

Identifying the Impact of Alternative-to-Suspension Programs on Student

Achievement and Discipline in a Large Urban School District

by

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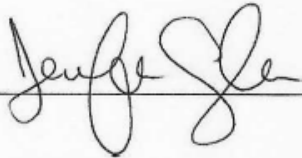
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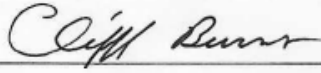
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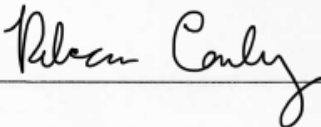
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## ABSTRACT

Out-of-school suspension is commonly used as a disciplinary action in high schools; however, alternative-to-suspension programs are increasingly used to improve student behavior without punitive damages. The literature review describes how the discipline has transformed multiple times in the United States and worldwide. It shows how discipline has shifted from corporal punishment to expulsions and suspensions, and now the newest transformation is the use of restorative justice. This study examined the impact of alternative-to-suspension programs used in three high schools and their effectiveness in improving students' academics and building a positive school climate. The partner schools in this study have incorporated multiple alternatives to suspension programs (e.g., Positive Behavior Support in School, Panorama, and an Afterschool Social and Emotional Learning program) to increase trust and respect between students and staff while anticipating a decrease in suspensions and an increase in student performance. This quantitative study used archived data. This study measured suspension, attendance, and graduation rates for the 2015–2016 school year to the 2018–2019 school year and assessed whether there were significant differences in the rates across three high schools in the Northeast. This study determined that there are some effects to the use of alternative-to-suspension programs. The study concluded that (a) one of the three high schools suspension rates were impacted after the implementation of the alternative-to-suspension program, (b) the graduation rate was positively impacted after the implementation of the programs, and (c) only one of the three schools attendance rates was impacted, negatively, after the implementation of the programs.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### Background

Out-of-school suspension is the most common means of punishment used in public high schools in the United States (Arci, 2006). In the article, *Achievement and Enrollment Status of Suspended Students Outcomes in a Large, Multicultural School District*, Arci (2006) described the overuse of suspension as a disciplinary measure and its impact on student academic achievement and performance. However, the overuse of suspension raises a major question: How does suspension affect the student? To answer this question, one has to look at the case. A student must commit a violation against the school's/board of education's code of conduct to get suspended; but an even more important question an educator must ask is whether suspension prevents, and teaches the student not to recommit, acts that violate the code of conduct.

Unfortunately, the research shows that suspended students typically continue to violate the code of conduct and thus continue a cycle of being suspended from school, which impacts students' learning. It is, therefore, unsuccessful in decreasing the misbehavior that caused the suspension (Arci 2006; Pyne 2019). Also, contrary to popular belief, suspension is often seen as a reward for some students (Allen-Glass, 2013). Specifically, academically struggling students may perceive suspension as a way out of having to complete assignments. As a result, most students miss instructional time while being suspended and fall behind in their class assignments. Suspended students must make up all their missed assignments during their personal time, and if they fail to complete them, they are at risk of failing.

Suspending students for their behavior is not a solution to the problem. Instead, it has a negative outcome on students' educational experience. Suspension interferes with students' academic progress because they are removed from the classroom. Ultimately, suspended students

are often found behind the rest of their classmates academically (Arci 2006; Pyne 2019). Due to the missed instructional time, suspension does not appear to be the answer for reinforcing positive behavior.

In a study about suspended students and their attitudes/ behaviors towards school, Pyne (2019) concluded that suspended students have a stronger decline in their academics and attitudes towards the school and its community. Suspension primarily requires the student to be placed outside of school, which causes students to miss classroom instruction and subsequently causes students to fall behind academically. As a result, suspended students are less likely to graduate on time and are more likely to drop out of school. According to Belfanz et al. (2012), being suspended one time in the 9th grade increases student dropouts. During the 2000–2001 school year, suspension increased students' dropout rate from 16% to 32% (Belfanz et al., 2012). Suspension also increased the achievement gap (Pyne, 2019). Although suspensions and expulsions have been deemed ineffective, they are still being used as a primary form of discipline, causing the suspended students' achievement to be negatively affected (Arcia, 2006).

Currently, when we examine the State of New Jersey's fourth Edition (2011) of the *Students' Rights Handbook*, schools should have rules for student conduct to see what sets the premise for removal versus suspension. We find that these rules would apply to students on campus and at school-sponsored events. Schools have the right to create codes of conduct and must share them with their students and parents. Students may be suspended for specific reasons. *Kid Law ACNJ's Legal Resource Center for Children* (2014, p. 2) outlined NJ students' discipline rules as a fact sheet.

The following are actions outlined in the article that would lead to a students' immediate removal from school:

- Assault on a teacher or other school personnel.
- Assault with a weapon or a firearms offense, even if this occurs outside of school grounds.
- Possession or suspicion of being under the influence of illegal/controlled substances or alcohol.

Conducts that would justify a long-term suspension or expulsion:

- continued and willful disobedience or defiance,
- destruction of school property,
- taking of property or money from another student by force,
- joining or encouraging other students to occupy school property unlawfully,
- having or using alcohol or illegal substances on school property,
- open defiance of teachers and other staff, and
- conduct that is dangerous to other students.

In the Extensive Code of Conduct review (2014), Lemaire emphasized teacher input in the code of conduct. Since the code of conduct also affects teachers, they should be an integral part of developing this code (Lemaire, 2014). The teacher's input should provide specific behavioral requirements, expectations, and consequences for everyone. Lemaire (2014) noted that teachers favor a code of conduct that fosters cooperation and partnerships within the school. How teachers perceive student achievement is the strongest predictor of academic success and should be used for behavioral adjustment (Westbrook, 2014). Collaboration is needed amongst all members to empower one another while creating and enforcing school expectations. Teachers'

and students' inputs are necessary for developing curriculum decisions to be implemented in the classroom, allowing and empowering student choice and voice.

In considering student inputs, choice, and voice, it is essential to acknowledge that students seek and need a sense of belonging to their school community. Students' sense of belonging builds a connection between the student and the teacher, builds students' self-confidence, and creates a sense of security, ultimately lowering office conduct referrals. When students feel a sense of belonging, they are more willing to participate and contribute to school activities (Dukynaitė, 2017). In addition, students look for a caring adult in school to strengthen and promote positive behavior and safety in school. According to Gage et al.'s (2016) study, schools should create a learning environment where the students feel safe and involve parents.

School leaders play an essential role in creating a school climate where students feel a sense of belonging. Unless physical safety is at risk, Gerzon (2006) advised that effective leadership involves taking stock before taking sides, stepping back, and attempting to see the big picture. Gerzon offers a way for school leaders to improve their school climate and culture through systems thinking. Systems thinking requires identifying all (or as close to all) the significant elements (Presence, Inquiry, Conscious conversations, and Dialogues) that relate to the conflict and understanding the relationship between those elements. Presence means that the school leader applies their own mental, emotional, and spiritual resources to assess and transform the conflict. Inquiry reflects the leader's method of asking questions to elicit all the essential information vital to understanding the conflict and transforming it.

Conscious conversation strives for flexibility in communication, is aware of speaking and listening options, and knows when to effectively use each opportunity to improve productivity and prevent additional conflicts. Finally, dialogue maximizes the ability to bridge thoughts and

ideas and encourages innovation through inquiry-based, trust-building methods of communication. “Leaders who want to deal effectively with these challenging, often tense situations need to be more than good managers. They need to be mediators” (Gerzon, 2006, p. 28). Using systems thinking allows the leader to transform conflicts into opportunities for growth to strengthen education while building bridges.

One such opportunity or one that is in line with a system thinking approach is focusing on building students’ relationships. Sense of belonging is a crucial factor in reduced suspension outcomes and constructing positive goals for students through alternative-to-suspension programs. Alternative-to-suspension programs allow students to be treated holistically, analyze the situation, and/or investigate the cause or reason for the misbehavior. Alternative-to-suspension programs became a culture shift in schools, moving from a punitive model to considering how to help the student change the negative behavior rather than quickly assigning a punishment. According to March (2017), alternative-to-suspension programs began in the 1970s as a mediation or reconciliation method between victims and offenders in the criminal justice system. Alternative-to-suspension programs were first implemented in Australia's Education system in the 1990s as Restorative Justice practices, and it has since spread to many countries, including the United States (Marsh, 2017). alternative-to-suspension programs are difficult to define; they focus on repairing harm, including the student's voice, applying a whole school approach, and incorporating practices and strategies to build students’ social and emotional skills (Guckenburg et al., 2015). The basic practices of Restorative Justice are building relationships, promoting respect, creating opportunities for equal dialogue and decision making, addressing harms, needs, and obligations, and encouraging students to take responsibility for their actions.

Teachers can help change student behavior by assisting students to abide by the classroom rules, respect one another, care for, accept, and treat each other fairly in class. The Teacher-Student Relationship is a crucial factor in lowering student discipline referrals. The higher the teacher's level of control in class, the larger the reduction in disruptive behavior. Students often seek to be heard and want guidance from adults they trust in the school. Alternative-to-suspension programs can assist students in building positive relationships with adults in the school and help students engage in future decisions and/or behaviors that are positive, decreasing the likelihood of future suspensions. Increased teacher support significantly predicted decreases in problem behaviors (Quinn, 2017). Students are less likely to cause disruption when they care for the adult in the room. In addition, students look for a sense of belonging, and when that is obtained, they will do everything to protect it. On the other hand, teachers should use the student-teacher relationship to get to know their students, aid them in the learning process, and help them to build a connection with the school environment by encouraging them to join extracurricular activities. How teachers perceive student achievement is the strongest predictor of academic success and should be used for behavioral adjustment (Westbrook, 2014).

### **Problem Statement**

Nationally, there is an increased focus from the US Department of Education and the US Department of Justice (2014) on encouraging schools to provide alternatives to suspensions and expulsions to improve student behavior in schools. In the school district under study, there has been an increase in out-of-school suspensions amongst their high schools. Therefore, the district has implemented alternatives to suspension programs meant to improve the schools' environment. The district has devoted time and allocated finances to training and educating its

leaders in multiple alternatives to suspension programs to reduce student suspension rates, increase graduation rates, and improve academic performance. The participating school district's goal is to implement alternative-to-suspension programs and improve school climate and culture, rather than using punishment as the main course of action. However, the implementation and delivery of the alternative-to-suspension program makes a difference in its overall impact.

This study examined the impact of alternative-to-suspension programs in these schools and their effectiveness in improving students' academics. The participating school district used in this study began training high school personnel in the Positive Behavior Support in School (PBSIS) framework during the 2015–2016 academic school year. In 2016–2017, the district trained its staff on the implementation of Panorama, focusing on the social-emotional needs of the students and the use of afterschool alternatives to suspension programs. These programs are briefly described below.

According to Sharkey and Fenning (2012), a school-wide behavioral support system has contributed to positive discipline results across the nation. PBSIS is used in schools to help lower the number of problem behaviors and enhance the school climate and culture. PBSIS is a three-tier intervention system that includes the following behavioral strategies, (a) primary prevention, universal strategies applied to all students across all settings, (b) secondary prevention, targeted strategies applied to groups of students at risk for developing chronic behavior problems, and (c) tertiary prevention, assessment-based and comprehensive supports used to address the individual needs of students with pervasive behavioral challenges (Goh, 2012). Schools in the partner district and nationwide use PBSIS to collect and analyze data by age group. With those data, they can determine and understand the causes of behavioral infractions, pinpoint the location of infractions, and determine if prevention plans are in place are helping to reduce the number of

infractions and suspensions. PBSIS reinforces positive behavior so that it is seen as a normal occurrence, thus reducing negative behaviors.

In this study, the participating school district had also begun training some of its schools on the Panorama Social Emotional Learning Survey. Panorama is an outside agent that uses student voice through survey analysis. Panorama encourages the usage of data analysis to improve school climate and culture, teaching and learning, family and community engagement, and students' social-emotional learning (Hess, 2020). According to Panorama's vendor website, Panorama also suggests strategies for teachers and the school community to connect with the student body. Panorama also enables administrative teams to evaluate and investigate the problems within their building while providing hands-on coaching and support. Finally, panorama facilitates the process of monitoring data on the individual student, school, district levels.

The district-designed Afterschool Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) alternative-to-suspension program is intended to lower suspension rates by allowing each school to develop and implement a curriculum that serves its school and student needs. As the program's name suggests, the Social and Emotional Learning Afterschool alternative-to-suspension program is used instead of suspending students for minor infractions. Schools meet with students after school to discuss infractions in group meetings, and they discuss alternatives to disciplinary action. The program uses social-emotional techniques focusing the students' attention on their academic and social progress.

Seliskar (2019) shared an alternative school program that found different practices can improve student behavior and mindset and improve the interaction between students and faculty. Seliskar's (2019) study focused on transforming the student with the label of a "bad kid" to one



with improved their behavior. Students perceived alternative practices as a second chance, and teachers perceived alternative practices as a tool that assists them in improving classroom management and building a better community that meets students' academic needs (Seliskar, 2019). These renewed perceptions lead to increased trust, respect, and care between the faculty and students. Dinham (2005) noted that “[i]n schools of lower socio-economic background, [effective school leaders] placed a high priority on the ‘personal’ and ‘social’ aspects of education to create an environment where students could experience academic success” (Dinham, 2005). Such focused and supportive programs help bring members and parts of the school together and foster better understanding, commitment, improved efficiencies, and outcomes.

This study focused on understanding how specific alternative-to-suspension programs are being implemented in three urban high schools across a school district in the Northeast. This study also assesses the effects of these alternative-to-suspension programs on students' academic progress and discipline to the school. The partner schools in this study have incorporated multiple alternatives to suspension programs to increase trust and respect between students and staff while anticipating a decrease in suspensions and an increase in student performance. The district believes that improving the school's environment and increasing student and staff ownership in decision-making will significantly improve academic success.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Out-of-school suspensions are overused to the point that they negatively affect students' academic achievement (Arcia, 2006). The purpose of this study was to analyze the implementation of the alternative-to-suspension programs and how they have influenced the number of suspensions, student academic performance in terms of graduating on time, and

attendance. The study helped determine the effectiveness of PBSIS, Panorama, and afterschool SEL alternative-to-suspension programs by measuring the suspension, attendance, and graduation rates for the past 4 years and assessing whether there are significant differences in the rates. In addition, the study evaluated alternative-to-suspension programs used in the three urban high schools and their effects on student achievement and behavior.

