

## **ABSTRACT**

Felisha Artina Whitaker. THE IMPACT OF BEHAVIOR INTERVENTION PROGRAMS ON STUDENT SUSPENSIONS (Under the direction of Dr. William A. Rouse, Jr.), Department of Educational Leadership, June 2015.

The purpose of this study is to determine if the use of the behavior intervention programs, Positive Behavior Intervention Support and Character Academy impact suspensions of African American students in a local education agency (LEA) in northeastern North Carolina.

Based on the literature review, suspension has been an issue for school officials for the past three decades (Unidos & Unidos, 2005). Students have been and continue to be derailed into the juvenile justice system as a result of suspensions. Students who are forced onto what is known as the school house to jailhouse track suffer dire consequences (Unidos & Unidos, 2005). A school-wide discipline plan is a first and necessary step in a continuum for providing behavior support to all students (Colvin, 2007). An alternative is a comprehensive, proactive approach to discipline known as School-Wide Behavior Support (Skiba & Sprauge, 2008). Character Academy is a program that is used in place of suspensions (Smith, 2013).

The data used for this research study were collected from an LEA in northeastern North Carolina. To answer the study questions, participant interview and school district suspension data reports were collected and triangulated. Data were collected through interviews with students, teachers, parents, and school administrators at the elementary, middle, and high school levels as well as school district leadership. School district suspension data were collected from the North Carolina Annual Report of Suspensions and Expulsions for the school years: 2011-12; 2012-13; and 2013-14 from Northampton County Schools.

Based on the findings, the district should continue use of the PBIS program but train a district team of veteran teachers, administrators, and central office support personnel on all

modules of the PBIS program to help implement and support the use of the program throughout the district. The district should discontinue the use of the Character Academy Program.



THE IMPACT OF BEHAVIOR INTERVENTION PROGRAMS  
ON STUDENT SUSPENSIONS

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by

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ON STUDENT SUSPENSIONS

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## **DEDICATION**

I wish to dedicate this dissertation to my family. I would like to thank my mother, Julia; my sisters Tandeka and Shaketa; and my brother Michael for believing in and encouraging me to keep pushing through. Thank you also to my nieces and nephews: Daylen, Makaila, Stephen, Isaiah, and Malisa for your love. Your faith and unconditional love for me is enduring and allowed me to complete this process. I hope that I have made you all proud.

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A special thank you to my son Jayven. You are the reason that I continued with my educational career. I want you to understand that learning is a life time commitment and process. I hope that I have engrained in you the determination to persevere as you strive to reach all of your goals. Thank you for encouraging me by telling me that you believe in me and that you are proud of me. Those words mean the world to me and gave me the determination to see it through. You continue to make me proud. You are my inspiration.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
TITLE.....	i
COPYRIGHT.....	ii
SIGNATURE.....	iii
DEDICATION.....	iv
LIST OF TABLES.....	viii
LIST OF FIGURES.....	x
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Background.....	1
Problem of Practice.....	4
Study Questions.....	5
Definition of Terms.....	5
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	7
Introduction.....	7
Types of Suspension.....	10
Policy Implication: The Causes of School Suspensions.....	14
The impact of school suspensions (out of school).....	24
Who is being suspended?.....	30
Suspensions: Witnessing the Jailhouse Track.....	36
African American Males and Suspension.....	48
Exceptional Children and Suspensions.....	54
Long lasting effects of suspension.....	58



Long-term suspensions and expulsions.....	64
Decreasing Suspensions: Alternatives to Suspension and Expulsions.....	72
Program Description: PBIS (Positive Behavior Intervention Support).....	77
Program Description: Character Academy.....	95
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY.....	100
Design of the Study.....	100
Statement of the Problem.....	100
Study Questions.....	101
Participants.....	101
Data Collection.....	102
Data Analysis.....	104
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS OF THE STUDY.....	106
Study Questions.....	106
Analysis of Data.....	106
Study Question 1.....	122
Study Question 2.....	136
Study Question 3.....	143
Study Question 4.....	153
Study Question 5.....	157
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	164
Statement of the Problem.....	164
Study Questions.....	165
Methodology.....	165

Literature Summary.....	166
Implications.....	171
Recommendations.....	174
Practice.....	174
Research.....	177
REFERENCES.....	178
APPENDIX A: LETTER FROM SUPERINTENDENT.....	185
APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS.....	186
APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE.....	187
APPENDIX D: MINOR ASSENT FORM.....	190
APPENDIX E: INFORMED CONSENTE ASSENT SCRIPT.....	193
APPENDIX F: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL.....	194

## LIST OF TABLES

1. Discipline in the 20 Largest Districts.....	43
2. Racial Disparities in Suspensions of Students with Disabilities.....	47
3. Office of Civil Rights Report Raleigh (Wake County, North Carolina).....	49
4. Short-Term Suspensions for Students with Disabilities.....	63
5. Long-Term Suspensions Given by Gender.....	65
6. Long-Term Suspensions Given By Grade Level.....	66
7. Expulsions Given by Grade Level.....	67
8. Expulsions for Students Receiving Special Education Services.....	68
9. Suspensions and Expulsions by LEA, Gender, and Race (2011-2012).....	69
10. One School’s Improvement as a Result of PBIS.....	85
11. School Wide Expectations Matrix: Squire Elementary School.....	87
12. School Wide Behavior Expectation Matrix: Willis Hare Elementary School.....	88
13. Gaston Middle School – Positive Behavior Intervention Support.....	91
14. Conway Middle School – Positive Behavior Intervention Support.....	92
15. School Wide Behavioral Expectation Matrix: Northampton County High School...	93
16. Northampton County High School Reward’s Matrix.....	94
17. Are Your General Perceptions of Positive Behavior Intervention Support Positive or Negative?.....	108
18. Are Your General Perception of Character Academy Positive or Negative?.....	109
19. What Do You Perceive as the Purpose or Guiding Philosophy of Positive Behavior Intervention Support?.....	110
20. What Do You Perceive as the Purpose or Guiding Philosophy of Character Academy?.....	112
21. Do You Agree with the Purposes of these Programs?.....	113

22. Do You Think the Problems the Programs Address are Severe or Important?.....	115
23. How Do You Think PBIS Works?.....	116
24. How Do You Think Character Academy Works?.....	118
25. Do You Believe that PBIS has been Effective in Reducing Suspensions and Increasing Instructional Time?.....	120
26. Do You Believe that Character Academy has been Effective in Reducing Suspensions and Increasing Instructional Time?.....	121
27. Do You Feel that One Program is Better than the Other in Decreasing Suspension and Increasing Instructional Time?.....	123
28. 2011-2012 Suspensions and Expulsions by LEA, Gender, and Race.....	124
29. 2012-2013 Suspensions and Expulsions by LEA, Gender, and Race.....	125
30. 2013-2014 Suspensions and Expulsions by LEA, Gender, and Race.....	126

## LIST OF FIGURES

1. Office of Civil Rights Civil Rights Data Collection Report.....	37
2. Arrests and referrals to law enforcement.....	39
3. Percent of enrollment by race out-of-school.....	46
4. Distribution of student population (Colvin, 2007).....	79
5. 2013-2014 suspensions Willis Hare Elementary School.....	130
6. 2013-2014 suspensions (race and exceptionality) Willis Hare Elementary School.....	131
7. 2013-2014 suspensions Gaston Elementary School.....	132
8. 2013-2014 suspensions (race and exceptionality) Gaston Elementary School.....	133
9. 2013-2014 suspensions Central Elementary School.....	134
10. 2013-2014 suspensions (race and exceptionality) Central Elementary School.....	135
11. 2013-2014 suspensions Gaston Middle School.....	140
12. 2013-2014 suspensions (race and exceptionality) Gaston Middle School.....	141
13. 2013-2014 suspensions Conway Middle School.....	142
14. 2013-2014 suspensions (race and exceptionality) Conway Middle School.....	144
15. 2013-2014 suspensions Northampton County High School.....	149
16. 2013-2014 suspensions (race and exceptionality) Northampton County High School	150
17. African American female suspensions 2011-2014.....	151
18. African American male suspensions 2011-2014.....	152

## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

### **Background**

School discipline has always been perceived as essential for the proper functioning of a public school (Colvin, 2007). There is expectation that discipline is necessary for students to learn and that educators should establish safe schools (Colvin, 2007). Educational stakeholders have historically taken pride in well-disciplined schools; however, there has been growing concern that the increase of problem behaviors or the lack of school discipline is reaching crisis proportions (Colvin, 2007). There seems to be agreement on the problems facing schools in regards to discipline, but debate on the way these problems need to be addressed (Colvin, 2007). The role and value of punishment is central to this issue (Colvin, 2007).

Schools are institutions of learning and should be safe for all teachers and students. Teachers are entitled to teach and students are entitled to learn in an environment that is conducive to learn and safe. A safe learning environment is essential for all students; if the environment is unsafe, students are not able to focus on learning the skills needed for a successful education and future (Hurley, 2014). When constant disruption is part of the educational setting, all students are affected in some way. Once, disruption in school was a fight between students that often took place on the schoolyard and ended with adult intervention. Today, it is not unusual for students to attack other students, teachers, security guards, and school personnel, showing a complete lack of respect for authority (Hurley, 2014). Additionally, low-level but persistent disruptive behavior results in significant loss of instructional time (Below the Radar: Low-Level Disruption in the Country's Classroom, 2013). According to the report, *Below the Radar: Low-Level Disruption in the Country's Classroom* (2013), by the Office of Standards in Education, such behaviors include:

- Talking to classmates while the teacher is talking; calling out answers instead of raising a hand; making silly comments for attention; passing notes; surreptitious throwing of small pieces of paper; arriving late to lessons; deliberately sitting in the wrong seat; minor squabbles during group tasks
- Children talking between themselves when they should be listening; fiddling with anything; writing when they should be listening; refusing to work with a talk partner
- Talking to each other (not about the work); texting or looking at mobile phones; rocking on chairs or getting up from seat; putting on make-up; playing around with friends-for example play fighting; dropping pens and equipment on the floor
- Not focusing on the task; just sitting there doing nothing; rolling eyes at teacher or other impolite gestures; demanding attention without regard for other students' needs

The perception of teachers is that disruption is basically caused by (1) Emotional problems resulting from issues outside of the school environment; (2) Frustration caused by school work and; (3) Frustration caused by a student's inability to get attention. The perception of the students is that disruption is caused by being bored, not getting attention fast enough, and teachers who in their opinion are unfair (Zimmerman, 1995).

A safe and orderly learning environment is essential for students of all ages. If schools are bombarded with issues of safety and disruptions to learning, educators are unable to focus on learning the skills needed for a successful education and future (Hurley, 2014). Creating a classroom that is organized and that is characterized by mutual respect makes it a lot easier to teach effectively, and one of the most important things teachers can do to promote learning is to create classroom environments where students feel safe (Creating a Safe Classroom, 2014).

Schools have begun to suspend and expel more students and in far more questionable circumstances (Yim, Losen, & Hewitt, 2010). It is important to note that anytime a student is

removed from instruction, she has been removed from the opportunity to learn. The exclusion of students from instruction, even for a short time period, disrupts a child's education and may escalate misbehavior by removing the child from a structured environment and giving him more opportunity to misbehave (Yim et al., 2010). School suspensions put students at risk for many negative outcomes and although educators have high expectations for student performance, many students still struggle academically and socially (Yim et al., 2010) as a result of school suspensions. Students who are suspended from school have an increased likelihood for academic failure and dropout (Krezmien, Leone, & Achilles, 2006). These failures put students at risk for involvement in the juvenile justice system (Krezmien et al., 2006). One suspension doubles the risk of dropping out of school from 16% to 32% (Flatow, 2013). Constenbader and Markson (1994) indicate that most educators believe that suspension is ineffective and counterproductive.

In March 2012, Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, gave a speech on strengthening civil rights enforcement in education and highlighting racial disparities in the use of suspension and expulsion. He stated that African American students, especially males, and students with disabilities are being suspended more often and punished more severely than their white peers (Losen 2010). In accordance, U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder, also addressed a conference of civil rights lawyers in Washington, DC and stated that his department would work collaboratively with the Secretary's department to remedy these discipline disparities (Losen, 2010). The belief and practice that schools should kick-out the bad kids so the good kids can learn violates the commitment to equal educational opportunity for all students (Losen & Gillespie, 2011).



## **Problem of Practice**

In a recent administrative meeting, the Superintendent of the district revealed that the district has one of the highest suspension rates in the state of North Carolina. Furthermore, in a recent school board meeting members raised questions about the district's suspension rates, especially in regards to students with disabilities. Parents, students, and community leaders have raised concerns about the number of student suspensions as well. In a recently held Community Roundtable Meeting, parents and community members stated that the school district is too quick to suspend students and need to do more to support students who have behavioral issues. School leaders agree that the out of school suspension rate is a serious issue in the district; however, they feel that in many cases, it is the only course of discipline to utilize to protect the instructional environment for school teachers and students. As a result, the school board has mandated that all school leaders are trained on and implement Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS) at each school. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the Positive Behavior Intervention Support and Character Academy programs to determine if the impact of the programs will result in a reduction of lost instructional times due to in-school and out of school suspension. In addition this study will assess if either program had a positive impact on students.

Northampton County is a rural community located in the northeastern part of North Carolina. The county's 539 square miles sit astride the Coastal Plain and Piedmont Regions. The population is approximately 23,000. Within 15-90 miles is an abundance of cultural, historical, recreational, and other educational institutions. Among these are the Lakeland Arts Center, Historical Halifax, Lake Gaston, the cities of Roanoke Rapids, Murfreesboro, Rocky Mount, Raleigh, Durham, Petersburg, Richmond, Tidewater, VA and the Research Triangle Park. Institutions of higher learning within a 100-mile radius include East Carolina University, North

Carolina Wesleyan College, North Carolina State University, Shaw University, St. Augustine's University, Duke University, University of Richmond, Virginia Commonwealth University, Virginia State University, Norfolk State University, Old Dominion University, Hampton University, Chowan University, Halifax Community College and Roanoke-Chowan Community College (Retrieved from [www.northampton.k12.nc.us](http://www.northampton.k12.nc.us)).

This study will prove significant to the school district and community because it will determine if currently used positive intervention programs are decreasing student suspensions and resulting in an increase of instructional time.

### **Study Questions**

This problem of proactive will explore:

1. To what extent if any does Positive Behavior Intervention Support decrease suspensions for African American students in the elementary school?
2. To what extent if any does Positive Behavior Intervention Support decrease suspensions for African American students in the middle school?
3. To what extent if any does Positive Behavior Intervention Support decrease suspensions for African American students in the high school?
4. To what extent if any does Character Academy decrease suspensions for African American students in the middle school?
5. To what extent if any does Character Academy decrease suspensions for African American students in the high school?

### **Definition of Terms**

*Exclusionary policies:* Policies that result in out-of-school suspension and expulsion.

*In-School Suspension:* Suspension used to punish students for inappropriate behavior, but ensures that they are still a part of the academic community.

*Out of School Suspension:* Suspension that prevents students from attending school for a specific period of time; the time out of school is dependent upon the violation made by the student.

*Expulsion:* Removes a student from the school environment for a long period of time. The exclusion could be for the remainder of a school year or for a full calendar year, depending on the infraction.

*Zero-tolerance:* Policies that mandate the automatic suspension or expulsion of students from school for offenses that jeopardize the safety of schools. Such offenses include drug possession/use and possession of a weapon.

*Super-predator:* Young criminals who are brutal and without conscience and described as products of single-family homes, poverty, and a lenient justice system.

*School to Prison Pipeline:* Concept that implies that schools are not meeting the educational and social developmental needs of a large number of students. School policies operate and push students out of school and into the criminal justice system.

*Implicit bias:* Thoughts, stereotypes, and attitudes about race that people don't often realize they carry, but that are manifested through their actions; the primary means through which racial prejudice and animosity are expressed.

*Explicit bias:* Occurs as a result of conscious thought, such as concluding black people, for example, are genetically inferior even after considering the evidence to the contrary.

*Critical Race Theory:* White privilege and institutional racism in this country has transformed from an overt and explicit process to a very subversive and subtle process.

## CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### Introduction

School discipline has always been perceived as essential for the proper functioning of a public school (Colvin, 2007). There is expectation that discipline is necessary for students to learn and that educators should establish safe schools (Colvin, 2007). Educational stakeholders have historically taken pride in well-disciplined schools; however, there has been growing concern that the increase of problem behaviors or the lack of school discipline is reaching crisis proportions (Colvin, 2007). There seems to be agreement on the problems facing schools in regards to discipline, but debate on the way these problems need to be addressed (Colvin, 2007). The role and value of punishment is central to this issue (Colvin, 2007).

Dupper (2010), as described by Bear, Cavalier, and Manning (2002), states that before the twentieth century, discipline was based on memorization of teachings from the Bible, fear of punishment, humiliation, and a sense of shame. Infants were viewed as evil and it was the parents' role to change the child's behavior through quick, strong punishment such as whipping rather than gentler methods such as scolding (Dupper, 2010; Wishy, 1968). Children were taught that if they disobeyed their parents that they were forcing God to condemn them to eternal death and that obeying their parents would result in a better chance of salvation (Dupper, 2010). This discipline philosophy was also reflected in the public school system, where teachers and school administrators, under the English common law concept of *in loco parentis* ("in place of parent"), had the right not only to teach but to "maintain an orderly and effective learning environment through reasonable control of students (Dupper 2010; Yell & Rozalski, 2008).

This punitive discipline in schools continued until the early mid-twentieth century. The emphasis was then placed on "threats, punishment, and religious education was replaced with an

emphasis on correcting and preventing school discipline problems through character education programs and their ideas about right and wrong (Bear et al., 2002; Dupper, 2010).

Over the past forty years, school discipline policies have been impacted by several United States Supreme Court rulings (Dupper, 2010; Education Law Center, 2007; Yell & Rozalcki, 2008). In all of these rulings, the United States Supreme Court was charged with striking a balance between (a) school's right to maintain a safe and orderly environment through the reasonable control of students and (b) students' constitutional rights to a public education, due process, right to privacy, and freedom from unreasonable searches (Dupper, 2010; Education Law Center, 2007; Yell & Rozalcki, 2008). Notable United Supreme Court Cases:

1. *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School* (1969): Focused on students' rights to freedom of expression while in school. The Supreme Court ruled that a student's right to freedom of expression "does not stop at the school house gate" and that "a student's non-disruptive personal expression that occurs in school is protected by the First Amendment even if the ideas are unpopular and controversial. They also ruled that school officials do not possess absolute authority over their students (Dupper, 2010).
2. *Goss v. Lopez* (1975): Recognized that students have Constitutional and due process protections when they are subjected to certain disciplinary procedures, such as suspension. Schools' disciplinary actions that result in a student being deprived of education for even 10 days, is a serious event in the life of the suspended child (Dupper, 2010; Yell & Rozalski, 2008).
3. *Ingraham v. Wright* (1977): Routine corporal punishment is not considered cruel and unusual punishment and does not violate procedural due process per se. Since this

ruling, many states have enacted legislation outlawing the use of corporal punishment in public schools (Dupper, 2010).

Such court rulings support the notion that schools face the challenge of meeting the educational and social needs of all children while also maintaining a safe and orderly learning environment (Skiba & Noam, 2001). Most educators agree that schools should be safe and conducive to learning; however, there is much controversy over how to achieve this lofty goal (Unidos & Unidos, 2005).

Suspension and expulsion are forms of school discipline used to keep schools safe. School administrators and superintendents use these methods to decrease violence, discourage drug use, and prevent criminal activity on school campuses (Unidos & Unidos, 2005). Expulsion is used for more serious incidents while suspension is used for a wide array of misbehaviors that include disruption, attendance, and insubordination. According to the Indicators of School Crime and Safety, insubordination is defined as:

A deliberate and inexcusable defiance of or refusal to obey a school rule, authority, or a reasonable order. It includes but is not limited to direct defiance of school authority, failure to attend assigned detention or on-campus supervision, failure to respond to a call slip, and physical or verbal intimidation/abuse (Dupper, 2010; Dinkes, Kemp, & Baum 2009).

The range of behaviors that fall under “insubordination” is very broad which makes it difficult to determine the severity of a student’s behavior that has resulted in suspension for this particular offense (Dupper, 2010). Some behaviors that fall under this category are serious, but others are less serious in nature. The problem with “insubordination” is that it is a catchall category that includes both major and minor offenses yet deals with all offenses in the same

harsh manner (Dupper, 2010). Thus, it is not possible to distinguish between serious and relatively minor offenses within this category. As long as school officials are given the option to discipline students under a broad category such as “insubordination,” there will always exist a question of fairness to whether or not a student’s behavior was serious enough to warrant a serious disciplinary response such as suspension (Dupper, 2010). It is also possible that administrators and teachers are misusing authority to arbitrarily punish students (Dupper, 2010).

### **Types of Suspension**

In most United States Schools, there are two types of suspensions: In-School Suspension (ISS) and Out of School Suspension (OSS short-term and OSS long-term). In-School Suspension is used to punish students for their behavior, but ensures that they are still a part of the academic community (In School Suspension: A Learning Tool, n.d.). When a student is placed in ISS, she is removed from the regular or traditional classroom and placed in a special class room, usually referred to as in school suspension (In School Suspension: A Learning Tool, n.d). School administrators are striving to keep more students in school, even those that are disruptive (In School Suspension: A Learning Tool, n.d.). This has resulted in more students being assigned to in school suspension programs (In-School Suspension: A Learning Tool, n.d.). Educators agree that keeping suspended students in school is much better than having them home unsupervised; however, schools need more than a room with a teacher for in school suspension to change inappropriate student behavior (In-School Suspension: A Learning Tool, n.d.). Structured programs that address multiple issues can help students get back to class faster and stay there (In-School Suspension: A Learning Tool, n.d.). When students are suspended from schools, teachers miss out on teachable moments when they can connect with students and build relationships (In-School Suspension: A Learning Tool, n.d.). If not planned appropriately, in-school suspension

programs can be little more than a window-dressing designed to pull down out-of school suspension numbers (In School Suspension: A Learning Tool, n.d.). Poorly conceived and inadequately staffed programs, may only be holding tanks-a stop on the route to out-of school suspension or expulsion (In-School Suspension: A Learning Tool, n.d.).

School administrators, parents, and community leaders are bothered by the idea of students serving out-of school suspensions roaming their communities during the day, possibly getting into more trouble (In School Suspension: A Learning Tool, n.d.). Thus, many schools created or expanded their in-school suspension programs (In-School Suspension: A Learning Tool, n.d.). For example, state officials in Louisiana became so concerned about suspended students missing instructional time, that the legislature began funding in-school suspension programs (In-School Suspensions: A Learning Tool, n.d.). The Kentucky Department of Education encourages schools districts to develop policies that include well-rounded academic offerings for students who are assigned to in-school suspension (In-School Suspension: A Learning Tool, n.d.).

To be an effective learning tool, in-school suspension programs should be one piece of a school wide strategy for creating and sustaining a positive, nurturing school climate, based on respectful relationships between teachers and students, teachers and teachers, and students and students (In-School Suspension: A Learning Tool, n.d.). The characteristics of a good ISS program may include:

- Ways to ensure in-school suspension is appropriate; in-school suspension is unlikely to resolve a truancy or homework completion problem that should be resolved through other means.
- A term limit: students should not be suspended indefinitely.



- Problem solving and/or mediation (including peer mediation) sessions among teachers and students or students and students, which result in written contracts that spell out future expectations.
- Ensuring students come to the program with academic assignments to complete.
- Professionals to staff the program, such as a teacher who can assess students for unidentified learning difficulties, assist in assignment completion, and by a counselor who can explore root causes of problems, refer students to community services, and engage with parents. (In-School Suspension: A Learning Tool, n.d).

Therefore, the purpose of In School Suspension programs is to minimize the time that students who are suspended are out of class and to provide both academic and behavior support to students.

Out of School Suspension prevents students from attending school for a specific period of time; the time out of school is dependent upon the violation made by the student. Costenbader and Markson (1994) found that in a study of 100 schools in ten states, 73% of schools in the study reported that the average period for students to be suspended (out of school) was two-four days. In North Carolina and for the purpose of this paper, out of school (short-term suspension) is defined as suspensions that can last up to ten days. Principals usually make decisions about whether to suspend a student short-term, about the duration of that suspension, and about whether the short-term suspension is to be served in or out of school (Annual Study of Suspensions and Expulsions, 2011-2012). In North Carolina, Long-term suspension is defined as a suspension that lasts from eleven days up to the remainder of the school year (Annual Study of Suspensions and Expulsions, 2011-2012). It is possible for a student to receive more than one long-term suspension during the year. When a student is suspended long-term, the student may

not return to their regular program in their home school for the duration of the suspension (Annual Study of Suspensions and Expulsions, 2011-2012). Districts may allow long-term suspended students to attend an alternative learning program (ALP) or alternative school during their long-term suspension (Annual Study of Suspensions and Expulsions, 2011-2012).

Therefore, out of school suspension, whether short-term or long-term is used to as measures to discipline students and correct inappropriate behaviors, but requires students to miss valuable instructional time from school.

Expulsion is permanent exclusion from school; it is used far less frequently than suspensions (Skiba & Sprague, 2008). Students are expelled from school as a last resort (Skiba & Sprague, 2008). Expulsions are considered a severe academic punishment. Some are temporary, after an extended period of time (such as a semester or a year), the student can return to school. Other expulsions are permanent, the student will not be allowed to re-enter school (Zero Tolerance in Philadelphia: Denying Educational Opportunities and Creating a Pathway to Prison, 2011). Expulsion also refers to a more procedural removal of students from school, typically, involving a decision by the superintendent and school board. In most cases, ten days is the dividing line between suspension and expulsion (Skiba & Sprague, 2008). In North Carolina, expulsions are defined as a being unable to return to the assigned school or any other school within the local education agency (Annual Study of Suspensions and Expulsions, 2011-2012). As with long-term suspensions, the superintendent and/ or the local board of education, upon the recommendation of the principal, make decisions about student expulsions on a case-by-case basis (Annual Study of Suspensions and Expulsions, 2011-2012). An expulsion is usually reserved for cases where the student is at least 14 years of age and presents a clear threat of danger to self or others. The acts do not have to occur on school premises for the superintendent

and/or school board to expel a student (Annual Study of Suspensions and Expulsions, 2011-2012).

In North Carolina, school districts are permitted to allow some expelled students to enroll in alternative learning programs. In North Carolina, alternative learning programs operate with a range of missions and primary target populations (Annual Study of Suspensions and Expulsions, 2011-2012). In addition some students are enrolled because of academic, attendance and life problems such as pregnancy, parenting, and work. Alternative programs serve students from other regular schools in the school district (Annual Study of Suspensions and Expulsions, 2011-2012).

Thus, schools have a right to ensure the safety of students and staff; yet school suspensions present school leaders with a difficult paradox. It is difficult for school officials to justify discipline measures that rely on excluding students from school when it is known that time spent in school learning is the single best predictor of positive academic outcomes (Skiba & Sprague, 2008).

### **Policy Implication: The Causes of School Suspensions**

Krezmien et al. (2006) state that school discipline has been a concern of parents and educators for the past 35 years because the recent shootings in schools have created the perception that many schools are unsafe. Nation-wide implementation of zero-tolerance policies and current discipline practices of public schools have increased the vulnerability for students who have historically received unfair treatment in school. Losen and Skiba (2010) stated that since the early 1970s, out of school suspension rates have increased dramatically. The higher use of suspension as a means to discipline students is a result of policies such as Zero Tolerance.

Between 79% and 94% of schools in the United States have such policies (Losen & Skiba, 2010).

Zero Tolerance is a school or district policy that mandates predetermined actions for student offences (Losen & Skiba, 2010). According to Yim et al. (2010), zero tolerance is the harshest form of school discipline. As a result of the onslaught of crime, school districts across the nation have embraced and imposed these policies. Because of the peak of school violence in the late 1990s and 2000s, particularly after the Columbine High School shooting, zero tolerance school discipline has swept the country (Brown, 2003). In the 1980s and early 1990s politicians were focused on an increasing crime problem and a new type of criminal, the superpredator; these criminals were brutal and without conscious, but most shocking is the fact that they were young (Brown, 2003). These young people were described as products of single-parent homes, poverty, and an all too lenient justice system (Brown, 2003). To this end, the public responded by instituting draconian changes in juvenile law, boot camps, and a zero tolerance attitude (Brown, 2003). As a result of school safety issues, school districts across the country began adopting harsh, unforgiving discipline policies and practices that emphasized the long-term exclusion of students who violated school rules (Brown, 2003). Soon after, zero tolerance was legislated into the school system. To support these policies, schools were filled with metal detectors, drug sniffing dogs, and security personnel (Brown, 2003). Schools also began to rely on local law officials and the courts to help with inappropriate student behaviors (Youth United for Change and Advancement Project, 2011).

Although most tend to associate zero tolerance policies with school discipline, the practice first received national attention as the title program developed in 1986, by Peter Nunez, the United States attorney in San Diego, who impounded seagoing vessels carrying large

amounts of drugs (Skiba & Noam, 2001). Soon after, U.S. Attorney General Edwin Meese, highlighted the program as a national model and in 1988, custom officials were ordered to seize vehicles and property of anyone crossing the border with even a trace amount of drugs and charge the individual in federal court (Skiba & Noam, 2001). Thus, the language of zero tolerance fired the public's imagination and within months, the term and strategy began to be applied to a broad range of issues, from environmental pollution, trespassing and homelessness (Skiba & Noam, 2001). During this time, schools across the nation began to become frightened by the overwhelming tide of violence and were eager for a response to drugs, gangs, and weapons (Skiba & Noam, 2001). Hence, beginning in 1989, school districts in New York, California, and Kentucky picked up the term zero tolerance and mandated expulsion for drugs, fighting, and gang related activity (Skiba & Noam, 2001). In the next several years, zero tolerance policies were adopted across the country and was swept into national policy in 1994 when the Clinton administration signed the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 (Skiba & Noam, 2001). Yim et al. (2010) agree that zero tolerance policies sprung from the Federal Gun Act of 1994, which was in response to violent school shootings. This act requires that every state enact a law that mandates school districts to expel for at least one calendar year any student who brings a firearm to school (Guidance Concerning State and Local Responsibilities Under the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994, 2014). The mandate also requires that the state law create exceptions to permit school administrators to modify an expulsion on a case-by-case basis (Guidance Concerning State and Local Responsibilities Under the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994, 2014). As a result of the 1994 federal ruling, state legislatures and local school districts began to broaden the mandate of zero tolerance beyond weapons to drugs and alcohol, fighting, threats, and swearing (Skiba & Noam, 2001). Many of these policies are still being used to discipline

students. Unidos and Unidos (2005) also assert that while zero tolerance once required suspension or expulsion for a specified list of serious offences, it is now an overarching approach toward discipline for potential weapons, imaginary weapons, perceived weapons, a smart mouth, headache medicine, tardiness, and spitballs. There is no federal mandate of suspension or expulsion for drug-related offenses, but the application of zero tolerance has become commonplace in such situations. Skiba and Noam (2001) cite the following example:

- In Casco, Maine, a 15 -year old high school student took pills given to her by a classmate for a headache. She was expelled for violation of the district's zero tolerance anti-drug policy. The student who gave the girl the pill was also suspended.

Many schools and districts are now using zero tolerance policies to exclude students for behaviors such as weapons, drugs, smoking, and fighting. Zero Tolerance also imposes automatic suspensions for minor offenses such as dress-code violations, truancy, and tardy. As aforementioned, the philosophy of zero tolerance comes from the adult criminal justice system and the War on Drugs. This same approach was a major contributor to the United States' prison population nearly tripling in just twenty years (Youth United for Change and Advancement Project, 2011).

The 2005 research by Unidos and Unidos discovered that advocates, parents, and youth believe that the harsh punishment and treatment of students is due to:

- Pushing out allegedly low-performing youths in an era of high-stakes testing.
- Perpetuating the structural racism that has resulted in the over-criminalization and incarceration of people of color that is victimizing younger and younger people of color.

The plight to end such policies is not a new initiative. Parents and community organizations have been fighting, and continue to fight, what many believe are unfair disciplinary policies. To illustrate, Skiba and Noam (2001) reported that parents have responded to such policies by pursuing a number of legal avenues that challenge exclusionary policies in court. Some examples of these avenues are as follows:

- Protections against discrimination on the basis of color or national origin through the equal protection clause of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment and the enforcement of efforts of the Office for Civil Rights under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.
- Challenges to zero tolerance policies under the 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment.
- Procedural and substantive due process protections under the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment.
- Protections afforded students with disabilities under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, based on the rights of students with disabilities to a free and appropriate public education.
- The fundamental right to a public education guaranteed by many state constitutions.

