

## **ABSTRACT**

Andre Charles Smith, LONG-TERM SUSPENSIONS: EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES TO KEEP STUDENTS ENGAGED IN SCHOOLING (Under the direction of Dr. Matthew Militello). Department of Educational Leadership, April 2016.

The purpose of the current study was to determine educational leaders' perceptions of effective strategies for keeping long-term suspended students engaged in learning. As school districts struggle with best practices to reduce dropouts and increase graduation rates, they look to ensure that suspended students remain focused on education. A Q-Sort methodology was employed that allowed 40 participants, each a principal of a school district, to sort cards that contained a list of effective strategies. The study involved an investigation of the best practices to keep students engaged while serving a long-term suspension, practices that were developed from the literature as well as from practicing school educators. A set of working strategies was generated for further examination. Educators "sorted" these strategies for quantitative analysis, and a selection was interviewed for qualitative analysis. Finally, data was collected and analyzed from educators regarding their perceptions and experiences of the effective strategies.

Findings revealed four emergent factors from the participants' understanding of the most effective strategies for keeping long-term suspended students engaged. Participants valued the importance of a strategy that places students in a separate physical site while serving their suspension, as well as programs that individually support each student to meet their unique needs (Factor One). Additionally, the principals in the study believed that placing an emphasis on building positive adult and peer relationships is an effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school, including utilizing outside agencies, social workers, and counselors as needed (Factor Two). Strategies that allow the long-term suspended student to keep pace with their coursework were also believed by the participants to be effective (Factor

Three) in allowing for on-time graduation. Finally, principals felt strongly about not giving up their efforts to redirect long-term suspended students' behavior and address individual needs, and were supportive of strategies that remove the long-term suspended student from their base school while maintaining consistent communication with the student, school, and family (Factor Four). Implications and recommendations for practice, policy, and research that emerged from the study are discussed.



LONG-TERM SUSPENSIONS: EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES  
TO KEEP STUDENTS ENGAGED IN SCHOOLING

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by

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TO KEEP STUDENTS ENGAGED IN SCHOOLING

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this work to my wife Sandra, who has always been by my side motivating me and encouraging me. As my best friend and partner, you have given me all that I have needed over the years to fulfill my dreams. I would also like to dedicate this work to my lovely daughters Taylor and Sierra, who act as my inspiration day-in and day-out. I love you all, and thank you deeply for your love and unwavering support.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Research and data on school disciplinary practices indicate that millions of students are suspended from school each year. Since 2009, more than three million students lost instructional time due to suspension from school (Morgan et al., 2014). Moreover, though research shows significant increases over the last decade in suspensions for students of all races, there is a growing racial discipline gap.

In fact, suspension rates for K-12 students have more than doubled since the early 1970s for all non-Whites. National suspension rates indicate that 1 out of every 6 Black students (17%) enrolled in K-12 was suspended at least once. Research also shows that 1 in 5 Black boys (20%) and more than 1 in 10 Black girls (over 10%) receive an out-of-school suspension. This rate is much higher than the 1 in 13 (8%) risk for Native Americans; 1 in 14 (7%) for Latinos; 1 in 20 (5%) for Whites; or the 1 in 50 (2%) for Asian Americans. For all racial groups combined, more than 13% of students with disabilities were suspended. This is approximately twice the rate of their peers. To sum up, while Black students represent 18% of the nation's student population, they account for 35% of those receiving out-of-school suspension at least once, 46% of students receiving out-of-school suspension multiple times, and 39% of those expelled from school (Losen, 2011).

These numbers suggest that school suspensions have increasingly become a normative practice to address inappropriate behavior. Removing students from the classroom is too often viewed as a "quick fix" to an immediate problem. Studies indicate that only 5% of all out-of-school suspensions can be attributed to behavior that put other students at risk, such as possession of a weapon or drugs, while the other 95% are categorized as disruptive behavior or

“other” (Losen, 2011). However, in an effort to maintain safe and orderly academic environments, schools and school districts have utilized out-of-school suspensions and expulsions for far lesser school infractions (Justice Policy Institute, 2011). Schools respond to common misbehavior problems with extreme responses and the creation of harsh discipline policies. As a reaction to many violent school incidents such as Columbine, the issue of school shootings has prompted school districts to enact “zero-tolerance” policies to ensure school safety. These policies were designed to send a message that violent behaviors and students who violate school rules will not be tolerated. Violators of the policy face harsh penalties like long-term out-of-school suspension, expulsion, or referral to the criminal justice system. But increasingly, these policies are impacting many students who are non-violent and not a threat to their peers.

The impact of suspension on student success has been addressed in the research, as studies show that high suspension rates negatively influence student achievement and dropout rates (Losen, 2011). Even more alarming, there are clear civil rights concerns related to such high number of suspensions. Children of color and students from other historically disadvantaged groups are far more likely than other students to be suspended out-of-school, and often find themselves marginalized in ways that lead to further problems later in life. In an attempt to address these concerns amidst new practices like zero-tolerance policies, several questions arise: What happens to the suspended student while on suspension? What happens when the non-instructed suspended student returns to school? How do teachers respond when the suspended student returns to school? It should be noted that studies have documented that many suspended students return demonstrating the same behaviors that resulted in their removal from

school. Thus, if we know that suspension from school does not work, then what are the options that keep students engaged in school while serving a suspension?

Suspensions have historically been used as a means to redirect behavior and send a message to both student and parent about the seriousness of student misbehavior (Flanagain, 2007). Research also supports that students removed from school for disciplinary reasons should be provided with a quality alternative education placement where there is continuity of instruction. However, with the high number of suspensions occurring in our schools, can we be certain that the students who are suspended are engaged in off-campus instruction?

### **Statement of the Problem**

Violence in schools is not a recent phenomenon. What has changed is the ability of popular media to share news in real time. The backlash of the hyper-media has been new policies by school districts, legislation by state officials, and even federal law. Some of these responsive policies and laws can be considered draconian. As incidents involving violence in schools continue to increase, school districts and lawmakers recognize the importance of keeping school campuses safe at all cost. Parents and the community, fueled by media coverage of serious events, demanded decision makers take action. This has prompted school districts to invoke zero-tolerance policies by which any infraction results in immediate disciplinary action.

Research has suggested that harsh school discipline policies that have resulted from the recent reaction to school violence and shootings do not work. The consequences negatively impact students. School districts have put in place practices like out-of-school suspension, expulsion, school based arrest, and placement into alternative settings for less severe infractions that do not warrant such a degree of punishment (Justice Policy Institute, 2011).

The issue of national school shootings has also prompted school districts to enact policies to ensure school safety. For instance, the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 requires a minimum one-year expulsion for students who bring firearms to school (GFSA, 1994). These zero-tolerance policies have become the norm for school districts across the nation, and have led to increases in suspensions and expulsions. Annually, there are approximately 3.3 million suspensions and more than 100,000 expulsions each year (NCES, 2009). This number has nearly doubled since 1974, with rates increasing in the mid-1990s as zero-tolerance policies began to be widely adopted (NAACP, 2005).

Like local educators and parents, researchers have historically expressed concern over the removal of students from the general education classroom because it promotes more poor behavior and caused students to be unengaged in school (Hochman & Worner, 1987; Sautner, 2001). Students who were suspended from school have been found to be more likely to become repeat offenders and receive additional suspensions over time (Ambrose & Gibson, 1995; Morrison & Skiba, 2001; Skiba, 2002). ). In addition, students who are suspended from school and lose instructional time run the risk of not graduating on time. This collateral damage that results from long-term suspension has a negative impact on graduation rates. National high school graduation rates are low for all students but even lower for minorities and, in 2004, only 68% of all students who entered the ninth grade graduated with a high school diploma (Orfield, Losen, Wald, & Swanson, 2004).

The Council of State Governments Justice Center (2014) published a report on school discipline, a collaborative effort involving hundreds of experts in education, behavioral health, law enforcement, and juvenile justice, as well as policymakers, parents, youth, and advocates.

The report contains an extensive review of the literature along with relevant research by experts in a variety of fields, and provides extensive, key recommendations regarding school discipline and out-of- school suspensions. It states that “students removed from campus for disciplinary reasons and students not succeeding in traditional settings should be provided with a quality alternative education placement where there is continuity of instruction and needed services” (Morgan, Salomon, Plotkin, & Cohen, 2014, p. 169).

Characteristics that are common in alternative settings include small student populations, small student/teacher ratios, small class sizes, and creative curriculums that are nontraditional (Lehr & Lange, 2003). These alternative settings typically provide inclusive and supportive learning environments that meet the student’s social, emotional academic and behavioral needs (Lange & Sletten, 2002). Questions still remain, however, regarding how effective these environments are in keeping students engaged in learning, and what are the best strategies that will allow students to return to their schools prepared to be successful.

Practices are needed to increase student learning during disciplinary periods, and to ensure a smoother transition for them back into the classroom. Recognizing that many school districts do seek strategies that will keep students in the classroom to avoid consequences such as suspensions, there are still concerns about lost instructional time with these disciplinary practices (Dupper, Theriot, & Craun, 2009).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the current study was to examine districts that provide learning opportunities for students during long-term suspensions. The study began with an investigation of the best practices to keep students engaged during long-term suspension. These best practices

were developed vis-à-vis the extant literature as well as from practicing school educators. A set of working strategies were then generated for further examination. Next, the study examined school educators' perceptions of the working strategies. Educators were asked to "sort" the strategies for quantitative analysis, and a selection of educators were interviewed for qualitative analysis. Finally, data were collected and analyzed from educators regarding their perceptions and experiences. The results of this investigation generated data on disciplinary strategies that were aimed to lead to a modified set of strategies ensuring that student learning during long-term suspensions does not end. Finally, the results of this study generated new disciplinary strategies for reducing repeat offenders and increasing student achievement.

### **Research Questions**

Effective school literature specifies that there is a benefit to providing alternative options for students to continue their schooling while on a long-term suspension. In addition, research suggests that students who have been removed from the school setting due to a suspension should be provided with continued coursework and specific behavioral strategies to be implemented in their home schooling environment. This study examined what engagement and learning strategies assist students in increasing their academic achievement during periods of discipline and facilitating their smooth transition back into the classroom. Additionally, this study examined the perceptions of these strategies by current school and district leaders, to determine to what extent school districts provide effective strategies that keep students engaged in instruction while on a long-term suspension.

Research supports that, for all students who are removed from school for disciplinary reasons, school districts should provide access to high-quality alternative education services that

address the student's social, emotional, behavioral, and academic needs. Looking toward these guidelines, the current study examined the following research questions:

1. What do educational researchers and educators consider to be effective engagement and learning strategies during long-term suspensions?
2. What do school and district leaders perceive to be important strategies for students placed on long-term suspension?
3. What has led educators to identify and implement those strategies found to be most effective?

### **Significance of the Study**

#### **Policy**

*Zero tolerance* can be defined as a “philosophy or policy that mandates the application of predetermined consequences, most often severe and punitive in nature, that are intended to be applied regardless of the seriousness of behavior, mitigating circumstances, or situational context” (Skiba, Reynolds, Graham, Sheras, Conoley, & Garcia-Vazquez, 2006). The severity and punitive nature of zero tolerance practices escalated with the placement of police on school campus, resulting in a considerable increase in the number of students arrested and referred to juvenile court for infractions once ha. The Gun-Free Schools Act (GFSA) of 1994 was a response to increasing violence on our school campuses, and mandates a minimum of one-year expulsion for students who bring firearms to school. While GFSA (1994) is not a zero-tolerance policy in itself, it led school districts to respond with harsh disciplinary practices and zero-tolerance policies designed to maintain safety and order on their campuses. However, such

policies that are applied equally to all students, also known as “one-size-fits-all” policies, work neither to the benefit of students nor in the interests of learning.

Moreover, a disproportionately large percentage of disciplined students are children of color, many of which have disabilities and low socioeconomic status. When suspended, these students are at significantly higher risk of falling behind academically, dropping out of school, and getting involved with activities that lead them to the juvenile justice system. We need to therefore understand how to mitigate the damage to students and to education as a whole by determining how schools can continue the education and growth of students who are suspended.

### **Practice**

Teachers are being held increasingly accountable for student performance, and so they look to school administrators to be supportive and provide a safe, quality environment that is conducive to learning. When students commit major or even minor infractions, suspensions have too often become the first option to address their misconduct. One of the major drawbacks to developing discipline practices to address misconduct are the inequities that surface as result. While there is no question that students who disrupt learning in schools and commit serious offenses may need to be removed from the school environment, it is also critical that educators continue to provide them with a quality education, and that practices are in place that enable them to do so.

### **Research**

Across the nation, schools have enacted zero-tolerance policies in an effort to maintain a safe educational environment. Such policies tend to punish both major and minor offenders severely in order to deliver the message that violence and disruptive behavior will not be

tolerated (Skiba & Peterson, 2000). However, these exclusionary policies have brought criticism from parent and advocacy organizations, professional associations, and even researchers.

There is general agreement in the literature that there should be alternative programs that permit the continuity of instruction while students are suspended. Losen (2011) argues that students removed from the classroom for disciplinary reasons should continue to receive quality instruction. Morgan et al. (2014) urges that students suspended from school should receive academic, behavioral, and emotional support to meet their individual needs, asserting that, currently, students suspended from school are left without supervision and continuity of instruction. Research also indicates that the quality of instruction and support across alternative education settings across the country varies, as such alternative settings are not consistent in operation, structure, or effectiveness (Lange, 2002). In addition, school districts are accountable for community concerns over school suspensions and the impact suspensions have on student achievement. School leaders therefore look for effective strategies that will keep suspended students engaged in schooling.

The current study is important for school leaders, as it provided an overview of best strategies to keep long-term suspended students engaged in schooling, and also examined the characteristics of effective alternative programs. In addition, the study explored the perceptions of educators and school leaders regarding effective strategies to maintain continuity of instruction while addressing the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of students in long-term suspension. Moreover, there is a need to understand if school districts have quality options to keep students engaged in schooling once they have been suspended, and the current study bears implications for school leaders as they continue to explore the development of alternatives to

long-term suspensions. The significance of the current study is in the insight it can provide district educational leaders regarding alternatives to long-term suspension and effective strategies that provide students with quality opportunities to continue their coursework, stay engaged in school, and address their social, emotional, and behavioral needs.

### **Definitions and Key Terms**

*Short-term suspensions.* Short-term suspensions are used for less serious offenses and can last up to 10 days out of school.

*Long-term suspensions:* Long-term suspensions last from a minimum of 11 days to a maximum of the days remaining in the school year.

*Achievement gap:* The term refers to “any significant and persistent disparity in academic performance or educational attainment between different groups of students, such as white students and minorities, for example, or students from higher-income and lower-income households” (Glossary of Education Reform, 2014, n.p.).

*Distance education:* A general term for any type of educational activity in which the participants are at a distance from each other.

*Online learning:* Education in which instruction and content are delivered primarily over the internet (Watson & Kalmon, 2005). The term does not include print-based correspondence education, broadcast television or radio, video cassettes, or stand-alone educational software programs that do not have a significant internet-based instructional component. This term is often used interchangeably with *virtual learning*, *cyber learning*, and *e-learning*.

*Zero tolerance:* A “philosophy or policy that mandates the application of predetermined consequences, most often severe and punitive in nature, that are intended to be applied regardless

of the seriousness of behavior, mitigating circumstances, or situational context” (Skiba et al., 2006).

*Q-methodology*: Provides a foundation for the systematic study of subjectivity, as in a person’s viewpoint, opinion, beliefs and attitudes (Stephenson, 1953).

### **Summary**

As a reaction to many violent school incidents such as Columbine, zero-tolerance policies were enacted to address the perceived increase in school violence during the 1990s. As the media focused on violence in schools, pressure increased on legislators to take action against guns in schools with the enactment of the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994. Following this, all 50 states adopted some variation of the zero-tolerance rule (Ashford, 2000). Some states and school districts went beyond the focus on weapons and decided to apply zero-tolerance standards to a wide range of disciplinary infractions in an effort to maintain order and safety. However, these policies have failed to keep students in school and engaged in learning (Wald & Losen, 2007). Studies show that high suspension rates negatively influence student achievement and dropout rates. In addition, there are civil rights concerns related to the high number of suspensions, due to the fact that students of color and other historically disadvantaged groups are far more likely to be suspended out-of-school (Losen, 2011).

Research and data on school discipline clearly indicate that millions of students are being suspended and removed from their classroom each year, many of whom are suspended for minor infractions (Losen & Gillespie, 2012). When suspended, these students are at risk of falling behind academically, dropping out of school, and/or coming in contact with the juvenile justice system.

Additionally, for more than 10 years, the Civil Rights Project has raised concerns about the frequency of out-of-school suspensions, racial disparities, and loss of instructional opportunities. Large numbers of students from every racial group are suspended, but the disparities between groups are significant (Wald & Losen, 2007). Still, the effects of out-of-school suspensions on student engagement and learning remain unknown—what can we learn from current school leaders regarding effective engagement and learning strategies?

Chapter 2 includes a review of the literature related to the history and characteristics of effective alternative programs, focusing on exclusionary disciplinary practices and the national discipline gap between minority and majority students.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

The purpose of this chapter is to review extant literature about effective strategies to keep long-term suspended students engaged and learning while out of the classroom environment. As the current study examined the negative impact and unintended consequences of out-of-school suspension on student achievement and behavior, the researcher intended to better understand which strategies are effective in keeping suspended students engaged, supported, and learning.

The following review of the literature focuses on the causes and uses of school suspensions, the enactment of zero-tolerance policies, and the unintended consequences of out-of-school suspensions. Another section of the literature review addresses alternative practices that are implemented to encourage student engagement and provide continued education for long-term suspended students.

### **School Suspensions**

Nationally, more than 3.5 million students are suspended each year (Rokeach & Denver, 2006). Suspension is a disciplinary action taken by the administration for serious violations of school rules and regulations. Suspensions may range from 1 to 10 days in accordance with each particular school district's policy and, while on suspension, a student may not participate in any extracurricular activities (Dupper, 1994).

Prevention of violent and disruptive behaviors is a rightful expectation of all school districts (Smallwood & Kern, 2006). However, while the use of suspension may be an appropriate disciplinary response for violations of school policies, the vast majority of suspensions are for minor offenses (Dupper, 1994). Only 10% of suspensions involve weapons, though most people believe suspensions are a legitimate response to serious violations of school

policies (Rokeach & Denver, 2006). In-school and out-of-school suspensions are the most common consequences for minor infractions such as attendance, disrespect, dress code violations excessive tardiness, insubordination, profanity, and classroom disruption (Dupper & Bosch, 1996; Morrison & Skiba, 2001).

Belfield and Levin (2005) assert that suspension is often the given punishment for a student who is disrupting the learning environment, because administrators believe that removing the student is the only way to allow learning to continue. As school administrators are under pressure to implement strategies that protect the learning environment and address inappropriate behaviors, they use suspensions as a means of getting students' attention and sending a message about the seriousness of their misconduct. Many educators see suspensions overall as a viable option at the least and some even perceive out-of-school suspensions to be an effective disciplinary strategy (Billings & Enger, 1995). However, most studies have suggested that out-of-school suspensions (OSS) are ineffective and, in many cases, discriminatory.

There is also little data to suggest that suspensions alter student behavior. Generally speaking, Webb and Kritsonis (2006) pointed to the fact that there is little evidence that students learn from the consequences of their misbehavior. Dupper (1998) added to this in noting that suspensions do not teach students how to behave more appropriately when they return to attend school. Other researchers suggest that the early identification of troubled students and implementation of preventive measures is a good way to provide effective behavioral support (Crum & Sherman, 2008). In fact, suspensions have been correlated with many negative educational outcomes (Dupper, 1994). Many researchers believe that these strategies to address negative behavior have a serious impact on student achievement. Overall, suspensions isolate

marginalized students and their parents from school (Cohen, Weiss, Mulvey & Dearwater, 1994). Punishment like suspensions have been found to be a threat to student's educational progress because they keep students away from learning (Gilliam & Shabar, 2006). Adams (1992) found that OSS students are typically weak academically, and many OSS students go unsupervised if they are not in school (Collins, 1985). Other researchers have stated that students who are repeatedly suspended are more likely to be retained and negatively labeled (Adams, 1992; Zirkel, 1997). In addition, students not being allowed to make up work missed during a large number of classroom absences can lead to failed courses (Zirkel, 1997). Sugai and Horner (1999) indicated that these disciplinary measures are ineffective and may even have an impact on the removal of students from direct learning environments, as frequently suspended students often fall irretrievably behind and become at risk of dropping out of school.

Moreover, the potential culpability of the school staff in some cases has not been ignored in the literature. Researchers from John Hopkins University found the following school characteristics to be associated with discipline problems: unclear rules; perception of fairness and inconsistency of enforcement; lack of understanding of the rules by teachers and administrators; disagreement on appropriate responses; and punitive attitudes of teachers (Gottfredson, 1997). Discrimination and lack of fairness in educators and administrators seems to be another factor affecting which students are suspended. Studies show that male, minority, and academically- and behaviorally-challenged students are suspended in disproportionate numbers (Cohen et al., 1994).

Researchers have documented that most disciplinary referrals begin in the classroom, but there is little evidence of a consistent relationship between the seriousness of the offense and the

severity of the consequence (Decker, Dona, & Christenson, 2007). There are, however, alternative programs to address out-of-school suspensions that employ efforts to keep students at school. For example, OSS in these settings is only considered an appropriate response for serious school offenses such as fighting, weapons, and controlled substance use or distribution (Dupper & Bosch, 1996). Suspension in alternative school disciplinary approaches is reserved for only the most severe infractions.

### **Zero-Tolerance Policies**

The term *zero tolerance* is defined as a “predefined, mandatory consequence applied to a violation of school rules regardless of the circumstances, disciplinary history, or age of the student involved (Skiba et al., 2006). Zero-tolerance rhetoric, which was borrowed from the War on Drugs, became increasingly widespread as school officials and community leaders responded to the rising violence in our nation’s schools. In fact, the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 (GFSA) created the foundations for zero-tolerance policies. The GFSA mandates that all schools that receive federal funding must have policies to expel any student who brings a firearm to school for a minimum of 365 days (Birkland & Lawrence, 2009; Peterson & Skiba, 2001). National media reports about school shootings that escalated in number during the 1990s and 2000s also helped to create these absolute policies focusing on weapons and drugs at school (Peterson & Skiba, 2001).

Zero-tolerance policies in schools have generally involved harsh disciplinary consequences such as long-term and/or permanent suspension or expulsion for violations, and often even arrest and referral to juvenile or adult court. Losen (2011) noted that proponents of zero-tolerance policies believe that these severe punishments are appropriate and necessary parts

of the school discipline structure. Most schools have adopted zero-tolerance policies for a variety of behavioral issues generally associated with violence, drugs, or fighting on school grounds. According to the Centers for Disease Control (as cited in Heitzeg, 2009), in most cases 100% of school districts had prohibitions against weapons and violence; nearly 80% had bans on gang-activity at school; and more than 90% had implemented zero-tolerance policies for alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs. However, some have maintained that zero-tolerance policies do not adequately distinguish between serious and non-serious offenses, nor do they separate intentionally disruptive students from those with behavioral disorders (ABA, 2001). As a result, there have been unintended consequences to zero-tolerance policies (Justice Policy Institute, 2011). Schools and districts have utilized out-of-school suspension and expulsion for far lesser school infractions, and have at times relied on police presence to maintain order on school campuses. Although the original intent of the GFSA was to require extreme consequences for serious violations involving weapons and violence, zero-tolerance punishments have frequently been applied to minor infractions such as tardiness and disruptive behavior (ABA, 2001).

