ABSTRACT

MOHRBUTTER, TRENT LANE. In-School Suspension: A Qualitative Examination of Assistant Principal Perceptions. (Under the direction of Dr. Paul Bitting).

This multi-site case study examined the perceptions of twelve assistant principals with regard to the use in-school suspension (ISS) in one school district. Qualitative methods were used to gain insight into the perspective of assistant principals regarding the rationale and effectiveness of ISS as a consequence for inappropriate student behavior in schools.

This qualitative study consisted of a confidential online survey, face-to-face interviews, a focus group discussion, a field observation, and an analysis of historic discipline documents. The online survey, assistant principal interviews and focus group consisted of a series of open-ended questions that allowed participants to share their thoughts and perceptions about ISS. The field observation was guided by several questions which were similar to those asked during the interviews. In order to gain additional perspectives, four teacher interviews (one teacher from each high school) were also conducted. An analysis of historical documents completed the data collection. The data collected through the teacher interviews and the historical documents were used to corroborate the data collected directly from the assistant principals.

The results of this study indicated that the assistant principal participants in this case perceived the rationale of ISS to be an appropriate consequence and punishment for minor unacceptable student behavior issues; however, the assistant principals in this case also perceived ISS to have minimal effect in changing or improving student behavior. They did perceive that the punitive nature of ISS was enough to deter some students from misbehaving. The data also revealed two philosophical schools of thought with regard to
student discipline and behavior. Some of the participants believed that stricter, more punitive consequences would lead to improved behavior; most, however, suggested that teaching, rewarding and reinforcing good behaviors would result in a more positive outcome for all students. The participants noted that school policies allowed them a great deal of discretion when assigning ISS. Parents, according to the participants in this case, had a major role to play in the management of student behaviors. The participants also noted the need for enhanced professional preparation for teachers and administrators as well as ongoing professional development focused on appropriate behavior management.
In-School Suspension: A Qualitative Examination of Assistant Principal Perceptions

by
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BIOGRAPHY

Trent Mohrbutter graduated from the University of Victoria in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada, in 1991 with a bachelor’s degree in secondary education. He began his career as a high school science and physical education teacher and became a high school guidance counselor in 1999. In 2002 he moved to North Carolina, where he continued in the field of education as middle school teacher. He received a master’s in school administration from East Carolina University in 2007 and became a school administrator that same year. He is currently a high school principal. Trent is married to a wonderful woman, Ginny Worsley Mohrbutter, and resides in Tarboro, North Carolina.
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The subjects of school discipline and managing student behavior are constant parts of the educational landscape, and establishing effective discipline practices are essential in ensuring academic success (Luiselli, Putnam, Handler, & Feinberg, 2005). The way school officials respond to inappropriate student behavior has been examined for decades, perhaps as long as schools have existed; not surprisingly, educators are concerned with their effectiveness in dealing with those behaviors (Washburn, Stowe, Cole, & Robinson, 2007). It is typical that inappropriate student behavior is followed by some type of consequence, often external discipline in the form of punishment usually consisting of suspension, corporal punishment or expulsion (Osher, Bear, Sprague, & Doyle, 2010). Unfortunately, according to Zimbardo, Johnson, & Weber (2006), what can be said about punishment as a consequence to change or improve behavior is that its effects are temporary at best. Carpenter (1974) wrote that punishment could be used to control behavior, but that Skinner believed that its use was generally inefficient. Ironically, the same conclusions were being drawn about the role of punishment in education half a century ago. Beauchamp and Mathis (1957) wrote that “the idea that behavior really is not eliminated until it is brought to free expression where it can be redirected is a contradiction of the idea that punishment can eliminate undesirable behavior. Sometimes punishment can do more damage than good…Furthermore, for some persons punishment is a reward” (Beauchamp & Mathis, 1957, p. 121). Yang (2009) suggested that punishment, regardless of how one describes it is ineffective in schools, and in almost every case, the more schools rely on punishment the lower the student’s achievement tends to be.
Punishment in schools, suspension or corporal, is often referred to as school discipline, which is somewhat of a misrepresentation given that punishment and discipline are two distinctly different things (Richey, 2009). While punishment is something that is inflicted upon a person, discipline is more about correcting and learning to behave appropriately and to be responsible for his or her behavior (Wallace, 2010). Discipline in education is about providing young people with the opportunity and teaching them how to become more responsible (Marshall, 2005).

This chapter will provide background and context for this study’s examination of one of the modes of punishment used to respond to inappropriate student behavior and will focus primarily on in-school suspension. This chapter will also outline and describe the purpose, the significance, and an overview of the methodological approach to the study.

**Background/Context of the Study**

In-school suspension (ISS) is one of the exclusionary, punitive and reactionary methods by which school administrators consequence students for minor disciplinary infractions (Morrisey, Bohanon, & Fenning, 2010). ISS first appeared on the educational landscape in the 1970s and quickly became a common method by which school administrators could meet the demands of all educators in providing an effective strategy for dealing with inappropriate student behavior, to assist teachers in dealing with disruptive or inappropriate behaviors and to help them manage their classrooms (Sullivan, 1989). Additionally, ISS does not reward the student for bad behavior, as may be the case when students are suspended out of school, and acts as an appropriate form of punishment and a means of deterring inappropriate behavior (Patterson, 1985). Educators are faced with the
challenge of not only dealing with disruptive classroom behavior but coming up with strategies to manage the behaviors as well (Guardino & Fullerton, 2010). Once a teacher has exhausted his or her “bag of tricks” and has tried to intervene, a student can be removed from class and assigned to ISS as a consequence of an inappropriate behavior and the teacher can continue to teach the remaining students (Patterson, 1985).

**A Case Narrative: Setting the Stage for this Study**

Having spent the better part of twenty years as an educator, and now the last five as a school administrator I have found myself questioning the means by which I, and my colleagues and I have dealt with and continue to deal with inappropriate student behaviors. By inappropriate behaviors, I mean those less serious non-violent behaviors that tend to be disruptive and interfere with classroom instruction.

A few years ago, while I was serving as an assistant principal, a student entered my office having been sent out of the classroom by a teacher who, according to the note at the bottom of the office referral, just did not know what else to do with him. Ralph, the 10th grade student and I, had become very familiar with one another given that he usually appeared in my office on a weekly basis, and this was not the first time that Ms. Jasper had sent him my way. Earlier that same month, Ms. Jasper had expressed her frustration and explained that she felt as though she had run out of options with Ralph and just wanted him to do his work and let the other students do theirs. On that day, she sent Ralph to my office for being disruptive, argumentative, and uncooperative. Ms. Jasper had followed our school’s discipline plan: she had conferenced with his parents, had tried to implement
classroom strategies for Ralph, and had sent him to me on several occasions. I had assigned him to ISS multiple times, but the problem behaviors continued.

I recall Ralph being pleasant enough at the time, and he calmly explained the situation as accurately as it was written on the referral. He told me that Ms. Jasper had asked him to move seats and that he did not appreciate being told where to sit. He simply did not understand why he should move seats and told her he was not going to do so. An argument between the two ended with him telling her that the only way he was changing seats was to move him somewhere out of the room. Ms. Jasper agreed to his resolution and sent him to find a seat in my office. We reviewed classroom and school expectations in terms of following instructions and what the consequences were for being insubordinate. He was quick to respond and was even able to recite the school’s policy to me, holding three fingers in the air pointed in the general direction of the school’s ISS room. I nodded to Ralph and told him that it would be three days in ISS. I could not help but smile. He was a decent enough kid, and our relationship was not antagonistic in anyway, but this ISS routine was wearing on both of us. As I signed the referral I felt as though both of us thought that ISS was a waste of time and that it would not be the last time we would exercise this process.

The school’s ISS was located in a trailer in the back part of our campus where students were, and still are, supervised by Ms. Shelby, a teacher’s assistant who had been the school’s ISS coordinator for several years. I met with her, as I usually did, at the end of the school day to give her the list of students she would have in ISS for the next day. Seeing Ralph’s name on the list caused her to roll her eyes and shake her head. We had been down this road with Ralph many times before and Ms. Shelby joked that she probably spent more
time with Ralph, as this was the sixth assignment to ISS this reporting period, than any of his teachers. It probably was the truth and, not surprisingly, Ralph’s academic progress reflected the fact that he had spent significant time out of the classroom. Although he was in school, he was not receiving the instruction necessary to be successful, and regardless of the number of times he had been assigned to ISS, neither his behavior nor his attitude towards school or his teachers had improved.

It was typical during that time for the administrative team to meet at the end of each day, and we did so then as well. The principal, three assistant principals, and lead counselor met to debrief and reflect on that day. Our discussion quickly found its way that evening, as it often did, to the number of students each of us had assigned to ISS. Bill, a 55-year-old with 20 years of assistant principal experience, explained his frustration with the kids that just don’t get it. His take on the whole discipline issue was that some kids simply don’t care, don’t want to be here, and ought to leave if they couldn’t do what we asked of them. Sylvia was a veteran educator, but had only recently become an assistant principal. She explained that, from her perspective, as long as we forced kids to be here, we are going to have to deal with their behavior. She questioned the revolving door nature of ISS, but wondered aloud what else we were supposed to do. She suggested that we force parents to come to the school to sit in ISS with their kids. Mike, our principal, reminded us that we were supposed to be using positive strategies to reward kids for following school rules, but he conceded that there wasn’t enough time in the day to recognize kids for doing what is expected of them. Our conversation continued, but in the end we concluded that we will likely continue to struggle with student behaviors that disrupt the learning environment of the school. I remember
thinking, at the time, that our opinions on the subject of student discipline and ISS were
definitely different. My contention at the time was, and still is, that school administrators use
ISS for a variety of reasons, not always the same, and their expectations of the results of
assigning ISS may be inconsistent as well.

I am no longer an assistant principal but do still work in the same school district.
Recently, I had the opportunity to speak with Ms. Shelby and got a chance to catch up on
some of my former students. She let me know that Ralph had not passed his grade and
continued to get in trouble. She said that the last time he was assigned to ISS, he left at the
end of the day and had not returned to school since.

About this Study

In this exploratory multi-site case study, the perceived rationale and effectiveness of
one school district’s use of ISS in four comprehensive high schools will be examined
specifically from the perspectives of the twelve assistant principals who work in those high
schools.

The School District

Smith County School District is a diverse system consisting of a approximately
17,000 students, who speak 15 languages and represent 26 different countries. The student
population is 53% African-American, 36% White, 7% Hispanic, 3% American Indian/Multi
Racial, and 1% Asian, and 64% of students qualify for the federal free or reduced lunch
program. The district is located in a state in the southeastern region of the United States and
covers approximately 590 square miles. There are seven rural townships and one urban city
within the boundaries of Smith County. The county school system operates with an annual
budget of slightly more than $207 million, roughly $8,600 per pupil, and is the largest employer, about 2,100 employees, in the county. The school district is headed by a superintendent and governed by an elected eleven person board of education. Approximately 4,800 high school students attend one of four comprehensive high schools, each of which enrolls 9\textsuperscript{th}-grade through 12\textsuperscript{th}-grade and houses an in-school suspension program. There are two alternative schools, neither of which has an ISS program.

**Bradburn High School**

Located in the heart of the urban area of Smith County, Bradburn High enrolls a little more than 1,200 students. It is the oldest high school in the county and has a rich tradition of academics and athletics. Bradburn High School graduates include several accomplished alumni including a state governor, two attorneys general, business leaders from around the state and country, and several professional athletes. The school operates with 4 administrators, 1 principal and 3 assistant principals, and employs 85 full-time teachers. In addition to offering core academic courses, the school enrolls approximately 40 students in an International Baccalaureate program. The school offers a full range of athletic programs, clubs and a Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (JROTC) to all students.

**MacIntire High School**

In the southern most area of the county, in an area that looks like it has been carved out of a corn field, sits MacIntire High. Enrolling 1,250 students, MacIntire has 77 full-time teachers and an administrative team consisting of 1 principal and 3 assistant principals. The school offers its students a full range of academic, club, athletic programs as well as JROTC. Students at MacIntire are also provided the opportunity to enroll in Advanced Placement and
college classes if they qualify academically. MacIntire is the newest of the high schools, and boasts top-of-the-line academic and athletic facilities. Students from both rural and urban areas of the county attend MacIntire, and although some of the students were in middle school together, many were not. Being a relatively new school, the alumni have not yet gained the momentum or backing that may exist at the other schools.

**Richmond High School**

Located in the north central area of the county, Richmond enrolls just over 1,250 students who are bused in from three distinct regions of the county. About 25% of the students come from the rural northern part of the county, 25% come from the rural central part of the county, and the remainder comes from the urban center. Richmond High School is located on just over 70 acres of land and maintains top-notch facilities for both academics and athletics. The school offers a wide variety of programs to all students including JROTC, and has a nationally recognized marching band, and yearbook club. Academically eligible students can enroll in advanced placement and college classes.

**Butler High School**

Butler is located in the eastern region of Smith County. It is the only high school in the county whose students come from just one middle school. Enrolling slightly more than 1,250 students, Butler has 4 administrators, a principal and 3 assistant principals, and 78 full time teachers. Like the other three high schools, Butler offers a full range of academics, clubs and athletic programs for its students, including college and Advanced Placement classes. Additionally, Butler offers an agricultural science program that is unique to the school.
The District’s In-School Suspension Programs

Each of the four high schools houses ISS in a separate setting where students have most of their typical privileges removed. They do not eat lunch with the rest of the school and are not allowed to leave the room without special permission to do so.

In this case, students are usually assigned to ISS for school-level disruptions, non-compliance, and other minor infractions that are not considered worthy of an out-of-school suspension (OSS). They may be sent to ISS by the classroom teacher as a timeout (the assistant principal is notified and follows up with the student), assigned as a result of a teacher-written office referral, an intervention by the administrator after consulting with the teacher, or as an immediate response to a behavior that may bypass the teacher altogether.

An administrator may assign the student to ISS for a time period as short as one class period but not usually longer than three full days. Infractions that would warrant a longer period are more major offenses, or repeated minor offenses, and are usually dealt with via an OSS. In this case, ISS is used as a consequence; it may also be used as a deterrent to inappropriate behavior, or it may simply be a way to provide a teacher with a break from a student.

An administrator’s perceived effectiveness of their ISS program should be one that helps to manage student behavior, provide teachers with additional strategies to manage student behavior, change or improve student behavior, and/or deter inappropriate behaviors, as well as serving as an alternative to out-of-school suspension (Blomberg, 2004). The examination of the assistant principal’s perceived rational for and effectiveness of ISS, in this case, will consist of a confidential online survey of all twelve assistant principals currently
working in Smith County School District’s four comprehensive high schools (9th through 12th grade), face-to-face interviews with six of the assistant principals, a focus group interview with the remaining assistant principals, a field observation involving the shadowing of an assistant principal, an analysis of documents associated with district suspension data from the previous year, and an interview with a teacher who has referred students to ISS at each of the schools.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this exploratory multi-site case study is to examine assistant principal perceptions with regard to the rationale for and effectiveness of the use of ISS in the four comprehensive high schools located in one school district in the south eastern region of the United States. Assistant principal perception will be examined in this case because one of their main responsibilities is to deal with student behaviors (Leadership Matters, 2008).

**Research Questions**

1. What do assistant principals perceive to be the rationale for assigning students to ISS?
2. What do assistant principals perceive to be the expected outcomes of ISS?
3. What do assistant principals perceive to be the effectiveness of ISS in achieving its intended outcomes?
4. What policy changes do assistant principals perceive to be needed in order to ensure effective student behavior management or student discipline?
5. What alternatives, support or resources do assistant principals perceive to be needed in order to properly facilitate the appropriate management of student behavior?

**Definition of Terms**

*In-School Suspension (ISS):* Students assigned to ISS are kept in an on-campus site, usually a classroom setting. They are segregated from the rest of the student population and usually have most of their normal privileges removed. Students in ISS may, for example, eat lunch at a different time, use the restroom at scheduled times, and not participate in or attend extra-curricular activities.

*Out-of-School Suspension (OSS):* Students assigned to OSS are not permitted on the school’s campus for the period of the suspension. OSS is assigned by the school’s principal or designee, usually an assistant principal, for a period of one to ten days. Out-of-school suspensions lasting longer than ten days are assigned by the superintendent.

*Classified Staff:* School personnel who are not professionally certified. A teacher’s assistant is an example of classified staff.

*Assistant Principal:* A member of the school’s administrative team. An assistant principal performs duties that assist the school’s principal in the day-to-day operation of the school. One of the main responsibilities of the assistant principal is to handle or deal with student discipline (Leadership Matters, 2008).

*Case study:* The detailed examination of one setting or a single subject, a single depository of documents, or a single event (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).
Significance of the Study

The management of student behavior may be one of the greatest challenges that face school officials; in fact, the lack of student discipline and behavior control is one of the most prominent concerns in education (Sugai, Horner, & McIntosh, 2007). Students unable to adhere to school rules and expectations are sometimes assigned to ISS as a means to keep students in school while they receive a consequence for inappropriate, disruptive behavior (Adams, 1992). Should it follow then, that school administrators, assistant principals in this case, ought to believe that there is an observed improvement in student behavior or a decrease in the recurrence of inappropriate behavior as a result of assigning students to ISS? Is this in fact the case? Do assistant principals believe that ISS helps to improve student behavior? Do they believe that ISS discourages inappropriate behavior? This study will provide insight into the rationale for and effectiveness of ISS from the perspective of the assistant principal. The perception of the assistant principal is especially significant for two reasons:

1. Although an assistant principal may do many jobs in the course of the day, it is typical that one of his or her main responsibilities is student discipline (Leadership Matters, 2008). In fact, Celikten (2001) reported that 92% of assistant principals surveyed identified themselves as their school’s primary disciplinarian. Bush (1997) found that duties performed most by Detroit city assistant principals were related to student discipline. These results are consistent with the findings of Hausman, Nebeker, McCreary and Donaldson (2001), who
found that assistant principals in Maine devoted the largest part of their time to student management.

2. Understanding a person’s perceptions and beliefs can provide a deeper understanding of their behaviors (Patton, 2002). If, for example, a person perceives or believes something to be true, it is true to them regardless of any available information that suggests or proves their belief to be untrue. People will act upon those beliefs, rather than facts (Henslin, 2005). Macionis (2007) wrote that The Thomas Theorem helps explain this: *Situations that are defined as real become real in their consequences*. In this case, if an assistant principal believes or perceives that punishment, specifically ISS, is an appropriate and effective manner with which to consequence inappropriate student behavior, then he or she will continue to use it despite information or evidence to the contrary.

The results of this study may be used to inform school systems as they examine their ISS programs in an effort to meet the needs of student learning and improve student behavior. The findings of this study may provide insight and lead to further investigation of ISS and its use in schools. Additionally, and perhaps most importantly, the results of this study may help guide decision and policy-making practices for school officials as they develop procedures for dealing with student behavior.

Patton (2002) suggested that the critical point of any assessment is the understanding that a common activity for all students being assigned to ISS for disruptive behavior can result in drastically different outcomes for different students. Patton (2002) also suggested that although quantitative studies provide useful statistics and measurement of percent
increase or decrease, it is qualitative studies that provide a method for capturing and reporting individualized outcomes and context for the results. The outcome of this study may provide significant insight into the rationale for and effectiveness of ISS from the perspective of the assistant principal. It should help administrators, specifically assistant principals, make more informed decisions with regards to the consequences assigned to students as a result of their inappropriate behavior. Additionally, this study should contribute to the body of research that exists with regard to school suspension.

**Overview of Approach**

In many schools it is the primary responsibility of the assistant principals to assign disciplinary consequences to students for inappropriate, disruptive behavior (Weller & Weller, 2002). All too often assistant principals spend the majority of their time dealing with student discipline (Elias, 2007). The rationale for assigning students to ISS was that they could be kept in school, though out of the classroom, while serving a consequence for minor behavioral problems such as disrespect, class disruption, and insubordination (Morrison & Skiba, 2001). In this case the rationale for using ISS and its effectiveness as a consequence will be examined through the lens of the assistant principal. A qualitative approach will be used in order to gain insight into assistant principals’ perceptions of the rational and effectiveness of ISS.

Qualitative research has several purposes such as exploratory, explanatory, critical, descriptive, action-oriented, and predictive (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). This study will use qualitative methods to explore, describe, and explain the perceived rationale for and effectiveness of ISS from the perspective of the assistant principal. The qualitative methods
in this case will include a confidential online survey with 12 assistant principals, 6 face-to-face interviews, a focus group interview with 6 assistant principals, a field observation involving the shadowing an assistant principal, an interview with a teacher who has referred students to the ISS at each of the schools, and the analysis of the district’s discipline data documents from the previous year. Although the sample size is relatively small, it should provide, as Patton (2002) suggests, a wealth of detailed information.

