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Principals' Perceptions of Manifestation Determination Implementation and Disciplining Secondary Students with Disabilities

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PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS OF MANIFESTATION DETERMINATION
IMPLEMENTATION AND DISCIPLINING SECONDARY STUDENTS WITH
DISABILITIES

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Abstract

Students with disabilities are often disciplined differently than their peers in school. This qualitative study focused on eight secondary administrators in the Fort Smith Public School district and their perceptions of manifestation determinations and their understanding of the laws of special education. Participants were interviewed face-to-face via an online platform, and results were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Glasser's Choice Theory guided the research and through the study the results indicated administrators gain insights to a SWD motivation for the behavior before assigning an intervention, punishment, or discipline procedure (Achilles et al., 2007; Glasser, 1998; Louis, 2009; Rose, 1988; Zirkel, 2010). The results of this study indicated that secondary administrators within the school district had differential understanding of the laws of special education, would benefit from better training, and the district needed more uniformity on how manifestations are handled.

Keywords: disabilities, manifestation determination

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I. Introduction

Background of the Problem

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1997 established the initial process for disciplining students with disabilities. (Hartwig & Ruesch, 2000). According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), students with disabilities (SWD) have more protections in place when being disciplined (Nashatker, 2010; Taylor & Baker, 2002). The process of suspending SWD has become problematic in education (Kaplan & Cornell, 2005; Skiba, Peterson, & Williams, 1997; Morgan, Wang, Woods, Mandel, Farkas, & Hillemeir, 2019). Prior to a student with disabilities being suspended for more than 10 days, a review must be held to determine if the behavior was a manifestation of the disability (Morgan et al., 2019).

Despite explicit IDEA laws governing this process, determining if a behavior is a manifestation of a disability is burdened with problems for the students with disabilities, and many are being suspended without review of services (Rose, 1988). The law in special education is explicit when determining how discipline is to be handled for a student with disabilities, so it will not be exclusionary to their education (Hartwig & Ruesch, 2000). Consequently, student suspensions have negatively impacted students with disabilities due to large failure rates or a disparity between African American or Hispanic males, which has been evident in various data collection over many years (Kaplan & Cornell, 2005; Skiba et al., 1997; Morgan et al, 2019). Furthermore, IDEA requires reports from local education agencies to prevent disproportionality of suspensions or discipline of students with disabilities of color (Morgan et al., 2019). A possible cause of this problem is administrators' not fully understanding the laws and processes which facilitate a manifestation determination (Amemiya, Mortenson, & Wang,

2020).   Therefore, this study will examine the overall experience of school administrators in grades seven through twelve in the process of manifestation determination and suspension of students with disabilities. Data collection will consist of interviewing various secondary administrators throughout the Fort Smith Public School district.

Statement of the Problem

There has been limited research specifically related to the perceptions and experiences of administrators' awareness of disciplinary procedures for students with disabilities. Additionally, administrators need to be knowledgeable of the manifestation determination process and understand special education laws in order to discipline SWD properly. SWD are susceptible to being disciplined without regard for their disability, and its impact on their behaviors (Armstrong, 2002; Spaulding & Pratt, 2015).

The study has the potential to add to the body of knowledge related to the experiences and perceptions of administrators disciplining SWD by utilizing preventative measures for behavior. Further, the research may provide insight into the manifestation determination process, and the laws of special education. Therefore, more research needs to be done to understand the experiences of administrators in disciplining students with students with disabilities through the process of manifestation determination review and their understanding of special education laws.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to examine secondary principals' perceptions of manifestation determination as it relates to disciplining secondary students with disabilities, and the laws of special education. The questions guiding this qualitative study are: (a) What has been the overall experience of secondary

school administrators with the discipline process for students with disabilities? (b) What are the experiences of secondary principals with manifestation determination? and (c) What are secondary principals' overall understanding of special education laws?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant to the body of knowledge because it will provide data that will help describe the experiences of secondary administrators utilizing the manifestation determination process with manifestation determination review and discipline of students with disabilities. Additionally, this study is important to administrators who are decision makers in the educational community in disciplining SWD. This study will further benefit the programming services of SWD and their education.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this qualitative study, key terms have been defined

- Administrator: A principal or assistant principal in a secondary setting in grades six through twelve who manages and presides over a body of students in an administrative role in secondary education (Wilson, 2007).
- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD): A neurodevelopmental disorder in children and adults characterized by lack of attention, impulsivity, and hyperactivity (Nuri, Akçamete. & Direktör, 2019).
- Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP): A strategy which addresses the function of the behavior of a student. These strategies are devised after a series of observations determining the antecedent behaviors of the student (Smith & Katsiyannis, 2004).

- Department of Education (DOE): The federal department in the United States (Est.1979) that controls all federal programs dealing with education including federal aid to educational institutions and students. Retrieved from: https://www2.ed.gov/about/overview/focus/what.html

- Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA): Public Law 94-142 established that all children with disabilities would have access to public education (Keough, 2007).

- Emotional Disturbance (ED): a disorder characterized by deficits in learning, relationships with peers/adults, mood, fears, and physical symptoms (Forness, Kavale, & Lopez, 1993).

- Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) FAPE is a civil right based on the 14th amendment and an entitlement for all students. SWD are entitled to receive special services, related services, and transition training for the future (Hartwig & Ruesch, 2000; Katsiyannis, Losinki, & Prince, 2012; Katsiyannis & Maag, 2001; Losen, et al., 2013; Razalski, Stewart, & Miller, 2010).

- Free and Reduced Lunch: Students who come from a household with an income below 130 percent of the poverty income threshold are eligible for free lunch. A student who comes from a household with an income between 130 percent and up to 185 percent of the poverty threshold is eligible for reduced price lunch (Anderson, 2018; Skiba et al.,1997).

- Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA): the direct and indirect assessment methods to collect data by determining the variables that maintain behavior, thus

generating a functional hypothesis to drive the development of intervention that inform Behavior Intervention Plans (Smith & Katsiyannis, 2004).

- Individual Education Plan (IEP): The plan that is developed for a student with disabilities by an interdisciplinary team, which ensures they receive specialized services or related services (Keogh, 2007).

- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): federal special education laws which govern the rules and regulations in which students with disabilities receive their education. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act entitles every affected child in the United States from infancy to young adults to a free appropriate public education (Lipkin, & Okamoto, 2015).

- Least Restrictive Environment (LRE): FAPE is a civil right based on the 14th amendment and an entitlement for all students. SWD are entitled to receive special services, related services, and transition training for the future (Hartwig & Ruesch, 2000; Katsiyannis, Losinki, & Prince, 2012; Katsiyannis & Maag, 2001; Losen, et al., 2013; Razalski, Stewart, & Miller, 2010).

- Manifestation Determination Review (MDR): a process required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which is conducted when considering the exclusion of a student with a disability that constitutes a change of placement. A change in placement occurs when a student with disabilities is out of school for ten consecutive days, or if their removal from educational placement adds up to ten days total (Katsiyannis & Maag, 2001).

- Students with Disabilities (SWD): The thirteen disabilities which are described in IDEA: Specific learning disability, Other health Impairment, Autism Spectrum

Disorder, Emotional Disturbance, Speech Language Impairment, Visual,

including blindness, Deafness, Deaf-Blindness, Orthopedic Impairment,

Intellectual Disability, Traumatic Brain Injury, and Multiple disabilities (NICHY,

2012).

- The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP): The Office of Special

  Education Programs (OSEP) provides leadership and financial assistance to states

  and local districts to improve results for infants, toddlers, children, and youth with

  disabilities ages birth through 21. Retrieved from:

  https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/osep/index.html).

Assumptions

For the purpose of this study, it is assumed that the participants will respond

honestly. Further, it is assumed that administrators had at least three years' experience

disciplining SWD.

Limitations

The study is limited to eight respondents who agreed to participate in the study, so

results will be specific only to those people. The results of this study may be transferred

to other school districts throughout the state of Arkansas. Another limitation of the study

was administrators may service more than one role within the school district.

Delimitations

Delimitations included that all participants are from the state of Arkansas. Another delimitation was that all the schools who participated were from lower socio-economic areas in the Fort Smith Public Schools district, depending on the ones who agreed to be in the study.

Organization of the Study

In summary, Chapter one will discuss the overall experiences of administrators in implementing the Manifestation Determination process and discipline of students with disabilities in grades seven through twelve. Chapter two will consist of a detailed literature review that examines the overall experience and perceptions of administrators with the manifestation process. Chapter three will discuss the methodology that will be used for the research study. Chapter four will examine and analyze the data collected. Finally, Chapter five will provide interpretation of the data, research conclusions, and recommendations.

Chapter II: Literature Review

The purpose of this study is to examine secondary principals' perceptions of manifestation determination as it relates to disciplining secondary students with disabilities. The questions guiding this qualitative study are: (a) What has been the overall experience of secondary school administrators with the discipline process for students with disabilities? (b) What are the experiences of secondary principals with manifestation determination and (c) What are secondary principals' overall understanding of special education laws? The literature review will examine the overall knowledge that is available on the topic, and the experiences of secondary administrators in disciplining students with disabilities through the process of manifestation determination review. The literature review will examine the following topics in the following order: history of SWD; manifestation determination; district policy for SWD; high suspension rates; prevention of negative behavioral outcomes for SWD; and theoretical perspectives. These themes were chosen to provide the reader with a historical context of disciplining SWD. The work of William Glasser will be used as a conceptual framework.

Students with Disabilities

SWD are students who have a major physical or mental impairment which may inhibit one or more daily living skills or life activities (Armstrong, 2002; Spaulding & Pratt, 2015).). The 13 disabilities which are described in IDEA are the following: Specific learning disability, Other health Impairment, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Emotional Disturbance, Speech Language Impairment, Visual, including blindness, Deafness, Deaf-Blindness, Orthopedic Impairment, Intellectual Disability, Traumatic Brain Injury, and Multiple disabilities (NICHY, 2012). Some SWD have low academic

achievement, and this can cause behavioral problems in the educational setting (Armstrong, 2002; Spaulding & Pratt, 2015). Attention problems among these students also can escalate and cause negative feelings and low self-esteem (Armstrong, 2002; Spaulding & Pratt, 2015). Special education is essential to proper education of SWD and their long-term outcomes and achievements for the future (Armstrong, 2002; Spaulding & Pratt, 2015). These services are important for critical roles for independence and positive self-worth (Armstrong, 2002; Spaulding & Pratt, 2015). The following paragraphs outline the history of special education, reform for students with disabilities, Education for All Handicapped Children Education Act (EAHCA), and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

History of SWD/timeline. Historically, SWD have often encountered hardships with exploitation and exclusion from society (Spaulding & Pratt, 2015). Societal attitudes and norms often dictated how persons with disabilities were treated (Spaulding & Pratt, 2015). The public assumed SWD were denoted as having an intellectual disability (Armstrong, 2002; Spaulding & Pratt, 2015). Societal attitudes and approaches toward educating SWD consisted of differences and separation, and SWD were often labeled as uneducable (Armstrong, 2002; Spaulding & Pratt, 2015). The history of educating SWD in America from the 1800s to the present is outlined below.

1800's. Although schooling was available in America in the 18th century, it was only available for typically developing students (Kim, Zhang, & Sun, 2019; Mesquita, 2012). In 1805, wealthy business owners from New York City began providing schooling for poor children peers (Hill & Sukbunpant, 2013; Kim et al., 2019; Mesquita, 2012). The model that was chosen by the businessmen was called Lancastrian, which

meant one headmaster and hundreds of students in one room peers (Hill & Sukbunpant, 2013; Kim et al., 2019; Mesquita, 2012). Information was provided and students were expected to learn via rote memorization, and there was an emphasis on discipline and obedience (Hill & Sukbunpant, 2013; Kim et al., 2019; Mesquita, 2012).

The first idea for supporting SWD in schools was not considered until the 19th century when people emigrated from France to the United States (Kim, Zhang, & Sun, 2019). Special education services were provided to French immigrant children with blindness, deafness, or intellectual disabilities (Kim, Zhang, & Sun, 2019. In 1817, the Connecticut Asylum for Education and Instruction of Deaf and Dumb Persons opened providing services to deaf Americans in Hartford, Connecticut (Kim et al., 2019). The move to open this asylum was politically and monetarily swayed by a prominent heart surgeon and New England parents who wanted their children with deafness to be able to read the Bible (Kim et al., 2019).

Additionally, in 1832, the Perkins Institute for the Blind was established, as well as a school for feebleminded youth in 1848 (Kim et al., 2019). In 1864, Gallaudet University was founded, which has been previously known as The National Deaf/Mute College (Kim et al., 2019). A public school for the first "special class" was established in 1875 in Cleveland, Ohio but ultimately was disbanded in the same year due to society deeming it too costly (Kim et al., 2019).

Early to mid-1900's. Changes in society, industrialization, economy, and immigration fostered a growth in compulsory public education during the late 19th and early 20th century; however, students with disabilities were still educated separately from their peers (Hill & Sukbunpant, 2013; Kim et al., 2019). As a result of this practice, their

exclusion fostered a high drop-out rate and/or institutionalization (Hill & Sukbunpant, 2013; Kim et al., 2019). Students with more severe disabilities only had the choice of being institutionalized or staying home to be taken care of by their families for the rest of their lives (Kim et al., 2019). Society at that time believed that having a disability equated to being a deviant, thus removing them from the public eye (Spaulding & Pratt, 2015).

Although special education classes were becoming a more popular concept in early 20th century society, the programs were varied and were not uniform within the United States (Hill & Sukbunpant, 2013; Kim et al., 2019). Quality programs for special education were rare (Hill & Sukbunpant, 2013). The 1940's brought about a new label of "brain injury" which is what is now known in modern times as a learning disability (Hill & Sukbunpant, 2013; Kim et al., 2019; Spaulding & Pratt, 2015). Programs that were considered appropriate for SWD by school systems were rarely accessible until 1954 brought about changes in laws (Kim et al., 2019).

The 1954, the case of Brown vs. Board of Education set the precedent for all students in public schools (Blanck, 2019; Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, (1998). This case, although one most commonly known for its ties to racial desegregation, provided a "steppingstone" for SWD and their parents by opening the door to equality (Blanck, 2019; Yell et al., 1998). The ruling in Brown vs. Board of Education stated, "In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education" (*Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 U.S. 483 1954; Yell et al., 2018). After this decision, lawsuits against school districts became more

common as parents with SWD argued their students had been excluded and discriminated against due to their disabilities (Blanck, 2019; Yell et al., 1998).

The EAHCA. The 1970s included another important era of legislation for SWD. The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA; P.L. 94-142) was passed on November 19, 1975 by President Gerald Ford, and focused primarily on SWD (Blanck, 2019; Lipkin & Okamoto, 2015). The law was in support of SWD in the United States who had been excluded entirely from the education system (Blanck, 2019; Lipkin & Okamoto, 2015). It also further stated that SWD were often denied equal access to their education, like that of their peers, and had the right to be educated in the same manner (Blanck, 2019; Lipkin & Okamoto, 2015).

Furthermore, the law assured that the rights of SWD and their parents were protected, and they would receive a free appropriate public education (Blanck, 2019; Lipkin & Okamoto, 2015). Monies were also to be appropriated to assist states with the transition and supplementary assessment practices to identify SWD (Blanck, 2019; Lipkin & Okamoto, 2015). Even though the EAHCA was passed and put into place for SWD in 1975, the government did not factor in the time it took to train teachers or to assess them, thus creating a two-year wait until these things were put into place. (Blanck, 2019; Lipkin & Okamoto, 2015).

The IDEA. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act was signed into law in 1997; the IDEA provided an update to the 1975 EAHCA and socially impacted over eight million SWD in the United States in 1997 (Blanck, 2019; Lipkin & Okamoto, 2015). The IDEA provided a free and appropriate public education to SWD and ensured that these students receive related services (Zirkel, 2016). 'Related service' is a term that

refers to extra supports that a student needs and can include services such as speech-language, audiological, interpreting, psychological, occupational, and physical therapy, therapeutic recreation, counseling, and early identification and evaluation of disabilities (Zirkel, 2016) . The federal legislation of IDEA ensured the following for SWD: rights to receive special education and related services, preparedness for job training and independent living, funding for schools to receive these services, and monitoring of the efforts of all institutions to provide these services (Zirkel, 2016). It also was put into law to protect the rights of parents and ensure special education and related services to those children. IDEA also governs state funding and early intervention services to over six million infants, toddlers, and children with disabilities (Zirkel, 2016). Part C of IDEA also provides for early intervention services for children and youth ages 3 -21 (Zirkel, 2016).

IDEA authorized that students with disabilities have the right to receive services and supports necessary to be successful in the least restrictive school environment (LRE; Hartwig & Ruesch, 2000; Losen, Hodson, Ee, & Martinez, 2013). LRE is the requirement by law that SWD are to be educated with their peers without disabilities to the maximum extent appropriate, and they should not be removed from regular classes unless supplemental aids and services cannot achieve success in this environment (Losen et al., 2013).

In 2004, IDEA was amended to include methods to identify students with learning disabilities, early intervention services, highly qualified teachers, discipline, and meeting accessibility standards (Hartwig & Ruesch, 2000). Moreover, IDEA mandated that a free and appropriate education should be available in public schools to all SWD across

all placements (Kurth et al., 2019). As a part of IDEA, Congress included a system called "procedural safeguard" that protected the rights of students with disabilities (Hartwig & Ruesch, 2000). SWD would now be afforded equal access to education by being identified under 13 different disabilities, rather than nine (Kurth et al., 2019).

Manifestation Determination and Manifestation Determination Review

Prior to 1997, IDEA discipline policies for SWD did not exist. Manifestation determination was created in response to regulation of disciplinary actions for SWD (Hartwig & Ruesch, 2000). Manifestation determination is an analysis and formal procedure identifying the relationship of the SWD disability to the behavior in question. It is used by teachers and administrators to determine if a student's behavioral issue was an expression of their disability (Hartwig & Reusch, 2017).

