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### The Impact of Suspension on the Academic Performance of Middle School Students

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THE IMPACT OF SUSPENSION ON THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF  
MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS.

A Dissertation Proposal Submitted  
to the Graduate College  
Arkansas Tech University

in partial fulfillment of requirements  
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

in School Leadership

in the Center for Leadership and Learning  
of the College of Education

March 2020

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of in-school suspension and out of school suspension on the academic performance of seventh-grade students, as measured by the ACT Aspire. This study was motivated by the assumption that out of classroom time and out of school time has an impact on student learning. It was further assumed that direct instruction from the classroom teacher would enhance students' learning; and, therefore, suspensions would have a negative impact on student achievement. This quantitative causal-comparative study used four research questions to examine the relationship between suspensions and academic performance of middle school students. The study relied on the archived ACT Aspire results and disciplinary data from one middle school in the Little Rock School District from the 2017-2018 school year. The study used ANOVAs to determine the statistical significance of the hypothesized relationship at  $p < .05$ . The data indicate there were no statistically significant differences between the four types of suspensions. Those students who received no suspensions had the highest mean scores in math ( $M=417.51$ ) and the second-highest mean scores in reading ( $M=417.0$ ). Those students who had both suspensions had the highest mean scores in reading ( $M=417.29$ ), and the second-highest mean score in math ( $M=417.4$ ). Based on the data, the four research questions were addressed, and the four null hypotheses were retained. Based on findings from this study, implications included policy initiatives regarding training staff on positive discipline approaches and alternatives to suspension. It was also recommended to develop a school-wide discipline plan, which includes alternatives to suspension.

*Keywords:* suspensions; discipline; academic performance; ACT Aspire

## DEDICATION

“For I know the plans I have for you,” says the Lord. “They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.” Jeremiah 29:11

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother and my grandmother, the two people who always encouraged me to follow my dreams and live up to my potential. Despite how the journey began, they believed in me and God’s plan for me.

Although my grandmother is unable to see my graduation, she is the inspiration behind pursuing my doctoral degree. There were countless times I wanted to give up, but did not because I could hear her voice in my heart telling me to keep going. I love and miss you so much.

My mother has always believed I could accomplish anything I wanted. Thank you for being my biggest cheerleader, for your love, support, and strength. This dissertation is for the both of you.

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I would also like to acknowledge my children: Kourtney, Kalyn, Kennedy, and Kasen. Thank you for being understanding when I had to miss events to attend class. Your support and understanding did not go unnoticed.

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

### **Background of the Study**

Advocates for education reform have brought widespread attention to growing concerns in recent years about how disciplinary problems are addressed in public schools, including the impact that certain methods have on student academic performance (Ordway, 2016). Policies that generate some key questions related to the in-school or out-of-school suspension that has been posed by several education reform advocates include the following: (a) Have these approaches made children safer? (b) Have these discipline approaches improved the learning environment for students in general? (c) Have these approaches caused more students to be unnecessarily introduced into a systematic cycle that essentially contributes to lower academic performance, and an increase in the dropout rate (Ordway, 2016)?

While many factors affect the success of students in the public education system (Putnam, Handler, & Feinberg, 2005), one of the factors that public school educators speak of is student behavior (Guerra & Nelson, 2007). This factor is vital because excessive negative student behavior has the potential to adversely impact the academic success of the students (Guerra & Nelson, 2007). In addition to the negative behavior, the discipline sanctions used in response to the negative behavior further add to the achievement gap (Ekenrode, 1993).

“School discipline is the system of rules, punishments, and behavioral strategies appropriate to the regulation of children or adolescents and the maintenance of order in schools” (K12 Academics, 2019, paragraph 2). The aim of this discipline system is to control the students’ actions and behavior to ensure an environment conducive to

learning. An obedient student is deemed to comply with the school rules and code of conduct (K12 Academics, 2019). Eamon and Altshuler (2004) conducted research to assess whether disruptive behavior in children can be predicted, so better alternatives than suspension can be employed in the discipline process. The researchers examined socioeconomic factors as well as those related to parenting and student perspectives as predictors for discipline problems in school. Eamon and Altshuler (2004) concluded that: (a) living in a single-parent household, (b) living under a lower socioeconomic status, and (c) the amount of physical discipline received at home are relevant predictors under the socioeconomic and parenting categories.

In relation to the views of the child or student of their peers, grades, and school, Eamon and Altshuler (2004) found peer influences were predictors as well, due to the potential effect on student actions. Students included in this study ranged in ages from 10-12. The ages represent students commonly transitioning from elementary to middle school. This information is important in examining whether there are significant behavioral changes in elementary students moving to higher grades by assessing the patterns of behavior for students in this age group. Generally, age 10 is the age for many fifth graders entering their middle school years. If there is a change in the number of incident occurrences for those leaving elementary and entering sixth or seventh grades, then a relationship may be made between transitioning and negative behavior (Eamon & Altshuler, 2004).

Different forms of suspension have been the standard form of punishment for educational systems to reduce discipline infractions and eliminate unwanted behavior (Flannigan, 2007). In-school suspension and out of school suspension, remove the

student from the classroom, causing the student to miss valuable instruction. According to Flannigan (2007), the suspension has been used as a punitive measure by administrators to send a message to students and parents about the seriousness of the student misbehavior. It was assumed that parental attention would be given to the misbehaviors when a student was punished with an out of school suspension. Out of school suspensions also encouraged parents to attend a conference to discuss the problematic behavior. Flannigan (2007) further stated that school suspensions provide a time for students to cool down away from other students and staff.

During the 2011–2012 school year in the United States, 3.5 million students were disciplined by in-school suspension and 3.45 million by out-of-school suspension (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014). This data is concerning because school calendars are based on the state's requirement that students attend a minimum number of days each academic year (Metzeker, 2003). While out of school suspension may affect these requirements, when students are not present for instruction, there may be an undesirable effect on the academic performance of the student (Metzeker, 2003).

Several issues can influence student academic performance, and there is growing evidence to support the notion that the approach taken with disciplinary measures is one of the most impactful (Singh et al., 2016). Consequently, a great starting point for assessing this notion is also to examine the contributing factors that may lead to more disruptive behavior patterns for students in middle school or other items labeled as causes of why a significant number of students are administered suspensions each year.

One reason posited by educators and researchers in the transition of middle school students from elementary. The changes in the behaviors of students as they transition



from elementary to middle school can have implications for their learning progression, self-concept, and further overall educational development.

According to the Council on School Health (2013), to find some answers (and gain a better perspective for furthering research to the question of whether this kind of transition has a negative effect on student behavior), the following steps, should be taken: (a) review literature regarding elementary versus middle school student discipline patterns; (b) identify consequences for increasing disciplinary practices of mal-adjusted students; (c) identify possible reasons for changes in behavior, and (d) identify other related issues regarding this transition.

Malmgren et al. (2005) propose that methods for managing classroom behavior used on elementary-aged children are less effective for older students. This information informs the topic of transitional behavioral changes for elementary students because it provides a possible reason some perceived behavioral problems exist for these students as they enter middle school. How one manages classroom behavior can influence a student's progress and actions in the classroom (Malmgren et al., 2005), and the stated factors may be key reasons suspension methods are employed in middle school at the current rates.

Perry and Morris (2014) asserted in their research that collateral consequences arose from the use of suspension as a means of punishment in public schools. This term borrowed from a criminology perspective that examines the impact of social control measures on behavioral patterns within institutional settings. In public education settings, these measures are typically negative. The collateral damage resulting from disciplinary measures (like out of school suspension that, in effect, isolate students from their peers) is impactful academically (Perry & Morris, 2014).

The findings of this research indicate that when there were higher levels of this type of discipline being enforced in a school system, not only were students who were suspended directly impacted academically, but non-suspended students suffer an indirect decline in academic performance as well. Thus, the impact is felt because of the punitive environment that places more emphasis on discipline than academic motivation in core areas such as reading and math. This conclusion is relevant in seeking an answer to the broader question of this research topic because it helps verify what consequences are likely for students who are punished as well as those who are not under the systems of schools within the U.S. education system (Perry & Morris, 2014).

Cook et al. (2008) provided an assessment of multiple studies related to “The Negative Impacts of Starting Middle School in Sixth Grade” as an excellent resource for assessing what factors that might influence behavioral changes in elementary children entering secondary school, including the use of suspension as a disciplinary measure. The research noted a statistical variation in the rate of discipline for students in the sixth grade and children in elementary school (Cook et al., 2008). The research also found there was a relationship between transitioning from elementary to middle school and an increase in behavioral problems that impacted students academically.

The researchers considered socioeconomic and other factors that may have influence over student behavior as well as their academic standing and asserted that a difference still exists in the number of occurrences between the two groups regardless of age or environment. The researchers identified factors that contributed to the increase in disruptive behaviors and lower academic performance as newfound freedoms and being mixed in with older students who are at a more impressionable age (Cook et al., 2008).

This secondary research is significant in helping to determine if there is a relationship between increased disciplinary measures like a suspension in middle school and changed patterns in academic performance and student behaviors.