**Chapter Summary and Organization of the Study**

ISS was developed several decades ago as a consequence for disruptive behavior without suspending students out of school (Dilling, 1979). Keeping the students in school provides an opportunity to be supervised while remaining on the school’s campus (Gushee, 1984). Students assigned to ISS may serve a period of time in an isolated room as a form of punishment, but there may also be a positive component, such as being given a chance to complete school assignments (Adams, 1982). ISS is a consequence and should, in theory, deter students from behaving inappropriately, reduce the occurrence of repeat incidents of inappropriate behavior, provide an opportunity for support and learning and, at the same time, reduce the loss of instructional time that occurs when students are assigned to OSS (Hrabak & Settles, 2005).

In this study the rationale for and effectiveness of ISS will be examined specifically from the perspective of assistant principals. A qualitative study will be used because qualitative methods allow researchers to gain insight and perspective into the thoughts, perceptions and beliefs of those participating in the study (Wolcott, 2001).
Chapter 2 will provide an extensive overview of existing literature and research related to school behavior, punishment, and suspension; a rationale for the development of in-school suspension; students’ behaviors associated with ISS; the role of ISS in teaching and learning; potential and real problems associated with ISS; approaches toward and beliefs about ISS; and suspension and student minority groups. Braxton (2004) suggested that a review of existing literature can help provide context for the study.

Chapter 3 outlines and describes the methodology used in this study. A qualitative approach will be used. This study will constitute an exploratory multi-site case study, a confidential online survey, six face-to-face interviews, a focus group with six participants, a field observation consisting of the shadowing of an assistant principal, an interview with a teacher at each of the high schools, and an analysis of historical ISS documents will. The data gathered in from the survey, the interviews, the focus group, the field observation, the teacher interview, and document analysis will be analyzed and discussed in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 will summarize the results and discuss their implications, draw conclusions, and make recommendations relevant to possible alternatives to ISS. Chapter 5 will also raise additional questions and possibly lead to further research into ISS.
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Student’s inappropriate behavior and a school’s response to it may be one of the most discussed issues in education as schools face challenges related to disruptive and antisocial students (Osher et al., 2010). Regardless of a person’s affiliation to education, whether he or she works in the field or not, student behavior is a focus and something that is generally at the top of the public’s attitudes and opinions about public schools (Vanderslice, 1999). Since the first Gallop poll with regards to public attitudes about education in 1969, classroom management and student discipline has been the number one issue on 16 different occasions (Nichols, 2004).

In a report describing the daily role of a school principal, Blendinger and Snipes (2001) stated that at least a portion of every day is made up of dealing with student discipline. Additionally, Chen, Blendinger and McGrath (2001) in their study of assistant principal job satisfaction found that the assistant principal participants listed student discipline and dealing with parents with regard to student discipline as the least desirable parts of their job. In his investigation of high school teachers’ perceptions of their school environment, Huang (2000) reported that many teachers viewed student discipline as a serious concern in their school. School building administrators are challenged with the task of managing student behaviors while simultaneously keeping their students safe, promoting daily attendance, growing them academically, and meeting social, psychological and physical student needs (Ediger, 1996).
In this review I will provide an overview of school behavior, punishment, and suspension, a rationale for the development of in-school suspension (ISS); students’ behaviors associated with ISS; the role of ISS in teaching and learning; potential and real problems associated with ISS; approaches toward and beliefs about ISS; and suspension and students minority groups.

**Student Behavior in Schools**

In 2003-2004 The National Center for Educational Statistics reported that school principals listed frequently occurring discipline problems, those occurring at least once a week, as follows:

- 11% of principals reported student verbal abuse of teachers
- 3% reported widespread disorder in classrooms
- 19% reported student acts of disrespect towards teachers
- 17% reported undesirable gang activity
- 3% reported undesirable cult or extremist activity

The report also stated that middle schools reported a higher frequency of behavior problems than elementary schools, and that principals in larger high schools were more likely to report discipline problems than those principals in smaller schools (Dinkes, Cataldi, Kena, & Baum, 2006). In a policy forum prepared for the U.S. Department of Education, Markowitz (2002) indicated that 81% of Virginia schools reported one or more serious acts of misconduct. In their study of student behavior problems, Abebe and Hailemariam (2007) concluded: “It appears behavior problems occur practically all day in all classrooms and among both regular education and special education students, except in a class where students chose to join and
earn the privilege to participate” (p. 9). Mayer and Furlong (2010) analyzed data from the School Crime supplement and the National Crime Victimization Survey and reported that although “school safety has improved over the past decade, other significant concerns remain” (p. 24).

Gushee (1984) in a discussion of student discipline policies noted that American schools have generally dealt with student misbehavior through punishment in one of two ways: suspension (out-of-school suspension (OSS) and in-school suspension (ISS)) and corporal punishment. He also stated that neither of these strategies has proved very effective in changing, improving, and/or eliminating inappropriate student behavior.

Corporal punishment as a means of dealing with student behavior is still in use in the United States, although many states have banned its use. In fact, by 2004, 28 states and the District of Columbia had banned the use of corporal punishment (McCarthy, 2005). McCarthy (2005) also stated that over half of the individual school districts within nine of the states that still authorize the use of corporal punishment have adopted policies which prohibit this type of disciplinary consequence. Sheffield-Coley (2009) concluded as a result of her study “that corporal punishment in schools was an ineffective, dangerous, and unacceptable method of discipline. The use of corporal punishment in the school reinforced the notion that physical aggression was an acceptable and effective means of eliminating unwanted behavior in society” (p. 163).

Data from the National Center for Educational Statistics (2009) indicated that disciplinary actions taken by school officials as a result of inappropriate student behavior resulted in the suspension of 3.3 million students. Additionally, the report stated that the
number of students expelled for disciplinary reasons was 102,100 nationally. The Public Schools of North Carolina State Board of Education Department of Public Instruction (2007) reported to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee that the number of short-term suspensions had increased from the previous year by 2.1% to just over 308,000. Additionally, the report also stated that without effective intervention student behaviors often get worse and result in further suspension. These numbers suggest that punishment has proved relatively ineffective in correcting, deterring, or eliminating inappropriate student behavior. Dinkes et al. (2006) reported that although school crime has decreased in recent years, students aged 12-18 were the victims of about 583,000 personal crimes and about 863,000 crimes of theft. Additionally, 25% of students in grades 9-12 reported that drugs were made available to them on their school campus.

Simply punishing students for inappropriate behavior is hardly the answer because harsh or punitive discipline is not effective in increasing the likelihood of appropriate behaviors (Epstein, Atkins, Cullinan, Kutash, & Weaver, 2008). Skinner (1968) wrote, for example:

> When we punish a student who displeases us, we do not specify the pleasing behavior. The student learns only indirectly to avoid or escape our punishment …

> We do not teach a child to tie his shoelace by punishing him for failing to do so.

(p.187)

According to Lefton & Brannon (2006) punishment of any kind has almost no long-term effect in eliminating unwanted behavior. Punishment only temporarily suppresses unwanted or inappropriate behaviors and is seriously limited in its effectiveness. Zimardo et al. (2006)
also concluded that punishment does not work for long-term behavioral change and may lead to hostile and aggressive behavior when it is used frequently.

Punishment does little, if anything, to address problem behaviors displayed in school that are linked to external factors such as mental depression or other stresses not associated with school (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2003). In a policy statement from the Committee of School Health, the American Academy of Pediatrics (2003) also stated that suspension and expulsion may exacerbate academic deterioration. Simply punishing the student by suspending him or her from school may not address the actual issue that caused the problem behavior. Left unchecked or unaddressed these students are more likely to get involved with criminal activity and are more likely to drop out of school. They are also more likely to use tobacco, alcohol and drugs, and are more likely to fight and carry a weapon (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2003). Carpenter (1974) wrote that Skinner claimed “the most effective control is by positive reinforcement” (p. 23).

**An Overview of Suspension**

It is common that school officials, as a general rule, react to inappropriate student behaviors with some sort of punishment, suspension for example, associated with removing students from the learning environment (Gushee, 1984). Punitive measures thought to punish students, however, tend to be counterproductive (Chen, 2008). As school officials struggled with the challenges associated with OSS such as the decrease in instructional time, they began to look at alternatives which may serve as a consequence for inappropriate behavior without being a detriment to the student’s academic learning (Adams, 1992). OSS takes place when students are not permitted to be on the school’s campus for any reason during the
duration of a suspension. Of course, students who receive suspensions out of school are unable to keep up with their school work and are at greater risk of falling behind academically; additionally they are at risk of being involved with significant problems outside the school (Theroit, Craun, & Dupper, 2010). Suspension has historically, as suggested by Flanagain (2007), been expected to serve as a deterrent by sending a clear message to students and parents that inappropriate behavior will not be tolerated. Flanagain (2007) also found that suspension usually provides for a cooling off period for students who may pose a danger to other students. He adds, however, that there is very little research to show that zero tolerance and other tough measures have any positive effect on improving or eliminating inappropriate behavior. In fact, he also stated that there is a growing body of research that suggests that there is a clear relationship between disciplinary exclusion and poor academic achievement. Skiba, Rausch, and Ritter (2004) found “that zero tolerance has not met its goal of maintaining safety, has been inconsistently applied, increased racial disparities, and has been associated with increased school dropout” (p. 1). Yang (2009), in a comparison of two schools located on the same campus and both struggling with student behavior issues, found that despite suspending and removing close to 25% of the student body each year, the school that adopted a zero tolerance policy “actually demonstrated lower test scores and matriculation rates than its counterpart. The second school demonstrated the largest test score increase in the entire school district after one year” (p. 52). The second school in the study had implemented a mentor program in lieu of suspension and not only kept more students in school but increased overall student achievement as well.
In a School Administrators article, Delisio (2008) suggested that students who have been suspended out of school are left to roam about their communities during the day, possibly getting into even more trouble. In their study of adolescent antisocial behavior, Hemphill, Toumbourou, Herrenkohl, McMorris, and Catalano (2006) found that school suspension significantly increased the likelihood of antisocial behavior. They stated that “it seems that early exposure to school suspension may increase subsequent antisocial behavior” (p. 743). Arcia (2006) indicated that suspended students show lower academic growth and are more likely to drop out. A study of indigenous and non-indigenous students found that suspensions were one of the factors most highly linked to failure in both groups of students. In fact, suspensions were the strongest predictor of at-risk status for both groups (Boon, 2008). Skiba et al. (2004) also found that schools with higher suspension rates tended to have lower passing rates.

In their case study of Greenfield Middle School, Rausch and Skiba (2004) used data from the state of Indiana to analyze the relationship between OSS and student achievement. They concluded that a decrease in the occurrences of OSS resulted in an increase in student achievement. Even prior to that, however, schools attempting to deal with changing and increasing demands of student achievement began to look at alternatives to OSS that would help keep students in a modified learning environment despite their behavior (Dilling, 1979).

A Historical Overview of In-School-Suspension

Gushee (1984) described ISS as an in-house program that provides both punitive components, in that students are removed from the regular class setting and isolated from their peers, and preventive components, if and when a counseling component exists, that
may be effective against some types of behaviors. Blomberg (2004) in his review of research literature of what were described as effective ISS models concluded that an ISS model that offered positive problem-solving and coping strategies to students would be more effective and less exclusionary than any OSS model. ISS was an outgrowth of the idea that keeping students in school would be beneficial. Because ISS kept students in school, it became possible for school officials to punish inappropriate behavior and to provide a number of corrective strategies for the students as well (Adams, 1992). In addition, students who remain in school, albeit not in the regular class, may continue with some form of academic instruction or assistance from their teachers (Vanderslice, 1999).

ISS may be used in schools as an intermediate step and as a consequence for dealing with inappropriate or disruptive behaviors. In many cases school officials use ISS to help classroom teachers manage student behavior and rather than being suspended out-of school or expelled students are removed from the school through OSS or expulsion, schools may use ISS to keep students in school where they are able to continue their school work (Delisio, 2008). Gushee (1984) also suggested that ISS may be used in lieu of OSS as it may be designed to counteract the effects of suspension. The nature of OSS is that students are removed from the regular school setting altogether for a time period ranging from one to ten days (North Carolina Department of Public Education, 2009). When students are removed from the school’s campus, they are removed from the class and the school as a whole. As a result, they lose teacher contact and instructional time, which results in a decrease in academic achievement (Skiba et al., 2004).
Proponents of OSS may argue that it reduces the recurrence of misbehaviors, increases parental involvement, highlights the significance of misbehavior, and decreases the disruption to other students’ learning, but the negative effects of student suspension are well documented (Riordan, 2006). Riordan (2006) also stated that OSS and suspension in general have been criticized for the overrepresentation of students of minority groups, students from low socioeconomic status, those who are homeless, and those who are achieving below grade level. In a three-year study, for example, Arcia (2007) found that black students were frequently suspended at much higher rates than students from other races. Other research contradicts OSS proponents arguments as well. In their investigation of suspension rates in 161 Kentucky middle schools, Christle, Nelson and Jolivette (2004) found that suspension did not reduce the recurrence of misbehaviors, and that “52% of the students in the 20 HSS who were suspended in 2001-2002 were suspended more than once” (p. 520). They also found that there was a positive correlation between retention rate and suspension rate. Additionally, there is evidence that suggests that there is little consistency between offense and consequence. Also, a disproportionate number of administrators disciplined students based upon the student’s race, gender, socio-economic status, and disability (Skiba, Peterson & Williams, 1997). The negative effect of suspension clearly seems to outweigh any possible benefits.

**Behavior Theory and In-School Suspension**

One of the more prominent concerns of all educators, and the public in general, is the lack of student discipline and behavior control (Sugai et al., 2007). McKevitt and Braaksma (2007) described school discipline policies which typically use some form of punishment as a
consequence and means to decrease undesirable or inappropriate behaviors. They add, however, that “they usually do not produce long lasting behavior change” (p. 735). Students removed from the classroom for behavior reasons, even when they are in an alternative placement, often fall behind in their school work, are labeled negatively, miss educational opportunities, and often return to class more frustrated and discouraged, which leads to further and more serious behavior problems (Theroit, Craun, & Dupper, 2010).

Exclusionary, punitive methods used by schools seem be contradictory to what behaviorists suggest is necessary for behavior modification, which “consists of procedures that combine conditioning and modeling to eliminate undesirable behaviors and increase desirable response” (Berk, 2004, p. 19). Myers (2008) suggested that using punishment in an attempt to decrease the frequency of inappropriate or undesirable behaviors of children is not effective because punished behavior is only suppressed, punishment teaches discrimination, punishment can teach fear, and punishment may increase aggressive behavior by modeling aggression as a way to cope with problems.

Rathus (2005) defines operant conditioning as a simple form of learning in which a person engages in a behavior for reinforcement. Children, he goes on to say, learn to behave in an appropriate manner because of the reinforcement they receive from their parents or teachers. Unfortunately other children may “learn to misbehave because misbehavior also gets attention from other people….children may learn to be bad when their good behavior is routinely ignored” (p. 245). The original development of ISS was grounded in the notion that students who behaved poorly would be kept in school, be punished, and learn corrective strategies (Adams, 1992). LaVigna and Donnellan (as cited in DiGennaro-Reed & Lovett,
“have argued that punishment in any form is unnecessary, claiming that reinforcement-based strategies provide the efficacy of punishment without harmful side effects, thereby making punishment unethical” (p. 61).

Hartman and Stage (2000) in their investigation of ISS and disruptive classroom behaviors suggested that a student’s lack of social processing ability may result in inappropriate behaviors and suspension. They attempted to explain the possibility that students who were repeatedly assigned to ISS might also have social information processing deficits. They go on to describe behavioral issues that may result in suspension as a student’s reaction to perceived hostile intentions, reactive aggression, and social problem solving. What seems like disruptive, disrespectful behavior to one might be a simple, normal reaction to others. It might be that for many students, their perception of the hostile intent of others and the students’ perception of their teacher’s intentions may be ambiguous when given the social situation. It may not be characteristic of a specific predetermined notion of a student to disrupt the classroom environment (Hartman & Stage, 2000).

In her field work associated with African-American males and suspension, Ferguson (2000) observed and described a hidden curriculum that reinforced the cultural norms of a dominant class and exacerbated or multiplied the inequalities that exist for minorities. Behavioral standards of the dominant class have, over time, become what are expected in a school environment. She stated, for example, that making eye contact during conversation may be a sign of respect in one culture and a sign of disrespect in another. Cultural minorities whose behavioral norms that may be different to the established norms in a school may be misinterpreted and seen as disruptive, unruly, uncooperative and disrespectful, and
are often suspended as a result (Ferguson, 2000). The behaviors for which ISS was
developed to address may simply make matters worse. Students might be assigned to ISS for
behaviors that are culturally normal to them. Behaviors that might typically disrupt class or
seem disrespectful such as speaking out of turn or raising their voice generally result in ISS.
Nonetheless, these real reactions to social situations cause some students to behave in a
manner that may be perceived by school officials as inappropriate and disruptive in nature
(Ferguson, 2000).

Additionally, students who demonstrate hostile intentional bias are more likely to
exhibit reactive aggression. These behaviors are not proactive attempts by a student to disrupt
the class but are a student’s inappropriate reaction to a social situation in the class, which
may result in school suspension (Hartman & Stage, 2000).

Obviously, students may be assigned to ISS for a host of reasons, but there may not
be a consistent, objective rationale for an ISS assignment. It may be difficult, therefore, to
come to any one definition for the type of behavior that ought to result in ISS. Parry-Jones
and Gay (1980), however, suggest that a typical definition might be that a disruptive child is
one who knowingly or unknowingly, effectively and frequently interrupts his own education
and that of others.

Maag (2001) suggested that removing students from the class as a punishment
because of their behavior is a temporary measure that deals with the student’s behavior
through aversion rather than any kind of corrective action. Teachers are, in fact, “negatively
reinforced for punishing students which, in turn, increases the use of punishment, which then
reinforces the teachers using it” (p. 176). He also stated that it becomes a cycle in which the
teacher and the student get involved. The student and the problem behavior are never really addressed or corrected; they are simply sent out of the room again and again.

**A Rationale for In-School Suspension**

One of the foremost reasons that schools began implementing ISS instead of or prior to assigning OSS was that misbehaving students, those who may already struggle academically or socially, would not miss instructional days at school and, perhaps, would not fall further behind academically (Dilling, 1979). In addition, school officials recognized that there seemed to be a connection between repeated occurrences of OSS and academic failure, a negative attitude towards school, and grade retention. These are major factors that lead to a reduction in school-based instructional time (Mendez, Knoff, & Ferron, 2002). In fact, students who are suspended are more often from single-parent families, less likely to have supervision at home, and live in or near poverty (Dawson, 1991). These factors cumulatively work against students who are suspended, and, in many cases, the student’s academic prospect for success becomes almost non-existent. It is not uncommon for students who have been suspended to become entrapped in a cycle of poor behavior and suspension leading to high rates of recidivism (Christle, Nelson, & Jolivette, 2004), the result being that students never learn to correct their behavior, continue to act out, disrupt class or worse, and are suspended or expelled. Rather than learning from the deterrent or punishment that was intended, many students with multiple out-of-school suspensions faced recidivism rates of over 50% (Safer, Heaton, & Parker, 1981). Additionally, they may purposefully behave inappropriately in order to be suspended, thus avoiding the classroom, teacher, and/or administrators altogether (Henderson & Friedland, 1996). Again, students not able to behave
in accordance with school policies and expectations rarely learn from suspension as a consequence and may add to school failure and dropout rates. ISS, at least in the best case scenario, serves to provide an opportunity for students to remain in school and to continue their school work.

ISS programs, it is important to point out, do not usually replace OSS altogether. It is more often the case that ISS is used in conjunction with OSS as an attempted alternative to OSS and as a means to change the discipline climate and suspension rates in schools (Haley, 2000). Those students who are assigned to ISS remain in school and may receive assistance with their schoolwork and more contact time with their teachers.

Schools may handle ISS in different ways. A school may, for example, develop a matrix or rubric that helps define behaviors worthy of suspension. Some schools may rely on administrator judgment, and others still may simply look to school board policy to make suspension decisions. In any case, in-school or out-of-school suspensions result in students being removed from the classroom for a period of time, instruction being lost, and, in the final analysis, may not result in any change in student behavior. In any school, student discipline is a focus of all teachers and administrators because inappropriate or disruptive student behavior can lead to the loss of instructional time (Eisenbarth & Spets, 1999). Effective behavior management may impact the school climate as a whole (Washburn et al., 2007).

In terms of teaching, learning, and the day-to-day process of interacting with students, any teacher could be asked about his or her goals in class. Answers may vary, but there may be a degree of consistency in terms of having students improve academically, socially, and
emotionally. Since a student’s appropriate behavior, may be considered a part of that day-to-day process, one might expect that improving student behavior or correcting inappropriate behavior might also be a goal. Dealing with behavioral problems, as suggested by Wong and Wong (2001), comes as part of the job of teaching. They go on to state that just like infractions in a sporting game are dealt with by sending the offending player to a designated area, disruptive students need to be separated from other students. Yell, Drasgow, and Rozalslu (2001) add that the purpose of student discipline is to teach students their roles and responsibilities in school and society. They go on to explain that students must understand the purpose of rules and the consequence of not adhering to those rules.

