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An Evaluation of Suspension Days Between Students in Special Education and General Education

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An Evaluation of Suspension Days Between
Students in Special Education and General Education
Richard Tarbunas

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Governors State University
2016
Abstract

The purpose of this study was to analyze the number of suspension days accumulated by students in general education compared to students in special education in a south suburban Chicago public high school. Data was collected from the school to determine if there was a large disparity between suspension days between the two groups based on population size. If a large difference was discovered, then a possible plan to remediate and resolve the issue would be proposed to the school’s administrators.

Key words: Discipline, suspensions, special education
Chapter I

Introduction

In 1974, Senator Harrison Williams, principal author of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA), stated it is “a travesty of justice and a denial of equal protection under law to deny the right to education and to equal opportunity within this nation for handicapped children” (Yell, 2012, p. 63). Amendments to the EAHCA in 1990 changed the name of the act to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and further amendments added to the act in 1997 and 2004 added more clarity, structure, and extensions to the law (Yell, 2012). Students meeting the definition of a student with disabilities set forth in IDEA fall under the following categories; autism, deaf-blindness, deafness, hearing impairment, intellectual disability, multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairments, other health impairments, emotional disturbances, specific learning disability, speech or language impairment, traumatic brain injury, visual impairment, including blindness (Yell, 2012). Under IDEA, these students are assured a free appropriate public education (FAPE) in a least restrictive environment (2004). The term restrictive can be classified as the extent to which students are educated with nondisabled peers; meaning a more restrictive setting is one in which disabled students spend no part of their educational program with nondisabled peers, whereas a less restricted environment places disabled students with nondisabled peers for a part of their educational day (Vaughn & Bos, 2009).

As stated in Honig v. Doe (1988), the individualized education program (IEP) is “the keystone of IDEA” (as cited in Yell, 2012, p. 235). According to Yell, the purpose of the IEP is to “ensure that a student’s special education program will meet his or her individual needs and confer meaningful educational benefit” (2012, p. 237). The IEP is designed in a collaborated
effort with other purposes being "communication, management, accountability, compliance and monitoring, and evaluation" (Yell, 2012, p. 237). If a student exhibits problem behaviors that "impede his or her learning or the learning of others, then the IEP team must determine which behaviors are significant to require interventions formally written into the IEP" (Yell, 2012, p. 339). If said behaviors are determined to impede the student's learning process, then the IEP team must conduct a functional behavior analysis (FBA) to assess the behavior and, finally, develop a plan to reduce the behavior and promote socially acceptable behavior which would not impede or interfere with the students' own or his or her peers' learning (2012).

**Statement of the Problem**

Discipline refers to procedures teachers and administrators use to maintain a classroom climate that is conducive to learning (Walker, Ramsey, & Gresham, 2004). According to Yell and Rozalski (2008), there are two fundamental prerequisites that teachers and administrators must adhere to in developing rules and imposing disciplinary procedures. First, the rules must be clear to all students and their parents. Second, the rules must have a school-based rationale (2008). Students with disabilities are not above these rules, but do have "more extensive due process rights than students without disabilities" (p.12). This is because "virtually all students with disabilities are protected by the nondiscrimination law, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and many other students with disabilities are covered by IDEA" (p. 12). According to Yell (2012), "discrimination refers to unequal treatment of qualified students with disabilities based solely on the basis of the disability" (p. 336).

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to evaluate the number of days of suspension for special education students and determine if there was a big enough difference in suspensions days.
between them and their general education student peers. Skiba (2002) suggests literature reveals little or no evidence that suspension and expulsion make any contribution to reducing disruptive behaviors or violence and also suggests some evidence that these punitive procedures target certain populations disproportionately. The study assessed if there was indeed a large enough disparity between the numbers of days of suspension for special education students vs. general education students in an attempt to ensure accountability of the school being studied. The data was collected from the discipline data on suspension days by a south suburban high school from August 2014 – May 2015.

**Question of the Study**

The question of the study was is there a difference between suspension days per population for students in special education vs. students in general education?

**Assumptions and Limitations**

A limitation of this study is the number of schools participating. Only one school from the south suburban Chicagoland area was studied. According to the Illinois School Report Card (2015), a five year trend shows the school serves approximately 2000 students per school year whose socio-economic status is low to middle class. About 60% of the school’s population is African-American, 20% Caucasian, 15% Hispanic/Latino, 1% Asian, and 4% multiracial. There was a time constraint in the study due to the Graduate Seminar Class at Governor’s State University.

**Significance of the Study**

Public school administrators and teachers have a responsibility to maintain a safe and orderly environment for all students. However, educators need to be aware of the legal restraints when disciplining students, especially the additional constraints of disciplining students with
disabilities mandated by the state and federal governments (Yell & Rozalski, 2008). These constraints come from the obligation that schools have to deliver a free appropriate public education under the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA, 2004) to students with disabilities. If these constraints are not met, then school educators are obligated to remediate the situation in order to “maintain an orderly and safe school by preventing and addressing behavior problems and the need to protect the right of all students to receive a meaningful education” (Yell & Rozalski, 2008, p 7).
Definition of Terms

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). According to the U.S. Department of Education, IDEA is a law ensuring services to children with disabilities throughout the nation. Idea was last reauthorized by the federal government in 2004. IDEA governs how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education, and related services to more than 6.5 million eligible infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities (United States Department of Education, 2010).

Individualized Education Plan (IEP). According to the U.S. Department of Education, an IEP is a legal document that details the individualized educational plan that will be used for a specific student. Every student that receives special education services is required by law to have an IEP (United States Department of Education, 2010).

Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA). According to Yell (2012), the IDEA encourages and sometimes demands IEP teams address problem behaviors having to do with a student with disabilities by conducting an FBA. An FBA is a process to gather information about factors that reliably predict and maintain problem behavior in order to develop more effective intervention plans (Yell, 2012).

Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP). According to Yell (2012), the IEP team develops a BIP based on the FBA. The BIP should be proactive and multidimensional, implementing multiple strategies in order to prevent problem behaviors using positive behavioral supports rather than coercion or punishment for behavior change. (Yell, 2012).

Manifestation Determination. According to Yell (2012), the manifestation determination is a hearing to determine whether a student’s misbehavior was caused by or was directly related to his/her disability. IDEA requires that within 10 days of any decision to change
the placement of a student with a disability due to a violation of school rules, school officials, the parents, and members of the IEP team must review all relevant information in order to ascertain whether or not a student’s misbehavior was due to his/her disability. The team must decide if the student’s misconduct was caused by his/her disability or if the student’s misconduct was a result of the school’s failure to implement the student’s IEP. If there is no relationship between the misconduct and the disability, then the student may be disciplined like any other nondisabled student. If a relationship does exist, then the student may not be expelled, but school officials may initiate change of placement procedures. The IEP team must also conduct an FBA and implement a BIP for the student, or review the BIP already in place (Yell, 2012).

