are faced with developing an appropriate form of discipline. There is an abundance of literature related to the need for discipline in schools, forms of punishment and the effectiveness of various forms of punishment including suspension. The primary purpose of this study was to determine if an alternative in-school suspension program was more effective in deterring improper behavior than an out of-school suspension program.

A search of the literature on out-of-school suspension (OSS) in schools reveals its uses and abuses. This reviews attempts to examine OSS and its historical basis, legislative impact, the types of behaviors represented, and the risks associated with its continued use.

It is very difficult for classroom teachers to deal with physically and verbally abusive children with in the classroom. These acting out children become threats to the safety of others. Teachers have many different methods in dealing with disruptive students. Many will refer the student to the principal's office for appropriate disciplinary measures.

Teachers refer students to the principal's office for repeated minor offenses. They feel their attempts at controlling them have failed and that their principal's impact will send those students a strong message to discontinue their misbehaviors. These offenses generally encompass the range of misbehaviors from being told to pay attention, to stop talking, to sit still, to absenteeism, to name a few (Guindon 1992)

Some teachers use a behavior modification plan which is often successful at warning students before more drastic actions are taken to deal with the misbehaviors. As an example, unless the offense is grievous, a misbehaving child is initially warned. If the misbehavior continues, his or her name is posted on the blackboard as a further warning. Additional

misbehaviors cause check marks next to the name. After two check marks, the students is then sent to the principal's office for discipline. Other teachers prefer to use other management devices such as ignoring, threatening and after-school detentions (Guidon 1992).

Guidon (1992) noticed that there are different tolerance levels for misbehaviors among the teachers. Some teachers prefer to deal with their behavior problems within the classroom and seldom resort to using the principal for discipline. Others may have less adequate pupil management skills and end up referring students to the office more often for discipline. Teachers who refer misbehaving student to the office more often seem to have a low frustration tolerance and lack the skills for using in-class time-out to allow a "cooling off" period. They may also view the principal as the main school disciplinarian with the authority and power to create enough of an impact to correct the misbehaving student. Understandably, a teacher may also have "inherited" a difficult group to manage.

After other discipline measures have been taken, suspension may be the next the alternative. The major reasons students are suspended are cited by Johnson (1979) who listed as many as 14 reasons schools typically use to suspend students. These include smoking, lethal weapons, obscenity, threats, forgery, drugs and alcohol use and others.

Discipline is becoming alarmingly more of a problem in schools nationally according to Collins (1985) who cites a study that shows educators and parents consider it a number one priority in our country's schools. Moreover, DiSciullo (1984) quotes a Gallup Poll taken in 1982, which listed inadequate discipline as the public's main school concern.

Out-of-School suspension

Out of school suspension (OSS) has become an accepted strategy for dealing with misbehaviors in many schools throughout the United States. However, the literature shows that OSS is seldom used at the elementary levels (Guidon 1992). Misbehaviors can become a pattern if it is not diminished at a young age. Elementary schools have traditionally been

able to deal with misbehaviors without resorting to OSS. However, with misbehaviors in severity at both levels, all schools need to be aware of all the disciplinary options.

There appears to be little change in the types of discipline used over the years by administrators. Johnson (1979) studied school suspension programs in Missouri and found that OSS was the most popular choice among school principals. He states that statistics indicate that as many as 20,000 children were suspended in New York City, 9,000 in Houston and 11,000 in Cleveland in 1972. Johnson (1979) states that most children found themselves in problem situation outside the school which put them at much greater disadvantage than if they had been allowed to remain in school to somehow work out their problems. There are many hazards on various city streets that place suspended students under high risk of influence and physical injury, particularly with absent, working parents.

A study by Guidon (1992) was developed to address the staff concerns at a New England elementary school of frequent out-of-school suspensions (OSS) resulting from misbehavior from referrals to the principal's office. The staff felt that suspended students were often rewarded by OSS, at risk on streets, interrupted in their schooling and they often continued to be repeatedly suspended (Guindon 1992)

At this New England school, the principal receives referrals of bad behavior of students through the teachers. The principal then decides on a case-by-case basis the disciplinary outcome on the referred student. If a student is a repeat offender or was involved in some serious incident, the principal will take the option of calling the parents to come pick up their youngster from school. OSS will take effect for part of the day to as much as ten school days. Anything longer would require a Planning and Placement Team meeting, as a longer term would be considered a change in educational placement.