Manifestation determination procedures were outlined by Congress to assist schools in preventative and positive programming for SWD who exhibit pervasive behavior problems (Hartwig & Ruesch, 2000). This requirement is in place to ensure that SWD are not penalized for their disability causing the action (Zirkel, 2016). Under federal law (IDEA, 1997), when a SWD is disciplined by removing them from their current educational environment for more than 10 days, a manifestation determination review (MDR) meeting is required to determine if the behaviors exhibited is a result of their disability (Zirkel, 2016). An MDR is required when a SWD violates the code of conduct at school and disciplinary action causes the following scenarios: (a) the student is out more than 10 days consecutively; (b) more than 15 days cumulatively in a school year; (c) when school days 11-15 constitute a pattern of exclusion; or (d) and exclusion of even one day for a student with an intellectual disability (Zirkel, 2016).

Manifestation determination procedures help ensure that all SWD facing disciplinary action are entitled to due process (Blanck, 2019; Lipkin & Okamoto, 2015; Lewis, 2017). Due process is a way to formally resolve a complaint that a person may have regarding their child's education (Blanck, 2019; Lipkin & Okamoto, 2015; Lewis, 2017). Due process complaints can only be filed in the instance of a SWD who is enrolled in a special education program (Blanck, 2019; Lipkin & Okamoto, 2015; Lewis, 2017). When disciplinary action occurs, and the parent feels the SWD rights are violated, they have the right to an impartial due process hearing, which can be overseen by a hearing officer (Blanck, 2019; Lipkin & Okamoto, 2015; Lewis, 2017).

Furthermore, there are special circumstances which may remove a SWD and place them in an alternative setting for no more than 45 days are as follows: (a) student has a weapon or possesses one on school property; (b) illegal drugs, possessing or selling on school premises; or (c) inflicts serious bodily injury on another person while on school premises or at a school function (Zirkel, 2016). In all these cases, the local education agency (LEA) must notify the parent immediately (Zirkel, 2016). Within 10 days of the decision to remove the SWD from their current classroom placement, the LEA, parent, and relevant members of the multidisciplinary team must determine if the behavior was caused by the student's disability or was it a result of the LEA not following the IEP (Zirkel, 2016).

Depending on the disability, it can be difficult to clarify if the behavior is related to the cause of the incident (Hartwig & Reusch, 2017). The assumption is that the disability is related to the behavior until the multidisciplinary team reviews the evidence to the contrary (Hartwig & Reusch, 2017). Accordingly, a multidisciplinary team

determines if there is a significant relationship between the SWD's actions and their disability (Russo et al., 2000). This occurs prior to any disciplinary action of SWD (Lewis, 2002). The multidisciplinary team reviews the student's IEP (Individualized Education Plan) to determine if behavioral supports have been included (Russo et al., 2000). An IEP is a legal document that is designed for any student who is receiving special education services (Russo et al., 2000).When a multidisciplinary team evaluates a student, they are to consider the student's ability to access the general curriculum, how the disability effects learning, and choose an appropriate placement to properly educate the student (Russo et al., 2000).

The multidisciplinary team must provide notice of the hearing to the parents and SWD before an MDR can occur, as well as procedural rights and safeguards (Lewis, 2017; Russo et al., 2000). Parents must also understand what procedural safeguards are and understand the MDR process (Blanck, 2019; Lipkin & Okamoto, 2015; Lewis, 2017 Russo et al., 2000).Witnesses and evidence for their case is allowed to be presented during the hearing (Blanck, 2019; Lipkin & Okamoto, 2015; Lewis, 2017). A significant case which was pivotal to MDR was *Goss vs. Doe* (Lewis, 2017; Russo et al., 2000). In this case, the Supreme Court determined MDR required an analysis of misconduct which could lead to greater removal of more than 10 days. This removal from the classroom is called a change in placement, which occurs when a SWD is out of school for 10 consecutive days or if they are removed from their current educational placement adding up to 10 days total (Hartwig & Reusch, 2017; Katsiyannis & Maag, 2001). When a change in placement for a SWD is proposed, an MDR must be conducted (Hartwig & Reusch, 2017; Katsiyannis & Maag, 2001).

Laws governing MDR. Questions of equity in special education and MDR have resulted in some litigation (Blanck, 2019; Lipkin & Okamoto, 2015; Lewis, 2017). When Congress enacted the Education for all Handicapped Children Act of 1975, now called the IDEA, special education funding for school districts was not available, and services were inadequate (Blanck, 2019; Lipkin & Okamoto, 2015; Lewis, 2017). In the past, SWD were excluded from a free and appropriate education, and some disabilities were not able to be identified, resulting in academic issues. (Blanck, 2019; Lipkin & Okamoto, 2015; Lewis, 2017).

Disciplinary procedures regarding SWD resulted in court cases because families of SWD did not feel students received equality in school (Blanck, 2019; Lipkin & Okamoto, 2015; Lewis, 2017). In Doe v. Koger (1979), the court introduced protections for SWD and suspensions, and whether the disruptive behaviors were related to their disability (Etscheidt, 2002).The courts also concluded in further cases that the discipline provisions of a school multidisciplinary team should ask if a placement should be changed for that SWD who is being disciplined (Etscheidt, 2002).

In a 1981 court case, S-1 v. Turlington, it was revealed that MDR procedures were not being followed (Lewis, 2017). In this case, SWD challenged a school district because an expulsion hearing occurred, but an MDR was not held. The school officials reported that the SWD knew the difference between "right and wrong" and it was impossible that students' disabilities, which were not behavioral in nature, would warrant that the perceived inappropriate behavior was a manifestation of their disability (Lewis, 2017). The court was not persuaded by the school district, and the following was determined:

> According to Lewis (2017), "Before a handicapped student can be expelled, a trained and knowledgeable group of persons must determine whether the student's

misconduct bears a relationship to his handicapping condition; (2) an expulsion is a change in 2 and section 504; (3) expulsion is a proper disciplinary tool under the EHA and section 504, but a complete cessation of educational services is not (p.2).

Administrator training in MD. Lack of administrator training has plagued disciplinary issues with SWD (Rose, 1988). A study of disciplinary practices revealed various factors affecting discipline of SWD related directly to the size of community, principal's experience, and grade level (Rose, 1988). When a student with a disability is disciplined, it is up to the school principal to oversee the process (Burton, 2012). Usually when a principal decides to discipline a student for a disciplinary action, or serious incident, they follow a set of policy and procedures code written by the school district (Burton, 2012; Yell et al., 1998). IDEA provisions can make discipline difficult for secondary administrators when disciplinary action is warranted for SWD (Burton, 2012; Yell et al., 1998). Disciplining SWD can create school climate disruptions, as well as threaten the safety of others; however, the principal is bound by ethical and legal responsibilities to protect all students, including SWD (Burton, 2012; Yell et al., 1998).

Administrator training is sometimes limited to only one special education class in their undergraduate program, and one special education law in their graduate program (Burton, 2012). The time for administrators to utilize the skills they previously learned in leadership school is when they are hired in a leadership position (Burton, 2012). According to Burton, 2012, difficult behaviors with students with disabilities can turn into ethical situations. This study will explore the knowledge of skills needed to discipline SWD, possibly setting a precedence for future training.

Discipline Policy for Students with Disabilities

Discipline policy has changed since EAHCA of 1975 was passed (Hartwig & Ruesch, 2000; Lewis, 2017). In 1988, Congress determined that SWD required a higher level of due process when being disciplined, as well as special protections to ensure that the laws were not discriminatory (Hartwig & Ruesch, 2000; Lewis, 2017). The 1990 IDEA law was reauthorized in the spring of 1997 and significant changes were made regarding the discipline of SWD (Hartwig & Ruesch, 2000).

Prior to the 1997 IDEA reauthorization, a discipline policy did not exist for SWD (Hartwig & Ruesch, 2000; Lewis, 2017). The IDEA Act of 2004 included changes and special procedures related to suspending, expelling, and conducting functional behavioral assessments (FBA) for SWD (Hartwig & Ruesch, 2000). In 2004, Congress amended the federal law to add language to ensure a meeting occurred before extreme disciplinary procedures occurred (Hartwig & Ruesch, 2000; Lewis, 2017). As outlined above, this amendment ensured that SWD are not removed from their current educational placement without first determining the nature of their behavior, and whether it is related to their disability (Hartwig & Ruesch, 2000; Lewis, 2017). The following sections outline district practices for SWD in Grades K-12, least restrictive environment, and exclusionary practices and civil rights law.

District Practices for SWD in Grades K-12. Each school district within the United States adheres to the laws set forth by Congress for SWD including state and federal policy (Lewis, 2017). School systems balance due process, school district needs, and best special education practices (Lewis, 2017). In the 1997 reauthorization, The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), and the U.S. Department of Education

(DOE) provided guidelines and clarification for school districts to guide administrators and educators with discipline of SWD (Hartwig & Ruesch, 2000).

In a memorandum to the states, the DOE noted that all students, including SWD, deserved safe and orderly disciplined environments (Hartwig & Ruesch, 2000; Lewis, 2017). The DOE further specified that teachers and administrators should already have the tools necessary to address any problems with SWD that should arise (Hartwig & Ruesch, 2000; Lewis, 2017). The DOE also included that SWD should have appropriately developed IEP's as well as behavior interventions conducive to intentional strategies (Hartwig & Ruesch, 2000; Lewis, 2017).

Least Restrictive Environment. The IDEA requires that SWD are provided with a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE; Hartwig & Ruesch, 2000; Katsiyannis, Losinki, & Prince, 2012; Katsiyannis & Maag, 2001; Losen, et al., 2013; Razalski, Stewart, & Miller, 2010). FAPE is a civil right of SWD to receive special services, related services, and transition training for the future (Hartwig & Ruesch, 2000; Katsiyannis, Losinki, & Prince, 2012; Katsiyannis & Maag, 2001; Losen, et al., 2013; Razalski, Stewart, & Miller, 2010. FAPE is rooted in the 14th amendment and is an entitlement for all students (Hartwig & Ruesch, 2000; Katsiyannis, Losinki, & Prince, 2012; Katsiyannis & Maag, 2001; Losen, et al., 2013; Razalski, Stewart, & Miller, 2010). Part of FAPE is an education in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE).

The LRE is the maximum extent appropriate with their nondisabled peers based on their individualized IEP based on a current review of current academic performance and services (Hartwig & Ruesch, 2000; Katsiyannis, Losinki, & Prince, 2012; Katsiyannis & Maag, 2001; Losen, et al., 2013; Razalski, et al., 2010) . When writing

IEPs, the multidisciplinary team must consider the LRE for the student, as well as behaviors of concern (Hartwig & Ruesch, 2000; Katsiyannis, Losinki, & Prince, 2012; Katsiyannis & Maag, 2001; Losen, et al., 2013; Razalski, Stewart, & Miller, 2010). The parents are also involved in developing the IEP and determining appropriate placement services for the SWD (Hartwig & Ruesch, 2000; Katsiyannis, Losinki, & Prince, 2012; Katsiyannis & Maag, 2001; Losen, et al., 2013; Razalski, Stewart, & Miller, 2010).

The placement continuum of services for LRE is based on the amount of time the student receives academic instruction and participates with their nondisabled peers in the general education environment (Hartwig & Ruesch, 2000; Katsiyannis, Losinki, & Prince, 2012; Katsiyannis & Maag, 2001; Losen, et al., 2013; Razalski et al., 2010). The following service options are considerations for multidisciplinary team when determining LRE: regular class with indirect services; regular class with 80% or more (inclusion services); regular class with 40% to 79% (resource services); regular class with less than 40% (self-contained services); and off campus services: (1) school-based day treatment; (2) special day school; (3) residential school, (4) hospital program, and (5) homebound instruction (Hartwig & Ruesch, 2000; Katsiyannis, Losinki, & Prince, 2012; Katsiyannis & Maag, 2001; Losen, et al., 2013; Razalski et al., 2010). The multidisciplinary team further has to explain reasons why they determined the percentage of services within the regular education environment was not appropriate for the SWD (Hartwig & Ruesch, 2000; Katsiyannis, Losinki, & Prince, 2012; Katsiyannis & Maag, 2001; Losen, et al., 2013; Razalski et al., 2010).

It is important to have a working definition of the LRE continuum of services within the school setting (Daniel, 1997; Rose, 1988). A regular education class would not

require the direct support of a special education teacher for a SWD; however, indirect monitoring through weekly consultation with the regular teacher is considered the norm (Daniel, 1997; Rose, 1988). In a co-teach or inclusion setting, the SWD has the benefit of being supported by a regular and special education teacher, who also plan and assess together for the benefit of their students (Daniel, 1997; Rose, 1988). These services provide for the student to be in an inclusive setting at 80% of the time with their non-disabled peers (Daniel, 1997; Rose, 1988).

Another setting for the team to consider on the continuum of services for SWD is resource (Daniel, 1997; Rose, 1988). A resource secondary setting allows the SWD to stay in the classroom for the main lesson, and then have the support of a resource teacher for more individualized small group mastery during independent time (Daniel, 1997; Rose, 1988). This allows the student to be with their peers for 40% to 79% of their time, depending on the level of accommodations and supports needed (Daniel, 1997; Rose, 1988).

The final school setting that the IEP team would need to consider across the continuum for SWD is a self-contained setting (Daniel, 1997; Rose, 1988). This setting allows students with moderate to severe disabilities to receive instruction in a modified curriculum and allows for regular class with less than 40% of time with their regular nondisabled peers (Daniel, 1997; Rose, 1988). These SWD focus mostly on daily living and vocational skills to assist with independent living in the future (Daniel, 1997; Rose, 1988).

Modifying the LRE. In order for the LRE to be modified, the parent and multidisciplinary team must agree that this is the appropriate placement (Hartwig &

Ruesch, 2000; Katsiyannis, Losinki, & Prince, 2012; Katsiannis & Maag, 2001; Losen, et al., 2013; Razalski, Stewart, & Miller, 2010). The IEP team then agrees which LRE is appropriate for the SWD based on the review of the placement continuum of services (Hartwig & Ruesch, 2000; Katsiyannis, Losinki, & Prince, 2012; Katsiyannis & Maag, 2001; Losen, et al., 2013; Razalski et al., 2010).

Disciplinary action such as an MDR would possibly require a change in LRE. Prior to a change in placement in the student's LRE, the multidisciplinary team has to consider a setting on the continuum of services and its appropriateness (Daniel, 1997; Rose, 1988). The team is usually managed by the administrator in charge of the SWD (Daniel, 1997; Rose, 1988). If a SWD has a history of behavioral discipline then data is reviewed, and efforts to provide behavioral supports are needed to move them across the continuum of services (Daniel, 1997; Rose, 1988). Once the behavioral supports are in place, then the data is to be analyzed by the multidisciplinary team (Daniel, 1997; Rose, 1988). The multidisciplinary team can then determine the appropriate LRE for the SWD (Daniel, 1997; Rose, 1988).

Exclusionary Practices due to Behavior and Civil Rights Laws. Exclusionary practices have been the "norm" in regular education, often disregarding SWD and what environment is best for them to learn (Daniel, 1997; Rose, 1988). Exclusionary practices are attitudes in society which disregard and sometimes devalue SWD (Daniel, 1997; Rose, 1988). SWD have experienced exclusionary practices in the past regarding behavior in the form of in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, and expulsions (Daniel, 1997; Rose, 1988). Contemporary schools often justify discipline based on

student misbehavior, and personal and family circumstances, which can contribute to exclusionary practices for SWD (Fedders, 2018).

Historically, the background of civil rights laws and inclusion of SWD are intertwined as ableism and racism both function as tools of exclusion in education (Ferri & Connor, 2005). Ableism is a term that refers to social marginalization of SWD as they are in subtle ways deemed "disabled" (Ferri & Connor, 2005). Like racism, ableism calls attention to where one side of a binary exerts power over the other, and seeks to be dominant (Ferri & Connor, 2005). Both laws for SWD and desegregation laws threatened the status quo that separate was not necessarily equal (Ferri & Connor, 2005).

In the case of *Brown vs. Board of Education*, lawsuits against school districts became more common as parents with SWD, argued their students had also been excluded educationally from being with their non-disabled peers (Blanck, 2019; Ferri & Connor, 2005; Yell et al., 1998). The disability community was buoyed by the *Brown vs. Board of Education* to fight for rights of SWD and exclusionary practices (Blanck, 2019; Ferri & Connor, 2005; Yell et al., 1998).

High Suspension Rates for SWD

Even though it has been over 40 years since SWD won the right to be included in the regular education environment, suspensions and expulsions for these students have continued to increase (Raj, 2018). Schools have utilized suspensions to exclude SWD from the general education setting (Raj, 2018). Current data from the US Department of Education reveals that public schools suspend SWD two times more than that of their peers without disabilities (Raj, 2018). Interpreting these results, Raj (2018) suggested the following:

Disabilities are fluid and thus their causal relationship to behavior occurs along a spectrum. But rather than acknowledge the complexity of the relationship between behavior and disability, the IDEA demands schools draw lines around behavior attributed to disabilities, which in turn leads to arbitrary results (p.865)

Factors that contribute to suspension rates. There are several factors that contribute to suspension rates among SWD. Firstly, racial disparities among SWD have an overrepresentation of African American students (Fedders, 2018; Katsiyannis et al., 2012). Zero tolerance has also contributed to suspension rates of SWD, often not taking their specific disability into consideration (Fedders, 2018; Monterastelli, 2017).

Factoring in the socio-economic status of these students, SWD minorities have a greater risk of suspension, expulsion, or corporal punishment (Fedders, 2018; Katsiyannis et al.; Skiba et al., 1997). The following paragraphs will address racial disparity, zero tolerance, and socioeconomic status in relation to suspension rates of SWD.

