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# **EDUCATOR PERCEPTIONS OF SUSPENSION AND SUSPENSION ALTERNATIVES**

A thesis submitted to  
the Graduate College of  
Marshall University  
In partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of  
Education Specialist

In  
School Psychology  
by

Jori Williams

Approved by

Dr. Lanai Jennings, Committee Chairperson

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Marshall University  
May 2019

## APPROVAL OF THESIS

We, the faculty supervising the work of Jori Williams, affirm that the thesis, *Educator Perceptions of Suspension and Suspension Alternatives*, meets the high academic standards for original scholarship and creative work established by the School Psychology and the College of Education. This work also conforms to the editorial standards of our discipline and the Graduate College of Marshall University. With our signatures, we approve the manuscript for publication.



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## **ABSTRACT**

Research shows that suspension can have a negative impact on public school students' academic and behavioral outcomes. To better understand how educators view the impact of suspension and the efficacy of suspension alternatives on student outcomes, 149 public school educators were surveyed from diverse academic departments and programmatic levels in a western North Carolina county. Findings indicate that although participants generally did not perceive suspension to be effective for improving behavioral outcomes, educators were more likely to endorse suspension for students without disabilities compared to students with cognitive or emotional-behavioral concerns. Educators in the survey perceived Social Emotional Learning to be the most effective intervention for students with a cognitive or emotional-behavioral disability, while Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support was perceived as the most effective strategy for non-disabled students. Overall, educators in the participating county provided higher ratings of efficacy for supportive practices (e.g., Mental Health Counseling or Social Emotional Learning), than punitive practices (e.g., In-School or Out-of-School Suspension) in promoting student outcomes. However, more research is needed due to limitations with the present sample.



## CHAPTER 1

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The American public education system serves a variety of purposes in the lives of children. One of its primary purposes is to provide a positive school climate that facilitates learning for every student. In fact, each state is required to set forth procedures for maintaining safe and supportive schools and disciplinary procedures to provide consequences for inappropriate behaviors. In addition to maintaining safety, it is the collective responsibility of school faculty members to implement disciplinary practices to maintain order in the classroom while simultaneously improving student outcomes (Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, 2015).

As a way to maintain order, schools implement disciplinary procedures to instruct children on the rules about proper conduct in a society (Trojan, 2003). While disciplinary procedures can reduce immediate undesired behaviors or show children that it is unacceptable to break rules, many of these practices can have negative outcomes. Specifically, some disciplinary procedures negatively impact students' academic achievement and interpersonal skills (Skiba, Horner, Choong, Rausch, May, & Tobin, 2011). School disciplinary procedures can be either inclusionary or exclusionary. Typically, schools utilize exclusionary methods (e.g., in-school or out-of-school suspension) to discipline students who engage in disruptive, aggressive, or violent behaviors (McGinnis, 2003). Though it is important to discipline students who violate rules, it is widely recognized that disciplinary practices such as suspensions are overused in public school settings (Freeman & Freeman, 2016). Removing a disruptive student from class may decrease immediate classroom distractions; however, not all individuals benefit behaviorally or academically through an exclusionary discipline method. If a student's behavior does not pose a

threat to others, how can educators both address the student's misconduct while maintaining classroom supports? While exclusionary procedures are the most widely used procedures in public school systems, there are more supportive alternatives that promote learning and increase student behavioral outcomes.

### **Positive School Climate**

When students feel safe, valued, and at-ease in an environment where they can interact with caring individuals they trust, a positive school climate exists (Borkar, 2016). The safety and positivity of a school's climate can have an effect on the way that students achieve academically as well as how they develop individually. Research suggests schools that successfully create environments conducive to learning tend to implement more supportive and positive school climate strategies (*Safe and Positive School Climate*, 2008). According to the Council for Exceptional Children, schools should implement policies which ensure a safe learning environment that contributes to each student's academic, cognitive, social-emotional, and ethical development (*Safe and Positive School Climate*, 2008). One major goal of all public-school administrators should be to provide every student with a safe and positive place to learn and grow individually.

While a positive school climate helps to foster students' success, it can also be advantageous for educators' level of satisfaction in the workplace. Research shows that disruptive behaviors in the classroom make it difficult for students to learn and achieve and are a source of work-related stress for teachers (Närhi, Kiiski, & Savolainen, 2017). In fact, student misconduct and teacher-student interactions influence teacher burnout experiences (Grayson & Alvarez, 2008). Results from one study emphasize the significance of promoting a positive school climate to minimize educators' experiences of work-related stress and enhance retention

of school staff. Specifically, this study recommended that schools consider implementing positive behavioral interventions and supports to promote an environment conducive to positive outcomes for students and teachers (Saeki, Segool, Pendergast, & von der Embse, 2018).

### **School Discipline**

Not only is school discipline meant to establish order, it is also expected to keep students safe and remediate any misbehaviors (Peguero & Bracy, 2015). Toward this end, schools have a wide range of disciplinary practices that vary from parent/student conferences all the way to expulsion. However, school discipline is often implemented in a zero-tolerance manner, which involves rigid or strict enforcement of the rules to punish all misconduct regardless of the specific scenario and mitigating circumstances such as a child's age, disability status, and/or reason for the offense. Moreover, the consequences are often unnecessarily severe at times given the level of student offense. As previously mentioned, a common type of punishment for misbehavior is school exclusion (e.g., suspension and expulsion), which is meant to enforce student compliance with school standards (Skiba & Peterson, 2003). Many schools began placing students with inappropriate behaviors out of the classroom in response to the potential threat of violence (Peguero & Bracy, 2015). Research has shown that exclusionary discipline practices may have a negative impact on student attendance, performance, and dropout rates (Gage, Sugai, Lunde, & DeLoreto, 2013). Likewise, zero tolerance procedures such as suspension are connected to involvement in the juvenile justice system and eventually prison (Mallett, 2016). While inappropriate behaviors should not go unnoticed, educators should be aware of how their responses to misconduct can affect student success in school.

**Out-of-School Suspension (OSS).** According to the U.S. Department of Education, schools must ensure that the consequences for disciplinary incidents are developmentally

appropriate and proportionate to the offense. Furthermore, the U.S. Department of Education asserts that removing students from the classroom should only be used as a last resort (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Though schools have several disciplinary procedures that can be used, out-of-school suspension (OSS) is one of the most widely utilized methods in the American public education system (Lee, Cornell, Gregory, & Xitao, 2011). This exclusionary approach can be enforced for a variety of reasons. One study asserts that out-of-school suspension is enforced to decrease the behaviors of students who engage in violence, drug abuse, or other criminal activities on school grounds (Taras et al., 2003). Nonetheless, there are numerous occasions when students are removed from school for minor offenses that do not involve violent behaviors (Bruns, Moore, Stephan, Pruitt, & Weist, 2005). Out-of-school suspension is also a behavioral outcome for truancy (Gage et al., 2013). If a student is not engaging in behaviors that result in damage to another person or another person's property, then it might be beneficial for educators to consider alternate methods before suspending or expelling students. Many children actually prefer being sent home from school, which may only intensify the behavior concerns (Bruns et al., 2005). Students with this kind of mindset may engage in certain activities to get them out of having to attend school. Thus, suspending some students may not be perceived as a form of punishment and may not contribute to molding their misconduct into prosocial behaviors.

Another major disadvantage of OSS is that students cannot be expected to learn and perform at the same rate as their peers. When students are banned from attending school, it is easy for them to fall even further behind in their classwork. Suspension from school can last up to as many as 10 days (Gibson & Haight, 2013). Missing that many days of school, without being permitted to make up assignments or receiving teacher supports on assignments, is

detrimental to a student's ability to learn. Students should be able to stay in school or be a part of a program that permits them to continue learning. Zero tolerance policies that involve school exclusion for students who do not pose a threat to another's safety likely increase risks of negative outcomes for the student, school, and community (Teske, 2011). School administrators must work together to find effective ways to improve student behaviors before sending them home, unless that student poses a threat to others. Suspension or other exclusionary discipline practices may be necessary and appropriate for students who engage in dangerous conduct (e.g., making threats or fighting) or engage in drug and alcohol abuse (Robinett, 2012).