### **Research Question**

The research questions addressed suspension's effects on students' academic performance and sense of belonging to the school. There is one research question with three sub-questions. The decision to create three hypotheses came from the need to understand the underlying problem for each high school building. The goal is to examine the relationship between suspension, student academics, and attendance to the alternative-to-suspension programs. The hypotheses examine the effectiveness of the alternative-to-suspension programs already in place by the district. The study takes a deeper look at the school climate and culture by analyzing the number of suspensions occurring in a 4-year timeframe, students graduating on time, and attendance performance. The researcher chose to examine students' sense of belonging by measuring on-time graduation rates and attendance rates before and while using the alternative-to-suspension programs. These data were collected from PowerSchool, a program the district uses.

The research also examined the effects of these alternative measures on suspension programs and how they have affected school suspension rates, academic achievement, and graduation rates for three different schools. In this study, the three schools are identified as School A, School B, and School C. Quantitative data were collected to analyze the below research questions.

The primary research question is What is the impact of the alternative-to-suspension programs (e.g., PBSIS, Panorama, and SEL) being implemented in three northeast urban high schools in terms of student academics, discipline, and attendance?

The following are sub-questions that help in answering the overarching research question, using groups A-C as identifiers for the three different schools used in the study:

- a) Is there a significant difference in student suspension rate before implementing the alternative-to-suspension program versus after the program's implementation from 2015–2016 to 2018–2019?
  - $H_{10}$ : There is no difference in student suspensions between the 2015–2016 groups A-C, the schools before the implementation of alternative-to-suspension programs, and the 2018–2019 groups A-C, the schools after the implementation of alternative-to-suspension programs.
  - $H_{1a}$ : There is a difference in student suspensions between the 2015–2016 groups A-C, the schools before the implementation of alternative-to-suspension programs, and the 2018–2019 groups A-C, the schools after the implementation of alternative-to-suspension programs.
  
- b) Is there a significant difference in students graduating on time before implementing the alternative-to-suspension program versus after the program's implementation from 2015–2016 to 2018–2019?
  - $H_{20}$ : There is no difference in student on-time graduation between the 2015–2016 groups A-C, the schools before the implementation of alternative-to-suspension programs, and the 2018–2019 groups A-C, the schools after the implementation of alternative-to-suspension programs.
  - $H_{2a}$ : There is a difference in student on-time graduation between the 2015–2016 groups A-C, the schools before the implementation of alternative-to-suspension programs, and the 2018–2019 groups A-C, the schools after the implementation of alternative-to-suspension programs.

c) Is there a significant difference in student attendance before implementing the alternative-to-suspension program versus after the program's implementation from 2015–2016 to 2018–2019?

- $H_{30}$ : There is no difference in student attendance performance between the 2015–2016 groups A-C, the schools before the implementation of alternative-to-suspension programs, and the 2019 groups A-C, the schools after the implementation of alternative-to-suspension programs.
- $H_{3a}$ : There is a difference in student attendance performance between the 2015–2016 groups A-C, the schools before the implementation of alternative-to-suspension programs, and the 2018–2019 groups A-C, the schools after the implementation of alternative-to-suspension programs.

### **Conceptual Framework**

As we try to examine the appropriate path to applying the proper discipline, I refer to Adler's theory, which concludes that children should be respected and treated equally regardless of race and age. Adler's theory recommends that schools implement positive discipline. Adler's research finds that discipline is not inherited but, rather, is a taught concept (Adler, 1991).

Positive Discipline Parenting and Classroom Management Model was incorporated as a classroom management model in some schools. The program's purpose was to highlight that a well-managed classroom could improve students' and teachers' performance and relationships, contributing to less misbehavior. Adler's theory stressed working within the classroom to build relationships, which ultimately lowers student misbehavior.

The main goal of this research was to reduce the number of students being sent to the office, reduce the number of suspensions, and improve the school environment for all

stakeholders while building a sense of belonging for students. Five concepts must be examined to incorporate Adler's theory successfully and obtain effective discipline: belonging and significance, kindness and firmness, perceptions, respect, and capability). The feeling of belonging encourages students to connect to their school setting and environment. It is essential to have mutual respect. Adults can model firmness by responding to the situation accordingly and kindness by responding to the student's needs. Perception is vital to considering what the student is thinking, feeling, and learning. Discipline through respect teaches the student to problem solve, cooperate, and build effective communication skills that the student can use at home, in school, and in the larger community. As I embark on determining the proper way to discipline or reward a student, it becomes inevitable that building long-term self-esteem and empowerment is essential when inviting students to discover their own capabilities. When analyzing Adler's theory closely, it is the key component of alternative-to-suspension programs. Alternative-to-suspension programs incorporate non-punitive alternative discipline instruments.

### **Limitations**

There are a few limitations to this research. The initial limitation regarded analyzing the fidelity of the implementation of each PBSIS and Panorama program across schools and the impact the programs have had on the school used in this study. The key questions involve whether the programs are beneficial, harmful, or do not affect student behavior. Another major limitation is studying the effects of the afterschool SEL program. This program was to be designed by each high school to lower the suspension rate. The third limitation of this study was its sample size. This study focuses on high school students actively enrolled in one of the largest urban districts in the state rather than looking at multiple school districts or statewide data. The fourth limitation in this study would be that one cannot attribute a positive reduction in

suspension, positive increase in graduation rates, or a positive increase in students' sense of belonging to one particular program.

### **Significance of the Study**

There are several types of school discipline. However, out-of-school suspensions are considered the most severe of them all (Blomberg, 2004). Out-of-school suspension is a controversial exclusionary discipline practice aimed at stopping unwanted behavior. According to Blomberg (2004) and Tolerance (2000), out-of-school suspensions are ineffective due to their failure to eliminate inappropriate behaviors while increasing the negative side effects of exclusion. In addition, researchers have reported that out-of-school suspensions have led to a decrease in academic achievement due to students' mandated absences from school.

The goal of this study was to investigate the effects of alternative-to-suspension programs on students' suspension, academic progress, and attendance. Alternative to suspension programs is in place to reduce out-of-school suspensions. Three out of seven high schools were selected for participants in this study. Historical suspension, graduation, and attendance data were analyzed for each of the three high schools. Furthermore, the findings from this research study can impact future disciplinary measures and yield a better understating of student behaviors and long-lasting impact. Alternative to suspension programs can improve student involvement, attendance, and graduation rates. The research intended to improve discipline policies.

### **Summary**

Suspension has a major impact on students and the school environment. This study was conducted in an urban high school district and examined the effect of an alternative-to-suspension program and its rates in three different buildings across one specific school district. This study used a quantitative method approach to explore the impact of suspension on

students' academics and behavior towards school. In addition, this study examined current alternative-to-suspension programs implemented in one specific urban district and whether it is related to reduced suspension rates. It also examines the impact it has on the school environment and the stability of the implementation of each program.

Through alternative-to-suspension programs, the school community would work as a team to repair what is broken and rebuild relationships amongst students and between teachers and students, increasing student involvement in school. This research looks at the effects of using alternative-to-suspension programs in lowering suspension rates and rebuilding students' sense of belonging to the school community. It is crucial to find alternative-to-suspension programs instead of suspending students for behavioral infractions against the code of conduct. Schools must positively address student behavior to create and improve the school climate.

### **Definition of Terms**

**Adolescence:** The transformation from child to adult. Suspension can redirect students' adolescence paths towards changes in character and delinquency (Pyne, 2019).

**At-Risk Students:** Students who will likely be retained due to their academic performance (Anderson et al., 2019).

**Educational Policy:** A purposeful and multidirectional change process aimed at putting a specific policy into practice and which affects an education system on several levels (Viennet & Pont, 2017). To create a good policy, policymakers must better understand education and disciplinary responses (Anderson et al., 2019).

**Meta-Analysis:** The statistical analysis of an extensive collection of data results from individual studies examined to integrate the findings (Glass, 1976). A quantitative method of combining results from independent studies and synthesizing conclusions.

**Panorama:** Using surveys to see how data plays a powerful role in improving school climate and culture, teaching and learning, family and community engagement, and students' social-emotional learning.

**Positive Behavior Supports (PBS):** An alternative to traditional disciplinary practices. Based on applied behavior analysis, person-centered planning, and inclusion, PBS employs educational and systems change methods to minimize problem behavior and improve an individual's overall quality of life (Goh & Bambara, 2012).

**Restorative Practices:** A tool used to build a school community while managing students' misbehavior, repairing harm, and restoring relationships (Ligon, 2019).

**School Discipline:** Receiving a consequence for misbehavior such as out-of-school suspension, parent contact, detention, etc. (Pyne, 2019).

**Social and Emotional Learning (SEL):** The process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.

**Social Psychology:** The study of how people think, feel, act, and behave is influenced by social groups (Pyne, 2019).

**Student Achievement:** Student performing well academically, as related to GPA and/or grades (Arcia, 2006).

**Student Behavior/Attitude:** Response or action taken by the student based on a situation in place (Anderson et al., 2019).

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**



## **Introduction**

Between 1974 to 2012, the number of out-of-school suspensions increased nationally from 1.7 to 3.25 million. It is important to narrow the racial disparities in the treatment of students by their teachers and administrators. To do so, schools must work on their school climates by implementing alternative-to-suspension programs and improving school-wide positive behavioral intervention and support programs (Nance, 2016). The focus of this research is to study the impact of alternatives to suspension on the number of suspensions issued, students' academic performance, and the climate and culture of the school. To effectively research suspension, we must first understand the history of discipline in education. Discipline in the United States has evolved and taken many forms. This chapter discussed the evolution of discipline in the United States from the impact of zero-tolerance on students to corporal punishment, expulsions, and suspensions and their long-term effects, the movement for Restorative Justice, building back student connections to the schools, and social-emotional learning.

### **History of Discipline in the US**

First, we take a look at the history of discipline in the United States. It is important to understand the history of discipline and how educators decided to use suspension as an effective tool to remedy student misbehavior. In this section, the history of discipline is reviewed, beginning with the use of corporal punishment. Murry (2018), the author of *History of Discipline in Education*, described the discipline changes in education and their impact on students. Corporal punishment was the only form of discipline used in the 19th century. Teachers hit students using rulers, lashes, and sticks to refocus students academically and reduce behavioral concerns in class. As of today, nineteen states still use corporal punishment as their primary

source of discipline. States where corporal punishment is being used include Alabama, Arkansas, Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Missouri, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Wyoming (Geershoff et al., 2016). Teachers and school officials have a wide range of choices in using corporal punishment (Anderson, 2015).

Lately, there have been calls to eliminate corporal punishment. In 2020, congressman A. Donald McEachin and congresswoman Suzanne Bonamici unveiled legislation to eliminate corporal punishment in all schools across the United States, calling for the Protecting Our Students in Schools Act of 2020. This legislation would prohibit any school receiving federal funding from enforcing corporal punishment as a disciplinary tool. This legislation would assist schools in improving school climate and culture by using various interventions (Bonamici, 2020). Unfortunately, the legislation was not approved, and states were left to determine the appropriate disciplinary measure for their students.

Although schools could not suspend students without a hearing, as ruled by the US Supreme Court in 1975, corporal punishment in schools was ruled Constitutional. According to Weymouth (1967), theorists like Phillipp Emanuel von Fellenberg (in the mid-1800s) believed that students learn best when interacting with and involved in the learning process. Fellenberg suggested that learning occurs best with encouragement, kindness, and individualized education plans, not corporal punishment.

Massachusetts Secretary of State Horace Mann stressed that states should be obliged to offer public education to all children across the nation (Groen, 2008). Mann believed that universal public education was significant to turn “disobedient” children into disciplined citizens. Mann is widely credited for creating public schools. Many states implemented a version of the

public schools created by Mann in Massachusetts (Greon, 2008). Schools were reshaped once principals were hired. As a result, teachers could focus more on their curricula and teaching practices (Murry, 2018). Timeout was an additional disciplinary strategy used during the 1970s and 1980s. Teachers would isolate students by requiring them to sit facing the wall. This isolation practice was believed to prevent aggressive behavior among students and encourage students to reflect on their actions so that the primary focus could be redirected to instruction led by the classroom teacher.

Timeout was not a favored disciplinary tool by many educators, as it resulted in the loss of instruction and often caused embarrassment for the student being disciplined in timeout. Some educators argue that for timeouts to be effective, they should include an emotional feeling of students missing out on something they would typically enjoy. Students who misbehave are less engaged during instruction. As a result, timeouts are not deemed punishment to students who misbehave; instead, they are seen as rewards that provide a break from classroom instruction. It is believed that if the teacher enforces consequences more calmly, the process of reflection and responsibility will be easier for the student (Linsin, 2015).

According to Murry (2018), a better approach for students relies on Maslow's (1943, 1954) "hierarchy of needs," which suggests that people can be motivated to achieve certain aims without punishment. The main idea is to allow teachers to create a safe environment for their students to succeed, lowering student behavioral issues. In addition to meeting the needs of students, teachers are encouraged to develop lessons that foster a high level of student engagement and provide effective classroom management to reduce misbehavior. Maslow developed a five-tier pyramid model focusing on the students' needs: (Physiological, Safety, Belongingness, Self-esteem and Self-actualization). Maslow's theory focuses on the importance

of motivating students to achieve behavioral and academic goals. Creating a safe environment and using classroom management strategies decreases the chance of students' misbehavior occurring.

