

# School Leaders' Perceptions of Students' Antisocial Behaviors

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## Abstract

This qualitative case study sought to understand school leaders' perceptions of students' ability to manage their behavior. This understanding provided insight into the barriers to addressing the problem and suggested a potential solution for increasing academic success. The recommended job-embedded professional development training might help increase the capacity of the school leaders to manage students' antisocial behaviors.

## Problem

- School leaders spend significant amounts of time working with students who exhibit **antisocial behaviors**.
- Public behavior and weapon possession data indicated that **incidents** of antisocial behavior were **increasing**.
- Failing to help students change negative behaviors results in increased antisocial behavior and a risk of academic failure (Teske, 2011).
- If school leaders understand how to help students improve their behavior, antisocial behaviors and school exclusions might decrease, and academic achievement increase.

## Purpose

The purpose was to **explore** school leaders' perceptions of the ability of students to manage their behavior, in order to **identify** possible solutions for increasing the self-regulatory ability of students with antisocial behaviors, thus potentially reducing the exclusion rate.

## Relevant Literature

### Background

**Exclusion** from school is often a result of students' failure to adhere to the school environment norms.

National **zero tolerance policies** called for the use of exclusion from school as a disciplinary consequence for antisocial behavior in order to eradicate violence and ensure school safety (Martinez, 2009). However, these policies have simply restricted many students from accessing educational opportunities.

To address the ineffectiveness of zero tolerance policies, school leaders should focus on **changing a culture of punishment into a culture that holds students accountable** while providing the support necessary to make behavioral changes (Bear, 2012; Gregory, Cornell, et al., 2010).

### Framework

**Antisocial behavior** contributes to delinquency and occurs from an inability to control one's emotions; it is this eventual lack of control that may lead to arrest (Mowat, 2010). Examining students' antisocial behavior from the self-regulation theoretical construct was pertinent because individuals' ability to self-regulate has a direct impact on their ability to function in an academic environment (Menziez & Lane, 2011). Self-regulation is a foundational skill for academic success and behavior management.

Failing to help students change negative behaviors results in increased antisocial behavior and a risk of academic failure (Teske, 2011).

## Research Questions

**RQ 1:** What are the experiences of school leaders in working with students who exhibit antisocial behaviors?

**RQ2:** What are the perceptions of school leaders regarding the skills they need to effectively manage students who exhibit antisocial behaviors?

**RQ3:** What are the perceptions of school leaders regarding the necessary interventions for students who exhibit antisocial behaviors?

## Procedures

Instrumental case study design, using semi-structured interview questions developed from the relevant, published literature.

Participants included a convenience sample of **13 school leaders** in one rural school district in Washington State.

## Data Analysis

Transcripts were coded to identify themes related to the research questions, using a comparative inductive process.

## Findings

### RQ 1

- School leaders invest significant time working with students' antisocial behaviors
- Descriptors: hardened, injured, or damaged, and generally have a chaotic and unsupportive home life
- Typical antisocial behaviors: low-level disruption, insubordination, and harassment, intimidation, and bullying; progression of the behaviors increased alongside the students' development
- Often occurs during unstructured time

### RQ 2

- Effectively managing students' behaviors requires adults to build relationships with students
- No evidence of a systemic, district-wide system to address and manage behavior
- An absence of ongoing, job-embedded professional development

### RQ 3

- The failed application of zero tolerance
- A need to adapt corrective action policies
- Various interventions help students reduce their antisocial behaviors; however, with the exception of *Love and Logic*, there was little to no consistency across the system

## Limitations

The researcher was the primary instrument of data collection, and a member of the participant subgroup.

The sample size may have been too small. Case study results are unlikely to be generalizable to another setting.

## Conclusions

Findings indicated a gap in practice that, if addressed, could potentially reduce students' antisocial behaviors throughout the district.

Improving the school climate and reducing the use of exclusionary discipline through targeted implementation of social-emotional skills learning (SEL) and School-wide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS) should improve academic achievement and develop successful and productive citizens.

This study provided examples of best-practices regarding effective skills, strategies, and interventions for working with students' who exhibit antisocial behaviors.

Reducing antisocial behaviors is essential for creating a culture that is conducive to learning.

## Social Change Implications

In the larger social context, school leaders would benefit from additional preparation and training on effectively managing students' behaviors.

By helping students learn to self-regulate and manage their behavior, they should experience increased academic success and decreased incidents of school exclusion.

Individuals who graduate from high school are more likely to become successful, productive citizens; additionally, decreasing incidents of antisocial behaviors should prevent an individual from entering the school-to-prison pipeline.