Positive Behavior Intervention and Support: An Alternative Approach

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For my son John E. Bridges Jr. and my girls Ashley and Tiffany
This above all: To thine own self be true.
—Shakespeare
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of PBIS on behavior in relation to the number of office discipline referrals, suspensions, and expulsions. Because of the current school discipline policies, black male students have been overrepresented in the exclusionary practices of office discipline referrals, suspensions, and expulsions. PBIS offers a viable alternative to current school discipline practices.
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine discipline and behavior in relation to suspensions and expulsions in an urban minority middle school implementing Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS). PBIS is a data based decision-making practice that aligns curricular instruction and behavioral supports to student and staff needs. A deleterious negative outcome of suspensions and expulsions is the overrepresentation of African American males in such disciplined responses. The overrepresentation of African American males in the exclusionary discipline practices of suspension and expulsion has been consistently documented over the past five decades, (Children’s Defense Fund 1975; Fenning & Rose, 2007; Skiba & Noam, 2001). There are several possible causative mechanisms that are hypothesized to account for the disproportionality of minorities in the exclusionary practices of suspensions and expulsions. They include the differential rates of inappropriate behavior in school settings, poverty, and racial stereotyping (Skiba, Horner, Choong-Geun, Karega Rausch, May, & Tobin, 2011).

Suspension in Illinois refers to short-term removal (10 Days or Less at a Time) from school if a child violates the student code of conduct. The school district is not required to provide educational services to students with disabilities during these
removals, unless services are provided to students without disabilities under similar circumstances (ISBE, 2009). Expulsion also refers to the removal of a child from school if a child violates the student code of conduct and may range from one semester to a year. Expelled students under the age of 16 are required to attend special alternative schools, (Expulsions on the Rise, 2009).

**Other Problems with Suspensions and Expulsions**

Suspending and expelling students from public schools may possibly be a violation of their right to an education (Morrison & D’Incau, 1997; Studley, 2002). Additionally, when students are suspended or expelled, “Where do they go?” They go back into their communities where they may commit crimes and are placed in the juvenile justice system (Skiba et al., 2011). Like suspensions and expulsions, there is an overrepresentation of minorities relative to whites at all stages of the justice process, which includes referral, arrest, conviction and confinement (Nicholson-Crotty, Birchmeier, & Valentine, 2009).

**School District’s Role in Overrepresentation**

Serious concerns about school violence led Congress to pass the Gun Free Act in 1994, which resulted in school districts taking a get-tough stance such as zero tolerance for weapons possession and use (Studley, 2002).

Given the concern for weapons possession and use, school districts began using metal detectors, police and security guards in the schools and began searching students as they entered the building. Additionally, accompanying police and security guards are other law enforcement procedures like video cameras, which have been referred to by
Hirschfield (2008) “as the criminalization of school discipline” (p. 83). What makes these practices a clear indicator of the criminalization of middle and high schools are the preventive practices of metal detectors and personal searches which define students as criminal suspects (Hirschfield 2008).

The prevalent use of metal detectors is positively related to minority students (DeVoe, Peter, Noonan, Snyder, & Baum, 2005). Not surprisingly, there has been an overrepresentation of minority students in the exclusionary discipline practices of suspensions and expulsions (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Morrison & D’Incau, 1997; Skiba, Peterson, & Williams, 1997; Townsend, 2000). The use of metal detectors, according to Hirschfield (2008) is an indicator of the criminalization of middle and high school.

School districts like Chicago and New York City who have placed city or school district police departments in charge of school security are said to be the most criminalized (Hirschfield, 2008). Police officers who are referred to as School Resource Officers (SRO) received specific training to prepare them to work in educational settings. The problem is, as on the street, any violations of the law are subject to arrest and the school officers are not required to seek permission from school officials, parents, or anyone else prior to an arrest (Devine, 1996; Hagan, Hirschfield, & Shedd, 2002). Research suggests that law enforcement in the schools erodes the traditional disciplinary role of teachers and other school staff (Devine, 1996).

In an attempt to reduce crime in public schools, zero tolerance policies were created by punishing offenders with the intent to send a message to other students that criminal behavior would not be tolerated. The Gun-Free Schools Act (GFSA) is an
example of zero tolerance policies; it contains provisions requiring local educational agencies to expel students who have brought a weapon to school for a period of not less than one year. However, school districts have gone beyond weapons charges and have begun to suspend and expel students for fights and other physical aggression (Arcia, 2007; Kicked Out, 2009; Skiba & Noam, 2001; Townsend, 2000). With the advent of zero tolerance, it appears to have increased the use of suspensions and expulsions, which are the most prevalent disciplinary tools in America’s public schools. Skiba and Noam (2001) reported, “The idea that zero-tolerance policies contribute to improved student behavior or school safety remains unsupported by evidence” (p. 35). The effects of zero tolerance policies from a research perspective lack empirical research to justify its practice. Zero tolerance is a political, not an educational solution (Skiba et al., 2001).

Zero tolerance as a school discipline philosophy was developed in the political arena for political purposes due to pressure to address violence in schools (Skiba et al., 2001). When middle school students/students in general, experience behavior problems they are usually suspended or expelled. The zero tolerance solution has been to remove them from the general population (Skiba et al., 2001). Suspensions or expulsions for trivial incidents don’t seem to be anomalous, “but rather inherent in the philosophy and application of zero tolerance” (p. 26). Historically, the use of suspension and expulsion has not worked and has caused unintentional outcomes such as incarceration in the juvenile detention center or prisons.
Statement of the Problem

The overrepresentation of minority students in the disciplinary practices of suspensions and expulsions is well documented. Black male students in the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) are more likely to be suspended than any other group in CPS (Chicago Tops the List on Discipline, 2009). These disparities are particularly stark in the elementary schools where Black males are suspended at a rate of two times the rate of females and five times the rate of white males (Kicked Out, 2009). Additionally, Black male students are expelled more than any other group in CPS, at the rate of 61% for Black males, 23% for all others, 15% for Latino males, and 1% for White males (Harshest Punishment, Widest Disparity, 2009). Chicago suspends more students than many other big-city school districts, leading Houston, Dallas, Los Angeles, Palm Beach, FL, Miami-Dade County, FL, and New York City (Chicago Tops the List on Discipline, 2009).

Out of school suspensions has risen in the last five years, especially for Black males. In 2003, the total number of students who received out of school suspensions in CPS was 29,709 with 13% being black males. Five years later, in 2008, the total number of out of school suspensions rose to over 50,031 with 26% being Black males. The out of school suspension rate for Black males increased over one hundred percent in five years and was higher than the 13% suspension rate for all students in 2008 (Out of School Punishment, 2009).

The expulsion rate for Black males in CPS is just as stark as the suspension rate for Black males in CPS. In 1997 of the 172 students who were expelled in CPS, 41%
were Black males. Eleven years later, the number of Black males who were expelled from CPS rose to 61% out of the 775 total students expelled (Expulsions on the Rise, 2009). Chicago Public School students are more likely to be expelled or suspended than students in suburban school districts. This disparity for Black male students holds true in six counties (Racial Disparity throughout the Region, 2009). Suspending and expelling African American males puts them at even higher risk for negative outcomes associated with the exclusionary practices of suspensions and expulsions, such as, involvement in the juvenile justice system (Wald & Losen, 2003) and poor academic performance (Skiba & Rausch, 2006).

**Alternative to Suspensions and Expulsions**

Research has clearly documented the impact suspension and expulsion has had on minorities. An alternative to suspensions and expulsions and a universal prevention-oriented approach to preventing behavioral problems before they happen is the Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) (Bambora, Nonnemacher & Kern, 2009; Bradshaw, Koth, Bevans, Lalongo, & Leaf, 2008; Mass-Galloway, Panyon, Smith, & Weissendorf, 2008; Sugai & Horner, 2007). PBIS is a data based decision-making practice that aligns curricular instruction and behavioral supports to student and staff needs. The implementation of PBIS begins by establishing clear behavioral expectations that are taught, modeled, and reinforced across all settings by all staff. This creates an environment, “that supports the adoption and sustained use of effective academic and social/emotional instruction” (Sugai & Horner, 2007).
George, White, and Schlaffer (2007) examined two urban schools that adopted PBIS. Their results indicated a substantial reduction in antisocial behavior based on the elimination of physical restraints. PBIS has also been successful on a large scale via statewide implementation in reducing office discipline referrals and suspensions (Muscott, Mann & LeBrun 2008).

**Research in the Field**

Research in the field has failed to address the problem of ineffective school discipline policies because current school discipline policies, which are primarily based on zero tolerance, lack empirical research to justify its practice. There is also the problem of the overrepresentation of minority students “in the exclusionary disciplinary consequences of suspensions and expulsions” (Fenning & Rose, 2007, p. 536).

Additionally, there is a lack of research on the PBIS initiative in urban schools with primarily African American populations.

This proposed research intends to address the problem of insufficient empirical data to justify a school’s discipline policies that has resulted in the overrepresentation of minority students “in the exclusionary discipline consequences of suspensions and expulsions,” and will address the evaluation of PBIS in an urban school with a 98% African American population, which is an understudied school population. The research will address these problems by evaluating the effects the Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports program (PBIS), has had on behavior problems (the number of office discipline referrals), the number of suspensions and the number of expulsions of a 98% urban minority middle school population.
Research Questions

1. Can school-wide PBIS be implemented with fidelity in an urban middle school with a high percentage of students who are African American?

2. What impact, if any, did PBIS have on the number of office discipline referrals of the students who participated in the PBIS program?

3. What impact, if any, did PBIS have on the number of:
   (a) in-school suspensions of the students who participated in the PBIS program?
   (b) out-of-school suspensions of the students who participated in the PBIS program?
   (c) expulsions of the students who participated in the PBIS program?

   The hypothesis is that there is no relationship between PBIS and the number of office discipline referrals, number of suspensions, and the number of expulsions for the students who participated in the PBIS program.

