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Traditional Suspension Practices and Nonpunitive Alternatives for Secondary Students with Disabilities

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COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

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Abstract

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MA, California State University, San Bernardino, 2004

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Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

Growing numbers of suspensions and expulsions of students with disabilities (SWDs) have prompted school districts to explore nonpunitive alternatives to traditional suspension practices. The study school district implemented nonpunitive alternatives to suspension for SWDs, specifically students classified as emotionally disturbed (ED). SWDs are being suspended at a higher rate than their general education peers for the same violation. The purpose of this causal-comparative study was to examine differences in academic performance between students with emotional disabilities who received out of school suspensions and those who received nonpunitive consequences other than suspension for the same violation. To understand disruptive behavior, social learning theory provided the framework for this study. The sample included 20 high school students, grades 9-12, who were SWD eligible under the criteria of ED. Archival data included academic records, attendance records, and suspension records. To compare the means of the data, independent-samples *t* tests were used to analyze differences in grade point average between the groups. The results found that with nonpunitive alternatives, student attendance was improved; however, there was no significant difference found in academic performance between students who received nonpunitive consequences and those who received out of school suspension. Statistical power was limited due to the study sample size. Positive social change implications include providing initial research findings to the study school district and initiating the dialogue on reducing suspensions of SWDs to improve attendance, which may increase the potential for future academic success.

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Dedication

This doctoral study is dedicated to those most influential in my life. To my father, William C. Clifford for instilling in me the "yearn" to learn. He pushed for higher education regardless of barriers that might get in the way of personal endeavors. To my mother, Darlene J. Clifford (1928-2011), for her understanding, kind spirit, and loving heart. To my children, Courtney Keiko and Marshall Keichi, who continue to fill my life with joy, love, laughter, and encouragement. To Dad, Mom, Courtney, and Marshall, you are who I am!

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To all of the students whom I have had the pleasure to educate: your personal stories, both gloomy and joyous, have kept me coming back for over three decades. You encourage me to make the life of our youth as safe as possible and to make their world a pleasant place to live.

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To my family, without your support, encouragement and strength during this time I would not have been able to pursue such a dream. I love you all so much.

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Section 1: Introduction to the Study

Lawmakers in Sacramento, California are directing districts to ensure that all students are afforded the right to receive an education under the state constitution. Although the state recognizes the need to keep schools safe, it also sees the need to provide interventions and to produce more successful students (California Department of Education [CDE], 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015). This study specifically considers a medium sized school district in Riverside County; the state has recognized that Riverside County constitutes 10% of all state suspensions. According to state lawmakers, when a district is unable to show positive gains in student achievement and student behavior, the state can and will impose requirements and restrictions on districts (CDE, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015).

The district addressed in this study has been found to be out of compliance by not following state and federal guidelines when a student with disabilities (SWD) has been removed from current placement for 10 school days in the same calendar school year (CDE, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015). The district has begun to conduct district discipline-committee meetings to review data, because school sites have been confronted with a systemic problem of k violations. Education Code Section 48900(k) defined k violations as: situations in which a student has disrupted school activities or otherwise willfully defied the valid authority of school staff in the performance of their duties (Education Code, 2014).

Currently the district holds students accountable to maintain a safe and orderly school (Losen & Gillespie, 2012) by using k suspension codes. At the same time, the district committee agrees on the need to explore strategies that provide educational access

and that change student behavior. The State of California determined that k violations are over used and districts should provide productive solutions to a growing dilemma (CDE, 2014, 2015) such as good teaching and engaging students to reduce poor behavior and the dropout rate (Losen & Gillespie, 2012).

Background

Suspension and expulsion numbers for SWDs, especially for students diagnosed with emotional disturbance, are increasing yearly, causing concern for school districts (Lee, Cornell, Gregory, & Fan, 2011). Numerous theories and opinions have been offered to explain the rise in suspensions for SWDs (Losen & Skiba, 2011). One theory was the implementation of the zero tolerance policy (Evenson, Justinger, Pelischek, & Shultz, 2009). Districts use this policy without consideration of the individual student or the disability (Evenson et al., 2009). Because SWDs experience negative impacts on their health and physical well-being when they are suspended (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2003; Hart, Cramer, Harry, Klinger, & Sturges, 2010; Wiley, Siperstein, Forness, & Brigham, 2010), they perceive they are failing academically and develop negative school attitudes, which increases their chances of making wrong choices (Oliver & Reschly, 2010; Schreur, 2006; Wiley et al., 2010). School administrators are often accused of being ineffective in dealing with SWDs, particularly when students are emotionally disturbed (ED) (Harry, Hart, Klingner, & Cramer, 2010). Students with ED who demonstrate behavioral problems (Skiba & Sprague, 2008) associated with the disability are among the most challenging students to reach, and they pose challenges beyond the scope of traditional discipline techniques (Lane, Kalberg, & Shepcaro, 2009; Losen, & Gillespie, 2012; McIntosh, Filter, Bennett, Ryan, & Sugai, 2010).

Often SWDs are suspended at the same rate as their non-disabled peers (Chin, Dowdy, Jimerson & Rime, 2012; Wiley et al., 2010). Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 [IDEA], students with disabilities hold due-process rights more extensively than do students without disabilities (Yell & Rozalski, 2008). IDEA allows school administrators to discipline SWDs in the same manner as nondisabled students with verbal reprimands, warnings, detention, and in-school suspension, as long as these procedures are used with all students. However, school administrators must follow the disciplinary requirements of IDEA when students are suspended from school, to ensure special education services are being provided according to the IEP (Yell & Rozalski, 2008). SWDs who are continuously suspended from school are entitled to a manifestation-determination meeting to determine whether the student's behavior was or was not a direct result of the student's disability (IDEA, 2004). Skiba and Sprague (2008), found the removal of troublemakers (students with or without disabilities) to be counterproductive, and concluded that purging schools of such students did not improve the learning environment.

California Senate leader Steinberg proposed Assembly Bill (AB) 1235, which would reduce the use of punitive zero tolerance measures, focusing instead on alternatives (CDE, 2015). AB 1235 would require school districts with high suspension rates to implement evidence based, alternative discipline programs to reduce the number of suspensions or expulsions by 2% annually (Boccanfuso & Kuhfeld, 2011). AB 1235 would require districts that have suspended more than 25% of their enrollment, or 25% of any subgroup, as of the start of the 2013–2014 school year, to institute a positive behavioral intervention support system that is evidence based and could be used

schoolwide for 3 years to reduce of suspensions by 2% (Boccanfuso & Kuhfeld, 2011). Assembly member Dickinson introduced AB 2242, prohibiting students from being expelled from school for lesser offenses, such as disrupting school activities or willfully defying school officials. Schools would be required to discipline students in an on-campus suspension classroom (Hong & Eamon, 2012). Senator Steinberg and Assembly member Dickinson agreed that suspensions not only keep students out of school and generally unsupervised for the days of their suspension, they also can cause children to fall behind, become further disengaged from school, and too often lead to school dropout and crime.

In this study, I examine whether nonpunitive alternatives to suspension are directly related to student success. The sample consisted of students serviced through an individual educational plan (IEP) qualifying under ED criteria. I used a statistical t-test to compare students in a district in Southern California, to determine whether there was a significant relationship between nonpunitive alternatives to suspension and student success. I examined student attendance, grades, and behavioral data before and after receiving nonpunitive discipline techniques.

Problem Statement

This study addressed the efficacy of nonpunitive alternatives to suspension for SWDs, specifically students classified as ED. I compared the academic performance of students with emotional disabilities who received out of school suspension and those who receive nonpunitive consequences for the same violation. I answered this question by collecting archival data from one high school. Given the growing numbers of suspensions and expulsions of SWDs, there is a need to find nonpunitive means to replace traditional

practice of suspension or removal of students from school from 1 to 5 days for each offense (CDE, 2012). Once an SWD receives 10 days of suspension, the school is required by law to hold a manifestation-determiUnited States meeting to determine whether there is a pattern to the behavior and, if so, whether the behavior is caused by the student's disability (IDEA, 2004).

Currently the district school administrators follow the district's sequential-discipline guidelines to determine how many days of suspension they apply per violation. Typically, administrators overreact to k violations as defined by the educational code. Administrators translate this law to include: missing materials, multiple tardies to class, defiance or disruption within the classroom (Chin et al., 2012; Moreno Valley Unified School District, 2014). The zero tolerance policy increases the number of suspensions and expulsions of all students (Evenson et al., 2009). However, IDEA clearly states that SWD's was suspended the same as their non-disabled peers up to 10 days. Once a student reaches the 11th day, it is considered a change of placement violating the student's right to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE). Each suspension from this point forward requires the school to hold a manifestation-determiUnited States meeting up to 20 days of suspension (IDEA, 2004).

This problem impacts student achievement, student social skills, and student self-esteem. Many factors may contribute to this problem, including administrators' tolerance levels (Luiselli, Putnam, Handler, & Feinberg, 2005), school philosophy (United Statesal Association of School Psychologists [NASP], 2010), teachers' classroom behavior-management system (Sundius, & Ferneth, 2008), and students' social competence (Evenson et al., 2009). Currently, the district is out of compliance regarding suspensions

and expulsions, as their average is 1.01% of SWDs, whereas the statewide average is .012% of SWDs (CDE, 2010).

This study contributed to the body of knowledge needed to address this problem by examining nonpunitive alternatives to traditional disciplinary procedures. Specifically, I determined what effect if any, in-school disciplinary programs had on student success, through attendance, grades, and suspension totals of ED secondary students. I also reviewd the number of students who had been suspended less than or greater than 10 days per school year to determine whether alternative disciplinary practices were related to fewer than 10 days of suspension. The study of school programs that offer alternatives to traditional suspension practices will also add to the body of knowledge needed to address the district's remediation plan, required by CDE.

I concluded this study in a medium size district located in Southern California. The district currently serves 35,000 students with 3,500 students requiring IEPs. The district has 34 group homes with 80% of their students receiving special education services. The district is the only district in the county that is its own special education local plan area (SELPA), servicing all students with any one of the 13 qualifying disabilities. Districts that are their own SELPA are responsible for services, discipline, and monitoring of all special education students enrolled. Reporting to the State Department of Education holds the district accountable for increasing failure rate, suspension/expulsion rates, and dropout rates. There are 24 schools in the county and the district has had the highest number of suspensions and expulsions of SWDs for the last 4 years (CDE, 2015).

Nature of the Study

In 2013, the district was found to be out of compliance in three areas: nonuse of functional behavioral analysis, lack of services being offered to SWDs while suspended, and SWDs being removed from current placement for 10 school days in the same school year (CDE, 2015). One issue resulting from this review was that the district needed to determine whether services were being offered to SWDs after 10 days of suspension (CDE, 2015) The district was also found to be out of compliance in educating SWDs in the general curriculum and progress toward meeting the goals set out in the IEP (CDE, 2015).

I selected a quantitative, cross-sectional design for this study due to time constraints, economic factors and the ability to conduct rapid data collection, (Creswell, 2013). I collected archival data on randomly selected students regarding grades, attendance, and suspensions in two treatment groups. I conducted statistical analysis using the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) (IBM, 2014). The purpose of this quantitative, cross-sectional study was to find solutions to the problem of students with ED being suspended from school for more than 10 days per year, and to determine whether nonpunitive discipline practices helped SWDs perform better in school than students who received punitive discipline. The control group and the treatment group were SWDs receiving services from a comprehensive high school. The treatment group received nonpunitive consequences different from those recommended in the district's Sequential discipline guide, whereas the control group received consequences following the district's Sequential discipline guide.

Research Questions

Because the number of suspension and expulsions are on the rise United States wide for students with ED, many districts are under scrutiny by the U.S. Department of Education to determine why and how. To address this problem, I asked the following research questions: "What alternative practices can be used to minimize exclusion from school for SWDs on the high school campus?" For this quantitative study, the following hypotheses are aligned with the research question:

H_o: There is no significant difference between the academic performance of students with emotional disabilities who receive out of school suspension and those students who receive nonpunitive consequences other than suspension for the same violation.

H_1: There is a significant difference in the academic performance of students with emotional disabilities who receive out of school suspension and those students who receive nonpunitive consequences other than suspension for the same violation.

The data for this study was collected by accessing archival data for attendance, grades, and behavioral logs. Section 3 will provide a detailed discussion on the methodology used in this study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine whether alternative suspension practices for k violations, when implemented at the high school of interest for students identified as ED, had a positive effect on academic performance. I examined the impact of the sequential discipline guide (CDE, 2012), on student attendance and grades, and compared it with the impact of the alternative discipline procedures within the treatment

group. Currently, administrators rely on punitive practices such as suspension and expulsion as disciplinary policies at each comprehensive school site (Chin et al., 2012). I also examined the consistency of administrators' usage of the sequential discipline guide for k violations. I also examined the discipline procedures used for one group of students with ED who had the opportunity to change their behavior by the use of alternatives to suspension. In addition, I examined the effectiveness of suspension practices and their influence on student academic performance (Chin et al., 2012; Oliver & Reschly, 2010; Skiba & Sprague, 2008). Skiba and Sprague (2008) found that the removal of troublemakers (students with or without disabilities) was counterproductive, and concluded that purging schools of such students did not improve the learning environment (Boccanfuso & Kuhfeld, 2011; Chin et al., 2012). Hong & Eamon, 2012).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study was social learning theory. Bandura (1973) addressed psychological disorders in the context of behavioral modification and determined that social learning theory had been applied extensively in understanding disruptive behavior. Human functioning was interpreted as the product of a dynamic, three-way interplay of personal, behavioral, and environmental factors (Bandura, 1986). Social learning theory is also the theoretical foundation for the techniques of behavior modeling (Bandura, 1997). As people learn by observing others' attitudes, behaviors, and outcomes of those behaviors, individuals begin to form an idea of how these new behaviors might be performed (Bandura, 1969, 1973, 1986, 1997; Goldstein, 1998). Several studies indicate that young adolescents often model learned disruptive behavior

from their family members, schools, and communities (Bandura, 1969, 1973, 1986, 1997; Goldstein, 1998; O'Keefe, 1997).

Kohlberg's (1969) theory was grounded in basic Piagetian assumptions of cognitive development. As Kohlberg elaborated on Piaget's work on moral development, Kohlberg identified six stages of moral development, grouping them into three levels. Each level represented a fundamental shift in the social–moral perspective of the individual. At the first level, the preconvention level, moral judgments are concrete. Individuals at the first level focus on avoiding breaking rules that are backed by punishment. Level 2 is characterized as the conventional level of reasoning. Here, individuals have a basic understanding of conventional morality, and reason with an understanding that norms and conventions are necessary to uphold society. Finally, the postconventional level is identified by reasoning based on principles, using a prior-to-society perspective. These individuals reason based on the principles that underlie rules and norms, but reject a uniform application of a rule or norm.