Not only have parents been fighting the use of zero tolerance policies, organizations such as the American Bar Association have also tried to sway lawmakers to eradicate such policies. The ABA's stance is that it is wrong to mandate automatic expulsion, suspension, or even referral to juvenile court without taking into consideration the specifics of each case (Out of School Suspensions and Expulsions, 2013).

The American Bar Association states:

“Thus, zero tolerance policies for students adopt a theory of mandatory punishment that has been rejected by the adult criminal justice system because it is too harsh! Rather than having a variety of sanctions available for a range of school-based offenses, state laws

and school district policies apply the same expulsion rules to the 6 year old as the 17 year old; to the first time offender as the chronic troublemaker; to the child with a gun as to the child with a Swiss army knife.” (Yim et al., 2010).

Furthermore, many have found that legal challenges to Zero Tolerance is a difficult process because most cases are usually dismissed because of the court’s caution about involvement in school policies. Also, if there is no physical evidence of discrimination, the law does not allow discrimination charges to be filed against schools (Kim, 2009).

Zero Tolerance policies have had a dire impact on students of color resulting in a priority issue by both the United States Department of Justice and the United States Department of Education (Youth United for Change and the Advancement Project, 2011). For example, in some states the zero tolerance approach has yielded tragic consequences for students because suspension from school and police involvement have not been limited to serious offences that pose ongoing threats to school safety. These policies instead have been routinely used for minor behavioral offenses (Youth United for Change and Advanced Project, 2011).

A 2010, study presented to the North Carolina General Assembly, indicated that many educators feel that zero tolerance policies are not clear (Iselin, 2010). Administrators report that they do not understand the policies and rely primarily on student characteristics to make decisions about implementation of such policies; they base their decisions on factors such as the student’s grade and age, whether she has had prior discipline issues, whether she presented a threat to school safety, and whether her parents are home to provide support and monitoring (Iselin, 2010). Furthermore, these policies have not been shown to improve overall school safety (Iselin, 2010). They are associated with negative factors such as lower academic performance,



higher rates of dropout, failures to graduate on time, increased academic disengagement, and expulsion from school (Iselin, 2010).

Teachers and principals are charged with maintaining safe schools and providing the most effective learning environment possible; however, there is controversy on how this should be accomplished. Supporters of zero tolerance policies have an array of reasons why these policies and out of school suspension are critical to maintaining order and discipline in schools. They feel that school officials should remove disorderly students, which will deter disorderly behavior from other students; thus, improving the school environment so that other students can learn without distraction (Losen &Skiba, 2010). Consequently, the use of zero tolerance policies has led to the increase of out of school suspension and expulsion rates (Losen & Skiba, 2010). This has caused many students to miss valuable instructional time and learning opportunities. Suspensions and expulsions have contributed to the high school drop- out rate (Losen & Skiba, 2010). This has raised serious questions about the fairness and effectiveness of such policies. Losen and Skiba (2010) further assert that reaction to these cases has created division among educational stakeholders. In a number of incidents, parents have filed lawsuits against school districts and a number of states have reacted by amending their policies to allow for more flexibility. In addition, after almost two decades of zero tolerance there is no evidence that the use of these policies and removing misbehaving students improves overall school culture.

- In Wilmington, North Carolina, a high school student was criminally charged by a sheriff's deputy for cursing in front of a teacher. Four months after the student went to court, facing possible jail time, prosecutors dropped the charges (Unidos & Unidos, 2005).

Suspension and expulsion have been an issue for school officials for the past three decades (Unidos & Unidos, 2005). Students have been and continue to be derailed into the juvenile justice system as a result of zero tolerance policies. Students who are forced onto the jailhouse track suffer dire consequences. Many will face punishments handed down by the courts; such punishments could include house arrest (Unidos & Unidos, 2005). Zero tolerance appears to be counterproductive because it prevents students from having the opportunity to learn (Unidos & Unidos, 2005). In recent years, such policies have come under scrutiny for their ineffective approach to discipline (Brown, 2003). When these policies are used, educators are limiting students' chances of success by taking them out of the learning environment and often times sending them into the criminal justice system. Use of such policies has created a *School to Prison Pipeline* (Youth United for Change and the Advancement Project, 2011). A recent incident of school officials' use of zero tolerance that has garnered national attention and spawned public outrage against such policies involve seventeen year old Erin Cox, a student from North Andover High School in Boxford, Massachusetts. According to news reports, a friend who was attending a party contacted Erin to transport her home. The friend told Erin that she was too drunk to drive. Moments after arriving to the party to retrieve her friend, police from several jurisdictions arrived to break up the party, arresting a dozen underage drinkers and handing out court summonses to fifteen others, including Erin (Miller, 2013). Erin told officials that she did not drink, that she was only at the party to assist a friend in getting home safely. A police officer at the scene reported in a statement that was provided to the principal and the judge:

Erin was not arrested and did nothing wrong. She had not been drinking, had no intention, of drinking, was there to help a friend and did not have even the “slightest” odor of alcohol on her person (Miller, 2013, p. 4).

Even when presented with this information, school officials still punished Erin, an honor student and captain of the volleyball team by stripping her of her role as team captain and suspending her for five games. School officials are supporting the decision. In a statement given by the school’s attorney, he responded:

The senior was in violation of the school’s zero tolerance alcohol and drug use policy.

The school is really trying to take a very serious stand regarding alcohol (Miller, 2013, p. 4).

The school district’s superintendent Kevin Hutchinson also supported the principal’s decision to punish the teen:

To be clear, the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court has ruled that participation in interscholastic athletics is a privilege. Rather than simply revoking the privilege, our Administration has consistently afforded its student-athletes a reasonable opportunity to be heard before a disciplinary decision is made (Miller, 2013, p. 4).

Wendy Murphy, attorney for the Cox family is outraged at the treatment of the student.

She stated:

The school district compounded its own injustice toward a kid when its attorney, Geoffrey Bok, said in court that Cox was drinking at the party. She was not. That a school would then lie to a judge in a court of law is an outrage and shows the length some school officials will go to retaliate against a family that dares to challenge an irrational *zero tolerance policy* (Miller, 2013, p. 4).

Cox's mother sued the school district, but a judge ruled that the court did not have jurisdiction; federal court will probably be the family's next move (Miller, 2013, p. 4). Erin insists that she did the right thing:

“Saving her friend from getting in the car when she was intoxicated and hurt herself or from getting in the car with someone else who was drinking (Miller, 2013, p. 4).

School is the first place where most children learn to fail (Kunjufu, 2002).

There is evidence that principals with more favorable attitudes toward suspension had higher rates of suspension in their schools, compared to principals who emphasized prevention and alternatives (Dupper, 2010; Rausch & Skiba, 2004). A number of studies show that suspensions are not limited to serious and dangerous offenses (Dupper, 2010; Skiba & Rausch, 2006).

According to the Losen and Gillespie (2011), often, inappropriate behavior is attributed directly to students; however, researchers know that the same student can act differently in classes that are taught by different teachers. Disruptions tend to increase and decrease with the skill of the teacher and the ability to provide engaging instruction in classroom management (Losen & Gillespie, 2011). In the Civil Rights Project survey of pre-K through 12<sup>th</sup> grade teachers, those who responded identified their greatest need of help was with classroom management and instruction (Losen & Gillespie, 2011). This research also suggests that there is an inverse relationship between student misbehavior and a teacher's ability to engage students (Losen & Gillespie, 2011). As student engagement in instruction increases, student misbehavior and suspension decrease (Losen & Gillespie, 2011). Although these apparent connections to classroom management and quality of instruction exist, policymakers often treat student misbehavior as a problem originating solely with students and their parents (Losen & Gillespie,

2011). Thus policy makers may not consider the key role that teacher training preparation programs, school administrators, and the school system play in the student behavior issue (Losen & Gillespie, 2011). Because of the connections researcher have found between student misbehavior and factors such as a teachers' management skills, it is plausible to ask three questions: (a) what point should frequent suspensions and expulsions warrant questions about a school's disciplinary policies, discrimination, the quality of its school leadership, and the training of its personnel? (b) how do such policies affect the school environment as well as the students who are removed and their families? (c) can educators instill order in ways that will not heavily rely on school exclusions? (Losen & Gillespie, 2011).

The use of Zero Tolerance policies have led to an increase of suspensions in schools. Although federal law requires schools implement Zero Tolerance policies to keep schools safe and free from violence and dangerous weapons, many districts have implemented Zero Tolerance policies for minor rule violations such as absenteeism, tardy, and insubordination. It is the misuse of such policies that has resulted in the overuse of suspensions as a discipline method in schools across the country.

**The impact of school suspensions (out of school).** Suspensions have been shown to be associated with a number of health and social problems (Dupper, 2010). To illustrate, students who are not in school are more likely to have lower rates of academic achievement, to smoke, to use substances such as alcohol, marijuana, and cocaine (Dupper, 2010). They are also more likely to engage in sexual intercourse, to be involved in fights, to carry a weapon, and to commit crime (Dupper, 2010).

Skiba and Sprague (2008), indicate that out of school suspensions have negative effects on student outcomes and the learning climate. To illustrate, students suspended in 6<sup>th</sup> grade are

more likely to receive office referrals or suspensions by 8<sup>th</sup> grade than students who had not been suspended. This has prompted some researchers to believe that suspension may act more than as a punishment for some students. The number of out-of-school suspensions a student received as a sixth grader was correlated with the probability that the student would not graduate from high school with his or her cohort (Dupper, 2010; Raffaele Mendez, 2003).

The high rate of out of school suspended students indicates that out-of-school suspension does not work and for some students it perpetuates inappropriate behavior (Unidos & Unidos, 2005). These policies have created other problems such as increases in out of school suspensions and expulsions. In schools across the county this approach does not promote school safety or academic success but rather:

- Removing a student from school appears to predict higher rates of future misbehavior
- Schools with higher rates of suspension and expulsion have less satisfactory ratings of school climate
- Zero tolerance is associated with an adverse impact on individual and school-wide academic performance
- Suspension and expulsion are associated with a higher likelihood of school dropout.
- Suspension and expulsion increase the likelihood that the youth will enter the criminal justice system. (Youth United for Change and Advancement Project, 2011)

Unidos and Unidos (2005) assert that schools are overreaching its' authority by inappropriately adopting law enforcement strategies that are leading students unnecessarily into the juvenile or criminal justice system. These policies in collaboration with school discipline policies and schools are discarding students who many perceive as trouble-makers that disrupt learning. The policies are being used without consideration for teaching young people how to

change behavior, using punishments that fit the conduct, or acknowledging adolescent development. Thus, such policies may have helped to fuel the School to Prison Pipeline. This concept implies that schools are not meeting the educational and social developmental needs of a large segment of children (Yim et al., 2010). Furthermore, zero tolerance and suspension have contributed to poor levels of student proficiency, massive drop-out rates, and the racial gap in academic achievement (Yim et al., 2010).

Tens of thousands of students are being removed from their schools each year and sent to the streets or jails because they are victims of zero tolerance and suspension policies (Youth United for Change and the Advancement Project, 2011). Thus, many public schools across the nation have turned into feeder schools for the juvenile and criminal justice system (Youth United for Change and the Advancement Project, 2011). Additionally, youth are finding themselves at risk of falling into this school to prison pipeline through *push-outs* (Unidos & Unidos, 2005). These *push-outs* are systematic exclusion through suspension, expulsions, discouragement, and high stakes testing (Unidos & Unidos, 2005). In the name of school safety, schools are implementing these unforgiving practices that turn many kids into criminals for acts that rarely constitute a crime when committed by an adult (Unidos & Unidos, 2005).

It is the local, state, and federal education and public policies that operate and may push students out of school and into the criminal justice system (Lieberman, 2010). Students of color and those with disabilities are disproportionately impacted by this system (Lieberman, 2010). Inequalities in areas such as school discipline have contributed to the funneling of students through the pipeline (Lieberman, 2010). Schools directly send students into the pipeline through zero tolerance policies that involve the police in minor incidents, which lead to arrests, juvenile detention, and incarceration (Lieberman, 2010). Schools also indirectly push students into the

criminal justice system by excluding them from learning through suspension, expulsion, discouragement, and high stakes testing (Lieberman, 2010). Suspension is usually the first step in pushing students from the school system and into the criminal justice system (Lieberman, 2010). In addition, further research by Yim et al. (2010) found that the pipeline is also fueled as a result of under-resourced schools and districts that employ practices that are genuine attempts to address real problems but that ultimately prove counterproductive. The lack of financial and human resources combined with pressures that are imposed by high stakes tests and accountability creates perverse incentives for school officials to actively push the most needy children out of schools (Unidos & Unidos, 2005). *Push-outs* can be non-disciplinary measures such as guidance counselors encouraging struggling students to enroll in GED programs, to more harsh forms of exclusion, which include more suspensions, expulsions, and school-based arrests (Yim et al., 2010).

Discussion of school suspension and expulsion should also consider the fiscal implication of such policies (Pediatrics: Official Journal of the Academy of American Pediatrics, 2013). These policies result in loss of capitation funds for student attendance. There are also other costs to the district associated with the process of suspending and expelling students, including time spent in meetings, seeking expert testimony, and preparing for the disciplinary hearing itself (Pediatrics: Official Journal of the Academy of American Pediatrics, 2013). In contrast to time spent by staff and administrators working to educate students, time spent on suspension and expulsion preparation yields no measurable educational benefit; therefore, suspension and expulsion are costly to school districts' mission (Pediatrics: Official Journal of the Academy of American Pediatrics, 2013).



There is also a distinct correlation between suspension and low achievement and dropping out of school (Yim et al., 2010). Flatow (2013) states that one suspension doubles the risk of dropping out of school from 16% to 32%. Suspensions also increase the likelihood of juvenile arrests and detention. According to *Out of School Suspension and Expulsion (2013)*, students who receive out of school suspension and expulsion are more likely to drop out of school; therefore, school leaders should consider the long-term fiscal consequences to the student and society as a whole. If a student does not graduate from high school, the long-term costs are profound. A high school dropout will earn \$400,000 (\$485,000 for females) less over a lifetime than a high school graduate (*Out of School Suspension and Expulsion, 2013*). The dropout will pay \$60,000 less in taxes than the high school graduate (*Out of School Suspension and Expulsion, 2013*). This represents a loss to federal and state governments of billions of dollars per year in income tax revenue (*Out of School Suspension and Expulsion, 2013*). The average high school dropout will experience worse health than the average high school graduate and has a life expectancy that is 6 to 9 years shorter (*Out of School Suspension and Expulsion, 2013*). As a result, the implications for the health system are great; therefore, it is in the best interest of students and society to seek alternatives to out of school suspensions and expulsions (*Out of School Suspension and Expulsion, 2013*).

*Zero Tolerance in Philadelphia: Denying Educational Opportunities and Creating a Pathway to Prison (2011)*, shows that when students are taken out of their structured learning environments they often go into unsupervised environments, which tends to cause them to get in additional trouble, fall behind academically, and become more disruptive upon return to school. In addition, exclusion from school also can have a damaging effect on the relationship between students and teachers, which is critical to the success of any school (*Zero Tolerance in*

Philadelphia: Denying Educational Opportunities and Creating a Pathway to Prison, 2011).

Suspensions are ineffective because they have the opposite effect of what is desired (Zero Tolerance in Philadelphia: Denying Educational Opportunities and Creating a Pathway to Prison, 2011). In a city-wide survey of Philadelphia youth, 32% stated that one reason they left school is because they had been suspended too often. As one student said:

“When I got suspended for four days, I lost focus on work and I lost out on a lot of credit. But when I went to my teachers for extra credit or work that I missed, they acted like it was not their problem. This affects me because when I fail they don’t seem to care, because they say it’s my fault that I got suspended. Even though it was, I should still be helped.” (Zero Tolerance in Philadelphia: Denying Educational Opportunities and Creating a Pathway to Prison, 2011, p. 17).

It appears that students who are affected by zero tolerance policies are getting younger; it is now common practice that children as young as five years old are being punished by long-term out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, and other punishments of this nature (Youth United for Change and the Advancement Project, 2011). These problems most times ignore children’s basic developmental needs, and the effects are extremely devastating (Zero Tolerance in Philadelphia: Denying Educational Opportunities and Creating a Pathway to Prison, 2011).

Zero tolerance and suspension policies not only affect students, but they can also have a devastating effect on parents and guardians (Zero Tolerance in Philadelphia: Denying Educational Opportunities and Creating a Pathway to Prison, 2011). They must not only face the impact of the brutal and unforgiving policies of out of school suspension on their children, but for many of them, it also means that they are forced to miss work, lose pay, and incur other costs associated with students being excluded from school (Zero Tolerance in Philadelphia: Denying

Educational Opportunities and Creating a Pathway to Prison, 2011). Furthermore, when students are arrested or referred to the court system, parents are usually held responsible for the cost of legal representation and court-mandated penalties (Zero Tolerance in Philadelphia: Denying Educational Opportunities and Creating a Pathway to Prison, 2011).

Schools that have high rates of student suspensions tend to have lower academic quality and pay significantly less attention to school climate (Zero Tolerance in Philadelphia: Denying Educational Opportunities and Creating a Pathway to Prison, 2011). Moreover, data from Skiba and Sprague (2008) indicate that schools with higher suspensions rates have lower outcomes on standardized achievement tests, regardless of economic level or student demographics (Skiba & Sprague, 2008). In addition, using suspension and expulsion as disciplinary measures can be superficial if school districts avoid dealing with underlying issues, such as drug abuse, racial and ethnic tensions, and cultural anomalies associated with violence and bullying (Out of School Suspension and Expulsion, 2013). There are also fiscal implications that need to be considered when using school exclusions as measures to discipline students (Out of School Suspension and Expulsion, 2013). In addition to the loss of funds for student attendance, there are other costs to the district associated with the process of suspending or expelling students including time spent in meetings, seeking expert testimony, and preparing for disciplinary hearings (Out of School Suspension and Expulsion, 2013). Many states require districts to have alternatives in place whereby expelled students continue to receive educational services (Out of School Suspension and Expulsion, 2013).

**Who is being suspended?** Both in-school and out of school suspensions of students are important not only because of loss of instructional time, but exclusion from school is among the leading indicators of whether a child will drop out of school; exclusion also increases risk of

incarceration. Over three million K-12 children lost instructional time in 2009-2010 as a result of suspension (Losen & Gillespie, 2011). This equates to about the number of children it would take to fill every seat in every major league ballpark and every national football stadium in the United States (Losen & Gillespie, 2011).

School suspension and expulsion are applied inconsistently across schools and school districts (Skiba & Sprague, 2008). This results in inequities when handing down suspensions to students (Skiba & Sprague, 2008). This inconsistency appears to be connected as much to classroom, school, and to principal characteristics, as to students (Skiba & Sprague, 2008). It is often assumed that in-school and out of school suspensions are reserved for offenses such as fighting that jeopardize school safety; however, schools use suspension in response to a wide range of behaviors, including tardiness, disruptive behavior, non-compliance, and insubordination (Skiba & Sprague, 2008). Only a small percentage of suspensions occur in response to behaviors that threaten school safety or security (Skiba & Sprague, 2008).

No one is safe from zero tolerance-age, grade, past behavior and disabilities are in many cases irrelevant. Even though students of all races and genders are victims of this track, it is especially reserved for children of color, especially males (Unidos & Unidos, 2005). Schools have partnered with law enforcement to make this happen by imposing a double dose of punishment: suspension or expulsion and a trip to the juvenile justice system (Unidos & Unidos, 2005). Statistical data analyzed by Losen and Gillespie (2011) indicates that national suspension rates show that 17% or 1 out of every 6 African- American children enrolled in K-12 were suspended at least once. This rate is higher than the 1 in 13 risk (8%) for Native Americans; 1 in 14 risk (7%) for Latinos; 1 in 20 risk (5%) Whites; or 1 in 50 risk (2%) Asian -American.

In addition, for all racial groups combined, more than 13% of students with disabilities were suspended at twice the rate of their non-disabled peers (Unidos & Unidos, 2005). In one state, in 2007-2008, an African American student was nearly three and a half times more likely to be taken into police custody than a White student (Unidos & Unidos, 2005). A Latino student was over one and a half times more like to be taken into police custody (Unidos & Unidos, 2005). When students were surveyed and asked if they thought zero tolerance policies were enforced fairly, only 30% said yes. The testimonies of students indicate that zero tolerance policies and school police and security officers are contributing to a culture of violence in some schools (Unidos & Unidos, 2005).

Police are used in schools in many ways. In some districts, officers from local police departments are assigned to the school, yet other districts have their own police departments, with all the powers of local police (Unidos & Unidos, 2005). The relationships between students and law personnel have damaged interactions and created hostile environments that are not conducive for learning (Zero Tolerance in Philadelphia: Denying Educational Opportunities and Creating a Pathway to Prison, 2011). For example, a student shared the following:

“When security guards searched me in school for my cell phone the usual routine is for them to pat me on my chest and rub their hand down my cleavage. Then they make us lift and shake our bras out. Also, they would run their hands down from our waist to our ankles. Next, they turn us around and pat our back pockets. At the very end they use the wand to search us thoroughly” (Zero Tolerance in Philadelphia: Denying Educational Opportunities and Creating a Pathway to Prison, 2011, p. 13).

Students in some schools report that that school police often intervene and arrest African American and Latino students for disruptive behavior, such as shoving or other physical

altercations that do not result in injury. These are the types of incidents that the school principals used to address in-house (Unidos & Unidos, 2005).

“.....at my school, about 30-40% of the kids are from the neighborhood, which is a rough neighborhood (mostly Black) and if I were to see any of these students at any other high school, I would unfortunately stereotype them.” –White teacher from Palm Beach Florida (Unidos & Unidos, 2005, p. 38)

Frey (2012) asserts that school officials have authority to suspend students for “willful defying” school authorities; over 425 of California suspensions were attributed to “willful defiance.” Willful defiance is highly subjective and is based on an administrator’s interpretation of the rule/policy when disciplining students (Frey, 2012). Many stakeholders feel that such subjectivity is unfair to students. As such, Roger Dickinson, Chairman of the Assembly Committee on Youth Delinquency Prevention and Youth Development wants lawmakers to remove “willful defiance” from state law (Frey, 2012). He introduced legislation that states:

“Under this highly subjective category (willful defiance), students are sent home and denied valuable instruction time for anything from failing to turn in homework, not paying attention, or refusing to follow directions, take off a coat or hat, or swearing in class. They can also be potentially expelled from the district for such offenses (Frey, 2012, p. 1).

Minority students are being suspended at much higher rates than non-minority students (Krezmien et al., 2006). In 1975, The Children’s Defense Fund examined figures from the United States Department of Education Office of Civil Rights and found that the suspension rates for African American students were two and three times higher than suspensions for White students at the elementary, middle, and high school levels (Krezmien et al., 2006). There is also

evidence of minority overrepresentation in school office referrals and expulsions (Krezmien et al., 2006). Research has also found racial differences in African American students receiving more suspensions than White students, even when controlling for socioeconomic status (Krezmien et al., 2006).

Increased suspension and expulsion rates are not an emerging trend; the disproportionate suspension of African Americans has spiked since the 1970s with African American suspensions increasing 12.5% while the suspensions of Whites increased just 1% (Flatow, 2013). According to Desmond-Harris (2013), poor African American students are likely to receive harsher penalties. The effects of the disparities are believed to go beyond school discipline and also fuel the achievement gap:

“For years, education advocates have highlighted the dire importance of closing the achievement gap of academic performance between students of different ethnic and socioeconomic groups. Now, another group of advocates is drawing attention to the discipline gap of unusual punishment to different groups of students. The Center for Civil Rights Remedies at the University of California, Los Angeles Civil Rights Project, released two reports on Monday that show the increasing gap between suspension rates of black and white students. One million or one in nine-middle school and high school students were suspended in 2009-2010, including 24% of black students and 7.1% white students” (Desmond-Harris, 2013, p. 1).

Krezmien et al. (2006) found that for African American and American Indian students the odds of being suspended increased overtime, although the ratio for the American Indian group was not significantly different from the White group.

According to Mendez and Knoff (2003), in Phoenix, Arizona, African American students were suspended or expelled 22 times more often than white students; in Austin, Texas, 4 times more than that of White students; in San Francisco, 3.7 times more than that of White students; and in Denver, 3.2 times more than that of white students (Mendez & Knoff, 2003).

In Texas, the State Education Commissioner, said that schools are handing down too many out of school suspensions (Stutz, 2013). Three hundred and fifty-eight school districts suspended students for 30 or more days during the 2011-2012 school year, with some out of school suspensions that ran more than 100 days (Stutz, 2013). Also, 119 of the school districts saw a doubling in the number of African American students who were suspended (Stutz, 2013).

Youth are not oblivious to the fact that the overwhelming majority of students being excluded from school are black and Latino. This can also cause resentment and breed an unhealthy school environment (*Zero Tolerance in Philadelphia: Denying Educational Opportunities and Creating a Pathway to Prison*, 2011). African American and other minority students may perceive the difference in treatment as a sign of rejection by the system, which can contribute to increased misbehavior (Skiba & Noam, 2001). Understanding that there is clear disparity in the treatment of students of color in some schools, students replied:

“Basically if the White people get in trouble, they get talked to or something and they basically get excused. As soon as I get in trouble, if I do something, it’s automatic suspension or something harsh, for even the little dumb things. And it’s not fair” (*Zero Tolerance in Philadelphia*, 2011, p. 18).

“The White students don’t get in trouble. There was one incident when I was in class where this boy threw a paper ball at me. And yes, he was White, and he and I were friends. Then I threw the paper ball back, and they saw both of us throw balls at each



other, but only I got in trouble and got detention for that” (Zero Tolerance in Philadelphia, 2011, p. 18).

The Office of Civil Rights Civil Rights Data Collection: Data Snapshot (School Discipline) (2014), highlights which students are being suspended, expelled, and arrested in school (see Figures 1).

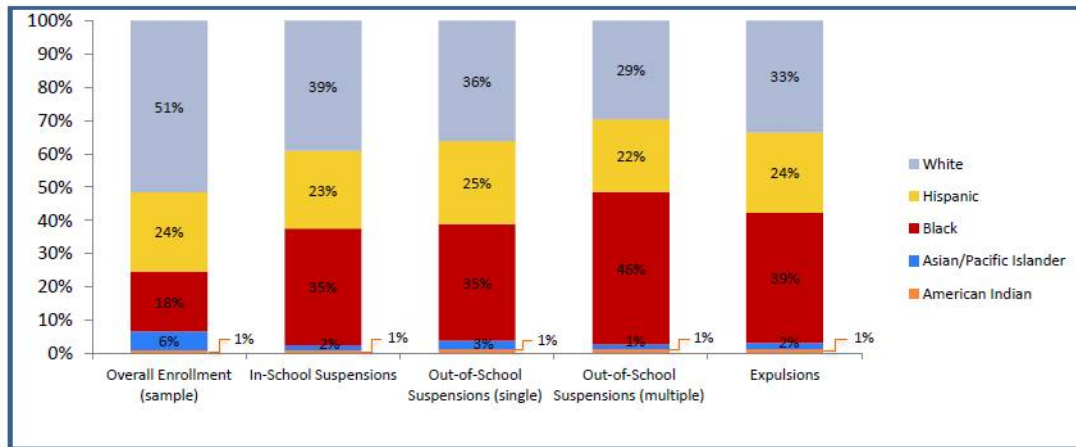
### **Suspensions: Witnessing the Jailhouse Track**

1. John is a fourteen-year old African American male. Because of an infection, he was allowed to wear his hat in school, which is usually against school policy. During the school day, John was approached by an assistant principal who demanded that he remove his hat. John attempted to explain; however, the administrator continued to demand removal of the hat. An argument ensued and soon John was cornered by both the assistant and the principal. The principal moved toward John to remove the hat, John instinctively extended his arm to block the principal’s reach, touching the principal in the chest-no injuries were sustained. A school police officer witnessed, intervened and arrested John. He received probation for 90 days (Brown, 2003).
2. One student stated:  
“After being suspended I missed some class. I even missed a test. I got a chance to make up the work, but since it piled on top of the work I already had, I couldn’t make it all up. Also, if you miss a certain number of days, your grade automatically drops, no matter what....I kind of stopped caring. I would ditch school more often.....I had been trying to keep up with my grades, but no matter how hard I had tried, I wouldn’t be able to make a difference now. Security guards literally all knew me, so they would always be looking for me and harassing me. They would always be treating me

# Discipline

The transformed CRDC makes public long-hidden data about which students are suspended, expelled, and arrested in school.

## Disparate Discipline Rates



African-American students represent 18% of students in the CRDC sample, but 35% of students suspended once, 46% of those suspended more than once, and 39% of students expelled.

Figure 1. Disparate Discipline Rates

like I was a troublemaker.” Ismael, Chicago Public School Student (Unidos & Unidos, 2005, p. 34).

Over 70% of students involved in school-related arrests or referred to law enforcement are Hispanic or African American (Civil Rights Data Collection: Data Snapshot (School Discipline), 2014) (see Figure 2).

The data from this report also reveals that across all United States districts, African American students are over three and half times more likely to be suspended or expelled than their white peers (Civil Rights Data Collection: Data Snapshot (School Discipline), 2014). In districts that reported expulsions under zero-tolerance, Hispanic and African American students represent 45% of the student body, but 56% of the students expelled under such policies (Civil Rights Data Collection: Data Snapshot (School Discipline), 2014).

Unidos and Unidos (2005) further show that the Chicago Public Schools have become infamous for severe execution of zero- tolerance policies. At this time, there is not valid data to support that these policies reduce school violence; however, these policies are still being used and have resulted in tens of thousands of student suspensions and an increasing number of expulsions. In 1995, the State of Illinois mandated that school districts ensure safe schools by imposing a minimum one-year expulsion for any student in possession of a weapon on school grounds; however, CPS’s (Chicago Public School) go way beyond the state requirements to include a list of 11 mandatory expulsion offenses (e.g. robbery or arson), 9 offenses for which students can be arrested (e.g. fights between two or more people); and 28 offenses for which students must be arrested (e.g. vandalism or false activation of fire alarm). Consequently, the Chicago Public School System has aggressively instituted a schoolhouse to jailhouse track that is destroying this generation of youth (Unidos & Unidos, 2005).

## Arrests and Referrals to Law Enforcement

Over 70% of students involved in school-related arrests or referred to law enforcement are Hispanic or African-American.

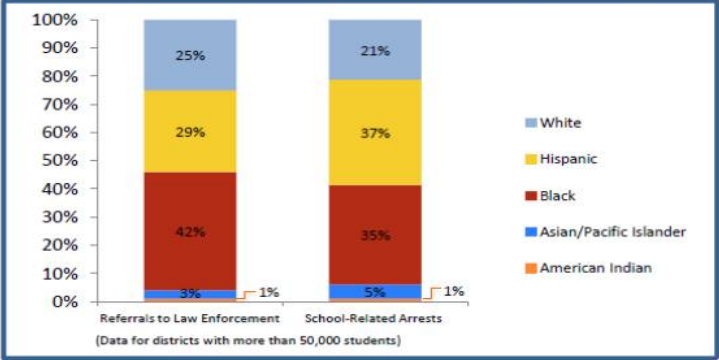


Figure 2. Arrests and referrals to law enforcement.

Chicago Public Schools has implemented an approach that excludes thousands of students from the classroom each year (Unidos & Unidos, 2005). In a single school year alone, over 8,000 students were arrested in the CPS (Chicago Public School System) (Unidos & Unidos, 2005). More than 40% of the arrests were for simple assaults, which did not result in serious injuries or weapons. Seventy-seven percent of the arrests were of African American students even though they made up only 50% of the student enrollment (Unidos & Unidos, 2005). This school district is working at odds with the courts and aggressively suspending, expelling, and arresting youth without regard of fairness and necessity (Unidos & Unidos, 2005). Police reports relating to school incidents in Chicago show that the weapons that youth most often use are their hands and feet, which would not constitute a deadly weapon if used by younger children. In many schools a large number of arrests are made for disorderly conduct, detrimental behavior, or disruption (Unidos & Unidos, 2005). There is also the concern of racial profiling in schools where there is the growing presence of police officers that belong to a department that has a history of such behavior (Unidos & Unidos, 2005). This is largely because the existence of structural racism is not a new concept in schools. The premise of Brown vs. Board of Education decision is that race is a determining factor in who receives quality education in the United States (Unidos & Unidos, 2005). Over fifty years later, education policy and practice continue to single out students of color for disparate treatment. To that end, racial disparities in school discipline have been documented for more than thirty years (Unidos & Unidos, 2005).