Racial disparity. Racial disparities in the field of special education have existed since SWD have been introduced into the educational setting (Fedders, 2018; Katsiyannis et al., 2012). Racial disparities are issues that affect people of different races in different ways (Fedders, 2018; Katsiyannis et al., 2012). Oppression has roots in overall prejudice, especially in minority groups. The education system in America must acknowledge the overrepresentation of African American students in special education programs (Fedders, 2018; Katsiyannis et al., 2012). African American males and SWD still account for most incidents of exclusionary practices within secondary education settings (Fedders, 2018). (Fedders, 2018; Katsiyannis et al., 2012). Despite the intent of the policies to give students greater opportunities educationally, special education has turned into a deceptive process of racial segregation (Fedders, 2018; Katsiyannis et al., 2012). Disparities are still seen for each of the three most common types of infractions (disorderly conduct,

insubordination, and other). Morrisson and D'Incau (1997) reported on minority students and SWD in Great Britain and Australia and their vulnerabilities for expulsion (Morrison & D'Incau, 1997). Minority students were excluded at a rate of 34%, and 12.5 % of expelled students were SWD (Morrison & D'Incau, 1997).

In a study conducted in Arkansas in 2012, African American students were suspended at a rate of 18.5% compared to their Caucasian counterparts, which was 13.3% (Morgan et al., 2019). African American students were suspended 3.5 times as often as Caucasian students, and 43% of these suspensions were SWD (Morgan et al., 2019). Consequently, African American students with and without disabilities are still overrepresented in exclusionary discipline compared to their white counterparts (Morgan et al., 2019).

Zero tolerance. Zero tolerance policies were devised attempting to maintain security measures within schools and eliminate learners who were a danger to the schools or learning institution (Fedders, 2018; Monterastelli, 2017). Zero tolerance is when administrators hand down harsh punishment such as expulsions or suspensions (Fedders, 2018; Monterastelli, 2017). These security measures have been a detriment to SWD with emotional or behavioral disorders prone to suspension and expulsions (Fedders, 2018; Monterastelli, 2017). It does not accommodate the fact that some of the behaviors of SWD are not controlled (Fedders, 2018; Monterastelli, 2017).

According to Fedders, (2018), zero- tolerance policies have resulted in suspensions of students who brought over-the-counter medication for an illness. Another student was suspended resulting from having a first aid kit in her car, and it contained a small knife (Fetters, 2018). There are still disparities regarding discipline infractions in

ethnically diverse students and special education learners (Fedders, 2018; Monterastelli, 2017). Even though schools have instituted behavior management systems, it still does not take into consideration the detrimental steps they are taking for SWD regarding zero tolerance (Fedders, 2018; Monterastelli, 2017

One example of zero tolerance, which could have been prevented, occurred with a student who had an OHI (Harvard Civil rights Project, 2000). An aide on a bus told a SWD who had severe ADHD to be quiet, or a written report would be filed (Harvard Civil rights Project, 2000). The SWD kicked the aide and was arrested and charged with battery (Harvard Civil rights Project, 2000).

Socioeconomic Status. Special education students from lower socioeconomic status also have a greater risk of suspension, expulsion, or corporal punishment (Skiba et al., 1997). Lower socioeconomic status is defined as inequalities with access to resources (Skiba et al., 1997). Even though IDEA has detailed procedures school districts must follow for discipline issues, disciplinary removals are not prohibited (Zirkel, 2016). Free and reduced lunch (FRL) students and students with disabilities is over-represented in referrals (Anderson, 2018). FRL students receive about 71.2% discipline referrals per 100 students, relative to about 28.9% per 100 for their non-FRL peers in the state, indicating their referral rate is about 2.5% times higher (Anderson, 2018).

Mitchell et al., (2019) reported that SWD who had ED were the most socioeconomically disadvantaged subgroups of students receiving services through special education. Statistically, 73% of SWD with ED had a parent who worked, and 62% lived in government housing (Mitchell et al., 2019). There is a greater likelihood of SWD who have ED to have lower socioeconomic status and attend low-income schools

(Mitchell et al., 2019). These two things negatively impact on SWD with ED completing high school or reaching gainful employment in the future (Mitchell et al., 2019).

Disability type. There are certain disabilities which have a higher incidence of suspension and expulsion in SWD (Skiba et al., 1997). Students with Emotional Disturbance (ED) and Other Health Impairment (OHI) have higher incidences of suspensions or expulsions (Monterastelli, 2017; Skiba et al., 1997). EBD and OHI are usually in conjunction with a comorbid condition such as conduct or learning problems, and are particularly vulnerable to disciplinary procedures (Monterastelli,, 2017; Skiba et al., 1997). ED has the twice the greatest risk among all students with disabilities to be suspended or expelled from school (Mitchell et al., 2019).

Emotional Disturbance. Sustaining challenging behaviors for SWD who are identified as ED has proved to become difficult for public schools (Mitchell et al., 2019). Emotional disturbances are characterized by diverse behaviors which encompass emotional and cognition problems (Cullinan & Sabornie, 2004). According to Mitchell et al., 2019,

> Emotional or Behavioral disorder means a disability that is characterized by behavioral or emotional responses in school programs so different from appropriate age, cultural, or ethnic norms that the responses adversely affect educational performance, including academic, social, vocational or personal skills; more than a temporary, expected response to stressful events in the environment; consistently exhibited in two different settings, at least one of which is school-related; and unresponsive to direct intervention applied in general education, or the condition of a child is such that general education interventions would be insufficient (pg.80).

Studies on students ED have been identified as the highest area in the exclusion category with OHI being second to this disability (Achilles, McLaughlin, & Croninger, 2019). In a summarization of ED students who experienced a discipline event, Mitchell

et al., (2019), compared out of school suspensions to peers without IEPs. For every 77 out of 100 SWD, suspension or expulsions were for 10 cumulative days. In comparison, ED students the ratio was 365 for every 10,000 students (Mitchell et al., 2019). This type of pattern represented 37 out of 10,000 SWD. Students who specifically had ED were suspended for more than 10 days (Mitchell et al., 2019). According to the U.S. Department of Education, EDW, (2017), 123 for every 10,000 students with ED were given 10 or more days of suspension in comparison to 37 of every 10,000 SWD (Mitchell et al., 2019).

Due to these students with ED having challenging behaviors, they are not likely to be educated in their LRE (Katsiyannis & Maag, 2001). Students with ED often are excluded and are five times more likely to be placed in a residential setting due to pervasive behaviors (Katsiyannis & Maag, 2001). Public schools struggle with effective interventions to discipline ED students who become verbal and physical aggression (Katsiyannis & Maag, 2001). ED students often have lower school grades than other SWD, even though their scores are comparable to their peers (Katsiyannis & Maag, 2001). Students with ED are typically male and African American, as outlined above, and already are associated with disparities in schools (Katsiyannis & Maag, 2001). According to Mitchell et al. (2019), given the challenges of students with ED, legislative mandates *Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA; PL 101-336) (1990, amended 2008)* have been enacted to allow for positive outcomes (Dunn, 2018; Katsiyannis & Maag, 2001).

Other Health Impairment. Schools are also coping with some students with OHI who exhibit behavior difficulties (Mitchell et al., 2019). A student who is identified as

Other Health Impaired (OHI) may not achieve in their learning environment due to the adverse effect the OHI disability has on their education (NICHCY, 2012; Skiba et al., 1997). OHI are due to either a heightened stimulus in their environment, which impedes learning, limited strength or vitality, or a chronic health problem (NICHCY, 2012; Skiba et al., 1997). OHI can include disabilities such as attention deficit or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), which can cause an adverse effect to a SWD educational performance (Skiba et al., 1997). Other disabilities are "including but not limited to asthma, attention deficit disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, diabetes, epilepsy, a heart condition, hemophilia, leukemia, kidney disease, sickle cell anemia or Tourette syndrome (Mitchell et al, 2019; NICHCY, 2012; Skiba et al., 1997).

Additionally, students with OHI who have Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) are characterized as having a lack of attention to task, controlling physical energy and movement (NICHCY, 2012; Skiba et al., 1997). The two disabilities, ADHD and ED, have been linked to overall higher suspension and expulsion rates for students with disabilities (Krezmien. Leone, Achilles, 2005). A study of adolescent suspension rates from 2001-2002 revealed that suspension rates were highest for students with Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) (17%), ED (44%), and other health impaired (OHI; 21%) categories) (Achilles et al., 2007)

Suspension Rates for SWD in Arkansas. Suspension rates for all students across the state of Arkansas has shown a decrease for SWD (ADE, 2020). Data from the Arkansas State Department of Education from 2017-2020 revealed the following totals for out of school suspension, and in-school suspensions for all students in the state: 2017- 2018 in-school suspensions 109,133; out of school suspensions 54,091; 2018-

2019 in-school suspensions 108,119; out of school suspensions 108,113; 2019- 2020 in-school suspensions 80,458 and out of school suspensions 35,334. The data from 2019-2020 in comparison to the previous year indicated 72,779 less out of school suspensions, and 27,661 less in-school suspensions. Data from 2019-2020 was skewed due to the COVID-19 virus. In disaggregating data from the Arkansas Department of Education (2019-2020), out of school suspensions for students without disabilities revealed an average of 137 average per district. Conversely, students with disabilities had a higher rate of suspension rate per district with 243 average Arkansas Department of Education (2019-2020).

Current data for SWD regarding suspensions revealed an upward trend in suspensions (ADE, 2020)**.**   Data from the Arkansas State Department of Education from 2017-2020 revealed the following totals for out of school suspension, and in-school suspensions for all SWD in the state: 2017- 2018 in-school suspensions 104,350; out of school suspensions 57,345; 2018- 2019 in-school suspensions 109.133; out of school suspensions 54,212; 2019- 2020 in-school suspensions 108,113 and out of school suspensions 51,271. The data from 2019-2020 in comparison to the previous year indicated 2,941 less out of school suspensions, and 27,661 less in-school suspensions. Data from 2019-2020 was skewed due to the COVID-19 virus.

Prevention of Negative Behavioral Outcomes for SWD

Negative behavioral outcomes for SWD have been problematic since EAHCA was passed in 1975 (Lewis, 2017; Smith & Katsiyannis, 2004). Negative outcomes for SWD are poor social, behavioral, and academic achievement in school, which in turn effects postsecondary outcomes (Mitchell, Kern & Conroy, 2019). Research has

demonstrated that the implementation of policies for SWD has not always happened with fidelity (Lewis, 2017). To prevent negative behavioral outcomes, Congress enacted legislation which called for manifestation determinations for SWD (Lewis, 2017; Smith & Katsiyannis, 2004). As outlined previously, when a SWD faces a disciplinary issue, the IEP team reviews the SWD primary disability and considers the ramifications of a change in placement. (Mitchell et al.; Smith & Katsiyannis, 2004) The following paragraphs will address the various ways schools work to limit negative behavioral outcomes for SWD, including behavior intervention plans, accommodations/modifications, positive behavioral interventions for SWD, and administrative support.

Behavior Intervention Plans. Behavior Intervention Plans can prevent negative behavioral outcomes for students with disabilities by taking into consideration the strategies, supports, and interventions for a SWD (Smith & Katsiyannis, 2004).   When an IEP committee is devising an IEP, it is a requirement for them to consider the behavioral needs of a SWD (Smith & Katsiyannis, 2004). Behavior intervention plans are a result of a functional behavioral assessment (FBA) describing the problem, why the difficult behavior occurred, as well as a hypothesis (Cullinan & Sabornie, 2004; Katsiyannis, et al., 2012; Kurt. et al., 2019; Hartwig et al., 2012). The IEP team then examines the variables in maintaining challenging behaviors for a SWD (Smith & Katsiyannis, 2004).

When a SWD has pervasive behaviors which impede their learning, the IEP committee will often require an FBA before moving forward to implement a behavior intervention plan (BIP) (Smith & Katsiyannis, 2004). Assessing the function of a behavior, antecedents, and consequences must be performed to determine if the

hypothesis about the behavior is true (this is an FBA). The laws do not provide specific components of an FBA or BIP, but strategies to devise the BIP which addresses the function of the behavior (Smith & Katsiyannis, 2004). When devising an IEP**,** the team considers appropriate strategies, supports, or interventions for a SWD in the special factors section (Smith & Katsiyannis, 2004).

        Accommodations/Modifications. Accommodations or modifications can assist SWD in preventing high-risk behaviors which trigger an MDR, thus having positive outcomes (Harrison, Bunford, Evans, & Owens, 2013). Educators do not currently have guidelines for what accommodations or modifications could help ED and OHI students in the classroom setting (Harrison, Bunford, Evans, & Owens, 2013) under IDEA guidelines. Accommodations and modifications are used interchangeably, but they are not the same thing (Harrison, Bunford, Evans, & Owens, 2013). An accommodation is defined as something that assists the SWD in meeting the same expectation as their peers (Harrison, Bunford, Evans, & Owens, 2013). For example, an accommodation would be allowing a student with OHI (ADD) listen to a text rather than reading it on their own because they may have dyslexia (Harrison, Bunford, Evans, & Owens, 2013).

        In contrast, a modification changes what the SWD learns in their curriculum (Harrison, Bunford, Evans, & Owens, 2013). One example of a modification would be an ED student who is reading below level is assigned a shorter or easier reading assignment (Harrison, Bunford, Evans, & Owens, 2013). These SWD require changes in their curriculum and are not expected to be working on the same material as their peers (Harrison, Bunford, Evans, & Owens, 2013). According to Mitchell et al., 2019,

ED students were less likely than any other disability category to receive modifications and therapeutic services.

  Positive Behavioral Interventions (PBIS) for SWD. In order promote more positive behavioral outcomes, school districts have adopted school-wide behavior support systems for all students (Katsiyannis et al., 2012). Positive Behavioral Interventions for Students (PBIS) is a multi-tiered system framework which is centered on social behaviors (Katsiyannis et al., 2012). SWD respond positively to PBIS when they are sharing similarities with their peers when it comes to behavior consequences and evidence-based practice (Katsiyannis et al., 2012). School-wide behavior plans have proved beneficial for SWD in creating more positive learning environments as well as supports to behavioral responsiveness intervention (Katsiyannis et al., 2012).

  Using school wide discipline plans and adopted policies that are proactive addresses disciplining student with and without disabilities (Katsiyannis et al., 2012). These support systems are important for SWD to prevent pervasive behaviors which require aversive interventions when safety is an issue (Katsiyannis et al., 2012). According to Katsiyannis et al. (2012), administrators must use aversive interventions as a last resort and when safety is paramount.

  Administrative support. Administrators can promote positive behavioral outcomes for SWD by embracing the differences of SWD by assisting in devising disciplinary plans for SWD. An administrator's primary responsibility, along with the IEP committee, is to provide an appropriate program for a SWD (Smith & Katsiyannis, 2004). Administrators are secondary principals who are a part of the IEP team and therefore just as responsible for designing discipline plans for SWD (Smith &

Katsiyannis, 2004). The expectation of principals is to provide educators with the tools necessary to discipline SWD and face any challenging behaviors with the appropriate strategies (Smith & Katsiyannis, 2004). These responsibilities include assuring teachers are utilizing research-based strategies to discipline students prior to escalation (Smith & Katsiyannis, 2004).

The IEP team decides which intervention strategies are appropriate for SWD (Smith & Katsiyannis, 2004). The administrative staff, along with educators, are responsible for ensuring that SWD are provided with strategies for behavior which include positive and negative consequences (Smith & Katsiyannis, 2004). If an MDR is necessary the administrator and IEP team need to consider the relationship of the student's disability and how it relates to the behavior (Smith & Katsiyannis, 2004). This study specifically will address the perceptions of secondary administrators in disciplining SWD and MDR (Smith & Katsiyannis, 2004).

Moreover, administrators may have varying ways of disciplining SWD (Dickinson & Miller, 2006). If a student with disabilities' total number of days of out- of -school suspension is more than ten days, then an MDR is held to determine if the behavior is a result of their current disability (Zirkel, 2010). The exception to this rule is only if a student brings weapons or drugs to school, then the Individual Education Plan (IEP) committee may choose to remove the student and place a student in an interim educational setting for 45 days (Dickinson & Miller, 2006; Hartwig & Ruesch, 2000**).**

Theoretical Perspective- Glasser's Choice Theory

Glasser's Choice Theory is based on the principle that an individual person has the power to control behavioral actions (Glasser, 1965, 1998). This theory explains that

individuals are to take responsibility for personal actions as well as prevent chosen behaviors from having a direct impact on others (Glasser, 1965; Peterson, 2000). Choice Theory also presents the idea that behaviors are intrinsic to satisfy basic needs (Peterson, 2000), and the ability to choose to satisfy needs based on the reality in an individual's mind (Glasser, 1998; Walter, Lambie, & Ngazimbi, 2008). Glasser further indicates the five basic needs are based on the following components: love and belonging, power, freedom, fun, and survival (Glasser, 1998; LaFond, 2012).

According to Peterson (2000), love and belonging, which is the connection and the closeness individuals feel with people, is essential for satisfying individual needs. It is the most important aspect of the five basic needs. It may not immediately be the most important of the needs, but loneliness, which is connected to belonging, can be the difference in life and death for some individuals (Glasser, 1965; Peterson, 2000). Survival represents the need for basic food, water, shelter, and the need for safety and security (Burns, Vance, Szadokierski, & Stockwell, 2006; Kutlu, & Pamuk, 2016). Power stems from the need to be important or recognized (Burns et. al., 2006); Kutlu & Pamuk, 2016; Peterson, 2000). Freedom is the ability to make decisions and have a choice over what influences an individual's life (Glasser, 1998; Peterson, 2000). Fun regarding learning, facilitates a need to make the task enjoyable, and thereby making it challenging to the students, and active involvement (Louis, 2009). Subsequently, Glasser (1998) found that individuals are constantly on a quest to satisfy one or more of these five needs. The underpinnings of Choice Theory coincide with assessing SWD and their behaviors in the MDR (Achilles, McLaughlin, & Croninger, 2007; Glasser, 1998; Louis, 2009; Rose, 1988; Zirkel, 2010).