While being sent home may become punitive to some children, there are many who find it rewarding. Some children may have intact families where one parent may be home to supervise, or may have to leave work to do it. In these cases the youngster being sent home is not likely to feel rewarded, especially if the parents dole out their own punishment.

However, there are many single parent homes in this small urban area where children often stay home by themselves. These latchkey kids will generally have the run of the house in the absences of their working parent. They are free to watch television, play, and go out to ride their bicycles. Being suspended from school is not a deterrent to these students. They find it more enjoyable to be at home and play than to work at school (Guindon).

Additionally, whenever a teacher sends a misbehaving child to the principal's office, learning is interrupted. If the student is only sitting outside the principal's office, he or she will miss the lesson that is going on in the class. Worse, yet, when a student is suspended from school, there will be many lessons missed. For a student who throughout the year receives a number of suspensions, learning will have considerable deterioration. Not being in class, therefore, can create some serious detriment to the misbehaving child's learning, and the more frequent the suspensions, the more the youngster will fall behind in classwork (Guindon).

It was concluded by this school that an alternative to OSS was needed in order to instill more effective discipline and provide some continuity in their learning. Otherwise, being suspended from school will continue to provide most of them with pleasurable experiences while interrupting their education. What was intended to be punishing often turns out to be rewarding. In this light, OSS may serve as a reinforcer for those who wish to continue misbehaving thereby setting into motion the cycle of referral-suspension that so many students have come to embrace.

Guindon (1992) concluded that OSS is often used at this elementary school for repeated minor offenses because of a lack viable alternatives. OSS is found to be rewarding to students, interruptive of learning and non-rehabilitative.

An Effective In- School Suspension Program

In-school suspension (ISS) was first developed in the 1970's. It has gained widespread acceptance in public schools across the United States. Sullivan's (1989) review

of ISS programs notes that principals, teachers, and parents have looked favorably upon this discipline method as a replacement for OSS and expulsion. ISS programs have been used and an alternative to OSS because they keep students in school and involved in school activities. However, if ISS programs merely provide a different location for students to perpetuate disruptive, non-academic behaviors, they do not provide a purposeful alternative (Siskind). Sullivan (1989) claims that many programs have not proven successful in decreasing the number of discipline referrals nor preventing further behavioral problems.

According to a study Conducted by Whitfield (1996) it was found through questionnaires of staff and students that ISS programs are not always as effective as they could be. One of the major discoveries of the study was that 50% of the students preferred OSS to ISS, and 60% preferred ISS to detention. This suggests that the severity of the punishment was in reverse order, and that if a student preferred OSS to detention, the first step should be eliminated. Students (70%) perceived the ISS as punitive, and the staff (70%) did not believe students returned to class with an improved attitude.

Whitfield (1992) concluded that the following needed to happen in order for an ISS program to be more successful:

- the administration and ISS director took a stronger leadership role;
- the entire faculty increased their support of the ISS and were more involved in operation of the program;
- communication between the ISS director and the faculty improved regarding students' assignment, behavior, progress, and return to the classroom.

Siskind (1993) concluded that to have a successful ISS program it needs to be academically oriented. Students should be held accountable for their regular classroom assignments while being monitored by a certified teacher in an area secluded from the rest of the school body. The assignment to ISS needs to be made as soon after the offense as possible by the school disciplinarian to convey a strong message of disapproval.

An ISS program can be effective in curbing misbehavior in a public school (Whitfield 1996). However, misbehavior is a complex problem with many human ramifications. Short

(1988) suggested that this intervention is not a panacea; but yet another strategy. But when it is well planned, goal oriented, and incorporated and implemented in a school wide discipline approach, it offers a viable approach to managing student behavior problems. If a program is ineffective, the error is compounded.

A close look at the population of the ISS students would reveal its effectiveness. If the percentages remained the same across grade level, then the program might not be performing its intended function in school (Whitfield 1996). A study of this aspect of ISS was done by Johnston (1989) at a high school in North Carolina. They discovered that more students came to ISS during their sophomore year than later years. This is an indication that the program was effective.

According to Linda Nielsen (1979) the rationale and benefits for an in-school suspension centers are as follows:

Protecting the community from vandalism inflicted by students expelled to the streets, helping employed parents who cannot supervise their children during the day; enhancing school finances through average daily attendance compensation, educating students who would otherwise be deprived of academic instruction; saving energy and time often involved in court procedures for lengthy out-of school suspensions; insuring other students a conducive learning environment by isolating the disrupters; and undermining the attempts of students who seek home suspensions as “holidays” from school.