Arcia (2007) makes a comparison of elementary and middle school suspension rates in a study analyzing rates of suspension among three different groups of sixth-graders transitioning to and from other grades (Arcia, 2007). Participants in the study included: (a) students who attended schools that included grades K-8 for all of their elementary and middle school careers, (b) students who moved from K-8 schools to middle schools, and (c) students who moved from elementary to middle schools (Arcia, 2007). Results show that across race, achievement, and sixth-grade suspension history, students in middle schools, were suspended at higher rates than were students in elementary/K-8 schools (Arcia, 2007).

### **Statement of the Problem**

There is little question that disruptive student behavior can reduce instructional time and negatively impact the quality of instruction received (Hastings & Bham, 2003). According to Fletcher (2010), misbehavior can negatively impact educational outcomes. In and out of school, suspensions are tools administrators use to reduce or eliminate unwanted behavior (Lacoe & Steinberg, 2018). When students are suspended, they miss classroom instruction (Scott & Barrett, 2004). While suspensions are undesirable sanctions, the impact and consequences of negative behavior must be considered for both the misbehaving students and the students who are motivated to learn.

Although administrators analyze discipline sanctions and the academic performance of students annually, no substantial inquiry into understanding how

discipline sanctions, specifically, in school and out of school suspensions, impact middle school students' academic performance within the Little Rock School District, thus, research was done to understand the relationship between in-school suspensions and out of school suspensions and middle school student academic performance. This study focused on in-school suspension and out of school suspension of middle school students and how absence from classroom instruction impacts student academic performance on the ACT Aspire in reading and math.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of in-school suspension and out of school suspension on the academic performance of middle school students from a central Arkansas urban school district. For this study, student academic performance was defined as scaled scores on the ACT Aspire in the content areas of reading and math.

### **Definition of Terms**

Student academic performance: Level of attainment of proficiency concerning a standard measure of performance or of success in bringing about the desired end (Glossary of Education, 2010).

ACT Aspire: A test that includes a vertically scaled battery of achievement tests designed to measure student growth in a longitudinal assessment system for grades third through tenth in English, reading, writing, mathematics, and science (ACT Aspire, 2016a).

In-school suspension: Discipline model where a student is removed from the classroom and required to stay in a specific area designated by the school administrator

for a variable length of time from one part of a day to several days in a row (Gootman, 1998).

Out of school suspension: Morrison and Skiba (2001) define out of school suspension as, "Disciplinary action that is administered as a consequence of a student's inappropriate behavior, requiring that a student absent him/herself from the school for a specified period of time" (p.174).

Exclusionary Discipline: any school disciplinary action that removes or excludes a student from his or her usual educational setting. Two of the most common exclusionary discipline practices at schools include suspension and expulsion, typically used to punish undesired behaviors, deter similar behavior by other students, and promote more appropriate behavior (National Clearinghouse on Supportive School Discipline, 2014).

### **Research Questions**

1. What effect will in-school suspension have on the reading scores of seventh-grade students, as measured by the ACT Aspire test?
2. What effect will in-school suspension have on the math scores of seventh-grade students, as measured by the ACT Aspire test?
3. What effect will out of school suspension have on the reading scores of seventh-grade students, as measured by the ACT Aspire test?
4. What effect will out of school suspension have on the math scores of seventh-grade students, as measured by the ACT Aspire test?

### **Hypotheses: Stated in the Null**

H<sub>0</sub>1: In-school suspension will have no effect on the reading scores of seventh-grade students, as measured by the ACT Aspire.

H<sub>0</sub>2: In-school suspension will not affect the math schools of seventh-grade students, as measured by the ACT Aspire.

H<sub>0</sub>3: Out of school suspension will have no effect on the reading scores of seventh-grade students, as measured by the ACT Aspire.

H<sub>0</sub>4: Out of school suspension will have no effect on the math scores of seventh-grade students, as measured by the ACT Aspire.

### **Assumptions**

The researcher utilized seventh-grade students' performance on the ACT Aspire in reading and math to investigate the impact of in-school suspension and out of school suspension on their academic performance. It is assumed that the research methods utilized to obtain data are the best approach in the study. It is also assumed the ACT Aspire, as a high-stakes test, is a reasonable measure of academic achievement of seventh graders in the areas of reading and math.

### **Limitations**

This study is limited in that it only contains one independent variable; suspension. Several additional variables can be considered when looking at impacts on student academic performance. Another limitation is the use of ex facto data from one grade level at the selected school. There are also potential limitations that may be outside of the researcher's control. The participants of this study are selected as an available group within a specific school district; therefore, the information in this study may not be

generalized to other schools or districts in Arkansas. The study may also be affected by time constraints, as well as the inexperience of the researcher in conducting this type of analysis.

### **Delimitations**

Several delimiting factors were used to better focus on the study. Many variables could impact student academic performance, but for the purpose of this study, the suspension is the only variable being investigated. Although the review of the literature suggests a number of demographic variables that may impact student achievement, there was no attempt to investigate or control any specific demographics of the students such as social-economic status, gender, or race. It is important to acknowledge that the study is limited to student achievement in reading and math for approximately 200 seventh-grade students in one school district in Arkansas. Although the review of the literature strongly suggested that transitioning from elementary to middle school appears to impact behavior, there was no attempt to control for this particular variable. Student achievement is defined as a score on the ACT Aspire assessment in the form of scaled scores in the areas of reading and math. The discipline approaches and academic achievement scores were drawn from archived data. These data are limited to the 2017-2018 academic school year.

### **Significance of the Study**

Discipline has been a part of the educational system since schools were developed (Lewis, 1997). There are wide ranges of misbehaviors students display (Deridder, 1990) that lead to disciplinary consequences. These behaviors range from too much talking to not following directions, to fighting. The more severe the misbehavior, the more likely

the behavior is to interrupt classroom instruction (Frazier, 1990). Disciplinary consequences are important to ensure an environment conducive to learning (Lewis, 2001).

Exclusionary discipline sanctions are widespread in the middle school setting. Students are usually impulsive and do not think about consequences during the adolescent years. This misbehavior in the classroom is perceived as a disruption to the learning environment, and the student is often removed from the classroom.

However, research shows exclusionary disciplinary consequences are not effective in correcting unwanted behavior and make the situation worse (Hemphill et al., 2006; Sharkley & Fenning, 2012; Theriot et al., 2010). Students who are excluded from the general education class miss instruction, fall behind, become frustrated, and act out on their frustration (Hemphill et al., 2006; Sharkley & Fenning, 2012; Theriot et al., 2010). Although this approach removed the immediate disruption, the student missed instruction; and, therefore, was unable to participate in the schooling process. According to Skiba et al. (2011), the exclusionary discipline has become problematic because a student's opportunity to stay engaged in instruction within the classroom has been diminished, and this engagement is a significant predictor of academic achievement. Students are still responsible for learning the material and performing at a minimum level of proficiency on high stakes standardized assessments, even when they are not present for instruction.

Typically, students have to be present for instruction in order to learn the content. The suspended students' knowledge of the content is judged equally by assessments taken by students who have not missed instructional time. This study seeks to determine



if there is a cause-effect relationship between school suspensions and student academic performance on a high stakes assessment. This information can impact this profession by encouraging state leaders and educators to provide alternatives to suspension in order to ensure all students have the opportunity to be successful as measured by the ACT Aspire. School district administrators, staff, and students, will also benefit from the information gained from this study, specifically the Little Rock School District Administration team.

Although the immediate results will be instructive for the Little Rock School District Administration Team, the larger focus of this study is significant to the efforts to reform policies in schools that impact students in the public education system (Tomczyk, 2000). Continued research in this area could lead to solutions for problems with, among other things, poor student academic performance and high school dropout rates.

Within the literature available on the issue of increasing dropout rates in public schools nationwide, as well as the impact of zero-tolerance policies on education, there is evidence that supports the need for policy review and reform on a broad scale. There is, however, a paucity of quantitative research that shows definitively whether disciplinary practices such as in school and out of school suspension hurt or hinder student progress because each is also viewed as subjective to other factors that may influence student achievement (Ferguson, 2012).

## **CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

Education reform is not a new issue of concern. It has been a topic of much interest and debate for Americans throughout the years. This massive educational effort has been ongoing for well over 20 years and has been revisited and reinvented more than once (Borman, 2003).

Initially, federal dollars allocated for education were not connected to a rigorous system of accountability that extended directly to schools and the students they served. As more schools began to receive federal dollars, conservative policymakers sought ways to ensure that the flow of federal dollars into public education was coupled to a system that would hold schools accountable for results (Garner, 2006).

To address these concerns, policymakers enacted the legislation titled No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Signed into law by then-President George W. Bush, accountability and expectations for student achievement was propelled to new heights (Williams, 2012). The stated purpose of NCLB was to provide every child with a fair and equal opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach proficiency on challenging state academic achievement standards and assessments (NCLB, 2001).

At the center point of the initiative was state-based assessments, of which states had to administer in order to receive federal funding. Today, the government continues to investigate educator accountability to determine the most effective methods of improving student achievement. However, high stakes testing, initially spawned by A Nation at Risk and Goals 2000 and continued with No Child Left Behind, is seemingly a permanent fixture in schools across the nation (U.S. Government, 2001). These tests have been used

to determine if a student passes to the next grade or if a teacher maintains his/her job (Amrein & Berliner, 2002).