Administrators are responsible for discipline of SWD, and also the environment which is appropriate for their education (Achilles et al., 2007; Glasser, 1998; Louis, 2009; Rose, 1988; Zirkel, 2010). Educators can design effective interventions that will aid the student in making appropriate behavioral choices (Achilles et al., 2007; Glasser, 1998; Louis, 2009; Rose, 1988; Zirkel, 2010). Choice Theory provides a deeper understanding into why a student is thinking a certain way about the behavior (Achilles et al., 2007; Glasser, 1998; Louis, 2009; Rose, 1988; Zirkel, 2010). Choice Theory seeks to help administrators gain insights to the SWD motivation for the behavior before assigning an intervention, punishment, or discipline procedure (Achilles et al., 2007; Glasser, 1998; Louis, 2009; Rose, 1988; Zirkel, 2010).

According to Choice Theory, one must understand that a need has not been met in a child, thus allowing for anticipation of specific behaviors. (Achilles et al., 2007). SWD who have behavior challenges often require FBA to determine how the environment they are in effects their behaviors (Achilles et al., 2007). For instance, FBA is an integral part of the MDR process if the behaviors are pervasive in nature (Achilles et al., 2007; Glasser, 1998; Louis, 2009; Rose, 1988; Zirkel, 2010). FBA is utilized to identify the relationship between the environmental or personal behaviors of the SWD and how the targeted behavior occurs (Achilles et al., 2007; Glasser, 1998; Louis, 2009; Rose, 1988; Zirkel, 2010). The principal objective of FBA is to understand a clear relationship between the behavior and the environment (Achilles et al., 2007; Glasser, 1998; Louis, 2009; Rose, 1988; Zirkel, 2010).

Choice Theory offers a framework in understanding student's behaviors. Choice Theory also could be informative for assisting principals in reducing behavioral

challenges prior to an incident occurring, thereby reducing the need for MDRs for students with disabilities (Glasser, 1998 Louis, 2009; Rodriguez, 2017; Rose, 1988; Zirkel, 2010). This study will focus on three components of Choice Theory-- belonging, power, and freedom--and how principals perceive disciplining students with disabilities (Glasser, 1998; Kauffman & Badar 2013. Overall, Choice Theory is a good fit for this study because principals choose specific discipline techniques for SWD, and this study will explore their perceptions and experiences with the process of handling discipline.

Conclusion

The literature review for this qualitative study began with an examination of the history of SWD, followed by brief description of federal laws governing MDR (Armstrong, 2002; Hill & Sukbunpant, 2013; Kim et al., 2019; Mesquita, 2012; Spaulding & Pratt, 2015). The literature review further outlined MDR reviews, and presented research supporting how laws governed administrators received training in MDR, and discipline of SWD (Hartwig & Reusch; 2017; Zirkel, 2016). Central to the literature review was an examination administrator training and an examination of district policy and practice (Burton, 2012; Hartwig & Ruesch, 2000; Yell et al., 1998).

Following a review of LRE, important exclusionary practices were discussed including (a) racial disparity, (b) zero tolerance, (c) socioeconomic status, and (d) specific disability types – ED/OHI (Hartwig & Ruesch, 2000; Katsiyannis, Losinki, & Prince, 2012; Katsiyannis & Maag, 2001; Losen, et al., 2013; Razalski, Stewart, & Miller, 2010). The literature review also contained an examination of suspension rates of SWD, prevention of negative outcomes for SWD, as well as administrator support Katsiyannis et al., 2012.

The literature review concluded with a detailed explanation of Choice Theory (CT) as the theoretical underpinning for this qualitative and an explanation of how CT informed the research questions guiding the study (Glasser, 1998 Louis, 2009; Rodriguez, 2017; Rose, 1988; Zirkel, 2010). The following chapter will outline the methods for data collection for this study.

Chapter III: Methodology

This chapter covers the methodology used for data collection in this study. The purpose of this study was to examine secondary principals' perceptions of manifestation determination as it relates to disciplining secondary students with disabilities. This chapter described the research design, participants, sampling, data collection, credibility, and data analysis for this study. The questions guiding this qualitative study were: (a) What has been the overall experience of secondary school administrators with the discipline process for students with disabilities? (b) What are the experiences of secondary principals with manifestation determination and (c) What are secondary principals' overall understanding of special education laws? This study was governed by the rules and regulations of research ethics. Approval was received from the Arkansas Tech University IRB prior to recruitment or data collection (see Appendix X).

Research Design

Qualitative research was the form of research chosen for this study. According to Patton (2015), qualitative research inquires, documents, and interprets personal experiences of groups and people to construct meaning. Qualitative research focuses on the phenomena, as well as studies its complexity (Leedy & Omrod, 2010). Qualitative data is expected to be rich and detailed descriptions of the participant's experiences, actions, feelings, reactions, and thoughts (Kirkevold & Bergland, 2007). The exploration and discovery of data via a qualitative research method often indicates there is not much written about the participants or the topic of study. Some of the characteristics of qualitative research included taking place in a natural setting, using multiple methods that

are interactive and humanistic, emerging data rather than prefigured data, and being fundamentally interpretive.

This study more specifically utilized the phenomenological approach, allowing the researcher to explore experiences of principals with manifestation determination and the discipline of secondary students with disabilities. Patton (2015) further described phenomenological studies as allowing researchers to gain a deeper understanding of experiences in everyday life. The researcher used face-to-face interviews and artifacts to look for trends, patterns, and themes that help capture thoughts of the participants, which were, for this study, secondary administrators (Patton, 2015).

According to Patton (2015), phenomenological approaches require methodologically capturing how people experience, perceive, and describe their own "lived experience", and gain firsthand information from the interviewee. According to Leedy & Omrod, (2010), phenomenological researchers try to answer questions about experiences to gain a deeper understanding of what is being researched. In this study, secondary administrators answered in-depth questions to help determine their overall perspectives of the manifestation determination process and discipline of students with disabilities, as well as their understandings of special education laws. The researcher explored individual perceptions of secondary administrators who are directly involved with working with SWD, thus gaining an appropriate amount of context to understand this phenomenon. Therefore, the goal of this research study was to provide a credible and valid account of secondary administrator's experiences with manifestation determination and the discipline of secondary students with disabilities, as well as their understandings of the laws involved.

Context of the Study

The study was conducted in Fort Smith, Arkansas, which is in Sebastian County. The population of the city is approximately 88,373. Demographically, the population is comprised of the following: White: 66.79%; Other race: 11.28%; Black or African American: 9.91%; Asian: 5.90%; Two or more races: 4.92%; Native American: 1.16%; and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander: 0.03%. The average household income in Fort Smith is $60,366 with a poverty rate of 23.19%. The school district contains 14,136 students, and 19.2% are below poverty level. There are 19 elementary schools, four junior highs, and two high schools. The four junior high schools have three secondary administrators, the two high schools have four administrators, and the alternative school has two. This gave the researcher access to a potential total of 22 administrators to conduct interviews with for the study, with only 8-10 being needed.

Participants

Participants in this study included approximately 8-10 secondary administrators from within a secondary school district who have at least three-year's experience, and who agreed to participate. By interviewing administrators from different demographics across the Fort Smith Public Schools school district, various perspectives were included in the study. Qualifications for participants were that he/she hold a secondary administration certification, serve in the capacity as a school administrator, and have at least three-years' experience as a secondary administrator.

Sampling method. Participants in this study were chosen using a convenience sampling technique. A convenience sample is a type of non-probability sampling method which participants are selected from groups easily accessible to the researcher (Creswell

& Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2015). In this study, participants (secondary administrators) were chosen from a single school district. To select the administrators from the district, the researcher obtained a list of current secondary principals from the district website.

The researcher emailed a letter requesting permission from the superintendent of schools in the Fort Smith School District to administer interviews. After the superintendent approved the request, then all 22 administrators from the seven schools were emailed a letter seeking permission to interview them, and the qualifications necessary to be included in the study. The researcher obtained the emails for the secondary administrators from the school websites. If a response was not received within seven days, an additional follow-up email will be sent, as well as a phone call the following week. After the invitation/recruitment period was over, 8-10 respondents were selected from the pool of those willing to participate. Participants were chosen based on demographic qualities to ensure appropriate representation based on demographics for all district secondary administrators.

Data Collection

Data for this study was collected from interviews and artifacts. In addition, the researcher employed the use of a notebook, documenting time, setting, and structure of the interview to gain important data for coding.

Face-to-face/online interviews. Semi-structured interviews required specific and follow-up questions, and they were open-ended in nature (Aborisade, 2013; Campbell, 2014; Patton, 2015).   Semi-structured interviews were chosen due to the nature of the research (Aborisade, 2013; Campbell, 2014; Patton, 2015). These semi-structured interviews allowed administrators to provide useful data to establish any thematic trends,

and a unique perspective of the interviewees (Carlson, Hock, George, Kumpiene, Yell, McCartney, Riddle, & Weist. (2020).

Interviews were scheduled with participants in October and November in 2020 at a time, place, and mode of their choosing. Due to current world events existing with the COVID-19 pandemic, two different interview options were available: face-to-face in the office of the administrator or online using a virtual meeting platform such as WebEx, Zoom, or Google meet. The mode of interview (face-to-face or online) was determined according to what is safest per state and national guidelines at the time in which the interviews were conducted.

Interviews lasted approximately one hour, and all participants received an informed consent prior to completing the interview and approving which protocol was used. Interviews were recorded via audio (face-to-face interviews) or video and audio (virtual interviews) and transcribed by an online transcription service to ensure the researcher had the information from the respondent verbatim. A disclaimer was added prior to interviewing due to the confidentiality of students. Names were not mentioned in the interview so as not to breach confidentiality on the part of any students with disabilities. Interview questions for administrators are in Appendix C, and the corresponding research question which coincides with it. An interview protocol was used to ensure consistency throughout the process. The protocol consisted of an introduction which included the following: demographic information, questions related to experiences with special education, manifestation, laws, and closing conversations (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2015).

Interview questions. Nineteen interview questions were created by the researcher after an extensive review of literature (Appendix A). The purpose of the interview questions was to determine principals' perceptions of manifestation determination and disciplining secondary students with disabilities, and their understanding of the special education laws involved with it.

The interview questions were divided into three separate sections, with each seeking to understand the overall experiences of principals with manifestation determination and disciplining students with disabilities, and special education laws. The first section included four questions that examined background information of respondents as well as types of schools they have administrated over. The following questions were posed to administrators to determine the length of time they have been an administrator, grade levels, and type of secondary school.

1. How long have you been a secondary administrator?

2. What grade levels do you currently serve?

3. What type of school do you administrate over (i.e., High school, Middle School, or Alternative School)?

4. What are your experiences with the thirteen types of disabilities?

The second section included eight questions which aimed to gain a deeper understanding of how administrators perceived the process of disciplining students and the manifestation determination process. The administrator was posed several questions regarding SWD and how they perceive the manifestation process. The researcher also gained knowledge of respondent's understanding of the manifestation determination

process (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The following questions were posed to administrators.

5. In general terms, what is your understanding of least restrictive environment (LRE) regarding students with disabilities?

6. How involved are you, as an administrator, in the LRE process?

7. Who determines what a student with disabilities' LRE is?

8. in general terms, could you describe what manifestation determination means to you?

9. What training, formal or informal, have you had in dealing with manifestation determinations?

10. What is the process that is utilized for manifestation determinations in your building for students with disabilities?

11. In the manifestation determination process, what is your perception of what works well for students with disabilities.

12. Could you describe an experience in detail or experiences that you have had with a manifestation determination and disciplining a SWD?

The third section contained seven questions utilizing application of skills with manifestation determination and discipline of SWD, as well as the laws they were currently knowledgeable of. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), phenomenological studies require multiple stages of data collection, refinement, and relationships of categories are to be determined. This section examined how administrators were applying their knowledge of manifestation determination in disciplining SWD.

13. If a secondary administrator is unsure of the manifestation determination process, what would the next step be?

14. What are some behaviors which may "trigger" a manifestation determination at your school?

15. Who is involved in the manifestation determination meeting at your school?

16. What are the specifically identified disabilities that you perceive are the ones who cause a student to have to review a manifestation on the most?

17. What are some preventative measures in place for SWD who are at risk for Manifestation determinations? Can you give some specific examples?

18. What procedures do you perceive would improve the MDR process?

19. Do you have any further information that you would like to share with the interviewer regarding manifestations or disciplining SWD that we have not talked about?

Artifacts. According to Patton (2015), artifacts are types of documentation which support qualitative inquiry. These artifacts can provide information that may not be observed during inquiry and may provide personal perception of what the participant has experienced with the subject (Patton, 2015). Participants in this study were asked to present the researcher with one artifact that is representative of their experiences with special education. The artifacts provided the researcher with a glimpse of the experiences of principals with discipline of students with disabilities and manifestation determination.

Credibility

Credibility is necessary to continuously engage and question the data (Patton, 2015). Qualitative data must be trustworthy and believable, and the researcher's

conclusions must be supported by the conclusions which are drawn (Patton, 2015).

Researchers need to communicate the step-by-step process on determining credibility in

their studies for participants and readers (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Miller,

2010; Patton, 2015).   Credibility for the data gathered in this study was ensured in

multiple ways: triangulation, peer review, member-checking, and reflexivity.

   Triangulation. Triangulation demonstrates that more than one data source yields

the same results (Patton, 2015). For this study, data was collected from interviews and

artifacts. Coding and cross-checking information from the two data sources provided

rationalization for themes that emerged (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Kirkevold &

Bergland, 2007; (Patton, 2015). This study used rich, thick descriptions, as well as direct

quotations to aid in finding thematic triangulation. According to Noble (2015), rich and

thick verbatim descriptions of participants who are being interviewed support findings

and demonstrate clarity through processes, thus leading to data analysis and subsequent

interpretations. When questions are extended to understand the emotions of the people

involved, qualitative research moves beyond information but seeks to provide context.

(Patton, 2015).

   Member checking. Member checking or informant feedback is when the

research presents data for all or some participants to comment on, thus enhancing the

credibility of participants who are involved and data analyzed (Varpio, Ajjawi,

Monrouxe, O'Brien, & Rees, 2017). When interviews were completed and transcribed by

an online transcription service, it ensured the researcher had the information from the

respondent verbatim, and the transcripts were provided to participants for comment. This

was another form of credibility for qualitative researchers. Participants were each

provided with their own personal individual transcript to review the data that was collected in the interview.

Peer review. An additional mode of insuring credibility is peer review. Peer reviews are conducted by knowledgeable experts in the field (Gliner, Morgan, & Leech, 2017) A peer can provide reflective questions inquiring about the data analysis of the researcher (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Kirkevold & Bergland, 2007; Patton, 2015). In this study, an Arkansas Tech University doctoral student provided reflective peer feedback regarding interview data analysis. This valuable feedback strengthened the qualitative data which is found during this process (Patton, 2015).

Reflexivity. According to Patton (2015), reflexivity is defined as an introspection and analytical scrutiny of one's self. The researcher can be open to new challenges in research, and can lead to insights of self-questioning, and self-understanding (Berger, 2015; Leedy & Omrod, 2010; Patton, 2015). Reflexivity is fundamental to all phases of research and requires the qualitative inquirer to be attentive to one's own voice, as well as the perspectives of others (Berger, 2015; Patton, 2015). According to Berger (2015), reflexivity seeks to enhance the research's credibility and account for the researcher's values, beliefs, knowledge, and biases. Reflexivity contributes to keeping the process of research ethical (Berger, 2015) First-person language and detailed documentation of decisions and rationales contributes to reflexivity (Berger, 2015).

My professional and personal experiences in working with students with disabilities led me to be interested in this topic for research. This subject was also personal for me being a person with a disability, as well as having a hearing-impaired sibling. I remember feeling ostracized at some point when I could not participate with my

peers in physical education classes due to my scoliosis making me weak, or others not understanding how it consistently hurt to move.

For the past 24 years I have worked in the field of special education. I began my teaching career as a self-contained teacher, for students with severe disabilities. I have worked in various classroom settings specializing in English resource, autism spectrum disorder, emotional disturbance, teaching math to students with deafness, and finally over a special education department.

Throughout my journey in special education, I have met some teachers and administrators who have welcomed my students into their classes or schools with open arms; however, there are still others who are not quite convinced that special education students need equality. I have experienced administrators' lack of understanding for SWD, as well as not adhering to state laws, or knowing about the laws of special education. Thus, began my questions about discipline of SWD, and my quest to understand how schools work through these issues. I often place myself in my student's shoes, and when consulted about discipline of students with disabilities, I must see both sides of the lens and figure out the how and why of behaviors occurring. To do this I must first understand what are the overall experiences of secondary school administrators with the discipline process for SWD? What are their experiences? Has it been successful?

Data Analysis

Data for this study was analyzed using the constant comparative method. Most qualitative data analysis involves constant comparison to develop theory and explanations to increase the richness of descriptions in analysis (Leedy & Omrod, 2010; Patton, 2015).

This captures what individuals have said has happened (Patton, 2015). Utilizing the constant comparative method increases checking for consistency and accuracy for coding, which may lead to further codes and associations of ideas (Patton, 2015). After completion of the interviews, the data was transcribed into notes through an online transcription service. From the notes, the researcher analyzed information and responses from the eight participants, question by question, which is a cross-sectional analysis (Leedy & Omrod, 2010; Patton, 2015). After reviewing the cross-sectional analysis, trends and patterns were identified and presented in the results chapter.

Research Ethics

Prior to conducting the study, the researcher examined professional association standards, and sought university approval through the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). After gaining permission from participants in the study, modality of interview was determined between researcher and parties being interviewed (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). When beginning interviews with participants, the researcher disclosed the purpose of the study, as well as respectfully asked for consent from each one (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) Furthermore, the researcher was sensitive to working with various populations, such as cultural, religious, and other differences (Aborisade, 2013; Campbell, 2014; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2015).

Summary

This qualitative study examined principals' perceptions of manifestation determination and disciplining secondary students with disabilities. This chapter described methodology, research design, participants, data collection, credibility, and data analysis. Data collection was based on face-to-face interviews, observations, and

artifacts were presented to the research by the participant. Analysis of the data consisted

of coding lines of data, analyzing patterns, and finding recurring themes.