Zimmerman and Archbold (1979) seem to agree with Nielson. They call their alternative to suspension “On-Campus Suspension” (OCS). OCS is a program where students are supervised and disciplined for improper actions as opposed to being sent home to watch television. OCS saves the school money by keeping the student in school, and it is preferred by most parents, because their children are supervised at school. The most important attribute of all is the child remains in a learning situation.

The OCS program works on a merit system. Upon entering the OCS room, students sign a contract which must be fulfilled before they are returned to the normal classroom. To insure that the students work to the best of their ability, work must be completed at the 70% level. Failure to fulfill the contract means more suspension time. The OCS version of

in-school suspension gives the suspension room teacher complete authority on whether or not the student is to remain longer than the initial sentence. Isolation from the rest of the student body is seen as the key to controlling behavior. Suspended students are kept in the OCS room during change of classes, lunches are eaten in the suspension room, and restroom privileges are restricted to regular class time (Zimmerman & Archbold 1979)

A study (Gallagher, 1980) was conducted to determine if in-school suspension would have a positive effect on the social behavior of aggressive emotionally disturbed students who have been classified for educational purposes. The results of this study indicated that the use of ISS did not have a positive effect on this population. However, Gallagher (1980) disclosed the fact that subjects did not show positive improvement may be the result of a faulty research design or procedure.

Goals of ISS

Mizell (1978) stated that "School officials who are developing in-school alternative to suspension should make sure their efforts are based on a solid philosophical foundation" (215). Mizell also believed that the purpose of such a program should include the following: 1) helping the child; 2) identifying and remedying root problems; 3) helping students develop self-discipline; 4) understanding the factors that contribute to discipline problems in order to prevent future problems; 5) eliminating out of school suspensions; and 6) providing a framework for the faculty to achieve the first five goals (p.216). These aspects should be included in the development of an ISS program.

The research of Opuni (1991) examined an ISS program which provided instructional and counseling support. The goals of the program were to improve students' attitudes, study skills, and behaviors through motivational techniques. Without these components, Opuni (1991) does not think an ISS program can be successful.

Part of the attraction of ISS program is that the student can maintain academic progress. The role of the ISS director should be to remediate academic deficits and continue

the instruction missed in the classroom. A program of this type was described by Rentz (1991). The goals of the program were to improve student behavior, attendance, morale, self-esteem, and academic achievement. The results included positive changes in each of the five goals and teacher feedback on the program was favorable.

Sullivan (1989) studied the effectiveness of ISS programs and outlined essential elements for success. They included the following: 1) research existing programs; 2) include a wide spectrum of staff members for positive acceptance; 3) provide adequate financial support for full time position; 4) provide remedial treatment for underlying problems; 5) have clearly defined measurable objectives; 6) use only for specified offenses; 7) provide a full time qualified, trained staff; 8) establish a standardized, frequently monitored record keeping system; 9) establish rules and procedures for ISS that are clearly defined; 10) allow students to complete regular class assignments for credit without academic penalty; 11) offer extensive, individualized counseling; 12) monitor students through follow-up strategies; and 13) regular program monitoring and ongoing evaluation are extremely vital for success.

One element that should be included in any effective model is a rehabilitative approach. Purely punitive measures serve only to punish and not to improve student behavior. Siskind (1993) found that most ISS programs are more punitive than therapeutic and counseling is not used systematically. ISS programs should have a therapeutic component to address negative attitudes and behavior. Hochman and Worner (1987) described a group counseling aimed at improving students' self-esteem, awareness of negative attitudes and behaviors, setting personal goals and improving problem-solving skills. Goals included reducing truancy, increasing attendance, raise grade point average and improving behavior.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

Schools have the responsibility of following the laws for all students. Eileen Ordover (1994) presented a paper addressing the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA),

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) as being the frameworks for providing educational services for students with disabilities. IDEA creates an entitlement to a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment (LRE) without exception, and so precludes a district from expelling an student with disabilities for alleged misconduct. A school may change a student's educational placement to another providing a free appropriate education meeting statutory requirement in LRE. Any exclusion from school of more than 10 days constitutes a change of placement and may be accomplished only through the change of placement procedures set forth in IDEA and its implementing regulations. Based on Section 504, an evaluation conducted before attempting to exclude a student for more than 10 days or expel must include a determination of whether there is a connection between the behavior and the student's disability. Some students may lose some of the protections if they are using illegal drugs or abusing alcohol.