Conclusion

Current school discipline programs based on suspension and expulsion tied to zero tolerance have not been effective. The use of zero tolerance policies have resulted in an even greater overrepresentation of minority students in the exclusionary discipline consequences of suspensions and expulsions.

Given the aforementioned, there is a need for a paradigm shift in terms of school discipline. There is also a need for school districts to be more accountable for educational outcomes.

PBIS, through its data collection process, provides the needed accountability and the much-needed support for students and staff. The goal of the PBIS program is to keep
students in school while school personnel use PBIS data to develop effective interventions to address academic and behavior problems for all children including those with a disability.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

The Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS) initiative has been offered as a viable option to address discipline issues on a prevention-oriented basis. Given the negative outcomes associated with public school suspensions and expulsions; particularly, the overrepresentation of African American males, “in the exclusionary discipline consequences of suspensions and expulsions.” The literature review will address the current general outcomes for African American males and PBIS as an alternative approach to traditional discipline practices.

Outcomes for African American Males

Over the past 25 years, the educational, social and economic outcomes for African American males have been more devastating than the outcomes for any other racial or ethnic group or gender (Given Half a Chance, 2008). The high school graduation rate for African American students continues to drop. In 2005/6, only 47% of African American males in the USA graduated from high school. That number was even lower in Illinois, where only 40% of African American males graduated from high school (The Schott 50 State Report, 2008). African American students continue to be overrepresented in the exclusionary discipline practices of suspension and expulsion (Kaufman et al., 2009).

Black males have consistently had low educational attainment levels, have been more chronically unemployed and underemployed, have limited access to health care
resources, thus causing them to be less healthy, die much younger, and are many more times likely to be sent to jail for significantly longer periods than males of other racial/ethnic groups. Additionally, Black males are more likely to attend the least resourced and most segregated public schools (Children’s Defense Fund, 2009; Childstats.gov, 2010; Given Half a Chance, 2008).

The problem appears to exist within public school systems with the least resources and who are the most segregated. Black students do not do poorly in all schools. Black students who attend good schools do well (Given Half a Chance, 2008).

**Urban Middle School – Preventing Disengagement**

Research has documented those minorities, particularly Black males, graduate at a lower rate than any other racial/ethnic group. As previously stated, in Illinois, the graduation rate for Black males in 2005/6 was below the national average, with only 40% of Black males graduating in Illinois (The Schott 50 State Report, 2009).

Balfanz, Herzog, and MacIver (2007) contend that many students in urban public schools become disengaged at the start of middle school, which greatly reduces the odds that they will graduate. This holds true to middle-grade students – especially those who attend high-poverty urban schools where the student bodies are primarily made up of minority students, who have continued to be the underperformers of the U.S. educational system. They further contend that middle or high school students who decide not to attend school on a regular basis, who misbehave, or who expend low effort are all “consequential behavioral” indicators that a student is growing disengaged from school and may drop out.
Balfanz, Herzog and MacIver (2007) used longitudinal analyses – following nearly 13,000 students from 1996 until 2004 to demonstrate how four predictive indicators reflecting misbehavior, poor attendance, and course failures in sixth grade can be used to identify 60% of the students who will not graduate from high school.

The authors chose sixth grade because the School District of Philadelphia (the location of the study) defined grade six as the official start of the middle school grades. Furthermore, the literature on adolescent development and high poverty neighborhoods, (Kowaleski-Jones, 2000) documents how middle school students in high-poverty neighborhoods face greater temptations and dangers. They are often drafted into roles that interfere with school, such as, being the caregiver for a younger sibling, being recruited by drug gangs, or by peers who ditch school. The high school graduation rate for African American students continues to drop. In 2005/6, only 47% of African American males in the USA graduated from high school. That number was even lower in Illinois, where only 40% of African American males graduated from high school (The Schott 50 State Report, 2008). African American students continue to be overrepresented in the exclusionary discipline practices of suspension and expulsion (Kaufman et al., 2009).

A universal sample of 12,972 students enrolled in sixth grade in 1996-97 over an 8-year span through 2003-04 or one year beyond their expected year of graduation was the cohort. The composition of the sample was predominantly minority students: 64% were African American, 19% were Whites, 12% were Hispanics, and 5% were Asians.
Data on free/reduced-price lunch eligibility indicated that 97% of the students attended a majority-poverty school.

Balfanz, Herzog and MacIver (2007) created four distinct sets of predictor variables that were based on prior work on behavioral disengagement, the available student data in the school system, and dropout predictions. The predictor variables were: attend school 80% or less of the time during sixth grade, fail sixth grade math, fail sixth grade English, and receive an out-of-school suspension in sixth grade.

Their findings, via using structural equation modeling analyses, indicated that, “academic press was highly predictive of good behavior, math utility was the strongest predictor of student effort, and parental involvement and math intrinsic interest had significant effects on both students’ level of effort in math class and their attendance in school.” The authors strongly support the use of comprehensive school reforms that attempt to improve student engagement through many mutually supporting mechanisms, since different factors affect good behavior, attendance, and effort.

**African American Male Discipline Patterns – Urban Schools**

The schooling experiences of African American students particularly, African American males, have been the subject of scholarly investigations for over three decades. The overrepresentation of African American males in the exclusionary consequences of suspensions and expulsions has been clearly documented, as have the low graduation rate (Skiba, Michael, Nardo & Peterson, 2002).

Lewis, Bonner, Butler, and Joubert (2010) utilized a sample of over 3,500 African American males in a Midwestern urban school district to investigate the discipline
patterns of African American males and the school districts responses that impact their academic achievement on state standardized tests. To this end they developed four interrelated objectives:

(1) To investigate all documented behavior occurrences of African American males in comparison to their peers during the 2005-2006 academic school year;

(2) To detail the discipline responses recommended by the school district for these offenses;

(3) To calculate the total amount of class time missed as a result of school district prescribed resolutions; and

(4) To provide a connection to performance on standardized test reporting for the larger African American student population in this urban school district.

The overrepresentation of African American males with regard to disciplinary practices can be explained in part by: (a) racial discrepancies in the dispensation of discipline which are more severe for African American males; (b) zero tolerance policies; (c) cultural and interpersonal misunderstandings; and/ or (d) attitudes of school personnel. Lewis et al. (2010) contend that cultural and interpersonal misunderstandings, and/or attributes of school personnel provides a forum for discussion regarding the relevance of pedagogy for closing what has been referred to as the discipline gap which was coined to draw attention to disproportionate discipline policies.

Monroe (2005) contends that the idea of culturally relevant pedagogy has implications that extend beyond academic achievement, such as classroom management.
An example of which would be Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clark and Curran (2004) found that several novice Caucasian teachers reported that they often perceived lively debates between African American males “as suggestive of aggressive behaviors,” when in reality, these African American males perceived their engagements as “merely culturally expressive communication.”

The results of the study, conducted by Lewis et al. (2010) are consistent with previous research that assesses the disparate disciplinary practices used by school districts on African American male students. Additionally, the district has standardized tests results revealed another problem. Less than 48% of the African Americans within the study performed at proficient/advanced levels for reading. Only 36% were deemed proficient or advanced for fourth grade, seventh grade, and ninth grade reading. Less than 36% of African Americans scored at this level for writing, and just 23% of fourth graders scoring at the proficient/advanced levels. The science and math proficiency scores were even lower. Less than 19% of eighth graders received a proficient/advanced score for science and only 7% of ninth and tenth graders met the proficient/advanced standards for math.

Lewis et al. (2010) stated that, it is important to extract patterns of disproportionality in empirical assessments; that the mere recognition of such patterns suggests little about the necessary strategies to address the ethnic disparities found in the exclusionary discipline consequences of out-of-school suspensions. They further recommended that educators and administrators implement culturally relevant professional development for classroom management; establish a discipline advisory
committee; enforce a three-strike rule for non-violent behavior offenses, and refer students for counseling/therapy.

**School Discipline – Student’s Perception**

Research has documented that minority students are more likely than White students to receive school punishment; but what is the student’s perception of school discipline? Kupchik and Ellis (2008) using data from a nationally representative survey of students, explored whether African American, Latino and Latina students, especially male students perceive school safety practices as less fair, less well communicated, and less evenly applied than White students. Additionally, the authors also investigated whether particular security strategies such as metal detectors, security guards, and locker checks affected the minority student’s perceptions of fairness.

The authors contend that studying student’s perceptions of fairness is important if we are to understand the educational and social control experiences of students across racial and ethical groups.

The authors explored student’s views of the overall fairness, communication of school rules, consistency, and rule enforcement. To test their hypothesis regarding the student’s perceptions of fairness, Kupchik and Ellis (2008) operationalized fairness in three ways: An overall perception that rules and the enforcement of rules are appropriate, that rules are clearly communicated by schools, and the perception that the rules are evenly applied across students. Their meaning of fairness was the condition whereby the rules are appropriate to the offense.
The sample consisted of 8,370 students between the ages of 12 and 18, from January 2001 through June 2001. The School Crime Supplement (SCS) to the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) was used to interview the students. The procedure included both public and private school students, with public school students being the majority, 89%. With regard to gender, a slight majority of the sample was male 52%. The self-identified samples were 82% white, 13% Black, 5% Asian, Pacific Islander, American Indian, or Aleutian/Eskimo; in addition to the 16% who identified as being of Hispanic origin.

The results indicated that African American students perceived school rules and rule enforcement as less fair than White students did. This perception was not aggravated by having metal detectors, security guards, or locker searches. This finding is consistent with prior studies on school punishment rates, which find that African Americans are disproportionately punished in schools (Skiba et al., 2002). Additionally, these results are also consistent with reproduction theories that suggest that schools use discipline to reproduce existing social inequalities. Needless-to-say, there is a need for an alternative to the existing school discipline practices which have contributed to the overrepresentation of minorities, particularly, African American males, in the exclusionary consequences of suspensions and expulsions. As previously stated, the PBIS initiative would be such an alternative to the existing school discipline practices.
Criminalization of School Discipline

Hirschfield (2008) would argue that American schools have increasingly defined and managed student discipline through a prism of crime control. He contends that due to a troubled economy, mass unemployment, incarceration of disadvantaged minorities, and the fiscal crises in urban education, have shifted school disciplinary policies, practices, and staff perceptions of poor students of color in a manner that promotes greater punishment and a perception of students being on a criminal justice ‘track’.