Henderson (2004) however, in a study of ISS programs in Mississippi schools found that school principals believed their ISS programs to be effective in providing an alternative consequence for unacceptable behavior. They also believed that ISS programs reduced the number of occurrences of OSS in their schools.

Although the effects of ISS may not be consistent, the outcomes, perceived or actual, seem dependent upon the characteristics or components that make up the program. Some research suggests that those specific characteristics or components may result in an improvement in student behavior, a decrease in student discipline, and a more positive school climate. ISS may be an appropriate setting for less severe disruptions and may provide a means of intervening without suspension or expulsion. Not the act of being assigned to ISS, but what happens during the ISS assignment is critical. Leapley (1997), for example, found that interventions provided by trained ISS staff lead to a reduction in the occurrence in violence and a significant change, for the better, in behavior. This type of alternative to
suspension may be critical to the success of many students who commit minor disruptive offenses because out of school suspension is so closely linked to drop out rates (Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack & Rock, 1986).

The effectiveness of any program designed to address or help improve student behavior might very well be linked to the presence or absence of several critical elements. Sanders (2001) suggests that consistent process, unified practice, documentation, clear communication, and administrative follow-ups are key components. Burns (2007) added that certified personnel, low student/teacher ratio, complete student work/assignments, room location, and clear behavioral expectations are essential to program success. It is important to note that there is little research in terms of actually measuring the effectiveness of ISS programs in particular and suspension in general (Morrison, Anthony, Storino, & Dillon, 2001). A review of literature from Guidon (1992) suggested that alternative programs such as ISS work more effectively when qualified counseling is provided, parent involvement is ensured, shared decision making is used to develop a program philosophy, and continued academic progress is part of the program. This is consistent with Delisio (2008) who more recently stated that the most effective ISS programs are those that have components that help address student needs, both academic and behavioral. She also noted that the student’s intense dislike of ISS is somewhat of a behavior management tool, but it is the interventions that precede ISS that actually work to change or improve student behavior.

Morris and Howard (2003) indicated that studies have shown that in order for a school to effectively decrease its number of occurrences of ISS, the students’ experiences must be more constructive than punitive. Skiba and Rausch (2004) suggested that a different
approach or attitude towards punishment as a consequence and the development of strategies that do not diminish the student’s opportunity to learn may be more effective in dealing with student behavior and creating a more positive school environment overall. This is similar to findings over two decades ago by Gushee (1984) who wrote that research argues for powerful prevention in order to reduce the number of day-to-day discipline problems. He continued that this would result in the school’s ability to become more productive. Chung and Paul (1996) also found that the components of an effective ISS program should include consistent implementation and use by all school officials, an expanded set of teacher classroom discipline strategies, consistent classroom management strategies and policies, and an opportunity for students to meet and discuss their behavior with a counselor.

In order to increase the effectiveness of OSS alternatives, some schools have added counseling, mentoring, and coaching components to their ISS programs. Munoz and Bacci (2002) in their investigation of a comprehensive program involving behavioral coaches (BC) indicated that all schools but one participating in the BC program reduced their number of suspensions. The objective of the BC program studied in this case was to promote a higher level of positive behavior and reduce school suspension rates by providing students with strategies to redirect inappropriate behavior, resolve conflicts, and teach appropriate social skills. They found that only three of the participating schools did not have a significant positive result, and the overall result of the program was a 9% reduction in suspensions. In effect the BC program is not ISS at all but something much different. In a pre- and post-intervention comparison of an ISS program, Smith (2001) found that ISS was significantly
more effective. There was a decrease in the total number of referrals as well as total recidivism rates when the program was revised to include specific intervention components.

The literature suggests with some consistency that certain components must be present if an ISS program has any hope of being successful. One might argue that it is not ISS that affects student behavior but the components that exist within any given program. Vanderslice (1999) suggested that a program’s success or failure is strongly correlated with the design of the program, the professional role of the person in charge of the program, the level of counseling and intervention, and the regular evaluation of the program. Vanderslice (1999) also stated that, “As with any instructional curricular component, the effective ISS model must have an evaluative phase. To be effective, the evaluation component must measure student behavioral change over time” (p. 8).

In his examination of four different types of ISS programs, however, Stage (1997) found that there were no apparent effects of ISS intervention on classroom disruptive behavior. Additionally, he found that the rate of student disruptive behavior remained rather constant across the four ISS interventions examined. Holland (2005), in a study of alternatives to OSS, found that ISS had no significant effect on the rate at which students were assigned alternative consequences or OSS as a response to their behavior. He added, however, that of the alternatives studied, ISS was the most viable.

Problems Involved With In-School Suspension

Historical Data

Although ISS has existed in one form or another for more than three decades, research suggests that not all ISS programs produce the same deterrent or corrective effects
among students (Opuni, Tullis, Sanchez, & Gonzales, 1990). In their investigation of an ISS model, a Student Assignment Center (SAC), Opuni et al. (1990) described the program to be partially effective at best. Their examination found, for example, that 51.5% of the students assigned to SAC did not receive a second referral. They also found, however, that a rather significant number of students (26%) had been assigned to SAC for three or more times during the year. The list of positive effects of ISS as opposed to OSS seems to be obvious. The students stay in school, miss less instruction, are supervised, and are usually in some kind of academic learning environment (Mendez et al., 2002). Unfortunately, there are other more negative or detrimental issues also associated with ISS. Mendez and Sanders (1981) indicated that ISS does not positively influence student attendance. Noblit and Short (1985) conducted a study of ten ISS programs and found that the design intentions and idealistic claims of the programs were not consistent with actual program outcomes. The programs varied little and were generally punitive in nature. Although they were more desirable than OSS, the ISS programs were ineffective. Although ISS is meant to counter some of the negatives effects of OSS such as loss of instructional time (Mendez et al., 2002), Jackson (2006) found that students spending time in ISS experience up to a 466% increase loss in instructional time. His investigation also found that long-term behavioral change was not achieved under any of the ISS conditions studied. Constenbader and Markson (1994) suggested that ISS may lead to high rates of disciplinary recidivism which causes students to be out of their assigned academic classes and actually miss more instructional time as a result.
In his investigation of the relationship between classroom disruption and ISS, Stage (1997) found that only 43% of the students assigned to ISS were due to inappropriate or disruptive classroom behaviors. He pointed out that students in his study were assigned to ISS for a number of reasons including 41% for being out of area, 13% for verbal abuse, and 2% for physical aggression. Although none of the behaviors indicated may be appropriate in school, it is important to note that greater than 50% of the offenses to which ISS was assigned were not related to classroom disruption.

**ISS Program Examples: A Closer Look**

Turpin and Hardin (1997) indicated that poorly monitored ISS programs do little to provide students with the interventions needed to correct their behavior and return to class. Delisio (2008) also suggested that, although keeping students at school in ISS is better than sending them home where they may be unsupervised, schools need more than a room that serves as a holding tank for disruptive students. In the course of his investigation of ISS, Boone (2006) found, during the observation of ISS rooms in three different schools, that very few of the students assigned to ISS were actually engaged in completing their school work. Additionally, the ISS rooms in his investigation seemed to be little more than holding rooms that kept students from being sent home. In a case study that investigated a middle school ISS program, Cole (2006) found that ISS was effective in removing unruly students from the regular class setting and provided an alternative to OSS but was lacking in meeting the learning needs of the students. This is consistent with a case study investigation of the effectiveness of an ISS program conducted by Cryer (2003) which found that as the number of days a student spends in ISS increases, both the student’s standardized test results and
GPA decrease. A study conducted by Knes (1995) that analyzed two different ISS programs in six different school in the Midwest revealed similar results in that neither program had a positive impact on behavioral recidivism or grade point average.

Stage (1997), in his preliminary investigation of the relationship between in-school suspension and disruptive classroom behaviors, showed that ISS did not have an effect upon observed classroom behavior. He also showed that students were more likely to be assigned to ISS because of off-task behavior than they were for disruptive behavior. In his examination of the effects of differentiated disciplinary actions in Missouri schools for one year, Watanabe (2009) found that some stringent actions, such as out-of-school suspension and expulsion, reduced the occurrence of serious incidents in school. However, the study also revealed that “serious offenses by students when lightly treated with in-school suspension may even encourage them to further engage in similar offenses in the following year” (Watanabe, 2009, p. 307).

In her interview and observation of students who had been assigned to an in-house suspension room, Ferguson (2000) stated that students described the room as “the Jailhouse where you go for afterschool detention. It is also the place where you spend time when you are given an in-house suspension. This means that you are banished from your class for a specified period of time—from half a day to three days—and enter a state of suspension” (Ferguson, 2000, p. 34). ISS being referred to as a jailhouse, regardless of its intention, suggests that very little positive could possibly be associated with it academically, socially or emotionally. The notion that students feel as though they are being assigned to the ‘jailhouse’ suggests that ISS, at least in this case, is problematic at best.
Holland (2005) found that ISS has several weaknesses, including incomplete student work, students unable to keep up to date with their assignments, student/teacher interactions decreased, more work created for the classroom teacher, students labeled as potential problems as a result of ISS assignment, and some students actually preferring the isolation of ISS.

**Approaches, Beliefs and Perspectives about ISS**

The beliefs of teachers and administrators may also have an effect on the manner with which student behavior is handled and the effectiveness of ISS. In their examination of principals’ attitudes towards inappropriate student behavior, Skiba and Edl (2004) were able to categorize the manner in which principals chose to handle those behaviors. They found that principals were likely to approach student discipline in one of three ways:

- Zero tolerance which sends a clear message that inappropriate behavior will not be tolerated;
- Implementing supportive and preventive approaches that include the student’s parents. These are specifically designed to meet the needs of disadvantaged students and those with special needs. This include the teaching of appropriate skills that will lead to a positive climate in which suspension and expulsion are not needed;
- Suspension of students works in that students disciplined in this matter are less likely to misbehave in the future. There is little a school or school officials can do if students do not take responsibility for their own actions.
Skiba and Edl (2004) also found that there was a difference in the way that men and women concerned themselves with student behavior. Women administrators are more likely to be corrective and preventative than males. They also noted a difference between the school types as well. Secondary school administrators are less likely to use preventative measures than are those administrators in elementary schools. Mukuria (2002) also found that the principal’s approach to discipline had a positive or negative effect on student suspension rates. Specifically, principals whose schools reported low suspension rates shared several common characteristics that included having:

- A clearly articulated vision for school discipline;
- High expectations for students and teachers;
- Alternatives to suspension for dealing with inappropriate student behavior;
- A sincere confidence that students could be successful.

Conversely, principals of schools with high student suspension rates were found to have:

- A lack of vision for improving student discipline;
- Low expectations for students;
- Little value or respect for the input of teachers with regards to student discipline;
- No established or clear routines.

Obvious inconsistencies in the manner with which inappropriate behaviors are handled suggest that the effectiveness of ISS will be inconsistent at best. In a study that analyzed the perceived effectiveness of ISS by principals in Missouri high schools, however, Billings and Enger (1995) found that:
ISS is currently used by 88% of Missouri high schools and was perceived
to be the most effective procedure for serious disciplinary incidents involving serious
disruptions to the school’s environment, yet not so serious as to necessitate out-of-
school suspension. ISS was perceived as the most effective procedure for behavior
which, although hostile and threatening, was not significantly physical, violent,
dangerous, and/or illegal. (p. 4)

Hartman and Stage (2000) found that teachers’ approach to students and their
behaviors also play a role in discipline consequences. A teacher’s disapproving remarks for
behaviors such as lack of engagement in academic activities are perceived by some students
to be critical and somewhat hostile. Some students react to these types of comments as
though they are a deliberate provocation. As a result, the student’s aggression towards the
teacher’s comments is an additional inappropriate behavior and compounds the consequence
for the student as it is a secondary behavioral offense. The teacher’s approach to behavior
management and the use of ISS serve to increase the consequence to the student for his or her
inappropriate behavior. In addition, Stage (1997) concluded that “The only significant
relationships between the classroom behaviors observed and assignment to in-school
suspension were student on-task and off-task behavior and the rate of teacher disapproval of
student social behavior” (p. 71). Similarly, Theriot and Dupper (2009) found that student
assignments to ISS were dramatically increased when the offenses were more subjective and
less concrete. They found that the more subjective an offense was, class disturbance or
failure to follow rules, for example, the more open it was to teacher interpretation. The
consequence, therefore, became more dependent on the teacher’s tolerance for the behavior
and less about the behavior itself. They concluded that middle school ISS rates increased by 43% for any subjective infraction and only 19% for objective infractions. In a 1-year study of 570 2^{nd}-grade students, Leflo\,Van Lier, Onghena, and Colpin (2010) found that the reduced use of teacher negative remarks had a positive effect on classroom behavior, including less talking out and less off-task behavior.

In their study and evaluation of a middle school ISS program, Chung and Paul (1996) interviewed and surveyed students, teachers, and parents and found ISS to be ineffective. Students felt that ISS was used too often and that it had a negative influence on their behavior. Thompson (2006), when studying suspension in general, reported that most students responded to her survey question “Do you think suspensions are effective?” by agreeing in the belief that suspensions are not effective. In addition, the teachers in the study also had a negative attitude towards ISS and its effectiveness. Chung and Paul (1996) added:

An interview with the ISS teacher revealed that one of the major drawbacks in this school’s use of ISS is the inconsistency with which the administration assigns ISS. This was supported by the comments made on the teacher surveys. The ISS teacher also expressed concern that some students preferred the ISS atmosphere to their own classrooms because the learning/working environment in their classroom interfered with their ability to complete work. Additionally, she noted that some teachers use ISS with remarkably more frequency than do others, which lead her to believe that these teachers are not equipped with a necessary variety of discipline strategies to maintain discipline among all students. (p. 12)
Johnston (1987), in her study of one school’s ISS program, found that students believed that ISS was an appropriate and sufficient punishment and that serving time in ISS was a suitable deterrent for inappropriate behavior. She concluded that “the ISS program in this study derives strength from its widespread support by faculty members and administrators” (p. 129).

ISS, though widely used, has very little positive effect. From the perspective of those who interact with ISS on a daily basis, it may be ineffective and generally negative especially if careful consideration has not been given to its implementation.

One rationale for ISS implementation, as described earlier, may be to help students who might ordinarily be suspended out-of-school or help teachers manage their classrooms (and, for this reason alone, there may be some argument for its existence). However, ISS programs whose purpose is to serve as nothing more than an alternative to OSS by keeping disruptive students in the school, as opposed to home or on the street, contribute little to the educational progress or problem solving skills of students (Hochman & Worner, 1987).

**ISS and Student Minority Groups**

Students of a minority race, lower socio-economic status (SES), or with learning disabilities are referred to the office and disciplined for inappropriate behavior in disproportionate rates (Skiba et al., 2004). That is to say, not all students are treated the same for identical rule or behavioral infractions. Adams (2008) stated:

The latest government data, analyzed recently by Howard Witt in an article in the *Chicago Tribune*, shows that black students are getting a raw deal in American schools when it comes to discipline. In the average New Jersey public school,
reports Witt, African-American students are almost 60 times as likely as white students to be expelled. Nationally, they are three times more likely than non-black students to be suspended or expelled for the same offenses. (p. 26)

A report by Barbarin (2010) identified school discipline policies and behavioral expectations as being partially responsible for the “school-to-prison” pipeline. Although African-American males, the report notes, make up only 10% of all youth, they make up 60% of youth incarcerated under the age of 18. Dillon (2010) wrote that blacks have always been suspended at greater rates than whites, but the overrepresentation has actually grown between 1973 and 2006 by 9%.

**Racial overrepresentation.** Howarth (2008), in his examination of minority suspension rates in Massachusetts school districts stated that “studies have consistently shown that minority students are treated differently when it comes to school discipline practices” (p. 2). He went on to say that African American and Latino students are suspended at a far greater rate than are their White peers. Unfortunately, this was also the case over two decades ago when Streitmatter (1985) found in a three school comparison of suspension data that white students are under-represented and minority students are over-represented.

In a study that analyzed discipline referrals, African-Americans were found to be more likely to receive an office referral than any other group of students (Rocque, 2010). Furthermore, when the analysis controlled for gender, GPA, free lunch status behavior, and school effects African-Americans remained a significant predictor of discipline. In Louisiana,
African-American students make up 44% of the student population but account for 68% of the suspensions and almost 73% of the expulsions (Sullivan & Morgan, 2010).

A report from the Southern Poverty Law Center, which summarized data from 9,222 middle schools across the United States, found that black males were suspended nearly three times the rate of white males, and that black females were suspended in excess of four times more often than White females (Viadero, 2010). Data from The United States Department of Education in 2001 (as cited by Hinojosa, 2008) indicated that although African-American students make up just 17% of the student population in the United States, they account for 32% of total suspensions nationally. Rausch and Skiba (2006) add that although there are very few studies that examine the extent of racial disparity in discipline, all have shown that black students with disabilities are more likely to be suspended or expelled than other students, including those who also have disabilities. Skiba, Michael, and Nardo (2000), in their investigation into the factors influencing the disproportionate representation of minorities and school discipline, found that racial and gender discrepancies in school discipline were consistent regardless of methodology. They also found no evidence that racial disparities disappear when poverty is removed as a variable. They added that African-American students are often referred to the office for less serious and more subjective behavioral offenses. In her study to examine and explain the variability in the suspension rates between black and non-black students in secondary schools, Arcia (2007) found that black students are suspended at much higher rates than students from other races. She also stated that black students may be more negatively affected academically by early suspensions than other groups. Furthermore, a recent newsletter from The Center for Comprehensive
School Reform and Improvement (2009) stated that “suspension discipline records showed that there was an overrepresentation of African-American males in out-of-school suspension” (p. 3). In a study of over 34,000 public schools in Texas, Sullivan (2007) found that although African-Americans made up only a small percentage of the student population, a little more than 14%, they represented in excess of 53% of all reported suspensions. In a study of 67 Florida public school districts, Dehlinger (2008) found that there was an overrepresentation of African-American students in school discipline data. This is consistent with the findings of Chrislte et al. (2004), whose study showed that the ethnic background of the student body was related to suspension rate “in that the higher the suspension rates, the lower the percentage of Caucasian students” (p. 520).

In her case study review of an in-house suspension program, Ferguson (2000) noted that six students had been assigned to the in-house suspension room during her observation, and all six children were African-American. She went on to describe the room as a place where students were supposed to do school work, but this was not the case. During her observation only one teacher checked on the progress of one student. Additionally, the adult in charge of the room spent most of his time arguing with the children in an effort to get them to do some of their schoolwork. Sheffield-Coley (2009) studied the relationship between corporal punishment, suspension, and student achievement. She found that “Blacks, especially Black males were four times more likely to receive corporal punishment, ISS, and OSS when compared to other students in the school” (p. 162). This is consistent with Krezmien, Leone, and Achilles (2006) who, in their study of state-wide suspension practices, found that the total percentage of students suspended increased from 6.6% to 8.9% between
1995 and 2003. During this time, “the odds ratios for African-American students increased during the 9-year period, whereas the odds of being suspended for white students, Hispanic students, and Asian students remained relatively stable” (p. 222). Krezmien et al. (2006) also found that the odds ratio for African-American students with disabilities was also higher than the odds ratios for white, Hispanic, and Asian students with disabilities.

The research suggests that there are discrepancies and inequities in the manner in which various categories of children are treated and disciplined in schools. An examination of school discipline and suspension procedures and policies in general is needed in order to ensure that student inequities are identified and addressed. In their study of middle school students, Theriot and Dupper (2009) found that although only 19% of the student population in the district they studied was of an ethnic minority, they made up 41% of the students reported for infractions. They also found that ethnic minorities along with males and students of low socioeconomic status were overrepresented in all discipline categories. This is consistent with the results of Eitle and Eitle (2004) who, in their comprehensive study of data from the Florida Department of Education, found that there was an observed greater representation of black students among those suspended. Similarly, Hinojosa (2008) found that African-American students are almost four times more likely to be suspended out-of-school and 2.59 times, or 159%, more likely to be suspended in school when compared to white students. More specifically, Bowman (2003) in an analysis of school suspension data from Kentucky concluded that “schools suspend students far too oftenespecially black students, who are booted from school 2 to 17 times as often as white students in some districts” (p. 1). In his investigation of a school system in a large metropolitan city located in
the Midwest, Nichols (2004) found that although minority students made up only 29% of the student population they accounted for 40% of total discipline reported and 35% of all assignments to OSS. He also noted that although the ratio of minority versus majority student discipline events seems to be decreasing, “minority students remain twice as likely to either commit or be cited for a disciplinary action and twice as likely as majority students to receive out-of-school suspension as a disciplinary consequence” (p. 419). This is consistent with earlier findings by Costenbader and Marksen (1994) who, in a study of 100 randomly chosen schools representing five regions around the United States, found that “respondents reported African-American students to be suspended in numbers significantly disproportionate to their total enrollment” (p. 104). These results are also consistent with more recent findings by Gregory and Weinstein (2008), who examined one year of school disciplinary data with regards to referrals specific to students’ defiance and found that African-American students were over-represented compared to other student groups. In a review of discipline data from three cities; Austin, Oakland, and San Francisco, Yang (2009) found that African-American boys across all three cities were most likely to be suspended from school.