**In-School Suspension (ISS).** Another exclusionary procedure that is typically enforced in an attempt to minimize undesired behaviors is in-school-suspension (ISS). This type of disciplinary action is a common result of behaviors such as: vocalizing inappropriate words in class, talking while the teacher is providing direct instruction, or not following basic classroom rules (Trojan, 2003). Truancy can also result in in-school suspensions (Gage et al., 2013). Students who engage in disruptive behaviors are generally removed from class due to the disruption of the learning process of the other students. In-school-suspension requires students to do the same homework and assignments that their peers complete. The problem lies within the fact that students are not able to participate in group activities or have their questions answered properly by their teachers. Trojan (2003) claims that "the passing rate of students in ISS is much lower than that of their classmates" (p. 1638). If a student is unable to actively participate in activities that pertain to their assignments, it makes sense that they may fall behind their peers. Similar to out-of-school suspension, in-school suspension may remove a student who is causing distractions; however, this student still has a right to a high-quality educational experience. Not only does in-school suspension limit students' educational supports, it also fails to provide

behavioral supports and monitor students' progress (Morris & Howard, 2003). One study found that educators generally perceived ISS to be an ineffective approach without providing academic supports and counseling services to improve student behaviors and academic success (Rimes, 2012).

### **Negative Outcomes of School Suspension**

**Impact of School Suspension on Student Academic and Behavioral Outcomes.** As previously noted, school suspension adversely impacts students with behavioral difficulties. Specifically, one problem is that suspension does not produce long-lasting effects for changes in behavior (McGinnis, 2003). Schools should regularly evaluate the effectiveness of any program or intervention that they use, especially when it can impact a student's future. In the case of school suspension, it does not teach students specific replacement behaviors. Instead, suspension primarily communicates that their actions violated a rule. The same way that we teach children to read, so it should be for teaching appropriate classroom behaviors. Children should be explicitly instructed by parents, teachers, or other school officials on skills and strategies that will engender long-term, prosocial, behavioral outcomes.

Moreover, school suspension is connected to academic failure and dropout rates. In fact, academic failure is one of the risk factors that serves as a reason why some high school students drop out of school (Noltemeyer, Marie, McLoughlin, & Vanderwood, 2015). All students, including students with behavioral concerns, should have the opportunity to benefit from the public education system. Research shows that many individuals who make the decision to drop out of school likely already have a record of school suspension (Noltemeyer et al., 2015). Whether it is in-school or out-of-school, students with a history of suspension fall significantly behind their peers academically. Some populations of students are more prone to dropping out

than others. One study found that African-American students are two times more likely to drop out than White students (Haight, Gibson, Kayama, Marshall, & Wilson, 2014). When youth drop out of school prematurely, it can result in negative outcomes. Some examples of these negative outcomes include: substance use, unemployment, imprisonment, and depending on government living assistance (Noltemeyer et al., 2015).

Public school students drop out for a variety of reasons. According to Balfanz, Fox, Bridgeland, and McNaught (2009), there are four main categories of reasons for student dropouts: life events, fade outs, push outs, and failure to succeed in school. Students in the push outs category are often viewed as low achievers or have serious behavioral concerns that may lead to suspension. Support for students who are suspended is vital to helping them stay on track toward graduation (Balfanz et al., 2009). Public schools should be willing to do whatever it takes to help students stay in school and live up to their full potential.

In order for students to be expected to acquire knowledge and behave more appropriately, they should remain in school and participate in programs that develop important skills (e.g., problem-solving, emotional regulation, or critical thinking). Suspending students will remain ineffective until school faculty help children get to the root of their behavior concerns (Dickinson & Miller, 2006). Children who have a history of suspension from school should not be repeatedly suspended without being taught skills to improve their behaviors. Seeking out alternatives to excluding students from the academic setting may help reduce public school dropout rates.

**Legal Implications of School Suspension.** Along with negative impacts on student outcomes, school suspension has legal implications. Public school children should not be deprived of their rights to an education. In fact, the United States Supreme Court has established

that students have a property right to government-provided education (Troyan, 2003). The primary example of education provided by the government is the public-school system. If a state denies a student of their property right to this kind of education, it may result in issues of due process (Troyan, 2003). The majority of students who are disciplined through zero tolerance policies do not pose threats of danger to their peers or school staff (Mallett, 2016). Suspending a student from school, who is not a threat to others, limits positive experiences in their rightful educational environment. As mentioned earlier, truancy is one of the reasons for school suspension (Gage et al., 2013). To put it into perspective, many students are suspended, or banned from school, for being absent from school on a regular basis.

**School Suspension and Disproportionality.** Not only are there negative and legal implications of school suspension, research shows that there is disproportionality in the population of students who are suspended. Specifically, research suggests that minority students and students with disabilities are more likely to be suspended than anyone else (McGinnis, 2003). Suspension can be detrimental to the achievement of students with disabilities and lead to further marginalization (Kline, 2016). Research suggests African-American students have a significantly higher risk of being suspended from school than other students. Another study determined that males and youth from lower socioeconomic backgrounds also have a high risk of school suspension (Noltemeyer et al., 2015). Why is it that certain groups of students seem to be suspended more than other populations? A possible answer to this question is that school professionals have referral biases (Teske, 2011). Sometimes school officials perceive the conduct of certain ethnic groups to be more aggressive or defiant (Anyon et al., 2014). Educators must intently examine the disciplinary practices that are being implemented in order to transform the disparities in discipline outcomes (Kline, 2016). Likewise, educators should be properly trained



to prevent student conflicts and provide behavioral supports for diverse populations of students, and to avoid discrimination in the administration of disciplinary procedures (U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

**School Suspension and Mental-Emotional Health.** In addition to legal implications, issues with disproportionality, and increased academic difficulties and dropout rates, school suspension can have a negative impact on students' mental and emotional health. Students who have been identified with a mental or emotional disorder are less likely to succeed when subjected to zero tolerance policies such as suspension and expulsion. Such policies fail to recognize unrefined skill sets that are linked to a student's ability to regulate emotions and resolve conflicts (Teske, 2011). Students with early onset antisocial behaviors are frequently suspended and expelled from school. These children may experience difficulty establishing and maintaining friendships (Carroll, Sanders O'Connor, Houghton, Hattie, Donovan, & Lynn, 2017). Social-emotional concerns should be addressed, as they can impact a child's academic success and way of life (Ballard, Sander, & Klimes-Dougan, 2014). When students are provided social-emotional and mental health supports in school, the need for administrators to utilize suspensions and expulsions can be reduced (Pediatrics, 2003). While not all students require explicit social skills instruction, research suggests that all students need social skills instruction at some point in their lives (Skiba & Peterson, 2003).

### **Alternatives to School Suspension**

Even though school suspension is very common in the public education system, educators should be aware of alternative methods that promote positive student outcomes. As the research indicates, removing a student from class may temporarily decrease the amount of disruptions but may not necessarily improve the student's behaviors or academic achievement.

School professionals should consider both of these factors when making decisions about suspending students. However, educators should not allow unacceptable behaviors go unpunished. Rather, school administrators should consider that taking students away from their primary learning environment may negatively impact the student. Although it is difficult to provide an exhaustive list of all alternatives to suspension due to the numerous programs and supports, some alternatives to school suspension include: Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS), Restorative Justice Practices, Alternative to Suspension (ATS) Programs, Mental Health Counseling, After-School Detention, Social Emotional Learning, Behavior-Focused Alternative Schools, and Functional Behavior Assessments and Behavior Intervention Plans.

**Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS).** First, one of the many alternatives to suspending students is Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS). Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support is a type of intervention often incorporated through a school's Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) process. SWPBS aims to use practices that benefit every student, regardless of ethnicity or race (Tobin & Vincent, 2011). This model is composed of a three-tiered system of behavioral interventions: primary, secondary, and tertiary. Each tier has a different level of intensity to correspond with certain target behaviors (Cohen, Kincaid, & Childs, 2007). The primary tier of SWPBS is meant to meet the needs of 80% of students, which is the majority of the school's population. Students on this level do not have significant conduct concerns. In the secondary tier of SWPBS, the needs of approximately 15% of students are met. Students on this level did not adequately respond to the primary tier, which means they need to be assessed and provided with more serious interventions. Lastly, the tertiary tier of SWPBS meets the needs of 5% of students. Students on this level have the most severe behaviors and need more prescriptive interventions (McGinnis, 2003).

SWPBS is a proactive approach that provides students with instruction on appropriate behaviors, unlike suspension (Morrissey, Bohanon, & Fenning, 2010). Simply communicating to children that their behavior is inappropriate or removing them from school may not be enough to make an actual change behaviorally. Many students with behavioral concerns are labeled as “bad” kids and are asked to stop when they engage in inappropriate behaviors. However, there is a lack of instruction on what they should do instead. Research shows that appropriate behaviors should be taught explicitly to students, if teachers truly desire to be effective in the classroom. When teachers create, instruct, monitor, and emphasize a small number of positively structured classroom expectations, students and teachers are provided observable and measurable examples of appropriate conduct (Magsuga-Gage, Simonsen, & Briere, 2012).

Aggression Replacement Training (ART) is a component of Positive Behavior Support. ART has been implemented in all three tiers of the PBS interventions continuum. Research suggests that ART programs help students learn important skills, manage anger, and improve moral reasoning (McGinnis, 2003). ART can be implemented during a regular school day. Students may be assigned to attend ART training instead of one of their regularly scheduled electives. ART intervention programs can even be offered in the evenings to students who have already been suspended for engaging in violent conduct. In situations in which the student has already been suspended for fighting, parents are required to accompany their child to learn what skills should be reinforced (McGinnis, 2003). ART teaches students the multiple triggers that lead to aggression (e.g., external and internal factors). Not only are students taught what these triggers are, they are also provided with specific instruction on how to respond when certain triggers arise in class or in the hallway. Students are directly taught replacement behaviors, rather

than to stop engaging in aggressive behaviors. Training students to replace aggression with other behaviors produces more long-term effects than school suspension.

**Restorative Justice Practices.** Another suspension alternative, which can be implemented alongside School Wide Positive Behavior Support, is Restorative Justice. The purpose of Restorative Justice practices is to decrease suspensions for students who exhibit defiant behaviors or other types of misconduct, while increasing positive school climates. Restorative Justice practices include: Tier I methods for community-building within the school; Tier II methods for repairing harm from interpersonal conflict; and Tier III methods for reacclimating students who have been suspended, expelled, or truant (Hashim, Strunk, & Dhaliwal, 2018). Bullying and aggression can also be addressed through this increasingly popular approach (Song & Swearer, 2016). Students are held accountable for their conduct and are provided opportunities to learn and grow within the educational environment. With these types of programs in place, students can share their perspectives on situations. Other restorative interventions may involve peace-making circles, conferences, or mediation (Mayworm, Sharkey, Hunnicutt, & Schiedel, 2016). School administrators should be moving in the direction of establishing community in schools as well as solving problems directly within that environment (Varnham, 2005). Restorative Justice can address student misconduct without the use of exclusionary discipline procedures. Based on the findings of a meta-analysis, individuals who participate in restorative programs demonstrate a decreased number of offenses and find satisfaction in the restorative process (Latimer, Dowden, and Muise, 2005).

**Alternative to Suspension (ATS) Program.** An Alternative to Suspension program is a specific intervention that allows students and their parents to choose this option instead of being suspended from school. Results from one study indicated the effectiveness of an ATS program in

a junior high school. This school's ATS program unified a student's family and school faculty to meet the individual's needs. It aimed to: address target behaviors in the same settings in which they occur, increase student motivation in the classroom, and collaborate with the student, the student's caregivers, and the student's teachers to determine how to improve the individual's learning environment (Dilling, 1979). The ATS program lasted the same amount of days as a typical suspension would last. It was held in the junior high school's counseling office.

The program included class periods with certified teachers (different than the student's usual teachers), opportunities for parental involvement, and individual or group counseling sessions. As a way to avoid unsupervised interactions with the rest of the school's student body, students who chose to be a part of this program (instead of being suspended) were instructed to go immediately to the counseling office in the mornings and to leave the premises as soon as the program ended in the afternoon. Students in the program for longer periods of time, were given chances to slowly regain privileges, such as going to one or more of their regular classes (Dilling, 1979). Students who participated in the ATS program had the opportunity to keep up with assignments from their regular classes, which might not have been the case if they had been suspended. This program also helped students have a more positive view of themselves and school than they did prior to attending the program (Dilling, 1979). Alternative programs such as the one previously mentioned seek to help motivate students as well as improve both behaviors and academics. Results from the aforementioned ATS program suggested that it was effective for the students who participated (Dilling, 1979). A similar ATS program was implemented in a study involving students at a Midwest high school. The program included themes such as: parental involvement, faculty support, and improvements in students' behavioral and social skills. Additionally, a curriculum plan to support incoming high school freshmen was developed

to address both academics and behaviors through interventions and other types of support (Stovall, 2017).

**Mental Health Counseling.** Mental health concerns can adversely impact a students' academic success and social skills (Weeks, Hill, & Owen, 2017). Public schools have an opportunity to encourage positive student behaviors, identify target behaviors early, and implement efficient behavior interventions. Mental health counseling can provide these opportunities for students (Bruns et al., 2005). When faced with disciplinary procedures such as suspension, direct counseling should be an option that is provided to students who would benefit from it. Counseling strategies may include: individual, group, or peer counseling (Morris & Howard, 2003). Traditional disciplinary practices have not proved to be successful in lowering misconduct; therefore, educators need to implement more therapeutic interventions (Walter, Lambie, & Ngazimbi, 2008). There are various mental health counseling strategies that can be provided to students such as: Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Bibliotherapy.

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is an effective, evidence-based intervention that identifies the relationship between an individual or group's cognition, emotion, and behavior (Weeks et al., 2017). One important aspect of CBT is helping children understand automatic and alternative thoughts. Specifically, children learn to become aware that thoughts affect emotions, which in turn, impact behavior (Squires, 2006). CBT is frequently implemented to help individuals work through anxiety, depression, or other mood disorders (Weeks et al., 2017). CBT sessions can also provide supports for students who experience post-traumatic stress or oppositional-defiant behaviors (Joyce-Beaulieu & Sulkowski, M, 2015). For students with a significant history of disciplinary referrals including In-School and Out-of-School Suspensions,

CBT has been successful in increasing self-regulation, anger-management, or conflict-resolution skills and decreasing suspensions (Joyce-Beaulieu & Sulkowski, M, 2015).

Oftentimes, school administrators fail to include students who are at-risk with the rest of the academic community. Reading intervention programs aim to include these students, so that their struggles with academic success do not result in significant misconduct (Schreur, 2006). Reading group programs focuses on building students' level of literacy, ability to think critically, as well as ability to regulate emotions during tense circumstances (Schreur, 2006). During times when reading intervention groups meet, students are given books to read that relate to their individual struggles. Once students read the books, they are able to contribute to a group discussion about the characters' struggles. While students discuss what happened with the story characters, it provides them with an opportunity to think critically about themselves (Schreur, 2006). In order for reading group programs to be effective, students should be assured that the group is a safe zone and they can freely share. Additionally, it is key to make the materials interesting to the students. If students are not engaged, then they may not want to participate in the reading group.

One specific type of reading intervention is Bibliotherapy. This involves helping students face issues that may arise through the use of books. Children have the opportunity to read a variety of materials that can help them think critically about their own individual situations. During Bibliotherapy sessions, students are taught that there are multiple ways to solve a problem. Explicit instruction on how to effectively solve problems is particularly important for students who are easily frustrated and tend to engage in inappropriate behaviors as a result. The goal of Bibliotherapy is to help students identify the main factors that contribute to target behaviors. Addressing these causes makes Bibliotherapy sessions therapeutic (Schreur, 2006).