Hirschfield (2008) defines criminalization as the manner in which policy makers and school staff think and communicate about student rule-violation, architecture, penal procedures and security technologies and tactics.

He contends that there are three dimensions of school criminalization. The first trend is that school punishment has become more formal and actuarial; thus mirroring the juvenile justice system. For instance, school punishment is increasingly based on uniform disciplinary procedures and guidelines around the nature of the offense rather than based on the teachers and other traditional disciplinary agents. An example of this trend would be ‘zero tolerance’. A large majority of school districts adopted ‘zero tolerance’ policies for tobacco, alcohol, drugs and violence (Simon, 2006). These policies resemble mandatory criminal sentences. However, unlike mandatory criminal sentences, zero tolerance policies usually permit little consideration of mitigating circumstances (Schwartz & Rieser, 2001).

The second trend towards school criminalization would be suspensions that are more frequent and expulsions. Hirschfield (2008) contends that the expanded use of
school exclusion is a “symbolic form of criminalization.” Further, that, education agencies who increase their use of exclusionary punishments are endorsing the prevailing rationale of contemporary criminal justice practices of deterrence and incapacitation.

The third and final trend toward school criminalization, Hirschfield (2008) describes as “the importation of criminal justice into schools.” This form of criminalization practices include the increased use of criminal justice technology, methodology, and personnel for disciplinary as well as security purposes. An example of which would be police and security officers in schools, bag searches and video cameras, metal detectors and personal searches. All of the aforementioned are clear indications of school criminalization since they define students as criminal suspects by their practices.

A 2004 national survey of teachers regarding armed police in schools, indicated that 67% of the teachers’ surveyed reported that in majority – Black or Hispanic middle and high schools, armed police are stationed in their schools. A proposition that has been induced from both ethnographic and journalistic accounts is that large school districts like New York City and Chicago, who are hyper-segregated, are the most criminalized (Hirschfield, 2008).

As previously discussed in the school to prison connection, the criminalization of school discipline also extends into the juvenile court system. Data from various jurisdictions including Ohio, Toledo, and Miami-Dade (Rimer, 2004) discuss the type of offenses that school districts refer to the juvenile court system, and that the alleged misconduct leading to a juvenile court referral is usually quite minor, suggesting, that the school districts could have possibly handled the offense. This increased collaboration
between school districts and the juvenile justice system gives additional insight into how
the overrepresentation of Black males in the juvenile justice system occurs.

**Black Males Dropout Rate**

The inequities in the graduation rate and achievement gaps impacting Black males are national and pervasive. The ten states that held the lowest graduation rates enroll more than 1,600,000 Black male students; this represents 40% of the Black male public school population.

Illinois held third place among the ten lowest performing states for graduation rates for Black males enrolled in the 2005/06 cohort (Given Half a Chance, 2008; Jet, 2007.). In sharp contrast, 82% of White males enrolled in the 2005/06 cohort graduated in Illinois, leaving a 41% gap between Black male graduates and White male graduates.

In Illinois in 2004/05 and 2005/06, Black male students graduated at lower rates than the national average, while White male students graduated at rates higher than the national average. The racial gap is significantly wider in Illinois than the national average and appears to becoming wider due to the decline in the Black male graduation rate.

Almost half of the Black students in Illinois are in Chicago Public Schools. A staggering 63% of the Black male students enrolled in the 2005/06 school year failed to graduate with their cohorts. The 2005/06 national average graduation rate for Black males was 47%. Illinois’ Black male graduation rate was 40%.

Of the ten school districts with the largest enrollment of Black male students, Chicago held second place with an enrollment of 102,185 Black male students in 2005/06. Of the 102,185 Black male students only 37% graduated, while 62% of the
White male students graduated, leaving a 24% gap between Black male graduates and White male graduates.

**The Dropout Problem – Negative Consequences**

Given the statistics on the graduation rate of Black males, with 40% or less graduating, the remaining Black male students who didn’t graduate would be considered dropouts. Every nine seconds in America a student becomes a dropout (Whatever It Takes, 2010). Given the aforementioned data, the majority of the dropouts appear to be Black males.

Since there is no universally-accepted definition of a dropout, for the purposes of this study, school enrollment figures will be used.

As previously stated, suspending and expelling students from public school may be a violation of their guaranteed right to an education as guaranteed in *Brown vs. the Board of Education* (Morrison & D’Incau, 1997). This is particularly devastating for Black males who are overrepresented in the exclusionary discipline consequences of suspensions and expulsions.

To compound the devastating effects of suspensions and expulsions, suspended students do not receive any educational support during the time they are out of school. Not only are they not receiving any educational services, more importantly, those students who may have underlined psychological and or social-emotional problem may not even be identified which may contribute to far worse offenses later (Studley, 2002). Once these students are identified, they would receive the support and services they need. Since it is difficult to distinguish between conduct disorder and emotional disturbance,
both groups tend to be underserved (Forness, Kovale, MacMillion, Asornow, & Duncan, 1996).

Over the past three decades the earning power of dropouts has declined. In 1971, male dropouts earned 35,087 (in 2002 dollars), but this dropped 35% to 23,903 in 2002, (Whatever It Takes, 2010). The earnings gap widens with years of formal schooling. The more education/ formal school the higher the earnings. All of this affects Black males since they have the lowest graduation rate of any group. The estimated lifetime revenue loss for male dropouts between the ages of 25-34 is $944 billion (Whatever It Takes, 2010). In 1999, 65% of African American male high school dropouts in their 20’s were unemployed. By 2004, that number had increased to 72% compared to 29% of white and 19% of Latinos (Wright, 2007).

Dropouts are significantly more likely to rely on public assistance than high school graduates, and their death rate is 25 times higher than for those with 13 or more years of education (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2003).

**Black Male Overrepresentation – Socioeconomics**

Socioeconomic status issue, as previously stated, Black males are more likely to attend the least resourced and most segregated public schools (Given Half a Chance, 2008).

Low income students who would be considered to be within the poverty range may come from families, who receive public assistance, may be wards of the state and live in institutions for neglected or delinquent children, in foster care or eligible to receive reduced or free lunches. In 2009, 83.4% of all the students enrolled in Chicago
Public schools were classified as low-income students. While the state of Illinois classified 42.9% of all the students in public schools as low-income (Catalyst-Chicago, 2009).

**Racial-Ethnic Overrepresentation**

In Illinois public schools, as of 2009, the major racial-ethnic groups were White non-Hispanic, Black non-Hispanic, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander and Native American (American Indian/Alaskan Native) (Catalyst-Chicago, 2009).

In the Chicago Public schools in 2009, African American students were the ethnic group with the highest enrollment with 46.2 percentage rate of all of the enrolled students. Hispanic students comprised 41.2%, White students 8.8%, Asian students 3.5% and Native American students, 0.2%.

**Academic Overrepresentation**

Academically, nearly two-thirds of the Black male students in Illinois scored below the basic level in eighth grade. Black males in Illinois scored below the national average; with 63% of the Black male students below basic achievement levels in eighth grade math compared to 54% of Black male students on the national average (Illinois Inequities in Graduation Rates, 2008).

**Disciplinary Outcomes**

The overrepresentation of Black males in the exclusionary discipline consequences of suspensions and expulsions has been clearly documented. Horner, Fireman, and Wang (2010) examined the relationship between student behavior, peer status, race, and gender to decisions about school discipline. They collected peer
nominations and demographic information from a diverse sample of 1,493 elementary school participants. They used the collected information to examine behavior “(overt and relational aggression, impulsivity, and prosociality), context (peer states), and demographic characteristics (race and gender) as predictors of teacher and administrator decisions about discipline.”

The 1,493 elementary school participants in the Horner, Fireman and Wang (2010) study consisted of 537 third-, 470 fourth-, and 486 fifth-graders. The participating sample was 43% Caucasian, 35% Hispanic, 20% African American, 1.5% Asian, 0.5% American Indian, and 0.8% missing race information. The data used for the study was part of a project with an urban public school district in a medium-sized city in the southwest.

The study analyzed key variables that may have influenced administrators and teachers’ decisions to discipline elementary school students. The researchers, specifically, sought to determine if peer behavioral ratings of impulsivity, pro-social behavior, and overt and relational aggression were significantly related to at least one school enforced disciplinary action. These disciplinary actions included out-of-school suspension, in-school suspension, expulsion, corporal punishment, alternative placement, or other administrative discipline. The study also examined contextual factors such as peer status and race and gender, to determine if they were related to decisions about disciplinary action. For example, if an African American students or Caucasian students are both “judged highly overtly aggressive” by their peers, would one student be more likely to receive a disciplinary action based on race alone.
The results indicated that, “students nominated as average or highly overtly aggressive were more likely to be disciplined than others.” Of these students, “race was the most significant predictor, with African American students more likely to be disciplined than other ethnic groups, including Caucasians, Hispanics, or those classified as ‘other’.”

There have been other documented studies that have found significant biases in punishment decisions; specifically to school discipline; when race and gender have been examined (Horner, Fireman & Wang, 2010). Other researchers have found that teachers made more negative disciplinary action referrals for minority students than for European American students (Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007).

**Juvenile Justice Outcomes**

Nicholson-Crotty, Birchmeier, and Valentine (2009) examined the degree to which school disciplinary decisions can help to explain observed rates of disproportionate minority contact with the juvenile court system. Research has documented that minority youth account for over 60% of children who are detained by the juvenile justice system across the United States (Nicholson-Crotty et al., 2009). Minority children are more than eight times as likely as White children to be detained in juvenile detention facilities (Wordes & Jones, 1998). Additionally, there is significant documentation that suggest that while they are in school, these same students are suspended or expelled, at much higher rates than white students (Skiba et al., 2002), which accounts for the overrepresentation of Black males.
While Nicholson-Crotty et al. (2009) attempted to demonstrate that the disproportion of minority students who receive disciplinary actions such as suspension and expulsions correlates with disproportion in the justice system, they and other researchers are careful not to conclusively attribute the disproportion that exist to racial prejudice. However, they did state that they were, “not suggesting that differential treatment by police is not in part responsible for disproportionate rates of law enforcement contact with black youth, but actions like out-of-school suspensions may contribute to that outcome in the absence of bias.”