**Students with disabilities.** In their policy brief for the Center for Evaluation and Educational Policy in which they investigated the relationships between discipline, disability and race, Rausch and Skiba (2006) stated that most studies have found that students with disabilities in Indiana are three times more likely to be suspended than those students without a learning disability. They add that students who suffer from an emotional disability (ED) are at a high risk of being referred to the office. They indicate that students with ED are
suspended or expelled significantly more than non-ED students. In fact, they found that students with ED were more likely to receive an office referral than any other student in special or general education. They cite Kansas data that indicates that students identified with ED are 7.5 times more likely to receive suspension or expulsion than their non-ED peers, and ED students are 12 times more likely to be suspended or expelled than all other students. Additionally, Hartman and Stage (2000) wrote that students with behavioral disabilities may be less able to generate alternative solutions to conflicts and situations that eventually result in ISS. The students’ disabilities may compound their inappropriate behavior in that they are unable to process the social cues that should prompt them to change their behavior. It may be that the very disability that impedes their learning also inhibits their ability to problem solve social interactions that occur within the classroom. Hartman and Stage (2000) also point out that those students with severe behavioral disorders exhibit reactive aggression, which is often associated with impulsive behavior and reduces their ability to process social information and consequently their ability to resolve conflicts with adults. The result for many students with disabilities is that they are deemed confrontational, argumentative, disruptive, and disrespectful. The inability of some students with learning and/or behavioral disorders to cope with and resolve social conflict results in students being assigned to ISS. Students with disabilities are typically disciplined more frequently and more severely than their non-disabled peers even when the behaviors are similar (Rausch & Skiba, 2006). This is consistent with the findings of Krezmien et al., who indicated that “youth identified as having disabilities experienced higher rates of suspension than youth not identified as having disabilities” (p. 223).
In addition to the overrepresentation of students with disabilities and suspension, ISS programs may do little to support students who are assigned to ISS. In their report about in-school suspension and students with disabilities, Dickinson and Miller (2006) wrote that without some type of transitional support, ISS does not adequately prepare students to return to their class. They found that only one third of the schools surveyed provided services to “help students with disabilities readjust to their normal routine” (p. 78).

**Chapter Summary**

Although the rationale for ISS may seem clear to some, in that it serves as an alternative to OSS and provides a punitive consequence for some inappropriate behaviors, any anticipated successes, as suggested by the reviewed literature, do not seem to be the norm, nor are they consistent. There may be an argument made for the use of ISS as a means of keeping students in school, supervised, and off the streets, but there is little consistency in the research that suggests its effectiveness beyond serving as an alternative to OSS.

The research reviewed indicates that suspension in general, for anything less than severe or dangerous behaviors, is not effective in dealing with and may even exacerbate problem behaviors. ISS is used with a great degree of frequency as an alternative to OSS, but with questionable results at best. Additionally, there is little or no consistency in intended outcomes for ISS or how it is implemented. Is it meant to punish, correct, intervene, prevent or deter? The research reviewed provides no clear answer to these questions. The lack of concrete answers leaves one to wonder why ISS exists and why schools, more specifically school administrators, continue to use it. Additionally, there is a gap in the existing literature with regards to the school officials most directly related to
addressing or dealing with inappropriate student behavior: the assistant principal. This is especially true about insight into the perception of ISS rationale and effectiveness from the perspective of the assistant principal.

Some research suggests that ISS may be successful in helping manage student’s behavior by removing the student from the class, decreasing the number of OSS incidents, or improving attendance. However, it does nothing to address, change, or correct the behavior or what might exist that is causing the behavior in the first place. Additionally, ISS is an alternative to OSS in that students are able to remain on the school’s campus, thus improving student attendance rates. The same research also suggests, however, that the success or effectiveness of ISS is determined or limited by the successful implementation and evaluation of specific, counseling for example, ISS program components. The research offers no significant evidence that any ISS program will be effective in accomplishing its goals. Stage (1997) found that in-school suspension programs, regardless if in the form of timeout, timeout plus academic assignment, or problem solving, do not appear to reduce disruptive behavior and, in fact, indicated that disruptive behavior often remains constant regardless of the suspension intervention. ISS programs do little or nothing to change, correct, or improve student behavior result in students being repeatedly put out of class. Students who are consistently assigned to ISS are not, in many cases, being provided with the basic right to education guaranteed by typical state constitutions. “At best, these students are being told to teach themselves. It is a de facto deprivation of the right to an equal education” (Troyan, 2003, p. 1,658). Dupper (2010) added that the negative impact of the measures
associated with punishment in schools has been ignored for too long, and that more effective alternative discipline policies must be implemented.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to address key research questions relating to the perceived rationale for and effectiveness of in-school suspension (ISS) programs as viewed from the perspectives of school building administrators, specifically assistant principals. Assistant principals are directly involved in the day-to-day implementation of assigning ISS to students. As the researcher, I examined the professional judgments of experienced high school assistant principals through a confidential survey, interviews and a focus group discussion, when asked specific research questions related to the use of ISS programs in their schools.

This section discusses the research design, research questions, sample selection, instrumentation, data collection procedures, data analysis procedures, research validity and reliability, subjectivity statement, ethical considerations, study limitations, and has a chapter summary.

Research Design

The field of education research is rapidly expanding to include more in-depth qualitative inquiry methods. Qualitative methods are appropriate to answer the questions a study is posing rather than serving as an analysis of statistical data. Patton (2002) describes qualitative research, unlike quantitative research, as a means to gather information that does not lend itself to counting. He goes on to suggest that qualitative inquiry helps to find out what things mean, how people feel, their perceptions, and what they believe. Wolcott (2001)
adds that the qualitative approach regards our fellow human beings as people instead of subjects, and that we can gain insight into their thoughts, feelings, and perceptions.

This study investigated the perceptions of 12 high school assistant principals working within the 4 comprehensive high schools (9th-grade through 12th-grade), 3 assistant principals at each, in one school district located in a state in the southeastern region of the United States. The investigation examined their perceived rationale for and effectiveness of in-school suspension in the district and will reflect an exploratory purpose. The assistant principals in each school have a shared responsibility and each has a role in student discipline within each of the schools.

The qualitative research methodology that was used in this study is an exploratory multi-site case study. A case study is a detailed examination of one setting, or a single subject, or a single depository of documents, or a particular event (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). By using a case study approach, I hoped to gain an in-depth understanding of perceptions, beliefs, meaning, and experiences from the assistant principals involved in the ISS program. Merriam (2001) suggests that insights gleaned from case studies can directly influence policy, procedures, and future research. Being a school-level administrator, I envision that the data collected and analyzed here may help provide useful insights into the decision-making process when student behavior and ISS programs are being considered or evaluated. Another unique strength of case study is its ability to handle a full variety of evidence – documents, artifacts, interviews and observations – beyond what might be available in a conventional historical study (Yin, 2003). Patton (2002) also stated that case studies employ various methods, which may include interviews, participant observations, and field studies.
In this case study, I used a confidential online survey, a series of interviews, a focus group discussion, a field observation, an interview with a teacher from each school, and an analysis of historical school district suspension documents to gather a rich source of data from multiple sources.

This study used a confidential online survey to gather demographic and base-line data as well as initial perceptions from all 12 of the school district’s assistant principals. A semi-structured, open-ended, face-to-face interview with six participants (digitally audio recorded) and focus group with the remaining participants (digitally audio taped) was used to gather richer more philosophical beliefs about the use of in-school suspension.

A field observation in the form of shadowing an assistant principal was used to gather additional data with regards to the assistant principal’s perceptions about in-school suspension. An interview with a teacher at each of the schools was completed in order to capture additional, external information about the assistant principals’ work with ISS, and an analysis of district discipline data with regards to occurrences and behaviors associated with suspension was completed.

By interviewing, I was able to discover information I could not readily observe. Patton (2002) describes the purpose of interviewing as a way to enter into other peoples’ perspectives, explore their thinking, their feelings, opinions and attitudes, and their expectations. In a semi-structured, open-ended interview, the interviewer has a list of pre-selected questions but may choose to deviate from the list to gain more information (Borg & Gall, 1989). Semi-structured interviews offer the opportunity to probe deeper into the subjects as needed, which adds to the richness and thickness of the data (Merriam, 2002). In
addition to being semi-structured, the interview questions were open-ended. This allowed each participant to answer the questions in his or her own words and in as much detail as he or she may wish to use. Each question was well thought out and carefully worded ahead of time, which Patton (2002) suggested is necessary to ensure that each interviewee receives the same opportunity to answer the same questions in the same manner.

Patton (2002) defines a focus group as an interview with a group of people. He added that a focus group interview may provide a variety of perspectives from a number of participants in a relatively short period of time. However, he points out that the focus groups are not problem-solving or decision-making sessions. They are rather a means for interviewing participants, hearing each respond to questions, and perhaps making additional comments based on what others have said. In this case, I aimed to gather additional data from several assistant principal perspectives on the perceived rationale for and effectiveness of ISS.

The participant observation in the form of a field observation was comprised of shadowing an assistant principal. The data gathered during the field observation allowed me to “better understand and capture the context…. help minimize prior conceptualizations of the setting….discover things that no one else has ever really paid attention to….and to learn things that people would be unwilling to talk about during an interview” (Patton, 2002, pp. 262-263).

The documents collected and analyzed were historical records of occurrences that indicate behaviors associated with ISS in the district. The documents were used to help illustrate whether or not the intended outcomes of ISS are reflected in the number of students
assigned, recidivism rates, or escalating consequences associated with repeated assignments to ISS.

**Research Questions**

This multi-site case study used a confidential online survey, interviews, a focus group discussion, a field observation, and an analysis of historical documents to examine the following research questions:

1. What do the participants perceive to be the rationale for assigning students to ISS?
2. What do the participants perceive to be the expected outcomes of ISS?
3. What do the participants perceive to be the effectiveness of ISS in achieving its intended outcomes?
4. What policy changes do the participants perceive to be needed in order to ensure effective student behavior management or student discipline?
5. What alternatives, support or resources do the participants perceive to be needed in order to properly facilitate the appropriate management of student behavior?

**Site and Sample Selection**

In this study, the sampling technique was purposeful sampling. I chose purposeful sampling to ensure that the participants have a thorough understanding of the subject matter important to the study’s purpose. A homogenous sampling of active assistant principals was chosen as a sample source because of their direct involvement with student behavior, student discipline, and ISS. Assistant principals are often the school level administrators who deal with most of the student discipline and, as a result, those who would have the most
experience with ISS. Purposeful sampling was used to select teacher interview participants as well.

The following criteria was used to select the assistant principal participants:
(a) professional assistant principals who currently work in the district identified in this case;
(b) those who use an ISS program in their school; and (c) those who are currently high school assistant principals in one of the four comprehensive high schools identified in this case. The sample size for the confidential online survey was 12 all assistant principals in the study.
The sample size for the interview portion of data collection was six assistant principals. The focus group consisted of six assistant principals who share the same or very similar experiences as those who will be interviewed. All assistant principals sampled for the survey, interview, focus group, and field study had the same criteria. The rationale for the number of assistant principal participants in this case study is as follows:

1. A small number of carefully selected participants who share common experiences can lead to an in-depth study which allows one to learn a great deal (Patton, 2002), and

2. The criterion of sufficiency and saturation (Seidman, 2006) will be satisfied in that the perspective of all high school assistant principals in the district will be examined first via survey and then by interview or focus group.

Data Collection

The data for this study was compiled from various sources, including confidential online survey (assistant principals), participants’ (assistant principals) interviews, a focus group interview (assistant principals), field observation (assistant principals), teacher
interviews, and document analysis. I listened, identified, recorded (digitally via computer), and interpreted input from the assistant principals on their professional judgments, explanations, and experiences with the ISS program in their school. Each source of data provided a different perspective in developing answers to the research questions. Data collected through the focus group, field-based observation notes, teacher interviews, and document analysis helped to confirm the information provided by the assistant principals who participated in the interview.

**Triangulation**

The triangulation method was used during the data collection phase. By examining information collected by different persons/participants, through different methods, and from different sources, I was able to corroborate findings and reduce the effect of systematic bias and other errors present in a single study. In addition, I attempted to reduce bias and error in the final results through careful understanding of the data source and what it represented. Triangulation in its purest form relates to the mathematical or navigational certainty of a specific location. It is used in this case as Patton (2002) describes as a means of ensuring that the data is collected using different methods. Additionally, the teacher interviews served as a member check that may help to corroborate, or contradict, the data that was collected directly from the assistant principals. Making use of several different methods, as well as multiple sources and perspectives reduces the vulnerability to errors that may be linked to one single method (Patton, 2002). Additionally, by providing diverse ways and multiple sources, this method of triangulation added credibility, leads to a fuller understanding of
what is being studied, and strengthens whatever conclusions might be drawn (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Confidential Online Survey

The following is the survey protocol that was used for the confidential online survey portion of the study. The questions in the survey protocol were developed from literature related to ISS programs in high school (Gushee, 1984; Haley, 2000; Leapley 1997; Prior & Tuller 1991). The protocol taxonomy (see Table 3.1) describes the organization of the survey questions.

SECTION I: Participant Demographics:

1. How involved are you, or what is your role in dealing with student discipline?
2. How long have you been an educator?
3. Have you always been an educator?
4. What made you want to become an assistant principal?
5. How long have you been an assistant principal?
6. How long have you been an assistant principal at your current school?

SECTION II: Attitude and behavior of students:

7. What student behaviors cause you to use ISS in your school?
8. What changes do you see in the attitudes or behaviors of students who have experienced the in-school suspension program?
9. How is the ISS program affecting the behavior of those students who have not been sent to the in-school suspension program?
Table 3.1

*Taxonomy of the Survey Protocol*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Content Area</th>
<th>Purpose of the Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question 1-6</td>
<td>Demographic data</td>
<td>These questions help to identify key demographic information with regard to the case study participants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 7-14</td>
<td>Classroom behavior of students</td>
<td>These questions help in answering research questions (a) and (b). The purpose of these questions is to inquire about classroom behavior of students and in-school-suspension programs, and to establish the assistant principal’s role in student discipline. These questions also provide insight into the assistant principal’s perception about the rationale for ISS and intended goals, objectives, and effectiveness of ISS.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 15-21</td>
<td>Teaching learning process</td>
<td>These questions assist in answering research question (c). These questions help inquire about the assistant principal’s perception about the effect of ISS on class management and teaching learning process, as well as student behaviors and attitudes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 22-25</td>
<td>Policy change</td>
<td>These questions assist in answering research question (d) by trying to provide insight into what assistant principals believe to be alternatives to ISS.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 26-31</td>
<td>Alternatives, support and resources</td>
<td>These questions assist in providing an answer to research question (e). The purpose is to inquire about alternatives, support and resources that may be necessary to properly meet the needs of the students and school.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
10. What do you believe to be the role of ISS in deterring more negative student behaviors?

11. How do you characterize the racial/ethnic types of student who are assigned to the ISS program?

12. How often do students repeat (recidivism) in-school suspension? Why does this happen?

13. Describe the strategies that are in place to provide students with the skills they need to alter, correct, or improve their behavior.

14. How do you think students characterize their experiences in ISS?

SECTION III: Classroom Management/Teaching learning process:

15. How does ISS affect student behavior in the classroom?

16. How does ISS affect the teacher’s approach or ability to manage student behaviors?

17. How well does ISS help keep students engaged in their school or class work once they have been assigned to ISS?

18. What factors, routines, procedures, or characteristics are in place to ensure that students assigned to ISS benefit academically from being there?

19. How does the ISS influence the amount of instructional time within the classroom?

20. What takes place in ISS to ensure that students maintain academic progress?

21. How would teacher and student interactions change if ISS was not present at your school?
SECTION III: Policy Changes:

22. What changes would you recommend regarding ISS?

23. Is ISS a fair and equitable manner in which to deal with student behavior?

24. How should educational or professional development be changed or improved to better prepare educators to manage student behaviors?

25. What strategies and their effectiveness are you aware of that may be used as an alternative to ISS?

SECTION V: Alternatives, Support and Resources:

26. What kind of support personnel do you have in your ISS program?

27. How effective is the ISS support staff in supporting the students while they are assigned to ISS?

28. What support and what resources are needed in order to provide services to students who would ordinarily be assigned to ISS?

29. What modes of training may be needed for staff who deals with the students ordinarily assigned to ISS?

30. What procedures are in place to ensure effective coordination among administrators, teachers, and staff who deal with students ordinarily assigned to ISS?

31. What other comments would you like to add about the ISS program in your school?
Assistant Principal Interviews

The interview portion of the study consisted of questions aimed at gathering deeper, richer, more philosophical information with regards to assistant principal perceptions. During the interviews with the participants, I used an interview protocol. The participants were contacted by telephone or email to schedule a personal visit for each of the interviews and for the focus group. In order to ensure confidentiality, the interviews were conducted at the participant’s office, and the door was closed to guarantee privacy. I was the only person who interacted with the participants during the individual interviews. Similarly, the focus group consisted of the participant group and me.

One interview was conducted with each of the participants. Each interview served the purpose of collecting answers to the interview protocol/guide. Each interview was scheduled to last for approximately one hour.

The interview protocol consisted of carefully chosen questions designed to structure the interviews with the assistant principals (participants). These questions partially guided the interview sessions. The interview protocols were adapted in response to the interview conducted with the participants. They evolved into a form that other researchers using the same protocol can use to conduct similar interviews in other settings. The interview protocol supported the ability to replicate this research. However, even with interview transcripts, my qualitative research allowed for contingencies that may have unanticipated effects.

I practiced the interview protocol with other persons to gauge the approximate length of time the interview would take. However, it became necessary during several of the interview sessions to add several follow up questions which caused the interview time to be
exceeded. I continued the interview session because the acquisition of additional information provided more adequate and detailed answers to the research questions.

To avoid interview bias, I tried not to provide any signs of approval or disapproval by speech (using words or phrases like “I agree”) or body language such as nodding, frowning, smiling, and other revealing behaviors. In order to aid accuracy, I recorded the interviews using a digital audio recorder.

The participants were contacted by telephone or email and were provided a copy of their interview transcript. They were able to cross check their answers to the interview protocol after transcription. This was done to ensure that what was recorded and transcribed was exactly what was meant by the participants.

**Interview Instrumentation/Protocol**

1. If you were omnipotent, all powerful, what would you do to limit the behavior problems at your school that require your time and attention? Your answer could be philosophical, sociological, theoretical or practical.
   a. Possible follow up.
      i. Does ISS play a role?

2. Tell me about a time that you had assigned a student to ISS multiple times.
   a. Possible follow up.
      i. Did ISS change or improve the student’s behavior?
         ii. Does the student learn anything about behaving differently?
         iii. Are there any other options for students?
3. Tell me about a time when you had to assign a student to ISS and felt as though
the student “needed” something different.
   a. Possible follow up.
      i. How constricted are you by school policy?
      ii. How do teacher expectations influence your decision to assign
          ISS?
      iii. How do colleague expectations influence your decision to assign
           ISS?
      iv. How do principal expectations influence your decision to assign
           ISS?

4. Is it possible that some students simply can’t follow the rules?
   a. Possible follow up.
      i. Describe some examples.
      ii. What should happen with those students?

5. Suppose ISS was not an option. What would you do?
   a. Possible follow up.
      i. Suppose suspension of any kind was not an option.
      ii. Suppose punishing students is not an option.

Focus Group

I conducted one focus group made up of assistant principals who shared similar
backgrounds and experiences as those who participate in the interview portion of the data
collection. Six assistant principals, those who did not take part in the face-to-face interviews,
were invited to participate in the focus group. Although the six invitees agreed to participate, one did not attend, and the focus group was made up of five participants. Again, purposeful and homogenous sampling was used so that participants were able to discuss the focus group questions in greater detail. All participants were able to contribute to the discussion with some degree of equality. In this case, the focus group participants answered and discussed questions associated with ISS. This, according to Patton (2002), provided a variety of perspectives and allowed for patterns to emerge. An interview guide was used for the focus group. The participants were asked to respond to the following protocol. The questions developed in this protocol were designed to address the research questions and allow for the group to participate in detailed discussion. As with the interview protocol, the focus group protocol helped me keep the group’s discussion focused on the research questions.

After the focus group conversation was transcribed, the participants had an opportunity to cross check their responses during the focus group discussion for accuracy.

**Focus Group Instrumentation/Protocol**

1. What types of behaviors are usually handled through ISS and what do you believe the intended outcomes of assigning students to ISS?

2. What affect do you believe ISS has on changing student behavior short and/or long term?

3. How effective do you believe ISS to be in reducing repeated inappropriate behaviors?

4. What happens in ISS to ensure that students do not get assigned to ISS again?
5. What if ISS was not an option, what would you do with the students you ordinarily assigned to ISS? What if suspension of any kind was not an option?