Another punitive method was the zero-tolerance policies developed and implemented during the late 1980s and early 1990s due to the War on Drugs initiative with the Gun-Free School Act of 1994. Congress sanctioned public school funding to implement zero-tolerance policies (Stahl, 2016). The government passed the Gun-Free Schools act in 1994. These policies allowed schools to use harsher punishments to reduce crimes and school violence, especially if the student violated a drug or weapons rule (Cerrone, 1999). A zero-tolerance policy punishes students by receiving out-of-school suspensions or expelling them from their base school to an Alternative Education Program. The zero-tolerance policy is still being used in schools today (Katz, 2016). Zero-tolerance is implemented when a student brings a weapon, alcohol, and/or drugs to school or engages in acts of violence such as fights or threatening students or teachers. Under the zero-tolerance policy, a student who violated school rules faced mandatory penalties adopted from the "broken windows" theory of policing. In addition, schools increasingly deployed police officers to monitor halls (Katz, 2016). The goal behind student discipline and the changes that occurred throughout the years is to ensure that schools are safe for students and teachers. The purpose of implementing the zero-tolerance policy is to make sure schools are places where students can achieve the education they are seeking. The goal of the policy was to reduce and eliminate violence in schools.

Murry (2018) also discussed the other discipline procedures that are being used in schools today. Several schools use a referral system, where teachers are expected to have used warnings and contacted parents before writing a disciplinary referral, requiring the student to

leave the class. Not every form of discipline has been effective for every student. Over time, teachers should personalize discipline for each student and understand which form works best for them (Murry, 2018).

In *Two Centuries of School Discipline*, Katz (2016) stressed the importance of clarifying and identifying teachers' roles as instructional leaders. He argued that the teacher's focus should be to teach students content rather than providing consequences for misbehavior. The authority of teachers to discipline students came from a legal term in English common law, "in loco parentis," which translates to "in the place of a parent," which gave the teachers more responsibility to discipline students (Katz, 2016). However, that changed when high school enrollment increased by 711% between 1890 and 1918. By 1916, every state required students to complete elementary school (Allen, 2012). In addition, school enrollment increased after the arrival of large numbers of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe in the 1980s, leading to more principals being hired, which shifted disciplinary issues to the school principal. Teachers were now required to set rules and expectations, whereas principals were required to discipline students when rules were broken. Many teachers, who did not want to focus on behavior problems, preferred this new shift of disciplinary responsibility (Katz, 2016).

### **Impact of Zero-Tolerance**

The first punitive method we examine further is the zero-tolerance policy described in the previous section. Many studies conclude that the implementation of zero-tolerance weakens relationships between students and the school community. According to Owens and McLanahan (2020), many schools with economically disadvantaged students adopted zero-tolerance policies, which caused more minorities to be suspended and disciplined more harshly than others. Specifically, they found that Black students are more likely to be suspended than

white students even when attending school and displaying the same disruptive behavior. Owens and McLanahan's study used teacher and parent reports of student behaviors when analyzing their data. Their study looked at the length of suspension assigned to black/white students involved in physical altercations and the number of discipline referrals sent to an administrator. The study determined students were treated differently based on their racial background. Black students are being mistreated at a very early age. As a result, the authors highlighted the importance of providing early differential treatment/support for black students (Owens & McLanahan, 2020). It is essential to build student rapport and self-awareness and treat all students in the same manner, which prevents all students, especially students of color, from receiving unjust treatment and creating a more equitable environment. Schools must improve the educational climate by creating school-wide positive behavioral interventions and support programs (Nance, 2016).

According to Pigott et al. (2018), school resource officers (SRO) are uniformed police officers enforcing the zero-tolerance policy in school. Schools are treating students just as officers would treat prisoners with the harsh treatments from SROs that students have had to face. African Americans and other minorities are suspended from schools at a higher rate than white students since the zero-tolerance policy has been in place. The zero-tolerance policy has pushed many students out of school due to the frequent use of suspension and expulsion, which eventually has led students to drop out. Pigott et al.'s (2018) study examined the hypothesis that SRO in school increases the number of expulsions and the number of incidents reported to the police. The study finds that there is an increase in student removal without providing services for schools with SRO. However, the presence of SRO does not create a problem for high school students or increase their likelihood of official criminal justice processing.

## Corporal Punishment

Next, we look at Corporal punishment. It was the only tool used to discipline students in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which would make it one of the most dated methods for discipline. Corporal punishment was primarily used as a tool to refocus the student's attention in the classroom. Many years later, the zero-tolerance law was implemented to help strengthen the education systems' expectations and build a safer environment for all students and staff. As time went by, schools began to evolve. They started to define the expectations for creating a positive learning environment that builds students' character while using suspension to reinforce school safety. Suspension is used when an assault has taken place, a weapon or alcohol has been brought to school, continued defiance, property damage, and/or theft has taken place, *Kid Law ACNJ's Legal Resource Center for Children* (2011).

Lambert (2018) explained the meaning of the word "corporal punishment" in his article *A Brief History of Corporal Punishment*. The "term corporal" was derived from a Latin word meaning body, meaning physical bodily mistreatment. Lambert discusses the use of corporal punishment since ancient times by providing examples of how Jesus was beaten and whipped before being crucified. Whipping was common in England during the 18th century and was also used in the army and navy (Lambert, 2018). In Britain, corporal punishment was eliminated in 1881; birching for minor infractions was prohibited in 1948. However, corporal punishment was used for thousands of years in schools, and it is still used when students misbehave. Corporal

punishment encourages physical aggression in our society. The usage of corporal punishment in schools sends the message to students that violence is acceptable, which makes it more likely for students to use violence in their own lives or towards family members in the future (Greydanus et al., 2003).

Corporal punishment does not just harm the student physically, but it also impacts the student academically and psychologically (Naz et al., 2011). Corporal punishment significantly affects students' learning capacity while limiting their creativity and affecting high school dropout rates. In addition, harassing and beating students to mold their behavior has long-term effects on the psychological wellbeing of the student. "Corporal punishment may be regarded as a blizzard in the course of mental alienation and a lethal for pro-active thought process" (Naz et al., 2011). Corporal punishment creates a sense of hatred among the student and engraves an antisocial personality, leaving the child with rival thoughts towards society. Antisocial attitudes are likely to impact students' adjustment towards society, where they are more likely to mimic behaviors observed passively.

Dubanoski et al. (1983) outlined the differences between the myths and facts of corporal punishment. Dubanoski described how corporal punishment is still used in many countries and how it negatively impacts students. Dubanoski provided alternatives to corporal punishment that would build students' character and maximize their effectiveness as learners. Corporal punishment insults and humiliates the student, and it hurts their character. The student is forced to pay attention, fearing the consequences of misbehaving rather than understanding why such actions should not occur. The authors suggested two alternative approaches to corporal punishment: the social learning approach and communication. These methods of discipline



improve classroom behavior and enhance students' communication skills. The classroom should be positive and not abusive or demeaning to maximize the learning experience (Dubanoski et al., 1983).

According to Jones and Lashinsky (2016), teachers and administrators believe that corporal punishment encourages good behavior. Jones and Lashinsky (2016) argued that corporal punishment is needed to protect teachers and create order in the classroom. According to Garratt (2008), corporal punishment was seen as a process of controlling students' behaviors while teachers delivered the content. Teachers used corporal punishment as their primary form of discipline throughout the 1900s. Students are in a struggle with the idea of corporal punishment. Some students feel it is necessary to help with classroom management and provide teachers with authority, whereas others are against it. Some students think that no one should be allowed to put their hands on them or hit them with anything.

As of today, corporal punishment is currently legal in nineteen states, and over 160,000 children in these states are subject to corporal punishment in schools each year. Teachers and administrators model students' behavior by applying corporal punishment to achieve social goals and/or acceptable behaviors from students (Northington, 2007). States that allow corporal punishment as a form of discipline in schools also have higher rates of child poverty and child mortality and lower college graduation rates than states that do not utilize corporal punishment in schools (Geershoff & Font, 2016). All public establishments besides schools excluded the use of corporal punishment. Using corporal punishment has led to serious physical and mental impairments. As of now, it is left to each state's legislation to revise statutes, education codes, or state regulations (Geershoff & Font, 2016).

During the 1700s, philosophers such as John Locke, Benjamin Franklin, and Thomas Paine emphasized the significance of improved teacher-student relations and a curriculum to teach students self-discipline instead of relying on strict punishment (Wright, 1965). Meanwhile, schools within states that allow corporal punishment can prohibit corporal punishment and encourage alternatives that would build student character and have a positive impact on the school's climate and culture. However, as it became clear that corporal punishment harms the students' chance of receiving a quality education and contributing to society, school administrators began utilizing out-of-school suspension in the 1960s. Other punitive methods used as alternatives to corporal punishment include expulsions and out-of-school suspensions (Adams, 2000).

### **Expulsion and Suspension**

Expulsion and suspension were primarily implemented as harsher disciplinary measures in schools after the zero-tolerance policy became part of the federal policy in the middle of the 1990s. This change occurred because of widely known school shootings (UCLA IDEA, 2017). Expulsions and suspensions are used as tools in the school discipline policies intended to ensure a productive and safe learning environment for all students and staff. There are two types of suspension; a short-term suspension that can lead up to ten days out of school suspension and a long-term suspension that can lead a student being placed out of school for 10 days or more.

According to the Legal Services of New Jersey Law-School Discipline, schools cannot suspend or expel students in pre-K to 2nd grade. However, schools can expel students on account of misbehavior. The school board is left to make the decision. The court is not subject to review

the decision made by the district board of education. Since someone is assigned responsibility for student discipline, the same person must be able to enforce the rules and regulations (Wells, 1927). Schools are to design alternative measures to address pre-K to 2nd-grade students' misbehavior.

When a student receives a long-term suspension, the school districts must provide educational services for those receiving more than 5 days of suspension. Suspended students are to return to their educational setting once the student has served the required out-of-school days in addition to a meeting with the student, parent, and school principal or vice-principal upon returning to school. On the other hand, when students are expelled, the school district is no longer required to provide educational services to that child. Special Education students are entitled to additional protection and services under the laws governing special education. The LSNJ website provides several types of conduct for which students may be suspended or expelled, including disobedience, defiance of authority, physical assault, stealing, damaging school property, drugs or weapons, harassment, intimidation, or bullying.

Recent data examined from the US Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights shows that suspension has been used more than corporal punishment and expulsion around the nation. Students receiving suspension can return to school and continue their education without being beaten or given the alternative of not receiving a free education.

Table 1

*National Discipline Data*

US Civil Rights National Data Totals						
Discipline	2006–2007		2009–2010		2011–2012	
	Number	Membership 48,497,767	Number	Membership 48,273,920	Number	Membership 48,672,843
Corporal Punishment	223,19 0	0.46%	184,52 7	0.38%	166,807	0.34%
Suspension	3,328,7 54	6.86%	2,597,6 63	5.38%	3,172,40 3	6.52%
Expulsion	102,07 7	0.21%	130,66 6	0.27%	140,695	0.29%

The National Discipline Data from the Us Civil Rights Data Tools shows an increase in corporal punishment, suspension, and expulsion from the 2009–2010 school year to the 2011–2012 school year. This data speaks to the overuse of harmful disciplinary actions currently being used in schools.

Suspensions could harm students and their academics (Pyne, 2019). Students' misbehaviors can cause a suspension, but does being out of school teach students not to commit such actions again? What did the suspension really teach the child? Research suggests that decision-makers must think about the child as a whole and be aware of how the students will be impacted by the missed instructional time (Pyne, 2019). Consequently, suspension can introduce students to groups outside of school that might foster future negative behavior. Suspended students tend to have lower trust levels than the adults in the school and lower levels of social connection. Engaging students in schools has behavioral and emotional benefits for the students

and the school environment. Once the student feels attached to the school, they will positively contribute to the learning environment as a response. Students' attitudes toward school are an integral part of their emotional engagement that, in return, would promote a growth mindset, which can increase learning skills. The academic environment should encourage students to use their thoughts, feelings, and perceptions to engage and enhance their academic attitudes. Schools can shape students' academic engagements to help aid positive future behaviors into adulthood. Pyne focuses his study on answering two questions in his article *Suspended Attitudes: Exclusion and Emotional Disengagement from School* (2019):

1. What degree do students' previous attitudes matter for becoming suspended during middle school?
2. How do school suspensions matter to changing emotional engagement in middle school?

Pyne (2019) discovered that suspension might negatively harm students by changing their academic identities and trust for adults in school. Suspended students become distant from the school and lose confidence in the system. Suspended students are likely to become academically disengaged as a cause of missing instructional time and not regaining missed instruction. Suspended students are vulnerable before being removed from school. Suspension impacts the students' emotional engagement in middle school and their outlook towards their future.

Another consequence is the negative impact on suspended students' achievements compared to their non-suspended peers. Hwang (2017) investigated the consequences that suspensions have on students and their non-suspended peers by concentrating on students' differences, comparing achievement before and after suspension, and comparing students' involvement in school. Studies have shown that students being suspended more than once impacts their academic achievement, increases their dropout rate, and increases their failure to

graduate on time (Arci, 2006; Hwang 2017; Morris & Perry, 2016). Conversely, Hwang's study also shows that *not* suspending students impacts the overall learning environment. Rebellious and disruptive student behavior can reduce instructional time, affect the quality of instruction, and cause teachers to burn out (Hwang, 2017). Therefore, it is essential to have discipline policies in place that improve students' misbehavior and build the school environment.

Many researchers have conducted qualitative studies that take a deeper look into how suspension affects high school students from the students' perception. Scelso's (2013) research indicated that students who have been suspended 5 days or more during 1 academic year can have far-reaching side effects. Out-of-school suspension affects students' academic progress, behavior, juvenile delinquency, and perception of future out-of-school suspension and overall consequences. Suspension is counterproductive; rather than modifying student behavior, it aggravates the negative behavior. Underrepresented groups are usually disproportionately suspended. Chu and Ready (2018) analyzed how suspended students differ from those who are not and examined the relationship between suspension and short- and long-term student outcomes. Their research found that suspension negatively impacts students' education outcomes and life paths. Teaching to meet the needs of the students must be the first step to consider when thinking of alternatives to suspension. The curriculum should be taught in a way that reaches students' academic, behavioral, social, and emotional needs (Chu & Ready, 2018).