Researchers and organizations have reported a number of incidents that have been subject to zero-tolerance punitive policies:

- A 17-year-old high school junior shot a paper clip with a rubber band at a classmate, missed, and broke the skin of a cafeteria worker. The student was expelled from school.
- A boy who chewed gum too loudly in class was given a long-term suspension.

- An eighth-grade honors student who scratched a boy who was bothering her with a pen was charged with a weapons offense and sent to an alternative education program.
- A nine-year-old on the way to school found a manicure kit with a one-inch knife and took it to campus. The student was suspended for one day.
- A ninth-grade boy forgot about a butter knife he had in his backpack before going through his school's metal detector. He was handcuffed to a chair, arrested, suspended, and sent to an alternative education program for the offense.
- A 12-year-old boy in Ponchatatoula, Louisiana who had been diagnosed with a hyperactive disorder warned the kids in the lunch line not to eat all the potatoes, or "I'm going to get you." The student, turned in by the lunch monitor, was suspended for two days. He was then referred to police by the principal, and the police charged him with making terrorist threats. He was incarcerated for two weeks while awaiting trial.
- A five-year-old boy in Queens New York had a tantrum and knocked papers off the principal's desk. He was arrested, handcuffed, and taken to a psychiatric hospital.
- Two 10-year-old students from Arlington, Virginia were suspended for three days for putting soapy water in a teacher's drink. At the teacher's urging, police then charged the boys with a felony offense that carried a maximum sentence of 20 years. The students were formally processed through the juvenile justice system before the case was dismissed months later.

- An 11-year-old girl in Orlando, Florida pushed another student. She was tazed by a police officer and arrested, and faced charges of battery on a school resource officer, disrupting a school function, and resisting with violence.
- A five-year-old girl in St. Petersburg, Florida was handcuffed, arrested, and taken into custody for having a tantrum and knocking papers off the principal's desk.
- A 14-year-old disabled student in Palm Beach, Florida was sent to the principal's office for allegedly stealing \$2.00 from another student. The principal then referred the student, who had no prior offenses, to the police, where he was charged with strong-armed robbery and held for six weeks in an adult jail (Advancement Project, 2005; Heitzeg, 2009; Justice Policy Institute, 2011).

The enactment and implementation of zero-tolerance policies in schools have increased without evidence that they actually improve school safety and security (Peterson & Skiba, 2001). According to the Advancement Project (2005), zero tolerance was adopted and expanded without data to support its effectiveness. Even more, there is evidence to support that these policies do contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline. Suspension or expulsion from school gives students unsupervised idle time that often leads to involvement in far more concerning negative and dangerous activities (Advancement Project & Harvard University Civil Rights Project, 2000). The Schott Foundation's (2012) report suggested that students who are suspended repeatedly have a greater likelihood of dropping out of school and students who are suspended are three times more likely to drop out by Grade 10 than those who were never suspended. The Justice Policy Institute (2011) similarly suggested that a student's referral to the juvenile justice system by the school often leads to an even greater amount of missed instructional time and an increased

likelihood of the student dropping out. Grant (2006) stresses that dropping out of school greatly increases the likelihood of involvement in criminal activities that lead to incarceration.

### **Racial Disparity**

Research has shown that large numbers of students from every racial group are suspended, but the disparities between groups are profound. Losen and Gillespie (2012) assessed data collected by the Office of Civil Rights regarding the 3,081,240 students in K-12 who were suspended out of school at least one time during the 2009-2010 school year. Their report showed that, across the nation, nearly 1 out of every 6 Black students (17%); 1 in 12 Native American students (8%); and 1 in 14 Latino students (7%) were suspended at least once. These numbers are lower than the suspension rates of 1 in 20 White students (5%) and 1 in 50 Asian-American students (2%) (Losen & Gillespie, 2012).

Nationally, Black students are being suspended in numbers greater than would be expected from their proportion of the student population. Rates of suspensions and expulsions for Latino are higher than expected, but Black students are impacted more by these disciplinary policies. On average across the nation, Black students are suspended and expelled at nearly three times the rate of White students. While Black girls and boys make up 17% of all school students, they account for 37% of suspensions and 35% of all expulsions (Witt, 2007). Even more, Black students receive harsher punitive measures such as suspensions and expulsions, and generally receive milder disciplinary consequences than their non-minority peers for the very same conduct (ABA, 2001).

Tables 1 and 2 display the results of Losen and Gillespie's (2012) analysis of the data from the Office of Civil Rights regarding suspension rates in the 2009-2010 school year. Table 1

Table 1

*State Sample Percentages for One or More Suspensions by Race/Ethnicity*

Rank	State	Black-White % Gap	American Indian- Alaska Native	Asian American	Latino	Black	White	Total	% of students in sample
1	IL	21.3	6.9	1.1	7.8	25.3	3.9	9.8	78
2	MO	18.4	5.6	2.0	5.2	22.8	4.4	8.0	77
3	CT	18.1	3.3	1.1	13.5	20.4	2.4	7.1	82
4	TN	16.4	4.1	2.1	6.0	21.1	4.7	8.9	95
5	MI	15.9	7.6	1.5	8.0	22.1	6.2	9.6	70
6	WI*	15.3	7.3	1.3	5.8	18.5	3.2	4.5	71*
7	MN	15.3	11.4	1.7	5.5	17.6	2.3	4.2	90
8	DE	14.4	9.3	1.6	10.2	21.8	7.3	12.3	93
9	NV	14.4	10.8	5.5	12.3	22.6	8.2	11.2	100
10	OH	14.0	2.4	1.1	7.6	18.6	4.6	7.7	71
11	NE	14.0	12.3	2.0	5.3	17.6	3.6	5.4	79
12	IN	13.6	3.9	1.5	8.4	19.5	5.9	8.3	78
13	AR	13.2	3.2	3.6	6.3	18.5	5.3	8.5	70
14	SC	13.2	7.8	2.5	7.8	21.0	7.9	12.7	96
15	PA	13.2	2.0	1.3	10.2	16.7	3.6	6.35	77
16	KS	12.8	5.2	2.0	7.1	16.8	4.0	6.0	75
17	OK	12.5	5.8	2.7	7.0	18.3	5.8	7.7	71
18	TX	12.3	3.8	1.4	6.5	15.4	3.2	6.5	88
19	GA	12.2	4.5	2.5	6.0	17.1	4.9	9.6	98
20	CA	12.1	10.6	2.6	7.5	17.7	5.6	7.1	91
21	VA	11.6	6.8	1.8	5.7	16.6	5.0	7.9	94
22	MS	11.2	4.4	2.4	4.7	17.6	6.4	11.9	91
23	IA	10.9	4.4	1.4	5.0	13.9	3.0	4.1	68
24	AL	10.7	3.5	1.6	4.9	16.3	5.6	9.3	96

25	NC	10.2	17.8	1.8	6.8	16.3	6.1	9.2	94
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Table 1 (continued)

Rank	State	Black-White % Gap	American Indian- Alaska Native	Asian American	Latino	Black	White	Total	% of students in sample
26	WV	9.9	0.0	1.0	7.6	18.6	8.7	9.3	91
27	CO	9.7	12.1	2.8	8.3	13.9	4.3	6.1	94
28	KY	9.3	1.0	1.5	4.1	13.9	4.6	5.8	84
29	NJ	8.7	1.5	1.0	6.6	12.0	3.3	5.5	75
30	RI	8.6	9.2	4.9	11.2	15.6	7.0	8.6	84
31	LA	8.3	6.7	2.3	5.9	15.3	7.0	10.7	96
32	AZ	7.8	8.9	2.3	7.1	12.5	4.6	6.3	84
33	WA	7.8	12.0	3.2	8.7	13.6	5.8	6.8	89
34	OR	7.6	8.2	1.9	6.7	12.5	4.9	5.5	83
35	MA	7.1	4.7	2.0	12.3	11.5	4.3	6.3	79
36	AK	6.4	8.7	3.9	5.2	10.9	4.5	5.9	90
37	MD*	6.1	5.7	1.4	4.3	11.0	4.9	6.9	100*
38	NH	5.3	3.3	0.9	9.2	11.4	6.1	6.3	77
39	SD	4.9	7.2	1.3	5.6	7.1	2.2	3.1	77
40	UT	4.2	6.7	2.3	5.0	6.2	2.41	2.7	85
41	ME	4.1	3.3	0.9	2.2	8.7	4.6	4.7	78
42	WY	3.8	13.2	5.8	8.0	13.8	10.0	9.8	81
43	VT	2.2	7.3	0.4	0.9	6.5	4.4	4.5	59
44	ND	2.0	7.6	0.0	2.2	3.6	1.6	2.2	81
45	NM	1.7	6.6	1.8	6.4	6.1	4.4	5.8	90
46	ID	1.0	6.0	1.6	4.7	4.2	3.2	3.5	85
47	MT	-0.3	11.3	0.0	3.9	3.4	3.8	4.8	80

*Note.* All students combined suspension risk percentage, ranked by Black-White % gap. Source: CRDC, 2009-2010 (numbers from national sample rounded to one decimal). \*MD and WI each had a large district removed from the sample so the size depicted on the right is no longer accurate and their estimates should be reviewed with extra caution.

Table 2

*Risk for Two or More Out-of-School Suspensions by Race and Disability*

Student Race/Ethnicity	Students with Disabilities	Students without Disabilities
African American	14%	7.4%
American Indian	5.6%	3.2%
Latino	5.9%	2.5%
White	4.1%	1.5%
Asian American/Pacific Islander	1.3%	0.6%

*Note.* Percentage of total subgroup enrolled (national sample) suspended two or more times.  
Source: CRDC, 2009-2010 (numbers from national sample rounded to one decimal).

includes the state sample rates for students who were suspended one or more times by racial group. Table 2 outlines the suspension rates for students with disabilities versus those without disabilities, also by racial group.

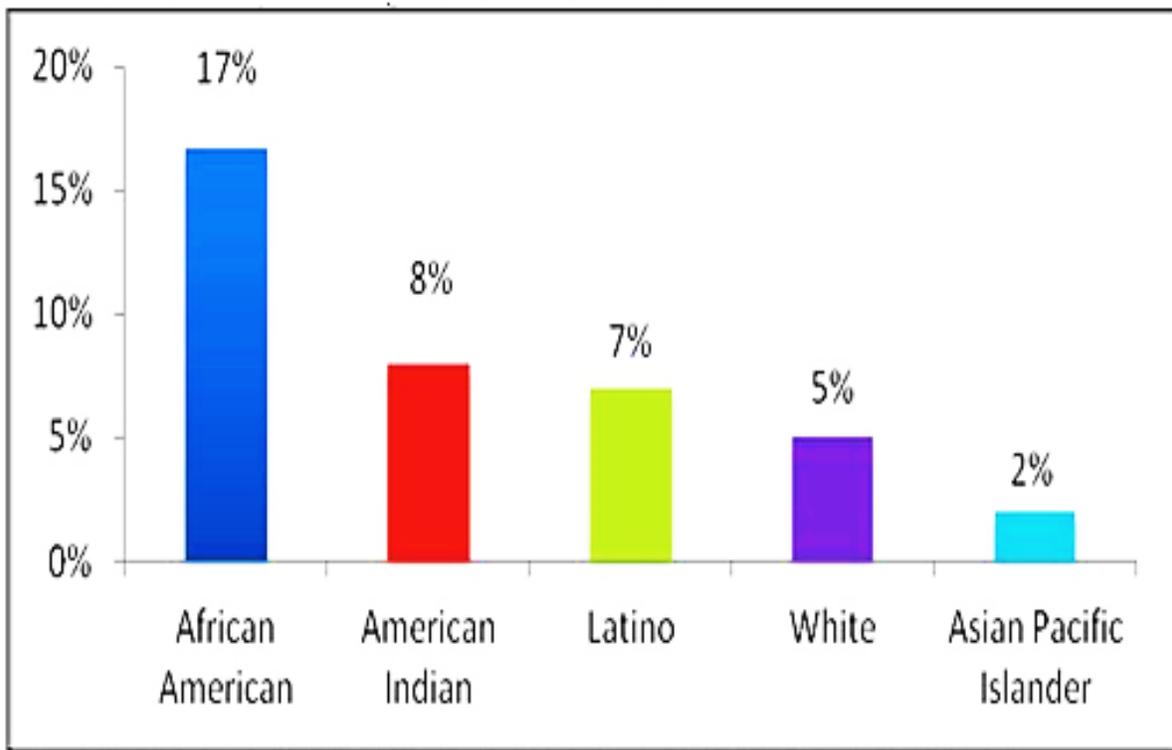
Figures 1 – 3 display the results of Losen and Gillespie’s (2012) analysis of K-12 suspension rates for various student groups in graphic form. Figure 1 shows the rates, by racial group, for students across the nation who were suspended at least once during the 2009-2010 academic year, with national sample sums rounded to whole numbers and calculated as a percentage of total enrollment. Figure 2 illustrates the suspension rates for students with disabilities versus those without disabilities, also divided by race/ethnicity. Looking at disability alone, Figure 3 compares, by disability status, the risk for students who were suspended once or multiple times.

A discussion of zero tolerance and racial disparity is relevant to the current study’s examination of school suspensions, as the Justice Policy Institute (2011) determined that schools with the highest rates of suspension and expulsion are usually schools with strict zero-tolerance policies. Moreover, as Flanagan (2007) noted, little has been offered to at-risk students after they are removed from the academic settings. Research on zero-tolerance policies has furthermore suggested that advantages and disadvantages of zero-tolerance approaches to discipline may cause concerns for school districts (Irvin et al., 2006).

## **Alternative Education**

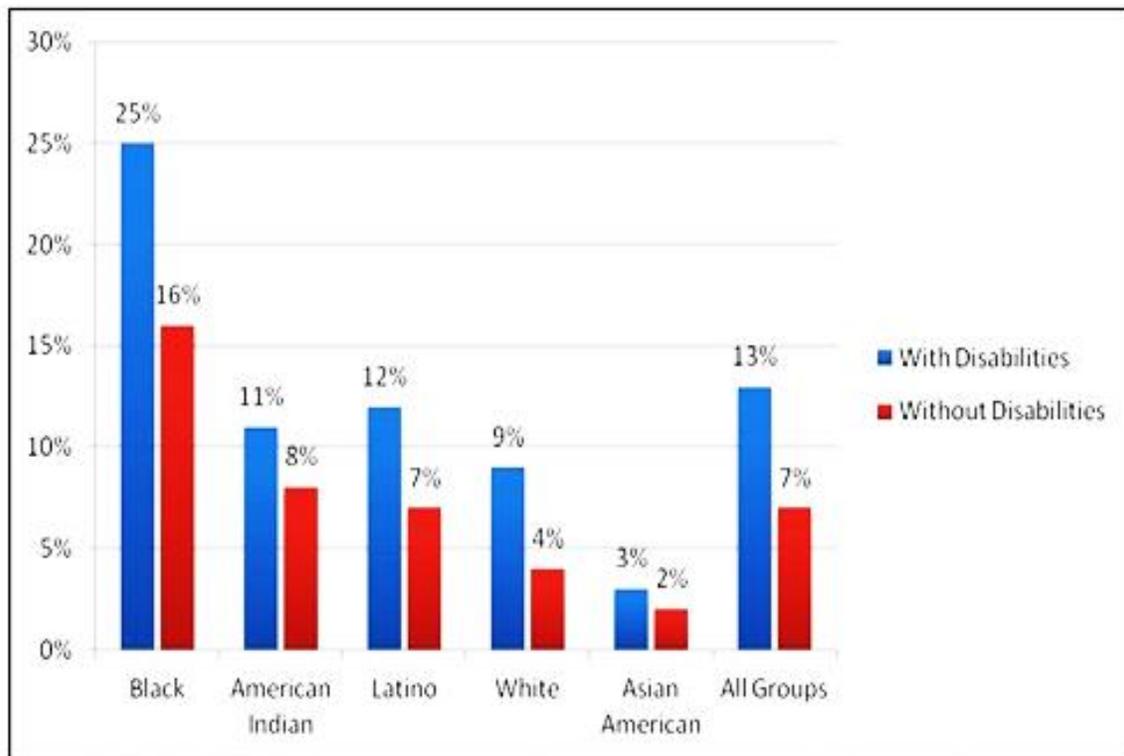
### **Early History**

Young (1990) asserts that alternative approaches in public schooling have existed since the birth of American education. However, the concept of “alternative education” was officially



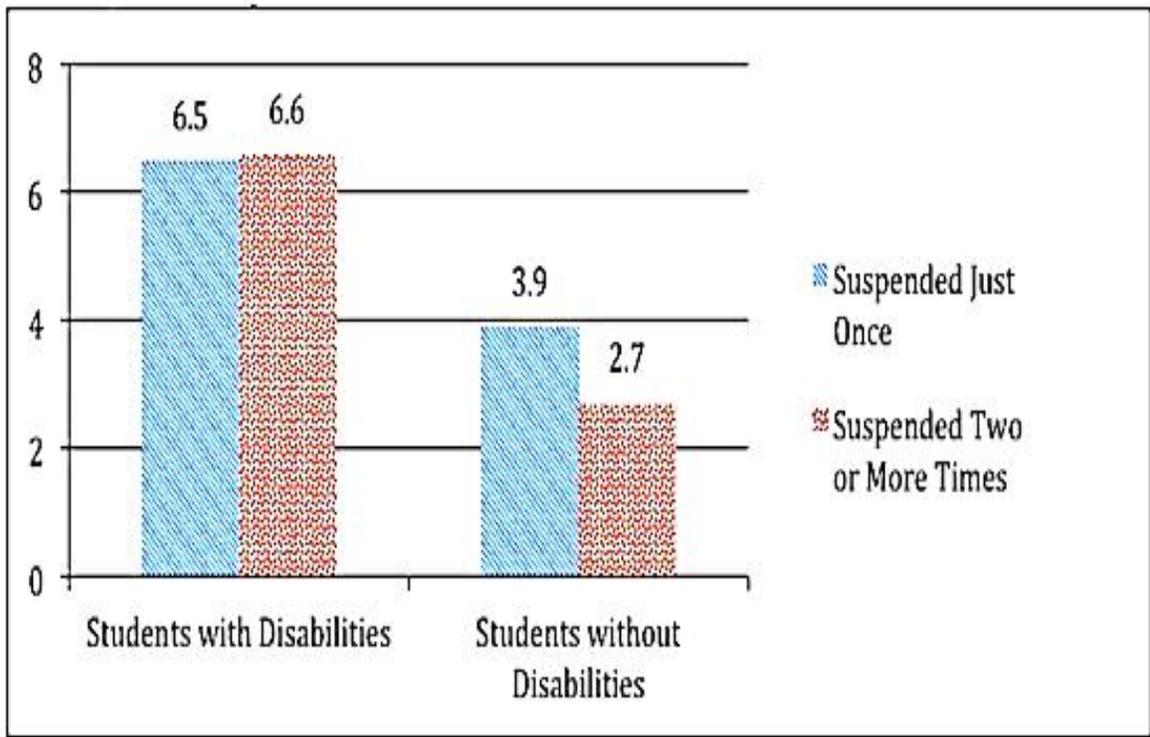
Source: CRDC, 2009-2010 (numbers from national sample rounded to whole numbers)

Figure 1. Student suspension rates by race/ethnicity, 2009-2010.



Source: CRDC, 2009-2010 (numbers from national sample rounded to whole numbers)

Figure 2. Out-of-school suspension rates by race and disability, 2009-2010.



Source: CRDC, 2009-2010 (numbers from national sample rounded to one decimal)

Figure 3. Students suspended once or multiple times by disability, 2009-2010.

established within the American public school system more than 40 years ago (Foley & Pang, 2006; Lange & Sletten, 2002). Some alternative education models emphasized discipline, while others focused on innovative programs designed to meet students' unique needs.

In the 1960s, a time of innovation and movement in the educational system, alternative education models first developed, which had lasting implications for public schools with respect to curriculum, delivery, and structure. However, most early non-public alternatives had a short lifespan (Raywid, 1981; Young, 1990). The definition of alternative schools began to narrow in the 1980s (Young, 1990). Many alternative models of the time focused on students who were disruptive or failing in their home school environment. Raywid (1981) suggests that it was during this time when alternative schools first became interested in teaching the basics to students, and also lessened the focus on collective decision-making.

### **Alternative Education Today**

The concept of alternative education was established within the American public school system more than four decades ago, but it has evolved through the years as an educational option. While alternative schools and programs often have a common foundation, the nation's school systems have not recognized a shared definition or monolithic model. Some alternative education models emphasize discipline; others focus on innovative programs intended to more effectively meet students' unique needs. Specifically, three categories of alternative education programs have been identified within the literature, each with its own approaches and goals (Foley & Pang, 2006; Lange & Sletten, 2002):

- Schools of choice, such as magnet school programs

- Behavior modification programs for students who have been identified as disruptive in standard school settings, programs which are typically “last chance” options for students who are at risk of long-term suspension or school expulsion
- Schools or programs emphasizing academic and/or social rehabilitation or remediation, with the goal of transitioning students back to base school settings

The majority of the literature on alternative education focuses on the last two categories.

According to recent articles, alternative schools and programs typically exist to offer individualized opportunities to meet the educational needs of students who have been identified as at-risk for school failure (Foley & Pang, 2006; Lehr, Tan, & Ysseldyke, 2009). This objective is supported by the U.S. Department of Education, which defines an alternative education school as:

...a public elementary/secondary school that addresses needs of students that typically cannot be met in a regular school, provides nontraditional education, serves as an adjunct to a regular school, or falls outside the categories of regular, special education, or vocational education. (as cited in Lehr & Lange, 2003)

There is general consensus within the literature regarding the characteristics of alternative education options and the students they serve, and research has examined academic and behavioral outcomes of students served by alternative schools and programs. For example, under a federally funded grant, the University of Minnesota launched a national research study in June 2002 to obtain extensive information on alternative schools in the 50 states. The three-year project consisted of four studies; several individual reports were published using data from one or more of these studies. To offer a national perspective on the characteristics, school

populations, and student outcomes of alternative education, three reports are referenced in this section (Lehr & Lange, 2003; Lehr, Moreau, Lange, & Lanners, 2004; Lehr et al., 2009). A collection of additional research articles and publications compiled by Educational Research Service (ERS) were also reviewed and are cited in this section.

### **Alternative Education Characteristics**

Nationwide, alternative schools have been described as having a disciplinary approach to managing or improving student behavior. Other common characteristics of the nation's alternative schools include small class sizes, total school populations, and student-to-teacher ratios; flexibility in class hours and class schedules; and a creative curriculum described as nontraditional, hands-on, and experimental (Lehr & Lange, 2003; Lehr et al., 2004; Lehr et al., 2009). Additional studies have also characterized alternative schools by their small and supportive environments, emphasis on one-on-one interactions between teachers and students, and flexibility in structure and opportunities (Foley & Pang, 2006; Powell, 2003).