6. If you had the ultimate power, if you could do anything what would you do to limit, or eliminate “bad” student behaviors?

7. Is it possible to limit or eliminate inappropriate student behaviors from school?

8. What types of alternatives, resources and/or support would you need?

Field Observation

I conducted the field work portion of the study by “shadowing” an assistant principal in the environment of their school. Since each of the assistant principals in this case were selected purposefully and shared very similar experiences with student discipline and ISS, I used a random sampling process to select a participant for the observation. By randomly selecting a participant, I did not have any preconceived ideas about their involvement in any other part of the study, which helped limit bias on my part.

I met with the school’s principal to gain permission and to coordinate an appropriate time for the field observation to take place. Patton (2002) wrote that negotiating with gatekeepers, those who control access to the field, is an important part of the observation process.

In an effort to glean deeper insight into assistant principal perceptions I planned my observation with regard to the actions and statements made by the assistant principal as they dealt with student discipline as it related to ISS. My notes reflected the activities of the assistant principal only, and I did not make reference to students or other people in the field. During the observation I used guiding questions, as outlined and described by Bogdan and
Biklen (2007), that helped provide insight into the assistant principal perceptions as far as student discipline and ISS rationale and effectiveness were concerned. The questions served simply as a guide and did not limit the scope of the observation.

**Guiding Questions for Field Observation**

1. What role does the participant play in the ISS program?
2. What are the school’s general policies associated with the ISS program?
3. What behaviors typically elicit the use of the ISS program?
4. Is the ISS program successful in limiting, changing or eliminating inappropriate student behaviors?
5. What is the process involved the ISS program?
6. What is the nature of punishment and discipline in the school?
7. Does punishment play a role in the ISS program?
8. What tone is used by the assistant principal as it relates to the ISS program?
9. Does the assistant principal convey any emotions associated with assigning students to the ISS program?
10. Are any behaviors ignored, or is there a strict adherence to the schools’ policies?

**Teacher Interviews**

Purposeful sampling was used to select the teacher interview participants. By using the following criteria, I was able to interview a teacher with similar experiences from each of the high schools. The teacher participants had worked as a teacher for at least five years, had written at least ten office referrals, and had interacted with their assistant principals as a result of those referrals. I used a semi-structured interview protocol that allowed me to ask
the same questions to each of the participants. The purpose of the interview was not to assess
the teacher’s perceptions of ISS, but rather to gain additional insight into the perceptions of
the assistant principals with whom they work. The teacher’s responses to the following
questions were used to corroborate the information gathered from the assistant principal
survey, interviews, and focus group.

**Interview Instrumentation/Protocol**

1. How long have you been teaching at this school and in general?
2. How often do you write office referrals, weekly, monthly, over the course of the
   year?
3. Tell me about your experiences with ISS and what you think the assistant
   principals believe to be the rationale for using ISS in your school.
4. Do you believe that assistant principals perceive ISS to be an effective manner in
   which to deal with inappropriate student behaviors?
5. Given the chance, and unlimited resources, do you believe that assistant principals
   would look to some other measure to try to limit or eliminate inappropriate
   behaviors?
6. How do you think the assistant principal’s approach to student discipline would
   change if ISS was not an option?

**Documents**

I collected and analyzed three separate archival documents that represent ISS data
from the district as a whole. The documents did not reflect individual written referrals but
rather an accumulated record of data from the district. The first document provided
information that identifies the number of times ISS was assigned for a given infraction. The second document was used to determine the rates of recidivism of the number of students that were assigned to ISS more than one time for a similar infraction. The third document provided information with regard to the rate at which ISS was used prior to a student being assigned OSS. Although these documents represent numbers of occurrences and rates of recidivism, they are used qualitatively as a means to corroborate the perceptions of the assistant principals surveyed, interviewed and those participated in the focus group.

Data Analysis

In this study I made use of content analysis, which as Patton (2002) stated is a “data reduction and a sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings” (p. 453). Patton (2002) also stated that content analysis is appropriate for case studies because patterns and themes come out of multiple sources of data.

The interviews were digitally recorded and then transcribed verbatim. I listened to each of the recordings and read the transcriptions in order to assure their accuracy. Before the analysis began, I provided a copy to the interview participant to verify transcript accuracy. The participants were able to mark their transcripts or make changes/additions depending on how the transcripts reflected what is was that they wanted to say or had thought they said. Very few of the transcripts were returned with changes. Those that did include changes were minor and mostly grammatical in nature. Several of the participants, for example, marked their transcripts with a question as to why words might have been repeated in the transcripts. I explained that the data had been transcribed verbatim and that they may have said a single
word two or three times while answering the question. No major changes were made to any of the participant transcripts.

An initial reading of the transcripts allowed me to begin analyzing the interview and to begin looking for themes and/or concepts. As I read more thoroughly through the transcripts, I was able to intuitively code them into categories and observed commonalities and differences between the responses in the interviews. The first step in the analysis, as suggested by Seidman (2006), was to mark, bracket and break the transcription into chunks of interesting information. An important part of this initial stage, he also stated, is that the researcher (I) must exercise judgment about what is more or less significant. In judging that significance, Seidman (2006) also suggested that it is important to “mark what interests you as you read it. Do not ponder about the passage. If it catches your attention, mark it” (p. 118). Once I read, reviewed, and marked I organized excerpts from the transcripts into categories and search those categories for connecting threads, patterns, and themes. Seidman (2006) refers to this process as classifying or coding. I used similar strategies to analyze the responses from the confidential online survey.

The recordings/data from the focus group interview, like the face-to-face interviews, was recorded digitally. I listened and transcribed the discussions that took place during the focus group and then read through the transcription to ensure its accuracy. Focus group participants were also contacted after the recording was transcribed and provided with a copy to verify what was recorded was accurate. I then duplicated the process of the interview analysis with the transcription of the focus group recording. I used the same intuitive
judgments to code the focus group so that I could note similarities and/or differences between the interview data and the focus group data.

The notes from my observation were analyzed in the same method. I read and re-read my field notes looking for the emergence of patterns and/or themes. Patton (2002) stated that qualitative analysis is usually inductive, and I used this same analytical reasoning to help create categories by which to organize the data.

I analyzed different documents that report the types of rule infractions, rates of recidivism, and escalating consequences. I used the documents to make inferences about the types of infractions that resulted in ISS, the number of students who were repeatedly assigned to ISS and the number of students who were assigned to OSS after ISS. As the investigator I examined the documents for behaviors and occurrences associated with ISS only. Student names, along with all other indicators, were removed or not included on any document and, thus, remained confidential. By analyzing the documents, I was able to corroborate the perceptions of the assistant principals.

**Trustworthiness**

I took several steps to help assure the trustworthiness throughout the study. Although the research was conducted by one person, bias should be reduced through the methods of data collection. Not only did I collect data from several different perspectives, I also collected data using several different methods. Although I am an active administrator with a keen interest in the subject matter, I am interested in the findings regardless of the results. I am not proving a hypothesis or grounded theory and, therefore, am not vested in the
outcome. I am objectively interested in the perspectives of the participants as to the rationale and effectiveness of in-school suspension.

Additionally, using a variety of data sources allowed me to build on the strengths of each of the data sources. Using a combination of data sources allowed for validation (Patton, 2002). Triangulation, according to Merriam (1998), strengthens the reliability of case studies and was accomplished in this case by gathering data from a number of different sources and participants. Interviews, focus groups, and document analysis provided a means of cross checking and added to the reliability of the data.

**Ethical Consideration**

All interview and focus group participants were assured the strictest confidentiality possible. The participants were asked for their cooperation prior to the study and participated willingly. All participant names, school names, and locations were changed or removed, thus protecting participant privacy. In addition, the study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (see Appendix A).

**Limitations of the Study**

The small number of interview candidates who took part might have contributed to the limitations of this study. In addition, although the interview participants have similar professional experiences, their responses may be dramatically different due to personal experiences. The study was also limited because only assistant principal participant data was collected, which meant that no other participant sources were collected or considered. The teacher interviews will help to address this area of weakness and add, as noted by Patton (2002), an extra layer of strength and validity to the study.
There are also limitations associated with the manner in which the data was collected. During the interviews, for example, subtle non-verbal gestures made unintentionally may discourage or encourage participant responses. Patton (2002) states that “Interview data are also subject to recall error, reactivity of the interviewee to the interviewer, and self-serving responses” (p. 306).

**Subjectivity Statement**

ISS and its effectiveness in changing or eliminating poor or inappropriate student behaviors are of great interest to me. During the course of my day-to-day professional life, student behavior is a primary focus. Since I have my own beliefs about the effectiveness of ISS, it may be somewhat of an understatement to say that I have some bias. I have a great deal of experience as an assistant principal and, of course, have my opinions. Assigning students to ISS, sometimes over and over again, takes up a great deal of time and leads me to question ISS effectiveness—hence this study. Additionally, I was at one time an assistant principal and am currently employed in this study’s school district. It is important to clarify that I am a principal at one of the alternative schools in the district and as a principal do not work, and have not worked, directly with any of the assistant principals involved in the study. An indirect subordinate/insubordinate relationship may be inferred with my position as a principal, but what must be made clear is that I hold no authority on the assistant principals in the study. However, it is important to the integrity of this study that I make clear my role within the school district. I am familiar with, by name not by experience, the assistant principal participants, and have no working relationship with them. I cannot say with absolute certainty, however, that my role as a principal was not completely ignored by the
participants. What I do believe is that my professional reputation served as a means to build trust with the participants, which helped them feel comfortable and lead to honest responses.

Although the participant’s anonymity cannot be guaranteed, I made every effort to ensure the strictest of confidentiality, thus providing the most reliable and trustworthy responses possible. Additionally, it was not the intent of this study to evaluate the participants, their discipline strategies, or their use of ISS, but simply to gather information with regards to assistant principals’ perceptions.

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) wrote “that qualitative researchers emphasize the subjective nature of reality…. and believe that the qualitative researcher tradition produces an interpretation of reality that is useful in understanding the human condition” (p. 27). Clearly, as may be the case with many qualitative researchers, there may have been some bias, but in this case, I do not feel that it disqualified me or the value of this study.

**Chapter Summary**

A case study approach was used to explore and examine the assistant principal perspectives with regard to the rationale and effectiveness of an in-school suspension program. The study used a qualitative approach which included the use of a confidential online survey, face-to-face interviews, a focus group, a field observation, and document analysis. Questions for the interview were predetermined and used as a guide for each interview. The data from the survey, interviews, focus group, and field observations was transcribed, coded, and analyzed for commonalities. The documents were analyzed and used to draw comparisons noted in the interview and observation data.
CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine, from the perspective of the assistant principal, the rationale for and effectiveness of ISS. This qualitative, multi-site case study examined one district’s use of ISS in four comprehensive high schools within the district. This study’s design and data collection was guided by and examined the following research questions:

1. What do the participants perceive to be the rationale for assigning students to ISS?

2. What do the participants perceive to be the expected outcomes of ISS?

3. What do the participants perceive to be the effectiveness of ISS in achieving its intended outcomes?

4. What policy changes do the participants perceive to be needed in order to ensure effective student behavior management or student discipline?

5. What alternatives, support or resources do the participants perceive to be needed in order to properly facilitate the appropriate management of student behavior?

Data was collected through a variety of sources, participants, and methods. A confidential online survey was used to gather demographic and baseline data from the twelve assistant principals involved in the study. Each of the participants was working in the district’s comprehensive high schools during the course of the investigation. Six of those assistant principals were randomly selected to participate in an individual face-to-face interview. The interviews allowed me to gather richer, more philosophical data with regard
to ISS. The remaining assistant principals participated in a focus group discussion, which also provided additional data with regard to in-school suspension. Additionally, a field observation was conducted. I shadowed one randomly selected assistant principal during the course of one regularly scheduled school day (7:30 am-2:45 pm). The data gathered during the field observation provided additional insight into the assistant principal involvement and experience with student behavior and ISS. Four teachers, one from each of the comprehensive high schools, were also selected and interviewed. The data gathered from the teachers provided me with an additional perspective of the work done by the assistant principal with regard to ISS. The teacher interviews focused on the teacher’s interactions with the assistant principals as they, the assistant principals, dealt with student behavior and ISS. The data from the teacher interviews, which was analyzed using the same process as the assistant principal data, was used to corroborate the data gathered directly from the assistant principals. Historical documents were analyzed and provided information with regard to the occurrences of ISS, OSS, and the types of behaviors associated with ISS.

**Chapter Overview**

This chapter first presents sample demographic data obtained from the confidential online survey with regard to participant profiles. The information presented in Tables 4.1-4.6 and Figures 1-3 is followed by a brief descriptive summary. The next section of the chapter presents and analyzes the findings of the study, which emerged as five major themes. Each theme (see Tables 4.2 through 4.6) is followed by a descriptive summary. Finally, this chapter concludes with a chapter summary.
Figure 1. Assistant principal experience.

*Note.* The participants in this study have had similar educational experiences in that all but one of them had been in the field of education for seven years or more (see Figure 1). Similarly, most of the participant, ten, had been working as an assistant principal fewer than seven years.
**Figure 2.** Careers of assistant principal participants.

*Note.* The majority of this study’s participants, 9 out of 12 or 75%, had spent their entire careers in the field of education. Figure 2 indicates that only three of the participants had been involved in a career other than education.
Figure 3. Assistant principal involvement in student discipline.

*Note.* All of the study participants, 12 out of 12, indicated that they were involved in dealing with student discipline in their schools. Figure 3 shows that 50%, 6 out of 12, of the participants were involved in all aspects of discipline in their school. Three of the participants were responsible for one third of the student discipline, and three others indicated that they were responsible for the discipline of a specific grade level.
Table 4.1

Alignment of Emerging Themes and Research Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Emerging Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) What do the participants perceive to be the rationale for assigning students to ISS?</td>
<td>Rationale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) What do the participants perceive to be the expected outcomes of ISS?</td>
<td>Student Attitudes and Behaviors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) What do the participants perceive to be the effectiveness of ISS in achieving its intended outcomes?</td>
<td>Effectiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d) What policy changes do the participants perceive to be needed in order to ensure effective student behavior management or student discipline?</td>
<td>School and Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e) What alternatives, support or resources do the participants perceive to be needed in order to properly facilitate the appropriate management of student behavior?</td>
<td>Alternatives</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The themes that emerged out of the content coding were aligned to the research questions. Table 4.1 indicates which of the emergent themes was aligned to each of the research questions.
Table 4.2

Emergent Theme: Rationale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Sample Evidence (quotes from survey, interviews, and focus group)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expectations</td>
<td>-the school needs to be safe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-it’s mostly tardies, disruption or insubordination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-my principal expects me to take care of things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-teachers need to feel supported when they need help with a disruptive student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-out-of-school can create something worse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-I feel obligated to the teacher to remove the disruptive student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consequence and punishment</td>
<td>-there has to be consequence, for every action there is a reaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-students have to know there are consequences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-without consequences we’d have chaos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-the more you allow them to get away with, the more they do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-if we didn’t punish…it wouldn’t be functional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching and learning</td>
<td>-removing one disruptive students means the other 29 or 30 can keep moving forward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-we can keep the student here, at school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-at home they are not in a learning environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-it’s a more restrictive environment that allows them to continue Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-they are supervised, they’re not allowed to talk, and some do their work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The study’s data was collected, coded, analyzed, and organized into categories. The categories were associated with each of the emergent themes. Table 4.2 provides a sample of the data with regard to research question examining the rationale for ISS.
Table 4.3

*Emergent Theme: Student Attitude and Behaviors*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Sample Evidence (quotes from survey, interviews, and focus group)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student needs</td>
<td>- they’re supposed to complete their assignments&lt;br&gt;- some students have low or no self esteem&lt;br&gt;- some students need to be in a different setting&lt;br&gt;- some students need more support&lt;br&gt;- we try to force too many square and triangle pegs into round holes&lt;br&gt;- sometimes they need time away&lt;br&gt;- most are African-American low socio-economic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social interactions</td>
<td>- students want to be with their peers&lt;br&gt;- depending on what they get outside of school is what we get in school&lt;br&gt;- most of them, the frequent flyers, want to be with their friends&lt;br&gt;- some come to hang and eat lunch&lt;br&gt;- sometimes the stigma of ISS, they don’t want their friends to see them there, so once is enough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviors and decision making</td>
<td>- sometimes they won’t (follow rules)&lt;br&gt;- sometimes they change, sometimes they don’t&lt;br&gt;- most are our frequent flyers&lt;br&gt;- everyone can follow rules, if they can’t, they don’t need to be in school anyway or in society&lt;br&gt;- sometimes they just don’t want to so they make bad choices&lt;br&gt;- sometimes they like to be out of the classroom and choose to misbehave, then they go to ISS&lt;br&gt;- if they’re not invested in their learning, nothing changes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The research question designed to examine the outcomes of ISS is represented in Table 4.3 as the emergent theme: Student attitude and behaviors. The table represents a small sample of the total data collected and is organized into categories and represents an overview of the participant’s perceived outcomes of ISS.
Table 4.4

_Emergent Theme: Effectiveness_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Sample Evidence (quotes from survey, interviews, and focus group)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Teachers   | -it’s a classroom management tool, but I don’t know that it’s a good one  
             -it gives the teacher some time away from the student  
             -sometimes ISS is a crutch when they just don’t want to deal with the student  
             -it does keep them here, and the teacher can help them |
| Students   | -typically they get in that environment and shut down  
             -many are repeatedly suspended  
             -removed out of the class, the more likely they are to fail or fall behind  
             -they learn that there is a punishment for their behavior  
             -it gets the parent’s attention  
             -some of them do their work  
             -they understand there are consequences to their actions  
             -no change (in behavior as a result of ISS)  
             -most of them are frequent flyers  
             -there are no strategies to help improve behavior |
| Changes    | -it needs to be restructured…a different focus…a behavior component  
             -it needs to have a different role…individualized attention  
             -more of a learning tool than a discipline tool  
             -discipline should be at the bottom of the totem pole and educating should be at the top |

*Note.* ISS effectiveness was examined and sample data of participant responses are included in Table 4.4. Sample data is included from participants and is organized into three categories; Teachers, Students, and Changes.
### Table 4.5

*Emergent Theme: School and Community*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Sample Evidence (quotes from survey, interviews, and focus group)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Policy**                      | -we follow the policy  
- board policy is the law  
- sometimes we’re constricted, but usually we work together  
- a matrix helps with consistency, but limits what you can do sometimes  
- we need to have some leeway  
- there is some grey area                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| **Societal expectations**       | - dealing with things on the street is done differently than school and they bring that into the school with them  
- they can’t make an adjustment from discipline on the street and the school  
- kids are different now, society is different  
- there has got to be a consequence and punishment  
- some parents are out of touch with what is required                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| **Parent involvement and support** | - positive behavior goes back to what we are taught at home  
- home life can be violent  
- we have a different breed of students… kids today can’t separate home lifestyles from their school lifestyles  
- we just can’t get any cooperation  
- the parents don’t know what to do with them either  
- they’re just as frustrated as us                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |

*Note.* Table 4.5 provides sample data that was collected with regard to the research question designed to investigate policy and/or policy changes. The data collected is organized into three categories, which focus on Policies, Societal expectations, and Parent involvement and support.
### Table 4.6

**Emergent Theme: Alternatives**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Sample Evidence (quotes from survey, interviews, and focus group)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Relationships               | -relationships have to get better  
                            | -we need to build better relationships  
                            | -there is a disconnect between the student and the teacher                                                                 |
| Classroom management        | -ISS is the last resort  
                            | -a plethora of strategies in the class  
                            | -improved classroom management  
                            | -keep students engaged  
                            | -good teaching and learning…lot less problems  
                            | -doing different activities a lot more students stay involved  
                            | -force teachers to use more strategies                                                                 |
| PBIS (Positive Behavior, Intervention, and Support) | -encourage them, say positive words  
                            | -rewarding them for good behavior  
                            | -provide some kind of intervention  
                            | -we have PBIS, we need to sustain it                                                                 |

*Note.* The final research question was developed to examine the participant perceptions with regard to possible alternatives to ISS. Table 4.6 provides a sample of the data collected from the participants.
Assistant Principal Participant Profiles

Demographic data gathered from the confidential online survey is illustrated in Figures 1-3. A brief summative description of each figure is included.

The assistant principals who participated in the study had a variety of experiences (see Figure 1). Although most of the participants, ten, had less than 7 years of administrative experience as an assistant principal, all were veteran educators. Six of the study participants had greater than ten years of experience in education. Most of the participants, eight, had spent less than three years at their current school, two had spent between four and six years, and two had been at their school between seven and ten years.

The majority, 75%, of assistant principal participants had spent their entire careers as educators (see Figure 2). Those who had not been educators listed their original backgrounds as being involved in retail sales and business management.