Chapter IV. RESULTS

This study was designed to examine the perceptions of the overall experience of school administrators in grades seven through twelve in the process of manifestation determination and suspension of students with disabilities. The questions that guided this qualitative study are:

1. What has been the overall experience of secondary school administrators with the discipline process for students with disabilities?

2. What are the experiences of secondary principals with manifestation determination?

3. What are secondary principals' overall understanding of special education laws?

Chapter four describes the participants in the study, how data was compiled and analyzed, development of themes, and a summarization of data.

Participants

Eight participants were selected for this study using a convenience sampling technique (Patton, 2015). A convenience sample was the type of non-probability sampling method which participants are selected from groups easily accessible to the researcher (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2015). Participants were secondary principals in the Fort Smith Public School district who had at least three or more years of experience. The participants were asked a series of three questions to gather data about their background information:

1. How long have you been a secondary administrator?

2. What grade levels do you currently serve?

3. What type of school do you administrate over (i.e., High school, Middle School, or

    Alternative School)?

Table 1 summarizes the information of the research participants:

Table 1

Demographics of Participants

Participant	Gender	Length of Time As Administrator	Grade Level	Type of School
Participant 1	Female	11 years	7-9	Junior High
Participant 2	Male	14 years	10-12	High School
Participant 3	Female	3 years	7-9	Junior High
Participant 4	Male	13 years	10-12	High School
Participant 5	Female	20 years	7-9	Junior High
Participant 6	Female	5 years	7-9	Junior High
Participant 7	Female	7 years	7-9	Junior High
Participant 8	Female	11 years	10-12	High School

Participants were selected from the pool of those willing to participate and were

chosen based on demographic qualities to ensure appropriate representation based on

demographics for all district secondary administrators. Participants in the study were

required to have a minimum of three years' experience as a secondary administrator.

Most of the participants (5/8) had 11 or more years of experience: one had three (1/8);

one had five years' experience (1/8); and one had seven years' experience (1/8). All of

the participants were currently administrating in secondary schools. Five of the

participants were administrating at a junior high school (5/8), and three were administrating at a high school 3/8).

Data Collection

In order to get permission for the interviews**,** the superintendent of schools was emailed for permission, and after a list of questions was sent to them for review, it was approved through an email two days later. Twenty-two administrators were emailed requests to participate in the study in total. Nine of the adult administrators responded that they would be willing to participate in the study. Although the goal of the study was to include eight to ten administrators, one of the candidates had to cancel on three occasions, and then apologized that there was not ample time for an interview in their schedule. Eight administrators were subsequently secured, and follow-up emails were sent confirming dates and times. All participants were sent a permission form through interoffice school mail, and they signed and returned them to the interviewer after the participation statements were read during the online interview.

These semi-structured interviews lasted between 45 minutes to an hour in length. The administrators provided useful data to establish any thematic trends, and a unique perspective of their perceptions of the questions which were posed. All of the interview data was placed on a recording device, and then transcribed verbatim and timestamped through an online third-party transcription service (REV.com was the transcription service that was utilized). The transcriptions were sent to each participant via hardcopy, and a verification was sent back by email after they were reviewed (member-checking).

At the end of each interviews, the participants in this study were asked to present the researcher with one artifact that is representative of their experiences with special

education. The artifacts provided the researcher with a glimpse of the experiences of

principals with discipline of students with disabilities and manifestation determination.

After collecting artifacts by digital means, they were uploaded to the appendixes in the

dissertation document.   Table 2 summarizes the information of the artifacts:

Table 2

Artifacts

Participant	Artifact	Relationship to Research Question
Participant 1 `	*Tess Chart*	RQ3
Participant 3	Special Education Law and Practice Book	RQ3
Participant 5	PLC Meeting Agendas	R1
Participant 7	Suspension Report	RQ2

Audit Trail Notation

Audit trail notations were used to provide anonymity of the participants in this

study. Administrators were identified as PARTICIPANT with a numerical code of 1-8.

This chapter includes direct quotes from participants.

Identification of Themes

Findings for this study were organized by themes within each of the three

research questions outlined at the beginning of this related to perceived meaningful

experiences. Data was extracted directly from interview transcripts and artifacts. Code

groups were analyzed and then presented as themes. Only quotes which were relevant to the study were included, and others that do not related will not be considered applicable to the study.

Table 3

Research Questions and Themes

Research Question #1: What has been the overall experience of secondary school administrators with the discipline process for students with disabilities?

Themes:

    A. A Variety of Discipline Experiences with SWD

    B. Anticipating Behaviors in SWD

    C. Disabilities Most Likely to Cause Discipline Issues

Research Question #2: What are the experiences of secondary principals with manifestation determination and the understanding of the laws?

Themes:

    A. Understanding the Meaning of MDR

    B. Process for MDR in Buildings

    C. Support for Administrators

Research Question #3: What are secondary principals' overall understanding of special education laws?

Themes:

    A. Interpreting Special Education Laws/LRE

    B. Committee Decisions

    C. Placement Conferences

RQ 1: What has been the overall experience of Secondary School administrators with the discipline process for students with disabilities?

Research question 1 focused on participants' experiences with the discipline process in general for students with disabilities. Participants were asked a series of five questions which informed the findings for research question

1. What are your experiences with the thirteen types of disabilities?

2. What are the specifically identified disabilities that you perceive are the ones who cause a student to have to review a manifestation on the most?

3. What are some behaviors which may "trigger" a manifestation determination at your school?

4. Could you describe an experience in detail or experiences that you have had with a manifestation determination and disciplining a SWD?

5. What are some preventative measures in place for SWD who are at risk for Manifestation determinations? Can you give some specific examples?

Findings from this research question came exclusively from the interviews and an artifact. Analysis revealed three common themes for personal experiences with types of disabilities: discipline experiences with SWD, anticipating behaviors in SWD, and disabilities most likely to cause discipline issues.

A Variety of Discipline Experiences with SWD. Several of the interviews focused on the experiences of administrators with SWD. One theme which emerged from Research Q1 was discipline experiences. Administrators in this study noted that most of their experiences with SWD were as teachers. Three subthemes emerged from

theme 1: More experiences as a teacher; (2) Experiences with specific disabilities; and (3) Limited experience. Each of these areas is discussed below.

More experiences as a teacher. Almost half of the participants (3/8) in this study specifically indicated they had more experiences with the discipline of SWD as a teacher as opposed to experiences as administrators. For example, Participant 1 related that she worked with SLD exclusively as a regular education teacher: "Before becoming an administrator, they (SWD) were very wonderful. Pretty much the only thing I ever dealt with was SLD reading or SLD in math."

Participant 6 said with a with a serious looking facial grimace,

> Well, honestly I would have to say, I have been more present on the disability as a teacher than I have as an administrator. Being a teacher for a long time I was more familiar with the disabilities than any training like that as an administrator on them.

Similarly, Participant 7, a female junior high principal with 7-years administrative experience recalled her previous special education experience in the classroom:

> So, most of my experience was when I was a special education teacher. So, I probably have a little bit better background than most. But in the classroom, as a special education teacher, I would serve the students. And so, when I would do the paperwork and sit through their evaluation meetings, I understand why they were served, under what category of those 13 categories.

Experiences with specific disabilities. Another sub-theme identified under the theme of principal's experiences with the discipline process for SWD was the participants' experiences with SWD in the past. Over half (5/8) of the participants cited

specific disabilities they have worked with as an administrator. The most common disability experience reported was Emotional Disturbance.

Participant 1 exuded confidence when she elaborated in the discussion:

> Well now, we had some kids that we ended up placing in the moderate school. So as far as testing, during the referral process, and holding the conferences, and programming and the same for those kids that are autistic or ED. I've had kids that are identified as ED and autistic but were not in a one to 10 or one to 15 classrooms.

Participant 2, a male high-school assistant principal with at least 14-years-experience indicated: "If I remember right that's the one that ADHD slides under and that's probably the most common disability we deal with in schools and so I hear that one probably more often than others."

Participant 8 a female high school principal with 11-years-experience in administration further explained:

> Most of the students that we dealt with were either cognitive disabilities or the one-to-six, one-to-10 classroom that didn't have school disability as well. Or we dealt with, in the inclusion classes, a lot of... I'm trying to think of the right word. Math deficiencies or English deficiencies for learners, for lack of another word. And so, to really spend time understanding the different characteristics of autism or visually impaired students who were in different levels of impairment really helped me to understand a much better level because I knew enough about it that when I encountered it, I had some experience.

Limited experience. In the final sub-theme informed by Research Question 1, some of the respondents reported (3/8) they had limited experience in working disciplining SWD.

Participant 2 indicated: "I'm familiar with those as categories, but beyond that I'm not super familiar."

Participant 4 responded: "You know, I would say probably limited."

The artifact most associated with RQ1, which was a Professional Learning Community (PLC) agenda, was presented by Respondent 5. The PLC agenda represented the amount of time the administrator's department spent discussing special education students on a weekly basis (see Table 2). Participant 5 further contributed: "Being a teacher for a long time I was more familiar with the disabilities than any training like that as an administrator on them.

Anticipating behaviors in SWD. The second major theme that emerged in Research Q1 was anticipating behaviors in SWD by exercising proactivity. Several of the respondents communicated proactivity techniques for behavior management needed to be employed in order to prevent pervasive behaviors in SWD. The data in this theme included participants' thoughts on how to be proactive with anticipating behaviors in SWD.

For example, Respondent 4 became serious for a moment before she answered the question,

From an operational stand point, I would tell you that I have changed several kids' classes to try to limit the distraction or limit the anxiety that one may have within the students in that class. People might say, well, that's really not being proactive and I would argue yes it is, that when you get a kid in a class that's

uncomfortable and they have, it doesn't matter if it's a disability or not. When you

get someone in class, uncomfortable because of someone else, that child's not

going to function right.

Respondent 7 emphasized that "Knowing their triggers, knowing exactly what their

disability characteristics are, and what can be done ahead of time."

Respondent 8, the high school principal with 11-years-experience reiterated,

I just would like for us to be more cognizant about students and their

disabilities and how they may benefit on the front end. Because if teacher

understood what a manifestation of disability in their classroom might look like,

they could deescalate situation right there. Then we don't end up with the

problems we end up with. I really think prevention is the way to go.

Positive Behavioral Intervention Support (PBIS) was also mentioned as an

intervention that helped participants anticipate behavioral issues in SWD. PBIS is a

three-tiered level of interventions for students which improves behavioral outcomes.

Students with disabilities and underrepresented groups can be improved socially and

emotionally by PBIS. One respondent emphasized that this has been helpful as an

intervention in reducing office referrals. Respondent 1, a former elementary teacher,

recalled poignantly:

No, I think when I've seen PBIS work the best, teachers have had really strong

interventions in place that fit their classroom, their teaching style, and those

students are having problems. So, you're reducing office referrals, which I don't

think we have a ton of office referrals anyway.

Disabilities most likely to cause Discipline Issues. The third and final theme that emerged under RQ 1 was related to disabilities the participants felt were most likely to cause discipline issues. One of the interview questions informing this research theme was, **"**What are the specifically identified disabilities that you perceive are the ones who cause a student to have to review a manifestation on the most?   Six of the eight respondents reported that Emotional Disturbance was the disability they had the most difficulty with in relation to disciplinary issues, and two of the eight related that Other Health Impairment (ADHD) was an issue.

ED.   Emotional Disturbance (ED) was the most common disability participants discussed as being the main cause of discipline issues relating to causing an MDR**.** For example, Respondent 1 reported several different disabilities could cause an MDR, but ED was the one reported as mostly likely: "If they're SLD. Or speech, SLI. I would think your ED kids would be more likely to have to ... But you would have to have that process in place." Similarly, Respondent 3 who had three-years-experience as an administrator, said:

> What I've seen most often is ED, emotionally disturbed. I know it has been tricky because trying to sort out behaviors from a mix for students in that situation... I'm trying to think if there's, that's just the first one that comes to my mind.

Respondent 4, a male assistant principal with 13-years-experience reflected, "Probably kids who're ODD (ED), I mean, that's pretty much it. I mean, the other kids that we have that have any kind of issue, we pretty much try to work." Respondent 7, who was previously a special education teacher, said,

> So, unless the 13 categories have changed, but is there still an emotionally disturbed category? That is for sure one. I don't know what the title of autism

is anymore. Autism spectrum disorders. Is that still one? I know that one is a little

bit broad. Yes. All encompassing.

Respondent 8 was very "matter of fact" with her answer: "ED, emotionally disturbed."

ADHD. Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) was the second most

common disability participants discussed as discipline issues relating to causing an MDR.

ADHD is a disability which is listed under Other Health Impairment (OHI). When a

student has (a) limited strength and vitality, and environmental stimuli limits their

alertness and (b) an acute health issue, or (c) it adversely affects their environment, then

this is considered an Other Health Impairment. For instance, asthma, attention deficit

disorder, and a plethora of other disabilities is categorized under OHI. Respondent 7, a

high school principal with 7-years- experience referred to her special education

background information said:

Other Health Impaired. Is that still one? Because that, sometimes too, I think

it's all encompassing. I mean, there's a lot of things thrown under that one. I mean,

maybe sometimes the multiple disability one through that."

Respondent 6, a female junior high assistant principal with 5-years-experience reflected:

It seems like all of them have ADHD. The ones that we have I had a lot of

problems with are the low IQ. Like when we have a classroom of one to 15 and

those students, we have a lot, all of them have ADHD, but they are not in there for

that. I think they would be in there for their IQ. In the one to 15 based on

behavior and IQ.

Summary of RQ1. Research question one focused on overall experiences and discipline for SWD. The administrative participants were asked five interview questions, and one artifact was presented that aided in answering research question 1. Responses and the artifact were coded and three themes emerged regarding participants experiences with discipline for SWD: a variety of discipline experiences, anticipating behaviors in SWD, and disabilities most likely to cause discipline issues.

Research Question 2: What are the experiences of secondary principals with manifestation determination and the understanding of the laws?

Research question 2 focused on secondary principals' experiences with manifestation determination and their understanding of the laws about SWD. Participants were asked six interview questions that informed the findings for research question 2:

1. In general terms, could you describe what manifestation determination means to you?

2. What training, formal or informal, have you had in dealing with manifestation determinations?

3. What is the process that is utilized for manifestation determinations in your building for students with disabilities?

4. If a secondary administrator is unsure of the manifestation determination process, what would the next step be?

5. Who is involved in the manifestation determination meeting at your school?

6. What procedures do you perceive would improve the MDR process?

Findings from this research question came from the interviews and one artifact. Analysis revealed three common themes for personal experiences with types of

disabilities: understanding the meaning of MDR, process for MDR in buildings, and supports for administrators.

Understanding the Meaning of MDR. The first theme that emerged for RQ2 was understanding the meaning of MDR. Respondents were asked to describe what their meaning of MDR was in general terms. Half of all respondents (4/8) correctly reported that they understood that an MDR meeting was held in order to determine if the student's behavior had any relation to their disability. Respondent 1 expressed the meaning as making sure there is a system in place, saying: "To me, it means making sure that we've taken the necessary steps to ensure that the student's disability is not a result of the suspension [The disability is not related to the behavior.]"
Respondent 2, a high school administrator with 14-years-experience elaborated extensively:

> And the way I understand the term, a manifestation determination is a meeting or a hearing to determine whether a child's behavior action is a manifestation of their disability. And that, if they are behaving inappropriately and it's because of their disability, well, then should we really be punishing them? Probably not. And that's what a manifestation determination meeting is to determine whether that behavior is a manifestation of their disability. I also understand though that there's a 10-day rule about suspension, that kids can be suspended up to 10 days without holding a manifestation determination. It is conceivable those 10 days would be punishment that's administered, even though it is a manifestation of the child's determination, because we don't start asking that question until we get close to the 10 days.

Respondent 7 recalled her background in special education and working with students with disabilities by giving a solid definition of manifestation. She also presented an artifact that was presented for RQ2, which was a suspension report (Table 2). The report listed suspensions of SWD and represented having to determine how many days they can be out before a MDR can be held. She reflected:

> So that means to me anytime a student who's being served under IDEA has a discipline infraction that we go back and look at that student's disability behavior plan if they have one. All the information about the student to see if that discipline was directly tied to their disability. And if it's part of their disability, we handle that very differently.

Respondent 8 recalled another definition which focused on manifestation learning environment:"We want to make sure that they're not being taken from their learning environment as a result of something that they can't control, and that needs to happen before the child is suspended."

The other half of respondents did not seem to have these accurate interpretations including statements like:

- "To me, it means making sure that we've taken the necessary steps to ensure that the student's disability is not a result of the suspension,"

- "If I remember correctly, it had to do with ultimately figuring out whether a student needed special ed services or not and how those were going to be need delivered."

- "I have very limited knowledge of that.

- "After we've tried, and if it's a suspension for 10 days and they continue to get into trouble, then we have to meet and discuss options and what is going to help."

Process for MDR in buildings. The Process for MDR in buildings was the second major theme for RQ2. Two subthemes that emerged were: understanding laws for SWD, and MDR meeting involvement. In the interviews, administrators were asked about the process that was utilized for manifestation determinations in their building for students with disabilities. All eight participants offered their perceptions of how the MDR process should work in their building. Responses under this theme centered around understanding the laws for SWD and MDR meeting involvement.

Understanding the laws for SWD. During the interviews, administrators were asked "What is the process that is utilized for manifestation determinations in your building for students with disabilities?"

Respondent 1 responded about her school site experiences, and offered:

So, in our building, we're going to be working, as a permanent administrative site, we're going to be looking at the student's disability. We're going to be looking at behaviors. We're going to be consulting to see if that student has a behavior plan, a behavior support plan. Are we following the behavior support plan? I think of it, if a kiddo is SLD in reading and they're fighting all the time, being SLD in reading is probably not their trigger, not the cause of their suspension for fighting. I would look to see what kind of school-based mental health supports we're giving them, counseling support.