In 1975, the Children's Defense Fund data revealed that national suspension rates for African American students were two to three times higher than the suspension rates for White students (Unidos & Unidos, 2005). This pattern still exists today. Because of the increased

referrals of school disciplinary issues to the juvenile justice system, students of color are more likely to be on the *schoolhouse to jailhouse track* (Unidos & Unidos, 2005).

In Chicago, the schoolhouse to jailhouse track is often set in motion for children at an early age. In a single school year, there were 830 juvenile arrests and 10% of those were children aged 12 and under. An analysis of these arrests show that majority of them did not involve a serious crime (Unidos & Unidos, 2005).

Unidos and Unidos (2005) stated that the Denver Public Schools just like most school districts across the nation have made a decision to implement a zero tolerance approach to school discipline. This system is using both school disciplinary methods and law enforcement to address even the most trivial acts of student inappropriate behavior. In 1993, the Denver legislature mandated the expulsion of students who are found with dangerous weapons or drugs or who commit a robbery or serious assault; however, the school district has gone far beyond this point when disciplining students for those offenses (Unidos & Unidos, 2005). The dramatic rate of suspensions in DPS (Denver Public Schools) shows that the system is making a serious effort to eradicate inappropriate student behaviors (Unidos & Unidos, 2005). The zero tolerance approach does not stop at school expulsions and suspensions. In addition, students are being referred to law enforcement at an increasingly high rate (Unidos & Unidos, 2005). The increased criminalization of students in Denver is not supported by a rise in dangerous crime because the acts student commit are so minor, that it is hard to characterize them (Unidos & Unidos, 2005). To illustrate, the most widely reported offense (42%) that led to referrals were for actions such as being involved in an unauthorized organization, destruction of non-school property, use of obscenities, disruptive appearance, use of slurs, bullying, and minor fights (Unidos & Unidos, 2005). Another 20% of the behavior was for detrimental behavior, which is defined as behavior

on or off school property that is detrimental to the welfare or safety of other students or school personnel. This includes behavior that creates the threat of harm to the student or other students (Unidos & Unidos, 2005). Denver's disciplinary practices fall more heavily on youth of color. Racial disparities exist in both suspension and referrals to law enforcement. Students of color in Denver's public schools are 70% more likely to be disciplined (suspended, expelled, or ticketed) than their White peers (Unidos & Unidos, 2005). African American students are three times more likely to receive out-of-school suspensions than White students, while Latino students are four times more likely to receive out-of school suspensions than White students (Unidos & Unidos, 2005). The pattern of racial disparity in discipline continues with tickets (discipline referrals to law enforcement), but Latino students have replaced African American students as the most ticketed group (Unidos & Unidos, 2005). The schoolhouse to jailhouse track was closely examined in DPS and it was discovered that the track is fueled by the fact that the district-wide school discipline policy is lengthy and ambiguous and the enforcement of the district policy varies from school to school (Unidos & Unidos, 2005). As a result, there is misunderstanding and confusion (Unidos & Unidos, 2005). Furthermore, there is nothing in the district policy warning students and parents that a particular conduct is subject to arrest or tickets (Unidos & Unidos, 2005). Consequently, they are unprepared when students receive tickets for conduct that occurred at school (Unidos & Unidos, 2005).

The Unidos and Unidos (2005) study presents school discipline data from early 21<sup>st</sup> century (2003-2005). Since that time, school suspensions have continued to increase and more and more students have been denied the opportunity to learn by being forced onto the school to prison pipeline. Table 1 indicates that student suspension rates have increased; thus spawning a nation-wide epidemic.

Table 1

*Discipline in the 20 Largest Districts*

	District	State	Students Suspended and Student Enrollment	White	African American	Hispanic	Asian/ Pacific Islander	American Indian
1	New York City Public Schools	NY	Suspensions Enrollment	46% 14%	85% 30%	42% 40%	2% 15%	1% 0.4%
2	Los Angeles Unified School District	CA	Suspensions Enrollment	4% 9%	26% 9%	67% 75%	3% 7%	0.4% 0.3%
3	Chicago Public Schools	IL	Suspensions Enrollment	3% 9%	76% 45%	20% 42%	0.3% 4%	0.3% 0.2%
4	Dade County Public Schools	FL	Suspensions Enrollment	4% 9%	50% 25%	46% 65%	0.3% 1%	0.1% 0.1%
5	Clark County School District	NV	Suspension Enrollment	25% 34%	25% 14%	45% 42%	5% 10%	1% 1%
6	Broward County Public Schools	FL	Suspension Enrollment	17% 28%	59% 39%	23% 29%	1% 4%	0.3% 0.3%
7	Houston Independent School District	TX	Suspension Enrollment	3% 8%	45% 26%	51% 63%	1% 3%	0.4% 0.3%
8	Hillsborough County Public Schools	FL	Suspension Enrollment	25% 44%	46% 23%	28% 30%	1% 3%	0.2% 0.3%
9	Fairfax County Public Schools	VA	Suspension Enrollment	28% 48%	27% 11%	31% 20%	13% 22%	0.3% 0.3%
10	Philadelphia City School District	PA	Suspension Enrollment	7% 13%	78% 62%	14% 17%	1% 7%	0.1% 0.2%



Table 1 (continued)

	District	State	Students Suspended and Student Enrollment	White	African American	Hispanic	Asian/ Pacific Islander	American Indian
11	Palm Beach County Public Schools	FL	Suspension Enrollment	20% 38%	57% 29%	22% 29%	1% 3%	1% 1%
12	Orange County Public Schools	FL	Suspension Enrollment	16% 34%	54% 28%	29% 33%	1% 5%	0.2% 0.5%
13	Gwinnett County Public Schools	GA	Suspension Enrollment	16% 34%	43% 28%	32% 26%	4% 11%	1% 0.5%
14	Dallas Independent School District	TX	Suspension Enrollment	3% 4%	48% 25%	48% 69%	0.3% 1%	0.5% 0.4%
15	Montgomery Public School District	MD	Suspension Enrollment	17% 38%	52% 23%	27% 23%	5% 17%	0.1% 0.3%
16	Wake County Public Schools	NC	Suspension Enrollment	25% 57%	57% 24%	17% 12%	2% 7%	0.3% 0.3%
17	San Diego Unified School District	CA	Suspension Enrollment	12% 24%	24% 11%	57% 48%	7% 17%	0.5% 0.4%
18	Charlotte- Mecklenburg Schools	NC	Suspension Enrollment	14% 33%	75% 44%	10% 17%	0.5% 5%	0.5% 0.4%
19	Prince George's County Public School District	MD	Suspension Enrollment	2% 2%	87% 87%	10% 10%	1% 1%	0.4% 0.4%
20	Duval County Public Schools	FL	Suspension Enrollment	22 42	72% 46	6% 8%	1% 4%	0.1% 0.2%

*Note.* Students suspended compared to student enrollment. Students without disabilities receiving one or more out of school suspensions (Civil Rights Data Collection: Data Snapshot (School Discipline), 2014).

The data presented in Table 1 details the suspension rate of the twenty largest school districts during the 2010-11 school year. Losen (2011) stated that school suspensions have risen steadily since the early 1970s, and racial disparities have grown as well.

The data in Figure 3 shows an increase for students of all races, with a growing racial discipline gap. Since the early 1970s, suspension rates have doubled for all non-White students and the African American/White gap more than tripled (Losen, 2011). Data also supports that students between the ages of 3 and 21 who have disabilities, have also experienced high rates of out-of-school suspensions (see Table 2). In a report conducted by the United States Office of Special Education Programs (Losen, 2011), at least one district in each of the 46 states surveyed imposed long-term suspensions or expulsions on students with disabilities more often than on non-disabled students (Losen, 2011). In some states, including Virginia, Tennessee, Delaware, Connecticut, Florida, Maryland, and Washington, 19% more of all districts reported that there were significant discrepancies in long-term suspensions discipline between students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers (Losen, 2011). There were also racial disparities within the subgroup of students with disabilities. Many states suspended more than one of five Black students with disabilities and three states: Nebraska, Wisconsin, and Nevada suspended more than 30% of all African American students with disabilities (Losen, 2011).

Losen (2011) further suggests that racial disparities in discipline are larger in areas that are subjective or vague. Racial and gender disparities in school punishment in urban schools discovered that White students were referred to the office more frequently for reasons that are easy to document such as smoking, vandalism, leaving without permission, and using profanity (Losen, 2011). However, African American students were referred more often for behaviors that are subjective such as disrespect, excessive noise, threatening behavior, and loitering (Losen,

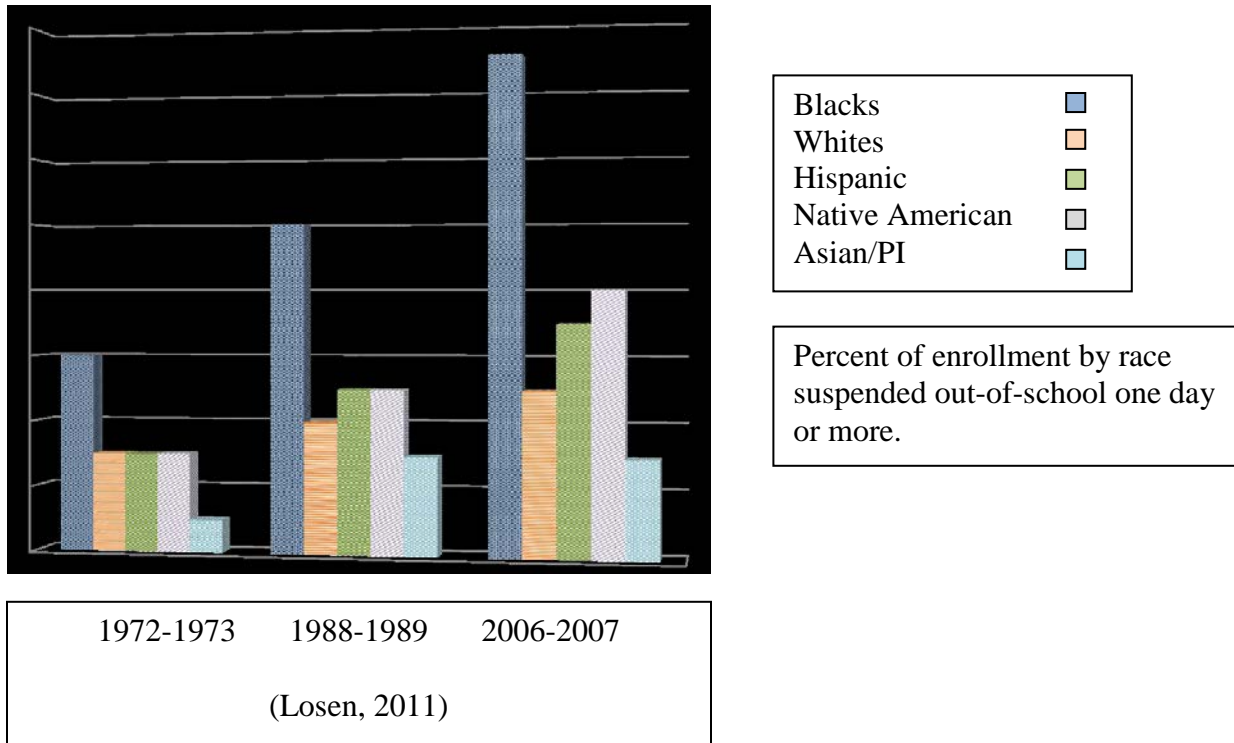


Figure 3. Percent of enrollment by race out-of-school.

Table 2

*Racial Disparities in Suspensions of Students with Disabilities*

	African American	White	Hispanic	American Indian/Alaska Native	Asian/Pacific Islander	Black/White Gap in Percentage Points
U.S. Average	16.64	6.67	7.8	10.31	6.67	9.97
Nebraska	36.76	6.4	7.57	15.63	3.89	30.36
Wisconsin	34.39	7.15	13.42	17.43	4.05	27.24
Nevada	30.92	11.76	15.19	13.57	9.49	19.16
Delaware	28.39	11.43	17.36	14.29	3.32	16.96
Texas	25.98	8.34	12.84	11.23	3.98	17.64
S. Carolina	22.85	11.01	10.42	39.84	4.28	11.84

*Note.* (Losen, 2011).

2011). The researchers concluded that there is no evidence that racial disparities in schools can be explained by more serious patterns of rule breaking among African American students. Losen (2011), suggests two possibilities: African American students focus their misbehavior on those types of behaviors that call for subjective judgment or that they are being unfairly singled out when it comes to prosecuting such misbehavior (Losen, 2011).

Analysis of data from North Carolina concerning first time offenders shows similar results. The data were collected in order to file a grievance with the Office of Civil Rights Report in September 2010, which argued that discipline policies in Wake County (Raleigh) North Carolina were discriminatory (see Table 3).

Losen (2011) further asserts that suspensions are largely influenced by factors other than student misbehavior. It is reported that only 5% of all out-of-school suspensions in the state was for disciplinary incidents that were considered serious such as possession of weapons or drugs (Losen, 2011). The remaining 95% of suspensions fell into two categories; disruptive behavior and other (Losen, 2011).

### **African American Males and Suspension**

African American males are three times more likely to be suspended or expelled from school than their white peers (Brewster, Stephenson, & Beard, 2013). This causes them to lose valuable instructional time, which can depress their academic performance, increase the risk that they'll repeat a grade and eventually drop out of school (Brewster et al., 2013). They are often suspended or expelled for minor or discretionary offenses like being tardy or using their cellphones (Brewster et al., 2013). African American kids represent 18% of all students, but 35% of students suspended once, 46% of those suspended multiple times, and 39% of all students expelled (Brewster et al., 2013).

Table 3

*Office of Civil Rights Report Raleigh (Wake County, North Carolina)*

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	African American Suspension Rates	White Suspension Rates
Cell Phone	35	14
Dress Code	37	15
Disruptive	37	20
Display of Affection	40	15

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*Note.* (Losen, 2011).

Furthermore, African American boys make up 9% of students but 24% of students who received out of school suspensions and 26% of students who were expelled, pushing them into the school to prison pipeline (Brewster et al., 2013). African American students not only get punished more often for the same offenses than white children commit, but when they are punished they tend to be punished more harshly (Brewster et al., 2013).

Perceptions and stereotypical attitudes contribute to the treatment of African American males in schools (Brewster et al., 2013). Johnson's work (as cited by Bradley, Johnson, & Rawls, 2006), state that how society thinks of African American men affects the way to which they are responded to and treated. African American young men are portrayed as unintelligent, drug addicted, violent sexual predators who are incarcerated and unemployed (Bradley et al., 2006). As a result of these perceptions, it may become easier for society, particularly teachers to deny Black males intentional, creative, and intellectual qualities (Bradley et al., 2006). Specifically, race and racism have influenced both the form and function of education in the United States (Bradley et al., 2006). Scholars of critical race studies in education have drawn attention to how race and racism work as mechanisms to limit students' opportunities to learn (Lynn, Bacon, Totten, & Jennings, 2010).

In the past minorities faced racial animosity that was expressed openly; however, today African Americans bear the brunt of implicit bias, or thoughts, stereotypes, and attitudes that people of all races do not often realize they carry (Brewster et al., 2013). Implicit bias has become the primary means through which racial prejudice and animosity are expressed (Brewster et al., 2013). Implicit bias contributes to the perceptions, thus, treatment of African American boys in school (Brewster et al., 2013). This is opposite of explicit bias which occurs as

a result of conscious thought, such as concluding that African Americans are genetically inferior even after considering evidence that dispute the notion (Brewster et al., 2013).

Implicit bias is projected onto African American boys (Brewster et al., 2013). They face an unconscionable number of negative assumptions and stereotypes-that they are dumb, threatening, lazy, criminal, animalistic, and overly sexual (Brewster et al., 2013). Americans project a tremendous amount of attributes onto African American males (Brewster et al., 2013). Popular culture and in the minds of all those exposed to this culture, African American boys are inherently prone towards underachievement, towards being thugs, and criminals, and we treat them accordingly (Brewster et al., 2013).

These perceptions and stereotypes may lead to African American boys being suspended or expelled from school more than children of any other race (Brewster et al., 2013). This trend has been documented since the 1970s. African American boys have been two to three times over represented in discipline of all kinds-suspensions and expulsions (Brewster et al., 2013).

“I get the negative stereotype of oh, he’s just the common nigger who hangs out in the street all day; he doesn’t have anything to offer society,” says Isaiah 16. “But if you really knew me you would understand that I’m a really artistic kid. I’m a writer, I’m a singer, I’m a drummer, and somewhat of an actor. I do everything, but people judge books before they get to read the content of the book” (Brewster et al., 2013, p. 167).

Payne (2010), states that there is a critical race theory described by Bonilla-Silva (2001), which explains white privilege and institutional racism, which is the discrimination against African American students in school. In this country this racism has transformed from an overt and explicit process to a very subversive and intact process (Payne, 2010). This subtle process of institutional racism in education is complex and difficult to detect (Payne, 2010). School



suspension policies today would never explicitly determine a separate set of discipline guidelines for students according to race or gender. This would be discriminatory and illegal (Payne, 2010). However, notion of a color blind system of justice and legal standards actually helps to keep a system of white racial domination and discrimination in place by denying that racial discrimination exists in schools (Payne, 2010).

According to Brewster et al. (2013), this punitive behavior begins when African American children are in preschool. The National Prekindergarten experiment looked at 3,898 state funded Pre-k, classrooms in 2003-2004, and found that children of all races were three times as likely to be sent from preschool than from grades K-12 (Brewster et al., 2013). Boys in Pre-k are boisterous and less attentive. African American girls are more verbal and fit into the realm of the classroom better (Brewster et al., 2013). African American children were twice as likely as white children and five times more likely than Asian American students to get thrown out of preschool (Brewster et al., 2013). The pattern of over discipline continues once African American students reach their teens. A 2011, Texas Study of Suspensions was conducted to improve policy makers' understanding of who gets suspended and expelled from school (Brewster et al, 2013). The study took a look at the records of every student in a Texas public secondary school over a six-year period (Brewster et al., 2013). Researchers found that nearly 60% of all students in the state had been suspended or expelled at least once between seventh and twelfth grade (Brewster et al., 2013). African American students were impacted disproportionately in that 83% of black male students, compared with 74% of Hispanic male students and 59% of white male students had been removed for at least one discretionary violation-a violation of the school's code of conduct but not of the state's rules for mandatory suspensions or expulsions (Brewster et al., 2013).

United States National statistics from 2006-2007 indicate that of the more than 9,000 middle schools in 18 of the nation's largest school districts, 28% of Black male students and 18% of Black female students were suspended at least once, as compared to 10% of white males and 4% of white females (Brewster et al., 2013). The study also found rising suspensions of black males between 2002 and 2006, while suspension rates of white and Hispanics males declined (Brewster et al., 2013). Fighting was the most common reason that young people were suspended followed by abusive language and attendance problems, disobedience, and disrespect (Brewster et al., 2013). The racial disparities in the study were so egregious that the authors wrote: "Regarding the causes for the disproportionately high rates at which students of color are suspended, some argue that minority children, particularly male students of color, tend to misbehave more frequently in school than do white children" (Brewster et al., 2013). Research on student behavior, race, and discipline has found no evidence that African American overrepresentation in school suspension is due to higher rates of misbehavior (Brewster et al., 2013). The profound race and gender based disparities raise important questions about both the condition of education in our urban middle schools and the possibility of conscious or unconscious racial and gender biases at the school level (Brewster et al., 2013).

Payne (2010) asserts that schools produce societal dynamics for students, particularly employment and workforce dynamics. The belief is that schools are implicitly structured to prepare students for the roles that they will likely inherit as adults. African American students' futures are dim in the areas of employment, higher education, health, and safety (Payne, 2010). The concept of preparation for adult roles translates into a discouraging schooling process for Black boys. As a result, they can easily disengage from school, which can be perceived that they do not care about education (Payne, 2010). This becomes a cyclical process with African

American boys perceiving that most adults and teachers as not caring about them (Payne, 2010). Furthermore, the suspension of African American male students in school can be viewed as an indicator of a larger dynamic that results in negative outcomes for African American males in society (Payne, 2010). The high rate of African American male gun violence and incarceration of African American males contributes to a pervasive perception that they are dangerous and bad. African American boys internalize this, which results in a self-fulfilling prophecy (Payne, 2010). This trajectory is also characterized as the school to prison pipeline (Payne, 2010). The result is the social reproduction process in schools, preparing and routing Black males for prison, more so than for college or the workforce (Payne, 2010).

### **Exceptional Children and Suspensions**

Both race and disability put African American students who are identified with a disability at the greatest risk for suspension. African American students within any disability category except OHI (Other Health Impaired) were more likely to be suspended than students without disabilities and were more likely to be suspended than students from the same disability category from any other racial group (Unidos & Unidos, 2005). The study also concluded that students who were identified as having a disability experienced higher suspension rates than those who were not identified (Unidos & Unidos, 2005). The finding of this report was consistent with other such reports that concluded that the risk of being suspended among students with disabilities was high across all racial groups, including White students without disabilities (Unidos & Unidos, 2005).

Unidos and Unidos (2005), stated that race, correlates with the severity of the punishment imposed, with students of color receiving harsher punishments for less severe behavior. There are also disparities in suspensions with regard to how students with disabilities are treated.

William Siffermann, Deputy Director of the Juvenile Probation and Court Services Department, estimates that at least 70% of the students referred to Chicago State's Attorney's Office are in special education programs or have some form of a learning disability (Unidos & Unidos, 2005). One Chicago Public School administrators reported that the schools tend to apply uniform disciplinary code even if the violation was due to a student's disability (Unidos & Unidos, 2005). This has resulted in children with special needs being inappropriately disciplined and in some cases arrested for conduct that is caused by their disability (Unidos & Unidos, 2005).

In 2002, African American children comprised 17 % of the student population but constituted almost 40% of students placed in the various categories of special education (Kunjufu, 2002). If an African American child was placed in special education, 80% of the time the child was male. Only 3% of African American students were placed in gifted and talented programs (Kunjufu, 2002).

The suspension rates of students create a problem because they need and require behavioral interventions that are implemented overtime (Zero Tolerance in Philadelphia: Denying Educational Opportunities and Creating a Pathway to Prison, 2011). Excluding students from school interrupts these interventions, thus having a negative impact on the students (Zero Tolerance in Philadelphia: Denying Educational Opportunities and Creating a Pathway to Prison, 2011). Students with disabilities are being denied significant learning opportunities as a result of out of school suspensions (Zero Tolerance in Philadelphia: Denying Educational Opportunities and Creating a Pathway to Prison, 2011). The negative consequences of these practices are being directed upon the students who already face the greatest academic and emotional challenges (Zero Tolerance in Philadelphia: Denying Educational Opportunities and Creating a Pathway to Prison, 2011).

According to Swanson (2008), school settings present a complex combination of educational, social, and behavioral situations that all students must navigate. Some students with disabilities may face challenges as a result. This may especially be the case for students with conditions such as emotional disturbance or autism, by which definition involve atypical behavior (Swanson, 2008). A recent report from the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2) found that about one in five high school-age students with disabilities exhibit problems with appropriately controlling behavior or fighting with classmates (Swanson, 2008). Forty-five percent of disabled youth argued with other students in class (Swanson, 2008).

Students with disabilities are more likely than their peers to be involved in the school disciplinary process. These students are suspended or expelled at higher rates than general education students (Swanson, 2008). According to the NLTS2 report, one third of special education students were suspended or expelled at some point during their school careers, compared with 21% of non-disabled students (Swanson, 2008). In a given year, one of every ten students with disabilities received multiple in-school suspensions, with one percent being expelled (Swanson, 2008). Male students and historically disadvantaged minorities are more often subject to disciplinary action than their female and majority white peers (Swanson, 2008). This trend is true for the general and special education population, with more disciplinary action found among students with disabilities (Swanson, 2008). To illustrate, at the secondary level, rates of suspension are 16 points higher for disabled male students than females-38 versus 22% (Swanson, 2008).

Students with special education needs can sometimes be harder to handle than other children; subsequently, causing them to get into trouble more often (Suspending Students with Special Needs, 2005). In some communities, these students are suspended at twice the rate of

students generally (Suspending Students with Special Education Needs, 2005). In some instances, students that have difficult special education needs receive serial suspensions. Some of these suspensions are given to make it easier for the school to maintain control in the classroom (Suspending Students with Special Education Needs, 2005). This may resolve the problem for schools, but is disruptive for the child and is discriminatory (Suspending Students with Special Education Needs, 2005). Some parents of children with special needs have been asked to withdraw their children from school. The maximum duration of a temporary withdrawal is one school day. In some cases parents have been asked to withdraw students or face suspension (Suspending Students with Special Education Needs, 2005).

Suspending Students with Special Education Needs (2005) states that it is important for school officials to keep in mind that punishing students with special education needs is not always appropriate, especially when students: (a) cannot control their behavior in some situations; (b) do not understand the consequences of their behavior or (c) do not understand how the “punishment” is connected with the behavior. If a student cannot control his behavior, or does not understand the consequences of his behavior, it is the decision of the teacher or principal whether he should be suspended. The suspension is not mandatory if there are certain mitigating factors:

1. The student does not have the ability to control his or her behavior
2. The student does not have the ability to understand the foreseeable consequences of his or her behavior
3. The student’s continuing presence in the school does not create an unacceptable risk to the safety of any person
4. The student’s history

5. The student has an IEP (Individualized Education Plan) (Suspending Students with Special Education Needs, 2005).

**Long lasting effects of suspension.** In-school and out of school suspensions leave youth on the streets without supervision and deprived of opportunities to further their development (Unidos & Unidos, 2005). Zero Tolerance and school discipline policies have created a number of problems for students, schools, parents, and communities: denial of education through increased suspension and expulsion rates, lower test scores, higher drop-out rates and in some cases racial profiling (Unidos & Unidos, 2005). According to the Center for Evaluation and Education Policy at Indiana University, schools with higher rates of suspension have been reported to have higher student-teacher ratios and lower level of academic quality, spend more time on discipline-related matters, pay significantly less attention to issues of school climate, and have less satisfactory school governance (Unidos & Unidos, 2005). The Massachusetts Department for Education published a report citing numerous suspensions among the leading indicator of high school dropouts (Losen & Gillespie, 2011).

In addition, the criminalization of students by their schools leaves additional scars. Students face emotional trauma and embarrassment of being handcuffed and taken away from school (Unidos & Unidos, 2005). These students are sometimes shackled with an ankle-monitoring device. They must also serve time on probation and if they miss a class or fail a grade, they could find themselves in jail (Unidos & Unidos, 2005). Once they are in the system, they never get back on academic track (Unidos & Unidos, 2005). Sadly, sometimes schools refuse to readmit students and even if they return to school, they are labeled and monitored by staff and police (Unidos & Unidos, 2005). As a result, many become discouraged and drop out of school. Those who do not drop out of school discover that their school and juvenile records will

deny them admittance into college, scholarships, government grants, the opportunity to enlist in the military and employment (Unidos & Unidos, 2005). Thus, the use of zero tolerance policies and school district policies fuel the schoolhouse to jailhouse pipeline. Therefore, the consequences of such policies may outlive the student's teenage years (Unidos & Unidos, 2005).

Without the services of trained professionals (such as pediatricians, mental health professionals, and school counselors) and without a parent at home during the day, students with out-of-school suspensions and expulsions are far more likely to commit crimes. A Centers for Disease Control and Prevention study found that when youth are not in school, they are more likely to become involved in a physical fight and to carry a weapon....The lack of professional assistance at the time of exclusion from school, a time when a student most needs it, increases the risk of permanent school drop-out (Losen, 2010, p. 11).

Many educators believe that if parents are more involved with their children's education, then this would improve the learning environment and reduce out of school suspensions and expulsions (Losen, 2010). However, even in households with effective parents, a child's suspension can have harmful impact on the entire family such as lost income or employment, especially for single or poor parents (Losen, 2010). For many parents, when a child is suspended, the only alternative is to leave the child unsupervised. The Academy of American Pediatrics' Committee on School Health issued the following research-based policy statement on out-of-school suspensions:

Children who are suspended are often more from a population that is least likely to have supervision at home. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, children growing up in homes near or below the poverty level are more likely to be expelled. Children with single



parents are between 2 and 4 times as likely to be suspended or expelled from school as children with both parents at home, even when controlling for other social and demographic factors.....(Losen, 2010, p. 9).

Children most likely to be suspended or expelled are those most in need of adult supervision and professional help. In one study, 15% of children who have never been abused but witnessed domestic violence were suspended from school in the previous year. This was attributed to heightened aggression and delinquency from living in a violent home environment. For students with major home-life stresses, academic suspension in turn provides yet another life stress that, when compounded with what is already occurring in their lives, may predispose them to even higher risks of behavioral problems (Losen, 2010, p. 9).

Just as in many other states, African American male students in North Carolina are being suspended from school at an astronomical rate; Black students had the highest rate of short-term suspensions in 2006-07 (Annual Study of Suspension and Expulsions, 2006-2007). The rate for Hispanic males increased from 2.11 per 10 students in 2005-06 to 2.20 per 10 students in 2006-07. This 4.3% rate increase was the largest for any of the male groups (Annual Study of Suspension and Expulsions, 2006-2007). The rate for multiracial males increased from 2.38 per 10 students in 2005-06 to 2.45 per 10 in 2006-07 (Annual Study of Suspension and Expulsions, 2006-2007). After a substantial rate increase in 2005-06, the short-term suspension rate for American Indian males decreased 2.4% in 2006-07. This group went from a rate of 4.67 short-term suspensions per 10 students in 2005-06 to a rate of 4.56 per 10 in 2006-07 (Annual Study of Suspension and Expulsions, 2006-2007). The short-term suspension rates for White males and Asian males declined slightly from 2005-06 to 2006-07 (Annual Study of Suspension and

Expulsions, 2006-2007). Among male students, Asians had the lowest rate of short-term suspensions (Annual Study of Suspension and Expulsions, 2006-2007). As for females, African American females received 2.75 short-term suspensions per 10 students in 2006-07. This was the highest rate of short-term suspensions among the female ethnic groups (Annual Study of Suspension and Expulsions, 2006-2007). Short-term suspension rates increased for American Indian females, Hispanic females, and multiracial females (Annual Study of Suspension and Expulsions, 2006-2007). Hispanic females had the largest percentage increase in rate, 9.6%. Short-term suspension rates for Asian females, African American females, and White females declined (Annual Study of Suspension and Expulsions, 2006-2007). Among females, Asian students had the lowest rate, 0.19 short-term suspensions per 10 students and the largest percentage decrease in rate, 15.0%. When looking at the grade level of most suspensions in North Carolina, 9<sup>th</sup> graders across the state received by far the largest number of short-term suspensions (Annual Study of Suspension and Expulsions, 2006-2007).

A comparison of North Carolina data between the school years of 2006-07 and 2011-12 show that over the past several years, an exuberant number of students were suspended and excluded from learning opportunities. Although there have been slight decreases in some areas, there are still far too many students who are being excluded from learning opportunities as a result of suspensions and expulsion. In 2011-12, the number of short-term suspensions for males was 2.7 times higher than suspensions for females (Annual Study of Suspensions and Expulsions, 2011-2012). Males received 189,073 short-term suspensions, which is a 2.9% decrease from the previous year (Annual Study of Suspensions and Expulsions, 2011-2012). In this same year, females received 69,123 short-term suspensions, a 2.8% decrease from 2010-11 (Annual Study of Suspensions and Expulsion, 2011-2012). During the 2011-12 school year,

African American students received the most short-term suspensions, followed by White students and Hispanic students; the number of short-term suspensions received by Hispanic students increased by 4.0% and number received by Asian and White students decreased by 20.1% and 7.1% respectively (Annual Study of Suspensions and Expulsions, 2011-2012).

Table 4 indicates that 59,830 suspensions account for 92.2% of the short-term suspensions received by exceptional children. These students received 64,860 or 25.1% of the 285,197 short-term suspensions. The representation of EC students in the school population is approximately 14% (Annual Study of Suspensions and Expulsions, 2012-2013).