Bibliotherapy sessions can take place during the normal school day or after school in a classroom. In order to maintain effective sessions, facilitators must provide students with positive praise, establish a set of expectations for the sessions, as well as monitor group discussions. Evidence suggests that this kind of therapy has numerous positive effects such as: helping students realize that they are not alone in their struggles, increasing critical thinking and literacy skills, and improving classroom conduct. Targeting a student's behaviors while improving their academic performance makes Bibliotherapy an effective alternative to school suspension (Schreur, 2006).

**After-School Detention.** Rather than immediately resorting to suspension, many schools have After-School Detention programs in place. Detention may require a student to stay in an undesirable room for a fixed amount of time outside of the school day, during recess, or during lunch (Fluke, Olson, & Peterson, 2014). Ashworth et al. (2008) maintained that "school detention is a punitive and ineffective way to change behavior" (Ashworth et al., 2008, p. 22). After-School Detention is meant to be a less restrictive method of discipline than suspension that may be used when students violate school rules. When given detention, students should not be deprived of academic instruction (Public Counsel, 2013). In fact, the After-School Detention room should be a serious environment where students are expected to complete their most difficult classroom assignments. Teachers who give After-School Detention to a student should provide work for the student to complete (Rosen, 2005). Not only should After-School Detention avoid depriving students of academic instruction, educators should also be careful not to deny the student's protected social interactions (Public Counsel, 2013). Though After-School Detention is an alternative to suspension disciplinary practice, research regarding its efficacy is limited.



**Social Emotional Learning (SEL).** Another suspension alternative that is available to educational institutions is Social Emotional Learning (SEL). SEL programs are preventive approaches that help students develop a wide variety of skills. Some of the skills that students develop through these SEL programs are: emotion management, responsible decision-making, maintaining positive relationships, and how to handle difficult situations effectively (Weissberg, Resnik, Payton, & O'Brien, 2003). Studies have shown that students who complete SEL programs increase their prosocial behaviors and decrease misbehaviors (Skiba, Shure, Middleberg, & Baker, 2011). Through SEL programs, students are able to become more self-aware and connected to their peers without being removed from the academic setting.

Conflict Resolution training is an element of social-emotional learning that is used to help decrease physical aggression. Physical violence is one of many reasons why students are suspended from school. There are numerous ways to teach conflict resolution as a replacement behavior that involve keeping students in the educational environment. One study found that a particular Conflict Resolution Training program, Alternative to Suspension for Violent Behaviors (ASVB), was effective in reducing the number of times students engaged in fighting at school (Breunlin, Cimmarusti, Bryant-Edwards, & Hetherington, 2002). The ASVB program is a type of secondary prevention that aims to teach students thinking skills as well as social problem-solving skills (Breunlin et al., 2002). This training helps students to recognize that there are indeed alternatives to fighting. One component of ASVB training is parent training. This component is essential because family beliefs about conflict can affect the way a student solves their own problems.

Another component of ASVB training is mediation, which begins with the realization that conflict is often inescapable and also damaging when it is not addressed properly. The

mediator helps students negotiate until they develop a resolution that works well for both parties and excludes fighting (Breunlin et al., 2002). Students need to be instructed on how they can try talking through their issues with another person instead of immediately resorting to physical violence. In order for mediation to be applied, students must first be instructed on how to actively listen and take other people's perspectives into consideration. It is easy to resort to violence when two individuals fail to understand each other's viewpoints. The Alternative to Suspension for Violent Behaviors was initially intended to help reduce fighting; however, it can be beneficial for children who are suspended for other behaviors (Breunlin et al., 2002).

**Behavior-Focused Alternative Schools.** Another alternative to suspension is a behavior-focused alternative school. Alternative schools exist for students who have significant behavioral concerns along with low academic achievement. The purpose of these schools is to address behavioral issues that have contributed to why students had difficulty succeeding in the traditional public education setting (Wilkerson, Afacan, Perzigian, Justin, & Lequia, 2016). Specially, students are able to receive specialized curriculum that meets their academic, emotional, behavioral, social, and mental needs. Since the population of students who attend alternative schools is lower than traditional schools, the student-to-teacher ratio is smaller. In other words, students in alternative schools tend to have more access to teachers and mental health professionals (Wilkerson et al., 2016). School administrators who work in alternative settings are trained to demonstrate unconditional acceptance and empathy to students even when the student is engaging in inappropriate classroom behaviors (Edgar-Smith, & Palmer, 2015). Behavior-Focused Alternative Schools are effective in decreasing dropout rates by providing at-risk students the supports they need to succeed in the educational environment (Franklin, Streeter, Kim, & Tripodi, 2007).

**Functional Behavior Assessment and Behavior Intervention Plan.** Another way educators can address misbehaviors is through the use of Functional Behavior Assessments (FBAs) and Behavior Intervention Plans (BIPs). Under the 1997 and 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), FBAs and BIPs are mandated components of multidisciplinary evaluations and Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) for students whose removals constitute disciplinary change of placements (Dieterich, Snyder, & Villani, 2017). FBAs involve identifying the purpose and function of a student's problem behaviors, while a behavior intervention plan is a concrete strategy to decrease problem behaviors (Zirkel, 2011). A student who displays chronic misconduct and is unresponsive to intervention may need the supports from an FBA. The concluding step in the FBA process is the BIP, which may consist of teaching replacement behaviors or reinforcing replacement behaviors (Collins & Zirkel, 2017). Rather than being implemented primarily as a disciplinary procedure, FBAs and BIPs are used to evaluate challenging behaviors. Effective FBA and BIP planning may reveal patterns of less severe behaviors before they develop into behaviors that require more intensive or restrictive interventions (Dieterich et al., 2017). Though only a portion of students with disabilities currently have FBAs and BIPs, school administrators may want to consider implementing FBAs for students without disabilities who are at risk of an emotional-behavioral disorder (Scott et al., 2004). In sum, the previously mentioned suspension alternatives demonstrate there is a plethora of resources available to improve students' behaviors and promote academic success.

### **Overview of Present Research and Research Questions**

Each state is required to set forth procedures for maintaining safe and supportive schools and disciplinary procedures to provide consequences for inappropriate behaviors. In addition to

maintaining safety, it is the collective responsibility of school staff to implement disciplinary practices to maintain order in the classroom while also improving student outcomes (ESEA as Amended by ESSA). Given the widespread use of exclusionary discipline practices and the negative impacts that it can have on student outcomes, it is important to determine educator perceptions of school suspension. Likewise, it is necessary to gain educators' perspectives on suspension alternatives in order to make systems level changes that will ultimately benefit students academically, behaviorally, socially, and emotionally. The current study aims to examine educator perceptions of the efficacy of school suspension and suspension alternatives on behavior, academics, and social skills of students with and without disabilities. There are various factors that may contribute to educators' decisions to implement or not implement a behavioral intervention (Elliot, 2017). According to Thomas & Grimes (2008):

Individuals are most likely to judge an intervention as acceptable if they have been provided with information about the effectiveness of an intervention. Individuals are also more likely to judge an intervention as acceptable if the description of the intervention they are provided with is pragmatic and does not use jargon. Acceptability has also been found to be higher for positive rather than for reductive treatment procedures, and interventions for more severe behavior have been rated as more acceptable than those applied to milder behavior problems (p. 805).

Research questions for the current study are listed below:

1. When presented with suspension and suspension alternatives, will educators differentially perceive overall effectiveness of suspension and alternatives based on a student's ability or emotional-behavioral concerns?
2. Will educators provide higher ratings of efficacy for supportive practices than punitive practices in promoting social-emotional-behavioral and academic outcomes?
3. How often do educators perceive suspension and suspension alternatives to require too much time, effort, or personnel?