Individuals learn through observations of others (Bandura, 1997). Theorists also indicate that an individual's learning consists of a sequence of qualitative changes in the way one individual thinks (Kohlberg, 1969). Social theorists agree that an individual interacts with the environment according to his or her basic understandings of the environment (Bandura, 1969, 1973, 1997; Goldstein, 1998; Kohlberg, 1969; O'Keefe, 1997). Another aspect of social conditioning for behavioral issues is the premise of modeling and shaping the desired behavior (Bambara & Kern, 2006). Because the classroom is a social environment n which children learn from one another, changing

students' conduct from disruptive to productive needs to be systematic and sequential, reflecting the social benefits for all students (Hart et al., 2010).

Operational Definitions

The following terms were used in this study:

Emotional disturbance (ED): For educational purposes, a student must qualify in one or more of the following area: (a) inability to learn that cannot be explained by sensory issues, intellect, or health factors; (b) inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances; (c) inability to build and maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and adults; (d) a general mood of unhappiness or depression; and (e) a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fear associated with personal or school problems (IDEA, 2004).

Free and appropriate public education (FAPE): The district is responsible for providing each student with FAPE at no cost to the parent (IDEA).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA): Current laws and mandates that affect students with disabilities in their educational process when considering placement, discipline, and behavioral challenges (IDEA, 2004).

Individual educational plan (IEP): An IEP is written by team members specifically for each student who qualifies for special education services. The team consists of an administrator, parent(s), a special education teacher, and a general education teacher. Other relevant team members may include the school psychologist, speech therapist, occupational or physical therapist, mental health therapist, nurse, attorney(s), advocate(s), and the student (IDEA, 2004). Discussion involves placement, current levels of performance, services, accommodations, and modifications. Once the

IEP is signed by the parent, these decisions become legally binding for up to 1 year unless there is a need to revise the plan to better serve the student.

K violations: Disrupting school activities or otherwise willfully defying the valid authority of school staff in the performance of their duties. Examples are prefight behaviors such as name calling, insults, squaring off, violation of hands-off such as pushing, hitting, or spitting, gang gesturing/writing or related, not appearing at a detention assigned by an administrator, inappropriate use of school, cell phone, or other electronic devices, use of profanity, and ongoing defiance of authority in any teacher's classroom (CDE, 2015).

Manifestation determination: SWDs are given due process when being disciplined to determine whether the behavior is a manifestation of their disability. Schools are required to conduct a meeting before the 11th day of suspension to determine whether the behavior has a direct relationship to the disability (IDEA, 2004; Yell & Rozalski, 2008).

Nonpunitive alternatives: Social, behavioral and cognitive skill-building, character education, or targeted behavioral supports for students who are at risk for violent or illegal behavior (Boccanfuso & Kuhfeld, 2011).

Sequential discipline: Sequential discipline guidelines were developed by the district to outline the consequences for inappropriate student actions that have been referred to administrators. This sequential discipline guideline provides a framework to address inappropriate student behaviors in a comprehensive and consistent manner. A student may be suspended or expelled for acts detailed in this guideline, including incidents that occur while on school grounds, incidents that occur while going to or coming from school, incidents that occur during the lunch period whether on or off

campus, and incidents that occur during or while going to or coming from a school-sponsored activity.

Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA): California is organized into SELPAs across the state. All SELPAs are responsible for developing policies, procedures, and guidelines for special education program operations in and across its jurisdiction, delineated in special education local plan requirements. A full range of services and placement options must be available in the SELPA. The district is a single-district SELPA. The local plan for special education is located in the SELPA director's office (CDE, 2013).

Students with disabilities (SWD): For educational purposes, a student who cannot access core curriculum without accommodations or modifications and has qualified as disabled under one or more of the 13 categories: autism, specific learning disability, intellectual disability, visually impaired, hard of hearing, deaf, deaf-blind, traumatic brain injury, orthopedic impairment, other health impairment, emotional disturbance, speech and language, multiple disabilities (IDEA, 2004).

Zero tolerance: School-district governing boards adopted zero tolerance policies to send a "get tough" message to the community that violent behavior, incidents, and crime would not be tolerated, due to escalating incidents of school violence (CDE, 2012).

Assumptions, Limitations, Scope, and Delimitations

It was assumed that students with ED would be educated in the least restrictive environment based on the IEP team decisions. Students selected would clearly be representative of all SWDs qualifying as EDs through their IEPs. All students would be from the selected district. It was also assumed that archival data would be accessible

through district records to support this study. Finally, I assumed student anonymity would be preserved.

This study was limited by selection. The *t* test included student data from one high school in one school district in Southern California. Therefore, the findings from this study reflected only the population in this district. The small sample size of 24 was another limitation and a potential weakness. Additionally, administrators may not have had proper documentation to support the number of days of suspension or reason for suspension (Evenson et al., 2009; Siperstein, Wiley &Forness, 2011).

The purpose of this study was to examine relationships between current suspension practices and the effects on students qualified as ED at the high school level. This study was delimited to the district in Southern California. This study focused on archival data through district files. The data collected included attendance, grades, and suspension records. The study was also delimited by the number of students with ED selected from the chosen comprehensive high school.

Significance of the Study

The district has shown significant increase in the number of suspensions and expulsions each year. In the 2010 and 2011 school years, elementary suspensions and expulsions increased by 50%, middle school by 30% and high school by 42% from the 2008 and 2009 school years (CDE, 2012). The numbers are increasing across the United States (Martinez, 2009), and this problem has become acute in the district where this study took place. Currently, CDE has identified the district as having disproportionate representation pursuant to the requirements of IDEA for 2010 and 2011. A determination of disproportionate representation reported by CDE is a serious violation: 3 years of

disproportionate representation could result in the district being penalized with monetary consequences by CDE (2012). The results of this study may provide the district administrators and educators with information on the effects of zero tolerance policies and the use of nonpunitive actions for k violations, including tardiness, lack of materials, and defiance by SWDs with ED.

Globally, universities supporting teacher preparation programs, educational leaders, and teachers may benefit from this study by improving the way administrators and teachers react to repeated problematic behaviors. Because suspension and expulsion rates are increasing significantly across the United States (Martinez, 2009) and internationally (Findlay, 2010), student achievement is being affected by students being excluded from the school setting (Hoyo, 2007). Exclusion from the school setting is not conducive to producing socially productive citizens (Schreur, 2006).

Since the reauthorization of the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (2004) behavior has been studied, described, and defined in an attempt to identify evidence based behavioral practices in an attempt to decrease suspension numbers (Sugai, & Anderson, 2012). Additional studies (Gresham, 1991; Sugai & Horner, 1999) have identified the need for effective implementation of a school wide behavioral framework designed to enhance academic and social behavioral outcomes of students (Sugai & Simonsen, 2012). This body of research, included 16,000 school teams around the United States, reflecting efforts by state and district leadership teams to build capacity for sustaining and scaling up their implementation of school wide behavioral systems (Bradshaw, Koth, Bevans, Ialongo, & Leaf, 2010; Bradshaw, Koth, Thornton, & Leaf,

2009; Bradshaw, Mitchell, O'Brennan & Leaf, 2010; Bradshaw, Reinke, Brown, Bevans, & Leaf, 2008; Horner, Sugai, & Anderson, 2010; Horner et al, 2009). Further discussion indicates a need for a continued development of evidence based behavioral interventions for all students (Sugai & Simonsen, 2012). Student outcomes from an evidence based intervention practice should include a small number of positively stated behavioral expectations, clear and distinctive consequences for rule violations, explicit social skills instruction and behavioral interventions (Braun, & Cochrane, 2008; McIntosh et al., 2010; McIntosh, Flannery, Sugai, Braun & Cochrane, 2008). The collection, analysis and use of data are essential to clarify and prioritize individual student needs, to better match the need and intervention to the student behavior, and to determine student responsiveness and outcome impacting the student efficiency, effectiveness and relevance (Horner et al., 2010; McIntosh et al., 2010; Sugai and Simonsen, 2012). My study focused on one district in Southern California.

The results of this study may contribute to positive social change by providing research for one district regarding the state of California's suspension practices for k violations and the implementation of nonpunitive actions for suspension and the effects on student achievement. Additionally, this study may contribute to the body of knowledge needed to address students' negative attitude toward school by using alternative methods in changing their problematic behaviors. Improving school discipline procedures may increase student motivation, improve educational outcomes (Evenson et al., 2009; Wiley et al., 2010) and help students become productive citizens in their communities and workplaces (Horner et al, 2010; Sander, Sharkey, Olivarri, Tanigawa, & Mauseth, 2010).

Summary

The U.S. Departments of Justice and Education have determined that disparities exist in discipline practices across the United States because many schools lack coherent, effective processes for preventing misconduct (Dupper, Theriot, & Craun, 2009). Administrators rely on punitive practices such as suspension and expulsion, which only serve to exclude students from school (Chin et al., Luiselli et al., 2005; Wiley et al., 2010; Sharkey & Fenning, 2012). Discipline policies are often applied unevenly throughout the school and continue to be punitive in nature (NASP, 2001; Losen & Skiba, 2011; Sharkey & Fenning, 2012). This study addressed the effectiveness of suspension practices and how they affect student academic performance.

Section 1 provided the foundation for the study. In Section 2, I provide a review of the literature on suspension practices and their effects on students' academic performance. In Section 3, I describe the research design for this study and in Section 4 I present the results. In Section 5, I interpret the findings, provide recommendations, and outline implications for social change.

Section 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review is to examine the current suspension practices, past and present theories, and the effects of suspensions on students with ED. The literature review focuses on social learning theory and the psychological disorders relating to behavioral modification as well as developing an understanding of disruptive behavior. This study addressed whether nonpunitive alternatives to suspension had a direct relationship to student success. The following research question guided this study: "What alternative strategies and practices can be used to minimize exclusion from school for SWDs on the high school campus?" The study addressed several areas, including attendance, grades, and suspension totals, as they relate to high school students' services and programs for students with ED. Two additional factors were studied: the number of students who had been suspended fewer than 10 days and the number of students who had been suspended more than 10 days per school year.

The purpose was to determine whether alternative disciplinary practices resulted in fewer than 10 days of off campus suspension. A study of school programs that offer alternatives to traditional suspension practices added to the body of knowledge needed to address the district's remediation plan, as required by CDE. The sources for this literature review came from Walden University's electronic databases including EBSCO*host*, ProQuest, and Sage Journals Online. I also used Google Scholar search engine. The review of literature provides a perspective on the immediate effects of suspension and the long term effects on attendance and grades of high school students with ED.

Based on the requirements of IDEA for 2010 and 2011, suspension rates for SWDs have reached disproportionate representation (CDE, 2012). CDE is responsible,

under IDEA, for monitoring activities based on district data submitted through the California Special Education Management Information System. Specifically, CDE must identify districts that have disproportionate suspension representation in special education (CDE, 2012). When a district is found to have disproportionate representation, the state is required, by Title 34 of the Code of Federal Regulations 300.600 (d), to monitor and ensure that district policies, procedures, and practices are compliant and do not lead to inappropriate identification (CDE, 2012).

The consequences for districts that are significantly unbalanced in their discipline of SWDs are significant (Losen & Skiba, 2011). A district found to be out of compliance was required to redirect 15% of its federal special education monies to reduce the problem (Federal Department of Education, 2010). With a district population of 32,000 a and10% of that population being SWD, approximately $900,000 would be redirected from special education monies. This would pose a substantial budgetary challenge, as other services provided to students would be compromised (CDE, 2012).

Historical Update on Improving America's School Act

This section introduces key legislation in how school discipline has been mandated over the years resulting in higher suspension rates of SWD's. In 1994, President Clinton signed the Guns-Free Schools Act (GFSA), with Congress amending the 1965 Improving America's School Act (GFSA, 1994). This policy mandated that school districts receiving federal funds for education must implement a policy mandating that students who bring a firearm to school must be expelled for at least 1 year (GFSA, 1994. GFSA further requires that such students be referred to the criminal-justice system (Hong & Eamon, 2012; Rice, 2009). GFSA was implemented in the early 1980s by the

U.S. Navy and later adopted by the U.S. Customs Agency (Findlay, 2010) "to seize the boats, automobiles, and passports of anyone crossing the border with even a trace amount of drugs and to charge those individuals in federal court" (Collins, 2013; Ferri, 2012), resulting in the phasing out their zero tolerance policy. However, the legislature modeled the policy for U.S. students and schools on a law that was originally developed to target drug lords; thus, the policy was criminalizing students (Collins, 2013; Ferri, 2012; Martinez, 2009).

In 1995, federal funds for GFSA were eliminated, and by 1997 more than 90% of public schools in the United States had implemented zero tolerance policies (Findlay, 2010). After the shootings at Columbine High School in 1999 and Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in 2007, widespread implementation of zero tolerance policies was enacted (Schachter, 2010). Data collected under GFSA showed that weapons in schools are relatively rare (Bosworth et al., 2011; Collins, 2013; Ferri, 2012), as approximately 49 million students attend public schools in the United States, and only .058 out of 1,000 students were caught with a weapon on campus. The GFSA data only indicated those students who were identified with a weapon in (Flannery, Frank, & Kato, 2012). The apparent myth of increasing school violence is fanned by media reports among the educational community crying for accountability and more stringent punishment for a perceived amplification of violence in schools (Findlay, 2010).

Statistics from Canada support similar conclusions (Bosworth et al., 2011; Collins, 2013; Dolmage, 1996; Ferri, 2012). Youth violence has remained stable for the past few years and may be showing a decline (Jull, 2010). However, Canadian teachers and public perception suggested that, as a result of the number of incidents and the

severity of youth crime, violence and unwanted aggression in Canadian schools may be on the rise (Bosworth et al., 2011; Collins, 2013; Dolmage, 1996; Ferri, 2012). Whereas the impact of zero tolerance focused on drug and weapons possession, the policy has since been expanded in the United States and Canada to include nonviolent behaviors such as drug possession, defiance of authority (O'Shea & Drayden, 2008), habitual profanity (Martinez, 2009), defacing school property, and gang-related behavior in schools (Fries & DeMitchell, 2007). This policy allows for no exceptions, compromise, or discretion, up to 10 days of suspension (Rice, 2009).