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). According to Feuerborn and Chinn (2012), PBIS is built on the tenets of prevention and require schools to restructure their discipline systems to promote universal, targeted, and intensive levels of supports to encourage positive social, emotional, and behavioral growth in all students. Universal supports promote a positive school climate where all students are taught behavioral expectations and are acknowledged for exhibiting appropriate behavior. Supplemental supports are provided at the targeted level for those who do not respond sufficiently to universal supports. Intensive supports are implemented for students with individualized social, emotional, and behavioral needs. (Feuerborn & Chinn, 2012).

Chapter Summary

Under IDEA, students eligible for special education services are assured a free appropriate public education in a least restrictive environment (2004). Within the requirements for a FAPE in a LRE are safeguards extending more due process rights to students with disabilities in order to protect them against disciplinary actions that may be considered
discriminatory solely on the basis of the student’s disability (Yell, 2012). The purpose of this study was to determine if students with disabilities in a south suburban Chicago high school were being discriminated against by analyzing disciplinary data in the form of suspension days. If such a disparity was found, then this information would be sent to the administrators of the school in order to help them develop a way to remediate said disparity. School educators are obligated to remediate such situations in order to “maintain an orderly and safe school by preventing and addressing behavior problems and the need to protect the right of all students to receive a meaningful education” (Yell & Rozalski, 2008, p 7).
Chapter II
Review of Literature

Legislation

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was signed into law by President Ford in 1975. IDEA ensures that “students meeting the IDEA’s definition of a student with disabilities receives the procedural protections of the law” (Yell, 2012, p. 67). Eligibility is determined on an individual basis by a team of individuals and includes the following categories listed in Table 1.

Table 1

Categories of disability under IDEA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Federal Disability Term</th>
<th>Brief Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Specific Learning disability (LD)</td>
<td>A disorder related to processing information that leads to difficulties in reading, writing, and computing; the most common disability, accounting for half of all students receiving special education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech or language impairment</td>
<td>A disorder related to accurately producing the sounds of language or meaningfully using language to communicate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual disability</td>
<td>Significant limitations in intellectual ability and adaptive behavior; this disability occurs in a range of severity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Disturbance</td>
<td>Significant problems in the social-emotional area to a degree that learning is negatively affected.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal Disability Term</td>
<td>Brief Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autism</td>
<td>A disorder characterized by extraordinary difficulty in social responsiveness; this disability occurs in many different forms and may be mild or significant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing impairment</td>
<td>A partial or complete loss of hearing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual impairment, including blindness</td>
<td>A partial or complete loss of vision.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deaf-blindness</td>
<td>A simultaneous significant hearing loss and significant vision loss.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orthopedic impairment</td>
<td>A significant physical limitation that impairs the ability to move or complete motor activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traumatic brain injury (TBI)</td>
<td>A medical condition denoting a serious brain injury that occurs as a result of accident or injury; the impact of this disability varies widely but may affect learning, behavior, social skills, and language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other health impairment (OHI)</td>
<td>A disease or health disorder so significant that it negatively affects learning; examples include cancer, sickle-cell anemia, and diabetes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple disabilities</td>
<td>The simultaneous presence of two or more disabilities such that none can be identified as the primary disability; the most common example is the occurrence of mental retardation and physical disabilities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1 (Continued)

*Categories of disability under IDEA*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Federal Disability Term</th>
<th>Brief Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deafness</td>
<td>A hearing impairment that is so severe that the child is impaired in processing linguistic information through hearing, with or without amplification that adversely affects a child's educational performance.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Two requirements under IDEA is the right to a free and appropriate public education in a least restrictive environment (Yell, 2012). Within these requirements are also procedural safeguards in regards to disciplining students with disabilities as well. These “constraints, which come from state and federal governments and the courts, impose certain conditions on educators’ rights and responsibilities when using disciplinary procedures with public school students” (Yell & Rozalski, 2008, p. 7). When it comes to discipline, “students have two primary areas of legal rights: (a) students’ right to privacy and freedom from unreasonable searches and (b) students’ right to due process” (p. 8). Although all students, “disabled and nondisabled, have Constitutional rights, they do not possess the same Constitutional rights as do people in a community setting” (p. 11). In order to maintain a safe environment conducive for the learning of all students, “administrators and teachers need to impose rules of conduct on their students. If students break these rules, then teachers may impose consequences in the form of disciplinary sanctions” (p. 11). According to Yell & Rozalski, there are two fundamental prerequisites that
teachers and school officials must adhere to in developing rules and imposing disciplinary procedures. First, the rules must be clear to all students and their parents. Second, the rules must have a school based rationale. Disciplinary procedures that serve as consequences for rule violations must also be clearly stated and understood by all students and their parents as well. If a suspension is involved, students must be given notice of the offenses that they committed and have an opportunity to tell their side of the story. (2008). In most respects, school officials can still discipline students with disabilities in the same manner as they discipline students without disabilities. These disciplinary actions include; “verbal reprimands, warnings, contingent observation, time-outs, response cost, detentions, in-school suspensions, or the temporary delay or withdrawal of goods, services, or activities” (p. 14). The exception is the “use of disciplinary procedures that result in a student’s being suspended or expelled from school or having his/her placement unilaterally changed” (p. 14). In these cases, the school must follow the requirements set forth in IDEA (Yell & Rozalski, 2008).