## CHAPTER 2

### METHOD

#### Participants

Participants in this study included 149 educators (e.g., school psychologists, principals, teachers, social workers, etc.) from various public schools in a rural western North Carolina county (n = 149). The researcher developed an online survey through Survey Monkey. Participants received a link to the questionnaire via email. Participation was voluntary and responses were anonymous. Approximately 86.58% (n=129) of all respondents were female, while 13.20% (n=20) of the remaining respondents were male. The average age of participants was 42.15. The youngest participant was 23 years old, while the oldest was 62 years old. The median and mode for participant age was 43 and 42 years respectively. Approximately 96% of educators in the sample were white-Non-Hispanic. The remaining 4% of respondents were Asian, Black/African-American, Hispanic, Native American/Alaskan, or other. Approximately 60.14% (n=89) of the respondents were general educators, while 10.14% (n=15) were special educators. Additionally, the following groups participated in the survey: school counselors, social workers, principals. Other support staff such as school psychologists, behavior specialists, reading/English Language Learner (ELL) specialists, media coordinators/specialists, instructional coaches, central office administrators, and assistant principals participated in the survey. The support staff groups contained only 2-5 respondents each. For example, school psychologists consisted of 2.03% of respondents, and behavior specialists consisted of 1.35% of the sample. Participants in the survey worked at a variety of programmatic levels. A little over half of all participants, or 51.01% , work at the elementary level, 36.91% work at the high school level, and 33.56% work at the middle school level. There was overlapping data within the

programmatic level demographic responses, as many of the educators in this county work at more than one school. The average participant has served 15 years as an educator. The participant with the least number of years as an educator noted that they began their career during the current school year (i.e., new teacher as of this year), whereas the most experienced teacher had been employed for 38 years. Approximately 42.28% (n=63) of respondents earned a bachelor's degree. Over half, or 54.36% (n=81), of educators earned a master's degree as their highest degree. Approximately 3.35% (n=5) of respondents have earned a specialist or doctoral degree.

The county in western North Carolina who participated in the survey is a predominately rural location. There are 27 schools in the county. Of the 27 schools, 15 are elementary schools, 4 are middle schools, and 4 are high schools. The remaining schools provide education for multiple programmatic levels. Each year in this county, the central office administrators and behavior specialists provide new educators with a Safe & Civil Schools classroom behavior intervention training called CHAMPS. CHAMPS is an acronym for Conversation, Help, Activity, Movement, Participation, Success. In addition to basic demographic information and questions tied to the rest of the research questions, participants were asked to provide information about their behavioral management experience. The researcher found that 67.33% believe they had a moderate amount of experience; 30.00% believe they had a great deal of experience in behavior management. Very few teachers had no experience at all. CHAMPS training may explain why there are so few teachers who reported having limited experience in behavior management in the participating county. Approximately 77.33% of individuals perceived the existing strategies at their school to only be somewhat effective.

## **Instruments**

The researcher developed a 17-item questionnaire focused on educator perceptions of the effectiveness of school suspension (e.g., in-school suspension and out-of-school suspension) and suspension alternatives. Specifically, the questionnaire inquired about how teachers perceive the effectiveness of suspension or alternatives for different groups of students (i.e., students with cognitive disabilities, students with behavioral-emotional disabilities, and students without disabilities). The survey consisted of multiple choice, scale range, open-ended, and matrix questions. Participants were also provided brief descriptions of the two types of suspension and eight suspension alternatives previously mentioned (i.e., Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support, Alternative to Suspension Programs, After-School Detention, Social Emotional Learning, Behavior-Focused Alternative Schools, Mental Health Counseling, Restorative Justice Practices, and Functional Behavior Assessment and Behavior Intervention Plans). See Appendix B: School Suspension Perspective Questionnaire for more information about the survey developed for this study.

Participants were asked how often they would recommend suspension or an alternate method for students with cognitive disabilities, students with behavioral-emotional disabilities, and students without identified disabilities. Respondents were asked how often they believe that certain procedures or interventions would promote social-emotional-behavioral outcomes and produce academic benefits for students. Educators who participated in the survey were also asked to rate how often suspension or an alternative to suspension would require too much time, effort, or personnel to be effective. The ratings were on a scale of zero to two. A score of zero represented “not often,” a score of one represented “somewhat often,” and a score of two represented “very often.” This questionnaire has face validity, meaning it is readable, feasible, has clear wording, and has an easy-to-follow style and layout.

## **Procedures**

The present study analyzed teacher perceptions of the effectiveness of suspension and suspension alternatives on behavior, academics, and social skills for students with cognitive disabilities, students with behavioral-emotional disabilities, and students without disabilities. The researcher developed a 17-item questionnaire that was emailed to educators in all public schools in a western North Carolina county. Each of the participating educators were provided with the same questionnaire developed by the researcher (see Appendix B for more information on the School Suspension Perspective Questionnaire). The online survey was available for voluntary and anonymous participation for two weeks. The researcher did not investigate individual student records or other confidential information; therefore, permission from parents and students was not necessary.

## **Analysis**

The present study used descriptive statistics to compare educator perceptions of school suspension and suspension alternatives on various populations of students' behavior, academics, and social skills. First, the researcher exported responses from the Survey Monkey questionnaire to Microsoft Excel. Next, the data was transferred to Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to render Pearson Chi-Square results.



## CHAPTER 3

### RESULTS

**Research Question 1:** When presented with suspension and suspension alternatives, will educators differentially perceive overall effectiveness of suspension and alternatives based on a student's ability or emotional-behavioral needs?

As indicated in Table 1: Overall Recommendation, respondents endorsed Social Emotional Learning as the intervention they would “very often” recommend more frequently than any other interventions for students with cognitive and emotional behavioral disorders or disturbances. Approximately 60.40% of respondents rated they would “very often” recommend SEL for students with cognitive disabilities, while 64.63% would “very often” recommend SEL for students with emotional-behavioral disabilities. For students without an identified disability, Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS) was perceived to be the intervention that participants would “very often” recommend overall. Approximately, 54.36% of respondents most often recommended SWPBS. In short, participants perceived that Social Emotional Learning would be most effective for students with a cognitive or emotional-behavioral disability, while Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support was perceived to be the most effective behavioral intervention for students without an identified disability.

Overall, respondents rated they would “not often” recommend Out-Of-School Suspension (OSS) for students with a cognitive disability, emotional-behavioral disability, or no identified disability. Approximately 76.51% of participants would infrequently recommend OSS for students with a cognitive disability, while 63.76% would infrequently recommend OSS for students with an emotional-behavioral disability. For students without an identified disability,

43.62% of respondents would infrequently recommend Out-of-School Suspension. For more information, review Table 1: Overall Recommendation.

Table 1  
*Overall Recommendation*

<u>Intervention/Disciplinary Practice</u>	<u>Not Often</u>			<u>Somewhat Often</u>			<u>Very Often</u>		
	<u>Student with Cognitive Disability</u>	<u>Student with EBD</u>	<u>Student without Disability</u>	<u>Student with Cognitive Disability</u>	<u>Student with EBD</u>	<u>Student without Disability</u>	<u>Student with Cognitive Disability</u>	<u>Student with EBD</u>	<u>Student without Disability</u>
Out-of-School Suspension	76.51%	63.76%	43.62%	21.48%	32.21%	41.61%	2.68%	4.03%	14.77%
In-School Suspension	53.38%	43.62%	22.15%	43.92%	44.30%	53.02%	4.05%	12.08%	24.83%
After-School Detention	48.32%	35.57%	18.12%	44.30%	52.35%	51.01%	8.05%	12.08%	30.87%
Behavior Focused Alternative Schools	33.56%	19.46%	17.45%	48.99%	53.02%	59.73%	18.12%	28.19%	24.83%
Functional Behavior Assessment and Behavior Intervention Plan	8.05%	5.37%	12.08%	46.98%	40.27%	58.39%	44.97%	55.03%	30.20%
Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support	10.07%	6.71%	4.03%	35.57%	32.89%	41.61%	54.36%	61.07%	54.36%
Alternative to Suspension (ATS) Program	26.35%	17.69%	10.74%	41.89%	47.62%	55.70%	32.43%	34.69%	34.23%
Mental Health Counseling	9.40%	7.38%	8.72%	34.23%	30.87%	48.32%	57.05%	62.42%	42.95%
Social Emotional Learning	6.04%	2.04%	6.71%	33.56%	33.33%	47.65%	60.40%	64.63%	46.98%
Restorative Justice Practices	25.50%	15.44%	11.41%	43.62%	48.99%	56.38%	30.87%	35.57%	33.56%

**Research Question 2:** Will educators provide higher ratings of efficacy for supportive practices than punitive practices in promoting social-emotional-behavioral and academic outcomes?