Any instance of violence or crime at school not only affects the individuals involved, but also disrupts the educational process and affects bystanders, the school itself, and the surrounding community (Collins, 2013; Evenson et al., 2009; Flannery et al., 2010). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2011) reported on such topics as: victimization, bullying, fights, weapons, and use of drugs and alcohol. During the 2009-2010 school years, NCES reported an increase in victimization and bullying. Public schools reported that bullying while at school occurred among students on a daily or weekly basis. Cyberbullying also occurs on a daily or weekly basis. Educators now recognize bullying at school and cyberbullying as a widespread and often neglected problem in schools that has serious implications for victims of bullying and for those who perpetrate the bullying (Swearer, Espelage, Vaillancourt, & Hymel, 2010).

In 2009, bullying varied by student characteristics. A higher percentage of female students (20%) between the ages of 12 and 18 reported being the subject of rumors whereas a higher percentage of male students (18%) reported being pushed, shoved,

tripped, or spit on (Welch & Payne, 2011). In addition, these students also reported being excluded from school activities on purpose. Sixth-grade students (39%) reported being bullied at school, compared to seventh and eighth grade students at (33%). Of high school students, 28% of ninth-grade, 27% of 10th-grade, 21% of 11th-grade, and 20% of 12th-grade students reported being bullied (Flannery, 2012). Data show that middle school students have a higher rate of being bullied than high school students (Trump, 2011).

Cyberbullying is also on the rise. Cyberbullying includes students who reported that another student posted hurtful information about the student on the Internet using instant messaging, Short Message Service, text messaging, e-mail, gaming, and being excluded online (Trump, 2011). Girls report being cyberbullied more often than boys (Bosworth et al., 2011; Collins, 2013; Ferri, 2012). Law enforcement attribute the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University murders to unchecked bullying in k–12 schools, illustrating some of the basic features of zero tolerance theory (Wittman, 2007). To stop violence in schools, there needs to be policy instituted in every school, starting with pre-school, a policy of zero tolerance for teasing, taunting, ridicule and bullying (Welch & Payne, 2011). Kids can get kicked out of school under the zero gun policy just for pointing their finger like a gun at another student (Fox & savage, 2009). Principals, school officials, teachers, other responsible adults, and fellow students who tolerate any degree of teasing, taunting and harassment or who join in or initiate the ridicule of a student must be held accountable (Bosworth, et al., 2011). Failure to report or stop such activities as ridicule and bullying must become the enforced norm in all schools (Bosworth et al., 2011; Fox & Savage, 2009; Wittman, 2007).

The Supreme Court ruled that students have constitutional and due-process protections when they are subjected to disciplinary procedures such as suspension, represented in the case of *Goss v. Lopez* (1975). Two general areas of due-process rights afforded students include procedural and substantive (Valente & Valente, 2005). Procedural due process involves the fairness of methods and procedures used by the schools; substantive due process refers to the protection of student rights from violation by school officials and involves the reasonableness of the disciplinary processes (Yell & Rozalski, 2008). In the case of *Goss v. Lopez* (1975), the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that students can be suspended or expelled as a reasonable punishment under due process. According to the court ruling, administrators have to authority to stipulate and impose out of school suspension for all students including SWD. Often administrators suspend SWD for up to 10 days causing this to be a serious event in the life of the suspended child (Bosworth et al., 2011; Fox & Savage, 2009).

Students with Disabilities and Discipline

All students, disabled and nondisabled, in public schools have constitutional rights (Welch & Payne, 2011). However, SWDs have extensive due process rights covered by IDEA. The issue of how to discipline SWD lacked clarity until the reauthorization of IDEA. IDEA mandated that, unless the infraction committed by the student is a direct result of the disability or results from Local Educational Agency's (LEA) failure to implement an IEP, the disciplinary measures are the same for that student as for the student's nondisabled peers (O'Shea & Drayden, 2008). SWDs who violate the school's code of conduct may unilaterally be suspended up to 10 school days, to the same extent that administrators impose such sanctions on students without

disabilities (Welch & Payne, 2011). Once a student reaches 10 days of out of school suspension, every out of school suspension after the 10 days is considered a change of placement, violating the student's offer of FAPE by LEA, based on student needs (CDE, 2015).

IDEA requires a manifestation determination meeting be held when a student with a disability has been removed from the current placement for more than 10 days in the same school year (CDE, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015) to determine whether the number of suspensions constitutes a pattern of removals, indicating a change of placement. The LEA must consider the length of each removal, the total time of the student's removal, and the proximity of the removals to one another when determining whether a change in educational placement took place (CDE, 2014, 2015). All suspension over 10 days must continue to provide FAPE to eligible students (CDE, 2014, 2015) offering a program appropriate in academic instruction, social skills development, and behavior support in conjunction with the student's IEP (CDE, 2014, 2015). Two points are to be considered when conducting a manifestation determination: Was the conduct a result of the failure of the school to implement the IEP? Was the conduct caused by or did it have a direct relationship to the student's disability? (IDEA, 2004). If the IEP team determined that the student's misconduct is a manifestation of the disability, the student must be returned to the placement from which he or she was removed, unless the parents and LEA agree otherwise that the student is dangerous (CDE, 2014, 2015). If the IEP team determined that the student's disability is related to the infraction, the student's IEP team must conduct a functional behavior assessment IDEA, 2004) review or provide the student with behavioral goals through a behavior-intervention plan (IDEA, 2004).

When the IEP team concludes that the misconduct was not a manifestation of the student's disability, the school district may take disciplinary action such as expulsion, in the same manner as it would for a child without a (IDEA, 2004). However, the IEP team may conclude that there is a need to include positive behavioral interventions, strategies, and supports to address behaviors that impede the child's learning or that of others (IDEA, 2004). Regardless of the setting, the school district must continue to provide FAPE for the student. Alternative educational settings must allow the student to continue to participate in the general curriculum and ensure continuation of services and modifications in the IEP (IDEA, 2004). If a parent disagrees with the IEP team's decision, they may request to expedite a due-process hearing that will take place within 20 school days of the date on which the request for hearing was processed (IDEA, 2004).

Sequential-Discipline Guidelines

For many years, public schools have "disciplined" students who commit serious violations of school rules or pose a threat to school safety, by temporarily suspending or permanently expelling them from school (Evenson et al., 2009; Fox & Savage, 2009; Bosworth et al., 2011). Beginning in the late 1980s, many states including California adopted rigid discipline policies. By 1994, Congress passed the GFSA, amending the 1965 Improving America's School Act (GFSA, 1974). This new policy mandated that school districts must have a policy stating that students who bring a firearm to school must be expelled for at least 1 year (Evenson et al., 2009). Although GFSA is not a zero tolerance law, many school policies enacted in response to GFSA are often referenced as zero tolerance (Evenson et al., 2009; Kim et al., 2010; Boswell et al., 2011; Stader, 2012).

In the 2012 and 2013 school year more than 496,000 California students were suspended and another 8,562 were expelled (Torlakson, 2014). Although exclusionary school discipline policies are intended to ensure productive learning environments, when students are removed from school their learning is severely disrupted. Students on suspension are disallowed from accessing core-curriculum lesson plans completed in the classroom, and are prohibited from completing missed assignments. Suspension prevents students from receiving direct instruction, impairing their ability to complete academic tasks when they return from disciplinary suspension. Moreover, little scientific evidence shows that suspension and expulsion are effective in reducing school violence or increasing school safety (Findlay, 2010). When students are suspended, instructors have limited time to focus on social skills, safety in the classroom, and resources that students can access to assist in preventing future suspensions or violence (Algozzine, Wang, & Violette, 2011; Bear, 2010; Wiley et al., 2010).

During the 2007 and 2008 school year, more than 815,744 students were suspended and 28,339 were expelled (CDE, 2012). In a 4-year period, that equates to an increase of 419,744 suspensions and 9,657 expulsions in California alone. If the rise in suspensions and expulsions continues with the current practices in place, the number of dropouts will also increase. The pervasive impact of zero tolerance discipline policies and practices in U.S. public schools cannot be overstated (Dupper et al., 2009). This arduous and swift uniform punishment has resulted in a near epidemic of out of school suspensions (Dupper et al., 2009; Chin et al., 2012; Losen & Gillespie, 2012). State Schools Chief Tom Torlakson, from Sacramento, California has reported a 15 percent decline in the number of students suspended in the 2013 and 2014 school year.

Statewide, 49,987 fewer students were suspended since the CDE implemented programs to reduce the suspension rate known as restorative justice (CDE, 2015).

Four major groupings of suspension records comprise minority students, SWD, secondary/elementary, and urban school students (Stadler, 2012). Researchers found disproportionate consequences for minority students compared to their nonminority counterparts for the same violation (Evenson et al., 2009). African American students are four times more likely to be suspended than White students for the same violation; Hispanic students are twice as likely to be suspended as White students. Students with disabilities are another group affected unfairly by zero tolerance. Researchers demonstrated that students in special education are often more negatively impacted by policies than general-education students (Dupper et al., 2009; Wiley et al., 2010; Welch & Payne, 2011). Although IDEA includes certain protections for SWDs regarding frequent suspension, researchers still find higher rates of suspensions for that demographic.

Statistics indicated that secondary schools have a higher number of suspensions compared to elementary schools. The number of suspension increase markedly after fifth grade with more than 50% of ninth-grade students being suspended at least once during this year. Data also indicates that of those students suspended in a given school year, at least 40% was repeat offenders (Sundius & Ferneth, 2008).

The fourth group of students, urban school children, has significantly higher rates of suspension in comparison to more rural or suburban areas. The use of suspension varies from school to school. In one urban area, half of the high school-student suspension rates were under 30%, but nearly one third of the schools in the same area

reported suspension rates higher than 60 % (Bradley, Doolittle, & Bartolotta, 2008; Bear, 2010). The differential statistics suggest that there is little accountability to district sequential discipline guidelines. The statistics suggest bias in the application of sequential discipline guidelines. Thus, suspension rates may be linked to school policies and possible factors of school climate or administrative practices.

School administrator's use of exclusionary measures such as out of school suspension should be used only after less restrictive strategies have proven unsuccessful or when student behaviors could result in injury to self or others (Stadler, 2006; Bradshaw et al., 2010; Welch & Payne, 2011). Appropriate use of these strategies requires planning, documentation, parental participation, and ongoing evaluation. When used inappropriately, time out and in school suspension become reactive measures that offer little or no opportunity to teach and maintain student pro social behaviors (Findlay, 2007). Research shows that suspension negatively impacts the mental health and physical wellbeing of students. Multiple suspensions of school age youth with behavioral problems is associated with higher rates of depression, drug addiction, and home life stresses (Sharkey and Fenning, 2012). Also, suspension may predispose these children to antisocial behaviors and suicidal ideation (Sundius & Ferneth, 2008; Algozzine et al., 2011).

In the 21st century, leaders continue to use traditional punishment and exclusion procedures. Stakeholders have proven repeatedly that these procedures provide a short lived reprieve from disciplinary problems, but over the long term, punishment and exclusion are ineffective and can lead to renewed incidents of disruption and escalating

negative behaviors (Mayer, 1999; Oliver & Reschly, 2010; Chin et al., 2012). As the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) is crucial for Academic Performance Index and Adequate-Yearly Progress scores, the traditional discipline procedures are no longer a benefit to the educational system. With mounting pressure to improve students' academic achievement, students excluded from class for behaviors seen as inappropriate by the teacher, impacts student learning. Researchers confirmed the notion that suspensions are not given for serious or violent offenses, but rather for minor infractions, such as third tardy to class, truancy, or verbal defiance (Chin et al., 2012). The U.S. Department of Justice and Education evaluated the 2012 and 2013 school year and published the following data: rates of serious violent crimes against school aged youth including rape, sexual assault, robbery, and aggravated assault are more than twice as high outside of school as they are inside of school (Torlakson, 2014). Schools are doing students a disservice by removing them for minor infractions that are neither violent nor illegal.

In a recent discussion with 10 educational leaders from across the United States, suspension was a controversial topic: 80% of these leaders did not favor suspension due to the loss of academic time, whereas 20% favored removing the student who spoiled the classroom for the others, so the classroom could become healthy once again (Yell, 2010). When asked what happens when the disciplined student returns and how the suspension helped the student or school climate, 50% of these leaders believed that "change can happen" and students can be successful.

Various Discipline Benefits

The success of students depends on empowerment (Mayer, 1999; Wiley et al., 2010; Algozzine et al., 2011). Students who are empowered by their teachers, support

staff, and administrators believe that they can achieve their goals, control their behavior, and meet the challenges that confront them, because they themselves have the power to shape their destinies and futures (Wiley et al., 2010; Algozzine et al., 2011). Empowered students can build powerful connections to their academic endeavors by creating realistic individual goals. Daily attendance without the threat of suspension allows staff and administration to work with students with proactive conversations to track students' progress. Schools create supportive, inclusive environments that support social and academic success, reducing the need for punitive consequences for maladaptive social behaviors (Gillian, 1982; Wiley et al., 2010).

Critics' traditional methods of discipline, extrinsic motivation, punishment, and exclusion, as disempowerment, leading students to learn and believe they are unable to manage themselves (Bradshaw et al., 2010; Curtis, Van Horne, Robertson & Karvonen, 2010). To build on empowerment, teachers should demonstrate their conviction that students can and will control their own behaviors. Teacher should assist them to do so without making them dependent on excessive or unnecessary teacher praise, assistance, or supervision (Wiley et al., 2010; Algozzine et al., 2011).

In many cases students have emotional problems, personality problems, situational problems, or physiological factors that are unknown to the teacher and staff (Curtis et al., 2010; Losen et al, 2010; Oliver & Reschly, 2010). In these situations, staff use traditional methods and behaviors do not diminish. Teacher awareness of these problem areas may require a cultural change in the classroom and even in the school. The

staff needs to become find consensus on helping students become empowered regardless of the problem.

Moral and Social Issues for Emotionally Disturbed Students

Moral education is becoming an increasingly popular topic in the fields of psychology and education (Sander et al., 2011; Tobin & Swain-Bradway, 2011; Vincent, Randall, Cartledge, Tobin & Swain-Bradway, 2011). Piaget is among the first psychologists whose work remains directly relevant to contemporary theories of moral development. In early writings, Piaget focused specifically on the moral lives of children, studying the way children play games, to learn more about children's beliefs about right and wrong (DeVries & Zan, 1994; Robles, 2011; Sander et al., 2011). In addition, Piaget (1965) interviewed children regarding acts such as stealing and lying. When asked why they should not lie, younger children could not explain beyond, "It's a naughty word," whereas older children were able to explain "because it isn't right," and "it wasn't true." Piaget concluded that children begin in a heteronomous stage of moral reasoning, characterized by a strict adherence to rules and duties, and obedience to authority (Kolberg, 1971; Smith, 2011).