Perry and Morris (2014) compared suspension and exclusionary punishment in school with the prison and criminal justice system. A controlled culture in schools threatens student success. The existing punitive punishments hinder the academic performance of well-behaved students and students who are likely to be suspended (Perry & Morris, 2014). Having a toxic

environment affects everyone in it. Suspension disrupts the school community and creates overwhelming anxiety in the school. Punishment can create oppression and distrust. The goal in schools is to build trust and success for all students (Perry & Morris, 2014).

### **Restorative Justice**

Now that we have looked at the disciplinary methods used throughout the history of US education, we can now focus on building practice when dealing with students' behavior. Restorative Justice is a form of discipline that is non-punitive and is currently being used as an alternative-to-suspension method. The alternative approaches used and led to the decrease of suspension and expulsions in schools have been (a) implementation of early warning indicator system, (b) no excuses discipline approaches used with school-wide positive behavior intervention system and support, and (c) changes in the discipline code of conduct used with teacher training and school resource officer programs (Steinberg, 2017).

*What Teachers Need to Know About Restorative Justice* focuses on building students' skills and knowledge of how to deal with problems without causing harm to others. Restorative Justice encourages students to meditate, talk out their problems, accept responsibility rather than fighting or disrespecting the other person. Though Restorative Justice programs have been around for hundreds of years, it was newly implemented in the US in the late 20th century. The program became known as a culture shift in schools from a punitive model to a Restorative model. The basic practices of Restorative Justice practices are to forge relationships, build respect, create opportunities for equal dialogue and decision making, address harms, needs, and obligations, and encourage students to take responsibility for their actions. Restorative Justice uses and applies any non-punitive alternative-to-suspension methods that would benefit students

and help build students' character, looking at the child as a whole rather than applying punishment for misbehavior.

Restorative justice practices improve the school's education climate while decreasing suspension and behavioral incidents. This change to the punitive system has been in schools for a long time. Sandwick et al. (2019) shared findings from five different New York City schools using Restorative Justice approaches in ways that fit and benefit their schools. The qualitative interviews address parents, students, and educators. The study takes a deeper look at the practices and resources used in school, stakeholders' perceptions, and the challenges schools have faced to find a Restorative Justice practice that works for their school (Sandwick et al., 2019). A recent study showed that restorative practices encourage community and conflict management while helping to restore relationships (Ligon, 2019). Each Restorative Justice practice highlights the importance of community building and elevating students' leadership.

Lustick (2017) conducted looks at the root causes of why the suspension rates of students of color remain higher than white students even in schools that utilize alternatives to suspension programs. The article also highlights those Restorative coordinators are consistently young staff and are typically from the same neighborhood as their student body. The study examined three schools in New York City that used restorative practices to reduce their suspensions and district-wide racial discipline gap. The study found that Restorative practices lowered the suspension rate and reinforced order in schools. The program coordinators developed a more precise understanding of how suspension and exclusion affected vulnerable student populations. Coordinators worked on building relationships between students and staff. Implementation of the Restorative practices made a difference. The school leader must model culturally responsive practices, transform adult staff perception, and heal the interpersonal harms of others.



Restorative practices are meant to change mindsets, confront biases, and improve the school culture and climate. “Restorative practices have the potential to serve as a means of challenging the hegemonic forces of social control that have led to systematic marginalization and sequestration of students of color, particularly Black students” (Lustick, 2017).

Steinberg (2017) pointed out that the number of suspensions and expulsions in the nation’s public schools had dropped 20% between 2012 and 2014 in his article, *What Do We Know About School Discipline Reform?* Steinberg explained his concern for many policymakers and educators calling for the adoption of alternative disciplinary strategies that would allow students to stay in school and not miss valuable instructional time. The idea is that with the reduction of suspensions, the school’s climate would improve for all students. Reducing suspensions would require schools to implement alternative strategies, such as behavioral intervention, counseling programs, dropout prevention programs, guidance for at-risk students, etc. Steinberg stressed the importance of further research to uncover how alternative approaches to suspension can affect school safety and student outcomes. There has been a decline in the exclusionary discipline used in schools and an increase in alternative strategies to address student misconduct. Social-Emotional Learning is currently being used as another disciplinary tool that is non-punitive where it focuses on conflict resolution and moral character education (Hoffman, 2009).

### **Social-Emotional Learning**

Another fairly recent school building practice is Social Emotional Learning (SEL), which influences and builds many competencies for students while benefiting the school climate. Hoffman (2009) best defined SEL as emotional awareness, managing emotions appropriately, making rational and responsible decisions, building positive social relationships, and handling

difficult situations. Students need to be able to recognize and label their own and other emotions to handle situations effectively. SEL programs are implemented in schools to foster and strengthen building interactions through school-level policies and initiatives. SEL helps shape the process of learning, practicing, building self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsibility in making decisions (Osher & Berg, 2018), Hoffman (2009), and Kula (2012). These include emotional awareness (being able to recognize and label one's own and others' emotions), having the capacity to express and manage emotions appropriately, making responsible decisions, establishing positive social relationships, and handling difficult interpersonal situations effectively.

Kula (2012) shared an interesting study that examines the effects of an alternative-to-suspension program. This study was conducted using a mixed-method approach. The program is called Why Try. Why Try is focused on teaching social and emotional learning skills to assist students in improving their attitudes and behavior. Students learn life skills from socializing in the classroom. Kula found that it is crucial to focus on those skills while teaching the core curriculum. Social and emotional learning skills look different from school to school. Therefore, it is important to meet students' needs within their communities. The study showed that students involved in the SEL or alternative-to-suspension program improved students' attendance.

A different approach is usually taken in Japan, focusing on cultivating positive bonds of emotional attachment and belonging. According to Hoffman (2009), Japanese school discipline focuses on emotion and classroom unity. For example, when a child misbehaves in the classroom, the teacher reminds the students of how they would feel if someone misbehaved and acted the same way. This method tends to resonate with students for the long term; it also creates

a sense of unity where everyone tends to care for each other and always try to think forward about their actions and how they can impact those with whom they share the classroom.

According to Korpershoek et al. (2020), there is a strong relationship between school belonging and social-emotional functioning in school. Student self-esteem is significantly affected by the support received by their teachers and peers. When students' need for belonging is met, they are more behaviorally and academically engaged.

### **Sense of Belonging**

As social-emotional learning is established, the student needs to have a sense of belonging. Ahn (2010) used a quantitative research methodology to analyze the effects student membership/attendance has on students' sense of belonging in school and their academic performance. Ahn addressed two research questions related to students' sense of belonging:

1. At-risk students' school engagement with academic performance, assesses the difference of student engagement with students involved in extracurricular activities and or Juvenile Justice System
2. Relationship between at-risk students' status, behavior engagement, and attendance at alternative schools. The author looked at the relationship between a student's history of discipline, attendance, and grades. Ahn concludes the study by outlining the need for intervention for at-risk students. At-risk students' grades were not impacted, yet the results were closely related to students' involvement in extracurricular activities. According to Ahn, students with a stronger sense of belonging to school are more likely to succeed academically and graduate on time. Students' academic and behavioral engagement/sense of belonging can be measured by their attendance, grades, and discipline records (Ahn 2010; Christenson & Thurlow

2004). Students at risk of dropping out of school typically have trouble participating in school, regularly attending classes, and following basic codes of conduct.

Students generally seek a sense of belonging within the school community. The student's desire to belong can aid in building teacher-student relationships, boost students' self-confidence, and create a sense of security that will ultimately reduce office conduct referrals. Students are more willing to participate and contribute to school activities if they feel connected to the school and its adults (Dukynaitė, 2017). Students look for a caring adult in school to strengthen and promote positive behavior and safety in school. According to Gage et al. (2016), schools should build a positive learning environment so that students feel safe, and schools should also involve the parents.

### **Leadership, Climate, and Culture**

Leadership is important to creating positive, innovative learning cultures that facilitate quality teaching and learning (Dinham, 2005). "School culture influences how teachers, school administrators, students, and other school actors render schooling into meaningful and actionable practices" (Rhodes, 2011). While it may take years to develop a positive school culture, a school leader must recognize that it requires strong interpersonal skills, must involve stakeholders, particularly teachers, and depends on collaboration, commitment, trust, and common purpose (Dinham, 2005).

Gordon and Fefer (2019) discussed the factors related to improving school climate to lower discipline history in *Discipline History and Demographics: Which Factors Relate to School Climate Perceptions Among High School Students?* Factors such as school size, student-to-teacher ratio, relationships with teachers, gender, and race influence school climates. These factors influence school climate and the perception of the school climate. Previous research has

shown that individual student-level factors can create up to 85% of the variability in perceptions of school climate. This research was conducted using eight dimensions of Delaware's school Climate Survey: Teacher-Student Relations, Student-Student Relations, Respect for Diversity, Clarity of Expectations, Fairness of Rules, School Safety, Student Engagement Schoolwide, and Bullying Schoolwide. The results showed that student discipline infraction data was a significant predictor of the school climate.

To have a thriving school climate where students can flourish, each school needs to have a leader with a clear vision for improving the school's climate and culture. In addition, the school leader must be capable of planning strategically to ensure the success of the students and the overall school building. Kim (2011) defined strategic planning as the process of matching an organization's activities or programs to its environment and resources capabilities. In practice, strategic planning identifies the organization's strengths and weaknesses, assesses whether a program works as planned, and determines how well the program's components contribute to achieving the organization's goals.

Depending on the program's purpose, target, or intended feature, a leader can employ various approaches to evaluate a program's effectiveness, including using quantifiable evidence (i.e., student achievement scores), qualitative evidence (i.e., stakeholders' perceptions and satisfaction with program implementation and effectiveness), and participation-oriented evaluation (i.e., the participation of stakeholders in the process of measuring a program's effectiveness and reaching a collective decision). Kim (2011) suggested using a combined congruent approach to traditional theory-based evaluation (TBE). The former includes a multi-attribute utility (MAU) analysis to account for multiple aspects of assessments for which a school leader would be concerned—implementation, administration, goal achievement, and

program effectiveness. By combining the two approaches, leaders can make the best choice between alternatives having different utility or effectiveness values. The process of applying this combined evaluative approach involves the following steps: (a) define program and evaluation goals, (b) identify stakeholders and their interests, (c) identify program components and activities, (d) build a program theory, (e) weight program components and activities (Scaling), (f) assess the outcomes of program activities, and (g) measure program effectiveness (summing). Using Kim's approach, a school leader can determine whether to continue the program, and the detailed effectiveness values can help develop a strategy for program improvement and resource allocation.

This program is how to create an effective discipline management system. Tackling student discipline involves a wide range of challenging and disruptive behaviors. Literature on best practice behavior management asserts three critical aspects of student discipline management in the classroom (Scott, 2011). First, a school must actively promote good behavior. Second, a positive school climate that promotes good behavior and provides a peaceful, respectful learning environment is essential. Third, teachers should not be forced to work in classroom conditions they are unable to control. Finally, the literature suggests that successful schools have developed a supportive culture that focuses on values, behavior management strategies, management structures, and familial and communal external support.

In developing a student discipline management system, a school leader must consult with the community, inform the community about trends, events, and initiatives, and seek the community's input, feedback, and support to understand who the school's key stakeholders are and ascertain their wants and needs are. Next, the school leader must use the system to maintain and alter patterns in the school's activities, define, communicate, and reinforce the school's

fundamental purpose and values, establish explicit limits and rules, require that they be respected and maintained, create diagnostic systems that monitor outcomes, and provide formal feedback so that any necessary adjustments can be made. Finally, the leader must ensure that the system effectively emphasizes narratives to communicate what is important and the standard for appropriate behavior (Scott, 2011).

### **Summary**

Discipline has transformed multiple times in the United States and around the world. It has shifted from corporal punishment, frequent timeouts, suspension, and expulsion to utilizing alternative-to-suspension programs and is a crucial component of an effective classroom and school environment. However, punitive discipline can harm the relationship between the students and the adults in the building, which harms the school climate and culture and students' sense of belonging and academic progress. This chapter has discussed the evolution of discipline in the United States, including the impact of zero-tolerance on students, corporal punishment and its scars, expulsions and suspensions and their long-term effects, restorative justice, the importance of having a positive school culture and climate, social-emotional learning, and creating a stronger sense of belonging for all community members in the school. However, this study further supports the importance of implementing alternative-to-suspension programs to improve students' academic and behavioral outcomes.

Intervention programs are needed to lower suspension rates and increase students' academic achievements. Students' behaviors are typically influenced by the lack of engagement in the school environment. When students are not engaged, they drift towards committing inappropriate behaviors. In other words, this behavioral pattern is observed by students who are disconnected from their teachers and feel that the rules are not fair. Schools should enable

learning by addressing barriers and encouraging collaboration (Adelman & Taylor, 2005). Those students need a sense of belonging to the school community rather than receiving a referral and being suspended for their misbehaviors. Therefore, alternate options to support the student's academic success and stability in school are needed for implementation. It is crucial that schools implement proactive programs that address the root of the problem, build a sense of belonging in the school community, and prepare the students for academic success.



## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I review the purpose of this study and research questions, discussing the research design, partner schools, and populations used for this study, and describing the instruments, procedures, and processes used for the data collection and analysis. Finally, I discuss ethical considerations and the role of the researcher.

#### **Purpose of the study**

School leaders are reconsidering school discipline practices to improve school climate while replacing punitive discipline strategies with interventions that teach social-emotional skills and substitute negative behaviors. One non-exclusionary disciplinary framework implemented in many schools is alternative-to-suspension programs. There are many practices in schools that seek an alternate method of disciplining students. Alternative-to-suspension programs try to balance the process between being too permissive and being too punitive. According to Seliskar (2019), the goal of alternative-to-suspension programs is to empower students to resolve conflicts on their own, reduce repeat offenders, and rebuild relationships. The purpose of this quantitative study is to examine the effects alternative-to-suspension programs have on the number of suspensions, student academic performance in terms of graduating on time, and the overall school climate and culture.

According to Cristini et al. (2012), students experience more efficient outcomes when they are helped to form healthy relationships with adults and are taught socialization norms. The goal is to examine whether and how alternatives to out-of-school suspension can help build a positive school environment for all stakeholders. The data used in this study were collected from

a large urban school district in the Northeast. The data focused on three of the seven high schools in the districts with grades 9 through 12 buildings.