The latest law, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), drops the NCLB mandates that required states to link their teacher evaluation to student achievement test scores and attempts to avoid the pitfalls that made NCLB the basis for disputes over standardized tests (Hunt, 2015). While education reform efforts elude educators and policymakers, the added element of the nexus between student discipline and its effect on student academic achievement continues to be investigated as a possible factor.

Various forms of discipline, such as in school suspension, out of school suspension, and expulsion, have been used to reduce or eliminate student behavior problems (Flannigan, 2007). Often these actions result in students being removed from the classroom, causing them to miss direct classroom instruction. Most states require a minimum number of school days per academic year (Metzker, 2003). Reducing the number of days of direct classroom instruction may result in an adverse effect on student academic performance, as measured by grades and high stakes assessments (Farbman & Kaplan, 2005).

Suspensions, whether in-school or out-of-school, have a long-term effect on the ability of students to comprehend the subject matter, pass tests, and be successful later on in life (Noguera, 2003). A high rate of suspensions appears to lead to a high rate of dropouts (Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, & Rock, 1986). Many times, suspensions are being handed out over minor infractions or too many absences, instead of major disruptive behavior (Imich, 1994; McFadden, Marsh, Price, & Hwang, 1992). Rather than using suspensions as a disciplinary option, it is important to explore alternative methods of

removing disruptive student behavior. In the case of keeping suspensions, in-school suspensions that focus on student emotional learning, as well as academic instruction, may be an acceptable alternative (Short, Short, & Blanton, 1994).

The research by Wu et al. (1982) shows that suspensions lead to lifelong issues for students who continue to struggle. There is also evidence that this is not purely an intellectual issue, but that emotional and social development also matters. Many schools are exploring alternative methods of suspensions, some with more success than others (Short, Short, & Blanton, 1984). By continuing to experiment with alternative methods, data can be collected and examined to determine the best way to assist students while reducing or eliminating disruptive behavior (Short, Short, & Blanton, 1994).

### **Student Academic Performance**

It is common knowledge among educators that school performance suffers due to current punitive practices. Despite this common knowledge, researchers acknowledge that a body of evidence is necessary to back it up. Skiba, Peterson, and Williams (1997) created a meta-analysis of the literature on the subject, in which they examined the effect of suspensions, as well as personal student characteristics that may affect individual cases. Thirty-four studies containing 53 cases were observed to find patterns related to suspension and dropout (Noltemeyer et al., 2015). Student suspension rates rise sharply in middle school (Arcia, 2007), necessitating the need for intervention before students reach high school.

Another group looked at both student characteristics and suspension cases in both the United States and Australia to confirm that there is a relationship between individual factors and rates of suspension (Sheryl et al., 2014). These results are discussed further later on in the paper. Other potential contributors to suspensions include high stakes

testing and bills such as the No Child Left Behind Act, which may be a contributor to the stress that results in teachers assigning more suspensions to disruptive students.

### **No Child Left Behind Act**

No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001) is one of the significant reform initiatives that have guided education since 2002. NCLB, the educational reform proposed by President George W. Bush and passed into law by Congress, aims to decrease the achievement gap between minority groups (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). The reform initiative is based on four principles: (a) accountability for results, (b) more choices for parents, (c) greater local control and flexibility, (d) and an emphasis on scientific research.

NCLB requires all schools (a) to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), (b) be measured by specific standards, (c) provide highly qualified teachers, and (d) use research-based methods to increase academic performance for all students. This legislation also required public schools to administer summative assessments in mathematics and reading for students in grades three through eight (Husband & Hunt, 2015).

Although the intentions behind this act were good, the No Child Left Behind Act placed a stiff focus on standardized testing and punishing students who did not meet performance requirements. These lower-achieving students are often the victims of uncalled-for suspensions (Raffaele, 2001). Critics of the act say that, although it is intended to help students, these students are not given the necessary resources and tools to succeed (Vaughn, 2019). Many schools do not have the money to do this. Because of the robust nature of this act, educators are concerned that more students will end up in

prison due to dropping out. Students who are low performers are encouraged to be placed in alternative schools, when that may not be necessary (Open Society Foundations, 2011). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2006), the No Child Left Behind Act has a positive effect on increasing student academic performance, leaving this act very controversial.

Although there is the flexibility to meet the requirements of NCLB, all students must achieve proficiency within 12 years (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). The passage of NCLB marked a shift from compliance-driven to performance-based accountability in education (Wong, 2008). NCLB mandates annual report cards on academic performance in meeting or failing to meet AYP (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). According to the United States Department of Education (2004), schools that do not make adequate gains for all students are subject to various consequences, including losing federal funding. These adequate gains are measured by standardizing tests.

### **High Stakes Testing**

Madaus and Stufflebeam (1984) explained educational accountability as a system that holds stakeholders responsible for their students' academic performance. Using data from high-stakes tests as an instrument to measure accountability continues to be the preferred model for federal and state education agencies.

In areas of high stakes testing, 34 percent of teachers changed their teaching to focus on areas important to the No Child Left Behind Act, which forced them to abandon curriculum in areas such as social studies and the arts (Dee et al., 2010). In areas of moderate testing, however, only 17% of teachers made these changes (Dee et al., 2010). Importance was not placed on standardized testing until 1983 (Turner, 2009). According to Tourgout (2004), high stakes testing is geared explicitly towards evaluating faculty and

schools to determine positive rewards, such as increased funding, and negative consequences, such as closing down a school. Teachers may be given bonuses, or they may be removed from their position, based on scoring (Amrein & Berliner, 2002). Possible consequences of high-stakes testing places pressure on faculty and staff.

High-stakes testing can be a stressful event. It influences how a teacher shapes curriculum, and it forces students and teachers to spend hours on the actual tests themselves. The testing programs can be very costly, as well (Cordogan, 2014). The stress placed on both teachers and students creates a hostile learning environment, which leads to the use of suspensions in minor cases.

### **ACT Aspire**

The ACT Aspire is a summative assessment that measures student growth in English, mathematics, reading, writing, and science beginning in third grade and continuing through early high school (ACT Aspire, 2016b). Students complete the assessment using paper and pencil or a computer-based format (ACT Aspire, 2016b). The ACT Aspire also monitors college and career readiness (ACT Aspire, 2016b). ACT Aspire was formed by combining academic research along with empirical data to efficiently create an assessment that measured consequences and revealed projected assessment outcomes (ACT Aspire, 2016b). ACT Aspire claims the assessment not only measures student readiness on a college and career path; it also provides educators with instructional assistance, and provides empirical data for accountability (ACT Aspire, 2016b).

ACT Aspire developed performance level descriptors (PLDs) to explain student progress across multiple grades (ACT Aspire, 2016c). There are four PLDs: (a) in need of

support, (b) close, (c) proficient, (d) and exceeding (ACT Aspire, 2016c). Proficient is the cut score that aligns with the ACT readiness benchmark at each grade level (ACT Aspire, 2016c). Performance level descriptors are significant elements involved in establishing standards that identify the minimum requirements for students to show proficiency (ACT Aspire, 2016c). It is suggested that educators use PLDs to differentiate instruction, identify target performance levels, and track student growth and proficiency (ACT Aspire, 2016c).

Scale scores are used to report student performance (ACT Aspire, 2016d). Scale scores begin with 400 and move upward (ACT Aspire, 2016d). ACT Aspire uses a longitudinal scale (ACT Aspire, 2016d). This design collects data over a period of time from the same target population (Wilson & Joye, 2017). ACT Aspire collects data from each cohort from the third grade through the tenth grade and incorporates a scaling system that provides a direct comparison for students at each grade level (ACT Aspire, 2016d).

The average score of the English, mathematics, science, and reading subcategories are used to provide a composite score (ACT Aspire, 2016b). Although the assessment is administered and data collected for grades third through tenth, composite scores are only provided for grades eighth through tenth (ACT Aspire, 2016f).

At the end of this designated period, students are considered well-prepared for understanding how to succeed on the ACT test, often used to determine admissions to college, as well as scholarship opportunities. ACT claims that this test is supported by evidence-based research, and the test also puts a focus on areas beyond math and reading, such as science and writing. There is also a test for social and emotional learning, called



the ACT Tessaera (ACT, 2019). This form of testing appears to be an excellent alternative to high stakes testing, but some schools have found issues with this system: (a) testing stress, (b) poor alignment with state standards, (c) additional costs?

The stress of the ACT Aspire test is noted by students, as well. The five-hour test spends the last 30 minutes, asking students to write an essay with no preparation beforehand. Students find these tests stressful, which may affect academic performance (Pfeiffer, 2014). Some states feel that the ACT Aspire test does not align with the state-based curriculum. Alabama, in particular, saw standardized testing scores unexplainably drop after adopting the ACT suite of tests (Crain, 2017).

### **Student Discipline: History**

Children naturally break the rules in some form as they grow up. Parents infuse appropriate behaviors during the pre-school years, usually from birth to five years old (Sumari, Hussin, & Siraj, 2010). Most students enter the school system in kindergarten at five years old. For the next twelve years, these children will spend five days a week under the supervision of a teacher (Farbman & Kaplan, 2005). Farbman and Kaplan (2005) argue that students may spend more time with teachers than with a parent. The concept of *in loco parentis*, Latin for “in place of the parent,” was common practice in schools across the country. *In loco, parentis* dates back to early American schools (Conte, 2000, p.195). For years, teachers had a similar authority to parents when it came to disciplining students (West’s Encyclopedia of American law, 2008, paragraph 3). Teachers are acting in place of a parent disciplined students at school for misbehavior with corporal punishment (Shmueli, 2010). *In loco parentis* remained the standard through the nineteenth century.