This heteronomy results from two factors. The first is the young child's cognitive structure—thinking—is characterized by egocentrism. This egocentrism leads children to project their own thoughts and wishes onto others, associated with a unidirectional view of rules and power associated with heteronomous moral thought (Truiel, 1983; Smith, 2011). The second major contributor to heteronomous moral thinking in young children is their relative social relationship with adults. In the natural relationship between adults and children, power is handed down from above, leaving the child with powerlessness

coupled with egocentrism feeding into a heteronomous moral orientation (Kohlberg, 1971; Turiel, 1983; Smith, 2011). Piaget concluded from this work that schools should emphasize cooperative decision making and problem solving, nurturing moral development by requiring students to work out common rules based on fairness (Piaget, 1965). Sociologists believed that morality results from social interaction or immersion in a group. Given these two viewpoints, classroom teachers should perform the difficult task of providing students with opportunities for personal discovery through problem solving, rather than indoctrinating students with norms (Smetana, 1996; Smith, 2011).

Kohlberg (1969) elaborated on Piaget's work, proposing that children form ways of thinking through their experiences, which include understandings of moral concepts such as justice, rights, equality, and human welfare. Kohlberg determined that the process of attaining moral maturity took longer and was more gradual than Piaget had proposed. On the basis of this research, Kohlberg identified six stages of moral reasoning, grouped into three major levels, pre conventional, conventional, and post-conventional. Each level represented a fundamental shift in the social moral perspective of the individual. Stage 1, the pre conventional level, is characterized by a concrete, individual perspective focusing on rules that are directly connected to negative consequences (Kohlberg, 1969; Kohlberg, 1971; Power, Higgins, & Kohlberg, 1989). Stage 2, the early emergence of moral reciprocity, is characterized by the instrumental, pragmatic value of an action (Kohlberg, 1969; Kohlberg, 1971; Power et al., 1989) Stage 3 is self-identified by understanding rules and upholding them consistently; being aware of shared feelings, agreements, and expectations; viewing morality as acting in accordance with what society defines as right.

Stage 4 marks the shift from defining what is rights in terms of local norms and role expectations to defining right in terms of the laws and morals established by the larger social system; the individual is a member of society. Stage 5 is the post-conventional level, characterized by reasoning based on principles, using a "prior to society" perspective. Stage 6 is a theoretical endpoint that rationally follows the preceding five stages (Kohlberg, 1969; Kohlberg, 1971; Power et al., 1989).

Kohlberg (1969) used these findings to reject traditional character-education practices. These approaches are premised on the idea that virtues and vices are the basis for moral behavior, or that moral character is comprised of a bag of virtues, such as honesty, kindness, patience, and strength. According to the traditional approach, teachers are to teach these virtues through example and direct communication of convictions, giving students an opportunity to practice these virtues, and rewarding their expression. Kohlberg's theories were grounded in basic Piagetian assumptions of cognitive development. Development in this model is not merely the result of gaining more knowledge but rather consists of a sequence of qualitative changes in the way an individual thinks. The goal of moral education is to encourage individuals to develop to the next stage of moral reasoning (Power et al., 1989; DeVries & Zan, 1994; Smith, 2011).

Longitudinal studies conducted by the Kohlberg (1971) research group began to reveal anomalies in the stage sequence and attempted to resolve these anomalies through adjustments in the stage descriptions. Smith (2011) and colleagues advanced this research through the domain theory. Theorists distinguished between the children's developing concepts of morality and other domains of social knowledge, such as social conventions.

According to domain theory, the child's concepts of morality and social convention emerge from the child's attempts to account for the qualitatively differing forms of social experience associated with these two classes of social events. Educational researchers using domain theory developed a set of recommendations for what is termed "domain-appropriate" values education (Smetana, 1996; Kurtines, Gervirtz & Lamb, 2014). This approach entails the teacher's analysis and identification of the moral or conventional nature of social values issues to be employed in values lessons (Truiel, 1983; Smith, 2011). Morality and convention are distinct, parallel developmental frameworks rather than a single system, as conceived by Kohlberg (1971). Because all social events, including moral ones, take place in the context of the larger society, a person's reasoning about the right course of action in any given social situation may require the person to access and coordinate their understandings from more than one of these two social-cognitive frameworks (Turiel, 1983; Smith, 2011; Kurtines et al., 2014). For example, people line up to buy movie tickets, largely as a social convention. Outside of northern Europe or North American lining up is not a shared social norm across cultures. The act of turn taking is a moral consequence (Gilligan, 1982; Turiel, 1983; Smith, 2011; Kurtines et al., 2014).

These hypothesized distinctions have been sustained through studies over the past 20 years. These studies, including interviews with children, adolescents, and adults; observations of child–child and adult–child social interactions (Gilligan, 1982; Turiel, 1983; Smith, 2011; Kurtines et al., 2014) cross cultural studies (Gilligan, 1982; Turiel, 1983; Smith, 2011; Kurtines et al., 2014) and longitudinal studies examined the changes in children's thinking as they grow older (Gilligan, 1982; Turiel, 1983; Smith, 2011;

Kurtines et al., 2014). The child and adult studies resulted in a set of recommendations for what is termed domain appropriate values (Gilligan, 1982). Within domain values there are educational values that would enable the teachers to analyze and identify the moral or conventional issues of social values to be employed through a series of values lessons (Gilligan, 1982; Turiel, 1983).

A discussion of dress code, for example, would constitute a poor basis for moral discussion, because mode of dress is primarily a matter of convention. Likewise, consideration of whether it is right to steal to help a person in need, would be a poor issue with which to generate a lesson intended to foster students' understanding of social conventions. Thus, students dealing with a moral issue would be directed to focus on the underlying justice or human welfare considerations of the episode. By being aware of the developmental changes that occur in students' comprehension of the role of social convention, and related changes in students understanding of what it means to be fair or considerate of the welfare of others, teachers are able to frame consideration of complex social issues in ways that maximize the ability of students to comprehend and act on the moral and social meaning of particular courses of action (Gilligan, 1982; Turiel, 1983; Smith, 2011; Kurtines et al., 2014).

A second critique of Kohlberg's (1971) work was put forth by Gilligan (1982), suggesting that Kohlberg's theories were biased against women, as only boys and men were used in Kohlberg's studies. By listening to women's experiences, Gilligan (1982) offered that a morality of caring can replace the morality of justice and rights exposed by Kohlberg (1971). In Gilligan's view, the morality of caring and responsibility is premised in nonviolence, whereas the morality of justice and rights is based on equality. Although

this gender debate is unsettled, Gilligan's work has contributed to an increased awareness that care is an integral component of moral reading. Educational approaches based on Gilligan's (1982) work have emphasized efforts to foster empathy and care responses in students.

Children enter school with varying degrees of social competence. Although some students are fluent in social skills and therefore are able to interact appropriately with peers and teachers, others might not have learned to perform socially appropriate behaviors and, therefore, risk low academic achievement and developing antisocial lifestyles (Walker, Ramsey & Gresham, 2003). Human beings can be proactive and engaged or alternatively, passive and alienated, largely as a function of the social conditions in which they develop and function. Careful consideration of the psychological needs and processes in domains significantly impact mental well-being, education, work, and relationships (Gilligan, 1982; Turiel, 1983; Smith, 2011; Kurtines et al., 2014).

Empowering students requires teachers to respond to a student's inability to perform a social skill exactly as they would a student's inability to complete an academic task. If students do not know how to solicit teacher attention appropriately, they need to be actively and systematically instructed to signal for help, for example, by raising their hands (DeVries &Zan, 1994; Losen & Skiba, 2011). Situation specific social skills instruction should focus on teaching behaviors perceived as functional by students and others with whom they interact. For instance, getting a teacher's attention must result from raising one's hand, and talking out or leaving one's seat must not result in getting a teacher's attention (Turiel, 1983). If an inappropriate behavior is made functional for a

student by evoking the desired response, teachers inadvertently might encourage the performance of inappropriate behavior. Socially appropriate behaviors in the classroom are likely to decrease the amount of time spent on disciplinary actions and increase students' access to academic content (Kohlberg, 1969). Situation-specific instruction should incorporate a model or description of the appropriate skill, provide students the opportunity to observe and practice the skill, assess the students' ability to perform the skill, provide reinforcement contingent on performing the taught skill, and avoid reinforcing inappropriate behavior (Gresham, 1998; Losen & Skiba, 2011).

Researchers indicated that zero tolerance policies are ineffective in the long run and are related to a number of negative outcomes, which include elevated rates of school dropout, poor school climate, low academic achievement, and discriminatory school discipline practices. Zero tolerance policies typically fail to increase school safety and often restrict students from assessing education (Schachter, 2010). To maintain school discipline and to maximize education opportunities, classrooms should become the focal point to improve student behavior through social skills instruction, thereby ensuring students' access to academic content (Hong & Eamon, 2012; Stader, 2012). The success of teachers and administrators in helping students develop social competence depends on their ability to (a) develop a school wide culture of social competence, (b) infuse the curriculum with situation specific social skills lessons that target key behaviors, and (c) match the level and intensity of instruction of students' social skills deficits (Stader, 2012). The list of recommendations for intervention is extensive and seems overwhelming, but school districts and school psychologists should adopt as many strategies as possible to remediate school disciplinary issues quickly (Findlay, 2010).

With moral education becoming an increasingly popular topic in the fields of psychology and education, the theories of Piaget (1965) and Kohlberg (1969, 1971) need to be explored in depth. A moral crisis exists in the United States due to media reports on the increase in violent juvenile crime, teen pregnancy, and suicide (CDE, 2012). Although not all of these social concerns are moral in nature, a growing trend links the solutions to these and related social problems to the teaching of moral and social values in the public schools (Truiel, 1983; CDE, 2012;).

What Educators Know About Discipline

Most LEA's require school personnel to immediately administer appropriate discipline for school related behaviors. Discipline without questions is the most essential and most difficult aspect of education, for without discipline there can be no effective teaching (Haroun & O'Hanlon, 1997; Vincent et al., 2011; Sharkey & Fenning, 2012). Students are to be responsible for attending school regularly and on time, conforming to school rules and regulations, and honoring obligations to respect teachers, administrators, self, and peers (O'Shea & Drayden, 2008; Robles, 2011). Many school personnel spend much time each day disciplining students displaying outbursts, bullying, or other forms of inappropriate and unacceptable physical and verbal behaviors (Crosby, Jolivette, & Patterson, 2006; Sander et al., 2011). LEAs must enforce discipline procedures and policies, not just punishing for misconduct, but modifying unacceptable behavior and encouraging acceptable behavior (Haroun & O'Hanlon, 1997; Vincent et al., 2011; Sharkey & Fenning, 2012)

Since the inception of the zero tolerance policy, school discipline has shifted from a prevention and correction model to a reactive and punitive model for minor infractions

such as profanity, lack of materials, and tardiness to class (Evenson et al., 2009). Research acknowledges that SWDs, especially those identified as having ED, are often more negatively impacted academically and emotionally than general-education students (Sandius & Ferneth, 2008). SWDs suspended in a given school year, at least 40% was suspended repeatedly (Sandius & Ferneth, 2008). This data suggest that some students do not find this option to be a deterrent, but rather an incentive to avoid challenging work or other difficulties often experienced in the school environment (United States Association of School Psychologists, 2010).

Explanation for Interest in Discipline

As professionals seek out sources for discipline problems, they speculate about how to address discipline (Sander et al., 2011; Vincent et al., 2011; Sharkey & Fenning, 2012). Potential sources of problems include the lack of order at home due to ineffective parenting practice, lack of role models, lack of adult supervision after school, lack of concern for absenteeism and truancy, abuse, and neglect (O'Shea & Drayden, 2008). Other sources of problems highlight home and community influences due to student's exposure to violence in the family and community, unsupervised access to firearms, or excessive exposure to violence in television programming, movies, and video games (Hofmaier, 2006; Losen & Skiba, 2011; Welch & Payne, 2011). Additionally, influences on problem behavior include limited awareness of individual behavior and effects, limited awareness of behavioral consequences, negative self-image, and peer pressure to engage in inappropriate behaviors, poor social skills, lack of problem solving skills, and limited conflict resolution skills (Hofmaier, 2006). Less attention to students' social development and increased attention to emotional and mental health issues in students in

classrooms now impact teaching (Crosby et al., 2006). LEAs have liability concerns when problem behaviors such as classroom disturbances or student pranks undermine the integrity of the learning environment and interfere with students' academic and social outcomes. Staff and student stress may threaten school safety and plays a key role in LEA's establishing liability, and in affecting roles and responsibilities when the need for discipline surfaces (O'Shea & Drayden, 2008).

Beyond the Sequential discipline guide for ED Students

Educators must move beyond the sequential discipline guide to support the emotional and social needs of the ED student. Researchers have shown that punishment does not teach alternative behavior that can be used in the future. Punitive discipline inhibits learning, does not effectively change behavior, allows students to blame others rather than accept responsibility for their own behavior, and creates a negative attitude toward school activities (Milanovich & Luty, 2007). Understanding the characteristics criteria, behaviors associate with each characteristic, and limiting conditions associated with ED is essential when dealing with problematic behaviors (IDEA, 2004). An educational definition of ED is a condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree, which adversely affects educational performance (IDEA, 2004). Table 1 defines the five qualifications.

Table 1

Educational Definition for Emotionally Disturbed Qualification

1. Inability to learn that cannot be explained by sensory issues, intellect, or health factors.	Fails classroom tests or quizzes May be at any level of achievement Performs daily academic tasks or homework at a failing level Fails to (or refuses to) complete class

	assignments/homework Demonstrates difficulty in beginning academic tasks
2. Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances.	Reacts catastrophically to everyday occurrences Has extreme mood liability Lacks appropriate fear reactions Reacts with unexplained rage or explosive, unpredictable behavior Puts forth flat, blunted, distorted, or excessive affect Behaves manically Believes others are conspiring against them Has hallucinations Thinks delusionally Has unrealistic plans for self Has involuntary physical reactions Performs self-stimulatory behaviors Is habitually confused
3. Inability to build and maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peer/adults.	Has no friends at home, school, or community settings Is extremely fearful of teachers and peers Avoids communicating with teachers and peers Is incapable of maintaining interactive behaviors with others Fails to participate verbally or physically in group situations Has pervasive social problems in home and school settings Peer relationships are short-lived, anxiety provoking, and even chaotic
4. A general mood of unhappiness or depression	Feels depressed, hopeless, or irritable prominently and persistently Has insomnia or hypersomnia Experiences excessive fatigue or loss of energy Feels of poor self-worth Exhibits unwarranted self-blame or self-criticism Has an inadequate self-concept Engages in self-destructive behavior Has recurrent thoughts of death or suicide

5. A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fear associated with personal/school problems.	Has physical symptoms without organic findings Persists in irrational fears resulting in avoidance of a specific object Has panic reactions Complains of physical discomfort Is intensely and generally anxious and fearful

Note: Adapted from "34 Code of Federal Regulations §300." Copyright (2016) by U.S. Government.