Short-Term Disciplinary Removals

According to Yell and Rozalski (2008), when students with disabilities violate a rule set forth in the school’s clearly stated code of conduct, then school officials may “unilaterally suspend the students or place them in an alternative educational program for up to 10 school days” (p. 12) which is the same type of protocol for students without disabilities. In these types of situations, school officials must still provide students with their due process rights as mentioned earlier. Amendments to IDEA in 2004 contain two important points relating to suspensions that are 10 days in length consecutively and cumulatively. “A suspension of 10 consecutive days is the upper limit on out-of-school suspensions” (Yell & Rozalski, 2008, p. 12). If a “suspension exceeds” the 10 day consecutive limit, then “it becomes a change of placement,
and if school officials do not follow IDEA's change of placement procedures, then the suspension" (p. 12) is considered unlawful. If a student with disabilities accrues 10 cumulative days of out of school suspension, then the IEP team and parents of the student must meet to address the following issues. First, the team must analyze and "determine if the 10 cumulative days of suspension constitute a pattern of removals, which may be a change of placement" (p. 12). Among analyses of these days of suspension are "number of suspensions, length of suspensions, proximity of suspensions to one another, and reasons for the suspensions" (p. 12). If a student with disabilities is suspended for more than 10 cumulative days, then the team must also "determine the educational services that will be provided to the student" (p. 12) which will allow him/her to "(a) progress toward meeting the goals set out in the student's IEP and (b) participate in the general education curriculum" (p. 12) even if he/she is placed in an alternative setting. The team must also "conduct a functional behavior analysis (FBA) and develop a behavior intervention plan (BIP)" (p. 12). If a FBA and BIP are already a part of the student's IEP, then they must be reviewed and revised if necessary. Lastly, the team must hold a "manifest determination to determine if a student's misbehavior was caused by or had a direct and substantial relation to his or her disability" (p. 12). A flow chart depicting how to conduct a manifest determination and what follows as a result is described in Figure 1.

**Long-Term Disciplinary Removals**

A student may be unilaterally removed to an interim alternative educational setting (IAES) for 45 days if the student "(a) brings a weapon to school or school function, (b) knowingly possesses or uses illegal drugs or sells a controlled substance, or (c) inflicts serious bodily injury on another person while on school grounds or at a school function" (Yell & Rozalski, 2008, p. 12). During this removal, the school must still "continue to provide
educational services” (p. 12) to the student. If the IEP team “holds a manifest determination and finds that there was no relation between the student’s misbehavior and his/her disability, then the student may be subjected to a long-term suspension or expulsion” (p. 12). Again, the school is still “responsible for providing a free and appropriate public education to the student” (p. 12) including continuing educational services during the long term suspension or expulsion.

**Manifest Determination**

According to Burton (2012), “provisions in IDEA make it difficult to discipline students with disabilities using the general disciplinary code” (p. 37). This is an intention constraint “because the manifest determination process is designed to protect students with disabilities from being disciplined for behaviors and characteristics that are attributed to their disabilities” (p. 37). For example, many students with emotional or behavioral disorders may exhibit problem behaviors with a higher frequency than students in general education, such as aggressive behavior, arguing with adults, insubordination, or the use of profane language. All of these behaviors may be a violation of the school’s discipline code and, therefore, without intentionally designed protections, would result in the student being suspended “so frequently that their education would be disrupted, thus denying them a FAPE” (p. 37).

Figure 1, adapted from Yell & Rozalski (2008) describes how a manifest determination is conducted and used to determine whether or not the suspension days accrued by the student are a result of his/her disability and whether or not those days constitute a change of placement.
Figure 1. A flow-chart outlining the steps in the manifest determination process. Adapted from "The Impact of Legislation and Litigation on Discipline and Student Behavior in the Classroom" by Yell, M. L. and Rozalski, M. E., 2008, Preventing School Failure, 52 (3), p. 13. Copyright 2008 by Heldref Publications.
Functional Behavior Assessments and Behavior Intervention Plans

According to Zirkel (2011), a functional behavior assessment (FBA) “is a systematic process of identifying the purpose, and more specifically the function, of problem behaviors by investigating the preexisting environmental factors that have served the purpose of these behaviors” (p. 262). Once data is collected to form a FBA, a BIP is created based on the results of the FBA and serves as “a concrete plan of action for reducing the problem behaviors as dictated by the particular needs of the student who exhibits the behavior” (p. 7). As stated prior, when a student with a disability reaches 10 consecutive or 10 cumulative days of suspension, an FBA must be conducted or reviewed if a current FBA exists. According to Moreno and Bullock (2011), “by examining and understanding the context of the challenging behavior” (p. 118) through a thorough FBA, “educators can initiate more accurate BIPs to assist students in the development of appropriate behaviors rather than resort to punitive measures” (p. 118).

The FBA can serve three major functions; identifying problem behaviors associated with any type of classroom environment using data and observation, serve as a more accurate means of identifying students for special education especially in earlier grade levels, and identifying more challenging behaviors associated with a student with a disability to be incorporated into the student’s IEP. According to Moreno and Bullock (2011), “when trained in the principles of FBA, a classroom teacher can incorporate a truncated version to address the onset of what might become challenging behaviors” (p. 119). Secondly, “if the FBA process is implemented with integrity in the general education setting, the resulting BIP is more likely to accurately address the challenging behavior as opposed to a BIP that was developed without an FBA” (p. 125). Furthermore, “such measures can be implemented to provide opportunities of assistance for students in the general education setting before a referral is prematurely suggested” (p. 125).
because “students who fail to respond to these measures are more likely to become better candidates for special education services assessments” (p. 125). Third, it allows for a systematic analyzation of a problematic behavior via the use of data to determine a goal-orientated BIP to best serve a student with an IEP, especially if it is required due to the 10 day suspension stipulation.

Overall, the goal of conducting a FBA is to “serve as an investigative process to accurately and reliably ascertain the function of a challenging behavior” (Moreno & Bullock, 2011, p. 120). “Once the function of the challenging behavior has been accurately identified and the conditions impacting its demonstration understood, educators can develop a BIP that appropriately reinforces the desired behavior with greater accuracy and social validity” (p. 120). By accurately defining the function or reason behind a challenging behavior, members of the IEP team can focus on creating BIPs that “place a premium on communication and skill building rather than coercion and punishment” (p. 120).

**Rationale for Differences in Discipline**

Prior to the reauthorization of IDEA in 1997, “Congress heard testimony regarding the lack of parity school officials faced when making decisions about disciplining students with and without disabilities who violated the same school rules” (Yell, 2012, p. 81) according to a 1997 Senate report. In order to address these concerns, Congress added the disciplinary requirements for school officials to adhere to in “an attempt to balance school officials’ obligation to ensure that schools were safe and orderly environments conducive to learning” (p. 81) for all students and “to ensure that students with disabilities received a FAPE” (p. 81). For example, Burton (2012) states “students with emotional disorders display problem behaviors on a regular basis;” (p. 37) arguing with adults, insubordination, aggressive behavior, and the use of profanity. All of
these behaviors may be constituted as a violation of a school’s code of conduct depending on the school’s general disciplinary code and school code of conduct. Therefore, if a student with such a disability was not protected by certain aspects of the law, then that student with a disability “could be subjected to suspensions so frequently that their education would be disrupted, thus denying them to a FAPE” (p. 37).