Heumann and Hehir (1995) state that when signs of misconduct by students with disabilities first appear they need to be addressed before any drastic measures are considered. There are a number of positive steps that educators can take to address misconduct as soon as it appears to prevent the need for drastic measures. For students whose disability have behavioral aspects, preventative measures, such as behavior management plans, should be considered and can be facilitated through the individualized Education Plan (IEP) and placement processes required by IDEA. Teacher training initiatives in conflict management and behavior management strategies also should be considered as these strategies are implemented (Heumann & Hehir 1995).

If the steps described above are not successful the appropriate use of measures such as study carrels, time-out, or other restriction in privileges could also be considered, so long as they are not inconsistent with the student's IEP. In addition, a disabled student may be suspended from school for up to ten school days. No prior determination of whether the misconduct was a manifestation of the student's disability is required before any of the

mentioned strategies are implemented. If the misconduct is such that more drastic measures should be called for, educators should review the student's current educational program and placement and consider whether a change in placement would be an appropriate measure to address the misconduct (Heumann & Hehir 1995).

Where educators believe that more drastic measures are called for, a disabled student may be removed from school for more than ten school days only if the following steps are taken. First, a group of persons knowledgeable about the student must determine whether the student's misconduct was a manifestation of his or her disability. If this group determines that the misconduct was not a manifestation of the student's disability, the student may be expelled or suspended from the school for more than ten school days, provided applicable procedural safeguards are followed and educational services continue during the period of disciplinary removal (Heumann & Hehir 1990).

However, if the group determines that the student's misconduct was a manifestation of his or her disability, the student may not be expelled or suspended from school for more than ten school days. Educators can still address the misconduct through appropriate instructional and/or related services, including conflict management and/or behavior management strategies, students and teacher training initiatives, measures such as study carrels, time-outs, or other restriction in privileges, so long as they are not inconsistent with the student's IEP, and, as a last resort, through change of placement procedures in accordance with IDEA. School districts also have the options of seeking a court order at any time to remove the student from the school or to change the student's placement if it believes that maintaining the students in the current educational placement is substantially likely to cause injury (Heumann & Hehir 1990).

Legislative Impact

Landmark legislation, such as PL 94-142, the Education for the Handicapped Act, now Part B of IDEA, provides for the provision and guarantee of an appropriate as well as

free education for all, judicial acts soon followed supporting students' rights. Because of court cases citing lack of due process procedures to students administrators began to take more seriously the legal issues involved in disciplinary actions, as well as, students' legal rights. Rothstein (1990) reports that disciplinary measures involving excessive suspension and expulsion were additionally challenged through a Supreme Court decision in *Goss vs. Lopez*, (95 S. Ct. 726, 1975), which voted in favor of the student. The issue at stake was the lack of procedural protection for a student in dealing with expulsion and suspension issues. Many schools, as a result, became more cautious about extended home suspensions. According to Center and McKittrick (1987), the maximum ten consecutive school days maximum suspension originated then.

The West Virginia State Legislature enacted the 1995 Safe Schools Act, which specifically mandates suspension and expulsion for not less than twelve consecutive months for possession of a deadly weapon, assaulting a school employee, or attempting to sell illegal drugs. In the case where these infraction were committed by a student with a disability, the Individual Education Planning (IEP) committee may recommend to place the students in an alternative educational setting for up to forty-five days (Safe Schools Act).

Henderson and Friedland (1996) stated that the obligation of schools to provide an alternative education for all expelled or suspended students is unclear. This issue was illustrated by a recent ruling in Greenbrier County, West Virginia. A sixteen-year old student was suspended for one calendar year for bringing a gun to school. The court ruled that the student "forfeited his right to attend a specific school, but not his right to educational facilities and services within his home count" (*JMP vs. Greenbrier Board of Education*). Since the school district did not provide this student with an alternative educational setting, the court granted the right for the student to return to his school. This decision upheld the student's right to a "free thorough and efficient education" even when suspended or expelled in a disciplinary action.