Comparatively small student populations and low student-to-staff ratios often characterize alternative schools. According to the literature, alternative schools usually serve fewer than 200 students, or they may exist as smaller units within a larger school (Hadderman, 2002; Lehr et al., 2009). In Lehr et al.'s (2004) national study, 20 states reported alternative school enrollments ranging from 0.2% to 18% of total school enrollment; similarly, 17 states reported a 10:1 student-to-teacher ratio in their alternative schools. Such a low student-to-staff ratio is a positive feature of alternative environments that can be helpful in fostering good relationships, often creating valuable educational attributes like a close-knit environment, a sense of community among school members, and opportunities for individualized instruction

(Hadderman, 2002). In a focus group study on alternative schools conducted by De la Ossa (2005), high-school student participants offered insight into the relationship between school size and connectivity. The students commented on how the smaller class and school sizes worked to facilitate peer and teacher communication and connection, especially in terms of receiving individual attention, developing relationships, and fostering a community atmosphere (De la Ossa, 2005). Comparably, in a qualitative case study of a single alternative high school serving a high minority and free or reduced-price lunch student population, researchers observed a caring, nurturing environment wherein students formed positive relationships with teachers and benefitted from small class sizes. Notably, however, the school was also found to offer a limited curriculum that only helped students obtain basic skills or recover credits for graduation, rather than promoting critical and higher order thinking (Kim & Taylor, 2008).

Other essential elements of alternative education and programs serving at-risk student populations that have been identified within the literature include clearly identified goals, a student-centered atmosphere, alignment of curriculum and assessment, availability of special education services, training and support for teachers, and links to multiple external agencies (Foley & Pang, 2006; Powell, 2003).

### **Alternative Education Options in North Carolina School Districts**

The current study reviewed alternative schools located in large North Carolina school districts to draw comparisons between the alternative education models implemented in Wake County Public School System (WCPSS), the district where the researcher worked as an Area Superintendent, and other similar districts. The school districts examined in this study include Charlotte-Mecklenburg County, Durham County, Forsyth County, and Guilford County Public

School Systems. The researcher gleaned information for the comparison from a review of alternative school websites, as well as interviews with Evaluation and Research staff and central services school leaders.

Based on a content analysis of the target student population and program services, several types of alternative educational options are available within WCPSS and other North Carolina school districts. In contrast, academic remediation, enrichment, and achievement are a priority at other alternative sites. Supporting both behavioral and academic objectives was also found to be common for alternative schools. However, the focus of each particular alternative education option is dependent on the student population being served. The researcher found an array of alternative schools and programs focusing on a range of student needs. Among the alternative education options were programs targeting the following populations:

- Students who have behavioral issues
- Students who have been long-term suspended
- Students who are over-age in their grade
- Students at risk for dropping out of school
- Students who have severe mental or emotional issues
- Students identified as in need of special education services

As shown in Table 3 (WCPSS, 2010), the availability of alternative education options is offered by the school districts. However, nearly all of the selected North Carolina public school districts – Charlotte-Mecklenburg County, Forsyth County, Guilford County, and WCPSS – supported the identified selection of programs and offered each of the above-mentioned alternative education options. The Durham Public School System, though, had more limited

Table 3

*Types of Programs Offered at Various NC District Alternative Schools by District*

District	School Name	Grades Served	Behavior Issues	Long-term Suspended	Over-age in Grade	At-risk of Dropping Out	Mental or Emotional Issues	Special Education Needs
Charlotte Mecklenburg	Morgan School	K12					X	X
	Turning Point Academy	4-12	X	X	X	X		
	Hawthorne High School	6-12				X		
	Midwood High	9			X	X		
Durham	Lakeview School	6-12	X	X		X	X	
Forsyth	Kennedy Learning	5-9	X	X	X	X		
	Griffith Academy	6-12		X				
	Forsyth Middle College	11-12				X	X	

Table 3 (continued)

District	School Name	Grades Served	Behavior Issues	Long-term Suspended	Over-age in Grade	At-risk of Dropping Out	Mental or Emotional Issues	Special Education Needs
Guilford	Gateway Education Center	6 months-22 years					X	X
	CD McIver Education Center	5-22					X	X
	SCALE – Greensboro	6-12	X	X				
	Dean B. Pruetts SCALE School	6-12	X	X				
	High School Ahead Academy	8			X	X		
	Twilight School	12	X			X		

Table 3 (continued)

District	School Name	Grades Served	Behavior Issues	Long-term Suspended	Over-age in Grade	At-risk of Dropping Out	Mental or Emotional Issues	Special Education Needs
Wake	Mount Vernon Middle	K-8	X		X	X	X	X
	River Oaks Middle	6-8	X		X	X		
	Longview	6-12	X				X	X
	Mary Phillips High	9-12	X			X		
	SCORE program	6-12		X				

*Note.* The Bridges program housed at Mount Vernon serves students in need of special education who may have mental or emotional issues. The Booster program housed at Mount Vernon and River Oaks serves over-age students.

options, with one alternative setting for long-term suspended students and smaller centers for specific-need students.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg County Schools, the second largest school district in North Carolina, supported an alternative school for students in grades K-12 who are in need of special education services, and a school for over-aged students in Grade 9. It also had an academy for students in Grades 4-12 serving long-term suspension. Also, middle- and high-school students who are academically at risk with minimal behavior issues may choose to attend Hawthorn High, a school in the district offering day and evening programs and supporting the academic progress of teenage parents through on-site services.

Durham County Public Schools had one alternative school serving middle- and high-school students who have been long-term suspended. This school created a therapeutic setting for students with mental health issues, and a detention center for adjudicated youth.

Forsyth County Public Schools offered a center for students in Grades 5-9, with programs for students who have been long-term suspended, over-age, at risk of dropping out, or in need of special education services. Also available was an alternative school for middle- and high-school students who have been long-term suspended. Another high school in the district, for students in Grades 11 and 12 who are at risk of dropping out, had partnered with Forsyth Technical Community College to promote student academic and vocational achievement.

Guilford County Public Schools had created a comprehensive alternative education center for students with severe mental and physical disabilities. This unique center had three age-appropriate programs for students of age six months to 22. In addition, another separate public school served students between the ages of 5 and 22 who are moderately to severely mentally

challenged. In addition, middle- and high-school students who have been long-term suspended may attend one of two School Community Alternative Learning Environments, or SCALE schools. To address the needs of middle- and high-school students who are at-risk, an option has been established to allow these students to attend a high school that provides day and evening programs. There was one academy that served over-age students in Grade 8, one serving over-age students Grade 12, and another for long-term suspended students in Grades 4-12.

When comparing the alternative education options within WCPSS and the selected North Carolina school districts, the researcher noted both similarities and differences:

- WCPSS offered alternative educational options for its large and diverse student population comparable to the selected school districts. Similar to Charlotte-Mecklenburg County, Forsyth County, and Guilford County Public School Systems, it provided separate educational environments for students with mild behavior issues and those with major behavioral issues who are also in need of special education services, as well as programs for over-age and at-risk students.
- The method in which WCPSS supported students serving long-term suspensions did differ from other districts in North Carolina. WCPSS puts students on long-term suspensions from the system rather than from their base school, and the district did not currently support a physical center for long-term suspended students. It did, however, have a program called Second Chance Online Resource for Education (SCORE) for teaching long-term suspended middle- and high-school students in an online learning environment. The program provided English, language arts, and mathematics instruction by certified teachers during courses that meet online Monday

through Thursday. Mathematics courses were offered 2:45 p.m. to 4:45 p.m., and English/language arts courses were offered 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. Participation in SCORE requires access to a computer.

- The capacity of the alternative schools and programs within WCPSS was lower than comparable sites in Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Guilford, and Forsyth Counties. As such, WCPSS could not serve as many students in alternative settings.
- Unlike Forsyth County Public Schools, WCPSS had not systematically created partnerships with community agencies to support the needs of alternative school students at a shared, partner alternative education site.

### **Summary**

The current study was designed to gather information to determine what educational researchers and practitioners consider best practices to keep students engaged during long-term suspensions. Looking at the potential value of alternative education to support this end, a section of this chapter is devoted to the history and characteristics of alternative education. The researcher then discusses the review of literature centered on discipline practices that lead to millions of students being suspended from school each year. The literature revealed data indicating that there has been a significant increase in suspension for students of all races, with a growing racial discipline gap. Zero-tolerance policies and the desire to maintain safe and orderly schools have contributed to the increase of long-term suspensions and community concerns regarding the “school-to-prison pipeline.” The literature also outlined and supported specific strategies and best practices to keep long-term suspended students engaged and prepared to successfully transition back to their base schools.

Chapter 3 provides an overview of Q-methodology, the research methodology that was used to construct and examine a set of strategies schools can employ to maintain student engagement and learning during long-term suspensions.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

### **Introduction**

The current study sought to understand the perceptions that educators and school leaders have regarding effective strategies for keeping students engaged in schooling while they are on long-term suspension. Q-methodology was the primary tool used to understand educators' and school leaders' perceptions of effective strategies. This chapter includes an explanation of Q-methodology, the rationale for its use in the current study; the methods employed in the study, and the data collection and analysis procedures.

### **Q-Methodology**

Q-methodology is a mixed methods research approach developed in 1935 by William Stephenson, as a way to scientifically examine and quantify human subjectivity. A means of extracting subjective opinion, Q-methodology as a research method provides the foundation for the systematic study of subjectivity (Stephenson, 1953). Brown (1997) notes that this method has been applied outside the field of academic psychology, mostly in the fields of communication and political science and increasingly in the behavioral and health sciences.

The use of Q-methodology begins with the development of a set of statements that the participants are asked to sort, known as concourse theory. In a Q-methodological study, participants respond to a sample of statements about some topic, called the Q-set. Using a quasi-normal distribution, participants, who are called the P-set, are asked to rank-order the statements from their individual point of view, according to some preference, attitude, judgment or feeling about them. As Brown (2012) states, "Perceptions are formed by how individuals organize and interpret their sensory impressions to give meaning to their environment" (p. 63). Thus, Q-

sorting is a research method that enables each participant to express their perceptions of the meaning of the given statements and thereby reveal their subjective viewpoint (Smith, 2001).

Watts and Stenner (2012) note that “Q-methodology is better suited to the study of specifics; the viewpoints of specific people, specific groups, or the viewpoints at play within a specific institution” (p. 67). In addition, Brown (2012) explains “When researchers want to better understand beliefs and attitudes of participants about a specific topic, Q-methodology should be used” (p. 64). Since the current study focused on understanding the perceptions held by educators and leaders on effective strategies to keep long-term suspended students engaged in schooling, using Q-methodology provided the best means to collect this subjective data.

### **Phase I: Using Concourse Theory to Develop the Q-Statements**

As Watts and Stenner (2012) assert, “concourse is a name for the overall population of statements from which the Q-set is sampled” (p. 45). It is a collection of statements focused on the topic of the study. Sampling may be driven by the research question or by part of the formulation of the research question. Additionally, the sources of sampling will vary according to the study. According to Stainton Rogers (1995), sources commonly come from individual and/or group interviews, literature review, transmitted media output, or the cultural experiences of the researchers. The number of initial statements is usually 2-3 times as many as the final number, as it is reduced in number through pilot testing based on appropriateness, clarity, and applicability.

For this study, the statements were generated from the literature review and the initial surveying of school administrators, educational leaders, and colleagues. The researcher collected 75 statements centered on the best strategies to keep long-term suspended students engaged and

learning. The statements were narrowed down based on applicability, redundancy, and appropriateness. At times, similar statements were combined to form one statement. A total of 37 statements based on the research question made up the final Q-sample.

For the educators who helped to create the statements, the researcher contacted four school principals and three educational leaders who worked with him at Central Services, and asked for their feedback on their perceptions on the best strategies for keeping long-term suspended students engaged in schooling in order to help with the transition back to their base school. The participants were asked the following questions:

1. Are the statements understandable, and what changes would you suggest?
2. Are there any statements that are similar and should be combined?
3. Are there any statements that you would add to the list?
4. Are there any statements you would remove from the list?

Table 4 details the Q-sample statement cards gathered from the current study's literature review and participant principal responses regarding the effective strategies to keep long-term suspended students engaged in schooling.

The researcher worked as an Area Superintendent while conducting this study, which provided the opportunity to supervise and engage school administrators and Central Services leaders. For the study, the researcher interviewed multiple colleagues and discussed the best practices and strategies to keep long-term suspended students focused on learning and prepared to return to their base schools. The researcher also supervised principals and conducted area meetings to provide professional development, updates, and presentations designed to enhance the principals' roles as school leaders. It is in this environment that the researcher engaged

Table 4

*Q-Sample Statement Cards*

No.	Statement	Source
1	An effective way to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is to provide continued coursework virtually, online.	- Study participant - Barr & Parrett (1997) - De La Rosa (1998) - Morgan et al. (2014)
2	An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is to provide an alternative physical site.	- Morgan et al. (2014)
3	An effective strategy to keep suspended students engaged in school is to provide continued work at home with a visiting certified teacher.	- Barr & Parrett (1997) - Morgan et al. (2014)
4	An effective strategy to keep suspended students engaged in learning is to have certified staff working with them on their study skills.	- Participant
5	An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is to have a program that provides community service for academic credit.	- Study participant - Gregg (1999) - Morgan et al. (2014) - Raywid (1998)
6	An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in schooling is to provide opportunities to gain academic credit while obtaining employment skills.	- Morgan et al. (2014)
7	An effective strategy to keep suspended students engaged in learning is to have them involved in a program that hires certified teachers that are trained to redirect inappropriate behaviors.	- Morgan et al. (2014)
8	An effective strategy to keep suspended students engaged in learning is to hire certified teachers in a program that provides academic enrichment and study skills	- Barr & Parrett (1997) - Gregg (1999) - Morgan et al. (2014)

Table 4 (continued)

No.	Statement	Source
9	An effective strategy to keep students engaged in learning is to provide them access to their coursework so that they can keep pace with their classmates and not fall further behind.	- Study participant - De La Rosa (1998) - Gregg (1999) - Morgan et al. (2014) - WCPSS (2008)
10	An effective strategy to keep suspended students engaged in school is to create a portal for teachers, students and administrators to have real-time access to monitor student academic progress.	- Study participant - Barr & Parrett (1997) - Cuban (1989) - Raywid (1998) - WCPSS (2008)
11	An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is to have an alternative program that is flexible and able to meet individual student needs.	- Study participant - Barr & Parrett (1997) - Morgan et al. (2014) - Raywid (1998) - WCPSS (2008)
12	An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in learning is to have programs that require student attendance in convenient and accessible locations.	- Study participant
13	An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is to have them involved in membership of a small-based cohort supervised by a mentor.	- Study participant - Morgan et al. (2014)
14	Consistent communication with students, parents and school is an effective strategy for long-term suspended students.	- Bernard (1991) - Cuban (1989) - De La Rosa (1998) - Gregg (1999) - Raywid (1998)
15	An effective way to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is having them enrolled in an alternative environment, being taught by online teachers, in subjects needed to graduate.	- Study participant - WCPSS (2010)

Table 4 (continued)

No.	Statement	Source
16	An effective way to keep long-term suspended students engaged in schooling is to provide a means of support to family.	- WCPSS (2010)
17	An effective way to keep long-term suspended students engaged in schooling is to provide a program that intentionally builds resiliency among students facing life challenges.	- Foley & Pang (2006) - WCPSS (2010)
18	Develop an effective, specific plan for transitioning long-term suspended students back to base school settings.	- Foley & Pang (2006) - Hartzler & Jones (2002) - Lange & Sletten, (2002) - Morley (1991)
19	Students engaged in positive relationships with adults are an effective strategy for long-term suspended students.	- Cuban (1989) - Foley & Pang (2006) - Hadderman (2002) - Raywid (1990) - Smith, Barr, & Burke (1976)
20	An unconventional academic approach regarding pedagogical strategies is an effective strategy for long-term suspended students.	- Hartzler & Jones (2002) - Lehr & Lange (2003) - WCPSS (2008)
21	A program that emphasizes dropout prevention strategies.	- Lange & Sletten (2002)
22	An effective way to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is to provide an environment that promotes self-esteem.	- Lehr et al. (2004) - Lehr et al. (2009)

Table 4 (continued)

No.	Statement	Source
23	An effective way to keep long –termed suspended students engaged in schooling is to provide an atmosphere that fosters positive peer relationships.	- WCPSS (2010)
24	An effective way to keep long-term suspended students engaged in schooling is to provide specific services for students with IEPs.	- Foley & Pang (2006) - Gregg (1999) - Powell (2003) - WCPSS (2010)
25	The teacher serving the suspended student will engage the base school teacher and administrator to discuss strategies upon the student’s return is an effective strategy.	- Lehr & Lange (2003) - Morley (1991) - Sanoff (1994) - WCPSS (2010)
26	School system monitors student progress once returned to home base at least for one semester is an effective strategy for long-term suspended students.	- WCPSS (2010)
27	An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in schooling is to have a transition plan with “back-up” strategies if student is not successful in the base school setting.	- Cuban (1989) - Raywid (1990) - Smith, Barr, & Burke (1976) - WCPSS (2010)
28	An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in schooling is to partner with community organizations and develop liaison groups to collaborate with the base school.	- Study participant - Barr & Parrett (1997) - Benard (1995) - Raywid (1998)
29	An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in schooling is to provide an educational environment for learning in which students receive counseling services.	- Benard (1995)
30	Provide long-term suspended students with the opportunity to receive schooling with the same content area as the base school.	- Foley & Pang (2006) - Gregg (1999) - Kermerer & Walsh (2000) - Powell (2003)

Table 4 (continued)

No.	Statement	Source
31	Social worker working with the student and family throughout the course of the suspension is an effective strategy to keep students engaged.	- Kermerer & Walsh (2000)
32	An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is to understand that each student has a unique situation and you have to find ways to support each student in a different way.	- Study participant - Foley & Pang (2006) - Gregg (1999) - Morgan et al. (2014) - WCPSS (2008)
33	An effective way to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is to have the program teacher develop individualized education approach to meet each student needs with specific goals.	- Study participant
34	An effective way to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is to have the program teacher provide extra assistance when needed beyond normal services.	- Study participant - Foley & Pang (2006) - Gregg (1999) - Lehr & Lange (2003) - Morgan et al. (2014)
35	Regular meetings with all relevant partners (teachers, parents etc.) is an effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged.	- Study participant - Foley & Pang (2006) - Gregg (1999) - Lehr & Lange (2003) - Morgan et al. (2014)
36	An effective strategy for long-term suspended students is to have one case worker that oversees all services a student is provide and act as liaison among all these peoples.	- Study participant
37	New services and/or pedagogical strategies implemented if goals are not met is an effective strategy for long-term suspended students.	- Study participant

several principals to recruit participants for the current study. Input and feedback received from the participant principals regarding the statements helped generate the Q-sample.

### **Phase II: P-Sample Sorting**

The participants who sort the Q-sample are referred to as the P-sample. According to Militello and Janson (2007), “Q-methodology does not require a randomly generated participant sample, because the goal is to deliberately access a range and diversity of pertinent viewpoints on the topic being investigated” (p. 420). This fact is significant to the current study because it speaks to the method used by the researcher to recruit the principals who participated, as well as to their roles in sorting the Q-sample.

According to Watts and Stenner (2012), Q-methodological studies only need enough participants to establish the existence of factors. For statistical reasons, an adequate number of participants is around 40-60. Watts and Stenner (2012) maintain that it may be sensible to conduct a study with a number that is less than the items in the study’s Q-set. The researcher selected 40 principals as the P-sample to participate in the Q-sort. This P-sample of principals represented a diverse level of schools within the same school district in North Carolina, a district which had 172 schools and 158,175 enrolled students. The participants were selected by using convenience sampling; every month, the principals are required to attend monthly area meetings, and it was in this setting that the researcher, for the convenience of the principals, selected the volunteers who participated.

Q-sorting is a strategy of capturing subjectivity in which participants are requested to sort items in rank order with ranking values. Watts and Stenner (2012) contend that “the participant’s viewpoint is made to impact the immediate environment under a controlled experimental

condition” (p. 26). In Phase II of this study, the researcher introduced a deck of business-size cards that each had one statement from the Q-sample. These statements are shown in Table 4.

On the face of each card was a printed random number. The researcher identified potential participants, and had them sign a consent form before the process was initiated (see Appendix E). Written instructions were given to each participant (see Appendix B) outlining the process for the Q-sort. Participants were asked to sort the cards by placing them on a Q-sort distribution grid (see Appendix A). The distribution grid is numbered from a positive value at one pole through zero, to the equivalent negative value at the other pole (Watts & Stenner, 2012). The distribution grid is a quasi-normal fixed distribution designed for use with a 37-item Q-sample. The grid has nine points on the scale, ranging from strongly disagree on the left side to strongly agree on the right.

After the participants completed the card-sort, they were administered a survey that asked questions about their background and perceptions. The data was then entered into a program called PQMethod to develop statistical interpretations of the Q-sorts. Phase II also involved interviewing participants who fell on different factors. The responses from the participants were used to develop the quantitative data. Figure 4 shows the Q-Sort Distribution Grid used in the study.

### **Phase III: Follow-Up Interviews**

In Phase III, the researcher conducted interviews with eight study participants based on data that was analyzed using a software program. Using the results of the analysis, the participants were chosen based on two considerations: they volunteered in Phase I to be interviewed, and they identified with a particular viewpoint that was analyzed in the study. The



participants that were selected to be interviewed in this Phase received a consent form to sign (see Appendix A). The post-sort interviews provided the researcher with additional insight into participants' perceptions and thought process by capturing the reasoning behind each participant's Q-sort selections and rankings.

Interviews were conducted individually and in pairs with each participant in a location that was convenient for the participant. During the Q-sort, participants indicated their willingness to voluntarily participate in a post-sort interview by completing the post-sort questionnaire. At the time of the interview, participants were given a consent form to sign indicating their agreement to be interviewed (see Appendix E).

The post-sort interviews centered on five questions (see Appendix F), were recorded, and lasted no longer than an hour. The interviews and responses were used to support the statistical outcomes of the Q-sort after the data was entered in the PQMethod program.

### **Data Analysis**

The quantitative data analysis was conducted by collecting the data from the Q-sorts to be entered into a statistical program to identify factors. After participants completed the card sort process, the researcher inputted the raw data into the PQMethod software program. The next component in the data analysis process was the factor analysis. This PQMethod program created a correlation matrix showing the inter-correlation of each sort with the other sorts.

The Varimax method was used to rotate the emergent factors based on Eigenvalues, which Watts and Stenner (2012) note, "together with the factor variance (a factor Eigenvalue) provides us with a clear indication of the strength and potential explanatory power of an extracted factor" (p. 111). The z-score for each statement on each factor allowed the researcher

to determine the participants' highest ranking statement. Q-sorts that load significantly on a particular factor exhibit a similar assorting pattern (Watson & Stenner, 2012). A factor array was conducted to represent the viewpoint of a particular factor, and these factor arrays functioned as the basis for the factor interpretation (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Factor interpretations supported the understanding of the perceptions and viewpoints of the participants.

The researcher began with open coding to identify major categories of information. Significant statements that provided an understanding of how participant's experiences with long-term suspensions shaped their perceptions and viewpoints were noted (Creswell, 1998). The statements were then grouped to form themes. Patterns were analyzed and used to understand how the participants made meaning out of their experiences (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The researcher used member checks throughout the data collection and data analysis phases. This practice helped the participants to validate their findings or clarify any misconceptions. Member checks also helped the researcher in interpreting the data correctly. The quantitative data was analyzed along with the qualitative data provided by the post-sort interviews that were conducted as the bases of the analysis from Phase II. This allowed the researcher to gain insight into the participant perceptions about strategies that are effective in keeping long-term suspended students engaged in learning. The researcher classified categories of information gleaned from the participants to better understand their viewpoints.

### **Subjectivity Statement**

It is significant for the reader to understand the current researcher's background and beliefs related to this study, as a researcher's experience can influence the perception and interpretation of the data garnered from a research study. The purpose of this subjectivity

statement is to provide the reader details of the researcher's personal experiences and views in the areas dealt with in this study.