This study had one overarching research question, and the quantitative research question had three sub-questions and hypotheses. The hypotheses emphasized the effectiveness of the alternative-to-suspension programs already in place by the district. The students' behavior records and graduation progress were tracked through PowerSchool. To be more precise, the three research sub-questions addressed student behavior and academic progress using archived data while examining the district-based data to address suspension and students' academic achievement.

The study also examined the effects of these alternative measures on suspension programs and the overall school suspension rate, academic achievement, and graduation rate. Quantitative data were collected to analyze the research questions. The primary research question was,

What is the impact of the alternative-to-suspension programs (e.g., PBSIS, Panorama, and SEL) being implemented in three urban high schools in terms of student academics, discipline, and attendance?

The following are sub-questions that help in answering the research question:

- a) Is there a significant difference in student suspension rate before implementing the alternative-to-suspension program versus after the program's implementation from 2015-2016 to 2018-2019?
  - a.  $H_{10}$ : There is no difference in student suspensions between the 2015–2016 groups A-C, the schools before the implementation of alternative-to-suspension

programs, and the 2018–2019 groups A-C, the schools after the implementation of alternative-to-suspension programs.

- b.  $H_{1a}$ : There is a difference in student suspensions between the 2015–2016 groups A-C, the schools before the implementation of alternative-to-suspension programs, and the 2018–2019 groups A-C, the schools after the implementation of alternative-to-suspension programs.
- b) Is there a significant difference in students graduating on time before implementing the alternative-to-suspension program versus after the program's implementation from 2015–2016 to 2018–2019?
- $H_{20}$ : There is no difference in student on-time graduation between the 2015–2016 groups A-C, the schools before the implementation of alternative-to-suspension programs, and the 2018–2019 groups A-C, the schools after the implementation of alternative-to-suspension programs.
  - $H_{2a}$ : There is a difference in student on-time graduation between the 2015–2016 groups A-C, the schools before the implementation of alternative-to-suspension programs, and the 2018–2019 groups A-C, the schools after the implementation of alternative-to-suspension programs.
- c) Is there a significant difference in student attendance before implementing the alternative-to-suspension program versus after the program's implementation from 2015–2016 to 2018–2019?
- $H_{30}$ : There is no difference in student attendance performance between the 2015–2016 groups A-C, the schools before the implementation of alternative-to-

suspension programs, and the 2019 groups A-C, the schools after the implementation of alternative-to-suspension programs.

- *H<sub>3a</sub>*: There is a difference in student attendance performance between the 2015–2016 groups A-C, the schools before the implementation of alternative-to-suspension programs, and the 2018–2019 groups A-C, the schools after the implementation of alternative-to-suspension programs.

### **Research Design**

The research design utilized a quantitative strategy. In quantitative research, the researcher uses hypotheses to generalize their findings for the population in the study. The key components of this methodology are population and random selections (Creswell, 2012). The quantitative historical data were used to determine whether there was a significant difference in student academic progress, out-of-school suspension, attendance, and graduation rates after implementing three alternative-to-suspension programs. According to Creswell (2013), quantitative research methods are used when the researcher wants to study how one variable affects another. Quantitative research begins with a theory, then data are collected to either support or contradict the theory. Finally, tests are conducted to determine the findings (Powoh, 2016). Quantitative research methods help the researcher draw conclusions about large numbers of people based on analysis of collected data. It examines probable cause and effects (Creswell, 2013). The main limitation of quantitative research is that it eliminates the participants' voice, there is limited understanding of the context of participants, and it is driven by data (Creswell, 2013).

PowerSchool generated reports of student academic performance and school suspension rates collected. The design guides the study, which results in extracting the data essential to informing the audience about the usage and effects of the implemented alternative-to-suspension programs. The study also helped determine the effectiveness of the alternative-to-suspension programs used with the PBSIS, Panorama, and afterschool SEL alternative-to-suspension programs by measuring the suspension rate for the past 3 years, graduation rates, attendance rates, and retention rates by grade. This study also took a deeper look at an alternative-to-suspension program used, its impact on student achievement, school discipline, and on-time graduation rate. In addition, the study measures the change in the suspension rate after implementing the PBSIS, Panorama, and SEL after-school alternative-to-suspension program.

The study compares archival data collected and analyzed from one of the largest urban school districts in the Northeast using student scores retrieved from three different high schools within the district. The three high schools used in this research are labeled from A to C for ease of reference. Schools A through C were using the same alternative-to-suspension program first implemented during the 2015–2016 school year. Therefore, the groups compared in this study were students in schools A to C who were enrolled in the school district during the 2015–2016 school year, along with students who were enrolled in the 2018–2019 school year who were issued a suspension and/or asked to attend the alternative-to-suspension program instead of a suspension.

In this study, a collection of quantitative data was used to address the research questions. Student graduation data for 2016 to 2019 is collected to assess the effectiveness of alternatives to suspension strategies used during those years. The researcher also collected students' attendance rates, suspensions, and graduation rates.

### **Partner schools**

The community partner for this study is a large urban school district with approximately 7,623 students enrolled in seven different high school buildings. Four of the high schools have implemented the Positive Behavior Support in Schools (PBSIS) by 2016, while all seven high schools had incorporated the Panorama Social Emotional Learning questionnaire by 2020. Panorama measures student mindsets, behaviors, and attitudes related to success in school and beyond. This study focuses on three out of the seven high schools.

The three high schools used in this study have implemented various alternative-to-suspension programs across their buildings. The schools also implemented PBSIS, Panorama surveys, and alternatives to suspension programs that target social-emotional learning. PBSIS was implemented across four out of the seven high schools to help reduce the school suspension rates. PBSIS was also used to assist with building positive behavior intervention, improving the schools' environment, and building better rapport between students and staff. Panorama was first incorporated across two high schools with the highest suspension rates in the district. Soon after, the program was introduced and is being implemented across the seven high school buildings. Panorama was introduced to gather information to help create a positive climate and culture and a sense of belonging to the school between students and staff members. As a result, the district developed an afterschool program in the seven high schools in 2019 called the Social-Emotional Afterschool alternative-to-suspension Program (SEL). This program is used as an alternative to suspension.

### **Population and Sample**

The 2018–2019 population of the participating school district consisted of approximately 30,243 K–12 students and 7,623 9–12 grade students enrolled. This study focuses on three

selected schools out of the seven high schools in the district. The study analyzed 2,939 students' academic, discipline, and school involvement data (see Table 2).

Table 2

*Partner District Information*

<i>Student Demographics</i>					<i>Percentage of Students' Demographics</i>				
	A	B	C	HS District Pop		A	B	C	HS District Pop
Hispanic	1009	827	1084	5593	Hispanic	78%	69%	70%	73%
White	68	91	102	552	White	5%	7%	8%	8%
Black	209	263	319	1330	Black	16%	22%	21%	17%
Asian	5	7	30	133	Asian	0%	1%	2%	2%
Other	3	3	4	14	Other	0%	0%	0%	0%
Total	1294	1191	1540	7623	Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

<i>Students' Lunch Status</i>					<i>Students' Lunch Status</i>				
	A	B	C	HS District Pop		A	B	C	HS District Pop
Free	835	731	1004	4676	Free	65%	61%	89%	61%
Reduced	62	81	107	623	Reduced	5%	7%	11%	8%
Paid	397	379	429	2324	Paid	31%	32%	32%	30%
Total	1294	1191	1540	7623	Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

This study used data from students who attended three high schools in this large urban district in the Northeast. Student identification numbers are not reported to protect the privacy of the students in the participating school district.

### **Rational for Criteria of Selection**

Schools were selected based on their student population and alternative-to-suspension programs in place. Further, no change of school administrators in the buildings occurred from 2016–2017 to 2018–2019. Participating schools shared the following characteristics:

1. open enrollment (any student can apply to their school of choice, and GPA is not a requirement),
2. student ethnicity,
3. student socioeconomic status as measured by free or reduced lunch,
4. PBIS schools creating a positive intervention system, and
5. students between the ages of 14 and 20 enrolled in grades 9–12.

### **Instrumentation**

There is one instrument used to conduct this study. The first instrument used to collect student archived data is PowerSchool, a web-based student information system used by the partner school district. PowerSchool has archived live student data that consist of grades, demographics, attendance, and more. PowerSchool is also used as a teacher grade book system and a way to share instructional information with the students and parents.

### **Procedures**

The quantitative data were gathered from archived data from the school district's PowerSchool system for the following school years: 2015–2016, 2016–2017, and 2017–2018. The data collected from the PowerSchool systems specifically assessed students' academic progress, attendance records, suspension, and office conduct referrals.

During this research, I gathered data from PowerSchool that is heavily related to my quantitative hypothesis. The data were collected and organized using Excel spreadsheets. The



spreadsheets track student demographic information, such as gender, Special ED/ELL indicator, ethnicity, grade level, cohort year, GPA, and socioeconomic status. The data collected assists with analyzing and addressing the research questions. The data does not include student identification. The data were given to me without the ability to decode for identification. The archived data from the school data is de-identified before they were given to the researcher. I analyzed the data using descriptive and non-parametric statistics.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis is a way to configure data to observe patterns, determine relationships, characterize ideas or topics, develop explanations, make understandings, generate evaluations, and create theories (Hatch, 2002). Within this study, the data analysis methods include Mann Whitney U-test. A series of independent samples Mann Whitney tests were conducted across several variables and groups to determine differences. Using different sources and methods allows the researcher to collect different dimensions of knowledge and information to form a more nuanced analysis and conclude the study's findings. Hatch (2002) emphasized that any kind of data can use interpretative analysis, but the quality of the interpretation should be balanced to make inferences and develop insights.

This study helped to determine the effectiveness of the alternative-to-suspension programs used with the PBSIS, Panorama, and afterschool SEL alternative-to-suspension programs. It used suspension, retention, attendance, and graduation rates for the past 3 years. Lastly, it measured the change in the suspension rate after implementing the alternative-to-suspension programs and their impact on student performance and sense of belonging to the school community.

## **Ethical Considerations**

Many researchers used human beings as the subject of the investigation (Creswell, 2012). This research used stored data for the quantitative analysis. The potential ethical implication must be reviewed whenever people are the focal points of an investigation. Ethical considerations include categories such as protection from harm, informed consent, right to privacy, and honesty with professional colleagues (Creswell, 2012).

The superintendent of schools was contacted through a letter of permission to request permission to conduct this study. Once permission was granted, the board of education voted to approve the study taking in the district during the November 2020 board meeting (see Appendix A). The quantitative data were then organized and sent to the researcher for analysis and assessment by the district's data analysis coordinator.

One ethical consideration in this study is the use of archival data. The data are extracted based on the students enrolled during the specified timeframe. The researcher contacted the districts' PowerSchool data coordinator to extract students' academic performance, demographics, and office conduct referral and consequence issues. Students' names and IDs were eliminated before being given to the researcher; therefore, the data were de-identified.

Data will be stored on a personal laptop in a secure folder and locked in an office desk at the researcher's home for 5 years. The data will be discarded 5 years after the completion of the study. The data were only used to further the research study. Any hard copies of the data will be shredded.

## **Summary**

In summary, this study focused on alternative discipline strategies and examined their effects on students' academics, attendance, and on-time graduation progress. Student data were

collected for high school students who have attended three of the seven high schools in a large urban district in the Northeast during the 2015–2016, 2016–2017, 2017–2018, and 2018–2019 school years. Data were also collected from the school district’s database files using the district's PowerSchool system. Permission was requested from the district, and data were gathered by the district’s PowerSchool technology coordinator. Mann Whitney U-tests were used to test two of the three hypotheses. A Chi-square test was also used to test student graduation rate performance.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **ANALYSIS AND RESULTS**

#### **Introduction**

This study investigated archival school data to examine the impact of alternative-to-suspension programs on student achievement and discipline in a large urban school district. This study uses three out of the seven high schools in that large urban district as the sample population. The data included in this study were concentrated over 4 years before COVID-19. The data collected were from the school year 2015–2016 to school year 2018–2019. The archived data focused on answering one overarching research question that included three sub-questions. The overarching research question investigated the impact of the alternative-to-suspension programs (e.g., PBSIS, Panorama, and SEL) implemented in three urban high schools.

The following sub-questions were developed to help address the research question:

- a) Is there a significant difference in student suspension rate before implementing the alternative-to-suspension program versus after the program's implementation from 2015–2016 to 2018–2019?
- b) Is there a significant difference in students graduating on time before implementing the alternative-to-suspension program versus after the program's implementation from 2015–2016 to 2018–2019?
- c) Is there a significant difference in student attendance before implementing the alternative-to-suspension program versus after the program's implementation from 2015–2016 to 2018–2019?

## Descriptive Analysis

### Demographics: School A, B, C 2018–2019 Demographics

Demographic data for the 2018–2019 school year show 1,291 students from School A, 1,188 students from School B, and 1535 students from School C. The largest groups are 9th-grade students, males, and Hispanic students. The following include the number of students in each grade level. Table 3 shows School C with the largest number of students out of the three schools used in this study. Table 4 breaks down the number of students by grade level, whereas Table 5 shows students by gender and Table 6 by ethnicity. We noticed that School B has 63% of females and School C has 69% of male students in Table 5. Table 7 shows the difference in suspension rates amongst female, male, and special education students. We noticed a significant decrease in male suspended students in School A, followed by special ed suspended students in School A. Finally, Table 8 shows the change of suspension rate across the 4 years in each high school in the study. Table 8 highlights the highest decrease of 8.46%.