To test their assertions regarding the relationship between racial disproportion in out-of-school suspensions and the juvenile court system the authors collected data on African American and Caucasian youth aged 10-17 in 53 Missouri counties in 2004/2005.

The data collected was from a variety of sources; juvenile justice records for ages 10-17, school discipline records, county demographics, including race, population density, and poverty rates for the racial groups. Their sample included rural, suburban, and urban jurisdictions, with a median income that ranged from the poorest to the wealthiest of U.S. counties.

The results of the analysis of the 53 Missouri counties in the study suggested that the jurisdictions in which schools disproportionately targeted African American students for suspensions and expulsions also experienced higher rates of juvenile court referrals for black youth. Even after controlling for environmental factors that have been identified as influencing juvenile referral rates, school behaviors had a significant and substantive
meaningful impact on the juvenile justice referral rates of blacks relative to whites. Additionally, a subsequent analysis of the disciplinary decisions in the schools that fell within the sample counties indicated that African American students were more likely to be targeted for out-of-school suspensions than their white counterparts were, even if they committed the same type of offense. This is further evidence that decisions made by schools have a meaningful impact on patterns of racial disproportion in the juvenile justice system. The authors further contend that any differential treatment bolsters their argument.

**PBIS as an Alternative Approach**

PBIS has been in existence since 1998. From 1998 to 2003 in Illinois it was the EBD (Emotional Behavioral Disabilities) component of the ISBE (Illinois State Board of Education). In 1998, 23 Illinois schools were trained and implementing PBIS. To date, as of June 30, 2009, 1,081 Illinois schools in 268 school districts have been trained and are implementing PBIS.

The Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is a collaboration between the U.S. Department of Education and 11 technical assistance units across the United States. The center has a 10-year history of defining, implementing and evaluating PBIS across more than 9,000 schools in 40 states. Drs. George Sugai (University of Connecticut), Rob Horner (University of Oregon), and Tim Lewis (University of Missouri) direct the Center.

Skiba et al. (2001) listed the following features as being successful approaches to school violence prevention.
• Policies – proactive discipline handbooks and procedural handbooks
• Structures – behavioral support teams
• Routines – opportunities for students to learn expected and appropriate behaviors, staff development, data-based decision making that promotes identification, adoption, full implementation, and monitoring a research–validated practice.
• Program monitoring and effective implementation – consistent high-quality program implementation is essential. Program quality may be more important than whether a program is completed. The most effective quality prevention programs are increasingly using student outcome data (office discipline referrals, suspension rates, student achievements, and special education referrals and placement to monitor program effectiveness).

The PBIS program encompasses all of the aforementioned features that were identified as being successful approaches to school violence prevention.

Office discipline referrals (ODRs) are currently a recommended school practice to assess and determine the overall condition of the general school climate (Irvin et al., 2006). Research also suggests that this same screening process may also be useful in developing interventions at the universal level (Forness et al., 1996).

PBIS in Middle Schools

Middle school students face increased risk as they prepare to make the transition from middle school to high school (McIntosh, Flannery, Sugai, Braun, & Cochrane, 2008). The aforementioned authors investigated the increased risk factors in the transition
from middle school to high school. Their study tracked academic and school discipline records for general education and special education students as they transitioned from Grade 8 to Grade 9. McIntosh et al. reported that in the United States, 10.3% of 16-to 24-year-olds were dropouts in 2004, and 32.4% of them were between 16 and 19 years of age (Bowlby, 2005; National Center on Educational Statistics, 2006).

Improving school environments and academic instructions as a way of decreasing risk factors in the transition from middle school to high school is investigated as a way of preventing school failure (McIntosh et al., 2008). In order to find a means of improving school environments and academic instruction, the aforementioned authors set out to explore the relationships between academic and behavior variables in order to understand how problems in academics or behavior compound the risk for problems in both areas. There particular interest was in investigating the effects of behavior on academics and vice versa, as opposed to the direct effects of behavior on behavior. They examined existing data that schools collect in Grades 8 and 9 for patterns and indicators that would identify students who were at risk of school dropout or failure. First they examined descriptive data of the prevalence of Grade 9 students with challenges in academics and/or behavior. Secondly, they used statistical analyses to answer their research questions: (a) Does Grade 8 academic skill level predict Grade 9 problem behavior? (b) Does Grade 8 problem behavior predict Grade 9 academic performance? And (c) When controlling for direct effects (e.g., Grade 8 academics on Grade 9 academics), are crossover effects (e.g., Grade 8 academics on Grade 9 behavior) still statistically significant?
The setting for the study was a small school district in the Pacific Northwest during the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 school years. The total district K-12 enrollment for the 2003-2004 school year was 5,542 students. The district’s ethnic composition was 2.5% African American, 2.4% Asian American or Pacific Islander, 83.6% European American, 9.2% Hispanic or Latino, and 2.3% Native American or Native Alaskan. Fifty-three percent of students in the district received free or reduced lunch. The district had implemented and sustained both school-wide positive behavior support (SWPBS), and a school-wide reading improvement model for over 10 years with documented effectiveness of both programs. The participants were all students who completed at least a term of both Grades 8 and 9 in the district (N=330).

The authors used office discipline referrals (ODRs) as a measure of problem behavior. School personnel used ODRs as a method of documenting incidents of problem behavior that required administrative involvement (e.g., physical assault, serious disruptive behavior, harassment, or extreme noncompliance).

The participating district used the Oregon State Assessment (OSA; Oregon Department of Education, 2003) reading test to assess academic skills. The OSA reading test is a group-administered state outcomes assessment that all students in the State of Oregon take yearly from Grades 3 to 10, excluding Grade 9.

The results indicated significant interactions between academic scores and office discipline referrals, both within and across grades (McIntosh et al., 2008).

There were statistically significant links between problem behavior in Grade 8 and academic performance in Grade 9 and academic skills in Grade 8 and problem
behavior in Grade 9 and the classroom effects from behavior to academic were also significant.

**PBIS Schoolwide**

Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS) programs implemented at the elementary school level have been associated with decreases in office discipline referrals and suspensions. Robertson and Lane (2007) provides a methodological illustration of how to conduct scientifically rigorous secondary interventions within the context of a three-tiered model of support.

Their goal was to demonstrate one approach for using schoolwide data to identify middle school students with academic and behavioral concerns. They describe how to conduct a group design treatment outcome study that compares two secondary interventions (study skills plus conflict resolution [n=31] versus (study skills [n=34]).

The sample consisted of 65 students (42 boys, 23 girls) who had been identified by schoolwide data as having academic and behavioral concerns. The participants included 14 sixth graders, 24 seventh graders, and 27 eighth-grade students. The majority of the students were Caucasian (n=63). The students ranged from 11.48 to 15.48 years of age.

Their results indicated that there were no significant differences between the study skills group. The study skills group and the study skills plus conflict resolution group showed similar patterns of responding with regard to knowledge of study skills at the end of the intervention.
In the behavioral domain, their results revealed a significant group effect for knowledge of conflict resolution skills. Students in the study skills plus conflict resolution group demonstrated significant improvements in their knowledge of conflict resolution skills following the intervention. However, students in the combined group did not become significantly more collaborative in their conflict resolution style. The authors contend that these results may be due to the limited increase in knowledge of the conflict resolution skills they were taught.

Implementing SWPBS provided Robertson and Lane (2007) with the data they needed to make scientifically based decisions regarding study skills and conflict resolution; to help them determine how to best support middle school students who have behavioral and academic difficulties.

**PBIS in Urban Schools**

Research has documented the positive effects PBIS has had in reducing the number of office discipline referrals and suspensions. The PBIS network in Illinois supports the development of proactive schoolwide discipline systems that provide the needed multiple levels of interventions to effectively address the behavior support needs of all students, including those students with significant behavior challenges. By incorporating a systems approach, such as PBIS, for establishing a continuum of proactive, positive discipline procedures for all students, all staff members, and in all settings; all student needs could be addressed (academic, behavioral, and social-emotional).
The overrepresentation of minority students in the exclusionary consequences of suspensions and expulsions has been clearly documented. Additionally, the graduation rate of Black males in Illinois, with only 40% graduating in the 2005/6 cohort, was documented. The PBIS initiative has the potential to address the overrepresentation issues.

Given the low graduation rate of Black males in Illinois, the low achievement rates of Black males in Illinois and the overrepresentation in the exclusionary consequences of suspensions and expulsions, an alternative to traditional school discipline practices is needed. The PBIS initiative appears to be the most effective alternative, particularly in Illinois.

Netzel and Eber (2003) explored the effects of PBIS implementation in an urban school district in Illinois. The Waukegan, Illinois School District had experienced hints of proactive and positive behavior change at the district level for approximately a decade prior to the implementation of PBIS. The goal of the district was to reduce incidences of behavior problems, detentions, suspensions, expulsions, and the high rate of referrals to special education.

The Waukegan School District chose North Elementary School (NES) to pilot the PBIS program in the 1999-2000 school years. North Elementary School is one of 24 schools in the district. It was chosen because it was similar to other district schools. Ninety-six percent of NES students were minority and 68% of whom were eligible to receive free or reduced lunch, and they were experiencing high levels of suspensions.
In the 1998-1999 academic year, at NES 9.8% of the students received at least one suspension, totaling 117 documented incidents of out-of-school suspensions. Along with suspensions, other disciplinary actions, such as, administrative warnings and parent conferences were used. Additionally, the building was plagued with a backlog of special education referrals.