The researcher worked in a career in education, and had a passion for it. While working as a special education teacher, the researcher began to better understand the significance of the achievement and discipline gap that existed in public schools, and the negative impact it had on handicapped and minority students. The researcher became driven to develop strategies that could positively impact student achievement while also recognizing how the loss of instructional time due to discipline was a barrier to students' success. Personal experience as a teacher showed the researcher how handicapped students were being suspended and falling behind their peers.

In addition, in serving as an Assistant Principal, Principal, and finally an Area Superintendent, the researcher gained more than fifteen years of experience as a high school administrator, and during this time received firsthand knowledge of the negative impact student suspensions can have. As an Area Superintendent, the researcher supervised and worked with principals to increase their school performance data and enhance their leadership capacity, and strived to close the achievement and discipline gap that he had seen in schools.

### **Summary**

This chapter discusses Q-methodology and the researcher's logic for selecting this particular research method. Elements of the research designed are also explained and outlined, and the process used for Q-sort, developing the concourse, choosing participants, and collecting the data was shared. Chapter 4 presents the statistical findings of the study and the data gathered from the post-sort interviews.

## **CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to identify what educational researchers and educators consider being effective strategies for students on long-term suspensions. The study was designed to determine what experienced principals perceived to be important ways to keep students placed on long-term suspension engaged in learning, and to help them successfully transition back to their base school assignments. The principals in the current study shared their perceptions of effective strategies by reviewing 37 statements and participating in a card-sort process as well as post-sort interviews.

This chapter provides a presentation of the findings from the Q-sort process and post-sort interviews. The data collected from the 40 Q-sorts was entered into an analytical software program, PQMethod, which was developed to analyze Q-methodology data (Schmolck & Atkinson, 1997). PQMethod computes factors, variances, and relationships between and among the individual Q-sorts based on the input data from the Q-sorts. After the statistical data was generated from the PQMethod software, the researcher began a process of reviewing the post-sort questionnaire and interviews to render qualitative data that would further the understanding of the statistical data. The subjective participant's responses were used to define and describe the factors that emerged from the analysis.

This chapter provides a detailed understanding of the study's data. It is divided into sections that discuss how the factors were extracted and factor descriptions. A summary is provided at the end of each section.

## Factor Extraction

### Correlation Matrix

PQMethod generates a correlation matrix to analyze the Q-sort. Principal component analysis is used to construct a correlation matrix among the different Q-sorts (Watts & Stenner, 2012). In this study, the matrix measured 40x40 based on the number of participants (n=40). The correlation matrix includes the data from all of the Q-sorts entered, and statistically generates all the viewpoints of the participants. The correlations reveal the degree of agreement or disagreement between any participants's Q-sort to all the Q-sorts in the study (Watts & Stenner, 2012).

The matrix shows correlation coefficients that range from +1.0 to -1.0, with the following being true:

- A correlation of +1.0 would be present for two sorts that are identical. Every card would be in the same column.
- A -1.0 represents a perfect opposite match.
- Zero is no correlation, 1.0 is perfect correlation.
- -1.0 (or close to it) represents a strong correlation but the mirror (opposite).

Table 5 provides an abbreviated display of this correlation matrix. In the truncated matrix, participants who sorted 2 or less than 16 have a very strong correlation, or they sorted in a similar fashion. Participants who sorted 1 or less than 17 demonstrated a low correlation.

Table 5

*Correlation Matrix between Sorts (Truncated)*

---

SORT	1	2	3	...	15	16	17
1	1.0	.48	.32	...	.30	.38	.30
2	.48	1.0	.43	...	.50	.66	.49
3	.32	.43	1.0	...	.43	.44	.36
15	.30	.50	.43	...	1.0	.54	.44
16	.38	.66	.44	...	.54	1.0	.58
17	.30	.49	.36	...	.44	.58	1.0

---

## Factor Analysis

PQMethod produced eight, unrotated factors. These factors represent the software-clustered participants with similar sorts. According to Brown (1980), “we do not classify them; they classify themselves on their own terms, which emerge as factors” (p. 208). In this analysis, each factor potentially identifies participants that share similar perceptions and viewpoints about effective strategies for long-term suspended students.

The unrotated factors were examined, and the Eigenvalue of this study’s eight unrotated factors were all greater than 1.0. A scree plot of Eigenvalues less than 1.0 are considered to account for too little variance for a Q-methodology study (Watts & Stenner, 2012). In the current study, the first factor had an Eigenvalue of 8.2, the second factor had an Eigenvalue of 3.5, the third factor had an Eigenvalue of 3.2, and the fourth factor had an Eigenvalue of 2.7. The researcher discussed the analysis with the dissertation committee Chair, resulting in a collaborative decision to create a four-factor rotation; four factors were chosen because three did not explain enough variance, while five factors only had 21 participants loaded. Four factors had 44% of explained variance, 35 participants loaded, and there was also a low correlation among factors, with .25 being the highest. Table 6 presents a summary of the decision process, and Table 7 includes the correlations between factor scores.

Factors were rotated using Varimax to create four distinct factor arrays. The correlation score is a measure of association between all of the individual Q-sorts.

Table 8 displays the factor scores for each participant in relation to the four factors. Those participants without an “X” are the individuals who did not load on any of the four factors

Table 6

*Information Used to Determine the Factor Rotation*


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Factor Rotation Solution	Eigenvalue Included	Explained Variance	Number of Participants Loaded	Correlation Among Factors
3	8.2, 3.5, 3.2	38%	35	0.3583 0.0085 0.1323
4	8.2, 3.5, 3.2, 2.7	44%	35	0.2602 0.2340 0.1476 1.000
5	8.2, 3.5, 3.2, 2.7	51%	21	0.1511 0.3096 0.3589 0.3724 0.2636 0.1741 0.1218 0.3258 0.2259

---

Table 7

*Correlations between Factor Scores*

---

	Factor One	Factor Two	Factor Three	Factor Four
Factor One	1.0000	0.3188	0.2253	0.2602
Factor Two	0.3853	1.0000	0.2762	0.2340
Factor Three	0.3613	0.2762	1.0000	0.1476
Factor Four	0.2602	0.2340	0.1476	1.0000

---

Table 8

*Factor Matrix Using Participants' Q-Sorts (Loadings)*

Participants	Factor One	Factor Two	Factor Three	Factor Four
S1	0.0815	0.7414x	0.0963	-0.1968
S2	0.2418	0.5079x	0.1944	-0.2984
S3	0.0005	0.0515	-0.2195	0.2884
S4	0.5118x	0.4584	0.0351	0.1250
S5	0.1067	0.4563x	0.2283	0.0304
S6	-0.0508	0.4115x	-0.0772	0.0507
S7	0.4355x	0.0162	0.0090	0.2646
S8	0.0298	-0.1267	0.7651x	0.0537
S9	-0.0919	0.7620x	0.1616	0.0604
S10	0.3108	-0.0861	0.4629x	0.4527
S11	0.0625	0.2912	0.0114	0.0848
S12	0.4386	0.0549	0.4750x	0.1087
S13	0.2384	0.2883	0.1294	0.2748
S14	0.3339	0.3375	0.5771x	0.0153
S15	0.7808x	0.2186	0.0251	0.0787
S16	0.8233x	0.0768	-0.0131	0.2402
S17	0.2581	0.1477	0.3725x	0.1431
S18	0.4437x	0.1910	0.2351	0.0549
S19	0.0110	0.0268	0.0231	0.2722

Table 8 (continued)

Participants	Factor One	Factor Two	Factor Three	Factor Four
S20	-0.2958	0.1532	0.6431x	-0.2643
S21	-0.2830	0.1398	0.7113x	-0.2200
S22	0.0855	-0.5750x	0.1159	0.4221
S23	-0.2002	-0.0335	0.3264	0.5498x
S24	0.3288	0.2210	0.2241	0.4724x
S25	0.4227	0.4991x	0.0336	0.3050
S26	-0.7327x	0.1889	0.0338	0.0361
S27	0.2347	0.0886	0.5248x	0.3160
S28	0.5081x	-0.1357	0.2182	-0.3266
S29	0.6603x	0.1164	0.2878	-0.2412
S30	-0.1025	0.5143x	0.0294	0.4518
S31	0.3550	0.2984	-0.0414	0.3576x
S32	0.2050	0.1072	0.0661	0.1553
S33	0.1695	0.7018x	0.3199	0.0542
S34	0.6417x	0.5695	-0.0002	-0.0280
S35	0.2259	0.5958x	-0.1224	0.3586
S36	0.3418	-0.0205	-0.0351	0.4577x
S37	0.2812	0.1233	0.6545x	0.0444
S38	0.1542	-0.1604	0.0225	0.4760x
S39	0.4014x	0.3724	0.2608	0.2439
S40	-0.0416	0.2593	-0.1178	0.7153x

Table 8 (continued)

Participants	Factor One	Factor Two	Factor Three	Factor Four
Cumulative % Explained Variance	13	12	10	9

*Note.*  $p < .05$ , Significance =  $.322 (1/\sqrt{n} \times 1.96)$  where  $n=37$ . An “x” denotes that the participant loaded on the particular factor.

and, as a result, their sorts are not represented. They each sorted differently and are therefore non-loaders for this study.

The data provided in Table 8 demonstrate that a four-factor solution was selected, reducing the study's 37 Q-sort statements and 40 Q-sorts to four factors. Table 9 details each Q-sort statement and where each of the four factor groups sorted the statements on a continuum from "Strongly Agree," to "Strongly Disagree." Table 9 also shows where each statement falls under each factor based on the model Q-sort.

### **Factor Descriptions**

#### **Factor One: Trying New Practices**

A total of 10 participants loaded significantly on Factor One, representing 20% of the total participants and 13% of the explained variance. Six of the participants were males and four were female. The participants' experience as a principal ranged from 1 to 15 years. Among the 10 participants, five serve as elementary school principals, two are middle school principals, and three are high school principals. Table 10 provides a summary of the participant characteristics for Factor One.

In the statistical analysis of the current study's findings, the z-score reflects how far, and in what direction, the statement deviates from the distribution mean. The statement with the highest agreement among this factor of participants was Statement 17: "An effective way to keep long-term suspended students engaged in schooling is to provide a program that intentionally builds resiliency among students facing life challenges." This statement is at the highest rank order with a z-score of 1.513. Statement 1, with the least amount of agreement among this factor of participants, reported: "An effective way to keep long-term suspended students engaged in

Table 9

*Statement and Factor Placements*

Statements	Factor One	Factor Two	Factor Three	Factor Four
1. An effective way to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is to provide continued coursework virtually, online.	-4	-2	-4	-1
2. An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is to provide an alternative physical site.	3	-1	3	4
3. An effective strategy to keep suspended students engaged in school is to provide continued work at home with a visiting certified teacher.	-3	-3	-3	-3
4. An effective strategy to keep suspended students engaged in learning is to have certified staff working on their study skills.	-2	-2	0	-1
5. An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is to have a program that provides community service for academic credit.	2	-4	-4	1
6. An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in schooling is to provide opportunities to gain academic credit while obtaining employment skills.	3	-4	-1	2
7. An effective strategy to keep suspended students engaged in learning is to have them involved in a program that hires certified teachers that are trained to redirect inappropriate behaviors.	3	-2	1	-2

Table 9 (continued)

Statements	Factor One	Factor Two	Factor Three	Factor Four
8. An effective strategy to keep suspended students engaged in learning is to hire certified teachers in a program that provides academic enrichment and study skills.	1	-1	1	-1
9. An effective strategy to keep students engaged in learning is to provide them access to their coursework so that they can keep pace with their classmates and not fall further behind.	-3	-1	4	2
10. An effective strategy to keep suspended students engaged in school is to create a portal for teachers, students and administrators to have real-time access to monitor student academic progress.	-2	-3	-2	-1
11. An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is to have an alternative program that is flexible and able to meet individual student needs.	2	2	0	1
12. An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in learning is to have programs that require student attendance in convenient and accessible locations.	2	0	2	1
13. An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is to have them involved in membership of a small-based cohort supervised by a mentor.	1	0	-2	1
14. Consistent communication with students, parents and school is an effective strategy for long-term suspended students.	0	1	3	4

Table 9 (continued)

Statements	Factor One	Factor Two	Factor Three	Factor Four
15. An effective way to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is having them enrolled in an alternative environment, being taught by online teachers, in subjects needed to graduate.	-4	-3	-1	3
16. An effective way to keep long-term suspended students engaged in schooling is to provide a means of support to family.	0	2	-3	1
17. An effective way to keep long-term suspended students engaged in schooling is to provide a program that intentionally builds resiliency among students facing life challenges.	4	2	1	0
18. Develop an effective, specific plan for transitioning long-term suspended students back to base school settings.	0	1	1	0
19. Students engaged in positive relationships with adults are an effective strategy for long-term suspended students.	2	4	2	3
20. An unconventional academic approach regarding pedagogical strategies is an effective strategy for long-term suspended students.	1	0	0	-3
21. A program that emphasizes dropout prevention strategies.	-2	1	0	-2
22. An effective way to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is to provide an environment that promotes self-esteem.	-1	2	-1	0

Table 9 (continued)

Statements	Factor One	Factor Two	Factor Three	Factor Four
23. An effective way to keep long –termed suspended students engaged in schooling is to provide an atmosphere that fosters positive peer relationships.	1	4	-1	0
24. An effective way to keep long-term suspended students engaged in schooling is to provide specific services for students with IEPs.	-1	0	2	-1
25. The teacher serving the suspended student will engage the base school teacher and administrator to discuss strategies upon the student’s return is an effective strategy.	-1	1	1	-2
26. School system monitors student progress once returned to home base at least for one semester is an effective strategy for long-term suspended students.	-1	-1	0	0
27. An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in schooling is to have a transition plan with “back-up” strategies if student is not successful in the base school setting.	-1	1	0	-1
28. An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in schooling is to partner with community organizations and develop liaison groups to collaborate with the base school.	1	-1	-2	2
29. An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in schooling is to provide an educational environment for learning in which students receive counseling services.	1	3	1	2
30. Provide long-term suspended students with the opportunity to receive schooling with the same content area as the base school.	-3	-2	3	-4

Table 9 (continued)

Statements	Factor One	Factor Two	Factor Three	Factor Four
31. Social worker working with the student and family throughout the course of the suspension is an effective strategy to keep students engaged.	-1	3	-2	3
32. An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is to understand that each student has a unique situation and you have to find ways to support each student in a different way.	4	3	4	1
33. An effective way to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is to have the program teacher develop individualized education approach to meet each student needs with specific goals.	0	1	0	-2
34. An effective way to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is to have the program teacher provide extra assistance when needed beyond normal services.	-2	0	-1	-4
35. Regular meetings with all relevant partners (teachers, parents etc.) is an effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged.	0	0	2	0
36. An effective strategy for long-term suspended students is to have one case worker that oversees all services a student is provide and act as liaison among all these peoples.	0	0	-1	0
37. New services and/or pedagogical strategies implemented if goals are not met is an effective strategy for long-term suspended students.	0	-1	-3	-3

Table 10

*Participants Loading Significantly on Factor One*

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	Gender	Number of Years as a Principal	Current Grade Level	Sort
S4	Male	5-10	High	0.5118
S5	Male	11-15	Middle	0.5118
S13	Female	1-5	Elementary	0.7808
S14	Male	5-8	High	0.8233
S16	Male	11-15	Elementary	0.4437
S24	Female	1-5	Elementary	0.7327
S26	Female	6-10	Middle	0.5081
S27	Male	1-5	Elementary	0.6603
S33	Female	6-10	Elementary	0.6417
S37	Male	6-10	High	0.4014

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school is to provide continued coursework virtually, online.” This means Statement 17 is in the +4 of this factor array, and Statement 1 would be in the -4 column. Table 11 shows the ranking of the statement cards and their respective z-score for the participants loading significantly on Factor One.

By symbolizing the actual sort, Table 11 is used to create Figure 5, which is the Factor One model sort. Figure 6 is a model sort for Factor One, displaying the participants who loaded significantly on Factor One, and demonstrating what Factor One participants view to be effective strategies to keep long-term suspended students engaged in schooling and prepared to transition back to school. Watts and Stenner (2012) assert that a model sort is seen as a Q-sort configured to represent the viewpoint of a particular factor; it reflects the viewpoints as a collective based on all participants’ Q-sorts. It also lays the foundation for data interpretation and the naming of factors. Figure 6 shows Statements 17 and 32 in the +4 columns corresponding with the two highest z-scores shown in Table 11. Statements 1 and 15 are shown as the least agreed upon statements and are displayed under the -4 columns.

Table 12 shows the high-positive and high-negative statements for Factor One in the current study.

The study showed that the 20% of the principal participants loaded significantly on Factor One. This sub-group sorted Statements 17, 32, 2, 6, and 7 on the +4 and +3 side of the distribution grid. As indicated earlier, this high sorting reflects that these participants strongly agree with those statements. The highest-scoring statements reflect a focus on establishing relationships and providing wraparound support for those students who are long-term suspended.

Table 11

*Factor One – Normalized Factor Scores*

Card	Statement	Z-Score
17	An effective way to keep long-term suspended students engaged in schooling is to provide a program that intentionally builds resiliency among students facing life challenges.	1.513
32	An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is to understand that each student has a unique situation and you have to find ways to support each student in a different way.	1.497
6	An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in schooling is to provide opportunities to gain academic credit while obtaining employment skills.	1.489
2	An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is to provide an alternative physical site.	1.254
7	An effective strategy to keep suspended students engaged in learning is to have them involved in a program that hires certified teachers that are trained to redirect inappropriate behaviors.	1.219
12	An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in learning is to have programs that require student attendance in convenient and accessible locations.	1.190
11	An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is to have an alternative program that is flexible and able to meet individual student needs.	0.989
19	Students engaged in positive relationships with adults are an effective strategy for long-term suspended students.	0.970
5	An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is to have a program that provides community service for academic credit.	0.956
20	An unconventional academic approach regarding pedagogical strategies is an effective strategy for long-term suspended students.	0.933

Table 11 (continued)

Card	Statement	Z-Score
23	An effective way to keep long –termed suspended students engaged in schooling is to provide an atmosphere that fosters positive peer relationships.	0.770
29	An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in schooling is to provide an educational environment for learning in which students receive counseling services.	0.755
13	An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is to have them involved in membership of a small-based cohort supervised by a mentor.	0.541
28	An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in schooling is to partner with community organizations and develop liaison groups to collaborate with the base school.	0.337
8	An effective strategy to keep suspended students engaged in learning is to hire certified teachers in a program that provides academic enrichment and study skills.	0.277
36	An effective strategy for long-term suspended students is to have one case worker that oversees all services a student is provide and act as liaison among all these peoples.	0.080
33	An effective way to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is to have the program teacher develop individualized education approach to meet each student needs with specific goals.	0.062
18	Develop an effective, specific plan for transitioning long-term suspended students back to base school settings.	0.029
37	New services and/or pedagogical strategies implemented if goals are not met is an effective strategy for long-term suspended students.	-0.133
16	An effective way to keep long-term suspended students engaged in schooling is to provide a means of support to family.	-0.292
35	Regular meetings with all relevant partners (teachers, parents etc.) is an effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged.	-0.324

Table 11 (continued)

Card	Statement	Z-Score
14	Consistent communication with students, parents and school is an effective strategy for long-term suspended students.	-0.324
27	An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in schooling is to have a transition plan with “back-up” strategies if student is not successful in the base school setting.	-0.356
26	School system monitors student progress once returned to home base at least for one semester is an effective strategy for long-term suspended students.	-0.357
31	Social worker working with the student and family throughout the course of the suspension is an effective strategy to keep students engaged.	-0.366
25	The teacher serving the suspended student will engage the base school teacher and administrator to discuss strategies upon the student’s return is an effective strategy.	-0.368
22	An effective way to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is to provide an environment that promotes self-esteem.	-0.397
24	An effective way to keep long-term suspended students engaged in schooling is to provide specific services for students with IEPs.	-0.541
4	An effective strategy to keep suspended students engaged in learning is to have certified staff working on their study skills.	-0.622
10	An effective strategy to keep suspended students engaged in school is to create a portal for teachers, students and administrators to have real-time access to monitor student academic progress.	-0.657
21	A program that emphasizes dropout prevention strategies.	-0.803
34	An effective way to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is to have the program teacher provide extra assistance when needed beyond normal services.	-0.814
30	Provide long-term suspended students with the opportunity to receive schooling with the same content area as the base school.	-0.972

Table 11 (continued)

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Card	Statement	Z-Score
3	An effective strategy to keep suspended students engaged in school is to provide continued work at home with a visiting certified teacher.	-1.280
9	An effective strategy to keep students engaged in learning is to provide them access to their coursework so that they can keep pace with their classmates and not fall further behind.	-1.622
9	An effective strategy to keep students engaged in learning is to provide them access to their coursework so that they can keep pace with their classmates and not fall further behind.	-1.622
15	An effective way to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is having them enrolled in an alternative environment, being taught by online teachers, in subjects needed to graduate.	-2.123
1	An effective way to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is to provide continued coursework virtually, online.	-2.508

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Strongly Disagree

Neither Agree / Disagree

Strongly Agree

-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4
1	3	4	22	14	8	5	2	17
15	9	10	24	16	13	11	6	32
	30	21	25	18	20	12	7	
		34	26	33	23	19		
			27	35	28			
			31	36	29			
				37				

*Figure 5.* Factor one model sort.

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Strongly Disagree		Neither Agree / Disagree					Strongly Agree	
-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4
5	3	1	2	12	14	11	29	19
6	10	4	8	13	18	16	31	23
	15	7	9	20	21	17	32	
		30	26	24	25	22		
			28	34	27			
			37	35	33			
				36				

*Figure 6.* Factor two model sort.

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Table 12

*Factor One – High-Positive and High-Negative Statements*


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Score	Card	Statement
+4	17	An effective way to keep long-term suspended students engaged in schooling is to provide a program that intentionally builds resiliency among students facing life challenges
+4	32	An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is to understand that each student has a unique situation and you have to find ways to support each student in a different way.
+3	2	An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is to provide an alternative physical site.
+3	6	An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in schooling is to provide opportunities to gain academic credit while obtaining employment skills.
+3	7	An effective strategy to keep suspended students engaged in learning is to have them involved in a program that hires certified teachers that are trained to redirect inappropriate behaviors.
-3	30	Provide long-term suspended students with the opportunity to receive schooling with the same content area as the base school.
-4	1	An effective way to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is to provide continued coursework virtually, online.
-4	15	An effective way to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is having them enrolled in an alternative environment, being taught by online teachers, in subjects needed to graduate.

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During the post-sort interview, the researcher captured the perceptions of key participants who loaded significantly on Factor One.

There were four unique viewpoints that emerged from this Q-sort, and Factor One had the most variance with the most number of participants that fell on this sort. Both Statements 17 and 32 fell on the +4 side of the distribution grid, reflecting a strong preference for these strategies for long-term suspended students: “An effective way to keep long-term suspended students engaged in schooling is to provide a program that intentionally builds resiliency among students facing life challenges” (Statement 17) and “An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is to understand that each student has a unique situation and you have to find ways to support each student in a different way” (Statement 32).

Participant S27 and S14 were selected to participate in the post-sort interview based on their sort of the statements. Participant S14 is a male high school principal with 6-10 years of experience, while Participant S27 is a male elementary school principal with 1-5 years of experience who has previously worked at a high school. When asked why they felt strongly about the strategies of Statement 17 and Statement 32, Participant S14 commented, “There has to be something different than what they were exposed to before” (personal communication, October 12, 2015). More specifically, Participant S14 believes strongly that long-term suspended students must be placed in a different environment and provided with a different program to meet the student’s individual needs.