By 1918, all states had compulsory education laws (Dupre, 1996). Compulsory laws led to schools abandoning *in loco parentis* and adopting *parens patriae*, “parent of the nation.” *Parens patriae* is the power of the state to act as a guardian for those who are unable to care for themselves (Wex Dictionary, 2015). Molsbee (2008) says administrators moved away from corporal punishment and moved towards assigning out of school suspension for student misbehavior. *Parens patriae* is what administrators would use to defend removing disruptive students from class; citing disruptive students inhibited the learning of other students on campus.

Goodman (2006) used R.S. Peters’s (1967) definition of discipline as a submission to rules. Goodman (2006) also asserts that discipline is essential to academic performance, embedded in the learning process, and establishes the order in the classroom as a gateway for learning. Children who are behind academically often engage in disruptive behavior, either out of frustration or embarrassment (Hirschi, 1969). Additionally, once students know the rewards of education are not available to them, students have little incentive to comply with school rules (Noguera, 2003).

Disciplinary practices utilized in public schools today resemble the practices used to punish adults in today’s society. Infractions that are considered serious, such as fighting and cutting class, result in excluding the student from the classroom environment. Suspension and expulsion are the standard forms of punishment by schools throughout the United States (Noguera, 2003). Irony exists in the fact that schools punish students that are behind academically by depriving them of instructional time. The following is stated by Noguera (2003):

Schools typically justify using removal through suspension or expulsion by arguing that such practices are necessary to maintain an orderly learning environment for others. The typical rationale given for such practices is that by sorting out the “bad apples,” others will be able to learn. (p. 346)

The public education setting has dealt with student discipline issues since the first public schools opened (Morris & Howard, 2003). Some educators have believed in harsh discipline methods like corporal punishment. However, corporal punishment is no longer acceptable in many public schools. Today, problem behaviors exhibited by students are addressed in schools through school consequences, including verbal reprimands, after-school detention, in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, and fines (Skiba & Peterson, 2000; Sugai & Horner, 1999; Townsend, 2000).

At the center of the school, discipline is an effort to reduce school violence. This effort to reduce school violence has led to the creation of zero-tolerance policies. Zero-tolerance policies were first introduced to the educational system as part of the Gun-Free Schools Act (GFSA, 1990). This act was passed by Congress to address the issue of school violence. This act required schools to implement a zero-tolerance policy that expelled students who brought a firearm on campus for at least one year or lose federal funds that the ESA provided (Martinez, 2009).

The law changed the terminology in 1995 from firearm to weapon (Casella, 2003). Many schools spread the zero-tolerance policy to other incidents and unwanted behavior on top of weapons. Drugs were added to the policy in 1997. After that, (Casella, 2003) reports that administrators began to use zero-tolerance policies as a way to give up responsibility for students with behavior problems.

Martinez (2009) shows that the data available on the effectiveness of zero-tolerance policies indicate an increase in the number of days students are suspended from school. There are mixed opinions on the effectiveness of zero-tolerance policies. Proponents of zero-tolerance policies argue the policy is reserved for students with the most severe unwanted behavior. Martinez argues that school administrators misuse the policy. Research by Skiba and Peterson (1999) suggests that the zero-tolerance policy is often used for students who are first-time offenders and considered good children. In addition, the policy has become a tool that school administrators use to justify the overuse of suspension (Martinez, 2009).

Historically, many forms of disciplinary sanctions such as in-school suspension, out of school suspension, and expulsion have been used to reduce or eliminate student misbehavior (Flannigan, 2007). These actions result in the student being removed from the classroom and not receiving direct classroom instruction. Reducing the amount of direct classroom instruction may result in an adverse effect on student academic performance.

Suspension has been used, to some effect, throughout school history. The prevalence of suspension, however, was not emphasized until the 1970s (Noltemeyer et al., 2015). Since this time, the use of suspensions has increased by over 50%. Much of this statistic is assumed to be resulting from the adoption of zero-tolerance policies (Chu & Ready, 2018). The suspension is defined as a forced absence from school for a short time, whereas expulsion is permanent (Noltemeyer et al., 2015). Growing evidence suggests that this is not effective, however, but causes long-term harm.

In the past 10 years, out of school suspension has been a popular method, but the in-school suspension is gaining ground as a preferred way to suspend students under probation (Noltemeyer et al., 2015). Suspension serves three purposes: (a) to remove students who are causing an issue, (b) to relieve faculty who deal with these individuals, and (c) to bring attention to the individual's parents regarding their behavior issues (Iselin, 2010). Schools with high suspension rates often have other characteristics in common. This can include low graduation rates, high dropout rates, students of low socioeconomic status, and low academic achievement rates. There also seems to be an association with the use of officers in schools with higher rates of punitive action (Chu & Ready, 2018).

### **Suspension**

Not only has it been found that suspension negatively affects student performance, but it has also been discovered that suspension results in an increased risk of dropout (Roderick, 1995). The type of suspension can also affect what occurs. While intended to discourage students from misbehaving, there are some situations where students find the suspension more relieving than daily school life. Further, those with suspensions in sixth grade have lower levels of understanding reading and mathematics at a seventh-grade level (Noltemeyer et al., 2015). Students who face multiple suspensions in middle school often face increased issues in ninth grade and beyond (Balfanz et al., 2014). Addressing this method of punishment begins before middle school years, as early as kindergarten.

The pattern starts early. Children who are suspended three or more times in early education see lower academic achievement in middle school (Dean, 2018). In turn, high

rates of suspension in middle school lead to trouble in high school, which results in dropouts that may lead to incarceration, as evidenced by survey data gathered by the Elementary and Secondary Education Civil Rights Compliance Survey from the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (Losen & Skiba, n.d.).

Because the issue can start early, some schools now ban suspensions below second grade (Division of Student Support, Academic Enrichment, and Educational Policy, 2018), but this still leaves third through fifth-grade students vulnerable. This measure may sound outlandish, but schools in Ohio have changed their policy as well, after 35,000 students in third grade or below were suspended (Kelley & Bischoff, 2018).

One school in Brooklyn saw 44 out of 203 kindergartners, and first graders receive suspensions (PBS, 2015). Although the removal of a disruptive student brings peace to the classroom momentarily, it can have a long-term negative effect on the student who is removed (Wade, 2019). Wade (2019) also noted that student characteristics such as race, socioeconomic status, and gender also affect suspensions.

Denbo (2002) states that another issue with school suspensions is the rate at which they are unevenly applied. If a student is male, black, or from low socioeconomic status, there is a higher chance of being suspended (Denbo, 2002). Not only is this true of certain student types, but it is true of certain school types (Denbo, 2002). For instance, urban schools with a high rate of poverty among students have a higher rate of suspensions, overall. Researchers found multiple cases in previous literature, confirming that suspension does not achieve its goal of motivating students (Denbo, 2002; Flannigan, 2007; Noguera, 2008). One study found that 30,000 students who faced academic

suspension ended in dropout. In truth, suspension often results in academic dropout, and alternative methods of punitive action are required (Noltemeyer et al., 2015).

Potential issues that may affect the effectiveness of suspensions are related to missing classwork, associating with other delinquent students outside of school time, other behavioral or academic issues, not being engaged with the school body as a whole, and other unidentified influences (Noltemeyer et al., 2015).

Other factors can include (a) disorders such as ADHD, (b) parents who are unsatisfied with the school system, and (c) kids reaching older ages (Iselin, 2010). The study between Australia and the United States showed correlations that factor such as (a) being a male, (b) coming from a low socioeconomic background, and (c) having violent tendencies can all result in higher levels of suspension, despite differences between schools and geographic location (Sheryl et al., 2014). Over the 2011-2012 school year, 130,000 students were expelled following disciplinary action (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Roderick (1995) states eight percent of students in the United States between ages 16 and 24 ends up as high school dropouts, meaning they never receive a diploma or a GED (General Education Development). Male students, Hispanic students, special education students, and those with academic or behavioral issues experience higher rates of dropout. Students who do not complete high school run a higher risk of (a) relying on public assistance, (b) facing learning issues in life, (c) falling prey to substance abuse, (c) being incarcerated, and (d) having fewer job opportunities (Noltemeyer et al., 2015).

Although studies are difficult to find on the subject, examining the mean score of a school's academic achievements with its suspension rates reveals a disturbing trend.

Schools with high rates of suspension show lower academic achievement, while schools with low rates of suspension perform better academically (Noltemeyer et al., 2015). This relationship is even true when controls are exercised to eliminate prejudice against black and low-income students (Noltemeyer et al., 2015).