As indicated in Table 2: Academic and Social-Emotional-Behavioral Benefits Recommendation, respondents indicated Mental Health Counseling as the intervention they would “very often” recommend more frequently than any other interventions to successfully promote social-emotional-behavioral outcomes for students. Specifically, 63.33% of respondents would frequently recommend Mental Health Counseling. Other interventions that participants believed would be successful in promoting social-emotional-behavioral student outcomes

included: Social Emotional Learning, Behavior Focused Alternative Schools, and Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support. Participants in the survey indicated they would “not often” recommend Out-of-School Suspension as a procedure to successfully promote social-emotional-behavioral student outcomes. Specifically, 38.00% would infrequently recommend Out-of-School Suspension.

Further analyses of educator perceptions regarding the social-emotional-behavioral benefits indicate that female respondents were more likely to endorse Mental Health Counseling, Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support, and other less punitive interventions as “very often” beneficial, compared to their male counterparts. In fact, a significant difference by gender was specifically noted for Mental Health Counseling  $X^2(2, N = 149) = 14.85 p = 0.01$ , whereas Social Emotional Learning, and Restorative Justice Practices approached significance at the .05 level. Male respondents, conversely, more frequently endorsed In-School Suspension, Out-of-School Suspension, and After School Suspension as “very often” beneficial compared to their female counterparts although Pearson Chi-square tests yielded no significant differences.

Additionally, no significant differences were revealed when comparing educators’ ratings for social-emotional-behavioral benefits by degree level (masters versus bachelors). However, when comparing self-reported experience in behavior management, participants with a “great deal” of experience were more likely to indicate they would “not often” recommend SWPBS to promote social-emotional-behavioral benefits compared to their coworkers with a moderate degree of experience. Specifically, one of every five respondents with a great deal of experience rated they would “not often” recommend SWPBS compared to only 5 of 101 respondents with a moderate degree of experience  $X^2(4, N = 149) = 11.12 p = 0.025$ . Significant differences in expected and obtained frequencies were additionally observed when comparing self-reported

experiences in behavior management and participants' endorsement of mental health counseling. Respondents with a "great deal" of experience were less likely to indicate they would "very often" recommend Mental Health Counseling to promote social-emotional-behavioral benefits  $\chi^2(4, N = 149) = 14.33 p = 0.06$ .

As indicated in Table 2: Academic and Social-Emotional-Behavioral Benefits Recommendation, respondents indicated Mental Health Counseling as the intervention they would "very often" recommend more frequently than any other interventions to successfully produce academic benefits for students. Specifically, 45.89% of respondents endorsed Mental Health Counseling to produce academic benefits for students. Participants in the survey indicated they would "not often" recommend Out-of-School Suspension as a procedure to successfully produce academic benefits for students. Specifically, 89.19% of participants indicated that they would infrequently recommend Out-of-School Suspension to produce academic benefits. Other interventions that participants believed would produce academic benefits for students included: Social Emotional Learning, Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support, and Functional Behavior Assessments/Behavior Intervention Plans. Overall, educators in this county provided higher ratings of efficacy for supportive practices than punitive practices in promoting student social-emotional-behavioral and academic outcomes.

Further analyses of educator perceptions regarding the academic benefits indicate that female respondents were slightly more likely to endorse Restorative Justice Practices as "very often" beneficial, compared to their male counterparts. Restorative Justice Practices approached significance at the .05 level. When comparing educators' ratings for academic benefits by degree level (masters versus bachelors), statistical differences were revealed. Specifically, participants with a bachelor's degree were more likely to indicate they would "somewhat often" recommend

Mental Health Counseling to promote academic benefits compared to their coworkers with a master’s degree,  $X^2(3, N = 149) = 8.58 p = 0.035$ . Participants with a master’s degree were more likely to indicate they would “somewhat often” recommend Behavior-Focused Alternative Schools to promote academic benefits compared to their coworkers with a bachelor’s degree,  $X^2(3, N = 149) = 12.05 p = 0.007$ .

Table 2  
*Academic and Social-Emotional-Behavioral Benefits Recommendation*

<u>Intervention/Disciplinary Practice</u>	<b>Not Often</b>		<b>Somewhat Often</b>		<b>Very Often</b>	
	<u>Academic Benefits</u>	<u>Social-Emotional-Behavioral-Benefits</u>	<u>Academic Benefits</u>	<u>Social-Emotional-Behavioral-Benefits</u>	<u>Academic Benefits</u>	<u>Social-Emotional-Behavioral-Benefits</u>
Out-of-School Suspension	89.19%	38.00%	8.78%	55.33%	2.03%	6.67%
In-School Suspension	45.89%	21.62%	46.58%	69.59%	7.53%	8.78%
After-School Detention	26.35%	16.78%	56.76%	62.42%	16.89%	20.81%
Behavior Focused Alternative Schools	12.93%	5.33%	61.90%	52.00%	25.17%	42.67%
Functional Behavior Assessment and Behavior Intervention Plan	13.61%	10.00%	59.18%	54.67%	27.21%	35.33%
Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support	10.20%	9.33%	50.34%	48.67%	39.46%	42.00%
Alternative to Suspension (ATS) Program	19.86%	8.00%	57.53%	61.33%	23.29%	31.33%
Mental Health Counseling	7.53%	2.00%	47.26%	34.67%	45.89%	63.33%
Social Emotional Learning	6.80%	2.67%	51.02%	45.33%	42.18%	52.00%
Restorative Justice Practices	15.75%	6.67%	60.27%	61.33%	24.66%	32.00%

**Research Question 3:** How often do educators perceive suspension and suspension alternatives to require too much time, effort, or personnel?

As indicated in Table 3: Too Much Time, Effort, and Personnel, respondents indicated that In-School Suspension would be a procedure that infrequently requires too much time, effort,

or personnel than any other intervention or procedure. Approximately 75.68% of participants in the survey believed that In-School Suspension infrequently requires too much time, effort, or personnel. Other interventions or procedures perceived as infrequently requiring too much time, effort, or personnel included: Out-of-School Suspension, and Functional Behavior Assessments/Behavior Intervention Plans. Participants indicated that After-School Detention would be a procedure that frequently requires too much time, effort, or personnel than any other intervention or procedure. In fact, 32.89% of respondents ranked After-School Detention as a procedure that requires too much time, effort, and personnel to be useful. Other interventions or procedures that were viewed as requiring too much time, effort, or personnel included: Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support, Alternative to Suspension Programs (ATS), and Functional Behavior Assessments/Behavior Intervention Plans.