Participant S27 agreed, and furthermore indicated that what schools have been doing in the past is not enough to address the needs of suspended students. He asserted, “I don’t see how long-term suspended students who are removed from school and engagement are going to be

successful if they already lack needed skills to be successful” (personal communication, October 12, 2015). This notion also alludes to Statement 6, which states, “An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in schooling is to provide opportunities to gain academic credit while obtaining employment skills.” Participant S27 also believed that these strategies offer the suspended student something different, and that they support the student by providing them with skills that will enable them to successfully navigate the traditional school setting. He stated, “Why would we expect them to behave any differently when they return, if we don’t provide them with training and skills and teach them why they need to be connected?” (personal communication, October 12, 2015).

Participant S27 and Participant S14 also felt that an alternative physical site is essential for the success of long-term suspended students, as reflected in Statement 2: “An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is to provide an alternative physical site.” That is, when questioned about this strategy in the post-sort interview, both participants expressed that long-term suspended students needed to be removed from their current setting so that intensive support to meet the individual student needs could be provided. Notably, this statement was highly scored by many of the study participants, which resulted in it being placed at the +3 end of the distribution grid.

Both Participant S27 and Participant S14 believed that long-term suspended students need to be removed from their current environment to receive individualized, needed support. Participant 27 asserted:

The best strategy is to place them in an alternative environment and, during this time, they are going to complete coursework and earn academic credit. They also can be given

the opportunity to participate in a trade school environment to gain employment skills.

This is what is needed, and probably will be more successful than any one-hour visit from a teacher or even online studies. (personal communication, October 12, 2015)

This principal's comment is notably grounded in Statements 6 and 7, which both fell on the +3 side of the distribution grid with high scores; it also simultaneously reflects an opposition to Statement 1, which states that continued online coursework is an effective strategy for long-term suspended students and fell on the -4 of the grid with low scores. The participants in the post-sort interview agreed that online work alone is not enough, and instead expressed a strong belief in the need for a program that hires a certified teacher trained to redirect inappropriate behaviors.

In addition, Participant S14 felt that Statement 13 was effective, despite the fact that it fell on the +1 side of the distribution grid. Statement 13 stresses, "An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is to have them involved in membership of a small-based cohort supervised by a mentor." When asked about this viewpoint, Participant S14 shared:

We need to know what motivates students...do we know they are being educated in the way that they want to be educated?... Students who are being successful in school and are earning credits are fine with the system. These students have gained the soft skills to understand and value their education the system is offering. (personal communication, October 12, 2015)

Additionally, Participant S14 believed that a good mentor can get at the heart and minds of struggling students who have not connected with school for any number of reasons, by supporting them and helping them gain the skills to succeed. He stated, "Many of the long-term

suspended students don't appreciate the soft skills, if they are supported in understanding and learning these skills to navigate the system, perhaps they can see that they need their education" (personal communication, October 12, 2015).

Participants S27 and S14 agreed that Statement 1 and Statement 15 were least effective in supporting long-term suspended students; both of these statements relate to computer-based instruction, and fell on the -4 side of the grid. Statement 1 expresses, "An effective way to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is to provide continued coursework virtually online." Similarly, Statement 15 asserts, "An effective way to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is having them enrolled in an alternative environment, being taught by online teachers, in subjects needed to graduate." These two strategies use online tools for virtual instruction, which the participants believed does not address the fundamental issues that lead to long-term suspensions.

The theme that continued to surface during the post-sort interviews, as reflected in the title of Factor One, is that the program or strategy that needs to be in place for long-term suspended students should be intentional, intensive, and different. Participant S27 stated:

The student who is not connected needs a program that differentiates and is intentional about the delivery of instruction. We have to change what we are giving them; we need to allow for a different kind of teacher. The typical classroom teacher does not have the background or training to support many of the students who are long-term suspended.

(personal communication, October 12, 2015)

Participant S14's comment added to this idea of providing a unique learning environment to reach long-term suspended students. He shared, "Many teachers think that these students go

home to lives like we had, which may not be the case. A different environment with trained teachers and administrators that can connect with the marginal student is what is needed” (personal communication, October 12, 2015).

Participants S27 and S14 furthermore stressed that long-term suspended students need adults in their lives who empathize with their family setting and environment, and who can teach them why schooling is important. The post-sort interview participants added that some students could benefit from strategies like those indicated in the computer-based instruction suggested in Statement 1 and Statement 15. They noted that some students who value their educations and are goal-oriented may be very successful in an online environment. Also, the participants pointed to the fact that some students who are successful in school may have merely made a bad choice resulting in their long-term suspension, and for this profile of students, computer-based learning may be ideal.

This group of 10 participants represents a factor that believes in building relationships that put students in a position to be successful when they return to school or join the workforce. The study participants also felt that an alternative learning site could be helpful for long-term suspended students, but more especially, they want to try providing an overall alternative to the norm—something “different” for these students. The statements that loaded on the -3 and -4 side of the distribution grid are established, normal strategies that differ from those that the study participants regarded more highly. As a result, the researcher named this factor, Factor One, as “Trying New Practices.”

## **Factor Two: Teach Relationship-Building, That's the Key**

A total of 10 participants loaded significantly on Factor Two. This factor represents 29% of the study participants and 12% of the explained variance. Six of the participants were female and four were male. The participants' experience as principal ranged from 1-15 years. Of the 10 participants, seven serve as elementary principals, one serves as a high school principal, and two serve as middle school principals. Table 13 provides a summary of the participant characteristics for Factor Two, and Table 14 includes the normalized factors scores for Factor Two.

Figure 7 is a model sort for the participants who loaded significantly on Factor Two, and demonstrates what the principal participants in this sub-group view to be effective strategies to keep long-term suspended students engaged in schooling. The +4 column shows that Statement 19 and Statement 23 received the highest agreement among the participants in this sub-group; these two statements corresponded with the highest z-scores presented in Table 14. For Factor Two, the two least agreed-upon statements among the participants were Statement 5 and Statement 6.

Table 15 displays the highest- and lowest-placed statements in the distribution matrix for Factor Two. The high-positive statements represent the participants' perceptions of the most effective strategies to support long-term suspended students.

Participants who loaded significantly on Factor Two sorted the Statements 19, 23, 29, 31, and 32 on the "Strongly Agree" side of the distribution grid. The study participants viewed counseling, adult, and peer relationships as key elements in keeping long-term suspended students engaged in schooling. These highest scoring statements reflect a focus on students being

Table 13

*Participants Loading Significantly on Factor Two*

	Gender	Number of Years as a Principal	Current Grade Level	Sort
S9	Female	6-10	Elementary	0.7414
S2	Female	11-15	Elementary	0.5709
S8	Male	1-5	Middle	0.4563
S7	Male	11-15	Elementary	0.4115
S3	Male	1-5	High	0.7620
S21	Female	11-15	Elementary	0.5750
S20	Female	21+	Elementary	0.4991
S29	Male	6-10	Middle	0.5143
S32	Female	1-5	Elementary	0.7018
S34	Female	1-5	Elementary	0.5958

Table 14

*Factor Two: Normalized Factor Scores*

Card	Statement	Z-Score
19	Students engaged in positive relationships with adults are an effective strategy for long-term suspended students.	1.909
23	An effective way to keep long –termed suspended students engaged in schooling is to provide an atmosphere that fosters positive peer relationships	1.815
29	An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in schooling is to provide an educational environment for learning in which students receive counseling services.	1.651
31	Social worker working with the student and family throughout the course of the suspension is an effective strategy to keep students engaged.	1.388
32	An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is to understand that each student has a unique situation and you have to find ways to support each student in a different way.	1.312
11	An effective strategy to keep long-termed suspended students engaged in school is to have an alternative program that is flexible and able to meet individual student needs.	1.063
16	An effective way to keep long-termed suspended students engaged in schooling is to provide a means of support to family.	1.012
17	An effective way to keep long-term suspended students engaged in schooling is to provide a program that intentionally builds resiliency among students facing life challenges.	0.998
22	An effective way to keep long-termed suspended students engaged in school is to provide an environment that promotes self-esteem.	0.867
14	Consistent communication with students, parents and school is an effective strategy for long-term suspended students.	0.594

Table 14 (continued)

Card	Statement	Z-Score
27	An effective strategy to keep long-termed suspended students engaged in schooling is to have a transition plan with “back-up” strategies if student is not successful in the base school setting.	0.399
21	A program that emphasizes dropout prevention strategies.	0.371
25	The teacher serving the suspended student will engage the base schoolteacher and administrator to discuss strategies upon the student’s return is an effective strategy.	0.358
33	An effective way to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is to have the program teacher develop individualized education approach to meet each student needs with specific goals.	0.354
18	Develop an effective; specific plan for transitioning long-term suspended students back to base school settings.	0.310
36	An effective strategy for long-term suspended students is to have one case worker that oversees all services a student is provide and act as liaison among all these peoples.	0.263
13	An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is to have them involved in membership of a small-based cohort supervised by a mentor.	0.220
34	An effective way to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is to have the program teacher provide extra assistance when needed beyond normal services.	0.094
12	An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in learning is to have programs that require student attendance in convenient and accessible locations.	0.067
24	An effective way to keep long-termed suspended students engaged in schooling is to provide specific services for students with IEPs.	-0.002
20	An unconventional academic approach regarding pedagogical strategies is an effective strategy for long-term suspended students.	-0.135

Table 14 (continued)

Card	Statement	Z-Score
35	Regular meetings with all relevant partners (teachers, parents etc.) are an effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged.	-0.146
2	An effective strategy to keep long-termed suspended students engaged in school is to provide an alternative physical site.	-0.326
37	New services and/or pedagogical strategies implemented if goals are not met are an effective strategy for long-term suspended students.	-0.396
26	School system monitors student progress once returned to home base at least for one semester is an effective strategy for long-term suspended students.	-0.441
9	An effective strategy to keep students engaged in learning is to provide them access to their coursework so that they can keep pace with their classmates and not fall further behind.	-0.506
28	An effective strategy to keep long-termed suspended students engaged in schooling is to partner with community organizations and develop liaison groups to collaborate with the base school.	-0.730
8	An effective strategy to keep suspended students engaged in learning is to hire certified teachers in a program that provides academic enrichment and study skills.	-0.755
30	Provide long-term suspended students with the opportunity to receive schooling with the same content area as the base school.	-0.789
7	An effective strategy to keep suspended students engaged in learning is to have them involved in a program that hires certified teachers that are trained to redirect inappropriate behaviors.	-1.073
4	An effective strategy to keep suspended students engaged in learning is to have certified staff working on their study skills.	-1.108
1	An effective way to keep long-termed suspended students engaged in school is to provide continued coursework virtually, online.	-1.155

Table 14 (continued)

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Card	Statement	Z-Score
15	An effective way to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is having them enrolled in an alternative environment, being taught by online teachers, in subjects needed to graduate.	-1.254
3	An effective strategy to keep suspended students engaged in school is to provide continued work at home with visiting certified teacher.	-1.352
10	An effective strategy to keep suspended students engaged in school is to create a portal for teachers, students and administrators to have real-time access to monitor student academic progress.	-1.359
6	An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in schooling is to provide opportunities to gain academic credit while obtaining employment skills.	-1.620
5	An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is to have a program that provides community service for academic credit.	-2.049

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Strongly Disagree

Neither Agree / Disagree

Strongly Agree

-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4
1	3	10	6	4	7	12	2	9
5	16	13	15	11	8	19	14	32
	37	28	22	20	17	24	30	
		31	23	21	18	35		
			34	26	25			
			36	27	29			
				33				

*Figure 7.* Factor three model sort.

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Table 15

*Factor Two – High-Positive and High-Negative Statements*

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Score	Card	Statement
+4	19	Students engaged in positive relationships with adults are an effective strategy for long-term suspended students.
+4	23	An effective way to keep long –termed suspended students engaged in schooling is to provide an atmosphere that fosters positive peer relationships.
+3	29	An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in schooling is to provide an educational environment for learning in which students receive counseling services.
+3	31	Social worker working with the student and family throughout the course of the suspension is an effective strategy to keep students engaged.
+3	32	An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is to understand that each student has a unique situation and you have to find ways to support each student in a different way.
-3	3	An effective strategy to keep suspended students engaged in school is to provide continued work at home with visiting certified teacher.
-3	10	An effective strategy to keep suspended students engaged in school is to create a portal for teachers, students and administrators to have real-time access to monitor student academic progress.
-3	15	An effective way to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is having them enrolled in an alternative environment, being taught by online teachers, in subjects needed to graduate.
-4	5	An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is to have a program that provides community service for academic credit.
-4	6	An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in schooling is to provide opportunities to gain academic credit while obtaining employment skills.

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engaged in positive relationships with adults and peers in an environment where students can receive counseling while under long-term suspension. Statement 19 stated, “Students engaged in positive relationships with adults is an effective strategy for long-term suspended students.” Similarly pointing to the importance of interpersonal interaction, Statement 23 stated, “An effective way to keep long-term suspended students engaged in schooling is to provide an atmosphere that fosters positive peer relationships.” The study showed that the 29% of the principals that participated in the study loaded significantly on Factor Two, which, as indicated earlier, demonstrates that these participants strongly agreed with the above statements. Falling on the 4 side of the grid were Statement 5 and Statement 6, which reflect that an effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in schooling is to have a program that provides community service for academic credit (Statement 5) or opportunities to gain credit while obtaining employment skills (Statement 6). The study participants, then, agreed least with these statements.

During the post-sort interview, the researcher captured the perceptions of key participants who loaded significantly on Factor Two. Participant S3 is a male high school principal with 1-5 years of experience, with considerable experience at the middle school level as well. Participant S32 is a female elementary school principal with 1-5 years of experience in the principalship, and her entire career thus far has been at the elementary level. Participant S32 opened the discussion by sharing how important it is for students to feel connected with schools and their teachers. Both participants spoke to relationships and the value of having adults and peers involved in each child’s school experience. Participant S3 noted the added importance of serving the families of long-term suspended students, stating:

We can talk all day about high expectations, but if they are going home to an environment that contradicts that notion, then it makes our work more challenging. If they are being told one thing at school and another thing at home, our efforts begin to fall short. (personal communication, October 26, 2015)

The interview participants continued to address the notion of relationships that include a partnership with school, family and community. Participant S32 stressed, “It has to be a combined effort with the school, family, and community. A combined effort is necessary for the family as well as the school to keep long-term suspended students focused on success” (personal communication, October 26, 2015).

Statement 5 and Statement 6 fell on the least effective side of the distribution grid at -4. Statement 5 asserts, “An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is to have a program that provides community service for academic credit.” Statement 6 contends, “An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in schooling is to provide opportunities to gain academic credit while obtaining employment skills.” When asked why Statements 5 and 6 were believed to be least effective, Participant S3 stated:

I don’t agree that one-size-fits-all and, in schools, especially large schools, it is a challenge to meet students’ individual needs. Statements 5 and 6 speaks to earning academic credit or gaining employment. Although these are great goals, I don’t think it is enough. There has to be a focus on establishing relationships with adults that can help teach you the soft skills needed to be a productive, successful individual after high school. (personal communication, October 26, 2015)

Participant S32 added to the conversation by stating that she saw value in Statement 11 as being a good strategy. Falling at +2 on the grid, Statement 11 asserts, “An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is to have an alternative program that is flexible and able to meet individual student’s needs.” Participant S32 shared, “Although it is important to establish relationships, it is equally important to meet each student where they are and address their needs” (personal communication, October 26, 2015). Participant S3 expressed his agreement and added:

We also have to know the profile of the long-term suspended student. If the student displays disruptive and violent behavior as opposed to the intentional non-learner, then we have to look at them differently. There are some students who just don’t like school, and we can provide them with tons of intervention and we just can’t reach them. No matter how much relationship building is done, it just doesn’t work. It is those students we have to do a better job with finding a way to connect with them. (personal communication, October 26, 2015)

The conversation shifted to those individuals or subgroups that historically have difficulty establishing relationships with adults in their schools. Participant S3 admitted:

In our school, we struggle with our Hispanic males, and we recognize that our staff doesn’t reflect the demographics of our school, which presents challenges with relationship-building. We continue to try and hire Hispanic staff, but it is a challenge.... We have difficulty in establishing relationships with this subgroup, so they often rely on community outreach programs to assist in creating ways to get Hispanic males involved

with their school and establishing relationships. (personal communication, October 26, 2015)

He shared a revealing anecdote about one of his school's teachers, who was working with a Hispanic student. Participant S3 recalled, "While my intervention teacher was engaging this student, [the student] suddenly said, 'I understand what you are saying, but how are you, a white female, going to connect with me, a male Hispanic?'" (personal communication, October 26, 2015). This story is a good example of the disconnect between many educators and administrators and their minority students.

Participant S32 shared her own issues with developing relationships, adding, "I have an ED class that is 100% male and 90% African-American. I wanted to hire an African-American male but could not. I finally found a male teacher in hopes that he can build relationships with the students" (personal communication, October 26, 2015). She also maintained, "The reality and truth of the matter is that you can't teach a teacher how to build relationships, but it is an expectation" (personal communication, October 26, 2015). Besides strong relationships being needed between educators and students, the study participants also stressed the importance of students building relationships with their peers.

The conversation drifted to the notion that teachers have to have a natural ability to connect with students. Participant S32 stated:

Teachers may be a master of their content area, being able to teach between point A and point B, but what they are lacking is the ability to talk between the content area. What life skills are you building into your lessons which are sometimes more important than the actual stuff you are teaching? (personal communication, October 26, 2015)

Participant S3 added:

I don't think this concept is unreasonable at all. If you want students to be successful and you want them to grow, then this is a requirement of the job. You have to build relationships so students know that you believe in them. (personal communication, October 26, 2015)

From the post-sort interview and the participants' sorting of the statements, it was clear that relationships were a key factor in the principals' perception of effective strategies for long-term suspended students. Statement 19 and Statement 23 speak directly to forging relationships as important, and the principals consistently stressed this idea as well. Thus, Factor Two was named "Relationship-Building, That is the Key."

### **Factor Three: More of the Same, Just Better**

A total of nine participants loaded significantly on Factor Three, accounting for 37% of the participants and 10% of the explained variance. Three of the participants were male and three were female, and their experience working as principals ranged from 1-15 years. Among the nine participants, three serve as high school principals, two serve as middle school principals, and four serve as elementary school principals. Table 16 provides a summary of the participant characteristics for Factor Three, while Table 17 includes the normalized factors scores for Factor Three.

Figure 7 is a model sort for the participants who loaded significantly on Factor Three, demonstrating what the principal participants in this sub-group view to be effective strategies to keep long-term suspended students engaged in schooling. The participants who loaded significantly on Factor Three sorted the Statements 9, 32, 2, 14, and 30 on the "Strongly Agree"

Table 16

*Participants Loading Significantly on Factor Three*

	Gender	Number of Years as a Principal	Current Grade Level	Sort
S4	Male	6-10	High	0.7651
S2	Female	11-15	Elementary	0.4629
S10	Female	6-10	Elementary	0.4750
S12	Female	1-5	Middle	0.3725
S15	Male	1-5	High	0.7620
S18	Female	1-5	Elementary	0.6431
S19	Female	1-5	Elementary	0.7113
S25	Female	1-5	Middle	0.5258
S38	Male	6-10	High	0.6545

Table 17

*Factor Three – Normalized Factor Scores*

Card	Statement	Z-Score
9	An effective strategy to keep students engaged in learning is to provide them access to their coursework so that they can keep pace with their classmates and not fall further behind.	1.995
32	An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is to understand that each student has a unique situation and you have to find ways to support each student in a different way.	1.916
30	Provide long-term suspended students with the opportunity to receive schooling with the same content area as the base school.	1.866
2	An effective strategy to keep long-termed suspended students engaged in school is to provide an alternative physical site.	1.328
14	Consistent communication with students, parents and school is an effective strategy for long-term suspended students.	1.092
35	Consistent communication with students, parents and school is an effective strategy for long-term suspended students.	1.063
19	Students engaged in positive relationships with adults are an effective strategy for long-term suspended students.	0.845
24	An effective way to keep long-termed suspended students engaged in schooling is to provide specific services for students with IEPs.	0.782
12	An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in learning is to have programs that require student attendance in convenient and accessible locations.	0.770
17	An effective way to keep long-term suspended students engaged in schooling is to provide a program that intentionally builds resiliency among students facing life challenges.	0.761
29	An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in schooling is to provide an educational environment for learning in which students receive counseling services.	0.725

Table 17 (continued)

Card	Statement	Z-Score
18	Develop an effective; specific plan for transitioning long-term suspended students back to base school settings.	0.617
7	An effective strategy to keep suspended students engaged in learning is to have them involved in a program that hires certified teachers that are trained to redirect inappropriate behaviors.	0.532
25	The teacher serving the suspended student will engage the base schoolteacher and administrator to discuss strategies upon the student's return is an effective strategy.	0.393
8	An effective strategy to keep suspended students engaged in learning is to hire certified teachers in a program that provides academic enrichment and study skills.	0.340
21	A program that emphasizes dropout prevention strategies.	0.122
26	School system monitors student progress once returned to home base at least for one semester is an effective strategy for long-term suspended students.	0.120
26	School system monitors student progress once returned to home base at least for one semester is an effective strategy for long-term suspended students.	0.120
11	An effective strategy to keep long-termed suspended students engaged in school is to have an alternative program that is flexible and able to meet individual student needs.	0.090
27	An effective strategy to keep long-termed suspended students engaged in schooling is to have a transition plan with "back-up" strategies if student is not successful in the base school setting.	0.029
20	An unconventional academic approach regarding pedagogical strategies is an effective strategy for long-term suspended students.	-0.029
4	An effective strategy to keep suspended students engaged in learning is to have certified staff working on their study skills.	-0.169

Table 17 (continued)

Card	Statement	Z-Score
33	An effective way to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is to have the program teacher develop individualized education approach to meet each student needs with specific goals.	-0.235
22	An effective way to keep long-termed suspended students engaged in school is to provide an environment that promotes self-esteem.	-0.359
23	An effective way to keep long –termed suspended students engaged in schooling is to provide an atmosphere that fosters positive peer relationships.	-0.526
6	An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in schooling is to provide opportunities to gain academic credit while obtaining employment skills.	-0.526
34	An effective way to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is to have the program teacher provide extra assistance when needed beyond normal services.	-0.718
36	An effective strategy for long-term suspended students is to have one case worker that oversees all services a student is provide and act as liaison among all these peoples.	-0.738
15	An effective way to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is having them enrolled in an alternative environment, being taught by online teachers, in subjects needed to graduate.	-0.840
10	An effective strategy to keep suspended students engaged in school is to create a portal for teachers, students and administrators to have real-time access to monitor student academic progress.	-0.858
13	An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is to have them involved in membership of a small-based cohort supervised by a mentor.	-0.932
31	Social worker working with the student and family throughout the course of the suspension is an effective strategy to keep students engaged.	-0.050

Table 17 (continued)

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Card	Statement	Z-Score
28	An effective strategy to keep long-termed suspended students engaged in schooling is to partner with community organizations and develop liaison groups to collaborate with the base school.	-1.115
16	An effective way to keep long-termed suspended students engaged in schooling is to provide a means of support to family.	-1.312
3	An effective strategy to keep suspended students engaged in school is to provide continued work at home with a visiting certified teacher.	-1.390
37	New services and/or pedagogical strategies implemented if goals are not met are an effective strategy for long-term suspended students.	-1.431
1	An effective way to keep long-termed suspended students engaged in school is to provide continued coursework virtually, online.	-1.457

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side of the distribution grid. Statement 9 stressed, “An effective strategy to keep suspended students engaged in learning is to provide them access to their coursework so that they can keep pace with their classmates.” These participants believe that long-term suspended students should have access to their coursework while on suspension so they can stay with the progress of their classmates. In addition, the participants value the importance of understanding that each student needs to be supported in a different way, as expressed in Statement 32: “An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is to understand that each student has a unique situation and you have find ways to support each student in a different way.”