Respondent 6 who has worked for five years in administration also indicated:

We met with the department, met with his parent if I remember correctly but like I said, it had gotten to the point that this student had been suspended 10 days before we intervened. The interventions that we came up with, like I said, I can't tell you if they worked or not, but we all had some input on it. And this particular student had a history of this as well at other school districts. And I think our goal at that point was to hopefully ... And this is one thing that I hate from my end is that our goal is to maybe put them in the ALE.

Respondent 7, the female administrator with seven-years-experience expressed confidence in the process:

Right now, the way the process goes is we come up with all of the disciplinary actions and there's a spreadsheet that it goes on that shows us whether or not that student has an IEP. And so, anytime we're getting ready to suspend a student with an IEP, we go back and look at total days of suspension. And if it's going to take that child over that, we immediately call our special-ed coordinator. And, so far, anytime we've had a manifestation determination, the special-ed coordinator has sat in on that process with us.

Respondent 8 also mirrored confidence in the process:

And so, what we'll do is we'll put the student in a holding situation here at school. It might be in that SNP room. It might be in the principal's office where someone can oversee them getting their work done. And then we call all of the people that needs to be involved in that conference. We review the actions. We review the IEPs. And then we, as a committee, make the decision as to whether or not it was related to the disability.

In continuance with experiencing the laws of disabilities, respondents were also asked to describe their experiences in detail or experiences that they have had with a manifestation determination and disciplining a SWD. 8/8 respondents related experiences they had with SWD, and some reiterated that they did not have experiences with manifestation determination specifically.

Respondent 1 who has at least 11-years- experience in administration said they have never participated in a manifestation:

> I have not. I have not had to do a manifestation determination. I have not. For me personally, I like to be in special ed conferences. Everything from initial referrals to re-evals, just because if I understand the disability and understand some of that testing, it helps me to better understand the behavior.

Respondent 2, one of the two male administrators interviewed, spoke of being tolerant of behavior for SWD:

> Well, remember the comment I made a minute ago that, in most cases, in   my e experience, the behaviors that would cause a kid to be suspended beyond 10 days are generally not going to be manifested by their disability…We just have to be more tolerant of that behavior even though it doesn't fit a file norm, even though it's not, even though we want to train it out of him, I can tell you this kid I'm thinking of, it isn't going to be trained out of this kid and he's going to be an adult and I'm hoping that he can hold down a job as an adult because these kinds of behaviors are the kinds of behaviors that get people fired from jobs you know?

Respondent 3 recalled how placement of a student made a huge difference:

One really interesting thing that I've learned in the last two and a half years is that placement makes a huge difference in how a student behaves. We had one particular student that was in a 1 to 15 class, and we were constantly either being called down. The more we talked to him and then we started looking into his file, we realized that he was probably placed wrong.

Respondent 4 the male administrator with 13-years-experience, had a negative experience:

I think you'll probably find a lot of people would disagree with me, but when these students know that you can't suspend them over so many days and they can tell it back to you, then that tells me really quick that they know their game in our system.

Respondent 5's perception was impulsivity can be redirected:

And like I said, this is funny to me because I've thought a lot about this lately, but my perception is that when I have talked to kids and I get them in my office and they can calm down and I can actually have a conversation with them, to me, my perception is they're very impulsive. Which I think is part of a learning disability and that they don't process this quickly and teachers are quick to say, "I already told them that once and then they did it." Or that they don't have proper behavior for whatever reason to ... They don't have the reasoning skills, which to me goes along with their learning disability to know how to act properly when maybe they're caught off guard and they feel attacked, or they feel embarrassed in front of their peers or something like that.

Respondent 6 recalled this was their first year dealing with disabilities:

Now I can think about discipline on a student with disabilities because I do have

that a fair amount as an assistant principal. In fact, my first year I felt like I dealt

with students with disabilities the majority of the time.

Respondent 7 recalled a specific disability they had experience with:

We had a kiddo when I was an assistant principal somewhere who he had

Tourette's. And would not shout out profanities, but very impulsive, had no

impulsiveness. So instead of ticks that you would think of Tourette's, his was

just constantly talking and arguing, just could not stop. You could not get the kid

to stop. And he would argue and argue and argue and argue with an adult.

Anyway. So anytime he would get into it with the teacher in front of all these

students, argue with the teacher, argue with the teacher, up in her face, argue with

the teacher. I tried to SDC. That's the first thing. The teacher would say, "That kid

needs to go to SDC. It's insubordination, it's disrespect." Well, the parents were

very thorough, "No, this is part of his disability. He has Tourette's and it is

documented." And they had   fantastic documentation. I'm very proud that this

young man was able to graduate. But this is part of his disability. Just arguing.

And it was very difficult. Very explosive. And he did have some of the ticks, but

his was more behavior.

Respondent 8 recalled family issues contributing to manifestations:

You know, it's really interesting. I have a student who is in our 1-15 academic

class … she was ED, and she just could not keep it together in class. I forget what

it was, but she and the teacher really did not do well. And then she got in trouble

at the office and was going... I don't remember exactly what was going to happen.

It wasn't going to take her up over, but she left the building. She stormed off and

she took off. And so, I had to go follow her, talk her down, and put her back in the

building. And so, we ended up having a manifestation hearing. And it didn't turn

out to be a manifestation of disability. She did end up going home...We spent a lot

of time with grandmothers. She was being raised by a grandmother through that

hearing. And really giving a lot of information on the family. And we were able to

put together a behavior plan, and all of a sudden it kind clicked.

MDR meeting involvement. The second subtheme related to the process for

MDR centered around participants' understanding of who should be involved in MDR

meetings. According to the law, when a student has an MDR meeting, certain individuals

are required to be involved in the meeting. For example, the smallest amount of

participants could be the following: a regular education teacher, special education

teacher, administrator, and the student. Other individuals are allowed to attend the

meeting if the need arises to determine if the student's disability is the cause of the

behavior in question. As such, participants were asked who was involved in

manifestation determination committee meetings at their schools. Table 4 below indicates

their responses.

Table 4

Committee Members involved in Manifestation Determination Meetings

Committee Member	Number of times mentioned	Participants who mentioned them
Advocate	1/8	Participant 1
School Based Mental Health	1/8	Participant 7
Student	1/8	Participant 2
General Education Classroom Teacher	2/8	Participants 3 and 4
Counselor	2/8	Participants 1 and 7
Special Education Coordinator	3/8	Participants 2, 6, and
Case Manager/File Holder	4/8	Participants 1, 2, 6, and 8
Parents	5/8	Participants 1, 2, 3, 6, And 8
Administrator/Principal	6/8	Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6
Department Chair/Head	6/8	Participants 1, 3, 4, 5, and 8

The principal and department chair (6/8) were the most recognized committee

members in order of importance reported by the participants. The parent was also

reported as attending the MDR by 5/8 participants. The one MDR participant that was not

readily reported was the student. One participant (1/8) recognized the student should be in attendance to their MDR.

Support for Administrators for MDR. The third and final theme that emerged under RQ 2 was related to the level of training and supports that administrators received to assist with understanding the MDR process. Administrators will often need to consult with an individual within the district to assist with MDRs due to their minimal training for special education. The three subthemes that appeared were the following: administrator training; assistance for administrators; and strategies for behaviors.

Administrator Training. Administrators were asked if they had any training in working with SWD**.** All respondents (8/8) in this study had some level of training for dealing with special education laws and students.

Respondents 1, 3, and 5 shared they had two special education classes in their master's programs. Respondent 1 indicated: "… And for my undergrad it was like teaching exceptional children. And then with both masters, I had school of law, which included a lot of that type of stuff, both for building and district level admin."

Respondent 3 said the same about the number of classes taken; however, they were not

      familiar with the term manifestation determination:

      Very little. I took one class in my, let's see, for my master's in special Ed. Then

      one class for my specialist that had to do with special ed law. I think other than

      those two classes, I'd never heard that term before.

 Respondent 5 reiterated: "I'm sure I had it a long time ago in my school Law class, I've

      had two school Law classes, and then I had it in my specialist, and then also just

      the training on side."

Two of the participants--Respondents 6 and 7 indicated they had taken only one special education law class in the past. Respondent 6 indicated with a furl in their brow:

> I mean, I'm sure that I had it in some of my classes. I had one, in my masters I had one that was just on special education and I'm sure that that came up. I mean, I know there was one class on students with learning disabilities, but to be quite honest, I don't remember.

Similarly, Respondent 7 who majored in special education as an undergraduate related:

> So, I had college classes just because I've got a master's degree in special education. So, I've had college classes. I did take educational law. So, in my graduate courses, higher level, and we talked about special education issues. The district does provide training. I think we've had one day with the school lawyer that's talked about special ed law.

Respondents 2, 4, and 8 (indicated that they only had some district informal training, but no formal training. Respondent 2 said they learned more on the job than in school theory:

> I don't think I've had any formal training in it. I think the only formal training I've had has been on the job that I've learned informally from special educators that I've interacted with…and not so much a discipline in manifestation determination.

Additionally, respondent 4 indicated their training was limited:

> Just by way of the position, I have not had very much special ed training at all. I've sat through a co-teaching training, co-teaching model. I've also had some SpedTrack training, but beyond the required trainings that we had to have in college that dealt with IDEA, very limited.

Respondent 8 mirrored their statements by saying hers was specifically on the job training:

> You know, I really was never trained on manifestation determination… And I asked a lot of questions about why did we suspend the child before the manifestation determination hearing was held? And I think that had kind of been the practice here. And I said, "We can't do that." And so, from that point forward, what we did was we called in our special-ed… I don't know the name of it.

Assistance for Administrators. When an administrator has to conduct an MDR, they will often choose to consult certain individuals within the school district to help them conduct a meeting. In this particular school district, special education coordinators are assigned to particular schools, and they are there to provide consultative services to the schools on special education issues that arise. Participants were asked, **"If a secondary administrator is unsure of the manifestation determination process, what would the next step be?"** Analysis of their answers revealed the following: 5/8 of the participants reported special education coordinator and special education director; 3/8 participants reported special education department chair; and 1/8 participants reported student services director or building level assistance. Table 5 below indicates the participants' responses:

Table 5

Assistance for Administrators

Individual who provides Assistance in district	Number of times mentioned by participants	Participants who mentioned them
Student Services Director	1/8	Participant 1
Building Level Assistance	1/8	Participant 4
Special Education Department Chair	3/8	Participants 2, 3, and 5
Special Education Coordinator	5/8	Participants 1, 5, 6, 7, and 8
Special Education Director	5/8	Participants 1, 2, 3, 7, and 8

Strategies for Behaviors. Behaviors are the cause of many MDR difficulties for

SWD. There are several preventative strategies that educators can use to help curb

inappropriate behaviors, such as behavior support plans or descalation techniques. The

participants were asked what procedures they perceived would improve the MDR

process. Respondents revealed behavior support plans, communication, and alternative

learning environments would improve the process.

Respondent 1 spoke of behavior support plans and knowing triggers for behaviors:

> I like to start with a behavior contract before we do a full-on behavior support
>
> plan. Because to me, if we can start with the behavior contract, that helps the
>
> student have some ownership in the choices that they're making. A referral to

school-based mental health. Of course, meeting with parents. Making the teachers

aware of what's going on and what some triggers might be. And giving them some

strategies that they can use in their classroom. Does that student need to go sit out

in the hall for two minutes? Give them a timer, something like that.

Respondent 2 spoke of communication being important for understanding SWD:

…when a special ed kid gets in trouble, it's kind of part of my mental checklist

when a kid gets in trouble and I'll make a note whether they're special ed or not

and if they are, then let's bring it on a case manager and I'll have a conversation

with that case manager about the situation.

Respondent 4 said: "I meet with them personally, if I believe that the student has some

issues that we could possibly resolve through school-based mental health counseling,

we'll do a referral."

Respondent 7 further noted:

When we foresee that things aren't going good and we might be ... Maybe the

ALE (Alternative Learning Environments) is what we're anticipating might be

good for them we would put them in one of those, after the fact, after we put that

together then we've always met with the teachers that have them and make sure

everyone is on the same page of exactly what's going to happen. What things we

put into behavior plan… I think that is lack of training for the teachers. If I think

if we had more training on it and I don't know where that training would come

from, but someone that you know is like, "Okay, these kids act like this and this is

some strategies that we need to use. We're not just letting them ...

Summary of RQ2. Research question two focused on experiences of secondary principals with manifestation determination and understanding of the laws of special education. The administrative participants were asked six interview questions, and one artifact was presented that aided in answering research questions. Responses were coded and three themes emerged. These themes were definition of MDR, MDR process in buildings, and supports for administrators for MDR**.**

RQ3: What are secondary principals' overall understanding of special education laws?

This research question explored participants' understanding of special education laws. Findings from this research question came from the interviews and two artifacts. Analysis revealed three common themes for secondary principals' overall understanding of special education laws: interpreting special education laws/LRE, committee decisions, and placement conferences. The following interview questions informed the findings for this research question:

1. In general terms, what is your understanding of least restrictive environment (LRE) regarding students with disabilities?

2. How involved are you, as an administrator, in the LRE process?

3. Who determines what a student with disabilities' LRE is?

Analysis revealed three common themes for secondary principals' overall understanding of special education laws: interpreting special education laws/LRE, committee decisions, and placement conferences.

Interpreting Special Education Laws/LRE. One theme that emerged from Research Q3 was participants' interpretations of the laws of special education and the

concept of Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). Participants discussed success in LRE, committee decisions, and placement conferences. Each of these areas are discussed below.

   Success in LRE. Respondents were asked if they could explain in general terms, what their understanding was of least restrictive environment (LRE) regarding students with disabilities. The meaning of LRE was described in several different ways by the respondents, but 6/9 respondents said that it was an "environment where they could feel successes."

Respondent 1, a former elementary teacher and now Junior High assistant principal said**:** "Least restrictive environment means providing an environment, in my mind, is providing students with enough support for them to be successful, but not over services. Not compromising their educational opportunities."

 Respondent 2 was excited because he felt comfortable with the question:

   Well, a student, whether they have a disability or not, should be educated   in the

   environment that is least restrictive to them. If they can handle a regular ed

   classroom, they ought to be in a regular ed classroom. If they can handle it a

   regular ed classroom, but only with supports, then they should be in a regular

   ed classroom and be provided those supports. The more severe the disability of

   the child, the more restrictive environment the child needs in order to be

   successful. That's a short explanation of my understanding of least restrictive

   environment.

Respondent 3 seemed apprehensive about wanting to say the word "restrictive."

Respondent 3 also presented a *Special Education Law and Practice* book as an artifact,

and this represented her trying to understand special education laws and LRE:. They said,

> We just want to put a student in, I hate to use the word… environment. That
>
> will still serve what they need, allow them to succeed without unnecessarily
>
> holding them back or putting them in a situation that's too low for them.

Respondent 7 provided an explanation in layman's terms, " So in general terms, what I

understand it is, is putting a student with disabilities in the most general education

classroom setting that they can be successful in with the accommodations that we provide

them. "

Respondent 8, the former special education teacher, said:

> We want to mainstream students to the extent that we can where they can   still be
>
> successful… So, we have different levels of that. For some of our   students, they
>
> may be in a mainstream classroom and simply be monitored students. They
>
> may not be actually assigned to a special ed teacher. Or we have students that
>
> can be very successful in inclusion or recourse all the way down to our people
>
> in our classrooms, our one-district classrooms, just depending on what level with
>
> the least most mainstream we can possibly have them where those students can
>
> still experience it best.

In response to the successes of LRE, Respondent 7 talked about the continuum of

services, "And if they're not successful, then only then do we go back and look at a little

bit more restrictive environment. Whatever that next level on the continuum is.

Committee Decisions. A second theme informing findings related to participants'
understanding of the laws was committee decisions**.** Respondents were asked to recall
who is involved in placement of a SWD in their LRE. As a building leader, a principal
must understand how a student is placed in an educational setting to the maximum extent
possible with their non-disabled peers. One of the responsibilities of an administrator is
to be knowledgeable of the laws and procedures that have to be followed in special
education, which includes proper committee members, and who is responsible for
determining LRE. Seven of the eight respondents said that a committee or IEP team was
responsible for decisions regarding LRE placement, while one of the respondents
indicated that alternative learning environment determined SWD placement in a specific
classroom. Table 6 below described participants' perspectives on who determines LRE.

Table 6

LRE determination

Participant	Who determines a student's LRE?
Participant 1	Committee
Participant 2	Committee
Participant 3	Anyone on the IEP team
Participant 4	The Alternative Learning Environment
Participant 5	IEP committee
Participant 6	IEP committee
Participant 7	The team for the IEP
Participant 8	Committee

Placement Conferences. The final theme related to participants' understanding of the laws was placement conferences. Placement conferences are when an IEP committee determines a SWD's LRE. Respondents were asked what their level of involvement was as administrators in the determination of placing a student in their LRE. Six of the eight respondents indicated they did not attend placement conferences, and usually someone else handled it. Two of the eight respondents said they were extremely involved or valued making placement decisions.

Respondent 1, who has experience in elementary and secondary, recalled her level of involvement and presented a TESS chart as an artifact (see Table 2). This chart

represented the special education department that she works with on a daily basis and

having to understand the educational placement of special education students. She said:

> At elementary, I was very involved. I sat in on every placement conference.
>
> Sometimes had to advocate for services for kids ... Because we would get them
>
> from another district, and our district would not allow them to be placed with the
>
> same services, until after we'd done testing. And it was explained to me that we
>
> had to start with the least restrictive and work our way up. And my argument to
>
> that is, you have to start with what's most appropriate and most supportive. Least
>
> restrictive doesn't mean you have to start at the bottom of the continuum, it means
>
> you start where they need, and you can always increase or decrease as needed.