The federal classification and limiting conditions are far from diagnostic or definitive; thus, the definition of each category and each limiting condition constitutes the substance of the eligibility criteria as defined by 34 Code of Federal Regulations 300.306 (Table 2). All three limiting conditions must be applied to each diagnostic category.

Table 2

Limiting Conditions

Limiting Condition	Definition
1. Exists over a long period of time…	Target behaviors/symptoms must have been in existence for at least 6 months unless the diagnosis has a different period of time conventionally stipulated as part of the defining characteristics. This is intended to eliminate from consideration, to the extent possible, situational stress, crisis reactions, and temporary adjustment problems.
2. Exists to a marked degree…	The criterion behaviors must exist as an "attribute of the person" in such a way as to be observable as disturbed or disturbing in all life

	setting: school, home and community. Thus, situational disturbances or conduct disorder would be excluded. In addition, the disturbing behavior must be intense, severe, and having a considerable impact. It must also be consistent or habitual. Patterns of mild emotional disturbance: identity disorders, attention deficit disorders, simple phobias and separation anxiety could not be included. Taken together, then, both pervasiveness and intensity as seen in home, school and community are necessary to define "a marked degree."

Note: Adapted from "34 Code of Federal Regulations §300." Copyright (2016) by U.S. Government.

To fully address the behavioral needs of SWDs, important changes must occur with all staff in a given school (Kern, Hilt-Panahon, & Sokol, 2009). One barrier to effective behavioral change is that all staff understands the characteristics, criteria, and behaviors associated with each characteristic and limiting conditions of ED when addressing problematic behaviors (IDEA, 2004). Additionally, all staff must receive training to fully understand the relationship between behavior and environmental events (Kern, Hilt-Panahon & Sokol, 2009).

School Climate

A major factor in effective classroom management is the teacher's ability to address minor disruptions before they become major problems (Kounin, 1970; Sander et al., 2010; Robles, 2011; Vincent et al., 2011). The teacher has the ability to be decisive element in the classroom (Oliver & Reschly, 2010). The approach taken creates the

climate, positive or negative (Curtis et al., 2010). The tremendous power of a classroom teacher possesses the control to make a child miserable or joyous, can be the tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration (Curtis et al., 2010). It is the teacher's response to a situation whether a crisis was escalated or deescalated and a child humanized or dehumanized. (Curtis et al., 2010; Vincent et al, 2011).

Such transformation depends on the role of the classroom teacher as first responder to disciplinary situations and the use of classroom management (Schachter, 2010) for minor infractions: talking out, not completing academic assignments, or exasperating other students (Montague, Cavendish, Enders, & Dietz, 2009) is the responsibility of the teacher (Schachter, 2010). Several studies indicate that positive praise and positive interaction are generally sufficient to develop and maintain appropriate behaviors for most students (Walker et al., 2003; Kennedy & Jolivette, 2008). Positive oral feedback on performance for students with ED should be immediate to reduce problem behavior rather than offering delayed feedback (Lingo, Jolivette, & Barton-Arwood, 2009). For example, a teacher may tell a student who is working on improving in mathematics, "Great job on your math test. You completed 80% of the problems correctly. That's an improvement of 5% from last week. Congratulations on your success." This type of praise is behavior specific and is delivered in a positive and genuine fashion. The recommended ratio for this type of verbal praise to criticism and reprimands is 4:1 (Kennedy & Jolivette, 2008).

The next transformation would be to incorporate visual feedback by displaying student work. Teachers work with students to decide what area of education is of importance such as mathematics, reading, homework, or classroom-work to improve

academic performance and self-esteem (Lingo et al., 2009). The teacher will have a folder for each student with a graph showing progress of agreed areas of need. This allows the student to have immediate visual feedback of their progress, giving them empowerment for their education (Kennedy & Jolivette, 2008). Visual and oral feedback is a viable teacher strategy that focuses on and promotes positive behavior without specialized training, materials, or intensive preparation (Lingo et al., 2009). In addition, visual and oral feedback can be altered easily to meet a variety of academic and social situations, settings, and students (Lingo et al., 2009).

The physical environment is well organized and open to allow students full view to ensure a sense of security and tranquility (Milanovich & Luty, 2007). The environment will display student work to create a sense of ownership and teamwork (Kennedy & Jolivette, 2008). Highly structured academic instruction is of high importance for the ED program. The environment includes individual desks, rectangular or kidney-shaped tables, leaning centers to support one-to-one or small-group instruction. Short transitions between direct instruction and center time, multisensory activities, and differentiated instruction with curriculum are additional alternatives to improving time on task to avoid problematic behaviors (Schachter, 2010). Keeping instruction well-paced and teaching from bell to bell builds structure to the program so students know exactly what is expected (Lingo et al., 2009).

Bridging the gap between teacher and student is another component to be addressed in the educational environment. The teacher must identify and define the most significant behavior problem. As many students have more than one behavioral concern, the most significant is the first to be addressed. Working on one behavior at a time is

more conducive to correcting the behavior over a period of time rather than try to address all problems at the same time (Milanovich & Luty, 2007). Once the significant behavior has been identified, obtaining a baseline of the frequency, identify when and where the behavior occurs, identify the trigger(s), identify the intent of the behavior (communication, fulfilling a need, etc.) and identify positive reinforcements to encourage the desired behavioral outcome. Invite the student to orally and visually discuss the findings to build a working plan to improve the inappropriate behavior (Schachter, 2010). Additionally, the basic key factor in developing responses to disruptive behavior is that students must be clearly aware of the rules, procedures, and consequences. Students must be given clear, polite cues indicating continuation of behavior that will evoke specific consequences, maintain consistency in rules and procedures, inform student they are choosing the consequence, whether it be positive or negative, and consequences should be educational in nature (Milanovich & Luty, 2007).

As students deal with insurmountable issues at home, getting to school can often be challenging emotionally. Because many students with ED are attempting to address medication issues, they often experience difficulties with the simple life function of arising from bed, getting dressed according to school dress code rules, and entering the bus at the appropriate time. If the morning structure is out of balance, it can trigger problematic behaviors before students ever arrive at school (Skiba & Sprague, 2008). Upon arrival to school, students are greeted courteously by staff, including the use of the student's name. Daily conversations and goal building with students in the morning provide staff with a student's emotional baseline. Meeting students at the gate or

classroom door with a warm greeting provides staff an emotional compass for students while giving the student a sense of trust and safety (Skiba & Sprague, 2008).

Social Skills Building

Social skills are a set of competencies that allow students to cope with and adapt to the demands of social environment, promote positive social relationships, and contribute to peer acceptance, and friendship development (Wilhite, 2010). Social skills are taught, learned, and performed. Once taught and learned, social skills transfer into social competence, demonstrated by successful interaction with peers, and significant adults across all life situations (Gresham, 1998; Wilhite, 2010). Social skills interventions lay on three main assumptions: (a) all students can learn social skills and they are not inherent in an individual, (b) social skills instruction is most effective when individualized to the student's needs, and (c) social skills must generalize to other settings to be beneficial (Schoenfeld, Rutherford, Gable, & Rock, 2008). Several techniques and programs to teach social skills are described below.

Developmental Assets®

The framework of the 40 Developmental Assets will identify a set of skills, experiences, relationships, and behaviors that enable young people to develop into successful and contributing adults (Sesma, Mannes and Scales, 2013). Over the following 2 decades, the Developmental Assets framework and approach to youth development became the most frequently cited and widely used in the world, creating what Stanford University's Damon described as a sea change in adolescent development (Sesma, Mannes and Scales, 2013). The Developmental Assets influence young people's development, helping them become caring, responsible, and productive adults. The

framework has been adapted to be developmentally relevant from early childhood through adolescence.

The first section of the framework identified external assets: (a) support—family, family communication, other adult relationships, caring neighborhood, school climate, and parent involvement in school, (b) empowerment—community values, youth as resources, service to others, and safety, (c) boundaries and expectations—family, school, neighborhood, adult role models, positive peer influence, and high expectations, and (d) constructive use of time—creative activities, youth programs, religious community, and time at home.

The second section of the framework identified the internal assets: (a) commitment to learning—achievement motivation, school engagement, homework, bonding to school, and reading for pleasure, (b) positive values—caring, equality and social justice, integrity, honesty, responsibility, and restraint, (c) social competencies—planning and decision making, interpersonal and cultural competence, resistance skills, and peaceful conflict resolution, and (d) positive identity—personal power, self-esteem, sense of purpose, and positive view of person future. A critical element in this research is to link these supports, strengths, and skills sometimes called non cognitive factors to critical priorities in society, including educational success, prevention of high-risk behaviors, and readiness for diverse options for college, careers, and citizenship that align with a young person's capacities, opportunities, passions, and purpose.

Why Try™

The purpose of the Why Try™ Program is to teach youth 10 visual analogies to help them learn life's daily pressures and challenges, enriched by music, videos, journals,

and team-building games. Why Try™ uses a hands on curriculum that helps students overcome their challenges and improve outcomes for truancy, behavior, and academics. Why Try™ uses multiple intelligences to motivate and create positive change that helps students achieve opportunity, freedom, and self-respect (Wymore, 2007; Gibbs, 2013). The goal of the Why Try™ program is to help students answer the question, Why try in life? when they are frustrated, confused, or angry with life's pressures and challenges. The Why Try™ program teaches youth that trying hard in life and putting effort into challenges at home, at school, and with peers is worth the effort (Moore, 2001; Wymore, 2007; Gibbs, 2013). Researchers found that youth had a significant increase in their perceived self-efficacy, that students were less likely to have attendance problems, that students experienced a decrease in negative attitudes toward school and teachers, and youth took more responsibility for their own behavior and outcomes after completing the program (Eggett, 2003; Baker, 2008).

Social skills training must occur in a systematic fashion similar to the approach taken for the remediation of academic deficits (Wilhite, 2010). One of the primary reasons students are referred for and classified as ED is based on their social deficiencies (Gresham, 2003). Social skills lessons incorporated into the curriculum and combined with classroom reinforcement of target behaviors effectively enhanced social behaviors (Wymore, 2007). Students began to show significant increase in their grade point averages and attendance after completing social skills programs. Teachers found a dramatic change in their classroom management approaches and experienced an increase in actual teaching time (Wilhite, 2010).

Mental Health Mandated Services

For more than 20 years, California school districts have benefitted from the state mandated alliance between education and the Department of Mental Health. In the early 1980s the first authorization of AB 3632 on mental health services was implemented and subsequently reauthorized into AB 2726, allowing school district special education departments, through the IEP process, to refer students to the county mental health department for an array of possible services. These services included individual therapy, group therapy, play therapy, day-treatment services, therapeutic behavioral services, parent training, wraparound services, medication evaluations, and out of home residential placement.

In 2010, the governor of California vetoed mental health funding, whereas the federal court ruled that districts were still mandated to provide mental health services as outlined in the Title 5 Composite of Laws. By 2011, AB 114 required districts to formulate a funding model with a clear and concise definition of educationally related mental health services. These services include parent counseling and training, psychological services that include administering psychological tests and other assessments, interpreting results regarding behaviors and conditions related to educational learning, consulting with staff members in planning programs to meet students educational needs for psychological services, and counseling. Then assisting in the development of positive behavioral intervention strategies

Increasing mental health services in schools was a comprehensive, systemic approach to strengthen students, families, school and community. The purpose of implementing such services in schools is to maximize learning and wellbeing for students

who experience educational and behavioral difficulties (IDEA, 2004; Adelman & Taylor, 2006). The most common mental health disorder among adolescent students include bipolar, impulse control, depression, obsessive compulsive, suicidal thoughts, substance abuse, anxiety, depression, and attention deficit hyperactive disorder (National Association of School Psychologists, 2010).

Within the school setting a behavioral team, under the leadership of a clinical psychologist, focuses on the most troublesome behaviors in need of changing specific to each student stressed by academic and behavioral issues (IDEA, 2004; Green, 2009). The behavioral team addresses the basis for the behaviors to predict the antecedents, the conditions and circumstance of the behavior during the manifestation of the behavior, and develop an implementation plan. Follow up meetings are held to discuss or modify the interventions as necessary (IDEA 2004; Scott, Park, Swain-Bradway & Landers, 2007).

The Lens of Therapy

Solution focused brief therapy (SFBT) was developed in 1980 by de Shazer and Berg. SFBT offers school based therapists a new lens to consider students' needs. Building solutions is different from problem solving. According to the cause and effect model one should explore and analyze the conflict to make a diagnosis before a remedy can be administered (Bannick, 2008; MacDonald, 2012). SFBT lends the staff member expertise in asking solution focused questions and in motivating students to change (Iverson, 2008; Franklin, 2012; Mac Donald, 2012). As the practice of SFBT has developed, therapists play a lesser and smaller part in the interviewing process lending all attention to developing a picture of a solution and discovering the resources to achieve it (Iverson, 2008; Bannick, 2010; Ratner, George & Iverson, 2012).

One of the key factors in an SFBT interview is the 0–10 scale, where 10 equals the achievement of the goal and zero is the worst possible scenario (Bannick, 2008; Iverson, 2008; MacDonald, 2012). Once a student indicates where they are on the scale, the therapist asks a series of questions to determine (a) where the student wants to be (results), (b) where they are now (rating), and (c) how they will get there (Iverson, 2008; Ratner et al., 2012). A structured SFBT interview begins with the interviewer stating the problem (reason for the interview). As the student is the expert at this time regarding the behavior, the interviewer then requests cooperation by stating I need your help." Next, the interviewer asks the three questions listed above to generate student awareness of the behavior (Bannick, 2010; MacDonald, 2012). Finally, the interviewer concludes the interview with a review of the solutions generated, persons responsible to assist in solutions, and establishing a date and time for next contact to review outcomes.