Therefore, school suspensions have a dire impact on students. Suspensions increase the likelihood of juvenile arrests and detention. According to the Pediatrics: Official Journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics (2013), students who receive out of school suspension and expulsion are more likely to drop out of school; therefore, school leaders should consider the long-term fiscal consequences to the student and society as a whole. If a student does not graduate from high school, the long-term costs are profound. A high school dropout will earn \$400,000 (\$485,000 for males) less over a lifetime than a high school graduate (Out of School Suspension and Expulsion, 2013). The dropout will pay \$60,000 less in taxes than the high school graduate (Out of School Suspension and Expulsion, 2013). This represents a loss to federal and state governments of billions of dollars per year in income tax revenue (Out of School Suspension and Expulsion, 2013). The average high school dropout will experience worse health than the average high school graduate and has a life expectancy that is 6 to 9 years shorter (Out of School Suspension and Expulsion, 2013). As a result, the implications for the health system are great; therefore, it is in the best interest of students and society to seek

Table 4

*Short-Term Suspensions for Students with Disabilities*

	SED	IDMI	SLD	SLI	OHI
2007-08	11,060	8,943	11,701	3,663	13,831
2008-09	12,070	8,438	21,380	4,473	14,633
2009-10	11,769	8,438	22,069	5,066	15,442
2010-11	11,029	7,842	22,195	6,282	16,294
2011-12	8,601	6,559	22,426	7,326	14,918

*Note.* (Annual Study of Suspensions and Expulsions, 2012-2013). OHI=Other Health Impaired; SLI=Speech/Language Impairment; SLD=Specific Learning Disability; IDMI=Intellectual Disability-Mild; SED=Serious Emotional Disability.

alternatives to out of school suspensions and expulsions (Out of School Suspension and Expulsion, 2013).

**Long-term suspensions and expulsions.** As in previous years, the majority of long-term suspensions were given to male students. There were four long-term suspensions given to males for each one given to females. Since 2007-08, there have been decreases in the number of long-term suspensions received by both males and females each year (Annual Study of Suspensions and Expulsions, 2013). These suspensions are depicted in Table 5.

Table 6 indicates that African American students received the most long-term suspensions in 2011-12, 871. A decrease of 37.7% from 1,397 reported in 2010-11 and 53.4% from the 1,869 reported in 2009-10 (Annual Study of Suspensions and Expulsions, 2012-2013).

As shown in Table 7, far more long-term suspensions were given to ninth graders than students at any other grade level and as depicted in Table 8, ninth graders also received more expulsions with 13, followed by tenth graders with 7. Furthermore, four of the 30 students expelled were Special Education Students, 13.3% (Annual Study of Suspensions and Expulsions, 2012-2013).

In looking at the school district that is the focus of this study, it can be understood why educational stakeholders are concerned with the suspension and expulsion rate and the number of students that are being forced onto the school to prison pipeline as a result. Table 9 shows the suspension rate of Northampton County Schools in relation to five surrounding school districts. Table 9 depicts the suspension and expulsion rates of six school districts in northeastern North Carolina. In all districts, except one, African American male students outnumber all other ethnicities in the number of suspensions handed out (Annual Study of Suspensions and Expulsions, 2012-2013). Northampton County Schools has the second highest suspension rate

Table 5

*Long-Term Suspensions Given by Gender*


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	American Indian	Asian	African American	Hispanic	Multi- Racial	White	Pacific
2007-08							
2008-09	76	22	2062	331	99	973	
2009-10	97	14	1869	327	103	914	
2010-11	28	19	1397	279	80	809	7
2011-12	29	9	871	206	64	430	0

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*Note.* (Annual Study of Suspensions and Expulsions, 2012-2013).

Table 6

*Long-Term Suspensions Given By Grade Level*

	12 <sup>th</sup>	11 <sup>th</sup>	10 <sup>th</sup>	9 <sup>th</sup>	8 <sup>th</sup>	7 <sup>th</sup>	6 <sup>th</sup>	PK-5 <sup>th</sup>
2008-09	174	345	590	1339	578	308	173	60
2009-10	189	295	521	1012	658	407	159	76
2010-11	167	293	468	873	376	226	140	58
2011-12	97	200	273	551	201	143	89	55

*Note.* (Annual Study of Suspensions and Expulsions, 2012-2013).

Table 7

*Expulsions Given by Grade Level*

	12 <sup>th</sup>	11 <sup>th</sup>	10 <sup>th</sup>	9 <sup>th</sup>	8 <sup>th</sup>	7 <sup>th</sup>	6 <sup>th</sup>	PK-5 <sup>th</sup>
2007-08	10	19	21	43	10	5	1	0
2008-09	16	17	20	48	7	1	1	2
2009-10	13	13	19	26	5	6	1	1
2010-11	3	8	16	16	12	1	0	13
2011-12	1	3	7	13	2	0	1	3

*Note.* (Annual Study of Suspensions and Expulsions, 2012-2013).



Table 8

*Expulsions for Students Receiving Special Education Services*

Special Education Status	07	08	09	10	11
Developmentally Delayed	0	0	0	1	0
Other Health Impaired	2	3	3	5	1
Serious Emotional Disability	4	5	3	8	1
Intellectual Disability-Mild	2	0	2	0	0
Specific Learning Disabled	4	11	5	7	2
Traumatic Brain Injury	1	0	0	0	0
Speech/Language Impaired	0	1	0	3	0
Intellectual Disability-Severe	0	1	0	0	0
Missing	0	3	4	0	0
Total	13	24	17	17	4

*Note.* (Annual Study of Suspensions and Expulsions, 2012-2013).

Table 9

*Suspensions and Expulsions by LEA, Gender, and Race (2011-2012)*

LEA	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	# Short-Term Suspensions 2011-12	# Long-Term Suspensions 2011-12	# Expulsions 2011-12
Northampton County Schools					
	Female	American Indian	<5	<5	0
	Female	African American	282	<5	0
	Female	White	20	<5	0
	Female	Multi-Racial	<5	<5	0
	Male	Asian	5	<5	0
	Male	Hispanic	10	<5	0
	Male	African American	610	<5	0
	Male	White	47	<5	0
	Male	Multi-Racial	<5	<5	0
	<b>Total</b>		<b>983</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>
Halifax County Schools					
	Female	American Indian	29	<5	0
	Female	Hispanic	7	<5	0
	Female	African American	517	<5	0
	N/A	N/A	3	<5	0
	Male	American Indian	37	<5	0
	Male	Hispanic	38	<5	0
	Male	African American	1,368	<5	0
	Male	White	77	<5	0
	Male	Multi-Racial	20	<5	0
	Male	Other/Missing	8	<5	0
	<b>Total</b>		<b>2,104</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0</b>

Table 9 (continued)

LEA	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	# Short-Term Suspensions 2011-12	# Long-Term Suspensions 2011-12	# Expulsions 2011-12
Roanoke Rapids City Schools					
	Female	American Indian	<5	0	0
	Female	Hispanic	5	0	0
	Female	African American	93	0	0
	Female	White	89	0	0
	Female	Multi-racial	<5	0	0
	Male	American Indian	<5	0	0
	Male	Hispanic	11	0	0
	Male	African American	216	0	0
	Male	White	371	0	0
	Male	Multi-racial	13	0	0
	<b>Total</b>		<b>804</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
Weldon City Schools					
	Female	White	129	<5	0
	Female	Hispanic	<5	<5	0
	Male	Hispanic	10	<5	0
	Male	African American	396	<5	0
	Male	White	9	<5	0
	Male	Multi-Racial	<5	<5	0
	<b>Total</b>		<b>549</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>
Hertford County Schools					
	Female	Hispanic	<5	<5	0
	Female	African American	209	<5	0
	Female	White	13	<5	0
	Male	Asian	<5	<5	0
	Male	Hispanic	6	<5	0
	Male	African American	440	<5	0
	Male	White	68	<5	0
	Male	Multi-Racial	6	<5	0
	<b>Total</b>		<b>745</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>

Table 9 (continued)

LEA	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	# Short-Term Suspensions 2011-12	# Long-Term Suspensions 2011-12	# Expulsions 2011-12
Bertie County Schools					
	Female	Hispanic	6	<5	0
	Female	African American	237	<5	0
	Female	White	27	<5	0
	Male	Hispanic	9	<5	0
	Male	African American	638	<5	0
	Male	White	26	<5	0
	N/A		4	<5	0
	<b>Total</b>		<b>947</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>

*Note.* (Annual Study of Suspensions and Expulsions, 2012-2013).

among the school districts, with 610, an astounding 60% of those suspensions being given to African American males (Annual Study of Suspensions and Expulsions, 2012-2013). It is taken into consideration that the school districts examined in the chart are of different sizes; however, Northampton County is next to the smallest in relation to student enrollment but has next to the highest number of suspensions.

### **Decreasing Suspensions: Alternatives to Suspension and Expulsions**

Some students with behavioral challenges may lack important thinking skills. This idea has been researched in the neurosciences for over thirty years on kids who are aggressive and have problems getting along with people, those diagnosed with ADHD, mood and anxiety disorders, oppositional defiant disorder, conduct disorder, and language processing disorders (Greene, 2008). This research supports the thought that the thinking skills involved are not in the traditional academic domains-reading, writing, and arithmetic-but rather in domains such as regulating emotion, considering outcomes of one's actions before one acts, understanding how one's behavior is affecting other people, having the words to let people know something's the matter (Greene, 2008). These children have a developmental delay, a learning disability (Greene, 2008). Just as kids who are delayed in reading have difficulty mastering skills for proficiency in reading and math, challenging students have difficulty mastering the skills required for becoming proficient in handling life's social, emotional, and behavior challenges (Greene, 2008). As such, if traditional discipline does not work for students who have social, emotional, and behavioral challenges, the only reason to continue using it would be because it is working for the students who do not have these challenges (Greene, 2008).

Greene (2008), further states that if one is to agree with this perspective on challenging students, then much of what is said about these students no longer makes sense:

- “He just wants attention”: We all want attention; therefore this is not a very useful explanation for helping to understand why a kid is struggling to do well.
- “His parents are incompetent disciplinarians”: Parents of well-behaved kids get too much credit for the fact that their children are well-behaved, and that parents of challenging students get far too much blame for the fact that their children are not well behaved. Blaming parents doesn’t help anyone deal effectively with the student.
- “He’s not motivated”: This is a popular characterization that can be traced back to “the kids do well if they want to. But why would any kid not want to do well?”
- “His sibling was the same way”: It’s in the gene pool. There is nothing that anyone can do about the gene pool although it’s likely that his sibling was lacking some important skills too.

According to Greene (2008), many of these are clichés that have lead school officials and care givers down an intervention dead-end. Once it is understood that challenging students lack important thinking skills, these explanations no longer make sense. The following is a more useful list for school officials when trying to work with students with behavioral issues:

- Difficulty handling transitions, shifting from one mind-set or task to another
- Difficulty doing things in logical sequence or prescribed order
- Difficulty understanding what is being said
- Difficulty considering a range of solutions to a problem
- Difficulty maintaining focus
- Poor sense of time
- Difficulty empathizing with others, appreciating another person’s perspective or point of view

- Difficulty starting conversations, entering groups, connecting with people/lacks other basic social skills
- Difficulty considering the likely outcomes or consequences of actions (impulsive)
- Difficulty attending to and/or accurately interpreting social cues/poor perception of social nuances
- Difficulty managing emotional response to frustration so as to think rationally (Greene, 2008).

Public schools are under enormous amounts of pressure to maintain school environments that are safe, orderly, and conducive to student learning. Lack of financial and human resources, over-worked staff, increased demands, greater numbers of special-needs children, and responding to students who are culturally and ethnically diverse make the task of providing education more complex and difficult (Colvin, 2007). Schools are clearly responsible for creating a safe, nurturing, and positive environment that is designed to promote desirable behavior and to reduce and control problem behavior. Therefore, there is a need to develop systems of support capable of serving all students (Colvin, 2007). These systems of support have more chance of being successful if the school environment is set up to enable these interventions to be implemented and maintained (Colvin, 2007). Establishing a positive, proactive school-wide discipline plan is necessary for empowering schools to achieve their goals and responsibilities (Colvin, 2007).

Colvin (2007) states that many schools have begun to take a more proactive approach in dealing with inappropriate behaviors and discipline. In this approach, the faculty is focused on establishing the desired behaviors that are necessary for the proper functioning of the school. These behaviors are identified and then systematically and explicitly taught (Colvin, 2007). A

team-based process is used to implement the plan. The role of the principal is vital in implementing such an approach. When a principal does not whole-heartedly support school improvement plans, the process is likely to dissipate (Colvin 2007). According to Colvin (2007), there are thirteen strategies that principals need to effect change; principals should use these strategies when working with staff to develop a proactive school-wide discipline plan:

1. Maintain standards
2. Make a public statement of support
3. Establish a leadership team
4. Support the team members
5. Guide the decision-making process
6. Take a leadership role in problem solving
7. Support the team meetings
8. Provide recognition to the faculty and team for their work
9. Serve as the point person for school-related groups
10. Monitor implementation activities and provide feedback
11. Review data and provide feedback regularly
12. Ensure innovation is sustained
13. Make a time commitment

It is extremely important to establish a workable process before taking steps to address a school-wide behavior plan. There are many stakeholders within the operations of a school (Colvin, 2007). Each stakeholder needs to know his or her roles in implementing the plan. If all stakeholders are not working together within the system, then the plan will fail or show minimal results (Colvin, 2007).



Colvin (2007), details the several components of a proactive school-wide discipline plan that schools must use in order for the plan to be successful:

- *Purpose of Statement*: The first step in developing the school-wide discipline plan is to formulate a purpose statement. This begins the process of the faculty working together, resulting in a clear product. The purpose statement also sets the stage and tone for the whole plan. It is upbeat, constructive, student centered, and success oriented.
- *School-Wide Behavior Expectations*: Defining the feature of a proactive school-wide discipline plan is the focus on the school-wide expectations. The emphasis becomes establishing the behaviors that should be displayed by students instead of the traditional focus of eliminating inappropriate behaviors. These expectations are universal; students are required to exhibit them in all settings and at all times.
- *Teaching the Behavior Expectations*: Expected behavior needs to be taught. “If you want good behavior, you have to teach it.” This is to be done in the same way as teaching a skill in academics, sports, or music. Desirable behavior has to be learned, which implies that it has to be taught.
- *Maintaining the Behavior Expectations*: Students need to be recognized and appreciated. As part of the school-wide discipline program, there needs to be a school-wide recognition plan. The students who consistently exhibit the school-wide behavior expectations receive recognition and attention for their efforts. School-wide recognition is a sure strategy for ensuring that the desirable behaviors are sustained.
- *Correcting Problem Behaviors*: The school-wide discipline plan presumes that proactive strategies for preventing serious and chronic problem behavior are viable,

user-friendly, effective, and cost efficient. There needs to be a model for correcting a full range of problem behavior. This system needs to have a continuum of procedures for addressing the full range of problem behavior and the continuum is broken down into two tracks, office managed behavior and staff managed behavior.

- *Using the Data:* The data management system is essential to maintaining a proactive school-wide management system. If used regularly, it provides necessary information for making critical decisions about the school-wide plan. The system allows schools to ascertain whether or not the system is working effectively.
- *Sustaining the Plan for the Long Haul:* The success of the plan relies in its' sustainability. There are two strategies for sustaining the program: (1) Conducting refresh sessions with the building leadership team each year, checking for adequate implementation of the various components of the plan and (2) Working with the operating factors inherent in the school system.

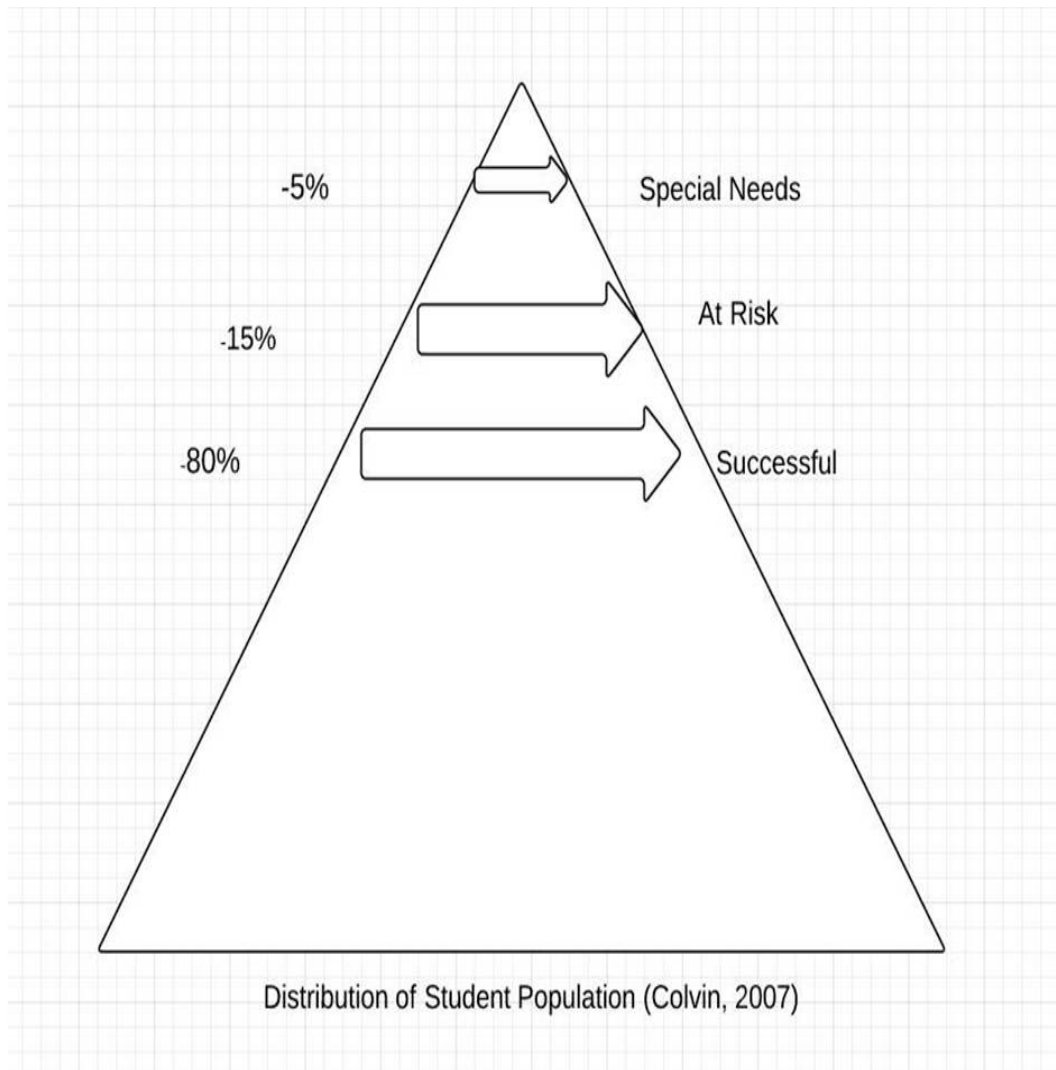
Hence, schools leaders should consider using a school-wide system that is both proactive and positive when working with students who have behavioral issues. Creating a system that can serve and promote the emotional and academic success of all students is vitally important in decreasing out of school suspensions and lost instructional time.

### **Program Description: PBIS (Positive Behavior Intervention Support)**

Ninety-five percent of discipline problems occur during the first and last five minutes of the class and come from 5% of the students (Kunjufu, 2002). The challenge for education leaders is to implement more effective, less exclusionary methods for maintaining safe, productive school environments (Skiba & Sprague, 2008).

A school-wide discipline plan is a first and necessary step in a continuum for providing behavior support to all students (Colvin, 2007). The student body can be divided into three groups. The first group represents approximately 80% of the student population (Colvin, 2007). These students are successful at school and respond positively to a proactive school-wide discipline plan (Colvin, 2007). The second group, comprising 10-15% of students, is classified as at risk (Colvin, 2007). These students can become successful in school with more specialized support beyond the school-wide plan (Colvin, 2007). The final group represents 5% of the student body and is classified as special needs students or students in crisis (Colvin, 2007). These students need individualized and in most cases, intensive support services (Colvin, 2007). This is depicted in Figure 4.

Studies conducted with schools throughout the United States reveal that school administrators do not use suspension and expulsion because they wish to remove students from the opportunity to learn; but they use these measures because they don't know what else to do (Skiba & Sprague, 2008). School administrators are looking for effective and practical alternatives to suspensions and expulsions. An alternative is a comprehensive, proactive approach to discipline known as School-Wide Behavior Support (Skiba & Sprague, 2008). This approach is based on the assumption that when educators across the school actively teach, expect, and acknowledge appropriate behavior, the proportion of students with serious behavior problems decreases and the school's overall climate improves (Skiba & Sprague, 2008). School-wide Behavior Support is also based on group behavior theory; behavior change occurs when desired behaviors are actively taught, clearly and consistently expected, and positively recognized and acknowledged (Out of School Suspension and Expulsion, 2013). Again, when SWBS is practiced, the proportion of students with serious behavior problems decreases and the



*Figure 4.* Distribution of student population (Colvin, 2007).

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schools' overall climate improves (Pediatrics: Official Journal of the Academy of Pediatrics, 2013). SWBS is based on three main components: (a) prevention; (b) multi-tiered support; (c) tiers of intervention (Out of School Suspension and Expulsion, 2013). The first component focuses on prevention involving all students, and staff, and all school settings (Out of School Suspension and Expulsion, 2013). The second focuses on groups and students engaging in at-risk behavior (Out of School Suspension and Expulsion, 2013). The third focuses on individualized intervention on students engaging in at-risk behaviors. The process is developed and driven by a group of 5 to 10 people to include administrators, staff, parents, community members, and students (Out of School Suspension and Expulsion, 2013). This group learns the key practices of the program and develops the behavior goals to be achieved. All school staff members need to reinforce desirable behavior and be consistent in responding to at-risk behavior and respond in a consistent fashion (Out of School Suspension and Expulsion, 2013).

In 1997, Congress amended the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), and since that time Positive Behavior Intervention Support has held a unique place in special education law (PBIS and the Law, 2014). PBIS is the only approach to addressing behavior that is mentioned in the law (PBIS and the Law, 2014). This emphasis on using functional assessments and positive approaches to encourage good behavior remains in the current version of the law (PBIS and the Law, 2014). In response to the IDEA mandate to provide positive intervention and support to students with disabilities, the Behavior Support Section of the Exceptional Children Division at the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction began to incorporate information into the professional development it provided. By the late 1990s the section was discussing school-wide management with schools and districts across the state (Positive Behavior Intervention and

Support, 2013). Shortly thereafter, North Carolina received a state improvement grant and funding to develop demonstration sites for school-wide positive behavior support (Positive Behavior Intervention and Support, 2013). In 2001-2002, Tim Lewis, of the University of Missouri, and one of the co-directors for the National Technical Assistance Center, came to the state to provide behavior support training for a cadre of trainers (Positive Behavior Intervention and Support, 2013). Thus, the vision behind PBIS (Positive Behavior Intervention Support), which it is now called is that all schools in North Carolina will implement it as an effective and proactive process for improving social competence and academic achievement for all students (Positive Behavior Intervention and Support, 2013). The mission is to provide leadership, professional development, resources, and on-going support in order for schools to successfully implement PBIS (Positive Behavior Intervention and Support, 2013).

The North Carolina Public Schools Positive Behavior and Intervention Support outlines the following guidelines:

- The North Carolina PBIS is part of the North Carolina State Improvement Program funded through IDEA.
- The primary purposes of the grant were personnel development and systems of change.
- PBIS programs are a way to impact the learning environments in the schools in order to support high student performance and to reduce behavioral problems.
- The North Carolina PBIS sites are working to integrate their Safe School Plans, Character Education, and efforts and strategies, and discipline efforts in order to make schools caring and safe communities for learning.

- Whole school PBIS is a systematic approach that establishes and reinforces clear behavior expectations.
- It is a team-based system involving the entire school staff using a systems approach.
- The school staff must adopt a common approach to discipline that is proactive, instructional, and outcome based.
- The data about the school is used to guide decision-making.
- The school team looks at the entire school campus and the whole school day.
- The goal is to help educate all students, even students with challenging behaviors.
- There is an emphasis on continuous data-based improvement, individualized to each school.
- PBIS is also an instructional approach that focuses on systematically teaching social behavior using effective instructional methodology.
- Systematically teaching and implementing behavioral interventions for the most difficult students is also a key component. (Positive Behavior Intervention and Support, 2013).

To implement PBIS requires an upfront investment of time and effort from the school's PBIS team and the entire staff (Positive Behavior Intervention and Support, 2013). PBIS training is broken into three sequential two-day modules that are completed as the school meets the implementation criteria over several years (Positive Behavior Intervention and Support, 2013). The modules are designed to be completed by a team that represents the entire school staff (Positive Behavior Intervention and Support, 2013). Recently, an elementary school staff discussed how PBIS helped to move their school out of Title I improvement as a result of not meeting adequately yearly progress as determined by federal guidelines in improving student

reading and math scores (Positive Behavior Intervention and Support, 2013). This meant that parents could if they chose to, request their child leave the school and be placed in a neighboring school with better test results (Positive Behavior Intervention and Support, 2013). The staff at the school was feeling overwhelmed and bogged down with routine paperwork and student discipline. The discipline referrals at the school equated to approximately one per student if they were averaged (Positive Behavior Intervention and Support, 2013). Students were in and out of the assistant principal's office with discipline referrals and suspensions continued to increase. Seeing the need to change, the principal and school leaders volunteered to try PBIS. The school was chosen to pilot a PBIS program in the district in which it was located the following school year (Positive Behavior Intervention and Support, 2013). They began the program by choosing staff members that would make up the PBIS team. These people were willing to devote time and effort to getting the program off the ground. They participated in intense staff development for the team the first year that included four two-day sessions throughout the school year. They held monthly meetings at the school to work on the action plan and training. They revised the office referral to make it simple for staff and they began to use a live data-management system. They instituted a positive office referral system for students that would "catch them being good." They also kept parents informed of PBIS happenings with a monthly newsletter (Positive Behavior Intervention and Support, 2013). The newsletter shared with parents the same statistical data that was provided to staff members as well as what the school was accomplishing through the use of PBIS (Positive Behavior Intervention and Support, 2013). They also assigned a PBIS coach, a person who attended all meetings and was always available for any type of behavioral consultation within the school. According to the staff at the school, the implementation of PBIS helped to move the school out of Title I School Improvement (Positive Behavior Intervention



and Support, 2013). As indicated by one school, inappropriate behavior decreased due to the use effective use of Positive Intervention Behavior Support (2013, see Table 10).

Positive Behavior Intervention Support (2013) is an evidence-based program that has improved the culture of schools as well as student academic performance. Since the inception of PBIS in 2001, more and more schools have opted to implement the program as a means to help deter negative student behavior and out of school suspensions (Positive Behavior Intervention and Support, 2013). During the 2001-02 school year, only 9 schools in the state were participating in the PBIS initiative; in 2011-12, the number grew tremendously (Positive Behavior Intervention and Support, 2013). During this school year there were 1,154 schools state-wide that were trained or implementing the program, 46% of the state's 2,512 schools (Positive Behavior Intervention and Support, 2013).

PBIS implementation requires an upfront investment of time and effort from the PBIS team and the rest of the school staff (Positive Behavior Intervention and Support, 2013). Costs for the school's PBIS team to attend training are limited to providing substitutes for team members. Aside from training expenses, schools determine the amount needed to support implementation activities. Most schools invest a few hundred dollars to post school rules or support a reinforcement system (Positive Behavior Intervention and Support, 2013). Many schools form partnerships with local businesses, seek grant funding, or gain support of the parent/teacher organization for financial assistance (Positive Behavior Intervention and Support, 2013).

The staff members at each school in Northampton County have all established PBIS teams and been trained on the first module of Positive Behavior Intervention Support. They all began implanting the program the 2013-14 school year.

Table 10

*One School's Improvement as a Result of PBIS*

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Referrals	Percent
Positive Office Referrals	Almost 700
Regular Office Referrals	Decreased by 50%
Suspensions	Decreased by 66%
Overall Reading Scores	Increased by 8 points
Overall Math Scores	Scores were .5 point higher than the district's during a year when scores were re-normed

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*Note.* (Positive Behavior Intervention Support, 2013).

The Northampton County Schools' Positive Behavior Intervention and Support District Plan, 2013, outlines the school-wide discipline program for five of its' eight schools. Missing from the district's Positive Behavior Intervention Support Plan are plans from two elementary schools and the district's alternative school (see Tables 11 through 16).

As a part of PBIS, teachers and administrators are responsible for helping deter negative and inappropriate behavior by teaching and modeling for all students positive character traits.

The Northampton County Student Code of Conduct (2013-14), lists the character traits:

- *Respect*: Showing high regard for authority, for other people, for self, for property, and for country; and understanding that all people have value as human beings.
- *Responsibility*: Being dependable in carrying out obligations and duties; showing reliability and consistency in words and conduct; being accountable for your own actions; and being committed to active involvement in your community.
- *Integrity*: Having the inner strength to be truthful, trustworthy, and honest in all things; demonstrating impartial, unbiased and equitable treatment for all.
- *Kindness*: Being considerate, courteous, helpful, and understanding of others; showing care, compassion, friendship, and generosity; and treating others as you would like to be treated.
- *Citizenship*: Being an informed, responsible and caring participant in the community; choosing worthy goals and setting proper priorities; thinking through the consequences of your actions; and basing decisions on practical wisdom and good sense.

Table 11

*School Wide Expectations Matrix: Squire Elementary School*

Setting					
Expectation	Hallway	Bathroom	Cafeteria	Classroom	Buses
(S) Show Self Control	(H) Hands by your side	(B) Be clean (wash hands)	(C) Clean up area	(R) Raise your hand to talk	(S) Sit in your sit
(O) Own it and Be Responsible	(A) All eyes forward	(A) Always flush	(A) Always use indoor voices	(O) Offer help	(A) Always use indoor voices
(A) Actively Listen and Learn	(L) Lips zipped	(T) Throw away trash	(F) Follow directions	(O) Open your ears	(F) Follow directions
(R) Respect Everyone	(L) Low Speed	(H) Have respect	(E) Eat while using manners	(M) Make good choices	(E) Enter and exit quietly

*Note.* Squire Elementary School did not include a school-wide reward's matrix in their behavior plan.

Table 12

*School Wide Behavior Expectation Matrix: Willis Hare Elementary School*

Willis Hare Elementary School Positive Behavior Intervention Support

Setting

Expectation	Classroom	Cafeteria	Restroom	Hallway/Breezeway	Assemblies	Playground	Bus
Trustworthy	Respond to quiet signal	Pay for your snack	Keep feet on the floor; water in the sink	Hands behind back All eyes forward Low speed Lips zipped Walk single file; be in second block	Return found items to an adult or rightful owner	Report problems, accidents, and injuries	Report problems and injuries to driver
In Place	Be on time; be in your seat	Keep all food to self; sit with feet on floor; bottom on bench, facing table	Go directly to bathroom; return to class promptly	Stay on the right Stop at stop signs	Remain seated in space; walk on blue line; report to assigned section	Walk to and from playground; stay within playground boundaries	Sit with feet on floor; bottom on seat; facing front; remain in assigned seat

Table 12 (continued)

Setting

Expectation	Classroom	Cafeteria	Restroom	Hallway/Breezeway	Assemblies	Playground	Bus
<b>Give Respect</b>	Use quiet voices; wait for your turn; listen to instructions; be attentive	Wait your turn in lunch line; use quiet voices; respond to “quiet” signal when prompted	Knock on stall door; give others privacy; use quiet voices	Use quiet voices; respond to “quiet” signal when prompted; hold door open for person behind you	Use quiet voices; respond to “quiet” signal when prompted; keep hands, feet, and objects to self	Take turns with playground equipment; use equipment properly; play fair-follow rules; include e	Listen to the bus driver; uses quiet voices; keep hands, feet, objects to self
<b>Eager to Learn</b>	Give your best effort	Uses good manner words, such as “thank you” and “please”	Practice good hygiene	Respect personal space	Ask appropriate questions	Try new activities	Learn about your seatmate
<b>Responsible</b>	Stay on task; be prepared for class	Enter/exit in orderly lines; have lunch number; get all utensils, milk, etc when first going through line	Flush toilet after use; report problems to an adult; put paper towels in trash	Keep hallways clean; go directly to your location	Pay attention	Follow adult directions first time given; use appropriate language	No eating or drinking

Table 12 (continued)

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Setting

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Expectation	Classroom	Cafeteria	Restroom	Hallway/Breezeway	Assemblies	Playground	Bus
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*Note.* Willis Hare Elementary School: School-Wide Criterion for PBIS Celebrations (Reward’s Matrix):

**Attendance**

- No unexcused absences
- No more than 1 excused absence (Exception: At administration direction)
- One tardy to school (arrival after 8:05 a.m.)