Although the participants had started their careers in different places, as educators or in another field, their responses to question 4 of the survey: “What made you want to become an assistant principal?” were very similar. All but one of the respondents described making a difference and/or having a greater impact on student learning as the reason for becoming an assistant principal. The single survey respondent that differed from the others listed insanity as the reason for becoming an assistant principal. Because the survey was confidential, there was no way to ask a follow up or clarifying questions to the participant. It may have been that he or she had been experiencing an extraordinarily frustrating day or simply did not take the question seriously.
All of the participants (see Figure 3) identified student behavior management and discipline as one of their main responsibilities. Six stated that they were involved in all aspects of student discipline, three were responsible for specific grade levels of students, and three were responsible for managing the discipline of one third of the student population. Regardless of the breakdown, each of the assistant principals indicated that student discipline was one of their main responsibilities as administrators.

**Data Analysis**

Once the data was collected and transcribed, I read and re-read the transcripts. During the second and third readings, I made inductive judgments about the data. Patton (2002) stated that “inductive analysis involves discovering patterns, themes and categories in one’s data” (p. 453). As patterns and categories emerged in the data, I was able to make connections and classify the data into themes. I used a series of codes (see Appendix D) to mark up the transcripts and help make sense of the data. Patton uses the term *sense-making* in defining the process of content analysis. Seidman (2006) also suggested that marking and bracketing the transcripts allows the researcher to organize excerpts of the data into categories, and that the connections between the categories may be emergent themes. In this study, I coded the data from the survey, interviews, focus group, and field observation in the same manner and was able to organize, classify and label the data into several categories. I was then able to group the categories into five emerging themes: rationale, student attitudes and behavior, effectiveness, school and community, and alternatives. These themes (see Table 4.1) were aligned with the research questions.
Emergent Themes

The codes were used to group the data into categories, and connections were made and similarities were drawn between the categories. Five themes emerged as I re-organized and re-examined the categories, and each emergent theme was made up of several different categories. In order to provide a thorough analysis of the data gathered in this investigation, each of the themes is outlined and described in detail, thus providing an overview of the data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Additionally, I have made use of extensive samples of participant quotations. Any statistical data, from the documents for example, has been woven into the text as a means of supplementing the narrative (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Each table (see Tables 4.2 through 4.6) represents one of the themes and is followed by a brief interpretive and summative description.

Rationale

The data gathered as evidence (see Table 4.2) suggested that the rationale for ISS is linked to three categories. First, there is an expectation that the assistant principals use ISS to remove students for more minor behavioral infractions. An interview participant noted that “teachers expect that when they write a referral or they call for administrator support that we are going to do something to stop that disruption in the class.” Another participant reported that “you don’t want to create an environment where the teacher doesn’t feel supported.” Fifty percent (6 out of 12) of the survey respondents indicated that ISS is a tool that removes negative and distracting behaviors from the class. The teacher is able to continue teaching the rest of the students in the class.
Second, removing a disruptive student and assigning him or her to ISS is perceived to be an appropriate consequence and punishment for inappropriate behavior. The interview participants, 100% (6 out of 6) of them, indicated that ISS is a reasonable punishment and an appropriate consequence for minor behavioral infractions. One interview participant stated that “there has to be some kind of consequence…if we feel that the student just needs some time from the classroom, that’s when we put ISS into play.”

Finally, the learning of other students is no longer impeded by the student who is removed from the class. The removed student remains in the school but is isolated and is able to continue with their school work in an isolated, supervised environment. Seven of the twelve survey respondents (58%) indicated that they perceived that removing a disruptive student improves the learning environment of the other students.

The document analysis indicated, in this case, that inappropriate classroom behavior represented 79% of all office referrals. Of those office referrals, 84% were made up by just three reported offenses: class disruption, tardy to class, and insubordination. As a result, ISS was assigned 652 times as a consequence. The data from the documents supported the data collected from the online survey. One hundred percent (12 out of 12) of the survey respondents reported that ISS is used mainly to address minor behavioral offense such as class disruption, disrespectful behavior, insubordination or being uncooperative, and being tardy to or skipping class.

**Student Attitude and Behaviors**

The data revealed (see Table 4.3) that ISS is perceived to provide favorable outcomes for some students. In some cases the student may get some time away from a teacher or
situation and may be able to, as one participant stated, “Chill-out, and reflect on what had happened. They (the student) may have just had a bad hair day, but that doesn’t make them a bad person.” Some students are able to use their time in ISS to complete assignments. For some simply being apart from their peers is enough to keep them on the right track. Some students find ISS to be a deterrent, according to the perceptions of the assistant principals as reflected in the following comment that the students, “learn that ISS is an unpleasant experience and change their behavior accordingly.” A focus group participant concluded, “I think for some it’s effective because they don’t like it and they don’t want to go back. So, therefore, it does change the behavior or make them think twice.” Another participant responded, “If you take them and put them in ISS all day, then it’s bound to break the behavior.”

For many students, however, the data suggested that the perceived outcome of ISS was of little or no consequence to the student’s attitude or behavior. For many students ISS is a way to get out of class work and has nothing to do with changing their behavior. Seventy-five percent (9 out of 12) of the survey participants reported that they observed little or no change in student attitudes or behaviors as a result of ISS. One interview participant stated that “some students choose to misbehave so that they can go to ISS. They’d rather be there than in the classroom.” Another added “They (some students) learn how to play the game. If they want out of class, they know exactly what to do.” A focus group participant added the following with regard to the observed change in student behavior:

None and none, I hate to say it, but the ones that go always go and
the ones that never go don’t go. It’s a Band Aid and the Band Aid leaks.
They are frequent flyers, but they can’t be in the class. It’s frustrating, but there are so few alternatives.

The data also indicated that, in many aspects, the needs of students are not met. The classroom and the Standard Course of Study do not present students with enough options and many students are bored and uninterested. An interviewed assistant principal stated the following:

One of the primary problems we have is the school setting that we have today does not meet the needs of every student that is coming on this campus. I think, if I could have the power, those students that don’t fit well…in the type of setting we have...have some other type of setting…it could be a myriad of reasons, but this type of setting is not conducive for every child.

The focus group discussion was similar in that the group recognized that the needs of today’s students are not being met. In a response to another participant’s comment that “it’s a nice thought that all kids are going to college, it’s just not a reality, and many of them don’t want to go to college”, one assistant principal suggested that “more options, and making school fun for them. I think that would skew some of the behavior in the right direction.” Another suggested a return to more hands-on type schools and stated:

When I was in school we had students in brick masonry. Now we still have that same caliber of student, who could probably do brick masonry and enjoy it and enjoy school, but now we have them sitting in a chemistry class, biology class…and we’re just asking for trouble.
Effectiveness

The data (see Table 4.4) revealed that the assistant principals, in this case, perceived ISS to be effective in terms of removing disruptive students, providing a punitive consequence for poor behavior and allowing the teacher to continue with the other students in the class. Although 58% (7 out of 12) of survey respondents reported that ISS may act as a deterrent and should have an impact on future behavior the remaining respondents, 42% (5 out of 12) reported that ISS had no impact on deterring negative behaviors. Additionally, 92% (9 out of 12) of survey respondents reported that students characterize their experience as a joke, a waste of time, a vacation from class, and interference in their social schedules.

Although it was reported that ISS removes a disruptive student from class and maybe used a classroom management tool, it was also reported that teachers might rely on the ability to send students out of the class rather than using intervention strategies that may help the student behaviorally and academically. One assistant principal characterized this during the interview and stated:

You know, there are days where I think ISS should not be an option…I think teachers may use ISS as a crutch…some teachers would find it more difficult to teach…if ISS was not an option, we would have no other choice but to teach these kids.

Beyond providing a consequence and punishment for some minor behaviors, the assistant principal participants in this study perceived little evidence to support ISS effectiveness for changing or improving student behavior. They reported that students get little, if any, behavioral support, and although they are in the school, they receive little in the
way of educational support. Data from the teacher interviews added to this, and although the
teacher data suggested that ISS was better than OSS, one teacher said:

I don’t want them in in-school (ISS). They don’t hear the teacher’s lecture…they
don’t get the teacher’s notes…they don’t hear the things the other students are privy
to…the depth of instruction is not available.

The data suggested that respondents perceived that ISS could be more effective with major
changes to the program. Recommendations with regard to ensuring that students have access
to educational support and resources and providing a behavioral component were made by
several of study participants. One assistant principal summarized the effectiveness of ISS as
follows:

I think the kids, for the most part, learn that there is a punishment for their
behavior, but they don’t learn, through ISS, how to improve that behavior so
that it doesn’t happen again.

Although all interview participants (6 out of 6) indicated that they felt that ISS had a
place in school, if given the chance they would change it so that it was educational, less
punitive, and more suited to the behavioral and academic needs of the students. One
assistant principal’s comments summarized this as follows:

It could be a different role. I think in-school suspension could be a
different capacity. Where kids could go and get some modified help or
some individualized attention. It could be used more for a learning tool
other than a disciplinary tool.
The online survey revealed two distinct categories of opinions with regard to changes that would improve ISS. Although 16.7% (2 out of 12) of the respondents did not recommend any changes, 41.7% (5 out of 12) stated that ISS should include instructional and/or behavioral components. The remaining respondents, also 41.7% (5 out of 12), indicated that stricter more punitive policies would help improve ISS. One respondent wrote, for example, that “ISS needs to be more structured and geared towards behavior modification. However, it does need to have the academic focus in order to prevent the student from getting behind.” Conversely, another respondent wrote that “If a student can't comply in ISS it is an immediate suspension.”

**School and Community**

In this case, the operation of the school and its interactions within the community, as indicated by the data, are perceived to be directed by three categories, and each has a role in guiding or, in some cases, mandating how assistant principals manage student behavior and discipline (see Table 4.5). First, the local Board of Education has developed and maintained an extensive list of policies with regard to the student code of conduct. These policies, however, do not typically address the assignment of ISS but are more specific to behaviors that would necessitate more drastic consequences including OSS and expulsion. One assistant principal noted:

Well, beyond board policy for things like drugs and weapons or those types of things…it’s primarily a decision that the administrators make. We sit down and as administrators and decide…what are the offenses that we feel are appropriate for in-school (ISS)?
The policies within the schools themselves are more like guidelines and the assistant principals have some flexibility in deciding when a student is assigned to ISS and for how long that assignment is going to be. Another assistant principal summarized the subjective nature of policies associated with ISS as follows:

(We’re) not that constricted (by policy). We still have a lot of grey area that we work with. My theory has always been to try to build a foundation. I never go for the jugular to begin with. I try to work with kids… I can be fair without being consistent.

Second, the data gathered indicated that there were perceptions with regard to societal expectation, what takes place, and what is acceptable outside of school. The perception was that those expectations send mixed messages and confuse how the students behave in school. That is to say, the manner in which many of the students interact and behave outside of the school is simply not appropriate inside the school. One assistant principal described, for example, that the students, “who grow up in poverty are accustomed to being yelled and cursed at, then you bring that into the school.” In essence, when the students get assigned to ISS for minor disruptions, insubordination or the use of profanity, they are being punished for what might be normal behavior to them. An assistant principal summarized this by saying that “the kids act out and there is a huge discipline problem in our school simply because of the lifestyles of some of our kids”. A focus group participant added:

The school mirrors society. We have to take them as they come.

What you see in the mall is what we get in the school. We take them as they are and try to move them forward, but society doesn’t
think they should do any of the work, and we should fix everything.

When we don’t, everything is the school’s fault.

On the other hand, the data also indicated a perception (see Table 4.2) that there needs to be a punitive consequence for inappropriate behaviors. As one assistant principal asked, and answered:

Well, it’s just like society, if we didn’t have any laws. What would our society be like? …if we didn’t punish anyone, and everyone did whatever they wanted, there’d be no direction.

Finally, the data suggested the perceived importance of the role of the parents in student behavior in schools. All of the study participants, 100% in the interviews as well as those in the focus group, discussed the importance of parents in their role of managing student behavior. Participants expressed the importance of increasing the parent’s role as follows:

I think we need to require the parents to be more responsible and involved… you know, just take more responsibility, the parent and child. We get to the point with the parent where they say, “We can’t do anything with them.”

So they give that responsibility to us and expect us to be able to take care of it.

I agree, just making the parent more responsible for their child, especially for those behaviors that happen over and over again. You know, the only way you’re going to be allowed back in the class is if your mother is here with you. A lot of times parents, parents didn’t even know there was a problem there, and the ones that really do care about their child’s learning it (ISS) did have a
positive impact. And, obviously there are times when it (ISS) doesn’t have an impact.

We already call parents in for meetings. To a certain degree, it’s beneficial; to a certain degree, it’s not. I really couldn’t see having more parent conferences. Sometimes parents come in, and they are just as frustrated as we are and they don’t know what to do.

I think behavior, positive behavior, goes back to what we’re taught at a young age, and I think some parent are out of touch with what is required at school in terms of behavior...Good behavior at home may be totally different than what’s expected at school. So what I would say is to just try and get more information to parents about what is expected behavior of a school setting.

This perception was also evident in the data collected during the field observation. The participant spent the better part of an hour trying to make contact with and then speaking to a parent with regard to their student’s behavior. Although I was not able to hear the conversation, the frustration on the assistant principal’s face was excruciatingly obvious.

The role of the parent is crucial, and the participants indicated that student behavior will only improve if parents are forced to be more actively involved and responsible for the manner in which their children behave within the school.

Alternatives

Every participant, at some point in the study, discussed or mentioned rewarding good behavior, and recognizing and reinforcing that behavior as an important part of an alternative to suspension solution (see Table 4.6). One interview participant stated “Everybody,
including adults, likes to be recognized and recognized for doing the right thing.”

Additionally, several participants discussed the importance of building relationships with students. A survey respondent noted that “often the students just want to be heard or wish to vent about problems occurring at home.” Another suggested that relationships could improve with, “workshops on relationship building for adults in school. Students have changed over the last 20 years, and we have to be able to relate to them in order to teach them.” An interview participant described the importance of relationships as follows: “We have to build better relationships...you can’t teach a kid until you actually learn where the kid is coming from.”

In terms of classroom management, 100% (12 out of 12) of the survey respondents reported that professional development, for all teachers, must continue to change and improve. For example, one survey participant wrote: “Education and professional development is changing to meet the needs of 21st century learners. When educators embrace the skills that students need in the 21st century, student behavior will change on its own.” Another survey participant responded as follows:

Educators need to be informed of alternative discipline avenues that can be explored. Not all student discipline are cut and dry issues. There are a lot of different factors that need to be explored to correct behaviors and make correct decisions for the student's education.

Although mentors and counselors were noted, the data collected in this study indicated that alternative strategies for improving student behavior revolved around teaching, rewarding and reinforcing good behavior. Given the chance to be all powerful, and to do
anything to limit or eliminate problem behaviors, five of the six interview participants listed teaching, reinforcing and rewarding positive behavior traits as strategies to implement. In fact, those 5 participants referenced one or all of those traits 27 times in answering. Two of the participants referenced Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) as a means of implementing strategies to help correct, rather than punish, behavior. One participant commented as follows:

We have…Positive Behavior Intervention Support, we say positive words everyday…the students are constantly reminded of what they are doing. That behavior that’s right in the school environment and they are being rewarded and they are hearing the same language from teachers, administrators, bus drivers… it’s just constant positive comments.

When asked what, if given unlimited resources, assistant principals might look to do to limit or eliminate inappropriate behavior three of the four teacher interview participants, 75%, identified PBIS, the use of rewards, and behavior management techniques in their answers. The other teacher’s suggestion was more punitive in nature. She suggested, “Give them something that would scare them straight, maybe that would help us out.”

Chapter Summary

This chapter presents the findings of this study, which were discussed as emergent themes and were organized according to the research questions. Data gathered from a confidential online survey, face-to-face interviews, a focus group discussion, and a field observation revealed assistant principal perceptions with regard to the rationale and effectiveness of in-school suspension. As is generally the case with qualitative research,
extensive participants’ quotations were used. This was done in order to build confidence in the readers by accurately representing the reality of the participants and situations involved in the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Additionally, teacher interviews and an analysis of historical documents were used to help contribute to, corroborate, and/or verify the information gathered from the assistant principals.

The initial finding of this study addressed research question 1: What do the participants perceive to be the rationale for assigning students to ISS? The first emergent theme was that the assistant principal participants involved in the study perceived that the rationale for ISS was to manage minor student behavior problems. ISS was described as an expected consequence for behavior problems such as disruption, disrespect and insubordination, behaviors that may not warrant an out-of-school suspension. This is especially the case for classroom disruptions, and particularly when teachers need administrative assistance. ISS was also reported to be an acceptable form of punishment and consequence for misbehavior in the classroom and around the school. The participants perceived that ISS served to remove disruptive students from the learning environment, thus allowing the teacher to continue teaching the rest of the students in the class. Additionally, and maybe most importantly, the disruptive student remained in the school in an alternative setting rather than being sent home.

The second finding, as reflected in the emergent theme student attitudes and behaviors addressed research question 2: What do the participants perceive to be the expected outcomes of ISS? The participants perceived the outcome of ISS, in some cases, to act as a deterrent for inappropriate behaviors. There was a perception that for some students,
those who cared about or who were invested in their education, ISS was enough of a
deterrent to dissuade them from behaving inappropriately. For most students, however, the
narrow scope of ISS, or perhaps the school in general, did not meet their needs, and ISS was
perceived to have had little, if any, effect on changing or improving their behavior. The
study participants perceived the behavioral and educational needs of the students to be too
great to be addressed appropriately by the current system. Additionally, the study
participants perceived the social climate, whether it be parents or society in general, to be out
of touch with the expected “norms” of the school.

The third was aligned to research question 3: What do the participants perceive to be
the effectiveness of ISS in achieving its intended outcomes? The finding emerged as the
perceived effectiveness of ISS. The participants reportedly perceived that ISS was, at certain
times, an effective behavior management tool and played an important role in their school
discipline procedures. They also indicated that ISS provided an opportunity for students who
commit minor behavior infraction to remain on the school’s campus, which lowered the need
for and occurrence of OSS. The participants perceived that ISS also allowed the teacher to
better maintain control of the classroom when disruptive students were removed. The
participants also noted, however, that ISS was at best a temporary solution and, unless
students were intrinsically motivated to learn, it did little to limit, change, or improve student
behavior in general. Although most of the participants perceived a need to maintain ISS in
their schools, they recommended several changes that they thought would improve its
effectiveness. Many of the participants stated that ISS needed to include behavioral and
instructional components and one-on-one counseling.
The fourth finding with regard to policy emerged as the interaction between the school and community, and addressed research question 4: What policy changes do the participants perceive to be needed in order to ensure effective student behavior management or student discipline? For the most part, the participant’s perceptions suggested that the school’s policies allowed them a degree of flexibility when dispensing discipline and assigning ISS. The need for policy development pointed in a direction over which the participants had little control: the student’s life outside the school and parent involvement and support. The perception of the participants was that many of their student’s experiences outside of school did not prepare them for the expectations inside the school. This was especially true with regard to the student’s behavior. Some of the participants stated that the ability to mandate parent involvement would help improve all aspects of student behavior in the school. They suggested that the students with the most supportive and involved parents were the least likely to commit behavior infractions.

The final finding addressed research question 5: What alternatives, support or resources do the participants perceive to be needed in order to properly facilitate the appropriate management of student behavior? It emerged as the theme alternative: alternatives to ISS, to suspension in general, and to punishment as a consequence. At times, the participants responded in practical terms, and at other times, the discussion was more philosophical. All of the participants noted the need to continue to develop and improve relationships with students. Many of them stated that teachers need to develop and improve their classroom management strategies. Although very few of the participants perceived that it was possible to eliminate inappropriate behaviors, most suggested that teaching, rewarding,
and reinforcing positive behaviors was the key to improving student behavior, and would likely decrease the need for ISS.
CHAPTER V: IMPLICATIONS, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Implications

The purpose of this multi-site case study was to examine the perceptions of assistant principals with regard to the rationale and effectiveness of in-school suspension. This study was guided by five research questions and resulted in findings that were discussed in detail in the previous chapter. The findings might lead one to jump to several conclusions, but in this case I will, as suggested by Wolcott (2001), “…avoid the term conclusion” (p. 55). Instead, I will summarize and identify a number of implications based on the data related to this study’s findings. The findings of this study were discussed in the previous chapter as five emergent themes with regard to assistant principal perceptions about ISS: rationale, student attitudes and behaviors, effectiveness, school and community, and alternatives. This chapter will first focus on describing what has been learned from this study. I will then discuss the connection between this study and existing research, recommendations, questions, and implications for further research as a result of this study.

In terms of what can be learned from this study, it is difficult to refrain from simply writing a few strong statements about what should be done in schools to change or improve student behavior. The literature discussed in Chapter 2 would support my notion to conclude from this study that the rationale for ISS, although clear, is misguided, and that it is at very best a temporary and relatively straightforward strategy to deal with the complexities behind inappropriate student behaviors. Instead, I will discuss the findings as they follow the research questions and address them in four areas: (a) rationale for and effectiveness of ISS;
(b) outcomes and changes in student attitudes and/or behaviors; (c) the interaction between the school and community; and (d) alternatives to ISS and suspension in general.