When examining the rate of suspension among African Americans, there is no notable reason in regards to violence or misbehavior that explains why African American children are suspended more often than others (Gregory, Dewey, Cornell, & Xitao, 2011). While disproportionate rates exist for many ethnic groups, this one has the starkest contrast (Iselin, 2010). Three times as many African American males are suspended than whites (Chu & Ready, 2018). When it comes to females, the ratio is six times as many African American females are suspended as other ethnic groups (CASCW Staff, 2018). A study by the University of Pittsburgh's Center on Race and Social Problems recently confirmed many concerns regarding the harmfulness of school suspensions at traditional and charter schools.

Lacoe and Steinburg (2018) found evidence that students who were under suspensions scored lower on tests in that year than when compared to the previous testing. Math scores fell by an average of 2%, but this percentage increases based on the number of suspensions per student. This relationship was also observed when the school conducted an experiment in which some disruptive students were given suspension, while others who were disruptive were not given a suspension. Suspended students scored lower than non-suspended students (Lacoe & Steinberg, 2018). Another recent study in California found similar results with students tested for English, while math scores seemed unaffected (Hwang, 2018).



## **Out-of-School Suspension**

Out of school suspension (OSS) is a disciplinary action that is administered as a consequence of a student's inappropriate behavior. OSS requires that a student absent him/herself from the school for a specified period of time (Morrison & Skiba 2001). Additionally, OSS encourages parents to attend a conference at the school to discuss the misbehavior.

Flannigan (2007) also details that out of school suspension provided a cooling-off period for students who presented a danger to other students and staff. Mendez, Knoff, and Ferron (2002) state that despite the frequency of its use, OSS does not effectively decrease inappropriate behavior or increase school success. Out of school, suspensions keep students away from the learning environment and offer no corrective actions (Billings & Enger 1995). A missed school day is time missed from direct classroom instruction; therefore, it is a lost opportunity to learn (Sheldon, 2007).

Additionally, parents did not support OSS as a punishment for student misbehavior. Parents stated that suspended students lost valuable instructional time when excluded from the regular classroom because of misbehavior (Schachter, 2010). Out-of-school suspensions require students to remain off of school grounds for up to 10 days (Raffaele & Mendez, 2001). Between the years of 2011 and 2012, 3.45 million students received an out-of-school suspension.

Large numbers of suspensions constituted the majority of the research performed by Noltemeyer et al. (2015). One issue with out-of-school suspension is that these students, who are often in need of increased supervision, are going home to places where adults are not around to supervise the students, even outside of normal school hours.

Further worsening the issue is the perception of students that suspensions are handed out too liberally and that these suspensions are “holidays” (Iselin, 2010).

Sixty-nine percent of students in one survey did not find suspension useful, and 32% felt like they would end up suspended more than once (Blomberg, n.d.). In-school suspensions are more likely, but they also carry issues related to student performance and dropout rates.

The math on out-of-school suspensions is astounding. Between the 2015 and 2016 school year, 66 million hours of teaching were lost to these suspensions. That is equivalent to over 63,000 years of learning. Teachers are not entirely to blame here. Between shortages of staff and being overworked, it is easy to see where fatigue can influence classroom management (Vaughn, 2019). The effect then trickles down to the students, who are dismissed instead of encouraged to improve themselves.

When it comes to out-of-school suspensions, there is not much uniformity to be found. The offenses that are committed range from minor disruptive behavior to major violent issues. This variance causes problems when it comes to establishing a baseline for when to use out-of-school suspension over in-school suspension (Blomberg, n.d.), as well as removes students from a structured environment who may need the benefits of said environment.

Forty-nine percent of students who receive three or more suspensions before high school ends up dropping out of high school (Gee, 2013). In order to prevent economic downfall later in life, it is important to keep students in school.

Not everyone agrees that out-of-school suspensions are bad, however. Anderson et al. (2017) found out of school suspensions can have a slightly positive impact or a

statistically insignificant negative impact. Based on the data reviewed from six years of collection, using out-of-school suspensions does not seem harmful in these cases. The researchers admit that other items of importance, however, may matter in terms of using suspension (Anderson et al., 2017). For example, the use of suspension does not treat the psychological root of a student's issues, which may lead to more behavioral issues in the future (Breen, 2017). In-school suspension is another method schools use.

### **In-School Suspension**

According to Garmin and Walker (2010), extensive due process rights made assigning out of school suspensions a tedious process. These due process rights prompted administrators to consider other consequences that would avoid due process requirements (Garman & Walker, 2010).

In-School Suspension (ISS) was the answer to due process. In-school suspension (ISS) is a discipline model where a student is removed from the classroom and required to stay in a specific area designated by the school administrator for a variable length of time from one part of a day to several days in a row (Gootman, 1998). Whitfield and Bulach (1996) state that ISS is viewed as an option before resorting to out of school suspension.

In school, suspension is widely accepted by parents and teachers as an acceptable and effective method of discipline (Whitfield & Bulach, 1996). Parents embraced ISS because it allowed students to remain academically involved on campus, and it ensured students served their consequences in a controlled educational environment (Molsbee, 2008).

According to Garrett (2013), keeping students in a school where they could learn benefited everyone- students, parents, and the community at large (p.30). Following this rationale, schools made concerted efforts to keep disciplined students on campus and engaged in academic content (Skiba, 2014). These findings are in contrast to out of school suspension where the student is removed from the learning environment and may be unsupervised.

With in-school suspension, students are placed in a separate classroom for up to a full day. During this time, the student still completes classwork and other assignments. This approach prevents the student from missing out on education while simultaneously inducing punishment by avoiding socialization with peers and participate in activities.

Between 2011 and 2012, 3.5 million students received an in-school suspension (Noltemeyer et al., 2015). The negative effect of in-school suspension is less than that of out-of-school suspension, but it does still exist (States et al., 2015).

While schools rely on in-school suspension more than out-of-school suspension for appearance purposes, a student undergoing in-school suspension still does not receive direct instruction from a teacher during this time. Students who face in-school suspension often suffer decreases in reading comprehension, as well as the ability to pass tests.

Suspensions do not seek to fix the issues a student is facing but instead seek to occupy the student in solitary busy work (Williams, 2012). Even if suspensions are kept as a disciplinary method, it is important to make this time constructive and scheduled.

Williams (2012) studied 1,630 students in a suburban school and revealed that most in-school suspensions were a result of excessive tardies or minor rule infractions, while more severe infractions resulting in out-of-school suspensions. This study also had

data supportive of the assertion that African Americans, students of low socioeconomic status, and male students were disproportionately assigned suspensions. Information for the following findings was gathered by a Williams' literature review. While males constituted 79% of the in-school suspensions, females only made 11% of this group. It was noted that this district, previously top-rated for its high academic achievements, went down in achievement as suspensions went up. There were also increases in enrollment, diversity, and students of low socioeconomic status (Williams, 2012). The changes in enrollment led to changes in punitive actions.

The school in this study by Williams (2012) was a prime example of what happens as struggling students attempt to work their way through the school system. Many of these students needed personal guidance when it came to personal and academic behaviors. Often, however, teachers begin to rely on the "relief" that suspension can bring, instead of addressing the root problem. By helping these students to develop emotionally, teachers can help these students advance academically, as well (Williams, 2012). Williams concluded that suspensions, as a form of disciplinary action, were not working. Williams stated the system must be changed, or alternative methods must be used.

Despite the many educators insisting that suspensions are associated with negative incomes, there is little quantitative evidence to back this up or examine the effect of alternative methods (Noltemeyer et al., 2015). A study by Iselin (2010) performed in North Carolina recognizes that even though 30 years of data has been gathered, interpretation only started in 2010. Iselin (2010) indicates that findings localized to this area may not extend to others. Schools with higher rates of suspension spend more on

each student, while schools with lower rates display higher rates of attendance (Iselin, 2010). There are many alternatives to consider when looking to replace suspensions or change how suspensions are used.

One way to lower the amount of suspensions is to focus on a positive reward system (Williams, 2012). This approach can be a proactive system that rewards all students, or it could be a system that restores freedoms for students who have lost privileges. By instituting positive behavior reinforcement, a friendlier ambiance is restored to the schools, and teachers have a way to make a positive impact on the life of a student. By enabling a student to feel self-actualized, schools prepare students for success in learning and life (Williams, 2012). Other changes to the school can be helpful, as well.

Williams (2012) also found that changing the social climate of a school may lead to fewer suspensions. Though important to the ability to learn, emotional awareness, and self-discipline are concepts not covered in school. It is necessary for schools to find ways to promote these concepts, as well as properly equip teachers. Teachers with terrible classroom management skills rely more on school suspensions than others (Williams, 2012). While it is important to focus on intellectual intelligence, social learning, and emotional intelligence are also vital portions of learning that are often overlooked (Williams, 2012).

Emotional intelligence and social learning are how one develops the ability to work with others and develop meaningful relationships. Since many disruptive behaviors have been learned, or are symptomatic of deeper issues outside of school, it is important in today's climate to teach a child how to properly manage his/her emotional intelligence and overcome these disruptive behaviors (Williams, 2012). This emotional intelligence

encourages future success and prevents children from falling behind in academic comprehension.

According to Noltemeyer et al. (2015), the many outcome variables that may play a role in the relationship between suspension and dropout need to be better examined. Studies need to exist that examine the potential impact that race, gender, and socioeconomic status may have on the rate of suspension and the rate of dropout. Although a study exists that controlled for these factors, more is needed to rule out any existing issues due to these factors. In the existing literature, there is a strong absence of noting research gaps, as well as no data on whether in-school suspension may be a better alternative than out-of-school suspension (Noltemeyer et al., 2015).