SFBT is a brief conversation with the student to strengthen and stimulate positive actions (Bannick, 2010; Franklin, 2012; MacDonald, 2012). Each student was empowered by outlining his or her own definition of happiness with a description of behaviors, cognition, and emotions (Bannick, 2010; Franklin, 2012; MacDonald, 2012). With the help of the interviewer, the student will explore ways of reaching their goal and become motivated to work harder (Iverson, 2008; Ratner et al., 2012). Conversations with students become positive, shorter, and more effective (Bannick, 2010; Franklin, 2012; Ratner et al., 2012).

On-Site Therapeutic Services

Therapeutic services offered on site consist of a clinical psychologist, licensed marriage and family therapist, and mental health interns. The clinicians provide services

using a three tiered process (Hurd & Palmiotto, 2012). As the interventions become more intensive, the service providers become more specialized. At the tier I level, interns and clinical psychologists provide group format social skills interventions, consult with parents and teachers, and develop behavior support plans. At the tier 2 level, clinical psychologists provide continued interventions for those students receiving a social emotional therapy to determine unique needs that lead to specific goals that drive short term treatment through their IEP. In addition, a specialized tier 3 mental health professional provides consultation as needed to the school site. At the tier 3 level special education students are referred for intensive services after participation in therapeutic programs have not been successful. Specific IEP driven goals become the focus in individual or family sessions with a specialized tier 3 mental health professional. In addition, students are provided in home behavioral consultation, parent education and training (Hurd & Palmiotto, 2012).

Improving School Discipline

In an attempt to improve school discipline, a quantitative approach was used during this study. A quantitative research study was characterized by having a population for which the researcher wants to draw conclusions (Lewis, 2007; Bhattacherjee, 2012, Creswell, 2013,) but it was not possible to collect data on the entire population (Bhattacherjee, 2012, Lewis, 2007). This study would require a proper, statistical random sample (Creswell, 2013) and to use methods of statistical inference to draw conclusions about the population (Lewis, 2007; Bhattacherjee, 2012). This was done by arranging the data in tables, making graphs of the data and analyzing the (Bhattacherjee, 2012). Finally, this methodology ensured that every member of the population had an

equal probability of being selected. Random sampling eliminating bias from the process of selection (Bhattacherjee, 2012, Creswell, 2013) and allows for statistical analysis to make generalizations for the larger population (Bhattacherjee, 2012).

Summary

The State of California has implemented two provisions to the educational process; school sites must be prepared to offer interventions instead of suspensions for students who engage in k violations for defiance or disruptive behavior, and SWD receive AB 144 mental health services. School districts in California are searching for alternatives to suspension and how to implement mental health services for all SWD. As the research is limited and focuses on the ineffectiveness of zero tolerance, it is clear that additional research on perceptions of suspension still need to be explored (Martinez, 2009). Researchers indicated that students with emotional and behavioral disorders have the poorest education, behavioral outcomes, and social outcomes of any disability group (Bradley et al., 2008). These poor outcomes are evidenced by lower grades, more course failures, higher retention, and lower rates of passing minimum competency tests compared to all other disability groups (Bradley et al., 2008).

In Section 3 I described the research design for this study. Data was entered into the SPSS program that will generate figures and tables. Anonymity of individual participants was secured in a locked file for five years. In Section 4 I present the results. In Section 5 I interpret the findings, provide recommendations, and identify implications for social change.

Section 3: Methodology

The purpose of this quantitative study was to determine whether there was a significant difference in the academic performance of high school SWD/ED who received out of school suspension and those students who received nonpunitive consequences other than suspension for the same violation. Such violations would include minor infractions such as tardy to class, defiance towards authority, and missing materials. The research question was the following: What alternative practices can be utilized to minimize exclusion from school for SWDs on the high school campus? This section contains information on the research methodology used and justification for the quantitative design. I also describe the population and how the sample of participants was selected. Information on the instrumentation and data analyses is also included. Finally, I explain how participants' rights were protected during this research study.

Research Design and Approach

I collected data by accessing archival data for SWD/EBD from the district's data-base. Archival data was collected for the randomly selected students including grades, attendance, and suspension records for the two treatment groups. The quantitative design most suited for this study was a cross-sectional design, which allowed for rapid data collection, given time constraints, and economic factors (Creswell, 2013). The purpose of this research design was to test the impact of a treatment or an intervention on an outcome, controlling for all other factors that might influence that outcome (Creswell, 2013). Using random selection of students who qualify as SWD/EBD, I assigned individuals to two group. Group A students were selected from the group receiving nonpunitive alternatives to suspension. Group B students were selected from the

comprehensive high schools receiving punitive suspensions following the districts sequential discipline guide.

Statistical analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Science program, known as IBM SPSS Statistics (IBM, 2014). IBM SPSS is a comprehensive data analysis software program available for personal computers. One of the many features of IBM SPSS is the accessibility of the pull down menus. The pull down menu interface also generates command syntax that can be displayed in the output tables. Statistics included in this program are descriptive statistics, bivariate statistics, prediction for numerical outcomes, and predication for identifying groups. The data view shows a spreadsheet view of a two dimensional table structure in which the rows represent cases and the columns represent measurements.

In addition to outstanding statistical analysis, IBM SPSS offers good data management (case selection, file reshaping, creating derived data) and data documentation. Also included in this program is the variable view that displays the metadata dictionary in which each row represents a variable and shows the variable name, variable label, value label(s), measurement types and a variety of other characteristics. Additionally, the cost of an IBM SPSS license is minimal. With IBM SPSS predictive analytical software, a researcher can predict with confidence what will happen next in order to make smarter decisions, solve problems and improve outcomes.

Setting and Sample

The school district in this study is located in Southern California. The total student population is approximately 42,000, of which 3,000 are SWD. The total high school population of SWD diagnosed with ED is 50 students. The targeted population of

interest in this study is SWDs, specifically students classified as ED in grades nine through 12. The school using nonpunitive suspension practices was referred to as School A. The two schools in this study using traditional suspension practices were referred to as School B and School C. Most of the students with ED fall in the normal range of intellectual achievement receiving district common core curriculum without accommodations or modifications. All students from School A received on campus therapeutic services; individual and group sessions and may have also received outside services through county mental health. Students from Schools B and C had access to school counselors and to outside county mental health services. Most students with ED had been prescribed medication for attention, anxiety, hyperactivity, and/or depression. Many high school students refuse to take their prescribed medication because they feel nauseous, can't eat causing weight loss or eat too much causing weight gain. Many students report a greater relief to their symptoms by self-medicating (medical marijuana) (Pettersen, Ruud, Ravndal & Landheim, 2013).

A random sample of students was selected. Randomization provides the ability to generalize to the represented population (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2008). To determine the sample size, I used the GPower analysis program (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang & Buchner, 2012). GPower assumes that users are familiar with basic concepts of statistical power analyses. GPower also assumes that users are knowledgeable about Cohen's effect size measures and the definitions of small, medium, and large, effect sides (Cohen, 1988). I decided to utilize independent samples *t* test design. The sample size was 20 students with an effect of 0.5.

Instrumentation and Materials

Each school year, Child Welfare and Attendance (CWA) analyzes suspension data at the county level, district level and school site level. Due to the nature of this study it was unnecessary to create new research tools. I used existing suspension data provided by CWA. Other data were attendance records and student grades for the 2013 and 2014 school year. Archival data was chosen for this study due to ease of data collection. Collection of archival date is less time consuming than collecting raw data. In addition, archival data has been processed by people with statistical expertise and can address important areas that have not been considered (Fawcett, 2012). Data retrieved once permission was given by IRB. All student records were collected and data were entered into SPSS.

Data Collection and Analysis

The statistics software program, SPSS for Windows version 16, was used to compare the means of the data. Independent samples *t*-tests were used to analyze grade attendance, behavior and grade point average (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2008). I used archival data to test for an increase in attendance and grades and a decrease in behavioral issues such as k violations. Data analysis involved examining the difference between the groups dependent and independent variables. Each of the 20 students were assigned a number as a code for identification. Once the data were collected, they were entered into SPSS. The results of data analysis were represented in tables and graphs.

Ethical Protection of Participants

Prior to conducting this research, I was granted written permission by the superintendent of the district. All-encompassing measures were taken to protect all participants' rights during this study by ensuring that anonymity of personal information. I participated in a web-based course Protecting Human Research Participants and was certified by the National Institutes of Health (Appendix A). Preceding the study, Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) granted authorization (Number 03-21-16-0140240). Ethical guidelines outlined by Walden University were followed throughout this study.

Every effort was taken to ensure anonymity of student data during this study. Student data were assigned a number as a code for identification of the treatment groups. No person was contacted personally or identified. Names or other identifiable information will not be collected or published in this study or any future studies or reports. The results were shared with the district and all data profiles were stored in a locked file cabinet in my office for 7 years. CWA is responsible for the collection and archiving data concerning attendance, grades, and suspensions/expulsions for all students in the district.

Summary

Using a quantitative research design, I examined whether a difference existed between alternative to suspension or traditional practices in improving student attendance, grades and behaviors. Archival data were collected from district reports and entered into the SPSS program to generate graphs and tables. Ethical standards were vital to ensure anonymity of participants and all documents was secured in a locked file for 7

years. In Section 4, I present the findings from the study. Graphs and tables are used to present results of data analysis.

Section 4: Results

The purpose for this study was to examine the influence of current suspension practices, and alternative nonpunitive practices on SWDs' academic outcomes. The literature review focused on social learning theory and the psychological disorders relating to behavioral modification as well as an understanding of disruptive behavior. The results of this study indicated whether nonpunitive alternatives to suspension had a direct relationship to student success and whether some alternative methods for SWD-ED would improve attendance and grades compared to SWD-ED students at the comprehensive high schools. In addition, I determined whether alternative disciplinary practices resulted in fewer than 10 days of off campus suspension. The information from this study adds to the body of knowledge needed to address the district's remediation plan, required by the California Department of Education (CDE, 2015) and findings may encourage administrators to examine the use of the zero tolerance policy (Evenson et al., 2009; Robles, 2011; Simonson et al, 2011).

The results of this study provided a perspective on the immediate effects of suspension and the long term effects of attendance and grades of high school students with ED. Results support the district in decreasing disproportionate suspension rates of African American special education students (CDE, 2012, 2013, 1014), thereby preventing the need for monitoring required by Title 34 of the Code of Federal Regulations 300.600 (d) to ensure that district policies, procedures, and practices are compliant and do not lead to inappropriate identification (CDE, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015). The financial consequences for districts that are significantly unbalanced in their discipline of SWDs are significant (Losen & Skiba, 2011). A district found to be out of

compliance is required to redirect 15% of its federal special-education monies to reduce the problem (Federal Department of Education, 2010). With a district population of 32,000 and 10% of that population being SWDs, approximately $900,000 would be redirected from special-education monies which would pose a substantial budgetary challenge (CDE, 2012).

This section includes a description of data collection, the data analysis process, figures and interpretations of the findings. The research question for this study was as follows: What alternative practices can be used to minimize exclusion from school for SWDs on the high school campus? The following hypotheses were aligned with the research question:

H_o: There is no significant difference between the academic performance of students with emotional disabilities who receive out of school suspension and those students who receive nonpunitive consequences other than suspension for the same violation.

H_1: There is a significant difference in the academic performance of students with emotional disabilities who receive out of school suspension and those students who receive nonpunitive consequences other than suspension for the same violation.

Data Collection

To collect archival data from the district's database, I met with the systems administrator where I presented the specific parameters including the identified high school sites that had ED programs, the precise student population of SWD-ED including random sampling of the chosen population, suspensions data relating to k violations, attendance records and grades within a 3-year period. The systems administrator created

an Excel spreadsheet with the specified data excluding any student information to protect identities. The data received did not require any adjustments or revisions.

Data Analysis

I analyzed data using the IBM SPSS Statistics (IBM, 2014). IBM SPSS is a comprehensive data analysis software program available for personal computers. Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics for the raw data.

Table 3

Measures of Central Tendencies and Spread

Performance Measures	n	Mean (SD)
Number of Suspensions		
Comprehensive Sites	2772	3.22 (1.56)
Alternative Sites	73	2.78 (1.57)
Unexcused Period Absences		
Comprehensive Sites	12288	60.95 (88.8)
Alternative Sites	88	91.61 (144.16)
GPA		
Comprehensive Sites	29	1.84 (0.79)
Alternative Sites	29	2.41 (0.77)

Suspension Data Analysis

An independent samples *t* test was used to determine the difference between the means of the number of suspensions at the alternative school and number of suspensions at the comprehensive high schools. There was a significant difference was found ($t(2843) = -2.34$, $p=.019$). The mean number of suspensions at the alternative school was significantly lower than the mean number of suspensions at the comprehensive high school sites (see table 3). The data presented documents a lower rate of suspensions at

the alternative site than at the comprehensive sites, therefore, rejecting the null hypothesis: There is no significant difference between the academic performance of students with emotional disabilities who receive out of school suspension and those students who receive nonpunitive consequences other than suspension for the same violation.

The data findings are consistent with how the comprehensive high school sites, utilizing the sequential discipline guide suspend SWD-ED at the same rate as their non-disabled peers without consideration for the disability. The data also coincides with the lower number of suspension at the alternative site not utilizing the Sequential discipline guide, taking into consideration the disabilities. There may be alternate interpretations for these results. For many years, public schools have disciplined students who commit serious violations of school rules or pose a threat to school safety, by temporarily suspending or permanently expelling them from school (Bosworth et al., 2011; Evenson et al., 2009; Fox & Savage, 2009). At the comprehensive sites, there are up to six, non-special education, administrators on one campus. One site will assign each administrator duty to a specific portion of the alpha whereas another site assigns administrator duties by departments; science, English, math, history, electives and special education. In the first example all special education students would see their assigned administrator by alpha whereas the second example has one assigned administrator for all special education students. Each administrator makes the subjective call to the extent of the behavior and the amount of days of suspension signifying a discrepancy between administrators on this campus and between the various comprehensive high school sites.

At the alternative site the administrator, who is educated in special education disabilities and laws, utilizing alternatives to suspension knows how to implement strategies for each individual student determined by their disability. For example, the emotionally disturbed student must be taught how to understand and control a behavior through modeling, role play, group lessons, solution based conversations and therapy. Through using such types of strategies the students learn to change a behavior decreasing their behavioral outbursts, keeping them on campus. Exclusion from campus for the ED student creates a sense of betrayal by influential adults, rejection by adults and peers, alienation by peers and self-shame, therefore increasing negative mental health outcomes, anti-social behaviors, suicidal ideation, higher rates of dropout and higher rates of becoming involved with the juvenile justice system (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2003; Skiba & Sprague, 2008; Crenshaw, 2015).