Respondent 2 indicated that they did not necessarily attend every placement conference

for SWD:

> I'm going to answer that question this way. I see that as a decision to be made by
>
> the committee in any given special ed situation. And I am probably more involved
>
> with special education as a department here at Southside than any other
>
> administrator. I kind of oversee that department. That's a department that falls
>
> under me. That does not mean that I attend every special ed meeting and
>
> participate in every committee decision but my understanding is that the
>
> determination of the least restrictive environment is a decision to be made by the
>
> committee.

Respondent 3 related that they relied on the Special Education department chair:

> …Departments chair about whether or not moving this person, moving the
>
> student, how that would affect the idea of her least restricted environment. The

room that we wanted to move her to was a slightly lower level, but the other

option of moving her, she had to be moved from this particular room. And the

other option we were afraid was too high and we would not be setting her up for

success. And so, we had a conversation about that, but other than that, generally

the special ed department handles it.

Respondent 5 talked about relying on the department chair to help with placement

conferences: "Well, I work with …, and sit in on conferences and we all work together

and talk to the parent." Respondent 7 recalled that their level of involvement as an

administrator was needed due to the extent of her alternative learning environment

programs within the school:

I was pretty involved. I would go, any student that was referred to that

classroom, because you had to be referred. As you know, you have to refer

a kid to the ALE. I would sit through those meetings. I'd look over their

behavior data. I'd put my 2 cents in because, man, that classroom was an

incredibly restricted environment.

Summary of RQ3. Research question three focused on secondary principals'

overall understanding of special education laws. The administrative participants were

asked three interview questions and two artifacts were presented that aided in answering

research question 3. Responses and artifacts were coded and three themes emerged

regarding secondary principals' overall understanding of special education laws. These

themes were understanding of special education laws, committee decisions, and

placement conferences.

Chapter Summary

Chapter four described the administrator participants in the study, the process for gathering and analyzing data, and the development of themes by research question, and the summary of data. This chapter explored those themes and presented data in support of each theme. Chapter five will use this data to support findings.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine secondary principals'

perceptions of manifestation determination as it relates to disciplining secondary students

with disabilities, and the laws of special education. Congress has outlined MDR laws to

assist schools with positive and preventative programming for SWD (Hartwig & Ruesch,

2000). Administrators are responsible for understanding and interpreting the laws of

special education, as well as determining placement with a committee for SWD. This

study was aimed at finding out administrators' perceptions of MDR and their perceptions

of the special education law exclusively through their experiences. Findings of the

research of this study, implications for practice, implications for future research and

conclusions are included in this chapter. The research questions for this

phenomenological study were:

1. What has been the overall experience of secondary school administrators with
   the discipline process for students with disabilities?

2. What are the experiences of secondary principals with manifestation
   determination?

3. What are secondary principals' overall understanding of special education
   laws?

Discussion of Findings

The research study included eight participants who were secondary

administrators. The eight administrative participants included two males and six females.

All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. These interview

transcripts were analyzed and coded based upon patterns that emerged. In addition, four

administrator participants provided artifacts which were coded and analyzed along with transcriptions. During data analysis, four themes emerged, which were reported in chapter four of this study.

There were four key findings in the study that emerged from the data in this study. These findings were:

1. ED was identified by most participants as the most prevalent in contributing to MDRs.

2. There was differential understanding of the laws, and the most understood law (by participants in this study) was LRE. Only half of administrators correctly described the meaning of MDR.

3. Uniformity was an issue within the school district regarding how MDRs were handled.

4. Training for implementation of Special Education/Special Education laws was deficient.

Key finding 1: ED was identified by most participants as the most prevalent in contributing to MDRs.

The first key finding in this study was that participants overwhelmingly reported ED as the most prevalent disability contributing to MDR. In the qualitative interviews, 75% of all administrators consistently reported that ED was the disability that caused MDRs. This finding supports what is already shown in the existing literature on this topic. In the review of the literature, ED was identified as having the greatest risk of suspension or expulsion for SWD (Mitchell et al., 2019). Emotional disturbances are characterized by diverse behaviors that are difficult to handle without training (Cullinan

& Sabornie, 2004). SWD who are identified as ED have been linked to overall higher suspension and expulsion rates (Krezmien. Leone, Achilles, 2005). A study of adolescent suspension rates from 2001-2002 revealed that suspension rates were highest for students with ED equated out to 44% of all suspensions (Achilles et al., 2007). Thus, the experiences of the participants in this study seemed to match the findings of other research that shows ED being commonly linked to behavioral issues and discipline outcomes in schools.

Key finding 2: There was differential understanding of the laws, and the most understood was LRE. Only half of administrators correctly described the meaning of MDR.

The second key finding was how administrators interpreted LRE and MDR and the laws. In the interviews, administrators were asked about the process that was utilized for manifestation determinations in their building for students with disabilities. All eight participants offered their perceptions of how the MDR process should work in their building. Responses under this theme centered around understanding the laws for SWD and MDR meeting involvement. There was also a difference in perception of understanding of the laws of special education. The meaning of LRE was understood by 75% of the participants in the study; however, only 50% reported that they actually knew what an MDR was by definition.

The literature review supports the second key finding of how administrators interpreted LRE and MDR and the laws. According to Burton, 2012, administrator training is sometimes limited to only one special education class in their undergraduate program, and one special education law in their graduate program. Half of all

participants in this study could correctly discuss LRE; however, when MDR was mentioned, most of the participants experienced difficulty correctly describing or fully understanding it. The amount of coursework that administrators had in school promoted a greater understanding of MDR and special education laws.

Key finding 3: Uniformity was an issue within the school district regarding how MDR's were handled.

The most captivating data in this study was the third key finding, the lack of uniformity of how MDRs were handled within the district. When interviewing participants, each administrator had a different experience when initiating an MDR. Participants in this study were all from the same district, but they all carried out the MDR process differently and reported that district policy and procedures were vague when it came to MDRs. It is important to have uniformity within a district when handling MDRs for SWD in order for them to be educated in their LRE (Daniel, 1997; Rose, 1988)

This was consistent in the review of literature when disciplinary action is required in an MDR, it may also change the placement, and an administrator needs to understand this process. Prior to a change in placement in the student's LRE, the multidisciplinary team has to consider a setting on the continuum of services and its appropriateness (Daniel, 1997; Rose, 1988) According to the literature, administrators are responsible for discipline of SWD, and also the environment which is appropriate for their education (Achilles et al., 2007; Glasser, 1998; Louis, 2009; Rose, 1988; Zirkel, 2010). Uniformity was an issue which was tied to the key finding of how MDRs were handled. The two main issues found in this study were differential understanding of the MDR process and use of various MDR procedures.

Understanding of the process of MDR. In this study, participants had different understandings of the actual MDR process. One example of this is that participants had varying understanding of who should attend meetings. The most reported persons in attendance at the meetings was principal and department chair, which was reported by 75% of all participants. Parents came in second as the most reported (62%), and one participant reported that the student should be in attendance (8%). At the least, in an MDR, the parent, administrator, special education teacher, and regular education teacher, and a student if they are 14 or older, should be in attendance as a committee (Smith, 2005). Other individuals are optional and can attend if it pertains to the SWD behaviors for MDR, or are invited by the parents (i.e., advocate). According to the review of literature, the team is usually managed by the administrator in charge of the SWD (Daniel, 1997; Rose, 1988).

The review of literature indicated that school systems are required to balance due process, school district needs, and best special education practices (Lewis, 2017). In the 1997 reauthorization, The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), and the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) provided guidelines and clarification for school districts to guide administrators and educators with discipline of SWD (Hartwig & Ruesch, 2000). However, in this study, it was clear the participants did not understand the process, which is concerning for due process for SWD.

Following the Same Process in the district for MDR. The second piece of evidence this study provided regarding the lack of uniformity in the MDR procedures was that all participants in this study carried out the MDR process in different ways (even though they all belonged to the same school district). Some administrators would go

directly to the director of special education, while some reported that the students were not required to be at the meeting. This is particularly concerning for the SWD who are depending on the administrators and the IEP team for conducting the appropriate due process.

If a SWD has a history of behavioral discipline, then data is reviewed and efforts to provide behavioral supports are needed to move them across the continuum of services (Daniel, 1997; Rose, 1988). The multidisciplinary team (IEP team) is responsible for determining the students LRE, and it is important to the SWDs placement during an MDR process. Furthermore, the literature also addressed when a principal decides to discipline a student for a disciplinary action, or serious incident, they follow a set of policy and procedures code written by the school district (Burton, 2012; Yell et al., 1998). IDEA provisions can make discipline difficult for secondary administrators when disciplinary action is warranted for SWD (Burton, 2012; Yell et al., 1998). Disciplining SWD can create school climate disruptions, as well as threaten the safety of others; however, the principal is bound by ethical and legal responsibilities to protect all students, including SWD (Burton, 2012; Yell et al., 1998). In this study, uniformity was an issue, and administrators not being able to follow the process correctly can create issues when disciplining SWD.

Key finding 4: Training for dealing with Special Education/Special Education laws was deficient.

The fourth and final key finding for this research study was the lack of appropriate training for administrators with regard to special education laws. When interviewing participants, 3/8 indicated they had one or two special education classes

(with the exception of Respondent 7 who was previously a special education teacher).

Other responses recorded were characterized as "limited", or mostly "on the job training

as we went along." Most administrators reported they learned skills to discipline SWD

by putting theory into practice within their own school building. Administrators in this

study did not report any extensive supports for special education from the district. They

did list names of the titles of persons in the district who could assist them. Five of

participants reported the special education coordinator and special education director as

the main support for MDR policies that they received. One participant reported

administration received training from the district in special education laws on certain

occasions, but it was at the "beginning of the year and limited at best."

According to the review of literature, the DOE sent a memorandum out to

teachers and administrators regarding the tools necessary to address problems with SWD

(Hartwig & Ruesch, 2000; Lewis, 2017). The DOE also included that SWD should have

appropriately developed IEP's as well as behavior interventions conducive to intentional

strategies (Hartwig & Ruesch, 2000; Lewis, 2017). Principals are expected to provide

educators with the tools necessary to discipline SWD and face any challenging behaviors

with the appropriate strategies (Smith & Katsiyannis, 2004). These responsibilities

include assuring teachers are utilizing research-based strategies to discipline students

prior to escalation (Smith & Katsiyannis, 2004). Lack of training could result in higher

incidents of MDR and behavior issues for schools. The literature further stated that a

study of disciplinary practices revealed various factors affecting discipline of SWD

related directly to the size of community, principal's experience, and grade level (Rose,

1988). More training is necessary to prevent issues with SWDs behavior and to decrease MDRs.

Implications

The following paragraphs explain implications the following: practice, school districts, administrators, parents and students, and future research.

For School Districts. This study has implications for school districts. School districts have opportunities to promote more comprehensive training for administrators regarding laws for SWD. There should be more comprehensive procedures and practices for the administrators in this study. The policy and procedures of the school district studied are too general/not specific enough to allow for uniformity in how situations are handled. Opportunities need to be created in the district which focus on positive discipline and constructive intervention strategies with SWD. These interventions could lead to less MDRs and a better understanding of how to positively manage behaviors.

For Administrators. This study has multiple implications for administrators. First, the policy and procedures are not specific enough to allow for uniformity in how MDR or SWD situations are to be handled. Current policy and procedures need to be revised. Administrators deserve and need the best training on school policy and procedures, in order to serve SWD. Secondly, ED was identified as the most prevalent disability causing MDRs. Administrators recognized this; however, they needed assistance in conducting MDR meetings for a student successfully. There is a need for more comprehensive training for administrators by the special education department or outside sources in conducting MDRs within the school system.

For Parents/Students. The data from this study revealed that administrators have a varied understanding of SPED laws and procedures; because of this, it is important for parents/students to help advocate for themselves and work with school personnel for the best outcomes for students. In the review of literature, it was noted that laws were put into place to protect the rights of parents and ensure special education and related services to those children (Zirkel, 2016). The findings of this study point to the need for parent training on advocacy and procedural safeguards to ensure that SWD are afforded the appropriate LRE and due process with MDR.

Implications for Future Research

There are several implications for future research. This study could be replicated and expanded. The scope in which the study could be replicated or expanded could be the following: different districts, wider range of participant demographics, more participants with varying use of the policies, different parts of the state/region/country. The findings of this study also suggest that more research is needed regarding administrators' understanding of laws and the MDR process, as well as best practices with regard to school policies and procedures for implementing what is required by law.

Chapter Summary

The findings of this qualitative research study were: ED was identified as most prevalent in contributing to MDRS; there were differential understanding of the laws, and the most understood was LRE. Only half of administrators correctly described the meaning of MDR**;** uniformity was an issue within the school district regarding how MDRs were handled; and training within the district for implementation of special education/special education laws was deficient. This chapter discussed these findings in detail, relating the findings to the literature in chapter two, as well as choice theory. Implications for practice for the school district administrators and educators, and parents were discussed. Finally, implications for future research were also discussed.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions for Secondary Administrators

Question number	Interview question	Related research question
Q1	How long have you been a secondary administrator?	R1- What has been the overall experience of Secondary School administrators with the discipline process for students with disabilities?
Q2	What grade levels do you currently serve?	R1- What has been the overall experience of Secondary School administrators with the discipline process for students with disabilities?
Q3	What type of school do you administrate over (i.e., High school, Middle School, or Alternative School)?	R1- What has been the overall experience of Secondary School administrators with the discipline process for students with disabilities?
Q4	What are your experiences with the thirteen types of disabilities?	R1- What has been the overall experience of Secondary School administrators with the discipline process for students with disabilities?
Q5	In general terms, what is your understanding of least restrictive environment (LRE) regarding students with disabilities?	R3 What are secondary principals' overall understanding of special education laws?
Q6	How involved are you, as an administrator, in the LRE process?	R3 What are secondary principals' overall understanding of special education laws?
Q7	Who determines what a student with disabilities' LRE is?	R3 What are secondary principals' overall understanding of special education laws?

Q8	In general terms, could you describe what manifestation determination means to you?	R2-What are the experiences of secondary principals with manifestation determination and the understanding of the laws?
Q9	What training, formal or informal, have you had in dealing with manifestation determinations?	R2-What are the experiences of secondary principals with manifestation determination and the understanding of the laws??
Q10	What is the process that is utilized for manifestation determinations in your building for students with disabilities?	R2-What are the experiences of secondary principals with manifestation determination and the understanding of the laws?
Q11	In the manifestation determination process, what is your perception of what works well for students with disabilities?	R1-- What has been the overall experience of Secondary School administrators with the discipline process for students with disabilities?
Q12	Could you describe an experience in detail or experiences that you have had with a manifestation determination and disciplining a SWD?	R1-- What has been the overall experience of Secondary School administrators with the discipline process for students with disabilities?
Q13	If a secondary administrator is unsure of the manifestation determination process, what would the next step be?	R2-What are the experiences of secondary principals with manifestation determination and the understanding of the laws
Q14	What are some behaviors which may "trigger" a manifestation determination at your school?	R1-What are the experiences of secondary principals with manifestation determination and the understanding of the laws?
Q15	Who is involved in the manifestation determination meeting at your school?	R2-What are the experiences of secondary principals with

		manifestation determination and the understanding of the laws?
Q16	What are the specifically identified disabilities that you perceive are the ones who cause a student to have to review a manifestation on the most?	R1- What has been the overall experience of Secondary School administrators with the discipline process for students with disabilities?
Q17	What are some preventative measures in place for SWD who are at risk for manifestation determinations? Can you give some specific examples?	R1-- What has been the overall experience of Secondary School administrators with the discipline process for students with disabilities?
Q18	What procedures do you perceive would improve the MDR process?	R2-What are the experiences of secondary principals with manifestation determination and the understanding of the laws?
Q19	Do you have any further information that you would like to share with the interviewer regarding manifestations or disciplining SWD that we have not talked about?	R1- What has been the overall experience of Secondary School administrators with the discipline process for students with disabilities? R2-What are the experiences of secondary principals with manifestation determination and the understanding of the laws? R3 What are secondary principals' overall understanding of special education laws?

1. How long have you been a secondary administrator?

2. What grade levels do you currently serve?

3. What type of school do you administrate over (i.e., High school, Middle School, or Alternative School)?

4. What are your experiences with the thirteen types of disabilities?

5. In general terms, what is your understanding of least restrictive environment (LRE) regarding students with disabilities?

6. How involved are you, as an administrator, in the LRE process?

7. Who determines what a student with disabilities' LRE is?

8. In general terms, could you describe what manifestation determination means to you?

9. What training, formal or informal, have you had in dealing with manifestation determinations?

10. What is the process that is utilized for manifestation determinations in your building for students with disabilities?

11. In the manifestation determination process, what is your perception of what works well for students with disabilities.

12. Could you describe an experience in detail or experiences that you have had with a manifestation determination and disciplining a SWD?

13. If a secondary administrator is unsure of the manifestation determination process, what would the next step be?

14. What are some behaviors which may "trigger" a manifestation determination at your school?

15. Who is involved in the manifestation determination meeting at your school?

16. What are the specifically identified disabilities that you perceive are the ones who cause a student to have to review a manifestation on the most?

17. What are some preventative measures in place for SWD who are at risk for Manifestation determinations? Can you give some specific examples?

18. What procedures do you perceive would improve the MDR process?

19. Do you have any further information that you would like to share with the interviewer regarding manifestations or disciplining SWD that we have not talked about?

Appendix B – IRB Approval

ARKANSAS TECH UNIVERSITY

**Office of Sponsored Programs
and University Initiatives**
Administration Building, Room 207
1509 North Boulder Avenue
Russellville, Arkansas 72801

Office: 479-880-4327
www.atu.edu

October 22, 2020

To Whom It May Concern:

The Arkansas Tech University Institutional Review Board has approved the application for Felicia Florez's proposed research, entitled "Principals' perceptions of manifestation determination implementation and disciplining secondary students with disabilities." This protocol has been assigned approval code Florez_102220. The IRB approves for the researcher(s) to proceed with the class project.

Please note that, in the event that any of the parameters of the study change, the researcher may be required to submit an amended application.