Table 18 shows the high-positive and high-negative statements for Factor Three in the current study.

During the post-sort interview, the researcher captured the perceptions of key participants who loaded significantly on Factor Three. Participant S4 is a male high school principal with 5-10 years of experience. Participant S38 is a male high school principal with 5-10 years of experience. Both principals have been long-time secondary educators.

The participants were interviewed separately on two different days due to challenges with their schedules. When interviewing Participant S4, he expressed a strong belief that Statement 1 and Statement 5 were least effective in keeping long-term suspended students engaged in schooling. Participant S38 felt the same way. Statement 1 states, “An effective way to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is to provide continued coursework virtually, online,” while Statement 5 maintains, “An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is to have a program that provides community service for academic credit.” Although both interview participants believed these strategies have merit and can be the right fit

Table 18

*Factor Three – High-Positive and High-Negative Statements*

Score	Card	Statement
+4	9	An effective strategy to keep students engaged in learning is to provide them access to their coursework so that they can keep pace with their classmates and not fall further behind.
+4	32	An effective strategy to keep long-termed suspended students engaged in school is to understand that each student has a unique situation and you have to find ways to support each student in a different way.
+3	2	An effective strategy to keep long-termed suspended students engaged in school is to provide an alternative site.
+3	14	Consistent communication with students, parents and school in an effective strategy for long-term suspended students.
+3	30	Provide long-termed suspended students with the opportunity to receive schooling with the same content area as the base school.
-3	3	An effective strategy to keep suspended students engaged in school is to provide continued work at home with a visiting certified teacher.
-3	16	An effective way to keep long-termed suspended students engaged in schooling is to provide a program that intentionally builds resiliency among students facing life challenges.
-3	37	New services and /or pedagogical strategies implemented if goals are not met are an effective strategy for long-termed suspended students.
-4	1	An effective way to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is to provide continued coursework virtually, online.
-4	5	An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is to have a program that provides community service for academic credit.
+4	9	An effective strategy to keep students engaged in learning is to provide them access to their coursework so that they can keep pace with their classmates and not fall further behind.

Table 18 (continued)

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Score	Card	Statement
+4	32	An effective strategy to keep long-termed suspended students engaged in school is to understand that each student has a unique situation and you have to find ways to support each student in a different way.

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for some students, overall, they did not view these strategies as being helpful for all long-term suspended students. Notably, Statement 1 and 5 both fell on -4 the negative side of the distribution grid. In regards to Statement 1, Participant S38 asserted:

If I long-term a student today and he is taking biology online, I have no assurances that he is the one actually taking the course or assessment and not his friend. Also, biology online is not like the biology you get in the classroom. There are labs and content that the online course cannot provide. Even in English I, there are papers that have to be submitted and just a lot of content that is lacking. The student will take a test that moves the student forward, but there is a gap that has not been addressed. (personal communication, October 28, 2015)

Participant S4 similarly expressed a lack of faith in the effectiveness of online coursework. He claimed:

Online work is good, but if it isn't a priority at home, then it can become a challenge. The student has to buy in to this method of learning. Many students are not equipped to learn by computer. Some students have reading difficulties that make completion of online work a struggle. (personal communication, November 3, 2015)

The researcher asked both principals why they felt Statements 9 and 32 were most effective, and what their reason was for supporting these strategies. Participant S38 shared:

If you are really serious about an alternative program being effective to keep students engaged, then you need to maintain a relationship with the base school while the student is at a separate site. You have to know the student and make sure the curriculum is tailor-fit. The school has to stay involved and keep up with the IEP if needed. I think you have

a better shot than just saying, “you are out for a year or semester and, when you come back, we will try it again.” (personal communication, October 28, 2015)

The researcher questioned Participant S38 further about his beliefs around Statement 9, and shared with the participant that many programs are designed to stay involved with students who are suspended, though it may not happen as it should at times. Participant S38 agreed and stated:

I support Statement 9 because I have had students who have been long-term suspended for the year and, when they come back, they should have been in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade but they remain in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, and we put them in classes with younger students. It becomes embarrassing for the student sitting in a class with siblings of their friends and, as a result, they tend to drop out. The data is clear that if a student repeats a grade they tend to drop out more. When students fall behind their peers they become soured toward the school. (personal communication, October 28, 2015)

As we further discussed Participant S38’s viewpoint on the sorting of the statements, he suggested:

The best possibility for long-term suspended students is having a program with a certified teacher, with other students, and not having the student lose momentum of what school is all about. I do think students can do online but I also think most online instruction, as good as it is, is not the same as interacting with a natural teacher. (personal communication, October 28, 2015)

It was evident that both principals believed that what was the status quo could be effective just as long as the program was operating with fidelity.

Participant S4 shared a similar viewpoint with the researcher, maintaining that there is a need for a separate physical site for long-term suspended students, but that there also has to be opportunities for relationship-building and making connections. He further stressed the importance of consistent communication with the base school while the student is serving the suspension:

You can't simply cut ties with the suspended student and the base school. You want the student to return to their base school knowing that the school and teachers have ownership of the student. In a perfect world, I would like to see a program where students are placed in an environment that operates from 3 to 7 p.m. This schedule will allow student the opportunity to gain employment or do community service while attending classes that has direct instruction. (personal communication, November 3, 2015)

Participant S4 went on to add:

There needs to be a program with systems and structures that will allow the long-term suspended student to graduate on time. The conversation that needs to take place is around what options are available for the student after graduation, what are the options that are on the other side of the graduation stage that are meaningful to the long-term suspended student, and how we can make that happen. (personal communication, November 3, 2015)

Both Principals S38 and S4 acknowledged that what many districts are currently doing can be effective in a time of limited resources, and that students can be successful with the current standards. This group shared a conservative viewpoint in the perspective that the most effective strategy is what we have been doing in the past, but it just needs to be done well, with the key

being maintaining a connection to the base school. Hence, Factor Three has been termed “More of the Same, Just Better.”

#### **Factor Four: Do the Same, Just Never Give Up**

Six participants loaded significantly on Factor Four, which accounts for 9% of the total variance. Four participants were female and two were male. This group shared similar perceptions and beliefs around effective strategies for long-term suspended students. In this group, five were elementary principals, while one was a high school principal. Table 19 displays the participant characteristics for this factor.

Table 20 indicates how the participants loaded significantly on Factor Four with their statements. The table presents the sequence of statement cards with corresponding z-score.

Figure 8 is a model sort for the participants who loaded significantly on Factor Four, demonstrating what the principal participants in this sub-group view to be effective strategies to keep long-term suspended students engaged in schooling. The participants who loaded significantly on Factor Four sorted the Statements 2, 14, 15, 19, and 31 on the “Strongly Agree” side of the distribution grid. Those participants believed an effective strategy for long-term suspended students is to provide an alternative learning site, and to maintain consistent communication with students, parents, and the school in their work as principal. Their approaches were notably somewhat traditional in nature, and in fact reflected a lot of what educators currently do throughout the nation. The highest-scoring statements reflect a focus on students being engaged in a positive alternative environment, where the program communicates with the student’s base school.

Table 19

*Participants Loading Significantly on Factor Four*

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	Gender	Number of Years as a Principal	Current Grade Level	Sort
S22	Female	11-15	Elementary	0.5498
S23	Female	11-15	Elementary	0.4724
S30	Female	6-10	Elementary	0.3576
S35	Male	1-5	Elementary	0.4577
S36	Female	11-15	High	0.4760
S19	Female	1-5	Elementary	0.7153

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Table 20

*Factor Four – Normalized Factor Scores*

Card	Statement	Z-Score
2	An effective strategy to keep students engaged in learning is to provide them access to their coursework so that they can keep pace with their classmates and not fall further behind.	1.880
14	Consistent communication with students, parents and school is an effective strategy for long-term suspended students.	1.489
15	An effective way to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is having them enrolled in an alternative environment, being taught by online teachers, in subjects needed to graduate.	1.251
31	Social worker working with the student and family throughout the course of the suspension is an effective strategy to keep students engaged.	1.140
19	Students engaged in positive relationships with adults are an effective strategy for long-term suspended students.	1.110
9	An effective strategy to keep students engaged in learning is to provide them access to their coursework so that they can keep pace with their classmates and not fall further behind.	1.106
6	An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in schooling is to provide opportunities to gain academic credit while obtaining employment skills.	0.989
29	An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in schooling is to provide an educational environment for learning in which students receive counseling services.	0.933
28	An effective strategy to keep long-termed suspended students engaged in schooling is to partner with community organizations and develop liaison groups to collaborate with the base school.	0.917
16	An effective way to keep long-termed suspended students engaged in schooling is to provide a means of support to family.	0.876

Table 20 (continued)

Card	Statement	Z-Score
11	An effective strategy to keep long-termed suspended students engaged in school is to have an alternative program that is flexible and able to meet individual student needs.	0.710
12	An effective way to keep long-termed suspended students engaged in schooling is to provide specific services for students with IEPs.	0.709
5	An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is to have a program that provides community service for academic credit.	0.587
32	An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is to understand that each student has a unique situation and you have to find ways to support each student in a different way.	0.319
13	An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is to have them involved in membership of a small-based cohort.	0.310
35	Consistent communication with students, parents and school is an effective strategy for long-term suspended students.	0.278
22	An effective way to keep long-termed suspended students engaged in school is to provide an environment that promotes self-esteem.	0.164
17	An effective way to keep long-term suspended students engaged in schooling is to provide a program that intentionally builds resiliency among students facing life challenges.	0.104
36	An effective strategy for long-term suspended students is to have one case worker that oversees all services a student is provide and act as liaison among all these people.	0.029
23	An effective way to keep long –termed suspended students engaged in schooling is to provide an atmosphere that fosters positive peer relationships.	-0.056
18	Develop an effective; specific plan for transitioning long-term suspended students back to base school settings.	-0.092

Table 20 (continued)

Card	Statement	Z-Score
26	School system monitors student progress once returned to home base at least for one semester is an effective strategy for long-term suspended students.	-0.102
10	An effective strategy to keep suspended students engaged in school is to create a portal for teachers, students and administrators to have real-time access to monitor student academic progress.	-0.175
4	An effective strategy to keep suspended students engaged in learning is to have certified staff working on their study skills.	-0.186
24	An effective way to keep long-termed suspended students engaged in schooling is to provide specific services for students with IEPs.	-0.203
27	An effective strategy to keep long-termed suspended students engaged in schooling is to have a transition plan with “back-up” strategies if student is not successful in the base school setting.	-0.352
1	An effective way to keep long-termed suspended students engaged in school is to provide continued coursework virtually, online.	-0.680
8	An effective strategy to keep suspended students engaged in learning is to hire certified teachers in a program that provides academic enrichment and study skills.	-0.825
25	The teacher serving the suspended student will engage the base schoolteacher and administrator to discuss strategies upon the student’s return is an effective strategy.	-0.836
21	A program that emphasizes dropout prevention strategies.	-0.929
33	An effective way to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is to have the program teacher develop individualized education approach to meet each student needs with specific goals.	-1.040
7	An effective strategy to keep suspended students engaged in learning is to have them involved in a program that hires certified teachers that are trained to redirect inappropriate behaviors.	-1.091

Table 20 (continued)

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Card	Statement	Z-Score
37	New services and/or pedagogical strategies implemented if goals are not met are an effective strategy for long-term suspended students.	-1.164
20	An unconventional academic approach regarding pedagogical strategies is an effective strategy for long-term suspended students.	-1.363
3	An effective strategy to keep suspended students engaged in school is to provide continued work at home with a visiting certified teacher.	-1.687
30	Provide long-term suspended students with the opportunity to receive schooling with the same content area as the base school.	-1.945
34	An effective way to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is to have the program teacher provide extra assistance when needed beyond normal services.	-2.175

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Strongly Disagree

Neither Agree / Disagree

Strongly Agree

-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4
30	3	7	1	17	5	6	15	2
34	20	21	4	18	11	9	19	14
	37	25	8	22	12	28	31	
		33	10	23	13	29		
			24	26	16			
			27	35	32			
				36				

*Figure 8.* Factor four model sort.

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In addition, Table 21 shows the high-positive and high-negative statements for Factor Four in the current study.

During the post-sort interviews, the researcher captured the perceptions of key participants who loaded significantly on Factor Four. Participant S22 is a female principal of an elementary school with 6-10 years of experience. Participant S1 is a male elementary school principal who also had 6-10 years of experience. When asked about the sort during the interview, both participants felt that providing a separate environment while at the same time building relationships was key to keeping long-term suspended students engaged in schooling.

Both participants believed that removing students from the base school into a different learning environment was acceptable, but they also felt strongly that such students need a teacher besides their regular teacher, one who will work to establish a relationship with the student. Participant S1 noted, “Students still want to learn, so an environment where students can even do virtual work, the student will welcome this environment if they know they are supported” (personal communication, October 20, 2015). This thought is aligned with Statement 15, which states, “An effective way to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is having them enrolled in an alternative environment, being taught by online teachers, in subjects needed to graduate.” This statement fell on the +3 of the distribution grid sort, reflecting that many of the study participants found it to be an effective strategy.

Speaking to the importance of building relationships with long-term suspended students, Participant S1 added, “If you have a separate physical space to keep the student learning and provide a certified teacher, you will also need to build the relationships. Separate environment,

Table 21

*Factor Four – High-Positive and High-Negative Statements*


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Score	Card	Statement
+4	2	An effective strategy to keep students engaged in learning is to provide them access to their coursework so that they can keep pace with their classmates and not fall further behind.
+4	14	Consistent communication with students, parents and school is an effective strategy for long-term suspended students.
+3	15	An effective way to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is having them enrolled in an alternative environment, being taught by online teachers, in subjects needed to graduate.
+3	19	Social worker working with the student and family throughout the course of the suspension is an effective strategy to keep students engaged.
+3	31	An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is to understand that each student has a unique situation and you have to find ways to support each student in a different way.
-3	3	An effective strategy to keep suspended students engaged in school is to provide continued work at home with visiting certified teacher.
-3	20	An unconventional academic approach regarding pedagogical strategies is an effective strategy for long-term suspended students.
-3	37	An effective way to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is having them enrolled in an alternative environment, being taught by online teachers, in subjects needed to graduate.
-4	30	Provide long-term suspended students with the opportunity to receive schooling with the same content area as the base school.
-4	34	An effective way to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is to have the program teacher provide extra assistance when needed beyond normal services.

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but not always at home, may not be enough” (personal communication, October 20, 2015).

Similarly, Participant S22 noted:

If the teacher is the one that led to the suspension, what kind of bias will they have when the child returns? People don't forget, and they may not forget those behaviors. [In] a separate environment with staff that may not know what the child has done, their history, the student might stand a better chance at success. (personal communication, October 20, 2015)

During the interview, another theme began to emerge from the participants' dialogue. Both participants felt strongly about sending the message to students and families that we never give up on the suspended student. Participant S22 began to direct the conversation toward how educators can support the long-term suspended student, asserting, “It's simply about not giving up on kids. Having a separate environment is fine, but most parents want to see their child be successful and want to partner with us. We have to find ways to partner with them appropriately” (personal communication, October 20, 2015). When asked to explain further, Participant S22 added, “A lot of families think we don't care about their children when we suspend them. So when they return back to the school setting, families believe we are not going to support them, that we have given up on them” (personal communication, October 20, 2015).

Statement 31, which also fell on the +3 side of the grid, was agreed-upon strongly by the participants in the post-sort interview, and also alludes to the idea of not giving up on students. Statement 31 claims, “Social worker working with the student and family throughout the course of the suspension is an effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged.” When asked about this statement, Participant S1 shared:

Wraparound support is needed, and mental health services is full of red tape. These resources need to be easily navigated, readily accessible for students to address their needs, a dedicated place or structure where those services can be more streamlined. A separate environment that sends the message I have not given up. (personal communication, October 20, 2015)

Both participants felt this issue was personal because both had endured a life-threatening medical crisis at one point in their life. Participant S1 shared, “Had my doctors given up on me, I would not be here,” and Participant S22 likewise commented, “What if my doctor had been five minutes late, or decided to just give up? This is why I believe we should never give up on children” (personal communication, October 20, 2015). The theme of never giving up on children surfaced throughout the post-sort interview. The participants shared this notion of supporting an alternative physical site as long as the strategy is accompanied by wraparound support.

At times in the interview, the conversation became emotional because of the participants’ strong belief that building relationships key to students’ overall success. When the researcher asked the participants about whether teachers coming to the home of the suspended students was a good strategy, they felt it was not enough. Participant S22 pointed out, “Even if you have a teacher to come to the home, you will need to have that teacher build a relationship with the student so that the student can eventually want to learn but also become eager to return to school” (personal communication, October 20, 2015). In addition, they expressed the importance of maintaining communication with the school and family as reflected in Statement 14.

Another notable point was raised in the interview conversation, which was that both principals felt strongly about the role of the classroom teacher in suspensions. The participants believed that the relationship-building they support must begin in the classroom. Participant S22 stated:

I don't think we engage enough kids in the classroom. You have to reach the students and find ways to peak their interest. Teachers must try to capture what the students are interested in, and find ways to keep them connected to school. When positive relationships are established, you can find ways to avoid difficult disciplinary issues that lead to long-term suspensions. (personal communication, October 20, 2015)

The interview conversation shifted to discuss strategies that were rated least effective. Statement 30 and Statement 34 both fell on the -4 side of the grid, reflecting the least amount of agreement with these statements. Statement 30 asserts, "Provide long-term suspended students with the opportunity to receive schooling with the same content area as the base school." In regards to Statement 30, Participant S22 commented:

This strategy just isn't enough; it doesn't address the behaviors or causes that results in out of school suspensions. You can move a child from one setting to another, but unless you tap into the emotional, social, or academic areas, the negative behaviors will resurface. (personal communication, October 20, 2015)

Participant S1 added; "We see that often with online instruction. We can't move students out of a classroom and put them in a setting with just a computer and someone to supervise them, and expect that the negative behaviors will extinguish" (personal communication, October 20, 2015). Although the participants agreed that online instruction has some value, they nonetheless agreed

that wraparound support for the student is also needed. Statement 34 states, “An effective way to keep long-term suspended students engaged in school is to have the program teacher provide extra assistance when needed beyond normal service.” However, the participants felt that this strategy fell short of being truly effective, as Participant S22 said, “Unless these additional services come with a social worker, counselor, or an interventionist, then you will be just spinning your wheels in hopes that the student will redirect his or her behaviors.”

The principals in the current study’s post-sort interview revealed strong opinions on how students and families of long-term suspended students should be treated. They believed that the traditional approach in removing students from their base setting was a good, often appropriate idea, but they also maintained that there should be sustained communication and a commitment to never give up on the students. Because of this, the researcher named Factor Four, “Do the Same, Just Never Give Up.”

### **Chapter Summary**

Chapter 4 provided an analysis of the data collected from 40 principals’ Q-sort of effective strategies for long-term suspended students. The purpose of this study was to gather viewpoints from principals on the effective strategies to keep long-term suspended students engaged in schooling. The Q-sorts and post-sort interviews were conducted and analyzed to determine what these principals viewed as the most and least effective strategies for doing so. PQMethod, a statistical software program, was used to analyze the Q-sort data, and from this, four factors emerged to develop an understanding of the most effective strategies. These factors describe four viewpoints.

Factor One, *Trying New Practices*, speaks to trying alternative strategies or new practices as an effective strategy. This factor can be described as a strategy that places students in a separate physical site while serving their long-term suspension, but in a program that is different and non-traditional. It is about implementing alternative educational practices to address the whole child, their education, social circumstances, and individual needs. It should be mentioned that, while these participants value these strategies, they may not be the best for students. As suggested by research, we have to consider the possible impact of further marginalizing student when they are separated from the traditional learning setting. Nonetheless, these are the participants' viewpoints as emerged from the current study.

Factor Two, *Teach Relationship-Building, That is the Key*, includes those strategies that place an emphasis on building positive adult and peer relationships for the long-term suspended student. Caring adults who look at each student uniquely to address their individual needs center this factor on providing support for students. It is also about utilizing outside agencies, social workers, and counselors as needed to strengthen the relationship between the suspended student and the adults in their lives.

Factor Three, *More of the Same, Just Better*, describes strategies that allow the long-term suspended student to keep pace with their coursework and not fall behind. This factor is about giving the suspended student access to all the coursework and instruction during their suspension, so that they will still be able to graduate on time. Notably, such a viewpoint aligns with traditional, more conservative approaches to keeping long-term suspended engaged in schooling, but the perception is that it has to be better and done with fidelity. It is also about

maintain strong connections with the base school so that students do not fall behind academically.

Factor Four, *Do the Same, Just Never Give Up*, can best be described as strategies that will remove the long-term suspended student from their base school, but maintaining consistent communication between the student, school, and family. This factor is also about never giving up on students. No matter what the strategy, even if it is a traditional one, you don't give up. It is also about helping students to develop positive relationships with adults.

Chapter 5 further examines these findings as it relates to the review of literature, and also discusses implications for this study. These implications will provide insight for school administrators, educators, and policymakers.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This chapter includes a summary of the main findings in the current study, including a discussion of the findings as they relate to the study of the literature. The characteristics of alternative schools and the body of recommendations as discussed in Chapter 2 are then reviewed, and comparisons drawn to the perceptions of the principals in the current study on what are effective strategies for long-term suspended students. Finally, implications and recommendations for policymakers, future research studies, and educators are discussed.

### Summary of Findings

There were similarities and differences among the four factor groups. All of the factors had some element related to supporting students by meeting their individual needs. In Factor One, *Trying New Practices*; Factor Two, *Teach Relationship Skills, that's the Key*; and Factor Three, *More of the same, Just Better*, the participants believed that it is essential to address the immediate and individual needs of the long-term suspended student. They stressed the importance of addressing the social, emotional and behavioral needs of the suspended student as important. One interesting aspect of Factors One and Three is that the viewpoints that surfaced from the post-sort interviews reflect an acceptance of a more traditional or conservative approach to keeping long-term suspended students engaged with their schooling. Although these factors value the importance of addressing the whole child, the perception of what needs to be in place for suspended students mirrors what we currently do across the country.

Where the beliefs of the study participants began to differ is seen in the priority that Factor One and Three places on removing the suspended student from school having them placed at an alternative site. The Participants in Factor One and Three considered such a separate site

away from the base school as a key element in engaging the long-term suspended student. In Factor One, both Participants S14 and S27 shared this belief, which is much of what we do now in education. They agreed that we need to address the whole child, but do it at a separate physical site where we can address any academic deficits and give them an opportunity to gain credit or a skill. As Participant S27 asserted:

The best strategy is to place them in an alternative environment and during this time they are going to complete coursework and earn academic credit. They also can be given the opportunity to participate in a trade school environment to gain employment skills. This is what is needed and probably will be more successful than any one-hour visit from a teacher or even online studies. (personal communication, October 12, 2015)

Participants in Factor Three also shared a similar belief about a separate alternative site, but additionally emphasized the need to maintain a connection with the base school and student's family in an effort to address the student's individual needs. For instance, Participant S38 shared:

If you are really serious about an alternative program being effective to keep students engaged, then you need to maintain a relationship with the base school while the student is at a separate site. You have to know the student and make sure the curriculum is tailored fit. The school has to stay involved and keep up with the IEP if needed. I think you have a better shot than just saying, "you are out for a year or semester and when you come back, we will try it again." (personal communication October 28, 2015)

Interestingly, the participants in Factor Two put a stronger emphasis on relationships rather than removing students from school and focusing on their academics alone. For example, Participant S3 stated:

I don't agree that one size fits all and in schools, especially large schools, it is a challenge to meet students' individual needs. Statement 5 and 6 speaks to earning academic credit or gaining employment. Although these are great goals, I don't think it is enough. There has to be a focus on establishing relationships with adults that can help teach you the soft skills needed to be a productive, successful individual after high school. (personal communication October 26, 2015)

From the current study's card-sorting exercise and post-sort interviews, four factors emerged. These are summarized in the following section.