**Academic**

- Turn in ALL homework, daily
- Completion of ALL class work, daily

**Behavior**

- Fulfill Tiger Expectations EVERYWHERE, daily
    1. On the bus
    2. On the playground
    3. In the restrooms
    4. In the hallway/breezeway
    5. In the “Cub”eteria
    6. In Connect classes
  - No more than one silent lunch
  - No out of school suspensions
  - No bus suspensions
-

Table 13

*Gaston Middle School – Positive Behavior Intervention Support*

Setting						
Expectation	Cafeteria	Movement	Classroom	Restroom	Bus	Assemblies
Respect	Have lunch number; maintain inside voice; keep place in line	Stay to the right; walk directly to appropriate destination; arrive on time	Have all materials for class; use a calm voice and appropriate body language; raise hand before speaking	Use facilities properly; treat doors, partitions, and sinks with care	Be at the bus stop on time; go directly to your bus after school and promptly find your seat	Act appropriately and be a role model to others; remain seated and quiet
Responsible	Keep hands and feet to yourself; Be polite to all cafeteria staff and teachers	Walk quietly so others can continue to learn; be a role model to others	Follow directions the first time given; treat others as you would like to be treated; listen with your eyes and ears	Allow the privacy of others; flush the toilet; wash hands; be considerate and use just one or two paper towels	Follow driver directions and speak nicely; remain in your seat at all times	Applaud appropriately to show appreciation; be alert for signal to be silent
Safe	Follow directions and procedures; keep your area clean; only one trip through the lunch line	Follow directions and procedures without reminders; silent during all practice drills; keep all areas free of trash and litter	Give best effort and make good choices; keep track of your belongings; value others' property; set goals to make better grades	Report any vandalism; complete task in a timely manner; use only at teacher appointed times	Report any vandalism to your driver; keep bus clean	Be an active listener; keep your eyes and ears on presenters; exercising appropriate behavior leads to improved assemblies

*Note.* Gaston Middle School did not include a reward's matrix in their behavior plan.



Table 14

*Conway Middle School – Positive Behavior Intervention Support*

Setting					
Expectation	Classroom	Hallway	Cafeteria	Restroom	Bus
Respectful and Kind	Address staff, peers, and school property with respect at all times	Hand to yourself and walk to the right	Use cafeteria time to eat and communicate at moderate tones	Keep walls and doors free of graffiti and derogatory statements	Listen and follow all directions given by the driver
Responsible	Come to class prepared (school supplies)	Take care of your needs in a timely manner; be on time	Clean up after yourself	Use the bathroom for the intended purpose	Be at your bus stop on time and keep the bus clean
Safe	Listen to the teacher and follow instructions	Walk in the hallway	Follow staff directions and do not cruise the cafeteria	Smoke and drug free environment	Remain seated while the bus is moving, keep all body parts and objects inside of the bus
Positive	Focus on learning and participate in class	Use appropriate language at all times	Speak at moderate tones	Wash your hands and leave the restroom clean	Speak softly
Honest	Do your own work (when working collaboratively, do your fair share)	Have a hall pass when moving in the hallway	Pay for all items	Restroom is not a classroom	Adhere to all safety expectations

*Note.* Conway Middle School did not include a reward’s matrix in their behavior plan.

Table 15

*School Wide Behavioral Expectation Matrix: Northampton County High School*

Setting Expectation	Classroom	Hallway	Cafeteria	Restroom	Bus
Respectful And Kind	Address staff, peers, and school property with respect at all times	Keep hands to yourself; refrain from inappropriate public display of affection (hugging, kissing)	Use cafeteria time to eat	Keep walls and doors free of graffiti and derogatory statements	Listen and follow all directions given by the driver
Responsibility And Self-Discipline	Come to class prepared (school supplies)	Take care of your needs in a timely manner; be on time	Clean up after yourself	Use the restroom for the intended purpose	Be at your bus stop on time and keep the bus clean
Courage and Perseverance	Listen to the teacher and follow instructions	Walk in the hallway	Follow all staff directions	Restrooms are smoke and drug free environments	Remain seated while the bus is moving; keep all body parts and objects inside of the bus and speak in moderate tones
Good Judgment	Focus on learning and participate in class	Use appropriate language at all times	Speak at moderate tones	Wash your hands and leave the restroom clean	The bus is a smoke, drug, and bully free environment
Honest and Integrity	Do your own work (when working collaboratively, do your fair share)	Have a hall pass when moving in the hallway	Pay for all items	The bathroom is not a classroom	Adhere to all bus expectations

*Note.* Northampton County High School PBIS Behavior Matrix.

Table 16

*Northampton County High School Reward's Matrix*

Incentive	When	Implementation
Jag Dollars: Students can receive Jag Dollars for good behavior (displaying character traits).	Daily	When students are observed going above and beyond school-wide expectations they can receive Jag Dollars from faculty and staff. Dollars can be used in weekly drawings, to purchase items from concession, to get into school functions.
Free-Flow Friday	Every Friday	Classroom teachers will document and track student behavior. Students who have positive Jag behavior will be given 15 minutes in each class on Friday to listen to music (ipods)- only during independent work.
Tech Day (Green Zone)	Daily	Students can listen to music or play games using electronic devices, but only in the Green Zone (cafeteria).
Student of the Month	Monthly	Teacher/administrator selection based on student performance in the classroom, leadership ability and conduct as they related to the school's character traits.
PBIS Monthly Celebration	4 <sup>th</sup> Friday of each month	Students that exemplify proficient in academic and behavior performance will participate. Each celebration will highlight students who have displayed the character trait of the month. This activity can be a pep-rally, sporting event, or dance.
Honor Roll Recognition	Every 9 weeks	Students will be recognized for academic excellence: trip, refreshments, etc.

*Note.* School Wide Behavior Reward's Matrix: Northampton County High School.

- *Courage*: Having the determination to do the right thing even when others don't and the strength to follow your conscience rather than the crowd; and attempting difficult things that are worthwhile.
- *Perseverance*: Being persistent in the pursuit of worthy objectives in spite of difficulty, oppositions, or discouragement; and exhibiting patience and having the fortitude to try again when confronted with delays, mistakes, or failures.
- *Self-Discipline*: Demonstrating hard work and commitment to purpose; regulating yourself for improvement and restraining for inappropriate behaviors; being in proper control of your words, actions, and impulses

Schools focus on one character trait each month. The trait is modeled and taught by all faculty and staff. In an effort to connect the Character Education Program with Positive Behavior Intervention Support, students are given positive incentives when they display the character traits. Each month, each school chooses a student who exemplifies the trait and the student and his parents are recognized at the monthly school board meeting.

### **Program Description: Character Academy**

In Northampton County, Character Academy is an alternative to out of school suspensions that serves students from grades 6 through 12. The superintendent may recommend students in lower grades on a case by case basis (S. Smith, personal communication, November 15, 2013). Instead of suspension, students are referred to the Academy to complete behavior modules that will help correct inappropriate behavior and help with decision-making skills. School Executives may refer a student who has violated multiple Level I or Level II rules (violations eligible for short-term suspension). Parents and students must agree to abide by the requirements and students enrolled must complete all components of the Character Academy as

affirmed in the parent contract (S. Smith, personal communication, November 15, 2013).

Students who are referred after enrollment in the school district following the suspension or expulsion from another school district will not be accepted unless assigned by the Superintendent to participate in the program. Students may be ineligible for participation based on history of a criminal offense, juvenile court adjudication, or discipline problem (S. Smith, personal communication, November 15, 2013)).

The Northampton County Character Academy District Plan (2013) outlines procedures for participants. Students must be willing to:

- Develop the commitment necessary to complete the behavior education program
- Communicate well and work collaboratively with others in an alternative behavior education environment
- Provide a record of functional behaviors (obtained through the ABE system-data management) and prior school attendance (available through HomeBase)
- Comply with the academic, moral, and behavioral standards
- Work on emotional and social development
- Share interests, talents, and extra-curricular activities and achievements that will assist in improving student behavior
- Cooperate and encourage their family to cooperate in helping the Character Academy meet the needs of the participant
- All students who participant in the Character Academy are required to completed a GAIN Short Screener (GAIN S-S) assessment. This assessment will be utilized to better assist staff in meeting the needs of the student. The GAIN-SS is a short and accurate assessment that can be used with minimal training and is easy to score that

covers a wide range of behavioral health problems. This assessment is desperately needed because less than 1 in 5 adults and 1 in 10 adolescents with substance use disorders (abuse or dependence) are receiving any kind of treatment (Assessments) (Northampton County Character Academy District Plan, 2013).

The procedure for placing students in Character Academy are:

#### I. School Executive Recommendation

1. The school's executive may visit the Character Academy page to access the referral form and checklist which details all the information that will be needed to complete the referral. Information includes student's previous report card and official transcript.
2. The school executive submits the completed referral form to the Director of Student Services.
3. The Student Services personnel provides notifications that the student has been referred to Character Academy. (Northampton County Character Academy district plan, 2013)

#### II: Referral Review Process

1. The Character Academy personnel review the referral (Northampton County Character Academy District Plan, 2013).

#### III: Notification

1. The Director of Student Services notifies parents of designated students of the recommended referral via U.S. mail and parents may receive a telephone call. (Northampton County Character Academy District Plan, 2013).

#### IV: Acceptance and Scheduling

1. Each referred student will receive an acceptance package that includes the Intent to Participate letter. This letter needs to be completed and returned to the Student Services Office. Parents of referred students will be contacted by the Character Academy personnel before their participation start date to schedule a Personalized Education Plan (PEP) meeting to review the Character Academy Student Parent Participation Expectations. A Parent and Student Orientation will be held the week before the active student participation starts and all referral documents for the affected student need to be completed by this time. (Northampton County Character Academy District Plan, 2013).

#### V. Global Appraisal of Individual Needs (GAIN) Short Screener (S-S) Assessment

1. The GAIN-Short Screener will be administered to all participants of the Character Academy. The purpose of the assessment is to determine the best fit between student participants and the Character Academy. The Character Academy personnel will utilize the data collected from the assessment to make referrals to community agencies and to assist students in setting individual goals. (Northampton County Character Academy District Plan, 2013).

#### VI. Student and Parent Conferences

1. Student and parent orientation, as well as student assessment activities are conducted in person at the Character Academy site. Students meet with the Character Academy personnel for a 10-15 minute conference about their goals and interests. Parents meet with as Character Academy staff member for a 30-45 minute conference about the type of behavioral educational experiences their

child will receive and to ask questions in a one-on-one setting. (Northampton County Character Academy district plan, 2013).

## VII. Post Assessment

1. Once an assessment has been completed, there will be a final review by the GAIN S-S certified Character Academy personnel. (Northampton County Character Academy District Plan, 2013).

The implementation timeline of the Character Academy is that all processes will be scheduled to start at the beginning of the school year. The program will support students from first semester to the end of the school year. The GAIN S-S Training is an online training with Chestnut Health at a cost of \$500 for the license to administer the assessment to the participants in the Character Academy. The ABE system is interactive software that delivers personalized modules to students based on over 50 targeted behaviors such as substance abuse, fighting, anger, or disrespect. The cost to include all schools in the Functional Behavior Assessment component with training and set up is \$9, 165.50. The total estimated budget for this program is \$9, 665.50 (Northampton County Character Academy District Plan, 2013).

School leaders in Northampton County Schools are using school-wide system approaches that are both proactive and positive in working with students who present challenging behavioral issues. To decrease suspensions and lost instructional time, they are using systems, Positive Behavior Intervention Support and Character, that can serve and promote the emotional and academic success of all students.



## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

### **Design of Study**

Trocim (2000) states that research design is thought of as the structure of the research project. It holds the research project together and allows one to show how all of the major parts of the research-participants, treatments, measures, and methods of assignment work together to address the research questions (Trocim, 2000). There are many types of research designs available to investigators which assist the researcher in answering research questions. Based on the nature of this study, a program evaluation was selected as the best method to use to answer the research questions.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of the Positive Behavior Intervention Support and Character Academy programs in decreasing student suspensions in Northampton County Schools. Therefore, based on the nature of this study, it was determined that the program evaluation is the best method to assess the study questions.

In a recent administrative meeting, the Superintendent of the district studied revealed to school leaders that the district has one of the highest suspension rates in the state of North Carolina. Furthermore, at a recent school board meeting, school board members raised questions about the district's suspension rates, especially in regards to students with disabilities. In addition, parent, students, and community members have raised concerns about the number of student suspensions from this district. In a Community Roundtable meeting, parents and community members stated that the school district is too quick to suspend students and need to do more to support students who have behavioral issues. As a result, the school board mandated that all school leaders be trained on how to implement Positive Behavior Intervention Support in

all of the schools. Therefore, this study examined the Positive Behavior Intervention Support and the Character Academy programs to determine if the impact of the programs resulted in a reduction of lost instructional time due to in-school and out of school suspensions.

### **Study Questions**

Six study questions were considered in this study. The questions are as follows:

1. To what extent if any does Positive Behavior Intervention Support decrease suspensions for African American students in the elementary school?
2. To what extent if any does Positive Behavior Intervention Support decrease suspensions for African American students the middle school?
3. To what extent if any does Character Academy decrease suspensions for African American students in the middle school?
4. To what extent it any does Positive Behavior Intervention Support decrease suspensions for African American students in the high school?
5. To what extent if any does Character Academy decrease suspensions for African American students in the high school?

### **Participants**

The participants in this study are 6 classroom teachers (2 elementary, 2 middle, and 2 high school teachers). Each of the 6 teachers has teaching experience in the district and can speak to implementation of the programs in an effort to decrease suspensions and lost instructional time.

Also participating in this study are 9 students (3 elementary, 3 middle, and 3 high school students). Recruiting of student participants will occur through the database of the available students in the LEA. A search of the PowerSchool data based was used. Students were randomly

selected by looking at grade level and gender. Students selected could ascertain whether or not Positive Behavior Intervention Support and Character Academy have impacted overall behavior at their respective schools. The parents of selected students were contacted and the study was explained to them. Parents then gave signed consent for students to participate in the study.

A third group of participants for this study is 6 parents (2 elementary, 2 middle and 2 high school parents). The parents will be of students who have struggled with behavior and lost instructional time as a result of in-school or out of school suspension and parents of students who have not lost instructional time as a result of in-school or out of school suspension but have knowledge and opinions about school the effectiveness of the Positive Behavior Intervention Support and Character Education programs.

A fourth group of participants was school administrators. These participants were chosen based on school level, discipline data, and location of the school in the school district (eastern or western end). The administrators chosen for this study are: 1 elementary principal, 1 middle school principal, and one high school principal (there are seven schools in the district).

The final group of participants for this study is district leaders. This includes the Superintendent, central office support personnel, and school board members. The participants selected for this category were chosen because they can discuss the suspension issue before and after the implementation of Positive Behavior Intervention Support and Character Academy. These members of the school board voted to implement the Positive Behavior Intervention Support and Character Education Programs.

### **Data Collection**

Selecting the design or designs to be used in the evaluation is one of the most important decisions evaluators make (Fitzpatrick, Sanders, & Worthen, 2011). Causal designs are intended

to answer causal evaluative questions such as did X program cause Y outcomes? In such cases, stakeholders do not just want to know if the program outcomes were at the desired level or whether achieving program outcomes is associated with attending the program. They want to know if the program itself caused those outcomes to change (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011). Whether the change is to the desired degree will be determined by interpreting the data and comparing it with standards set during the planning stage of the evaluation. Thus, casual designs focus simply on whether the observed changes can be attributed to the program (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011).

The technique for collecting the quantitative data for this study was to gather student discipline data from the LEA's PowerSchool data base. This data was analyzed to determine if there was a decrease of suspensions at each grade level: elementary, middle, and high school as a result of the school district's use of Positive Behavior Intervention Support and Character Academy. Data from the school years 2011-12 and 2012-13 will be compared to data from 2013-14 to ascertain if there was a decrease.

The qualitative data was generated by conducting audio interviews with the following stakeholder groups: teachers, students, parents, school administrators, and district leaders. Interviews are a central part of qualitative data collection (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011). Interviews allowed clarification and probing and permitted exploration and discovery. Interviews are useful when the nature of the information to be collected is more ambiguous (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011). Good interviewers encourage people to talk and to tell their stories; they also guide discussion, through questions and probes, to learn more about the evaluation questions of interest (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011). Participants were interviewed individually and each interview lasted approximately thirty minutes. Participant interviews were conducted in the safety of each school selected to participate in this study: Gaston Elementary School, Central Elementary School,

Gaston Middle School, and Northampton County High School. Teacher interviews were held during the teachers' planning period in their classroom or the teacher conference room. Parents were interviewed after school at their child's perspective school and/or at the local community center or library. School administrators will be interviewed at their schools and district leaders to include the superintendent and board members will be interviewed at the district's central service office. Interviews were conducted using Audacity software and scripting responses. Responses were then be transposed for data collection. The interview questions used in this study can be found in Appendix C.

### **Data Analysis**

The purpose of data analysis was to reduce and synthesize information-to make sense of it-and allow inferences about populations (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011). Stakeholders should be involved in the data analysis process from the beginning (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011). The qualitative data will be evaluated by taking each evaluation question that was addressed and summarizing the results for each important stakeholder group by using charts and graphs to explain the loss of instructional time before and after the implementation of Positive Behavior Intervention Support and Character Academy. The following guidelines will be used to interpret the qualitative data (a) summarize interview data to determine if the goals of the Positive Behavior Intervention Support and Character Academy were achieved; and (b) summarize the interview data to establishing the value of the Positive Behavior Intervention Support and Character Academy programs.

The quantitative data was analyzed by looking for patterns or themes in the suspension data of students at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. The criterion for judging if Positive Behavior Intervention Support and Character Academy reduced suspension rates in the

LEA will be ascertained by using the qualitative data to compare the suspension rates before and after the implementation of the Positive Behavior Intervention Support and Character Academy programs.

## **CHAPTER 4: RESULTS OF THE STUDY**

As stated in Chapter 1, the objective of this study was to ascertain if the use of the behavior intervention programs Positive Behavior Intervention Support and Character Academy decreased student suspensions in Northampton County Schools. The data that has been analyzed for this study was generated from qualitative interview data and quantitative discipline data that were generated from the school district's discipline report that was submitted to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction for the 2011-12; 2012-13; and 2013-14 school years.

### **Study Questions**

There were five study questions which are as follows:

1. To what extent if any does Positive Behavior Intervention Support decrease suspensions for African American students in the elementary school?
2. To what extent if any does Positive Behavior Intervention Support decrease suspensions for African American students in the middle school?
3. To what extent if any does Positive Behavior Intervention Support decrease suspensions for African American students in the high school?
4. To what extent if any does Character Academy decrease suspensions for African American students in the middle school?
5. To what extent if any does Character Academy decrease suspensions for African American students in the high school?

### **Analysis of Data**

There were nine interview questions asked of each participant. The responses for each question provided the qualitative data for this study. Responses were summarized and given a

rating of positive, negative, or unsure to determine in part, the effectiveness of Positive Behavior Intervention Support and Character Academy in decreasing suspensions.

Qualitative data analyzed show that four of the five participant categories had a positive rating of 100% for perception of the program (see Table 17). They all feel the program is used to promote positive behavior traits in students by focusing on and rewarding appropriate behavior instead of punishing or using punitive consequences for negative behaviors. One student responded:

*PBIS is for good behavior. It is for students who do not have write-ups. It is a reward for students for doing right and having good behavior and it is used to keep suspensions down.”*

Character Academy is not well understood in the district. There is a 100% negative perception of this program by students and parents and 66% negative perception by teachers, administrators, and district leaders. Forty-four percent of the respondents (looking at all participant groups) were unfamiliar with the program. They had either not heard of the program or had very little knowledge of it and how it is being used in the district to decrease suspensions and lost instructional time. Of the participants who were aware of the program, the perception was not positive. One teacher responded that she was aware of the program but did not like it because she did not feel that the program helped to improve student behavior (see Table 18).

All of the respondents had a positive view or understanding of the goal or guiding philosophy of the PBIS program. It is clearly understood across the district as denoted by participant categories that the purpose of this program is to help schools manage student behaviors, decrease suspensions and increase instructional time by promoting positive student behavior (see Table 19).



Table 17

*Are Your General Perceptions of Positive Behavior Intervention Support Positive or Negative?*

	Teacher	Student	Parent	Administrator	District Leader
Positive	100%	100%	83%	100%	100%
Negative	0%	0%	17%	0%	0%
Unsure	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Table 18

*Are Your General Perceptions of Character Academy Positive or Negative?*

	Teacher	Student	Parent	Administrator	District Leader
Positive	34%	0%	0%	34%	34%
Negative	66%	100%	100%	66%	66%
Unsure	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Table 19

*What Do You Perceive as the Purpose or Guiding Philosophy of Positive Behavior Intervention*

*Support?*

	Teacher	Student	Parent	Administrator	District Leader
Positive	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Negative	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Unsure	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

There is a severe lack of understanding of the Character Academy program among students, teachers, parents, and school leaders. There is not a clear understanding about the purpose of the program and how it should work to assist schools in managing inappropriate behaviors to decrease suspensions and increase instructional time. Although some respondents were aware of the program, there still exists ambiguity as to how the program is supposed to be used (see Table 20). One school administrator stated:

*The program is supposed to be used after school as a means for students to receive guidance on how to improve behaviors. There is a school site on each end of the county. Students can be assigned to the program and complete online behavior modules to assist them in understanding how to replace negative behaviors as well as how to make positive choices. The issue that we have is that it is not being used. There is no one to supervise the programs after school so it pretty much fell through. There is also no transportation for students to get to the Character Academy sites and teachers and parents just do not know much about it. It is not being used with fidelity.*

All of the respondents agree with the purposes of the programs. One hundred percent of the respondents believe that keeping students in school by reducing suspension will benefit all students. They also agree that the programs focus on the positive instead of negative behavior of students. One respondent stated that the programs help students to develop into productive citizens and prepare them for coping in the real world (see Table 21).

All of the participants feel that the problem that the programs address is important. They all understand that out of school suspensions is an issue that needs to be addressed in the school district because students are losing a valuable amount of instructional time. The school district

Table 20

*What Do You Perceive as the Purpose or Guiding Philosophy of Character Academy?*

	Teacher	Student	Parent	Administrator	District Leader
Positive	34%	0%	0%	0%	17%
Negative	66%	100%	100%	100%	83%
Unsure	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Table 21

*Do You Agree with the Purposes of These Programs?*

	Teacher	Student	Parent	Administrator	District Leader
Positive	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Negative	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Unsure	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

has one of the highest out of school suspension rates in the state (see Table 22). One parent stated:

*The school district's test scores have been negatively affected by the inappropriate behavior and class disruptions of some students. These students prevent teachers from providing instruction to those who want to learn. I feel that PBIS can be used to combat this by providing a positive learning environment for students.*

One hundred percent of parents and school administrators believe that the PBIS program is working and implemented with fidelity, whereas only 75% of students, teachers, and district leaders do. The participants all understand that the program is supposed to work according to the guidelines established by North Carolina Department of Public Instruction; however, there is confusion on some campuses as to whether or not the program is working according to the specified guidelines. The program looks different from one campus to the next and is implemented differently in the elementary, middle, and high school. The schools have behavior matrices that outline behavioral expectations of students, but the process differs as to how schools determine when and how students receive recognition for their positive behavior. All of the schools give students some form of token such as a ticket of buck to reward positive behavior. The issue that most respondents stated is that there is ambiguity on when and how students can earn these tokens. This method differs from school to school and from class to class within a school. Thus, there is some confusion on how the program actually works and whether or not it is effective (see Table 23). A middle school administrator had this to say about PBIS

*I think that PBIS is great for elementary and middle school. I think that having tickets and rewards work better at a younger age. At the high school, PBIS rewards aren't as tangible and meaningful.*

Table 22

*Do You Think the Problems of the Program Address are Severe or Important?*

	Teacher	Student	Parent	Administrator	District Leader
Positive	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Negative	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Unsure	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%



Table 23

*How Do You Think PBIS Works?*

	Teacher	Student	Parent	Administrator	District Leader
Positive	75%	75%	100%	100%	17%
Negative	25%	25%	0%	0%	83%
Unsure	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

There is minimum understanding of Character Academy. The only respondent group that had heard of and had a positive view of the program was the teacher group; however, only 17% of those participants responded positively about the program. When looking at all participants collectively from all categories, 50% of them did not know enough about the program to speak to how the program works. One teacher responded that she does not know enough about the program to speak about how it works and one student responded that she had not heard of the program; it had not been explained to them. The administrator group participants are aware of the program, but do not feel that the program is beneficial to the school district because it is not being used (see Table 24). District leaders feel that there needs to be more fidelity in implementation of the program. A district leader shared views of the program in the district

*We have not implemented viable systems on any campus. There is service level PBIS working in pockets, but overall I have not seen exemplary programs that have been implemented with fidelity.*

The participants feel that the program has to be used with consistency and fidelity in all schools. It is not effective if there is not one-hundred percent buy-in from all stakeholders and if all stakeholders do not share in creating and maintaining behavioral expectations for students. The issue with the program occurs when some teachers follow the program expectations and others do not. In addition, the state and/or school district should provide schools with funds to purchase incentives for students. Providing students with incentives to reward positive behavior is one of the major components of the program. All schools in the district have difficulty in providing incentives for students on a consistent basis because they do not have the funds to do so. The incentives are extremely important for the success of this program. If schools are not rewarding students for positive behavior, students may feel that the initiative is not important. It

Table 24

*How Do You Think Character Academy Works?*

	Teacher	Student	Parent	Administrator	District Leader
Positive	17%	0%	0%	0%	75%
Negative	83%	100%	100%	100%	25%
Unsure	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

may also promote the thought that students who behave are not given attention and praise for their efforts.

Participants in each group believe that PBIS has been effective in decreasing suspensions in the school district; however, there are some participants who are not sure. School administrators have the highest positive response to this question followed by parents and students. There are also participants in each group that are unsure of the effect PBIS has had on decreasing suspensions. Students and teachers have a lower positive response rate as to whether or not PBIS has been effective in decreasing suspension. One teacher responded:

*I am not sure if suspensions have been decreased, but as a program that we have implemented, I can see a difference in student behavior in the hallway during transitions and in my classroom.*

Another teacher responded that she feels that PBIS has been effective in decreasing suspensions because instructional time has been increased because when she uses the behavior matrix and plan, she does not have to continuously stop teaching to deal with inappropriate student behaviors. One school administrator stated that suspensions have been decreased as a result of using PBIS (see Table 25).

There is a 0% positive response in all categories to the question of whether or not Character Academy has decreased suspension and lost instructional time. Respondents who do not have a negative perception of the program are unsure about the program. This may be a result of the lack of knowledge and understanding that the respondents have about this program (see Table 26).

There is not a clear distinction of which program works best in decreasing suspensions and lost instructional time. The school administrators are 100% unsure if one program is better than

Table 25

*Do You Believe that PBIS has been Effective in Reducing Suspensions and Increasing*

*Instructional Time?*

	Teacher	Student	Parent	Administrator	District Leader
Positive	33%	34%	50%	66%	0%
Negative	33%	66%	33%	34%	0%
Unsure	33%	0%	17%	0%	100%

Table 26

*Do You Believe that Character Academy has been Effective in Reducing Suspensions and*

*Increasing Instructional Time?*

	Teacher	Student	Parent	Administrator	District Leader
Positive	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Negative	34%	100%	0%	100%	0%
Unsure	66%	0%	100%	0%	100%

the other. Seventeen percent of teachers had a positive response; 33% have a negative response, and 50% of them were unsure if one program is better than the other. Students were split, 50% felt that one program was better than the other (PBIS) and 50% were unsure. In the parent category, 17% have negative response; 17% have a positive response; and 66% are unsure (see Table 27). One district leader responded

*I am unsure if either program has decreased suspensions and lost instructional time in the school district. PBIS is the better program for reducing suspension because it requires students to interact with adults and peers and Character Academy does not require this. PBIS has a component that allows peers to motivate each other.*

The quantitative data was analyzed to determine if there is a decrease of suspensions as a result of the school district's use of Positive Behavior Intervention Support and Character Academy. Data from the school years 2011-12 and 2012-13 will be compared to data from 2013-14 to ascertain if there was a decrease in suspensions. Individual school data from each school was looked at to ascertain if the intervention programs has decreased suspensions for African American students at the elementary, middle and high school. Suspensions by gender and race for the school district for the school years was analyzed 2011-12; 2012-13; and 2013-14, respectively (see Tables 28, 29, and 30).

### **Study Question 1**

*To what extent if any does Positive Behavior Intervention Support decrease suspensions for African American Students in the elementary schools?*

Data collected from the participant interview questions and the district discipline data were used to determine if PBIS decreased suspension and lost instructional time of African American students in the elementary schools. The interview data revealed that all participants on

Table 27

*Do you Feel that One Program is Better than the Other in Decreasing Suspension and Increasing Instructional Time?*

	Teacher	Student	Parent	Administrator	District Leader
Positive	17%	50%	17%	0%	17%
Negative	33%	50%	17%	0%	83%
Unsure	50%	0%	66%	100%	100%



Table 28

*2011-2012 Suspensions and Expulsions by LEA, Gender, and Race*

		Number of Short-Term Suspensions 2011-12	Number of Long-Term Suspensions 2011-12	Number of Expulsions 2011-12
	<b>Total</b>	<b>983</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>
Female	American Indian	<5	<5	0
<b>Female</b>	<b>Black</b>	<b>282</b>	<b>&lt;5</b>	<b>0</b>
Female	White	20	<5	0
Female	Multiracial	<5	<5	0
Male	Asian	5	<5	0
Male	Hispanic	10	<5	0
<b>Male</b>	<b>Black</b>	<b>610</b>	<b>&lt;5</b>	<b>0</b>
Male	White	47	<5	0
Male	Multiracial	<5	<5	0

*Note.* Annual Study of Suspensions and Expulsions, 2011-2012. Though the data was reported by subgroup, the focus of this study was African American male and female students. The Exceptional Children population is not disaggregated in this data set as generated from North Carolina Department of Instruction.

Table 29

*2012-2013 Suspensions and Expulsions by LEA, Gender, and Race*

		Number of Short- Term Suspensions 2012-13	Number of Long- Term Suspensions 2013-14	Number of Expulsions 2014-15
	Total	950	1	0
<b>Female</b>	<b>Black</b>	<b>255</b>	<b>&lt;5</b>	<b>0</b>
Female	White	19	<5	0
Male	Hispanic	14	<5	0
<b>Male</b>	<b>Black</b>	<b>617</b>	<b>&lt;5</b>	<b>0</b>
Male	White	40	<5	0
Male	Multiracial	5	<5	0

*Note.* Annual Study of Suspensions and Expulsions, 2012-2013. Though the data was reported by subgroup, the focus of this study was African American male and female students. The Exceptional Children population is not disaggregated in this data set as generated from North Carolina Department of Instruction

Table 30

*2013-2014 Suspensions and Expulsions by LEA, Gender, and Race*

		Number of Short-Term Suspensions 2013-14	Number of Long-Term Suspensions 2013-14	Number of Expulsions 2013-14
	<b>Total</b>	<b>533</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
Female	Hispanic	<10	0	0
<b>Female</b>	<b>Black</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
Female	White	<10	0	0
Female	Multiracial	<10	0	0
Male	Hispanic	<10	0	0
<b>Male</b>	<b>Black</b>	<b>323</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
Male	White	15	0	0
Male	Multiracial	<10	0	0
Missing	Other/Missing	55	0	0

*Note.* Annual Study of Suspensions and Expulsions, 2012-2013. Though the data was reported by subgroup, the focus of this study was African American male and female students. The Exceptional Children population is not disaggregated in this data set as generated from North Carolina Department of Instruction.

the elementary level: students, parents, teachers, and school administrators hold a positive perception of the program at a 100% rating. Parent participants have an 83% positive perception of the PBIS programs used in their children's schools (see Table 17). One hundred percent of participants for each group agree with the guiding philosophy of PBIS (see Table 19). They all have a clear understanding that the purpose of this program is to help schools manage student behaviors by decreasing suspensions and lost instructional time by promoting positive behavior in students. Each of the elementary student participants had a positive perception of how the program worked at his/her school. One student stated that the program is good because if you follow expectations, you get rewarded. He likes that he is rewarded for displaying good behavior in school with fun things such as eating pizza and ice cream. An elementary teacher responded:

*PBIS is good for behavior. I like the incentives that students receive for positive behavior. This program is to help kids not do bad things, but to be positive. This is important because some students need incentives to behave in school. The program has helped with transitions in our school.*

The PBIS program is implemented differently at each elementary school. However, elementary teacher, student, and administrator participants all agree that PBIS could work better at each school if it were implemented or used consistently and with more fidelity. Although each school has a PBIS behavior matrix and use it to guide and reward student behaviors; there is still the question of how teachers are implementing the program in each class. Teachers and administrators feel that there needs to be more buy-in from the staff as well as a method to ensure that all staff members are holding students to the behaviors outlined in the behavior matrix. There is the belief that PBIS is used with fidelity in some classes and in others it is not.