There is little evidence that suspension and expulsion are effective in bringing about changes in student behavior (Children's Defense Fund, 1985). In spite of the lack of evidence to assert that suspension and expulsion are effective, there is evidence that its use has increased in schools across the nation. The Children's Defense Fund declared that the suspension of children from all levels of school has become a problem of national proportion. As a disciplinary procedure, suspension is often abused and its use deprives students of the school services they urgently need.

In summary, the literature stresses that the use of OSS is fraught with problems. OSS may be rewarding to many and inappropriate to others. For example, why should schools have a policy of suspending students for truancy. It seems ridiculous to reward the behavior of not coming to school with a three day "vacation." Schools need to consider alternatives to an OSS program. The alternative, whether it is ISS or another alternative, needs to be rehabilitative, educational, and punitive. The alternative needs to be found that will maintain instruction and reduce recidivism.

Chapter Three

RESEARCH DESIGN

To determine if an alternative in-school suspension policy will reduce the suspension rate for special education students as a compared to out of school suspension, a sample of 13 special education students who have been in attendance at Pennsville Memorial High School since the 1997-98 school year was studied. These students were selected because they had received disciplinary points in the 1997-98 school year. The population consists of three 11th grade seventeen year old girls, one classified Emotionally Disturbed (ED) and two classified with a Specific Learning Disability (SLD), two 12th grade eighteen year old boys, one ED and one SLD, three 11th grade seventeen year old boys, all classified SLD, four 11th grade sixteen year old boys, two SLD and two ED, and one SLD 10th grade fifteen year old boy.

Each of their disciplinary records were obtained from their files with the permission of the Principal. These records reveal the name, date, offense, and points given to the student for their misconduct. The students receive these points when they have been referred by a teacher for misbehavior. The Assistant Principal or Principal would then speak to the student about the infraction and make the students aware of the point(s) they were receiving. The office would then record the referral slip and a copy would be sent home to the parents.

The disciplinary point system of Pennsville Memorial High School began in the 1996-97 school year. The points given for each offense has been the same since the inception of the policy. The only change to the policy is the consequences of the accrument of points. According to the 1997-98 policy a student would be out-of-school suspended for two days when they reached twenty-five points, another two day out-of-school suspension with forty points and fifty points. At fifty points, the student would also be required to meet with the Superintendent to discuss the behavior problems. At this time, the Superintendent would

consider out of district placement, or a continuation of suspension at ten point intervals. Many times the out-of school placement was not an option because of finances.

This policy became a problem for the regular education students and the special education students. Students would consider the two-day suspension a “vacation.” With state laws mandating a maximum ten-day total out-of-school suspension for a special education student, the district could no longer suspend them after the ten-day limit. Special Education students would keep receiving points with no other form of disciplinary action. Regular education students would usually continue to be out-of-school suspended.

In the 1998-99 school year, regular and Special Education students are required to abide by the following discipline policy. The point allotment for discipline infraction is as follows:

Lateness to school

1-3 points. Points assigned based on 15-minute intervals.

Lateness to Class

1-5 points. Number of minutes late to class and number of times late to the class will determine the number points. Anyone missing more than half of a class due to lateness will be assigned five points.

Class Cuts- minimum of 5 points

1st cut-5 points
2nd cut- 6 points
3rd cut- 7 points

Smoking Outside on School Grounds- 5 points

Smoking in the Scholl Building- External suspension/Police Complaint
(State Statute 26:3D 209)

Extreme Fighting- External Suspension

Class Disruption-Student Sent Out of Classroom

1st Offense- 3 points
2nd Offense- 4 points
3rd Offense- 5 points and Parent Conference

Extreme Disruption/Flagrant Disrespect- minimum 5 points

Hats- 2 points

Eating in Hallways

1st Offense- 2 points

- 2nd Offense- 3 points
- 3rd Offense- 5 points
- Beepers-** 5 points and parent contact
- Driving Regulation-** No driving or being in a car during lunch.
- 1st Offense- 10 points
- 2nd Offense- external suspension

Once a student reaches 20 points, he/she will be out-of-school suspended for 2 days and must return with a parent conference. The conference between the student, the parent, and the principal or assistant principal will take place in the main office at 8:15 a.m. on the day the student returns. Another two-day suspension will result upon accumulation of 35 points and again upon accumulation of 50 points, a conference with the Superintendent of schools will be required. The Superintendent will then require the student to attend the Learning Center, which is an alternative in-school suspension program, for a mandatory minimum of 5 days.