Table 3  
*Too Much Time, Effort, and Personnel*

	<b>Not Often</b>	<b>Somewhat Often</b>	<b>Very Often</b>
<u>Intervention/Disciplinary Practice</u>	<u>Too Much Time, Effort, &amp; Personnel</u>	<u>Too Much Time, Effort, &amp; Personnel</u>	<u>Too Much Time, Effort, &amp; Personnel</u>
Out-of-School Suspension	42.36%	40.97%	16.67%
In-School Suspension	75.68%	18.24%	6.08%
After-School Detention	16.78%	50.34%	32.89%
Behavior Focused Alternative Schools	32.19%	51.37%	16.44%
Functional Behavior Assessment and Behavior Intervention Plan	33.11%	43.92%	22.97%
Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support	20.95%	48.65%	30.41%
Alternative to Suspension (ATS) Program	29.05%	45.95%	25.68%
Mental Health Counseling	22.45%	62.59%	16.33%
Social Emotional Learning	25.00%	59.46%	15.54%
Restorative Justice Practices	21.23%	56.85%	21.92%

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **DISCUSSION**

Despite its adverse effects, school suspension remains the most widely used disciplinary approach in the American public education system (Freeman & Freeman, 2016). The aim of this study was to examine educator perceptions of suspension and suspension alternatives. The investigator surveyed 149 educators. Findings suggest that although participants generally did not perceive suspension to be effective for improving behavioral outcomes, educators were more likely to endorse suspension for students without disabilities compared to students with cognitive or emotional-behavioral concerns. Consequently, educators' general perceptions about suspension tend to align with the research, which deems suspension as ineffective in managing student behaviors because it does not get to the root of the issue (Dickinson & Miller, 2006). Participants most frequently endorsed Social Emotional Learning as the most effective intervention for students with a cognitive or emotional-behavioral disability, while SWPBS was perceived as the most effective strategy for students without an identified disability. Both SEL and SWPBS are commonly used in school settings and are likely more familiar to the average educator, as opposed to ATS, Restorative Justice Practices, and Behavior Focused Alternative Schools.

Overall, educators in the participating county provided higher ratings of efficacy for supportive practices (e.g., Mental Health Counseling, SEL, SWPBS), than punitive practices (e.g., ISS or OSS) in promoting student social-emotional-behavioral and academic outcomes. The participants in this district may have perceived the effectiveness of these interventions because of their district specific CHAMPS training and other experiences in behavior management. Though their individual experiences with implementation likely varies

significantly, each respondent participated in at least one initial CHAMPS training. Refresher courses for CHAMPS training are offered for teachers in this county on a yearly basis. However, Individuals who self-reported a high degree of behavior management experience perceived SWPBS to be ineffective. Moreover, it is important to note that school-based mental health services are available for students at all schools within the participating county. Results might be affected if responders knew that counseling was not easily accessible. Participants may perceive Mental Health Counseling as effective for students with emotional-behavioral concerns because it specifically addresses the same skills that these students may lack.

Though many respondents maintained that certain strategies are effective in promoting positive outcomes, they concomitantly viewed some of these same strategies as requiring too much time, effort, or personnel such as: SWPBS, ATS, and FBAs / BIPs. The research on social validity indicates that educators' perceptions of intervention acceptability is contingent upon multiple factors including appropriateness of intervention given the target behavior; time and effort; and risks to the target student and classroom peers (Elliott, 2017). Another intervention perceived by respondents to require too much time, effort, or personnel to be useful was After-School Detention. This disciplinary procedure may be perceived as requiring too much time, effort, or personnel due to the fact that it is a part of a teacher's job description to provide the student they assign to After-School Detention with assignments, while monitoring them to ensure that the student is not asleep or distracted (Rosen, 2005). For students with cognitive disabilities, fewer participants endorsed punitive consequences.

Conversely, the majority of respondents indicated that ISS infrequently requires too much time, effort, or personnel. Other procedures perceived as requiring less time, effort, or personnel included: OSS, and FBAs / BIPs. These interventions and procedures are often the primary



responsibility for other individuals in the school. School administrators should be familiar with evidence-based strategies, such as the methods included in the present study, that promote positive, academic and social-emotional-behavioral outcomes for all students in the public education system regardless of ability.

One benefit of the present investigation is that educators are introduced to evidence-based strategies to improve behavior that do not involve suspending students from the educational environment. In fact, these alternatives provide academic and social-emotional-behavioral supports for students. This research is important to the field of school psychology because school psychologists can be proponents for change. School psychologists are experts in the areas of learning, behavior, mental health, and systems level change (National Association of School Psychologists, 2017). Therefore, school psychologists can inform other school administrators of the harmful effects of suspension and advocate for more effective approaches to improve students' overall wellbeing and educational experiences. Another benefit is this research will add to the current literature about school suspension and suspension alternatives.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

There were several limitations inherent to the current investigation. First, participation was confined to one county in western North Carolina. These results will likely not generalize to a district or county with limited opportunities for positive behavior management trainings. Future research should include additional districts and regions in the United States. Secondly, the present study was limited to educators' perceptions. Therefore, social desirability is an inherent issue. Future research may want to determine how perceptions of behavioral interventions and disciplinary practices translate to the home setting. More research is needed with parents' perspectives. Similarly, the demographics of the participating educators did not represent that of

the students in the county. Research is, therefore, needed with actual students. Future directions may include obtaining student and parent perceptions of suspension and suspension alternatives.

Another limitation is that other key variables in treatment acceptability like 1) skill needed to implement such interventions; 2) negative effects for the target student; and 3) unintended effects on other classmates (Elliott, 2017) were not explicitly investigated in the current study. Future research could incorporate different facets of treatment acceptability and also provide more in-depth training about the interventions prior to administering a survey regarding their perceptions. Likewise, future research may want to address interventions that are already recognized in a particular county to determine educators' perspectives. Though the survey for the present study provided a brief summary of each intervention and procedure, participants did not appear to be very familiar with certain strategies such as ATS or Restorative Justice Practices. Perhaps ratings might have varied with increased knowledge of this type of language. The current survey did not allot space for open-ended response choices. Respondents may have had other thoughts about resources for academic and behavioral supports than those provided on the survey. It is also possible that some of the interventions or practices included in the survey may have been perceived as socially undesirable. Future research may want to form focus groups to develop a survey regarding educators' perspectives and opinions.

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## APPENDIX A: OFFICE OF RESEARCH INTEGRITY APPROVAL LETTER



Office of Research Integrity  
Institutional Review Board  
One John Marshall Drive  
Huntington, WV 25755

FWA 00002704

IRB1 #00002205  
IRB2 #00003206

January 7, 2019

Lanai Jennings, PhD  
School Psychology, MUGC

RE: IRBNet ID# 1128050-1

At: Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral)

Dear Dr. Jennings:

<b>Protocol Title:</b>	[1128050-1] Educator Perceptions of Suspension and Suspension Alternatives	
<b>Site Location:</b>	MUGC	
<b>Submission Type:</b>	New Project	APPROVED
<b>Review Type:</b>	Exempt Review	


In accordance with 45CFR46.101(b)(2), the above study was granted Exempted approval today by the Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral) Designee. No further submission (or closure) is required for an Exempt study **unless** there is an amendment to the study. All amendments (including the addition of research staff) must be submitted and approved by the IRB Chair/Designee.

This study is for student Jori Williams.

If you have any questions, please contact the Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral) Coordinator Bruce Day, ThD, CIP at 304-696-4303 or day50@marshall.edu. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.

## APPENDIX B: SCHOOL SUSPENSION PERSPECTIVE QUESTIONNAIRE

The purpose of the School Suspension Perspective Questionnaire is to gain insight on what educators believe about suspension as it pertains to student academic, behavioral, and social outcomes as well as educator views on alternatives to suspension. The following are questions used for the qualitative evaluation conducted in the study.



**Marshall University®**

**Educator Perceptions of Suspension and Suspension Alternatives**

**SCHOOL SUSPENSION PERSPECTIVE QUESTIONNAIRE**

My name is Jori Williams. This questionnaire is a part of the requirements for my graduate thesis. The purpose of the School Suspension Perspective Questionnaire is to gain insight on what Burke County educators believe about suspension as it pertains to student academic and behavioral outcomes, as well as educator views on alternatives to suspension. The following are questions used for the qualitative evaluation conducted in the study. Results are anonymous and will be collected in a summary with Burke County Public Schools. The estimated completion time is 10-15 minutes. Please contact me if you have any questions ([jori@burke.k12.nc.us](mailto:jori@burke.k12.nc.us)). Thank you for taking this survey.