**Rationale for and Effectiveness of ISS**

Two of the first three findings of this study indicated that assistant principals perceive that ISS has several purposes, and it is somewhat effective in serving those purposes. The participants in this study perceived that there was an expectation for ISS to be used as a response to minor behavior infractions, it is a consequence and a punishment, and it contributes to the teaching learning process. It may be implied from the data collected in this study that ISS is a necessary part of school and helps teachers and administrators manage student behavior. An additional implication could also be made that, contrary to the research discussed in Chapter 2, assistant principals in this case study perceived that punishment as a consequence is an effective and essential part of discipline in schools. Another implication could be that the decisions made with regard to student behavior and discipline in schools by this study’s participants were grounded in their personal beliefs and perceptions rather than research. It may be difficult for some assistant principals to separate what they were taught growing up, what they experienced in school, how they might discipline their own children or how they view society’s acceptance of punishment with what is sound practice in terms of educating students about behaving appropriately. A further implication could be made that the educational programs that help develop and certify the assistant principals in this case study needed to do a better or perhaps more thorough job of providing course work associated with effective behavior management. The assistant principals in this study perceived the effectiveness of ISS to be limited, at best, and described it as a temporary,
Band-Aid-like consequence for some, and/or a modest deterrent for a few others; yet its use in this case was justified.

**Outcomes and Changes in Student Attitudes and/or Behaviors**

This study’s third major finding associated with the outcomes of ISS was reflected in the theme student attitudes and behaviors. The participant perceptions gathered in this study indicated that ISS, the school, and the state’s educational system in general did not meet the student’s needs. Perceptions of the assistant principals suggested that social interactions within and between the school and community, play a pivotal role in the school and student behavior, and that ISS does little, if anything, to improve the decision-making process or behavior of the students. An implication could be made from the perception of the participants in this case that very few students are positively impacted by their experience in or with ISS. An additional implication could be made that the students most responsible for the behavioral issues in school, those referred to as frequent flyers, are the students most in need of something other than punishment and more in need of coping or behavioral strategies. Again, the perceptions of the participants in this study suggest that a final implication could be made that the inclusion of a behavioral or instructional component to a behavioral consequence may lead to more positive outcomes with regard to student attitudes and behaviors.

**The Interaction Between the School and Community**

The perceptions of the participants in this study suggested that the community as a whole plays a role in the school’s operation, and that its interaction with the school has an effect on the behaviors and expectations of the students. Although this study suggested the
overwhelming importance of parent involvement, societal expectation and the policies used to govern the school, the participants could not describe a scenario in which the development of whole scale policy or law that mandates parental involvement as a pre or co-requisite to attending public schools would be supported. Having said that, Sheldon and Epstein (2002) documented that schools able to make a strong connection with parents and community also had improved student behavior. Additionally, school officials who were able to bring parents into their schools and conduct workshops with regard to school goals reported improved student behavior as well. They stated that parenting and volunteering were most productive in reducing the percentage of students who received disciplinary actions. In this case, I believe there was a general sense of helplessness on the part of the participants in terms of improving parent responsibility. Having said that, their perceptions suggest that a further implication of this case study is that increasing the parent’s role and responsibility in the school may improve student behavior as a whole.

**Alternatives to ISS and Suspension in General**

This study’s final finding emerged as the theme alternatives, and included discussions and suggestions with regard to improving relationships, improving classroom management strategies for teachers, and implementing Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS). The participants suggested that improved relationships could help teachers better understand the students they teach. An implication in this case could be made that schools that make building better relationships a part of their culture are likely to have fewer discipline problems. Another implication could be made that better relationships will facilitate a more conducive learning environment, and if teachers know their students on a more personal
level, they will be better able to meet the social, emotional, and academic needs of the students. This is consistent with Milner and Tenore (2010) who describe relationships in the classroom as key. They suggest that improving classroom relationships is hard work, but that they result in increased engagement, improved participation and higher academic achievement. Additionally, they also suggest that sound student teacher relationships are central to academic and social success.

Without ISS, the participants indicated that teachers would need more effective classroom management strategies. Additionally, participants in this study suggested that the strategies used by teachers in the classroom need to change as the needs of the students change; teachers cannot manage their classrooms as their teachers did in years past because the students they teach are different than the students they used to be. Two implications with regard to this case can be made: one about the effectiveness of teacher education programs in preparing new teachers, and the second about professional development in which teachers participate as they progress through their careers. First, the participants in this case suggested that teachers rely on ISS as a way to avoid dealing with behavioral issues. The implication here is that teacher education programs may not adequately provide new teachers with the education and skills they need to effectively manage student behaviors in the classroom. And second, it might prove beneficial to mandate professional development activities that allow teachers to continue to hone their classroom management skills.

Finally, the findings indicated that the assistant principal participants discussed PBIS as a means of teaching, recognizing, rewarding, and reinforcing appropriate behaviors. A thorough discussion of PBIS follows in the next section of this chapter. An implication in this
case could be made that schools able to successfully implement systems that teach and reward good behavior, such as PBIS, could help improve student behavior, and decrease the need for ISS and suspension in general. The following includes a general review of alternatives, criteria for successful alternatives, and a discussion of PBIS.

Discussion: Another Look at the Literature

Many of the participant perceptions found in this study were similar to the findings of prior research discussed in Chapter 2, but there were some differences as well. The perceived rationale for ISS in this study, for example, was very much the same as what was found in the literature. Conversely, the participants in this study perceived the need for punishment as a consequence for inappropriate student behavior, while the literature described punishment, specifically ISS and OSS, as ineffective with little or no long term effect on improving student behavior.

Also included in Chapter 2 was research associated with examples of alternatives to suspension. The perceptions of the participants in this study were very similar to that discussed in Chapter 2. The participants perceived that consistent, well developed alternatives may be helpful in improving student behavior, and referred specifically to PBIS. This is consistent with existing literature as the resulting outcomes of alternative programs may be inconsistent, and in some cases they actually prove contrary to expected favorable outcomes. For example, in their study of after school programs for elementary students, James-Burdumy, Dynarski and Deke (2008) found that negative behaviors increased for many of the students involved in the programs. Unfortunately, many of the programs of the type described in Chapter 2 are often very specific and localized treatments that may not
have any significant positive effect or outcomes. In many cases, schools implemented programs that targeted individuals or groups of students, were short term, and often went without substantial evaluation. The results, when there have been results to document, are often short term and moderate at best. Although some strategies may be effective in addressing isolated problem behaviors, their sustained implementation is often hampered by the specialization of the strategy or the target population, the implementation of other initiatives, the overuse of reactive and exclusionary consequences, and the fact that they may be short term in nature (Sugai & Horner, 2006).

**Criteria for Successful Alternatives**

Prior to the 1980s, reviewers of research studies had a difficult time determining the effectiveness of program treatments as they applied to student behavior in the educational environment. Lipsey and Wilson (1993) stated that the “systematic knowledge about efficacy of psychological, educational, and behavioral interventions for many individual and social problems as being almost entirely dependent upon the research conducted within the experimental or quasi-experimental framework….such research often yields an ambiguous mix of results-decidedly positive, suggestive, convincing null, and hopelessly inconclusive” (p. 1,181). The result is that there is little convincing support for the efficacy of many treatments and, therefore, it is difficult to claim that a treatment “works.” The same is true when discussing the treatments or programs associated with alternatives to suspension. In a huge meta-analysis of 302 treatments for practical individual and social problems, however, Lipsey and Wilson were able to show “that well developed psychological, educational, and behavioral treatments generally have meaningful positive effects on the
intended outcome variables” (p. 1,199). They concluded that midrange, relatively free standing interventions have significant positive results.

In their meta-analysis, which included results from 165 studies, Wilson, Gottfredson, and Najaka (2001) examined features of effective school-based prevention activities that ranged from individual counseling to behavior modification. Although the study highlighted several inadequacies in existing research for policies and practice, “the most noticeable of which is that many popular school-based prevention approaches have not been well studied to date” (p. 247), it also showed that whole-school prevention approaches appear to be effective. They concluded with reasonable confidence that “instructional prevention programs will be more effective when they are taught using methods based on sound learning principles” (p. 268). Additionally, they suggested that schools should look to effectively implement well-developed, comprehensive packages of preventions.

A meta-analysis conducted by Mytton, DiGuiseppi, Gough, Taylor, and Logan (2002) analyzed data from 9,286 electronic records with regard to school-based prevention programs. Of the 44 randomized controlled trials school-based programs identified, 64% provided outcome data. Though many of the trials were small, pooled results suggested that school-based interventions may have a positive effect in reducing targeted behaviors.

**Positive Behavior Intervention and Support: An Overview**

In assessing the social validity of school-wide positive behavior support plans, Lane, Kalberg, Bruhn, & et al. (2009) suggested that there was a “strong association and significant positive correlation between social validity and treatment integrity” (p. 138). Their findings
also suggested that there was significant positive relation that indicated that higher social validity is predictive of higher treatment fidelity.

In terms of well-developed, widely-used programs, there may not be a more significant movement in the public school systems of the United States than Positive Behavior Support (PBS). In the discussion that follows with regard to positive behavior systems, several different acronyms (PBS-positive behavior support, PBIS-positive behavior support and intervention, and SWPBS-school-wide positive behavior support) are used interchangeably depending solely upon how they were identified and described in the literature that is discussed. Kroeger and Phillips (2007) wrote that positive behavior support is not only good practice, it is federal policy. The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) was amended to include PBS as the recommended form of intervention when dealing with behavioral issues for students with disabilities. Carr, Dunlap, Horner, and et al. (2002) described PBS as “an applied science that uses educational and systems change methods (environmental redesign) to enhance the quality of life and reduce behavior problems” (p. 4).

The discussion that follows is not an endorsement of Positive Behavior Interventions and Support, but rather a review of several studies that suggest some positive outcomes as a result of the implementation of a school or system-wide positive behavior program. The discussion is included because, as discussed in chapter 4, the participants in this study indicated that positive rewards programs in their schools, specifically PBIS, were perceived to be beneficial. The studies included in the discussion highlight the results of the successful implementation of Positive Behavior and Support both at the school and system level.

Important to keep in mind, however, is that any study involving students cannot claim
unquestionable validity because it may not be possible to compare a test group to a control
group of subjects. Additionally, Nelson et al. (2003) noted that the reliability and validity of
any discipline office referral is affected by teacher subjectivity, administrative policies and
procedures, and the variance of implicit standards associated with students, the behavior and
the time. Ultimately, there may be many variables that factor into the decrease of office
referrals or student assignment to ISS as a result of a positive behavior program.

PBS is a value-based intervention approach that attempts to broadly prevent and
change patterns of problem behaviors displayed by students in schools (Bambara,
Nonnemacher, & Kern, 2009). Carr et al. (2002) wrote that PBS has evolved over many
years but has always been grounded in multiple research perspectives and, as it has continued
to evolve it has drawn on many different theoretical perspectives. They also stated that PBS
is a systems approach as it deals with larger units (rather than individuals or targeted groups),
deals with natural settings rather than clinical settings, and views research as an ongoing
collaboration between scientists and system stakeholders. Carr et al. (2002) also described
the following three principles as a theoretic framework for PBS:

1. Change occurs in systems, not individuals. The intervention must be about the
context and changing or redesigning the environment, rather than blaming the
individual.

2. Implementing simple techniques, strategies, or programs will not result in change.
In order to effect positive sustainable change, there must be a reallocation of
resources (e.g., time and money) priorities, mission, and values.
3. Successful intervention relies on the continuous reflection of the relationships between the individuals within the system and the system itself. In order for an intervention to work, it “must involve multicomponent systems change, which…constitutes the heart of PBS” (p. 11). Eber, Lewis-Palmer, and Pacchiano (2002) added that PBS is a researched-based systems approach that focuses on the whole school, which teaches, supports, and develops school-wide positive behavior plans to effectively improve student discipline.

PBS is not a new intervention package but rather an application of a behaviorally based systems approach to building a school’s capacity to design effective behavior management plans that are based on research-validated practices (Sugai, Horner, Dunlap, Hienaman, & Lewis, 1999). This is consistent with McKevitt and Braaksma (2007) who described School-wide PBS as “a broad set of research-validated strategies designed to create school environments that promote and support appropriate behavior of all students” (p. 735).

Beyond behavioral factors, PBS assessment also considers cognitive, biophysical, developmental, and environmental factors to better understand the problem behaviors and to help to guide the development of appropriate, comprehensive, and effective behavioral support plans (Sugai et al., 1999). Additionally, school-wide PBS (SWPBS) is a systemic, structured way to use positive reinforcement by recognizing and rewarding positive behaviors to develop positive relationships throughout the whole school and to improve the school’s climate as well (McKevitt & Braaksma, 2007). According to Sugai and Horner (2006), “the SWPBS approach offers schools a conceptually sound and educationally valid
means of increasing their capacity to adopt and implement evidence-based behavioral interventions” (p. 256).

Essential to the successful implementation of PBS is the development of a team that systematically collects, analyzes, and reflects on school-wide discipline data in an effort to determine and then address the major behavioral concerns within the school (Morrissey et al., 2010). The team then selects several replacement behaviors “to be taught in every location of the school….once the team has determined the expectations for the school, the entire student body is explicitly taught” (p. 29).

In their investigation into the factors that may be barriers or enablers to the sustainable implementation of School-Wide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS), Bambara et al. (2009) described five essential practices. These practices include:

1. Establishing a supportive school culture,
2. Establishing administrative support,
3. Establishing a structure and processes for the use of time and resources,
4. Providing ongoing professional development, and
5. Continuously developing the involvement of students and their families.

Of these five, the researchers found that time and resources for teachers to meet, plan, and carry out the PBS process and the need for sustained professional development and training are most critical to successful PBS implementation.

Using data from a 5-year longitudinal randomized effectiveness trial of school-wide positive behavior/intervention support (SWPBIS), Bradshaw, Mitchell, and Leaf (2010) examined implementation fidelity and student discipline and achievement data. Their
analysis of the data revealed that schools implemented the model with a high level of fidelity and experienced significant reductions in office referrals and suspensions and an increase in student achievement.

Childs, Kincaid, and George (2010) used baseline data gathered through a number of instruments to assess the fidelity of implementation and to evaluate the outcomes of more than 300 Florida schools that had implemented a Positive Behavior Support (PBS) program. They found that PBS, when implemented with fidelity, had a positive impact on student behavior in reducing the number of office referrals, days of ISS, and days of OSS.

Johns, Patrick, and Rutherford (2007) wrote that research from the field of PBS shows that systematic practices have a positive impact on student behavior. They suggested that the same processes and components that are used to build school-wide interventions policy and procedures can be used to influence school district or system-wide practices. They also wrote that successful system-wide implementation of PBS must include a cohesive and comprehensive three to five year plan that involves a change in the philosophical mission, has clearly outlined goals, and allocates the resources needed to meet those goals. It is necessary, they added, to find creative ways to present and implement PBS in ways that have meaning to the system as a whole. They went on to describe a best practice implementation of PBS as one that provides means for district level and school level administrators to ensure consistency across the system.

For a system-wide implementation, as is the case for developing broad-scale systems for PBS, to be successful, consideration must be given to a number of factors including developing policy, sustainable funding sources, consistent and committed organizational
leadership, and sustainable implementation capacity (Sugai et al., 2007). Sugai et al. (2007) also explained that because initiatives consistently come and go or start and stop, it is important that school-wide implementation practices must be sustained by district and state level organizational leaders. They suggested that although many individual schools may have success with implementation, “the importance of building accurate and sustained implementation capacity at district and state levels has quickly emerged as a high priority” (p. 772).

**Encouraging Results**

The following discussion briefly summarizes several research studies that indicate that SWPBS can be effective in helping schools and school systems to improve the manner in which they deal with inappropriate student behavior. The reviewed research suggests that SWPBS has been successful in reducing the number of office referrals, reducing the occurrence of school suspensions, decreasing the loss of instructional time, and improving student behavior and school climate. The discussed studies are not meant to represent all research with regard to SWPBS, nor do I suggest that all SWPBS implementations are 100% effective. The discussion simply provides a variety of examples of SWPBS effectiveness.

In a 3-year analysis, Luiselli et al. (2005) described a whole-school positive behavior model that emphasized:

1. Improving instructional methodology,
2. Setting clear behavioral expectations,
3. Increasing student engagement in the classroom,
4. Reinforcing good/expected behaviors, and
5. Monitoring efficacy through evaluation.

They reported that office discipline referrals decreased each year of the study. They also noted that both reading and math scores had improved on standardized tests after implementing the whole-school program.

The Los Angeles Unified School District implemented a Positive Behavior Support system that resulted in a change in the way they dealt with student behavior and student discipline. Schachter (2010) described an example of one 800-student school in Los Angeles district that saw a drop in office referrals from 335 to 271 after implementing PBS. He also reported that the school saw an average increase of 55 points on average standardized test scores within two years of implementing PBS.

Although longitudinal studies with regard to the effectiveness of PBS exists, Curtis, Van Horne, Robertson, and Karvonen (2010) stated that no studies to date had examined the effect of school-wide positive behavior support (SWPBS) on the loss of instructional days due to behavioral infractions. In their four-year case study of a SWPBS implementation, however, they found that behavioral referrals decreased in every year that the study was conducted. Specifically, they found that there was a 40% decrease in the number of behavior referrals and a 67% decrease in the number of out-of-school suspension assignments. They concluded that:

Although implementing the program does require significant time and effort, the resulting improvements in behavior and suspensions evidenced by this particular school can be an important ingredient in allowing professional school counselors
the time needed to focus on building and maintaining thriving comprehensive counseling programs. (Curtis et al., 2010, p. 5)

This is consistent with Washburn et al. (2007), who suggested that school-wide positive behavior support is effective in reducing problematic behavior, improving the climate of a school and student perceptions of school safety.

In one state, the North Carolina Department of Public Education (2006) reported that a SWPBS implementation yielded positive results in one elementary school. The report documented the following data as a result of SWPBS implementation in the school:

1. A 60.2% reduction in the number of office referrals,
2. A 72.3% reduction in the number of students assigned to in-school suspension,
   and
3. An increase in the number of students achieving at or above grade level in both reading, +6.1, and math, +0.9, during the course of the implementation.

Additionally, the report went on to state that the implementation was successful in Asheboro City Schools. Approximately 4,700 students in seven of the eight schools in the district participated in the SWPBS implementation and, over the course of three years, occurrences of out-of-school suspension (OSS) decreased each year from 646 the first year to 329 at the end of the last year. Similar results were noted at Pender Middle School, where the number of occurrences of OSS dropped from 204 to 44, a 79% decrease, and there was a 44% decrease in the number of office referrals. The school also reported an 11% increase in reading achievement test scores.
In an analysis of 14 school profiles that had implemented SWPBIS, Eber et al. (2002) analyzed data and suggested that schools were successful in improving student behavior. Results from their analysis showed that the schools observed a decrease in office referrals, as well as a decrease in the occurrences of in-school suspension and out-of-school suspension. They also suggested that the interventions may prove successful for students with more intensive and chronic behavior problems as well. They did caution, however, that although their findings are encouraging, the data may not be representative of the whole school district as only 14 of the 187 schools in the district participated in the study.

Cregor (2008) described a school that used a positive behavior and intervention support (PBIS) model whose success came in part from recognizing and reinforcing good behaviors. Additionally, the school’s PBIS team collected and analyzed discipline data on a weekly basis in an effort to recognize trends in behaviors. The school was able reduce the number of in-school suspensions and after school detentions by 50% and cut out-of-school suspensions by 85%.

A three year implementation of SWPBS (Morrisey et al., 2010) compared baseline data from the first year of the implementation to data observed at the end of the third year. Although the lack of acceptable experimental control prohibited them from concluding causality, they did report that:

1. Office referrals decreased,
2. A significantly smaller number of students received multiple office referrals,
3. The number of students with zero office referrals grew from 46% to 63%,
4. The number of students with two to five office referrals dropped 10%, and
5. The number of students with 6 or more office referrals dropped from 21% to 13%. They wrote that “the reduction in office referrals….indicates that there was a good possibility that school-wide PBS was having a positive impact on student behavior” (Morrisey et al., 2010, p. 34).

Mass-Galloway, Panyan, Smith, and Wessendorf (2008) analyzed the implementation fidelity and assessed the initial outcomes of a state-wide PBS model in Iowa. The study reviewed results over a 3-year period and concluded that SWPBS adoption had resulted in fewer office referrals. They noted that results of PBS implementation in Iowa were similar to those in other states and suggested that SWPBS can be reliably adopted and can yield positive outcomes.