The students sent to the Learning Center will begin their school day at 3:00 p.m. and end at 7:00 p.m. Each day of the week the student will receive instruction in a discipline.

The schedule is as follows:

- Monday-Science
- Tuesday-Math
- Wednesday-Social Studies
- Thursday-English
- Friday-Physical Education/Counseling

Each of their disciplinary records were obtained from their files with the permission of the Principal. These records reveal the name, date, offense, and points given to the student for their misconduct. The students receive these points when they have been referred by a teacher for misbehavior. The Assistant Principal or Principal would then speak to the student about the infraction and make the students aware of the point(s) they were receiving. The office would then record the referral slip and a copy would be sent home to the parents.

The disciplinary point system of Pennsville Memorial High School began in the 1996-97 school year. The points given for each offense has been the same since the inception

of the policy. The only change to the policy is the consequences of the accrual of points. According to the 1997-98 policy a student would be out-of-school suspended for two days when they reached twenty-five points, another two day out-of-school suspension with forty points and fifty points. At fifty points, the student would also be required to meet with the Superintendent to discuss the behavior problems. At this time, the Superintendent would consider out of district placement, or a continuation of suspension at ten point intervals.

Many times the out-of school placement was not an option because of finances.

This policy became a problem for the regular education students and the special education students. Students would consider the two-day suspension a “vacation.” With state laws mandating a maximum ten-day total out-of-school suspension for a special education student, the district could no longer suspend them after the ten-day limit. Special Education students would keep receiving points with no other form of disciplinary action. Regular education students would usually continue to be out-of-school suspended.

In the 1998-99 school year, regular and Special Education students are required to abide by the following discipline policy.

Each of their disciplinary records were obtained from their files with the permission of the Principal. These records reveal the name, date, offense, and points given to the student for their misconduct, benefits students and staff if it is done properly. Some of the key characteristics that should be included in an ISS program include having a full time qualified staff to institute the program, establish clear rules and procedures for the ISS room, allow students to complete regular class assignments, and monitor the progress of the student. The goals should include improving student behavior, attendance, morale, self esteem, and academic achievement (Siskind 1993).

The alternative in-school suspension program (Learning Center) at Pennsville Memorial High School has captured the essential components of an effective discipline policy. A goal of this program has been to reduce the rate of misbehavior for special education and regular education students. When a student misbehaves they are given disciplinary points, which

continue to accrue. Once the student receives fifty points, they are assigned to the Learning Center for a minimum of two weeks. Here the student receives instruction in all of their disciplines by a certified teacher. This program has eliminated the problem of only being able to suspend special education students for ten days in a school year. The student is now assigned to the Learning Center and the problem is avoided.

Chapter Four

RESULTS

The question to be determined by this research was whether or not having an alternative in-school suspension program as opposed to an out-of-school suspension program would reduce discipline problems in a high/middle school. Thirteen high school special education students were selected to take part. The discipline records for these thirteen students were compared in the 1997-98 and 1998-99 school years to determine if a pattern occurred. If students received less discipline points in the 1998-99 school year, the alternative in school suspension program must have had an impact on student misbehavior.

The discipline records for the thirteen students were obtained at the end of March 1999 and compared to the previous school year. Of the thirteen students, nine had an increase of discipline points from the 1997-98 school year. In the 1997-98 school year the mean for the points obtained was 30.4 as compared to the 40.8 for the 1998-99 school year. Four of the students went down in points from the previous year. Their average decrease was 12 points. The other nine students went up an average 20.8 points during September to March observation. (See appendix A for chart)

Of the thirteen students, seven of them accrued 50 points, which warranted placement in the Learning Center. However, only four of them attended the Learning Center. Three of the seven students chose to drop out of school instead of attending the alternative in-school suspension program.

The results show an average increase in the 1998-99 school year for the thirteen students.

Chapter Five

DISCUSSION

My research sought to prove that having this Learning Center program was going to be a deterrent for misbehavior by students. However, there were some variables that affected the outcome of this research. If the following changes were made or these variables taken into account when one looks at the results, they may see them in a different light.