**1. Gender**

Male

Female

**2. Age**

18 60 100

**3. At which school(s) do you work?**

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**4. Ethnicity**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Asian/Pacific Islander  | <input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Black/African-American  | <input type="checkbox"/> White/Non-Hispanic   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Native American/Alaskan | <input type="checkbox"/> Multiple Ethnicities |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify)  |   |

**5. Type of Educator**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> General Educator       | <input type="checkbox"/> School Counselor    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Special Educator       | <input type="checkbox"/> Behavior Specialist |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Principal              | <input type="checkbox"/> Social Worker       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> School Psychologist    |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) |  |

**6. Programmatic Level (Check all that apply)**

- Preschool
- Middle/Jr. High
- Elementary
- High School
- Other (please specify)

**7. Years as an educator**



**8. Highest degree earned**

- Associates
- Specialist
- Bachelors
- Doctorate
- Masters
- Other

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**9. How much experience do you have in behavior management?**

- None at all
- A great deal
- A moderate amount
- Other (please specify)

**10. How effective are the behavior management strategies that you or your school use/have used?**

- Not at all effective  Very effective
- Somewhat effective
- Other (please specify)

**11.**

**For information purposes only, please read the following definitions to help you process items 12-17 (your school/county may not have all of these procedures in place):**

***In-School Suspension:*** Students are removed from class to another school location as a disciplinary action.

***Out-of-School Suspension:*** Students are removed from the school premises as a disciplinary action.

***After-School Detention:*** Students are required to stay in an undesirable room for a fixed amount of time outside of the school day as a disciplinary action.

***Behavior Focused Alternative Schools:*** A student is provided educational services in an alternative school. The goal of the alternative school is to address behavioral issues that have contributed to why students have difficulty succeeding in the traditional public education setting.

***Functional Behavioral Assessment/Behavior Intervention Plan:*** An FBA involves identifying the purpose and function of a student's problem behaviors, while a BIP is a concrete plan of action to decrease problem behaviors.

***School-Wide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS):*** This model is comprised of a three-tiered system of behavioral interventions: primary, secondary, and tertiary. Each tier has a different level of supports designed to meet students behavioral and social-emotional needs.

***Alternative to Suspension (ATS) Program:*** Permits students and their parents to choose this option. It lasts the same number of days as a suspension would and aims to: address target behaviors in the same settings in which they occur and increase student

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motivation. This specific program takes place during designated class periods with certified teachers (different than the student's usual teachers), and provides opportunities for work completion, parental involvement, and individual/group counseling sessions.

**Mental Health Counseling:** Seeks to encourage positive student behaviors and identify target behaviors early, through teaching appropriate communication and other skills. It is provided by a mental health practitioner and may include reading group programs to target academic and social-emotional concerns (e.g. Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy, Bibliotherapy, etc).

**Social-Emotional Learning:** Preventive and responsive approaches that teach students: modeling, conflict resolution, aggression replacement, emotion management, responsible decision-making, maintaining positive relationships, and how to handle difficult situations effectively.

**Restorative Justice Practices:** The goal is to reduce suspension for students who display defiance and other types of misconduct, while increasing positive school climates and helping to repair harm from misconduct (e.g. discussion circles, relationship building, peer and adult mentor programs).</



**12. On a scale of 0-2, in your opinion, how often will this intervention or procedure be successful in promoting social-emotional-behavioral student outcomes?**

*(Please check only one box per row.)*

	0 (Not Often)	1 (Somewhat Often)	2 (Very Often)
In-School Suspension	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Out-of-School Suspension	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
After-School Detention	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Behavior Focused Alternative Schools	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Functional Behavior Assessment and Behavior Intervention Plan	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Alternative to Suspension (ATS) Program	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mental Health Counseling	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Social Emotional Learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Restorative Justice Practices	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

13. On a scale of 0-2, in your opinion, how often will this kind of intervention or procedure require too much time, effort, or personnel to be useful? *(Please check only one box per row.)*

	0 (Not Often)	1 (Somewhat Often)	2 (Very Often)
In-School Suspension	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Out-of-School Suspension	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
After-School Detention	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Behavior Focused Alternative Schools	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Functional Behavior Assessment and Behavior Intervention Plan	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Alternative to Suspension (ATS) Program	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mental Health Counseling	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Social Emotional Learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Restorative Justice Practices	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



14. On a scale of 0-2, in your opinion, how often will this kind of intervention or procedure produce academic benefits for students? *(Please check only one box per row.)*

	0 (Not Often)	1 (Somewhat Often)	2 (Very Often)
In-School Suspension	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Out-of-School Suspension	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
After-School Detention	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Behavior Focused Alternative Schools	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Functional Behavior Assessment and Behavior Intervention Plan	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Alternative to Suspension (ATS) Program	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mental Health Counseling	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Social Emotional Learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Restorative Justice Practices	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

15. On a scale of 0-2, in your opinion, how often would you recommend this kind of intervention or procedure for a student with a cognitive disability (e.g. Intellectual Disability)? *(Please check only one box per row.)*

	0 (Not Often)	1 (Somewhat Often)	2 (Very Often)
In-School Suspension	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Out-of-School Suspension	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
After-School Detention	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Behavior Focused Alternative Schools	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Functional Behavior Assessment and Behavior Intervention Plan	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Alternative to Suspension (ATS) Program	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mental Health Counseling	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Social Emotional Learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Restorative Justice Practices	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

16. On a scale of 0-2, in your opinion, how often would you recommend this kind of intervention or procedure for a student with an emotional-behavioral disability (e.g. ADHD)? *(Please check only one box per row.)*

	0 (Not Often)	1 (Somewhat Often)	2 (Very Often)
In-School Suspension	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Out-of-School Suspension	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
After-School Detention	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Behavior Focused Alternative Schools	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Functional Behavior Assessment and Behavior Intervention Plan	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Alternative to Suspension (ATS) Program	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mental Health Counseling	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Social Emotional Learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Restorative Justice Practices	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

17. On a scale of 0-2, in your opinion, how often would you recommend this kind of intervention or procedure for a student **without** an identified disability? *(Please check only one box per row.)*

	0 (Not Often)	1 (Somewhat Often)	2 (Very Often)
In-School Suspension	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Out-of-School Suspension	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
After-School Detention	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Behavior Focused Alternative Schools	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Functional Behavior Assessment and Behavior Intervention Plan	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Alternative to Suspension (ATS) Program	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mental Health Counseling	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Social Emotional Learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Restorative Justice Practices	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## APPENDIX C: VITA

### Jori Williams

#### EDUCATION

**EdS** (Educational Specialist)  
Marshall University

**Spring 2019**

*Thesis title:* “Educator Perceptions of Suspension and Suspension Alternatives”

*Committee:* Dr. Lanai Jennings (Chair), Dr. Conrae Lucas-Adkins, and Dr. Marianna Linz

**MA in Psychology** (School Psychology Emphasis)  
Marshall University

**December 2017**

**BA in Psychology**  
Marshall University

**December 2015**

*Capstone title:* “The Relationship of ADHD and Executive Functioning: An Exploration of Checklists and Tests”

*Advisor:* Dr. Marianna Linz; *Co-author:* Gabriel Taylor

#### HONORS AND AWARDS

- Nominated (by faculty) NASP and WVSPA Student Leader Representative
- Graduated Magna Cum Laude with B.A. in Psychology
- Marshall University Dean’s List
- Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Scholarship

#### UNIVERSITY SERVICE

##### **Graduate Assistant**

*The H.E.L.P. Center, Marshall University*

- Answered questions about the H.E.L.P. Program (National Center of Higher Education for Learning Problems) services (e.g., IQ or achievement testing, academic tutoring, or skills training)
- Front desk receptionist (e.g., made copies, organized and stored files, answered phone)
- Assisted tutees/examinees with finding their tutors/examiners
- Picked up/dropped off students’ tests or mail

##### **Graduate Assistant**

*The Tutoring Center, Marshall University*

- Placed students with tutors who assist with the course(s) requested
- Occasionally tutored Psychology and French when needed
- Presented information about Tutoring Services during campus tours for prospective students and their families
- Answered phone calls or questions regarding Tutoring Services