There is also the concern that there needs to be more consistency in the rewards students receive for positive behavior as well as when and how the rewards are given.

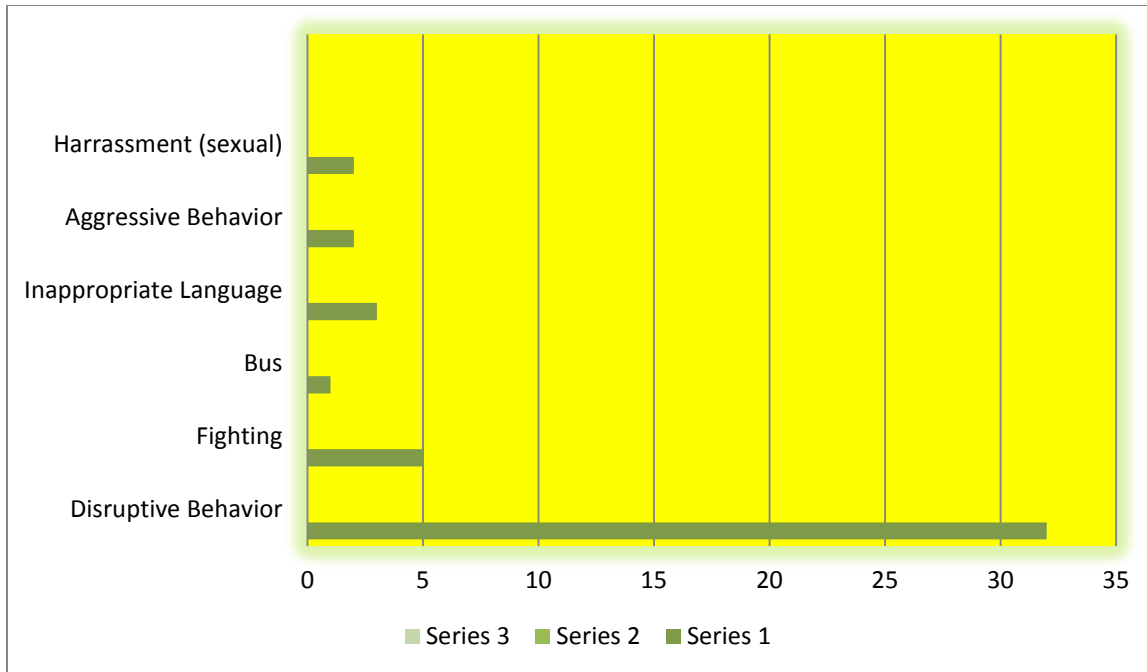
Each elementary school should have a behavior and reward matrix to guide their use of PBIS (see Table 12 for Willis Hare Elementary School; there were no matrices available for Central and Gaston Elementary Schools). The process used to identify and reward students at each elementary school differs. At Gaston Elementary School, when students display positive behavior, they receive tickets that they can return to purchase tangible items. There is also a monthly school-wide PBIS activity in which students can participate. According to a parent interview participant from this school, her child also brings home a behavior log that shows positive behavior her child has exhibited. Students are given the opportunity to participate in school-wide PBIS activities such as dances in which they can play games and have refreshments. At Willis Hare Elementary School, students have behavior folders that allow them to keep up with and be accountable for their behavior. According to a student interview participant, there is a behavior sheet that contains bubbles. If the bubbles are not marked off by the teacher, then the student is recognized for being good. If the bubbles are marked off, then the student is noted for not having positive behavior. At Central Elementary School students are given the opportunity to participate in the monthly school-wide PBIS activity.

At the elementary level, participants were unsure of whether or not the PBIS has been effective in decreasing suspension and lost instructional time. When asked the question, “Do you feel that PBIS has been effective in reducing suspensions and increasing instructional time,” 33% of teachers had a positive perception; 33% had a negative perception; and 33% were unsure (see Table 25). The elementary teacher participants fell into the unsure category. They believe that the program has helped them to have better management in their classes and can see how it has

helped with student transitions in the school, but are not aware of the effect the program has had on suspensions. The administrator category had a 66% positive perception and 34% negative perception as to whether PBIS has been effective in decreasing suspension and lost instructional time in the school district. The elementary school administrator was part of the 34% negative perception. Fifty percent of parents had a positive perception; 33% had a negative perception; and 17% were unsure if PBIS has been effective in reducing suspensions and lost instructional time in the school district. The 50% of positive perception was from elementary school parents.

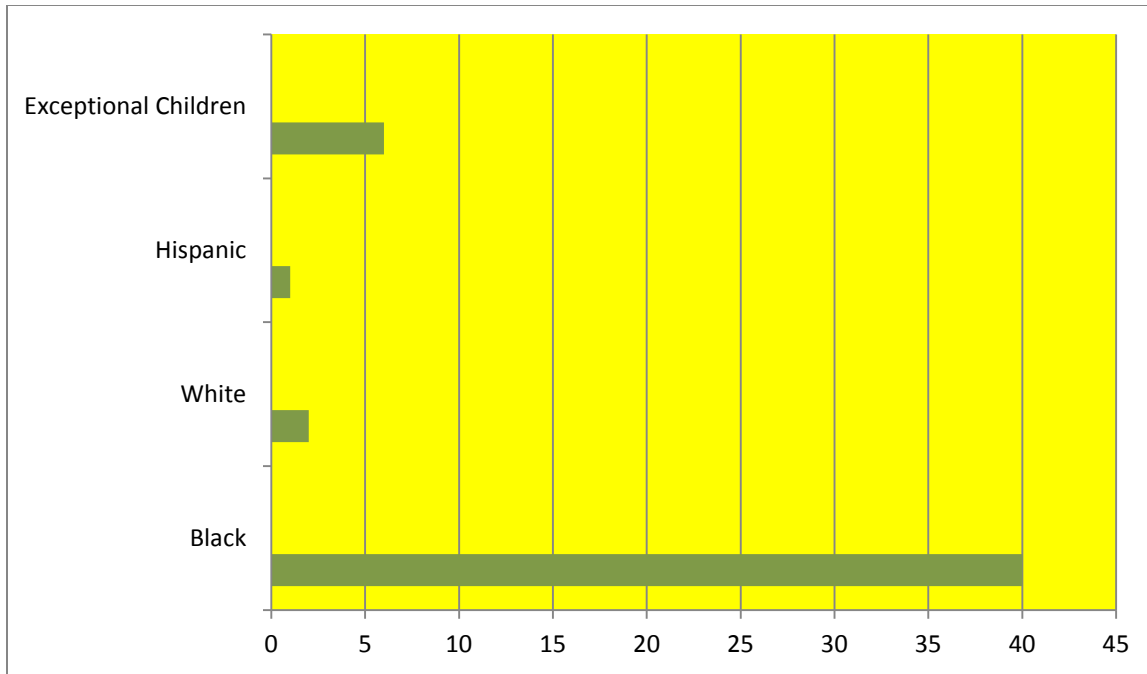
Discipline data show that for the 2013-14 school year, Willis Hare Elementary School had a total of 43 suspensions (see Figure 5). Of the 43 suspensions, 40 were African American; 2 were White; and 1 was Hispanic. In addition, 6 of the 43 suspensions belonged to students in the Exceptional Children's program and all of those students were African American (see Figure 6). Gaston Elementary School had a total of 15 suspensions (see Figure 7). Of the 15 suspensions, 13 were African American and two were Caucasian. Two of the 15 suspensions were given to students identified as Exceptional Children and these students were Caucasian (see Figure 8). Central Elementary school had a total of 63 suspensions (see Figure 9). Of the 63 suspensions, 60 belonged to African American students and 3 belonged to Caucasian students. Twenty-one of the suspensions were given to exceptional students (see Figure 10).

Discipline data from the 2011-12 Suspension and Expulsion Report (Report to Joint Legislative Committee, 2013), show that for that school year, there were 282 African American female suspensions and 610 African American male suspensions. In 2012-13, there were 255 African American female suspensions and 617 African American male suspensions. This was a decrease of 27 (10%) for African American females and an increase of 7 (1.1%) for males. In



*Figure 5. 2013-2014 suspensions Willis Hare Elementary School.*

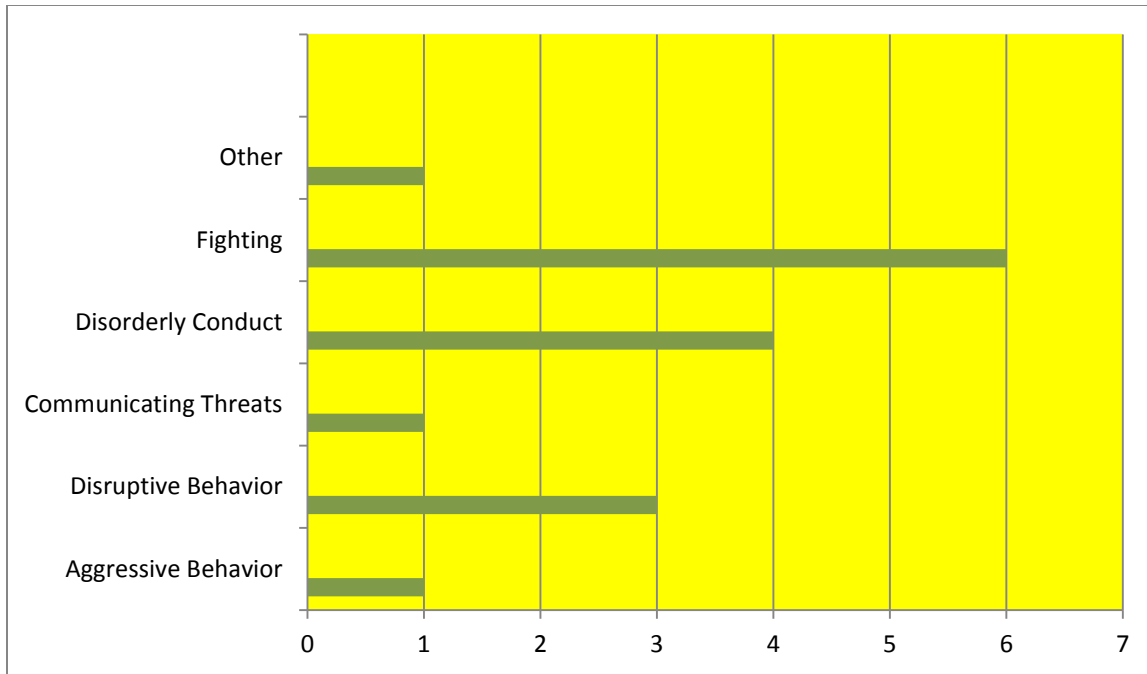
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*Figure 6. 2013-2014 suspensions (race and exceptionality) Willis Hare Elementary School.*

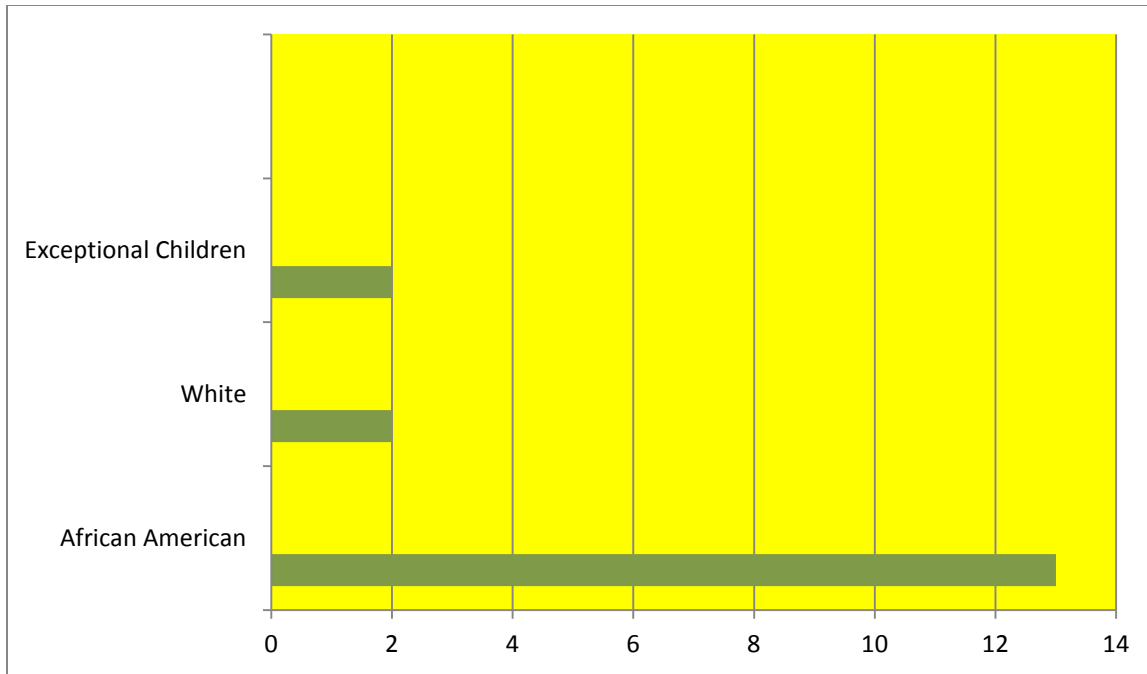
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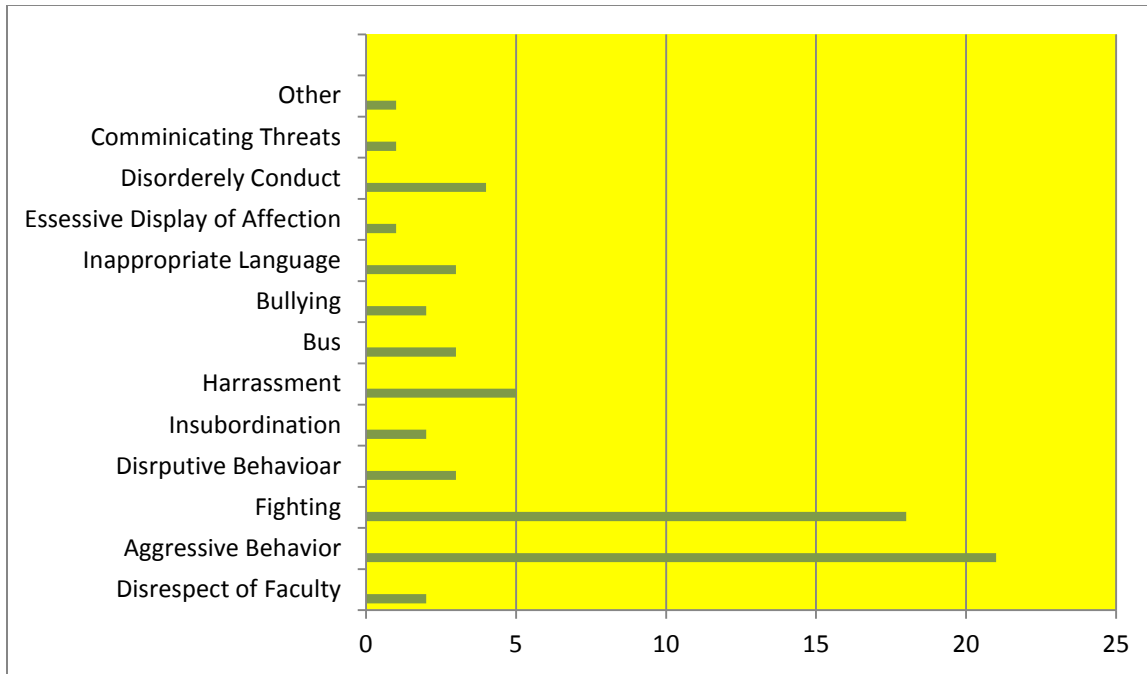
*Figure 7.* 2013-2014 suspensions Gaston Elementary School.

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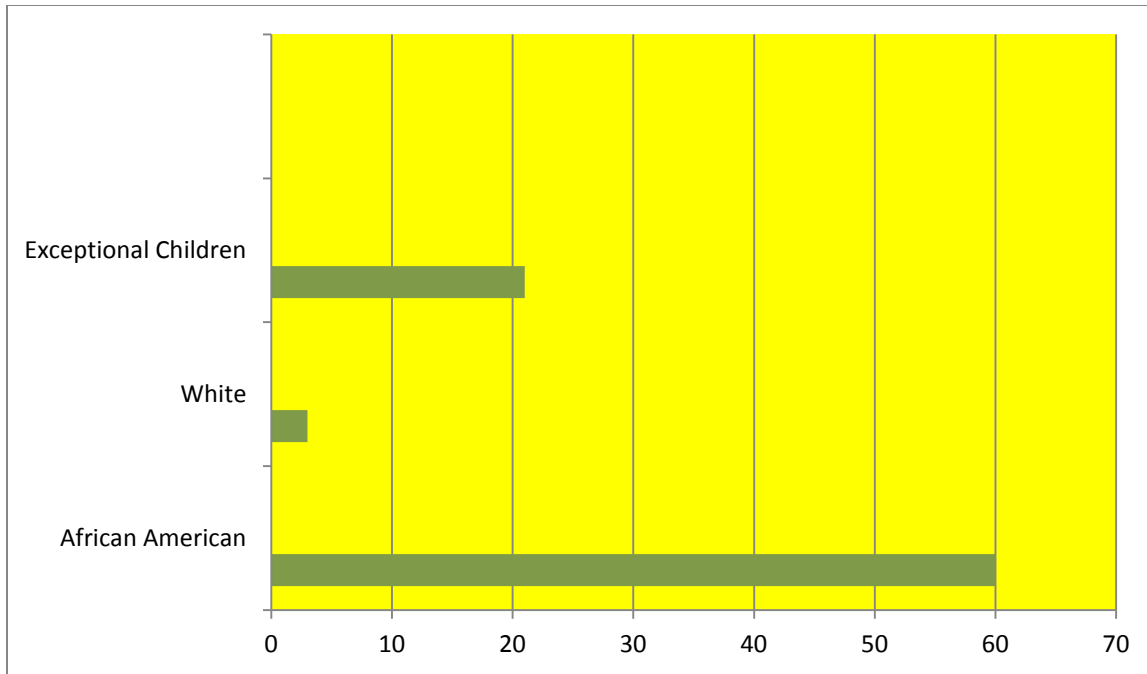
*Figure 8. 2013-2014 suspensions (race and exceptionalty) Gaston Elementary School.*

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*Figure 9.* 2013-2014 suspensions Central Elementary School.

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*Figure 10.* 2013-2014 suspensions (race and exceptionality) Central Elementary School.

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2013-14, African American female suspensions decreased from 255 the previous school year to 129 and from 617 to 323 for African American boys. This was a decrease of 126 (74%) for female and 294 (62%) for males. African American female suspensions decreased from 282 for African American females in 2011-12 to 129 in 2013-2014. This is a decrease of 153 (74%). African American male student suspensions decreased from 610 in 2011-12 to 323 in 2013-14. This is a decrease of 287 suspensions (61%). Hence, stakeholders in the elementary school have a positive perception of the Positive Behavior Intervention Support program.

Therefore, it can be concluded that Positive Behavior Intervention Support has been effective in decreasing African American suspensions in the elementary schools.

### **Study Question 2**

*To what extent if any does Positive Behavior Intervention Support decrease suspensions for African American Students in the middle schools?*

Data collected from the participant interview questions and the district discipline data were used to determine if PBIS decreased suspension and lost instructional time of African American students in the middle schools. The interview data revealed that all participants on the middle level: students, parents, teachers, and school administrators hold a positive perception of the program at a 100% rating. Parent participants have an 83% positive perception of the PBIS programs used in their children's schools. One hundred percent of participants for each group agree with the guiding philosophy of PBIS. They all have a clear understanding that the purpose of this program is to help schools manage student behaviors by decreasing suspensions and lost instructional time by promoting positive behavior in students. Each of the middle student participants had a positive perception of how the program worked at his/her school.

One middle school student stated

*When we act good, we get a ticket then we can exchange them to get Hurricane bucks. It is a good opportunity for kids to act good. I think that this program is good because some kids can get out of hand and PBIS helps those who act bad to act good. They get a reward. This is a good program because it helps kids who get suspended stay in school and if they are in school then they won't miss their academics.*

One hundred percent of participants for each group agree with the guiding philosophy of PBIS. They all have a clear understanding that the purpose of this program is to help schools manage student behaviors by decreasing suspensions and lost instructional time by promoting positive behavior in students. Each of the middle school student, teacher, and administrator participants had a positive perception of how the program works at his/her school. They also agree with the guiding philosophy of the program. They believe that the goal of the program is to decrease suspensions by managing student behavior by rewarding students for following positive behavior expectations. A middle school student stated

*This school was pretty bad before, now it is better with PBIS. It is important that kids are not suspended because they miss important stuff like tests when they are suspended.*

*They need to be here. With PBIS if you are seen doing good, you get a ticket and you can turn in the ticket to get stuff like toys, extra play time, or a dance.*

Middle school administrators also agree with the philosophy of PBIS. A middle school administrator had this to say about the goal of the PBIS program

*The goal of the program is to foster character traits that are beneficial to students. This is a needed program because of suspensions. PBIS is good because some kids can't resolve issues without fighting, but this program is good because it teaches students to be positive and the rewards system works.*

The PBIS program is implemented differently at each middle school. Middle school stakeholders agree with the elementary stakeholders concerning how PBIS is working in schools. They agree that PBIS could work better at each school if it were implemented and used consistently and with more fidelity. Stakeholders at one middle school felt that the program is good and can make a tremendous difference but it should be introduced to students at the beginning of the school year. This year the program was introduced to students during the second semester of the school year. The teacher stated:

*PBIS can be effective at this school if it is used with fidelity. It needs to be introduced to students at the beginning of the school year so that they can know what the behavior expectations are. It should not be introduced in the middle of the school year. Also students will not buy into the program if adults do not do what they say they are going to do. The incentives also need to be kept as something the kids can strive for.*

At the middle school level, there is also the concern that there needs to be more consistency in the rewards students receive for positive behavior as well as when and how the rewards are given. Each middle school has a behavior matrix to guide their use of PBIS; however, neither school had a reward's matrix. The process used to identify and reward students at each middle school differs. At Gaston Middle School, when students display positive behavior, they receive tickets that they can use to purchase Hurricane bucks. Students can then use the bucks to purchase items at the school-wide PBIS activity. The school-wide PBIS activity is usually a dance that students can attend where they can also play games and have refreshments. A parent from this school stated:

*I think that PBIS is working good. It is used to help students with their behaviors because some students have problems every day. PBIS helps teachers to build relationships with*

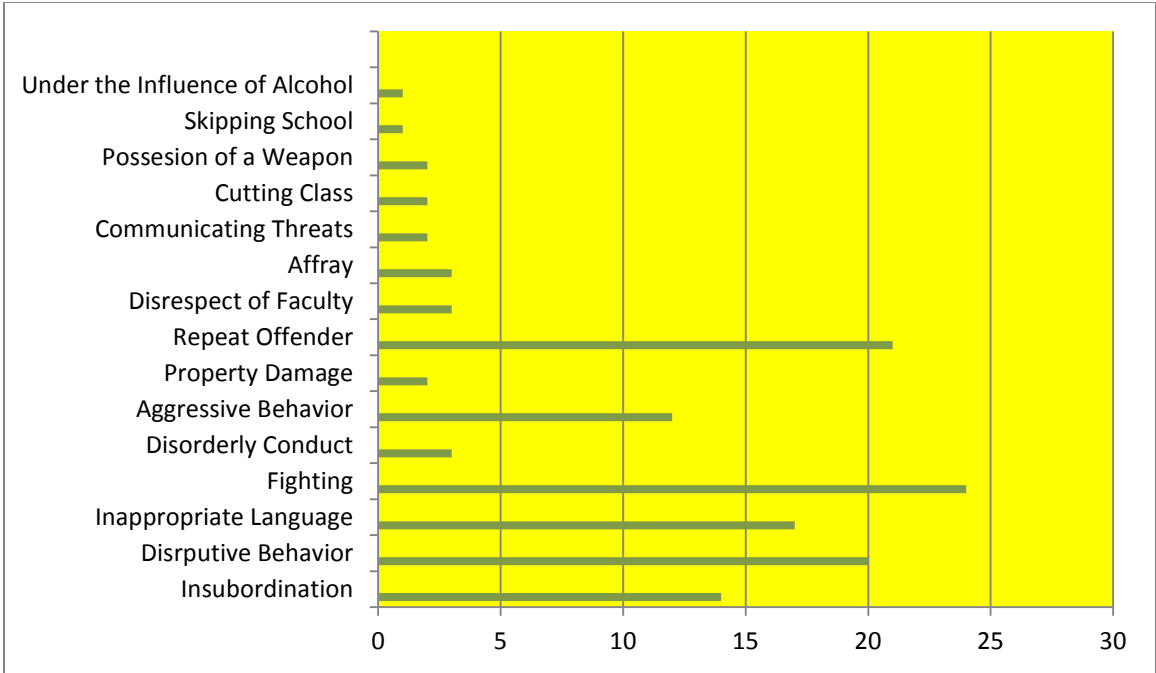
*students and this helps them with their behavior. The students like the incentives that they get.*

At Conway Middle School, students can earn Devil Dollars for displaying positive behavior. Those who meet their behavior goals are given the opportunity to participate in monthly school-wide PBIS activity. They can use the Devil Dollars to buy refreshments or incentives at the activity.

At the middle school level, participants are unsure of whether or not PBIS has been effective in decreasing suspension and lost instructional time. When asked the question, “Do you feel that PBIS has been effective in reducing suspensions and increasing instructional time,” 33% of teachers had a positive perception; 33% had a negative perception; and 33% were unsure. At the middle school level, one teacher’s response was in the unsure category and one teacher’s response was in the positive category. The administrator category had a 66% positive perception and 34% negative perception as to whether PBIS has been effective in decreasing suspension and lost instructional time in the school district. The middle school administrator was part of the 66% positive perception. Fifty percent of parents had a positive perception; 33% had a negative perception; and 17% were unsure if PBIS has been effective in reducing suspensions and lost instructional time in the school district.

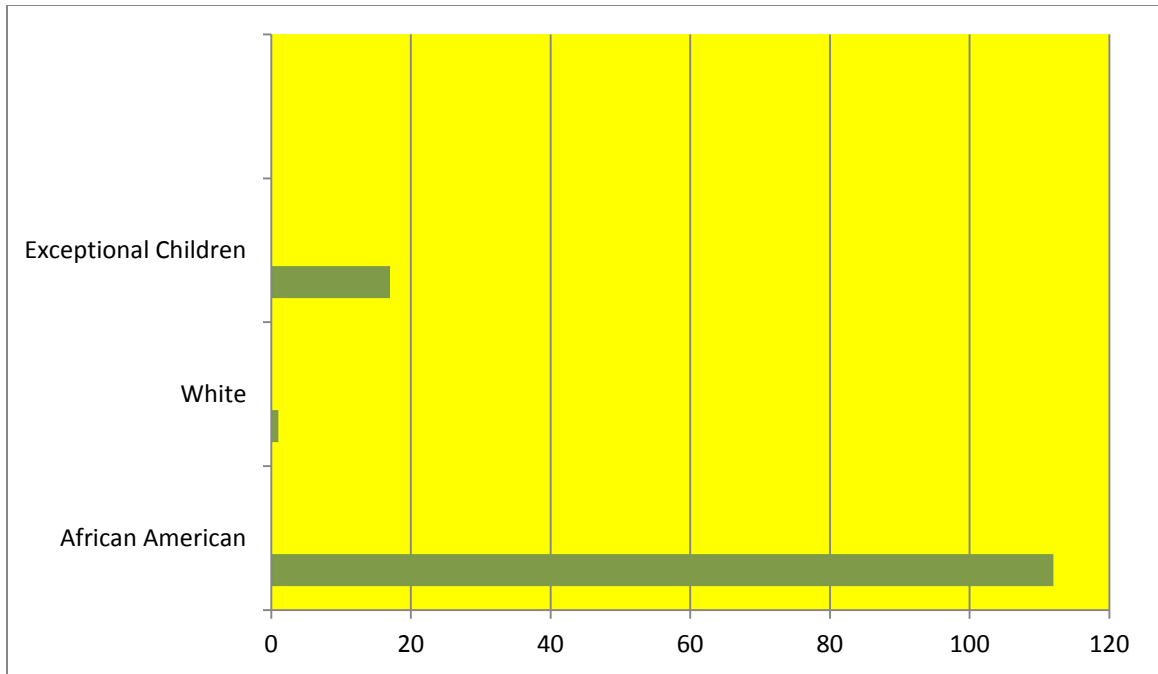
Discipline data show that for the 2013-14 school year, Gaston Middle School had a total of 130 suspensions (see Figure 11). Of the 130 suspensions, 129 were African American and 1 was Caucasian. In addition, 17 of the 130 suspensions belonged to students in the Exceptional Children’s program and all of those students were African American (see Figure 12). Conway Middle School had a total of 52 suspensions (see Figure 13). Of the 52 suspensions, 50 were African American and two were Hispanic. Of the 52 suspensions, five were given to students





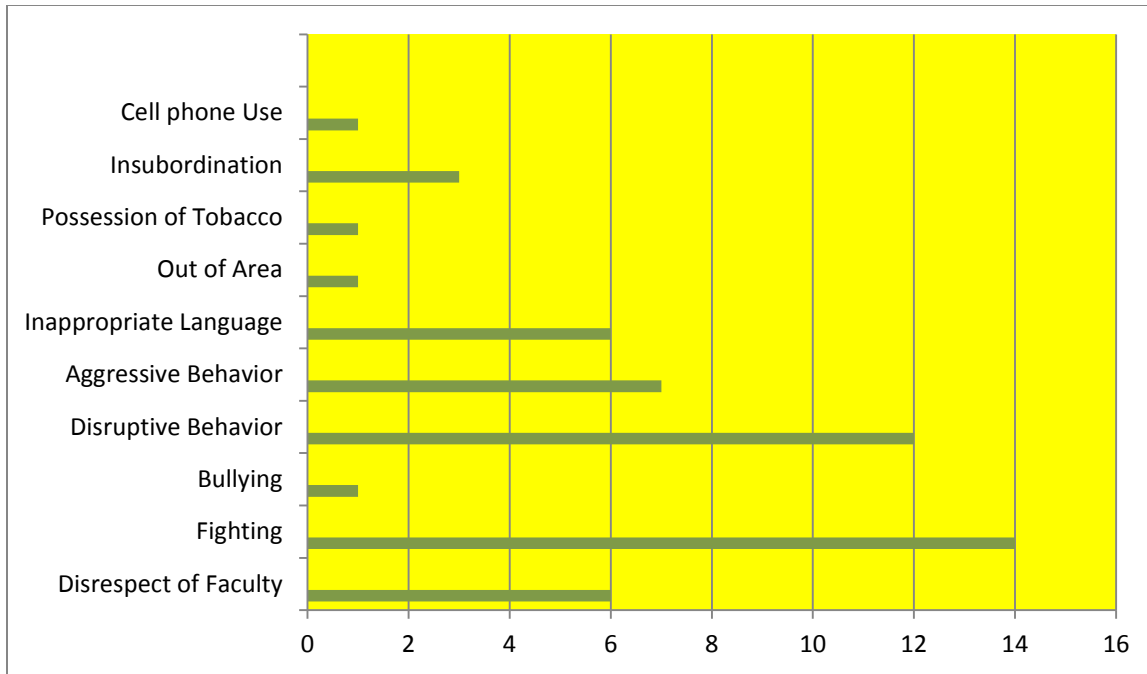
*Figure 11. 2013-2014 suspensions Gaston Middle School.*

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*Figure 12.* 2013-2014 suspensions (race and exceptionality) Gaston Middle School.

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*Figure 13.* 2013-2014 suspensions Conway Middle School.