In a case study of the implementation of SWPBS in an alternative educational setting, Simonsen, Britton, and Young (2009) documented the impact of introducing a school-wide approach to primary-level interventions into a setting that had already implemented secondary and tertiary interventions. They noted that implementation of SWPBS had an almost immediate positive effect. Serious incidents of behavior decreased consistently after the implementation, and 83% of the students refrained from engaging in serious physical aggression. There appeared to be a positive effect on student behavior in general, and the number of students with zero office referrals increased by 13% within the second year of the implementation. Additionally, they found that the occurrences of the use of restraints decreased, as did the percentage of serious incidents.

The effectiveness of implementing school-wide positive behavior support was reviewed in a 3-year study of an urban, inner-city middle school in the Midwest. The data in
the study included office discipline referrals, suspensions, standardized test scores and
treatment fidelity. Not only did the number of office referrals decrease, but the loss of
instructional time due to the time consuming nature of the referral process was reduced. An
estimated 659 hours, or eighty-two eight hour days-almost a full semester of instruction-was
saved since implementing SWPBS (Lassen, Steele, & Sailor, 2006). The authors also noted
a significant reduction in the number of student suspensions each year of the study as well as
an increase in academic achievement in both reading and math on standardized tests during
the study. They concluded that SWPBS is effective in reducing student problem behaviors
and that those improvements can be sustained over a long period of time. Lassen et al.
(2006) also concluded that SWPBS has a significant positive impact on student learning
because students are referred to the office for disciplinary reasons less frequently and are able
to spend more time in the classroom.

Sherrod, Getch, and Ziomek-Daigle (2009) examined the effectiveness of a SWPBS
implementation at a Southeastern suburban elementary school that had been experiencing
increased discipline referrals. Post SWPBS implementation data revealed that there was a
significant reduction of office discipline referrals by 26%. Sherrod et al. (2009) concluded
that PBS “can help create a productive environment for learning in the school setting by
using prevention and intervention methods to decrease discipline referrals….and increased
academic performance” (p. 428).

The Waukegan School District, an urban district in Illinois consisting of a little more
than 15,000 students, used a team approach to implement a system-wide PBIS program. The
district is 87% minority students and 57% low-income and had been experiencing behavioral
problems that had resulted in high rates of detention, suspension, expulsions, and referrals to special education. A case study of the school district revealed that after one year of PBIS implementation there was a 22% reduction in referred infractions (Advocates for Children and Youth, 2006).

The effects of SWPBS implementation in two schools were examined by George, White and Schlaffer (2007). One school’s data indicated that the SWPBS resulted in “substantial reductions in antisocial behavior as indicated by the virtual elimination of physical restraint….and the closing of the only two seclusionary time-out rooms at the school” (p. 43). By the end of the first year of implementation, the second school in their study showed a significant decrease (close to 60%), in the number office referrals as well as a significant decrease (more than 90%) in after-school detentions.

**Recommendations**

The results of this study support and add to the literature discussed in Chapter 2. By examining the perceptions of assistant principals, this study provided insight into the rationale for and effectiveness of ISS. In this case, ISS was used as a punitive consequence for minor behavioral infractions. To that end, ISS was perceived as being a somewhat effective, albeit reactionary, tool with which to handle those behaviors. This study also revealed, however, that assistant principals do not perceive ISS to be effective in changing or improving student behavior as a whole. The findings prompt a number of questions worth, I believe, further investigation, and a number of recommendations. Questions and recommendations are discussed in the following areas: teacher preparation programs,
administrator preparation programs, educator professional development, and an investigation of ISS programs.

**Teacher Preparation Programs**

In an effort to better understand teachers’ ability to appropriately manage their classroom, it might be appropriate to examine the course work or study that is required by an institute of higher education (IHE) of its students with regard to behavior management. A number of questions could be asked, including but not limited to the following:

1. How many courses focus on the social and emotional development of students?
2. How much course work is dedicated to the understanding of adolescent psychology and development?
3. Do IHEs graduate their students with the skills necessary to meet the behavioral and academic needs of their students?
4. How do students learn to manage student behavior?
5. Are the student’s classroom management skills measured or assessed prior to entering the classroom?
6. How does the IHE ensure that the development of the student’s classroom management skills is grounded in research rather than belief, perception or prior experience?

The assistant principal participants in this study suggested that some teachers rely on ISS as a means of avoiding unpleasant student behaviors because they are able to have the student removed from the learning environment for minor behavioral infractions, rather than dealing with the issue or behavior themselves. Many times, in this case, the infractions could be as
minor as being tardy to class. The perceptions of the participants of this study suggest that although the teacher is able to continue with the class, the tardy student loses valuable instructional time, and there is little chance that the student will necessarily be any less tardy to class in the future as a result of being assigned to ISS. This is a simple but worthy example, as being tardy to class was mentioned by this study’s participants several times and was prominent infraction listed in the analyzed documents as well. It may be implied from this study that both the student and teacher would benefit if the teacher was better able to address the issue of being tardy and help the student learn the importance of good time management. This may also be true, at least in this case, with most of the behaviors that result in ISS assignments as they are typically associated with inappropriate behaviors in the classroom.

**Administrator Preparation Programs**

A number of questions worth examining might be similar to those discussed in the previous section, but I would suggest that administrators need to go even further in the development of their understanding of the behavioral needs of the students. Not only do they need to be cognizant of the most current and effective educational practice, but they must also be able to teach and direct colleagues and faculty with whom they work or supervise. Several questions might include the following:

1. How do IHEs ensure that students adequately understand how to effectively manage student behavior?

2. What do IHE students learn with regard to creating and maintaining positive learning environments?
3. What course work is done to facilitate the understanding and ability to create and maintain a positive school climate?

4. How do administrative students learn and apply research-based behavior management strategies?

5. What happens to ensure that new administrators are innovative problem solvers who look for new and alternative ways to deal with school issues?

There seemed to be a dichotomy in the perceptions of this study’s participants in that they deemed ISS necessary but also acknowledged that it did little to improve the behavior of students as a whole. I would suggest that too often, and this is my opinion, administrative decisions are made about student discipline based upon beliefs and experience rather than sound educational practice that is grounded in research. More, I believe, needs to be done to ensure that both new and practicing administrators are provided with the most current research with regard to adolescent behavior and strategies to improve that behavior.

**Educator Professional Development**

In his book *Results Now*, Schmoker (2006) discussed the value of professional development and asserts that most staff development is irrelevant, inadequate, unfocused, and a waste of time. He also wrote, “We have struck a strange bargain: if you sit through our workshops, we promise not to make any real claims on your time or practice” (p. 26). Schmoker goes on to say that “professional development is bad beyond hope…most of it typically makes no formal, immediate arrangements for teachers to translate learning into actual lessons or units” (p. 109). I believe this applies to most aspects of the educational environment. In terms of student behavior, I recommend that guidelines for professional
development should mandate that all educators are current in sound, research-based classroom management strategies. I would also suggest that there should be processes in place to ensure that professional development, with regard to student behavior, is not only mandated and implemented, but be regularly assessed as part of the teacher’s and school’s continuous improvement cycle.

**An Investigation of ISS Programs**

The literature discussed in Chapter 2 describes ISS as an alternative to OSS and a program that allows students to be punished for inappropriate behaviors while keeping the students on the school’s campus. Additionally, the benefits of keeping students in school are also discussed. Worthy of investigation, I believe, is an examination of how ISS programs are implemented, how they are staffed and how they are managed. It is reasonable to assume that the outcomes of one ISS program may differ from that of another depending upon who is involved in terms of faculty, and what happens while the student is in ISS. The results of this study indicated that ISS programs in this case were each staffed by teacher assistant, but there was no indication of the training or background of the staff involved. I do not believe it is reasonable to assume that the outcomes could be consistent given the differences that exist. This is one, relatively simple example of how ISS programs differ, but highlight the importance of understanding who is involved, and what takes place in ISS. We could expect entirely different outcomes if an ISS program, for example was staffed with a counselor instead of a teacher’s assistant. Some questions worth investigating might include:

1. Who is hired to supervise or teach the students while they are in ISS?
2. Do the students receive counseling as part of their assignment to ISS?
3. Are students segregated in any way once in ISS? Is there, for example, a different ISS room for girls and boys?

4. Do the students engage in any problem solving activities while in ISS?

5. Are the rules imposed in ISS strictly enforced?

We might also expect different outcomes if ISS included an opportunity for students to participate in collaborative problem solving, which is something Greene (2010 p. 28) describes as “radical departure from traditional school discipline practices. It can help school staff view challenging behavior through more compassionate, accurate, and productive lenses.” This may be especially helpful in dealing with students this study’s participants describe as frequent flyers, those students who do not seem to benefit from traditional behavior consequences, positive (PBIS) or negative (ISS). Though the answers, I believe, to improving student behavior cannot be found in ISS, a thorough, large-scale investigation of ISS programs may lead to changes in the way schools approach student discipline, and facilitate the development of more productive policies with regard to the manner in which educators meet the challenge of meetings student’s behavioral needs.

Although the participants in this study noted that ISS was a suitable punishment there is evidence, as described in Chapter 2, that punishment has little long term effectiveness in changing or improving student behavior. PBIS, on the other hand, provides effective strategies to help schools deal with ongoing student behavior issues, and its practical success is mounting throughout the country. Broad, research-based prevention/interventions combined with educational practices that support student learning and promote the
reinforcement of good or appropriate behavior have achieved encouraging results in many schools, school systems, and states.

Although challenges remain, it seems that when PBIS is implemented with fidelity the data, in most cases, indicate that student behavior improves, fewer students are referred for inappropriate behavior, fewer students are suspended, less instructional time is lost, and student achievement is increased. Student behavior issues may never be eliminated from the school setting, but it appears that PBIS can help educators, at all levels, provide more effective means by which to discipline students in their schools.

In addition to the findings of this study, and given the research as discussed in Chapter 2, that exists with regard to the ineffectiveness of punishment as a strategy to improve student behavior, less exclusionary strategies associated with PBIS programs could provide educators with the tools they need to deal with student’s behavior issues more constructively, positively, and educationally. Equally important, though, is that any positive behavior program, whether it is PBS, PBIS or SWPBS, must be implemented at a systemic level, and that all students, teachers, administrators, and the school as a whole operate under the program guidelines. Positive behavior programs may help create the type of environment that, as suggested by Marshall (2005), teaches students about self discipline and how to become more responsible for their behaviors rather than simply being punished. When teaching and learning, the very heart and soul of education, are fundamentally part of how student behaviors, good and bad, are managed, ISS and suspension in general may become a thing of the past. In reference to school, John Dewey (1938) wrote, “The main purpose or objective is to prepare the young for future responsibilities and for success in life” (p. 18). I
believe this to be as true today as it was when Dewey wrote it. I also believe that effective behavior management strategies that help teach students how to manage their own behaviors, true self discipline, may help to create schools that can accomplish just that.

**Concluding Thoughts and Implications for Further Research**

One of the limitations of this case study, as described earlier, was the relatively small number of participants. This limitation did not, I believe, reduce the value of the results, but rather highlighted the need to examine the perspective of high school assistant principals with regard to student behavior on a much larger scale. The results of this study, as reflected by the perceptions of this study’s participants, suggest that there is a philosophical disconnect between punishment and discipline in terms of how to appropriately improve student behavior. The participants in this study indicated that they have the discretion to use ISS as they deem appropriate, claim that it is effective, but acknowledge that in most cases it does little to improve or change student behavior. Similarly, researchers in a Texas study, which examined nearly 1 million discipline records, found that of the half a million students who had been suspended or expelled only 3 percent of the actions were required by state law. The rest were at the discretion of school officials (Shah, 2011).

The results of this current study suggest that a large scale survey of assistant principals, which examines their perceptions about effective behavior management strategies, including their philosophical beliefs with regard to punishment as a consequence, may provide the data needed to make changes in the way school systems develop student behavior management policies, and the manner in which IHEs prepare or educate school administrators. Scholars and practitioners alike agree, for the most part, that traditional
methods of preparing administrators fall short of providing the skills and understanding necessary to lead schools, and advance student achievement in a complex and diverse society (Lapointe & Davis, 2006). Lapointe and Davis also describe the empirical research supporting the effectiveness of administrative preparation programs as “minimal” (p. 18). Further research is, therefore, also needed with regard to the programs that prepare administrators to be instructional leaders who can meet the needs of all students. The correlation between lower achievement, increased dropout rates, and lower graduation rates was clearly described in Chapter 2. If educators can be all but certain that students who spend more time in ISS and OSS are less likely to progress academically, then the need for school leaders who are equipped with skills that improve, not simply punish inappropriate student behavior is also clear. In this case, the assistant principals perceived the punitive consequence of ISS as necessary, but also described it as relatively ineffective in improving or changing the behavior of most students. The perceptions of the assistant principal in this case were contrary to the literature discussed in Chapter 2 with regard to punishment as a consequence, but very similar to the literature with regard to ISS effectiveness. An examination of administrator preparation programs including an analysis of what is taught with regard to managing and improving student behaviors may provide insight into the apparent disconnect found in this case.

Although this study was aimed at examining the perspective of assistant principals, future research should include the perspectives of students. A comparative analysis, for example, of the perceived outcomes or value of ISS or any behavioral consequence may prove interesting. This may be especially true in comparing what different groups of people;
students vs. administrators for example, believe to be effective means of improving student behaviors. Understanding what students perceive as effective discipline strategies may be useful for school officials as they develop behavior plans.

A Final Takeaway: A Personal Narrative

I had hoped that the results of this study would not only provide insight into the perceptions of assistant principals with regard to their use of ISS, but also provide some ideas about how all educators might better affect behavioral outcomes of students in our schools. Since finishing the research and analyzing the data, it has occurred to me that what wasn’t said by this study’s participants might be of some significance as well, especially in terms of future research. Some of their responses were simply not what I had anticipated, which may have occurred for a number of reasons including perhaps the caliber of the researcher, the research design or the manner in which the questions were asked. Regardless, this has led me to think that more work needs to be done, more questions need to be asked, and more perspectives need to be considered.

The data gathered in this study suggests that the participants have likely confused the concepts punishment with those of discipline, and use the two interchangeably when they are two very different things. Peters (1966) wrote that there is no conceptual connection between punishment and the notion of “deterrence”, “prevention”, and “reform”. He also suggested that a teacher who refuses to resort to repressive forms of coercion may have problems with discipline. I believe this to be true about assistant principals as well, in that those who do not act swiftly and punitively may appear to be weak and lack the fortitude to punish students. They may, therefore, use what are expected forms of punishment, such as
the isolation of an ISS assignment, even though they know that it will be ineffective and in some cases counterproductive. Peters (1966) also suggests that these types of techniques not only do little good for the offenders, but most often serve to further alienate them further from genuine education.

In looking forward to further research I believe that questions employing more concise language may help develop a clearer understanding of what assistant principals believe to be the value of punishment in school and how it differs from discipline. This current study may have been improved if participants were asked to define and explain the difference between discipline and punishment. Additional questions with regard to the causation of ISS; what students do to earn an ISS assignment vs. what causes an administrator to assign ISS, for example, might provide additional insight.

Again, I do believe that this study’s results have value in that the participants indicated that ISS is an appropriate punishment, regardless of its outcomes, and is necessary in their schools. I am not sure how the participants can describe ISS as having little to no positive effect, even negative effects in some cases, but insist that is a necessary tool. This is a philosophical dilemma and something I believe worthy of further examination.
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APPENDICES
APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

North Carolina State University is a land-grant university and a constituent institution of the University of North Carolina

Office of Research and Innovation
Division of Research Administration
Campus Box 7514
Raleigh, North Carolina 27695-7514
919.515.2444 (phone)
919.515.7721 (fax)

From: IRB Administrator
North Carolina State University
Institutional Review Board

Date: February 23, 2011

Project Title: In-school suspension: Assistant principal perceptions of its rationale and effectiveness

IRB#: 1846-11-2

Dear Principal Researcher,

The project listed above has been reviewed by the NC State Institutional Review Board for the Use of Human Subjects in Research, and is approved for one year. This protocol will expire on February 16, 2012 and will need continuing review before that date.

NOTE:
1. You must use the attached consent forms which have the approval and expiration dates of your study.
2. This board complies with requirements found in Title 45 part 46 of The Code of Federal Regulations. For NCSU the Assurance Number is: FWA0000342.
3. Any changes to the protocol and supporting documents must be submitted and approved by the IRB prior to implementation.
4. If any unanticipated problems occur, they must be reported to the IRB office within 5 business days by completing and submitting the unanticipated problem form on the IRB website.
5. Your approval for this study lasts for one year from the review date. If your study extends beyond that time, including data analysis, you must obtain continuing review from the IRB.

Sincerely,

Deb Paxton
NC State IRB
APPENDIX B: REQUEST FOR SCHOOL SYSTEM PARTICIPATION

North Carolina State University
College of Education
Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis

From: Principal Researcher
To: Superintendent of Schools
    Principal of School
Re: Research Study Invitation
Date: Spring, 2011

Dear_________,

I am a doctoral candidate in the educational leadership and policy analysis department at North Carolina State University and am writing you at this time because I am interested in conducting dissertation research in your school system. Specifically, I would like to gather information, through interview, survey and focus group, from the high school assistant principals with regard to their perceived rationale for and effectiveness of in-school suspension. My study also involves the “shadowing” of one assistant principal as well as an interview with one teacher from each high school. Although the data collection represents multiple sources and location, at no point will there be any contact between the principal researcher, me, and students. I am solely concerned with the perceptions of assistant principals with regard to in-school suspension, and not the students with whom they interact.

I will contact you via telephone in order to determine your willingness to assist with my dissertation research.

Thank you,

Principal Researcher
Doctoral Candidate
ELPS
NCSU

Dissertation Committee Chair
Associate Professor
Education Leadership and Policy Studies
North Carolina State University
APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT

North Carolina State University
College of Education
Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis

This consent form is valid February 16, 2011 through February 16, 2012

From: Principal Researcher
To: Potential Research Study Participant
Re: Research Study Participant Informed Consent Form
Date: Spring, 2011

Dear Potential Research Study Participant,

The purpose of this correspondence is to serve as an informed consent form. I must provide you with various information about my proposed study because you are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary, and you have the right to choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty. This study is not a part of your job requirement, and should not be considered as such. The purpose of this research study is to gain insight and understanding with regard to the perceived rationale for and effectiveness of in-school suspension from the perspective of the assistant principal. You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from being in this study. Research studies also may pose risks to those that participate. In this consent form you will find specific details about the research in which you are being asked to participate. It is your right to ask the researcher for clarification or more information if you do not understand something in this form. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you.

- The purpose of this exploratory multi-site case study is to examine assistant principal perceptions with regards to the rationale for and effectiveness of the use of ISS in the four comprehensive high schools located in one school district in the South Eastern Region of the United States.

- Participation in this dissertation research is completely voluntary and unpaid. There is no penalty or consequence for refusing to participate in the study

- There is not likely to be any direct benefit to any of the research participants.

- One potential risk associated with participating in this study includes the possibility of direct identification within the focus group portion of the study. Focus group participants will be randomly selected, but will be interacting with five of their colleagues during the focus group.

- As the principal researcher, I will be collecting all of the data prior to the end of February, 2011.
This study will involve a confidential online survey, face-to-face interview, a focus group, a field observation, an interview with a randomly selected teacher, and an analysis of historical documents.

The assistant principal part of this study will involve the completion of a confidential online survey, followed by either a face-to-face interview or a focus group. One assistant principal will be randomly selected to participate in a field observation.

A teacher will also be randomly selected at each school site to be interviewed with regards to how they view assistant principal perceptions with regard to in-school suspension. The teachers will not be judging the effectiveness of in-school suspension and will not be asked to judge assistant principal effectiveness in any way.

Documents with regards to the occurrences of in-school and out-of-school, as well as the associated types of rule infractions will be analyzed. All identifiable names, codes, or anything else that may be used to determine participant names or location will be removed from the documents prior to analysis.

In order to assure confidentiality of study participants, to the fullest extent of the law, pseudonyms will be used for all potentially identifiable information sources gathered from interview transcripts and archival documents.

Participant confidentiality cannot be guaranteed due to the low participant numbers. Though every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality in that identities will be masked and pseudonyms will be used, participants may still be identifiable in publications.

Data stored electronically will be done so using encrypted files by the principal researcher. Hard-copy data sources will be kept in locked file storage and all files, both electronic and hard copy will be destroyed at the completion of the study.

If, at any point, you feel as though you have not been treated according to the description in this letter, or your rights have been violated during the course of this research study, you may contact Deb Paxton, Regulatory Compliance Administrator, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919/515-4514).

“I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.”

Subject's signature_____________________________ Date ________________

Investigator's signature_________________________ Date ________________
**APPENDIX D: CONTENT CODES**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<td>Alternatives to suspension general</td>
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<tr>
<td>AI</td>
<td>Alternatives to in-school suspension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AS</td>
<td>Alternatives to out-of-school suspension</td>
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<td>TI</td>
<td>Teaching or instruction</td>
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<td>Student learning</td>
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<td>Positive student attitude</td>
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<td>Negative student attitude</td>
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<td>Positive student behavior</td>
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<td>Improved student behavior</td>
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<td>Classroom management</td>
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