One alternative method that may assist in lowering unwanted behaviors would be to provide warm environments while at school. Fifty-five percent of students in one survey admitted to being angry at the person who suspended them (Blomberg, n.d.). Studies in North Carolina show schools that are clean and well-kept have lower rates of suspension (Iselin, 2010). There may be an inference here that a district that has well-kept schools has a staff that cares about the students as individuals and encourages them, but further study in this area is needed to draw such conclusions. Another way to lower suspensions is by encouraging healthy relationships between students, as schools with high suspension rates often have high rates of student hostility towards other students. This perspective also applies to relationships between students and faculty (Iselin, 2010), further confirming that it is worth researching the effect of a caring faculty on student misbehavior. It may also be useful to loosen codes of conduct within reasonable levels, as stricter schools experience higher rates of suspension (Iselin, 2010).

A “one-size” approach will not solve this situation. Each school must examine its individual needs and issues to decide which alternative method will work best (Iselin, 2010). This examination provides an excellent opportunity for pioneering different methods for other schools to try implementing. Each program needs to have prevention built in to avoid the necessity of disciplinary action. Training staff in conflict resolution and cultural awareness may also help the situation (Iselin, 2010). To truly treat disruptive students effectively, a focus must be put on climate.

Some schools are experimenting with restorative justice, where students work out issues standing in a circle, over punitive action (Washburn, 2019). Surveys conducted by the researchers showed a decline in punitive actions and an increase in a friendly school environment. Although there is concern that the impact is not felt as strongly at the middle-school level, the research was limited and needs to be conducted further (Augustine et al., 2018). A school in Oakland has applied restorative justice with limited success, hoping that the program will continue to show a positive change in the future (Yusem et al., 2014). One group applied practical consequences to misbehaviors.

In one school, a student who ripped up a textbook was not given a suspension. Instead, the faculty looked up the cost of the book, as well as standard minimum wage, and had the student work around the school to earn the cost of the new textbook. Having experience with the group “Boys Town,” which helps troubled youth, workers realized that their students needed emotional, intellectual development, and new ways to handle issues. The difference in suspension rates was a noticeable improvement (Fink, 2019). California saw improvement after instituting workshops informing educators of



alternative methods to suspension (Loveless, 2017). As of 2015, many states are beginning to recognize the importance of finding alternatives.

This fight cannot be left entirely up to the schools, however. Parental involvement is also key. One school has started to encourage parents to eat lunch with their kids on-campus once a month to help strengthen familial bonds (Lambert & Reese, 2015).

Students face much stress, both in the classroom and outside of it, from areas such as bullying, social media, trauma, substance abuse, and more (Smith, 2018). Parents are the front line between their children and these issues. Maintaining a healthy relationship is vital.

Children are impressionable, and setting them up for failure will only encourage the pattern to continue. It is important to teach them how to manage impulses and behaviors instead (Build Initiative, n.d.). Empathy is a powerful tool when attempting to improve the life of students. A study in California showed a drastic decrease in suspended students between teachers who completed an exercise in empathy and those who did not (Underwood, 2016). Only by instituting programs of empathy and positive reinforcement can the disruptive behavior slowly change into self-management.

### **Theoretical Framework**

John Carroll synthesized learning theory research into his Model of School Learning. The model describes the components that determine the effect of instruction on learning (Carroll, 1963, Carroll, 1989). According to Carroll's Model of School Learning (Carroll, 1963, Carroll, 1989), five elements contribute to the effectiveness of instruction (a) aptitude, (b) ability to understand instruction, (c) perseverance, (d) opportunity, and (e) quality of instruction. Aptitude refers to the students' ability to learn. Ability to

understand instruction refers to the students' knowledge of prerequisite skills needed to understand instruction. Perseverance refers to the number of times students are willing to spend actively participating in the learning process. Opportunity refers to the amount of time available for learning. Quality of instruction refers to the effectiveness of the instructional delivery.

Carroll combined the elements, as mentioned above, into a model focusing on time as the key factor in opportunities to learn (OTL). OTL was coined in the 1960s and conveyed the idea that students' learning in schools is a result of the opportunity and time they spend engaged in learning (Carroll, 1963). The five elements described above contribute to either time needed to learn or time spent in learning. Carroll (1963) stated that the degree of learning could be described as a ratio between (a) time needed to learn and (b) time spent on learning.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of school suspension on the student academic performance of middle school students on the ACT Aspire. Carroll's theory (1963) concentrates on the use of time and learning and emphasizes the importance of students being successful learners if there is sufficient time spent on what is to be learned. Opportunity to Learn, a component of Carroll's model, conveys the idea that a student's ability to learn is based on opportunity. Both suspensions and poverty hinder that opportunity. Specifically, suspensions keep children out of the classroom and impact their ability to engage with academic material (Arcia 2006). Keeping students out of the classroom and keeping students from engaging with academic material affect their opportunity to learn.

## **Summary**

Zero tolerance policies as they relate to student discipline have equipped school administrators with the power to exclude students from the learning environment for displaying unwanted behaviors. Students assigned to in-school suspension and out of school suspension are removed from direct classroom instruction. Although these students are removed from direct classroom instruction, students are still expected to show proficiency in the mandated summative assessment. The ACT Aspire is the summative assessment used by Arkansas public schools to measure student academic performance (ACT Aspire, 2016b).

Often, a student who is suspended over minor disruptive behavior or tardies requires guidance. By teaching these students self-discipline, proper management of emotional intellect, and social learning skills, teachers and staff can enable students to succeed. A student disciplined with sitting in quiet and working on handouts falls behind his or her classmates. This falling behind causes the student to have issues passing tests or classes, which can hold more significant consequences down the road. Many students who drop out do so after multiple suspensions. These students will not have as many career opportunities or may even end up in jail. By using alternative methods to suspension, children can learn to avoid risky behavior without suffering long-term consequences that prevent them from succeeding later in life.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of in-school suspension and out of school suspension on the student academic performance of seventh-grade students on the ACT Aspire. This chapter will outline the methodology used in this study. In this chapter, the participants, research design, procedures, instrumentation, data analysis, and ethical considerations will be presented.

### **Participants and Sampling**

There are about 590 students enrolled in general education classes in grades six through eight in the selected middle school. Of these 590 students, 201 were enrolled in sixth grade, 194 were enrolled in seventh grade, and 195 were enrolled in eighth grade. Of the students enrolled, 83% were African American, 13% were Hispanic, 3% were white, and 1% identified as other (Arkansas Department of Education, 2017).

Convenient stratified sampling was used to compare seventh-grade general education students who received an in-school suspension, seventh-grade students who received an out of school suspension, and seventh-grade students who did not receive a suspension during the 2017-2018 school year. The ACT Aspire reading and math scores of the seventh-grade students who did not receive any suspension served as a baseline to compare the impact on the achievement of those seventh-grade students who did.

Although many variables may influence academic achievement and be related to standardized test scores, such as the demographics of gender, race, SES, family make-up, as well as age, none of these characteristics were stratified for the purpose of control. The variables of interest of this study were: (a) types of suspensions of students, (b) no suspensions, or (c) both types of suspensions received.

## **Research Questions**

The following Research Questions were addressed in this study.

1. What effect will in-school suspension have the reading scores of seventh-grade students, as measured by the ACT Aspire test?
2. What effect will in-school suspension have on the math scores of seventh-grade students, as measured by the ACT Aspire test?
3. What effect will out of school suspension have on the reading scores of seventh-grade students, as measured by the ACT Aspire test?
4. What effect will out of school suspension have on the math scores of seventh-grade students, as measured by the ACT Aspire test?

## **Hypotheses: Stated in the Null**

H<sub>0</sub>1: In-school suspension will have no effect on the reading scores of seventh-grade students, as measured by the ACT Aspire.

H<sub>0</sub>2: In-school suspension will have no effect on the math schools of seventh-grade students, as measured by the ACT Aspire.

H<sub>0</sub>3: Out of school suspension will have no effect on the reading scores of seventh-grade students, as measured by the ACT Aspire.

H<sub>0</sub>4: Out of school suspension will have no effect on the math scores of seventh-grade students, as measured by the ACT Aspire.

## **Research Design and Method**

This casual-comparative study attempted to identify the impact of in-school suspensions and out of school suspensions on the student academic performance of seventh-grade students. Because there were four groups of seventh graders being tested (in-school, out of school suspension, no suspension, both in-school and out-of-school), an

Analysis of Variance ANOVA) was employed to analyze the data. Statistical significance was established at an alpha level of  $p < .05$  for accepting or rejecting the null hypothesis.

This study used an *ex post facto* research methodology in which analyses were conducted on a convenience sample using archived discipline data, and archived ACT Aspire data. The sample population consisted of seventh-grade general education students during the 2017-2018 school year that received in-school suspension or out-of-school school suspension as a disciplinary sanction. It also included seventh-grade students that did not receive a suspension as a disciplinary sanction. Kerlinger (1986) defined the *ex post facto* design as follows:

*Ex post facto* research is a systematic empirical inquiry in which the scientist does not have direct control of the independent variables because their manifestations have already occurred or because they cannot be manipulated. Inferences about relationships among variables are made, without direct interventions, from a concomitant variation of independent and dependent variables (p. 520).