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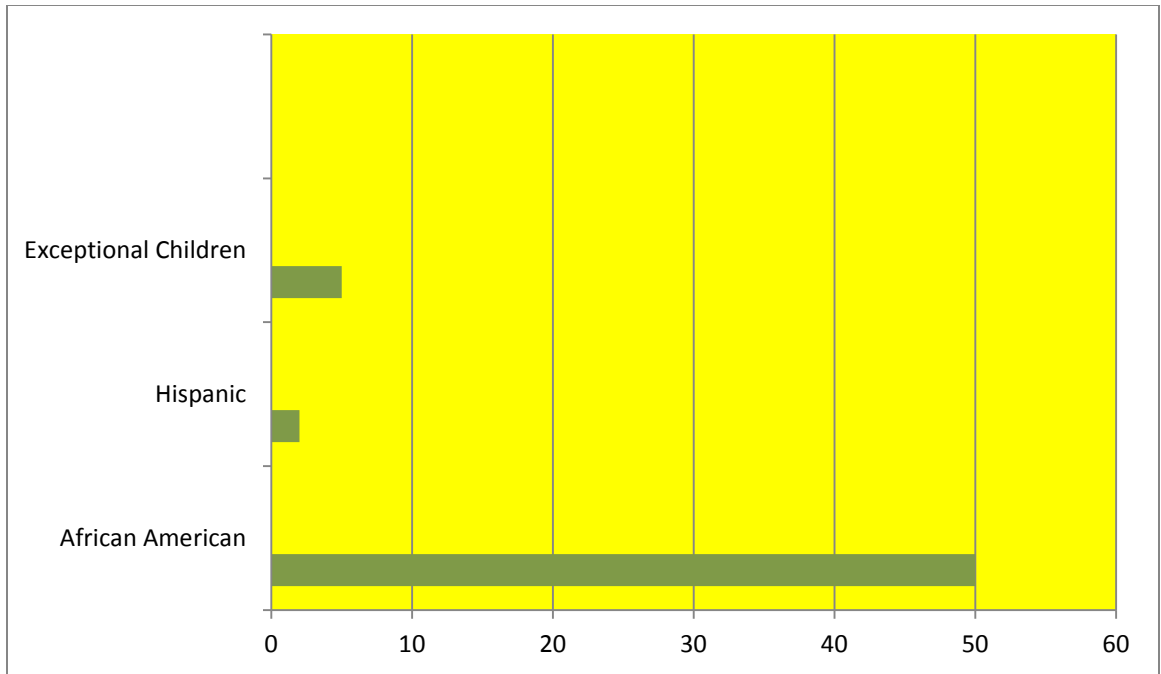
identified as Exceptional Children and all five of these students were African American (see Figure 14).

Discipline data from the 2011-12 Suspension and Expulsion Report (Report to Joint Legislative Committee, 2013), show that for that school year, there were 282 African American female suspensions and 610 African American male suspensions. In 2012-13, there were 255 African American female suspensions and 617 African American male suspensions. This was a decrease of 27 (10%) for African American females and an increase of 7 (1.1%). In 2013-14, African American female suspensions decreased from 255 the previous school year to 129 and from 617 to 323 for African American boys. This was a decreases of 126 (65%) for females and 294 (62%) for males. African American female suspensions decreased from 282 in 2011-12 to 129 in 2013-2014. This is a decrease of 153 (74%). African American male student suspensions decreased from 610 in 2011-12 to 323 in 2013-14. This is a decrease of 287 suspensions (61%). Therefore, it can be concluded that Positive Behavior Intervention Support has been effective in decreasing African American suspensions in the middle schools.

### **Study Question 3**

*To what extent if any does Positive Behavior Intervention Support decrease suspensions for African American Students in the high school?*

Data collected from the participant interview questions and the district discipline data were used to determine if PBIS decreased suspension and lost instructional time of African American students in the high school. The interview data revealed that all participants on the high school level: students, parents, teachers, and school administrators hold a positive perception of the program at a 100% rating. Parent participants have an 83% positive perception of the PBIS programs used in their children's schools. One hundred percent of participants for



*Figure 14.* 2013-2014 suspensions (race and exceptionality) Conway Middle School.

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each group agree with the guiding philosophy of PBIS. They all have a clear understanding that the purpose of this program is to help schools manage student behaviors by decreasing suspensions and lost instructional time by promoting positive behavior in students. Each of the high school student and teacher participants had a positive perception of how the program worked at his/her school.

One high school teacher stated

*I like that PBIS is a growth model that you implement as you go. You nail down one area before you move to the next. You nail down the school-wide expectations and then move to tiered needs such as individual support and guided training.*

One hundred percent of participants for each group agree with the guiding philosophy of PBIS. They all have a clear understanding that the purpose of this program is to help schools manage student behaviors by decreasing suspensions and lost instructional time by promoting positive behavior in students. The high school student, teacher, and administrator participants had a positive perception of how the program worked at the high school. They also agree with the guiding philosophy of the program. They believe the goal of the program is to decrease suspensions by managing student behavior by rewarding students for following positive behavior expectations. A high school parent stated

*PBIS is used to promote positive behavior and good character. There are celebrations for those who meet behavioral goals and have no disciplinary referrals.*

High school students also have a positive perception of PBIS and agree with the goals of the program.

*PBIS is for good behavior; for students who do not have disciplinary write-ups. When we follow the rules, they give us good incentives such as sock-hops or assemblies. PBIS*

*rewards kids for doing the right thing. It promotes positive behavior and keeps suspensions down.*

High school administrators also agree with the philosophy of PBIS. A high school administrator had this to say about the goal of the PBIS program

*PBIS is a good program that is used to educate kids on the right thing to do. It teaches responsibility and helps kids to learn how to redirect negative behaviors. It is also used to bring order to schools.*

The high school stakeholders believe that PBIS is working well, but it can be improved. They believe that teachers and school leaders should be provided with more training on how to implement PBIS school wide. Just as with the elementary and middle schools, there is also concern at the high school level about the consistency and fidelity in which the program is used.

A high school parent stated

*PBIS is excellent when used correctly and not used as an “I got you.” When used correctly for kids, it can make a difference. I like the program but I wonder if it is being used correctly and to its’ fullest capacity. PBIS should be about more than giving students a dance and having activities. In order for it to work, it needs to be used consistently and maximized throughout the school. Everybody has to be on board.*

A school district leader agrees with the use of PBIS at the high school

*At the high school level they do not give enough ideas on what works. Rewards at the high school are different from those that are used in the elementary and middle schools. There need to be high school exemplary schools that can be visited.*

The high school has both a behavior and reward matrix. The high school has a rewards matrix that affords all students the opportunity to display positive behavior and to be rewarded. Students

can be rewarded daily with Jag Dollars. These dollars are given to students when they are observed going above and beyond the school-wide expectations. Dollars can be used in weekly drawings, to purchase items from concession, or to pay entrance into school functions such as sporting events. Also as a part of the reward's matrix, students can have Free-Flow Friday. This is a weekly incentive that students can earn. Classroom teachers document and track student behavior. Students who have positive Jag behavior will be given 15 minutes in each class on Friday to listen to music while completing independent classwork. The high school's reward's matrix also gives students an opportunity to use an electronic device to listen music or play games. This is a daily incentive that students can earn but they can only use these devices in the Green Zone (cafeteria) and they have to have had good behavior during the day to participate in the Green Zone. Students who do not have disciplinary referrals can also participate in the monthly PBIS celebration which occurs the 4<sup>th</sup> Friday of each month. The celebrations will highlight students who have displayed positive behavior. The activity could be pep rally, sporting event, or dance.

There is uncertainty of whether or not PBIS has been effective in decreasing suspension and lost instructional time. When asked the question, "Do you feel that PBIS has been effective in reducing suspensions and lost instructional time," 33% of teachers had a positive perception; 33% had a negative perception; and 33% were unsure. Two high school teachers were in the category of positive perception and one was in the category of negative perception. The administrator category had a 66% positive perception and 34% negative perception as to whether PBIS has been effective in decreasing suspension and lost instructional time in the school district. The high school administrator was part of the 66% positive perception. Fifty percent of parents had a positive perception; 33% had a negative perception; and 17% were unsure if PBIS

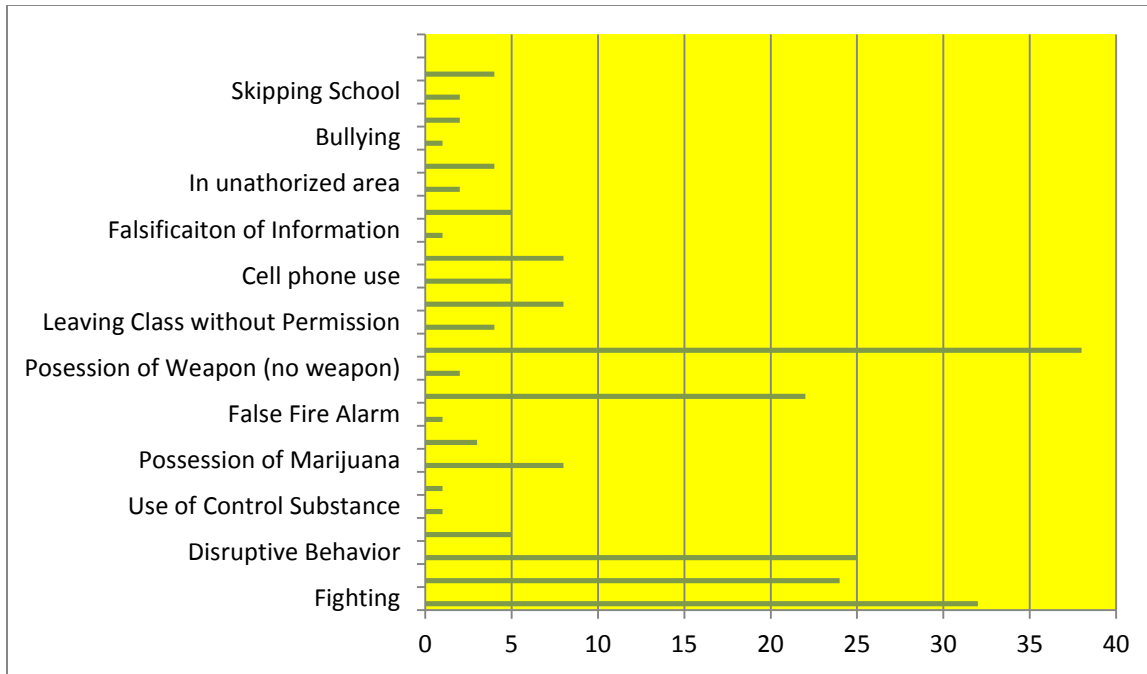


has been effective in reducing suspensions and lost instructional time in the school district. A high school parent stated:

*PBIS is not effective in decreasing suspensions. There are so many behavior issues and some of the behaviors are allowed. Some teachers are too friendly with students. I think that they need to understand how to draw the line between teacher and student.*

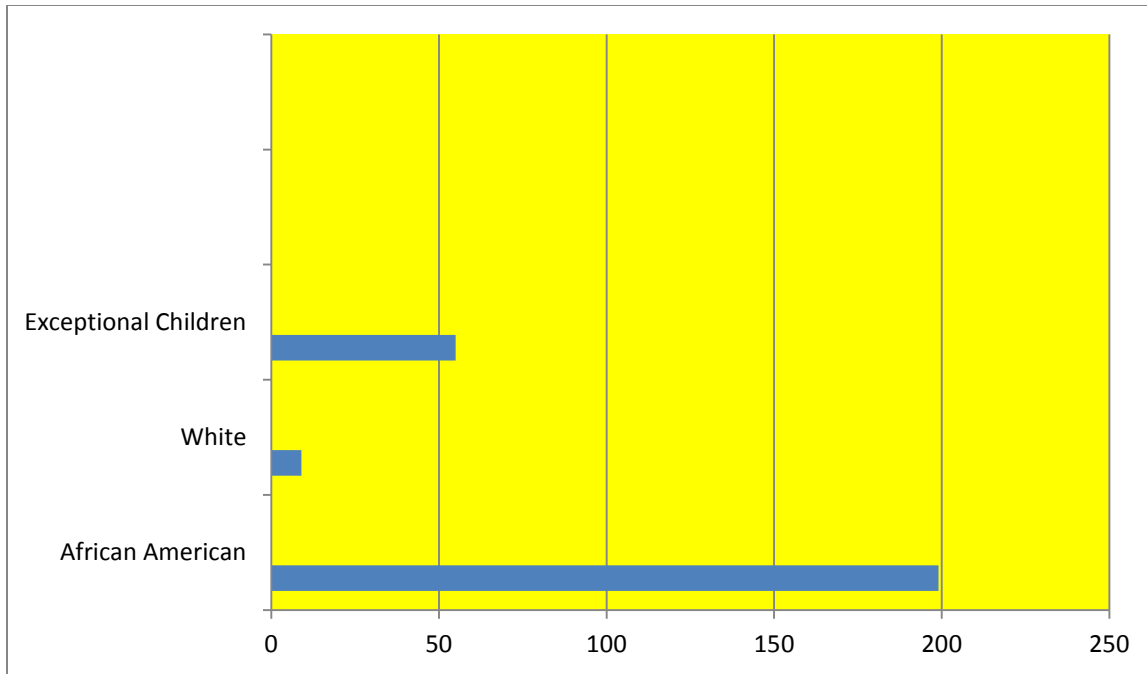
Discipline data show that for the 2013-14 school year, Northampton County High School had a total of 208 suspensions (see Figure 15). Of the 208 suspensions, 199 were African American and 9 was Caucasian. In addition, 55 of the 208 suspensions belonged to students in the Exceptional Children's program; 52 of those suspensions belonged to African American students (see Figure 16).

Discipline data from the 2011-12 Suspension and Expulsion Report (Report to Joint Legislative Committee, 2013), show that for that school year, there were 282 African American female suspensions and 610 African American male suspensions. In 2012-13, there were 255 African American female suspensions and 617 African American male suspensions. This was a decrease of 27 (10%) for African American females and an increase of 7 (1.1%) for males. In 2013-14, African American female suspensions decreased from 255 the previous school year to 129 and from 617 to 323 for African American boys. This was a decrease of 126 (65%) for female and 294 (62%) for males. African American female suspensions decreased from in 2011-12 to 129 in 2013-2014. This is a decrease of 153 (74%). African American male student suspensions decreased from 610 in 2011-12 to 323 in 2013-14. This is a decrease of 287 suspensions (61%) (see Figures 17 and 18).



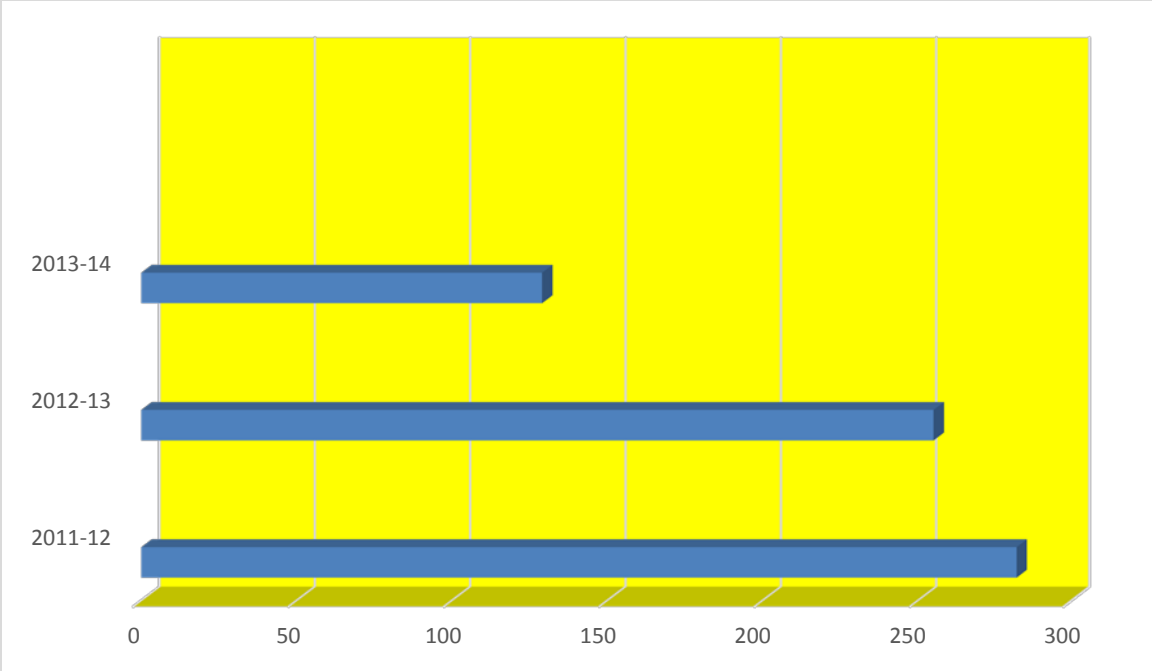
*Figure 15.* 2013-2014 suspensions Northampton County High School.

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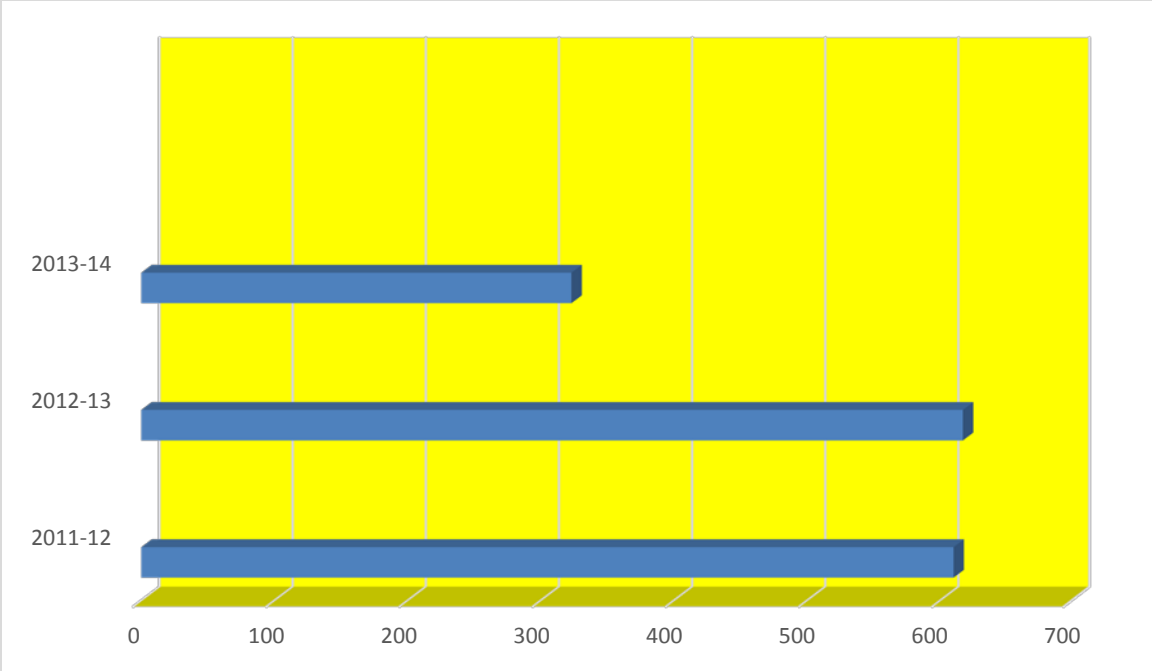
*Figure 16.* 2013-2014 suspensions (race and exceptionality) Northampton County High School.

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*Figure 17. African American female suspensions 2011-2014.*

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*Figure 18.* African American male suspensions 2011-2014.

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Therefore, based on stakeholder perception and quantitative data gathered, it can be concluded that Positive Behavior Intervention Support has been effective in decreasing African American suspensions in the high school.

#### **Study Question 4**

*To what extent if any does Character Academy decrease suspensions for African American Students in the middle school?*

Data collected from the participant interview questions and the district discipline data were used to determine if Character Academy decreased suspension and lost instructional time of African American students in the middle schools. The interview data revealed that the Character Academy program is not well understood in the school district. In all participant groups, respondents had a higher negative perception of the program than positive. Teachers had a 66% negative perception; students had a 100% negative perception; parents had a 100% negative perception; school administrators had a 66% negative perception; and school district leaders had an 83% negative perception (see Table 18). A school district leader had this to say of the program:

*I don't know a lot about the program but I know it is supposed to help kids who are not doing well.*

Neither student nor parent participants could comment on their perception of the Character Academy program because they were not familiar with it. Not only is there an overall negative perception of the Character Academy program, also many of the respondents were unable to discuss the guiding philosophy of the program. There is a clear lack of understanding about the purpose of the program and how it should work to assist schools in managing inappropriate behaviors to decrease suspensions and lost instructional time. There is some awareness of the

program; however, not to the extent that it is being used consistently and according to guidelines in the middle and high school. When participants were asked what do you perceive as the purpose or guiding philosophy of Character Academy, only the teacher, 34% and district leaders 17%, categories had positive responses. The other category of respondents had negative responses. Students, parents, and school administrators had a 100% negative response rate and district leaders had an 83% negative response rate. Of the 34% of teachers who had positive responses about the program, the responses were concerning the ABE system that is used to write student referrals. The teachers who did respond to the question were only familiar with the portion of the program that allows them to write a student behavioral referral and send it directly to an administrator to handle. They were unaware of the behavior modules the system provides, thus, were not using them as a means to assist in redirecting inappropriate behaviors in their classrooms. One middle school teacher stated:

*The program is not being used for referrals as it was last year. This is because there are a lot of new staff members and there needs to be training on how to use the system.*

Although responses are negative concerning participant perception and understanding of the Character Academy program, all of the respondents agree with the purpose of the program. One hundred percent of participants were positive that if implemented and used correctly, Character Academy could be an effective tool in decreasing suspensions and lost instructional time. In addition, 100% of the respondents believe that the problem (suspensions) the program addresses is severe in the district.

The Character Academy program is not being used to its' fullest potential at the middle school levels. One middle school administrator responded:

*I don't know much about the program. It has not been stressed at our school but I think that it could be beneficial. The missing part is assessing; here we only use it for referrals.*

There is little knowledge of how the Character Academy program works. When asked the questions, "How do you think Character Academy works," the teacher, 17% and district leader group, 17% are the only two that had positive responses. The student, parent, and administrator group all had 100% negative responses for this question. A district leader said:

*Character Academy is a good opportunity for administrators to provide continuous learning to students around making bad behaviors. This program will allow students the opportunity to reflect and think of positive choices. This program is an alternative to suspensions.*

Stakeholders have concerns about the Character Academy program. The only participant group that did not have negative responses to this question was the teacher group. Seventeen percent of teachers had a positive response to this question and 83% were negative. All other participant groups: student, parent, school administrator, and district leader all had 100% negative responses to this question. Overwhelming, respondents feel that the Character Academy program has the potential to really decrease suspensions and lost instructional time; however, there needs to be more training on what the program is and how it can be used in class rooms. One middle school administrator said that his concern is that he does not know enough about the program to really speak on it. A district leader stated that she had not heard that schools were really using the program. The middle school students are not aware of the program nor are their parents. Of the Character Academy program, another district leader stated:

*I am not certain if the way we are using the program is aligned with the way that it is suppose to work. I believe that we are using it, but not as frequently as we should.*



At the middle school level, participants were unsure of whether or not Character Academy has been effective in decreasing suspension and lost instructional time. When asked the question, “Do you feel that Character Academy has been effective in reducing suspensions and increasing instructional time,” 0% of teachers had a positive perception; 34% had a negative perception; and 66% were unsure. The administrator category has a 0% positive perception and 100% negative perception as to whether Character Academy has been effective in decreasing suspension and lost instructional time. One hundred percent of parents are unsure the affect Character Academy has had on decreasing suspensions and lost instructional time. One hundred percent of school administrators had a negative response to the question and 100% of district leaders are unsure if Character Academy has been effective in reducing suspensions and lost instructional time.

Participants were asked the question: “Do you feel that one program is better than the other in decreasing suspensions and increasing instructional time?” There were mixed reactions to this question. The school administrators are not 100% unsure if one program is better than the other. Seventeen percent of teachers had a positive response; 33% have a negative response, and 50% of them were unsure if one program is better than the other. Students were split, 50% felt that one program was better than the other (PBIS) and 50% were unsure. In the parent category, 17% have negative response; 17% have a positive response; and 66% are unsure. A district leader shared:

*PBIS is for sure a better program. This program allows students to have interactions with adults. Students do not have this interaction with Character Academy. With Character Academy, they are given individual opportunities to correct behavior. PBIS has a component of peers motivating each other.*

Discipline data from the 2011-12 Suspension and Expulsion Report (Report to Joint Legislative Committee, 2013), show that for that school year, there were 282 African American female suspensions and 610 African American male suspensions. In 2012-13, there were 255 African American female suspensions and 617 African American male suspensions. This was a decrease of 27 (10%) for African American females and an increase of 7 (1.1) for males. In 2013-14, African American female suspensions decreased from 255 the previous school year to 129 and from 617 to 323 for African American boys. This was a decreases of 126 (65%) for females and 294 (62%) for males. African American female suspensions decreased from 282 for in 2011-12 to 129 in 2013-2014. This is a decrease of 153 (74%). African American male student suspensions decreased from 610 in 2011-12 to 323 in 2013-14. This is a decrease of 287 suspensions (61%).

Therefore, it can be concluded that Character Academy has not been effective in decreasing suspensions in the middle schools.

### **Study Question 5**

*To what extent if any does Character Academy decrease suspension and lost instructional time of African American Students in the high school?*

Data collected from the participant interview questions and the district discipline data were used to determine if Character Academy decreased suspension and lost instructional time of African American students in the high school. The interview data revealed that the Character Academy program is not well understood in the school district. In all participant groups, respondents had a higher negative perception of the program than positive. Teachers had a 66% negative perception; students had a 100% negative perception; parents had a 100% negative

perception; school administrators had a 66% negative perception; and school district leaders had an 83% negative perception.

Neither student nor parent participants could speak on their perception of the Character Academy program because they were not familiar with it. Not only is there an overall negative perception of the Character Academy program, many of the respondents were unable to discuss the guiding philosophy of the program. There is clear lack of understanding about the purpose of the program and how it should work to assist schools in managing inappropriate behaviors to decrease suspensions and lost instructional time. There is some awareness of the program; however; not to the extent that it is being used consistently and according to guidelines in the high school. When participants were asked, “What do you perceive as the purpose or guiding philosophy of Character Academy,” only the teachers, 34% and district leaders 17%, had positive responses. The other participants have negative responses to the question. Students, parents, and school administrators have a 100% negative response rate and district leaders have an 83% negative response rate. Of the 34% of teachers who had positive responses about the program, the responses were concerning the ABE system that is used to write student referrals. The teachers who did respond to the question were only familiar with the portion of the program that allows them to write a student behavioral referral and send it directly to the school administrator for immediate processing.

Although responses are negative concerning participant perception and understanding of the Character Academy program, all of the respondents agree with the purpose of the program. One hundred percent of participants are positive that if implemented and used correctly, Character Academy could be an effective tool in decreasing suspensions and lost instructional time. In addition, 100% of the respondents believe that the problem (suspensions) the program

addresses is severe in the district. The school district has one of the highest suspension rates in the state of North Carolina.

The Character Academy program is not being used to its' fullest potential at the high school level although it is being used more in the high school than it is in the middle schools. In the high school, all teachers are required to use the ABE electronic system for submitting behavioral referrals on students. Once the referrals are submitted, they are handled by an administrator or the ISS coordinator. Depending on the student infraction, they can be assigned to complete behavioral modules in the Character Academy program. In the high school, students are assigned to complete the online behavioral modules in the In-School suspension class room as part of their requirement for returning to the regular class room. In addition, the administrators at the high school have used the Character Academy program instead of out of school suspension for handling more severe student infractions. In such cases, instead of students spending time out of school, they are allowed to complete modules in school. In rare cases, students have completed the online modules in one of the districts Character Academy programs that are housed the district's two middle schools. This was the objective of the program, allowing students who are suspended to attend regular school during the day and complete behavior modules in the afternoon at one of the Character Academy sites. According to interview participants, there are two major concerns with that concept. One, there was lack of supervision because no one to monitor the after school program. When the program was brought to the district, it was discussed among the school leaders that the In-School Suspension Coordinators and Deans of Students would rotate working in the Character Academy after school programs at both the middle schools. The issue with this is that many of those persons are also athletic coaches. They do not want to give up coaching sports that they enjoyed nor the supplemental

salary that accompany the coaching position. Monitoring the Character Academy after school does not offer more pay. It was discussed to allow those persons to begin work later in the morning so that they might work the Character Academies in the afternoon without requiring additional pay. According to school administrators, this was not a good idea because those persons are instrumental in assisting teachers with student behavior throughout the day and they are needed as soon as instruction begins. The second major issue with having the Character Academy programs after school is that students and parents are responsible for transportation to and from the program. The lack of transportation is an issue for many parents in the district. A high school administrator had this to say of the program:

*The program is supposed to be used after school as a means for students to receive guidance on how to improve behaviors. There is a school site on each end of the county. Students can be assigned to the program and complete online behavior modules to assist them in understanding how to replace negative behaviors as well as how to make positive choices. The issue that we have is that it is not being used. There is no one to supervise the programs after school so it pretty much fell through. There is also no transportation for students to get to the Character Academy sites and teachers and parents just do not know much about it. It is not being used with fidelity.*

There is little knowledge of how the Character Academy program works. When asked the question, “How do you think Character Academy works,” the teacher group, 17% and district leader group, 17% are the only two that had positive responses. A district leader stated:

*I like that the program focuses on helping students to continue to grow and develop positive interactions.*

The student, parent, and administrator group all had 100% negative response rate for this question. Stakeholders have concerns about the Character Academy program. The only participant group that did not have negative responses to this question was the teacher group. Seventeen percent of teachers had a positive response to this question and 83% were negative. All other participant groups: student, parent, school administrator, and district leader all had 100% negative responses to this question. Overwhelming, respondents feel that the Character Academy program has the potential to really decrease suspensions and lost instructional time; however, there needs to be more training on what the program is and how it can be used in classrooms. About the Character Academy program, one high school administrator said:

*Character Academy is not that successful. There is confusion about the program. Is it to be used after school or do we adjust students' schedules so that they can complete the modules at school during the day?*

Not only are there concerns about the program at the school level, but at the district level as well. A district leader shared this concern:

*I am concerned with the usage of the program. I am not sure if the district's investment in the program parallels with the district's use of it.*

At the high school level, participants are unsure of whether or not Character Academy has been effective in decreasing suspension and lost instructional time. When asked the question, "Do you feel that Character Academy has been effective in reducing suspensions and increasing instructional time," 0% of teachers had a positive perception; 34% had a negative perception; and 66% were unsure. The administrator category has a 0% positive perception and 100% negative perception as to whether Character Academy has been effective in decreasing suspension and lost instructional time in the school district. One hundred percent of parents are

unsure the affect Character Academy has had on decreasing suspensions and lost instructional time. One hundred percent of school administrators had a negative response to the question and 100% of district leaders are unsure if Character Academy has been effective in reducing suspensions and lost instructional time. A high school teacher had this to say about the Character Academy program:

*I don't like Character Academy. Students can just sit at a computer and click through modules. If they are going to do that, then there should be a class set up for them to complete the modules so that they are being properly supervised. Just because they are clicking through the modules, does not mean that they are learning how to correct their inappropriate behaviors.*

Participants were asked the question: “Do you feel that one program is better than the other in decreasing suspensions and increasing instructional time?” There were mixed reactions to this question. The school administrators are 100% unsure if one program is better than the other. Seventeen percent of teachers had a positive response; 33% have a negative response, and 50% of them were unsure if one program is better than the other. Students were split, 50% felt that one program was better than the other (PBIS) and 50% were unsure. In the parent category, 17% have negative response; 17% have a positive response; and 66% are unsure. A high school teacher stated:

*Neither program has been effective in decreasing suspensions and lost instructional time. PBIS has been effective with increasing instructional time with all students because the procedures that have been established helps teachers manage their classes.*

When asked if one program was better than the other in decreasing suspensions and lost instructional time, one district leader stated the following:

*The two programs have impact and can decrease suspension and lost instructional time if used consistently and with fidelity.*

Discipline data from the 2011-12 Suspension and Expulsion Report show that for that school year, there were 282 African American female suspensions and 610 African American male suspensions. In 2012-13, there were 255 African American female suspensions and 617 African American male suspensions. This was a decrease of 27 (10%) for African American females and an increase of 7 (1.1%) for males. In 2013-14, African American female suspensions decreased from 255 the previous school year to 129 and from 617 to 323 for African American boys. This was a decrease of 126 (65%) for females and 294 (62%) for males. African American female suspensions decreased from 282 in 2011-12 to 129 in 2013-2014. This is a decrease of 153 (74%). African American male student suspensions decreased from 610 in 2011-12 to 323 in 2013-14. This is a decrease of 287 suspensions (61%).

Therefore, it can be concluded that the reduction of suspensions should not be attributed to the implementation of the Character Academy program. In both the middle and high schools, the program is used primarily as a method to track student discipline referrals.