As discussed in Section 1, lawmakers in Sacramento, California are directing districts to ensure that all students are afforded the right to receive an education under the state constitution. As the state recognizes the need to keep schools safe from violent acts towards students and staff, it also sees the need to provide interventions and to produce more successful students (CDE, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015). The district studied in Southern California, has been found to be out of compliance by not following state and federal guidelines when a student with disabilities (SWD) particularly students of color, have been removed from current placement for 10 school days in the same calendar school year (CDE, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015) for k violations, which continues to be systemic problem throughout the high school comprehensive sites. Education Code Section 48900(k) defined k violations as disrupting school activities or otherwise willfully defied

the valid authority of supervisor, teachers, administrator, school officials, or other school personnel engaged in the performance of their duties (Education Code, 2014).

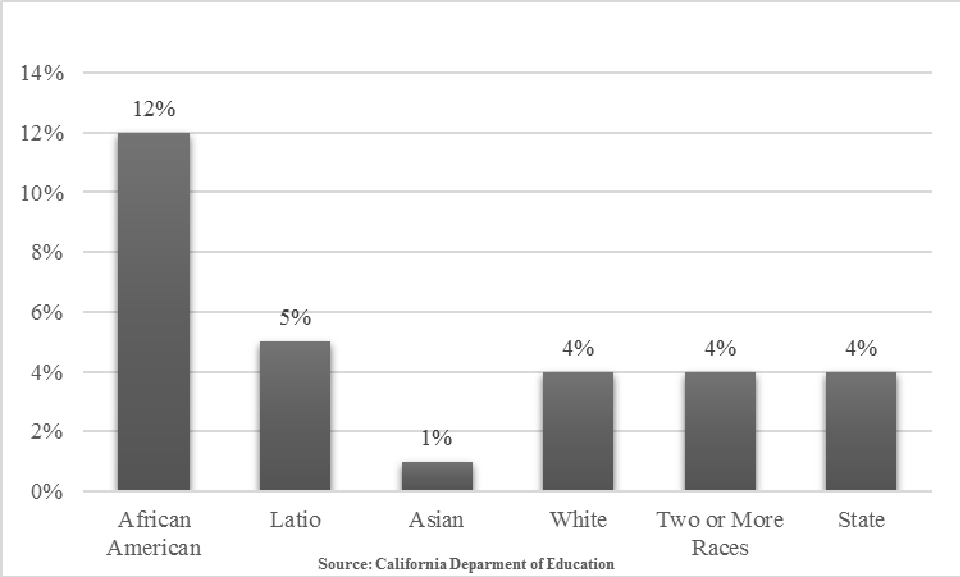

Figure 1. California students suspended at least once during 2013 and 2014 school years.

California has been identified as the fifth largest population of African American students (U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, 2014; CDE, 2014) being the home for about 900,000 people under the age of 25. About 373,000 of these young people are enrolled in our public schools. As mentioned earlier, African American students are disproportionally over represented in special education programs (NRC, 2002) specifically placed in emotionally disturbed or intellectually disabled programs whereas, no such disproportionality exists in the physically disabled, visually or hearing impairment programs (LRC, 2014). Additionally, African American students are more likely than other ethnicities to be placed in a more restrictive setting (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2003; Skiba & Sprague, 2008) removing them from same age peers, social settings, and educational advantages (Crenshaw, 2015). Figure 2 revealed the risk ratio

analysis for whites, Hispanics and African Americans identified as special education students. African American students are 1.5 times more likely than all other students to be identified for special education. Figure 3 revealed African American students are 2 times more likely to be identified under emotional disturbance. These risk ratios remained relatively unchanged during the past three years.

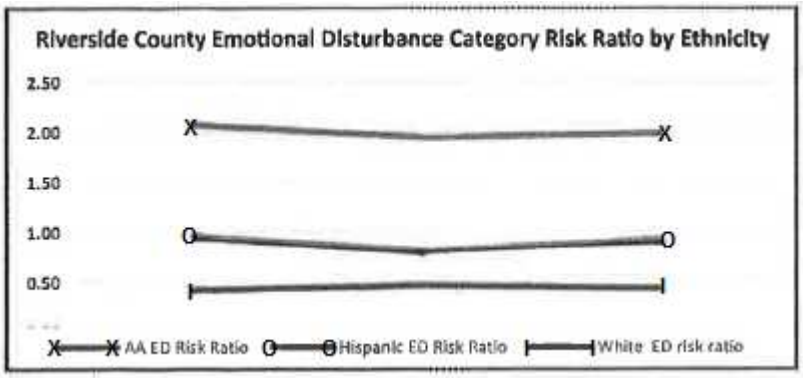

Figure 2. Riverside County emotional disturbance category risk ratio by ethnicity.

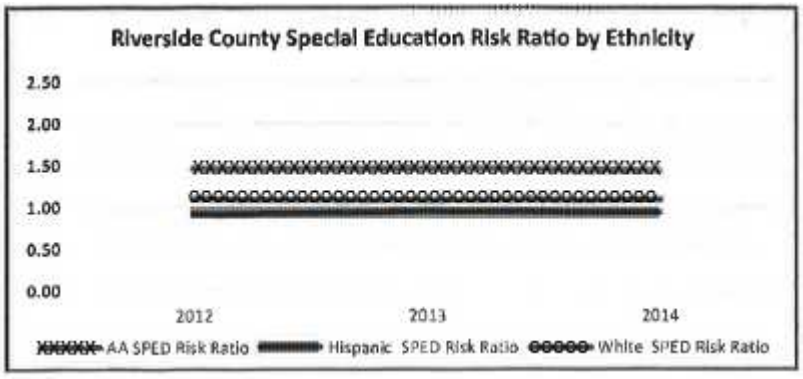

Figure 3. Riverside County special education risk ratio by ethnicity.

If students don't feel safe at school, they can't learn. Yet, California's African American students are twice as likely as their white peers to feel unsafe at school and are also more likely to face disciplinary action. They are three times as likely as white students to be suspended and expelled, with both boys and girls disproportionately

affected. While boys are more likely than girls to be suspended, United States data reveals that African American girls are suspended six times as often as their white counterparts. These disciplinary tactics exclude students from learning, take a toll socially and emotionally, contribute to disengagement from school and are frequently a precursor to encounters with law enforcement or the juvenile justice system (Crenshaw, 2015).

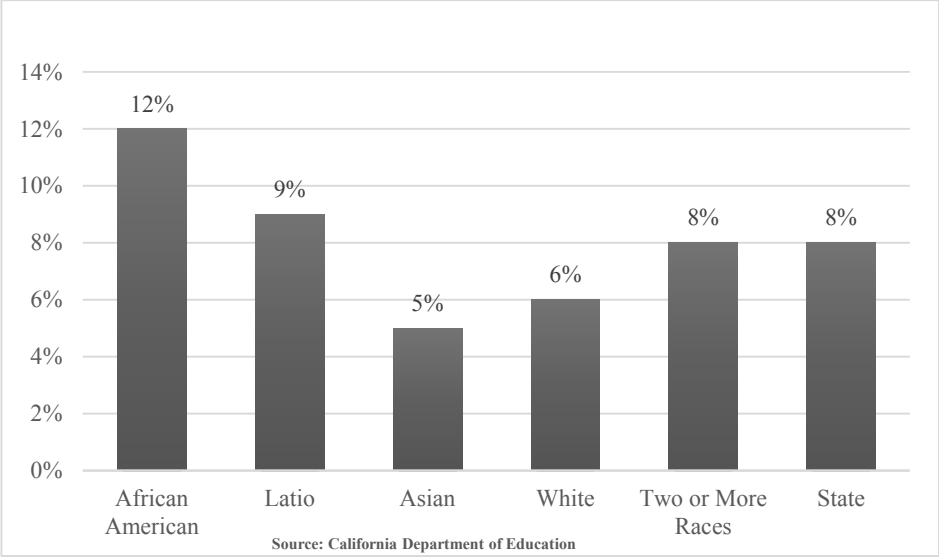

Figure 4. Percent of California students feeling unsafe at school in grades 7, 9, and 11.

Researchers find that teacher bias and discrimination partiality explain these disciplinary disparities. One study found that teachers quickly develop negative responses to student behavior when those students are African American (Okonofua and Eberhardt, 2015). Another study found that teachers are more likely to suspend a student who conducts a minor offense like using a cell phone or violating the dress code if the student is African American (Bradshaw, 2010).

As California's African American students are twice as likely as white students to be identified for learning disabilities, and more likely to be identified for special education services (CDE, 2015) many referrals to special education for learning disabilities could be avoided by correctly identifying and addressing students' academic needs. Unfortunately, once identified for special education, correctly or not, students rarely catch up to their peers (California Statewide Task Force on Special Education, 2015) contributing to increased social delays, internalized emotional trauma, disengagement from school and increased encounters with law enforcement or the juvenile justice system (Crenshaw, 2015).

Attendance Data Analysis

An independent samples *t* test was used to determine the difference between the mean number of unexcused individual period absences of students at the alternative school and unexcused individual period absences of students at the comprehensive high schools. A very slight significant difference was found ($t(88.48) = 2.004$, $p=.048$). The mean number of absences at the alternative site was significantly higher than the mean number of absences at the comprehensive high school sites (see table 3).

The data documents a higher rate of absenteeism at the alternative site than at the comprehensive sites therefore, failing to reject the null hypothesis. There is no significant difference between the academic performance of students with emotional disabilities who receive out of school suspension and those students who receive nonpunitive consequences other than suspension for the same violation.

Interpretations to this data may also include the harmful effect of being in special education at the alternative site. The alternative site does not have specialized programs

as the comprehensive site does, such as sports, clubs, rallies, musical programs, or academies. The students at the alternative site wish to participate in such activities with their age appropriate peers and that is emotionally upsetting. Once the students become accustomed to the alternative program, attendance does improve. Also, many of the SWD-ED are taking multiple medications such as Zyprexa, Zoloft, Ritalin, Seroquel, Prozac, Remeron, with minimum dosage of 50 mg upwards to150 mg, which can impair their internal clocks. Several students aren't able to get to sleep at night, generally falling asleep after 4:00 a.m. During their awake time suicidal ideations or additional voices are in their heads causing the emotionality to become more prevalent. Many parents will call the school to excuse the absence due to the mental state of their child.

As students deal with insurmountable issues at home, getting to school can often be challenging emotionally. Because many students with ED are attempting to address medication issues, they often experience difficulties with the simple life function of arising from bed, getting dressed according to school dress-code rules, and entering the bus at the appropriate time. If the morning structure is out of balance, it can trigger problematic behaviors before students ever arrive at school (Skiba & Sprague, 2008). Student then arrive at school feeling unsafe (figure 4), which in turn affects learning. SWD-ED need consistent affirmation and recognition for themselves and the African American students need affirmation for their culture (LRC, 2015) to feel a sense of belonging and safety. SWD's often experience interactions from adults on campus that convey low expectations for their performance and behavior causing anxiety and fear of returning to school. (Curtis et al., 2010; Vincent et al, 2011).

During a Riverside County focus group to increase academic achievement for African American students, one student reported, "I have a D in my class and I asked my teacher if there is anything I could do to raise my grade. He said that I should be happy, that a D is passing." In the same session, another student reported, "Mostly what I see in my history class is slavery. I know there is more, but they don't want to talk about it. I learn more on Twitter and Instagram about my history than I do at school." Study after study has found that teachers hold lower expectations for students of color, especially SWD-ED. A teacher's expectations and perceptions can predict and even influence students' school outcomes. (Curtis et al., 2010; Vincent et al, 2011).

Grade Point Average Data Analysis

An independent samples *t* test was run to compare the mean Grade Point Average (GPA) of students who attended a comprehensive high school site to their GPA's at the alternative school. There was a significant increase in GPA for students who attend alternative sites versus comprehensive sites ($t(56)=2.779$, $p=.007$). The data presented documents a higher grade point average at the alternative site than at the comprehensive sites (see table 3), therefore, failing to reject the null hypothesis. There is no significant difference between the academic performance of students with emotional disabilities who receive out of school suspension and those students who receive nonpunitive consequences other than suspension for the same violation.

The increase in GPA at the alternative site might have a direct relationship to the sense of safety on campus. As the staff understands the effects of the environmentally factors from when they leave campus to when the return to campus, upon arrival all students are greeted by staff with a good morning and a handshake while being assessed

to determine whether students mental state is at baseline (Skiba & Sprague, 2008; Lingo, Jolivette, & Barton-Arwood, 2009). If it appears that a student might not be at baseline they are immediately offered options; talk with a chosen staff member, take a quiet time in a classroom or outside, talk with the principal or speak with a therapist. These strategies give the students a sense of security, safety and love to get them back to baseline. The students also know that absolutely nobody, except site staff was allowed on campus at any time. As each and every student on the alternative site has a story of their own, knowing they are safe from outside factors, they are able to focus in the classroom. At times when the students are unable to regain baseline, students are offered alternatives to study; outside with and instructional assistant, in another classroom for independent study, time with the principal, walk the field, etc., until they are able to work through their current situation. If students can't get their work completed during a specific period they will complete their work during their free time or at home, it's their choice.

It is important that schools fuel student academic interest with instructional strategies, materials, learning environments and assessment practices that reflect students' culture, builds confidence and allow students to show what they know (Skiba & Sprague, 2008; Lingo et al., 2009; Schachter, 2010). The Common Core State Standards adopted by California, emphasize rigorous content and application of knowledge through higher order thinking skills to assure that all students graduate high school with the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in college or career (CDE, 2015). As the standard indicates all students, the district expectation is that all SWDs, excluding

intellectually delayed will graduate from high school within four years with all necessary skills as their general education peers.

In 2013, the district was required by federal guidelines to participate in a self-compliance review for disproportionality of SWDs (MVUSD Self-Compliance, 2014). The district was found to be out of compliance in educating SWDs in the general curriculum and progressing toward meeting the goals set out in the IEP (DF 300.530 (d) (1) and over-representation of African American students in special education. In high school SWD-ED and identified as African American have less access to broad and enriching curriculum. As a result of these barriers, outcomes are far worse for SWD-ED African American students than for most other students (Crenshaw, 2015). When we look at California's newest test scores that include SWDs, African American students consistently lag behind their counterparts, widening the achievement gap. In figure 5, the graph shows the percentage of California's 11th graders meeting or exceeding standards in English language arts on the 2015 California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CDE, 2015).