Because this study used *ex post facto* data, the independent variables cannot be manipulated or controlled. Researchers consider this a disadvantage because the results are only able to suggest possible explanations for impact (Field, 2009; Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007).

## **Procedures**

The researcher contacted the selected district's testing coordinator by email to request permission to conduct research in the district. Student academic performance data on seventh-grade students from the selected school will come from the ACT Aspire. The ACT Aspire data was obtained at the district level from the Data Specialist. After

permission was granted to run the study, the researcher requested the archived 2017-2018 ACT Aspire data in reading and math and the 2017-2018 discipline data from the selected school from the district's Data Specialist. Once the data were provided, the researcher coded the data on an interval scale and entered the data into SPSS for analysis. For this study, there were four independent variables: (a) in-school suspension, (b) out of school suspension, (c) no suspension, and (d) both in-school and out of school suspension. The Arkansas Department of Education data center will provide the school demographic data. No other variables related to academic achievement were considered for this study.

### **Measurement and Instrumentation**

The ACT Aspire was administered to all general education students during the 2017-2018 school year. The ACT Aspire is an achievement test and is designed to measure student growth in a longitudinal assessment system (ACT Aspire, 2016a). However, the investigation was not a longitudinal study; therefore, the scores were not used to determine academic growth. Rather the scores were used to make comparisons. These comparisons provided some indication of the impact of the three suspensions on academic achievement as defined as scores on a standardized test. The ACT Aspire generates data in the form of scaled scores for each of the content areas. It was these scaled scores that were analyzed regarding academic achievement. The researcher obtained in-school suspension data and out of school suspension data for the 2017-2018 school year that was included in the School Information System (SIS).

### **Data Analysis**

An Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to compare the scaled scores for the ACT Aspire tests in Reading and math between seventh-grade students who received (a)

an in-school suspension, (b) seventh-grade students who received an out of school suspension, (c) seventh-grade students who did not receive a suspension, and (d) seventh-grade students who received both an in-school suspension and an out of school suspension. An alpha level of  $p < .05$  was used to accept or reject the hypotheses and address the research questions. ACT Aspire student performance data in reading and math from the selected school's Student Information System (SIS) for the 2017-2018 school year was entered into SPSS for analysis. In-school suspension data and out of school suspension data for the 2017-2018 school year for seventh-grade students were also entered into SPSS for analysis.

### **Ethical Considerations**

No harm was done to any participants in the study. The researcher agreed to conduct the study with respect and concern for the welfare of the participants involved. The researcher also acknowledged the responsibility for ensuring the ethical practices research. These data are archived data. All disclosures were made available, and the identities of participants were protected at all times. Permission to conduct this study was granted by the superintendent of schools.

### **Summary**

High-stakes testing required the U.S. Department of Education and state boards of education to measure teacher performance through student academic performance on standardized tests (Carroll, 2008). This mandate did not take into consideration other factors that could impact student performance. Students are responsible for learning the materials that are presented, even if they are not present for direct instruction. Exclusionary discipline such as in-school suspension and out of school suspension



remove students from the instructional setting and deprive them of the opportunity to receive direct instruction over material they will be tested over on the ACT Aspire. For this reason, this study focused on the impact of in-school suspension and out of school suspension on the academic performance of seventh-grade students in reading and math on the ACT Aspire.

This casual-comparative research study was not an actual experiment because the data were examined after the fact and the independent variables were not controlled in any way. The archived data from the 2017-2018 school year were provided by the Data Specialist in the district of the selected school. The data included archived ACT Aspire scores in reading and math from the 2017-2018 school year and discipline data from the 2017-2018 school year. The study used an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to determine if there are statistically significant differences between the four groups of students to identify the impact of various levels of suspension on their academic achievement. An alpha level  $p < .05$  was used to accept or retain the null hypothesis.

## **CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this quantitative causal-comparative study was to determine the effects of different types of suspension on the academic achievement of middle school students. For this study, academic achievement was defined as ACT Aspire scores in reading and math of seventh-grade students. To determine these effects, this study examined the following questions.

### **Research Questions**

1. What effect will in-school suspension have on the reading scores of seventh-grade students, as measured by the ACT Aspire test?
2. What effect will in-school suspension have on the math scores of seventh-grade students, as measured by the ACT Aspire test?
3. What effect will out of school suspension have on the reading scores of seventh-grade students, as measured by the ACT Aspire test?
4. What effect will out of school suspension have on the math scores of seventh-grade students, as measured by the ACT Aspire test?

### **Hypotheses: Stated in the Null**

H<sub>0</sub>1: In-school suspension will have no effect on the reading scores of seventh-grade students, as measured by the ACT Aspire.

H<sub>0</sub>2: In-school suspension will have no effect on the math schools of seventh-grade students, as measured by the ACT Aspire.

H<sub>0</sub>3: Out of school suspension will have no effect on the reading scores of seventh-grade students, as measured by the ACT Aspire.

H<sub>0</sub>4: Out of school suspension will have no effect on the math scores of seventh-grade students, as measured by the ACT Aspire.

### Data Analysis

An Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was employed to address the four research questions and test the four Null hypotheses of this study. The ANOVA was used to identify the effects of the four different types of suspensions (In-School, Out-of-School, Both suspensions, and No suspensions) on the academic achievement (defined as scaled scores generated from the ACT Aspire in the areas of math and reading. An alpha level of  $p < .05$  was used to identify statistical significance. This information is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

*A Comparison between Suspension Types and Academic Achievement of Middle School Students*

Aspire Scores	ISS (n=18)		OSS (n= 35)		None (n=91)		Both (n=42)		<i>F-ratio</i>	<i>p</i>
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
Reading	<sup>a</sup> 415.33	5.24	415.80	5.22	417.0	5.73	417.29	7.33	.801	.495
Math	416.17	4.16	417.11	5.17	417.51	5.59	417.24	5.06	.332	.802

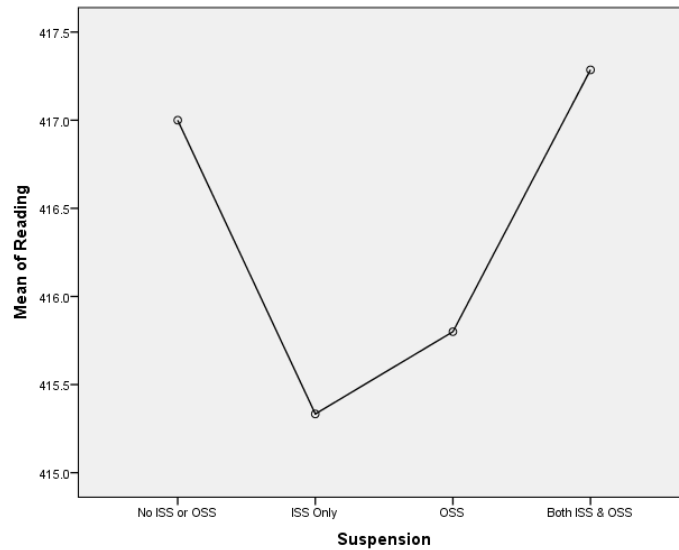
*Note:* ISS = In-School Suspension, OSS = Out-of-School Suspension, None = No Suspensions, Both = Both ISS and OSS

<sup>a</sup>The data are presented in scaled scores generated from the ACT Aspire Exam.

The data indicate there were no statistically significant differences between the four types of suspensions. Those students who received no suspensions had the highest mean scores in math (M=417.51) and the second-highest mean scores in reading

( $M=417.0$ ). Those students who had both suspensions had the highest mean scores in reading ( $M=417.29$ ) and the second highest mean score in math ( $M=417.4$ ). Based on the data presented in table 1, the four research questions have been addressed, and the four null hypotheses have been retained.

To provide a visual perspective of the data presented in Table 1, two figures are presented below:



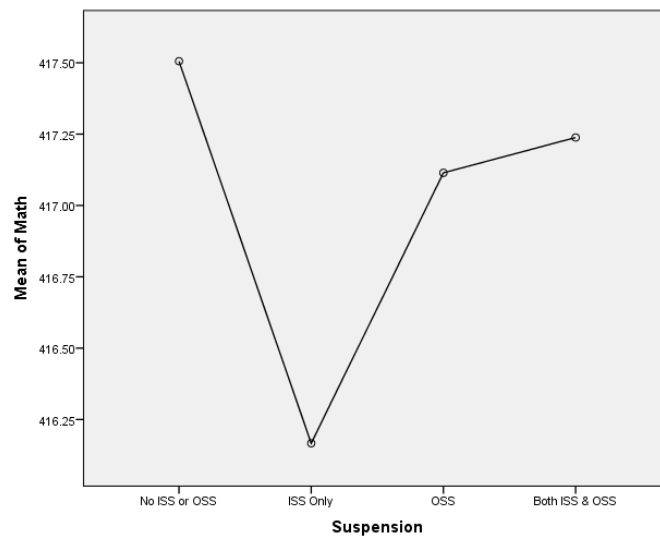
*Figure 1. Means Plots of Reading Scores by Types of Suspensions*

*Means and Standard Deviations of the Impact of Suspension on Student Academic Performance in Reading*

<i>Subject</i>	<i>Groups</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
<i>Reading</i>	<i>ISS</i>	415.33	4.24	18
	<i>OSS</i>	415.80	5.22	35
	<i>Both ISS and OSS</i>	417.29	7.33	42
	<i>No ISS or OSS</i>	417.00	5.73	91

For reading, students who received No ISS or OSS the mean score ( $M = 417.51$ ,  $SD = 5.58$ ) was higher than students who received ISS only ( $M = 416.17$ ,  $SD = 4.16$ ), OSS only ( $M = 417.11$ ,  $SD = 5.17$ ). However students with Both ISS and OSS were higher than the other three suspensions. ( $M = 417.24$ ,  $SD = 5.05$ ).