At Risk Students

Christle, Nelson, and Jolivette (2004) describe research indicating “suspension is used disproportionately with students who are: (a) male, (b) from low socioeconomic families, (c) of a minority ethnic background, and (d) identified as having a disability or low academic competence” (p. 510). Furthermore, “students with disabilities were twice as likely to be suspended than students without disabilities, and that students identified as having an emotional or behavioral disability were 11 times more likely to be suspended” (p. 510). McElderry and Cheng (2014) also confirm in a study to analyze the discipline gap from an ecological perspective that “students who are categorized as male, lower socioeconomic status, ethnic minority, and in special education experience higher rates of suspension” (p. 247). Skiba (2002) also concurs with Christle et al. (2004) and McElderry and Cheng (2014) in that research does, in fact, find students with disabilities are disproportionately suspended than students without disabilities (p. 84)

Suspension Effects

Skiba (2002) states “there is little or no evidence showing that suspension improves student behavior or contributes to overall school safety” (p. 84). In fact, “according to the Committee on School Health of the American Academy of Pediatrics (2003), students who are suspended often are least likely to have supervision at home, are from single parent families, and
are those most in need of professional help” (as cited in Christle et al., 2004, p. 510). According to Skiba (2002) “evidence suggests that suspension is ineffective for those students for whom it is used most often considering 40% of school suspensions are given to repeat offenders” (p. 84) suggesting “this segment of the school population is decidedly not figuring out that disciplinary removal intends to teach” (p. 84). “These marginalized students may end up in the school-to-prison pipeline” (McElderry & Cheng, 2014, p. 247).

Christle et al. (2004) outline the school-to-prison pipeline as the phenomenon occurring when students who are frequently suspended exhibit higher propensities to dropping out of school and become more likely to become involved with the juvenile justice system and eventually prison (p. 510). “Behavior problems, which result in” (p. 510) exclusionary disciplinary practices such as suspensions, “perpetuates a failure cycle in which the student falls further behind academically and receives fewer opportunities to learn appropriate behaviors” (p. 510). According to Mallett (2014), the experience of being juveniley incarcerated or detained “has increasingly been found to have a causal impact on youth reoffending and recidivism” (p. 147). Mallett (2014) goes on to state “the experience of (juvenile) detention…has a profound negative effect on students’ education, mental and physical well-being, and future employment opportunities” (p. 148). Lastly, “many detained adolescents with learning disabilities fail to return to school” (p. 148) thus begging the question; how can school officials maintain a safe environment for all students that is conducive to learning while also teaching appropriate behaviors whilst not removing students due to exclusionary discipline practices that might perpetuate a cycle of increasing odds of incarceration?
Perceptions of Behavior

According to Feuerborn and Chinn (2012), teachers’ perceptions of behavior can vary considerably and “these differences may be due in part to different levels of understanding of behavioral principles,” (p. 226) lack of adequate training, and experience.

Behavior is innate

In a study done by Feuerborn and Chinn (2012) of 69 teachers on their perceptions on how to deal with different behaviors in their classrooms, “participants tended to perceive behavior as innate, taught and shaped in the home, or otherwise out of their control” (p. 227). In Mallett’s (2014) investigation of why special education students are disproportionately sent to juvenile detention centers, thus reinforcing the school-to-prison pipeline discussed earlier, he mentions three possible hypotheses for the disparity. Of those hypotheses is what he refers to as the susceptibility hypothesis which “proposes that adolescents with learning disabilities have cognitive, neurological, and intellectual difficulties that make them susceptible to engaging in delinquent behavior” (p. 148). But according to Feuerborn and Chinn (2012), “viewing the causes of behavior as internal to the child or linked to variables that are out of a teacher’s control, the teacher may be less apt to intervene” (p. 227). When behaviors are not viewed as “functional, one may be less likely to teach appropriate alternative behaviors” (p. 227) and “may unintentionally reinforce negative behaviors” (p. 227). Furthermore, participants in Feuerborn and Chinn’s (2014) study “speculated that students possessed the skills to behave and achieve appropriately, but for various reasons choose not to” (p. 227).

Novice Versus Experienced Teachers

Emmer and Stough (2001) state “novice teachers may be more affected by the instructional disruptions caused by externalizing behaviors than their more experienced
colleagues" (as cited in Feuerborn & Chinn, 2012, p.226). Johnson and Fullwood (2006) further express novice teachers with limited behavioral knowledge tend to have more “emotional reactions to behaviors, particularly those of a defiant nature” (as cited in Feuerborn & Chinn, 2012, p. 226). For example, a novice teacher may write a discipline referral for a behavior that an experienced teacher may deem as tolerable and manageable. “Whereas similar perspectives of behavior and discipline might unify teachers within a school and create a common vision for change, tensions between teachers’ perceptions of behavior and discipline may create an undercurrent of discordance that could interfere with staff cohesiveness” and make implementing a school wide positive behavioral intervention system more difficult (p. 226).

**Lack of Behavioral Training**

In Feuerborn and Chinn’s (2012) study, “most of the participants centered their strategies” (p. 227) regarding social, emotional, and behavioral supports “on consequences, coupling extrinsic rewards with a decrease or absence of inappropriate behavior rather than an increase in appropriate behavior” (p. 227). Myers and Holland (2000) conducted a similar study and also found few participants who “discussed social, emotional, or behavioral challenges from an ecological or behavioral framework” (as cited in Feuerborn & Chinn, 2012, p. 227). According to Feuerborn and Chinn (2012), “this failure to address social, emotional, and behavioral supports may be due to limited knowledge and training in positive behavior supports” (p. 227). According to Zins and Ponti (1996), “targeted training on the powerful effects of school-based behavior supports may promote an internal locus of control and thereby increase the likelihood that teachers will intervene in a proactive manner” (as cited in Feuerborn & Chinn, 2012, p. 227). Coupled with the idea that student behavior is innate and out of a teacher’s proactive control, Feuerborn and Chinn (2012) speculate this as a reason for such few responses
regarding proactive “teaching of social, emotional, and behavioral skills” (p. 228). On the other hand, “those who discussed directly teaching social, emotional, and behavioral expectations were special education teachers and teachers working in schools” (p. 228) where proactive positive behavioral training was implemented. Those participants who came from schools implementing school wide positive behavioral supports, which would have required more behavioral-based training, “were more apt to consider the effect of alterable classroom variables on student behavior” (p. 227) and “may be more apt to view difficult behavior as preventable and malleable, and consequently, more apt to apply positive behavioral supports” (p. 227).