Sincerely,

Melissa Darnell, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board Member
Arkansas Tech University

Table 1

Demographics of Participants

Participant	Gender	Length of Time as Administrator	Grade Level	Type of School
Participant 1	Female	11 years	7-9	Junior High
Participant 2	Male	14 years	10-12	High School
Participant 3	Female	3 years	7-9	Junior High
Participant 4	Male	13 years	10-12	High School
Participant 5	Female	20 years	7-9	Junior High
Participant 6	Female	5 years	7-9	Junior High
Participant 7	Female	7 years	7-9	Junior High
Participant 8	Female	11 years	10-12	High School

Table 2

Artifacts

Participant	Artifact	Relationship to Research Question
Participant 1 `	Tess Chart	RQ3
Participant 3	Special Education Law and Practice Book	RQ3
Participant 5	PLC Meeting Agendas	R1
Participant 7	Suspension Report	RQ2

Table 3

Research Questions and Themes

Research Question #1: What has been the overall experience of secondary school administrators with the discipline process for students with disabilities?

Themes:

    D. A Variety of Discipline Experiences with SWD

    E. Anticipating Behaviors in SWD

    F. Disabilities Most Likely to Cause Discipline Issues

Research Question #2: What are the experiences of secondary principals with manifestation determination and the understanding of the laws?

Themes:

    D. Understanding the Meaning of MDR

    E. Process for MDR in Buildings

    F. Support for Administrators

Research Question #3: What are secondary principals' overall understanding of special education laws?

Themes:

    D. Interpreting Special Education Laws/LRE

    E. Committee Decisions

    F. Placement Conferences

Table 4

Committee Members involved in Manifestation Determination Meetings

Committee Member	Number of times mentioned	Participants who mentioned them
Advocate	1/8	Participant 1
School Based Mental Health	1/8	Participant 7
Student	1/8	Participant 2
General Education Classroom Teacher	2/8	Participants 3 and 4
Counselor	2/8	Participants 1 and 7
Special Education Coordinator	3/8	Participants 2, 6, and
Case Manager/File Holder	4/8	Participants 1, 2, 6, and 8
Parents	5/8	Participants 1, 2, 3, 6, And 8
Administrator/Principal	6/8	Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6
Department Chair/Head	6/8	Participants 1, 3, 4, 5, and 8

Table 5

Assistance for Administrators

Individual who provides Assistance in district	Number of times mentioned by participants	Participants who mentioned them
Student Services Director	1/8	Participant 1
Building Level Assistance	1/8	Participant 4
Special Education Department Chair	3/8	Participants 2, 3, and 5
Special Education Coordinator	5/8	Participants 1, 5, 6, 7, and 8
Special Education Director	5/8	Participants 1, 2, 3, 7, and 8

Table 6

LRE determination

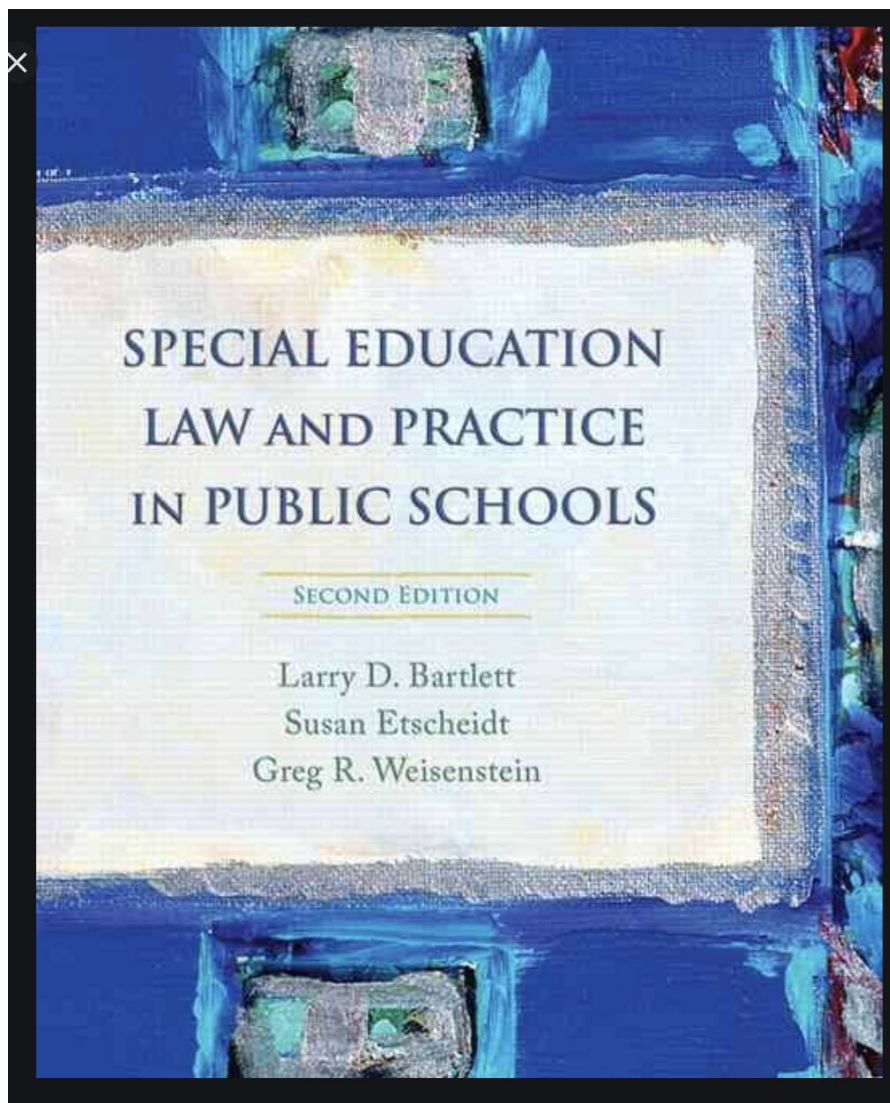| Participant	Who determines a student's LRE?
Participant 1	Committee
Participant 2	Committee
Participant 3	Anyone on the IEP team
Participant 4	The Alternative Learning Environment
Participant 5	IEP committee
Participant 6	IEP committee
Participant 7	The team for the IEP
Participant 8	Committee

Artifact 1

TESS Chart

2B3		2B2		2B1		2A (Formal Observation)			
Cecil, Emily	Chase	Courtney, Teana	Chase	Coats, Adam	Chase	Carpenter, Michele	Chase		
Coleman, Judy	Chase	Ha, Christopher	Chase	Freeman, Sara	Chase	Hubbs, Sara	Chase		
Florez, Felicia	Chase	Foster, Rachael	Chase	Mullin, Melissa	Chase	Storey, Jessica	Chase		
Padilla, Dakota	Chase	Grubbs, Shelby	Chase	Schneider, Anthony	Chase	Wilhite, Gigi	Chase		
Potts, Miranda	Chase	Humphries, Britt	Chase	Verge, Anthony	Chase	Morris, Ken	Williamson		
Smith, Jordan	Chase	Thomas, Joni	Chase	Ramey, Amra	Chase	Parnell, Tiffany	Williamson		
Mondier, Matt	Chase	East, Donna Jo	Williamson	Lemley, Ashley	Chase	Rackley, Amber	Williamson		
Campbell, Clairessa	Williamson	Holland, Adrienne	Williamson	Dunn, Katie	Williamson	Remy, Kelli	Williamson		
Cantrell, Patrick	Williamson	Woods, Donald	Williamosn	English, Charleigh	Williamson	Tierney, Todd	Williamson		
Hornung, Ben	Wliamson	Buccella, Donna	Johnson	McKinney, Jennifer	Williamson	Cash, Daniel	Johnson		
Newman, Regina	Williamson	Cox, Shauna	Johnson	Pierce, Amy	Williamson				
Swearingen, Allysa	Williamson	Ehnle, Pam	Johnson	Putman, Athena	Williamson				
Walker, Melissa	Williamson	Herrlein, A.J.	Johnson	Springs, Samantha	Williamson				
Ali, Ghufran	Johnson	Ludgood, Kayla	Johnson	Core, Michelle	Johnson				
Candelaria, Dee	Johnson	Medlock, Lena	Johnson	Post, Sonya	Johnson				
Choo, Hyejin	Johnson			Weaver, Katie	Johnson				
Dunn, Brett	Johnson			Whitsett, Matthew	Johnson				
Gonzales, Blanca	Johnson								
Heyn, Cari	Johnson								
Shelly, Sheila	Johnson								

Artifact 2

Special Education Law and Practice book

Artifact 3

PLC Meeting Agendas

Team Meeting Agenda

7-9th grade   Date: 11/10/20

Team Members Present	Norms:
Leeann Bailey Dawn Chancey Patricia Whitfield Threasa Peck	- Begin and end promptly at 10:35 to 11:10. Meet in the library or agreed upon place. . - All participants actively participate. - Welcome the input of any stakeholders in our team meetings. Data is confidential, exercise professionalism. - Decisions that are made will be accepted by all team members. In the event of a disagreement over a decision, an effort will be made to base the decision on what's best for the students. - We expect all team members to share his/her expertise. - If a team member is consistently not adhering to our NORMS, one or more

	team members will visit privately with him/her.

Roles: Recorder: Threasa Peck Timekeeper: Dawn Chancey

4 Critical Questions for Meeting:	**Purpose/Goal for this meeting:**
● What is it we expect our students to know and be able to do? ● How will we know if each student has learned it? ● How will we respond when some students do not learn it? ● How will we extend the learning for students who have demonstrated proficiency?	Establish a goal for the SPED students.

Discussion/Decision Summary: Discussion/Decision Summary:

We established a goal that we wanted our students to accomplish by the end of the year. We discussed appropriate expectations.	

What follow-up is needed based on the information shared at this meeting?

STAR assessment results or Mobymax reading level Continue Interventions	Person Responsible: All team members
Reflection of norms:	Date of next meeting: 11/17/2020
Questions for Administrators:	Reply:

Team Meeting Agenda

7-9th grade   Date: 11/17/20

Team Members Present	Norms:
     Leeann Bailey	- Begin and end promptly at 10:35 to 11:10. Meet in the library or agreed upon place. . - All participants actively participate.

Dawn Chancey Threasa Peck	- Welcome the input of any stakeholders in our team meetings. Data is confidential, exercise professionalism. - Decisions that are made will be accepted by all team members. In the event of a disagreement over a decision, an effort will be made to base the decision on what's best for the students. - We expect all team members to share his/her expertise. - If a team member is consistently not adhering to our NORMS, one or more team members will visit privately with him/her.

Roles: Recorder: Threasa Peck

             Timekeeper: Dawn Chancey

4 Critical Questions for Meeting:	Purpose/Goal for this meeting:
What is it we expect our students to know and be able to do?	

● How will we know if each student has learned it? ● How will we respond when some students do not learn it? ● How will we extend the learning for students who have demonstrated proficiency?	Formulated a plan to assess the student's reading levels.

Discussion/Decision Summary: Discussion/Decision Summary:

We established a goal that we wanted our students to accomplish by the end of the year. We discussed appropriate expectations.

What follow-up is needed based on the information shared at this meeting?

STAR assessment results or Mobymax reading level **Continue Interventions**	**Person Responsible:** **All team members**
Reflection of norms:	**Date of next meeting: 12/1/2020**

Questions for Administrators:	Reply:

Team Meeting Agenda

7-9th grade   Date: 12/1/20

Team Members Present	Norms:
Leeann Bailey Dawn Chancey Threasa Peck	- Begin and end promptly at 10:35 to 11:10. Meet in the library or agreed upon place. . - All participants actively participate. - Welcome the input of any stakeholders in our team meetings. Data is confidential, exercise professionalism. - Decisions that are made will be accepted by all team members. In the event of a disagreement over a decision, an effort will be made to base the decision on what's best for the students. - We expect all team members to share his/her expertise.

	• If a team member is consistently not adhering to our NORMS, one or more team members will visit privately with him/her.

Roles: Recorder: Threasa Peck
Timekeeper: Dawn Chancey

4 Critical Questions for Meeting:	**Purpose/Goal for this meeting:**
• What is it we expect our students to know and be able to do? • How will we know if each student has learned it? • How will we respond when some students do not learn it?	 All members began gathering data by administering the Star assessment on students.

● How will we extend the learning for students who have demonstrated proficiency?	

Discussion/Decision Summary: Discussion/Decision Summary:
We established a goal that we wanted our students to accomplish by the end of the year.
We discussed appropriate expectations.

What follow-up is needed based on the information shared at this meeting?

STAR assessment results or Mobymax reading level **Continue Interventions**	**Person Responsible:** **All team members**
Reflection of norms:	**Date of next meeting: 12/8/2020**
Questions for Administrators:	**Reply:**

Team Meeting Agenda

7-9th grade   Date: 12/08/20

Team Members Present	Norms:
Leeann Bailey Dawn Chancey Threasa Peck	- Begin and end promptly at 10:35 to 11:10. Meet in the library or agreed upon place. . - All participants actively participate. - Welcome the input of any stakeholders in our team meetings. Data is confidential, exercise professionalism. - Decisions that are made will be accepted by all team members. In the event of a disagreement over a decision, an effort will be made to base the decision on what's best for the students. - We expect all team members to share his/her expertise. - If a team member is consistently not adhering to our NORMS, one or more team members will visit privately with him/her.

Roles: Recorder: Threasa Peck

Timekeeper: Dawn Chancey	

4 Critical Questions for Meeting:	Purpose/Goal for this meeting:
● What is it we expect our students to know and be able to do? ● How will we know if each student has learned it? ● How will we respond when some students do not learn it? ● How will we extend the learning for students who have demonstrated proficiency?	Team members continued to gather data by administering the Star assessment.

Discussion/Decision Summary: Discussion/Decision Summary:
We established a goal that we wanted our students to accomplish by the end of the year.   **We discussed appropriate expectations.**

What follow-up is needed based on the information shared at this meeting?

STAR assessment results or Mobymax reading level	Person Responsible:
	All team members

Continue Interventions	
Reflection of norms:	Date of next meeting: 12/15/2020
Questions for Administrators:	Reply:

Team Meeting Agenda

7-9th grade   Date: 12/15/20

Team Members Present	Norms:
Leeann Bailey Dawn Chancey Threasa Peck	● Begin and end promptly at 10:35 to 11:10. Meet in the library or agreed upon place. . ● All participants actively participate. ● Welcome the input of any stakeholders in our team meetings. Data is confidential, exercise professionalism. ● Decisions that are made will be accepted by all team members. In the event of a disagreement over a

	decision, an effort will be made to base the decision on what's best for the students.
	● We expect all team members to share his/her expertise.
	● If a team member is consistently not adhering to our NORMS, one or more team members will visit privately with him/her.

Roles: Recorder: Threasa Peck   Timekeeper: Dawn Chancey

4 Critical Questions for Meeting:	Purpose/Goal for this meeting:
● What is it we expect our students to know and be able to do? ● How will we know if each student has learned it? ● How will we respond when some students do not learn it?	 Team members continued to gather data by administering the Star assessment.

● How will we extend the learning for students who have demonstrated proficiency?	

Discussion/Decision Summary: Discussion/Decision Summary:
We established a goal that we wanted our students to accomplish by the end of the year. We discussed appropriate expectations.

What follow-up is needed based on the information shared at this meeting?

STAR assessment results or Mobymax reading level **Continue Interventions**	**Person Responsible:** **All team members**
Reflection of norms:	**Date of next meeting: 01/05/2020**
Questions for Administrators:	**Reply:**

Team Meeting Agenda

7-9th grade   Date: 01/05/21

Team Members Present	Norms:
Leeann Bailey Dawn Chancey Patricia Whitfield Threasa Peck	• Begin and end promptly at 10:35 to 11:10. Meet in the library or agreed upon place. . • All participants actively participate. • Welcome the input of any stakeholders in our team meetings. Data is confidential, exercise professionalism. • Decisions that are made will be accepted by all team members. In the event of a disagreement over a decision, an effort will be made to base the decision on what's best for the students. • We expect all team members to share his/her expertise. • If a team member is consistently not adhering to our NORMS, one or more team members will visit privately with him/her.

| Roles: | Recorder: Threasa Peck |
| | Timekeeper: Dawn Chancey |

Discussion/Decision Summary: Discussion/Decision Summary:

We established a goal that we wanted our students to accomplish by the end of the year.

We discussed appropriate expectations.

What follow-up is needed based on the information shared at this meeting?

STAR assessment results or Mobymax reading level **Continue Interventions**	**Person Responsible:** **All team members**
Reflection of norms:	**Date of next meeting: 01/12/2021**
Questions for Administrators:	**Reply:**

Artifact 4

Suspension Report

FORT ★ SMITH
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Suspension Report

Dear Parent/Guardian:

I must inform you of our decision to suspend,_____, for 5 days.

This suspension will begin at 8:00 on 11/20/2020. The student may return to school on 12/04/2020. At the time of suspension and/or

prior to reinstatement, a parent conference must be held with Shawn Hinkle   at Darby Jr. High, phone 479-783-4159.

The suspension is for the following reasons:

Drugs: Student was found to be in possession of a small bag of weed.

This is _____ first drug offense this school year. A second drug offense this school year may result in a recommendation for

expulsion.

I have explained the reason for the suspension and have reviewed the available facts. For a review or appeal of the suspension,

you must first contact the principal of the school. After a conference with the principal, you may contact the Director of

Student Services at 479-785-2501. The Fort Smith School District has written discipline policies that apply to all students. Parents

and students have been provided copies of the policies. The discipline policies were adopted to ensure a positive learning

environment for all students in Fort Smith. Parents may request that the school collect class assignments. The student will be expected

to make up his/her work and may receive full credit upon satisfactory completion. The sole responsibility for completing assigned

work rests with the student. All make-up work should be returned to the appropriate teacher by the student the day the student returns

to school. Tests missed during a suspension will be given at the teacher's convenience.

Sincerely,

_____

Principal/Assistant Principal

Copies To:

Parent/Guardian – Superintendent – Student Services – School Fi