The results were encouraging. After one year of implementing PBIS, NES experienced a 22% reduction in overall suspensions from 1998-1999 to 1999-2000. They had also begun to see a decrease in office discipline referrals, however, at a slower rate due to the novelty of the new office referral procedures. More importantly, given the history of the overrepresentation of black males in the exclusionary consequences of suspensions and expulsions in Illinois, at NES each suspension and office referral received by a student was entered into the PBIS data system, which created graphs that were visually shared with the NES staff. The data offered direction for PBIS implementation and comparison. Since 96% of NES students were minority, this study is an indication that PBIS can be an effective intervention in addressing the overrepresentation issue.

As previously documented, PBIS has been proven to be effective in reducing suspensions and office discipline referrals which ultimately allows more time for academic instruction.

PBIS has also proven to be effective in promoting appropriate class attendance in an urban high school in New York City, with a 55.5% African American population, a 40.1% Hispanic population, a 2.9% Asian population and a 1.5% White student
population (Flanagan, 2006). Flanagan investigated the effects PBIS had on the attendance behaviors of students with and without disabilities.

The setting was an inner-city public high school located on a major street in the East Bronx section of New York City. The high school was a five-story building that encompassed a square city block that included a basement level and a football field across the street. Most of the windows were covered with metal gates, which are consistent with Hirschfield’s (2008) the criminalization of school discipline. The school was classified as a scanning school. In order for students to gain access to the building, they had to walk through a “gauntlet of security precautions.” Which included metal detectors, a security system that scanned student I.D. cards, and their school bags had to go through a portable x-ray machine.

The school was located in a high crime and poverty section of the city. Like Illinois and other large inner-city schools, the high school shared many of the same problems, such as gang activity, drugs, violence, crime, public assistance enrollment, group homes, and domestic problems. Many of which are the negative outcomes African American males face who experience the “exclusionary discipline consequences of suspensions and expulsions.”

The New York City High School staff was not only concerned about the high national dropout rates and truancy, they were additionally confronted by “the seemingly endless behavioral phenomenon of hall walking.” The student hall-walkers cut classes and wandered the halls, the school grounds throughout the day, and stairwells. They would also hide in places such as the auditorium, the cafeteria, an office, an empty
classroom or a class with a substitute teacher. With a student population of the 3,203 as of October 31, 2003 and at 131.2% capacity during the 2003-2004 school year, hallwalkers presented a formidable challenge. Additionally, during the 2003-2004 school year, the Mayor of New York City had classified the school as an impact school due to the high number of suspensions and police incidents the previous two years.

Of the 3,203 students enrolled, approximately 1,000 fit the specific nonattendance behavior criteria. The criteria for inclusion in the positive behavior support program was that a student had cut 20 classes or at least one disciplinary referral for class cutting, and had more than five unexcused absences. After 350 recruitment packets were distributed, the final sample of (N=64) participants were recruited.

The research was directed towards special needs students due to their consistently high rates of cutting, failing grades due to nonattendance, and low rates of attendance.

The positive behavior support program was administered in two levels. The first level was through small groups and the second level was through the school-wide instruction of the targeted expected attendance behaviors.

The results indicated significant differences between the intervention group (n=32) and the comparison group (n=32) on the posttest. The comparison group showed a decrease in attendance and grade data and the intervention group showed an increase in attendance and grade data. There were also significant correlations between the positive behavior support treatments and passing grades.

The aforementioned research has demonstrated that PBIS can be used as an effective intervention in urban inner-city schools with a high African American
population. Given the overrepresentation of African American males, PBIS appears to be a viable alternative to the current school discipline practices.

**Summary**

Overrepresentation is an issue. PBIS seems to have a promising potential at addressing the overrepresentation issue, however, more work needs to be done. The focus of the current project is a PBIS evaluation in a middle school with a large population of students who are African American.

The negative impact that suspensions and expulsions has had on African American males has resulted in the overrepresentation of this minority group for over five decades. Additionally, the exclusionary consequences of suspensions and expulsions has negatively affected academic progress, has caused an increase in the African American male’s incarceration rate, reduced income, health and mortality issues, and has caused overall feelings of disengagement in academic settings.

Given the aforementioned, PBIS has been offered the viable option to address discipline issues on a prevention-oriented basis. PBIS research in urban middle schools with a high population of minority low-income students has proven to be effective in reducing the number of office discipline referrals and suspensions.

While research in minority urban middle school districts has been forthcoming, it is still limited with regard to the Chicago area where only 37% of Black males graduate from high school.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore the role of the PBIS program with respect to behavioral outcomes in a 97% African American urban middle school. The PBIS program was administered to the entire student population to explore pre and post intervention effects. The research questions are:

(1) Can school-wide PBIS be implemented with fidelity in an urban middle school with a high percentage of students who are African American?

(2) What impact, if any, did PBIS have on the number of office discipline referrals of the students who participated in the PBIS program?

(3) What impact, if any, did PBIS have on the number of:
   (a) in-school suspensions of the students who participated in the PBIS program?
   (b) out-of-school suspensions of the students who participated in the PBIS program?
   (c) expulsions of the students who participated in the PBIS program?

Setting

The participating middle school for the study is located just outside of Chicago in the south region of Cook County and is the only middle school in a five elementary school district. The community consists of low to middle-income private homes and apartment buildings. The middle school shares many of the same problems as the neighboring Chicago Public schools, such as, gang activity, violence, crime, public
assistance enrollment and domestic problems. The middle school houses one seventh
grade special education resource class and one eighth grade special education resource
class.

Participants

The participants for this study consisted of 242 students and staff from the middle
elementary school in grades 7 and 8 during the 2007-2008 academic years, ranging in
ages from 12 to 15. The middle school staff used the School Wide Information System
(SWIS) to document the number of ODRs, suspensions, and expulsions for both seventh
and eighth grade students for the 2007-2008 academic years. Of the 242 students on
register as of August 23, 2007, the ethnic make-up of the student body consisted of 97%
African American, 2% Hispanic or Latino, and 1% European American. The population
consisted of 143 male students and 99 female students. Of the 242 students, 23 of the 242
students were receiving special education resource services.

As a result of the number of ODRs, suspensions and expulsions that were
generated school wide during the 2007-2008 academic year; the middle school staff
decided to implement PBIS school wide for the 2008-2009 academic year.

Procedure

The positive behavior intervention and support program sought to counter the
antecedent environmental factors that influence inappropriate behaviors that result in
office discipline referrals, suspensions and expulsions.

The PBIS initiative was implemented by the middle school home room teachers
as part of their social skills curriculum due to the number of ODRs, suspensions, and
expulsions during the 2007-2008 academic year. The five-homeroom teachers who implemented the PBIS program, along with the middle school staff, were trained by an Illinois PBIS network staff during the 2007-2008 academic year for the purpose of data collection and decision making regarding the middle school students. The PBIS initiative was fully implemented during the 2008-2009 academic year in the school that will participate in the study.

The positive behavior interventions and supports program (PBIS) focused on being safe, responsible, and respectful for the entire middle school population. Data from the middle school school-wide information system (SWIS, 2009) was compiled to generate daily, weekly, and monthly office discipline referral totals, daily, weekly, and monthly in and out of school suspension totals, and daily, weekly, and monthly expulsion totals for each participant.

Teachers and staff were made aware of the positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS) program and received a review course in the particulars of the program on the teacher in-service days prior to the students first day of school for the 2008-2009 school year. They also were required to attend weekly meetings with a PBIS internal coach stationed in their building, and they attended monthly training meetings as well as having the availability of their external PBIS coach whenever they had a question or a concern. Active participation by the teachers and staff was encouraged throughout the PBIS initiative. The positive behavior support techniques suggested for use included tokens when a student was observed being safe, responsible, and respectful by his teacher or any school staff. The student could redeem their tokens for gifts on a daily basis or if
they chose to, they could save them to buy things they needed like school supplies and even school uniforms.

The entire middle school staff, once trained gave students tokens for appropriate behavior as well as ODRs for inappropriate behavior.

**PBIS – School Wide Implementation**

The first Friday of the September 2008-2009 school year, the entire school participated in a kick-off assembly to introduce the PBIS program. For the months of October 2008 through May 2009, there was a monthly booster assembly to reinforce weak areas based on the months SWIS data. For example, if there had been a spike in the out of area referrals at 2:30pm during dismissal, additional staff would be assigned to strategic locations during dismissal and a booster lesson on being responsible would be re-taught during the monthly assembly. In addition to the teaching of booster lessons, teachers and their classes with the least number of ODRs would be acknowledged for being safe, respectful and responsible.

Teachers were also encouraged to use classroom management strategies. For example, students were given three warnings before an office discipline referral was written. Only students with two or more ODRs were included in the SWIS data. Students with 0-1 referrals usually responded to verbal redirection and were not included in the SWIS data.
Materials

Materials required for this study included the generation of approximately 350 daily behavior sheets and lesson plans that focused on being safe, being respectful, and being responsible. The lesson plans were incorporated into the Life Skills lessons. Each behavior sheet included a square for each class period of the day, in which a student who was observed being respectful, safe, and responsible received three points for each class. Students could redeem awarded points for token gifts, such as pens, pencils, candy, notebooks, school uniforms, basketballs, footballs, and tickets to school sports events.