**Behavioral and social skill instruction.** According to Sayeski and Brown (2011), “without a solid ‘core’ of behavioral support in the classroom, students do not have the guideposts necessary to learn, practice, and develop desirable skills” (p. 16). According to Schoenfield, Rutherford, Gable, and Rock (2008), there are three tenets of social instruction; (a) all behaviors are learned and therefore can be taught, (b) social skill instruction should be customized to the individual student’s needs, and (c) social skills cannot be considered successful until generalized into a new setting (as cited in Sayeski & Brown, 2011, p. 16).

**Multitiered System of Interventions and Supports**

One way for schools to address concerns about behavioral management in order to decrease suspension rates for all students is by instituting a School Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS) framework (Sugai & Horner, 2006).

**Support for Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports**

According to Sugai and Horner (2006), Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is a multitiered framework that has received considerable attention, especially at the elementary and junior high levels (as cited in Bradshaw, Pas, Debnam, & Johnson, 2015).
Studies (Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 2001; Kincaid, Childs, Blasé, & Wallace, 2007) show “many school discipline systems continue to rely on consequences, depending on punitive or reactive strategies such as detention and suspension to curb behavioral violations” (as cited in Feuerborn & Chinn, 2012, p. 219). Studies done by Bonanon et al., (2006) and Bradshaw, Reinke, Brown, Bevans, and Leaf (2008) support PBIS as an effective way to reduce “rates of disciplinary referrals, detentions, and suspensions” (as cited in Feuerborn & Chinn, 2012, p. 219). According to Severson, Walker, Hope-Doolittle, Kratochwill, and Gresham (2007), PBIS is also “particularly beneficial to students with emotional and behavioral challenges” (as cited in Feuerborn & Chinn, 2012, p. 219). Furthermore, other studies (Kartub, Taylor-Greene, March, & Horner, 2000; Lewis, Colvin & Sugai, 2000; Taylor-Greene et al., 1997) have demonstrated “schools achieving a high level of PBIS implementation fidelity experienced 20% - 60% reductions in office discipline referrals” (as cited in Bradshaw et al., 2015, p. 483). Between 2008 and 2012, six other studies (Bradshaw, Koth, Bevans, Ialongo & Leaf, 2008; Bradshaw, Koth, et al., 2009; Bradshaw, Mitchell & Leaf, 2010; Bradshaw, Waasdorp & Leaf, 2012; Horner et al., 2009; Waasdorp et al., 2012) also confirm “significant impacts on suspensions and office referrals, bullying, peer rejection, as well as improved academic achievement and school climate” (as cited in Bradshaw et al., 2015, p. 483) as a result of implementing Tier 1 supports of a PBIS framework.

**Description of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports**

Implementing PBIS “requires that schools restructure their discipline systems to provide universal, targeted, and intensive levels of supports to encourage positive social, emotional, and behavioral growth in all students” (Feuerborn & Chinn, 2012, p. 219). By implementing PBIS, “staff and students work together to create a school-wide program that clearly articulates positive
behavioral expectations, provides incentives to students meeting these expectations, promotes positive student-staff interactions, and encourages data-based decision-making by staff and administrators” (Bradshaw et al., 2015, p. 481). The PBIS framework follows a proactive and preventative multitiered approach. According to Sugai and Horner (2006) and Walker et al. (1996), Tier 1 components represent universal supports for all students, Tier 2 components represent selective supports for students who insufficiently respond to Tier 1 supports, and Tier 3 components represent indicated and intensive supports for students with individualized social, emotional, and behavioral needs (as cited in Bradshaw et al., 2015).

Studies (Horner, R. H., Sugai, G. & Anderson, C. M., 2010; Sugai & Horner, 2006; Walker et al., 1996) indicate the universal Tier 1 component should be comprised of seven features: (a) A PBIS team consisting of 6-10 staff members, including an administrator, whom act as a building-level leadership team charged with the responsibility of implementing the PBIS framework. The team’s responsibilities include; attending annual training events, establishing an action plan for implementation, developing materials to support and enhance implementation, training of other staff members, and meeting bi-monthly to discuss school-wide behavior management systems and procedures. (b) On site consultation and support is provided by a behavioral support coach, which is typically a school psychologist or guidance counselor who has prior experience working with PBIS and conducting functional behavioral assessments (FBA). (c) The team establishes three to five positively stated school-wide expectations for student behavior which are known by staff and students and are posted in all school settings. (d) Plans are developed by the school staff in order to teach students the behavioral expectations. (e) A school-wide system is developed to reward students who exhibit expected positive behaviors in the form a tangible reinforcer that is consistently used by all staff. (f) A school-wide system is
created to respond to behavioral violations. Staff and administrators agree on what constitutes classroom versus office managed discipline problems, and students in all classrooms receive consistent consequences for disciplinary infractions. (g) A formal system is developed to collect, analyze, and use data for data-driven decision making associated with Tier 2 and 3 interventions and supports (as cited in Bradshaw et al., 2015).

Although the “PBIS framework has been widely promoted by the U. S. Department of Education and many state departments of education, dissemination and research efforts have largely focused on the Tier 1 elements” (Bradshaw et al., 2015, p. 482). According to Hawken, Vincent, and Schumann (2008), the multitiered system of PBIS should be consistent with a response-to-intervention approach in which “it is hypothesized that 80% of students will respond to the Tier 1 model and that the remaining 20% of youth will need Tier 2 or Tier 3 prevention programming to be successful at school” (as cited in Bradshaw et al., 2015, p. 482). As part of their responsibilities to the school as being part of the PBIS team, members are tasked with collecting and analyzing data “to make decisions regarding program implementation, as well as to identify whether the majority of students are responsive to the universal Tier 1 supports and to select other evidence based programs to meet the needs of students” (p. 482) who require Tier 2 and Tier 3 supports.

**Implementation Barriers**

According to Fixen, Naoom, Blase, Friedman, and Wallace (2005) and Muscott et al., (2004), “one reason many school systems continue to operate on such an antiquated, ineffective approach to discipline may reside in the complex nature of systemic change and the propensity of educators, administrators, and policy makers alike to underestimate this complexity” (as cited in Feuerborn & Chinn, 2012, p. 219). According to Adelman and Taylor (2007) and Hall and
Hord (2011), "when the complexity of school-wide reform is not appreciated, creating systemic readiness for change may be neglected" (as cited in Feuerborn & Chinn, 2012, p. 220). Too often, educators, administrators, and policy makers "prioritize the procedural tasks associated with an innovation and underestimate the need to actively foster the readiness and support from the very school staff crucial to the implementation of the innovation" (p. 220).