### **Summary of Emerging Factors**

#### **Factor One: Trying New Practices**

Participants in the current study valued the importance of a strategy that places students in a separate physical site while serving their suspension, as well as having a program that individually supports each student to meet their unique needs. While this strategy reflects a traditional approach of pulling students out of their current setting, it differs by adding some new alternatives to this approach. The participants in this sort disagreed with strategies involving online or virtual instruction, which leads them to support alternative approaches. They believed that placing students in front of a computer is not enough to address their individual needs. In the participants' ideal program, students would have the support to address their academic, emotional, and social needs—thus serving the “whole” child—but at a site located away from the base school. Notably, one might argue that separating students from their current setting is much like what we do now across the country in alternative sites. Though this is the typical approach, research questions how effective it might be and in what ways it may impact students.

### **Factor Two: Teach Relationship Building, That's the Key**

Participants believed that an effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in schooling is to place an emphasis on building positive adult and peer relationships for the student. This includes utilizing outside agencies, social workers, and counselors as needed. With caring adults who look at each student uniquely to address their individual needs, this factor centers on providing support for students. Simply put, Factor Two is about cultivating a strong relationship between the suspended student and the adults in their lives.

### **Factor Three: More of the Same, Just Better**

Participants in the current study valued strategies that allow the long-term suspended student to keep pace with their coursework and not fall behind. This factor centers on giving the suspended student access to all the coursework and instruction they are missing, so that they will be able to graduate on time. Factor Three reflects current, conservative practices in most alternative sites, with just some differentiating enhancements. They acknowledged that removing the long-term suspended student from their base school may be a necessity, but maintained that the student's individual needs must be addressed as well. Specifically, this factor speaks to the importance of addressing each student's individual needs, as the participants felt strongly that program administrators must continue to communicate with the base school, even if placing long-term suspended students in an alternative site and providing them with access to their coursework.

### **Factor Four: Do the Same, Just Never Give Up**

Participants felt strongly about maintaining a relentless attitude when it comes to redirecting long-term suspended students' behavior and addressing their individual needs, and

were supportive of strategies that remove the long-term suspended student from their base school while maintaining consistent communication with the student, school, and family. This viewpoint is one that has traditional elements, but Factor Four is also about never giving up on students and helping them to develop positive relationships with adults. Of note is the fact that there was a strong belief by the participants that such a “never give up” attitude should begin in the classroom before the student is suspended.

### **Findings and the Literature**

This section focuses on a comparison of this research study’s findings to the body of literature addressing the impact of long-term suspensions on student achievement and examining effective strategies to keep these students engaged in schooling. The purpose of comparing this study’s results to the literature discussed in Chapter 2 is to identify how the perceptions and viewpoints of the principals compare and are aligned with the literature. Information that surfaced from the Q-sorts, emerging factors, and post-sort interviews are examined and compared to what the literature says about strategies to keep suspended students focused on their education and successfully transition them back to their base schools.

Collective research supports the notion that school districts should provide all students who are removed from school for disciplinary reasons with access to high-quality, alternative education services. In addition, these alternative programs should address the student’s social, emotional, behavioral, and academic needs. The current study examined the following research questions:

1. What do educational researchers and educators consider to be effective engagement and learning strategies during long-term suspensions?

2. What do school and district leaders perceive to be important strategies for students placed on long-term suspension?
3. What has led these educators to identify and implement these strategies to be most effective?

Common themes aligned with the literature were shared by all the participants from Factor One to Factor Four, as discussed below.

### **The Whole Child**

All of the participants believed that it is important to address the whole child and to do more than leave the long-term suspended student with a computer or a different teacher. More specifically, they believed that, in order to keep a long-term suspended student engaged in schooling, the issues that resulted in their suspension must be addressed. Participants clearly pointed to the social, emotional, and academic reasons that act as barriers to student success, often leading the student to demonstrate behaviors that result in their long-term suspension. For example, Participant S3, a high school principal, noted:

How can we expect students to succeed when they are not reading to grade level and cannot “do school” Why are we surprised that they are not successful and begin to act out in class or follow a negative path? We are setting them up for failure when we haven’t reached them academically or given them the social skills to navigate school. (personal communication, October 26, 2015)

Many of the participants in the study noted that there are two profiles of long-term suspended students. The first type of student is not connected to schooling at all, and commits such egregious policy violations that they are required to be long-term suspended. This profile

student has not bought into the value of the education that the school is attempting to provide. Participant S4, a high school principal who was recently appointed but has several years as a middle school principal, asserted, “This student does not care about their learning, and it is this type of student that requires a more intensive approach to keep them engaged in schooling” (personal communication, November 3, 2015). Also pointing to this profile of student, Participant S22, an elementary school principal added, “Often times, students are coming from a home environment that does not instill the importance of education, or they have such deficits they would rather fall behind than be embarrassed by their peers” (personal communication, October 20, 2015).

The second profile of the long-term suspended student is one that wants to learn and is already engaged in schooling, but has simply made a mistake and committed a policy violation that results in a long-term suspension. High school principal Participant S38 described this type of student:

Some students who end up suspended for drug or alcohol violations were doing well in school; they just made a mistake, drank before a dance or something like that. These type of students welcome an opportunity to keep pace with their peers and fight to graduate on time. (personal communication, October 28, 2015)

This student requires a different approach while serving the suspension. It is this profile of student that can be successful with limited intervention, and can do online instruction with minimal supervision. According to Losen (2011), alternative programs should be flexible and able to meet the needs of different students, regardless of their profile. This argument is aligned with the viewpoints of the participants in the study.

According to the literature, the majority of alternative education settings are schools or programs for students with behavioral issues who are suspended or expelled from traditional school settings, and these settings often do not meet the quality standards of researchers (Morgan et al., 2014). As Participant S38 acknowledged:

I had students who were long-term suspended, and they just sat out the year doing nothing. When they returned back to school, they should have been in tenth grade but are still in the ninth. Then there are some students who cannot read well and just can't do online coursework so they do nothing. Most long-term suspended students I have had just lose that instructional time because there is no structure in place to allow them to keep pace. (personal communication, October 28, 2015)

There is general agreement in the literature that there should be alternative programs that permit the continuity of instruction while students are suspended. Losen (2011) argues that students removed from the classroom for disciplinary reasons should continue to receive quality instruction. Morgan et al. (2014) similarly urges that students suspended from school should receive academic, behavioral, and emotional support to meet their individual needs, and should not be left without supervision and continuity of instruction as many are currently (Morgan et al., 2014).

The theme that was repeated in all of the post-sort interviews by the participants involved the notion of there being two types of long-term suspended student, yet only one way to redirect their behaviors, by removing them from school. The participants did not agree with this approach. Many of them did not like the long-term suspensions strategies they have experienced, which tended to be the one-size-fits-all model that removes the student from the base setting and

places them in an environment with little intervention strategies and without attempting to address the whole child or the student's individual needs. However, while the participants did not agree with removal from school as the sole way to deal with misbehavior, most supported it as a needed response to certain behaviors. For instance, Elementary school principal Participant S22 shared, "Often, there are times that require the removal of a student from their base just to give the school and student some time-out from one another" (personal communication, October 20, 2015).

### **Preventive Measures**

Another theme that emerged from this study is the concept that there needs to be preventive measures to keep students from being suspended in the first place. Many of the participants believed that keeping students engaged in schooling begins in the classroom, before they become suspended. Participant S14, a high school principal who viewed Statements 17 and 13 as being highly effective strategies, noted:

We need to know what motivates students. Do we know they are being educated in the way they need to be educated? Students who are being successful in school and earning credits are fine with the system. They are establishing positive relationships with their teachers. They have the soft skills to understand and value their education. Many long-term suspended students don't have these skills. Teachers need to build these relationships and make them understand why these skills are important to help prevent them from violating policies that result in suspension. (personal communication, October 12, 2015)

Two of the most frequently discussed alternative measures to prevent suspensions are Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and restorative justice (Morgan et al., 2014). PBIS is supported by the United States Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs, and focuses on building social intelligence and reinforcing positively stated behavior expectations within the classroom and throughout the school. Approximately 20,000 schools across the United States now use PBIS (Hanover Research, 2015). Restorative Justice is an interactive disciplinary technique used to build a sense of community and resolve conflict by repairing harm and restoring positive relationships. This approach involves three steps that begin with a preliminary meeting to identify the parties involved to establish guidelines. The next step involves a face-to-face meeting where the parties make an agreement to repair the harm that has been done. The last step involves the offending party to complete the agreement.

Some of the principals in this study believed that there need to be strategies such as PBIS in place at the school, which provide training for teachers and staff in classroom management techniques. Also, alternatives to suspensions such as in-school suspension and community and family interventions are measures that should be employed before students are long-term suspended.

## **Resources**

Another theme that emerged in the current study's post-sort interviews was the issue of resources. Many of the participants agreed that employing the most effective strategies, such as addressing the whole child and conducting intensive interventions, would require resources that many schools and districts simply do not have. This was an important theme that reoccurred throughout all of the interviews, with one veteran high school principal stating, "There just isn't

[sic] enough resources to adequately respond to the needs of students who are long-term suspended.” The principals therefore asserted that creating the perfect alternative setting and an ideal alternative model for long-term suspended students would have to involve the school district, the school, community partners, social agencies, and families.

When you look at the issue of providing support for suspended students, it is undoubtable that resources are needed. Teacher and staff capacity must be built to redirect behaviors, and there must also be support personnel to maintain communication with families and address the student’s emotional, mental, and academic needs. As Participant S1 shared, “Wraparound support is needed, and mental health services is full of red tape. These resources need to be easily navigated, readily accessible for students to address their needs, a dedicated place or structure where those services can be more streamlined” (personal communication, October 20, 2015).

These comments are in line with the literature, as researchers have acknowledged that funding is a significant challenge for most schools and districts (Morgan et al., 2014). Most alternative education programs receive the majority of their funding via per-pupil allocations. Morgan et al. (2014) suggest that partnering with community- or faith-based organizations can also help provide additional staff and support for these programs. Arguably, though, we need a review of district policies and possible changes that may even involve legislation to ensure that there are additional resources to support the array of services and programs needed to provide for students.

## **Disciplinary Referrals**

The findings of this study indicated that there were similarities and differences among principals' perceptions of the most effective strategies to keep long-term suspended students engaged in schooling and transition them successfully back to the base school. Nonetheless, the principals who participated in the post-sort interviews all agreed that there will be times when students have to be long-term suspended. For example, school districts have zero-tolerance policies in place that result in automatic removal from school, as discussed in Chapter 2, and the literature examines the use of such policies and its impact on student suspensions and achievement. Research and data on school discipline clearly indicate that millions of students are being suspended and removed from their classroom each year, many for minor infractions (Losen & Gillespie, 2012). Some states and school districts went beyond the zero-tolerance policy's initial focus on weapons and decided to apply zero-tolerance standards to a wide range of disciplinary infractions, in an effort to maintain order and safety. However, these policies have failed to keep students in school and engaged in learning (Wald & Losen, 2007). Even more, studies show that high suspension rates negatively influence student achievement and dropout rates. Suspended students are at risk of falling behind academically, dropping out of school, and coming in contact with the juvenile justice system. In addition, there are civil rights concerns related to the high number of suspensions, due to the fact that students of color and other historically disadvantaged groups are far more likely to be suspended out-of-school (Losen, 2011).

Additionally, much like the zero tolerance policy, researchers have documented that most disciplinary referrals begin in the classroom, but there is little evidence of a consistent

relationship between the seriousness of the offense and the severity of the consequence (Decker et al. 2007). During the post-sort interviews, the conversation interestingly drifted to the notion that teachers can sometime contribute to student suspensions by not having a natural ability to connect with students. As Participant S32 stated:

Teachers may be a master of their content area, being able to teach between point A and point B, but what they are lacking is the ability to talk between the content area. What life skills are you building into your lessons which are sometimes more important than the actual stuff you are teaching? (personal communication, October 26, 2015)

Some principals in the current study noted that minor offenses in the classroom can escalate and lead to a long-term suspension. Participant S22, a middle school principal, admitted that students will many times display insubordinate behaviors that force him to place them in long-term suspension in order to adequately support the classroom teacher. He noted, “We are placed in situation where we have to long-term suspend students based on policy” (personal communication, October 20, 2015).

In the current study, the principals supported strategies intended to keep students valuing their education, as well as preventive measures to keep students from demonstrating behaviors that result in immediate removal from school. Participant S27 stated:

The student who is not connected needs a program that is different and is intentional about the delivery of instruction. We have to change what we are giving them; we need to allow for a different kind of teacher. The typical classroom teacher does not have the background or training to support many of the students who are long-term suspended. (personal communication, October 12, 2015)

A consistent perception shared by most of the participants regarding strategies to deal with long-term suspended students centered on the importance of addressing the whole child. In other words, removing students from their base school during a long-term suspension is an effective strategy to ensure overall safety, but the student must have access to their coursework and interventions that address their social, emotional, and academic needs. The Council of State Governments Justice Center (2014) published a report on school discipline, a collaborative effort involving hundreds of experts in education, behavioral health, law enforcement, and juvenile justice, as well as policymakers, parents, youth, and advocates. The report contains an extensive review of the literature along with relevant research by experts in a variety of fields, and provides extensive, key recommendations regarding school discipline and out-of-school suspensions. It states that “students removed from campus for disciplinary reasons and students not succeeding in traditional settings should be provided with a quality alternative education placement where there is continuity of instruction and needed services” (Morgan et al., 2014, p. 169).

In the study, Statement 30 asserted that an effective strategy is to “provide long-term suspended students with the opportunity to receive schooling with the same content area as the base school.” With regard to this statement, veteran elementary principal Participant S22 disagreed:

This strategy just isn’t enough; it doesn’t address the behaviors or causes that results in out of school suspensions. You can move a child from one setting to another, but unless you tap into the emotional, social, or academic areas, the negative behaviors will resurface. (personal communication, October 20, 2015)

Participant S38 concurred with Participant S22, noting, “The data is clear that, if a student repeats a grade, they tend to drop out more. When students fall behind their peers, they become soured toward the school” (personal communication, October 28, 2015). This participant also added, “The best possibility for long-term suspended students is having a program with a certified teacher, with other students, and not having the student lose momentum” (personal communication, October 28, 2015). Notably, the literature supports the idea of it being important for long-term suspended students to not fall behind, one of the unintended consequences of out-of-school suspension. Researchers have stated that students who are repeatedly suspended are more likely to be retained and negatively labeled (Adams, 1992; Zirkel, 1997). In addition, students not being allowed to make up work missed during a large number of classroom absences can lead to failed courses (Zirkel, 1997).

Collective research show that model alternatives to out-of-school suspension typically have an off-site learning area where students can keep up with their schoolwork under adult supervision. The purpose of these sites is designed to counteract the loss of instructional time (Hanover Research, 2015). Research shows that an effective strategy to keep students engaged in their education is to have to have a comprehensive program that supports all of the needs of suspended students, and the participants in this study overwhelmingly agreed. Likewise, the literature describes programs that are alternative education facilities which removes suspended students from school while at the same time allowing them to continue learning and working to address their behavioral issues. Some programs even require alternative programs to spend a certain number of hours on social-emotional support (Hanover Research, 2015).

Many of the current study's participants also believed in the importance of maintaining communication with the base school and the families. Participant S22 asserted:

It is simply about not giving up on kids. Having a separate environment is fine, but most parents want to see their child be successful and want to partner with us. We have to find ways to partner with them appropriately. (personal communication, October 20, 2015)

When asked to explain further, Participant S22 added, "A lot families think we don't care about their children when we suspend them. So when they return back to the school setting, families believe we are not going to support them, that we have given up on them." Participant S3 commented on the importance of serving the families of long-term suspended students:

We can talk all day about high expectations, but if they are going home to an environment that contradicts that notion, then it makes our work more challenging. If they are being told one thing at school and another thing at home, our efforts begin to fall short. (personal communication, October 26, 2015)

Continuing with this notion about the importance of student-adult relationships to include a partnership with school, family, and community, Participant S32 stressed, "It has to be a combined effort with the school, family, and community. A combined effort is necessary for the family as well as the school to keep long-term suspended students focused on success" (personal communication, October 26, 2015).

It should be noted here that there is little data to suggest that suspensions alter student behavior at all. Generally speaking, Webb and Kritsonis (2006) pointed to the fact that there is scant evidence that students learn from the consequences of their misbehavior. Dupper (1998) similarly noted that suspensions do not teach students how to behave more appropriately when

they return to attend school. Researchers suggest that the early identification of troubled students and implementation of preventive measures is a good way to provide effective behavioral support (Crum & Sherman, 2008). In line with this, the participants in the current study never suggested that suspensions in themselves alter student behavior, and instead were proponents of preventative and intervention methods along with the power of student-adult relationships to affect real change.

### **Recommendations in the Literature**

The Council of State Governments Justice Center (2014) offered recommendations for the most effective strategies to keep long-term suspended students engaged in their schooling that align with the perceptions of the principals in the current study. These include:

**Recommendation 1.** “Provide all students removed from school for disciplinary violations with an alternative education option that affords continuity in learning and any needed behavioral health supports, as well as mechanisms for fully reintegrating the students back to the traditional school environment” (Morgan et al., 2014, p. 169).

An effective strategy to keep students engaged in their learning is to have a program that provides students with the opportunity to continue their learning with the assistance of a certified, effective educator, while also enabling them to receive the same behavioral interventions if required. The report suggests that schools and districts should ensure that suspended students have access to an alternative option that provides a safe, supportive environment of educational and behavioral health services. Alternative programs must be in locations that are convenient and accessible to students across the district. In addition, districts should strive to have multiple sites to provide broader access. The report also recommends that

alternative programs should hire qualified staff that are trained and experienced in working with students who have a vast array of challenges. These strategies are also aligned with the statement cards used in the card sort and identified by principals as effective strategies.

Another strategy that is recommended in the report and aligned with the perceptions of the principals in this study is having the school designate a staff person to serve as an liaison between the educators and suspended students. This person should be appointed by the principal to be responsible for ensuring that all related educational plans are implemented. In addition, this staff member should assist with the student's transition back to their base school (Morgan et al., 2014).

**Recommendation 2.** "Create a continuum of multiple pathways for all students who are not succeeding in the traditional education settings and align the pathways with student's academic, behavioral health, and related needs" (Morgan et al., 2014, p. 110).

This concept is aligned with Statement 6 in the Q-sort for the current study. Identified by many of the principals as an effective strategy, Statement 6 reads, "An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in schooling is to provide opportunities to gain academic credit while obtaining employment skills." Research indicates that children learn differently, and have a variety of needs that cannot always be supported in the traditional setting. The Council of State Governments Justice Center report suggests that alternative education should be reframed as a system of multiple pathways that provide numerous options for students that fit their individual needs and interests. Giving students options and pathways would allow them to receive a quality education and better prepare them for college or career, thereby keeping them more engaged in schooling. Such multiple pathways should be provided for students expelled

from school, students who are not connected or engaged in the traditional school setting, and students who are seeking a vocational career.

The research reviewed in Chapter 2 supports these recommendations, and views them as model strategies. Throughout the nation, there are alternative programs that employ effective strategies that include small class sizes; low student-to-teacher ratios; flexibility in class hours and class schedules; and a creative curriculum described as nontraditional, hands-on, and experimental (Lehr & Lange, 2003; Lehr et al., 2004; Lehr et al., 2009). Additional studies have also characterized alternative schools by their small and supportive environments, emphasis on one-on-one interactions between teachers and students, and flexibility in structure and opportunities (Foley & Pang, 2006; Powell, 2003).

Other effective elements of alternative education and programs serving at-risk student populations that have been identified within the literature include clearly identified goals, a student-centered atmosphere, alignment of curriculum and assessment, availability of special education services, training and support for teachers, and links to multiple external agencies (Foley & Pang, 2006; Powell, 2003).

### **Consensus Statements**

A consensus statement reflects those statements where there was universal agreement across all participants. In this study, there was one statement that was universally rejected by all the participants who sorted, Statement 3, which reads, “An effective strategy to keep suspended students engaged in school is to provide continued work at home with a visiting certified teacher.” Unsurprisingly, this strategy did not resonate with the participants in the current study, as it is a traditional approach to address long-term suspended students once they are removed

from their base setting. Such a dated school strategy relies on the motivation of the student and effectiveness of the teacher, and does not include an effort to get at the root problem that led to the suspension. It is also ineffective in that it relies on the hope that the student will comply with the process and not become distracted by the home environment. Because this strategy leaves much to chance and does not yield positive results, it is understandable why the study participants did not accept this statement.

On the other side of the distribution grid was Statement 19, a positive statement that was accepted across the board by the participants. The viewpoints were similar, though not statistically, but each of the principals in the study felt positive about the strategy. Statement 19 asserted, “Students engaged in positive relationships with adults is an effective strategy for long-term suspended students.” During the post-sort interviews, this concept was repeated as an essential aspect to keeping students engaged in schooling. The participants felt strongly that relationships were key to connecting with students and providing them with the support needed to move forward from the suspension and ultimately become successful.

Statement 29 was also positive and sorted as effective by the study participants. It stated, “An effective strategy to keep long-term suspended students engaged in schooling is to provide an educational environment for learning in which students receive counseling services.” Most participants felt strongly that this was an important strategy. In speaking to the concept of addressing the whole child, this strategy was repeated in comments during the post-sort interviews, and there was common agreement among the principals about the need for counseling and other services to address the individual student needs.

## **Implications for Practice, Policy, and Research**

This section includes recommendations regarding policy and practice at the district and state levels that emerged from the study. In addition, implications of this study for practitioners and researchers are discussed.

### **Implications for Practice**

In many school districts, students are suspended from school and left without a safe and supervised place to continue their education. Students in these circumstances frequently become disengaged with their schooling, and soon find themselves at risk of dropping out or falling behind in their academic studies. Students who have individual challenges too often do not receive continuity of services to address their unique needs. Moreover, research reveals that students of color and students with disabilities are being long-term suspended from school in numbers that are disproportionate to those of their peers. These circumstances point to a developing crisis in our nation, where students are being suspended at alarming rates and with evident inequities in disciplinary practices.

The focus of this study centered on effective strategies for keeping long-term suspended students engaged in their schooling. The researcher and the principals who participated in the post-sort interviews had similar views on best practices relating to long-term suspended students. These views are the bases for the researcher's following recommendations.