Definition of Behavior

The definition of behavior for this study refers to the manner in which students conduct themselves. The goal of this research is to determine if a PBIS program could decrease the prevalence of inappropriate behaviors in a public middle school setting. Manifestations of inappropriate behaviors include disruptive classroom behavior, verbal and physical aggression towards students and staff, being late to class, bringing a weapon to school, walking the hallways after the tardy bell, leaving the school building before the end of the academic day, receiving disciplinary referrals for inappropriate behavior, being given suspensions and expulsions for inappropriate behaviors. Appropriate behaviors include being in school on time, being marked present in class on a daily basis, attending all programmed classes, and complying with the positive behavior intervention and support initiative of being safe, responsible and respectful to staff and students. The major goal is to have a reduction in ODRs, suspensions, and expulsions and to improve academic performance as measured by the schools AYP data.
Variables

Office Disciplinary Referrals (ODRs)

This refers to the participants’ total number of ODRs during the 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 academic year. The number of ODRs is calculated as the total number of ODRs a student received during an eight class period day, which were then totaled on a weekly and monthly basis. This variable is used to provide an indication of problem behavior in the current study. In the middle school studied, school personnel use ODRs as a method of documenting incidents of problem behavior that require administrative involvement (e.g., physical assault, serious disruptive behavior, or extreme noncompliance). ODRs are used for several purposes: they may be used as a corrective consequence, as data to track patterns of universal (school wide) behavior and also as a method to track and analyze an individual student’s problem behavior (Sugai, Sprague, Horner, & Walker, 2000). As a measure of student behavior, ODRs possess sufficient construct validity and adequately sufficient concurrent validity with a number of standardized measures of individual behavior (as cited in Irvin, Tobin, Sprague, Sugai, & Vincent, 2004). Additionally, ODRs also pass predictive validity of further problem behavior, including physical assaults and dropout (Tobin, Sugai, & Colvin 1996). Lastly, ODRs have been identified as being an effective and efficient measure for decision making in schools (Irvin et al., 2006). This is because school personnel in the school building may complete ODRs. The reliability of ODRs may differ by school personnel or building (Kern & Manz, 2004). To counter this threat, personnel in the middle school studied were provided with annual trainings on determining what types of behavior
should or should not result in an ODR, a mentor in the building (who received monthly training by a PBIS coordinator) who met with them on a weekly basis, and who was available to them on a daily basis.

There are, however, limitations to the use of ODRs. Tobin, Sugai, and Colvin (1996) compared students from sixth to eighth grade. They did not find a significant correlation in either grade. The number of ODRs for the building rather than the specific behavior influenced the raters. ODRs measure overt records of behavior that are tied to the behavior tracking system in the schools and are not a direct measure of the student’s behavior.

SWIS is presently being used in 6,507 schools (3,858 Elementary Schools, 1,092 Middle Schools, 515 High Schools, and 1,042 K-8/12 Schools). The schools are located in Australia, Canada, Iceland, and New Zealand and in the United States. Schools using SWIS sign a license agreement with the University of Oregon and pay an annual fee of $250 per school academic year.

**Suspensions**

This is participant’s total number of in and out of school suspensions received weekly and monthly. In-school suspension refers to time out of class spent in a detention room in the school building. Out-of-school suspension refers to one to ten days out of the school building. Suspension data for the number of students suspended for the 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 academic years will be collected from the school’s database. Suspension as defined as being removed from a general education school for a specific number of
days because of breaking school rules. Suspensions may range from one to ten consecutive days per incident (one student gets three days = 1 incident).

**Expulsions**

Expulsion is defined as being removed from a general education school from one semester to a year. Expelled students who are under 16 are required to attend special alternative schools. It is participant’s total number of expulsions received weekly and monthly. Expulsion data for the number of students expelled for the 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 academic year will be collected from the school’s data base.

**Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) Data**

AYP is defined as the percentage of students who are meeting their annual yearly progress. AYP data will be collected from the State Board of Education’s data system.

ODR, suspension, and expulsion data will be collected by school personnel and stored in the School-wide Information System (SWIS). SWIS was designed to help school personnel use office referral data to design both school-wide and individual student interventions. The three primary elements of the SWIS system are: (a) a web-based computer application for data entry and report generation; (b) an efficient system for gathering information; and (c) a practical process for using information for decision making. These three elements give school personnel the capability to evaluate the behavior of groups, to evaluate individual student behavior, behaviors occurring in specific settings, and behaviors occurring during specific periods of the school day. The SWIS reports indicate times and/or the locations “prone to elicit problem behaviors, and
allow teachers and administrators to shape school-wide environments to maximize students’ academic and social achievements.”

**Implementation Measures**

Research has demonstrated the effectiveness of PBIS that has been a reduction in office ODRs (Sugai, Lewis-Palmer, Todd, & Horner, 2001). Schools are vastly increasing the implementation of school wide positive behavior supports (SWPBS) to improve student outcomes. Over the past decade, recommendations have consistently stated that a team approach to data based decision making is essential in the SWPBS process (OSEP Center on Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports, 2004; Sugai, Horner, & Gresham, 2002). In order for PBIS to be effective, it has to be implemented with fidelity. In the current study, the data collected by using the measures listed below will be used for evaluating the implementation of PBIS.

**School-wide Evaluation Tool (SET) (Sugai et al., 2001)**

SET measures a school’s progress across each academic year. The internal consistency and validity of SET is highly correlated with the Team Implementation Checklist (TIC) which reflects internal self-assessment. Spaulding, Tobin, and Vincent (2010) analyzed SET data from 833 elementary schools. Their focus was on the internal consistency and validity of SET. Their results indicated that SET performs best in elementary schools. There was less cohesion in middle and high schools. SET results are used to:

1. Determine annual goals for school-wide effective behavior support;
2. Assess features that are in place;
3. Evaluation on-going efforts towards school-wide behavior support;
4. Design and revise procedures as needed;
5. Compare efforts toward school-wide effective behavior support from year to year.

**Team Implementation Checklist (TIC)** (Sugai et al., 2001)

The TIC is used to guide the PBIS team activities throughout the academic year. The TIC also facilitates the team in action planning and identifies technical assistance needs. TICs are completed by the schools three times a year until they meet and maintain fidelity on the Benchmarks of Quality or on the School-wide Evaluation Tool.

Benchmarks of Quality (BoQ) is used to assess and identify areas of strength and weaknesses for the purpose of establishing future action plans. BoQ is reliable, valid, efficient and useful at the Tier 1 level. It is intended to be used as a self-assessment and not progress monitor. The results of the correlation with BoQ are N=572 (09-10), Pearson r = .72 (09-10 (p<.0001) (Kincaid, Childs & George, 2005).

**Data Analysis**

The descriptive study examined the seventh grade students SWIS data for the 2007-2008 school year, which will be used as a comparison for the same group the following year (2008-2009), as eighth graders. In 2007-2008 PBIS was not in place, but was implemented in 2008-2009. A nonparametric test the chi-square test will be used to compare the 2007-2008 school wide numbers of ODRs, in school suspensions and out of school suspensions before PBIS implementation to the 2008-2009 school wide numbers of ODRs, in school suspensions and out of school suspensions when PBIS
implementation occurred. Pre and post intervention data will be examined each quarter for the number of ODRs, the number of suspensions and for the number of expulsions. There are four quarters in an academic year. The data will be examined for the months of October 2008, January 2009, March 2009, and June 2009.

Participants will be assigned ID numbers to ensure de-identification.

**Conclusions**

The overrepresentation of African American males in the exclusionary discipline practices of suspensions and expulsions has been documented for over five decades (Children’s Defense Fund, 1975). Current school discipline practices have not been effective; in fact, they have resulted in the “racial disproportionality in school discipline” (Skiba & Noam, 2001, p. 30). Racial disproportionality in school disciplinary practices, as previously stated has an extensive history and continues to present day (Children’s Defense Fund, 1975; Drakeford, 2006; Glackman et al., 1978; Skiba et al., 2002).

There clearly needs to be an alternative to current school discipline practices. The PBIS initiative appears to offer a viable alternative to current school discipline practices. PBIS has proven to be effective in reducing problem behavior, office discipline referrals, and suspensions (Barton & Stepanek, 2009; George, White, & Schlaffer, 2007; Muscott, Mann, & LeBrun, 2008; Netzel & Eber, 2003; Todd, Campbell, Meyer & Horner, 2008). However, there has been limited research documenting the effectiveness of PBIS with a minority population.
CHAPTER IV
RESULTS

The overrepresentation of African American males in the exclusionary discipline practices of suspension and expulsion was documented for well over five decades (Children’s Defense Fund, 1975; Fenning & Rose, 2007; Skiba & Noam 2001). This overrepresentation has been a deleterious outcome of the current discipline practices in the U.S. public school system (Skiba & Noam, 2001). Given the aforementioned, an alternative approach to school discipline is needed. PBIS appears to be a viable alternative to current school discipline practices.

PBIS Implementation in Urban Schools

Research Question One. Can school-wide PBIS be implemented with fidelity in an urban middle school with a high percentage of students who are African American?

Due to the potential flaws and uncertainty with the data collection process the SET data could not be used to respond to questions about fidelity. The SET data used to measure the school’s progress across each academic year did not show any distinctions between before PBIS intervention and after PBIS intervention. The SET data for 2007-2008 when PBIS was not being implemented showed 88% implementation. This was unlikely to be the case because PBIS implementation did not occur until the following year in 2008-2009. The SET data for 2008-2009 when PBIS was being implemented showed 95% implementation.
Research Question Two. Does the number of office discipline referrals of students entering as seventh graders in 2007-2008 change when they research eighth grade in 2008-2009?

The hypothesis is that there is no relationship between PBIS and the number of office discipline referrals for the seventh graders in 2007-2008 when they reach eighth grade in 2008-2009.

This question will be addressed through descriptive statistics data and chi-square analysis. SPSS was used to conduct a chi-square test of the relationship between pre PBIS Office Discipline Referral (ODR) data and post PBIS ODR data. The chi-square test of the relationship between pre PBIS ODR data and post PBIS ODR data produced \( X^2 = 22.528 \), which is statistically significant at \( p < .05 \). This is associated with a critical value of 11.07, indicating that we are speaking of a meaningful difference between pre and post PBIS data.

The number of office discipline referrals of students entering as seventh graders in 2007-2008 decreased significantly when they reached eighth grade in 2008-2009 after receiving PBIS. During the 2007-2008 academic years, the seventh grade students received 264 office discipline referrals with no PBIS implementation. During the 2008-2009 academic years, those same students now in eighth grade, received 205 office discipline referrals; which is a decrease of 59 office discipline referrals. The Chi-Square test supported that there were less ODRs after PBIS implementation than before. We reject the null hypothesis that there is no relationship between PBIS and the number of office discipline referrals for the seventh graders in 2007-2008 when they reach eighth
grade in 2008-2009. (See Tables 1 and 2 for descriptive statistics of ODR’s before and after PBIS; see Table 3 for Chi-Squared Test.)