**Teacher Perceptions of PBIS.** According to Feuerborn and Chinn (2012), "the perceptions teachers hold toward PBIS can affect implementation" (p. 220) as "both a major facilitating and inhibiting factor" (p. 220). According to a study done by Kincaid, Childs, Blasé, and Wallace (2007), the PBIS team reported "that misunderstandings, philosophical beliefs incongruent to PBIS, and limited knowledge of behavioral principles were all factors influencing the implementation of PBIS in their schools" (as cited in Feuerborn & Chinn, 2012, p. 220). In a follow-up study (Lohrmann, Forman, Martin, & Palmieri, 2008), PBIS team members and "coaches reported major barriers of implementation at the universal level (Tier 1) included teacher perceptions such as skepticism that PBIS was needed, a belief that PBIS was ineffective, and philosophical differences with the core elements of PBIS" (as cited in Feuerborn & Chinn, 2012, p. 220). Another study (Bambara, Nonnemacher, & Kern, 2009) states PBIS team members working with students within Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions reported that staff-related variables including "philosophical beliefs inconsistent with PBIS, limited knowledge of PBIS principles, and difficulties in collaborative problem solving with other staff and families...as one of the most pervasive barriers to implementation" (as cited in Feuerborn & Chinn, 2012, p. 220). Although literature exists (Handler et al., 2007; Muscott et al., 2004; Sugai & Horner, 2006) recommending "80% of staff support or 'buy into' PBIS prior to implementation" (as cited in Feuerborn & Chinn, 2012, p. 220) in order to be successful, "strategies for attaining this level of
staff support are not well elucidated” (p. 220) in the same literature and fall on the shoulders of the PBIS team members in their delivery of training to the rest of the school.

**Lack of Training.** As stated earlier, when educators and other school staff view “the causes of behavior as internal to the child or linked to variables that are out of the teacher’s control, the teacher may be less apt to intervene” (Feuerborn & Chinn, 2012, p. 227) or, more specifically, less apt to apply positive behavioral supports. “This failure to address social, emotional, or behavioral supports may be due to limited knowledge and training in positive behavior supports” (p. 227). In their study, Feuerborn and Chinn (2012) rarely encountered participants, particularly secondary education teachers, who discussed “preventing individual problem behaviors by manipulating antecedents or triggers, using behavioral assessment data, or teaching alternative behaviors” (p. 228). Regardless of the cause, “this has implications for increased teacher preparation and professional development in positive behavior supports” (p. 227) in order to fully implement a PBIS framework successfully.

According to Begeny and Martens (2006), “many teachers are not provided sufficient training in positive behavior supports” (as cited in Feuerborn & Chinn, 2012, p. 229). According to Garrahy, Cothran, and Kulina (2005), teachers also “fail to find the little training they have received to be useful to them in the field, consequently relying on only their past experiences to guide their daily practices” (as cited in Feuerborn & Chinn, 2012, p. 229). Without proper training and support, “teachers may not be ready to make the shift toward PBIS to promote positive outcomes for all students, including those with emotional and behavioral challenges” (p. 229).

**Lack of Collaboration.** “Collaboration is central to the practices of PBIS” (Feuerborn & Chinn, 2012, p. 228). The goals of increasing “positive attitudes towards school, prosocial
Chapter V

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine if students within special education were being discriminated against by receiving more days of suspension versus their general education counterparts. According to IDEA, students within special education have safeguards within the law allowing them more due process rights to protect them from unwarranted disciplinary action that may be due to their disability (Yell, 2012). Without these safeguards, students with disabilities could be disciplined more often simply by the nature of their disability (Skiba, 2002).

This study analyzed the discipline data in the form of suspension days per each student population from a south suburban Chicago public high school to determine whether or not students in special education were being overrepresented in the number of suspension days they served compared to their regular education peers. Any implications from this study will be presented to the school’s administrators in order to better understand whether or not the data implies they might need to remediate any discriminatory practices within their school.

Discussion

Graphical Analysis

Figure 2 in Chapter IV shows students within special education make up 7% of the school’s population and accounted for 15% of the suspension days (ISS and OSS) while students in general education make up 93% of the population and accounted for 85% of the suspension days. The big difference in suspension days comes from the fact that general education students do make up a majority of the student population and should account for a majority of the suspension days. However, the fact that students within special education occupy 7% of the population but make up 15% of the suspension days might lead some to think that students in
special education are being over-identified for disciplinary actions that lead to suspension. On the other hand, data was not available to determine the number of days of suspension each individual student accumulated, so it became difficult to assess whether all students in special education were contributing to those days of suspension and might, therefore, be discriminated against solely on the basis of their having a disability or whether their disability was the contributing factor as to why they may have been suspended.

Figure 3 shows the number of days each student group spent in either OSS or ISS. Here, it can be seen that there is not much of a difference between the number of days each group spent in either OSS or ISS. Students in special education are 7% more likely to be disciplined by being sent to ISS than regular education students. Also, students in general education are 7% more likely to be suspended out of school. According Yell (2012), the reason special education students may be more likely to be suspended in school rather than out are “(a) it avoids the possibility of the suspended student roaming the community unsupervised, (b) the student being disciplined is segregated from the general school population, and (c) the student continues to receive an education during the suspension period” (p. 354). ISS also does “not constitute a change of placement because the school district provided a program that was comparable, in nature and quality, to the educational services regularly provided to special education students” (Yell, 2012, p. 355). This explains why the school may use ISS more frequently with students from the special education population.

Table 2 from Chapter IV shows the number of suspension days an individual student from either group might accumulate in one year. The table also shows the number of days an individual student from the total population might accumulate as well. The data reveals that students in special education receive more days per student of ISS and OSS. The data also
concurs with the data in Figure 2 in that students in special education are receiving more days in ISS than OSS. Compared to the total population, students in special education receive more days per student as well.

**Out of School Suspensions**

According to Skiba (2002), suspensions do not have an effect on adjusting behavior within students. Also, according to Skiba (2002), the students which suspension is most often used on are those students who need the most help and often do not have many other supports outside of school. So, why would schools continue to employ reactive, punitive measures in order to correct a behavior when the student would no longer be within the school in order to try and actually correct the behavior? According to McElderry and Cheng (2014), the continual marginalization of these types of students increases their chances of becoming part of the school-to-prison pipeline. Obviously, if a student’s behavior demonstrates he/she may become a threat to his/her peers or staff, for example by bringing a gun to school, then removing the student from the school until an evaluation of why the student brought the gun to school may be deemed appropriate. However, these types of infractions that would constitute being suspended out of school would need to be discussed and formally decided upon by school officials. Until then, the use of ISS to continue to serve these students seems like a step in the right direction.