First, the study's findings indicated that practitioners should create a positive and nurturing environment in schools where students can be successful, regardless of their backgrounds or personal circumstances. Cultivating strong relationships with students is the key, so it is critical that schools as well as districts have mechanisms in place to ensure all staff will

work to build positive relationships with students. Professional development for teachers and alternative programs like PBIS serve as preventive measures to help students avoid long-term suspensions. Moreover, it is important to recognize that students are different; they learn differently and have a variety of needs, some of which cannot always be supported in the traditional school setting. Schools must therefore recognize these individual differences in students, and work with the student to build their capacity to learn the soft skills required to navigate school, career, and life. While this is often a challenge, schools need to create an atmosphere that promotes positive relationships with students and their families.

Another recommendation that emerged from the study's findings relates to the severity of the behaviors that lead to suspensions. While there will certainly be occasions in which a student has to be suspended, if the student is put on long-term suspension, it should be for major policy violations and not minor infractions. Zero-tolerance policies, for example, too often put administrators in a position in which they have to suspend a student even when there are mitigating circumstances to be considered. For this reason, though they are implemented in the name of safety, such policies may be doing a disservice to the success of our students.

The researcher also recommends that school administration put alternative programs in place that can aptly serve a wide variety of students with an array of individual needs, and where students can maintain full access to their coursework in order to keep pace with their peers during a long-term suspension. It is ideal to have multiple pathways to such an alternative program available, and the suspended student should be placed in an environment that meets his/her unique profile and interest. Additionally, if students were receiving behavioral, health, academic, or other related services in the traditional school setting, these services should be

continued during their suspension. It is also important that the location of the alternative program is easily accessible to the student and family, in consideration of students' varied personal living conditions and to encourage attendance; if the site is located away from the student's base school, then the district should provide programs at multiple sites so that transportation is not an issue. Using community-based organizations for alternative program sites is a good option to ensure that there is accessibility across the district for all long-term-suspended students.

Finally, findings in the current study implied the importance of how the alternative program is staffed and run as well. There should be a process in place to efficiently and immediately transfer information about a long-term suspended student to the alternative program, which should be staffed with certified teachers trained to work with students who have individual needs. These teachers should be equipped to not only build relationships with the students, but to also provide the students with the necessary skills to navigate school as well as life in general. Moreover, the researcher proposes that it is vital that communication between the student, teachers, and family is maintained during a student's long-term suspension. The principal should designate a staff person to be responsible for providing and maintaining communication from the base school to the alternative program in order to better prepare the student for reentry, or for placement in a new environment that is appropriate for the student, if necessary.

### **Implications for Policy**

Frequent use of long-term suspensions has many undesirable and unintended outcomes indicated by the research as discussed earlier. That is, suspension is a local disciplinary issue with national consequences. Collective research shows that high suspension rates are detrimental

to academic achievement, and can even increase the chance that students will become involved in the juvenile justice system. In addition, suspensions disproportionately affect students of color and those with disabilities, which has become a national issue. School, district, and state leaders must have an understanding of the barriers that prevent students from being successful in school and put them at risk of long-term suspensions.

This study also brought up implications for policymakers. In 2014, the United States Department of Justice and the Department of Education issued policy guidance for public schools to implement nondiscriminatory discipline practices. These two departments applauded those schools that “incorporate a wide array of strategies to reduce misbehavior and maintain a safe learning environment, including conflict resolution, restorative practices, counseling, and structured systems of positive interventions” (U.S. Dept. of Justice, 2014, p. 6). Policymakers therefore need to examine how alternative programs are created, and look to re-conceptualize these programs as a system of multiple pathways for students who are not being successful in the traditional setting.

Furthermore, this researcher recommends that policymakers work to develop policies that support the funding of programs which will provide schools with the training needed to staff alternative programs with highly trained personnel who can support all students’ individual needs—from conflict resolution to counseling and interventions. In addition, the district must hold these alternative programs accountable to the same standards as the traditional schools. This includes credits and coursework earned at an alternative program being transferable, because students risk falling further behind academically if their work is not recognized at another school. Having a transition counselor on staff can help facilitate communication between the

alternative pathway and the traditional school, and can serve as another valuable support mechanism for the long-term suspended student.

Another proposed recommendation, one with clear policy implications, involves the long-term suspended student's reentry process into the base school. Students who are expelled or long-term suspended often have challenges when they attempt to return to their base school or enroll at another school. In fact, many states do not have policies that require schools to re-enroll students who have been expelled or long-term suspended (Morgan et al., 2014). This results in students being out of school for a period of time or attending an alternative program that may not meet their needs. It is recommended that state laws and district policies support the return of students to their base school, or another school if the situation is appropriate.

Research shows that long-term suspensions contribute to academic failure and a high risk of students dropping out of school. This could be attributed to any number of factors discussed in this section, such as missed coursework, not having certified teachers, failing to meet the student's individual needs, and lack of communication to enable a successful transition back to the traditional school setting. Students who drop out of school lose hundreds of thousands of dollars in income over a lifetime, which translates into billions of dollars per year in federal and state income tax revenue (National School Boards Association, 2013). Clearly, the issue of long-term suspended students who are not afforded the opportunity to remain engaged with their schooling has tremendous impact on not only the student but also our society, and policymakers must take note and action.

## **Implications for Research**

The statistics on long-term suspensions are troubling, and they are rising to reveal a disturbing trend. Collective research shows that this has become a civic issue that community and civil rights advocates are noticing. This trend of increased suspensions to maintain safe and orderly schools is not new, and suspensions disparity has doubled since the 1970s (Losen & Martinez, 2013). Moreover, educational researchers assert that these statistics raise serious concerns about how disciplinary bias and unintended consequences are becoming evident problems in our nation's classrooms. Across the country, school boards, superintendents, school administrators, and researchers have recognized that suspending students should be a last resort. Many school districts are striving to implement alternative strategies to lower suspension rates and allow students to remain in schools. However, when students are suspended, districts seek effective strategies that will keep students learning and moving forward educationally and behaviorally.

With this in mind, the current study has tremendous value and implications for research. It suggested some effective strategies to keep suspended students engaged in schooling, and revealed how researchers and principals view these practices. However, there is a continued, pressing need to examine if school districts and classrooms around our nation actually employ these strategies, and to what extent and rate of success. To supplement the findings of this study, future researchers might investigate how, and to what degree, the following topics that were found by the participants to be effective work to keep students engaged in schooling while suspended:

- Staff shares the philosophy that all students can learn and meet high expectations.

- Student-teacher ratios are conducive to learning and appropriate for individualized instruction in alternative programs.
- Schools and individual programs have autonomy and flexibility to meet student's needs.
- Educators receive professional development in order to more effectively meet the needs of students.
- Parents and families are treated with respect and valued, and are reached out to by schools.
- Alternative programs incorporate counseling, social services, and other behavioral health components to address individual student needs so that the student does not fall behind academically.
- Students and adults in the school engage in trusting and caring relationships.

In addition, researchers could examine whether districts, schools, and community-based organizations have these elements within their programs. Collecting data on these key elements can serve a school, district, or general public well.

### **Research Questions Revisited**

As an educator and long-time principal, I often struggle with the fact that policy offered me little alternative to suspending students, especially long-term. As an administrator, I was motivated to look for strategies to prevent marginalized students from falling further behind after making a mistake that could alter their future. Moreover, I recognized early in my career as a teacher that all students were not treated equally, especially if they have distinguished themselves negatively. I also recognized that there was a clear disparity in our society when it

came to students of color or disability. This understanding led me to investigate what others perceived to be the best way to keep students in school and enable their success after they have been long-term suspended.

The three-step process within the Q-methodological study provided me with a way to secure answers to my research questions. What I liked about this method was the ability to sit down and talk to principals and gain their insight and perceptions about long-term suspensions. After initially engaging in a literature review, I was able to uncover studies that had been conducted on topics related to my statements. The second part of the process offered me insight on individual principals' viewpoints on the statements. Finally, I was able to engage principals to gain a deeper knowledge and answers to the research questions.

My first research question asked, "What do educational researchers and educators consider to be effective engagement and learning strategies during long-term suspensions?" The first phase of the Q-methodology process allowed me to learn what educators and researchers viewed as effective strategies. My second question inquired, "What do school and district leaders perceive to be important strategies for students placed on long-term suspension?" This is where the Q-sort process truly offered me answers to this question. My final question asked, "What has led these educators to identify and implement these strategies to be most effective?" The review of the literature and deep conversations with principals secured answers to this question. As I look back on the research process, I realize it was the opportunity to engage in rich dialogue with administrators and my own reflection of my experiences that truly made this process and study enlightening.

## **Conclusion**

Research and data on school disciplinary practices indicate that millions of students are suspended from school each year. Since 2009, more than three million students lost instructional time due to suspension from school (Morgan et al., 2014). Moreover, though research shows significant increases over the last decade in suspensions for students of all races, there is a growing racial discipline gap.

The purpose of the current study was to examine districts that provide learning opportunities for students during long-term suspensions. The study began with an investigation of the best practices to keep students engaged during long-term suspension. A set of working strategies was then generated for further examination. Next, the study examined school educators' perceptions of the working strategies. Educators were asked to "sort" the strategies for quantitative analysis, and a selection of educators were interviewed for qualitative analysis.

Finally, data were collected and analyzed from educators regarding their perceptions and experiences. The results of this investigation generated data on disciplinary strategies that were aimed to lead to a modified set of strategies with the goal that student learning does not end during long-term suspensions. The results of this study generated new disciplinary strategies to prevent suspensions and increase student achievement. The key perceptions from the principals who participated in the post-sort interviews centered around building relationships and addressing the whole child. During this process, it was clear that the principals genuinely understood that suspending a student may at times be unavoidable, but felt strongly that educators can employ certain strategies to keep the student on track and alter what might otherwise be a detrimental path to dropout or the juvenile justice system.

A major takeaway for this researcher was how to treat a child when they make a mistake that has consequences like long-term suspension—it is important that we do not give up on them. It is inevitable that young people will make mistakes, but when they have to be removed from their academic setting through suspension, the hope is that they will learn from the mistake and not lose pace and fall behind academically. There is a hope that they will not lose continuity of instruction and adult support. There is a hope that when they go back to school, everything will return back to normal, and the student will not be viewed nor treated differently. Finally, there is a hope that every child will rebound from their mistake with the help of caring and nurturing adults and eventually achieve their dreams. With more effective strategies in place to keep long-term suspended students engaged in schooling, we can hope to lower dropout rates and increase student success, and, in turn, create a more educated, college- and career-ready society of high school graduates.

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## APPENDIX A: CARD SORT CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS

East Carolina University



### East Carolina University Informed Consent to Participate in Research

**Title of Research Study:**

Long-Term Suspensions: Effective Strategies to Keep Students Engaged in Schooling

**Principal Investigator:**

Andre C. Smith, under the guidance of Dr. Matthew Militello

---

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 study is to seek to understand the best practices to keep students engaged in schooling while serving a long-term suspension, educators' perceptions of best practices to keep suspended students engaged in learning and better transition back to their base school. As an educator, you are being invited to take part in this research to seek your perceptions, viewpoints, and insights about best strategies for long-term suspended students. You are being asked to take part in the study by participating in a Card Sort Exercise. Your participation in this study is voluntary. The decision to take part in the research is yours to make. You have the right to participate, to choose not to participate, or to stop participating at any time without penalty. By conducting this research, we hope to obtain findings to the following research questions:

1. What do educational researchers and educators consider to be the effective engagement and learning strategies during long-term suspension?
2. What do school and district leaders perceive to be important strategies for students placed on long-term suspension?
3. What has led these educators to identify these strategies to be most effective?

If you volunteer to participate in this research, you will be one of about 40 people to do so.

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

There are no known reasons for why you should not participate in this research study. In addition, there are no known risks to participating in the card-sorting exercise.

**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 Crossroads II Building, 5625 Dillard Drive, Cary, NC 27518. Please report to Room 1400A. The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this study is approximately one hour.

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

You will be asked to sort 37 cards. These cards have statements about effective strategies for long-term suspended students printed on them, and your task will be to sort them according to your own beliefs and viewpoints. This process should take approximately one hour. After sorting the cards, you will be asked to complete a brief questionnaire about the statements and why you placed specific statements in certain areas on the distribution grid. In addition, you will be asked some general demographic data. Your card sort and your responses to the questionnaire will remain anonymous and confidential.

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

We do not 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 do not 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:

- Any agency of the federal, state, or local government that regulates human research. This includes the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), the North Carolina Department of Health, and the Office for Human Research Protections.
- The University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UNCIRB) and its staff have responsibility for overseeing your welfare during this research, and may need to see research records that identify you.

**How will you keep the information you collect about me secure? How long will you keep it?**

The information in the study will be kept confidential to the full extent allowed by law. Data will be stored securely on a computer and in a location of which only the researcher has access. No reference will be made in oral or written reports that could link you to the study.

**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 phone number (919) 431-7755 (8:00 am to 4:00 pm) or via email at [acsmith@wcpss.net](mailto:acsmith@wcpss.net).

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) 744-2941 (8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.). 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.

**Are there any conflicts of interest I should know about?**

The Principal Investigator (or the sub-investigator, research staff member, or family member) has a potential conflict of interest that involves (provide a brief description of the conflict). (ECU, institution’s name or office name) and (name or title of person with conflict) have developed a management plan to minimize any negative impact that would otherwise occur from the potential conflict of interest. This plan has been reviewed by the University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board and found to be adequate to protect your rights.

**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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Participant's Name (PRINT)	Signature	Date
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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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Person Obtaining Consent (PRINT)	Signature	Date
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## APPENDIX B: Q-SORT INSTRUCTIONS

Thank you again for your willingness to participate in this research study. In this process, you will sort and rank statements on a distribution grid from the statements with which you most agree to those with which you most disagree.

### Instructions:

1. Lay out the column headings from -4 to +4 across the top of the table.
2. Please read through all 37-statement cards to become familiar with the statements.
3. Please read through the statements for a second time. As you read the statements, please organize them into three piles:
4. On the right side, place the cards with the statements with which you **most strongly agree**.
5. On the left, place the cards with the statements of which you **most strongly disagree**.
6. In the middle, place the cards that you feel more undecided about or that you are not in agreement with as much as those on the right or not in disagreement with as much as those statements on the left.
7. Beginning with the pile on the right, place the 2 cards that you most strongly agree with in the far right column (+4 marker) in any order.
8. Next, turning to your left side, place the 2 cards that you most strongly disagree with in the far left column (-4 marker) in any order.
9. Returning to the pile on the right, choose 3 cards that represent the next statements with which you agree and place these cards under marker +3, in any order.
10. Do the same with the pile on the left, following this pattern as you work your way to the center pile.
11. You are free to change your mind during the sorting process and switch items around as long as you maintain the requested number of items under each marker.
12. You should have 2 cards under markers +4 and -4.
13. You should have 3 cards under markers +3 and -3.
14. You should have 4 cards under markers +2 and -2.
15. You should have 5 cards under markers +1 and -1.
16. You should have 6 cards under marker 0.
17. Your sorted cards should match the diagram on the Q-Sort Distribution Grid handout. After sorting the cards, please record each card's specific number onto the Q-Sort Distribution Grid in the same order as you sorted the cards.
18. After sorting the cards, complete the Post-Sort Questionnaire and Demographic Information.
19. If you are willing to be interviewed about your card sort, please provide your contact information in the blank spaces for the last question of the Post-Sort Questionnaire.



**APPENDIX D: POST-SORT QUESTIONNAIRE AND  
PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION**

*East Carolina University*



1. Consider the statement(s) you placed in the “Most Strongly Agree” columns of the distribution grid. Explain what these statements mean to you and why you placed them under “Most Strongly Agree.”
2. Consider the statement(s) you placed in the “Most Strongly Disagree” columns of the distribution grid. Explain what these statements mean to you and why you placed them under “Most Strongly Disagree.”
3. As you sorted the statement cards, did you feel that any statements that represent your beliefs, opinions, or viewpoints about effective strategies for long-term suspended students were missing? If so, what are the statements? Where would you place those statement cards and why?
4. Which statement(s) were the easiest to place? Why?
5. Which statement(s), if any, did you have difficulty placing? Why?
6. What are your beliefs about long-term suspended students and the support needed to have them successfully transition back to their base?
7. What are your beliefs and viewpoints about elements of effective strategies for long-term suspended students that have the most critical impact students transitioning back to their base school?
8. If you are willing to be interviewed about your perceptions and beliefs concerning effective strategies for long-term suspended students, please provide your contact information below.

I agree to participate in a follow-up interview.

Name:

---

E-Mail Address:

---

Phone Contacts: Home \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_  
Work \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_  
Cell \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_

## Participant Demographic Information

Please indicate your answer by checking the box in front of your selection.

1. Gender:  Male  Female
  
2. Number of years, including this school year, you have served as a principal.  
 Less than 1 year  1-5  6-10  11-15  16-20  21+
  
3. Grade level at which you currently serve as a principal.  
 Elementary  Middle  High
  
4. Have you ever suspended a student long-term, and what support did you give them upon their return?  
 Yes  No
  
5. What strategies do you have in place for suspended students that will allow them to successfully get back on track and eventually graduate?

## APPENDIX E: POST-SORT INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS

### East Carolina University Informed Consent to Participate in Research

East Carolina University



#### **Title of Research Study:**

Long-Term Suspensions: Effective Strategies to Keep Students Engaged in Schooling

#### **Principal Investigator:**

Andre C. Smith, under the guidance of Dr. Matthew Militello

---

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 study is to seek to understand the best practices to keep students engaged in schooling while serving a long-term suspension, educators' perceptions of best practices to keep suspended students engaged in learning and better transition back to their base school. As an educator, you are being invited to take part in this research to seek your perceptions, viewpoints, and insights about best strategies for long-term suspended students. You are being asked to take part in the study by participating in a Card Sort Exercise. Your participation in this study is voluntary. The decision to take part in the research is yours to make. You have the right to participate, to choose not to participate, or to stop participating at any time without penalty. By conducting this research, we hope to obtain findings to the following research questions:

4. What do educational researchers and educators consider to be the effective engagement and learning strategies during long-term suspension?
5. What do school and district leaders perceive to be important strategies for students placed on long-term suspension?
6. What has led these educators to identify these strategies to be most effective?

If you volunteer to participate in this research, you will be one of about 40 people to do so.

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

There are no known reasons for why you should not participate in this research study. In addition, there are no known risks to participating in the card-sorting exercise.

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

You can choose not to participate.

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

The research will be conducted at Crossroads II Building, 5625 Dillard Drive, Cary, NC 27518. Please report to Room 1400A. The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this study is approximately one hour.

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

If you agree to participate in this stage of the study, you will be asked to participate in an interview as a follow-up activity to the previous card-sorting exercise. Interview questions will focus on the findings of the Q-sort and will be used to seek a deeper understanding of your viewpoints and perceptions about the factors that emerged during the sort and its analysis. Reflection questions will be asked to gain understanding of the rank value you assigned certain factors in the rank order. The interview will be recorded, and the recording will be transcribed as part of the data analysis of the study.

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

We do not 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 do not 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:

- Any agency of the federal, state, or local government that regulates human research. This includes the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), the North Carolina Department of Health, and the Office for Human Research Protections.
- The University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UNCIRB) and its staff have responsibility for overseeing your welfare during this research, and may need to see research records that identify you.

**How will you keep the information you collect about me secure? How long will you keep it?**

The information in the study will be kept confidential to the full extent allowed by law. Data will be stored securely on a computer and in a location of which only the researcher has access. No reference will be made in oral or written reports that could link you to the study.

**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 phone number (919) 431-7755 (8:00 am to 4:00 pm) or via email at [acsmith@wcpss.net](mailto:acsmith@wcpss.net).

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) 744-2941 (8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.). 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.

**Are there any conflicts of interest I should know about?**

The Principal Investigator (or the sub-investigator, research staff member, or family member) has a potential conflict of interest that involves (provide a brief description of the conflict). (ECU, institution’s name or office name) and (name or title of person with conflict) have developed a management plan to minimize any negative impact that would otherwise occur from the potential conflict of interest. This plan has been reviewed by the University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board and found to be adequate to protect your rights.

**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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Participant's Name (PRINT)	Signature	Date
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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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Person Obtaining Consent (PRINT)	Signature	Date
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## **APPENDIX F: POST-SORT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. What would you name as important factors about effective strategies for long-term suspended students?
2. Why are factors +3 and +4 so important to you concerning elements of effective strategies for long-term suspended students?
3. Why are factors -3 and -4 ones that you disagree with as to their importance to effective strategies for long-term suspended students?
4. What effective strategies do you perceive to have the most impact on keeping long-term suspended students engaged in learning and prepared to return back to their base school?
5. Why do you believe these long-term suspension strategies as most crucial and effective?

## APPENDIX G: IRB APPROVAL TO CONDUCT THE STUDY



EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY  
University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board Office  
4N-70 Brody Medical Sciences Building- Mail Stop 682  
600 Moye 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: [Andre Smith](#)  
CC: [Matthew Militello](#)  
Date: 4/15/2015  
Re: [UMCIRB 15-000451](#)  
Effective strategies with long-term 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 4/15/2015 to 4/14/2016. 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
Appendix Fpost interview questions.docx	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
Appendix Fpost interview questions.docx	Surveys and Questionnaires
Consent Form for Q-Sort	Consent Forms
Consent Form Post-Interview	Consent Forms
Long-Term Suspensions: Effective Strategies to Keep Students Engaged in Schooling	Study Protocol or Grant Application
Q-Sort Instructions/Questionnaire	Data Collection Sheet
Questionnaire	Surveys and Questionnaires

# APPENDIX H: CITI COURSEWORK REQUIREMENTS REPORT

## COLLABORATIVE INSTITUTIONAL TRAINING INITIATIVE (CITI PROGRAM) COURSEWORK REQUIREMENTS REPORT\*

\* NOTE: Scores on this Requirements Report reflect quiz completions at the time all requirements for the course were met. See list below for details. See separate Transcript Report for more recent quiz scores, including those on optional (supplemental) course elements.

• **Name:** Andre Smith (ID: 2006989)  
• **Email:** SMITHAND8@student.ecu.edu  
• **Institution Affiliation:** East Carolina University (ID: 316)  
• **Institution Unit:** Educational Leadership  
• **Phone:** 919-850-1810

• **Curriculum Group:** Human Research  
• **Course Learner Group:** Group 2.Social / Behavioral Research Investigators and Key Personnel  
• **Stage:** Stage 2 - Refresher Course

• **Report ID:** 11130901  
• **Completion Date:** 01/06/2015  
• **Expiration Date:** 01/05/2018  
• **Minimum Passing:** 70  
• **Reported Score\*:** 100

REQUIRED AND ELECTIVE MODULES ONLY	DATE COMPLETED
SBE Refresher 1 – Defining Research with Human Subjects	01/06/15
SBE Refresher 1 – Privacy and Confidentiality	01/06/15
SBE Refresher 1 – Assessing Risk	01/06/15
SBE Refresher 1 – Research with Children	01/06/15
SBE Refresher 1 – International Research	01/06/15
Biomed Refresher 1 - Instructions	01/06/15
SBE Refresher 1 – History and Ethical Principles	01/06/15
SBE Refresher 1 – Federal Regulations for Protecting Research Subjects	01/06/15
SBE Refresher 1 – Informed Consent	01/06/15
SBE Refresher 1 – Research with Prisoners	01/06/15
SBE Refresher 1 – Research In Educational Settings	01/06/15
SBE Refresher 1 – Instructions	01/06/15

For this Report to be valid, the learner identified above must have had a valid affiliation with the CITI Program subscribing institution identified above or have been a paid Independent Learner.

CITI Program  
Email: [citisupport@miami.edu](mailto:citisupport@miami.edu)  
Phone: 305-243-7970  
Web: <https://www.citiprogram.org>

Collaborative Institutional  
Training Initiative  
at the University of Miami