Table 3

*Demographic Data for the 2018–2019 School Year: Count*

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>School A</b>	1291	32%
<b>School B</b>	1188	30%
<b>School C</b>	1535	38%
<b>Total</b>	4014	100%

Table 4

*Demographic Data for the 2018–2019 School Year: Grade*

	<b>Grade 9</b>		<b>Grade 10</b>		<b>Grade 11</b>		<b>Grade 12</b>	
	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>School A</b>	433	34%	310	24%	275	21%	276	21%
<b>School B</b>	404	34%	294	25%	257	22%	236	20%
<b>School C</b>	595	39%	383	25%	277	18%	285	19%
<b>Total</b>	1432	36%	987	25%	809	20%	797	20%

Table 5

*Demographic Data for the 2018–2019 School Year: Gender*

	<b>Male</b>		<b>Female</b>	
	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>School A</b>	618	48%	676	52%
<b>School B</b>	442	37%	749	63%
<b>School C</b>	1056	69%	484	31%
<b>Total</b>	2116	53%	1909	47%

Table 6

*Demographic Data for the 2018–2019 School Year: Ethnicity*

	<b>Black</b>		<b>Hispanic</b>		<b>White</b>		<b>Asian</b>	
	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>School A</b>	209	16%	1009	78%	68	5%	5	0%
<b>School B</b>	263	22%	827	70%	91	8%	7	1%
<b>School C</b>	319	21%	1084	71%	102	7%	30	2%
<b>Total</b>	791	20%	2920	73%	261	7%	42	1%

Table 7

*Suspension Rates of Subgroups*

	Female			Male			Special Ed.		
	Year 1	Year 4	4yr Change	Year 1	Year 4	4yr Change	Year 1	Year 4	4yr Change
<b>School A</b>	16.64%	13.17%	-3.47%	31.18%	18.45%	-12.74%	36.05%	25.00%	-11.05%
<b>School B</b>	15.72%	13.35%	-2.37%	25.55%	23.30%	-2.25%	26.62%	18.52%	-8.10%
<b>School C</b>	11.34%	9.71%	-1.63%	16.41%	15.25%	-1.16%	22.62%	22.54%	-0.08%

Table 8

Suspension Rate Per School

	Year 1	Year 4	Change
<b>School A</b>	24.15%	15.69%	-8.46%
<b>School B</b>	19.41%	17.04%	-2.36%
<b>School C</b>	14.70%	13.51%	-1.20%

The remainder of this chapter is organized by hypothesis. It shows the results for the different statistical tests used to analyze trends in the data in this research. The following sections address the hypothesis and identify the test used to examine the hypotheses and determine the findings. Each section includes a findings summary for the three schools by hypothesis.

**Sub-Research Question 1: Intervention Impact on Suspension**

A Mann-Whitney U test was conducted to determine if there was a significant difference in student suspension rate before implementing the alternative-to-suspension program versus after the program's implementation from 2015–2016 to 2018–2019. It compared the number of suspended days students had before and after implementing the alternative-to-suspension programs in three different high schools in one large urban district in the Northeast. This test was

done twice to determine whether there was a significant difference in suspension rates when including and excluding non-suspended students in the data set.

Null hypothesis: There is no difference in student suspensions between the 2015–2016 groups A-C, the schools before the implementation of alternative-to-suspension programs, and the 2018–2019 groups A-C, the schools after the implementation of alternative-to-suspension programs.

Table 9

*School A. Data Includes Students with “0” Suspensions.*

**Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test Summary**

Total N	2586
Mann-Whitney U	765312.000
Wilcoxon W	1603177.000
Test Statistic	765312.000
Standard Error	13237.953
Standardized Test Statistic	-5.334
Asymptotic Sig. (2-sided test)	.000

The Mann-Whitney U test was applied to determine if there were differences in the number of suspended days before and after the implementation of alternative-to-suspension programs. For this case, the "Asymptotic Sig. (2-sided test)" is 0.000, which is the p-value indicating whether the hypothesis should be rejected or not rejected. The Hypothesis Test Summary table displays the decisions: reject the null hypothesis since the p-value is less than 0.05. For example, in year 1, the percent of suspended students was 24.15%, and in year 4, the number of suspended students was 15.69%, for a decrease of 8.46% in the number of suspended students. The number of suspended students with ten days or more has also decreased from



4.88% in Year 1 to 2.31% in Year 1. The sample medians of student suspensions when including non-suspended students from the data in School A, both equal to 0. However, as discussed, the two groups do not have similar distributions,  $U = 765312$ ,  $Z = -5.334$   $p = 0.000$ . This outcome indicates a relationship between student suspension rates in School A before and after implementing the alternative-to-suspension programs when including non-suspended students.

Table 10

*School A. Data Excludes Students with "0" Suspensions*

**Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test Summary**

Total N	515
Mann-Whitney U	31782.000
Wilcoxon W	52488.000
Test Statistic	31782.000
Standard Error	1634.712
Standardized Test Statistic	.070
Asymptotic Sig. (2-sided test)	.944

The Mann-Whitney U test was applied to determine if there were differences in the number of suspended days before and after the implementation of alternative-to-suspension programs. For this case, the "Asymptotic Sig. (2-sided test)" is 0.944, which is the p-value indicating whether the hypothesis should be rejected or not rejected. The Hypothesis Test Summary table displays the decisions: retain the null hypothesis since the p-value is greater than 0.05. Since the two groups have similar distributions, the median suspended days were not statistically significantly different. Therefore, there is not a significant difference from school year 2015–2016 (median = 4) to school year 2018–2019 (median = 4) in student suspensions when excluding non-suspended students from the data in School A,  $U = 31782$ ,  $Z = 0.70$   $p =$

0.944. This finding indicates that there is no relationship between student suspension rates in School A before and after the implementation of the alternative-to-suspension programs when excluding non-suspended students.

Table 11

*School B- Data Includes Students with "0" Suspensions*

**Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test Summary**

Total N	2402
Mann-Whitney U	702665.000
Wilcoxon W	1412501.000
Test Statistic	702665.000
Standard Error	11441.437
Standardized Test Statistic	-1.616
Asymptotic Sig. (2-sided test)	.106

The Mann-Whitney U test was applied to determine if there were differences in the number of suspended days before and after the implementation of alternative-to-suspension programs. For this case, the "Asymptotic Sig. (2-sided test)" is 0.106, which is the p-value indicating whether the hypothesis should be rejected or not rejected. The Hypothesis Test Summary table displays the decision: retain the null hypothesis since the p-value is greater than 0.05. Since the two groups have similar distributions, the median suspended days were not statistically significantly different. Therefore, there is not a significant difference from school year 2015–2016 (median = 0) to school year 2018–2019 (median = 0) in student suspensions when excluding non-suspended students from the data in School B,  $U = 702665$ ,  $Z = -1.616$   $p = 0.106$ . This finding indicates that there is no relationship between student suspension rates in

School B before and after the implementation of the alternative-to-suspension programs when excluding non-suspended students.

Table 12

*School B- Data Excludes Students with "0" Suspensions*

**Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test Summary**

Total N	438
Mann-Whitney U	22393.000
Wilcoxon W	43099.000
Test Statistic	22393.000
Standard Error	1308.996
Standardized Test Statistic	-1.115
Asymptotic Sig. (2-sided test)	.265

The Mann-Whitney U test was applied to determine if there were differences in the number of suspended days before and after the implementation of alternative-to-suspension programs. For this case, the "Asymptotic Sig. (2-sided test)" is 0.265, which is the p-value indicating whether the hypothesis should be rejected or not rejected. The Hypothesis Test Summary table displays the decision: retain the null hypothesis since the p-value is greater than 0.05. Since the two groups have similar distributions, the median suspended days were not statistically significantly different. Therefore, there was not a significant difference from school year 2015–2016 (median = 4) to school year 2018–2019 (median = 4) in student suspensions when excluding non-suspended students from the data in School B,  $U = 22393$ ,  $Z = -1.115$   $p = 0.265$ . This finding indicates that there is no relationship between student suspension rates in School B before and after the implementation of the alternative-to-suspension programs when excluding non-suspended students.

Table 13

*School C- Data Includes Students with "0" Suspensions*

**Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test Summary**

Total N	2982
Mann-Whitney U	1098954.500
Wilcoxon W	2285524.500
Test Statistic	1098954.500
Standard Error	14209.711
Standardized Test Statistic	-.801
Asymptotic Sig. (2-sided test)	.423

The Mann-Whitney U test was applied to determine if there were differences in the number of suspended days before and after the implementation of alternative-to-suspension programs. For this case, the "Asymptotic Sig. (2-sided test)" is 0.423, which is the p-value indicating whether the hypothesis should be rejected or not rejected. The Hypothesis Test Summary table displays the decisions: retain the null hypothesis since the p-value is greater than 0.05. Since the two groups have similar distributions, the median suspended days were not statistically significantly different. Therefore, there is not a significant difference from school year 2015–2016 (median = 0) to school year 2018–2019 (median = 0) in student suspensions when excluding non-suspended students from the data in School C,  $U = 1098954$ ,  $Z = -0.801$   $p = 0.423$ . These data indicate that there is no relationship between student suspension rates in School C before and after the implementation of the alternative-to-suspension programs when excluding non-suspended students.

Table 14

*School C. Data Excludes Students with "0" Suspensions*

**Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test Summary**

Total N	420
Mann-Whitney U	23934.500
Wilcoxon W	45670.500
Test Statistic	23934.500
Standard Error	1234.080
Standardized Test Statistic	1.529
Asymptotic Sig. (2-sided test)	.126

The Mann-Whitney U test was applied to determine if there were differences in the number of suspended days before and after implementing alternative-to-suspension programs. For this case, the "Asymptotic Sig. (2-sided test)" is 0.126, which is the p-value indicating whether the hypothesis should be rejected or not rejected. The Hypothesis Test Summary table displays the decisions: retain the null hypothesis since the p-value is greater than 0.05. Here, since the two groups have similar distributions, it could be demonstrated that the median suspended days were not statistically significantly different. Therefore, there is not a significant difference from school year 2015–2016 (median = 3) to school year 2018–2019 (median = 4) in student suspensions when excluding non-suspended students from the data in School C,  $U = 23934$ ,  $Z = 1.529$ ,  $p = 0.126$ . This finding indicates that there is no relationship between student suspension rates in School C before and after the implementation of the alternative-to-suspension programs when excluding non-suspended students.

Table 15

*Hypothesis 1. Intervention Impact on Suspension*

	<b>P-value including non - suspended students</b>		<b>P-value excluding non - suspended students</b>	
	<b>P-value</b>	<b>Decision</b>	<b>P-value</b>	<b>Decision</b>
<b>School A</b>	0.000	reject	0.944	retain
<b>School B</b>	0.106	retain	0.265	retain
<b>School C</b>	0.423	retain	0.126	retain

When reviewing the p-value in Table 15, we cannot determine that there is a relationship between the alternative-to-suspension interventions used and student suspension for all of the observed schools. We noticed that only one school rejected the null hypothesis, demonstrating a relationship between the alternative-to-suspension programs in School A. However, the schools showed no relationship between the implemented interventions and the improvement of reducing students’ suspensions, except for school A.

**Sub-Research Question 2: Intervention Impact on Graduation**

A Chi-square test was conducted to investigate whether there is a significant difference in students graduating on time before implementing the alternative-to-suspension program versus after the program's implementation from 2015–2016 to 2018–2019. The Chi-square test reveals the relationship between the number of graduated students before and after implementing the alternative-to-suspension programs in three different high schools in one large urban district. Researchers also use the Chi-square test to determine the differences between different categorical variables in a population. It is a non-parametric test.

Null hypothesis: There is no difference in student on-time graduation between the 2015–2016 groups A-C, the schools before the implementation of alternative-to-suspension programs, and the 2018–2019 groups A-C, the schools after the implementation of alternative-to-suspension programs.

Table 16

*School A. Graduation Data*

**Graduation Status \* Year Crosstabulation**

		Year		Total
		1	4	
Graduation Status	Count	375	45	420
	Expected Count	244.6	175.4	420.0
No	Count	0	14	14
	Expected Count	8.2	5.8	14.0
Yes	Count	0	210	210
	Expected Count	122.3	87.7	210.0
Total	Count	375	269	644
	Expected Count	375.0	269.0	644.0

**Chi-Square Tests**

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	478.810 <sup>a</sup>	2	.000
Likelihood Ratio	589.227	2	.000
N of Valid Cases	644		

a. 0 cells (.0%) have an expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 5.85.

Table 17

*School B. Graduation Data*

**Graduation Status \* Year Crosstabulation**

		Year		Total
		1	4	
Graduation Status	Count	379	50	429
	Expected Count	253.7	175.3	429.0
No	Count	0	8	8
	Expected Count	4.7	3.3	8.0
Yes	Count	0	204	204
	Expected Count	120.6	83.4	204.0
Total	Count	379	262	641
	Expected Count	379.0	262.0	641.0

**Chi-Square Tests**

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	458.221 <sup>a</sup>	2	.000
Likelihood Ratio	558.264	2	.000
N of Valid Cases	641		

a. Two cells (33.3%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.27.

In this example, the value of the Chi-square statistic is 478.810. The *p*-value appears in the same row in the “Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)” column (.000). The result is significant



if this value is equal to or less than the designated alpha level (normally, .05). In this case, the  $p$ -value was smaller than the standard alpha value, so we reject the null hypothesis that claims the two variables are independent of each other. The result is highly significant: The data showed that the variables graduated students before and after the implementation of the alternative-to-suspension program are correlated. The graduation rate for School A in 2015–2016 was 74%. That number increased in 2018–2019 to 78% after the implementation of alternative-to-suspension programs. Therefore, we could conclude that the percentage of graduated students before and after implementing the alternative-to-suspension program differed,  $\chi^2 (2, N = 644) = 478.810, p = .00$ .

The Chi-square statistic appears in the Value column of the Chi-square tests table immediately to the right of the Pearson Chi-square. In this example, the value of the Chi-square statistic is 458.264. The  $p$ -value appears in the same row in the “Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)” column (.000). The result is significant if this value is equal to or less than the designated alpha level (normally .05). In this case, the  $p$ -value was smaller than the standard alpha value, so we must reject the null hypothesis that the two variables are independent. Again, the result was significant: the variables of graduated students before and after the implementation of the alternative-to-suspension program are correlated. For example, the graduation rate for School B in 2015–2016 was 75%, which increased in 2018–2019 to 79% after the implementation of alternative-to-suspension programs. Thus, we could conclude that the percentage of graduated students before and after implementing the alternative-to-suspension program differed,  $\chi^2 (2, N = 641) = 458.221, p = .00$ .