The first variable that had a major impact on the results of this study was having a new Vice Principal in the 1998-99 school year. The Vice Principal is the disciplinarian of the school. The point system that was in effect in the 1997-98 school year was the same as the 1998-99 school year, however, the consistency of the distribution of points was quite different. The new Vice Principal took a much harder stance on student misbehavior. Each time there was an infraction by a student, points were assigned. During the 1997-98 school year this was not always the case. Many times students would receive a warning for their misbehavior instead of receiving points. This in turn delayed disciplinary action such as an out-of-school suspension. This practice of giving warnings became common, especially for the special education students. Given that special education students can only be suspended ten days a school year, they started to receive many warnings since there was no other penalty in place other than out-of-school suspension. Once a special education student had reached their ten day limit the school did not have another punishment to award them. These students would continue to misbehave and not incur any further discipline action.

With the Learning Center the new Vice Principal has not been faced with this dilemma. She is able to award points to every student because an appropriate policy is in place to deal with students who accrue many points. As a result, there is much more consistency in the distribution of points and students are also accruing many more points.

The consistency of point distribution may account for why nine of the special education students had an increase of points from the 1997-98 school year. It is my estimate that if this

same comparison was made next year, the amount of points received by the special education students would go down. In the 1999-00 school year the students would be cognizant of the fact that there would be no warnings given out for misbehavior and that the Learning Center in place to accommodate them as opposed to an out-of-school suspension. Students are aware of the new discipline policy concerning the Learning Center, however, no one was aware of what it really entailed since this was the first year of its implementation.

The new discipline policy, along with the description of the Learning Center, was sent home to all students and their parents. However, without any students really experiencing what it would be like to attend school from three to seven instead of the regular school day, students were unaware of the Learning Center's impact. Now that students have been sent to the Learning Center this year the word has spread that it is a "punishment." By this I mean students who have attended the Learning Center have shared with the other students that during the ten-day placement in the Learning Center they have had to really work. Students complete all of their work that was sent to the Learning Center by their teachers and more it time permits. Students work for a full four hours night minus one ten minute break at five o'clock. Next year students will know what to expect of the Learning Center because their peers have informed them. Of the students that have been placed in the Learning Center in the 1998-99 school year, all of them have commented that they can not wait to get back to the regular school day. They want to get back to their friends and the regular school hours. They have commented that they will not accrue any more points, which would have the results of being sent back to the Learning Center.

An interesting impact the Learning Center has had was the withdrawal of three students from school. Upon reaching the fifty points that warrants placement in the Learning Center these special education students chose to drop out of school, as opposed to attending this alternative in-school suspension program. This impact can be interpreted in two different ways. The first being that the alternative in-school suspension program is too much of a deterrent and students are dropping out. On the other hand, these students were most likely

to drop out anyway so the Learning Center became the final determination. Looking at the academic records of these three students it is clear as to why they made this decision. They all had numerous failures and were a minimum of two years behind their fellow classmates.

In order to improve on my research design I would have done several things differently. First, I would have made the time period in which the points were compared longer. This design allowed for the comparison of points from September to March. I would change this design so that the comparison lasts from September to June. The reason being that it has taken several of the students until March to accrue fifty points. Now that they have attended the Learning Center, it is my guess that the points they continue to accumulate will decrease. Therefore, the final comparison may be altered significantly. Last year students continued to get points throughout the year until June. I think once the students get to fifty points this year they will stop their misbehavior because they will not want to return to the learning center. Given this scenario the comparison may be quite different and my hypothesis supported.

Another consideration would be to give a survey to the special education students on what they think of the discipline policy and the Learning Center. This attitudinal survey may reveal that the Learning Center is enough of a deterrent for continued misbehavior. The researcher may be better able to support the hypothesis of points decreasing if the survey reflects that the students do not want to continue to misbehave and face the consequence of getting more points.

Two students had situations that affected the outcome of the research as well. Student number10 had an increase of thirty-nine points over last year because the teacher that was his mentor retired this year. This student met with this teacher every morning and went to him when he felt he was about to lose control. This teacher had a very positive impact on the student and his behavior. Unfortunately, the student has had a difficult time adjusting to the new school year. However, upon completing two weeks in the Learning Center in February this student has only received two points.

Student number two has received fifty points, which means they should have been placed in the Learning Center. However, the Vice Principal decided that the Learning Center was not the appropriate placement for this student. It was determined that an exception would be made for this student. A contract was written with the student and as long as she worked two points off in the morning by coming to detention at seven am, then she would not be placed in the Learning Center. However, upon accrument of more points the student may face placement in the learning center. This should not become a common practice if the Learning Center is to be successful. Strict guidelines need to be followed.