**Limitations of the Data**

Because the data simply displayed the number of days each group accumulated over one school year, it is difficult to determine assuredly whether or not students in special education were discriminated against. Data showing the number of days each individual student accumulated might have been a better way of interpreting the data because, then, the data could have been analyzed in a way that would have been easier to manipulate and may have shown
more of what was going on within the school. For instance, the data used for this study did not display whether one student accumulated multiple days of suspension and may have been a repeat offender which may have swayed the data in one direction. If the number of discipline referrals per student were calculated and measured, this might also have been a better selection of data to analyze for the purposes of this study.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it does appear that students in special education are receiving more days of suspension than students in general education. However, due to the limitations of the data, it is difficult to determine if this difference is substantial enough to say that students in special education are being discriminated against. It does seem as though the school is doing its best to keep students who violate the school’s rules within the walls of the school in the form of ISS when it comes to students with disabilities. However, the school does not have a PBIS program in place to try and proactively reduce suspensions and promote positive behavioral supports for all students. Based on the data, it seems as though students in special education are being overrepresented, but because the data is limited, it cannot be said to be the basis of discrimination conclusively.

Educational Implications

This study will be presented to the school’s administrators in an attempt to allow them to redefine how they view out of school suspensions and to determine if a PBIS framework would be a suitable direction to follow in order to positively change school climate. Also, because of the limitations of the data, it is recommended that the school determine a better way to collect disciplinary data in order to make more informed decisions related to discipline.
Recommendations for Further Research

Recommendations for further study would include assessing more data over a longer period of time in order to determine if students in special education are being over identified for disciplinary action and for what reasons. Research into effective and cost-efficient methods of running an in school suspension room would also be recommended based on research suggesting out of school suspension is ineffective in behavioral modification. Further research into alternatives to suspension might also be an effective way to curb negative behaviors whilst not alienating a student from their right to a free and appropriate public education.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine whether or not special education students in a south suburban Chicago public high school were being over identified and discriminated against based on accumulated suspension days versus their general education peers. A review of the literature found that out of school suspensions are ineffective at modifying behavior and tend to marginalize students whom this type of disciplinary action is most often used. Moreover, a multitiered proactive and positive support and intervention framework such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) seems to be the best way to reduce suspensions and improve school climate.

The data from the study, although limited, showed no discreet evidence that the students in special education were being overrepresented or discriminated against compared to their general education peers. However, due to the lack of detail within the data, this could not be determined conclusively. More detailed data on the number of referrals written per student might have been a better way to gage and analyze the data to come to a more concrete conclusion, but was unavailable.
This study will be provided and presented to the school’s administration in order to allow them the opportunity to decide if they should revamp any of their disciplinary practices in lieu of the data analyzed. Also, it may afford them the opportunity to decide whether or not the data they are tracking is an effective method for use in decision making and policy formation.
References


behavior, higher rates of achievement, and better school attendance” (p. 228) can only be attained via collaboration. Interestingly enough, Feuerborn and Chinn’s (2012) study revealed “as level of teaching experience increased, discussions of collaboration with families and other professionals decreased” (p. 228). Feuerborn and Chinn (2012) speculate this could be the result of an “accumulation of negative or ineffective experiences with collaboration, increasing frustration over the lack of time for collaboration, or a general propensity to become more routinized and isolated over time” (p. 228). As stated earlier, many participants in Feuerborn and Chinn’s (2012) study indicated the importance of family “as central to student social, emotional, and behavioral development, few experienced teachers discussed working collaboratively with parents” (p. 228). It is speculated that this, “too, may be the result of repeated, failed attempts at collaboration resulting in the form of learned helplessness” (p. 228) or because collaboration with parents “takes more time, it may be a natural tendency for a busy individual with constrained time to become less collaborative” (p. 228). Bambera et al. (2009) noted similar challenges in collaboration which acted as barriers to successful implementation of a PBIS framework (as cited in Feuerborn & Chinn, 2012). Overall, when developing strategies for training and implementation, the PBIS team must take these barriers to collaboration into account in order to achieve success (Feuerborn & Chinn, 2012).

Chapter Summary

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was signed into law in 1975 and ensures that “students with disabilities receive the procedural protections of the law” (Yell, 2012, p. 67). Two requirements under IDEA is the right to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) in a least restrictive environment (Yell, 2012). Within these requirements are also procedural safeguards imposing “certain conditions on educators’ rights and responsibilities
when using disciplinary procedures with public school students” (Yell & Rozalski, 2008, p. 7). These procedural safeguards allow certain due process rights to students with disabilities pertaining to the length of a suspension, the cumulative number of days of suspension over time, behavioral reviews, and placement decisions (Yell, 2012). Congress added the disciplinary requirements for school officials to adhere to in “an attempt to balance school officials’ obligation to ensure that schools were safe and orderly environments conducive to learning” (p. 81) for all students and “to ensure that students with disabilities received a FAPE” (p. 81).

Skiba (2002), Christle et al. (2004), and McElderry and Cheng (2014) agree that research does, in fact, find students with disabilities are disproportionately suspended than students without disabilities. According to Skiba (2002) “evidence suggests that suspension is ineffective for those students for whom it is used most often” (p. 84) suggesting “this segment of the school population is decidedly not figuring out that disciplinary removal intends to teach” (p. 84).

“These marginalized students may end up in the school-to-prison pipeline” (McElderry & Cheng, 2014, p. 247).