Table 18

*School C. Graduation Data.*

**Graduation Status \* Year Crosstabulation**

		Year		Total
		1	4	
Graduation Status	Count	394	38	432
	Expected Count	252.2	179.8	432.0
No	Count	0	12	12
	Expected Count	7.0	5.0	12.0
Yes	Count	0	231	231
	Expected Count	134.8	96.2	231.0
Total	Count	394	281	675
	Expected Count	394.0	281.0	675.0

**Chi-Square Tests**

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	532.373 <sup>a</sup>	2	.000
Likelihood Ratio	659.444	2	.000
N of Valid Cases	675		

a. One cell (16.7%) had an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 5.00.

The Chi-square statistic appears in the Value column of the Chi-square tests table immediately to the right of “Pearson Chi-Square.” In this example, the value of the Chi-square statistic is 532.373. The *p*-value appears in the same row in the “Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)” column (.000). The result is significant if this value is equal to or less than the designated

alpha level (normally .05). In this case, the  $p$ -value is smaller than the standard alpha value, so we'd reject the null hypothesis that claims the two variables are independent of each other. The result is again significant: the variables of graduated students before and after the implementation of the alternative-to-suspension program are correlated. The graduation rate for School C in 2015–2016 was 80%, which increased to 83% in 2018–2019, after the implementation of alternative-to-suspension programs. Thus, we could conclude that the percentage of graduated students before and after implementing the alternative-to-suspension program differed,  $\chi^2 (2, N = 675) = 532.373, p = .00$ .

Table 19

*Hypothesis 2. Intervention Impact on Graduation*

	<b>P-value</b>	<b>Decision</b>	<b>2015–2016 Graduation Rate</b>	<b>2018–2019 Graduation Rate</b>
<b>School A</b>	0.000	reject	74%	78%
<b>School B</b>	0.000	reject	75%	79%
<b>School C</b>	0.000	reject	80%	83%

The  $p$ -value in Table 19 shows a relationship between the alternative-to-suspension interventions used and graduation rates for any of the observed schools. The graduation rate has increased after the implementation of alternative-to-suspension programs.

**Sub-Research Question 23: Intervention Impact on Attendance**

A Mann-Whitney U test was conducted to determine if there is a significant difference in student attendance before and after implementation of the alternative-to-suspension program from 2015–2016 to 2018–2019. It compared the number of absences students had before and

after implementing the alternative-to-suspension programs in three different high schools in one large urban district.

Null hypothesis: There is no difference in student attendance performance between the 2015–2016 groups A-C, the schools before the implementation of alternative-to-suspension programs, and the 2019 groups A-C, the schools after the implementation of alternative-to-suspension programs.

Table 20

*School A. Total Out of School Days*

**Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test Summary**

Total N	2586
Mann-Whitney U	867865.500
Wilcoxon W	1705730.500
Test Statistic	867865.500
Standard Error	18966.576
Standardized Test Statistic	1.684
Asymptotic Sig. (2-sided test)	.092

The Mann-Whitney U test was applied to determine if there were differences in the total number of days absent before and after the implementation of alternative-to-suspension programs. For this case, the "Asymptotic Sig. (2-sided test)" is 0.092, which is the p-value indicating whether the hypothesis should be rejected or not rejected. The Hypothesis Test Summary table displays the decisions: retain the null hypothesis since the p-value is greater than 0.05. Here, since the two groups have similar distributions, it could be demonstrated that the median number of days absent was not statistically significantly different. Therefore, there is not a significant difference from school year 2015–2016 (median = 9) to school year 2018–2019

(median = 9) in student absences in School A,  $U = 867865$ ,  $Z = 1.684$   $p = 0.092$ . These outcomes indicate that there is no relationship between student absences rate in School A before and after the implementation of the alternative-to-suspension programs.

Table 21

*School B. Total Out of School Days*

**Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test Summary**

Total N	2402
Mann-Whitney U	692613.500
Wilcoxon W	1402449.500
Test Statistic	692613.500
Standard Error	16974.857
Standardized Test Statistic	-1.681
Asymptotic Sig. (2-sided test)	.093

The Mann-Whitney U test was applied to determine if there were differences in the total number of days absent before and after the implementation of alternative-to-suspension programs. For this case, the "Asymptotic Sig. (2-sided test)" is 0.093, which is the p-value indicating whether the hypothesis should be rejected or not rejected. The Hypothesis Test Summary table shows that since the p-value is greater than 0.05, the null hypothesis was affirmed: Since the two groups have similar distributions, the median number of days absent was not statistically significantly different. Therefore, there is not a significant difference from school year 2015–2016 (median = 8) to school year 2018–2019 (median = 8) in student suspensions when excluding non-suspended students from the data in School B,  $U = 692613$ ,  $Z = -1.681$   $p = 0.093$ . This outcome indicates that there is no relationship between student absences rate in School B before and after the implementation of the alternative-to-suspension programs.

Table 22

School C. Total Out of School Days

**Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test Summary**

Total N	2982
Mann-Whitney U	1158592.500
Wilcoxon W	2345162.500
Test Statistic	1158592.500
Standard Error	23466.839
Standardized Test Statistic	2.056
Asymptotic Sig. (2-sided test)	.040

The Mann-Whitney U test was applied to determine if there were differences in the total number of days absent before and after the implementation of alternative-to-suspension programs. For this case, the "Asymptotic Sig. (2-sided test)" is 0.040, which is the p-value indicating whether the hypothesis should be rejected or not rejected. The Hypothesis Test Summary table displays the decision to retain the null hypothesis since the p-value is greater than 0.05. Here, since the two groups do not have similar distributions, it could be demonstrated that the median number of days absent were statistically significantly different. Therefore, there is not a significant difference from school year 2015–2016 (median = 7) to school year 2018–2019 (median = 8) in student suspensions when excluding non-suspended students from the data in School C,  $U = 1158592$ ,  $Z = 2.056$   $p = 0.040$ . This outcome indicates that there is a relationship between student absences rate in School C before and after the implementation of the alternative-to-suspension programs. This finding means the number of absences increased in year 4 based on the median, resulting in a one-point increase.

Table 23

*Hypothesis 3. Intervention Impact on Attendance*

	<b>P-value</b>	<b>Decision</b>
<b>School A</b>	0.092	retain
<b>School B</b>	0.093	retain
<b>School C</b>	0.040	reject

The p-value in Table 23 shows was no relationship between the alternative-to-suspension interventions programs used and student attendance in two out of the three high schools observed. At School C, there was a difference in student attendance from 2015–2016, before the implementation of alternative-to-suspension programs, and the 2018–2019 school year, while alternative-to-suspension programs were being implemented.

**Summary**

The research question examined was, "What is the impact of the alternative-to-suspension programs (e.g., PBSIS, Panorama, and SEL) being implemented in three urban high schools in terms of student academics, discipline, and attendance?" Three sub-research questions were created to align with the research question being investigated. The three variables were measured using archived data from one of the largest urban districts in the northeast. Three out of the seven high schools in the district were used to measure these three hypotheses. The three sub-research questions assessed were as follows:

- a) Is there a significant difference in student suspension rate before implementing the alternative-to-suspension program versus after the program's implementation from 2015–2016 to 2018–2019?

- b) Is there a significant difference in students graduating on time before implementing the alternative-to-suspension program versus after the program's implementation from 2015–2016 to 2018–2019?
- c) Is there a significant difference in student attendance before implementing the alternative-to-suspension program versus after the program's implementation from 2015–2016 to 2018–2019?

This study contains multiple tests to investigate the three sub-research questions. Each sub-research question required one test per school, resulting in nine tests being completed; however, the first hypothesis required two tests per school, which resulted in 12 completed tests. The first sub-research question required two Mann-Whitney U tests to determine if there was a significant difference between suspension rates before and after implementing an alternative-to-suspension program. One test included non-suspended students in the data set, while the other excluded the non-suspended students from the data. The second sub-research question required three different Chi-square tests to demonstrate if there is a significant difference in on-time graduation before and after the implementation of alternative-to-suspension programs. The third sub-research question requires an additional three Mann-Whitney U tests to determine if there is a significant difference amongst students' absences before and after the implementation of alternative-to-suspension programs. The findings were mixed across the three high schools except for the second sub-research questions discussing students' on-time graduation progress before and after the implementation of alternative-to-suspension programs. The null hypothesis was rejected for all three high schools. The findings suggested a significant difference in students' on-time graduation progress before and after the implementation of the alternative-to-suspension programs.



## **CHAPTER 5**

### **SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

#### **Introduction**

There has been an increase of punitive disciplinary punishment being used in many schools across the United States (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014a). Suspensions have increased by 1.14% from 2009–2010 and 2011–2012 school year (Table 1), Expulsion has increased by .02% from 2009–2010 and 2011–2012 school year. Schools have applied the use of detentions, suspensions, expulsions, and reliance on zero-tolerance policies as ways to improve student misconduct. The United States Department of Justice and Department of Education created the Supportive School Discipline Initiative as a response to the increase of punitive disciplinary practices in many schools across the United States. The Supportive School Discipline Initiative offers regulations on employing alternative disciplinary practices within schools across the United States (U.S. Department of Education & U.S. Department of Justice, 2014b).

Like the school district in this study, many school districts are beginning to reevaluate their school discipline practices and reduce/replace punitive exclusionary practices with alternative disciplinary practices that help shape the student and improve the school environment (Quin & Hemphill, 2014). The goal of the alternative disciplinary programs is to improve school environments, build students' characters, manage conflicts, rebuild damaged relationships while reducing misbehavior, and improve students' academic performance. The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of the implementation of the alternative-to-suspension programs being used and how they have influenced the number of suspensions, student academic performance in terms of graduating on time, and attendance in the second largest urban school district.

Many researchers conducted studies in this area that have focused on student academic performance through the lens of state exams while measuring student performance on the state exams in relation to their discipline history (number of suspensions or days received in out of school suspensions; Allen-Glass, 2013; Anderson et al., 2019; Arcia, 2006; Chu, 2018; Goh & Bambara, 2012; Hwang, 2017). Other researchers have compared suspension with the prison pipeline (Nance, 2016; Pigott et al., 2018). Recent researchers have focused their studies on the effects of restorative justice programs on student discipline (Guckenburg et al., 2015; Ligon, 2019; Marsh, 2017; Morris & Perry, 2016). This research examines the relationships of alternative-to-suspension programs with student suspension, attendance, and graduation within a 4-year term across three high schools in one urban school district. Therefore, this research takes a deeper look at investigating the benefits of having alternative-to-suspension programs while exploring its relation and effects on the school environment through the students' lens of measuring student discipline, academic progress, and attendance to the school.

The remainder of this chapter focuses on a summary of the study and its findings, limitations, implications, and recommendations for further research.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

**Overarching Question:** What is the impact of the alternative-to-suspension programs (e.g., PBSIS, Panorama, and SEL) being implemented in three urban New Jersey high schools in terms of student academics, discipline, and attendance?

**Sub-Question 1:** Is there a significant difference in student suspension rate before implementing the alternative-to-suspension program versus after the program's implementation from 2015–2016 to 2018–2019?

**Sub-Question 2:** Is there a significant difference in students graduating on time before implementing the alternative-to-suspension program versus after the program's implementation from 2015–2016 to 2018–2019?

**Sub-Question 3:** Is there a significant difference in student attendance before implementing the alternative-to-suspension program versus after the program's implementation from 2015–2016 to 2018–2019?

These were the research questions used to guide the hypotheses of the study. The first set of hypothesis tests conducted examined the relationship between alternative-to-suspension programs such as (PBSIS, Panorama, and SEL) and the number of out-of-school suspensions given by three different schools. The hypothesis tests revealed that the alternative-to-suspension programs did not affect the number of out-of-school suspensions issued, except for one school. Six Independent-Sample Mann Whitney U tests were conducted to test this set of hypotheses (Table 15). Five of the six null hypotheses were retained, and one was rejected. The one hypothesis test that showed a relationship between out-of-school suspensions and alternative-to-suspension programs included all suspended and non-suspended students in the data. The findings showed a statistically significant difference as confirmed by ( $p \leq .05$ ) between the alternative-to-suspension programs used and the number of out-of-school suspension days assigned to students in School A. The Independent-Sample Mann Whitney U test indicated no change in the median between the 2015–2016 and the 2018–2019 data used (Table 9) with a median of 0 number of suspensions. This result calls for a deeper look at additional data. School A has an even distribution between the ratio of male and female, compared to the other schools included in this study, with a population of 48% male and 52% females.

Therefore, further exploring the percent of students suspended before and after implementing the alternative-to-suspension programs showed an 8.46% decrease between the number of students suspended. The data (Table 7) shows that in year 1 (2015-2016), the percent of suspended students in School A was 24.15%, and in year 4 (2018–2019), the percent was 15.69%. These data show a significant difference from 2015–2016 to 2018–2019 in student suspensions when including non-suspended students from the data in School A. Thus, there is a relationship between student suspension rates in School A and the implementation of the alternative-to-suspension programs when including non-suspended students.

The second sub-questions examined the relationship between alternative-to-suspension programs such as (PBSIS, Panorama, and SEL) and the school's graduation rate. The hypothesis tests revealed that the alternative-to-suspension programs did influence schools' graduation rates. Three Chi-square tests were conducted to test these hypotheses (Table 19). The results confirmed that the elements analyzed in the second research question were associated with higher graduation rates across the three high schools in this study. There is a relationship between alternative-to-suspension programs and students' academic performance. As supported by many researchers, students perceived alternative practices as a second chance and that it helps meet students' academic needs (Arci 2006; Pyne 2019; Seliskar, 2019; Westbrook, 2014).

The first Chi-square (Table 16) test comparing the alternative-to-suspension programs and student graduation rate showed that there is a statistically significant difference in students' graduation rates before and after the implementation of the alternative-to-suspension program and student's graduation rate at School A, as confirmed by ( $p \leq .05$ ) with  $\chi^2 (2, N = 644) = 478.810, p = .00$ . A comparison of students' graduation rates for year 1 (2015–2016) and year 4 (2018–2019) revealed a 4% increase (Table 19).