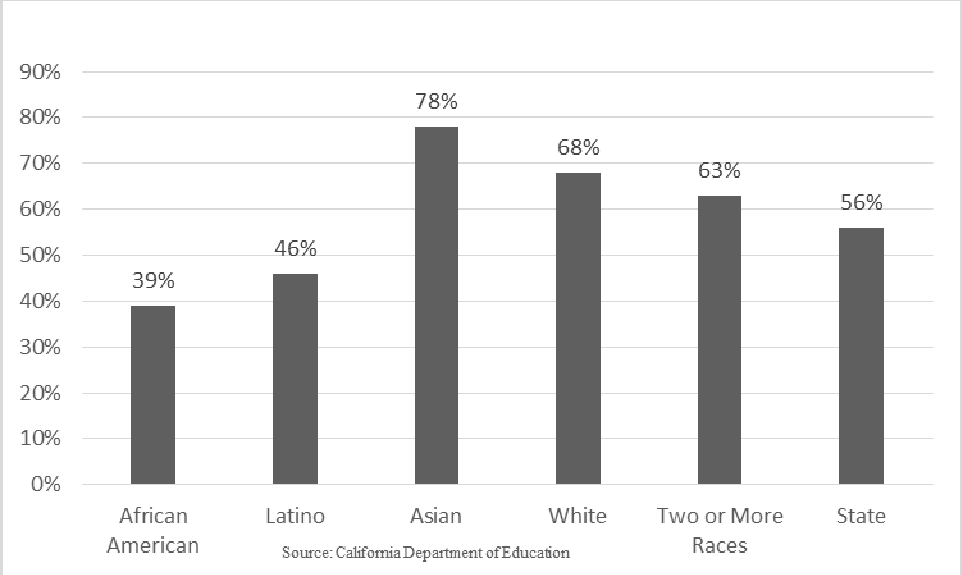

Figure 5. Percent of California's 11th-graders meeting or exceeding standards in English language arts on the 2015 California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress.

The California Department of Education has reported that 1 in 5 African American high school students become drop-outs. As shown in Figure 6 below, 68% of African American graduate from high school in four years but this figure masks enormous variability at the school level. African American students are disproportionately found in alternative settings like continuation schools, juvenile court schools or out of district placements into non-public school for SWDs. The state does not publicly report graduation rates for these types of high school programs and the limited data available suggest that their graduation rates are quite low.

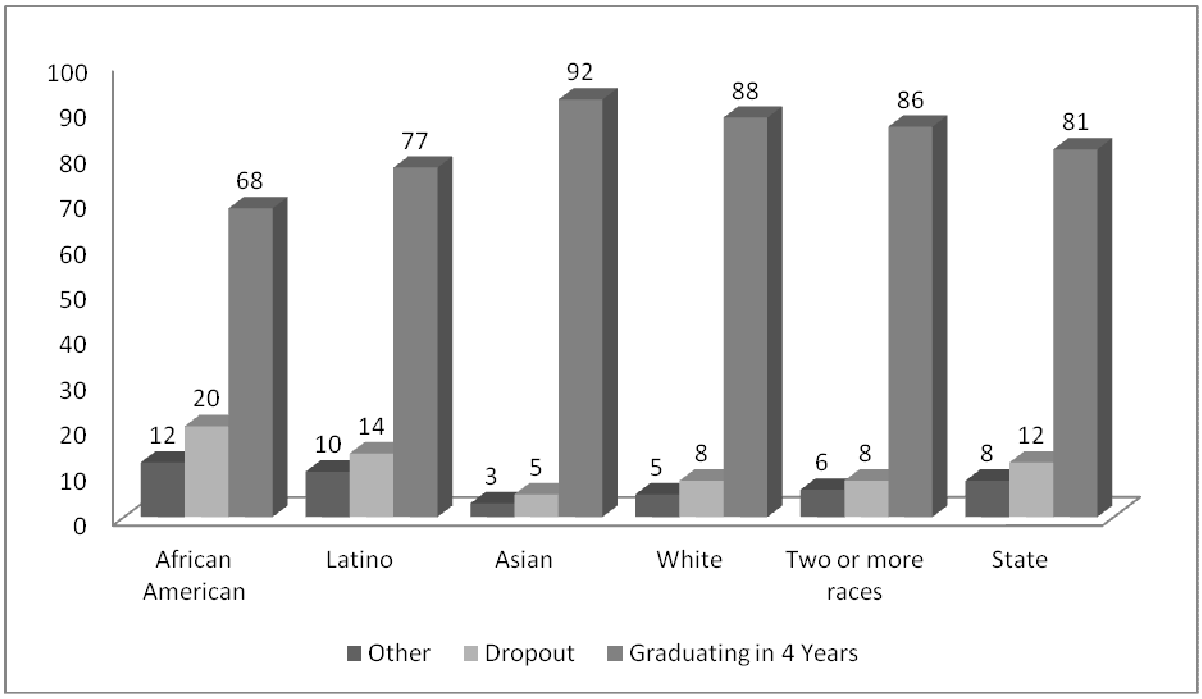

Figure 6. 2014 Cohort graduation and dropout rates.

In the above figure, other includes students who are still enrolled and those who have completed high school without a diploma. Data may not sum precisely to 100 due to rounding.

To effectively change school climates and behavioral outcomes, some fundament shifts are needed in the way we've traditionally responded to student behavior (Skiba & Sprague, 2008; Emerson et al., 2009). In order to raise academic achievement of SWDs, researched based approaches like restorative justice practices offer great opportunities for schools to reduce the number of suspensions and expulsion. These types of practices largely center on increasing communication and actively resolving conflicts rather than relying on the ineffective practice of zero tolerance (Emerson et al., 2009). To fully participate and succeed in school, SWD-ED's physical, mental and emotional needs must be met. SWDs who come from low-income families or have experienced trauma, benefit

from mentorship from clergy, school personnel, counselors, social workers, etc. Addressing physical and mental health issues prevents chronic absence, which in turn improves academic achievement (Skiba & Sprague, 2008; Boccanfuso & Kuhfeld, 2011).

Summary

The question addressed was, what alternative practices can be used to minimize exclusion from school for SWDs on the high school campus? After completing the research and analyzing the data, it was apparent that providing alternatives to SWD-ED have lower numbers of exclusions from school than other SWDs without alternatives. SWD-ED who had been placed at an alternative site where alternative practices were implemented student behaviors improved minimizing exclusion from school. Alternatives afforded to these students showed improved grades from a 'D' average to a low/middle 'C' average. As attendance did not improve at the alternative site, attendance was not impacting their education. Section 5 will interpret the findings, provide recommendations and outline implications for social change.

Section 5: Overview

The study was conducted to determine whether nonpunitive alternatives to suspension had a direct relationship on student success for SWD qualifying as emotionally disturbed through the Individual Education Plan (IEP). The district chosen for this study had been found out of compliance by not following state and federal guidelines regarding students with disabilities being removed from their current placement for 10 school days in the same calendar school year (CDE, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015). Because the U.S. Department of Education is scrutinizing how districts suspend/expel students for noncompliance, I compared students' grades, attendance, and suspension data for the comprehensive high schools and an alternative school for SWDs. The following research question guided this study: What alternative practices can be used to minimize exclusion from school for SWDs on the high school campus? District data were extracted for SWD-ED in the area of attendance, grades, and suspensions and analyzed using a statistical *t* test (independent samples). Social learning theory provided the theoretical framework. As people learn by observing others' attitudes, behaviors, and outcomes of the behaviors, individuals begin to form an idea of how these new behaviors might be performed (Bandura, 1969, 1973, 1986, 1997; Goldstein, 1998). Several studies supported the social theory that young adolescents often model learned disruptive behavior from their family members, schools, and communities (Bandura, 1969, 1973, 1986, 1997; Goldstein, 1998; O'Keefe, 1997).

Findings indicated that providing alternatives to SWD-ED, resulted in lower numbers of exclusions from school than SWDs without alternatives. SWD-ED who has been placed at an alternative site where alternative practices were implemented

experienced less exclusion from school. Students who were afforded alternative showed improved grades from a D average to a low/middle C average. Although attendance was not better at the alternative site, attendance did not impact their learning as their grades did show improvement.

Findings

The following research question guided this study: What alternative practices can be used to minimize exclusion from school for SWDs on the high school campus? The following hypotheses aligned with the research question:

H_o: There is no significant difference between the academic performance of students with emotional disabilities who receive out of school suspension and those students who receive nonpunitive consequences other than suspension for the same violation.

H_1: There is a significant difference in the academic performance of students with emotional disabilities who receive out of school suspension and those students who receive nonpunitive consequences other than suspension for the same violation.

The following shows the descriptive statistics, including measures of central tendency and spread, which were used to interpret the results of the independent samples *t* tests. The probabilities shown in the data output of days of suspensions and GPA (.019 and .011, respectively) show that results are not attributable to random variation. SWD-ED showed a decrease in exclusion from school and an increase in grades when multiple alternatives were provided to them through placement at an alternative site.

Implication for Social Change

The intent of this quantitative study was to examine the relationship between nonpunitive actions and SWD-ED students' academic success. Since the reauthorization of the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (2004) student behavior has been studied, described, and defined in an attempt to delineate practices and features through evidence based behavioral practices (Sugai & Anderson, 2012). Research indicated a need for evidence based behavioral interventions for all students (Sungai & Simonson, 2012). After two decades of research pertaining to student removal from school, the implementation of zero tolerance has proven not to be effective for transforming anti-social behavior in pro social behavior (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2003). California has been identified as having disproportionate representation for SWDs, and African American students have been three times more likely to be suspended as their White peers (18% vs 6%) for k violations such as disrespect, defiance, loitering, and lack of materials (Skiba & Sprague, 2008). The students being suspended multiple times are those needing the most adult supervision and professional help due to emotional stressors that have occurred in their life, yet when they are suspended typically have no supervision at home (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2003). Students who have been suspended repeatedly have higher rates of dropout and higher rates of becoming involved in the juvenile justice system (Hart, Cramer, Harry, Klingner & Sturges, 2010; Schachter, 2010). Suspension has not been proven to be a benefit to the student or the community. Psychologists have found that exclusion from school increases student shame, rejection, alienation and the betrayal of healthy adult bonds (Hart, Cramer, Harry, Klingner & Sturges, 2010) thereby increasing negative mental health outcomes, anti-social behaviors,

and suicidal ideation (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2003). When students have a history of suspension, dropout rates surge causing crime rates and juvenile incarceration rates to rise.

The study findings are consistent with the assumption that SWD-ED are excluded from school at the same rate at their non-disabled peers at the comprehensive sites. The findings also coincide with the assumption that SWD-ED who are allowed alternatives to exclusion will remain in school allowing academic success (Skiba & Sprague, 2008). Social change may occur when students observe proper behaviors from others allowing them to stay in school to gain academic knowledge, to experience a greater belonging to peer groups, and to develop a greater set of social skills (Bandura, 1969, 1973, 1986, 1997; Goldstein, 1998; O'Keefe, 1997).

Recommendations for Action

This study contributes to the existing body of literature on traditional suspension practices versus nonpunitive suspension for SWD, particularly students qualified as emotionally disturbed. The findings coincide with research regarding special education students and district suspension practices at the comprehension school sites (Bandura, 1969, 1973, 1986, 1997; O'Keefe, 1997; Goldstein, 1998). Based on the findings of this study several were recommended. First, results of this study was shared with the district superintendent, cabinet and the board of trustees to discuss further actions to address the need for nonpunitive alternatives to suspension throughout the district at all levels. Second, the district should reform discipline practices and end out of school suspension by transforming the school climate to include social emotional health skills for SWD-ED. Third, expand restorative justice to create supportive schools that encourage students to

take responsibility for their actions and repair harm that they may have caused rather than focusing on using suspension as a means of retribution for misbehavior (Skiba & Sprague, 2008). Fourth, the district should incorporate social emotional learning (SEL) to focus on self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making (Gresham, 1998; Wilhite, 2010). I will present these findings and actions to the superintendent, cabinet and board of education. Once a plan has been approved by the stakeholders, I will conduct trainings for administrators, counselors, and teachers of SWD.

Recommendations for Further Study

I compared suspension practices of SWD-ED at the comprehensive high schools and one alternative high school. One recommendation for future study would be to include other school districts throughout the United States to examine a wider variety of current suspension practices for SWD-ED to determine whether national trends are consistent with this study. Researchers could also examine school wide interventions using evidence based approaches at the comprehensive sites to decrees exclusion from school for SWD. An additional recommendation would be to determine which SWDs, have a parent who is incarcerated or suffering from mental illness and/or substance abuse, as these students are more likely to display externalizing behaviors.

Conclusion

Students with disabilities should be afforded the opportunity to be successful in school and productive in society. Because these students did not ask to have a disability, it is up to the educational system to ensure that SWDs are taught the proper social skills. Psychologists have found that exclusion from school increases student shame, rejection,

alienation, and the betrayal of healthy adult bonds (Hart, Cramer, Harry, Klingner & Sturges, 2010; Schachter, 2010). Educators should do all they can to ensure healthy mental outcomes, proper social behaviors, and increased internal belief systems. When students have a history of suspension, dropout rates surge causing crime rates and juvenile incarceration rates to rise.

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Appendix A

Education Code Section 48900(k) defined k violations as: disrupted school activities or otherwise willfully defied the valid authority of school staff in the performance of their duties (Education Code, 2014) within this code are 31 violations defined as:

K1 Disruption of On-Campus suspension

K2a Pre-fight behaviors such as name-calling, insults, challenging fights

K2b Violation of hands-off, pushing, grabbing, hitting, spitting

K3 Gang gesturing

K4 Possession of electronics and/or signaling devices

K5 Incite a riot, disturbance

K6 'No Show" to detention assigned by an administrator

K7 Inappropriate use of school, cell, public phone or other devise

K8 Possession of stink bomb, poppers, water balloons, markers

K9 Unauthorized areas, excluding truancy

K10 Buying or selling meal ticket, food, drinks

K11 Falsifying or altering document, misuse of passes, misuse of ID

K12 Gambling in any form

K13 Loitering/trespassing on another school campus

K14 Violation of dress code

K14a Not having school identification

K15 Tampering with or signaling false fire alarm or fraudulent use of 911

K16 Any form of pornographic material, written or electronic

K17 Possession or use of matches or lighter

K18 Habitual disruption of school/classroom activities; horseplay, running

K19 Habitual or egregious cheating

K20 Violations of auto or motorcycle procedures

K21 Defiance of bike, skateboard, skates, scooter rules

K22 Engaged in or attempted to engage in physical conduct of sexual nature

K23 Misuse of computer network account or password

K24 Theft or unauthorized possession of network account

K25 Violation of computer and/or network security

K26 Defiance of authority

K27 Intimidating or menacing school personnel or students

K28 Swearing, use of profanity