Table 1. ODRs before PBIS Implementation 2007-2008 (Descriptive Statistics)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>VAR00001</strong> Valid N (list wise)</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>10.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>11.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Variable</strong></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Std.</td>
<td>Variance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>VAR00001</strong> Valid N (list wise)</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.3217</td>
<td>.15355</td>
<td>1.08242</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. ODRs after PBIS Implementation 2008-2009 (Descriptive Statistics)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>VAR00001</strong> Valid N (list wise)</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>6.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Variable</strong></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Std.</td>
<td>Variance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>VAR00001</strong> Valid N (list wise)</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.7826</td>
<td>.10094</td>
<td>1.08242</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3. Office Discipline Referrals after PBIS (Chi Square Test)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Observed N</th>
<th>Effected N</th>
<th>Residual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>21.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>37.0</td>
<td>-4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>-12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>-1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>-5.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ODR After</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chi-Square</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>df</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asymp. sig</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The average number of ODRs per student was lower in the after PBIS implementation sample (mean 1.78 ODRs per student, standard deviation 1.08 ODRs per student), than in the before PBIS implementation sample (mean 2.32 ODRs per student, standard deviation 1.65 ODRs per student). The difference in the average number of ODRs per student was large enough to produce a significant result when the chi-square test was run.

The maximum number of ODRs students received in the data set decreased from 11 in the before PBIS implementation sample to 6 in the after PBIS implementation sample. The minimum number of ODRs students received was unchanged; it was 1 in both samples.
There are three separate components to research question three. The first part had to do with whether school-wide PBIS implementation was associated with a reduction in the number of in-school suspensions.

SPSS was used to conduct a chi-square test of the relationship between pre PBIS in school suspensions and post PBIS in school suspensions. The chi-square test of the relationship between pre PBIS in school suspensions and post PBIS in school suspension produced $X^2 = 13.116$, which is statistically significant at the $p < .05$. This is associated with a critical value of 5.99, indicating that there is a meaningful difference between pre PBIS in school suspensions and post PBIS in school suspensions. Thus, we reject the null hypothesis that there is no relationship between PBIS and the number of in school suspensions. During the 2007-2008 academic years, the seventh grade students received 112 in-school suspensions with no PBIS implementation. During the 2008-2009 academic years, those same students now in eighth grade, received 68 in-school suspensions with PBIS implementation which is a decrease of 44 in-school suspensions. Therefore the Chi- Square test supported that there was a reduction in in-school suspensions after PBIS implementation.

The numbers of in-school suspensions were significantly reduced after PBIS implementation. (See Tables 4 and 5 for descriptive statistics of pre/post in-school suspensions and Table 6 for the Chi-Square Test.)
Table 4. In School Suspensions before PBIS Implementation 2007-2008 (Descriptive Statistics)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N Statistic</th>
<th>Range Statistic</th>
<th>Minimum Statistic</th>
<th>Maximum Statistic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VAR00001 Valid N</td>
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<tr>
<td>(list wise)</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>.9739</td>
<td>.09762</td>
<td>1.04681</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5. In School Suspensions after PBIS Implementation 2008-2009 (Descriptive Statistics)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N Statistic</th>
<th>Range Statistic</th>
<th>Minimum Statistic</th>
<th>Maximum Statistic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VAR00001 Valid N</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(list wise)</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>.5913</td>
<td>.06038</td>
<td>.64747</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6. In School Suspensions after PBIS (Chi-Square Test)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Observed N</th>
<th>Expected N</th>
<th>Residual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>.00</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>17.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>55.0</td>
<td>-7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>-10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Test Statistics

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chi-Square</td>
<td>13.116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>df</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A symp. Sig.</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The average number of in school suspensions per student was lower in the after PBIS implementation sample (mean .59 in school suspensions per student, standard deviation .65 in school suspensions per student), than in the before PBIS implementation sample (mean .97 in school suspensions per student, standard deviation 1.05 in school suspensions per student). The difference in the average number of in school suspensions per student was large enough to produce a significant result when the chi-square test was run.

The maximum number of in school suspensions students received in the data set decreased from five in the before PBIS implementation sample to 2 in school suspensions per student in the after PBIS implementation sample. The minimum number of in school suspensions students received was unchanged; it was zero in both samples.

The second component to research question three had to do with whether school-wide PBIS implementation was associated with a reduction in the number of out of school suspensions? The hypothesis is that there is no relationship between PBIS and the number of out of school suspensions.
SPSS was used to conduct a chi-square test of the relationship between pre PBIS out of school suspensions and post PBIS out of school suspensions. The chi-square test of the relationship between pre PBIS out of school suspension data and post PBIS out of school suspension data produced $X^2 = 6.108$, which is not statistically significant at the $p<.05$. This is associated with a critical value of 9.49, indicating that there is no difference between pre PBIS out of school suspensions and post PBIS out of school suspensions. Thus we fail to reject the null hypothesis. During the 2007-2008 academic years, the seventh grade students received 150 out-of-school suspensions with no PBIS implementation. During the 2008-2009 academic school years, those same students now in eighth grade, received 137 out-of-school suspensions; which is a decrease of 13 out-of-school suspensions which was not a large enough number to be statistically significant. (See Tables 7 and 8 for descriptive statistics of pre/post out-of-school suspensions and Table 9 for Chi-Square Test.)

Table 7. Out of School Suspensions before PBIS 2007-2008 (Descriptive Statistics)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Statistic</td>
<td>Statistic</td>
<td>Statistic</td>
<td>Statistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VAR00001</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>6.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid N (listwise)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Variance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Statistic</td>
<td>Std. Error</td>
</tr>
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<td>VAR00001</td>
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<td>.10566</td>
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<tr>
<td>Valid N (listwise)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8. Out of School Suspensions after PBIS 2008-2009 (Descriptive Statistics)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N Statistic</th>
<th>Range Statistic</th>
<th>Minimum Statistic</th>
<th>Maximum Statistic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>VAR00001 Valid N (listwise)</td>
<td>115 115</td>
<td>4.00 .00</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean Statistic</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>Variance Statistic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VAR00001 Valid N (listwise)</td>
<td>1.1913 .08725</td>
<td>.93561 .875</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9. Out of School Suspensions after PBIS (Chi-square Test)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Observed N</th>
<th>Expected N</th>
<th>Residual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>.00</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>-1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>47.0</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>-5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>-4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>115</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chi-Square df</th>
<th>A symp. Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.108</td>
<td>.191</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The average number of out-of-school suspensions per student was lower in the after PBIS implementation sample (mean 1.19 out of school suspensions per student, standard deviation .94 out of school suspensions per student), than in the before PBIS implementation sample (mean 1.30 out of school suspensions per student, standard deviation 1.13 out of school suspensions per student). There was no statistical significance in the number of out of school suspensions. In the pre and post PBIS
implementation groups; therefore we cannot say that PBIS implementation was associated with a reduction in out of school suspensions.

The maximum number of out of school suspensions students received decreased from six in the before PBIS implementation sample to four in the after PBIS implementation sample. The minimum number of out of school suspensions was unchanged; it was zero in both samples.

The third component to research question three had to do with whether school-wide PBIS implementation was associated with a reduction in the number of expulsions for the 8th grade students who received PBIS in the 2008-2009 academic years in comparison to the number of expulsions for the same students in 2007-2008 when no implementation occurred?

A descriptive analysis was used to answer this question. In 2007-2008 when no PBIS implementation occurred for the seventh grade students, there were seven expulsions for that academic year. In 2008-2009 when PBIS implementation occurred for those same students in eighth grade, there were no expulsions for that academic year. There were no expulsions after PBIS implementation. While we couldn’t conduct a statistical test because of the low numbers; the descriptive findings supported that there were no expulsions after PBIS implementation.

According to the Illinois interactive report card; the student’s Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) also improved after PBIS implementation. In 2007-2008 academic school years the seventh graders achieved a 60.4 % in Reading and a 54% in Math with no PBIS implementation. In 2008-2009 academic school years, those same students
significantly improved; achieving a 69.6% in Reading and a 72.4% in Math. While we could not conduct a statistical test, the Illinois interactive report card supported findings that reading and math percentages improved after PBIS implementation.
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

School Discipline Background

School discipline has become an increasingly serious concern given the amount of school violence. Serious concern about school violence led Congress to pass the Gun Free Act in 1994, which resulted in school districts adopting a get-tough stance such as zero tolerance for weapons possession and use (Studley 2002).

The zero tolerance for weapons possession and use prompted school districts to begin using metal detectors, police and security guards in the schools and student searches as they entered the building, what Hirschfield et al. (2008) terms “as the criminalization of school discipline” (p. 83).

A result of such school discipline practices as zero tolerance which resulted in suspensions and expulsions from school; a deleterious negative outcome of suspensions and expulsions has been and continues to be the overrepresentation of African American males in such discipline responses.

Black male students continue to be disproportionately subjected to suspensions, expulsions, and corporal punishment (Townsend, 2000). In 1993, The Office for Civil Rights reported the findings of a national survey which documented that African American males accounted for only 8.23% of the total student population. They were suspended at rates over three times their percentage in the population.
To date this overrepresentation of African American males in such deleterious negative outcomes of suspensions and expulsions increases year by year. The suspension rate for Black males in the Chicago Public School System increased 100% over a five-year span from 2003 to 2008 (Catalyst-Chicago, 2009).

This overrepresentation of Black male students is not unique to Chicago. Kaufman et al. (2010) examined office discipline referral data by race from a densely populated Northwestern city. Their results were consistent with over five decades of data. African American/Black students received significantly more referrals.