The second Chi-square test (Table 17) comparing the alternative-to-suspension programs and student graduation rates showed that there is a statistically significant difference in student graduation rate before and after the implementation of the alternative-to-suspension program and student's graduation rate at School B as confirmed by ( $p \leq .05$ ) with  $\chi^2 (2, N = 641) = 458.221, p = .00$ . A comparison of graduation rates for year 1 (2015–2016) and year 4 (2018–2019) showed a 4% increase (Table 19).

The third Chi-square test (Table 18), comparing the alternative-to-suspension programs and student graduation rate, showed that there is a statistically significant difference in student graduation rate before and after the implementation of the alternative-to-suspension program and student's graduation rate at School C as confirmed by ( $p \leq .05$ ) with  $\chi^2 (2, N = 675) = 532.373, p = .00$ . A comparison of students' graduation rates for year 1 (2015–2016) and year 4 (2018–2019) showed a 3% increase (Table 19).

Additional analysis was conducted (Table 19) to identify the graduation rate difference between year 1 (2015–2016) and year 4 (2018–2019). The analysis showed a 3%–4% increase before and after implementing the alternative-to-suspension (PBSIS, Panorama, and SEL) programs that have taken place across the three high schools in this urban school district. The study concluded that there is a relationship between the alternative-to-suspension interventions used and graduation rates for all the observed schools. The graduation rate has increased after the implementation of alternative-to-suspension programs.

The third sub-question examined the relationship between alternative-to-suspension programs such as (PBSIS, Panorama, and SEL) and the total number of out-of-school days students have in the three different schools. The hypothesis test revealed that the alternative-to-suspension programs did not affect the number of students absent, except in one school. Three

Independent-Sample Mann Whitney U tests were conducted (Table 23) to test these hypotheses. Two out of the three null hypotheses were retained, and one was rejected. The one test that showed there was a relationship between student attendance and alternative-to-suspension programs was School C. The findings showed a statistically significant relationship, as confirmed by ( $p \leq .05$ ), between the alternative-to-suspension programs used and student attendance. In addition, the Independent-Sample Mann Whitney U test indicated that there was a change in the median between 2015–2016 of 7 and 2018–2019 of 8 data used (Table 22) were statistically significantly different, since  $p > 0.05$ ,  $U = 1158592$ ,  $Z = 2.056$ ,  $p = 0.040$  ( $<0.05$ ). This result means the number of absences increased in year 4 based on the median, resulting in a one-point increase.

The research concluded that there is no relationship between the alternative-to-suspension interventions programs used and student attendance in two out of the three high schools observed. School C demonstrates a difference in student attendance from 2015–2016 before implementing alternative-to-suspension programs and the 2018–2019 school year while implementing alternative-to-suspension programs. School C has the most attended students (Table 7) of 1535 students in the 2018-2019 school year. School C also has 69% male and 31% female. School C has the most males across the three high schools included in the study.

### **Conclusion**

This study was divided into three domains: student discipline, student academic performance, and student sense of belonging. Student discipline was measured by the number of days students received out-of-school suspensions. Student academic performance was measured through participating schools' graduation rates. Student sense of belonging was measured through attendance participation rates. The data collected for the 2015–2016 school year were

compared with archived data from the 2018–2019 school year to determine any relationship between the alternative-to-suspension programs implemented in the school district and the difference of data in 2015–2016, before the implementation of the program, and 2018–2019, during the program implementation.

The research did not find a significant difference in all the hypotheses tested. However, it did show a significant difference in one of the three schools' out-of-suspension data, in all graduation rates, and one of the three schools' student attendance. These results were supported, though five of the twelve hypotheses tested were rejected, which shows that attendance and suspensions rates were not all that different before and after the implementations. Perhaps more time is needed for the implementation of the programs to show the significance of their impact.

### **Limitations**

There are a few limitations to this study. The first limitation was not having data on the implementation fidelity for the PBSIS, Panorama, after school alternative-to-suspension SEL program across schools. Implementation of the programs makes a significant difference to the effectiveness of its outcome. Program fidelity is essential to ensuring that the program has been implemented effectively. In this district, we notice multiple alternatives to suspension programs (PBSIS, Panorama, afterschool alternative-to-suspension SEL programs) are being implemented simultaneously. Therefore, we cannot identify which program has had the biggest impact and how effective it is. It also limits the research to how the programs impacted the three high schools involved in this study

Another major limitation is studying the effects of the afterschool SEL program. This program was to be designed by each high school to lower the suspension rate. Therefore, the curriculum was to be designed by each building's administrative team and used as an alternative

tool to suspension. Here, we acknowledge that leadership has the most significant impact on the program design, ensuring that the program is being employed correctly and reassessing/restricting programs as necessary for student and building needs. In addition, school leaders must ensure that programs effectively communicate what is considered important and the standard to which appropriate behavior must meet with all school community members (Scott, 2011). Therefore, the difference in the implementation of the programs across the high schools in the district is a limitation of this study.

The third limitation in this study is the sample size. This study focused on high school students actively enrolled in one of the largest urban districts in the northeast. Therefore, the study was limited to one district including 9–12 grades students rather than looking at multiple school districts or statewide data including K–12 grade levels or various grades across the United States.

The fourth limitation in this study is that it is difficult to attribute a positive reduction in suspension, positive increase in graduation rate, or an increase in students' sense of belonging to one particular program. The partner schools have had the choice to implement all three programs at the same time. It was left to the administrative team to develop a plan of implementation. Therefore, I was not able to separate the effects between PBSIS, Panorama, and SEL after school alternative-to-suspension programs that have contributed to reducing suspension or determine if all three programs combined have had greater success in reducing suspension rates, improving graduation rates, and rebuilding student sense of belonging across the three high schools within the period of the study.



## **Recommendations**

### **Implications for Practice and Policy**

There are several recommendations for educators and policymakers based on the results of this study. The first recommendation would be to stay true to an intervention. Educators and policymakers are encouraged to select one alternative-to-suspension program and train staff members to apply the programs with fidelity. The participating district in this study was implementing three alternatives to suspension programs at once. The district felt it would be better to add on additional programs rather than implementing one program at once. However, this causes difficulties when assessing the effectiveness of the programs in terms of student suspension rates, climate and culture changes, student graduation, and attendance performance. Applying the intervention program with fidelity would assist with measuring its effectiveness and ensuring that it is utilized correctly. This decision should include research-based best practices, meet student and school needs, and engage students in taking an active role. Policymakers are encouraged to include staff professional development that is job-embedded and ongoing training as needed. Such training should meet the diverse needs of the student population with the school district.

The second recommendation is for school leaders to take an active role. The implementation of positive interventions is meant to be proactive in finding models, policies, and programs that best serve student and school needs. Ongoing reflections and self-assessments are needed across schools and districts that involve input from all stakeholders are helpful tools in developing and restructuring practices and policies to prevent student suspension and improve school environments (Burkhardt, 2009). One reflective model recommended is the School Leader Self-Reflection Tool (Transforming Education, 2020); this tool integrates social-

emotional learning at the school level while helping school leaders reflect on how they are facilitating, through their actions, the systems and structures they deliver to their school communities. This tool requires the leader to teach, model, coach while examining and cultivating the development of the culture and climate of their school. Another effective tool that school leaders can use yearly to assess their success, school success, and specific program successes is the Self-Assessment Tool for School Leaders (The Institute for Education Leadership, 2014). The purpose of this assessment is to aid school leaders in assessing their practices while reflecting the evidence of their school's development. An additional model that many school districts use is the parent, student, and staff School Climate and Culture Survey. The survey was designed to help school and district personnel assess the effectiveness of the school, school leader, programs in school that have contributed to the school climate, culture, and overall safety. This survey was designed to collect school and workplace awareness data. The collaboration between school leaders, staff, and parents will help ensure student compliance, improve the school environment, encourage students to make better decisions, and rebuild relationships between parents, school leaders, staff, and students.

The third recommendation is to identify and develop a transitional plan to support suspended students when returning to school. School codes of conduct should be reviewed and revised to only suspend students as a last resort. Once students are suspended, there should be an additional program to help transition students back to school settings. The most common transition plan currently used in schools is the return-to-school parent, student, and administrator conference. This meeting is important; however, one must remember to build students' confidence by stating their strengths, reviewing problem behavior while reteaching school expectations, and identifying students' necessary academic and behavioral support (Taylor,

2016). Often suspended students become at risk academically and disengaged from school. At-risk students are left feeling disconnected from their school and instructional setting, which ultimately increases at-risk student dropout changes (Cho, 2008). Another transitional plan used as an alternative measure is to transition students back into the school setting while meeting their educational needs and ensuring students are reconnecting with the school. Student sense of belonging is a crucial component to improving their academics and building relationships with others. According to Ahn (2010), students with a stronger sense of belonging to school are more likely to succeed academically and graduate on time. Students' academic and behavioral engagement/sense of belonging can be measured by their attendance, grades, and discipline records (Ahn 2010; Christenson & Thurlow 2004 ).

### **Implications for Future Research**

The findings of this study are limited to one urban school district and students in grades 9–12. This study should be duplicated with a larger sample size, including different school districts across the United States and various grade levels, to measure the effectiveness of alternative-to-suspension programs. This study measured the effectiveness of three different alternatives to suspension programs. Therefore, it is difficult to identify which program has impacted student discipline, academics, and attendance record or if it has to do with a combination of all three programs (PBSIS, Panorama, after school alternative-to-suspension SEL programs). Future studies should measure one specific intervention program across various age groups to ensure the program is significantly effective. Further studies can focus on additional years of program implementations and target their study towards specific groups of students, such as special education, black male, female students, etc.

Another recommendation would be to include a qualitative study that would consist of parent, student, and school leader perspectives. This change would enable the researcher to understand the effects of the alternative-to-suspension program/s being used, how it is applied, and their input on how effective it has been.

This study was limited to a collection of historical data. An addition of interviews with participating school officials, students, and parents would strengthen the information collected. Perspectives collected from others would determine the different effects of alternative programs on student behavior, academic progress, and sense of belonging while improving the overall school environment. Including a school official's perspective for future research should impact the type of intervention used to help students' behavior and academics. Further study would benefit from studying the implementation process of the intervention, not just its outcome.

An additional recommendation for further study is to conduct a study involving a school district using Restorative Practices as their alternative-to-suspension program. This study did not include restorative practices as an intervention. However, restorative practices have been bought and used in the United States as recently as the 1990s (Ligon, 2019). Restorative Justice practices include proactive strategies that reshape student discipline while improving the school environment. The field of research would benefit from further studies conducted on Restorative Practices and Restorative Justices Programs that include student, staff, and parent perceptions.

### **Summary**

This quantitative study investigated the relationship between the alternative-to-suspension programs and student suspension, graduation, and attendance rates. Archived suspension data, achievement data, and attendance data were utilized to determine the effects of the alternative-to-suspension programs used. Data was collected from the 2015–2016 school year

and compared with data collected from the 2018–2019 school year after implementing three specific alternative-to-suspension programs across three different high schools in one urban school district. Out-of-school suspension data were collected for the 2015–2016 school year and compared with the out-of-school suspension data collected after implementing the intervention programs in 2018–2019. Students' on-time graduation records were collected and compared with on-time graduation rates of the specific schools between 2015–2016 and 2018–2019. Finally, total out-of-school days were collected and compared for 2015–2016 and 2018–2019 to determine students' sense of belonging and wanting to be in school.

The findings of this study have highlighted a mixed result from the alternative-to-suspension programs used during the 4-year period listed. This study was broken into three domains: Student discipline, student academic performance, and student sense of belonging. Student discipline was measured through the number of days students were given out-of-school suspensions. Student academic performance was measured through student graduation and participating schools' graduation rate. This research study concluded that (a) the implementation of alternative-to-suspension programs (PBSIS, Panorama, and SEL) has an impact on student's suspension rate in school A, when including the entire school population, (b) The alternative-to-suspension program (PBSIS, Panorama, and SEL) has an impact on student graduation rate across the three high schools, and (c) the alternative-to-suspension programs (PBSIS, Panorama, and SEL) has an impact on student's attendance in school C. Further studies are needed to determine the role of the alternative-to-suspension programs in shaping at-risk students to become our forthcoming leaders.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**BOARD APPROVAL**

**5**

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Authorizations Report  
Authorization to Make Application, etc.  
November 19, 2020

**BOARD OF EDUCATION:**

The Superintendent of Schools recommends approval of the following recommendations.

**AUTHORIZATION TO MAKE APPLICATION**

Recommended: That the Board of Education be authorized to make application to the New Jersey Department of Education, Division of Early Childhood Education for the 2021-2022 One Year Preschool Operational Plan Updates.

**AUTHORIZATION TO USE DISTRICT DATA**

Recommended: That be authorized to use district data from the Elizabeth Public Schools during the 2020-2021 school year to conduct research and obtain archival data for his doctorate program at St. Peter's University.

Recommended: That Mona Wanis be authorized to use district data from the Elizabeth Public Schools during the 2020-2021 school year to conduct research and obtain archival data for his doctorate program at St. Peter's University

Recommended: That be authorized use district data from the Elizabeth Public Schools during the 2020-2021 school year to conduct research and obtain archival data for her doctorate program at St. Peter's University.

Recommended: That be authorized use district data from the Elizabeth Public Schools during the 2020-2021 school year to conduct research and obtain archival data for her doctorate program at St. Peter's University.

**APPENDIX B**  
**CITI CERTIFICATE**



Completion Date 01-Oct-2020  
Expiration Date 01-Oct-2023  
Record ID 38707886

This is to certify that:

**Mona Wanis**

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

**Human Subjects Research** (Curriculum Group)  
**Graduate Students - Human Subjects Research** (Course Learner Group)  
**1 - Basic** (Stage)

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME. Do not use for TransCelerate mutual recognition (see Completion Report).

Under requirements set by:

**Saint Peter's University**



Verify at [www.citiprogram.org/verify/?wfbe73a6b-f57e-4b47-880d-8b7af7ebda96-38707886](http://www.citiprogram.org/verify/?wfbe73a6b-f57e-4b47-880d-8b7af7ebda96-38707886)

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