Although *Figure 1* suggests extreme differences between the mean scores in reading between the ISS only and the Both ISS & OSS, it should be noted that these differences represent only 1.96 mean scores apart.



*Figure 2. Means Plots of Math Scores by Types of Suspensions*

*Means and Standard Deviations of the Impact of Suspension on Student Academic Performance in Math*

<i>Subject</i>	<i>Groups</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
<i>Math</i>	<i>ISS</i>	416.17	4.16	18
	<i>OSS</i>	417.11	5.17	35
	<i>Both ISS and OSS</i>	417.24	5.05	42
	<i>No ISS or OSS</i>	417.51	5.58	91

For math, students who received No ISS or OSS, the mean score ( $M=417.51$ ,  $SD\ 5.58$ ) was higher than students who received ISS only ( $M=416.17$ ,  $SD = 4.16$ ), OSS only ( $M=417.11$ ,  $SD = 5.17$ ), and Both ISS and OSS ( $M=417.24$ ,  $SD\ 5.05$ ).

Although *Figure 2* suggests extreme differences between the mean scores in math between the ISS only ( $M=416.17$ ) and the No ISS and OSS ( $M=417.51$ ), it should be noted these differences represent only 1.34 mean scores apart.

### **Summary**

Using a quantitative design the purpose of the current study was to determine the impact of In-School Suspension (ISS), Out of School Suspension (OSS), Both In School and Out of School (ISS & OSS), and No In-School Suspension or Out of School Suspension (No ISS or OSS) on the reading and math ACT Aspire scores for seventh grade students.

The data revealed no statistically significant differences in the four types of suspensions and the corresponding math and reading scores. These data analyses have addressed the research questions, and the four tested null hypotheses were retained.

Chapter 4 presented the analysis of an ANOVA to determine if these four suspensions types had an impact on the mean math scores and mean reading scores generated from the ACT Aspire. Chapter 5 Conclusions, Discussions, and Recommendations will include a discussion of the results in light of existing literature, implications for future research and practice, and a discussion of limitations.

## **CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Introduction**

This chapter will examine the results of the findings in Chapter 4. There will include a brief introduction, a discussion and summary of the results, and conclusions. Finally, this chapter concludes with recommendations for future research. The purpose of this study was to determine the effects of different types of suspension on the academic achievement of Middle School Students.

A growing body of research is emerging in the literature that questions the impact of student discipline on academic achievement. One factor that is considered when investigating this issue is the impact of exclusionary disciplinary policies resulting in lost instructional time, which can negatively impact academic performance. According to Whisman and Hammer (2014), these research studies provide evidence of a link between school discipline practices—especially the use of suspensions—with lower academic achievement. These researchers further purport that the level of disciplinary involvement also has a strong negative relationship with the ability of students to achieve. This premise is further detailed in research studies conducted by Gonzalez (2012) and Jones (2013), who concluded that exclusionary discipline practices increased student discipline problems because excluded students eventually returned to classes and found themselves academically behind the students who were present for instruction. While the existing body of literature is growing on the question of the effect of disciplinary measures on academic performance, the results of these investigations are not conclusive.

This study, an examination of the impact of different types of suspension on the academic achievement of Middle School Students, sought to determine if In-School

Suspension (ISS), Out of School Suspension (OSS), both In School and Out of School Suspension (ISS & OSS) and No In-School Suspension or Out of School Suspension (No ISS or OSS) will affect the reading and math scores of seventh grade students as measured by the ACT Aspire test. This study was motivated by the assumption that out of classroom and out of school time affects student learning. It was further assumed that direct instruction from the classroom teacher would enhance students learning; and therefore, suspensions would have a negative impact on student achievement.

This study was designed and conducted to determine the effect of different types of suspension on the academic achievement of Middle School Students.

### **Research Questions and Answers**

The study included seventh grade Middle School students who took the ACT Aspire test during the 2017-2018 school year. The study investigated the effects of different types of suspension on the academic achievement of Middle School Students.

The research questions were:

1. What effect will in-school suspension have on the reading scores of seventh grade students, as measured by the ACT Aspire test?
2. What effect will in-school suspension have on the math scores of seventh grade students, as measured by the ACT Aspire test?
3. What effect will out of school suspension have on the reading scores of seventh grade students, as measured by the ACT Aspire test?
4. What effect will out of school suspension have on the math scores of seventh grade students, as measured by the ACT Aspire test?



The results of the data analysis found that there were no statistically significant differences between the four types of suspensions. Those students who received no suspensions had the highest mean scores in math ( $M=417.51$ ) and the second-highest mean scores in reading ( $M=417.0$ ). The students who received no suspensions were regularly present to receive direct instruction in a classroom setting from a certified teacher.

Based on the literature review and these results, it can be concluded that students' academic performance on standardized tests math is higher when the students are presented with the opportunity to learn without exclusionary discipline. When instructional time is reduced through in-school suspension or out of school suspension, it seems probable to assume academic progress will be hindered. Those students who had both suspensions had the highest mean scores in reading ( $M=417.29$ ) and the second highest mean score in math ( $M=417.4$ ). These results were surprising. Taking a look at possible explanations for these results lead to an in-depth examination of the in-school suspension program. Students are supposed to receive their daily assignments. In the event a student does not have assignments to work on, they are allowed to read a book. Twelve minimum hours of reading for each in-school suspension a student is assigned is a possible explanation for these results.

## **Discussion**

### ***Limitations of the Study***

This study was limited to seventh grade middle school students in the Little Rock School District that were assessed with the ACT Aspire test in reading and math during the 2017-2018 school year. This study was further limited by the investigation on seventh-

grade students only and may well have had some variances in outcomes when researching the impact of In-School Suspension (ISS), Out of School Suspension (OSS), both In School and Out of School Suspension (ISS & OSS) and No In School Suspension or Out of School Suspension (No ISS or OSS) on the reading and math scores of students in all grades, sixth, seventh, and eighth in Middle Schools in the District.

### ***Recommendations***

Evidence from this study has implications for policy initiatives regarding training and technical assistance to staff on positive discipline approaches and alternatives to out of classroom time and out of school time. The school should develop a school-wide discipline plan that includes the following (a) school-wide behavior expectations, (b) teaching the behavior expectations, (c) correcting problem behavior, (d) analyzing discipline data, and (e) sustaining the discipline plan. This school-wide plan should also include alternatives to ISS and OSS and be included in the School Improvement Plan.

Based on results from this study, more accountability from teachers is recommended as it relates to ISS. Academic instruction time should not be hindered when students are placed in In-school suspension. The integrity of instruction should be preserved through direct instruction from a certified teacher. As it currently stands, classroom teachers send assignments to the ISS instructor, and the ISS instructor gives the assignments to students. If the teacher does not provide any assignments, the students are allowed to work on digital learning alternatives such as ST Math and Exact Path. These digital programs provide students a personalized learning path based on their personal scores from a given assessment. At the current time, there is nothing in place to track how much time students are spending on digital programs or how often students are

completing the assignments provided by the classroom teachers. It is recommended that classroom teachers prepare lesson objectives, provide assignments, and make them available to the designated ISS instructor. The instructor should provide direct instruction and hold the students accountable for the assignments. Assignments should be turned in to the ISS instructor, and the instructor should be responsible for returning the assignments to the regular teacher.

The out-of-school suspension protocol for assignments depend on the number of suspensions the student has incurred. The first suspension guarantees the student the right to receive make-up assignments. The subsequent suspensions do not guarantee the opportunity to receive assignments. The decision is left up to the teacher. It is recommended that students who receive an out-of-school suspension are always guaranteed the opportunity to receive their assignments. Every student has access to an Ipad, and digital learning should be provided when necessary. The decision to afford a student education should not be left up to a classroom teacher, but instead guaranteed at all times.

As policymakers develop and implement regulations aimed at improving student achievement, conclusions are drawn from the evidence in this study, which found no statistically significant differences in the four types of suspensions, and the corresponding reading and math scores should be considered. Future researchers may want to consider the following factors when looking at the impact of suspensions on student academic performance: (a) the academic abilities os students who have received an ISS or OSS sanction, (b) mental health issues, and (c) lack of direct instruction. Further research needs to be done on the elementary, middle, and high school levels on the impact of

suspensions on student academic performance. Although the rationale of suspension is to provide a productive learning environment to the remaining students, removing students from the classroom and school is likely to lower the academic performance of the suspended students. Therefore, more research that investigates ways to deter disruptive behavior and restorative practices will provide important implications for schools.

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