## **CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The objective of this study was to ascertain if the use of the behavior intervention programs Positive Behavior Intervention Support and Character Academy decreased student suspensions in Northampton County Schools. Based on the literature review, out of school suspensions have been on the rise over the past 30 years which has resulted in thousands of students missing valuable instructional time. Thus, many of these students have dropped out of school or been placed on the School to Prison Pipeline. This study examined whether behavior intervention programs decreased suspensions of African American students in the elementary, middle, and high schools in Northampton County. The data that has been analyzed for this study is qualitative interview data and quantitative discipline data that were gathered from the school district's discipline report that was submitted to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction for the 2011-12; 2012-13; and 2013-14 school years.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of the Positive Behavior Intervention Support and Character Academy programs in decreasing student suspension rates in Northampton County Schools. Based on the nature of this study, it was determined that the program evaluation is the best method to assess the study questions.

In a recent administrative meeting, the Superintendent of the district revealed to school leaders that the district has one of the highest suspension rates in the state of North Carolina. Furthermore, at a recent school board meeting, school board members raised questions about the district's suspension rates, especially in regards to students with disabilities. In addition, parent, students, and community members have raised concerns about the number of student suspensions from this district. In a Community Roundtable meeting, parents and community

members stated that the school district is too quick to suspend students and needs to do more to support students who have behavioral issues. As a result, the school board mandated that all school leaders be trained on how to implement Positive Behavior Intervention Support in all of the schools. Therefore, this study examined the Positive Behavior Intervention Support and the Character Academy programs to determine if the impact of the programs resulted in a reduction of suspensions due to in-school and out of school suspensions.

### **Study Questions**

1. To what extent if any does Positive Behavior Intervention Support decrease suspensions for African American students in the elementary school?
2. To what extent if any does Positive Behavior Intervention Support decrease suspensions for African American students in the middle school?
3. To what extent if any does Positive Behavior Intervention Support decrease suspensions for African American students in the high school?
4. To what extent if any does Character Academy decrease suspensions for African American students in the middle school?
5. To what extent if any does Character Academy decrease suspensions for African American students in the high school?

### **Methodology**

The methodology used in this study was program evaluation. Participant interview and school district suspension data reports were collected and triangulated to address the study questions. Data were collected through interviews with students, teachers, parents, and school administrators at the elementary, middle, and high school levels as well as school district leadership. School district suspension data were collected from the North Carolina Annual

Report of Suspensions and Expulsions for the school years: 2011-12; 2012-13; and 2013-14. The following process was used in the program evaluation:

1. Selection of Focus
2. Identification of Research Questions
3. Collection of Data
4. Reporting Results
5. Taking action based on data

### **Literature Summary**

School discipline has always been perceived as essential for the proper functioning of a public school (Colvin, 2007). There is expectation that discipline is necessary for students to learn and that educators should establish safe schools (Colvin, 2007). Educational stakeholders have historically taken pride in well-disciplined schools; however, there has been growing concern that the increase of problem behaviors or the lack of school discipline is reaching crisis proportions (Colvin, 2007). There seems to be agreement about the problems facing schools in regards to discipline, but debate on the way these problems need to be addressed (Colvin, 2007). The role and value of punishment is central to this issue (Colvin, 2007).

Schools are institutions of learning and should be safe for all teachers and students. Teachers are entitled to teach and students are entitled to learn in an environment that is conducive to learn and that is safe. A safe learning environment is essential for all students; if the environment is unsafe, students are not able to focus on learning the skills needed for a successful education and future (Hurley, 2014). When constant disruption is part of the educational setting, all students are affected in some way. Once, disruption in school was a fight between students that often took place on the schoolyard and ended with adult intervention.

Today, it is not unusual for students to attack other students, teachers, security guards, and school personnel, showing a complete lack of respect for authority (Hurley, 2014).

Thus, schools have begun to suspend and expel more students and in far more questionable circumstances (Yim et al., 2010). It is important to note that anytime a student is removed from instruction, she has been removed from the opportunity to learn. The exclusion of students from instruction, even for a short time period, disrupts a child's education and may escalate misbehavior by removing the child from a structured environment and giving her more opportunity to misbehave (Yim et al., 2010). School suspensions put students at risk for many negative outcomes and although educators have high expectations for student performance, many students still struggle academically and socially (Yim et al., 2010) as a result of out of school suspensions. Students who are suspended from school have an increased likelihood for academic failure and dropout (Krezmien et al., 2006). One suspension doubles the risk of dropping out of school from 16% to 32% (Flatow, 2013). Constenbader and Markson (1994) indicate that most educators believe that suspension is ineffective and counterproductive.

Krezmien et al. (2006) state that school discipline has been a concern of parents and educators for the past 35 years because the recent shootings in schools have created the perception that many schools are unsafe. Nation-wide implementation of zero-tolerance policies and current discipline practices of public schools have increased the vulnerability for students who have historically received unfair treatment in school. Losen and Skiba (2010) stated that since the early 1970s, out of school suspension rates have increased dramatically. The higher use of suspension as a means to discipline students is a result of such policies. Between 79% and 94% of schools in the United States have such policies (Losen & Skiba, 2010).

Zero Tolerance is a school or district policy that mandates predetermined actions for student offences (Losen & Skiba, 2010). According to Yim et al. (2010), zero tolerance is the harshest form of school discipline. As a result of the onslaught of crime, school districts across the nation have embraced and imposed these policies. Zero Tolerance policies have had a dire impact on students of color resulting in a priority issue by both the United States Department of Justice and the United States Department of Education (Youth United for Change and the Advancement Project, 2011). For example, in some states the zero tolerance approach has yielded tragic consequences for students because suspension from school and police involvement have not been limited to serious offences that pose ongoing threats to school safety. These policies instead have been routinely used for minor behavioral offenses (Youth United for Change and Advanced Project, 2011).

Suspension and expulsion have been an issue for school officials for the past three decades (Unidos & Unidos, 2005). Students have been and continue to be derailed into the juvenile justice system as a result of zero tolerance policies. Students who are forced onto the jailhouse track suffer dire consequences. Many will face punishments handed down by the courts; such punishments could include house arrest (Unidos & Unidos, 2005). Zero tolerance appears to be counterproductive because it prevents students from having the opportunity to learn (Unidos & Unidos, 2005). When these policies are used, educators are limiting students' chances of success by taking them out of the learning environment and often times sending them into the criminal justice system. Use of such policies has created a *School to Prison Pipeline* (Youth United for Change and the Advancement Project, 2011).

The use of zero tolerance policies have led to an increase of suspensions in schools. Although federal law requires schools to implement zero tolerance policies to keep schools safe

and free from violence and dangerous weapons, many districts have implemented zero tolerance policies for minor rule violations such as absenteeism, tardy, and insubordination. It is the misuse of such policies that has resulted in the overuse of suspensions as a discipline method in schools across the country.

Suspensions have been shown to be associated with a number of health and social problems (Dupper, 2010). To illustrate, students who are not in school are more likely to have lower rates of academic achievement, to smoke, to use substances such as alcohol, marijuana, and cocaine (Dupper, 2010). They are also more likely to engage in sexual intercourse, to be involved in fights, to carry a weapon, and to commit crime (Dupper, 2010).

Skiba and Sprague (2008), indicate that out of school suspensions have negative effects on student outcomes and the learning climate. To illustrate, students suspended in 6<sup>th</sup> grade are more likely to receive office referrals or suspensions by 8<sup>th</sup> grade than students who had not been suspended. The number of out-of-school suspensions a student received as a sixth grader was correlated with the probability that the student would not graduate from high school with his or her cohort (Dupper, 2010; Raffaele Mendez, 2003).

The high rate of out of school suspended students indicates that out-of-school suspension does not work and for some students it perpetuates inappropriate behavior (Unidos & Unidos, 2005). In schools across the county this approach does not promote school safety or academic success.

There is also a distinct correlation between suspension and low achievement and dropping out of school (Yim et al., 2010). Flatow (2013), states that one suspension doubles the risk of dropping out of school from 16% to 32%. Suspensions also increase the likelihood of juvenile arrests and detention. According to *Pediatrics: Official Journal of the American Academy of*

Pediatrics (2013), students who receive out of school suspension and expulsion are more likely to drop out of school; therefore, school leaders should consider the long-term fiscal consequences to the student and society as a whole. If a student does not graduate from high school, the long-term costs are profound. A high school dropout will earn \$400,000 (\$485,000 for females) less over a lifetime than a high school graduate (Pediatrics: Official Journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics, 2013).

Statistical data analyzed by Losen and Gillespie (2011) indicates that national suspension rates show that 17% or 1 out of every 6 African- American children enrolled in K-12 were suspended at least once. This rate is higher than the 1 in 13 risk (8%) for Native Americans; 1 in 14 risk (7%) for Latinos; 1 in 20 risk (5%) Whites; or 1 in 50 risk (2%) Asian -American. In addition, for all racial groups combined, more than 13% of students with disabilities were suspended at twice the rate of their non-disabled peers (Unidos & Unidos, 2005).

Minority students are being suspended at much higher rates than non-minority students (Krezmien et al., 2006). In 1975, The Children's Defense Fund examined figures from the United States Department of Education Office of Civil Rights and found that the suspension rates for African American students were two and three times higher than suspensions for White students at the elementary, middle, and high school levels (Krezmien et al., 2006).

Colvin (2007) states that many schools have begun to take a more proactive approach in dealing with inappropriate behaviors and discipline. In this approach, the faculty is focused on establishing the desired behaviors that are necessary for the proper functioning of the school. These behaviors are identified and then systematically and explicitly taught (Colvin, 2007). A team-based process is used to implement the plan.

A school-wide discipline plan is a first and necessary step in a continuum for providing behavior support to all students (Colvin, 2007). The student body can be divided into three groups. The first group represents approximately 80% of the student population (Colvin, 2007). These students are successful at school and respond positively to a proactive school-wide discipline plan (Colvin, 2007). The second group, comprising 10-15% of students, is classified as at risk (Colvin, 2007). These students can become successful in school with more specialized support beyond the school-wide plan (Colvin, 2007). The final group represents 5% of the student body and is classified as special needs students or students in crisis (Colvin, 2007). These students need individualized and in most cases, intensive support services (Colvin, 2007).

### **Implications**

The purpose of this study was to determine if the Positive Behavior Intervention Support and Character Academy programs decreased student suspensions in Northampton County Schools. Based on the results, the following implications were derived:

1. The Positive Behavior Intervention Support and Character Academy programs could decrease suspensions of African American students at the elementary, middle, and high school levels if implemented with fidelity and consistency.

Studies conducted with schools throughout the United States reveal that school administrators do not use suspension and expulsion because they wish to remove students from the opportunity to learn; but they use these measures because they don't know what else to do (Skiba & Sprague, 2008). School administrators are looking for effective and practical alternatives to suspensions and expulsions. An alternative is a comprehensive, proactive approach to discipline known as School-Wide Behavior Support (Skiba & Sprague, 2008). This approach is based on the assumption that when educators across the school actively teach,



expect, and acknowledge appropriate behavior, the proportion of students with serious behavior problems decreases and the school's overall climate improves (Skiba & Sprague, 2008).

Positive Behavior Intervention Support is being used by this school district to decrease African American suspensions.

Character Academy is an alternative to out of school suspensions that serves students from grades 6 through 12. The superintendent may recommend students in lower grades on a case by case basis (Smith, 2013). Instead of suspension, students are referred to the Academy to complete behavior modules that will help correct inappropriate behaviors and decision-making skills (Smith, 2013).

It would seem reasonable to surmise that the Positive Behavior Intervention Support and Character Academy programs will decrease suspensions of African American students. The analysis of data in this study distinctly produced results that indicate that the Positive Behavior Intervention Support Program has in part decreased the number of suspensions received by students, whereas, Character Academy has had minimal impact on student suspensions.

Thus, it is likely that Positive Behavior Intervention Support is the better program for decreasing suspensions of African American students in this school district.

2. The use of Positive Behavior Intervention Support and Character Academy could decrease lost instructional time for African American students due to suspensions.

With the decreased suspension time as a result of the use of Positive Behavior Intervention Behavior Support and Character Academy, students will spend less time away from school learning and more time in class. The increased time focused on instruction will benefit students because data show that the number of out-of-school suspensions a student received as a sixth grader is correlated with the probability that the student will not graduate from high school

with his or her cohort (Dupper, 2010; Raffaele Mendez, 2003). There is also a distinct correlation between suspension and low achievement and dropping out of school (Yim et al., 2010). Flatow (2013) states that one suspension doubles the risk of dropping out of school from 16% to 32%. Suspensions also increase the likelihood of juvenile arrests and detention. According to Pediatrics: Official Journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics (2013), students who receive out of school suspension and expulsion are more likely to drop out of school; therefore, school leaders should consider the long-term fiscal consequences to the student and society as a whole. If a student does not graduate from high school, the long-term costs are profound (Pediatrics: Official Journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics, 2013).

The analysis of data in this study distinctly produced results indicating that Positive Behavior Intervention Support in part decreased African American student suspensions at the elementary, middle, and high school, whereas Character Academy had minimal impact on suspensions.

Thus, it is highly likely that the use of Positive Behavior Intervention Support will increase instructional time of students as a result of a decrease in out of school suspensions.

3. The use of the Positive Behavior Intervention Support and Character Academy programs could increase time for school administrators to monitor instruction and support teachers with the teaching and learning process.

Positive Behavior Intervention Support and Character Academy are programs used to decrease suspensions of African American students. With a decrease in inappropriate behaviors and suspensions, school leaders are able to spend more time monitoring and assisting teachers with instruction. According to Bharti (2014), if someone is a true educational leader, he must be where the action is taking place or where the teachers are, in the classroom. It is only by

monitoring and observing teachers will a school administrator be able to judge their capability, knowledge, and areas in need of improvement. In addition, teachers enjoy having principals by their sides. It gives them a sense of security as they feel that someone is watching and guiding them in their work. Moreover, the regular visibility gives the students the sense that the school leader is interested and involved in their learning.

The analysis of data in this study distinctly produced results indicating that Positive Behavior Intervention Support in part decreased African American student suspensions at the elementary, middle and high school, whereas, Character Academy had minimal impact on student suspensions.

Thus, it is highly likely that the use of Positive Behavior Intervention Support will increase the time that school administrators are able to monitor instruction and support teachers with teaching and learning.

### **Recommendations**

Based upon the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are indicated. The recommendations are presented in two sections: (a) Practice; and (b) Research.

#### **Practice**

Three recommendations are made:

1. The district trains veteran teachers, administrators, and central office support personnel on all modules of the PBIS program.

Overall, the Positive Behavior Intervention Support program is looked upon favorably in the school district. All of the participants have a positive perception of the program. They like that it focuses on the positive instead of the negative aspect of student behavior. However, there

are concerns about the program such as the consistency of the use of the program and processes for implementing it. There is a lack of consistent implementation of the program in the schools as well as confusion on the processes of how the program is used from class to class and school to school. In order to eliminate these concerns, it is recommended that the district trains a team of stakeholders to be the district PBIS training team. The district has done a good job in training stakeholders; however, due to the high level of turnover in the district, every two years the district has to retrain new teachers and administrators. This has a negative impact on implementing the program with fidelity. This team will then be responsible for training all current and new school personnel. This will benefit the district because there is an onsite team that can provide training as soon as it is needed instead of the district having to wait for the availability of state consultants to train stakeholders. In addition, a district training team can also help in establishing the processes that each school can use to create both behavior and rewards matrices. Presently, not all schools have both. Each school has a behavior matrix; however, there is not a viable rewards matrix for each school that outlines how students who present the positive, appropriate behavior will be rewarded. The team can also assist with progress monitoring at each school and also with providing all stakeholders quarterly updates about student discipline and how behavior intervention programs are being used to deter inappropriate behaviors and suspensions. Feedback is necessary for the success of the program and schools should not wait until the end of the school year to ascertain whether or not the program is being effective. A district team can give feedback and assist schools in areas that support is needed throughout the school year. School administrators should be required to be a part of their school's PBIS team. If the principal has a clear understanding of the program and works with the

team in implementing and monitoring, this will help with ensuring the program is used consistently and with fidelity.

2. Providing tangible rewards to students for appropriate behaviors is a key component of the Positive Behavior Intervention Support Program. Rewarding students for good behavior motivates them to do well and to follow behavioral expectations.

The school district should assist schools in providing tangible incentives for students who meet behavioral goals by allotting local funds to each school. These funds can then be used to purchase incentives that will motivate students to adhere to behavioral expectations. At this time, schools are pressed to purchase incentives. At each school, a monthly incentive activity is given that consists of having a dance, sporting event, or pizza/ice cream party. At these school-wide activities, incentives such as gift cards to local shops and restaurants are given to students. However, because of a lack of businesses in the school district, these incentives are limited and many do not have the funds needed to purchase them. Schools have a real need for funds to purchase incentives that students will value and like to have. Administrators and teachers feel that they need to provide incentives other than the monthly activity.

3. Stop use of the Character Academy program.

Character Academy is looked upon unfavorably in the school district. There is little understanding of the program and how it is supposed to work to improve student behavior and decrease suspensions. There is concern about the consistent use of the program. It is not being used in either of middle or high schools according to program guidelines. The analysis of data for this study distinctly produced results that indicate that Character Academy is not used correctly or with consistency throughout the school district. It has had a minimal impact on decreasing suspension; therefore it is recommended that the district discontinues use of the

program. The district has spent \$9,965.00 a year (for the past three years); a total of \$29,895.00 on the Character Academy program. Because the program is rarely used and has not made a significant decrease in suspensions, it is recommended that the money that is used for the program is divided equally among each of the schools. This will give each school a little over \$1,400 a year that they can use to purchase incentives to help strengthen the Positive Behavior Intervention Support Program.

### **Research**

It is recommended that other school districts who are utilizing the Positive Behavior Intervention Support and Character Academy programs as avenues to decrease student suspensions conduct program evaluations to ensure that they are getting the desired results and that the districts' investment in the programs parallel to the districts' use of the programs. Research needs to be conducted on the programs in other school districts to determine if the Positive Behavior Intervention Support and Character Academy programs impact African American suspension rates. Do Positive Behavior Intervention Support and Character Academy focus on best practices in improving student behavior? And, do these programs focus on best practices that translate into decreased suspensions of African American students? Furthermore, do Positive Behavior Intervention Support and Character Academy focus on strengthening school leaders' ability to work with students who present behavioral issues which lead to suspensions? If so, does the continued development, implementation, and use of the programs decrease suspensions and increase student time in school? In other words, do the Positive Behavior Intervention Support and Character Academy programs impact the continued decrease in suspensions of African American students?

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## APPENDIX A: LETTER FROM SUPERINTENDENT



# NORTHAMPTON COUNTY SCHOOLS

Dr. John Parker, Interim Superintendent

February 21, 2014

To Whom It May Concern:

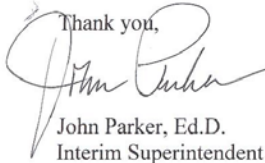
I am writing this letter in support of Felisha Whitaker's dissertation/problem of practice. It is a pleasure for me to do so.

Ms. Whitaker has been an educator in our district for 16 years and I am currently serving as her immediate supervisor. Ms. Whitaker has a varied and extensive background in public education, both as a teacher and as a school administrator. She has the capacity to work independently and can be trusted with difficult, long-term assignments, knowing that they will be completed in a thorough and efficient manner, with minimal guidance or direction needed once the assignments have been given. It is for this reason that I support Ms. Whitaker's problem of practice that will hopefully give insight into what is causing the school suspension rate increase in our school district and provide strategies that we can implement to decrease them.

Out of school suspensions and expulsions have become an issue in our district. School administrators are charged with keeping schools safe and conducive for learning, yet in too many instances, suspension is the strategy that's used to do so. The use of suspension as a discipline measure is somewhat of a paradigm. It is difficult for school officials to justify discipline measures that rely on excluding students from school when it is known that time spent in school learning is the single best predictor of positive academic outcomes. In addition, during the 2011-12 school year, Northampton County had the second highest number of out of school suspensions when compared to six neighboring districts, and one of the highest suspension rates in the state. In each of the seven districts, excluding one, African American male students outnumbered all other ethnicities in the number of suspensions handed out. Thus, this study is much needed.

Without hesitation or reservation, I support Ms. Whitaker's work on this problem of practice. If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact me.

Thank you,



John Parker, Ed.D.  
Interim Superintendent

## **APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. What are your general perceptions of Positive Behavior Intervention Support and Character Academy? What do you like about the programs? What do you not like about the programs? Why?
2. What do you perceive as the purposes (goals) or guiding philosophy of PBIS? Character Academy? Do you agree with these purposes? Do you think the problems the programs address are severe or important? Why?
3. How do you think PBIS works? How is it supposed to work?
4. How do you think Character Academy works? How is it supposed to work?
5. What concerns do you have about PBIS?
6. What concerns do you have about Character Academy?
7. Do you believe that PBIS has been effective in reducing suspensions and increasing instructional time at your school? Why or Why not?
8. Do you believe that Character Academy has been effective reducing suspensions and increasing instructional time at your school? Why or Why not?
9. Do you feel that one program is better than the other in decreasing suspensions and increasing instructional time?

## APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

East Carolina University



### **Informed Consent to Participate in Research**

Information to consider before taking part in research that has no more than minimal risk.

Title of Research Study: The Impact of Behavioral Intervention Programs on Student Suspensions

Principal Investigator: Felisha Whitaker      IRB Study #: 14-001935  
Institution, Department or Division: Educational Leadership  
Address: 154 Speight Building Greenville, North Carolina 27858  
Telephone #: 252-328-4219

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Researchers at East Carolina University (ECU) study issues related to society, health problems, environmental problems, behavior problems and the human condition. To do this, we need the help of volunteers who are willing to take part in research.

#### **Why am I being invited to take part in this research?**

The purpose of this research is to evaluate the Positive Behavior Intervention Support and Character Academy Programs to see if they have resulted in a decrease of in-school and out of school suspension and increased instructional time. You are being invited to take part in this research because you are a student, parent, teacher, administrator, or district leader in Northampton County Schools. The decision to take part in this research is yours to make. By doing this research, we hope to learn if the intervention programs are effective in decreasing student suspension and increasing instructional time. If you volunteer to take part in this research, you will be one of about 27 people to do so.

#### **Are there reasons I should not take part in this research?**

You should not volunteer to take part in this research if you cannot discuss the impact Positive Behavior Intervention Support and Character Academy has had on student suspension (behavior) and lost in instructional time.

#### **What other choices do I have if I do not take part in this research?**

You can choose not to participate.

#### **Where is the research going to take place and how long will it last?**

The research will be conducted at Northampton County Schools, primarily the school that you have been assigned. You will need to come to the specified room (room number will vary at each site) during either your elective or planning period. If you are a parent, you will meet at your child's school in the specified room. The interview times will be from 5:30 p.m.-7:30 p.m. The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this study thirty-five-forty minutes over the next two months.

#### **What will I be asked to do?**

Consent Version # or Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Page 1 of 3

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Initials



You will be asked to do the following: You will be asked to participate in a one on one interview where you are asked several questions (please see below):

10. What are your general perceptions of Positive Behavior Intervention Support and Character Academy? What do you like about the programs? What do you not like about the programs? Why?
11. What do you perceive as the purposes (goals) or guiding philosophy of PBIS? Character Academy? Do you agree with these purposes? Do you think the problems the programs address are severe or important? Why?
12. How do you think PBIS works? How is it supposed to work?
13. How do you think Character Academy works? How is it supposed to work?
14. What concerns do you have about PBIS?
15. What concerns do you have about Character Academy?
16. Do you believe that PBIS has been effective in reducing suspensions and increasing instructional time at your school? Why or Why not?
17. Do you believe that Character Academy has been effective reducing suspensions and increasing instructional time at your school? Why or Why not?
18. Do you feel that one program is better than the other in decreasing suspensions and increasing instructional time.

**What might I experience if I take part in the research?**

We don't know of any risks (the chance of harm) associated with this research. Any risks that may occur with this research are no more than what you would experience in everyday life. We don't know if you will benefit from taking part in this study. There may not be any personal benefit to you but the information gained by doing this research may help others in the future.

**Will I be paid for taking part in this research?**

We will not be able to pay you for the time you volunteer while being in this study.

**Will it cost me to take part in this research?**

It will not cost you any money to be part of the research

**Who will know that I took part in this research and learn personal information about me?**

ECU and the people and organizations listed below may know that you took part in this research and may see information about you that is normally kept private. With your permission, these people may use your private information to do this research:

- The Office for Human Research Protections.

**What if I decide I don't want to continue in this research?**

You can stop at any time after it has already started. There will be no consequences if you stop and you will not be criticized. You will not lose any benefits that you normally receive.

**Who should I contact if I have questions?**

The people conducting this study will be able to answer any questions concerning this research, now or in the future. You may contact the Principal Investigator at 252-673-0276 (Monday-Friday between 6:00 p.m-8:30 p.m.

If you have questions about your rights as someone taking part in research, you may call the Office of Research Integrity & Compliance (ORIC) at phone number 252-744-2914 (days, 8:00 am-5:00 pm). If you would like to report a complaint or concern about this research study, you may call the Director of the ORIC, at 252-744-1971.

**I have decided I want to take part in this research. What should I do now?**

The person obtaining informed consent will ask you to read the following and if you agree, you should sign this form:

- I have read (or had read to me) all of the above information.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions about things in this research I did not understand and have received satisfactory answers.
- I know that I can stop taking part in this study at any time.
- By signing this informed consent form, I am not giving up any of my rights.
- I have been given a copy of this consent document, and it is mine to keep.

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<b>Participant's Name (PRINT)</b>	<b>Signature</b>	<b>Date</b>
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**Person Obtaining Informed Consent:** I have conducted the initial informed consent process. I have orally reviewed the contents of the consent document with the person who has signed above, and answered all of the person’s questions about the research.

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<b>Person Obtaining Consent (PRINT)</b>	<b>Signature</b>	<b>Date</b>
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## APPENDIX D: MINOR ASSENT FORM

East Carolina University



### Assent Form

*Things You Should Know Before You Agree To Take Part in this Research*

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IRB Study # \_\_\_\_\_ *(The IRB office will fill this in, if this is a new submission)*

Title of Study: The Impact of Behavior Intervention Programs on Student Suspensions

Person in charge of study: Felisha Whitaker

Where they work: Northampton County Schools

Other people who work on the study:

Study contact phone number: 252-673-0276

Study contact E-mail Address: wycchef@northampton.k12.nc.us

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People at ECU study ways to make people's lives better. These studies are called research. This research is trying to find out whether or not the Positive Behavior Intervention Support and Character Academy programs have been effective in reducing the time students are suspended from school and increased the time that they are in school learning.

Your parent(s) needs to give permission for you to be in this research. You do not have to be in this research if you don't want to, even if your parent(s) has already given permission.

You may stop being in the study at any time. If you decide to stop, no one will be angry or upset with you.

### **Why are you doing this research study?**

The reason for doing this research is to get your opinion about whether or not you feel the PBIS and Character Academy programs are working by keeping students in school and not suspended.

### **Why am I being asked to be in this research study?**

We are asking you to take part in this research because you are a student in one of our focus schools and we would like to hear your opinion about the programs.

### **How many people will take part in this study?**

If you decide to be in this research, you will be one of about 27 people taking part in it.

### **What will happen during this study?**

- You will be asked to participate in an interview in which I will ask you 8 questions. The interview will last between 30-40 minutes.
- Once the interview has ended, you will be done with participating in the research. You will not be required to take part in any follow-up activities.

I will take notes of what you share with me during your interview and your interview will also be recorded. However, you can request that the audio recorder is turned off during your interview.

All audio tape will be kept in a securely locked file cabinet in the researcher's. In order to ensure confidentiality, all data will be destroyed 5 years following the completion of the research.

Check the line that best matches your choice:

- OK to record me during the study  
 Not OK to record me during the study

This study will take place at your school: Garysburg Elementary, Central Elementary, Conway Middle, Gaston Middle or Northampton County High School and will last 30-40 minutes.

### **Who will be told the things we learn about you in this study?**

No one in the school district will be told the things we learn about you in this study (this includes your teachers, school administrators, or other students).

The researcher is the only one who will have access of the information that you share. For your protection, this study is overseen by:

- Any agency of the federal, state, or local government that regulates human research. This includes the Office for Human Research Protections.
- The University and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and its staff, who have responsibility for overseeing your welfare during this research, and other ECU staff who oversee this research.

### **What are the good things that might happen?**

Sometimes good things happen to people who take part in research. These are called "benefits." There is little chance you will benefit from being in this research; however, your school may benefit if the research prove that PBIS and Character Academy are working to keep students in school and not suspended. We will tell you more about these things below.

### **What are the bad things that might happen?**

Sometimes things we may not like happen to people in research studies. These things may even make them feel bad. These are called "risks." There is little risk associated with this research. You should report any problems to your parents and to the researcher

### **What if you or your parents don't want you to be in this study?**

If you or your parents don't want you to be in this study, here are some other things that you may be able to do :

1. Inform researcher that you do not wish to participate in the study.

### **Will you get any money or gifts for being in this research study?**

You will not receive any money or gifts for being in this research study.

### **Who should you ask if you have any questions?**

If you have questions about the research, you should ask the people listed on the first page of this form. If you have other questions about your rights while you are in this research study you may call the Institutional Review Board at 252-744-2914.

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If you decide to take part in this research, you should sign your name below. It means that you agree to take part in this research study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Sign your name here if you want to be in the study

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print your name here if you want to be in the study

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person Obtaining Assent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Assent

## **APPENDIX E: INFORMED CONSENT ASSENT SCRIPT**

My name is Ms. Felisha Whitaker and I am a student at East Carolina University. One of my assignments is to conduct a research project. In your school, your teachers and principals use PBIS (Positive Behavior Intervention Support) and Character Academy to make sure the school is safe and orderly. Sometimes when students misbehave, they are suspended from school. This is why some schools have PBIS, to stop suspensions and to help students stay in school. My research project is to determine whether or not PBIS and Character Academy are doing that in your school and in your school district

If you agree to participate in this research project, you will be asked to participate in an interview where I ask you several questions. The interview should only take about 35 minutes. You will be asked the following questions:

1. What are your general perceptions of Positive Behavior Intervention Support and Character Academy? What do you like about the programs? What do you not like about the programs? Why?
2. What do you perceive as the purposes (goals) or guiding philosophy of PBIS? Character Academy? Do you agree with these purposes? Do you think the problems the programs address are severe or important? Why?
3. How do you think PBIS works? How is it supposed to work?
4. How do you think Character Academy works? How is it supposed to work?
5. What concerns do you have about PBIS?
6. What concerns do you have about Character Academy?
7. Do you believe that PBIS has been effective in reducing suspensions and increasing instructional time at your school? Why or Why not?
8. Do you believe that Character Academy has been effective reducing suspensions and increasing instructional time at your school? Why or Why not?
9. Do you feel that one program is better than the other in decreasing suspensions and increasing instructional time.

You do not have to participate in this project. You can volunteer, if you would like. This project is for research purposes only, and the results of it will not affect your grades.

## APPENDIX F: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



### EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

#### University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board Office

4N-70 Brody Medical Sciences Building · Mail Stop 682

600 Moyer Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834

Office 252-744-2914 · Fax 252-744-2284 · [www.ecu.edu/irb](http://www.ecu.edu/irb)

Notification of Initial Approval: Expedited

From: Social/Behavioral IRB  
To: [Felisha Wyche](#)  
CC: [Art Rouse](#)  
Date: 1/28/2015  
Re: [UMCIRB 14-001935](#)  
The Impact of Behavior Intervention Programs on Student Suspensions

I am pleased to inform you that your Expedited Application was approved. Approval of the study and any consent form(s) is for the period of 1/28/2015 to 1/27/2016. The research study is eligible for review under expedited category #6, 7. The Chairperson (or designee) deemed this study no more than minimal risk.

Changes to this approved research may not be initiated without UMCIRB review except when necessary to eliminate an apparent immediate hazard to the participant. All unanticipated problems involving risks to participants and others must be promptly reported to the UMCIRB. The investigator must submit a continuing review/closure application to the UMCIRB prior to the date of study expiration. The Investigator must adhere to all reporting requirements for this study.

Approved consent documents with the IRB approval date stamped on the document should be used to consent participants (consent documents with the IRB approval date stamp are found under the Documents tab in the study workspace).

The approval includes the following items:

Name	Description
Informed Consent Document Template No More Than Minimal Risk 10 16 14 (1).doc	Consent Forms
Informed Consent Minor Assent Form (1).doc	Consent Forms
Informed Consent Parental Permission Form.doc	Consent Forms
Informed Consent-Assent Script.docx	Consent Forms
POP Confidentiality Confirmation.docx	Data Collection Sheet
POP Data Collection Form.docx	Data Collection Sheet
POP Dissertation Final Proposal (Chpts 1-3)2-.pdf	Study Protocol or Grant Application
POP Interview Questions.docx	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
POP Protocol Template.pdf	Study Protocol or Grant Application

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