Looking at face value, this research can not confirm that an alternative- in-school suspension program is any more of a deterrent to misbehavior than the previous out-of-school discipline policy at Pennsville Memorial High School. Being in its first year of operation, I believe the Learning Center is a useful program. Instead of students being given a three day “vacation” when they misbehave, they must still attend school. Students are able to keep up with their schoolwork and receive the appropriate support needed to help them be successful. When they return to the regular school day they are caught up in their work, which benefits everyone affected by the situation.

The research question of whether an alternative in-school suspension program can reduce the rate of misbehavior as compared to an out-of school suspension program was unable to be proven by this research design. However, if the above considerations are incorporated into a new design the answer to the question may change. The Learning Center is a positive improvement at Pennsville Memorial High School and I commend the school for taking steps to solve a problem. If schools do not look into new programs and attempt new policies the problems will continue.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Center, D.B., McKittrick, S. (1987). Disciplinary removal of special education students. Focus on Exceptional Children. 20(2).
- Children's Defense Fund (1985). Washington, D.C.: Author.
- Collins, C.G. (1985). In-school suspensions. Anaheim, CA: Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Council for Exceptional Children. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 258 353).
- DiSciullo, M. (1984). In-school suspension: An alternative to out-of-school suspension. Clearinghouse. 75. 328-330
- Gallagher, James. The Effects of In-School Suspension on Aggressive Emotionally Disturbed Students at an Alternative School. Thesis at Rowan University, 1980.
- Guindon, Jerry. (1992). Developing an In-School Suspension Program in an Elementary School as an Alternative to Home-Bound Suspension. Ed.D. Practicum. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 349 679).
- Heumann, Judith & Hehir, Thomas. (1995). Questions and Answers on Disciplining Students with Disabilities. OSEP Memorandum. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. 385 055).
- Hochman, S. R.. & Worner, W. (1987). In-school suspension and group counseling: Helping the at-risk student. NASSP Bulletin, 71(501), 93-97.
- Johnson, A. (1979). Missouri in-school suspension programs: A descriptive study of the rationale, structure, common usage, and success in reducing the number of suspensions. Ph.D. dissertation. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED.173 907)
- Johnston, S. J. (1989). High school completion of in-school suspension students. NASSP Bulletin, 73(513), 89-95.
- Mizell, M. H. (1978). Designing and implementing effective in-school alternatives to suspension. The Urban Review, 10(3), 213-226.
- Nielson, Linda. "Programs: The Counselor's Role, "The School Counselor", 26: 325-333, May, 1979.
- Opuni, K. (1991). Student assignment centers: An in-school suspension program. (ERIC Documentation Reproduction Service No. ED 339 137).

- Ordovery, Eileen. (1994). Disciplinary Exclusion of Students with Disabilities under Federal Law. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 377 623)
- Rentz, R.D. (1991). The development and implementation of an in-school suspension program. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 339 103).
- Rothstein, L.F. (1990). Special education law. New York: Longman.
- Safe Schools Act, WV H.B. 2073 (1995)
- Short, P.M. (1981). Planning and developing in-school suspension programs. University of Georgia, Athens, Ga.
- Siskind, T.G. (1993). An evaluation of in-school suspension programs. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 360 718).
- Sullivan, J.S. (1989). Planning, implementing, and maintaining an effective in-school suspension program. The Clearing House, 62(9), 409-410.
- Whitfield, D. (1996). A Study of the Effectiveness of an In-School Suspension. Tampa, Fla: Paper presented at the National Dropout Prevention Network Conference. (ERIC Educational Reproduction Service No. ED 396 372).
- Zimmerman, Jim and Lou Ann Archbold. "On-Campus Suspension: What it is and Why it works," NASSP Bulletin The National Association of Secondary School Principals, 63: 63-67, September, 1979.

Appendix A

Table 1 Sample Population Point Distribution

<u>ID #</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Disability</u>	<u>Points/1997-98</u>	<u>Points/1998-99</u>
1	17	SLD	27	3
2	17	ED	54	52
3	15	PI/SLD	11	20
4	16	SLD	18	6
5	17	SLD	32	50
6	16	ED	51	64
7	16	ED	73	82
8	16	SLD	14	62
9	17	SLD	9	10
10	17	ED/SLD	11	50
11	18	SLD	29	72
12	18	ED	37	28
13	17	SLD	29	32
<u>Mean</u>	16.9		30.4	40.8