**Effects of Exclusionary Discipline**

The effects of suspensions and expulsions have wide-ranging and long lasting consequences. One of which is a widening achievement gap between African American students and their white peers (Garibaldi, 1992). In 2005-2006 only 40% of Black males graduated from High School in Illinois (Schott 50 State Report, 2008). In addition to the low graduation rate, “Black male dropouts lead nation in incarceration” (PR Newswire, 2010, p. 1). To compound the low graduation rate and high rate of incarceration, Black Males also have a high unemployment rate.

In 1999, 65% of Black male high school dropouts in their 20’s were unemployed. In 2004, the unemployment rate for Black males had increased to 72% compared to 29% of whites and 19% of Latinos (Wright, 2007).
**PBIS as an Alternative**

Given over five decades, documenting the overrepresentation of African American males in the exclusionary discipline practices of suspensions and expulsions, (Children’s Defense Fund, 1975; Fenning & Rose, 2007; Skiba & Noam 2001), an alternative approach to suspensions and expulsions appear to be warranted.

PBIS has demonstrated via the results of this study and others like it that it is a viable alternative to the school discipline practices of suspension and expulsion (Skiba & Noam, 2001).

**PBIS Implementation in Urban Schools**

There has been limited, PBIS implementation with fidelity in urban schools with a high percentage of students who are African American has been documented. Netzel and Eber (2003) examined PBIS implementation in an urban school district in Illinois with a 96% minority population. The districts goal was to reduce behavior problems that led to detentions, expulsions, suspensions, and high rates of special education referrals. They used office discipline referrals as a means of tracking behavior trends, for both appropriate and inappropriate behaviors. After one year of implementation, the participating school experienced a 22% reduction in suspensions. They also observed a decrease in office discipline referrals but at a slower rate.

Other studies, such as, Bohanon et al. (2006) have also documented PBIS implementation with fidelity with a high minority population in an urban school. They examined the impact of PBIS implementation in an urban high school setting with a 36% African American and 36% Hispanic population. They used the School-wide Evaluation
Tool (SET) and qualitative interviews to examine the impact of implementation. Their results indicated that schoolwide PBIS was implemented in an urban high school with success.

Skiba et al. (2011) also documented PBIS implementation in urban schools with fidelity. They examined the patterns of office discipline referrals of 272 K-6 graders and 92 6-9 graders. Their investigation focused on patterns of office discipline referrals by race and administrative decisions by race. Their results indicated that African American females are 2.19 (for elementary) and 3.78 (for middle school) times more likely to receive office discipline referrals than their White peers. These results are consistent with findings by Gregory and Weinstein (2008), that African American students receive higher rates of office discipline referrals.

PBIS implementation with fidelity in a minority population has been documented by the aforementioned studies, however with regards to this study. This examiner due to the limitation of the data that addresses fidelity cannot answer the question of implementation with fidelity in an urban middle school with a high percentage of students who are African American. However, the results of this study (a decrease in ODRs, a decrease in suspensions and an increase in academic performance) are consistent with current PBIS research (George, White, & Schlaffer, 2007; Netzel & Eber, 2003).
Office Discipline Referrals after PBIS

The results of this study found a statistically significant reduction in ODRs after PBIS implementation for the eighth grade students who received PBIS. By reducing the number of ODRs a student receives, this translates into more instructional time in the classroom. Given the low graduation rates for minorities in Illinois, particularly the Black male graduation rate in Chicago (Schott 50 State Report, 2008), more instructional time appears to be needed.

These results are consistent with ongoing PBIS research, which has consistently documented a decrease in the number of office discipline referrals after PBIS implementation (Barrett, Bradshaw & Lewis-Palmer, 2008; George, White & Schlaffer, 2007; Netzel & Eber, 2003; Oswald, Safran & Johnson, 2005).

In School Suspensions after PBIS

The results of this study found a statistically significant reduction in, in school suspensions for the eighth grade students who received PBIS.

These results are consistent with ongoing PBIS research which documented reduced in school suspension with PBIS implementation (George, White & Schlaffer, 2007; Netzel & Efer, 2003).

Out of School Suspensions after PBIS

The results of this study found a decrease in out of school suspensions for the eighth grade students who received PBIS; however, the difference in the number of out of school suspensions was not large enough to produce a statistically significant result. The
number of out of school suspensions did not significantly change over the two years of data this research reviewed.

These results are consistent with Skiba et al. (2011), even with the implementation of PBIS; African American students continue to be overrepresented in the exclusionary discipline practices of suspensions and expulsions. Skiba reviewed the documented patterns of office discipline referrals of 364 elementary and middle school students for the 2005-2006 academic year. They found that African American families are 2.19 (for elementary) and 3.78 (for middle) school, more likely to receive an office discipline referral for problem behavior than their White peers.

Additionally, this study found a significant difference in the reading and math scores for the eighth graders who received PBIS and those same students as seventh graders with no PBIS. There was a significant improvement in the AYP of the eighth graders who received PBIS. As seventh graders in 2007-2008 with no PBIS they achieved a 60.4% in reading and a 54% in math. These same students as eighth graders for the 2008-2009 academic year, after PBIS achieved a 69.6% in reading, an increase of 9.2 points and a 72.4% in math, an increase of 18.4 points.

**Contribution to the Literature Base**

The results presented in this study extend the research literature on the effectiveness of PBIS with a predominantly minority middle school population by providing strong support for the implementation of the PBIS program with minority students, and confirming current research which has demonstrated that the
overrepresentation of minority students continues even with the implementation of PBIS (Skiba et al., 2011).

The result of the research confirms the need for additional changes in policy, practice and research to address this ongoing problem of the overrepresentation of minorities in the exclusionary practices of suspensions and expulsions.

**Limitations and Future Research**

The data on ODRs, suspensions, and expulsions analyzed for this study was collected from 115 students. While the number of participants was relatively small, it is consistent with the studies on PBIS implementation, which are highly reliable, and can be applied nationally to schools and in Illinois public schools. Out of school suspensions results were not significant, suggesting that possibly more than PBIS is needed to address the multi-decade cycle of the overrepresentation of African American students in the exclusionary discipline practices of suspension and expulsion.

A more controlled study in the future might provide more information. To test whether PBIS has an effect, we might use a control group who did not receive PBIS for seventh and eighth grade and compare the results to the seventh and eighth grade treatment group who received PBIS.

Additionally, Vincent, Randall, Cartledge, Tobin and Swain-Bradway (2011) may have a possible solution with their approach to the integration of cultural responsiveness and PBIS (Sugai et al., 2011). Vincent et al. (2011) contends that PBIS emphasizes sameness, while cultural responsiveness emphasizes difference. She further contends “difference emphasized by cultural responsiveness theory commonly refers to cultural
and linguistic diversity” (p. 220). She further contends that by closely examining the characteristics of culturally and linguistically diverse students we may have a better understanding of their difference. After those dimensions have been identified, we can then examine how to adopt behavioral support (PBIS) to accommodate them.

An area for future research concerns PBIS implementation with a larger minority population. It is necessary to examine specific concerns about racial disproportionality to determine appropriate interventions to stop the cycle of overrepresentation.

**Summary**

The overrepresentation of African American males has been an ongoing practice for over five decades. The PBIS initiative has proven to be a viable alternative to suspensions and expulsions. The results of this study were promising. The eighth grade students, after receiving PBIS experienced a decrease in ODRs, in school suspensions, improved reading and math scores and did not have any expulsions. The aforementioned results do warrant continued research.
APPENDIX A

OFFICE REFERRAL FORM
## Office Referral Form

**School District**

**Location**

- □ Playground
- □ Cafeteria
- □ Computer Lab/Library
- □ Bathroom
- □ Hallway
- □ Classroom
- □ Bus
- □ Other

**Name:**

**Date:**

**Teacher:**

**Grade:**

**Refering Staff:**

### Problem Behavior

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minor</th>
<th>Major</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□ Inappropriate language</td>
<td>□ Abusive language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Physical Contact</td>
<td>□ Fighting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Defiance</td>
<td>□ Physical aggression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Disruptive</td>
<td>□ Over Defiance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Property Misuse</td>
<td>□ Harassment/Threat/Alcohol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Out of Rest</td>
<td>□ Disruption</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Other</td>
<td>□ Other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Possible Motivation

| Obtain peer attention | Obtain adult attention | Obtain items/activities | Avoid Peer(s) | Avoid Adult | Avoid safe or activity | Don't know | Other |

### Administrative Decision

- □ Loss of privilege
- □ Time in office
- □ Conference with student
- □ Parent contact
- □ Out of school suspension
  - □ Home Parent Counseling
  - □ Day(s)
  - □ Other

### Teacher Decision

- □ Time Out
- □ Loss of privilege
- □ Conference with parent
- □ Sont previous notice(s)

### Others Involved in Incident:

- □ None
- □ Peers
- □ Staff
- □ Teacher
- □ Substitute
- □ Unknown
- □ Other

**If peers were involved, list them:**

**Other comments:**

- □ I need to talk to the students' teacher.
- □ I need to talk to the administrator.

**Parent Signature:**

**Date:**

All minors are filed with classroom teacher. Three minors equal a major.

**BE RESPECTFUL  BE RESPONSIBLE  BE SAFE**

White – Parent’s Copy  Canary – Office Copy  Pink – Teacher’s Copy

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REFERENCES


VITA

Lucy Bridges was born in Clarksdale, Mississippi and raised in Chicago, Illinois. Before attending Loyola University Chicago, she attended DePaul University, where she earned a Bachelor of Science in Psychology and a minor in Education. After graduating from DePaul University, she worked for several years in a community mental health center before attending the Illinois Institute of Technology where she earned a Master of Science degree in clinical psychology in 1986. After graduating from the Illinois Institute of Technology she taught special education in the Chicago Public School system and was also a school psychologist for nine years.

While attending Loyola she had an opportunity to study in Rome, Italy during the summer of 2007. In March 2007 from March 18-23, 2007 she lived on the campus of Oxford University, Oxford England and participated in the Oxford Round Table. Currently, Lucy is working as a consultant for several school districts. She lives in Chicago, Illinois.