According to Feuerborn and Chinn (2012), teachers’ perceptions of behavior can vary considerably and “these differences may be due in part to different levels of understanding of behavioral principles,” (p. 226) lack of adequate training, and experience. When behaviors are not viewed as “functional, one may be less likely to teach appropriate alternative behaviors” (p. 227) and “may unintentionally reinforce negative behaviors” (p. 227). According to Zins and Ponti (1996), “targeted training on the powerful effects of school-based behavior supports may promote an internal locus of control and thereby increase the likelihood that teachers will intervene in a proactive manner” (as cited in Feuerborn & Chinn, 2012, p. 227).
Studies done by Bonanon et al., (2006) and Bradshaw, Reinke, Brown, Bevans, and Leaf (2008) support PBIS as an effective way to reduce “rates of disciplinary referrals, detentions, and suspensions” (as cited in Feuerborn & Chinn, 2012, p. 219). By implementing PBIS, “staff and students work together to create a school-wide program that clearly articulates positive behavioral expectations, provides incentives to students meeting these expectations, promotes positive student-staff interactions, and encourages data-based decision-making by staff and administrators” (Bradshaw et al., 2015, p. 481).
Chapter III

Methodology

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the number of days of suspension accrued by students in special education versus students in general education. A practical action based research plan as described by Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2009) was used to conduct the study. School wide data was collected from existing discipline referral records for the 2014-2015 school year from the school’s data base. Participants of the study included all students attending a south suburban Chicago high school for the 2014-2015 school year as well as all staff contributing to the issuance of discipline referrals resulting in either in school or out of school suspension. A qualitative descriptive approach via descriptive statistics was used to determine if there was a significant difference between suspension days accumulated by students in special education and students in general education (Gay, 2009). The results were used to determine a plan of action to begin to remediate any statistical differences or disparities between groups.

Participants

All students from a south suburban Chicago public high school were chosen for this study. Both male and female students, ages 14-18, were reviewed. Students were separated into two major groups consisting of general education students and special education students. Students were defined as being in special education based on whether or not they possessed an IEP. Discipline referrals were written by all school staff members eligible for writing student discipline referrals which would result in days of suspension including; teachers, teacher’s aides, administration, deans, and dean’s assistants.
Instrumentation

The data was collected for this study from the school’s data base system which records the number of days of out of school suspension (OSS) and in school suspension (ISS) for each student group. A data collection chart was created to log the results. The chart had two main areas which examined the number of days of OSS and ISS for students in general education and students in special education. The school’s assistant principal for building control gave consent to conduct the study.

Procedures

The number of days in OSS and ISS for students in general education and students in special education was collected and tabulated from the school’s data base. The data was broken down on a monthly basis showing the total number of days of suspension (OSS and ISS) each group accumulated.

Data Collection

The number of suspensions for students in general education and special education was tabulated per month. A chart was created to view the results. All students attending the high school during the 2014-2015 school year with discipline referrals written by eligible staff were collected in the chart.

Data Analysis

Analysis of the data was based on determining differences between the percentages between populations based on qualitative descriptive statistics (Gay et al., 2009). The percent of each group from the total population was calculated. The percent of days suspended per population was also calculated. The percentage of days each group occupied in either out of school suspension or in school suspension was also calculated.
Chapter Summary

A practical action based research method was used for this study (Gay et al., 2009). The purpose of this research project was to qualitatively measure the number of days of suspension students in general education earned versus students in special education. Data was collected using structured record review from existing discipline records to determine whether students in special education were suspended more than students in general education. Qualitative descriptive statistics were used to calculate whether or not a noticeable difference existed between groups thus demonstrating a discriminate disparity in need of remediation.
Chapter IV

Results

This study was an effort to determine if special education students were suspended more than general education students in a public high school in a south east suburb of Chicago. The purpose of the study was to determine if there was a disparity between the numbers of days of suspension between special education students and general education students. A plan of action could then be proposed for the school to remediate said disparity. Data was collected from the 2014-2015 school year on the number of days per month each group was suspended out of school (OSS) and in school (ISS). Based on the data, the school may devise an action plan to reduce the numbers of suspensions for their special education population.

Demographics

The school being studied is located in the south suburbs of Chicago. According to the Illinois School Report Card, the enrollment for the 2014-2015 school year was 1868 students of which 7% consisted of students in special education. Roughly 63% of the students are black, 17% white, 16% Hispanic, 1% Asian and 4% mixed race. About 71% of the student population is eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunches, live in substitute care, or whose families receive public aid (Illinois State Board of Education, 2015).

Differences Between Special Education and General Education Suspension Days

The goal of the study was to determine if there was a noticeable enough difference to determine whether students in special education were getting suspended more so than general education students.
Figure 2. The first bar of each set shows the percent of the population each group occupied. The second bar of each set shows the percent of days suspended per population. Regular education = RE; Special education = SE.

Figure 3. The following figure shows the percentage of days each group occupied in either out of school suspension (%OSS) or in school suspension (%ISS). Regular education = RE; Special education = SE.
Table 2. Suspension Days per Student

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population</th>
<th>ISS days/student</th>
<th>OSS days/student</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Special Education</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular Education</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Students</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. This data represents the number of days of suspension each student would accumulate throughout the year. ISS = in school suspension; OSS = out of school suspension

Data Analysis

Figure 1 shows students within special education make up 7% of the school population and are responsible for 15% of the total suspension days. On the other hand, the regular education students make up 93% of the population and are responsible for 85% of the total suspension days. Figure 2 shows the difference in suspension days as a percentage each group accumulated in either ISS or OSS. The data showed 45% of the days special education students were suspended were served as OSS while 55% were served in ISS. On the other hand, students in general education served 52% in OSS and 48% as ISS. Table 2 shows the number of days of suspension a single student would accumulate throughout the year. The data was separated into three groups; special education population, regular education, and total population. The data reveals a student in special education would receive 2.1 days of ISS and 1.7 days of OSS. Whereas a student in regular education would receive 0.76 days of ISS and 0.82 days of OSS. Looking at the total population of both groups combined, any individual student may receive 0.85 days of ISS and 0.89 days of OSS for the year.
Chapter Summary

Suspension day data was collected via the school’s disciplinary database which showed the number of total suspension days for OSS and ISS within the general education population and special education population. The data was collected and displayed in the form of two graphs and a table; the first figure showing the days of suspension as a percent per population, the other figure showing the percentage of days spent in OSS and ISS, and the table displays the number of days of suspension accumulated by an individual student for the year.


Appendix A: Ethics Form

CITI Certificate

Consent Letter
February 11, 2016

Dear Assistant Principal of Building Control,

   My name is Richard Tarbunas and I am currently in the final stages of completing my Master's Degree in Multi-Categorical Special Education at Governor's State University. I am asking permission to view data from the 2014-2015 school year in regards to student discipline referrals rates for all students in attendance in order to examine a difference between referrals between students in special education and students in general education. This is an action based research study in which the results may be used to determine whether a school-wide plan may be necessary to remediate any disparities between these two groups of students.

   Your permission would be highly appreciated and all results will be offered up as further data the school can use to better understand if they are disciplining students in special education appropriately. All records will remain confidential and will remain under lock and key when not being actively studied. At the end of the Spring 2016 semester, all data will be destroyed to maintain participant confidentiality.

   Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Richard Tarbunas

Student at Governor's State University

Science Teacher